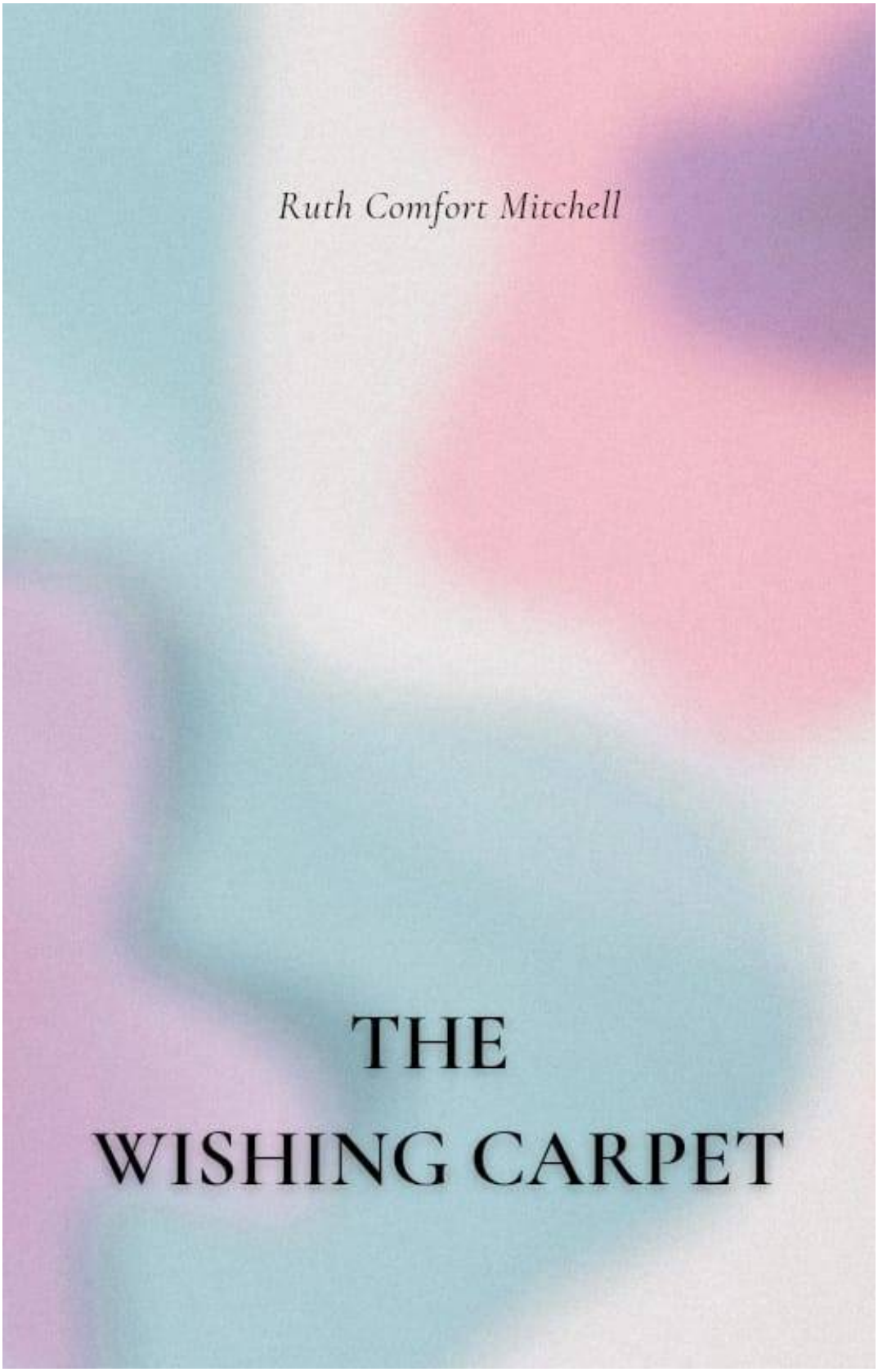
Ruth Comfort Mitchell
THE
WISHING CARPET

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CHAPTER I

Glenwood Darrow, looking only at the eyes, overlooks the chin, and a rarely beautiful Persian rug is overshadowed by golden oak.

ONCE, when Glen Darrow was six years old, she put a hand on her mother's thin knee and halted the reading of a fairy tale.

"Mummie," she whispered, "is that one?"

She was pointing at a small and very beautiful Oriental rug which seemed singularly out of place in the ugly and characterless sitting room. Color, design, and texture were exquisite. A fanciful person, contrasting it with the strident carpet, the atrocious vases and pictures, the glistening golden oak furniture, might have thought it was like a nobleman, briefly taking refuge in the mean hut of a peasant.

"Mummie, dear!" The child was insistent. "Is that a Wishing Carpet?"

Her mother did not answer immediately. Her blue gaze, with its habitual expression of brooding pathos, rested on the rug, and she sighed mistily before she spoke, which was her vaguely irritating custom. She had the effect of pleading with the world to be sorry for her. This seemed, to busy and hard-headed people, a waste of time—she was so patently and amply sorry for herself.

"Yes, darling," she replied at length, gently and tremulously, "it *is* a Wishing Carpet in a way, because, for nine long years I've been looking at it and wishing for things I knew I could never have!"

"Well, maybe," Glen Darrow suggested hopefully, "you didn't stand right on it with your eyes shut tight and your left hand on your heart, like the old witch said?" Then, as Mrs. Darrow shook her head—"Well, when I wish I'll wish the right way!" She patted her mother's knee again, consolingly, this time. "And I won't wish till I have to, and then I'll wish for something I think is going to happen anyway!"

That was her father in her, the woman reflected rather peevishly. That was Glenwood Darrow all over. No striving after higher things, no yearning.... Well, doubtless she would be better off. The fine-fibered, over-sensitive people of the world were never really happy, as no one knew better than herself.... Effie Darrow's soft eyes filled and her soft chin quivered.

The doctor had married her eyes without noticing her chin. She had played the small, sobbing organ in the church he boredly attended while he earned a summer vacation by caring for a godly and epileptic youth. The top of the hymn book had cut her face in two. Glenwood Darrow saw only a white brow under fine, fair hair, a mild gaze,

blue and beautiful, celestially sweet. The chin and the ineffectual mouth with its permanent sag at the corners were not discovered until too late.

