By the Author of "Slippy McGee"

A WOMAN NAMED SMITH

By MARIE CONWAY OEMLER

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BY

MARIE CONWAY OEMLER

AUTHOR OF
SLIPPY McGEE, ETC.

title page decoration

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To

ELIZABETH HEYWARD OEMLER

Sometimes my Little Girl.

When you were yet an Awful Baby,
And bawled o' bed-time, I said "Maybe
It is not best to spank or scold her:
Suppose a fairy-tale were told her?"
And gave you then, to my undoing,
The wolf Red Riding-Hood pursuing;
Sang Mother Goose her artless rhyming;
Showed Jack the Magic Beanstalk climbing;
Three Little Pigs were so appealing,
You set up sympathetic squealing!
Then, Bitsybet, you had your mother—
You bawled until I told another!

The Awful Baby's gone. Here lately
You bear your little self sedately.
You've shed your rompers; you want dresses
Prinked out with frillies; fluff your tresses;
Delight your daddy, aunts, and mother;

And sisterly set straight your brother.
Your bib-and-tucker days abolished,
Your manners and your nails are polished.
One baby trait remains, thank glory!
You're still a glutton for a story.
Still, Bitsybet, you beg another:
So here's one for you from

YOUR MOTHER.

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[ILLUSTRATIONS: *frontispiece* *key* *plan*]

CHARACTERS

SOPHY: *A woman named Smith.*

ALICIA GAINES: *Flower o' the Peach.*

NICHOLAS JELNIK: *Peacocks and Ivory.*

DOCTOR RICHARD GEDDES: *Cœur-de-Lion.*

THE AUTHOR: *Himself.*

THE SECRETARY: *A Pleasant Person.*

MISS EMMELINE PHELPS-PARSONS: *of Boston, Massachusetts.*

MISS MARTHA HOPKINS: "*Clothed in White Samite.*"

JUDGE GATCHELL: *The Law.*

SCHMETZ AND RIEDRIECH: *Workmen and Visionaries.*

THE JINNEE: *A Son of the Prophet.*

SOPHRONISBA SCARLETT: "*The Scarlett Witch.*"

THE HYNDSES OF HYNDS HOUSE.

PAYING GUESTS.

THE PEOPLE OF HYNDSVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA.

MARY MAGDALEN; QUEEN-OF-SHEEBA; FERNOLIA: *Important Persons.*

BORIS: *A Russian Wolfhound.*

THE BLACK FAMILY: *A Witch's Cat's Kittens.*

BEAUTIFUL DOG: *Last but not Least.*

A WOMAN NAMED SMITH

CHAPTER I

THE SCARLETT WITCH DEPARTS

If it had been humanly possible for Great-Aunt Sophronisba Scarlett to lug her place in Hyndsville, South Carolina, along with her into the next world, plump it squarely in the middle of the Elysian Fields, plaster it over with "No Trespassing" signs, and then settle herself down to a blissful eternity of serving writs upon the angels for flying over her fences without permission, and setting the saved by the ears in general, she would have done so and felt that heaven was almost as desirable a place as South Carolina. But as even she couldn't impose her will upon the next world, and there was nobody in this one she hated less than she did me—possibly because she had never laid eyes on me—she willed me Hynds House and what was left of the Hynds fortune; tying this string to her bequest: I must occupy Hynds House within six months, and I couldn't rent it, or attempt to sell it, without forfeiture of the entire estate.

I can fancy the ancient beldam sniggering sardonically the while she figured to herself the chagrined astonishment, the helpless wrath, of her watchfully waiting neighbors, when they should discover that historic Hynds House, dating from the beginning of things Carolinian, had passed into the unpedigreed hands of a woman named Smith. I can fancy her balefully exact perception of the attitude so radically conservative a community must needs assume toward such an intruder as myself, foisted upon it, so to speak, by an enemy who never failed to turn the trick.

Because I'm not a Hynds, at all. Great Aunt Sophronisba was my aunt not by blood but by marriage; she having, when she was no longer what is known as a spring chicken, met my Great-Uncle Johnny Scarlett and scandalized all Hyndsville by marrying him out of hand.

I have heard that she was insanely in love with him, and I believe it; nothing short of an over-mastering passion could have induced one of the haughty Hyndses to marry a person with such family connections as his. For my father, George Smith, was a ruddy English ship-chandler who pitched upon Boston for a home, and lived with his family in the rooms above his shop; and my grandmother Smith dropped her "aitches" with the cheerful ease of one to the

manner born, bless her stout old Cockney heart! I can remember her hearing me my spelling-lesson of a night, her spectacles far down on her old button of a nose, her white curls bobbing from under her cap.

"What! Carn't spell 'saloon'? Listen, then, Miss: There's a hess and a hay and a hell and two hoes and a henn! Now, then, d 'ye spell it!"

Not that Mrs. Johnny ever accepted us. It was borne in upon the Smiths that undesirable in-laws are outlaws. This despite the fact that my mother's pink-and-white English face was a gentler copy of what her uncle's had been in his youth; and that when I came along, some years after the dear old man's death, I was named Sophronisba at Mrs. Johnny's urgent request.

After Great-Uncle Johnny died, as if the last tie which bound her to ordinary humanity had snapped, his widow retired into a seclusion from which she emerged only to sue somebody. She said the world was being turned topsyturvy by people who were allowed to misbehave to their betters, and who needed to be taught a lesson and their proper place; and that so long as she retained her faculties, she would do her duty in that respect, please God!

She did her duty so well in that respect that the Hynds fortune, which even civil war and reconstruction hadn't been able altogether to wreck, dwindled to a mere fifteen thousand dollars; and she wasn't on speaking terms with anybody but Judge Gatchell, her lawyer. She would have quarreled with him, too, had she dared.

To the minister, who bearded her for her soul's sake every now and then, she spoke in words brief and curt:

"You here again? Wanted to see me, hey? Well, you've done it. Now get out!"

And in the meantime the years passed and my own immediate family passed with them; but still the gaunt old woman lived on in her gaunt old house, becoming in time a myth to me, and to Hyndsville as well; where they referred to her, succinctly, as "the Scarlet Witch." I heard from her directly only once, and that was the year she sent me a red flannel petticoat for a Christmas present. After that, as if she'd done her worst, she ignored me altogether.

My mother had wanted me to be a school-teacher, in her eyes the acme of respectability. But as it happens, there are two things I wouldn't be: one's a school-teacher, the other a minister's wife. If I had to marry the average minister,

I should infallibly hate all church-goers; if I had to teach the average school-child and wrestle with the average school-board, I should end by burning joss-sticks to Herod.

So I disappointed my mother by becoming a typist. After her death I secured a foothold in a New York house—I'd always wanted to live in New York—and went up, step by step, from what may be called a rookie in the outside office, to private secretary to the Head. And I'd been a business woman for all of seventeen years when Great-Aunt Sophronisba Scarlett departed at the age of ninety-eight years and eleven months, and willed that I should take up my life in the house where she had dropped hers.

"Oh, Sophy!" cried Alicia Gaines, the one person in the world who didn't call me Miss Smith. "Oh, Sophy, it's like a fairy-story come true! Think of falling heir to an old, old, old lady's old, old, old house, in South Carolina! I hope there's a big old door with a fan-light, and a Greeky front with white pillars, and a big old hall, and a big old garden—"

"And an old stove that smokes and old windows that rattle and an old roof that leaks, and maybe big, big old rats that squeak o' nights," I said darkly. For the first rapture of the astonishing news was beginning to wear thin, and doubt was appearing in spots.

"Sophy Smith! Why, if such a wonderful, beautiful, unexpected thing had happened to *me*—" Alicia's blue eyes misted. I have known her since the day she was born, next door to us in Boston, and she is the only person I have ever seen who can cry and look pretty while she's doing it; also, she can cry and laugh at the same time, being Irish. Some foolish people, who have been deceived by Alicia Gaines's baby stare and complexion, have said she hasn't sense enough to get in out of a shower of rain. This is, of course, a libel. But what's the odds, when every male being in sight would rush to her aid with an umbrella?

After her mother's death I fell heir to Alicia, who, like me, was an only child, and without relatives. Lately, I'd gotten her into our filing-department. She didn't belong in a business office, she whose proper background should have been an adoring husband and the latest thing in pink-and-white babies.

"But somebody's got to think of stoves and roofs and rats and such, or there'd be no living in any old house," I reminded her, practically. "My dear girl, don't you realize that this thing isn't all beer and skittles?"

Alicia wrinkled her white forehead.

"Consider me, a hardy late-summer plant forced to uproot and transplant myself to a soil which may not in the least agree with me. Why, this means changing all my fixed habits, to trot off to live in an old house that is probably haunted by the cross-grained ghost of a lady of ninety-nine!"

"If I were a ghost, you'd be the very last person on earth I'd want to tackle, Sophy," remarked Alicia, dimpling. "And as for that new soil, why, you'll bloom in it! You—well, Sophy dear, up to now you have been root-bound; you've never had a chance to grow, much less to blossom. Now you can do both."

I who was confidential secretary to the Head, looked at the girl who was admittedly the worst file-clerk on record; and she looked back at me, nodding her bright head with young wisdom.

"I hope," she said, wistfully, "that there'll be all sorts of lovely things in your house, Sophy,—old mirrors, old books, old pictures, old furniture, old china. Lord send you'll find an attic! All my life I've day-dreamed of finding an attic that's been shut up and forgotten for ages and ages, and discovering all sorts of lovely things in all sorts of hiding-places. When I think my day-dream may come true for you, Sophy, it almost reconciles me to the pain of parting from you; though what on earth I'm to do without you, goodness only knows!" She was sitting on my bed, kimonoed, slippered, and braided. And now she looked at me with a suddenly quivering chin.

"Alicia," said I, "ever since I discovered that there's no mistake about that lawyer's letter—that Hynds House is unaccountably, but undoubtedly mine and I've got to live in it if I want to keep it—it has been borne in upon me that you are just about the worst file-clerk on earth. You're a navy-blue failure in a business office. Business isn't your *motif*. Now, will you resign the job you fill execrably, and accept one you can fill beyond all praise—come South with me, share half-and-half whatever comes, and help make that old house a happy home for us both?"

"Don't joke." Her lips went white. "Please, please, Sophy dear, don't joke like that! I—well, I just couldn't bear it."

"I never joke," I said indignantly. "You little goose, did you imagine for one minute that I contemplated leaving you here by yourself, any more than I contemplate going down there by myself, if I can help it? Stop to think for a

moment, Alicia. You have been like a little sister to me, ever since you were born. And—I'm alone, except for you—and not in my first youth—and not beautiful—and not gifted."

At that she hurled herself off my bed and cried upon my shoulder, with her slim arms around my neck. Those young arms were beginning to make me feel wistful. If things had been different—if I had been lovely like the Scarletts, instead of looking like the Smiths—there might have been—

Well, I don't look like the Scarletts; so there wasn't. The best I could do was to drop a kiss on Alicia's forehead, where the bright young hair begins to break into curls.

And that is how, neither of us having the faintest notion of what was in store for us, Alicia Gaines and I turned our backs upon New York and set our faces toward Hynds House.

CHAPTER II

AND ARIEL MAKES MUSIC

We had wired Judge Gatchell when to expect us, but the venerable negro hackman who was on the lookout for us explained that the judge had a "misery in the laigs" which confined him to his room, and that he advised us to go to the hotel for a while.

We couldn't, for wasn't our own house waiting for us? A minute later we had bundled into the ancient hack and were bumping and splashing through unpaved streets, getting wet, gray glimpses of old houses in old gardens, and every now and then a pink crape-myrtle blushing in the pouring rain. Hyndsville was, it seemed, one of those sprawling, easy-going old Carolina towns that liked plenty of elbow-room and wasn't particular about architectural order. Hynds House itself was on the extreme edge of things.

The hack presently stopped before a high iron gate in a waist-high brick wall with a spiked iron railing on top of it, the whole overrun with weeds and creepers. Of Hynds House itself one couldn't see anything but a stack of chimneys above a forest of trees.

The gate creaked and groaned on its rusty hinges; then we were walking up a weedy, rain-soaked path where untrimmed branches slapped viciously at our faces, and tough brambles, like snares and gins, tried to catch our feet. On each side was a jungle. Of a sudden the path turned, widened into a fairly cleared space; and Hynds House was before us.

We had expected a fair-sized dwelling-house in its garden. And there confronted us, glooming under the gray and threatening sky that seemed the only proper and fitting canopy for it, what looked like a pile reared in medieval Europe rather than a home in America. Its stained brick walls, partly covered with ivy and lichens; its smokeless chimneys; its barred doors; its many shuttered windows, like blind eyes—all appeared deliberately to thrust aside human habitancy.

A residence for woman, child, and man,
A dwelling-place,—and yet no habitation;

A House,—but under some prodigious ban
Of Excommunication.

Yet there was nothing ruinous about it, for the Hyndses had sought to build it as the old Egyptians sought to build their temples—to last forever, to defy time and decay. It was not only meant to be a place for Hyndses to be born and live and die in: it was a monument to Family Pride, a brick-and-granite symbol of place and power.

The walls were of an immense thickness, the corners further strengthened with great blocks of granite. The house had but two stories, with an attic under its sloping roofs, but it gave an effect of height as well as of solidity. Behind it was another brick building, the lower part of which had been used for stables and carriage house, and the upper portion as quarters for the house slaves, in the old days. Another smaller building, slate-roofed and ivy covered, was the spring-house, with a clear, cold little spring still bubbling away as merrily in its granite basin, as if all the Hyndses were not dead and gone. And there was a deep well, protected by a round stone wall, with a cupola-like roof supported by four slender pillars. And everything was dank and weedy and splotched with mildew and with mold.

O'er all there hung a shadow and a fear
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted!

When we opened the great front door, above which was the fan-light of Alicia's hope, just as the round front porch had the big pillars, a damp and moldy air met us. The house had not been opened since Sophronisba's funeral, and everything—stairs, settles, tables, cabinets, pictures, the chairs backed inhospitably against the wall as if to prevent anybody from sitting in them—was covered with a shrouding pall of dust.

The hall was cross-shaped, the side passage running between the back drawing-room and library on one side, and the dining-room and two locked rooms on the other. It was a nice place, that side passage, with a fireplace and settles; and beautiful windows opening upon the tangled garden. All the down-stairs walls were paneled: precious woods were not so hard to come by when Hynds House was built. It was lovely, of course, but depressingly dark.

We got one of the big windows open, and let some stale damp air out and

some fresh damp air in. Then, having despatched our hackman for certain necessities, Alicia and I turned and stared at each other, another Alicia and Sophy staring back at us from a dim and dusty mirror opposite. If, at that moment, I could have heard the familiar buzzer at my elbow! If I could have heard the good everyday New York "Miss Smith, attend to this, please"! God wot, if I had not literally burned my bridges behind me—Oh, oh, I had!

"The garden around this house,"—Alicia spoke in a whisper—"stretches to the end of the world and then laps over. It hasn't been trimmed since Adam and Eve moved out. But those crape-myrtle trees are quite the loveliest things left over from Paradise, and I'm glad we came here to see them with our own eyes! Brace up, Sophy! We'll feel heaps better when we've had something to eat. Aren't you frightfully hungry, and doesn't a chill suspicion strike you, somewhere around the wishbone, that if that Ancient Mariner of a hackman doesn't get back soon we shall starve?"

At that moment, from somewhere—it seemed to us from up-stairs—a sudden flood of sweetest sound poured goldenly through that sad, dim, dusty house, as if a blithe spirit had slipped in unawares and was bidding us welcome. For a few wonderful moments the exquisite music filled the dark old place and banished gloom and neglect and decay; then, with a pattering scamper, as of the bare, rosy feet of a beloved and mischievous child making a rush for his crib, it went as suddenly as it had come. There was nothing to break the silence but the swishing downpour of the outside rain.

When I could speak: "It came from up-stairs! Somebody's playing a violin up-stairs. I'm going up-stairs to find out who it is."

Alicia demurred: "It may be a real person, Sophy!—a real person with a real violin. But I'd rather believe it's Ariel's self, come out of those pink crape-myrtles. Don't go up-stairs, please, Sophy!"

"Nonsense!" said I. "Somebody's played a violin and I mean to know who he is!"

And up-stairs I went, into a huge dark hall, with the cross-passage cutting it, and closed doors everywhere. At the front end was a most beautiful window, opening doorlike upon a tiny iron bird-cage of a balcony, hung up Southern fashion under the roof of the pillared front porch. At the rear a more ordinary door opened upon the broad veranda that ran the full width of the house. Both door and window were closed, and bolted on the inside, and the big, dark, dusty

rooms which I resolutely entered were quite empty, their fireplaces boarded up, their windows close-shuttered. There was no sign anywhere of violin or player. I went down-stairs just as wise as I had gone up.

"I told you it was Ariel!" Alicia stood by the open window—our windows are sunk into the walls, and cased with solid black walnut as Impervious to decay as the granite itself—and leaned out to the wet and dripping garden.

"Sophy," said she, in her high, sweet voice that carries like a thrush's. "Sophy, the best thing about this world is, that the best things in it aren't really *real*. This is one of its enchanted places. Sycorax used to live in this house: that's what you feel about it yet. But now she's gone, her spell is lifting, and Hynds House is going to come alive and be young again!"

"At least," I grumbled, "admit that the dust inside and the rain outside and the weeds and mud are real; and I'm really hungry!"

"Me too!" Alicia assented instantly and ungrammatically. "Oh, for a square meal!" She thrust her charming head out far enough for the rain to splatter on her bright hair and whip it into curls, and bring a deeper shade of pink to her cheeks, and a deeper blue to her eyes. "Ariel!" she fluted, "Spirit of the Violin, I'm hungry—earthily, worm-of-the-dustly, unromantically hungry! Send us something to eat."

"Why don't you rap on one of the tables," I suggested ironically, "and call up your high spirits to do your bidding?"

"My high spirits won't be above making you a soothing cup of coffee just as soon as that ancient African returns. In the meantime, let's look around us."

People had forests to draw from when they built rooms like those in Hynds House. There were eight of them on the first floor. On one side the two drawing-rooms, the library, and behind that a room evidently used for an office. We didn't know it then, of course, but that library was treasure trove. Almost every book and pamphlet covering the early American settlements, that is of any value at all, is in Hynds House library; we have some pamphlets that even the British Museum lacks.

The rooms had enough furniture to stock half a dozen antique-shops, all of it in a shocking state, the brocades in tatters, the carvings caked with dust. You couldn't see yourself in the tarnished mirrors, the portraits were black with dirt,

and most of the prints were badly stained. Alicia swooped upon a pair of china dogs with mauve eyes and black spots and sloppy red tongues, on a what-not in a corner. She said she had been aching for a china dog ever since she was born.

"Oh, Sophy!" cried she, dancing, "wasn't it heavenly of that old soul to die and leave you two whole china dogs! I wouldn't want sure-enough dogs that looked like these, but as china dogs they're perfect! And cast your eyes about you, Sophy! Have you ever in all your life seen a house that needed so much done to it as this house does?

"'If seven maids with seven mops,
Swept it for half a year,
Do you suppose,' the Walrus said,
'That that would make it clear?'
'I doubt it,' said the Carpenter,
'And—'

"Sophy! I shall clean some of these windows myself. Did you know that Queen Victoria, when she was a child, had the same virtuous inclination? Well, she had, and you see how she turned out!"

"I don't believe it!"

"Don't be skeptical!—Look at that pink mustache-cup over there on that little table! Who do you suppose had a mustache and drank out of that cup? It couldn't have been Sophronisba herself? *I* insist that it was a black-mustached Confederate with a red sash around his waist. I adore Confederates! They're the most glamorous, romantic figures in American history. I wish a black mustache went along with the cup and the house; don't you? It would make things so much more interesting!" And she began to sing, at the top of her voice, in the sad and faded room that hadn't heard a singing voice these many, many years:

"'Arrah, Missis McGraw,' the Captain said,
'Will ye make a sojer av your son Ted?
Wid a g-r-rand mus-tache, an' a three-cocked hat,
Wisha, Missis McGraw, wouldn't you like that!
You like that—tooroo looroo loo!
Wisha, Missis McGraw, wouldn't you like that!'"

If Great-Aunt Sophronisba's ghost, and the scandalized ghosts of all the haughy Hyndses ever intended to walk, now was the accepted time! And as if

that graceless ballad were the signal for something to happen, upon the hall window-shutter sounded three loud, imperative knocks.

Alicia dashed down the hall.

"Sophy!" she called, breathlessly, "Sophy!"

Framed in the open window, with the dripping trees and the slanting rain behind him, was the bizarre, the astounding figure of a gnomelike negro in a terra-cotta robe fastened about the waist with a girdle made of a twisted black shawl with the most beautiful Persian border and fringe. A striped silk scarf was bound turban-wise about his head, from which tufts of snowy wool protruded. From his ears hung crescent-shaped silver ear-rings studded with coral and turquoise; a necklace of the same barbaric magnificence was about his neck, and his arms were covered with bracelets. His deep-set eyes, his flat nose, his mouth set in a thousand fine wrinkles, the whole aspect of him, breathed a sly and impish drollery. He glanced from Alicia to me with the smiling malice of a jinnee delighted to mystify mortals. Then with a rapid movement he shifted the umbrella he carried over a large linen-covered tray, eased the latter upon the deep window-ledge, and beckoned with a very black and beringed hand.

"For *us*?" breathed Alicia.

With a fine flourish he swept aside the linen covering. And there was golden-brown chicken, white rice, cream gravy, hot biscuit, cool sliced tomatoes with sprigs of green parsley, fresh butter, fresh cream, a great slab of heavenly cake, a wicker basket of Elberta peaches, rain-cooled, odorous, delicious, and a pot of steaming coffee. On the edge of the tray was a cluster of rain-washed roses.

"No," Alicia doubted, "this is not true: it can't be!—Sophy, do you see it, too?"

He motioned her to take the tray; and his ear-rings swung, and all his bracelets set up a silver tinkling. An automobile honked outside in the street shut off by our garden trees, and a dog barked. Our jinnee cocked a cautious head and a listening ear, thrust the tray upon Alicia, and with inconceivable swiftness vanished around a corner.

"Let's hurry and eat it before it, too, takes to its heels," said Alicia, practically. Without further ado we dragged forward a small table, and fell to. Aladdin probably tasted fare like that, the first time he rubbed the magic lamp.

When we had polished the last chicken bone, and had that comfortable feeling

that nothing can give so thoroughly as a good meal, Alicia carefully examined the china and silver.

"Old blue-and-white English china; English silver initialed 'R.H.G.' Sophy, handle this prayerfully: it's an apostle spoon. Think of having a jinnee fetch you your coffee, and of stirring it with an apostle spoon."

She spoke reverently. Alicia is the sort who flattens her nose against antique-shop windows, and would go without dessert for a month of Sundays and trudge afoot to save carfare, if thereby she might buy an old print, or a bit of pottery; just as I am content to admire the print or the pottery in the shop window, feeling sure that when they are finally sold to somebody better able to buy them, something else I can admire just as much will take their place. Mine is a philosophy not altogether to be despised, though Alicia rejects it. She handled the blue-and-white ware with tender hands, laid the silver together, and set the tray upon the window-ledge. Then, on a leaf of my pocket memorandum—she never carries one of her own—she scribbled the following absurdity and pinned it to the linen cover:

> Ariel, accept the gratitude of mortals set down hungry in the house of Sycorax. Gay and kind spirit, when we broke your bread you broke her spell: the wishbone of your chicken has cooked her goose! Maker of Music, Donator of Dinners, thanks!

"And now," said she, "having been serenaded, and satisfied with nothing short of perfection, let's go up-stairs, Sophy, and decide where we shall sleep to-night."

We chose the front room because of a gate-legged table that Alicia wanted to say her prayers beside, and because of the particularly fine portrait of a colonial gentleman above the mantel, a very handsome man in claret-colored satin, with a vest of flowered gold brocade, a gold-hilted sword upon which his fine fingers rested, and a pair of silk-stockinged legs of which he seemed complacently aware.

"I wish you weren't dead," Alicia told him regretfully. "Your taste in clothes is above all praise, though I fancy you were somewhat too vain of your legs, sir. I never knew before that men had legs like that, did you, Sophy?"

"I take no pleasure in the legs of a man." I quoted the Psalmist acridly enough.

"Don't pay any attention to Sophy," Alicia advised the portrait, naughtily. "Just to prove how much we both admire you, you shall have Ariel's roses." She had

brought them up-stairs with us, and now she walked over to the mantel to place them beneath the picture.

"Why!" exclaimed Alicia, "why!" and she held up nothing more remarkable than a package of cigarettes, evidently left there recently, for it was not dusty.

"I dare say Judge Gatchell forgot it, when he was looking over the house. That reminds me: the silver you admired so much was marked 'G.' Then, in all probability, Judge Gatchell sent us that spread, and very thoughtful it was of him, I must say."

"Rheumatic old judges don't smoke superfine cigarettes, Sophy, nor send black tray-bearers in terra-cotta robes out on rainy days for the entertainment of strange ladies. No: this is something, or somebody, *young*. But since when did Ariel take to tobacco?"

"Let's go down-stairs," I suggested, "and wait for that old darky, if he is a real darky and ever means to return." I did not fancy those big forlorn rooms, with their great beds that didn't seem made for people to sleep and dream in, but to stay awake and worry over their sins—and then die in.

The down-stairs halls had grown darker, and the rain came down in a gray sheet, so that the open window seemed a hole cut into it. The tray we had left on the window-ledge was gone. In its place was nothing more romantic than a freshly filled and trimmed kerosene lamp, two candles, and a box of matches.

When our Jehu finally returned he rummaged out some firewood from the sooty kitchen and built us a fire in the hall. He was a pleasant old negro, garrulous and kindly, by name Adam King, or, as he informed us, "Unc' Adam" to all Hyndsville folks.

"Uncle Adam," Alicia asked, while he was drying himself before the blazing logs, "Uncle Adam, who's the violinist around here?"

Uncle Adam looked at the Yankee lady a bit doubtfully. The old fellow was slightly deaf, but he would have died rather than admit it.

"Wellum," he told us, "since ol' Mis' Scarlett's gone, folks does say de doctor is. Dat's 'cause ob de Hynds' blood in 'im. All dem Hyndses was natchelly de violentest kind o' pussons, an' Doctor, he ain't behin' de do'." He rubbed his hands and chuckled. "Lawd, yes! I know de Doctor, man an' boy, an' he suttinly rips an' ta'hs when he's riled! You ought ter seen 'im de day ol' Mis' Scarlett let

fly wid 'er shot-gun an' blowed de tails spang off'n two of 'is hens an' de haid off'n 'is prize rooster! De fowls come thoo' de haidge, an' ol' Mis' grab 'er gun an' blaze away. De Doctor hear de squallation, an' come flyin' outer de office an' right ovah de haidge. I 'uz totin' fiahwood fo' ol' Mis' dat day, an' I drap een de bushes; it ain't no place fo' sensible niggahs when white folks grab shot-guns. Doctor see me an' holler: 'Adam! git outer dem bushes, you ol' fool! You my witness what dis hellion's done to my fowls!'

"Ol' Mis' Scarlett she s'anter ter de winder wid 'er gun sort o' hangin' loose, an' holler: 'Adam! Come outer dem bushes 'fo' I pickle yo' hide! You my witness ob dis ruffian trispassin' on my prop'ty an' cussin' an' seducin' a ol' woman widout 'er consent,' she says. 'Has I retched my age,' says ol' Mis' Scarlett, 'to have his fowls ruinin' my gyardin', an' him whut's a dunghill rooster himself flyin' ovah my fences unbeknownst?'

"'If there evah was a leather-hided ol' hen ripe foh roastin' on Beelzebub's own griddle, it's you, you gallows ol' witch!' says Doctor, shakin' 'is fist up at her.

"'Aha! I got a plain case!' says ol' Mis', grim-like. 'I'll have a warrant out foh you dis day, Geddes, you owdacious villyum!'

"And she done it. Yas'm. An' dey done sont de shariff atter me for witness, all two bofe o' dem."

"Well, and what did you do?" I asked, curiously. I was getting a side-light on Great-Aunt Sophronisba.

"Me? I got on muh knees an' wrastled wid de speret," said Uncle Adam. "I done tuck mah troubles to de Lawd, whichin He *'bleeged* ter know I cyant deal wid ol' Mis' Scarlett an' de Doctor. Missis, I prayed!"

"Oh! And what happened then?"

The old man looked around him, cautiously, and lowered his voice: "Wellum, Mis' Scarlett she tuck an' went an' up an' died. Yessum! She done daid. An' next thing we-all heah, she 'd went an' lef de Hynds place to youna, 'stead ob de Doctor, or dat furriner."

"She had Hynds relatives, then? I didn't know."

"Wellum, de Doctor an' ol' Mis' Scarlett wuz cousins. Dat's how come dey could fight so powerful. Ain't you nevah had no relations to fight wid, ma'ams?"

We explained, regretfully, that we hadn't.

"Den you ain't nevah knowed, an' you ain't nevah gwine ter knew, whut real, sho-nough fightin' *is*," said Unc' Adam, with conviction.

"You mentioned a foreigner," hinted Alicia.

The old man shook his head deprecatingly. "Don't seem lak I evah able to rickermembah dat boy's name, nohow. His grampa' 'uz a Hynds, likewise his ma, but she 'sisted on marryin' er furriner, an' de boy takes atter de furriners 'stead er we-all. 'Taint de po' boy's fault, but ol' Mis' Scarlett hated 'im wuss 'n pizen. De only notice she take er de boy is ter warrant 'im fo' trispassin'. Dat 's how come folkses ter say—" he paused suddenly.

"Well, what do folks say?" I wanted to know.

"Well, Missis," he admitted, "dey say it's natchel to fight wid yo' kin whilst you 're livin', but 'taint natchel ter carry de fight inter de grave-yahd. Dat's whut she done, ma'ams. An' folks is outdone wid 'er, whichin' she ain't lef de Hynds place to de Hyndses, but done tuhn it ovah ter—uh—ah—"

"To a Yankee woman named Smith?"

"Yessum, dat's it."

"Had either the Doctor or the foreigner any real claim or right to this property, do you know?"

"No, ma'am, we-all 'lows dey ain't got no mo' law-right dan whut you's got. Ol' Mis' Scarlett ain't *'bleeged* ter lef it to de Hyndses, but folks thinks she oughter done it, an' dey's powerful riled 'cause she ain't. Dey minds dis wuss'n all de warrantin' an' rampagin' an' rucusses she cut up whilst she wuz wid us."

"I see," said I, thoughtfully.

"Missises," said the old man, anxiously, "you-all ain't meanin' ter stay hyuh to-night, is you?" He seemed really distressed at the notion. "Lemme take you-all to de hotel, please, Missises! Don't stay hyuh to-night!"

"Why not? What's the matter with this house?"

Again he looked around him, stealthily.

"It's h'anted!" said he, desperately. "Missis, listen: I 'uz comin' home from

prayer-meetin', 'bout two weeks ago, walkin' back er dis same place in de dark ob de moon. An' all ob a suddin I hyuh de pianner in de pahlor, *ting-a-ling-a-ling! ting-a-ling-a-ling!* I say, 'Who de name er Gawd in ol' Mis' Scarlett's pahlor, when dey ain't nobody in it?' I look thoo de haidge, an' dey's one weenchy light in de room, an' whilst I'm lookin', it goes out! An' de pianner, she's a-playin' right along! Yessum, de pianner, she's er tingalingin' by 'erself in de middle o' de night!"

"And who was playing it, Uncle Adam?"

"Dat's what I axin yit: who playin' Mis' Scarlett's pianner when dey wasn't nobody in de house?"

"Why didn't you find out?"

"Who, me?" cried the old man, with horror. "If I could er borried a extra pahr er laigs from er yaller dawg, I'd a did it right den, so 's I could run twict faster 'n I done!—Whichin' please, ma'ams, lemme take you-all ter de hotel."

When he saw that he couldn't prevail upon us to do so, he left us regretfully, shaking his head. He would come back early in the morning to do anything we might require. But he wouldn't stay overnight in Hynds House for any consideration. No negro in the county would.

"Alicia," said I, when we had had a cup of tea made over our spirit lamp, and firelight and lamplight made the place less depressing and eerie, "Alicia, that terrible old woman has played me, like an ace up her sleeve, against her neighbors and her family. She has left me a house that needs everything done to it except to burn it down and rebuild it, and a garden that will have to be cleared out with dynamite. And she has seen to it that I have the preconceived prejudice of all Hyndsville."

Alicia's pretty, soft lips closed firmly.

"Here we are and here we stay!" she said determinedly. "Nobody's been disinherited to make room for us. Sophy, in all our lives we have never had a chance to make a real home. Well, then, Hynds House is our chance, and I'd just like to see anybody take it away from us!"

"Up, Guards, and at 'em!" said I, smiling at her tone. I am slower than she, but even more stubborn, as the English are.

"Tell your admiral that if he gets in my way I will blow his ships out of the water!" said Alicia, gallantly.

But when we went up-stairs, we took good care to lock our door, and bolt it, too. Alicia said her prayers kneeling by the gate-legged table, snuggled into bed between the clean sheets we had brought with us, tucked a china dog under her chin, and went to sleep like the child that she was. I said the Shepherd's Psalm and went to sleep, too.

I was awakened suddenly, and found myself sitting up in bed, staring wildly about the strange room. The house was breathlessly still. My heart pounded against my ribs, the blood beat in my ears. I was oppressed with a nameless terror, an anguished sense that something had happened, something irremediable. The feeling was so strong that my throat closed chokingly.

I am particular in thus setting it down, because it was an experience that all of us under that roof had to undergo. You had to fight it, shut your mind against it, oppose your will to it like a stone wall, refuse to let it master you. Then, as if defeated, it would go as suddenly, as inexplicably, as it had come.

That's what I did then, more by instinct than reason. But I was exhausted when I finally got back to sleep.

CHAPTER III

THE DEAR LITTLE GOD!

When we went over Hynds House the next morning and took stock, I began to entertain very, very peculiar feelings toward Great-Aunt Sophronisba Scarlett, who, it would appear, had given me a white elephant which I could neither hire out for its keep, nor yet sell out of hand. I had to live in Hynds House, and Hynds House as it stood wasn't to be lived in.

The rain had ceased, and from the outside jungle came innumerable calls of birds, and fresh and woodsy odors; but the whole aspect of the place was grim and forbidding. At the back, where there wasn't such an overgrowth, the lane had been closed, barricaded with barbed-wire entanglements, and fairly bristled with thistles and "No Trespassing" signs.

"All this house needs is a mortuary tablet set up over the front door."

But Alicia demurred.

"I'm not a bit disheartened," she declared stoutly. "There's just one thing to be done to this house—first make it beautiful, and then make it pay. It can be done. It's going to be done. It's *got* to be done. And when it's done—we'll have a home. Vision it as it's going to be, Sophy—rosewood and mahogany and walnut, old brass and china and prints and portraits, the sort of things we've only been able to dream of up to now. Why, this house has been waiting for us! We were born to come here and make it over: it's *our* house!" Alicia, has the gay courage of the Irish.

The heavy iron knocker on the front door resounded clamorously.

"Uncle Adam thinks we've been ha'nted out of existence, and he's hammering to wake the dead," said I.

But it wasn't Uncle Adam to whom we opened the door. An enormous, square-shouldered man stood there, looking from me to Alicia with bright, keen blue eyes behind glasses. He was so big, so magnificently proportioned, that he held one's attention, at first, by mere size. Then one had time to observe that

although he hadn't the sleek and careful grooming of successful New Yorkers, he wore his clothes as, say, Cœur de Lion must have worn mail. He hadn't the brisk business manner, either; but there radiated from him an assured authority, as of one used to having his orders obeyed without question. No one could pass him over with a casual eye. I have known people who hated him frankly and heartily; I have known people who adored him. I have never known any one who was lukewarm where he was concerned.

"Which of you is Miss Smith?" he asked, in a very pleasant voice. "Miss Smith, I'm your next-door neighbor, house to the right: Doctor Richard Geddes, at your service."

We gave him to understand, with the usual polite commonplaces, that we were pleased to make his acquaintance, and ushered him into the dilapidated drawing-room.

"I'd have come over yesterday, when I learned you'd arrived, except that my cook was suddenly seized with the notion she'd been conjured, and I had to—er—stand by and persuade her she wasn't. Swore she had my lunch ready, as usual; swore she'd placed it on a tray, left it on the kitchen table for a few minutes, and when she came back from the pantry, not ten feet away, the tray was gone. Vanished. Disappeared. Nowhere to be found. She flopped on the floor and howled. She weighs two hundred and forty pounds and I hadn't a derrick handy. I had to roll her up on bed-slats. You've never had a conjured two-hundred-and-forty-pounder on your hands, have you? No? Well, then, don't. *But* if you ever do, try a bed-slat. This morning she discovered the tray in its usual place, dishes and silver intact, nothing missing. She's looking for the end of the world."

"O-o-h!" quavered Alicia, while I could feel my knees knocking together. "O-o-o-h! How very, very singular! And—and was that all?"

"All! Wasn't that enough? I've had burned biscuit and muddy coffee, because my cook's got liver and nerves, and insists it's her soul," said the doctor, grimly. "I've given her to understand that if she hasn't got her soul saved before to-night, I'll physic it out of her and hang her hide on the bushes, inside out, *salted*." He added, hastily: "In the meantime, I hope you haven't fared too badly in this mildewed jail?"

"Thank you, no," Alicia said demurely. "We have fared very well."

"Glad to hear it." The big man looked at her with the frank pleasure all

masculinity evinces at sight of Alicia. And then he asked, abruptly:

"Has Jelnik called yet?—gray house on the other side of you.—No? I dare say he's off on one of his prowls then. A bit of a lunatic, but a very charming fellow, Jelnik, though your amiable predecessor, Miss Smith, chose to consider him a sort of outlawed tom-cat, and warned him off with a shot-gun." The doctor paused, stroked his beard, and regarded me earnestly.

"Having heired the old girl's domain, I hope you won't consider it necessary to heir her—er—prejudices," he remarked hopefully. "Bad lot, Sophronisba. Very bad!"

"Mrs. Scarlett," I reminded him gently, "was my relative only by marriage."

"Cousin of mine; mother's relative. Not on speaking-, only on fighting-terms," he interjected.

I remembered what Uncle Adam had told us; and I'm afraid I eyed him a bit harder than politeness warranted.

"I discern by your eye, Miss Smith," said the doctor, "that you think a blood relation is more likely to walk in that old demon's footsteps than an outsider is. My dear lady, under ordinary circumstances and with *human* neighbors, I'm as meek as Moses; I am a lamb, a veritable lamb! As for your aunt, she was a man-eating, saber-toothed tigress!"

"Not my aunt, Doctor Geddes; your cousin."

"Your aunt-by-marriage. It's just as bad. Anyhow, she preferred you to any of us, didn't she?"

"Perhaps because she didn't know *me*."

"Have it so. *But* she did whatever she did because she was an old devil of a woman, and an old devil of a woman can give points to Satan. If," cried the doctor, vehemently, "there is one great reason why a man should be glad he's a man, it is because he will never live to be an old woman!"

"That depends upon one's point of view," I told him firmly. "Now, I'm glad I'm a woman because I shall never live to be an old man. Old ladies are far, far nicer. Have you ever known an old lady who thought herself captivating? Have you ever known any old man who didn't think he could be if he wished?"

"Yes," shouted the doctor, "and no!—in both cases! There is no sex in fools. There is no age limit, either."

"The Talmud says: 'An old woman in the house is a blessing; but an old man is a nuisance.'"

"I don't give a bobtailed scat what the Talmud says. I know what I know.—Miss Gaines, I leave it to you."

"Why, I like them both, when they're nice; and I'm sorry for them both when they're not." And she added, with a naïve air of confidence: "But I think I like young men better than either, as a rule."

The doctor removed his hat again, and sat down. His eyebrows went up, his eyes crinkled.

"Miss Alicia Gaines," he said genially, "I perceive you are a girl-child of fine promise.—As for us, Miss Smith, what have we to do with age and foolishness, who, as yet, have neither? Let's get down to business. What are you going to do about the lane behind Hynds House? We had the use of that lane this hundred years and more, until the devil got too strong in Sophronisba and she shut it up. Now, shall you keep the lane closed, or shall you dismiss the injunctions?"

"I shall have to consult Judge Gatchell."

"Gatchell's a fossilized remains. He's got no more blood in his liver than a flea. Gatchell would hang his grandmother on a point of law. Why should you, or any other ordinarily intelligent person, be guided by Gatchell?"

"By whom, then, shall I be guided? You?" I wondered.

"That's not in my line," replied the doctor, shortly, and thrust his hands into his gloves. "In the meantime, ladies, I'm your next-door neighbor; I have no wife to gossip about you, no children to annoy you; I'm far enough away to keep you from smelling my pipe; and I shall quarrel with you only when I can't help it. In return, I have but one favor to beg of you: don't use a shot-gun on my prize chickens! Get a dog and train him to chase them home, if they get into your yard. Or catch them and throw them over the hedge. I'll pay any damages within reason. And please send for your cat."

"We have a cat?"

"You have. After Sophronisba's death, Mandy took her in; or rather, Mandy was afraid to turn her out, for it's bad luck to cross a witch's cat. In return for this charity the hussy immediately foisted upon us two wholly unnecessary kittens. Mandy wouldn't allow them to be decently drowned, for it's worse luck yet to tamper with a witch's cat's kittens, particularly when they're as black as the hinges of Gehenna. Mandy thinks their mother had them black as a delicate mark of respect for the late crone."

"Send them over, please. Black cats will just go with this house. It was very thoughtful of that cat to have two black kittens ready for us, and very kind of you to let them stay with you until we came."

"I? I abhor the whole tribe of cats!" cried the doctor. "Don't thank my kindness: thank Mandy's idiocy, of which she has more than her just share. To my mind, the best place for cats is under the grape arbor."

"Let us strike a bargain. You keep your chickens in your own yard, and we'll keep our cats in our own house."

"Compromise: you get a dog," suggested the doctor.

"Perhaps I may. I've always wanted a poodle."

"I said a *dog*!" said the doctor, lifting his lip. "A poodle! In Hynds House! The lamented Sophronisba had a bloodhound."

"The lamented Sophronisba could have what she chose. This Sophronisba prefers a poodle."

"*Sophronisba?* What! Another one? Good God!" cried the doctor. "All right! Get a poodle. Keep the cats. Get a parrot—and an orphan with the itch—and a hyena—and a blunderbuss! *Her name is Sophronisba*!—I—oh, Lord, where's Jelnik? I have got to go and warn Jelnik!" And he made for the door.

At that Alicia laughed. Peal upon peal, like silver bells, irrepressibly, infectiously, irresistibly, Alicia laughed. She cries with her eyes open and her mouth shut, and she laughs with her eyes shut and her mouth open. The effect is beyond all words enchanting. The doctor paused in his headlong flight.

"All right: laugh!" he said, darkly. "But I shall warn Jelnik, none the less!" And muttering: "*Sophronisba!* Lord have mercy on us! *Sophronisba!*" he departed hastily.

"What a nice neighbor!" commented Alicia. She added, musingly: "Sophy, this is an enchanted place—a place where one has good meals, bad advice, and black cats showered on one, free and gratis. All one has to do is to stand still and take things as they come!"

"And hope one won't follow in the footsteps of one's predecessor, who was an unmitigated old devil."

"At least," said Alicia, laughing, "*he*'ll never live to be an old woman, will he, Sophy?"

"The man has the tact of a cannibal—"

"The shoulders of a Hercules—"

"An abominable temper—"

"And a beautiful beard. Somehow, Sophy, I rather approve of a beard, on somebody his size. I decidedly approve of a beard!"

"If his miserable hens come over here, I shall most certainly—"

"Keep the eggs. We'll tell him so when he comes again."

"Comes again? What, and my name Sophronisba?"

"My own grandmother had the second sight; and *I* don't need spectacles," said Alicia. "Sophy, that man has come into our lives to stay. I feel it in my bones! It's not an unpleasant feeling," she finished gracelessly.

When Unc' Adam presently put in his appearance, he was profoundly impressed and respectful: we were brisk, unhaunted, and unafraid, after a night in Hynds House! The three colored women who had come with him, induced by cupidity and curiosity to enter ol' Mis' Scarlett's ill-omened domain, at first hung back. They were plainly prepared to bolt at the first unusual noise.

Of the three, one—by name Mary Magdalen—proved to be a heaven-born, predestinated cook; and her we persuaded, by bribery, cajolery, and subornation of scruples, to remain with us permanently. Only, she flatly refused to stay on the place overnight. Darkness shouldn't catch Mary Magdalen under the Scarlett Witch's roof-tree.

There are certain gifted beings who possess the secret of bringing order out of

chaos; for them the total depravity of inanimate objects has no terrors; inanimate objects become docile to their will. Such a one was Mary Magdalen. In two days she had transformed a sooty cavern into a clean and orderly kitchen. For she was a singing and a scourful woman, and her Sign was the speretual and the scrubbing-brush. It is true that she put a precious old Spode tea-pot on the stove and boiled the tea in it; that she hung her wig and the dish-towel on the same nail; and that she immediately asked for a white stocking foot to use as a coffee-bag.

"But don't you-all go bust no new pai'h," she advised economically. "Ah 'd rathah make mah coffee in a ol' white stockin' foot any day, jes' so you ain't done wo' out de toes too much."

"Sophy," said the horror-struck Alicia, "that woman must be watched until we can buy a percolater. Suppose she's got 'a ol' white stockin' foot' of her own!"

Despite which there never was, never will be, such another cook as Mary Magdalen. It is true she wasn't amenable to discipline, and reason wasn't her guiding-lamp. And nothing—not bribes, threats, entreaties, prayers, orders, commands, moral suasion—could break her of doing just what she wanted to do just when and how she wanted to do it. You'd be entertaining your dearest enemies, serene in the consciousness that your house was a credit to your good management; and behold, Mary Magdalen in the drawing-room door, with her wig askew and her hands rolled in her apron:

"Oh, Miss Sophy!"

"Well?" say you, resignedly, with a feigned smile; "what is it, Mary Magdalen?"

"Miss Sophy, you know we-all's sugah?"

"Yes."

"Wellum, Miss Sophy, 't ain't any."

"I have already ordered more, Mary Magdalen."

"An' you know ouah flouah, Miss Sophy?"

"I—"

"Us ain't got a Gawd's speck!"

Then she would beam upon the visitors, all of whom were known to her.

"Howdy, Miss Sally! How you-all comin' on? Ah comin' 'round to see de baby soon 's Ah gits chanst." Or, "Lawsy me, Miss Jinny, dat boy o' yo's is jes' natchelly bustin' outer da clo'es wid growin', ain't he? He jes' de spit o' he pa, bless 'im!"

Which untoward confidence didn't seem to surprise our visitors. They had Mary Magdalens of their own.

A few days later Doctor Geddes sent us Schmetz, the gardener, a gnarled little man with a peppery temper, a torrential flow of Alsatian French, and a tireless energy. I don't know why nor how Schmetz had come to Hyndsville, except that somehow he had acquired a small farm near by and couldn't get away from it. He explained to us, gently but firmly, that if we wouldn't meddle after the manner of women, but would leave his job in his own hands, it would be better for us, and for the garden. We meekly acquiescing, he called in helpers and with a wave of his hand set hoe and ax and spade to work.