Young Glen's eyes were like her mother's in size and coloring, but there was a drastic difference in their expression: they were not in the least wistful or appealing. Features, however, were not going to matter very much with Glen Darrow, because of the hair which framed her face in a veritable flame of shimmering, blazing red, bequeathed by some ancestor who was not even a legend on either side of the house.

People stopped and stared at it: sometimes the child could feel them touching it with a tentative finger, as if to see if it really radiated heat.

"All right. Never mind!" she said now, closing the issue of the Wishing Carpet. "Go on, Mummie!"

The woman read steadily in her pretty and plaintive voice, but she was not aware of the adventures of the prince and the princess and the wicked witch, because her thoughts were making a melancholy pilgrimage, walking backward....

When Dr. Darrow had brought her from her prairie town to Chicago she was startled to find that he had already furnished the flat, office and living quarters, in his own exuberant taste. She winced visibly when her eyes fell upon the magenta and mustard colored roses in the carpet, and lifted to the idealized Brussels sprouts on the wall paper, but she had darted toward the Persian rug with a little cry of pure pleasure.

"Oh, Glenwood! How *lovely*!" Here, at last, was something she could whole-heartedly praise, and she knelt and worshiped it. "I heard a missionary lecture on Oriental rugs, once, and then I got a book and studied, and I know enough to realize that this is really fine!" Her soft little hand was held up to him. "Oh, dearest, I think you were wonderful to choose it for me!"

Her bridegroom was ruefully honest. "Didn't choose it. It's a G. P."

"What's that?"

"'Grateful Patient.' Old Mrs. Ludermann, only rich family on my books. Most of this junk"—he waved a complacent hand—"is wedding presents."

He had many patients who were grateful, it appeared, but only one with taste. There were appalling ornaments and pictures, among them, inevitably, a feverishly tinted copy of "The Dying Child." Darrow had stirred the edge of the rug with the toe of his boot. "Well, Effie, I'm glad something makes a hit with you! Fact is, I sort of figured we'd take it back to Field's and get credit for it. Old Lady Ludermann'd never know the difference, and it's out a' place with the rest of our stuff."

But the bride had cried out in passionate protest. "No, Glenwood, *no*! Please let me keep it! I think—I feel everything else is out of place with this!"

“Suit yourself.” He had yielded, good-temperedly enough, but he was a little hurt under his crust of gruffness. “It stays. Unless”—he grinned—“unless it takes one good look around and starts crawling back to Persia!”

During the early years of her marriage Effie Darrow had held the lovely rug as a symbol, a goal, but without success. Her husband was a good doctor, and a bad business man. He loved his work, and it bothered him very little when people paid him slowly, in dribblets which never seemed to count, or not at all, but the comfortable, shabby, easy-going poverty which ensued crushed his wife completely.

After the birth of their only child—and Darrow had wanted six, and four of them boys—she began definitely to droop.

A palely pretty creature, Glenwood Darrow continued to love her faithfully, though he had stopped being in love with her rather early in the second year. It is probable that he came to regard her more as a patient than a wife,—a patient who never paid.

At any rate, when two of his colleagues met in consultation, decreed that she must be moved to a milder climate, he submitted without complaint or audible regret.

Effie rallied immediately. With every mile of the journey southward a faint pink warmed in her cheeks and lips. It was not merely the thought of a more indulgent thermometer: it was escape into a new life, a new world. Not even the thought of the hideous carpets and the glistening golden oak, following her slowly but inexorably by freight, could crush her: she and her daughter were on the Wishing Carpet, which was bearing them away to enchanted isles.

She had always been the type of Northerner who applauds violently when the band plays “Dixie,” and now she visualized herself in softly ruffled and gauzy frocks, rocking on a white pillared porch while her child disported herself beneath the magnolia trees, and the dusky, adoring servitors sang at their toil. There were other women in the vision, delicate, high-bred creatures who dropped their *r*’s and spoke in a sweet, languorous drawl—who understood her, and made her one of them. The doctor did not appear in the picture very prominently. He would be in his office or away on his calls, but even Glenwood Darrow, she dared to hope, would mellow in that rich and golden atmosphere.

It was her slow, reluctant relinquishment of the fiction, her bitter and rebellious acceptance of the fact, which put the seal of permanence on her invalidism. She was better in body for a year or two, but the will-to-live went out of her, never to return.

Dr. Darrow disliked the South and refused to adjust himself to it. He was a rushing, bustling sort of person who enjoyed movement for its own sake, and he went charging about among the slow-stepping, slow-speaking Southerners and found himself with wide margins of time left over, and grew caustic and choleric. He went out of his way to mention that his father and two of his uncles had shared Sherman’s march to the

sea, and took pains to contrast the speed and efficiency of Chicago with the meandering methods of the lovely, drowsy old Southern city.

It was both natural and just that they should resent his attitude, but it was hard that Effie, who, like Agag, had come unto them delicately, ready to rise at the first strains of "Dixie," ready even to drop her *r*'s as soon as she could get the knack of it, should be so inflexibly ignored.

They were never actively unkind to her: they were simply—and utterly—unaware of her. She felt, to the day of her death, snatching at every chance to blame her heedless husband, that his choice of a house had a great deal to do with her failure. He bought it while they were staying at a hotel, without consulting her.

"Wanted to surprise you!" he beamed, but sensing very soon how thoroughly and disastrously he had done so.

"Oh, Glenwood, *dear*,"—Effie always employed endearments in italics when she found fault—"why didn't you select a nicer neighborhood?"

"S'matter with the neighborhood? Darn' good location, lemme tell you—just halfway between the residence section and town!"

"That's just it!" she wailed, hooding her blue gaze under grieving white lids. "Halfway—always halfway...."

He stared for an instant and then cleared his throat. "Now, look here, Effie, you want to get this front family bee out of your bonnet," he said gruffly. "I'll never get a sniff of the top-layer practice! Why, there's doctors doddering around this berg that tapped a drum in the Lost Cause, and their sons are carrying on their practice, and grandsons on the mark, ready to go! It's a close corporation; no outsider'd ever get a smell! And that suits me," he finished robustly. "Plain man myself, likes to deal with plain people. I'll get all I need with the tradespeople and the mill workers and the mountaineers. That's our kind, Effie! Let small boats keep near the shore!"

The fine old residence section was on softly rolling ridges back of the city and above it: the cotton mills were down on the level. One spoke of The Hill, and the mills, and between the two, inevitably, was a great gulf fixed. Dwellers on The Hill looked down on the rest of the community, literally and figuratively, which was their quite natural and pleasant prerogative, and had never annoyed anybody except the Darrows, while mill hands and villagers looked up to The Hill, again in the double sense and without rancor.

The Darrows' characterless house was on a dull street which ran from the business section to the heights: beneath the one in birth and breeding and background (Effie was keen enough to know that money mattered little) and above the other....

Often, during the first weeks, she took her child by the hand and walked up to the seats of the mighty at her frail and hesitating gait. The heat was modified by a piney and pungent breeze; they did not even seek the shady side of the street. Fine old houses sat well back from their gracious gateways; vague white and faintly tinted figures moved among the trees and shrubbery; soft voices, light laughter, drifted out to her. Sometimes a gorgeous cardinal would sit on a blossoming bough and make joyous, liquid inquiry:

"*What cheer? What cheer? What cheer?*"

The woman was almost overborne by her yearning to go up the shaded walks, to cross the ancient lawns, to mount the shallow steps, to enter into and become a component part of the story-book life, but for all their gates swung wide and vines wrapped confidently about rusted hinges she could sense the barriers.

All hope was abandoned, presently, for herself, but surely the little Glen, transplanted so young, must be allowed to take root, to climb and cling, to bud and blossom in this rich soil! Childish friendships were her liveliest hope, and she talked down the doctor's democracy and sent the child to a private school which had functioned since Civil War days. Nancy Carey, a beautiful, mildly amiable child who had nodded and smiled at Glen, attended Miss Josephine's little seminary, and Effie built feverishly upon her favor. The Careys owned a cotton mill, and their shabby, stately ante-bellum mansion was her favorite of all the dwellings on The Hill.

"Darling," Effie urged her daughter, "you must be *very* nice to that little girl!"

"Why?" She was a downright child, with a measuring glance very like her father's, for all her startling beauty.

"Because—why, because she's such a very *nice* little girl, dearie, and Mama hopes you'll be little chums. You might walk home with her after school, because the exercise is so good for you, and remember what your father says about holding your shoulders back and taking deep breaths. And if Nancy *should* ask you to come in for a little while, why, Mama wouldn't mind!"

Mrs. Darrow's valentine party for her daughter's little schoolmates was a gallant but ghastly effort, seared into the child's memory for all time. She always remembered her mother, hectic red spots on her cheekbones, breathing fast, cutting out fat red hearts and stringing them about the ugly room, making tiny heart-shaped cakes, slackly assisted by the yellow slattern Emma-*leen*. She had taken the place of the dusky servitor (adoring) who sang and toiled simultaneously in the long-dead northern vision. Emma-*leen* sang even less than she toiled, and clearly scorned her timid mistress.

The day was mild and fine. Birds perched on greening branches and butterflies balanced delicately on flowering shrubs: doors and windows were wide and there was

the feel of spring in the house. They were ready early—Glen in a white dotted swiss with a blue sash and a blue bow in her flaming hair.

Nobody came.

Mrs. Darrow had felt it cannier not to send written invitations. The little girls were merely to trip home and say—"Glen Darrow wants me to come to a party this afternoon!"—and the little girls had doubtless carried out their part of the program perfectly. It was the mothers who had missed their cues.

Lying long awake that night beside her placidly puffing spouse, Effie tortured herself with imagined dialogues——

"*Why, honey-lamb, yo' don't know that child!— Well, suppose she does go to Miss Josephine's—I don't know her and I don't know her mother and I don't even know where she lives! No, yo' just tell little what's-her-name yo' thank her just the same, but yo' motha had otha plans fo' yo'.*"

Not even Nancy Carey! She came as far as the front gate under convoy of a stiffly starched young negress, and called up regretfully:

"Oh, Glen! I'm right sorry, but I can't come! I have to go visiting with my Auntie Lou-May!"

At four o'clock one guest was among those present, Janice Jennings, a Northern child sojourning at the Bella Vista with a gay grandmother while her parents were being divorced.

"Grammer said I could come for a while but I can't eat any refreshments," she announced with sincere regret. "My stummick is upset. She sent for your popper and he said I dassent eat any sweet stuff for a week. Lookit!" She produced, as evidence, an unpleasant tongue.

Pert, sharp with the brittle wisdom of a hotel child, she inspected games and food and favors, contrasting them frankly with more opulent affairs in her native Pittsburg, and when it seemed certain that no one else was coming she retrieved her hat and wrap.

"No fun playing games with just us two," she said, candidly, "and as long as I can't eat I'd rather sit on the hotel porch and listen to the ladies talking. They tell about who's trying to get married, and who's getting divorced, like my mother and father, and *about babies coming*, and if I keep awful still they don't tell me to run away and play like a good girl."

On departure, shaking hands primly and assuring them that she'd had a perfectly lovely time, shrill mirth laid hold on her.

"Oh, golly," she giggled, "you know what it makes me think of?

'*Smarty had a party,*

And nobody came,
And Smarty ate all the jelly-cake
And nearly died with the stummick ache!'

Of course, it's really 'belly,' to rhyme with 'jelly,'" she explained engagingly, "but my grammer makes me say 'stummick'."

Directly she was out of sight, Effie Darrow had hysterics, entirely against her better judgment, for she well know that Emma-*leen* would gleefully carry the tale to other kitchens, but she was beyond caring for the moment.

Glenwood Darrow, walking in on the scene, became the target of her revilings.

"If you'd settled in a decent neighborhood! If we had a decent house! If you tried—even *tried*—to get decent people for patients!" The reproaches came forth in little yelps of woe. "If you ever did *anything*—not for *me*—I expect nothing, but for your poor *child*——"

The doctor picked her up roughly but capably, carried her upstairs and put her to bed with a sleeping potion, and took his red-eyed, hot-cheeked daughter for a ten-mile drive into the hills.