The weather had changed into days of deep blue skies, splendid days full of the warmth of potential power; and nights filled with fragrance, nights of fierce beauty, and the glamour of golden moons, and the thrilling melody of that feathered Israfel, the mocking-bird. Through our open windows immense moths, spirits of the summer nights, drifted in on enameled and jeweled wings and circled in a fire-worshiping dance around our light.

Those were wonderful days. For that was a house of surprises, a house full of laid-by things. One never knew what one was going to find. One morning it might be a Ridgway jug all delicate vine leaves and faun heads, or an old blue-and-white English platter, or a piece of fine salt-glaze. On the top shelf of a long-locked closet, pushed back in the corner, you'd discover a full set of the most beautiful sapphire glassware, and a pagoda work-box with ivory corners; and on a lower shelf, wrapped in half a moth-eaten shawl, two glowing luster jugs in proof condition. Mary Magdalen salvaged a fine china sillabub stand, with little white-and-gold covered cups on it, from a sooty box under a kitchen cupboard. A back drawer of the dusty office desk yielded up half a dozen exquisite prints. And I'm sure Alicia will remember even in heaven the ecstasy she experienced when a battered bureau gave into her hands the adorable Bow figures of Kitty Clive and Woodward the actor, she pink-and-white, petticoated and furbelowed, lovely as when London went mad over her, and he cocked-hatted and ruffled and

dandified; and neither with so much as the least littlest chip to mar their perfection.

Or a hair trunk would reveal little frocks stitched by hand, and a pair of tiny flat slippers with strings gone to dust like the little feet that had worn them. With these were two dolls, one dressed in sprigged India muslin and lace, with a shepherdess hat glued on her painted head; the other dressed in a poke-bonnet, a satin sack, and a much-flounced skirt. They had evidently belonged to "Lydia, our Darling Child," whose name, in unsteady letters, was painfully set down in the printed picture-books at the bottom of the trunk. These things that had belonged to a "darling child" so long dead lent the grim old house a softening touch. Poor old house, whose little children had all gone, so long ago!

It was the day we were taking up the beautiful old carpet in the back drawing-room. Alicia was rejoicing for the thousandth time over this treasure of hand-woven French art. Of a sudden, horrible yells rose from the garden, and a shrieking negro went by the window like an arrow. We caught "Murder!—Ol' Witch!—Corpses!" as he disappeared. Uncle Adam, catching his panic, bolted with him; the two negro women followed. Only Mary Magdalen, amazonian arms bare, a rolling-pin grasped in a formidable fist, stood like a rock of defense behind us.

"Ah jes' wants to catch any ol' corpses trapesin' 'round mah kitchin, trackin' up mah clean flo', an Ah 'll suah settle day hash once fo' all!" trumpeted Mary Magdalen.

Outside, Schmetz was jumping up and down, flapping his arms, and screaming in voluble French:

"Name of a dog! Senseless Senegambians, remain! Iron-skulled offspring of the union of a black mule and a pickax, cease to fly!"

"What is the matter? For heaven's sake? what is the matter?" I shouted.

"We done dig up de corpses! We done fin' wha'h dat ol' witch 'oman bury de bodies!" howled a workman in reply.

"Imbeciles, asses, beings without brains, listen to me!" shrieked Schmetz, this time in good English. "This corpse is not alive! Never yet was he alive! Return, sons of perdition, and assist me to raise him—may he fall upon your brain-pans of donkeys!"

As if that had been all that was needed, the last wavering workman flung down his shovel and took to his heels, running like a rabbit and roaring as he ran.

"Schmetz!" called a clear and peremptory voice. "Schmetz! what's the matter over there?"

"Ah! It is Monsieur Jelnik!" bawled Schmetz. "*Nom de Dieu*, Monsieur Jelnik, come with a great quickness! I have dug from the earth the leetle boy of stone—you know him, *hein*? Those niggers, *sacrement*! they think they have uncovered the deceased corpse, the victim of Madame the late mistress, with which she made her spells of a sorceress."

"What!" said the voice. "You've found the statue, Schmetz? Ask, my good fellow, if it is permitted that I come and view it."

"Why, of course!" said I, quickly.

"Thank you," said the voice.

There had been a great space cleared in our garden, and on the edge of this, in removing a stubborn gum-tree, the negroes had uncovered what they supposed to be the body of one murdered. Upon our knees, with Schmetz helping us, we were trying to tear away the rotten coverings, and the dirt and mold. And there, beautiful despite the stains disfiguring him, lay the boy Love. The marble pedestal from which he had been removed lay near him. On the base, decipherable, was the sculptor's name, and on one side, in small letters, "*Brought from Italy, 1803, by R.H.*"

"Why, he is perfect!" cried Alicia, joyfully. "Oh, who could have been so stupid and so cruel as to hide away something so lovely? Poor dear little god, aren't you glad to get out of that grave and come back to the sun? Aren't you grateful, little god, that Sophy and I came to Hynds House?"

And at that moment a tall, slim, dark-skinned young man walked up, hands behind his back, and stood there regarding us with eyes as clear and cool as mountain water when the sunlight is upon it and golden flecks come and go in its brown depths. The exquisitely aquiline features, the small black mustache, an indescribably proud and high-bred ease and grace of manner and bearing, were oddly exotic and even more oddly fascinating. His slenderness was as strong as a tempered sword-blade, his quietness was trained power in repose. And the hair of his head was so black that a purplish shadow rested upon it, and so thick that

one was minded of Absalom:

> ... in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.
>
> And when he polled his head (for it was at every year's end that he polled it: because the hair was heavy on him, therefore he polled it:), he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels after the king's weight.

He was so vivid and so new to me that my whole being was breathless with the wonder of him. I knew, of course, that he did not belong to *my* world at all. King's sons are for princesses, for those human birds of paradise that flash, beautiful and fortunate, in larger spheres than those prosaic paths trodden by a workaday woman named Smith.

"What have you found?" he asked, in a delightful voice.

Alicia looked up. Her face was like the break of day for youngness and freshness, and a wisp of a bright curl misbehaved itself on her cheek, a flirtatious curl that knew exactly how to make the most of its opportunities. The young man's eyes approved of it.

"We have found Love!" cried Alicia, breathlessly. "Sophy and I have found Love in our garden! Isn't it wonderful and impossible and exciting and delightful? But it's true! And it just goes with this whole place!" cried Alicia, morning-eyed and May-faced.

The young man's glance came back to me. I should hate to be untruthful, and have to meet so straight a glance!

"Why, yes. It is impossible, and, like all impossible things, perfectly true," he agreed, with the golden flecks dancing in and out of his eyes and a slow and lazy smile, a sort of secret smile, curving his beautiful, mocking mouth. "Fancy finding Love, of all things, in Sophronisba's garden!" A fine black line of eyebrow went up whimsically. "And now that you have found him," said Mr. Jelnik, "hadn't you better let me help you set him up?"

CHAPTER IV

THE HYNDSES OF HYNDS HOUSE

When the fine weather had taken the kinks out of Judge Gatchell's joints, he came to see us—a tall, thin, punctilious, saturnine old gentleman with frosty Scotch eyes and the complexion of a pair of washed khaki trousers. Chaos reigned in Hynds House then, and he was forced to pick his way, like an elderly and cautious cat, between piled-up chairs, tables, and rolls of carpet. In the most stately manner he parted the tails of his skirted coat, seated himself upon the sofa, placed his hat beside him, drew up the knees of his black broadcloth trousers, took off and wiped his spectacles with great thoroughness and deliberation upon a large silk handkerchief, replaced them upon the middle of his Roman nose, cleared his throat, pursed his lips, and drily but clearly talked business.

Great-Aunt Sophronisba would have left a much larger fortune had she been less addicted to lawsuits. You wouldn't think an old soul of almost a hundred could find very much chance to brew mischief, would you? You didn't know Great-Aunt Sophronisba!

I was informed that the case of Scarlett vs. Geddes had been automatically closed by the death of the plaintiff; *but* I had inherited along with Hynds House:

The case of Scarlett vs. The Vestry and Pastor of St. Polycarp's Church, from whom Mrs. Scarlett sought to recover three paintings—"Faith," "Hope," and "Charity"—which her father had commissioned a visiting artist to paint, and had then presented to St. Polycarp's, with the stipulation that they should "forever hang in the sacred edifice, reminding the brethren of the Cardinal Virtues of the Christian Religion."

They did hang in the church for a century. Then, when the Ladies' Missionary Society was helping "do over" the parsonage, a faded Faith, a dulled Hope, and a fly-specked Charity were transported thither. Whereupon suit was immediately brought by the donor's daughter, who averred that the church had lost all right and title to the paintings by an action directly contrary to her father's will, and insisted that they should be turned over to herself as sole heiress. It was a nice

little case, and called forth an imposing array of counsel. Mrs. Scarlett had added a codicil to her will, leaving *me* her claim to the three paintings "fraudulently withheld by the pastor and vestrymen of St. Polycarp's Church."

There was, too, the question of the lot on Lafayette Street, between Zion Church on the one hand, and the Y.M.C.A. on the other. Both had tried to buy it; and both had been refused with contumely. Instead, that nice old lady ran up extra-sized bill-boards. Every time the Zionist brethren looked out of their side windows of a Sunday, they had ample opportunity to learn considerable about the art of advertising on bill-boards. And if a circus happened to be coming to Hyndsville, they could count on every child in their Sunday school missing his lesson, unless the text, by a fortunate chance, happened to touch upon the prophet Daniel.

And when the Y.M.C.A. people looked out of *their* side windows, Sophronisba's alluring bill-boards besought them to smoke only certain cigarettes and to be sure to look for the trademark on their playing-cards. Naturally, this made the Y.M.C.A. secretaries very, very happy.

A weather-beaten picket fence protected the lot upon the street front; the bill-boards formed the side attractions; and in the center front was the monument, a stone of stumbling and offense. It was a neat, plain granite obelisk, which bore this inscription:

This Stone is Erected
By the Affection
of
Sophronisba Hynds Scarlett
To Commemorate the Many Virtues
of
The Most Perfect Gentleman in Hyndsville
Her Bloodhound
NIPPER

"There should have been an open season for Sophronisba," Alicia said with conviction. Then she put her head down and laughed.

The judge looked at her over his glasses, doubtfully. With a slight edge to his voice he referred to the several prosecutions "for wanton and wilful trespassings" upon the closed, barbed-wire lane behind Hynds House. As the strip in question was not a public thoroughfare, and Mrs. Scarlett had rock-ribbed titles covering

it, she could close it; and she did, greatly to the inconvenience of her immediate neighbors, particularly Doctor Richard Geddes.

"There is something to be said for Mrs. Scarlett's methods," said the judge dryly. "The Lafayette Street bill-boards are the best-paying ones in Hyndsville. As to closing the lane, Miss Smith, let me remind you that Doctor Geddes, although an estimable man and a very able physician, is not at all backward in coming forward in a quarrel. He greatly angered my late client."

"Nevertheless, that barbed wire comes down. He may use the lane whenever he wants to," I decided.

The judge bowed. "And now," he said, politely, "let us take up the case of Mr. Nicholas Jelnik, if you please. It was Mrs. Scarlett's wish that you should be fully informed concerning Mr. Jelnik's antecedents, that you might be on your guard."

"Against Mr. Jelnik? But, good heavens, why? Why?" I was beginning to get angry. "Let me see: I am to make myself odious to Mr. Jelnik, and I am to refuse to allow a physician to run his car through a barren strip of weeds and sand, because they are her relatives and she hated her relatives. I am to vex the souls of harmless Christians with bill-posters of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and I'm to pay taxes on a lot that's been turned into a cemetery for a hound dog. I'm to fight St. Polycarp's Church, for a couple of chromos I should probably loathe. —I don't like pictures of cardinal virtues, anyhow. It altogether depends on who possesses them as to whether I can stand for the cardinal virtues themselves."

"Faith looking up, and Charity looking down, and Hope hanging to an anchor, *something* like Britannia-Rules-the-Waves. Make the church keep them, please, Sophy!" begged Alicia.

Judge Gatchell made an odd noise in his throat.

"One of my little granddaughters, taken to Saint Polycarp's by her mother, asked, 'Mamma, who is that big woman up there with the pick-axe?' And they told her," said the Judge, scathingly, "they told her it was *Hope*!

"When the vestry came to me about the case, I reminded them that Aholah and Aholibah were damned for doting upon paintings on the wall, painted in vermilion, which in plain English is Scarlett!" A covenanting gleam shot into his frosty eyes, and the old fighting Scotch blood showed for a second in his lank

cheek. He was a godly man, and when he saw confusion in the ranks of the Philistines, he rejoiced.

"I can't help who was damned," said I. "My job is to live in peace with my neighbors. St. Polycarp's people may hang their Virtues wherever they please, for all of me."

Did a faint, faint shade of regret flit over the parchment-like face? It seemed so to me. But he said, composedly:

"You must act according to your best judgment. And now, please, let us go back to Mr. Nicholas Jelnik."

We rather prided ourselves upon the possession of so pleasant a neighbor, and we said so. He had helped us with our garden, and it was he who selected the spot upon which the resurrected Love should be set up.

"Ah, yes, the statue, brought from Italy by Richard Hynds, a great grandfather of his. Did he tell you anything about Richard?" asked the judge.

"Nothing."

"I shall have to go a long way back, more than a hundred years, to make you understand," said the judge. "When I was a boy some of the oldest folk here in Hyndsville used to say that Hynds House never should have come to Freeman Hynds, Mrs. Scarlett's father; but to Richard Hynds, his elder brother—that same Richard whose initials are cut in the base of the statue he brought in his pagan godlessness from Italy, and which his brother afterward buried, wishing to remove all trace of him and his follies.

"You are to understand that it was the unwritten law of the Hyndses' that this house should come to the eldest son. Primogeniture is of course foreign to American ideas, but this is an old house, Miss Smith. When it was built, American ideas hadn't been born. And the Hyndses were a law to themselves.

"The then head of the house was James Hampden Hynds, a man of an immense pride, a rigid sense of duty, and the nicest notions of honor. He had two sons, Richard, and the younger brother, Freeman. The daughters do not count: it is with these two sons we are concerned.

"From every account Freeman Hynds was a good man, a quiet, God-fearing, methodical man, attentive to his affairs, and meticulously exact in all his

dealings; not warm-hearted, perhaps, but just. But as if the bad blood of the entire family had come to a head in one man, Richard was born a roisterer and a spendthrift.

"He grew up a magnificent young scapegrace, reckless to the point of madness, and with that inherent love of risk that is the very breath of life to such men. Despite these defects there is no doubt that his was one of those personalities that win love without effort. So of course it was a foregone conclusion that he should win the girl that his younger brother, among others, adored to distraction.

"His family hoped that his love for his young wife would change him for the better. But there was something tamelessly wild in Richard Hynds. He would have done very well, very well indeed, in the *Golden Hind* with Drake, or in the *Jesus* with Morgan. He did not fit in a gentler generation, and a mild life had no charm for him. Gossip buzzed with his name, even in a day when gentlemen were permitted to behave pretty much as they pleased.

"Up to this time there had never been anything altogether unpardonable charged against him. But one fine morning the Hynds jewels were missing. Remember that the Hyndses had always been a wealthy and powerful family. The theft of those jewels was no trumpery affair. For generations they had been adding to that collection—sometimes a lustrous pearl, sometimes a flawless emerald; once it was a sapphire that had belonged to a French queen, once a pair of rubies that had hung in the ears of a duchess beloved of King Charles.

"Richard's mother happened to be a meek and quiet body, deeply religious, something of a Quakeress, so she wore them but seldom. It was upon the occasion of a ball to be given in honor of Freeman's twenty-first birthday that the question of what jewels his mother should wear came up, and the strong-box in which they were kept was opened. Only the settings remained.

"When the clamor quieted and sane questions began to be asked, suspicion fastened upon Richard Hynds. His affairs were chaotic, his needs imperative and desperate. He had been heard to ask his mother if she intended wearing what he called 'the Hynds fortune' at Freeman's ball. He knew, of course, where they were kept—in the anteroom of his mother's apartment. It was not only possible but easy for him to gain access to them.

"Let us consider the case without prejudice: Here is a young man—a gambler, a wastrel—with pressing debts, and clamoring creditors threatening what might

be considered dishonor. Within reach of this young man's hand are certain very valuable properties which he might even consider his own, since they would in time descend to him. His mother's resources are exhausted, his father's heart steeled against further advancements. Cause and effect, you see—debts: missing jewels.

"The case not only formed two factions in public opinion; it split the Hynds family itself. His two sisters, and his cousin Jessamine, raised in this house, believed him guilty. His mother and his wife believed in his innocence and refused to hear a word against him. These two things only did Richard Hynds salvage in that utter wreck and catastrophe—his mother's faith and his wife's love.

"He lost his father's. This was a man, who, under his pleasant exterior of a landed gentleman, was rigid and inflexible. He had already borne a great deal, remember; but this was disgrace, an indelible stain upon a stainless name. Therefore this father, who was at the same time a just and good man, disinherited his favorite child and eldest son. House, slaves, lands, money, the great position of the head of a powerful family, came to Freeman Hynds, my late client's father, born five years later than his brother, on the twentieth day of September, 1785—a long time ago! a long time ago!

"Richard was disgraced, and a beggar. And it seemed that the rod that had lain in pickle for the Hyndses for their pride, was brought forth to scourge them all. For Richard, desperate, distracted, careless of what happened to him, rode out one day through a pelting rain. Result, congested lungs; the poor wastrel, who had no wish to live, was soon satisfactorily dead.

"When James Hampden got that news, he rose up from his chair, laid the book he had been reading—it was Baxter's 'Saint's Rest'—down on the library table and fell as if lightning had struck him. Apoplexy, it was said; a thrust through the heart, I should call it. Richard the sinner was none the less Richard his first-born.

"Hard upon the heels of these two disasters came a third, the case of Jessamine Hynds. This Jessamine—a highly gifted, imperious creature, proud as Lucifer, after the manner of the Hyndses—was an orphan, reared in Hynds House. She was some several years older than her cousins, to whom she was greatly attached. The trouble so preyed upon her that she became melancholy, and one fine day disappeared and was never afterward found. There was great hue and cry made for her, and men riding hither and yon, for this was a Hynds

woman, and her story touched popular imagination, so that she is supposed," said the lawyer dryly, "to wander around Hynds House o' nights, crying for Richard and searching for the lost jewels.

"After the death of James Hampden Hynds, it was discovered that he had added a singular enough codicil to his will. This codicil provided that in the event the jewels were found intact, and Richard Hynds's innocence thereby incontrovertibly established, Hynds House as it stood should revert to him as eldest son, after the custom of the family. *But* until the jewels were recovered, Richard and his heirs were to have exactly—nothing. And nothing is what Richard and his heirs got."

"And was he really guilty?" breathed Alicia. Her sympathy was instantly with Richard. That is exactly like Alicia, who is sorry for the fatted calf, and the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea, and Esau swindled out of his birthright; had she been one of the wise virgins she would have trimmed the lamps of all the foolish ones and waked them up in time.

"In theory," said the judge, "a man is innocent until he is proved guilty. In practice, he is guilty until he can prove his innocence."

"And was nothing, absolutely nothing, ever heard or known further?—nothing that would justify his mother's faith, or comfort his poor young wife's heart?"

"There was but one incident to which even the most credulous could attach the slightest importance. You shall judge for yourself whether it deserved any. Freeman Hynds, riding about the plantation after his habit, was thrown from his horse and died from the injuries sustained. He recovered consciousness for a few minutes before he died; some said he never really regained it. Be that as it may, the dying man cried out, in a voice of great anguish and affliction: '*Richard! Brother Richard! The jewels—the jewels!*' He struggled to say more, and failed; looked into the concerned faces around him, with the awful look of the soul about to depart; struggled to raise himself; and fell back upon his pillow a corpse.

"Some—they were in the majority—said, sensibly enough, that the pain and disgrace of his brother's downfall had haunted the poor gentleman's death-bed, and occasioned that last sad cry. Some few said he had wished to confess a thing heavy upon his conscience, who had taken his brother's place as Jacob took Esau's. Richard's wife, of course, was of these latter. She went to her grave a passionate believer in the innocence of her husband, whom she averred to have

been a deeply wronged and cruelly used man; and, for heaven's sake, who do you suppose she claimed had wronged him? Freeman! She couldn't prove anything; she hadn't the ghost of a clue to hang the ghost of an accusation upon; yet, womanlike, she clung to her notion, and she taught it to her son as one teaches a holy creed.

"The Hyndses were excellent haters. Freeman's daughter, born into an atmosphere of family disruption, abhorred the very memory of her uncle, and hated her uncle's wife, the woman who doubted and led others to doubt her father's honesty. This hatred she discovered for Richard's son, who, as he grew older, referred to Freeman as 'my Uncle Judas.'

"This second Richard became in time a highly successful physician, a man honored and beloved by this community. There was no wildness in *him*, nor in his son, the third Richard. His granddaughter Sarah Hynds married Professor Doctor Max Jelnik, the celebrated Viennese alienist, whom she met abroad. Your next-door neighbor is Sarah's son, born somewhere in Hungary, I believe. Both the young man's parents are dead, and I understand he has led a vagrant and irresponsible life, preferring to rove about rather than follow his father's profession, to which he was educated.

"My late client, indeed, held that he had inherited the deplorable characteristics of the first Richard. She asserted—she allowed herself great freedom of speech—that you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. It displeased her that he should come to Hyndsville. She thought it showed a malignant nature and a peculiar shamelessness that he chose to reside next door to Hynds House, from which his great-great-grandfather had been so ignominously driven. Her first meeting with the young man bred in her an ineradicable dislike."

Now what really happened is this: The fences having been neglected, and in consequence fallen down, and the hedge broken in many places, Mr. Jelnik, just come to Hyndsville, thoughtlessly and perhaps ignorantly crossed the sacred Scarlett boundaries. Up-stairs behind her blind, like an ancient spider in her web, the old lady spied him. She flung open the window and leaned out.

"Who are you that prowl about other peoples' yards like a thievish cat?" she demanded peremptorily.

The young man looked up, uncovering his beautiful head.

"I am Nicholas Jelnik. And I pray your pardon, Madame: I did not mean to intrude," and he made as if to go.

"Jelnik!" said she, in a hoarse and croaking voice. "Jelnik! Aha! I know your breed! I smell the blood in you—bad blood! rotten bad blood! You've a bad face, young man: a scoundrelly face, the face of a fellow whose grandfather robbed his house and shamed his name! And why have you come near Hynds House, at this hour of the day? He, he, he! *I* know, *I* know!"

Lost in astonishment, Jelnik remained staring up at her. The apparition of this venerable vixen, who had hated Richard's son and now hated him of a later generation, who had seen those that had talked to Richard himself in his ill-fated lifetime, so stirred his imagination that it deprived him of utterance. All he could do was to stand still and stare and stare and stare. He had never seen anybody so old—she was nearly a hundred, and looked a thousand—and he stared at the old, old, wrinkled, yellow face, the unhuman face, in which the beady black eyes burned with wicked fire; at the nearly bald head, thinly covered with a floating wisp or so of wool-like white hair; at the claw-like, shriveled, yellow hands, the stringy neck, the whole sexless meager wreck of what had been a woman. It was a stare made up of wonder, and instinctive dislike, and human pity, and young disgust. She raised her voice:

"Did you not see those signs? Scoundrel, puppy, foreign-born poacher, didn't you see my sign-boards?" And as she looked down at him—Richard's blood alive and red in a youthful and beautiful body: and *she* what she was—she fell into one of those futile and dreadful fits of rage to which the evil old are subject; and mumbled with her skinny bags of lips, and shook and nodded her deathly head, and waved her claw-like hands, screeching insults and abuse.

The pity died out of Jelnik's face. He regarded her with his father's eyes, the calm, impersonal, passionless gaze of the trained alienist. She was an unlovely exhibition, to be studied critically. In some subtle manner she understood, for she jerked herself out of her anger, and fell silent, regarding him with a glance as brilliantly, deadly bright as a tarantula's. The cold, relentless hate of that glance chilled him. He forced himself to bow to her again, and to beat a dignified retreat, when his inclination was to take to his heels like a school-boy caught pilfering apples.

The next morning a bailiff presented Mr. Nicholas Jelnik with a notice forbidding him to enter the grounds of Hynds House without the written

permission of the owner, and threatening prosecution should he disobey.

"The Hyndses, as I have said, are good haters," finished Judge Gatchell.

"And so she left Hynds House to me," said I without, I am afraid, much gratitude.

"It was hers, to dispose of as she chose." The lawyer spoke crisply. "If you have any scruples, dismiss them. My late client understood that it was far better for the estate to fall into the hands of a sensible woman like yourself than into the keeping of a young man with what foolish people like to call the artistic temperament, which in plain English means a person who can't earn his salt in any useful, sensible business.

"You doubt this? Let us consider this same artistic temperament and its results," continued the judge, making a wry face. "Once or twice it has been my bad fortune to meet it. One trifling scamp I have in mind, painted. A house, a fence, a barn, even a sign-board? Not at all, but messes he called 'The Sea,' one doesn't know why, save that the things slightly resembled raw oysters. However, the women raved over him. His laundress and his landlady had good cause to rave!

"He wrote, too. A text-book, a title, a will, a deed, a business letter? Far from it! He wrote *poetry*, if you please! The little wretch wrote *poetry*! That's what the artistic temperament leads a man to! Bah! I hate, I despise, I abhor, the artistic temperament!"

We looked at the judge, open-mouthed. "Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?"

"There have been times," admitted the judge, subsiding, "when I radically disagreed with my late client; when I opposed her strongly. But when she willed her whole estate to you, Miss Smith, instead of to Nicholas Jelnik, I heartily approved. Understand, I have no personal bias, no animosity against this young man; but he is, I am told, more or less of an artist, and one might as well leave an estate to an anarchist at once. I have expressed this opinion to the town at large, and I seldom express my opinion publicly," finished the old jurist stiffly.

I heard that opinion with mingled emotions.

"But we like Mr. Jelnik," I said at last. "The injunction against him doesn't hold water. Personally, I feel like apologizing to him."

"Oh, no! One can't afford to cuddle an old vendetta, as Abishag dry-nursed old King David. I always *hated* Abishag!" Alicia said naïvely.

"My late client," said the judge enigmatically, "hadn't counted on *you*." He almost succeeded in looking human when he said it, and his eyes upon Alicia weren't at all frosty. Then he folded his papers, replaced them in his wallet, wiped his glasses, shot his cuffs, hoped we'd find Hynds House all we'd hoped, hoped the town would be to our liking, hoped he could be of further service to us, bowed creakily, and took his departure.

"Sophy," said Alicia, after a long pause, "if ever I had to rechristen this house, I'd call it Hornets' Nest."

We had not attended church on our first Sunday, because we were too tired. But on our second Sunday we plucked up heart of grace and went to St. Polycarp's.

The old town wore an air of Sabbath peace and quietness infinitely soothing to the spirit. People passed and repassed us. We knew they knew who we were. The old gentlemen, indeed, bowed to us with stately uncoverings of the head; the rest regarded us with the sort of impersonal and perfunctory interest one bestows upon uninteresting passing strangers. Nobody spoke to us, though the eyes of the young men were not unaware of Alicia's fairness.

In a great city, of course, one takes that sort of thing for granted; but in this small town, where everybody knew and spoke to everybody else, the effect was chilling.

"Talk about the sunny South!" murmured Alicia. "Why, my teeth want to chatter!"

During the services I was conscious of covert glances in our direction, but whenever a pair of feminine eyes met mine, they slid off like lizards and glided another way, with calculated Christian indifference. They weren't hostile, nor unfriendly: they were just deliberately indifferent. Nobody had the faintest notion of being heedful of us strangers among them; and I should be sorry for angels who expected to be entertained unawares in South Carolina!

When the congregation had filed out and gone about its leisurely business, the minister and his wife came forward to greet us. They were a bit nervous,

remembering the diabolic uproar about Faith, Hope, and Charity. Mr. Haile was a mild-mannered little man of the saved-sheep type, with box-plaited teeth and a bleating voice. His wife had the worried face and the anxious eyes of the minister's helpmeet, and the painfully ready smile for newcomers who might, or might not, prove desirable parishioners.

She wanted to be nice to us as a Christian woman to women, but not too nice as the minister's wife of a church whose members looked upon us as interlopers. I had deputed Judge Gatchell to inform the trustees that the suit was dropped. I suppose Mrs. Haile was timid about broaching the delicate subject, for she ignored it with a nervous intensity that made me feel sorry for her. She and Mr. Haile would call just as soon as it was convenient for us to receive visitors; and then they shook hands with us, and I think they breathed a sigh of relief.

"Oh, Sophy! And we've got to keep on going there!—next Sunday, and Sunday after next Sunday, and maybe every Sunday after that until we die! Perhaps after a while some of them will bow to us, or maybe even say, 'How do you do?' *but* we'll feel as if we'd been put in cold storage every time we enter that door!" wailed Alicia.

"It is our Father's house," I reminded her.

"But I don't want to be made to feel like a spanked child, in anybody's house!" Alicia said, resentfully.

"You say that because you're Irish."

"You say I say it because I'm Irish because you're English." Then she screwed up her mouth like a coral button, and squinted her eyes: "I'm Irish, and you're English, and we're both American. Sophy, let's join my Irish and your English to our Yankee, and teach this town a lesson!"

"Barkis is willin'. But in the meantime let's go home and see what Mary Magdalen has for lunch."

We walked slowly, enjoying the calm, lovely late-summer day. Hyndsville at its best was a big, green, sprawling old town, a quaint, unpainted, leisurely, flowery, bird-haunted place, with glorious trees, and do-as-they-please, independent gardens. Nobody ever seemed to be in a hurry, and at first we used to wonder how they ever got anything done, or kept pace with the moving world; yet they did. Only, they did it without haste and without noise. And they were

always polite. Though they should take your substance, your reputation, or even, perhaps, your life, they would do it like ladies and gentlemen.

We paused a while, just inside the big brick-pillared gate, and looked up the oak-arched garden path toward our house. Of course one can't expect an old fortress of a brick house that's been neglected for more than three quarters of a century to look spick and span inside of a brief fortnight, but already Hynds House was sitting up, so to speak, and taking notice.

Life had begun to flow back into it. Mary Magdalen had brought a dog with her—a yellow dog of unknown ancestry, of shamefaced demeanor, a ropy tail, splay feet, and a rolling eye; named, she and heaven alone knew why, Beautiful Dog.

He shunned Alicia and me because we were white people: Beautiful Dog was intuitively aware that colored people's dogs must meet white people with suspicion, aloofness, and reserve. When we fatuously sought to make friends with him, he tucked his tail between his legs, and shivered as if we made goose-flesh come out on his spine; and once when I took him by his rope collar he fell down and shrieked. But just let Mary Magdalen roll out an unctious, "Whah is yuh, Beaut'ful Dawg?" and his ears and tail went up, he curveted, and made uncouth movements with his splay feet, and grinned from ear to ear.

Doctor Geddes's Mandy had brought over the black kittens and their mother. Mary Magdalen made sure of their staying at home by the simple process of buttering their paws. In South Carolina, when you want a cat to stay in your house, you butter its paws and let it lick the butter off leisurely, the while you whisper in its left ear: "*Stay in my house for keeps, cat!*" The cat will ever thereafter play Ruth to your Naomi.

Our cat was Mrs. Belinda Black, and her children were Potty Black and Sir Thomas More Black, this last being a creature of noble mien and a meditative turn of mind.

"Homage and praise to Bast, the cat-headed, the wise one, the great goddess!" purred Alicia, stroking Mrs. Belinda Black's satiny head. "And may Sekhet the Cat of the Sun aid me, a devotee at her shrine, to butter the paws of some two-legged cats in Hyndsville!"

"You-all's dinnah 's waitin'." Mary Magdalen stubbornly held to the notion that any meal eaten between breakfast and night was dinner; lunch being

sandwiches and fried chicken taken out of a basket at church picnics and eaten out of one's hand, or lap, for choice. "What was de text to-day, Miss Sophy? Ah sort o' likes to chaw easy on a mout'ful o' text whilst Ah 'm washin' up mah dishes."

We gave her the text, which happened to be one that fills every negro's heart with undiluted joy: "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." And we had the satisfaction of hearing her rolling out, to the clatter of pans and pots:

"Dry bones in de valley,
Ma-a-ah, La-a-awd!
Whut yuh gwine do wid dem dry bones,
Ma-ah-ah La-a-a-w-wd"

while we went up-stairs to change our frocks. We were still sharing one room then, finding it more convenient. And there, in front of our door, in a nest of ferns and mosses, was a great cluster of wild flowers, summer's last and autumn's first children. They had been gathered in no ordered garden, but taken from the skirts of the fields and the bosom of the woods; and Carolina the opulent, the beautiful, the free-handed, does not deck herself niggardly.

Alicia's face that had been so wistful lighted with a sudden joy. She gave a happy cry:

"Ariel!" she cried, "Ariel! Oh, what a heavenly thing, what a *human* thing to do! And to-day, too, just when we need a little bit of friendliness!" She looked around with a queer, shy smile.

"Ariel!" she called, "Ariel, no matter who comes, or goes, or what happens in Hynds House, *we* believe in you. Don't leave us, Ariel! Maker of music, bringer of blossoms, stay!"

CHAPTER V

"THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF"

Mr. Nicholas Jelnik, with an uplift of his fine black brows and a satirical smile, once diagnosed the case of Great-Aunt Sophronisba Scarlett as "congenital Hyndsitis"; Doctor Richard Geddes said you'd only to take a glance at her house to see that she was predestined to be damned. *I* know that she was so hidebound in her prejudices, so virulently conservative, so constitutionally opposed to change, that anything savoring of modernity was anathema to her.

That old woman would as lief have had what remained of her teeth pulled out as have parted with anything once brought into Hynds House. She preserved everything, good, bad, indifferent. You'd find luster cider jugs, maybe a fine toby, old Chinese ginger jars, and the quaintest of Dutch schnapps bottles, cheek by jowl with an iron warming-pan, a bootjack, a rusty leather bellows, and a box packed with empty patent-medicine bottles, under the pantry shelf. A helmet creamer would be full of little rolls of twine, odd buttons, a wad of beeswax, a piece of asafetida, elastic bands, and corks. She had used a Ridgway platter with a view of the Hudson River on it, as a dinner plate for her hound, for we found it wrapped up, with "Nipper's platter" scrawled on the paper.

By and large, it wasn't an easy task to renovate a brick barracks finished in 1735, and occupied for ninety-nine years by a lady of Sophronisba's parts; though I sha'n't tell how we had to tackle it room by room, nor of the sweating hours spent in, so to speak, separating the sheep things from the goat things. I can't help stopping for a minute, though, to gloat over the front drawing-room that presently emerged, with a cleaned carpet that proved to be a marvel of hand-woven French art, rosewood sofas and chairs upholstered in royal blue and rubbed to satiny-browny blackness, two gloriously inlaid tables, and a Venetian mirror between two windows.

We gave the place of honor on the white marble mantel to a porcelain painting Alicia found in a work-box—the picture of a woman in gray brocade sprigged with pink-and-blue posies, a lace fichu about her slim shoulders, and a cap with a rose in it covering her parted brown hair. The little boy leaning against her knees had darker blue eyes, and fairer hair pushed back from a bold and manly

forehead. The painting was about the size of a modern cabinet photograph, and, though pleasing and spirited, was evidently the work of a gifted amateur. What gave it potent meaning and appeal was the inscription lettered on the back:

Mrs. Lydia Hariott Hynds & Rich^{d}. Hynds Ag'd 7
Paint'd for Col^{nl}. J. H. Hynds by his
Affec. Neece Jessamine

You couldn't help loving him, the little "Richard Ag'd 7." There was that in the face which won you instantly; it was so clear-eyed, so gallant, so brave, so *honest*. So we gave him and his pretty, meek mother the place of honor in the room that had once heard his laughter and seen her tears. And we brought down-stairs the fine painting of Colonel James Hampden, who was the splendid colonial in claret-color that we had so much admired, and hung him and a smaller painting marked, "Jessamine, Aged 22" where they could look down on those two.

These were the only pictures allowed in that room, and they gave to it an atmosphere flavored most sweetly of yesterday. Indeed, I think they must have approved of the room altogether, for we hadn't changed so much as we'd restored it. Even the glass shades that use'd to shield their wax candles were in their old places. There was their old-world atmosphere of stateliness; their Chinese jars, their English vases, their beautiful old Chelsea figures; and the sampler so painstakingly

Work'd by Ann Eliza Hynds
Ag'd 9 Yrs. 2 Mos., Nov'r, 1757

that had been carefully framed and mounted as a small fire-screen, perhaps for Ann Eliza's lady mama or proud grandmother. It was such human and intimate things, the mute mementoes of children who had passed, that made us begin to love Hynds House, for all its bigness and uncanniness and dilapidation.

We did discover one human touch laid upon the place by Sophronisba herself. She had gathered together a full set of small, hand-colored photographs of Confederate generals, wrapped them in a hand-made Confederate flag, into which was tucked a receipt signed by Judah Benjamin for Hynds silver melted into a bar and given to the Cause, written, "The glory is departed," across the package, and hidden it. Alicia, who had a hankering after Confederates, herself, put the photographs in a leather-covered album at least as old as themselves, and kept them sacredly. She said these were America's own vanquished and vanished

Trojans, and that one got a lump in the throat remembering how

> Fallen are those walls that were so good,
> And corn grows now where Troy town stood.

Schmetz brought us our upholsterer, Riedriech the cabinet-maker, most cunning of craftsmen, who knew all there is to know about old furniture and just what should and shouldn't be done to it. In addition he was a grizzled, bearded, shambling old angel who clung to a reeking pipe and Utopian notions, a pestilent and whole-hearted socialist who would call the President of the United States or the president of the Plumbers' Union "Comrade" equally, and who put propagandist literature in everything but our hair.

"Mr. Riedriech," you would say reproachfully, "yesterday I discovered Karl Marx and Jean Jaurès lurking behind my coffee-pot and Fourier under the butter-dish. To-day I find Karl Kautsky in ambush behind the cream-jug and Frederick Engels under the rolls."

Riedriech would regard you paternally, placidly, benevolently, through his large, brass-rimmed spectacles:

"So? Little by little the drop of water the granite wears away. I give you the little leaflet, the little pamphlet, *und* by and by comes the little hole in your head."

Thank heaven the doctor next door didn't hear that!

Alicia knew how to handle the old visionary with innocent but consummate skill. Looking at the kind old bear with her Irish eyes:

"It must be a wonderful thing to have such mastery of one's tools, to know exactly what to do and how to do it," she would sigh. "'Tisn't everybody can be a master craftsman!"

"I show you in a little while what iss cabinet-making!" he said proudly. "I do more yet by you," he added charitably, "then make over for you chairs and tables and such, already: I make over for you your little mind."

The old socialist did indeed show us what cabinet-making can be. He turned the office behind the library into a workroom, and from it Sophronisba's tattered and torn and forlorn old things emerged, piece by piece, in shining rosewood and walnut and mahogany majesty. If you love old furniture; if it gives you a thrill

just to touch a period chair of incomparable grace, or the smooth surface of an old table, or the curve of a carved sofa, you'll understand Alicia's open rapture and my more sedate delight.

The tiled fireplace in the library was really the feature of Hynds House. There wasn't any mantel: the fireplace was sunk into the wall, and above it and the book-cases on each side was a space filled with more relics than all the rest of the house contained—portraits, signed and framed documents, letters, old flags, and a whole arsenal of weapons. Above the fireplace hung the portrait of Freeman Hynds—thin, dark, austere, more like a Cameronian Scotsman than a Carolina gentleman of an easy habit of life.

However, it was not portrait or relics that made the room remarkable, but the tiles, each a portrait of a Revolutionary hero. Laurens, Marion, Lafayette, Pulaski, von Steuben—there they were in buff and blue, martial, in cocked hats, and with such awe-inspiring noses! The center and largest tile was, of course, the Father of his Country, without the hat, but with the nose, and above him the original flag, with the thirteen stars for the thirteen weak-kneed little states that were to grow into the great empire of freedom that the high-nosed, high-hearted soldiers fought for and founded. Alicia and I touched those tiles with reverence. They were the pride of our hearts.

As often happens in the South, there were bedrooms on the lower floor; two of them, in fact, on one side of the hall. The front one had been not only locked but padlocked; the windows had been nailed on the inside, and heavy wooden shutters nailed on the outside. So long had the room been closed that dry-rot had set in. The silk quilt on the four-poster was falling to pieces, the linen was as yellow as beeswax, and the sheets made one think of the Flying Dutchman's sails. This room was of almost monastic severity: an ascetic or a stern soldier might have occupied it. Besides the bed it contained four chairs, a clothes-press, a secretary, and a shaving-stand. On a small table near the bed were a Wedgwood mortar with a heavy pestle, a medicine glass, and a pewter candlestick turned as black as iron. The press in the corner still held a few clothes, threadbare and sleazy, and in the desk were some dry letters and a Business Book—at least, that's how it was marked—with lists of names, each having an occupation or task set down opposite it, I suppose the names of long-dead slaves. On the fly-leaf was written, in a neat and very legible hand, "*Freeman Hynds*."

"Sophy!" Alicia's voice had an edge of awe. "This must have been his room. I believe he died here, in this very bed. And afterward they shut the room up; and

it hasn't been opened until now."

We looked at the old bed, and seemed to see him there, trying to raise himself, crying out so piteously upon dead Richard's name, only to fall back a dead man himself. What had he wanted to tell, as he lay there dying? His painted face in the library was not a bad man's face. It was proud, stern, stubborn, bigoted; a dark, unhappy face, but neither an evil nor a cruel one. What was it that really lay between those two brothers? After more than a hundred years, we were as much in the dark as they in whose day it had happened and whose lives it had wrecked.

We built a fire in the long-disused chimney to take the dampness out of the room, and forced open the windows to let in the good sun and wind. Over in one corner, pushed in between the clothes-press and the side wall, was, of all things, a prie-dieu; and upon it a dusty Bible with his name on the fly-leaf. Nor was it a book kept for idle show; it plainly had been read, perhaps wept over by a tortured heart, for it fell open at that cry of all sad hearts, the Fifty-first Psalm. I was moving this prie-dieu, when my foot slipped on the bare floor and I dropped it with a crash. Fortunately it was not injured. But what had looked like a mere line of carving on the outer edge of the small shelf—rather a thick and heavy shelf now that one examined it carefully—had been struck smartly, releasing a cunning spring. There opened out a thin slit of a drawer, just big enough to hold a flat book bound in leather and stamped with two letters, "F.H." On the fly-leaf appeared, in his own neat, fine script, "*The Diary of Freeman Hynds, Esqr.*"

The thing seemed incredible, impossible. His own daughter had evidently been unaware of the existence of this book, which he had not had time to destroy. And we, as by a miracle, had fallen upon it—and perhaps the truth!

It was written in so fine and small a hand as was only possible to the users of goose-quill pens; and this tiny, faded, brown writing on the yellowed pages covered a period of years. He had not been one to waste words. Once or twice, as we hurriedly turned the pages, appeared the name "Emily." Mostly it seemed a dry, uninteresting thing, a mere memorandum, where a single entry might cover a whole year.

It was impossible for us to stop our work to read it then and there, or to do more than give it a cursory glance. We turned feverishly to those years that covered, as we figured, the period of the Hynds tragedy. And he had written:

This day was Accus'd Rich'd. my Bro. of robbing us of our Jewells. He protests he knows

> Naught & my Mthr. believes him as doth Emily. Has a true Heart, Emily. Horrid Confusion & my Fthr. Confound'd.

Impatiently I turned over the pages, raging to read the end, my heart pounding and fluttering.

> Two nights since dy'd Scipio, son of old Shooba's wife, the which did send for me—

Thus far had I read, Alicia and I sitting head to head on the hall stairs. In came Schmetz the gardener, raving, gesticulating, and after him old Uncle Adam, stepping delicately, and with a placating smile on his wrinkled countenance.

"Those bulbs that I have planted under the windows of you," raved Schmetz, "the demon hens of *le docteur* Geddes are with their paws upturning! They upturn with rapidity and completeness, led by a shameless hog of a rooster. Is it the orders of you that I devastate those fowls, Mademoiselle?"

Schmetz was furiously angry, and small wonder. Those had been choice bulbs, some of which he had presented me from his own cherished store—freesias, daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, and the starred narcissus, "such as Proserpine let fall, from Dis's wagon."

"Oh, our flowers!" wailed Alicia, springing to her feet; "and we counting on those bulbs for Christmas!"

I shut Freeman's diary with a snap. Hens were more immediate.

"Put it in the drawer of the library table," called Alicia, running out with Schmetz at her heels. "We'll read it to-night."

When I had done so, closing the door after me, I too ran outside, where some enormous black-and-white hens, led by the biggest rooster I had ever seen, were completing the utter destruction of our flower bed.

We charged down upon them, and they ran to and fro, after the stupid fashion of fowls. Back and forth Alicia, Schmetz, and I chased those brutes; but Adam stood with folded hands, looking on from a safe and sane distance. He refused to have anything to do with Geddes fowls in ol' Mis' Scarlett's yard. Just then the huge rooster ran into my skirts, all but upsetting me. It was the work of a strenuous moment to seize him by the wings and so hold him.

Left to their own devices, the hens scuttled back to their own domain through a break in the palings on our side of the hedge, while in my hands the rooster

squawked and plunged and kicked and struggled; it was like trying to hold a feathered hyena.

I was very angry. I had lost my bulb bed. I couldn't wring the neck of the raider, much as I should have liked to do so, but with an arm made strong by a just and righteous rage I lifted that big brute high above my head and hurled him over into his own yard. He sailed through the air like a black and white plane.

"*Damn! Oh, damn!*" said somebody on the other side of the hedge. There was a horrible grunt, as of one getting all the wind knocked out of him, a scuffle, and the squawks of the big rooster, to which the hens dutifully added a deafening chorus.

"The brute—has just about—murdered me!" grunted Doctor Richard Geddes.

We stood in stricken silence. Swiftly, noiselessly, Uncle Adam faded from sight, putting a solid section of Hynds House between himself and what he felt was coming battle. Uncle Adam had no wish to have to pray me to death, and he wasn't going to run any risks with Doctor Richard Geddes. Where that irascible gentleman was concerned, Uncle Adam, like Br'er Rabbit, would "trus' no mistakes."

A second later, red-faced, half-breathless, but with the light of battle in his eyes, Doctor Geddes appeared, mounted on a ladder on his side of the hedge.

"Who shot off that rooster?"

"*Monsieur le docteur*, the hens of you began this affray," explained Schmetz, politely. "They are fowls abandoned in their morals, horrible in their habits, and shameless in their behavior. And the husband of these wretches, Monsieur, is a bandit, a brigand, an assassin, fit only to be guillotined. Observe, Monsieur, it happened thus—"

"Schmetz," snapped the doctor, "shut up!—Now then, I want to know who fired off that rooster."

"I did!" I said valiantly. "Look at my bulbs! Just look at my bulbs!"

"Look at my stomach!" roared the doctor. "Just look at my stomach!"

"*Mon Dieu! O mon Dieu*!" cried Schmetz, dancing up and down. "Monsieur, again I implore that you will remain calm and listen to the voice of reason! Your

hens, creatures malicious and accursed—"

"Why should I look at your horrid stomach?" said I, outraged. "I think you had better get down off that ladder and go away!"

"Why should you? Because, you jade, you've all but driven a twenty-pound rooster clean through it—beak, spurs and tail feathers—that's why!" bawled the doctor. "Gad! I shall be black and blue for a fortnight! I'm colicky now: I need a mustard-plaster!"