That trip, and her father's words to her, stayed always in her memory beside her mother's tragic festivity.

"Now, you listen here to me," he said sternly. "Don't you ever think you're not good enough for those little washed-out blue bloods that wouldn't come to your party! You're too good, d'you hear? Too good! And I want you to let 'em see that you know you are, understand? My God, I don't know what they ever did, these people down here, to feel so dressy about, except get beaten to a pulp! Your mother's got her head full of sentimental slush—well, she's a sick woman, but you're a strong, hearty, sensible young one, and I want you to get this thing straight!" Brutally, competently, he bound up the bleeding wounds of her little pride, cauterizing them first with his own bitter, bracing philosophy of life.

She was able to face her small, giggling world next day with dry eyes and an upheld chin, even—when the hotel child repeated her ditty of the day before—with an outthrust tongue.

The thing, therefore, trivial in itself, had definite consequences. Young Glen Darrow stopped being her mother's dear little girl and became her father's boyish daughter. She no longer sought to be very nice to nice little girls in order that they might be nice to her; she strove, instead, and with marked success, to show all little girls that she did not like or heed or want them.

The vivid hair, flaming about her small truculent face, was a red flag of defiance to all other children.

CHAPTER II

Mrs. Darrow seeks further for gentility, and her daughter has her hair pulled and doesn't mind it.

EFFIE DARROW died when Glen was twelve years old, quite suddenly and excitingly after long and uneventful years of invalidism.

She became, so patently that even the child could sense, if she could not understand it, a person of importance once more in the eyes of her husband. For seven tense and high-keyed days and nights she interested him intensely, though he had never expected her to interest him again. If he could not summon a handsome grief at will, at least he could and did produce an earnest solicitude which satisfied her amply as long as she was conscious.

His eyes blurred for an instant when he heard the dismal dropping of clay upon the coffin, but they brightened again at the thought that his child was now his indeed.

Driving back from the cemetery in a soft, warm rain, he fired his first gun. "Glen, how'd you like to leave Miss Josephine's and go to public school?"

"I don't care," the girl answered, heavy-eyed.

"All right, then—tell her you're quitting. Suits me fine. Never did like that namby-pamby, cambric tea outfit up there!" He scowled savagely. "Go where you're good as any and better than most—and they know it,—that's my idea!"

"I don't care," said the child again, her voice sodden with grief.

She started in at public school the following Monday morning, but she did not react to it with especial pleasure, so far as her disappointed father could see. She grew normally cheerful again, however. It was a fact that once her sound young nerves had recovered from the shock of death and burial, life in the ugly house went on more briskly and comfortably without Effie's pathetic presence. Yellow Emma-*leen* stayed on, having an even freer hand, carrying a brazen basket home every night, and the doctor and his daughter were well fed, if slackly swept and dusted.

Glen spent all her free time with her father, driving him capably over the deeply rutted country roads, waiting for him in the mud-splashed buggy while he made his calls, her head bent over her lessons. He liked having her with him, but he fretted because she made no young intimacies.

Her one real friend was a curious choice—a fragile spinster who taught English and History, Miss Ada Tenafee, impoverished connection of the ancient and honorable Tenafee clan, in whose thinly fleshed veins the blue blood ran fiercely. The singularly vivid child made an instant appeal to "Miz-*za*da," as her hectoring pupils called her, while Glen felt for her something of the chivalrous pity she had given her mother. Her

devotion deepened with perspective: Effie's foolish, futile ways grew dim and dimmer in her memory.

It was the opposite with her father. "Whyn't you bring young ones home to supper?" he would demand. "Whyn't you go play with 'em?" He was secretly dashed. Was his system failing as utterly as his wife's had done? Then it was her fault—because she had spoiled the child in her formative years. He criticized and resented Effie more in her grave than ever when she was moving about his house at her hesitating gait, soft eyes and soft chin tremulous.

Once, tripping over the Persian rug, his temper flared. "Oh, damn that thing anyway! Always did detest it! Get rid of it! Give it to the darky!"

Glen, looking up from her Ancient History, stared at him. She could not know that his sore heart harked back to a honeymoon day, with a blue-eyed bride kneeling and worshiping, setting up her delicate standards to belittle his, but she did remember the incident of the fairy tale.

"*For nine long years I've been looking at it and wishing for things I knew I could never have!*"

The girl left her chair, walked to the rug and smoothed it into place again, looking gravely down at its old rose and mauve, its fawns and deep blues. "No, I won't ever give it away," she said, very quietly. "*She* liked it, and I like it."

Then the doctor stamped out of the room, swearing, banging the door behind him, ashamed of himself, and furious for being ashamed, and his child looked after him consideringly.

His practice narrowed down to the mill hands and the mountaineers. It was the work which interested him most, and he put heart into it as well as head. They needed him; they were grateful, after their fashion, and though he raged at them for failing to follow his instructions for sanitation and hygiene, he continued to tend them faithfully. The mill workers were a sallow and bloodless lot, in the main, spiritless and indifferent, but the mountaineers gave him the keenest possible pleasure.

"Best stock in the country," he stated often to Glen. "Just give 'em roads and schooling, and watch 'em come on!"

He took a shameless delight in their blood feuds; it was exactly his own idea of settling disputes, for he grew more testy and truculent with the years. Evenings, when he was not called out, Glen read aloud to him from radical books and certain weeklies of daring and rather destructive opinions, and he got a satisfactory reaction for his vicarious rebellions. Actually, his radicalism was less than skin deep; he was, at heart, rather well content with his government's behavior, and swarthy soap-box orators (there had been an influx of South European labor to the mills) roused him to heated

combat, though the speakers might be voicing, more violently, the very same views as the weeklies.

But to the girl, her bright head bent over the pages, the burning words she read to him became the law and the gospel. The lonesomeness of a snubbed childhood and a proudly detached girlhood fed by these doctrines, grew into a curious creed which was one part Effie Darrow's blighted dreams and two parts Glenwood Darrow's determined scorn for things unattainable.

To the neighbors and the townspeople she was an accustomed sight—the doctor's daughter, that red-headed Darrow girl who carried a chip on her shoulder and flocked alone, but strangers always stared at her as they had done since her babyhood.

At fourteen she was a startling figure, tall, thin with a healthy and proper young thinness, square-chinned, steady-eyed. Her skin was remarkable. It had set out to be the delicate, very thin sort which goes, ordinarily, with red hair—the blue-whiteness of thriftily skimmed milk, prone to burn and peel and freckle unpleasantly, but her early removal to the warmer climate had darkened and thickened it. It was now a sort of golden olive which deeped at certain times and in certain lights to a positive amber. There was no further color in her cheeks and her mouth was red, straight, and unsmiling, but it was her hair which caught and held the eye.

Once, on a Saturday, she drove her father higher into the hills than they had ever gone before to see a very old woman who had sent for him. She was a witch-like crone, clay colored, shriveled and twisted, and her hot little eyes burned still with a horde of mountain loves and hates.

"Hit's not that I were ailing," she explained to the doctor. "I'm right peart, and aiming to live two, three year yet, but I have kindly heard of you from all my tribe and kinnery, and I was wishful to name hit to you consarning my boy Luke."

Darrow sat down beside her, companionably. "Well, what about your son?"

"Hit's not my son," she cackled mirthfully, "nor neither yet, my son's son! Hit's my son's *son's* son! His maw died a-borning him, and I have kindly raised him up myself. But now hit purely stands to reason I must leave him, hit's ontelling when, and I do shorely hone to have him fotched on, for he is one young-un with a headpiece!"

Good roads and schooling would come too late for Ailsa Manders, but she had glimpsed the vision for lack of which her people were perishing. The doctor knew the Manders; a hard and reckless lot; killers. The old woman had the look of a ruthless tribal priestess. She caught sight of Glen and beckoned to her to come nearer.

"Howdy, Sis? Red h'ar is my delight!" She ran her gnarled fingers through it, making little mouthing sounds of pleasure. "Hit purely warms a bordy! Air you wedded yet?"

"Lord, no," the doctor exploded. "She's a youngster in school—will be, for years!"

The old creature wagged a disapproving head. “When I were her size I had two—one on the floor and one at suck! I had fo’teen, which is a right fam’ly, but a pusson is obliged to start early, and wimmin now days——”

“But how about this boy, Luke?” he brought her back to her main theme.

The lad had learned to read and write and figure—he was smart as a steel trap at figures—at the evening school down on the Branch, but his ancient kinswoman wanted real learning for him, a chance to work for his board in a town family, advanced schooling.

“But, sir, I’m pine-blank skeered he won’t go! Wild as a hawk, he is! Hit’s even ontelling if he’ll see you!” She lifted a gourd horn and blew a surprisingly lusty blast.

After a perceptible pause, long enough to indicate indifference, brief enough to preclude all possibility of fear, a tall youth lounged into the room. There were no windows in the tiny shack, but between the two doors, front and back, was a shaft of golden sunlight, a concentrated radiance in which the boy stood. He was gypsy-dark, richly tinted, bold-fearless, and free, and the modeling of his arms and legs, his lean young torso, was magnificent.

“Well, my lad,” the physician’s eye roved delightedly over the perfection of the splendid young animal, “so you want to come to town and get an education?”

“No!” snarled Luke Manders, shooting a malevolent glance at his great-grandmother.

“Why, I thought——”

“I aim to stay here, where my paw stayed, and live the way he lived! Hit’s *my* way!” His brown grip tightened on the barrel of the rifle he was carrying.

“But, honey-lamb-chile,” the old woman quavered, “hit’ll pine-blank break my heart to have you stay here and do so fashion!” Her gaze rested on the weapon. “Live and die in battle and bloodshed! You air the smartest of ary Manders heard tell of, and if you was to be fotched on—” She was trembling with eagerness.

Dr. Darrow patted her arm. “Now, don’t you worry, Granny Manders, he’ll come, all right! He’s just a little shy and timid, but——”

The boy wheeled to face him. Who was afraid?—Afraid of the chicken-livered mill hands? He was Luke Manders and his father’d been Luke Manders before him, and his Grandpappy Luke Manders before *that*! Ask anybody in these mountains if ever a Manders was scared of anything or anybody that walked the earth!

A furious outpouring, vigorous, incoherent, picturesque and profane. Boyish bombast, but something more than that: a seething hatred incompatible with fresh youth.

Glen Darrow, looking and listening with breathless interest, saw with amazement that her father was keeping his temper—the temper which boiled up and over so promptly for less cause than this.

"Well, by George, boy," he stated with amusement and approval, "I believe your grandma's right about you! I believe you'll go pretty far, once you get something under your skull beside fancy cuss words, and learn to do something smarter than aim a pop gun behind berry bushes!"

The pacific speech further enraged the young savage. "I don't want to know anything but what my pap knew!" he shouted. "I don't aim to do anything but what my pap did!"

"All right, son, all right! All *right*!" The choleric doctor was entirely good-humored, immensely entertained. "You just run and play Injun till you're fed up on it, and then you come to me!"

Luke Manders flung himself out of the cabin, cursing and snarling, and the old crone began to weep the slow and difficult tears of age, bright drops trickling grudgingly from her hot little eyes.

"Don't you fret yourself, Granny Manders!" Dr. Darrow took her leathery old claws in a warm and reassuring grip. "That's a great boy, and he'll come out all right—you mark my words!"

The great-gandmother hung her head. "I am purely shamed of my kin, for unmannerly orneryness! Shamed to my marrow bones."

"Kid stuff, that's all! Never you mind," he insisted cordially. "Just crazy, hot-headed kid stuff! Showing off! I glory in his spunk!"

"I am beholden to you, sir," the old woman said brokenly. "Hit is shorely mighty kind and mannerly. Good-by, Sis, and you coax your pappy to fotch you again! Red h'ar is purely my delight!" She reverted to her mortification. "That ary kin of mine should act so pizen mean——"

"Now, now, don't you bother your head about that! Come along, Glen!" Chuckling, he waved his daughter toward the door. "I glory in his spunk! I do, for a fact, glory in his spunk!"