"*Two* mustard-plasters," I insisted severely: "one on your tongue and the other on your temper!"

"Temper?" flared the doctor, and flung up his arms. "*Temper?* Here's a minx that's all but murdered me, and yet has the stark effrontery to blather about temper! You've a bad one yourself, let me tell you! You've the worst, outside of your late aunt—"

"Grand-aunt-in-law; your own cousin-by-blood, whom you greatly resemble in that same matter of family temper, I am given to understand."

"Gatchell told you that!" cried the doctor, wrathfully. "Fish-blooded old mummy! *His* place is in a Canopic jar! Gatchell hasn't had a thought since 1845."

"Well, if he satisfied himself so long ago as 1845 that you have a frightful temper and that your hens are unutterable nuisances, I see no reason why he should change his mind," I said, frigidly. "You have; and your hens are; and your rooster is a *demon*!"

"Straight out of the pit; undoubtedly they were hatched under Satan's wings. Monsieur, believe me, Schmetz, when I tell you so."

"Didn't you ask me," I demanded, "to throw them over into your yard when they invaded my premises? Very well: I threw one over and you caught it. Why, then, should you complain?"

"Oh, yes, I caught it!" A horrible sneer twisted his countenance.

Schmetz fell to praying aloud. But he couldn't remember anything save the grace before meat, so he prayed that, in a sonorous voice. For he is a pious man.

The doctor's nose wrinkled and his lips stretched: "*Sophronisba!*" he hissed,

and, having hurled this hand-grenade, scuttled down the ladder like a boy of ten.

Alicia sank upon the ground and rocked to and fro. For a minute I wanted to catch her by the shoulders and shake her soundly; but catching her eye instead, I also fell into helpless laughter. Leaning on his spade, Schmetz stared at us, shaking his grizzled head.

"Name of a cat!" murmured the puzzled Alsatian, and fell to salvaging such bulbs as weren't utterly ruined. We were all busy at this, when a head again appeared over the hedge—a big, leonine head with a tossing mane and a tameless beard. An enormous pair of shoulders followed, a tree-trunk of a leg was swung over, and Doctor Richard Geddes dropped into our garden like a great cat. He strolled over, hands in pockets, and looking down at grubbing us, asked politely: "Making a garden?"

"Oh, no," Alicia told him sweetly, "we're laying out a chicken-run."

"Er—what I came over to say, is that I've got some fine bulbs, myself, this year, particularly fine bulbs—eh, Schmetz?—and more than I need for myself. Will you share them with me, Miss Smith? Please! I—well, I'd be really grateful if you would," said this overgrown boy.

"We'll be enchanted," Alicia said instantly. "When can we have them, please?"

"Now!" cried the doctor, with brightening eyes. "By jingo, I'll get 'em this minute, and plant 'em for you, too!"

And he did. He was on his knees, trowel in hand, shouting to Riedriech, who had come outside for a few minutes' happy arguing with his good friend the doctor, that the socialist argument boiled down amounts to about this—that one should do without boiled eggs for breakfast now, in order that the proletariat may have baked hen for dinner in the millennium; which is lunacy; anybody with a modicum of brains—

"Brains!" snorted Riedriech. "What is it you know about brains? *No* doctor knows what is on the inside of brains! You make tinkerings mit the inside plumbings, *Gott bewahre*! and cut up womens and cats and such-like poor little dumb beasts and says you, 'Now I know all about the brains of man.' It is right there where you are wrong, Comrade Geddes!"

"*Habet!*" said Comrade Geddes.

"Look you," said the old visionary, with sudden passion, "look you on the little bulb here, so dirty and ugly you hide him in the ground quick. So! But by and by comes up green shoots, and blossoms. So it is with the great thoughts of men, the deep race-thoughts, Comrade Geddes—seeds, bulbs, germs, all of them, in the ugly husks of the common people. Out of our muck and grime they come, the little green shoots which the fool will say is poison, maybe, but which the wise know and labor and make room for. I, Riedriech, and workers like me, we go into our graves nothing but husks. But it is out of the buried hearts of us comes green things growing; and then—*die Blumen! die Blumen!*" said the cabinet-maker, with a still, far-away look.

"And," he finished, with a sad smile, "it is *our* flowers that you put in vases of gold on your altars. And you say, 'Listen: Jesus the carpenter talks plain words to his fishermen friends.' And, 'Hush! Burns the plowman makes songs in the field!'"

The doctor looked up, and his eyes were very tender; his smile made me wonder. With a swift, friendly hand he patted the rougher hand of the other. And it was at this opportune moment that Mary Magdalen led around a corner of Hynds House no less personages than Mrs. Haile and Miss Martha Hopkins. Their eyes fell upon Doctor Richard Geddes. They looked at each other. They looked at Alicia and me. And I knew their thoughts: "Sirens, both of you!" said Miss Hopkins's eyes.

"How do you do, Doctor Geddes!" said both ladies, as demurely as cats. *I* should have felt like a boy caught stealing jam. He went right on planting bulbs.

"Hello, Martha. What's on the carpet now?" he greeted that lady, airily. "Writing another paper on 'The Ironic Note in Chivalry'? How about 'The Effect of the Pre-Raphaelites upon the Feeble-minded'? Or is it the 'Relation of the Child to Its Mother,' this time?"

"You will have your little joke, Doctor," smiled Miss Hopkins, a dish-faced blonde with a cultured expression.

"Joke?" The doctor stared up at her. "Joke? Gad, I'd like to believe it!" He turned to Alicia and me, politely: "Miss Hopkins," he informed us, "moves among us clothed in white samite. She is our center of culture; Hyndsville revolves around her."

He went on putting a bulb in the place prepared for it. His eyebrows twitched

slightly, but his mouth was smileless; Miss Hopkins was smiling, and not at all displeased. Mrs. Haile was bland and blank, as befits a minister's wife. Alicia's eyes were downcast, but a wicked dimple came and went in her cheek. She looked ravishingly pretty, the bright hair breaking into curls about her temples, her young face colored like a rose. I do not blame Doctor Richard Geddes for stopping in his work to stare at her with unabashed pleasure, but I do not think it was diplomatic.

Mrs. Haile apologized for calling when we were so very busy. They had just stopped in passing, because they were reorganizing their missionary society and wanted to see if they couldn't interest us in the good work. Their day-school in Mozambique needed another teacher, and their hospital in Bechuanaland had to have more beds.

Doctor Geddes got to his feet, slapped our garden soil from his knees, and shook his tawny mane. His eyes were no longer sweet.

"Miss Smith and Miss Gaines, thank you for the opportunity of playing in the sand in pleasant company. Mrs. Haile, Miss Hopkins, I go to attend some home-grown niggers who of course don't need a hospital, nor even a decent school, in our Christian midst. Ladies, good afternoon!" He made a fleering motion of the hand and was gone. Mrs. Haile and Miss Hopkins smiled indulgently. Evidently, Doctor Geddes was one brother they were willing to forgive though he offended them until seventy times seven.

Alicia and Miss Martha Hopkins walked down the garden path together and Mrs. Haile fell into step with me. In a low voice she thanked me, hurriedly, for having dropped that dreadful suit. And were we—she hesitated—were we going to be regular communicants?

I didn't want to go to St. Polycarp's any more, and it was on the tip of my tongue to give a politely evasive reply, when our eyes met and held each other. I saw the naked truth in hers—the pitiful truth of the slim, poor, aristocratic little parish; the old church overtaken and surpassed by its more modern and middle-class rivals; and the minister's family struggling along on a salary that would have made a hod-carrier strike. She was neatly dressed; she looked like a gentle-woman, but one in straightened circumstances. I made a rapid mental calculation.

"Why, yes, I think I can say we shall. Now, Mrs. Haile, I am a business woman, and if I speak bluntly you must pardon it. Miss Gaines and I can give

two hundred dollars a year between us—fifty for the church; one hundred and fifty to be added to the minister's present salary."

I knew what that meant to her, and she must have known I knew, but she didn't show it by so much as the quiver of an eyelash. Only a faint, faint color showed in her sallow cheek, and she bowed, half-formally, half-friendly.

"Thank you, Miss Smith," said she, gallantly. And she added, with a glimmer of humor in her worried eyes: "As you say you're a business woman, may I say I hope you will get your money's worth?"

At that I laughed, and she with me.

We walked down our garden path, chatting innocuously and amiably, until of a sudden they caught sight of the little Love, the gay, charming, naked little Love, holding his torch above his curl-crowned head. You miss him, when you come up the broad drive from the front gate, for Nicholas Jelnik put him in the secretest, greenest, sweetest spot in all our garden, and you must go down a winding path to find him.

"So it wasn't an idle tale: they did find it, really!" breathed Miss Hopkins, staring with all her eyes. And I knew with great certainty why *she* had come to Hynds House that afternoon.

"Forgotten all these many years, and now here, like the dead come to life!" murmured Mrs. Haile, abstractedly. "How strange!"

"It was said he bought it for his mother, because it looked so like himself as a child," said Miss Hopkins. Then she remembered her duty, held up two fingers before her eyes, and squinted through them critically:

"Charming, but don't you think the pose strained? It's an example of eighteenth-century work, placid enough, but it lacks that plastic, fluidic serenity, that divine new touch of truth, that is revivifying art since the great Rodin lighted the torch anew."

Heaven knows what else she said. It sounded like a paper on art to me, and I have a terror of papers on art. They are, Alicia informs me, purple piffle. Yet Alicia drank in every word Miss Hopkins uttered, though the dimple came and went in her cheek.

"You seem interested in art, Miss Gaines." Having torn the poor little peasant

Love to tatters, Miss Hopkins descended to us groundlings.

"I don't always seem to know what art is," admitted Alicia, dovelike.

The lady who "moved among us clothed in white samite" smiled encouragingly.

"That is because you are really little more than a child," she said kindly. "When you begin to *grow*, you will improve your mind."

Alicia puckered her brows. "Ah, but I'm Irish!" she said, seriously, "and the Irish hate to have to improve their minds. I imagine it takes an able-bodied mind to stand intensive cultivation," she added, guilelessly.

Miss Hopkins smiled: it was a masterpiece, that smile!

"But why, may I ask, did you choose such a situation for the statue?" she inquired critically. "Now, *I* should never dream of tucking it in such an out-of-the-way place!"

The pucker came back to Alicia's brow.

"Shouldn't you?" she wondered. "I shall make a point of mentioning that to Mr. Nicholas Jelnik, if you don't mind. You see, he chose that spot, and we rather like it, ourselves."

Miss Hopkins stopped dead short, and Mrs. Haile started in spite of herself. Evidently, the situation was beyond them. Didn't we *know*? How much had Judge Gatchell seen fit to tell us? Alicia had dropped a bomb-shell that before night would detonate in every house in Hyndsville. They haven't very much to talk about in small towns, except one another, and when a plump mouse of gossip frisks about whisking his tail, why, it is cat nature to pounce upon it.

"Mr. Jelnik!" said Miss Hopkins, with an accent. "Oh, I see. Well—he is a neighbor, of course. Certainly if Mr. Jelnik selected that particular spot for the statue—he of all people has the best right to do so—and to have his wishes considered."

"Of course. He has lived abroad, and seen everything of art there is to see," Alicia agreed, placidly. Which wasn't at all what Miss Hopkins meant.

We could see those two women turning the thing over and over in their minds—Nicholas Jelnik, last heir and descendant of Richard Hynds, tactily (perhaps

even gladly; for had they not just witnessed the behavior of Doctor Richard Geddes?) accepting the interlopers in the house of his fathers! Nicholas Jelnik selecting the site for the statue Richard had brought home in pride, and Freeman had buried in sorrow! Miss Hopkins's stare dismissed me, shifted to Alicia, and discovered the cause of this shameless surrender of family pride. Her lips tightened. With politely cold hopes that we should like Hyndsville, and warmer hopes that we would join the missionary society, they left us.

"Wedge Number One: The poor dear heathen, Sophy!" smiled Alicia. "The P.D.H. can be a very present help in times of social trouble, can't he? I shall attend that missionary meeting, and take stock. Incidentally (For goodness' sake, don't look so scandalized, Sophy Smith! this is a fight for our lives, so to speak!) incidentally, I shan't do the P.D.H. any harm. He won't be a bit worse than he was before, which is promising." She put two fingers before her laughing eyes, squinted through them, and drawled:

"You lack subtlety, Miss Smith. Cultivate your imagination, my dear!" in Miss Hopkins's best voice.

Riedriech stuck his grizzled head out at a window, cautiously:

"Fräulein, she hass gone?" And seeing that the coast was clear, he added, vehemently: "Cultivate the mindt! Cultivate the imatchination! *Ach, lieber Gott! Dornröschen*, cultivate you the *heart*. It iss not what the woman thinks, but what she loves, what she feels, which makes of the world a home-place for men und *kinder*." The good old Jew nodded his head vigorously at the girl, smiled, and went back to his work. And Schmetz came and finished the bulb bed by covering it carefully with two thicknesses of chicken-wire.

That night, just before we went up-stairs, I went into the library after Freeman Hynds's diary, which we were simply burning to read. I opened the table drawer in which I had placed it. The drawer was quite empty. The little flat book was gone.

CHAPTER VI

GLAMOURY

Alicia insisted that we were living in a fairy-story, and had better enjoy every shining minute while it lasted. But, as I pointed out, the cost of restoring Hynds House was appallingly real, so real that it left a big, big hole in the bank-account. It is true that we who never really had had a home since we were little children, and then the most modest sort, had gotten such a home as comes to but few. But —one doesn't get something for nothing!

We had done our part for Hynds House; now Hynds House had to do its part for us. It had to earn its keep, and ours. We had known that from the beginning, and Alicia mapped out the entire plan of how it was to be done; a plan which I at first looked upon as the fairy-storiest part of the whole thing!

To-night we sat facing each other across the library table, with a great pile of receipted bills between us, the total of which made me feel pale. Alicia, however, was cheerfully figuring away on her own hook; and presently she shoved a list of addresses across to me.

The first two were the head of our old firm, and the one celebrity I had ever seen or spoken to, a novelist and lecturer with record-breaking best sellers to his account. He once had some business dealings with our firm, and I attended to the details, thereby winning his cantankerous approval. He had very bad manners, of which he was totally unashamed, and very good morals, of which he was somewhat doubtful, as they didn't smack of genius; a notion that he was a superior sort of Sherlock Holmes, having the truffle-hound's flair for discovering and following up clews and unraveling mysteries, most of which didn't exist outside of his own eager mind; and such a genuine passion for old and beautiful things as Balzac had. It was upon this last foundation that Alicia was building.

"He has written that the average wealthy modern home is a combination of Pullman Palace Car and Gehenna. And that the so-called crime wave which sweeps recurrently over American cities, is very likely nothing more than the inevitable reaction of our damnable house decorations upon our immature intellects." Alicia repeated it dreamily. "I have chosen for him the upper

southwestern room with the sunset effect and the pineapple four-poster. It has a claw-footed desk of block mahogany, three hand-carved walnut chairs, two Rembrandt prints, and a French prie-dieu with a purple velvet cover embroidered with green and gold swastikas. He has a purple soul with gold tassels on it, himself, Sophy, and he should be willing to pay a thumping price for it. That room is worth at least two lectures and one best seller, not to mention what he'll get out of the rest of the house."

"First catch your hare," I reminded her skeptically.

"First set your trap, and you can reckon on hare nature to do the rest. A few good photographs of this house, along with the information that it runs back to the beginning of things American and has never been exploited, will fetch him at a hand-gallop. Add a hint that we have our own brand of family spook, and you couldn't keep him away if you tried. The only trouble is that he may walk off with your brass tongs up his trouser-leg, or a print or two tucked under his shirt."

We had decided that we would have a series of photographs of the house, with all particularly good points stressed; such as, say, the library fireplace, the fan-light window at the end of the upper hall, the pillared front porch, and a corner of the drawing-room.

Also—and this was the great thing, calling for a heavy outlay—we would advertise in some two or three of the ultra periodicals, the advertisement to carry a stunning little cut of our front porch. We decided to run the risk of expending more money than we could really afford, because the people that advertisement was meant to attract would in the long run pay for it.

"Our prices will be predacious, piratical, prohibitive, and profitable. We shall stop just this side of highway robbery. Therefore our demands will be cheerfully, nay, willingly met; and everybody, including you and me, Sophy, will be satisfied and happy!"

"*Boarders!*" said I, limply, "*boarders*—in Hynds House!"

"Perish the thought! We have possibly the most interesting and beautiful old house in America. It's one of the few really historic houses left in the whole South. It has seen the Indians, it has seen the British, it has seen Sherman's men, and escaped them all. Well, then, we propose to allow certain of the elect, who can afford it, to come and live in Hynds House for a while. They will be willing to pay a round sum for the privilege. That's all."

"Oh, is it, indeed! And will they?"

"Won't they, though!" Alicia spoke confidently. "Now draft me a letter to the Head, setting forth the many reasons why himself, his wife, their car, and her Chow, can't afford to miss Hynds House on their trip South this season. You might explain that Mary Magdalen is our cook, and the Queen of Sheba our hand-maid. Also, please help me decide in which of these magazines we had better advertise first."

"But the cost!" I wailed. "We have spent so sinfully much already! And the place is eating its head off, with nothing coming in. Since I took down those bill-boards, actually the price of that Lafayette Street lot has gone down. Nobody seems anxious to buy it any more."

"Change your mind about selling it; hint that you're considering an ice-cream parlor and a movie theater," said the girl who'd been the worst file-clerk. "In the meantime, Sophy, you have sense enough to understand that we've spent so much money we've got to spend more to get some of it back.—I vote we start in this one, Sophy," and she laid her finger upon the most expensive and ultra of all the magazines!

"But that is for *millionaires*!" said I, aghast.

"So is Hynds House," insisted Alicia, coolly. "How much did you say was in the bank?"

I was afraid to hear my own voice mention that insignificant sum; for, when one considered Hynds House, the little we had was beggarly; so I wrote it down, and pushed the paper across to her. Instead of looking scared, Alicia Gaines looked delighted!

"All that?" And round chin on pink palm, she fell to studying me with as much curiosity as if she had just met me and were puzzled to get at the real Me. Then she nodded, and snatching a sheet of paper, began to figure again, pausing every now and then to regard me with slitted eyes. At the end of ten strenuous minutes she pushed the paper over to me, and watched me grow all but apoplectic as I studied it. It was an entertaining list, beginning with a hat and ending with silk stockings. With all sorts of wonderful things in between—for me, you understand. Things like "One brown frock, with something cloudy-yellow about it." ("Sophy, blondes can stand yellow wonderfully well; I suggest a bronze, instead of a duller brown.")

"Why, I have plenty of clothes!" I protested.

"Business-woman-of-a-certain-age, general-utility, will-stand-wear-and-tear clothes. Not a stitch of Hyndshousey clothes among them. No *happy*, glad-I'm-alive-and-a woman clothes. Here's where you cease to look merely useful, respectable, and responsible, and begin to look the Lady of the Castle. There's quite as much philosophy and good morals in looking like a butterfly as there is in resembling a caterpillar."

"*Why* should I have more clothes?" I demanded.

"Because." And she added, with a fleeting smile, "And then catch your hare."

"Alicia!" said I, scandalized. "Alicia Gaines, do you realize I am thirty-six years old?"

"You wouldn't be if you just had sense enough to forget to remember it." This resentfully.

"No? Would you mind telling me how I might become such an accomplished forgetter?"

"Why, there's nothing easier! When you really wish to forget to remember something, Sophy, all you have to do is to remember to forget it!" And then, with real earnestness: "Sophy, it's the better part of wisdom to look like the job you want to hold down. Your job is holding down Hynds House. And we are up against things, Sophy, you and I. We have got to win out because it means—all this." Her eyes swept over the beautiful old room with an immense pride and affection.

"We have just *got* to keep Hynds House, if only to teach these Hyndsville women a lesson." She spoke after a pause. "Sophy, they flatten their ears and arch their backs at sight of us; and whenever there's a good chance for a wipe of a paw, why, we catch it across the nose. Now I," she admitted frankly, "am naturally full of cat feelings myself. I will not do what *you* want to do—walk off looking aggrieved, after the fashion of Old Dog Tray. I will repay in kind, retaliate in true lady-cat manner. And these,"—she began to smile—"these shall be our weapons of offense and defense. It will be a gorgeous struggle; however, my forebears came from Kilkenny!"

I laughed, but indeed I did not feel any too optimistic. Holding down Hynds House was no easy task, and the town was not disposed to make it easier for us.

While we had been busy renovating, while our hands were so full of work that every minute was occupied, we hadn't felt our isolation. It was only when we had time to pause and look around us, that the stubborn, quiet hostility of the town's attitude to the new owner of Hynds House was borne in upon us.

Not that anything overt was done by any one. Nor was there the slightest breach of politeness: they were as punctiliously polite when chance brought us into contact with them, as well-bred folk are to strangers whose further acquaintance they have no desire to cultivate. The vestrymen of St. Polycarp's had expressed their appreciation of Miss Smith's action in promptly dropping the suit against them; she was welcome to come and worship God in their church, and to do her duty by the heathen. Such ladies as happened to belong to the missionary society spoke to us pleasantly in the church vestibule. The minister and his wife were as sincerely, duteously courteous. But that was all. Not a house in Hyndsville opened its doors to us. They simply would not accept the interloper that the malignity of the Scarlett Witch had put in possession of that which should have gone back to Richard's last heir, or failing him, to Richard Geddes.

The fact that these two descendants of the Hyndses did not seem to see and do their duty as members of that illustrious family, but shamelessly made friends with the aliens, did not raise us in the town's estimation. Quite the contrary. Nor were they even faintly angry with Mr. Jelnik and Doctor Geddes, who were, so to say, unsuspicious Israelites coaxed into the Canaanitish camp.

I admit that I considered Doctor Richard Geddes undiplomatic in his behavior. It never once occurred to that lordly gentleman, who had had his own way ever since he was born, that he should stop now to consider the feelings or the prejudices of Hyndsville. It wasn't that he meant to champion *us*. It never occurred to him that we needed championing. He simply liked us because he liked us. We pleased him. That sufficed, so far as he was concerned.

I had begun really to like the doctor, myself. But I wished to heaven he weren't, at that critical time, so tactless. For instance, I have been peremptorily taken by an elbow and led willy-nilly to his waiting car, on Lafayette Street, which is our principal thoroughfare, under the calm, appraising, watching eyes of all feminine Hyndsville. Not one of whom would fail to remark, casually:

"Oh, *did* you see that Miss Smith with Doctor Geddes this morning? Men are so unsuspicious, aren't they!"

I couldn't explain the situation to him, of course, any more than I could explain to Mr. Nicholas Jelnik that *his* presence in Hynds House, while pleasing to us, was disquieting and displeasing to others.

It was to be expected that this handsome young man, who kept his affairs so strictly to himself that nobody knew anything about them, should arouse the avid curiosity and hold the breathless interest of a little town where everybody had always known everybody else's business.

Why had he come to Hyndsville? To find the Hynds jewels, after a century? Didn't he know that the Scarlett Witch had the eye of an eagle for the glitter of gold and would long since have discovered whatever of value had been in Hynds House? Why didn't he consult older members of the community, who could furnish him with immensely interesting side-lights on the Hyndses?

Mr. Jelnik never explained. He didn't ask anybody anything. He didn't even employ Hyndsville negroes, who could be expected to gossip: his household consisted of a stately bronze-colored man-servant who was reputed to be a pagan, and the huge wolf-hound, Boris, his constant companion.

When Doctor Geddes was delicately sounded, the big man explained that he himself had but recently made the acquaintance of his young kinsman; Jelnik was a first-rate chap, declared the doctor; immensely clever, as befitted his father's son; altogether likeable, but a bit of a lunatic, like all the Hyndses.

It was natural, too, that the young ladies in a small town where young men are at a premium should have noticed this one particularly and expected a like interest on his part. The inexplicable Jelnik failed to exhibit it. There was but one house that he visited, and that was Hynds House.

Whatever his reasons for this may have been, and the town named several, the fact remains that Hynds House would never have been so beautiful, the restoration wouldn't have been so nearly perfect, had it not been for the critical taste of Mr. Jelnik. He had the European knowledge of beautiful things, and, toward the finer graces of life, the attitude of Paris, of Rome, of Vienna, rather than of New York, of Chicago, or of, say, Atlanta.

There was a glamour about the man. Whatever he did or said had an indefinable, delightful significance; what he left undone was full of meaning. His mere presence ornamented and colored common moments so that they glowed, and remained in the memory with a rainbow light upon them. He was

never hurried or flurried, any more than sun and sky and trees and tides are; and he was just as vital, and quite as baffling.

We accepted him at first as part of the fairy-story into which Destiny had pitchforked us. He belonged to Hynds House, so to speak, and there one might meet him upon common ground. But sometimes when I happened to glance up I would find him watching us with those reflective eyes that were so full of light and at the same time so inscrutable. And then he would smile, his Dionysiac smile that made him all at once so far off and so foreign that I knew, with a sinking heart, that he didn't belong at all; that this beautiful and brilliant bird of passage was lightening for but a very brief space my sober skies.

Alicia said he made her think of peacocks and ivory. He delighted and dazzled her, though he did not disquiet her as he did me, perhaps because she, too, was young and beautiful, and I—wasn't.

It will be seen, then, that our position, take it by and large, wasn't one that called for flags and buntings. Life didn't look a bit rose-colored to me as I sat there that night, drafting a letter to the Head. Of a sudden arose clamor in the hall, and howls, hideously loud at that hour and in that quiet house. There came the noise of running feet, and there burst into the lighted library, with gray faces and rolling eyes, our two lately acquired colored maids, Fernolia the thin one, and Queen of Sheba, fat and brown.

"Good heavens! What's the matter?" I asked, fearfully. It had been a terrible task to break in those two handmaids, to train them *not* to take part in the conversation at table, *not* to take off cap, and hair, not to do the thousand and one undisciplined and disorderly things they did do.

"Ghostes! Sperets! Ha'nts!" chattered the colored women. "Ol' Mis' Scarlett's walkin' in de ca'iage house!"

"Nonsense!" At the same time I felt myself turning pale, and goose-flesh coming out on my spine.

"No, ma'am, Miss Sophy, 't ain't nonsense. It's ha'nts!" protested Fernolia. She was the brighter of the two, but given to embroidering her facts.

"Yessum, I done saw 'er," corroborated Queenasheeba. (That's how one pronounced her name.)

The two occupied a very pleasant room above the carriage house, a room that

had overcome their unwillingness to stay overnight at Hynds House. Queenasheeba was just dozing, when she was awakened by Fernolia, who had been sitting by the window. Both of them, peering through the scrim curtains, saw a tall white figure disappear into the spring-house. A few minutes later, to their horror, they heard Something moving downstairs in the carriage house—Something like the clank of a chain—footsteps—and then silence. Almost paralyzed with terror, the two women clung together. *Anything* might be expected of ol' Mis' Scarlett! However, nothing further happened. With shaking hands Queenasheeba relighted the lamp. Then, snatching up such clothes as they could grab, the two fled to us.

Mary Magdalen and Beautiful Dog always departed after dinner. Except for the Black family and the two canaries, Alicia and I had big, lonesome Hynds House to ourselves. Mr. Jelnik's gray cottage, set amid Lombardy poplars and thick shrubberies, was some distance away, and we didn't know whether Doctor Geddes was at home or not. It is true we had firearms, a pair of pistols having been literally forced upon us by the doctor, who fretted and fumed about our staying there alone. Both of us were more afraid of those pistols than of any possible ghostly intruder.

Nevertheless, I went up-stairs and fetched them. Alicia took one as she might have taken a rattlesnake, and I held the other. Armed thus, carrying torch-light and lantern, and with the two gray-faced, half-clad negro women following us, one carrying our brass poker and the other the tongs, we marched upon the carriage house.

The big barnlike place, lately cleaned and whitewashed, looked painfully empty. In one of the stalls the hay purchased for our recently acquired Jersey cow gave off a pleasant odor. Over in one corner, in a neat, clean, orderly array, were Schmetz's tools. A little farther on was our chicken feed, in covered barrels.

We went from empty stall to empty stall, to reassure the women; there wasn't so much as a cobweb in any of them. All the down-stairs windows were heavily barred with iron and further protected, like the doors, with heavy oaken shutters studded with iron nail-heads. The two small rooms in the rear had once been used as a jail for recalcitrant slaves; they held now nothing deadlier than Schmetz's flower pots and seedlings. Every shutter was closed, and the iron bars looked reassuringly strong; also, the walls are three feet thick.

"You were dreaming, you silly women! I told you you were dreaming!" said I,

and had turned to go, reassured and relieved, when Alicia's nose wrinkled. I could hardly keep from sniffing, myself.

In the carriage-house was a faint, indeterminable scent, the ghost of the ghost of fragrance, so elusive that one sensed rather than smelled it, so pervasive and haunting that one could not miss it. And it certainly had nothing to do with the wholesome odor of hay and cow feed, or the smell of whitewash and oiled tools.

"Yes, you were dreaming." Alicia began to edge the colored women toward the doors. "But as you've had a scare," she added pleasantly, "I'll give you a new lace collar, Queenasheeba, and you a red ribbon, Fernolia, to wear to church next Sunday, just to prove to you that being awake is heaps better than having nightmares."

We padlocked the big doors after us, and went through the rooms up-stairs. They, too, had been freshly cleaned and calcimined. And they, too, were quite empty.

Despite which, Fernolia and Queenasheeba were firmly, tearfully, shiveringly certain they had seen nothing less than ol' Mis' Scarlett's ha'nt. They had the worst possible opinion of ol' Miss Scarlett: she had been bad enough living—but as a spook! We had to let them lug their bedding over and sleep in the room next to ours; we had to give them sweet lavender to quiet their nerves. I am sure they would have bolted incontinently if they hadn't been too scared to venture outside.

"If I could catch that ghost I'd shake it!" declared Alicia. And we went back to our figuring, with a sort of desperate courage. "*Now* will you get those clothes, Sophy Smith?" she resumed, through her teeth, and the pink came back to her cheek, and her eyes deepened. "And do you agree to stick it out, you and I shoulder to shoulder, town or no town, ha'nts or no ha'nts; and win out?"

"Yes!" said I.

CHAPTER VII

A BRIGHT PARTICULAR STAR

Wire from The Author, New York City, to Miss S. Smith, Hyndsville, South Carolina:

> Photos received. Furniture noted. It's pretty, but is it art?

Wire from Miss Smith to The Author:

> What is Art?

Wire from The Author:

> Sometimes an invention of the devil. Is your stuff Madison Avenue or Grand Rapids? Reply.

Wire from Miss Smith:

> Madison Avenue and Grand Rapids hadn't been invented when Hynds House was furnished.

Wire from The Author:

> Maybe not, but mightn't be same furniture. Have been stung before. Can't be genuine. Too much of it.

Wire from Miss Smith:

> Please yourself.

Wire from The Author:

> Coming to investigate. Won't sleep in anything but pineapple bed; won't sit in anything but carved chair; can't pray without prie-dieu. If spurious will publicly gibbet you and probably burn your house down. Hold southwest room my arrival.

Alicia laughed, and cuddled those yellow slips.

"I knew this was an enchanted place!" she cried. "Oh, Sophy, it's working! He's coming, he's coming, and he's the biggest ever, and he's going to *stay*! Sophy, think of the advertising!"

"He will probably be detestable. Geniuses are generally horrid to live with. And there will be something the matter with his digestion; there is always

something the matter with their digestion."

"From swallowing all the flattery shoveled upon them, poor dears," Alicia explained charitably. "Don't worry about his digestion: leave it to Mary Magdalen's waffles. Hooray! Hynds House stock is booming!"

It was.

From the head of our firm:

My dear Miss Smith:

I have your interesting letter and the delightful photographs, which have so completely charmed Mrs. Westmacote and me that we have decided it wouldn't be good business to miss Hynds House on our trip South this year.

Mrs. Westmacote asks if you could also accommodate a cousin of hers, Miss Emmeline Phelps-Parsons, a lady deeply interested in the colonial homes of America.

You must allow me heartily to congratulate you upon your great good fortune in falling heir to such a wonderful old place; and to wish you many happy and prosperous years in it.

I shall telegraph you when to expect us. With all good wishes,

Yours faithfully,
GEORGE PEABODY WESTMACOTE.

Letter from Miss Emmeline Phelps-Parsons, of Boston:

Dear Miss Smith:

My cousin Mrs. Westmacote, whom I have been visiting, showed me your letter and the enchanting photographs of your house which you were kind enough to send Mr. Westmacote. Hynds House is just the one place I have long been looking for!—an unspoiled colonial house, with historic associations!

It is perfect! I must see with my own eyes those Chelsea figures on your drawing-room mantel, the luster and Washington jugs in the dining-room, and the cabinets in the hall.

Sincerely yours,
EMMELINE PHELPS-PARSONS.

P.S. I hope it is really true that there is an Influence in Hynds House? I do so greatly long to come in contact with the Occult and the Unknown!

"Somewhere on the firing-line of fifty," mused Alicia. "A lady with a soul. Don't you hear dear old Boston calling you, Sophy? Here's one to put Miss Martha Hopkins's light under a bushel basket!"

We had several other inquirers; and chose from them Mr. Chetwynd Harrison-Gore and his daughter, English folk "doing" America and delighted to include a Carolina colonial house in their trip; a suffrage leader, whose throat needed a

rest; and Morenas, the illustrator. It seemed that Hynds House offered to each one something that had been craved for.

The Author pounced upon us two or three days before we expected him, to take stock after his own fashion. I have heard The Author commended for "the humor of his rare smile and the keen, kind intellectuality of his remarkable eyes." Well, the smile was rare enough; and of course there isn't any doubt about the man's intellectuality. For the rest, he proved to be a tall, lanky, stooping person, with a thin tanned face, outstanding ears, a high nose, and long, blue-gray eyes half-hidden under drooping lids and behind glasses. His hair was just hair. And he had the sort of mustache that bristled like a cat's when he twisted his lip.

So far as monetary success, and efficacious press-agents, and the adulation, admiration, emulation, and envy of his contemporaries went, he had nothing to complain of. He was lionized, quoted, courted, flattered, reviewed, viewed through rose-colored spectacles; and disillusioned, discontented, cynical, selfish, and, of course, most horribly bored. He was gun-shy of women; he suspected them of wanting to marry him. He was wary of men; he suspected them of wanting to exploit him. He loathed children, who were generally obstreperous and unnecessary editions of parents he didn't admire. He didn't even trust the beautiful works of men's hands. They, even they, were too often faked! If you had dug up the indubitable mummy of the first Pharaoh from under the oldest of the pyramids, The Author would have turned him over on his back and hunted for the trade-mark of The Modern Mummy-makers: London, Paris, and New York; Catalogue on Request.

He stalked through Hynds House with slitted eyes and bristling mustache—business of silent sleuth on the trail of the furniture-fakir! He'd pause at each door and with an eagle glance take a comprehensive survey; then, defensively, offensively, he examined things in detail. From our rambling attics to our vast and cavernous cellars did he go; and not a word crossed his lips until he had completed this conandoyley examination. Then:

"Telegraph form if you have one, please," he requested briefly. "I wish to wire for my car. Put Johnson in the room next mine. Johnson's my secretary." He looked at Alicia, reflectively. "Amiable ass, Johnson," he volunteered. Then he went over to the tiled fireplace—we were in the library—and bent worshipfully before it.

"The finest bit of tile-work on this continent," he said, in a hushed voice. "Absolutely perfect. And it belongs to a woman named Smith!"

"We know just how you feel about it," Alicia told him sympathetically, while The Author turned red to his ears. "I have often felt like that myself, when something I particularly wanted was bought by somebody I was sure couldn't properly appreciate it. I dare say I was mistaken," admitted Alicia, "just as mistaken as you are now in thinking that Sophy and I aren't worthy of those tiles. We are—all the more so because we never before had anything like them."

The spoiled darling of success looked at us intently; and a most curious change came over his clever, bad-tempered face. His eyes are as bright as ice, and have somewhat the same cold light in them. Now a thaw set in and melted them, and a mottled red spread over his sallow cheeks.

"Miss Gaines," he said, abruptly, "your doll-baby face does your intelligence an injustice—Miss Smith, I apologize." And before the astonished and indignant Alicia could summon a withering retort, he added heartily: "This whole place is quite the real thing, you know—almost too good to be true and too true to be good. Would you mind telling me how you happened to think of letting me in on it, eh?"

"Because we knew it *was* the real thing," Alicia replied, truthfully.

"Do you know,"—The Author was plainly pleased—"that that is one of the very nicest things that's ever been said to me? Because I really *do* know above a bit about genuine stuff."

"It must be a great relief to you to hear something pleasant about yourself that is also something true," I said with sympathy. The Author grinned like a hyena, and Alicia giggled. "Because you must be bored to extinction, having to listen to all sorts of people ascribe to you all sorts of virtues that no one man could possibly possess and remain human." I was remembering some of the fulsome flubdub I'd read about him.

"Hark to her!" grinned The Author. "What! you don't believe all the nice things you've read about me?"

"I do not."

"You don't in the least look or write like a dehumanized saint, you know," supplemented Alicia, laughing.

"What *do* I look like, then?" He sat on the edge of a table and cuddled a bony knee. Behind his glasses his eyes began to twinkle.

"You look more like yourself than you do like your photographs," decided Alicia.

The Author threw up his hands.

"And now, tell me this, please: How, when, where, and from whom, did you acquire the supreme art of aiding and abetting an old house to grow young again without losing its character?"

"We were born," Alicia explained, "with the inherent desire to do just what we have been able to do here. This house gave us our big chance. But it wouldn't have been so—so in keeping with itself," she was feeling for the right words, "if it hadn't been for Mr. Nicholas Jelnik."

The Author pricked up his intellectual ears. His eyes narrowed.

"Jelnik? I knew a Jelnik, an Austrian alienist; met him at dinner at the American Ambassador's in Vienna; quiet, unassuming, pleasant man, and one of the greatest doctors in Europe."

"Mr. Jelnik is Doctor Jelnik's son."

"What!" shrieked The Author. And with unfeigned amazement: "In the name of high heaven, what is Jelnik's son doing *here*?"

"Mr. Jelnik's mother was a Miss Hynds. She met and married your doctor abroad."

That sixth sense possessed by him to an unusual degree, warned him that he was on the trail of Copy.

"May I ask questions?" he demanded.

"Of course."

"You inherited this property from an old aunt, I believe?"

"She wasn't my aunt, really. She married my mother's uncle, Johnny Scarlett."

"I see. And Jelnik's mother was a Miss Hynds. How long has he been here?"

"For some time before we came."

"Near neighbor of yours?"

"Yes," Alicia put in; "and Doctor Richard Geddes is our neighbor on the other side. His grandmother was a Miss Hynds."

"Pardon a writer-man's curiosity," begged The Author, smiling. "But this house is unusual, very unusual. While I am here I shall look up its history. It should make good copy."

Having a pretty shrewd idea of The Author's powers of finding out what he wanted to find out, we thought it better that he should hear that history, as we knew it. If the mystery had ever been solved, the tragedy of Hynds House would have had but passing interest for The Author. But the undiscovered piqued and puzzled him and aroused his combative egotism.

From the pictured face of Freeman—dark, stern, uncommunicative—he trotted back to the drawing room to look again at the boyish face of little Richard leaning against his pretty mother's knees; at the haughty, handsome face of James Hampden; and at beautiful dark Jessamine, who had a long black curl straying across the shoulder of a blue frock, and a curled red lip, and a breast of snow.

"Freeman was not a crook; his face is hard, stern, bigoted, secretive, but honest. Yet if he didn't do it himself what was he trying to tell when death cut off his wind? If he did it, where did he hide the plunder? Here in this house? His family must have known every nook and cranny as well as he did himself, and he could be sure they'd pull it to pieces in the search that would ensue.

"If Richard were the thief, to whom did he give the loot? If the gems had been put upon the market, some trace of them must have been discovered. Remains: Who got them? Where did they go?"

"That's what the unhappy people in this house asked a century ago, and there was no answer," I remarked, soberly.

"And that poor woman Jessamine went mad trying to solve it!" he said, looking at her with commiseration. And after a pause: "And so the lady who left her husband's grandniece the house of her forebears was Freeman's daughter: and the Austrian doctor's son is Richard's great-great-grandson! I meet Jelnik *père* in Vienna, and come to Hyndsville, South Carolina, to meet Jelnik *fils*. H'm!

Decidedly, the situation has nice possibilities!"

Whereupon he took note-book and fountain-pen from his coat pocket and in the most composed manner began to jot down the outstanding features of Hynds House history.

"It will give me something to puzzle over while I'm here," he remarked, complacently. It did!

The Author approved of Hynds House. It had all the charm of a new and quaint field of exploration and research, and there was nothing in it to offend his hypercritical judgment. I have a shrewd suspicion that Mary Magdalen's cooking played no mean part in his satisfaction. His prowess as a trencherman aroused the admiration and respect of Fernolia, who waited on table. Fernolia had learned to admire herself in her smart apron and cap, and to serve creditably enough. Only twice did she fall from grace; once was the morning The Author broke his own record for waffles. Fernolia, excited and astonished, placed the last platter before him, raised the cover with a flourish, and remarked with deep meaning:

"*Dem's all!*"

The second time was when we had what Mary Magdalen calls "mulatto rice," which is a dish built upon a firm foundation of small strips of bacon, onion, stewed tomatoes, and rice, and a later and last addition of deliciously browned country sausages. Fernolia, beaming upon The Author hospitably, broke her parole:

"You ain't called to skimp yo'self none on dat rice," she told him confidentially. "De cook done put yo' name in de pot *big*. She say she glad we-all got man in de house to 'preciate vittles. Yes-*suh,* Ma'y Magdalen aim to make you bust yo' buttonholes whilst you hab de chanst."

I am told that The Author always makes a great hit when he tells that on himself, and is considered tremendously clever because he can imitate Fernolia's soft South Carolina drawl.

Mr. Nicholas Jelnik, whom he managed to meet within the week, aroused The Author's professional interest. For once his tried and tested powers of turning other people's minds inside out failed utterly. His innocent-sounding queries, his adroit leads, were smilingly turned aside. The defense, so far as Mr. Jelnik was

concerned, was ridiculously simple: he didn't want to talk about himself and he didn't do it.

He was perfectly willing to talk, when the humor seized him, and he did talk, brilliantly, wittily, freely, and impersonally. The egoistic "I" was conspicuous by its absence. And while he talked you could see the agile antennæ of The Author's winged mind feeling after the soul-string that might lead him through the mazes of this unusual character. That he could be deftly diverted filled The Author with chagrin mingled with wonder.

He manœuvered for an invitation to the gray cottage and secured it with suspicious ease; called, and had a glass of most excellent wine in his host's simplest of bachelor living-rooms; made the closer acquaintance of Boris—he didn't care for dogs—and of self-contained, dark-faced Daoud, Mr. Jelnik's East Indian man-servant; and came home dissatisfied and determined. He scented "copy," and a born writer after copy is, next to an Apache after a scalp or a Dyak after his enemy's head, the most ruthless of created beings. He will pick his mother's naked soul to pieces, bore into his wife's living brain, dissect his daughter's quivering heart, tear across his sister's mind, rip up his father's life and his best friend's character, lay bare the tomb itself, and make for himself an ink of tears and blood that he may write what he finds. Of such is the kingdom of Genius.

And in the meantime the wondrous news that The Author himself was staying at Hynds House, percolated through Hyndsville and soaked to the bone. The Author was too big a figure to be ignored, even by South Carolina people. Something had to be done. But how shall one become acquainted with a notoriously unfriendly and gun-shy celebrity, a personage of such note that every utterance means newspaper space; and at the same time manage utterly to ignore and cast into outer darkness the people with whom the great one is staying?

The town felt itself put upon its mettle. The first move was made by Miss Martha Hopkins. It was understood that if anybody could clear the way, carry a difficult position with skill and aplomb, that somebody was Miss Martha Hopkins.

She didn't bear down directly upon The Author: that would have been crude. She opened her campaign by a flank movement upon Alicia and me, in her capacity of secretary and treasurer of the missionary society.

Miss Hopkins sailed into Hynds House on a perfect afternoon, to discuss with

us a proposed rummage-sale which was to benefit the heathen. She wasn't really worrying about the heathen: he had all the rest of his benighted life to get himself saved in, hadn't he? All the while she sat there and talked about him, she was really loaded to the muzzle with pertinent remarks to affluent authors.

She had come with the hope of chancing upon the great man himself; and, failing that, she meant to pump Alicia and me of enough material to, say, enable her to use a part of her stock of pet adjectives in the paper she would prepare for the next meeting of the literary society. She had a pretty stock of adjectives—plump, purple words like *lyric*, and *liquid*, and *plastic*, and *subtile*, and *poignancy*, with every now and then a *chiaoscuro* thrown in for good measure; and a whole melting-pot full of "rare emotional experiences," "art that was almost intuitive in its passion, so subtly did it"—oh, do all sorts of things!—and "handling the plastic outlines of the theme with rare emotional skill and mastery of technique," "purest lyricism lifted to heights of poignancy,"—all that sort of stuff, you know. Next time a writer, or, better still, a fiddler or a pianist comes to your town, look in your home paper the morning after, and you'll see it.

As it happened, The Author was not at home. His secretary had arrived a day or two before, and after unloading a systemful of copy upon that faithful beast of burden, The Author had given himself a half-holiday with old Riedriech, who knew quite enough about old furniture to win his interest and affection.

Miss Hopkins, then, had Alicia and me to herself. Sedately we discussed rummage-sales, and the effect of cotton shirts upon the adolescent cannibal; and all the while Miss Hopkins was stealthily watching doors and windows and hoping that high heaven would send The Author to her hands. We hadn't so much as mentioned his name. It pleased us to sit there and watch her trying to make us do so.

The iron knocker on the front door sounded. And ushered in by Queenasheeba, there stood Nicholas Jelnik with great gray Boris beside him, and beauty and glamour and romance upon him like a light. Miss Hopkins had seen him on the streets, but hadn't met him personally. I don't think she relished the fact that she had to come to Hynds House to do so. Nor could she save herself from the crudity of staring with all her eyes at this handsome offshoot of the Hyndses, with what in a less polite person might well have been called avid curiosity.

"Miss Leetchy," (he had gaily borrowed Fernolia's pronunciation of Alicia's

name), "I have brought you the butter-scotch your soul hankers after. I fear you can never hope to grow up, Miss Leetchy, while you cherish a jejune passion for butter-scotch."

"Oh, I don't know. It might have been fudge!" Alicia replied airily. "But thank you, Mr. Jelnik: it was very nice of you to remember."

"Yes. I have such an excellent memory," said he, blandly. "Miss Smith, this preserved ginger is laid at your shrine. If you offer me a piece or two, I shall accept with thanks: I like preserved ginger, myself.—Boris, you'll prefer butter-scotch. You may ask Miss Gaines to give you a piece."

Miss Hopkins, it appeared, despised butter-scotch, and abhorred preserved ginger.

"I saw The Author hiking across lots a while since. Nice, open-hearted, neighborly man, The Author.—Oh, by the way, Miss Smith: is it, or is it not written in the Book of Darwin that the gadfly is one of the distinct evolutionary links in the descent of man?"

"Good heavens, certainly not!" cried Miss Hopkins. And she looked strangely upon Mr. Nicholas Jelnik.

"No? Thank you. I was in doubt," murmured Mr. Jelnik. The golden flecks danced in and out of his eyes. "But we were speaking of The Author: may I ask how The Author appeals to you as a human being, Miss Hopkins?"

"I do not know him as a human being," Miss Hopkins admitted.

Mr. Jelnik looked surprised. His eyebrows went up.

"Oh, come, now!" he demurred. "He isn't so bad as all *that*!"

"Oh, dear me, no!" Alicia protested, in a shocked voice. "He may have abrupt manners and say unexpected things, but he is perfectly respectable, Miss Hopkins! There's never been a *breath* against his character. I thought you knew," purred the hussy, demurely. "Why, he's dined at the White House, and lunched and motored and yachted with royalties, and lectured before the D.A.R.'s themselves! And he belongs to at least a dozen societies. There are,"—Alicia was enjoying her naughty self immensely—"good authors and bad authors. Sometimes the bad authors are good, and sometimes the good authors are bad. But our author is more than either: he's It!"

"You entirely and strangely misunderstand me." Miss Hopkins spoke with the deadly gentleness of suppressed fury. "I had no slightest intention of reflecting upon the character of so eminent a writer, with whose career, Miss Gaines, I am thoroughly familiar. I was merely trying to explain that I had never met him."

"Oh, I see. Of course! I should have remembered that!"

Miss Hopkins's entire contempt for Alicia's mentality overcame any suspicion she might have entertained. Also, she had come determined to discover what she could about The Author, and she was not one lightly to be put aside. She said, smiling tolerantly:

"Of course you should! But mayn't I congratulate *you* upon knowing him? Having him here in Hynds House almost justifies turning the old place into a boarding-house, doesn't it?"

"The Author," Mr. Jelnik remarked gently, "has a very sensitive soul. I shudder to think what the effect upon him would be were he to hear himself referred to as a boarder. My dear Miss Hopkins, never, never let him hear you designate him 'boarder'!"

"Who's talking about boarders?" asked a hearty voice, and Doctor Richard Geddes came in like a gale of mountain air.

"Miss Hopkins. She thinks The Author's presence almost justifies the turning of Hynds House into a boarding-house," answered Mr. Jelnik. He added, thoughtfully, "Curious notion; isn't it?"

"Martha has plenty more," said the doctor, bluntly. "Boarding-house? Well, supposing? What was it before? A hyena-cage, Martha, a hyena-cage, into which you'd be the last to venture your nose, my dear woman! I say, put on your bonnets, all of you, and let's have a spin in the fresh air. The roads are gorgeous. You can come too, Jelnik: there's room for five."

Mr. Jelnik was desolated: he had a pressing engagement. Miss Hopkins rose precipitately. She also had an engagement; besides, she liked to walk. People needed to walk more than they did. The reason why one saw so many bad figures nowadays, was that people lolled around in automobiles instead of walking.

"Well, walking is certainly good for you, Martha. It helps you to reduce," the doctor agreed. Miss Hopkins said dryly that the little walking she intended to do

just then wouldn't affect her weight any. And that Doctor Geddes should himself take to walking: men always got fat as they neared fifty.

"Fat! Fifty!" roared the doctor, with enraged astonishment. "Why, I'm not by some years as old as you are, Martha! You were several classes ahead of me in school, don't you remember? I am exactly thirty-nine years old, and as you know everything else, you ought to know that!"

Miss Hopkins studied him with a balefully level eye.

"You really can't blame anybody for forgetting it, Richard," she said, ambiguously.

"You are to recollect, Geddes, that a woman is always as young as she looks," (Mr. Jelnik bowed, smilingly, to Miss Hopkins), "and a man is older than he feels," he added, for the doctor's benefit.

"All right. Let's say I feel as good as Martha looks," the doctor's momentary ill humor vanished. Miss Hopkins smiled. She had stuck her claws into him and drawn blood; but her fur was still ruffled.

Mr. Jelnik made his adieus, Boris offering each of us a polite paw.

"And now," the doctor ordered briskly, "to your spinning, jades, to your spinning! Into my car, the three of you! No, Martha, I will *not* take a refusal; you shall not walk: you've got to come along, if I have to tuck you under my arm. I don't care if you never reduce. What do you want to reduce for, anyhow? You're all right just as you are! There! are you satisfied?"

We stood by passively while the masterful doctor heckled and hustled the unhappy Center of Culture into his car. With heaven knows what feelings, she found herself seated beside me, Sophy Smith, while Alicia, beside the doctor, tossed gay remarks over her shoulder. Miss Hopkins realized that all Hyndsville would witness what she herself knew to be high-handed capture by force, but which must hideously resemble capitulation; and she also realized that explanations never explain.

I respected her misery enough to keep silent, and she made no attempt to converse. Her hat slid forward at a rakish angle over one ear, and her hair blew about her face in stringy wisps, as the doctor broke the speed laws on the long, level stretches of quiet roads. When we came to a rough spot she bounced up and down (one might hear her breath exhaled in a—well, yes, in a grunt) but she

made no complaint, uttered no protest. She was a shackled and voiceless victim, until we finally drew up at her own gate, after an hour's jaunt, and allowed her to escape.

"Why, Martha, our little spin has given you a fine color!" remarked the doctor, genuinely pleased. Two conspicuously red spots shone in Miss Hopkins's cheeks, and her eyes were extremely bright. "We'll have to take you out with us again," he added, genially.

"Shall you, Richard?" muttered Miss Hopkins, and scuttled up her front path,

Like one who in a lonesome wood
Doth walk in fear and dread,
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread!

By and large, I should say that the honors were with Alicia.

The Author's secretary was pacing up and down the garden when we reached home, with Potty Black careering after him and every now and then dashing into the shrubbery to put to flight Beautiful Dog, who was also enamored of the young man with the nice smile and the good brown eyes. He had a great affection for animals, as they seemed to understand.

Beautiful Dog laid aside, for his sake, his fear of white people, and slunk after him fawningly, wagging what did duty as a tail, and showing every tooth in an ear-to-ear grin. At sight of us, Beautiful Dog gave a dismal yelp and disappeared.

"Let's sit in the library," coaxed the secretary. "I want you please to allow me to hold in my hands your copy of 'Purchas his Pilgrimes.' The Author dreams about that book out loud. Oh, yes, another thing I want to ask you: what sort of perfume do you use, and where do you get it?"

My scalp prickled.

"I noticed it in the upper hall last night," went on the secretary, innocently. "It was pervasive, but at the same time so delicate, so elusive, that I couldn't determine what it was. I am very sensitive to perfumes."

"So are we," Alicia told him. "And if what you think you smelled is what we think we smell, it isn't a—a regular perfume. It's a—a—a something that belongs

to Hynds House."

The library was flooded with the ruddy light of sunset. Every bit of color in the big room stood out against a golden background, and a great golden spear fell across the dark, brooding face of Freeman Hynds above the old tiled fireplace. In that rosy glow he seemed to look down at us with living eyes.

"Is that so?" The secretary stopped; and his head went up and his nose wrinkled. For the "something that belonged to Hynds House" walked upon the air with invisible feet.

CHAPTER VIII

PEACOCKS AND IVORY

"Sophy, do you remember the night we talked it over, and decided to come here, and you were afraid of the new soil's effect upon yourself?"

"Of course. Why?"

"Oh, because."

"Because why?"

"Just because.—I wish to gracious you had a little saving vanity, Sophy Smith!"

"And what, then, is *this*?" I asked ironically, and rustled my skirts. For the Westmacotes were to arrive that night, in time for dinner, and I, standing before the mirror in my room, was what Alicia called "really dressed" for the first time in my life.

"From your point of view, this is a business necessity. From mine, it is applied morality. Why, Sophy, you're *stunning*! Here, sit down: I have to loosen up that hair a bit."

"Now!" said she, when she had critically surveyed her finished work and found it good, "Now, Sophy Smith, you are no longer efficient and utilitarian; you are effective and decorative, thank heaven!"

Really, clothes do make a tremendous difference, after all. Why, I—Well, I no longer looked root-bound.

"I said you'd put out new leaves and begin to bloom!" Alicia exulted. We bowed to the Sophy in the glass, a small and slender person with quantities of fair hair, a round white chin, and steady blue eyes. For the rest, she had a short nose and the rather wide mouth of a boy. She wasn't what you'd call a beautiful person, but she wasn't displeasing to the eye.

"*Vale*, plain Sophy Smith!" cried Alicia, "*Ave*, dear Lady of Hynds House! We

who about to live salute you!"

The Westmacotes were delighted with Alicia. The Head had noticed her just about as much as a Head notices a pale file-clerk in a white shirt-waist and a black skirt. This radiant rose-maiden—"little Dawn-rose," old Riedriech called her—was new to him; and so, I fancy, was a Miss Smith in such a frock as I was wearing. He, as well as his wife and Miss Phelps-Parsons, accepted us at our face-value, with the background of Hynds House outlining us.

Miss Emmeline Phelps-Parsons was a lady with a soul. She said she had psychic consciousness and a clear green aura, and that she had been an Egyptian priestess in Thebes, in the time of Sesostris. In proof of this she showed us a fine little bronze Osiris holding a whip in one hand and the ankh in the other. ("My dear, the moment I saw him, I knew I had once prayed to him!") and she always wore a scarab ring. She had bought both in an antique-shop just off Washington Street. I thought this rather a far cry from Thebes, myself, but The Author insisted that if a Theban vestal of the time of Sesostris *had* to reincarnate, she would naturally and inevitably come to life a Boston one.

The Author hadn't taken any too kindly to the notion of other people coming to Hynds House. He grumbled that he had hoped he had at last found a quiet haven, a place that fitted him like a glove; he protested piercingly against having it "cluttered up with uninteresting, gobbling, gabbling, ordinary people."

"You came too late. You should have been here with Great-Aunt Sophronisba," Alicia told him, tartly. "You'd have been ideal companions, both of you beware-of-the-doggy, hair-trigger-tempery, all-to-your-selfish."

The Author gasped, and rubbed his eyes. Never, never, in all his pampered life, had one so spoken to him.

"Why, of all the cheek!" exploded The Author. "Am I to be flouted thus by a piece of pink-and-whiteness just escaped from the nursery pap-spoon?"

"Out of the mouths of babes—" insinuated Alicia.

The Author grinned. And his grin is redeeming.

"Sweet-and near-twenty," he explained. "I am not exactly all-to-myselfish, but I demand plenty of elbow-room in my existence. Generally speaking, my own society bores me less than the society of the mutable many. I like Hynds House. And I like you two women. You are not tiresome to the ear, wearisome to the

mind, nor displeasing to the eye. I am even sensible of a distinct feeling of satisfaction in knowing that you are somewhere around the house. You belong. But I'm hanged if I want to see strangers come in. I object to strangers. Why are strangers necessary?"

"For the same reason that you were."

"I?" The Author's eyebrows were almost lost in his hair. "My dear, deluded child, I knew this house, and you, and Sophy Smith, before you were born! I knew you," The Author declared unblushingly, "before *I* was born! Now, am I a stranger?"

"Then you ought to know why Sophy and I have just got to have people, the sort of people who are coming." She paused. "*We* haven't best-seller royalties piled up to the roof!"

"No," said The Author, bitterly, "but I have. That's why I am forever plagued with strangers. That's why, when I discover a place and people that suit me to perfection, I can't keep 'em to myself! Oh, da—drat it all, anyhow!"

"But they aren't coming to see you. They're coming to see Hynds House," Alicia reminded him soothingly. "Besides, I don't think they're the sort of folks that care much for authors," she finished, encouragingly.

"They'll care about *me*" grumbled The Author glumly. "But let 'em come and be hanged to them! I shall take—"

"Soothing syrup?"

"Long walks!" snarled The Author. "I shall work all night and be invisible all day."

The Westmacotes, as Alicia said, didn't greatly care for authors, though they sat up and took polite notice of this one. (One owed that to one's self-respect.) Only Miss Emmeline paid more than passing attention to him, though her interest really centered in Mr. Nicholas Jelnik, who was dining with us that night, as was Doctor Richard Geddes.

Mr. Jelnik's presence had the effect of lightening The Author's gloom. His eyes brightened, his dejection changed into alertness, and there began that subtle game of under-the-surface thrust and parry that seemed inevitable when the two met. Mr. Westmacote listened with quiet enjoyment. His dinner was to his taste,

Hynds House more than came up to his expectations, Alicia was Cinderella after the fairy's wand had passed over her, *I* had ceased to be a mere person and become a personage; and he found here such men as Doctor Geddes, The Author, and Nicholas Jelnik. The Head smiled at his wife, and was at peace with the world.

Miss Emmeline had already discovered the Lowestoft and Spode pieces in our built-in cupboards; that there were two perfect apostle jugs in the cabinet in the hall: that our Chelsea figures were lovelier than any she had heretofore seen; and that Hynds House, in which everything was genuine, had an atmosphere that appealed to her soul, or maybe matched her clear-green aura. Anyhow, the house reached out for Miss Emmeline as with hands and laid its spell upon her enduringly.

She sat beside me, with Alicia's pet album of Confederate generals on her knees.

"I never thought I'd have a sentimental regard for rebels," she confessed. "But, oh, they were gallant and romantic figures, when one looks at their old photographs here in Hynds House. I am Massachusetts to the bone, but I don't want to hear 'Marching through Georgia' while I'm here!"

Mr. Jelnik, overhearing her, laughed. "Perhaps I may find for you something more in keeping with Hynds House," he said, and sauntered over to the old piano. Unexpectedly it came to life. And he began to sing:

It was the silent, solemn hour
  When night and morning meet,
In glided Margaret's grimly ghost,
  And stood at William's feet.
Her face was like an April morn
  Clad in a wintry cloud:
And clay-cold was her lily hand,
  That held her sable shroud.

The Author shaded his eyes with his hand, his gaze riveted upon the singer. Alicia leaned forward, lips parted, face like an uplifted flower, eyes large with wonder and delight. The Confederate generals slid from Miss Emmeline's lap and lay face downward, forgotten. Westmacote's faded little wife, who had no children, crept closer to her big husband; and gently, unobtrusively, he reached out and took her hand in his warm grasp.

Why did you promise love to me
And not that promise keep?
Why did you swear mine eyes were bright,
Yet leave those eyes to weep?
Why did you say my face was fair,
And yet that face forsake?
How could you win my virgin heart,
Yet leave that heart to break?

I am sure there is no lovelier and more touching ballad in all our English treasury than that sad, simple, and most beautiful old song. And he had set it to an air as simple and as perfect as its own words, an old-world air that suited it and his rich and flexible voice.

"Why, Jelnik!" exclaimed Doctor Geddes, in a voice of pure astonishment, "I knew you could tinkle out a tune on a piano, but, man, I didn't dream it was in you to sing like this!" And he stared at his cousin.

"I'd make bold to swear that Mr. Jelnik has a dozen more surprises up his sleeve, if he chose to let us see them," The Author said pleasantly.

"My father's system of education included music. For which I praise him in the gates," Mr. Jelnik replied casually.

"'Tinkle out a tune on a piano'!" breathed Alicia, and cast a look of deep disdain upon the blundering doctor. "Why, I've never in all my life heard anybody sing like that!"

But I saw him through a mist, and felt my heart ache and burn in my breast, and wondered what he was doing here in my house that might have been his house, and how I was going to walk through my life after he had gone out of it.

I had a wild desire to run outside into the dark night and the hushed garden, away from everybody and weep and weep, despairingly. Because a veil had been torn from my eyes this night, and I knew that the cruellest thing that can happen to a woman had happened to me. There could be but one thing more bitter—that he or anybody else in the world should know it.

So I sat there, dumb, while everybody else said pleasant things to him, their voices sounding afar, far off.

After a while we went into the living-room where our new piano is, and he

played for us—Hungarian things, I think. Then he drifted into Chopin, and Alicia stood by and turned his music for him.

"Those two," whispered Miss Emmeline, "are the most idyllic figures I have ever seen." I think she sighed as she said it. "Youth is the most beautiful thing in the world," she added.

The Westmacotes, weary after a long journey, retired early. Mr. Jelnik and Doctor Geddes had gone off together. The secretary had to finish a chapter. The Author lingered to ask, oddly enough, if I had the original plan of Hynds House. Did I know who designed it?

"Why don't you interview Judge Gatchell?"

"I did. He was polite and friendly enough, but knows no more than is strictly legal. He told me he found Hynds House here when he arrived and expected to leave it here when he departed. And Geddes knows no more. Geddes isn't interested in Hynds House by itself," finished The Author, with a crooked smile.

"Perhaps Mr. Jelnik may have some family papers."

"Perhaps he may. I'd give something for a whack at those papers, Miss Smith."

"Why not ask him to let you see them, then?"

"Tut, tut!" said The Author, crossly, and took himself off.

When I was kimonoed, braided, and slippered, Alicia in like raiment came in from her room next to mine, sat down on the floor, and leaned her head against my knees, with her cheek against my hand.

For a while, as women do, we discussed the events of the evening. Both of us had deep cause for gratification; yet both of us were strangely subdued.

"Sophy, Peacocks and Ivory is a very wonderful person, isn't he?" hesitated Alicia, after a long pause. She didn't lift her head; and the cheek against my hand was warmer than usual.

"Yes," I agreed, quietly, "so wonderful that something never to be replaced will have gone out of our lives when he goes away, and doesn't come back any more. For that is what the Nicholas Jelniks do, my dear."

"Is it?" Again she spoke after a pause. "I wonder! Somehow, I—Sophy, he

belongs here. He's—why, Sophy, he's a part of the glamour."

"I'm afraid glamour hasn't part nor place in plain folks' lives."

"But we aren't plain folks any more, either, Sophy," she insisted. "Why—why—*we're* part of the glamour, too!"

"That is just about half true."

Alicia ignored this. She asked, instead:

"Did you hear what that great blundering doctor said about tinkling out a tune on a piano?"

I could hear Mr. Jelnik praised by her or doubted by The Author. But somehow I could not bear any criticism of Doctor Geddes just then. I said stiffly:

"I have learned to appreciate Doctor Geddes."

"You are far too fair-minded not to." Presently: "Sophy?"

"Uh-huh."

"We aren't ever going to be sorry we came here—together—are we, Sophy? And we won't ever let anybody come between us. Not anybody. Not The Author—nor his secretary—nor whatever guests come—nor Mr. Nicholas Jelnik—nor—nor Doctor Richard Geddes." Her head pressed closer to my knees.

"We came first, you and I," said Alicia, in a muffled whisper. "We are more to each other than any of them can be to us. You'll remember that, won't you?"

"I will remember, you absurd Alicia!" But I did not ask my dear girl what her incoherent words might mean. I did not ask why the soft cheek against my hand was wet.

As I have said before, Hynds House is but two stories high, with deep cellars under it, and an immense attic overhead; an attic all cut up into nooks and corners, and twists and turns, and sloping roofs and dormer windows, and two or three shallow steps going up here, and two or three more going down there, and passages and doors where you'd never look for them. We had never been able fully to explore our attic. It was Ali Baba's cave to us, with half its treasures unguessed and every trunk and box whispering, "Say 'Open, Sesame,' to me, and see what you'll find!"

While I was sitting with Alicia's head against my knee, a light, swift footstep sounded overhead in the attic, followed by a sort of stumble, as if somebody had slipped on one of those unexpected steps. Alicia rose quickly.

"Sophy," she breathed, "I have thought, once or twice, that I heard somebody walking in the attic."

"We will soon find out who it is, then," said I. Noiselessly we stole out into the hall, past the sleeping Westmacotes, and Miss Emmeline Phelps-Parsons who so longed to come in closer contact with the occult and unknown. We moved like ghosts, ourselves, our felt-soled mules making no sound.

The Author opened his door just as we approached it, and held up an imperious finger.

"Did you hear it, too?" he whispered. And walking ahead of us, he stole up the cork-screw stairway at the end of the side hall, lifted the latch of the attic door, and stepped inside.

It was frightfully dark up there. If you peered through the uncurtained windows you could see tree-tops tossing like black waves against the dark sky, and in between them rolling clouds, and little bright patchwork spaces of stars. And it was so quiet you could hear your heart beat, and your breathing seemed to rattle in your ears. We strained our eyes, seeking to pierce the gloom, stealing forward step by step. A board creaked, noisily; and then—I could have sworn it—then something seemed to move across one of the dormer windows. It was so vague, so shadowy, that one could not distinguish its outline; one could only think that something moved.

The Author gave an exclamation and switched on his electric torch, trying to focus the circle of light upon that particular window. There was nothing there. Only, it seemed to me that something, incredibly swift and silent, flashed down one of the bewildering turns to which our attic is addicted. But when we ran forward, the passage was empty. We brought up at the red brick square of one of the chimney stacks.

Almost savagely The Author flashed his light over every inch of wall and floor. Nothing. But on the close and musty air stole, not a sound, but a scent.

The Author swung around and trotted back. The window across which we thought we had seen something move was fastened from the inside, and there

were one or two wooden boxes and a leather-covered trunk in the dormer recess. He sniffed hound-like around these, and with an exclamation leaned over. Behind the trunk crouched—Potty Black, with a mouse clamped in her jaws.

"For heaven's sake!" cried Alicia. "The cat! Sophy, what we heard was the cat!"

"Let us go," said The Author. And feeling rather silly, we trailed after him.

"You see," said I, "there is nothing. There never is anything."

"Come in my room for a minute," The Author whispered, and there was that in his voice which made us obey.

Inside his door, he opened his hand. In his palm was a soiled and crumpled scrap of tough, parchment-like paper about the size of an ordinary playing-card, so frayed and creased that one had difficulty in deciphering the writing on it. There clung to it a faint and unforgetable scent.

"It was behind the trunk, partly under the cat's black paw. I smelled it when I leaned over, and I thought we might as well have a look at it." said The Author.

And on the following page is what The Author had found.

"'Shades of E.A. Poe, and Robert Louis the Beloved! What have we here?" cried The Author, joyously, and stood on one leg like a stork. "Was there a Hynds woman named Helen? 'Turn Hellen's Key three tens and three?' Some keyhole! I say, Miss Smith, let me keep this for a while, will you?"

"Do, Sophy, let him keep it!" pleaded Alicia.

Key: Turne Hellens Keye Three Tennes & Three...

"I'll take the best care of it, Miss Smith; indeed I will!" The Author promised. "Look here: I'll lock it in the clothes-closet, in the breast pocket of my coat." As he spoke, he opened the cedar-lined closet, that was almost as big as a modern hall bedroom, and put the paper in the breast pocket of his coat. Locking the door, he placed the key under his pillow, and beside it a new and businesslike Colt automatic.

"There!" said The Author, confidently. "Nobody can get into that closet without first tackling *me*. Now you girls go to bed. To-morrow we'll tackle the unraveling."

And we, remembering of a sudden that we were pig-tailed and kimonoed, and that The Author himself resembled a step-ladder with a shawl draped around it, departed hurriedly.

He was late at the breakfast-table next morning. Gloom and abstraction sat visibly upon him. He left his secretary to bear the brunt of conversation with the Westmacotes and Miss Emmeline. For once he failed to do justice to Mary Magdalen's hot biscuit, and ignored Fernolia's astonished and concerned stare; even a whispered, "Honey, is you-all got a misery anywheres?" failed to rouse him. I found him, after a while, waiting for me in the library.

"Miss Smith,"—The Author strode restlessly up and down—"this house has a peculiar effect upon people; a very peculiar effect. Since I came here, I have learned to walk in my sleep." And seeing my look of astonishment, "I walked in my sleep last night. And I took that bit of doggerel out of my coat pocket, locked the closet door, and replaced the key under my pillow."

"How strange! And where did you put it?" I wondered.

"Exactly: where did I put it?" repeated The Author, rumpling his hair with both hands. "That's what I want to know, myself. I've looked everywhere in my room, and in Johnson's, and I can't find the thing. It's gone," and he stalked out, with his shoulders hunched to his ears.

I sat still, staring out at the window. There was a thing I hadn't told The Author, or even Alicia. I had no idea what the "bit of doggerel" meant, if, indeed, it meant anything. But when I had held Freeman Hynds's old diary in my hands, between the two pages following the last entry had been a creased and soiled

piece of paper. I had seen it out of the tail of my eye, as the saying is. It was only a glimpse, but one trained to handle many papers, as I had been, has a quick and an accurate eye. And I knew that the paper found by The Author in the attic, and now lost again, was the paper I had seen in Freeman Hynds's diary.

CHAPTER IX

THE JUDGMENT OF SPRING

Judge Gatchell's nephews and nieces, brought by that punctilious gentleman to call upon Miss Alicia Gaines, found her enchanting and cried it to the circumambient air. It was as if the voice of April had summoned the cohorts of Spring. For fresh-faced boys of a sudden appeared in increasing numbers; and flower-faced girls came fluttering into Hynds House like butterflies. They cared for its history and its hatreds not a fig: what has April to do with last November? The faith of Youth has a clearer-eyed wisdom, a sweeter, sounder justice than the sourer verdict of the mature. For theirs is the judgment of Spring. By this sign they conquer.

Susy Gatchell enlisted Mary Meade and Helen Fenwick, and these three held all younger Hyndsville in the hollow of their pink palms. After which, as Doctor Richard Geddes told me wrathfully, you "couldn't put your foot down without running the risk of stepping on some little cockerel trying to crow around Hynds House."

The tide was turning in our direction. Also, we were in daily contact with really worth-while people, people that otherwise we should have met only in books, magazines, and newspapers. And they liked us. The amazing miracle was that we, also we, were their sort of folk!

I knew I was being given unbuyable things. One could not live under the same roof with thin dark Luis Morenas and view what magic his pencil worked, without learning somewhat of the holiness of creative work. One couldn't listen to The Author without being somewhat brightened by his daring wit, his glowing genius; nor live face to face with big Westmacote without revering the broadness of the American master spirit, to which Big Business is only a part of the Great Game. As for Miss Emmeline Phelps-Parsons, it didn't take Alicia and me long to discover what real depths underlay that Boston-spinster mind of hers.

And you simply couldn't breathe the same air with The Suffragist—who appeared with two trunks, three valises, and a type-writer, all covered with "Votes for Women!" stickers—without an expansion of the chest. She gave you

the impression of having been dressed by machinery out of gear, and of then having been whacked flat with a shovel. When she clapped on what she called a hat, you wondered whether a heron hadn't built its nest on her head. But when she began to speak, you listened with the ears of your immortal soul stretched wide. Women worshiped her, though Mr. Jelnik's eyes danced, and Westmacote's military mustache bristled a bit, and she all but drove Doctor Richard Geddes, who had notions of his own, out of his senses.

"Stop trying to argue with me, my dear man," she'd say in her rich voice, "but come and let us reason together. I haven't heard one word of reason from you yet!" And she'd let loose one of her rollicking laughs that set the doctor's teeth on edge and made The Author shudder. The Author snarled to me that she laughed like a rolling-mill and reasoned like a head-on collision. He put her in his new book, clothes and all. Just as Luis Morenas, with an edged smile on his thin lips, made rapid-fire sketches of her. *He* called her "The Future-Maker."

Now, shouldn't Alicia and I have been happy? And yet we weren't. Alicia's laugh wasn't so frequent. I would catch her watching me, with an odd, troubled, anxious speculation in her eyes. She had a habit of blushing suddenly, and as quickly paling. And quietly, but none the less surely and definitely, she had begun to avoid Doctor Richard Geddes. It wasn't that she ceased to be friendly; but she placed between herself and him one of those women-built, impalpable, impassable barriers which baffled, puzzled men are unable to tear down. It was impossible, I thought, that she should remain blind to his open passion for herself: he was anything but subtle, was Richard of the Lionheart. A blind man could have told, from the mere sound of his voice, a deaf man from the mere expression of his eyes, that Alicia had the big doctor's whole heart.

On his side, he was in deep waters. His ruddy color faded; his face took on a fixed, grim intensity. And when he watched the girl flirting now with this boy, now with that, after the innocent fashion of natural girls, but always reserving a friendlier smile, a more eager greeting, for Mr. Nicholas Jelnik, I was so sorry for Doctor Richard that I couldn't help trying, covertly, to console him.

It so happened that Miss Emmeline Phelps-Parsons, daughter of the Puritans though she was, nevertheless had a distinct liking for what she termed Episcopacy. She was pleased with old St. Polycarp's. She liked Mrs. Haile, to whom she happened to mention that her opportunities for studying the life of native women and children in the East had been rather unusually good, since she had visited many missionary stations in China and India. Things were

languishing just then, and Mrs. Haile looked at Miss Emmeline almost imploringly: would she, could she, give the ladies a little lecture?—tell us things first-hand, so to speak?

Miss Emmeline reflected. She looked at Alicia and me.

"Could we have it in your delightful library?" she wondered. "That beautiful old room has a soul which speaks to mine. Dear Miss Smith, would it be too much to ask you to let me have my little talk, a very informal little lecture, in wonderful old Hynds House?"

Mrs. Haile turned a sort of greenish pink. It wasn't for her to suggest, after that, that it might be better to have the lecture in the parsonage; any more than for me to hint, without ungraciousness, that it might be just as well not to have it in Hynds House. Alicia shot me one quizzical, Irish-blue glance when I said, "Yes."

And that's how, on a sunny Wednesday afternoon, all Hyndsville came to Hynds House to hear Miss Emmeline Phelps-Parsons tell them "How to Reach the Women of the East." Somehow, I rather think they were as curious about two Yankee women as they were about those Eastern women of whom Miss Emmeline was talking. I'm sure Hynds House was just as interesting to them as Mohammedan harems and Indian zenanas.

Miss Emmeline really spoke well, and her audience was interested in her, in her theme, and in Hynds House. The Suffragist picked up the thread where the less gifted woman dropped it, and in simple, living phrases drove home the great truth of the sisterhood of all women.

Which, of course, called for tea, and some of Mary Magdalen's cookies. It was the cookies that caught The Author. Coming in from a long and hungry prowl, he spied Fernolia crossing the hall with a huge platter, got one tantalizing, mouth-watering odor, and dashed after her, bent upon robbery. A second later he found himself in a room full of women. Hyndsville was meeting The Author!

Alicia introduced him, pleasantly. And, "Talk about angels—" said she, gaily, "We have just this minute stopped talking about the heathen! And may I give you a cup of tea?"

"And a dozen or so cookies, please. Thank heaven for the heathen! What is home without the heathen?—Without sugar, Miss Gaines, without sugar! And

for charity's sake, no lemon!"

He sipped his tea and munched his cookies, with his head on one side and the air of a thievish jackdaw; and proceeded, after his wont, to extract such pith as the situation offered.

"Doctor Johnson," Miss Martha Hopkins remembered, as she watched him drinking his fourth cup of tea, "Doctor Johnson was also addicted to tea-drinking. Most great literary men are, I believe."

"It isn't possible you consider old Johnson a great literary man!" The Author's eyebrows climbed into his hair.

"Why! wasn't he?" Her eyes widened. She had as much respect for Dr. Johnson as Miss Deborah Jenkyns had, though of course she never read him. Life is too short.

"Why! was he?" asked The Author. "Outside of Boswell—and *he* was a fool—I've never known anybody who thought he amounted to much."

The Suffragist looked up. "Nelson had his Southey, Boswell had his Johnson, and Mr. Modern Best-seller may well profit by their example." And she smiled grimly.

The Author's lip lifted. "Oh, but you couldn't do it!" he purred. "And if I offered you the job you'd excuse your incapacity on the ground that there wasn't anything to write about. I know you!" He took another cooky.

"Yes, I dare say I'd blurt out the truth. Women are like that," admitted The Suffragist.

"The female of the species is more deadly than the male," conceded The Author. "Nevertheless," he raised his tea-cup gallantly, "To the ladies!" He got up, leisurely. "And now I go," said he, "to paint the lily and adorn the rose. In short, to set forth in adequate and remunerative language the wit, wisdom, virtue, beauty, and ornateness of woman as she thinks men think she is. Nature," reflected The Author, smiling at The Suffragist, "made me a writer. The devil, the editors, and the women have made me a best-seller." And he departed, a cooky in each hand.

That night one of the Gatchell boys took Alicia to a dance. She was in blue and white, like an angel, and the Gatchell boy trod on air. But to me came

Doctor Richard Geddes, and threw himself into a wing-chair.

"Sophronisba Two," he asked, we being alone in the library, "what have I done to offend Alicia?"

"Is Alicia offended?"

"Isn't she?" wondered the doctor. "She won't let me get near enough to find out," he added gloomily. "And it isn't just. She ought to know that—well, that I'd rather cut off my right hand than give her real cause for offense. I'm going to ask you a straight, man question; is that girl a—a flirt? She is not a—jilt?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Does she care for anybody else?"

"On my honor, I don't know."

"It couldn't be any of these whipper-snappers of boys: she's not that sort," worried the doctor. "Sophy, is it—Jelnik?"

My heart stood still. I could make no reply.

"I don't know. My dear friend, I don't know!"

"It would be the most natural thing in the world," he reflected. "Jelnik looks like Prince Charming himself. And, for all his surface indolence, there's genius in the man. Why shouldn't she be taken with him?"

We looked at each other.

"I see," said the doctor, quietly. "Now, little friend, what concerns you and me is our dear girl's happiness. Does Jelnik care, do you think?"

"I don't know!" I said again. I felt like one on the rack. It seemed to me I could hear my heart-strings stretching and snapping. "But what is one girl's affection to a man born to be loved by women?"

"He is indifferent to women, for the most part," the doctor said thoughtfully. "He is so free from vanity, and at the same time so reserved, that one has difficulty in getting at his real feelings."

"She, also, is free from petty vanity," I told him. "She has an innocent, happy pleasure in her own youth and prettiness, but hers is the unspoiled heart of a

child."

"Who should know it better than I, that am a great hulking, bad-tempered fellow twice her age!" groaned the doctor. "Yet, Sophy, *I* could make her happier than Jelnik could. Dear and lovely as she is, she couldn't make him happy, either —Don't you think I'm a fool, Sophy?"

"No," said I, smiling wanly; "I don't."

"This business of being in love is a damnable arrangement. Here was I," he grumbled, "busy, reasonably happy, with a sound mind in a sound body, and a digestion that was a credit to me. And along comes a girl, and everything's changed! My work doesn't fill my days, my food is bitter in my mouth, and I wake up in the night saying to myself, 'You fool, you're chasing rainbows!' Sophy, don't you ever fall in love with somebody you know you can't have! It's hell!"

I didn't tell him I knew it.

One of his men came to tell him he was needed urgently. As it meant a thirty-mile trip and the night was cold, I made him wait for a cup of coffee and an omelet."

"Miss Smith—"

"You said 'Sophy' a while ago. 'Sophy' sounds all right to me."

"It sounds fine to me, too, Sophy." And he reached out and seized my hand with a grip that made me wince.

"I told you I was a bear!" he said, regretfully.

When Alicia returned, she came, as usual, to my room.

"I am tired!" she yawned, and curled herself up on the bed.

"Didn't you have a nice time?"

"Oh, I suppose so! Everybody was lovely to me, and I could have divided my dances. These Southerners are easy to love, aren't they? I find it very easy for me! And oh, Sophy, there's to be a picnic day after to-morrow, at the Meade plantation, in my honor, if you please! We go by automobile.—I never thought I could get tired dancing, Sophy. But I am. Tired!"

"Go to bed and sleep it off."

"Did you have time to make out that grocery list? They've been overcharging us on butter."

"Yes: I finished it after Doctor Geddes left"

"Oh! He was here, then?" She yawned again.

"Yes. But somebody sent for him, and he had to cut his visit short."

Alicia frowned.

"I wonder he keeps so healthy, running out at all hours of the night; and heaven knows how he manages about meals! His cook told me that sometimes he has to rush away in the middle of a meal, and sometimes he misses one altogether."

"I remembered that, so I made him wait for a cup of coffee and an omelet."

She reached over and squeezed my hand. "You're always thinking about other people's comfort, Sophy." She paused, and looked at me half-questioningly:

"I wish he had somebody to look after him," she said in a low voice, "somebody like you." She added, as if to herself: "He takes two lumps of sugar in his coffee, one in his tea, wants dry toast, and likes his omelet *buttered*."

And when I stared at her, she slipped nearer, and laid her cheek against mine.

"Sophy," in a soft whisper, "you've made up to me for my father and my mother, and for the sisters and brothers I never had. We're all sorts and conditions of folks, aren't we, Sophy?—but none like you, Sophy; not any one of them all like you!"

At that moment, through the open window, there stole in on the night air the faintest whisper of music. It wasn't mournful, it wasn't joyful, but both together; a singing voice, a crying voice, wild and sweet, part of the night and the trees and the wind, and part, I think, of the secretest something in the human heart. We had no idea where it came from; out of the sky, perhaps!

Somebody ran down-stairs, and a moment later the front door opened softly. The Author had heard, and was afoot. But even as he stepped outside, Ariel's ghostly music ceased. There was nothing; nobody; only the night.

CHAPTER X

THE FOREST OF ARDEN

I had seen Alicia whirl away in the Meades' big car. I had seen the Westmacotes and Miss Emmeline off on what they termed a nature-hunt. The Author and his secretary were up to the eyes in a new chapter; The Suffragist was spreading the glad tidings; and Riedriech and Schmetz had Luis Morenas in hand for the afternoon, visioning the United States of the World, while he snatched sketches of the visionaries.

The Author, Mr. Johnson, and I, lunched together.

"Miss Smith," began The Author abruptly, "did you know this house was built by British and French master masons? No? Well, it was. Judge Gatchell's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were solicitors for this estate, and the judge at last very kindly allowed me to look through a great batch of papers in his possession. From these I discovered that one of the Hyndses visited England in 1727, joined the new lodge lately established there, and brought one of the brethren, an architect, back to America with him. Another came from France. These three planned and built this house, and did it pretty well, too.

"This house-builder, Walsingham Hynds, made his house a sort of lodge for the brethren, just as in later times his grandsons sheltered the brethren of those societies that fathered the American Revolution. Gatchell tells me there is a legend of the master of Hynds House entertaining British officers and at the same time hiding the forfeited rebels they were hunting. I'd like to know," The Author added, reflectively, "where he hid them."

"An old house like this has dozens of places where one could be hidden without much danger of detection," remarked Mr. Johnson.

"I'm pretty sure of that," agreed The Author, emphatically.

"You should be, since you did a neat little bit of hiding on your own account," Mr. Johnson reminded him.

The Author was nettled. He had never found the paper lost out of the closet in

his own room, though he had never given up a tentative search for it.

"Well, it's confoundedly odd I never did such a thing before," he grumbled.

"What is odd is that I myself was waked out of my sleep that night by the most oppressive sense of misery and hopelessness I have ever experienced," Mr. Johnson said seriously. "It was so overpowering that it made me think of Saint Theresa's description of her torment in that oven in the wall of hell which had by kindly forethought on the part of the devil been arranged for her permanent tenancy. Of course, it was just a nightmare," he added, doubtfully; "or perhaps a fit of indigestion."

"Indigestion takes many forms," I remarked, as lightly as I could. "And you must remember you've been warned that Hynds House is haunted. Why, the servants insist they've seen ol' Mis' Scarlett's h'ant!"

"Ah!" nodded The Author. "And I smell a mysterious perfume, I walk in my sleep for the first and only time in my life, and I hide where it can't be found a paper with an uncouth jingle and some dots on it, Johnson and I have the same nightmare. And I have heard footsteps. All hallucinations, of course! I will say this much for Hynds House: I never had a hallucination until I came here. By the way, did I merely imagine I heard a violin last night?"

"Oh, no: I heard it, too." Mr. Johnson looked at The Author with a concerned face. "You're getting a bit off your nerves, Chief. Anybody might play a violin."

"Anybody might, but few do play it as I thought I heard it played last night. Who's the player, Miss Smith?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. Alicia thinks it's a spirit that lives in the crape-myrtle trees."

I was beginning to be aweary of The Author's shrewd eyes and persistent questioning, and I was heartily glad when he had to go back to his work.

That was a gray and windless afternoon, and the house was full of those bluish shadows that belong to gray days; it was charged, even more than usual, with mystery: the whole atmosphere tingled with it as with electricity. I couldn't read. I have never been able to play upon any musical instrument, much as I love music. I do not sing, either, except in a small-beer voice; and when I tried to sew I pricked my fingers with the needle. I went into the kitchen, consulted with Mary Magdalen as to the evening's dinner, weighed and measured such

ingredients as she needed, saw that the two maids were following instructions, tried to make friends with Beautiful Dog, until he howled with anguish and affliction and fled as from pestilence; and, unable to endure the house any longer, put on my hat and set out upon one of those aimless walks one takes in a land where all walks are lovely.

Automobiles came and went upon the public road, and to escape them I crossed a wooden foot-bridge spanning a weedy ditch, struck into a path bordering a wide field followed it aimlessly for a while, and before I knew it was in the Enchanted Wood.

The Enchanted Wood was carpeted with brown and sweet-smelling pine-needles, with green clumps of honeysuckle breaking out here and there in moist spots. There were cassena bushes, full of vivid scarlet berries; and crooked, gray-green cedars; and brown boles of pine-trees; and the shallowest, gayest, absurdest little thread of a brook giggling as it went about its important business of keeping a lip of woodland green.

It was very, very still there, somewhat as Gethsemane might have been, I fancy. I had wanted to be alone, that I might wrestle with my trouble. Yet now that I was facing it, my spirit quailed. Never had I felt so desolate, or dreamed that the human heart could bear such anguish.

If I had had the faintest warning, that I might have saved myself! If I had never come to Hynds House at all, but had lived my busy, matter-of-fact, quiet life! Yet the idea of never having seen him, never having loved him, was more cruel than the cruellest suffering that loving entailed. It was harder even than the thought that Alicia and I cared for the same man, who perhaps cared for neither of us. At that I fell into an agony of weeping.

That passed. I was spent and empty. But the calm of acceptance had come. I wasn't to lose my grip, nor wear the willow. The idea of me, Sophy Smith, wearing the willow, aroused my English common-sense. I refused to be ridiculous.

And then I looked up and saw him coming toward me, his great dog trotting at his side. I pulled myself together, and smiled; for Boris was thrusting his friendly nose into my palm, and rubbing his fine head against my shoulder, and his master had dropped lightly down beside me.

I had not seen Mr. Jelnik for several days, and it struck me painfully that the

man was pale, that his step dragged, and the brightness of his beauty was dimmed. He looked older, more careworn. If he was glad to see me, it was at first a troubled gladness, for he started, and bit his lip. I wondered, not with jealousy, but with pain, if there was somebody, some beautiful and high-born lady, at sight of whom his heart might have leaped as mine did now. Was it, perhaps, to forget such a one that he had exiled himself?

"You are such a serene, restful little person!" he said presently, and a change came over his tired face; "and I am such a restless one! You soothe me like a cool hand on a hot forehead."

"Restless?—you? Why, I thought you the serenest person I had ever known."

His mocking, gentle smile curved his lips. But his eyes were not laughing. For a fleeting, flashing second the whirlpools and the depths were bared in them. Then the veil fell, the surface lights came out and danced.

"My father was an excellent teacher," he said, indifferently. "The whole object of his training was self-control. He was really a very wonderful man, my father. But he overlooked one highly important factor in my make-up, my Hynds blood."

I made no reply. I was wondering, perplexedly, how I, I of all people, should have been picked up and enmeshed in the web of these Hyndses and their fate.

"Thank you," said he, gratefully, "for your silence. Most women would have talked, for the good of my soul. Why don't you talk?"

"Because I have nothing to say."

"You evidently inherited a God-sent reticence from your British forebears. The British have 'illuminating flashes of silence.' It is one of their saving graces."

I proved it.

Mr. Jelnik, with a whimsical, sidewise glance, drew nearer.

"Why, instead of sitting at the foot of a pine-tree, which is also a reticent creature, are you not sitting at the feet of our friend The Author, who is perfectly willing to illumine the universe? Very bright man, The Author. How do you like his secretary?"

"Mr. Johnson? Oh, very much indeed! He is charming!"

"I find him so myself. But he is melting wax before the fire of feminine eyes. A man in love is a sorry spectacle!"

"Is he?"

"*Ach*, yes! Consider my cousin Richard Geddes, for instance."

At that I winced, remembering the doctor's eyes when he had spoken of Alicia and of this man. I looked at Mr. Jelnik now, wonderingly. If he knew that much, hadn't he any heart? He stopped short. A wrinkle came between his black brows.

"I am not to speak lightly of my Cousin Richard, I perceive."

"No. Please, please, no!"

"I hadn't meant to. Richard," said Mr. Jelnik, gravely, "is a good man."

"Oh, yes! Indeed, yes! And—and he has a deep affection for *you*, Mr. Jelnik."

"We Hyndses are the deuce and all for affection. We take it in such deadly earnest that we store up a fine lot of trouble for ourselves." His face darkened.

I had been right, then, in supposing that there was somebody, perhaps half the world away, for whom he cared. *And he didn't care for Alicia.* I was sure of that.

"Don't go!" he begged, as I stirred. "Stay with me for a little while: I need you. I am tired, I am bored, I am disgusted with things as they are. There is nothing new under the sun, and all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Also, I am fronting the forks of a dilemma: Shall I shake the dust of Hyndsville from my foot, yield to the *Wanderlust* and go what our worthy friend Judge Gatchell calls 'tramping,' or shall I stay here yet awhile? I can't make up my mind!"

"Do you want to go?"

"Yes and no. Hold: let's toss for it and let the fall of the coin decide." He took from his pocket a thin silver foreign coin, and showed it me.

"Heads, I go. Tails, I stay," he said, and tossed it into the air. It fell beside me, out of his reach. With a swift hand I picked it up.

"Well?" he asked, indifferently.

My hand shut down upon it. There was the sound of wind in my ears, and my heart pounded, and my sight blurred. Then somebody—oh, surely not I!—in a

low, clear, modulated voice spoke:

"*You will have to stay, Mr. Jelnik*," said the voice, pleasantly. "*It is tails.*"

And all the while the inside Me, the real Me, was crying accusingly: "Oh, *liar! liar! It is heads!*"

Did he smile? I do not know. He did not look at me for the minute, but stared instead at the gray-blue, shadowed woods, the brown boles of the pines, the bright trickle of water playing it was a real brook.

"Tails it is. I stay," he said presently. And with a swift movement he reached out and lightly patted my hand with the coin in it.

"Well, it's decided. You have got me for a next-door neighbor for a while longer, Miss Smith. No, don't go yet."

So I stayed, who would have stayed in the Pit to be near him, or walked out of heaven to follow him, had he called me.

"Do you know," he spoke in a plaintive voice—"that I haven't had any lunch? I forgot to go home for lunch! Boris, go get me something to eat, old chap!"

Boris hung out a tongue like a flag, looked in his man's eyes, and vanished, running as only the thoroughbred wolf-hound can run.

"I am so tired! Should you mind if I kept my dog's place warm at your feet, Miss Smith?" And he stretched his long length on the pine-needles, his hands under his head, his face upturned.

"I wish I had a pillow!" he complained.

I scooped up an armful of the pine-needles, while he watched me lazily, and packed it over and between the roots of the pine-tree.

"You're a Sister of Charity," said he, gratefully. "But I can't afford to scratch my neck." And coolly he took a fold of my brown silk skirt, patted it over the straw, and with a sigh of satisfaction rested his head upon it.

"This is very pleasant!" he sighed. Presently: "Your hair looks just as a woman's hair ought to look, under that brown hat," he said drowsily, "soft and fair. And after this, I shall order some brown-silk cushion-covers. I never knew anything could feel so comfortable and restful!" He closed his eyes.

I sat there, hands locked tightly together, and looked down at his beautiful head, his slim and boyish body; and I felt an aching sense of resentment. No man has any business to be like that, and then come into the life of a woman named Smith.