They went out of the frowsy little cabin, into the frowsy dooryard, but before they had traversed the brief distance to their waiting vehicle the young savage had plunged out of a thicket and come after them.

Swooping down upon Glen, he caught up a handful of her glowing mane, halting her sharply and painfully.

"Hi, Sis," he drawled, "run duck your head in the Branch! Didn't you know your h'ar was a-fire?"

CHAPTER III

Miss Ada Tenafee is faithful to ancestor worship, while the Darrows weave a golden legend about a golden lad.

THE continuing marvel was that even then the doctor was not angry. Glen jerked herself free with a force which brought tears to her eyes, and laid a hand on her father's arm, fearful of the wrath about to descend upon the wild young mountaineer.

"Dad—it's all right—I don't mind——"

But Glenwood Darrow was still chuckling, seeming to regard this heavy yokel pleasantry as high comedy.

"By George, that's a great kid!" he ejaculated, clambering into his sagging buggy. "The old witch was right—wild as a hawk, but what a magnificent young brute he is!"

He saw that his daughter's hands, gathering up the reins, were not quite steady, and that there was rare color in her golden-olive cheeks. "Lord, Glen," he gave her knee a reassuring pat, "you don't want to mind that! Not a bit of harm! He just——"

"I don't mind," said the girl, stressing the pronoun, marveling at him still.

"Best blood in the country, as I've told you before," he went on. "Good, solid, Scotch and English stock. Good, clean blood—hot blood, I'll admit, but it's an honest red, not a washed-blue like your mother's idols on The Hill!" He always snapped when he spoke of his dead wife. "Golly, if you could set that boy on the right road, you'd feel you'd done something, by George! There's something to that lad, lemme tell you, besides a necktie and a shine! Why, he could take one of those young whipper-snappers and wring his neck like a chicken's, with one hand tied behind him!"

"Yes!" Glen kindled to the picture.

Her father screwed himself round in the seat to look at her. "Yes, and I'd rather see you married to one of his sort, when the time comes, than one of those idle-born, overfed, underworked blue bloods!" he exploded.

His daughter nodded in calm agreement, quite without self-consciousness. "Yes," she said again.

Darrow stared at her. His slow-footed, plodding imagination had suddenly sprouted wings on its heels. There had been something in the spectacle of those two gorgeous young creatures—the dark and splendid boy, his copper-maned, glowing girl—that instant when his brown fingers were twisted in her blazing hair, her head flung back, the fine fearlessness of her! Two beautiful bold young things! Why wasn't it a

possibility, by George, if he took the lad under his wing? When Glen was grown, of course—ten years from now—and the hill savage tamed—but not too much!

He was silent, dramatizing the situation to himself, and the girl did not speak. How much was she impressed? He wondered.

"And the old woman was great, too," said the doctor, out of a long meditation. "Like an old tribal priestess! They tell me, for a fact, she's a hundred and three! Can't write her name, never seen a town or a railroad train, but she wants her 'son's *son's* son fotched on!' Well, we'll look out for him, won't we?"

"I guess he can look out for himself," said Glen, soberly. "I expect he'd kill any one who looked crosswise at him."

"Oh, he'll key down when he gets away from that feud stuff! It's out of date, now, even in the mountains. The Manders family is the last to carry on, I understand. He's got a head on him, that boy; he'll learn—learn fast!"

She had never seen him so alertly interested. It became an obsession with him in the weeks which followed; they took toilsome trips far out of their way to find Luke Manders, and they made little progress in confidence or friendship, but this merely added a fillip to their determination. It became a sort of golden legend with them, gilding their dull days. "Well, Glen, I saw him!"

"Oh, *did* you, Dad?" (One of the rare times when she had not been with him.) "What did he say?"

"I don't use such language in the presence of ladies," her father grinned enjoyingly. "Oh, yes—he yelled back at me—'Where's the red-head?' His poor old granny's pretty discouraged, but I tell her she needn't be. Wild things are slow to tame."

Glen told Miss Ada Tenafee about him, but the delicate teacher who kindled pinkly to romance and adventure on the printed page shook her head disparagingly. "I'm sure it's very kind of your father, but I believe he'll have his trouble for his pains, dear. I have heard my own dear father say and my Cousin Amos Tenafee as well, that the mountaineers were a lawless lot." Miss Ada had two oracles, her father, who had been the mildly black sheep of a fine old family, and Amos Tenafee, the silver-headed, gallant old chief of the Tenafee clan. Hector Tenafee had married beneath the Tenafees, perhaps, but decidedly above himself—a pretty, amiable, capable girl whose father ran the livery stable which furnished him with mounts, and who had died when his daughter was a little child. When Glen Darrow was old enough to weigh and balance and catch shadings of feeling she realized that Miss Ada was entirely resigned to her mother's early demise; it was, she clearly considered, the act of a wise Providence ... the best possible thing for an impossible connection to do was to quietly slip away.... It was interesting to see how wholly Tenafee, how not at all Simpson, Miss Ada considered herself. She said, "My father," or "my own dear father," if other

sires or personages were under discussion, with a lifted chin, an intake of breath, a gleam in her pale eye, but she said, when absolutely necessary, “My little mother,” or “My poor little mother who left me when I was a tiny child.” Once she described her—“My little mother, who was a sweetly pretty young creature, *innately* refined.” Pride of blood burned brightly in the faded spinster; she was the flower of chivalry, withered and pale, a flower pressed carefully in a precious old book. It was a great pity that she was obliged to teach in the public schools at forty-four, after her father’s death which came as a climax to a lingering, querulous illness, but Miss Josephine’s select school was full and running over with high-born and reduced maiden ladies whose fathers had *not* married beneath them, so she became “Miz-*za*da” to the proletariat, living in a small housekeeping room which was situated as far as possible from the stable now conducted by her Simpson uncles.