He did not move, nor did I. We might have been creatures motionless under a spell, in that Enchanted Wood; until from the outside world came Boris, carrying a wicker basket, in which sandwiches, fruit, a small bottle of wine, and a silver drinking-cup had been carefully packed.

"Boris is used to playing courier." His master patted him affectionately. "Come, Miss Smith. By the way, that isn't your real name, though. Your name is Woman-in-the-Woods. Mine is—"

"Fortunatus."

He raised his brows. "I was about to say 'Man-who-is-Hungry,'" he finished, pleasantly. "I once knew an Indian named Tail-feathers-going-over-the-Hill. It taught me the value of being explicit as to one's name. Here, you shall have the cup, and I'll drink out of the bottle. Some of these fine days, Woman-in-the-Woods, I shall take you on a jaunt with me and Boris."

"It sounds promising," I admitted, cautiously.

"It is more. You shall learn all the fine points of out-of-door housekeeping.—Drink your wine, Woman-in-the-Woods. You were pale, very pale, when I came upon you. I was afraid something had been troubling you."

"Something troubles everybody."

"Oh, bromidic Miss Smith!—Drink your wine, please. And do not look doubtfully upon that sandwich. My man knows how to build them."

His man did. The sandwich was manna. The wine evidently came from heaven.

"Now you have a color. I say, is Morenas going to do you, too?"

"Good gracious, no! But he has sketched Alicia a dozen times at least."

"And me," said Mr. Jelnik, gloomily. "There's no evading the brute. I turn like a weathercock; and there he is, with corrugated brow and slitted eyes, studying me! And the baleful eye of The Author also pursues me. Between them, I feel

skinned."

"Mr. Morenas says you are a rare but quite perfect type," I told him, mischievously.

The young man shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. "Am I a type, Woman-in-the-Woods?" he asked.

"Indeed, you are absolutely different from anybody else." And then, terrified, I turned red.

"Oh, I know! You didn't mean it either as a brick-bat or a bouquet, merely the truth as you see it. You are transparently truthful, fundamentally truthful, and at the same time the American business woman! You can't understand how that intrigues me!"

And then, quite simply and boyishly, he began to talk about himself. I got glimpses of a boyhood spent partly in a stately home in Vienna, and partly roaming about the great Hungarian estate which his mother loved, and to which the two returned summer after summer, until her death. Then student days, and after that, foot-loose wanderings up and down the earth and across the seven seas.

His grandmother had dropped courtesies to kings; and mine had dropped "aitches." His father had been a European celebrity, mine a ship-chandler in Boston, U.S.A. Yet here we two were; and he might have been a high-spirited and most beautiful little boy picnicking with a sedate and old-maidish little girl.

"How old should you imagine me?" he flung the question like a challenge, as if he had divined my thoughts.

"Oh, say, thirteen, going on fourteen."

"Dear Woman-in-the-Woods, I am thirty-three."

"You are older than I thought."

"You are younger than you think. And you betray the fact," he smiled.

"I have never been very young; probably I shall never be very old."

"You will always be exactly the right age," said Nicholas Jelnik. "For you will always be a little girl, and a young maiden, and a grown woman, and a bit of an

old maid, and something of a grandmother. That is a wonderful, a very, very wonderful combination!"

I looked at him with more than doubt. But no, he was not poking fun, though the rich color had come into his cheek, and the golden lights flickered mischievously in his eyes.

"And I forgot to add, also a business woman!" he finished gaily. "*Herr Gott*, but it took a business woman to tackle old Hynds House and gather together such folks as you have there now!"

"Alicia was the head and front of *that*. I merely helped."

"Alicia," said Mr. Jelnik, "is a darling girl. Alicia is everything a girl ought to be." But there was not in eyes or voice that light and tone that crept into Doctor Richard's when he named her. My dear girl's tender face—so true and beautiful and loving—rose before me, and all she had meant to me, been to me, crowded upon my heart. I said what I had never intended to say to any one:

"Why, Alicia's my—my *child*, to me! Don't you understand?"

"Dear Woman, yes!" His voice was melted gold.

The ridiculous little brook went whish-whis-sssh; and the bluish shadows melted into gray; and a chill came creeping, creeping, into the air.

"Before you go," said Nicholas Jelnik, "I should like to give you a talisman, to turn Miss Smith into Woman-in-the-Woods every now and then." And with his pocket-knife he cut a sharp line down the thin old coin he had tossed, worked at it for a few minutes with a pocket file and a stone, and then with his fingers that looked so slim but were strong as steel nippers. The coin broke in halves.

"Half for you," said Mr. Jelnik, "and half for me, to commemorate a comradely afternoon, and to mark a decision. We'll consider it a token, a charm, a talisman—what you will. And if ever I really and truly need a Woman-in-the-Woods to help me, why, I'll send my half to her; and she'll obey the summons instantly and without question. And if ever she needs a man—like me, say—why, she'll send her half, and he'll come, instantly and without question." He was smiling as he spoke. Now he paused to look at me earnestly. "Because we are going to be real friends, you and I; are we not?"

I hesitated. How could we two be real friends, when the balance between us

was so uneven, so unequal? He saw the hesitation, momentary as it was, and looked at me with something of astonishment and a hint of hurt.

"I have never," he said, proudly, "had to ask for friendship. Yet I do desire yours, who are such a grave, brave, true little thing, such a valiant-for-truth, stand-fast little thing! You have the one quality that I, born wanderer, foot-loose rolling-stone, need most in this world, unchanging, loyal, unquestioning steadfastness."

I considered this. It is true that I hold fast, for that is the English way.

"But outside of that one thing," I told him, "I have nothing else."

"No?—She hasn't," said he, in a teasing tone, "anything to give, except unbuyable truth. She has nothing to offer except Friendship's very self!—this poor, poor Miss Smith!"

Now, heaven alone knows why, but at that my eyes filled with foolish tears. If he saw them—and they ran down my cheek in spite of me—he mercifully gave no sign. Instead he held out his fine brown hand, and when I placed mine in it, he lifted it to his lips with foreign grace.

"We two are friends, then—through thick and thin, above doubting, and without fear or reproach. That is so, *hein*?"

"Yes!" I promised.

So, walking slowly, as if loath to go, we two went out of the Enchanted Wood and left the Forest of Arden behind us.

When I was again in my own room, and had taken off the brown frock, I held against my cheek, for a long, long minute, that fold against which his head had rested; I fingered the broken coin; I looked long and long at the hand his lips had touched; and though I had told a shameless lie, I was not at all ashamed.

I have often read that women do not and cannot love men, but only love to be loved by them. Only a man could have been stupid enough to say that; and, then he didn't know. The woman hadn't told him.

"I say! Haven't you got on a new frock to-night? My word, it's scrumptious!" remarked The Author, after dinner. I was wearing a black-and-blue frock, and he had seen it before, as I explained with some surprise.

He adjusted his glasses, frowned, and shook his head.

"I am becoming unobservant," he said crossly. "This place is playing the very deuce with my mental processes! But stay: surely your hair is arranged differently? It wasn't brought over your ears like that, the first time I saw you, I know it wasn't!"

"It is curled a little and fluffed a little; that's what makes it look different," I told him patiently.

"Then that frock is curled a little and fluffed a little, and that's what makes it look different, too," The Author decided, and stared at me critically. "You are improving," he told me, with condescension.

"You are *not*!" I was goaded to reply.

The Author merely grinned.

"Do you know," he asked, "if that man Jelnik is coming to-night? I hope so. Unusual man. Can't think why he buries himself here! Our old friend Gatchell doesn't seem to admire him. I wonder why?"

"I can't possibly imagine," I replied equably, "unless it is that the judge grows old."

"Hah!" The Author's eyebrows went up truculently. "And is it a sign of advancing age and mental decrepitude not to admire this fellow?"

But I laughed at him.

"You're all alike, you women." A wicked light snapped into his eyes. "Hear, dear lady, the Bard of the Congaree, the Poet Laureate of South Carolina, Coogle for your benefit," hissed The Author, and repeated, balefully:

> Alas, poor woman, with eyes of sparkling fire,
> Thy heart is often won by mankind's gay attire!
> So weak thou art, so very weak at best,
> Thou canst not look beyond a satin-lined vest!
>
> I've seen thee ofttimes cast a-winning glance,
> And be carried away, as it were within a trance,
> By the gay apparel of some dishonest youth
> Whose bosom heaved with not a single truth!

He was so outrageously funny that I forgave his impertinence. His face relaxed, and his eyes twinkled. He was in high feather the remainder of the evening. He was, in fact, so good-humoredly witty that the boys and girls Alicia had brought home clustered about him like golden bees.

"Miss Smith," whispered Miss Emmeline, under cover of their laughter, "may I have a word with you?"

We drifted into the library; and she seated herself, folded her hands, and said tremulously:

"My dear, my wish has been granted. I have really come in contact with the Unknown! I have seen something, Miss Smith!" I looked at her steadily. "Just before dawn," Miss Emmeline continued, "I woke up, with a curious, indefinable, uneasy sense of trouble, as if something had happened and I was remembering it, say. I saw how foolish it was to allow a mere nightmare to worry me, though I am not subject to nightmares, my conscience and my digestion being quite all right, thank heaven! Gradually the impression faded. I was just dropping to sleep again, when I heard the faintest imaginable footfall, almost as if somebody were walking upon the air itself. And then, Miss Smith, there stole across my room a figure. There was nothing terrifying about it: it was merely a figure, that was all, and so I was not frightened. It came from my clothes-closet, went into the next room, and vanished. For when I arose and followed, there was no trace of it. And the doors were locked. Now, was not that remarkable?"

"Very," said I, with dry lips.

"I should have thought I was dreaming," went on Miss Emmeline, "save that there lingered in the air, for some time, a faint and very delicate—"

"Perfume," I finished.

Miss Emmeline started, and seized my hand.

"Then you have experienced it, too?"

"I have detected the perfume," I admitted, "but I have never seen anything. Dear Miss Emmeline, would it be too much to ask you to keep this to yourself, for a while at least? People are so easily frightened; and wild stories spread and grow."

Miss Emmeline nodded. "Of course I'll keep it quiet," she promised kindly. "I shall, however, write down the occurrence for the Society for Psychical Research, without giving actual names and place." To this I raised no objection. But it was with a troubled mind that I left Miss Emmeline.

I was destined to hear one more confidence that night, unwittingly this time. I had gone down-stairs to place, ready to Mary Magdalen's hand in the morning, the materials for the breakfast. This entails work, but it insures successful handling of household economics. Having weighed and measured what was necessary, and seen that the inquisitive Black family occupied their proper quarters on the lower veranda, I went back up-stairs. The Author's door was slightly ajar, and I could hear him walking up and down, as he does when he dictates; for he is a restless man.

"Johnson," The Author was saying as I passed, my slippered feet making no sound, "Johnson, that Sophy woman intrigues me. Hanged if she doesn't, Johnson!"

"I like Miss Smith, myself. She reminds me very much of my mother," said Johnson's cordial voice in reply.

"But I don't like the way things look here, at all, Johnson!" fumed The Author. "What's his game, anyhow? What's he after? What's he here for? Does she know, or suspect? Or doesn't she, Johnson?" The Author asked, earnestly. "Look here: somebody's got to protect that Sophy woman against Nicholas Jelnik!"

CHAPTER XI

THE JINNEE INTERVENES

Just before he went back North, Luis Morenas good-naturedly agreed to exhibit his new sketches for the delectation of such folk as we cared to ask to view them—this to please Alicia, whom he called Flower o' the Peach.

Now an exhibit of Morenas sketches would have been an art event in the Biggest City itself. But think of it in Hyndsville, where few worth-while things ever happened; and imagine the polite wire-pulling for invitations that ensued!

It wasn't my fault that I couldn't ask the whole town to come to my house to see those brilliant sketches. I would have done so with all my heart, but there was a section of Hyndsville I couldn't reach. It was locked up behind bars of pride and prejudice of its own building; and losing by it, of course, since one can't be exclusive without at the same time being excluded. To shut other folks out you have first got to shut yourself in.

For instance, figure to yourself Miss Martha Hopkins. She had visited as far north as Atlanta; and she had relatives in Charleston, as she would have condescendingly informed arch-angels, principalities, powers, thrones, and dominions. But she wasn't blessed with much of this world's goods, and most of the time she stayed home and improved her mind. She took herself with profound seriousness. She seemed to think that the better part of wisdom consists in knowing who said this and who didn't say that—"as Mr. Arnold Bennett expresses it," "as Mr. H.G. Wells remarks," "as Mr. James Huneker writes,"—she was the only person in all Hyndsville who could write up music and art, and she wasn't even afraid to use the word *sex* in its most modern acceptance; though in South Carolina you refer to the ladies as "the fair sex" if you're a gentleman, and to the gentlemen as "the stronger sex" if you're a lady. You understand that "male and female created He them," and you let it go at that. Miss Martha Hopkins, then, was daring; she was also exclusive.

I suppose if I had been younger I could have smiled at Miss Martha, as Susy Gatchell and her graceless friends did, but somehow she appeared to me a creature trying to peck at the world and peek at the stars through the bars of a

bird-cage. That's why, when I met her a morning or two before the Morenas exhibit, I asked her if she wouldn't like to see it. I knew that, once asked, she could be kept away by nothing short of an earthquake or a deluge. Yet—

"Thank you, Miss Smith, I shall be glad to look over the sketches." And she added blandly: "Four o'clock, did you say? Very well, I will come. It is one's moral duty to encourage men of talent."

"Whoop!" cried The Author, joyously, when I told him that. "Revenge yourself, Morenas: sketch her, man! sketch her!"

Morenas laughed. "Put her in one of your books and make her talk," he suggested slyly. "You have a genius for making a woman talk like an idiot."

"That's because he does the talking for her, himself," said Alicia, impudently.

"It pays, it pays!" smiled The Author. "I draw from life."

"Nature-fakir!" Alicia mocked.

"My dear fellow, *I* draw. *You* draw and quarter," said Morenas.

The Author flung out his arms, grandiloquently.

> You may as well try to change the course
> Of yonder sun
> To north, and south,
> As to try to subdue by criticism
> This heart of verse,
> Or close this mouth!

he cried, thumping his chest. "Come on, Johnson: let's leave these knockers to fate—and Miss Martha Hopkins!"

Miss Martha Hopkins came, she saw, and she had a perfectly beautiful time. As a matter of fact, everybody that could come, did come. And the very smartest and prettiest of the younger set served tea. Oh, yes, decidedly the tables were turning!

Despite which, Alicia and I were not happy. It seemed to me that a veil had fallen between us, for we were shy with each other. Both suffered, and each dreaded that the other should know.

I was grateful that The Author's mind was too taken up with Hynds House history to focus itself upon us. The Author spent his spare hours rummaging through such dusty and musty records as might throw some light upon the Hyndses. In the old office were many faded plantation and household books, and he was able to glean enough from these to confirm the methodical carefulness of Freeman Hynds. There were, too, dry receipts for "monies Paid by Mr. Rich. Hynds" for some old slave; or a brief notice that "By Orders Mr. Richd. Hynds, no Women shall be Whipt"; or "Bought by Mr. R. Hynds & Charg'd to his Acct., one Crippl'd Black Childe namd Scipio from Vanham's Sale, & Given to Sukey his Mother." Another time it would be a list of Christmas gifts: "One Colour'd Head Kerchief for Nancy. One Flute for Blind Sam. One Shoulder Cape for Kitty my Nurse. One Horn-handl'd Knife for Agrippa. One Pckt. Tobacco & a Jorum of Rum for Shooba."

Over against these items were others: "By Orders Mr. Freeman Hynds, Juba to Receive Twenty light Lashes for Malingering; Black Tom to be Shipt to River Bottom Plantation for the Chastning of his Spiritt; Bread & Water & Irons 3 Dayes & Nights for Shooba for Frighting of his Fellowes & other Evil Behaviour."

This was interesting enough, but not conclusive. All that The Author could find only deepened his uncertainty, and this made him abominably cross, an ill temper increased by the presence of Mr. Nicholas Jelnik, who came and went, unruffled, aloof, with inscrutable eyes and a gently mocking smile.

The Harrison-Gores came shortly after Morenas left. The Englishman was a pink-faced old gentleman in a shabby Norfolk suit and with the very thinnest legs on record—"mocking-bird legs," Fernolia called them. His daughter was a gray-eyed Minerva with the skin of a baby and the walk of a Highland piper. They found Carolina people charming, and they secured some valuable data for their book, "The Beginnings of American History." Everything in Hynds House pleased them, even The Author.

Other people who do not enter into this story came and went during that winter. But they were merely millionaires—people who motored around the lovely country, ate Mary Magdalen's hot biscuit and fried chicken, slept in our four-posters, paid their stiff bills thankfully, and went about their business as good millionaires should, and generally do. Only one out of them all was disagreeable; he wanted to buy Hynds House out of hand for a proposed club of which he was to be founder and president.

"It'd be just what the bunch would like," he told me. "All we'd have to do would be to paint these wooden walls a nice cheerful light color, change one room into a smoker, another into a billiard-room, and a third into a grill, add some gun-racks and leather wing-chairs, and we'd be right up to the minute in club-houses!"

When I explained that I couldn't sell he offered to compromise on two of the carved marble mantels, the library tiles, and two inlaid tables, "at double what you'd get from anybody else." And when I wouldn't even let him have these trifles, he was disgusted and took no pains to conceal it. He was rude to Alicia, who snubbed him with terrible thoroughness, a proceeding which made him call loudly for his "bill" and his car. The last we heard of him was his bullying voice bawling at his sullen chauffeur.

"That pig," said The Author to me, with fury, "is undoubtedly the lineal descendant of the one Gadarene swine that hadn't decency enough to rush down the slope with the rest of the herd and drown himself."

Busy as I was, it wasn't over easy for me to find time to revisit that brown and sweet-smelling spot in the Forest of Arden where on a gray afternoon, I had met Nicholas Jelnik and received from him a kiss on the palm, and a broken coin. And I wanted to go back there, as ghosts may desire to revisit the glimpses of the moon.

That is why, on the first free afternoon I had, I changed into the selfsame brown frock, put on the brown hat with the yellow quill in it, and slipped out of Hynds House alone. It wasn't a gray afternoon this time, but a clear, bright, sun-shiny one, all blue and gold and green, and with the pleasantest of friendly winds a-frolicking, and a pine-scented air with a pungent and a vital bite to it.

I went along the highroad for a while, crossed the weedy, ferny ditch that separated it from the fallow fields beyond, and struck into the deserted foot-path that leads to the Enchanted Wood.

It was very lonesome, very peaceful. I could see the pine-trees I love swaying and rocking against the blue, blue sky; I could catch the low-hummed tune they crooned to themselves and the winds; I could sniff a thousand woodsy odors. Spears of sunlight made bright blobs on the brown grass; and every littlest bush and shrub wore a shimmering halo, as you see the blessed ones backgrounded in old pictures. There was a bird twittering somewhere; occasionally a twig snapped with a quick, secret sharpness; and once a thin brown rabbit took to his

heels, right under my feet.

I stopped from time to time to sense the feel of the afternoon, to drink the air and be healed. In a few minutes I should be within the forest and hear the little brook giggling to itself as it scurried over its brown pathway. And then I heard—something—and turned.

The deep and weedy ditch, crowded with high stalks of last year's goldenrod and fennel, edged all that pathway, draining the entire field. Crawling snakelike through it he had followed me. And now here he was, suddenly erect on the path behind me, looking at me with narrowed eyes under his flat forehead.

I wasn't afraid—at first. Nothing like him had ever crossed my path, and I stared at him with more of disgust and aversion than terror.

He was tall and bony, immensely powerful, and his black skin showed with a grayish shine upon it through the rents in his rags. His gray-black, horny toes protruded through what once had been shoes, and a shapeless, colorless felt hat covered his bullet head. His corded black arms emerged from the torn sleeves of his checked shirt, and his hairy chest was naked. There came from him an indescribable reek of tobacco, whisky, filthy clothes, and the beastlike odor of an unclean body. He was beardless, and his gorilla-like nostrils twitched, his forehead wrinkled. His eyes were mere pin-points, with a sort of red glare far back in them; his mouth was like a dirty red muzzle. He was a prowling tramp, of the worst sort.

Involuntarily he stopped in his tracks as I faced him, his hands hanging loosely at his sides. His eyes swept greedily over me—silver mesh-purse, wrist-watch, the brooch at my throat, the rings on my fingers.

"Whut yuh doin' hyuh, w'ite lady?" he asked in a thick voice, and grinned. And quite suddenly such a fear as I had not dreamed could be felt by a mortal took me by the heart and squeezed it as with an iron hand.

"Whut foh yuh come by mah field, lil w'ite lady?" he purred. "Ah'm takin' lil snooze in de ditch grass, an' dey yuh comes, wakin' me up! Whut yuh wake me up for, w'ite gal?" Leering, he began with a gliding, stealthy movement to advance.

"Stop!" cried I, in a voice that wasn't mine, it was so sharp and thin and reedy. "Go back—where you came from! Don't you dare to take another step! Go

back!"

The hands hooked into outstretched claws. His head sunk between his shoulders. Of the eyes, only red pin-points showed in the twitching face. I stood stone-still, struck into utter immobility. My brain was trying to urge me to fly, fly! This is the Black Death, Sophy! the Black Death!

He, too, stood of a sudden stone-still, as if rooted to the ground. His eyes widened, and stared, as if he saw something over and beyond me. I didn't dare turn my head. It might be a trick, to divert attention for a fatal second.

The claws clenched into balled fists, the lips drew back, showing blackened and decayed teeth. Bristling like an aroused beast, his forehead wrinkling, his nostrils twitching, he made an inarticulate, growling, brute-like noise in his throat. His head twisted sideways. Of a sudden the sweat burst out upon his face, and he began to back away, warily.

And then something swift and dark sped by, bounding on light and flying feet; something that must have come from my forest. It was The Jinnee! God be praised, it was The Jinnee, his dark robe giving an odd effect of flying, his eyes living vengeance, his face like Fate carved in ebony.

I saw him leap, and close in upon the horror; I heard a sort of wolfish yapping. The Black Death disappeared. And then I, too, was falling, falling into infinite blackness and blankness, with one red flash when I struck my head.

Half-conscious, half-hearing, altogether unseeing, I thought there were two Voices near me. I couldn't understand what they said. One of the Voices was gently and persistently applying cold and soothing applications to my forehead. Another Voice chafed my hands. I thought one said, "Achmet," and the other replied, "Sahib." I knew I must be dreaming. But it was a pleasant dream enough.

Quite suddenly somebody said in good, anxious English:

"Thank God! you are better!"

I had opened my eyes. There was the whish-whish-whishing little brook, the good brown pines, with their heavenly odor. And there was the face of Nicholas Jelnik, bent over me. And beside him, gravely concerned and troubled, Boris.

I looked from one to the other, both so clear-eyed, so kind, so *safe*; and then I

remembered.

"Sophy! Sophy!" He had his arms around me, in a close, protecting clasp, while Boris pawed my skirts, and cried over me in loving, honest dog fashion, and licked my wet cheek with his affectionate tongue. I slipped my arm around the big dog's neck, and clung to the two of them. And it seemed to me that while I clung thus, with my head bent and my face hidden, one of them kissed my hair.

"It never occurred to me—that there might be danger for you," he was whispering. "To have that horror come near you—oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

I was terrified at sight of his face, dead-white, with eyes of steel, and straight lips, and pinched nostrils; the terrible face of the avenging white man, a face as inexorable as judgment. I hid my own before it, and trembled; and yet was glad that I had seen it.

I stammered: "There was—a devil—and then a Jinnee came. And I heard—sounds. Then I fell. Did—did The Jinnee—" My voice died in my throat.

His eyes were ice, his mouth a grim, pale line.

"That has been attended to," he said composedly.

He blamed himself for having been thoughtless. "But I was so glad to have you come here, that afternoon, that I could think of nothing else!" And it seemed that this particular bit of woodland was his, bought because its quiet beauty pleased him. He was in the habit of coming here frequently; it had never occurred to him that danger could lurk near it.

"I thought I heard—somebody calling somebody else 'Achmet.'" I told him, confusedly. "And there was a Jinnee, really there was. And two Voices. Who brought me here? Did you find me, over there?"

"You were not hard to carry," he said evasively.

"But The Jinnee?"

"The Jinnee did exactly what a good Jinnee always does, his duty. Having done it, he disappeared. Didn't I tell you you're not to think of what's happened? It is finished," said Mr. Jelnik, peremptorily.

I asked no more questions.

"Do you think you are able to walk now?" he asked.

I tried to, with shaking knees. At the edge of the field I grew faint again, and staggered, and was unpleasantly sick.

"You simply cannot appear in Hynds House in this shape, and invite comment and question," said Mr. Jelnik, anxiously. His fine brows wrinkled. "I have it: you will stop at my house for a few minutes, and I'll give you a cordial, that will put you to rights."

I went staggering along beside him, making desperate efforts to hold myself erect. The pathway squirmed and wriggled like a snake, the trees and bushes bowed, the sky bobbed up and down.

He took me by by-paths so cunningly hidden that you might pass up and down the highroad daily and never suspect their existence. We went between cassenas and cedars and young laurels, branchy to the roots. And then I was walking down a path bordered with Lombardy poplars; and then I was sitting on a couch in Mr. Jelnik's living-room, while he bathed my face with scented water, and afterward held a small glass to my lips. The fluid I swallowed went tingling through my whole body like friendly fire.

I stole a woman-glance around the room that The Author had been so anxious to investigate. It was altogether a man's room, the scoured floor partly covered with a handsome rug, and the divan on which I was sitting covered with another. On both sides of the big fireplace were crowded book-shelves, above which hung weapons gathered from the four corners of the earth. There were two or three deep, comfortable arm-chairs, a square table, a couple of Winchesters in a corner, and near the window a flat, old-fashioned desk, above which hung two small portraits, evidently his parents, for the gentleman with stars and crosses on his braided uniform, a sword at his side, and a plumed hat in his hand, bore a striking resemblance to Mr. Jelnik; and the stately blond lady had a family resemblance to Doctor Richard Geddes.

Mr. Jelnik touched a bell near the door, and a tall, copper-colored man in spotless white appeared. At the merest gesture of an uplifted finger the copper-colored one bowed, vanished, and returned ten minutes later with a tiny cup of black coffee and a couple of thin wafers.

"I shall have to insist upon the coffee; and I advise the wafers," said Mr. Jelnik, pleasantly. So I drank the coffee, nibbled the wafers, and felt better.

The copper-colored man, standing still as a statue, waited until I had finished, took the cup, bowed, and disappeared. He was a stately impressive person, rather like a shah in disguise. Mr. Jelnik addressed him as "Daoud."

I had risen. I was trying to straighten my sadly flattened brown hat, and to smooth my frock, stained with damp earth, and water. A quick step sounded on the porch, somebody knocked, and without waiting for an answer, opened the door, impatiently, and strode into the room. With a fold of my disheveled frock in my hand, I looked up and met the angry and astonished eyes of The Author.

CHAPTER XII

MAN PROPOSES

The Author closed the door and leaned against it. His piercing glance jumped from Nicholas Jelnik's face to mine, with a prolonged and savage scrutiny. No detail of my appearance escaped him—my reddened eyelids, my pallor, my nervousness, my dishevelment. His eyes narrowed, his jaw hardened.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, roughly. "Come! At least one may hope for the truth from *you*!"

Mr. Jelnik gave him a level look. There was that in it which brought an angry red to The Author's thin face.

"Let me answer for her: just at present Miss Smith is getting ready to go home."

The Author struggled to keep his rising temper in hand.

"I asked you a plain question, Miss Smith!" His peremptory tone jangled my strained nerves.

"Mr. Jelnik has answered you: I am getting ready to go home."

The Author stamped.

"Don't talk nonsense! Again I ask you, what are you doing here? Have you lost your senses? Why have you been weeping? It is plain that you have been weeping. Miss Smith, why do I find you here—alone?"

"I do not like your manner of questioning me," I said, indignantly.

"My dear fellow," protested Mr. Jelnik, "you *are* behaving unmannerly, you know. The simple truth is, I was so fortunate as to be of assistance to Miss Smith. She had an unpleasant experience—fell and gave her head such a nasty bump, that it made her faint. I'm afraid I splashed her a bit when I was trying to revive her. I thought best to bring her here and give her a stimulant. She didn't want to stagger home and alarm the whole household unnecessarily."

"Is this true?" The Author asked me, rudely.

"You heard what Mr. Jelnik said!" I flamed.

"One allows somewhat more license to genius than might be accorded ordinary mortals; but really, you know, there are limits," Mr. Jelnik reminded him. "You're beginning to be rather a nuisance. It's unfortunate to have to remind a man, in one's own house, that he's a nuisance."

"I think you are, too!" I told The Author—"bursting into people's houses like an East-Side policeman, asking outrageous questions in an outrageous manner, and then questioning the answers one is patient enough to give you! What right have you got to ask *any* questions?"

"I'd rather like to know that, myself," put in Mr. Jelnik.

The Author straightened his shoulders, drew himself up to his full height, and folded his arms. He is an impressively tall man.

"Should you?" said he, quietly. "Well, I'll tell you—the right of an honest man to protect the woman he happens to want to marry."

I sat down, suddenly. I'm afraid my eyes popped, and I know my mouth fell open. I had the doubtful satisfaction of seeing Mr. Nicholas Jelnik's eyes and mouth open, too. After an astounded moment:

"Isn't this rather sudden?" wondered Mr. Jelnik. "Who'd suspect this fellow of volcanic possibilities?"

"I do Miss Smith no dishonor when I ask her to be my wife," said The Author, haughtily. "*I* am no adventurer. She can never suspect *me* of ulterior motives!"

"Heavens, no! Like Cæsar's wife, you are above suspicion; which, of course, gives you the right to suspect everybody else! But you were about to propose to Miss Smith in due form, were you not? Miss Smith, you will permit me to withdraw? I have never before been a third party to a proposal of marriage, and I confess I do not exactly understand what is expected of me," said Mr. Jelnik, delicately.

The Author smiled wryly.

"You succeed in making me appear a fool," he admitted. "That is no mean achievement, young man! I merely wished to set myself straight with Miss

Smith, to leave her no room for doubt as to my absolute honesty of purpose toward her; and you," said The Author, gulping, "you have made me *bray*! I wish you'd clear out. You *are* in the way, if you want the truth. And," he added, clenching his hands, "you can think yourself lucky that you're getting out with a whole skin, da—confound you!"

Mr. Jelnik smiled so sweetly that I was terrified.

"Oh, a whole skin!" he repeated, thoughtfully. "My good sir, I was born with a whole skin, and I rather expect to die with one." He looked at The Author reflectively: "Of course, I don't know what Miss Smith's feelings may be in regard to you, *but* if I thought you were seriously annoying her, I give you my word I should pitch you out of the window without further ado. Miss Smith," he turned to me, his eyes gentling with compassion, "I am more sorry than I can say that you should be called upon to endure this further strain. You will, I trust, forgive my unwilling share in it. Now, shall I leave you?"

"No, stay," said I, flatly.

Mr. Jelnik sat down, and with unruffled composure, waited for The Author to unbosom himself further.

"Miss Smith," The Author spoke after a pause,—and oh, I give him credit for his courage at that trying moment!—"Miss Smith, I have placed myself, and you also, in what appears to be rather an absurd position. I am sorry. But I meant exactly what I said. I base my right to question you upon the fact that I intended asking you to marry me. You need a protector, if ever woman did. I offer you the protection of my name."

I sat on the divan and stared at him owlishly. He went striding up and down the room, pausing every now and then to look down at me.

"When I came to Hyndsville," he went on, "nothing was farther from my thoughts than the desire to marry *anybody*. I have never considered myself a marrying man. But I find myself liking you, Miss Smith, better than I have ever liked any other woman, and for better reasons. You would make me an excellent wife, the only sort of wife a man like me could endure. And I think I should make you a good husband. I am not really so great a bear," he added, hastily, "as at times I appear to be. I should really try to make you happy. Now then, what have you to say?"

What could any woman say in such circuit stances? *I* said nothing, but slid down on Nicholas Jelnik's divan and howled.

"Didn't I tell you she'd had a bad time and wasn't herself? Now I hope you're satisfied!" raged Mr. Jelnik.

"It's as much your fault as mine!" snarled The Author. "Miss Smith, for heaven's sake don't cry like that! My dear girl, stop it. You run me distracted, Miss Smith!—Give her some vinegar or something, Jelnik! Confound you, Jelnik!—why don't you do something? Burn a feather under her nose! Make her stop it, Jelnik! She'll kill herself, if she keeps on crying like that! Here!" cried The Author, desperately; and tried to push back my hair and all but scalped me.

"Get away!" said Mr. Jelnik. "I'll try to quiet her. Miss Smith, if you don't stop crying, I shall slap you! Do you understand me, Miss Smith? Stop it this minute, or I shall slap you!" He thrust an arm around my shoulders and pulled me erect, none too gently.

"I—I—I ca-ca-ca—n't!"

"You can!" he snapped. "Stop it! Sophy, *shut up!*"

I was so astonished that in the middle of a howl I blinked, and gasped, and gulped, and stopped!

"Ring the bell, by the door," Mr. Jelnik told The Author, curtly. And when Daoud appeared, he ordered: "Cordial—top shelf; and some ice-water."

Five minutes later a forlorn and red-eyed wreck was sitting up looking at two wretched, embarrassed men. Thank Heaven, they looked just as miserable as they should have felt! Daoud brought me scented water, and I bathed my face. Then I patted into shape the hair that The Author had pulled awry, and said in the cold, accusing, I-die-a-martyr-to-your-stupidity voice that women punish men with:

"I think I shall go home."

With a chastened, hang-dog air The Author rose to accompany me, casting a withering look upon Mr. Nicholas Jelnik, who despised The Author for a bungling and intrusive idiot, and let his glance convey the fact. He was sorry for me, with a compassionate understanding of what I had been through. But I wanted neither his sorrow nor his compassion. He had punished The Author, but

he hadn't saved *me* from a ridiculous and painful situation. I gave him a limp hand, and had the satisfaction of leaving him thoroughly uncomfortable.

When we reached our gate The Author, who had trudged beside me in gloomy silence, laid his hand upon my arm.

"I shall not ask you to answer me at once. But I do ask you to consider carefully what I have said, and to realize that I mean every word of it. And—and—I'm sorry it came about in this wise, Sophy," he finished, with a touch of compunction.

"So am I." And then I went up-stairs, and crept into bed. My head ached frightfully, my heart throbbed and fluttered. I was so unnerved that it seemed a burden to be alive. And then, mercifully, I fell asleep, and didn't wake until Alicia brought me a breakfast-tray the next morning.

"My goodness, Sophy, you must have had a terrific headache!" she exclaimed. "Why, your lips are bloodless, and you've black circles under your eyes!"

"I'm all right this morning," I said, hastily. "But you look pale, yourself. Aren't you rather overdoing things, Leetchy?"

"No: I'm as sound as a trivet!" said she. And then: "Sophy, guess who was here last evening." Her eyes began to shine. "Mrs. Cheshire Scarboro; no less!" And she paused, to let that highly important statement sink in.

Mrs. Cheshire Scarboro was the Leader of the Opposition. She'd had a lifelong feud with old Sophronisba, who said that when the Lord wanted to try himself out in the way of a fool, He made Cissy Scarboro. They hated each other as only relations can hate. Naturally, Mrs. Scarboro resented our presence in Hynds House. She said Hyndsville ought to show us what it thought of the outrage. Under her leadership, Hyndsville showed us.

Mrs. Scarboro was a very important person in Hyndsville. She ruled the older and more conservative portion of it, and although the younger set at times rebelled and went its own way, her power was very real. That she had changed her mind, or at least her tactics, in regard to us was important news.

"She came with Mr. and Mrs. Haile," Alicia continued. "It was the first time she had ever been inside Hynds House. Think of that, Sophy! There were some girls here, and a few boys, naturally, Jimmy Scarboro among them. Should you think that accounted for his mama's presence, Sophy? And we sat around like

adoring mice, listening to The Author's sky-rockets going off. Doctor Geddes wouldn't let us sing, wouldn't even let us have music, because you mustn't be disturbed. He thinks a whole lot of you, Sophy."

"I think a whole lot of him. I never thought I could like that man as much as I do."

I was determined to show Miss Alicia Gaines that no matter how much, or for whatever reasons she had changed for the worse toward him, I, at least, had changed for the better. But she listened listlessly. For which cause, being resentful, I said not one word to her about The Author.

The thought of The Author confused me. I wasn't so much flattered as astounded. He was not offering me a light honor: The Author's name meant a great deal. Who, then, was I, a woman named Smith, to say nay to this miraculous possibility? Was it not rather for me to accept, meekly, the high gift that the gods in a sportive moment chose to toss to me? Yea, verily. And yet—My hand stole to the half of a thin old foreign coin hidden in my breast.

The Author behaved with exemplary patience and dignity. He went about his own work and left me to mine, and though I knew I was under his hawklike watchfulness, his matter-of-fact manner set me at my ease. You can't dread to meet a man, of a morning, who pays more attention to his batter-cakes than to you.

I was just beginning to breathe freely, when Doctor Richard Geddes came over one afternoon, and, finding me in our living-room with only the Black family to keep me company, flung himself into an arm-chair, seized Sir Thomas More Black by the scruff, and pulled his whiskers and rubbed his fur the wrong way until Sir Thomas More scratched him with thoroughness.

"Get out, then, you black hellion!" growled the doctor. Sir Thomas More got out. He hadn't wanted to stay in the first place.

"Shall I bind your hand for you?" I asked. But the doctor refused. He tapped his foot on the floor, and hemmed, and looked at me strangely. Then:

"Sophronisba Two, you consider me a reasonably decent sort, don't you?"

"That goes without saying."

"Think I'd make a woman a reasonably good husband?"

"I do," said I, truthfully. Whatever ailed the man?

"Good! And I," the doctor said, deliberately, "know that you'd make any man more than a reasonably good wife. Should you like to be mine, Sophronisba Two?"

The jump I gave threw Potty Black off my knees.

"You're ill, wandering in your wits, you poor man!" I was genuinely alarmed. "Isn't there something I can do for you, doctor?"

"There is: you can marry me, if you want to," replied the doctor, soberly. "Honestly, my dear girl, I'd be kind to you. I like and admire and respect you more than I can tell you, Sophy."

"My dear friend," I said, when I caught my breath, "I like, admire, and respect you, too. But people who marry each other need something more than that. They —well, they need—love."

His shoulders twitched.

"This business of love is the devil's own invention!" he cried. "It's safer and saner to like and respect people than to love them, and lots harder. Now, what do you say to marrying me?"

"I say you had no such notion in your head the last time you and I talked together. When did it seize you?" I demanded, suspiciously.

"I began to think about it seriously—er—ah—some days ago," he said, reddening.

"What day, to be exact?"

"Well," said he, resentfully, "it occurred to me last Wednesday, if you want to be so all-fired sure!"

"What happened last Wednesday to make you think of asking me to marry you?"

The doctor looked at me very much as a little boy looks at a grown-up who is holding a soapy wash-cloth in one hand and an ear in the other.

"What do you want to know for?"

"Because. I just want to know because. Well?" He squirmed, and was silent. "Was it because you have ceased to care for Alicia, already?" His glare answered that question. "No? Why, then, didn't you ask Alicia, instead of coming to me for second choice? Look here, Doctor Richard Geddes: if I was not firmly and truly your friend, I should be furious, do you understand? Or," I added, darkly, "I might even revenge myself by taking you at your word!"

"Sophronisba Two!" The doctor looked at, me piteously.

"Why didn't you ask Alicia?" I persisted, inexorably.

"I did!" gulped the doctor. "But she said she couldn't. She said, why didn't I care for you instead of her? You were so much better—and—and I'd be happier with you, for I'd have the most unselfish angel—" he stopped miserably.

"Well?"

"Well, I kept turning it over in my mind; and the more I thought of it, the clearer I perceived that with a wife like you I'd be a better and a more worth-while man. I—I think so much of you, Sophy, that I'm telling you the whole truth," he finished.

"That's why I'm going to keep on being friends with you—better friends than ever," I told him.

"You're going to marry me, then, Sophy?"

"Didn't you just hear me tell you I meant to keep on being friends with you?"

"You won't, then?"

"I won't, then."

"Yet there are good reasons why you might reconsider your decision," he said, after a pause. "We are so diametrically opposed it would seem inevitable we should marry each other. Why, Sophy, we've got enough to quarrel happily about for the rest of our lives. For instance, do you sleep with all your windows open?"

"I close two, and leave two open."

"Every window open, day and night, hot or cold, rain or shine," said the doctor, firmly. "Do you use pillows?"

"Two."

"None at all. Sleep with your head flat. How many blankets?"

"Two, and a comfort."

"One army blanket, except in extremely cold weather," said the doctor. "Do you like a pipe?"

"It always makes me sick. I peculiarly and particularly loathe and detest a pipe."

"A pipe, my dear, deluded woman, is a comfort, a stay, a prop to a man's soul, an aid to meditation and repose. I insist upon a pipe—within moderation, of course. Do you like parrots? Sophy, are you capable of supporting a parrot? I have already perceived your reprehensible fondness for cats." He looked at his scratched hand.

"I have always wanted a parrot. I think they're the most—"

"Damnable brutes!" finished the doctor. "Gad, I'd as lief live in the house with Sophronisba One! It is not moral to like a parrot. What do you think of stewed rhubarb?"

I made a wry face. I abhor stewed rhubarb. Somehow, it always makes me think of orphans in long-waisted gingham dresses with white china buttons down the back. One way of punishing children for losing their parents is to make them wear dark gingham dresses with china buttons down the back and to eat stewed rhubarb for dessert.

"Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you what you are," pronounced the doctor. "It's a sign of moral rectitude to eat stewed rhubarb. Now, as to science: what is your attitude toward evolution?"

"Well, I think plenty of men turn themselves into monkeys, but I refuse to believe that God ever turned a monkey into a man."

"Ha!" mused the doctor, pulling his nose; "I see! Do you insist upon a sacrosanct meal hour? Are your meal hours fixed, even as the laws of the Medes and the Persians?"

"How else, pray, shall one run one's house with any degree of system?" I wanted to know.

"Bunk!" snorted the doctor. "*I* eat when I'm hungry! Now, lastly, sister, tell me truthfully: are you a Democrat or a Republican?"

"I don't see much difference: they're both of them nothing but *men*."

"I knew it!" The doctor shook his head with sad triumph. "She'd scratch Brown, because she didn't like the expression of his ears, and vote for Jones, because he had such beautiful whiskers! My dear, dear woman, can't you see that it's almost a law of nature for you and me, who don't agree about anything, to marry each other?"

"I don't even agree with you as to that!" said I, and fell into helpless laughter.

"It rather looks like flying in the face of Providence not to," he warned me. "In the meantime—"

"In the meantime, let us be grateful Alicia didn't put the notion into your head to ask somebody who might have taken you seriously."

"That means you don't, and won't." He drew a long breath. "But we're good friends; aren't we, Sophy?"

"If a man never does anything worse than ask a woman to marry him, he will probably retain her friendship until she dies," I replied.

"Provided she refuses him," the doctor said, gratefully. And bending down, he kissed me brotherly on the cheek, an honest and resounding smack; at which opportune moment Alicia walked in.

Wholly unabashed, the doctor spoke pleasantly to Alicia, shook hands with me effusively, and went off whistling. All was right with the world. I'd refused him, you understand! Instead of being enraged and offended, I found myself giggling.

That night, as Alicia didn't come in my room, I went into hers.

"I know what you've come to tell me, Sophy dear," she said, directly. "I've seen it for some time. And I'm glad as glad—glad with all my heart, Sophy." Her voice was tenderness itself, her eyes melted. But the hand on my hand was cold. "I love you a great deal, Sophy," she whispered. "More than anybody else in the world, I think."

"And was it because you loved me, dear girl, that you put the absurd notion of

asking me to marry him into Doctor Geddes's head?"

"Absurd notion?" repeated Alicia. "Absurd notion? But he asked you! Didn't he ask you?"

"As to that, he told me I could marry him if I wanted to," I admitted. "Oh, Leetchy, it was funny, though! If you could have seen the poor dear, trying to martyr himself, just to oblige you—"

"You *refused* him?" breathlessly.

"Of course. There wasn't anything to say but 'No.'"

"But—I saw—"

"You saw him kiss me on the cheek? Honey, that wasn't love: that was gratitude!"

"I don't understand!" stammered Alicia, twisting her hands. "Why, you cared for him—I thought you cared."

"Of course I care for him! But not like that! Good heavens, Alicia, however did you get such a notion? My dear, if I loved you less, or him more, I should never, never be able to forgive either of you. As it is, we'll forget it."

At that Alicia began to cry.

"Oh, what have I done?" she whimpered. "Sophy, you don't know—what I've done!"

"You haven't done anything that can't be undone," said I, comfortably. "You and I, my dear, fell into a Hynds House maze. Now we're out of it!" And thinking she would be better by herself, I kissed her good night.

Out of Hynds House maze, indeed! I had only to step back into my own room to have it again enmesh me. For on the prie-dieu that had once held Freeman Hynds's Bible and now held mine, was the lost diary.

CHAPTER XIII

FIRES OF YESTERDAY

I wasn't frightened, of course. There isn't anything terrifying in finding a little old leather-covered book on a prie-dieu by one's bedside. But it was some minutes before I could induce myself to take up that yellowed old diary and examine it.

It begins the year of Freeman's return from college, "a Finish'd Young Gentleman." He has refused to go abroad, considering that "our Young Gentlemen have enough Fripperies & Fopperies at Home without bringing worse Ones from Abroad." Brother Richard has been abroad more than once, and Freeman does not "find him Improv'd save in Outer Elegancies."

The only person that "much Travelling hath not Spoil'd," he finds, is Mistress Emily Hope of Hope Plantation. "Shee was a Sweet Child," he remembers; and now that the dew of their youth is upon them both, he finds her "of a Graceful and Delicate Shape, with the Most Beautiful Countenance in the World, a Sweet & Modest Demeanour, a Sprightly Wit, an Accomplish'd Mind, & a Heart Fix'd upon Virtue."

The estates are near each other, the families intimate friends. Emily seems to like the boy. At any rate, she doesn't repel him. And then returns Richard—the gay, the handsome, the irresistible Richard—who adds to the stalwart comeliness of a colonial gentleman the style, the grace, the cultivated manners of the Old World.

Almost fiercely Freeman notes the effect he produces, and how "Women do catch an Admiration for him as't were a Pox."

Then he begins to set down, grimly, "The Sums my Father hath paid for My Brother's Debts." A little later, he adds: "You Might Pour the Atlantic Ocean full of Gold through his Pocketts & Overnight would He empty Them." Richard, also, "Makes Choice of rake-hell Companions," to his father's growing unease and indignation, his mother's distress. But "Good God! how is all Forgiven the Beautiful, the Gift'd!"

"Jezebel herself, that carries her Head so High, wears her Heart upon her Sleeve, een like a simple Milkmaid! 'Tis a Rare Spectacle. Sure there's a Fatality about this Man!"

"This Day dress'd I in my new Blue Cloathes, the which become me not Ill & riding over to Hope Plant'n did ask for Emily's Hand. Alas, 'Tis even as my Fears foretold! Shee loves me Not. 'Tis Richard alone hath her Heart.

"I do Fear Shee will sup Sorrow & drink Tears that setts her Affection upon the Unstable. Shee's too Mild, too Tender, hath not a Firm enough Hand to restrain him. He should een have ta'en Madame Jezebel. Hath a Grand Passion for him. Will not lightly wear the Willow."

"This Day did Richard my Brother Wed Emily Hope," he records, after a six-months' silence. "All say 'tis a most Noble Mating. My Mother in a Gown from London Town, & our Finest Gems, enow to make a Dutchess envious of a Carolina Lady. My Father in high Spiritts.

"I danc'd with the Bridesmaids, but Salut'd not the Bride, the Which noted Madame Jezebel. Was Handsomer than ever I did See her, many thinking her Handsomer than the Bride. Had a great Following, the which the Hussy treat'd with Disdain.

"'Have you Kiss'd the Bride, Sir?' says shee, a-mocking of me after her Wont. 'What a Fine Thing is a Love-Match, Master Freeman!'

"'Have you Wish'd the Bridegroom Joy?' says I. The woman anger'd me.

"'May Heaven send him all the Happiness he Deserves!' cries shee. 'Sure, you'll echo that yourself, Master Freeman!' 'Tis a jibing Wench. Would to God Richard had Wedded her!"

Then came dry notes of a visit to Kinsfolk in Virginia. Freeman seems to have been away from home for some time. When he returns, it is to chronicle in brief his brother's downward course. "They have sold Hope Plantation and Most of the Slaves. 'Tis an evil Chance."

"I shall be Twenty-one next month, though I feel a Thousand. We shall have a Ball, after the Custom of our House. 'Tis to be a Grand Affair. I do think my

Parents are somewhat Tender of Conscience to meward. Though my Father Loves me not as he Loves my Brother, yet he begins to Lean upon me more & More Heavily. My poor Mother is a Little Envious of these Dry Virtues of mine, seeing her Darling is like to come to Shipwreck for Lack of them. Yet had he Fortune & Beauty & Emily!"

The next entry records the loss of the Hynds jewels. "'Tis a great Mystery!" One is sorely puzzled here. There is no getting at what Freeman really thinks. Coldly, tritely, he sets down the bald, bare facts of the tragedies that wrecked the Hyndses.

With a strange lack of emotion he chronicles Richard's death, and adds: "At the Pleasure of God his Birth fell upon a Wednesday, at Sun-rising, the which was by some Accounted Favourable. His Death came upon a Friday, at Noone, it Raining heavily."

Then comes his father's sudden death; and this curious item:

"Despite his Anguish & Affliction of Spiritt upon that Date, he did tell me Part, after the Custom of our House, the morning of my Twenty-first Birthday. Alas, when he was Stricken, upon the News of Richard's Demise, he had no Chance to tell me All, nor was there among his Papers the Keye nor any Clue to It. When J. call'd us, he was Beyond Speech & shee Hystericall with Affright. Thus the Whole Secret perishes, since Without the Keye & his Instructions 'twould be Impossible to Proceed."

"This evening came Capt. B., the worst of the Plundering Crew that pluck'd Richard. 'Sirrah,' says he, impudently, 'thy Brother owe'd me three thousand pounds.' And he pulls me out a great fistfull of Billets.

"'Sirrah,' says I, 'my Brother owes his Wife and Orphan'd Infant three thousand times more than that. There be Debts of Nature which precede so-called Debts of Honour. Each billet in thy hand, thou swindling runnigate, calls for a bullet. Begone, lest *I* owe thee a horse-whipping.'

"'Anan!' says he, 'and one of you a Thief! *That* for Honour, in the mouth of a Hynds!' And snapp'd me his fingers under my Nose.

"We arrang'd a Meeting, though 'T was Foolish to Risk myself, with the Roof tottering over my Mother's Head. My fellow Pompey, Mr. G. Dalzell, Mr. F.

Mayne, & Dr. Baltassar Bobo with me. Two of his scoundrelly Associates with him. His ball graz'd my arm above the Elbow & Burnt the Linen of my Shirt. Mine Finish'd him. 'T was too great an Honour & more than he Deserv'd, to die by the Hand of a Gentleman."

A little later: "This morn disappear'd my Cozen Jessamine.

"Nothing discover'd of her Whereabouts," he records from time to time.

"This morn saw I Emily & Richard's little Son. 'T is a Fine child, much Resembling my Brother. Emily turn'd her Face away, drawing down of her Widow's Weeds, & turn'd also the Babe's face aside. I felt Embitter'd."

By this time he has taken over the whole Hynds estate as heir. He mentions his sisters' marriages, notes that they have received their dowers, and so dismisses them.

His mother has been dead some time when he marries. One wonders what the bride was like, whom he commends for "Housekeeping Virtues, so that the Servants instantly Obey, there is no Pilfering & Loitering, & the House moves like Clockwork."

He must have been like clockwork, himself. There seems less and less human emotion in him. The birth of his only child gets this:

"This day was born Sophronisba Harriott Hynds, nam'd for her Estimable Mother. I am told 'Tis a fine healthy Child."

Casually thereafter he mentions "my Daughter." Twice her mother "Requested me to Chastise her for Unchristian Temper," which chastisement he seems to have administered with thoroughness and a rattan, in his office. On the second occasion, "I whip'd her Severely & did at the same Time admonish her to Ask Pardon of God. Whereupon she Yell'd Aloud & did Seize the Calf of my Leg & Bite me, Causing me Great Physical Pain and Mental Anguish. How sharper than a Serpent's Tooth is an Ungrateful Child!"

(Oh, Ungrateful Child, I do not find it in my heart to blame you overmuch. Somehow I can't feel sorry that you bit him, Sophronisba!)

"This day died my Wife, an Estimable Helpmeet. I shall sadly Lack her Management of the House." In spite of which, he buys more land. Life seems to run smoothly enough. "The Lord hath bless'd me with Abundance. They that

Spoke evil of me are Astonied & made Asham'd. The Lord hath done it."

Then comes this last entry:

"Two nights since died Scipio, son of old Shooba's last Wife, the which did send for me, Urgently entreating of my Presence. 'T was ever a Simple-minded Creature & found a faithful Servant, wherefore I did go to him.

"He was greatly in Dread of Dying, for that he was in mortal Terrour of old Shooba, fearing to Meet that Evil Being outside of the Flesh. Had been with Shooba when the wretched Creature passed away, a harden'd Heathen among Convert'd & Profess'd Christians. Said he was a Snake Soul.

"The man was craz'd with Fear, dreading Shooba to be even then in the Room. And indeed the Tale he whisper'd me was enough to Craze a Christian Man, & hath all but crack'd mine own Witts. If 't were not for the Paper he slip't into my Palm, I should sett it down for a Phantazy, one of old Shooba's evil Spells. Most merciful God, how came he by that Paper if the Tale be untrue?

"Greatly am I upsett by this Improbable & Frightful Thing. Sure this requires Prayer & Fasting, lest I be Delud'd."

Between the pages following this last entry was a piece of yellowed paper, the paper that had been lost from the Author's coat pocket, in the locked closet of his room.

After a while I managed to work the slit of a drawer open, and to this hiding-place I returned Freeman's diary, and with it the faintly scented bit of paper that The Author mourned.

The failure of her matrimonial plans for me did not occasion Miss Alicia Gaines overmuch grief. She seemed to have dismissed the whole matter from her mind. Restored to her old time gaiety, she sang like a thrush as she worked. She bubbled over with the sheer joy of living, until the very sight of her gladdened one. And she simply couldn't make her feet behave! She danced with the broom one morning, to the great amusement of our scholarly old Englishman.

"I'm supposed to be somewhat of an old stick myself: why not try me, instead of the broom?" he suggested slyly. Instantly she took him at his word, and danced him up and down the hall until he was breathless.

"This," panted the scholar, "is a fair sample of what the Irish do to the English."

"We do lead you a pretty dance, don't we, dear John Bull?" dimpled Alicia.

"You do, you engaging baggage!" he admitted. "But," he added, in a tone of satisfaction, "we manage to keep step, my dear! Oh, yes, we manage to keep step!" And he trotted off, chuckling.

"There are times," said The Author to me, darkly, "when the terrifying tirelessness of youth gives me a vertigo. Come away, Miss Smith. Leave that kitten to chase her own shadow up the wall."

"Cross-patch, draw the latch,
Sit by the fire and spin—yarns!"

chanted Alicia.

"Go away, you pink-and-white delusion!" said The Author, severely. "You have made Scholarship and Wisdom put on cap and bells and prance like a morris-dancer. Isn't that mischief enough for one day?"

Alicia has a round, snow-white chin, and when she tilts it the curve of her throat is distracting.

"On second thoughts," said The Author, critically, "I discover that I do not wholly disapprove of you. Come outside. I wish to talk about the venerable, and yet common design that tops every outside window and door of this house.—What do you call that design, may I ask?"

"Why, everybody knows the Greek fret!" said Alicia, staring at it. "It's as old as the hills."

"Exactly," agreed The Author. "The Greek fret is as old as the hill. And, with the single exception of the swastika, it is the design most universally known to man. You may find it on a bit of ancient Greek pottery, or on a crumbling wall in Yucatan. Many people refer to it as the Greek key."

Something began to glimmer in my mind—the vaguest, most tenuous shadow of an idea; a tantalizing, hide-and-seek phantom of a thought.

"*Turne Hellens Keye*
Three Tennes and Three,"

he quoted the doggerel verse.

We looked at him mutely.

"It is a tiresome truism," he went on, reflectively, "that what lies close to the eye often escapes observation. For instance, these windows have been staring at me daily, each with its nice little eyebrow of design, and I overlooked the design until my subconscious mind suggested to me that here, in all probability, lies Hellen's Keye."

I remembered the entry in Freeman's diary, concerning the loss of a "Keye," which hadn't been found among his father's papers, and of a secret which had died with the older man.

"I think I told you," said The Author, "that this house was built by master masons, shortly after the Grand Lodge was established in London. Thirty-three is rather a significant number. Yet, how to apply it," he paused, frowning.

"Without disturbing a Watcher in the Dark?" Alicia made light of The Authors itch for mystery. "Aren't you rather forgetting the Watcher in the Dark? Teller of tales, isn't it moon-stuff you're trying to spin?"

"Who talks of a Watcher in the Dark?" asked a pleasant voice. Accompanied by Mr. Johnson, Mr. Nicholas Jelnik had strolled up unperceived.

"The Author," Alicia explained, mischievously, "is trying to make sense out of nonsense."

"That," said Mr. Jelnik, smiling, "is not an uncommon occupation."

"It's all about a bit of doggerel we found on a scrap of paper in the attic," I told him. And I quoted it, adding: "There was a column of dots under it. The Author laments that he lost it, before he had chance to unravel it."

"I lost it, walking in my sleep," said The Author, disagreeably.

"And now he's trying to make us believe that the design in the brick-work above our windows, just because it's the Greek fret, is Hellen's Keye," Alicia said, jestingly.

"Well, you know, if a thing means *anything*, it's got to mean *something*," put in Mr. Johnson.

"Ain't it the truth, though?" hissed The Author, with fury.

Mr. Johnson was saved from stammering explanations by the irruption of Beautiful Dog, who at sound of his voice had wriggled, and cringed, and fawned his way out of the shrubbery, cocking a wary eye to see that none of the Black family was around. Beautiful Dog rolled his eyes at his god, swung his tail, waggled his ears, made uncouth movements with his splay feet, and grinned from ear to ear. He was so utterly absurd that he claimed everybody's amused attention.

"Why, old chap! You're rather glad to see your friends, aren't you?" the secretary said in his pleasant voice.

Beautiful Dog yelped with rapture, darted back into the shrubbery, and a moment later emerged and laid at his adored one's feet all his treasure, a chewed slipper. He tried to say that precious as this gift undoubtedly was, he gave it willingly, joyfully. But scenting other white people too near, he backed off, and fled.

The Author's eyes followed him.

"I wonder if I'd have been equal to that, myself, if I'd been born a nigger dog with an ingrained distrust of the white man?" he questioned. "Gad! it comes near being the real thing, Johnson!"

The secretary looked at the slipper lying at his feet: "I wonder where he found that, now?"

I was wondering the same thing, and so was Alicia.

"Let's show Beautiful Dog the Chinese politeness of being decent enough not to accept his gift when he's decent enough to offer it," she suggested.

"Yes, throw it into the shrubbery and let him find it. That may raise white people somewhat in his estimation," I added, hastily.

Instantly Mr. Jelnik picked it up and tossed it among the bushes. His action seemed the merest polite compliance with my request, and he barely glanced at the object he cast away. Yet it was really worth a second glance. Chewed, frayed, and torn, it had once been of finest red Morocco leather; and it was such a flat and heelless slipper as no native Hyndsville foot had ever worn. It was The Jinnee's slipper.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TALISMAN

Mrs. Cheshire Scarboro was far from the fool her cousin Sophronisba had credited her with being. She had sufficient cleverness to understand that Hyndsville wasn't big enough to hold two factions. For a faction was forming with Hynds House as its storm-center, and it was one which threatened Mrs. Scarboro's hitherto unquestioned sovereignty. Jimmy Scarboro himself, a most personable youth, was one of the ringleaders of revolt.

A weaker woman would have kept up the fight. Mrs. Scarboro understood that to spend one's powers trying to hold an untenable position is a proof not of valor but of stupidity. She quietly declared a truce, sending out, in the form of an invitation to one of her sacred card-parties, tentative notice that she would consider joining forces. We recognized the olive-branch, seriously extended. The next move was ours.

"There's a time to fight, and a time to leave off fighting," Alicia decided. "Here's where we disarm. When these people come from under the shade of the dear old family tree, they're quite human. We have got to let them give themselves the opportunity to discover that we're human, too."

It wasn't necessary to explain things to The Author, because a portion of his brain is purely and cattily feminine. That's why he is a genius. No man is a genius whose brain isn't bisexual.

"I shall have to lay aside a cherished prejudice and lend this lady the light of my countenance, although I loathe card-parties. I abhor cards, outside of draw-poker on shipboard, with a crook of sorts sitting in to lend the game a fillip. Despite the fact that poor Mrs. Scarboro couldn't lay hands on a decent crook to save her life, I think I shall go, and thereby acquire merit," he concluded, with the air of a martyr.

I looked at him gratefully.

"I'll wager that little Sophy thinks she wants to go because she desires to be friends and neighbors. 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to

dwell together in unity!'—You're a transparent person, you Sophy!"

"But I do desire to be friends with them. I have to live here all the rest of my life, haven't I?"

"Not necessarily," replied The Author, arching his eyebrows. "For instance, you can live in New York any time you want to, Sophy."

"I've never told you that you might call me Sophy," I parried, hastily.

"Oh, but I like to call you Sophy," he responded airily. "And really, you shouldn't mind. I've called people lots worse things than Sophy, in my time! But then," he added, "I didn't happen to like them. As for you, I find you a very likeable being, Sophy; upon my word, extremely likeable!"

"Thank you," said I. I wasn't anxious to hear The Author tell me how likable he found me; at least, not yet.

For pride's sake as well as for the sake of custom—and in South Carolina custom has all the power of a fetish—Mrs. Scarboro would have died rather than vary by one jot or tittle her usual refreshments, or wear a new frock, on that particular night. Yet the occasion, despite its mild diversions, was distinctly epochal, in that it marked the reunion of Hyndsville. Even Mr. Nicholas Jelnik, for the first time, put in his decorative appearance, to The Author's fidgety surprise. He played a highly creditable game of bridge. And after a while he sang "Believe Me if All Those Endearing Young Charms," so exquisitely that a hushed and rapturous silence fell upon everybody, and the old ladies and gentlemen present held their hands before misty eyes. They used to sing that song when the old men were boy soldiers marching off to the tune of "The Bonnie Blue Flag," and the old ladies were ringleted girls in hoop-skirts bidding them good-by.

"My dear boy," Mrs. Scarboro told him, with great feeling, "you have been forgetting that you're a cousin of mine. Your mother and I were girls together. I want you to meet some other old friends of hers and your grandfather's," and she carried him off to a group of those wonderful old ladies who grow to purest perfection in South Carolina—low-voiced lovely old ladies, dressed in black silk, with cameo brooches at their throats, and lace caps on their white hair.

A little group of old gentlemen immediately foregathered with them. They

knew who was and wasn't kin to Sally Hynds's son, unto the seventh generation.

"They've begun on the begats," chuckled The Author, "First Book of Chronicles, Chapters One to Four."

"Jelnik's really kin to them, and he ought to pay for the privilege," said Mr. Johnson.

The Author looked at the old ladies, on whose delicate withered hands the wedding-rings hung loosely, and at the erect old gentlemen with white goatees, and something whimsically tender came into his clever face.

"It is worth the price," he said, very gently—for him.

"Now, that was your soul speaking!" said Miss Emmeline, warmly. Instantly The Author wrinkled his nose, bristled his mustache, and looked like a hyena. Miss Martha Hopkins, worshipfully observant of the great man, caught his eye at that moment and thought he was scowling at *her*. She looked so stricken that The Author presently strolled over and sat down beside her, to her fluttering delight. But discovering that she was wholly unacquainted with the original verse of J. Gordon Coogler of Columbia, he first bitterly reproached her for neglecting home-made talent, and then proceeded to make sure that she would remember the Bard of the Congaree so long as she lived.

"Not know Coogler!" cried The Author, shrilly; "ignorant of the bard raised, so to speak, around your own door-step? Horrible! Listen to this!" said he, accusingly:

"Fair lady, on that snowy neck and half-clad bosom
Which you so publicly reveal to man,
There's not a single outward stain or speck.
Would that you had given but half the care
To the training of your intellect and heart,
As you have given to that spotless neck!"

"Gracious Heavens!" gasped Miss Martha, who showed a modest salt-cellar in the mildest of Vs.

"Is it possible you don't like him?" demanded The Author, amazedly. "But, my dear woman! Coogler's—why, Coogler's ginger-pop to a thirsty world!"

"I—I don't drink ginger-pop!" confessed the be-deviled Center of Culture,

foggily.

"Alas! for the South, her books have grown fewer,
She never was much given to literature,"

quoted The Author, pensively.

She was speechless. The shameless Author, fixing upon her a last long, lingering look of sorrowful reproach, said with emotion:

"From early youth to the frost of age
Man's days have been a mixture
Of all that constitutes in life
A dark and gloomy picture."

And he stalked off, leaving Miss Martha Hopkins in a state of mind.

"Friend Author," Alicia murmured, as he paused beside her, "I wish you were my own dear little boy for just five merry minutes. I'd show you," she declared, divided between Irish mirth and human pity for Miss Martha, "I'd show you what a hair-brush could accomplish!"

"Too late!" regretted The Author, shaking his head. "But," he suggested, brightening, "couldn't you wish to be my own dear little girl, instead?"

"This is so sudden!" murmured Alicia, coyly.

"Deluding devilette!" breathed The Author, "get thee behind me!"

That evening was the first time I had ever heard myself called "pretty." I was used to "businesslike" and "efficient" and "trustworthy"—all excellent terms, in their way, but not such happy things, any one of them, as "pretty."

"What are you thinking of, Sophy?" asked The Author. "Something over the hills and far away? Because you look as Maude Adams used to look when she first played 'Peter Pan.'"

I hoped it might be true, because—

I looked up then and met Mr. Nicholas Jelnik's dark eyes. They were falcon eyes, but now there was something in them that made me, to my rage and confusion and chagrin, blush like a silly school-girl. When I again ventured to glance in his direction he was patiently and politely listening to a white-goateed,

game-legged U.C.V. refight the Civil War with so fiery a zest that he presently caught another veteran a resounding crack on the funny-bone with the gold-headed stick he was flourishing. Both gentlemen half rose, the one making wry faces and rubbing his elbow, the other bowing and apologetic.

"Pahdon me, Majah! My deah suh, pahdon me! But I was just tellin' this boy about the day in the Wilderness his grandfathah Hynds took a Yankee bullet out of my leg with a paih of silvah scissahs and bandaged it with the tail of his shirt.

"'I've lost my niggah and my instruments, Sam,' says the doctah, 'but that's no reason why the damyankees should have the satisfaction of killin' a puffeckly good rebel, when there's not enough to go around now. Hold your leg still,' says he, rollin' up his sleeves, 'an' with the help of God and my scissahs and my shirt-tail, I'll save it for you.' An' he did. I walked home from Appomattox on that same leg, suh," said the veteran, and brought his stick down on the toes of it with a force that made him utter a muffled bellow.

The other, still nursing an outraged elbow, smiled sweetly.

"Thanks, Sam," he drawled.

The Author chuckled appreciatively. "And to think we Americans rush abroad, when the republic of South Carolina is right next-door to us!" he murmured.

A gentle change was creeping over Hynds House, perhaps because of the delightful old ladies who had begun to come there. Old gentlemen, too, formed the pleasant habit of dropping in, beguiled by the artful Author, waited upon son-like by his secretary, foregathered with as kith and kin by the Englishman, mint-juleped by the three of them, enchanted by Alicia, and teaed and caked and beloved by me. Even our cats adored them. The Black family could spot a Confederate veteran as far off as the front gate, and would rush wildly to meet him, rubbing and roaching and purring in and out of his old legs. The Author insisted that their passion for U.C.V.'s was an inherited trait with our cats, and that we ourselves were merely acquired characteristics.

In April, just before Miss Emmeline was to return to Boston, and the Englishman and his daughter were to go back home, Alicia and I decided to give a farewell dance. It was to be in costume.

Hyndsville was pleasantly excited. Never had there been such rummaging of attics, such searchings of old trunks! We rummaged our attic, too. I selected a

yellow brocade trimmed with seed-pearls and cascades of lace, and Alicia chose a skimpy blue satin frock with a round neck, an upstanding lace collar, and absurd little puffed sleeves. The Englishman was a Puritan, his daughter a Quakeress, Mr. Johnson a Huguenot Lover, Miss Emmeline a Colonial Lady, Doctor Geddes a bearded and belted Boyar, and The Author a painfully realistic Mephistopheles, his eyebrows corked upward and his mustache waxed into points. Mr. Jelnik sent regrets.

We had waxed the floors, and moved most of the furniture out of the big front drawing-room; and this and the wide halls were used for a ball-room, just as they had been used in the old days. The older people played cards in the living-room and library. Every now and then, between pauses, some masked and brilliant figure, like a bright ghost from the past, would steal in to look over their shoulders and whisper in their ears.

But those grandparents weren't content to sit down and play cards while others footed it. Not they! They danced the Lancers, and a polka or two, and waltzed and dipped and bowed to "Comin' through the Rye" while all the masqueraders lined up against the walls to admire and applaud. And after the gayest sort of a buffet supper, the prizes that had been won by a belle and a trooper of '61—she in her grandmother's crinoline and he in his grandfather's gray jacket—were turned over by acclaim to a sprightly lady of seventy and her sprightlier partner of seventy-five, for coming disguised as old folks. The Author made the presentation speech. He began it by saying that in South Carolina any man might well be excused for falling in love with his grandmother.

Then the oldsters began to depart, with laughter and gay good nights. It had been a delightful affair, one of those affairs that go with a swing and a rhythm all their own, and that one remembers with a pleasant taste in the mouth.

Only the more indefatigable youngsters remained. They hadn't the slightest intention of foregoing half a night's dancing. They danced in the hall to the music of the victrola, while the regular musicians were being fêted in the kitchen by Mary Magdalen, Queenasheeba, and Fernolia.

I missed my fan, and went into the drawing-room to look for it. The room was quite empty for the moment, and looked lonesome for all its blazing lights. A cool, sweet night wind came in through the open windows, refreshingly. And quite suddenly there was framed in one of them a figure more exotic, more bizarre, than any of our maskers had been.

His dark robe was folded over his breast, and the silver shaft of a knife showed in his red girdle. His white wool stuck out from under his red fez, and his ear-rings gleamed against his black cheeks, and the bracelets on his wiry arms made a faint tinkling as he leaned forward. Emboldened by his twinkling eyes, his crooked, friendly smile, eager to question him, I drew nearer. He stretched out his hand, and slipped into mine the half of a broken coin.

CHAPTER XV

THE HEART OF HYNDS HOUSE

I stood staring at the broken coin in my hand with a sort of stupefaction, while The Jinnee moved slowly away from the window. I had received a summons I could not ignore. Had I not promised, smilingly indeed, but sincerely, to answer that call whenever and however it should come?

The music had ceased for the moment, and the big hall was quite empty, for the dancers had trooped into the dining-room, from which came laughter and chattering voices, and the chink of silver and china. The great front doors were wide open. I slipped unseen into the darkly bright, whispering night.

The moon was high in the heavens, for it was past midnight; the wind was chill upon my shoulders, the dew silvery under my feet. There was an odor abroad—the ineffable odor of sleepily stirring spring, of young new leaves budding, of tender grass, growing like a baby's hair.

At some distance ahead I could just distinguish the dark figure of the messenger, flitting soundless as a shadow. And then, to my infinite relief, out of the shrubbery stepped Boris, and thrust his doggy nose into my hand. I laid hold of his collar, and he trotted sedately beside me.

I had half expected to be led to the gray-gabled cottage, but The Jinnee stole along in the shadow of the hedge, stopped beside the spring-house, and held up his hand.

"In the name of God!" said I, involuntarily.

"The compassionate, the merciful!" finished The Jinnee, and turning to the east made a profound reverence. There was something so simple and so sincere in his manner that my momentary fear subsided.

"But why have I been sent for? Why are *you* here?" I wondered.

He folded his arms upon his breast, and in a sing-song voice, curiously unlike any other I had ever heard, answered parrotlike:

"This is the word of the master: Take to the fair-haired lady the broken coin, my sign, and she will remember her word to me. Verily, for the sign's sake, she will follow without fear."

"The master is not ill, then?"

"In his body he is well. But of the spirit of man, and what help he needs, there is but one judge, namely, God."

"He has need of me?"

"He sends the token by me, Achmet." And he stood there with a motionless patience, waiting.

Achmet! I remembered an afternoon in the Enchanted Wood, and that name ringing in my ears—Achmet!

"I will follow you," I said. And instantly The Jinnee pushed open the unlocked door of the spring-house and stepped inside.

I hesitated for a moment, turning my head toward Hynds House, blazing with lights. I could hear voices, laughter, snatches of song. From the kitchen Mary Magdalen's great, rich, unctuous laugh rolled out like an organ peal. Silhouetted against the lighted library window was one of our big black cats, with an arched back and an uplifted and expressive tail.

"I wait," said a quiet voice. And, clutching Boris by the collar, I stepped inside the door.

It was dark in there; only a faint and broken light came through the one window, set high in the wall. Boris's eyes were balls of fire, and his feet made a stealthy, scuffling sound on the flagged floor. The little spring bubbling in its stone basin was like a whispering, secretive voice.

Achmet stooped down, over in one corner. Then, shading a very modern flash-light with a fold of his robe, he showed me one of the square flags lifted, and a black hole yawning in the floor.

I backed away. With a crooked, sly smile, The Jinnee snapped his fingers at Boris. The big dog jerked himself free of my hand and disappeared.

"Now!" said The Jinnee. And like one in a dream I gathered my lace-trimmed skirts in my hand and backed down a spider-web stairway that barely gave one

foothold. Achmet waited until I reached the bottom, then he, too, backed in, and I heard the flagstone fall to over my head.

There was a moment of utter and awful blackness and stillness. I was upon the point of shrieking, when something cold and friendly touched my hand: Boris was nosing me. The Jinnee, at the bottom of the steps, showed the light.

We were in a circular shaft, narrowing upward like an inverted funnel. It was quite clean and dry, lined with hard cement. Branching from it were two wedge-shaped openings, just wide enough to allow one person at a time to walk through.

The Jinnee plunged into one of these, and Boris and I followed. There was nothing else for us to do.

"This is safest way. If I come through house, I am seen. Not want that," said Achmet, over his shoulder.

I made no reply. I was wondering what The Author would have said had he seen us at that moment—The Jinnee shuffling ahead in heelless slippers and Oriental dress, upon his woolly head a red fez with a silver crescent on it, and on his breast a string of *saphies*, verses from the Koran, in exquisite Arabic script, framed in flat round pieces of silver and strung on a chain. Boris, larger and nobler even than most of his breed, paced behind him. Then came I, a slim blonde woman, with fair hair powdered, in a dress a century old.

The passage wasn't quite six feet high, and so still that you could hear the beating of your heart. Achmet's slippers went *scuf-scuf-scuf*. Boris swayed from side to side, his tongue lolling, his eyes phosphorescent. He resembled those ghost-hounds of old stories, terrific beasts that follow the Wild Huntsman.

We went down some steps. I shouldn't have been surprised had I found myself climbing the beanstalk after Jack. Dazedly I thought: "I'll wake up in the morning and tell them at the breakfast-table what a wonderful dream I had." I could fancy the Lady with the Soul clasping her hands, and The Author crinkling his eyes, and Alicia laughing.

This last passage, which, I learned afterward, ran under the carriage house, presently crooked like an elbow and led us into a windowless and stone-floored little room, under the cellar. On the opposite side of the room was the opening of another such passage, with stone steps leading to it. On these steps sat Nicholas

Jelnik.

He got to his feet and stood looking at me. A momentary red rushed to his cheek, and his eyes flashed. Boris, tongue out, tail wagging, rubbed against him, and the master's hand dropped between the speaking eyes with a swift caress.

"Good dog! You came with her!"

"And I. Am I not also a good dog?" asked The Jinnee, jealously.

Mr. Jelnik's reply I did not understand, but Achmet made a respectful salutation, and his grin was the grin of a little boy.

"Sophy!" said Nicholas Jelnik, and his voice shook, "Sophy! Oh, I knew you would come!" He gave a low, pleased laugh. "And now she is here, she doesn't even ask why I have sent for her!"

"The mistress," said Achmet, "should have been of the Faith. May Allah enlighten her!"

"Sit down here beside me for a few minutes, Sophy, and rest," said Mr. Jelnik, seating himself. "And do not look so pale, my little comrade."

"I thought—that you might be ill," I faltered. "I thought—that you needed me."

"I am not ill, but I do need you," he said quickly, and took my hand in a firm clasp. The touch of that hand brought me out of my trance-like state. It was all right, and the most natural thing in the world, that I should be sitting in this windowless vault, with two candles and a shadowy lantern burning dimly in the still air, an old black Jinnee squatting on his heels watching me, a great wolf-hound stretched beside him. Wasn't Nicholas Jelnik holding my hand?

"Sophy," he said directly, "I have found the lost Key of Hynds House." I looked at him dumbly. "I have reached that point where I can tell you everything, little friend. Thank Heaven you have come!" But of a sudden his-forehead was damp.

"You will remember," he said, after a moment's silence, and still holding my hand—and I think that now he held it as he had once held his mother's—"when I talked to you about my childhood and my mother, I told you she had made me more of an American than an Austrian. This old home-town of her people, this

old house, the mystery that blackened the Hynds name, were as real to me as the scenes and people that actually surrounded me.

"When I was older, she turned over to me all her family papers, and I sifted and assorted and reduced them to system and order. I found among them Richard Hynds's own brief account of the affair, and copies of letters to his father, but the bulk of the papers consisted of such data as his son and namesake could gather. This formed a copious mass, for he had set down every least circumstance that he thought might have any bearing upon his father's case. These papers, guarded so jealously, bequeathed to his successors the sacred task of righting Richard Hynds.

"In Richard's short statement, left for his little son, he, as rightful heir of Hynds House, mentions the secret passages and tells how they may be entered. He had been taught that much, himself, on reaching his majority. But there was one vital secret that hadn't been revealed to Richard, for not until the head of Hynds House knew he was about to die did he give to his successor the Key to the hidden room; the room concealed so cunningly that without the Key one could never hope to find it. They planned and built wonderfully well, those old master work-men. They meant that secret room to be the strong-box, the inviolate hiding-place which should keep what might be entrusted to it. It was, as it were, the heart of Hynds House.

"Remember that Richard's father died of a stroke of apoplexy, and without speaking. Thus Freeman would know no more than Richard did. There was but one person alive who knew, and that was—"

"A slave?" I whispered, remembering Freeman's diary.

"A slave, an unlettered slave. How he discovered it I do not know. But he did discover it. He knew, and the Hyndses did not. In regard to this same slave, a curious item was set down by Richard's son:

"'This day Black Shooba's son told me of a heathen song Shooba made before he died and swore him to forget not. 'Tis a strange chaunt:

"I, Shooba, the Snake Soul, make me a Song.
In the night I sing it for my Snake.
My Snake showed me a Secret Thing.
Two Eyes and Two Eyes looked upon One Eye.
One Eye is open and sees, and sees not.

This my Snake showed me, in the Dark.
But the Strong Ones, the White Ones,
They have no Snake. Ho! Never shall they see it!'"

"Sounds like a stark raving, doesn't it? One can fancy the doctor feeling a bit ashamed of himself when he wrote it down.

"I rather fancied it raving, myself, until one day I came across—" here he paused, and looked at me intently—"a yellowed slip of paper between the pages of an old diary that had been accidentally discovered. I knew then that there was really something to be discovered, and that I had not been a visionary sentimentalist when I yielded to my mother's last expressed wish that I should come here and search.

"I suppose," he went on dreamily, "that it was in my blood, the desire to come here to Hyndsville, like a homing bird. But when my mother died, the ties that bound me to her country seemed to be in a measure loosened. Then, too, the *Wanderlust* had me in its grip. I put aside the profession my father had bred me to, left my affairs in what I thought capable hands, and indulged my desire to wander up and down the earth and sail the seven seas. It was upon one of these prowls that I came upon my old Achmet here, and induced a master who didn't love him to part with him." And he looked at the old man with whimsical tenderness.

"I am your slave," spoke up The Jinnee, sturdily. "I am the fostered offspring of my master's bounty. May he live a thousand years!"

That shocked my Yankee ears. Achmet smiled his crooked smile.

"Why did the sahiba follow when I showed her a broken coin?" he asked.

"Because I knew that Mr. Jelnik needed me."

"Even in the bowels of the earth?" I was silent.

"Because he is the master!" said The Jinnee. "Therefore you obeyed. He is the master. Wherefore am I, Achmet, his slave." Oh, shame upon you, Sophy Smith, for there was that in you, and that not the least divine part, which was in full accord with black Achmet!

"Achmet's ideas are of the immutable East," said Mr. Jelnik, with a faint smile. "He is archaic." And dismissing this persiflage with a wave of the hand,

he continued:

"Behold me, then, footing it up and down the highways and byways of the world. But it was as if I had disobeyed the dead, and they would give me no rest. So presently I stopped short and came to Hyndsville.

"With Richard's directions in my possession, it was comparatively easy for me to find the passageways, and after the old woman's death I had chance to examine the house room by room. And sometimes, Sophy, when I have been alone in this tragic old place—" he paused, and looked at me with a puzzled frown—"it has seemed to me that there were—well, secret influences, say; things outside of our sphere. I have felt a sense of horror and despair descend upon my spirit, a weight almost too heavy to bear. Sometimes it would be so powerful, so insistent, so vivid, that I had to fly from it.

"Then I happened to remember something that a gipsy, an old, old man reputed to be very wise, told me when I was a boy. He said that troubled spirits can be soothed and sent hence by music. It is the old and sure charm, as David found when he played upon the harp and drove the evil spirit out of Saul the king. I brought my violin and tried it. And," said the cosmopolitan Mr. Jelnik, "the gipsy was right."

"Ah, yes, I see you know, now. It was I whom you heard playing, that first day. It was I, touched by your plight in that forlorn and dusty barracks, who gave you some slight relief. It was easy enough for me to cut across to Geddes's house, reach in through his kitchen window, lift his tray, and escape through the ragged hedges while his cook's broad back was turned. Achmet was willing enough to play the obliging Jinnee. You had your dinner, and I had a bit of harmless amusement. It pleased me to hear Alicia call me Ariel. It pleased me to stand by, to protect you, if that should be necessary. Achmet and I took turns in safeguarding you at night.

"You will understand"—he gave me a straight, clear, proud look—"that it was never my desire to mystify or to frighten you. But I couldn't take you offhand into my confidence, could I? I had to find out something more about you. Remember, too, that my search in no wise jeopardizes your interests.

"Day after day, night after night, Sophy, I have pored over old papers, or burrowed mole-like into the black recesses of Hynds House. Bit by bit I have pieced scraps of evidence together—Shooba's savage chant with Scipio's dying whisper in Freeman's ear, and these two with a rude verse and a line of dots. But

there the thread snapped.

"Do you remember the morning you told me, The Author's guess that 'Hellen's Keye' was the Greek fret, the design over all the windows and doors of Hynds House? The trail was plain then. I was to follow the line of the Greek key for three and thirty turnings, when I should come upon a sign. I tried and tried. And to-night—I reached the end of it, Sophy. I found it." Again his forehead was damp, and his pallor, if possible, deepened.

I rose as if on springs. The hair of my head rose, too, I thought, and my scalp tingled.

"Found what?"

"The hidden room that the masters built for the master of Hynds House." He stopped, and a shudder passed over him. His hand closed upon mine, and it was deathly cold.

"You have been in a secret room?—here in Hynds House?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes," said he in a whisper. "I opened the door—and went in. The room hadn't been opened for a hundred years, Sophy. There was a table in one corner, and I went over to it. There was something else there, too, Sophy." He moistened his lips, and looked at me with dilated eyes.

"What?" I asked; "in God's name, what?"

"The thief," said Nicholas Jelnik.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DEVILL HIS RAINBOW

I was taken with a cold grue.

"Is it—murder?" It seemed to me that the still room shook and echoed to the barely whispered word, that the candles stirred and flickered as in a wind of passing wings.

"Not in the sense you mean," he replied. "But whatever it may be, Sophy, this thing has got to be met and faced by us two together. It concerns you now, as well as me." He stood up as he spoke. "And now," he asked, "are you strong enough to come with me?"

I gathered the living spirit within me and looked him in his eyes.

"Yes," I said steadily.

"Allah! but here is a woman a man may serve without shame to his beard!" quoth The Jinnee, wagging his old white head. And with Boris stretched beside him he resigned himself to wait with the tireless patience of the East.

If the other passages had been narrow, that which we now entered was worse. It was so narrow that the wall on each side seemed about to close in and crush us, like those frightful sliding walls that became a living coffin for the victims of medieval cruelty. Always one was confronted by solid brick walls; and to turn back was to meet others seemingly risen to cut off all escape. For this passage follows the simple and yet intricate pattern of the Greek key. Thus:

Plan of Passage and Secret Chamber

I fancied myself doomed to spend a frightful eternity of burrowing through brick wormholes which led nowhere. I lost all sense of location, time, and direction. I wasn't even sure of my own identity any more: things like this couldn't happen to a woman named Smith! Just when I reached the stage where I was ready to drop down and lie there unmoving until I died, he turned his head and gave me a comradely smile of assurance and trust. I plucked up heart of grace and staggered on. Of a sudden he stopped. The pale circle of the flash-light

moved up, inch by inch, steadied, and stayed on one spot.

I found myself staring fixedly at the old and familiar enough symbol of the rayed eye within the triangle. It was not commonplace or familiar set up there in that secret and awesome place and seen by a pale light. There was about it a stark and stern solemnity, such as suggested the winged circle of immortality carved above the rock-hewn doors of the tombs of Egyptian kings. Higher than a tall man's head, it was painted on bricks of a lighter hue than the surrounding ones, and when the light touched it it seemed to leap out of the dark like a thing alive, a thing that watched with an unwinking and terrifying intensity.

I remembered Shooba's savage chant of the One Eye that his Snake had shown him; and the doggerel verse on the frayed paper in Freeman's diary.

"The Watcher in the Dark!" I stammered; "the Watcher in the Dark! Why—why, that paper was the Key itself!"

"Exactly. And a very simple key, though it took me a heartbreaking length of time to turn it. The cipher was easy enough. It falls apart into the figures three, five, seven, and nine; it was also the simplest train of reasoning to apply these figures to the column of dots. Only, I hadn't the remotest idea what the dots themselves represented. Nor did it occur to me that the tortuous turnings of any of the passageways of Hynds House might follow the pattern of the Greek key, until The Author called your attention to the design over the outside windows. Clever man, The Author!

"I lost the paper in the attic the night you heard me stumble on the stairs. Fortunately, The Author put it in his coat in the closet and locked the door on the outside. You can enter any room in the Hynds House through those closet-walls, Sophy. They're paneled, remember. I hated to have to go through The Author's pockets like a burglar, but I had to have the key."

He handed me the flash-light.

"Now for the column of dots, each of which represents a brick," he said, and began to count, from the first dark brick immediately under the center of the triangle. At the third brick he paused; I could see his fingers moving around the white line that, apparently, held it in place. And that third brick, which looked so solidly placed, turned as upon a pivot and swung out sideways. Still counting from top to bottom, he paused at the fifth, the seventh, and the ninth, and they, too, behaved in the same manner. As the ninth one turned, that which had

seemed a section of solid wall rose soundlessly from the floor and left in its place an opening, a door, as it were, some six feet high and about eighteen inches wide.

"It is not brick at all, but painted wood. A really wonderful bit of work," explained Mr. Jelnik.

I could only stare, owlishly.

"You are wondering where we are?" He answered the unspoken question: "Above the library, between the outside wall and the chimney-stacks. You'd have to tear the house down to find it, without the Key." As he spoke, he was lighting two of the candles Achmet had provided us with, and although his hand was quite steady, he had become frightfully pale. I, too, felt myself growing paler, felt again the cold grue, as if the wind of death had stirred my hair.

"Reach into my breast pocket and you'll find a small vial. Put a drop of the contents on your handkerchief and hold it against your mouth for a moment," said Mr. Jelnik, with a sharp glance at me.

I obeyed mechanically. The scent had an indescribably tingling, spicy odor, and left a cool and grateful sensation in one's parched and dry throat. My blurred vision cleared, my dull and throbbing head was relieved.

"An Alexandrine Copt gave me that," he said, watching its effect with satisfaction. "He told me he had gotten it from a temple papyrus, and that it was undoubtedly one of the lost perfumes of Punt, used by the higher priesthood in their mysteries. Once a year he sends me such a tiny vial as you see. I could hardly have survived my searchings in this house, without that saving perfume. Do you feel able to go on?"

"Yes."

"Come, then," and with that he stepped through the opening, and I after him.

The room was not large—perhaps some nine feet high, some eight feet wide. The walls were of such exquisitely grooved and polished red mahogany that the candle-light was reflected in them as in mirrors; one seemed to be surrounded by twinkling red stars. On each side of the opening stood a tall and narrow cabinet, somewhat like a high-boy, and in one corner was a chest with iron clasps and handles. Over in another corner was a heavy, medium-sized square table, on which stood a blackened candelabrum and a tarnished silver-gilt cup. There were

two chairs drawn up to this table. On one of them, fallen forward, was something.

Mr. Jelnik placed the candles in the empty sconces. We two stood looking down, he with pity, I with a mounting, sick horror, at the thing before us—the poor, huddled thing that had lain there so long. For it was not, as one might suppose at first glance, a frayed and threadbare mantle flung across one corner of the table. By the long black hair it was a woman, and a young woman.

She had on what must once have been a most beautiful brown silk dress, trimmed with quantities of fine lace, and looped up over a stiff brocaded petticoat. Her skeleton feet were in the smallest of low-cut shoes, the tarnished silver buckles of which were set with rhinestones. Her head rested on her arm, outflung across the table. The other arm hung limp, and the fingers pointed downward, as if accusingly. She had quantities of glorious black hair, and this alone had death respected; nothing else of her loveliness remained. Under her fleshless hand lay the soiled and yellowed papers she had written, and over which, in biting mockery, she had kept watch and ward.

"Who is it? Oh, God, God!—who is it?" I gasped, and heard my voice rattling in my throat like a dying woman's. As, perhaps her voice had rattled, here in the dark. The thought of her, sitting here in awful loneliness these long, long years, while life, all unknowing, ebbed and flowed within reach of her, made me shudder.

"It is Jessamine Hynds, lost Jessamine Hynds," said her kinsman of a later day, looking down upon the wreck of her with compassion.

"But how—how—why did she come here? To die thus—Oh, my God! my God!"

"I saw the papers under her hand, and her name written upon the first page," he said. "What further things she has written, I do not know. I waited, Sophy, until we should read it together." He smiled at me wanly. "I could bear it better, with you beside me. You see how much I need you!" And he took the papers from her and spread them upon the table. What she had written I shall insert here, as its properest place.

> I, Jessamine Hynds, Gentlewoman, being of sound Mind (though they do say I am mad) but of infirm Body, the which I am shortly to be rid of, do state and declare before God that it was I who did take the Hynds Jewells, being help'd thereto by black Shooba the witch doctor, who was my father's man before my Uncle James Bought him at the Publick Outcry of our Effects.

As to the Why & Wherefore I have act'd thus, thou knowest, thou cruel God, who made me a beggar'd Orphan, a poor dependant in this House of Pride!

Yet, God, thou knoweth I lov'd them well enow until Richard came home the last Time from Abroad, a Young Man in the Beauty of his Youth, who saw not Jessamine the poor Cozzen, but Jessamine the fair woman. He would have me sing him Ballads, he would hang Entranc'd upon the Spinet when I play'd. Now would he fetch me a flower for my hair, placing of it himself. And now 't was a knot of ribband for my dress, and himself fetch'd home broach and ear-rings for my Birthday Gift, saying in my ear no fairer woman's face had gladded his eyes since he left home. And by the clipt Hedge on a May night he kiss'd me. Alas, oh blind high God, alas, alas!

'T was Wondrous to see how even the Servants did catch the Humour, they waiting upon me Marvelous ready. Until came my dear Aunt, smiling sickly, and laying of her Hand upon my Sholder said she must speak for mine own Good. Richard was but a young Man, wild & headlong, and I a fair Woman thrown in his Way in an empty betweenwhiles ere his own true love came. See to it, Jessamine, says she, that a Boy's short-liv'd Fancy makes not a mock of thee, at thy years, that should know better!

Mine Uncle ever twitt'd me for liking of Books, & laugh'd when I beg'd I might have my Chance of Becoming an Artist. "What," says he, "a Hynds woman painting of strange folks their faces? Out upon thy notion, Jessamine!" And my Cozzens laugh'd and said, Ever did Gentlemen dislike a Learn'd Female. Should have gotten me a good Husband this Ten Years since but for my Shrew's Temper & Vanity of Books.

To cure me they did Cruelly bait me to Marry the Pursy Ninny that hath the Plantation beyond the Hopes, he that hath been Ogling of me for years. Could scratch the Wretch his eyes Out! Puffeth with his mouth in a way hateful to me & hath pig's jowls. Yet were all they fair mad I should marry me this Paragon. Should have a home of mine Own, worthy a Lady. Aye,—and be out of the way, lest I lead Richard Astray.

Mine Uncle chid me for Ingratitude to God in that I stamp'd my foot and said No! But Richard laugh'd at the idea of Jessamine wedding yon tun. Quoth Richard, "Let Jessamine be, all of ye! she is meat for his masters." Freeman smil'd sourly, & shrug'd. I love not Freeman, nor do I hate him overmuch though he call'd me "Madame Jezebel."

And then came Emily home from Visiting of her Aunts in London Town. And they made a Marriage between her and Richard, Richard that was mine. He had lov'd me an they had let us be. Once pledg'd, he had held fast to his word. Nor would I, for his own Soul's sake, have let him go. There is none, none under the sun but me alone, was strong enough to have sav'd Richard.