On holidays, New Year’s Day in particular, Miss Ada put on her gray silk and the jet jewelry and the lace which had been her father’s mother’s, and drove in a hired hack (not a Simpson vehicle, however) in the earlier days and presently in an infirm motor car, to the house of her second cousin, Mr. Amos Tenafee, there for a period of not less than two hours or more than three to disport herself among her kinfolk. She was warmly and affectionately received by her Cousin Amos and his wife (dear Cousin Minnie, who had been one of the Charleston Harringtons) and the rest of the family connection, and presented to strangers with a great deal of impressiveness.

“You know our cousin, I think?” the tribal head would say, a courtly hand at the back of her waist, bringing her gently forward. “Our Cousin Ada?—Hector’s girl? Is it possible? I am amazed, sir! Ada, my dear, may I present Mr. LeRoy Harrison from Atlanta? His queenly mother, you will recall, did us the honor to receive with us two years ago to-day. A great loss, sir, a great loss ... one which we shared with you, my dear wife and I.” Then, as Miz-*za*da moved delicately away, she would hear always the gentle boom of his voice behind her—“A fine woman, sir, a fine, high-spirited woman ... all Tenafee.”

The excellent eggnog of which she partook with relish made her glow within and without; the sharp modeling of her pinched little face would soften with color; old Amos Tenafee, blinking at her, would step resolutely toward his duty, sweeping her under the mistletoe and kissing her generously. “An old man’s privilege, gentlemen!” he would assert defiantly to the young blades grouped about, although there were never any contenders—“An old man’s privilege!”

Just as the little cakes and sandwiches with the potation filled her with such a sense of luxurious repletion that she got herself no supper on the gas shelf and wakened faint and weak at five in the morning, so did the meeting and mingling, the high converse with her exalted clan nourish her spirit; it would be weeks before the crudities of her immediate environment brought a sense of hollowness again.

Her eyes were always faintly red rimmed, but there was, notwithstanding, a clear and rain-washed looked about her—the chastened brightness of one who has risen betimes and got her weeping out of the way early. There was subtle comedy about her, perhaps, for the discerning, but there was nothing giddy, nothing grotesque, and the young Glen found herself growing steadily fonder of her. She asked her to supper once, pursuant to her father's wish that she should make friends, but the affair was hardly a success.

"Whyn't she play round with young ones of her own age?" Dr. Darrow asked himself wrathfully. "Why in time does she want to train with that old hen?" He was crusty, grudgingly hospitable, and Miz-*za*da, who had her own delicacies about going to widowers' houses, never went again.

He piled her plate high with food and criticized her slender appetite rudely. She had always been, she stated, a small eater.

"You look it!" he rejoined briefly. "Live alone—cook for yourself? Thought so! Egg'n-cuppa-tea—malnutrition! I know your kind like a book."

His attitude toward her put her into the same class with Effie; Glen began at once to protect her. It was rather a blow to have Miss Ada refuse to see the romance and drama in young Luke Manders, but she *would*, the girl privately thought, as soon as she saw him. It would be easy, then, to persuade her to teach him.

But the splendid young savage, it appeared, was not going to need a teacher for the excellent reason that he would not be there. He refused, persistently and profanely, to leave his gun, his trails, his lawless habitat, and when Dr. Darrow came glumly home to supper one night and reported hearing that Granny Manders was dead, Glen shared with him the conviction of failure. The great-grandmother had been his only urge toward civilization: now that she had folded her leathery little old claws for the last time, he could relapse, unhindered, into the wild ways of his forbears.

Glen stared at her lessons that evening without turning pages. She had small concern with their pallid problems—with how many miles A could walk in an hour, and B in three hours, if C could walk two and one-half miles. Lady Jane Grey's delicate head dropped from the block without especial emphasis. Her whole preoccupation was with young Luke Manders.

So their golden legend was over! The old crone's "son's *son's* son" would never be "fotched on" now. All that splendid strength and the fine young possibilities would narrow down to a shot from ambush, himself or his hereditary foe. If he held the family luck, he would bring down the ancient enemy of his house, skulking and hiding thereafter from a languid law; if it went against him, then he would topple forward one sunny day, one silver night, coincidentally with a harmless little popping sound,

and lie face downward somewhere on the brown earth, high in his hills, a dark stain widening beneath him.

They stopped talking about him. "*That's* finished," said the doctor gruffly, but Glen could see that disappointment gnawed deep.

Miss Ada was frankly relieved.

"I can understand your father's kind and philanthropic interest in the lad, dear, but, believe me, it would have been a fruitless effort. He would have had his trouble for his pains. I have heard my own dear father say, under similar circumstances, employing a rather common but very forceful expression, that you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear!"

But seven days after Granny Mander's death, Dr. Darrow's doorbell rang at midnight. Stumbling sleepily into slippers and robe he went downstairs, swearing heartily, for it was wild weather, wind and rain, and he'd had less than an hour's rest after his last drenching excursion.

Glen, following to the head of the stairs, with dutiful daughterly concern for his putting on dry things, saw him draw the bolt, making truculent inquiry as to who was there.

Then the fury of the gale wrenched the door from his grasp and flung it wide with a crashing bang, and—as if precipitated by the mad energy of the storm—Luke Manders pitched over the threshold and stretched his length on the shabby linoleum of the entrance hall.

CHAPTER IV

Granny Mander's curse is potent: the hawk comes down to feed in the barnyard.

"BY gad, Glen," the doctor shouted, "it's our boy! And he's hurt!" He dropped to his knees and gently turned Luke Manders over so that he rested upon his back. "Gimme some light!"

Glen, who had been forcing the door shut in the face of the storm, ran to pull the light from the tiny bead which served at night to its full force. "Oh, Dad," she wailed, looking down at the inert figure, sensing that her dismal fiction was visualized in fact before her, "he's dead!"

"Dead, nothing!" her father snapped. "Go get my bag!" He was beginning to unfasten the sodden rain and blood-soaked clothing. "But he's hurt, all right; hurt bad. 'S'matter with you? Don't stand there gawping at me! *Get my bag!*" He scowled up at her horror-stricken face and swore under his breath as she stumbled away. This was the way the soft-eyed, soft-chinned Effie would have acted: was the girl, for all his toughening processes, more her mother's daughter than his?