'T is true, as men judge such things, his Conduct to me was but Gallant Pleasantry, such as Fine Gentlemen do show to Favour'd Ladies. And he did Spare my Pride. Never did he show by word or Deed, or admit to any, that I had car'd more Deeply than he. But Emily knew. I knew she knew. Saw it in her Eyes, that look'd on me with Pity. I will not brok that any mortal Woman shall Pity me!

Secretly I suffer'd, suffer'd so that a Burning fire crept & crept into my Brain and Stay'd, nor has left me, Day or Night. And in all the World was no one I might Weep before, or that would Comfort me and leave me Unasham'd, save Shooba, the witch doctor, whom the slaves Fear for that he hath a Snake-soul and makes Charms and casts Spells.

'T is true, that Shooba hath a Spiritt. When it worketh upon him he is Dull and Overcast and may not Labour untill it be gone. And then will he rise and Speak strange and sometimes Terrible things, and Prophesy. In the old times my Father smil'd, and let him be. But here 't is otherwise. When Shooba's Spiritt made him Heavy and Sleepy, and when he woke again and Spoke, mine

Uncle's new Overseer had the old man Whip't. Twice did this Happen before I knew of It.

Then went I to the Overseer, with Indignation, and said: "Do not whip Shooba, any more. 'T is Monstrous, to Whip an old man that hath a Spiritt! 'T is not true he makes dissentions and plots Revolt among the slaves. 'T is not true he is lazy & will not Work. There is no better Workman than Shooba. 'T is only true you are a cruel man and misuse your Power."

Flick'd with his Whip his worsted Stockings. Said in a hateful voice: "'Taint your place, Miss, to be a-giving of orders to the Overseer. I take orders only from them that has the right to Give 'em. When I think that old Nigger ought to be whipt, whipt he 'll be."

Then march'd he to mine Uncle and ask'd was Mistress Jessamine to oversee the Overseer, and call him hard Names for the whipping of a Troublesome Nigger? And my Uncle fell into a Fury With me. Allowed the wretch to Triumph. Shooba was whipt again. I saw his Back.

Once old Shooba cur'd me of a pestilent Fever, with Simples, when I was a little Child, and our Leech had given me Over, nor did he Bleed me once. Now Shooba's Back was Bleeding, and I might not help him!

Now in the night I had gone secretly to his Hut to fetch him such poor little Comforts as I might secretly get & give. He took them, & look'd at me long & long, with his brooding, deep, strange eyes.

"For the man that whipt me, I have sent forth my Snake. My Snake will have a Thing to say to him. The man will die. Then laughed he, and hugg'd his knees.—And 't is true Meekins the Overseer one week later was bitten by a Serpent in the Field and died an Unlovely Death.

"Missy," whispered Shooba, "in my country when I young, chief get mad with chief more stronger, not fight with spears. Call Witch doctor and make Medicine. Stronger chief, him come dead one day soon. Maybe bumbye you and me make some Medicine?" My lips curl'd somewhat. Poor old Shooba making medicine against the Hyndses. "You go now and think some. I stay here, and think some, too. Maybe one time you find medicine. Maybe one time my Snake find."

I went away, smiling sadly. 'T would need strong medicine to heal me and Shooba!

Now Time pass'd, and they fell to planning for Freeman's Ball. 'T was to be a Grand affair, and there was Talk of my Aunt's Frock, and wearing of the Hynds Jewells. And Richard's Wife was to be Allow'd to wear the Queen's Emerald.

Came Emily to me in secret, and says she, "Come, Jessamine, be Friends with me. My Mind is Fix'd you shall Outshine all the other Ladies. I have the very Frock for you, just new come from London, a lustrous thing will make you glow & Sparkle like a Ruby. We shall make it a State Secret, Jessamine. Not a word shall be breath'd, but you shall burst upon them all like a Meteor!"

I do admit that ever was something Noble & Generous in Emily, that something in myself did Honour. I had thank'd her Thought, but that Richard came in & kiss'd her for it, saying he een Lov'd her the Better for that she lov'd his haughty Cozzen. But, O God, they Two went away Hand in Hand! He forgot me for her sake, so completely that he said not even, "Good-by."

That night went I to Shooba secretly, and said, "Is thy Snake awake? For A Thought is in my mind." Then took we Counsel together. Shooba is a man most cunning in all manner of Herbs and Simples. They in Hynds House began for to sleep sweetly and soundly, but felt no ill Effects. Nay, they rose betimes most pleasantly rest'd & refresh'd.

Then did Shooba and I, who thus had undisturb'd Access to my Aunt's room, work swiftly until Dawn. Three nights and a half night did we two work, before our Task was compleat'd, the

Kernell's filch'd from the Nuts, and the Empty Shells left for my lady's adorning of herself at my lord's birth-night Ball.

Oh, 't was a rare, rare Jest! I laugh'd and old Shooba laugh'd. And I did chap them atween my hands, those flaming Bawbles, as children chap chaff. And they did sparkle & glow like the Devill his Rainbow! All day was I Happy, Hugging of my Secret to my Heart.

Emily had the brown dress brought Secretly into the House, & Made for me in mine Own Room. Once was she wishful I might wear one of the Hynds Rubies, just for one Night, but I chid her, saying that already the Frock was more than Enough. Indeed 't is a beautiful Dress. Will serve me well for a Shroud.

Ever came the Ball nearer & nearer, and all we a-flutter, I with my hands overfull, my hours overcrowd'd, with Helping of them. I could not have slept in peace did I not know what was a-coming.

And then open'd they the Safe in my Aunt's morning-room. Shall be such a Howling from the Damn'd on the Day of Judgment as went up from Hynds House that day! Makes me to think of the text, And there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Lord, how did they run Hither & Thither, what Wailing & Reproaching & Accusing & Screeching! How did my dear Aunt's eyes grow Redder than ever Mine had been! How did my Proud Uncle find his Lofty Crest Lower'd, and was in that Honour of his Scourg'd more Cruelly than ever old Shooba's Back had been! How, too, was *her* Happiness burst like a Bubble, that had been so rainbow Bright! In that house all wept save me alone. Nor did one of them so much as dream in 's sleep of suspecting Jessamine Hynds!

And then—oh, God! oh, God—Richard, my Richard, that I Lov'd more than mine own Soul, died! As a Candle is snuff'd out, so went Richard that was so comely and so strong. I had only thought to Punish him, Make them all Suffer to Pay me for mine own Suffering. Never, never, had I meant that Richard should Die. 'Twas a Thunder-bolt upon my Head, 'twas Lightning splitting my Heart.

'Twas I brought the News of Richard's death to my Uncle James. Was sitting in the Library pretending for to read. Then came I in, and clos'd the Door, and said:

"*Richard is dead*." How the man star'd! Had a ruddy face, very Handsome. Before my eyes it pal'd and pinch'd. I said again: "Don't you understand? *Richard is dead*."

As a tree falls, he fell. I knew his Time was come, and gently I rais'd him. He claw'd at his Breast and mouth'd "Richard—Freeman—Pocket-book—The Key, the Key!" Look'd at me piteously. 'Twould melt one's Heart to see his Eyes.

I did thrust my hand into the breast of his blue Broad-cloath Coat, and draw forth his Pocket-Book. 'Twas in Dark Green leather, & upon it the Arms of our House. There were bank-notes in't, some silver, two or three folded papers, and one in a small silk Cover, put by itself. I saw his Fading Eyes brighten as I held it up. He maw'd, "Key—Freeman—" and puff'd with his Lips, and fell Unconscious. I slipt the Book back into his breast, put the silk-covered paper in mine own, and ran out of the Room, Calling Loudly for help.

He dy'd that Night. And when I look'd at the "Key" 'twas naught but a silly Verse. Yet I was doubtful of Giving it to Freeman. Instead, I did show it to old Shooba.

"I will ask my Snake if he knows anything of Keyes," said Shooba. And remembering the Overseer, I did not smile, but gave him the Paper. I like not to think of Shooba's Snake.

Then buried we mine Uncle in the Hynds tomb and my Aunt was left to wander ghostlike,

seeking for what she should never find.—Oh, why did not they leave Richard and me alone!

I repent not. But I am Troubled because of Richard who comes in the Night and looks at me, and asks, without anger, only with Sorrow, "*Was it well done, Jessamine?*" I answer, weeping; "Richard, it was to be. You made me Love you, Richard, and you put me by. For which Cause, and for that their Pride was beyond Bearing, did I pull down the Roof of Hynds House over their heads, and these my Hands did push you into your Grave. But go you back to Sleep, my dearest Dear. I shall Find mine Own Grave shortly, and then I shall be able to come closer to you. When I am Dead, Richard, you will understand."

Sometimes he will go, looking at me over his Sholder with Eyes so sad that for Pity I must weep mine own eyes Blind. But sometimes he will say, in a Voice none may hear but me: "Cruel, cruel Jessamine! You shall not come near me even when you are Dead: You shall be Farther from me than when we two walk'd Quick under the Sun. Never, never did you truly Love me: I know, the Dead being Wiser than the Living! 'T is Emily Lov'd me truest."

And oh, thou awful, far-off God, I cannot make him Understand! And unless I can make him understand, I am lost! My misery, my misery! He will not listen. I am dying of this thing!

Now did Shooba's Death-in-Life come upon him once more, and for a day and a night he lay Stark. And in the Sleep his Snake came and show'd him the untying of the Knot, and the Turning of the Keye. In proof whereof Shooba took me by the hand & Show'd me the Watcher in the Darke.

"Do but one thing more for me, old Shooba: Put out the Fire in my Brain, Shooba, for I would Sleep. And I would Sleep here, in Secret, where none but the Watcher may see."

For a while he ponder'd, Watching of me with still eyes.

"Not good to stay awake too long. You shall Sleep," he said.

Last night he Brought me the Pinch of Powder that is an Open Door. To what? I know not. But I go without Fear, because without Hope. So shall I sleep in the secret Chamber, and it maybe I shall Dream that Richard lightly Lov'd and as lightly Left me. Whereof Richard Died. And, that Freeman thinks his Brother Guilty and a Thief: A Hynds a Thief! so that Hynds House hangs Heavy above his head. And that Emily begins to Hate Freeman, who Loves her. She thinks he hath play'd Judas. I shall have Pleasant dreams!

Never shall they Find where Shooba hid the Gems, between a night and a morning. Never shall any look upon my face more, nor read what I have written, nor know what I have done. I repent not, O God! What I am I am, Not I but Thou hast created me! Having liv'd mine own Life, I do die mine Own Death.

JESSAMINE HYNDS.

"This is the Horror that we have—felt!" I babbled. "She's been sitting here—by herself—all the time—" and my voice failed me, remembering that dark and anguished sense of guilt and ruin, of unease and terror, that at times fell upon one in the night like a smothering garment. Cold drops came upon my forehead, when I reflected that we had been living under the same roof with This, and we all unknowing. And I began to whimper: "I cannot stay even one night more under the same roof with her. I cannot! I cannot!"

"Sophy," said Nicholas Jelnik's quiet voice, "I brought you here because I relied upon your courage, your common sense, and your charity."

I gulped. In the most matter-of-fact manner, he gave me another whiff of that incomparable perfume, and I felt my taut nerves steady. Not untruthfully had the Coptic physician claimed magic qualities for that perfume.

Mr. Jelnik said gently: "Had you been other than you are, I would not have dared call you to my aid to-night. But when I discovered the real thief—and she Jessamine Hynds—I could not bear that any other eyes than yours should see her as she is. And—I want you to be with me when I find the jewels."

The jewels? I blinked at him. Immersed in the tragedy of the woman Jessamine, her piteous fate had put all thought of everything save herself out of my mind.

"Shooba hid them, between a night and a morning. Shooba brought her here, between a night and a morning. Where should the jewels be but here?"

At his words the grim and mocking ghost of that terrible old African, who had been whipped for falling into trances, and who had so tragically revenged himself and his slighted mistress, seemed to rise behind all that remained of her.

"Yes, he would put them where she could keep watch over them. Why should she come here, make her way through those dreadful passages, save for that? Think of her stealing out of her room in the dead of night, coming alive to what she knew was her tomb, shutting that door upon herself—" I looked at the tarnished cup, and hoped that the witch doctor's potion had given her a speedy sleep. I looked at the blackened candelabrum, and wondered whether that candle had gone out before she had, or whether her head had fallen upon her arm, and she had died wide-eyed in the black, black dark. The cold grue shook me again, and I beat my hands together for terror and pity.

"Do not think of that!" said Mr. Jelnik. "Death rectifies human wrongs, and all of them have long, long since been healed of their hurts. Come, let us find the jewels. We are losing time."

We opened the cabinets first. They held papers that had been precious in their day—old deeds, old charters and grants, with the king's seals and the signatures of the Lords Proprietors upon them; correspondence, a casual glance at which showed Revolutionary activities—a hanging matter once, but harmless enough

now; a box of foreign coins, all gold; a charge, in medieval Latin, on fine parchment, which exquisitely illuminated initial letters; a plain silver chalice and a patten; some threadbare robes and regalia, and a gavel; a most carefully done chart of the Hynds family, ending, however, with Colonel James Hampden Hynds himself; two letters, and a miniature of Charles the First; letters signed, "Yours, B. Franklin," "Yours, John Hancock"; several from "Geo. Washington."

The chest held two uniforms, one British, the other buff and blue; a pair of pistols, spurs, and a sword. The buff-and-blue uniform was worn and stained, with a burnt and ragged hole in the breast. It had belonged, said the slip pinned to it, to "Captain Lewis De Lacy Hynds, my youngest Brother, the youngest of our House, who Fell Gloriously at the Battle of Cowpens."

And that was all. Although we examined every inch of that floor, every board of the walls, and made the most scrupulously careful search of the cabinets and the chest. I even dared pass my hands over Jessamine herself.

Shooba the witch doctor had done the unexpected. Wherever he might have hidden them between a night and a morning, he had not hidden the Hynds jewels in the secret room of Hynds House. And she who alone could have solved the mystery and told us the truth, lay there with a lipless mouth.

CHAPTER XVII

ON THE KNEES OF THE GODS

We gave over the futile search at last. Mr. Jelnik sat down and took his head in his hands, for the moment a prey to overwhelming disappointment. I could have wept for him. Presently:

"Is it so hard to lose that which you never possessed?" I ventured to ask.

"It is always bitter to fail."

"But you haven't really failed. You have succeeded in proving that both Richard and Freeman were the victims of an insane jealousy and a terrible revenge."

"Jessamine's confession might well be set aside: insane people often accuse themselves of crimes committed only in their own disordered brains. The one indisputable proof would be the jewels in my hands." He added, with a faint smile: "I should have liked to see those accursed things made clean by your wearing them, Sophy."

"I don't want them!" I said, and my head went up. "I don't care *that* for all the Hynds jewels ever lost! I wouldn't have come here to-night for their sake or mine, not if they were worth an empire's ransom! I wanted them for Richard's sake, and—and yours."

"I know, I know. At first I wanted them for him and me, too. Afterward I wanted them for him and for you, Sophy."

"For me? *I* have no right to them. What have *I* to do with Hynds jewels?" And then I stopped. If Jessamine's confession were true—and I believed in my heart that every word Jessamine had written was the truth—what right had I to Hynds House itself? "As to that, I have no right to Hynds House, either. It is yours," I said.

He stared at me thoughtfully.

"It is yours," I repeated, gaining courage. "I am an outsider, to whom this

house was left from motives of malice and revenge. Mr. Jelnik, this thing must be set straight. We will show Jessamine's confession and clear Richard's name. We will bring Freeman's diary forward to prove the truth of our assertions. Then you can come into your own."

"Ah!" said Mr. Jelnik, gently, "I see. Quite simple, and perfectly feasible. And after I have taken Hynds House, what of you? What do you get?"

"I get out," I said briefly. And a horrid qualm came over me. Leave Hynds House, forever? Go away from Hyndsville, leaving this friendlier, pleasanter, happier life behind?

"You are forgetting my training," I reminded him, trying to keep my voice steady. "I can always do what I did before I came here. I—I'm really an excellent private secretary, Mr. Jelnik."

"That," said Mr. Jelnik, smiling curiously, "may very well be. But I think the stars in their courses fought to bring you here. And I really do not at all relish the notion of your turning backward into a private secretary, although there is, of course, the alternative of The Author. And what of Alicia?"

"Alicia's sense of justice is quite as well developed as mine," I told him proudly.

"Alicia is a dear girl," he agreed. "But, my dear lady, your plan wouldn't hold water in any court. This place isn't mine, legally or morally, though the jewels would be if I could find them. If ever I do find them, which is highly improbable, I may be tempted to make you an offer of exchange."

"You don't want Hynds House? Richard's house? You won't take Hynds House?"

"I don't want Hynds House. I won't take Hynds House. Further, if anybody on earth but you made me such an offer, in such circumstances, I should find it hard to forgive. Even from you I hardly think I could bear it twice." A bright red showed in his cheeks for an instant, his nostrils quivered, his whole face was a blaze of pride. "What! Nicholas Jelnik accept gifts from women?"

"As good and proud men as Nicholas Jelnik have accepted gifts from women, and been none the worse for it," said I, tartly. "You offered me your jewels. Why shouldn't I offer you my house?—particularly when it should have been your house. I also have my pride, Mr. Jelnik!"

The hauteur went out of his face, and something sweet and quizzical and boyish flooded it.

"Keep Hynds House, dear, dear Donna Quixotta," said he, gently. "You have given me something I needed a thousand times more."

Now, although we had not found the jewels, we had found Jessamine Hynds, and there remained to be done a thing that called for what strength of will and courage we possessed. And we had need to make haste. Already more time had been consumed than we bargained for.

Mr. Jelnik fetched a deep breath, and went over to the Thing in the chair. There was in his manner neither repugnance nor horror, nothing but an almost divine compassion. Never, never, had I respected the courage, the honor, the mercy of man so greatly as I did then.

It was a ghastly task; I do not like to remember it. In the hot, dry air of the room without windows she had become, not a bleached skeleton, but a shriveled, fleshless, blackened mummy. The hair still clung tightly to the skull, the discolored skin was stretched over the bony contour of the face; the lips had shriveled away from the teeth, which showed in a sort of jeering grin. And—well, we had to tie her hair, like a rope, around her chest and arms; and I tore the ruffles off my petticoat, to tie her skirts at the knees and ankles.

The brown frock was low-necked and short-sleeved, too. And the picture of her, down-stairs, showed her with so red a lip, so round an arm, so soft, so white a bosom!

> Thou might'st think thou hadst drunk the water of Paradise who had tasted the nectar of her lip.... The ends of her ringlets fell into the hand like as the sleeve of the generous in the hand of the needy.

Oh, Jessamine!

She had been so splendidly tall a woman, that as he held her grisly head upon his shoulder the little shoes that rattled upon her shriveled feet were well below his knees. One great rope of her blue-black hair escaped and fell down the back of his white coat, and as he moved it moved, too, with a lazy and languid coquettishness horribly travesting youth and beauty. It was such wonderful hair! Small wonder young Richard had praised its dark splendor, and kissed its shining folds to his undoing!

"Jessamine," Nicholas Jelnik said as he bent over her, "you shall have your

chance to rest. You shall sleep under the open sky. Nature shall have you, Jessamine, and make you over into something of loveliness and of peace."

"Because she loved much, much shall be forgiven her," I whispered. Ah! At the last, who but Him of Galilee shall speak for us?

Never, until I shall be what she was then, shall I be able to forget that return journey. Mr. Jelnik walked ahead, holding her on one arm, and carrying the flash-light with his free hand. I followed with a candle that burned with a low and reddish glare and gave off a heavy, waxy odor in the still air. Whenever the faintest draft lifted the dull flame, we two living creatures seemed to recede into darkness, while the light sought her out and stayed upon her. The motion of his body shook her lightly, and she gave forth a dry and stealthy rattling, an uneasy rustling. One hand hung down, with a loose, loose bracelet jingling on the brittle brown wrist. And her poor little feet with the rotting shoes upon them moved delicately, as if they trod the impalpable air. Once her head struck, with a hollow thud, as we turned a corner. It was almost more than flesh and blood could bear, —like things you were afraid of when you were a child in the dark—the candles melting audibly, and walls, walls, pressing us in.

I think it took us years to reach the room where Achmet waited. At sight of what the master bore, The Jinnee started up and called upon God the Lord Paramount, Help of the Faithful. Then, like the fine old fighter he was, he squared his shoulders, folded his arms, and waited orders. Boris, with a deep-throated, smothered growl of fear and protest, bared his teeth and sidled against him, bristling and trembling.

We consulted briefly. Mr. Jelnik was for leaving her there in the cellar room, until a fitter opportunity offered to give her sepulture. But to this I vehemently objected. I could not have stayed another hour in that house while I knew she was in it. I wanted Jessamine Hynds consigned to the grave from which she had been too long kept. I wanted her to sleep in the brown bosom of the earth, with the impartial grass to cover her, and roses to blow over her by and by, when summer should have come back to South Carolina.

Achmet led the way, and presently we were in the spring-house. When I am feverish I dream of that last climb up the spidery stair, with Jessamine's jaws widened into a soundless laugh, and The Jinnee's light playing at hide-and-seek upon her.

I knelt down and plunged my face into the cold spring-water, and drank and

drank. How good it was! And how grateful to my lungs was the outside air, so sweet, so fresh, so clean! I loved the friendly trees waving in the good wind, I blessed the friendly stars.

We stopped at Mr. Jelnik's house, and the man Daoud appeared in answer to a low-voiced summons and fetched me a most beautiful shawl, which I found extremely comfortable. A stately and stoical personage was Daoud, unlike shy black Achmet, who hid himself from observation so thoroughly that people in Hyndsville were not aware of his existence. I sat on the steps while for Jessamine Hynds was fetched a length of canvas, a linen sheet, and a gray army blanket. Achmet appeared with spades. And so we set out.

The old cemetery in Hyndsville, unlike the newer one in which folks take a sort of ghastly pride, one lot differing from another lot in glory, is an unpretentious place, enclosed by crumbling walls, the iron gates of which have rusted ajar. It is a grassy, bird-haunted, tree-shaded spot, with some dozen or so old family vaults, some modest monuments that bear stately names, some raised marble slabs supported on carved and slender legs, like Death's own little card-tables, some stones let flat into the earth, with names and dates long since erased by rain and wind and fallen leaf. Nobody comes here any more. Sophronisba Scarlett was the first and last to be interred in the old cemetery within the memory of the present generation.

We went down dismal paths where the night wind sighed a miserere in the cedars, and things of the dark scurried away with furtive noises, or flapped ill-omened black wings overhead. In a corner shaded by cypresses was the Hynds vault, a venerable affair with a slate roof. Outside, in an inclosed space were some marble-covered graves and in a corner the simplest of all, one marked "R.H." Emily slept beside him, and their son beside her. But on the farther side, next the wall, was room for one more sleeper. And here, while Mr. Jelnik laid down his burden, Daoud and Achmet began to dig.

She lay there in the ghostly light and shade, so utterly cast aside and forgotten, so unloved, so unwept, so far removed from every human tie, that terror and pity filled my heart. While Daoud and Achmet were making ready her bed, Nicholas Jelnik and I spread out the length of canvas, and wrapped her securely in the sheet and blanket. We folded her claws upon the empty breast in which had once pulsed the passionate heart of Jessamine Hynds, and spread her hair over what had been her face.

Over in a sheltered spot behind the vault clambered a huge, overgrown, briery rose, and by some sweet impatience of nature one shoot had budded before its time. I broke off the small, pale roses and placed them in her grasp. But Mr. Jelnik took from his breast a pearl and silver crucifix, and this, reverently, he laid upon hers.

"It was my father's grandmother's. She held it when she was dying. She was an old saint. It would please her to know that her crucifix should stay, one holy thing, with Jessamine Hynds."

"'*Verily, the gate of repentance is not nor shall be shut upon God's creatures until the sun shall rise in the west*,'" The Jinnee quoted his Prophet And he broke off two of his *saphies*, each with a holy verse written upon it, and dropped them upon her out of pure charity.

Daoud, who was intelligent and orthodox where Achmet was emotional and tender, was evidently not altogether sure of the wisdom of this proceeding; but he was not too orthodox to stand up arrow-straight, face the East, and pray for her.

So we wrapped her, brown silk dress and yellowed laces, and long black hair, in the strip of canvas, and gave her to the earth. The last thing we saw, thank God! before the blanket fell over her for the last time, was the silver crucifix shining out of the roses in her hands.

Daoud and Achmet, their spades over their shoulders, left the cemetery, the latter the strangest, quaintest, most outlandish figure ever seen on a Carolina road. Mr. Jelnik and I, with Boris close beside us, walked more slowly.

"Shall you go on with the search?" I ventured presently.

"But where shall I begin now?" he wondered. "I have searched everything and every place searchable."

"If Shooba hid them anywhere outside of that room, it must have been in some place that Jessamine herself knew and could get at if she wished; some particular place where nobody would dream of looking for them. Women always choose hiding-places like that, and the notion would suit Shooba's grim humor," I said.

"They who knew every nook and cranny of the house searched it pretty thoroughly at the time," he reminded me. "I have fine-combed it myself."

"I am so sorry! I wanted you to find them. But the fact that you didn't surely couldn't make very much difference to you. One's happiness doesn't depend upon anything so problematical."

He hesitated. "Aside from their value, which is by no means inconsiderable, I —well, they would have made certain things easier for me. I should then have been in a better position to do what I want to do."

"Oh! You had some definite plan which hinged upon your finding them?"

He was silent for a space, as if considering within himself just how far he could admit me into his confidence.

"At first, it was a matter of family pride with me to clear up this mystery. Later—I wanted to have the Hynds jewels in my possession, that I might ask the woman I love to marry me." His voice vibrated like a violin string.

I took the blow standing. I did not wince, though it had come unexpectedly. Of course I had known all along that there must be some lady whom he loved, a woman of that world to which he himself belonged. But I couldn't for the life of me imagine how the finding or the not finding of the Hynds jewels could have any bearing upon the case. I couldn't understand how any woman, any real woman, could let such a thing come between her and Nicholas Jelnik.

When we had walked a little farther: "Doesn't she know you care for her?"

"Who knows what any woman knows or thinks? She may really care for another man."

"There is another man?"

"There is always another man. Her feeling for me may be nothing but pure kindness, for she is kindness itself."

"Still, I think you should tell her," I said, with such a heavy heart!

He shook his head. "There are reasons why my faith might be questioned, my motives doubted; and I couldn't bear that."

"But if you are perfectly sure of your own feelings, if there is absolutely no doubt in your mind that you love her—"

"Love her? I never thought," he said, "that any woman could mean so much to

a man! I never dreamed that just one woman could be in herself all that a man needs to hold fast to! Love her? I have been all over the world and I have seen many women in many lands, but never any woman of them all, save that one, for me! It was a revelation to me, that I could care so much. Ah! I wish I could make it plain just how much I do care!"

I had not known until that moment how much the heart can bear of anguish and not break.

"I hope she loves you just as much in return, Mr. Jelnik. I hope with all my heart you will be happy, both of you."

"I hope she does! I hope we shall!" he cried, with ardor. "Why, if I could be sure she cares for me, like that, if I could know that all other men counted as little with her as all other women count with me! But I am not sure. And I do not take it lightly, for my woman must be more to me than most women mean to most men. Well, it is on the knees of the gods."

I stole a covert glance at him as he walked beside me. It seemed to me he had never been so beautiful. But his beauty hurt me. I felt old, very, very old, and sad, and tired. The salt taste of tears was in my mouth. My feet dragged.

We entered that strip of land which on a time old Sophronisba barb-wired and barricaded against her neighbors, and which touched the Jelnik grounds in the rear. We were to cut through his garden and enter mine by the gap in the hedge behind the spring-house and I hoped to get into the house and up-stairs to my own room unperceived.

The gray cottage lay dark and silent, but there were lights in Hynds House although the night was upon the verge of morning. A gray light, upon which was stealing a primrose tinge, was already in the sky. It was, in fact, four o'clock. I was so mortally tired that for a moment I sat down on his steps.

"It's been pretty rough on you, Sophy. One woman in a thousand could have gone through this night's experience without going to pieces," said Mr. Jelnik, with feeling. And then:

"Sophy!" cried a frightened and hysterical voice. "Oh, is that you, at last, Sophy?" And turning a corner of the gray cottage, Alicia, Doctor Geddes, and The Author confronted us. They were still in costume, and the Mephistophelian effect of The Author was such as would turn any actor green with envy. Ensued

a pregnant pause. It was a lovely situation! It reduced me, for one, to idiocy.

"Sophy! Jelnik!" exploded Doctor Geddes, with a gesture of rage and astonishment.

"Yes. It is I. What is the matter? Why aren't you home and in bed? What are you doing here, at this hour?" I asked, stupidly.

Here The Author, all in red tights, cape, and doublet, snatched his red cap with the cock's feather in it off his head, and bowed diabolically:

"Let us ask you that same question: Why aren't *you* home and in bed? What are *you* doing here at this hour?"

"After everybody had gone home, I ran up to your room, Sophy—and—and you were gone. You weren't in the house. I looked everywhere; and you'd disappeared, as if the earth had opened and swallowed you." Alicia's voice was trembling.

"Oh, Sophy, I was so frightened, so horribly frightened! I kept thinking every minute you must come. I kept looking and waiting, and still you didn't come. I telephoned Doctor Geddes, when I couldn't stand it any longer. And then The Author came down-stairs. And oh, Sophy, there was such an unearthly, clammy, waiting sort of feeling in the house—all those lights, all those empty rooms—I felt as if something terrible must be happening!" She clung to me as she spoke, kissing me, and shook, and wept. "And when you still didn't come, and we couldn't find you anywhere, The Author suggested that we should come over here and enlist Mr. Jelnik.

"When we got here, there wasn't a soul in this house. Not even the dog. We went back to Hynds House, and walked through our garden, and then came back here, because we didn't know what else to do. Oh, Sophy!" I patted her shoulders, mumbling that she mustn't cry, it was ail right.

"Miss Gaines, I am dreadfully sorry you should have been frightened. But there really wasn't the least occasion for alarm. Because Miss Smith was with *me*," said Mr. Jelnik calmly.

Alicia looked at him, trying to read his face in the wan light. Her world, as it were, was rocking under her feet. She looked at me; and I said nothing. To save my life I couldn't speak of Jessamine Hynds then, nor talk coherently of that night's experience. I couldn't betray Nicholas Jelnik's secrets, nor mention the

Watcher in the Dark, nor that dreadful red-walled room. So I merely patted Alicia's shoulder, while she held fast to me as if I might again disappear.

"That is exactly what we should like you to explain, Mr. Jelnik, if you please," said The Author, with deadly politeness. "You must pardon us if we disagree with your assertion that Miss Gaines had no real occasion for alarm."

"Miss Smith and I," said Mr. Jelnik, stiffening, at the tone, "found it absolute necessary to leave Hynds House for a short while to-night, to attend to—an affair of some importance to us both, but which concerns no one else on earth." Under the grave politeness his voice had an edge of irritation. "I repeat that I am sincerely sorry Miss Alicia was frightened. For my share in that, I crave her pardon. I ask all of you to accept this apology as an explanation which is final."

"I for one shall do no such thing!" cried The Author, hotly. "Are we impertinent children to be thus lightly dismissed? Of course, if Miss Smith herself—"

"You have neither right nor authority to cross-question Miss Smith," interposed Mr. Jelnik, sharply. But Doctor Geddes broke in, with mounting anger and astonishment:

"Of course we've got the right and the reason to question both of you! You might just as well come off your high horse; you've behaved very badly, Jelnik! To induce Sophy to scuttle off in the middle of the night, without a word to anybody, and go wild-goose-chasing with you, was an unworthy action. I wouldn't have believed it of you, Jelnik; I thought you had more common sense—not to speak of Sophy herself. Gad, I'd like to shake the pair of you!" And he stamped his feet.

"Doctor Richard Geddes," said Mr. Jelnik, in dangerously low and honeyed tones, "I find you insufferable. You have the instincts and the manners of a navvy."

"Mr. Jelnik!" cried The Author. "Mr. Jelnik, honor me, please, by considering my instincts and manners infinitely worse than Doctor Geddes's. I, Mr. Jelnik, at this instant feel within me the instincts of a cave man and I hone for the thigh-bone of an aurochs to prove it to you. Do you know what I think of you, Mr. Jelnik? I consider you a man without conscience and without scruples, sir!"

"My faith! The man even talks like a serial!" said Mr. Jelnik, weariedly. "My

dear, good sir, while we're by way of indulging in personalities permit me to inform you that you annoy me by existing. As to your behavior to Miss Smith —"

"*My* behavior to Miss Smith?" shrieked The Author, stamping with fury, "*my* behavior to Miss Smith? You had better set about explaining *your* behavior to Miss Smith! You're a rascal, Mr. Jelnik!"

"You, my dear sir, are worse: you're an ass," said Mr. Jelnik, and fetched a sigh of tiredness. "Would to heaven somebody would fetch you a halter!"

"Jelnik," choked Doctor Geddes, "a man who behaves as you're behaving to-night runs the risk of getting himself shot. You're my own cousin, but—"

Mr. Jelnik turned at bay.

"Doctor Geddes," said he, in a razor-edged voice, "it is no light affliction to be kin to the Hyndses!—What do you want me to explain? I have already told you it was necessary for Miss Smith and me to attend to a matter that is none of your business. In return, you hold us up like brigands. Would it make a dent in your armor of righteous meddling, if I were to remind you that you are seriously annoying Miss Smith?"

"Not a dent!" roared the doctor. "And if it annoys Sophy to be asked a straight question by those who have her interest at heart, let her be annoyed and take shame to herself!"

Alicia began to cry.

"Oh, Sophy!" wailed Alicia, "whatever is the matter with us, anyhow? What is wrong, Sophy? Why are we quarreling? What are we quarreling about, Sophy?"

I put my hands to my head. "I don't know. That is. I can't tell. I mean. I can't think, at all!

"Doctor Geddes has spoken like an honest man," said The Author, standing flat-footed in his pointed red shoes. "Mr. Jelnik, I ask you plainly: Why do I find Miss Smith here at this hour? Why and wherefore the mystery? Let me remind you that I have asked Miss Smith to marry me, and that she hasn't as yet given me her answer," he finished, significantly.

"Why, Sophy!" gasped Alicia. "Why, Sophy Smith!"

"Holy Moses!" gasped Doctor Geddes. "What, man, you too? Well, then, if it comes to that, I can call you to account, Jelnik, because *I* asked Sophy to marry me, too. In my case she had sense enough to say 'No' at once."

"You know he did, Sophy!" Alicia corroborated him tearfully. "You told me so yourself, though you never so much as opened your mouth about The Author; and I don't think that was a bit like you, Sophy. And why you refused the doctor, I can't for the life of me imagine!"

"Can't you? Well, *I* can," snorted the doctor, and drew Alicia closer to him. She put both her hands around his arm.

"What!" gulped The Author, rocking on his red toes, and wrinkling his nose until his waxed mustache stood out with infernal effect, and his corked eyebrows climbed into his hair. "What! You, Geddes? My sainted aunt! Why, man alive, I thought that you—that is I'd have sworn that you—" Here The Author's breath mercifully failed him.

I was dumb as a sheep in the hands of the slayers. I could only blink at these dear people who were tormenting me. I thought of Jessamine Hynds in her brown silk frock, with the crucifix in her skeleton fingers and the earth fresh over her. And I couldn't say a word. And while I stood thus silent, Mr. Nicholas Jelnik walked up and took my hand in his warm and comforting clasp, and looked at me with kindling, starry eyes, and laughed a deep-chested laugh.

"Gentlemen and Miss Gaines," said Mr. Jelnik, in a ringing and vibrant voice, "permit me to inform you that I also have asked Miss Smith to marry me. And she has done me the honor to accept me."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GREATEST GIFT

The Author threw his short cape backward, laid one hand upon the hilt of his sword, doffed his cap, and made a sweeping courtesy.

"Prettily played, Mr. Jelnik!" said he, admiringly. "May one be permitted to congratulate you, upon your indubitably dramatic instinct?"

"All things are permitted; but not all things are expedient," Mr. Jelnik replied evenly.

"Oh, we know who can quote scripture!" cried The Author; and looked longingly at the other's naked throat.

At which point Doctor Geddes, coming as it were out of a trance, took the situation in hand.

"Have done with this nonsense!" he ordered sharply. "Alicia, get Sophy home; she looks more dead than alive. Jelnik, your declaration puts a new complexion on this affair; but let me tell you flatly I don't like your method of announcing engagements."

"Suppose you waive criticism and look after Sophy," suggested Mr. Jelnik. He walked up to his cousin and looked straight in his eyes: "Richard, you're not such a fool as to dare doubt *us*?"

"Eh?" blinked the doctor, "what? Doubt *Sophy*? I should say not! And you—oh, well, you're a bit of a fool yourself at times, Jelnik, and this seems to be one of the times; but I don't doubt you. However," said the doctor, grimly, "I should like to whale some sense into you with a club!"

"An ax would be more to the point," murmured The Author, regretfully.

"In the meantime, Richard," said Mr. Jelnik, with a faint smile, "take Sophy home, please."

I have a vague recollection of swallowing something that the doctor told me to

swallow. Then came blessed oblivion, a sleep so profound that I didn't even dream, and didn't awake until that afternoon; to find the tender face of Alicia again bent over me.

I waited for her to ask at least one of the many questions she must have been longing to ask. But Alicia shook her head.

"Sophy," said she, loyally, "you haven't got to tell me one single, solitary thing unless you really want to. But—isn't this just a bit sudden? I was—surprised."

"So was I."

"You see, Sophy, I never once dreamed—"

"That he cared for me? Neither did I."

"No. That you cared for him," Alicia puckered her brows.

"My dear girl," I was trying to feel my way toward letting her have the truth, "listen: whether or not he is engaged to me, Mr. Nicholas Jelnik really loves some lady that neither you nor I know. He told me so himself."

It took Alicia some moments to recover from that!

"And yet you're going to marry him, Sophy?"

"You heard him announce our engagement."

"I can't understand!" sighed Alicia. "Oh, Sophy, sometimes I could wish we had never come to Hynds House!"

"It had to be," I said dully.

"And—The Author?" ventured Alicia, after a pause. "He thinks you belong to him by right of discovery. He doesn't accept Mr. Jelnik's announcement as final. He told me this morning that his offer stood until you actually married somebody else. The Author isn't used to being crossed, and he doesn't quite know how to take it."

"It is on the knees of the gods," I repeated, weariedly.

Came a gentle tap at the door, and following it the fresh, kind face of Miss Emmeline.

"Are you trying to rival the Seven Sleepers?" she asked, gaily, and laid a bunch of carnations on my knees by way of offering. "Judge Gatchell sent them to me this morning," she explained, with an October blush. For the sallow old jurist had taken so great a liking to the Boston reincarnation of a Theban vestal, and was in consequence so rejuvenated, himself, that all Hyndsville was holding up the hands of astonishment and biting the finger of conjecture.

"My dears," said Miss Emmeline, presently, "I want to tell you the singular dream I had last night, or rather this morning. I was quite tired, for I do not often dance," admitted Miss Emmeline, who had nevertheless danced with a zest that rivaled that of the youngest, "so I must have fallen asleep immediately upon retiring. Well, then, I dreamed that all those old Hyndses whose portraits are down-stairs were gathered together in the library, to bid farewell to a member of the family who was going away—that beautiful creature who disappeared and was never afterward found. Now, aren't dreams absurd? She was setting out upon a long journey dressed in a low-necked, short-sleeved brown silk dress trimmed with quantities of fine lace. And for goodness' sake what do you think that woman wore over it for a traveling-cloak? Nothing more or less than a gray army blanket, a corner of which was thrown over her head like a hood and quite concealed her face.

"She moved away slowly, holding her blanket as an Indian does. And as she passed me by—for I was standing in the door—a fold slipped, and what do you think she was holding to her breast? A pearl-and-silver crucifix. You can't imagine how I felt when I saw it!"

I knew how I felt when I had seen it, but that I couldn't tell Miss Emmeline. Instead, I held the carnations to my face, to hide my whitening lips. For once the Boston lady had come into actual contact with the occult and the unknown.

"She went out by the back door," continued Miss Emmeline, "and I ran to the window and saw her gray-blanketed figure disappear down the lane, behind the hedge that separates Mr. Jelnik's grounds from yours. And all the Hyndses called: '*Jessamine, good-by!*' But she never turned her head once, nor spoke, nor gave a sign that she heard. She just *went*, leaving me staring after her. I stared so hard that I woke myself up. Now, my dears, wasn't that an odd sort of dream? And so vivid, too! Why, I can hear those voices yet!"

"Well, I'm glad she went," said Alicia. "Ladies that do up their heads in blankets and won't answer when they're spoken to, ought to go."

Mrs. Scarboro, Judge Gatchell, and one of my old ladies were dining with us that night, for which I thanked Heaven. Judge Gatchell discovered in himself a fund of sly humor that astonished everybody, and Miss Emmeline was like a November rose, sweet with a shy and belated girlishness, rarer for a touch of frost. And The Author was in a fairly good humor because they let him alone.

Mr. Nicholas Jelnik dutifully put in his appearance after dinner. The Author was balefully polite to him, Alicia shyly friendly. I had on a new frock, and the knowledge that it was becoming gave me a courage I should otherwise have lacked. A new frock, pink powder, and a smile, have saved many a fainting feminine soul where prayer and fasting had failed.

The gentleman who had blandly announced my engagement to himself only last night assumed no airs of proprietorship, but was placidly content to let me sit and talk to Mr. Johnson, who was holding forth on the merits of our Rhode Island Reds as against either barred Plymouth Rocks or White Leghorns, and the variety of vegetables and small fruits in our kitchen-garden, so admirably planned by Schmetz, so carefully and neighborly looked after both by him and Riedriech. From gardens, Mr. Johnson went to cattle; he had a delight in cows, and our cow was a Jersey with a cream-colored complexion, large black eyes, and the sentimental temperament. We called her the Kissing Cow, because she couldn't see the secretary without trying to bestow upon him slobbering salutes.

He paused in his homely talk to smile at something The Author had just said. Then his eyes strayed to Mr. Nicholas Jelnik, being talked to by Mrs. Scarboro and an apple-faced Confederate with pellucid blue eyes and a renowned trigger-finger.

"That is the most gifted—and detached—human being I have ever known," said the secretary. "But it is his misfortune to have no saving responsibilities. What he needs is to fall in love with the right woman and marry her."

"You mean he should marry some great lady, some dazzling beauty? Naturally."

"Heaven forbid!" said the secretary, with unexpected vigor. "No, no, Miss Smith, that is not what such a man as Nicholas Jelnik needs!"

"But it may be what he wants," said I.

"I should never think so, myself," Mr. Johnson replied thoughtfully; "and I

have seen a good deal of him. No, Jelnik doesn't want great beauty; he has enough of it himself. For the same reason, he doesn't want brilliant qualities. He needs quiet, dependable goodness, the changeless and unswerving affection of a steadfast heart."

But I could not agree with this simple-minded young man, who had in himself the qualities he named. Why, if Nicholas Jelnik asked only for a changeless love, *I* could have given him full measure, even to the running over thereof!

"What was Johnson talking to you about, that you both looked so earnest?" Mr. Jelnik wanted to know presently.

"Oh, just things; flowers and fruits and animals."

"And people?"

"People always end by talking about people."

"Johnson's opinions are generally sound, because he himself is sound to the core," said Mr. Jelnik, quietly.

"Miss Emmeline says he has got a limpid soul. The Author says it's really a sound liver. However that may be, one couldn't live in the same house with him without conceiving a real affection for him. He is a very easy person to love."

Mr. Jelnik's eyebrows went up. "Don't love him too much, please, Sophy. If you feel that you really ought to love somebody, love *me*." The golden lights were in his eyes.

At that moment I both loved and hated him.

"Mr. Jelnik," said I, in as low a tone as his own, "it isn't fair to talk to me like this. You did what you did to save me from annoyance—and—and—misunderstanding. But you are perfectly free: I have no idea of holding you to such an engagement, no, nor of feeling myself bound by it, either."

"I understand, perfectly, Sophy," he said, after a pause. "And now, may I ask you one or two plain questions, please?"

"I think you may."

"You never cared for Geddes?"

"Good heavens, no! Besides, he—"

"Wants Alicia? That's obvious. But what about The Author? I'm not enamored of him, myself, but he's an immensely able and clever man. How many brilliant social lights would be willing to shine at the head of his table! What are you going to do about The Author, Sophy?"

"What are *you* going to do about the lady you are really in love with?" I countered.

"I'm waiting to find out," said he, coolly. "Answer my question, please: Do you imagine you love him, Sophy?"

"It is not unpleasant to me that he should wish me to do so," I admitted.

"I see. You are trying to persuade yourself that you should accept him."

"I am not growing younger," I said, with an effort. "Remember, too, that Alicia will be leaving me presently, and I shall then be utterly alone. That is not a pleasing prospect—not to a woman."

"Nor to a man, either, but better that than a loveless marriage." He reflected for a moment. "If you are sure you care for the man, tell him truthfully every incident of last night. Otherwise, I do not feel like sharing my affairs with him; I do not want to drag Jessamine Hynds out of her grave to gratify his curiosity. For he has the curiosity of a cat, along with the obstinacy of a mule."

I smiled, wanly. "I gather that I'm not to tell him anything. What further?" I wanted to know, not without irony.

"This, then: that you keep on being engaged to me."

I looked at him incredulously.

"For the time being, Sophy, submit to my tentative claim. If you decide to let your—ah—common sense induce you to make what must be called a brilliant marriage, tell me, and I will go at once. In the meantime, Sophy, I am your friend, to whom your happiness is as dear as his own. Will you believe that?"

It was not in me to doubt him. "Yes," I said. "And if—the lady you told me about—you understand—you will tell me, too, will you not? I should like to know, for your happiness is as much to me as mine could possibly be to you."

"That's the most promising thing you've said yet," he said. "All right, Sophy:

the minute I find out she cares more for me than she does for anybody else, I shall certainly let you know. In the meanwhile, don't let being engaged bear too heavily on your spirits. *I* find it very pleasant and exhilarating!"

"I don't think you ought to talk like that," I demurred.

"I can't help it: I never was engaged before, and it goes to my tongue."

"I never was, either. But it doesn't go to *mine*," I reminded him, with dignity.

"Sophy, you are the only woman in the world who can reproach a man with her nose and get away with it," he said irrelevantly. "You have the most eloquent little nose, Sophy!"

I looked at him reprovingly.

"I adore being engaged to you, Sophy," said he, unabashed. "Being engaged to you has a naïve freshness that enchants me. It's romantic, it has the sharp tang of uncertainty, the zest of high adventure. Think how exciting it's going to be to wake o' mornings thinking: 'Here is a whole magic day to be engaged to Sophy in!' By the way, would you mind addressing me as 'Nicholas'? It is customary under the circumstances, I believe."

"I do not like the name of Nicholas."

"I feared so, seeing the extreme care with which you avoid it. That is why I suggest that you should immediately begin to use it. Practice makes perfect. Observe with what ease I manage to say 'Sophy' already," he said airily. "I'm glad your hair's just that blonde, and soft, Sophy. I couldn't possibly be engaged to a woman who didn't have hair like yours."

I looked at his, and said with conviction:

"How absurd! Black hair is incomparably more beautiful!"

His eyes danced.

"Sophy!" said he, in a thrilling whisper, "Sophy, *The Author's hair is brindle*!"

I got up and incontinently left him. And I saw with stern joy how Mrs. Scarboro again seized upon and made him listen to tales of his grandfather, until in desperation he fled to the piano, and played Hungarian music with such effect that even The Author was moved to rapture.

"Jelnik!" said The Author, enthusiastically, "I shall put you in my next book. Gad, man, what a magnificent scoundrel I shall make of you!" A remark which scandalized Mrs. Scarboro and startled my dear old lady, but didn't phase Mr. Jelnik.

I found myself growing more and more confounded and confused. Was I, or wasn't I, engaged to a man who had never asked me to marry him? In the vernacular, I didn't know where I was at any more.

Alicia added to this confusion.

"Sophy," said she, some time later, "isn't it just possible you misunderstood Mr. Jelnik? About his being in love with somebody else, I mean."

"I don't know what makes you think so."

"Don't you? I'll show you," she said, and swung me around to face a mirror. "*That's* what makes me think so. Sophy Smith, unless he's a liar—and Peacocks and Ivory couldn't be a liar to save his life—the woman Nicholas Jelnik loves looks back at you every time you look in the glass."

I shook my head. I have never been able to tell pleasant lies to myself.

"Well, we'll see what we'll see! I told you once before that you hadn't caught up with the change in yourself." And she kissed me and laughed. It came to me that she couldn't have cared much for him, herself, to be able to laugh that light-heartedly.

When Miss Emmeline and the English folk were leaving Hynds House, everybody in Hyndsville turned out to say "Good-by." Even our lanky old Judge was on hand, with a great bunch of carnations and a huge box of bonbons for Miss Emmeline.

"Sophy," Miss Emmeline said, smiling, "I don't see anything left for me to do but come back to Hyndsville, do you?"

"No, I don't. And come soon. Hynds House won't feel the same without you. I thought of all she had taught me by just being her fine, frank self, and looked at her gratefully. She looked back at me quizzically, and of a sudden she slipped her arm around my shoulders.

"Sophy Smith," said she, softly, "I have met many women in my time, many far more brilliant and beautiful, and what the world calls gifted, than you. But I have met none with a greater capacity for unselfish loving. It's easy enough to win love, a harder thing to keep it, but divinest of all to give it and keep on giving it. And there's where your great gift lies, Sophy." And she kissed me, with misty eyes, and such a tender face!

That put such a friendly, warm glow in my heart that I was sorry to part even with the Englishman's daughter, Athena though she was, and I mortally afraid of her. As for her father, he was bewailing the parting with Alicia, whose Irishness was a manna in the wilderness to him.

"It's like saying good-by to the Fountain of Youth," he lamented. "You're more than a pretty girl: you're the eternal feminine in Irish!"

"She's the Eternal Irish in proper English, that's what she is!" said The Author darkly, and looked so wise that everybody looked respectful, though nobody knew what he meant. Perhaps he didn't know, himself.

After the train had gone, Doctor Geddes hustled us into his waiting car.

"I'm going to take you for a quiet spin in the country, to make the better acquaintance of Madame Spring-in-Carolina," he said. A few minutes later he swung the car into a lonesome and lovely road edged with pines, and sassafras, and sumach, and cassena bushes, and festooned with vines. Madame Spring-in-Carolina had coaxed the green things to come out and grow, and the people of the sky to try their jeweled wings in her fine new sunlight. The Judas-tree was red, the dogwood white, the honey-locust a breath from Eden. A blossomy wind came out of the heart of the world, and there were birds everywhere, impudently eloquent.

We didn't want to talk, or even to think; we just wanted to be alive and glad with everything else. The very car seemed to feel something of this intoxication, for as it went flying down the road it hummed and purred and sang snatches of the Song of Speed to itself. We turned a corner, I remember. And then there was a frightful lurch and jar, and the big car bounded into the air, and turned over in the ditch. I remember the rear wheels turning with a grinding, spitting noise.

When I woke up, Alicia was sitting by the side of the road, with the doctor's head in her lap, and I was lying on the grass near by. Her eyes were big and blank in a bloodless face, and the curling ends of her long bright hair hung in the

dust. There was a cruel red mark on her forehead. Otherwise she was quite uninjured. I wasn't conscious of any pain myself—not then, at least.

"Sophy," Alicia said, impersonally, "Doctor Geddes is dead." And she fell to stroking his cheek lightly, with one finger; "quite dead. Without one word to me, Sophy!"

The figure on the ground looked dreadfully still and helpless. There was something ghastly wrong in seeing so strong a man lie so still and helpless. And the road, an unfrequented one, was unutterably lonesome. There was nothing, nobody in sight—nothing but the buzzard, black against the blue sky, tipping his wings to the wind.

"You must go for help," I mumbled.

"I dare not leave him. I know he's dead, Sophy. But—he might open his eyes, just once more. You see, he didn't know, before he—died, that I was very much in love with him—oh, terribly in love with him, Sophy!—from the first time I saw him standing in our door. I thought you cared for him, too, Sophy dear—and I sent him away from me— And now he has gotten himself killed." With a gentle touch she pushed back the thick reddish hair from his forehead. She looked at me imploringly: "Don't let him be dead, Sophy! For God's sake, Sophy, don't let him be dead! Make him open his eyes, Sophy!"

A negro teamster came upon us, recognized the doctor, shrieked, and set off for help, lashing his mules into a mad run. But Alicia never moved, and I huddled beside her, numb and silent, looking at the white face upon her knees. With all the impatience wiped out, it was a fine face, at once strong and sweet.

"Richard," said Alicia, "Richard, if I had been killed, and you begged and prayed me from your breaking heart to listen to you, to understand that you'd cared for me, only me, all along, *somehow* I'd manage to let you know I understood. Richard, listen to me! Open your eyes, Richard. Please, please, Richard, open your eyes!"

Her voice was so piteous that I fell to weeping. And, by the mercy of God, Richard opened his eyes and stared with blue blankness straight into Alicia's quivering, anguished face.

"Richard," said she, bending down to him, "my dear, dear love, keep your eyes open just a little longer, until I can make you understand. Oh, Richard, I

cared! Indeed, indeed, I cared!"

The blue stare never wavered. It gathered intensity.

"Don't, don't look at me like that, Richard!" cried Alicia, beginning to sob wildly. "Don't—don't look so—so *angelic*, dear. Look like your own self at me, Richard! Oh, darling, for our dear God's mercy's sake, please, please try to look bad-tempered just once more!"

His pale lips twitched curiously. He sighed. Then he murmured something that sounded like "not sure."

"Not sure?" wept Alicia. "Oh, my heart, my heart!"

"I think—could die in peace—say 'I love you, Richard,'" murmured the doctor.

"Oh, I do, I do love you, Richard—*frightfully*!" sobbed Alicia. "I love you with all my heart!"

The corpse sat up, and for a dead man he showed considerable life. Painfully he rose, and stood staggering on his feet, big, pale, shaken, with a bump the size of an egg on the side of his head, but with such shining blue eyes! He put out a big hand and lifted Alicia from the ground.

"Leetchy," said Doctor Geddes, "if you ever take back what you've said I shall be sorry I wasn't killed. But I don't mind staying alive if you'll keep on loving me. If I stay alive, will you marry me, Leetchy?"

"If you don't, I can't m-m-marry any-anybody at all!" wailed Alicia.

"Amen!" said the doctor. "Now stop crying, and put your hand into my pocket, and you'll find something that's been owing you this long time, Leetchy."

Alicia blinked, and rubbed her eyes, then slipped her hand into his breast pocket and drew forth a small, square, satin-lined box; an inviting box.

"Richard!" she exclaimed, "why, Richard!" Then: "Of all the impudence!" cried Alicia, scandalized. "Why, you haven't even *asked* me! Whoever in this world heard of buying a girl's ring before she's said 'Yes'?"

"Alicia," said Doctor Richard Geddes, "I'm your Man, and you know it. And you're my Girl, and I know it. Here, let's see if this thing fits."

Meekly Alicia, the impudent, the flirt, held out her slim hand.

"That's settled, thank God!" said the doctor. And he swept her clear off her feet, and kissed her with thoroughness and enthusiasm.

"Richard! People are coming! They'll see you!"

"Let 'em!"

I sat there quietly, and stared at the two of them with a sort of vacant watchfulness. My hat was gone, my hairpins had taken unto themselves wings, and my hair, covered with dust, hung about me like a veil. I was just beginning to be conscious of pain. It was a shuddering pain, new and cruel, and I winced. The next minute Alicia was kneeling beside me, and her face had again become quite colorless.

"Sophy!" her voice sounded shrill and far off. "Sophy, you said you were all right!—Richard, look at Sophy!"

I felt the doctor's swift, deft hands upon me. And more pain. People were arriving now. Cars stopped, and excited men and women surrounded us. One tall figure leaped from the first car and reached us ahead of all others.

"Geddes!" cried a voice. "Thank God, Geddes! We were told you'd been killed outright! Alicia all right, too?" Then: "Sophy!" This time it was a cry of terror. "Never tell me it's Sophy!"

I saw his face bent over me. Then a red mist came, and then everything went dark.

CHAPTER XIX

DEEP WATERS

Somewhere, far, far off, a faint and feeble little light glimmered, one small point of light in vast blackness. In the whole universe there wasn't anything or anybody but just that tiny light, and swift black water, and drowning me. Something deep within me—I think occultists call it the body-spirit—was clamoring frantically to hold fast to the light, because if that went under I should go under, too. I tried to keep my eyes upon the trembling spark.

Whereupon the light changed to a sound, the monotonous insistence of which forced me to be worriedly aware of it. It was—why, it was a voice, calling, over and over and over again, "*Sophy! Sophy!*"

Somebody was calling *me*. With an immense effort I managed to raise my eyelids. I was lying in a bed, and caught a drowsy, fleeting glimpse of four posts.

> Four posts upon my bed,
> Four angels for my head,
> Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John
> Bless the bed that I lie on!

Granny used to say that for me at night; only she had said "four hangels for my 'ead," at which I used to giggle into my pillows. I hadn't felt so close to Granny since I was little Sophy, in the rooms over our shop in Boston. She was somewhere around me; if I went to sleep now, she'd be there when I woke up in the morning. But the sound that was a calling voice wouldn't let me go to sleep. Slowly, heavily, I managed to get my eyes open again.

"Look at me!" said the voice imperiously. Two large dark eyes caught my wavering glance and held it, as in a vise. "Sophy! Sophy! *I need you.*"

Said another voice, then, brokenly: "For mercy's sake, Jelnik, let her go in peace!"

"No, she sha'n't die. I won't have it!—Sophy, come back! It is I who call you, Sophy. Come back!"

My stiff lips moved. "Must go—sleep," I tried to say.

"No, I forbid you to go to sleep, Sophy!" His dark eyes, full of life and compelling power, held my tired and dimmed ones, his firm, warm hands held my cold and inert fingers. "My love, my dear love, stay. You have got to stay, Sophy. Don't you understand? You can't go, Sophy!"

My dulled brain stumblingly laid hold upon a thought: *Nicholas Jelnik was calling me. He was calling me because he loved me.* One simply can't go down into sleep and darkness, when a miracle like that is climbing like the morning-star into one's skies.

"Stay!" he said, his lips against my ear. "Sophy! My love, my dear love, stay!"

But although he held me close, I could feel myself being drawn away. There must have been that in my straining glance that made him aware, for of a sudden he cried out, lifted me bodily in his arms, and kissed me on the mouth.

My heart quite stopped beating, as a spent runner pauses, that he may gather new strength to go on. With a sigh I fell back; but not into the water and the dark.

"By God, you've pulled her through, Jelnik!" cried the voice of Richard Geddes.

Came vague sounds, stirs, movements, hands upon me. Then oblivion again.

I woke up one pleasant forenoon to find a brisk and capable young woman in white sitting in my room, her head bent over the piece of linen she was hemming. She was a healthy, handsome young woman, with hard, firm cheeks, hard, firm lips, and professional eyes and glasses. She glanced up and met my wan stare.

"What are you doing here, if you please?" I asked politely.

"I have been nursing you, Miss Smith. You have been quite ill, you know."

I lay there looking at that self-contained, trained young woman, with feelings of almost ludicrous astonishment. I remembered the skidding car; and Richard Geddes lying with his head on Alicia's knees, and how we had both thought him dead; and myself sitting in the dust; and then the pain. But it was astounding news that I had been very badly hurt full three weeks ago!

Alicia stole in and, seeing me awake, tried to smile, but cried instead, with a wet cheek against my hand. A few minutes later Doctor Geddes himself appeared. It was enough to scandalize any self-contained nurse to see a six-foot-three doctor behave in the most abandoned and unbedside manner!

"Sophy!" gulped the doctor, "oh, deuce take you, Sophronisba Two, what do you mean by scaring honest folks half out of their wits?"

The nurse was destined to receive another shock. Richard of the Lion Heart dropped down on his knees beside Alicia, and laid his bearded cheek against my wan one, and for a while couldn't speak. Alicia tried to get her slender arms around him, and couldn't.

"I think," ventured the nurse, in level tones, "that the patient had better not be excited. Shall I give her a stimulant, doctor?"

"The patient's on the highroad to getting well," said the doctor. "And we're the best of all stimulants, aren't we, Sophy?"

When I began to get stronger, the dream which had haunted my illness came back with astonishing vividness and haunted my waking hours. I knew it was a dream, for of course I hadn't been in black water, I hadn't strained toward a light upon the flood, and of course, I hadn't really heard Nicholas Jelnik calling my name; and the kiss was part of the fantasy. I watched him stealthily, this cool, collected, impersonal young man, to whom even the efficient nurse was astonishingly respectful, and pure laughter seized me at the idea of *his* crying aloud, being as agitated, as passionate, as fiercely insistent, as he had been in the vision.

I ventured to put a part of the vagary to the acid test:

"Alicia, I wasn't thrown out again, into water, was I?"

"No. That was delirium, dear. You were frightfully ill for a while, Sophy." Her face paled. "So ill that The Author fled, because he wouldn't stay in the house and see—what we expected to see. He said it would permanently shatter his nerves. But he has wired every day since."

"It was sensible of him to go. And it's kind of him to wire." I said no more about the water.

"Everybody has been kind. And it wasn't duty kindness, either. It was kind

kindness!" said Alicia, lucidly. "Do you know what they're saying in Hyndsville now? They're saying old Sophronisba played a joke on herself." She left me to digest that as best I might.

It isn't pleasant to be ill anywhere. But it isn't altogether unpleasant to be on the sick list in South Carolina. Everybody is anxious about you. Old ladies with palm-leaf fans in their tireless hands come and sit with you. They aren't brilliant old ladies, you understand. I know some whose secular library consists of the Complete Works of John Esten Cooke, Gilmore Simms's War Poems of the South, and a thumbed copy of Father Ryan. But add to these the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Imitation of Christ, and it doesn't make such a bad showing. It's astonishing how soothing the companionship of women fed upon this pabulum can be, when the things of the world are of necessity set aside for a space, and the simpler things of the spirit draw near.

Old gentlemen in well-brushed clothes and immaculate, exquisitely darned linen, call daily with small gifts of fruit and flowers, and send you messages from which you infer that the sun won't be able to shine properly until you come outside again. And there isn't a housekeeper of your acquaintance who hasn't got you on her mind: there are sent to you steaming bowls of perfect soup, flaky rolls and golden cake, jeweled jellies, and cool, enticing, trembly things in glass dishes. And when you can sit up for more than an hour or two at a time, why, then you know what it really means to have South Carolina neighbors.

Doctor Geddes made me spend my days in the garden that Schmetz had labored upon with such loving-kindness, and that in consequence was become a marvel of bloom and scent. Every butterfly in South Carolina must have visited that garden. I hadn't known there were that many butterflies in the world. All the florist-shop windows in New York, that I had once paused before with envy and longing, were stinted and poor and pale before the living, out-o'-doors wonder of it. Florist shops haven't any bees, nor birds, nor butterflies, nor trees that wave their green branches at you like friendly hands.

A flowering vine festooned the marble Love, and one great scarlet spray of bloom flamed upon his marble torch, "so lyrically," Miss Martha Hopkins said, that she was moved to write a poem about it. I thought it a very nice poem, and I said so, when she read it to us. But Doctor Geddes, who doesn't care for poetry, except Robert Burns's, rubbed his nose.

"Oh, well, your grandmother and your aunts used to make antimacassars and

wall-pockets and paper flowers," he ruminated. "Why shouldn't you make poetry if you feel like it?"

"You are to be pitied, Richard," said Miss Martha, with crushing charity. "Such a disposition! And the older you grow the worse it gets."

"Confound it, Martha!—"

"I do," said she.

Alicia looked at Richard with impersonal eyes. She looked at the ruffled center of culture.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Miss Martha," she said, with a charming smile. "Your poem is very pretty, and he knows it."

"He means well," said Miss Martha, resignedly.

"Now, you look here, Martha!" the doctor said angrily, "I won't have anybody telling me to my face I mean well. You might as well call me a fool outright."

"You are far from being a fool, Richard. And you do mean well. Everybody knows that."

He turned appealingly to his dear Leetchy, and received his first lesson in Domestic Science.

"Miss Martha is right, Richard," she decided.

"Leetchy," the doctor asked, when the mollified Miss Hopkins had departed, "why did Martha go off grinning?"

"How should I know?" wondered Alicia, innocently. Then she looked at him with Irish eyes: "Have you had your lunch, dear?" she asked.

"Lunch?" He looked bewildered.

"Because I'm going to fix Sophy's lunch now, and you may have yours with her, if you like. I love to wait on you, Richard," she added, and a beautiful color flooded her face.

He caught his breath. When she went back to the house, his eyes followed her adoringly.

"Sophy," he said, huskily, "what does she see in me? Do you think I'm good enough for *her*, Sophy?"

"I think you are quite good enough even for Alicia."

When he had gone, Alicia sat with her head against my knees. Of late a touching gravity, a sweet seriousness, had settled upon her. Her love for the big doctor was singularly clear-eyed and far-seeing. There were going to be times when every ounce of skill, tact, patience, love itself, would be called upon, for the reins must be gossamer-light, invisible, but always firm and sure, that should guide and tone down so impatient and fiery a nature as his. It was very easy to love him; it wasn't always going to be easy to live with him, and Alicia knew it. But she also knew, with a faith beyond all failing, that this was her high, destined, heaven-ordained job.

"Sophy darlin', I'm deplorably young, am I not?" she sighed.

"You'll get over it."

"Do you think I'll make him a good wife, Sophy?"

"I am absolutely certain," I said, "that you'll make him a good husband. Which is far more important."

Alicia hugged my knees, and laughed. Then, seeing Mr. Nicholas Jelnik approaching, she scrambled to her feet, picked up the tray of empty dishes, and went back to the house.

Neither she nor the doctor had asked me so much as one question about Mr. Jelnik. As if by tacit understanding that subject was avoided. And because I hadn't anything to tell them, I, too, held my peace.

He raised my hand to his lips, dropped into a chair, and bared his forehead to the soft wind.

"How good that feels!" he sighed. "Fräulein, may one smoke?" And receiving permission he smoked for a while, comfortably, leaning back with half-closed eyes.

"Achmet salaams to you, *hanoum*," he said presently. "You have won his heart of a true believer. Even Daoud demands daily news of you."

"I particularly like The Jinnee. I should like to have him around me. And

Daoud is highly ornamental."

"When is The Author coming back? Or is he coming back?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, yes. He will be here for the wedding. So will Miss Emmeline."

After a long pause, and with an evident effort:

"I have been thinking," he said, "that perhaps it was unfortunate I came between you and The Author. Perhaps," he added deliberately, "it would have been better had you let your common sense gain the day."

I don't know why, but just at that moment the dear and haunting dream of having been lifted out of deep waters and kissed back to life, cradled in this man's arms, came to me with peculiar poignancy. Of a sudden I laughed aloud.

"Oh, I'm just remembering a dream I had, when I was ill," I told him, in answer to his look of surprise.

"It must have been a very amusing dream," said he, staring at me thoughtfully.

"Oh, very! Quite absurd. But go on. You were by way of advising me to marry The Author, were you not?"

His hands on the arms of the wicker chair clenched. He half rose, thought better of it, and sank back.

"I was saying that it might have been better for you," he said, breathing quickly. "In all probability you would have accepted him, had I not been here to —blunder into the affair."

"He mightn't have asked me, if you hadn't been here to blunder into the affair," said I, composedly. "Let us drop the subject, please. I shall never marry The Author." It gave me a sense of relief and freedom to hear myself say that. "I can't marry The Author."

He went pale. "Sophy—you can't marry me, either," he said.

"Of course not." I wondered at myself for being so calm and collected. "I knew that all along. You care for another woman. You told me so, you know."

"I told you no such thing," he said. "I told you I cared for a woman, but that there was another man. Now I've just been told she has no idea of accepting the

other man. In spite of all he has to offer, she isn't going to marry him." His face was at once ecstatic and tortured. "*Why* won't you marry the other man, Sophy?"

"Because of a dream I dreamed, when I was sick," I said noncommittally.

"Ah! And did you dream that somebody called you—and held you—and wouldn't let you go?"

"I never told you!" I cried.

"No need, Sophy. It was to me you came back." Of a sudden his head drooped. "And now I can't marry you!"

"Why can't you?"

"Because I'm a beggar."

Nicholas Jelnik a beggar couldn't find lodgment in my brain. I could only stare at him incredulously.

"I learned some time ago that things were not altogether right over yonder, but I hadn't the ghost of an idea that my entire estate was involved; that while I'd been 'tramping'—I'll use Judge Gatchell's word—the men in whose hands I placed too much power had taken advantage of it. A very common, every-day story, you see.

"Remains the fact that I'm stripped to the bone. The estate's wiped out. And," he added, with a grave smile, "I haven't even discovered the mythical Hynds jewels. Now you see, Sophy, why I can't marry you."

"I see why you think you can't."

He flushed to the roots of his black hair. Hynds-Jelnik pride rose in arms.

"I should cut rather a sorry figure marrying the owner of Hynds House, in the present circumstances," he said curtly. "You will remember that The Author called me an adventurer! I have told you I have nothing."

"Aren't you forgetting your profession?"

"No. But I neglected that, too, Sophy. The *Wanderlust* had me in its grip."

"What do you propose to do?"

"I shall leave here, put in some months of hard study, and then fight my way upward. My father was the greatest alienist of his generation, and I was trained under his eye. But in the meantime—"

"Yes. In the meantime, what of *me*?" I asked.

He winced as if he had been struck. "You are free," he said, in a whisper.

"I am free to be free, and you're free to set me free. You never asked me to marry you, in the first place," I agreed quietly.

Stupefaction seized him. He put his hands to his head.

"Why, Sophy! Why, Sophy!" he stammered. Of a sudden he straightened his shoulders, and stood erect: "Miss Smith," he said, with grave politeness, "will you do me the honor to marry me?" and he waited.

"It is rather a belated request, Mr. Jelnik. Besides, you haven't told me why you want to marry me," said I, sedately.

"You are well aware that I love you, Sophy. And I think you care for me in return. Why did you turn that coin when it meant 'Go,' and bid me, instead, 'Stay'? Was it because you cared, Sophy?"

"Yes, Mr. Jelnik: it was because I cared. I cared enough to tell a—a lie. And—I shall say yes to your other question, Mr. Jelnik."

But he shook his head. "Ah, no, my dear! You'd be called upon to make too many sacrifices. I couldn't bear that!"

"A man needn't be worried about the sacrifices a woman makes for him when she knows he loves her."

"Not in normal circumstances; not when he can give as much as he takes."

"Hynds House," I said, "is costing me a steep and bitter price, Mr. Jelnik!"

"Do I not also pay?" he asked fiercely.

"Oh, you have your pride!" said I, wearily; "Hynds pride!"

"A poor enough possession, Sophy, but all that remains to me," he said gently. "Is it a light thing for Nicholas Jelnik to say to the woman he loves, 'I cannot marry you: I am a beggar'? Is it such a small sacrifice to give you up, Sophy?"

"It would appear so."

"You crucify me!" he said, in a choking voice. "Good God, don't you understand that I love you?"

"I don't understand anything, except that you are going away from me. And I have waited for you all my life," I said.

"And I for you! and I for you!" he said passionately. "Don't make it too hard for me, Sophy!"

"If you go away from me," I gasped, "I think I shall die. Nicholas—I can't bear it! It was easier for me when I thought you loved somebody else. But now that I know you love *me*" and I paused.

He took a step forward, but stopped. His arms fell to his sides.

"Not as a beggar!" he said. "Not as a beggar! Never that, for Nicholas Jelnik! I love you too much for that, Sophy. I love you not only for yourself, but for my own best self, too, my dearest."

For a moment he stood there, regarding me fixedly. It was a long look, of suffering, of love, of pride, of unyielding resolve. Then he lifted my hand to his lips, bowed, and left me.

I sat staring over the garden. I wondered if, somewhere on the other side of things, Great-Aunt Sophronisba wasn't snickering.

CHAPTER XX

HARBOR

"My faith, but I'm glad you're entirely well again, Sophy!" wrote The Author, in his small, fine, hypercritical script. "You make the world a pleasanter place by being alive in it. People like you should inculcate in themselves the fixed and unalterable habit of being alive. They should firmly refuse to be anything else. I call this to your attention, in the hope that you will see your bounden duty and do it.

"When I thought you were going to quit, I ran away. That was a calamity I could not stand by and witness, without disaster. However, Jelnik stayed!

"Your nurse (I do not like Miss Ransome, though I respect, admire, and fear her. Her emotions are carbolized, her heart is sterilized, her personality has the mathematical perfection of something turned out by a super-machine: like, say, the last word in machine-guns. None of the divine imperfection of your hand-wrought, artist-stuff there! I forgive her for existing, because she is intelligent and useful, two things that, without lying like a Christian and a gentleman, one may not say of many women, and seldom of one woman at the same time), your nurse gave me a highly interesting, impersonal, scientific account of what happened after my flight. Her testimony was all the more valuable in that she was, as she said, only 'psychologically interested.' She reminded me that Empedocles is said to have recalled a young woman from death by the same means, i.e., the insistent repetition of her name; which proved to Miss Ransome that the poor old ancients had 'anticipated, though of course unscientifically, some of the principles of modern psychology.' *Eheu!*

"It proved something else to me, Sophy—that I had too willingly underestimated Mr. Nicholas Jelnik. There is very much more to that young man than I like to admit.

"He would have made such a perfect villain: I could have made a work of art of him, as a villain! And now I can't, because he isn't. This chagrins me. It upsets my notions of the fitness of things. More yet: he loves you, Sophy, more than I do, or ever could.

"Does this astound you? Come and let us reason together: the spirit moves me to speak out in meeting.

"You are the only woman I have ever been willing to marry. That I should wish to marry you astonished me far, far more than it did you. At the same time it delighted me by its very unexpectedness. It gave me a brand-new emotion, and brand-new emotions aren't every-day affairs, let me tell you! You brought something naïve, unusual, fresh, perplexing, into a bored existence. And then you refused to spoil it! That added to the quality of the unusualness. The ninety and nine would have subjected me to the acid test of matrimony, with the later and inevitable alimony. The saving hundredth sees to it that I shall keep my illusions! O rare dear wise Sophy! How shall I repay you?

"For I shall be able to indulge in day-dreams now. I shall not grow old cynically. There *are* unselfish, true-hearted, valiant women. There *are* women who will not marry men for position, name, fame, power, money; no, nor for anything but love. How do I know? Because you don't love me, my dear. But you do love Nicholas Jelnik. You had not come back from the gates of death else, Sophy.

"Marry him. You will bring him the quiet strength and sureness he needs. A temperamental man, a finely organized, highly gifted, sensitive, and intellectual man needs just such affection as yours, as unshakable as the sun, as faithful as the fixed stars. That you should love him almost makes me believe in the direct intervention of divine Providence in his behalf. My own innate and troublesome decency forces me to add that he is worth it. He has altogether *too* much, confound him!

"Do you know that while you lay ill, he came and told me about the finding of Jessamine Hynds, showed me her statement, told me, in short, the whole story? I was consumed with envy, malice, and all uncharitableness; to think that such a thing should or could happen right under my nose, and I all unwitting! And you, too, Sophy, went through such an experience! I'd give a year of my life to have been with you.

"When Jelnik had finished, and I'd caught my breath, I apologized for having been a dam' nuisance. He explained, delicately, soothingly, with exquisite politeness, that literary folks of consequence *have* to be dam' nuisances at times. It's the price they pay.

"And now let me speak to you, my little Sophy, as your loving and loyal

friend: *Hold fast to Jelnik.* I knew his father. The position he occupied wasn't exactly royal, but the elect addressed him as 'thou.' And you have learned somewhat of the Hyndses. In consequence, your Jelnik is a mixture of South-Carolina-Viennese-Hynds-Jelnik pride, beside which Satan's is as mild, meek, and innocuous as a properly raised Anglican curate. Don't meet his pride with pride. Meet it with *you*, Sophy. Most of us have been loved in our time, but how few of us have been permitted really to love! That you have in full measure this heavenliest of all powers, is your hope and his.

"There are times I'm almost sorry you didn't love *me*, Sophy. I should then have passed my days in a state of pleasant bewilderment, trying to figure out how the deuce it happened. Or should I, though? H'm! I might have gotten used to being married to you, and that would have spelled boredom. The thought makes me shudder.

"Johnson and I are coming down for Leetchy's wedding, of course. That pink-and-white piece of Irishry will rule Geddes to perfection. There's the steel under the velvet, the cat's claws under that satin paw of hers—more power to it! I have two prints and a piece of Cloisonné for her that I am sorely tempted to keep for myself. I have more than once bought things to give to friends, and then found myself unable to do so. I shouldn't be able to give these to anybody but one of the ladies of Hynds House.

"Johnson mopes. The youngest Meade girl, she with the dimples, the pink cheeks, the fluffy hair, and the fluffier brains, is the cause. He sighs for everything and everybody. For Mary Magdalen's batter cakes. For the Black family. For the Kissing Cow, and for Beautiful Dog. Hynds House is a fatal place!

"So we are coming back to it, as soon as we may. I kiss your hand, Madame, and beg you to understand that so long as we two live you are never going to be able, for any considerable length of time, to get rid of,

Your affectionate friend,
THE AUTHOR."

I was able to read between the lines, and my heart warmed to The Author. At the same time the letter saddened me, in so far as it referred to Mr. Jelnik.

Refuse to let him go? But I couldn't keep him. I knew now that he had to go, that it was the best thing, the only thing. Doctor Geddes helped me to see that.

The doctor tried, at first, to keep his cousin in Hyndsville. Why shouldn't Nicholas go into partnership with him? Why shouldn't Nicholas share everything the open-hearted, open-handed doctor had?

Mr. Jelnik smiled, thanked him, and put the offer by. And I knew he was right.

It had been a rainy day and was now one of those afternoons that have the rawness of autumn, though summer is still present. It was so chilly that a fire burned in the library fireplace, before which I was sitting. The wind was from the northeast, and the trees and bushes slanted before it. Potty Black and I had the library all to our alone-selves, for Alicia was spending the day with Mary Meade, one of her bridesmaids.

The wedding was less than six weeks off, and preparations were under way. It was to be a home wedding, the first to take place in Hynds House since Richard's day, and somehow that lent the occasion the rose color of romance. It was thus a part of Hynds House history, something Hyndsville couldn't take lightly. Alicia's wedding was a town affair, in which everybody was delightfully interested.

Besides, the bridegroom himself was a Hynds on his mother's side, as Hyndsville ladies remembered, when they sat on our front porch working on wonderful bits of embroidered things for the bride. It was then I learned in fullest detail the whole history of Hyndsville, of the Hyndses, and of Great-Aunt Sophronisba in particular. I fancy that the Witch of Endor's neighbors must have had just such an opinion of her as these Hyndsville folk had of Great-Aunt Sophronisba.

South Carolina people always talk in terms of three generations. When they say something about you, they remember something about your mother or your grandfather at the same time, and they tell that, too. There is a fearsome frankness about the conversation of the born South Carolinian that The Author says is only to be matched in an English country house when the county families are gathered together. Like this, for instance:

"No, my dear, I can't say I'm surprised at Sally's running away and getting married. Let's see: her grandfather was a Dampier, wasn't he? Didn't one of the Dampiers murder somebody, or something like that? It seems to me I have heard dear Mama relate some such circumstance."

"Oh, *no*, Mary! It wasn't *murder*! He shot one of the Abercrombies in a duel,

that's all. He was really a very fine man! They had a dispute about a horse, and Mr. Abercrombie struck Mr. Dampier's little negro groom over the head with his crop. After that, of course, there was nothing to do but challenge him. You must be thinking of Barton Bailey, Eliza DuFour's grandfather on her mother's side. *He* was a complete scoundrel. His poor wife (she was a Garrett; very dull, poor thing, like all the Garretts, but at least the Garretts were honest, which is more than even charity can say for the Baileys) his wife led a martyr's life with him. Or maybe you're thinking of Tiger Bill Pendarvis. A most *awful* person!—almost an out-law!"

Mrs. Scarboro looked up, bit off a thread, and said placidly:

"Oh, awful! He was a cousin of mine on dear Papa's side of the family. Papa and Mama used to say that they never could understand why Cousin Sophronisba Hynds didn't pick out Tiger Bill instead of pouncing upon a perfectly innocent little Englishman."

I sat and listened. One thing was joyously clear and plain to me. They liked and trusted me enough now to talk about their own people before me, which is the high sign of fellowship in South Carolina. But learn, O outsider, that silence is golden, so far as *you* are concerned. Wisely did I hold my peace, and devoutly thank the Lord that times had changed for the better.

For a great deal of that change I had to thank my dear girl, so much more clever and tactful than I. And so I would not cloud her last days with me by letting her see that I was unhappy. Only, I was glad this afternoon to be by myself for a breathing-space. It rests one's face occasionally to take off one's smile. I took off mine, then, and let down the corners of my mouth.

The door leading to the hall was half open. The house was full of blue-gray shadows, and had a drowsy hush upon it, a pleasanter hush than it used to know. One heard the rushing wind outside, and above it Mary Magdalen singing one of her interminable "speretuals."

A slinking shadow stole through the hall, a wary yellow head appeared in the door, and Beautiful Dog sneaked into the room. Beautiful Dog had not known a happy day since the departure of Mr. Johnson. Not all the coddlings of the cook, nor the blandishments of sympathetic housemaids consoled him for the absence of his god. He grew thinner, if that could be possible. His tail hung at half-mast, his ears were a signal of mourning. Queenasheeba said he looked like "sumpin' 'at happened to a dawg."

One hope sustained Beautiful Dog's drooping spirit—the hope that he might suddenly turn a corner, or enter a room, and find the adored Johnson smiling kindly at him. Wherefore he dared the to-be-shunned presence of other white people. He nerved himself to enter tabooed domains. Love sustained him. He knew he had no business there, just as our cats knew it and, whenever they caught him at it, visited swift and dire punishment upon him. Beautiful Dog dared even the cats, those black nightmares of his existence.

He met my glance, paused, and cringed. But as I made no hostile movement, and seemed disposed to be friendly, Beautiful Dog grinned half-heartedly, wagged his rope of a tail dejectedly, and advanced farther. Then he paused again, head on one side, ears forlornly flopping, and made an awkward motion with his fore paws, expressive of doubtful trust and painful inquiry. His god had been wont to choose this particular room by preference. Did I know where he was? When he was coming back?

Beautiful Dog glanced wistfully at the empty chair over by the window. Once or twice his god had allowed him to lie beside that chair while he read, and if Beautiful Dog happened to raise his head, a kind hand happened to fall upon it. He hadn't forgotten. His desire now was to sneak over to the chair and sniff at it. Perhaps by some exquisite miracle his man might suddenly appear in his old place. Can't miracles happen for Beautiful Dogs as well as for other folks, when times and seasons are propitious?

Beautiful Dog took another step toward the chair. And then there paced into the library, and caught him in the rear, his arch enemy—Sir Thomas More Black. The great cat took one look at the nigger dog trespassing upon forbidden ground. You could see Sir Thomas More swell with rage and astonishment, and then lengthen out like an accordion. Without a sound he launched himself upon the intruder. And at the same instant and actuated by the same motive, Potty Black, who had been sweetly and peacefully dozing on my lap, rose up with slitted eyes, bottle-brushed her tail, and hurled herself into the fray.

Attacked front and rear, Beautiful Dog was at hideous disadvantage. He launched himself sidewise; he didn't even have time to howl. He fell over his own splay feet as he ran, butted into chairs and tables, twisted, turned, whirled, dodged, but always presented just the right spot to be clawed. He couldn't dash to the door and escape: the cats were too swift for him. They kept their bewildered victim circling around the middle of the room.

I was sorry for Beautiful Dog, for my sleek, petted, purring pussies had turned into raging black tornadoes edged with a lightning of claws. If the aristocratic Black Family had been raised in Hooligan's Alley itself, on the soft side of the ash-bins, they couldn't have behaved more villainously. Alas! they were *cats*, just as people are people.

I snatched up the brass-headed poker, the readiest thing to my hand. I merely wished to shoo off the Blacks with it. But as I rose from my chair with a *scat*! upon my lips, Beautiful Dog, seeing out of the tail of his eye a chance to escape, dashed headlong into me. He came with such force that I fell backward, and the poker flew out of my hand and came *crack*! upon the sacred tiles of Hynds House library. There was an ominous clatter, for no less than the Father of his Country himself had fallen out of his place. At the same instant Beautiful Dog gained the door, with both cats upon his hind quarters; with one prolonged yell of terror he made for safety and Mary Magdalen.

I picked myself and the tile up. Thank Heaven, it wasn't broken. The blow had loosened the cement that held it in place, and where it had been was a small square hole.

I looked at that hole doubtfully. There oughtn't to be any hole there at all. That was a curious way to fix tiles, such precious tiles as ours. I slipped my hand in and tentatively tested the black wall, and discovered that the other tiles, as might be expected, had been properly put in; that is, against a solid background.

I put my hand farther into the aperture. It was larger than might be expected, and most cunningly contrived—a hollow space some ten inches in width, and possibly a foot deep. There was something in it.

Now I am mortally afraid of rats and mice, and what I had touched had the sleazy feel of frayed silk. It might be a rat's nest! I took a sliver of lightwood from the fire, and with this examined the black interior, before I ventured my fingers again. It wasn't a rat's nest in the corner. It was a package. A package, or rather a sizable buckskin bag carefully tied together with thongs of the same material, and this wrapped in a piece of silk that tore and went to pieces even as I fingered it.

Even then I didn't guess! I thought it was, perhaps, a Revolutionary hoard, maybe such another collection of old coins as we had found in the room without windows.

The silk dropped away like rotting leaves, but the buckskin bag was stout and in perfect condition. So many and so hard were the knots in the thongs that I had to use my penknife to cut them. And having done so, I poured the contents of the bag on the library table.

It was, as I have said, a gray day. But the fires of a century's sunsets flamed and flashed in that library! Ruby, sapphire, diamond, emerald, pearl—how they glowed and glimmered! How they shone and sparkled! For the moment there fell upon me that madness that jewels bring upon women, a sort of wild delight in their hard, bright beauty, an ecstasy, an intoxication. I poured them from one hand to the other, I held the greatest to my cheek. The loveliness of them went to my head. "I did chap them atween my hands, as children chap chaff. They did glow like the Devill his rainbow," Jessamine had said. And remembering her, the delight vanished.

With stunning force the meaning of this discovery came home to me. I had found the unfindable! This, this was where Shooba had hidden them between a night and a morning, Shooba the "skilfullest workman on Hynds place." One fancied him here, in the dead of night, while all Hynds House slept a drugged sleep. It would suit his sardonic humor, his impish malice, to hide them where the Hyndses must pass them daily; and, himself a slave, to hide them behind the pictured semblance of Washington. The grim irony of the thing! And not the cunning of man, but the antics of a cur, a yellow nigger dog, had outwitted the cunning of the old witch doctor! Beautiful Dog had brought to light that which Jessamine had died alone in the dark rather than reveal.

There was one thing more in the buckskin bag, wrapped separately. When I got this separate package open, I found three frayed, black feathers bound together with a strand of black hair, a piece of yellow wax with two slivers of what I think was bone thrust through it crosswise, and a small semblance of a snake, rudely carved out of wood. There was, too, some dust, or powder, that must once have been leaves, or perhaps roots. These unchancy things and the bag that held them I dropped into the fire, breathing a sigh of relief to see its red tooth seize upon them. The wax made a hissing noise, and the dust of leaves, or whatever it was, burned with a bright, fierce flame.

Then with feverish haste I got the Hynds jewels back into the buckskin bag. I hadn't the faintest notion as to their actual value, though I knew it must be considerable—enough to make up to Nicholas Jelnik the losses he had sustained; enough to decide his fate—and mine. Even now he was packing to go; even now

there were "For Sale" signs on the gray cottage.

I ran into our living-room, snatched my sewing-bag from the sewing-stand, and dropped the heavy bag into it. That looked more commonplace.

The clamor from the kitchen, incident upon Beautiful Dog's having taken refuge under Mary Magdalen's skirts, had died down. I knew that Beautiful Dog was licking his wounds after defeat, and the Black cats, sedate and mild-mannered, were licking their paws after victory. I determined that from that afternoon Beautiful Dog should become an honored and important institution in Hynds House. If I had to choose a new family escutcheon, I think I should insist upon having Beautiful Dog rampant upon it!

When I went outside, the garden was a gray-green gloom of flying leaves and twisting tree-branches bending before the stiff northeast gale. It was wild weather—weather that sent the blood tingling through the veins and whipped red into one's cheeks.

I got into Mr. Jelnik's grounds through the hedge behind the spring-house, and ran like a hare through his garden. I had to hammer upon his door before I could make Achmet hear me, so loud and surf-like was the noise of the wind in the trees.

The Jinnee stepped back and salaamed, his hands upon his breast. Then he laid a finger upon his lips, for from up-stairs came the wailing outcry of a violin.

The Jinnee looked thin and old. His garments hung loose upon his shrunken frame. There was trouble in that house, he told me. The master had wished to send Daoud away. Daoud had refused to go. To leave one's lord when calamity came upon him was to shame one's beard. It was the act of the infidel, not the behavior of the faithful, and Daoud had threatened to shave his beard, put on the dress of a pilgrim, and beg his way from Hyndsville to Mecca. He was even now kneeling upon a prayer-mat reciting a four-bow prayer. As for the master, for two days he had not eaten; he merely swallowed a cup of coffee in the morning because Achmet wept. This afternoon he had fled to his violin for relief. Verily, God was afflicting them! "The bad fortune of the good turns his face to heaven, even as the good fortune of the bad bends his head to the earth. It is the will of God: *Islam*!" said The Jinnee, simply.

"I must see Mr. Jelnik, now, this minute! I have news for him," I said hastily.

The Jinnee looked doubtful. Plainly, he didn't want his master disturbed, even by me. "I have never seen him like this before," he told me. "Listen!"

Came the cries of the violin, heart-rending cries of regret and despair, followed by furious protests; then a nobler grief, and love, and longing.

"After a while it will pray for him. Then Satan the stoned, whom may God confound, will depart from him," said Achmet.

"But in the meantime I must see him, immediately."

"He goes to-morrow. That is why he is afflicted to-day," said The Jinnee. "I think, *hanoum*, he would go without seeing you again. It is a grievous thing to say to one's beloved, 'I leave you.' I have said it. I was young then. I am old now, but I have not forgotten."

I unfastened the chain from my neck. A half-coin swung from it as a pendant.

"Place this in his hand. It is a sign. It has power to lay the evil spirit which troubles this house," I told him gravely.

He seized upon it with an eager hand. "In the name of God!" said The Jinnee, and fairly flew out of the room.

A minute later, his violin grasped in one hand, my chain in the other, Nicholas Jelnik appeared. His appearance shocked me. The mask was off; here was stark and naked misery.

"Nicholas!" I said, "Nicholas!"

"You should not have come!" he said roughly. "Why have you come? I did not want you to see me—thus. Is it not enough for me to suffer?" And he made an impatient, imploring gesture. His lips quivered.

"Put aside the violin, Ariel," I said. "But keep the coin."

He stiffened, as if he braced himself for further blows. But he laid aside the violin, and with a supreme effort of will got himself in hand. That early training in self-control worked a miracle now. Here was no longer the wild, white-lipped musician, but a pale, proud young man who faced me with stately politeness.

"I have another gift for you, Nicholas Jelnik." To save my life I couldn't keep my voice from shaking, my eyes from glittering, my cheeks from flaming. "Do

not go, old Jinnee. Stay and see what gift I bring the master."

Then it occurred to me that it would be dangerous should strange or greedy eyes look upon what my sewing-bag hid. The thought frightened me."

"You are sure there is none to see? Achmet, there is no stranger around?"

"We are alone," said the black man, quietly. Both of them seemed astonished and concerned.

Reassured, I drew forth the heavy buckskin bag and placed it in Nicholas Jelnik's hands.

"From Hynds House—and me—and oh, Nicholas, from Beautiful Dog, too!" I said, and laughed and cried.

For the moment he didn't understand. He thought it some loving woman-foolishness of Sophy's, some woman-gift she had made for him. I knew, for he gave me a glance of tenderness. And then he opened the bag, and staggered like a drunken man, and sank into the nearest chair, trembling like a leaf in the wind. The Hynds fortune had come back to the last of Richard's blood.

When the mist cleared from my eyes, I saw old Achmet on the floor, with his hands upraised and tears running down his black cheeks like rain, unashamedly and unaffectedly pouring out praises and thanksgivings to his Creator.

"Hold out your skirts, Sophy!" cried Nicholas Jelnik, and poured the glittering things into my lap, boyishly. He was beautiful again, radiant and young-eyed as the choiring cherubim. There were two exquisite, pear-shaped ear-ring drops among the Hynds jewels, and these he took, threaded upon my chain on either side the broken coin, and hung around my neck. He held a ruby against my lip and turquoises near my eyes, and laughed.

"These for Hynds House, Sophy!" he cried, and laughed again to see my lips tremble. "What? It is not these you want? Choose for yourself, then. I promised you the best of them, you know."

"I want none of them," I said.

"No? Take them, then, Achmet, and put them away," said Mr. Jelnik, in a matter-of-fact voice. "You will guard them for me, for the time being. And tell Daoud I have changed my mind about sending him away. He can change his

about shaving his beard, and save himself the trouble of begging his way to Mecca."

I stood up in silence, and held out my skirt apron-wise, while The Jinnee as silently removed the Hynds jewels. Then he tied the buckskin bag, concealed it in a fold of his robe, and left the room.

"Now, Sophy," said Mr. Jelnik, facing me, "you offered Hynds House to me once, and I refused it because I didn't have the price. I told you at the time that if ever I had the Hynds jewels in my possession, I might be tempted to make you an offer of exchange. I am going to make you an offer now. I should like to live in Hynds House, Sophy. I don't think I could be happy anywhere else. You see, Sophy, I'm going to spend the rest of my life here in America, become an American citizen. Now, what about Hynds House?"

"You may have it," I said.

"At my own price?" he demanded.

"At your own price. Did you think I would haggle with you?"

"No. It's I who intend to haggle with you. I'm going to make a tremendous bargain. There's something that must go with the house. Something that's worth more than all the Hyndses ever had in all their lives. *You*, Sophy. My sweetheart, come!" And he stood there shining-eyed, and held out his arms.

"Once I sent for you. Once I called you. And both times you came to me, Sophy. You came because you are mine. *Come!*" said Nicholas Jelnik. And the golden lights danced in and out of his eyes that were like brown mountain water when the sun is upon it, and his hair was like Absalom's.

> *In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.*

And caught by the surge and power, as it were of the very wave of life itself, I was swept into those outstretched arms.

END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A WOMAN NAMED SMITH

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