She redeemed herself in the raw hour which followed. Her father saw, presently, that there had been nothing craven in her shrinking. It had been pure grief for the end of their golden legend, their golden lad.

"Ought to get him on the table," the doctor fretted, "but—" he regarded the gaunt length of the young mountaineer.

"I can help you carry him, Dad!" the girl interrupted eagerly. "You take the hurt part of him and I'll carry his feet! Wait—I'll fix the table!" She flew to spread a folded blanket and a sheet over the glistening golden oak.

The removal was accomplished with comparative ease, the boy coming only to partial consciousness and relapsing instantly into merciful stupor. "He'll wake up, fast enough, when I get busy after that bullet," said the man grimly. "You'll have to hold him steady, Glen, if you can."

"I can," she answered palely. She worked quietly and capably, swiftly and intelligently obedient to a curt word or even a gesture. It was a strange, a grotesque scene, and the memory of it was to stay with her as long as she lived—their splendid, wild young savage, bold and fearless and free against his background of rocky hills and rushing streams and dark forests, free no longer, and no longer wild and splendid, lying limp on the dining table in the hideous room Effie Darrow had hated, now slackly swept and dusted by the yellow slattern Emma-*leen*.

The child, working wordlessly with her father, bringing hot water and soft old linen, setting her teeth when he probed into the raw flesh, putting all her young muscle into holding the twisting shoulders down, tried vainly to make a reality of it all. The stark reversal was what made it so crassly unbelievable. One day he had been leaping away into his mountain fastnesses like a young stag, scorning them, and another day he had come crawling down from his heights to their level, scorning them still, no doubt, but begging their bounty. It hurt her conception of him, her pride in him.

The doctor, panting, and glistening with sweat, and sharply impatient with her, suddenly barked: "Well, how clean'd *you* be, without a bathtub or hot water, huh?" He had followed her gaze to the griminess of hands and feet. "He's cold water clean, brook clean, at that. How much better'd *you* be? Huh? Answer me that?" It was amazing how he championed the wild lad from the first hour of their knowledge of him.

"I was thinking *that*," said Glen flushing. "He's tried to be clean, and his clothes——"

"You go get some sheets and blankets and make up a bed here on the couch," her father snapped. "I'll get his clothes off and wash him. You throw a nightshirt of mine downstairs." He had sensed, dimly, that too much intimacy with the inelegancies of the young mountaineer's toilet would not enhance the golden legend, and she was not called in again until the patient was made ready for his bed.

The girl made up the couch swiftly and capably and helped to carry him to it. "Bring a hot-water bag, and then heat up some soup," the doctor directed. "He'll come to for keeps any minute now, and I miss my guess if he's eaten to-day."

When Glen came back with her bowl of steaming broth Luke Manders was, quite as her father had predicted, wholly conscious. He dragged himself up on the elbow on the uninjured side and fell upon the food with wolfish hunger.

"Uh-huh," Dr. Darrow wagged his head. "When'd you eat last, boy?"

"Yes'dy mawning," he said thickly, without lifting his head.

The man handed the emptied bowl back to his daughter, and chuckled at the hungry pleading in the boy's eyes. "That'll hold you for a while, son. Can't let you founder yourself. Now, then, how'd you pick up that lead, and what brought you here?"

Glen, on her way to the kitchen, halted silently in the doorway to look and listen.

The gaunt young face darkened and his words came hoarsely and jerkily. "Reckon hit were Olivers." (The Olivers were hereditary foes of his house, the other side of the feud four generations long.) "And yet—" his eyes widened—"hit's ontelling *how*.... Farley Oliver, he's abed with a misery, and Jake's down to the county seat, and Link has got his right arm broke, and Eddie, which is the least one, is purely too small...." He drew a quick breath and spent a moment in brooding silence. "My gran'mammy,

she named hit to me when she were a-dying ... if I crossed her wish ... if I didn't come down hyar to yo'all, she'd ha'nt me, day and night, night and day, twel I did!"

"Well?" the doctor prodded him.

To Glen, flattening herself against the kitchen door, hardly breathing in the tenseness of her interest, it seemed as if a chill and eerie wind stole into the room which had no kinship with the gale outside.

The youth's pallor deepened. "I know in reason hit were some Oliver," he insisted stubbornly, more to himself than to his interrogator. "Hit were purely erbleeged to be! But my gran'mammy were a right quare woman...." His lean young frame began to shake violently, so that the old couch vibrated with it.

"All right," said the doctor briskly. "Lie still, now, and keep covered up warm! Got your feet on that hot-water bag? Well, your Grandma was a wise old woman! Maybe you didn't mind her as well as you might, but I guess you will now!"

"Reckon so, suh," he answered unsteadily, with the first note of respect he had ever shown.

"You get to sleep now. Here—swallow this!" The doctor eased the dark head back on the pillow and tucked the blankets about him, stirred up the fire, and opened a window to admit a breath of snarling storm. "I'll leave my door open; you just shout if you need anything or if you get to feeling bad. I'll be down, two—three times before morning, anyway." He snapped off the light and herded Glen out of the kitchen.

"Glen, you get to bed fast as you make it! Nice time of night for you—" he fumed as he always did, but halfway upstairs he gave her a commendatory pat. "Good girl. Nerve. Kept your mouth shut and minded me. 'Night."

Help was summoned in the morning to move the young mountaineer to an upper chamber where he spent three days in feverish pain, and when he was able to sit up in a high-backed rocker he made his position plain. The old woman had carried her point in death as she had not done in life. He had come down, and he would stay down, and permit himself to be "fotched on," to the fulfilling of the old crone's dream for him.

"But I am not aiming to be beholden," he stated with his scant civility. "If yo'all will get me work in the mill and a place to live, and tote me, just once, to the night school, I will make out to do fo' myself."

"All right, son." Dr. Darrow was carefully casual about it. "Guess I can fix you up. Tollivers—know 'em?—come from up your way—they'll feed and sleep you for next to nothing, and there'll be no trouble about getting into the mill. But about school—I believe the best thing'd be for Glen, here," he nodded toward his daughter, waiting silently for the patient's tray, "to find out how much you know, and maybe coach you a little. It'll save you time."

Young Manders turned his hawklike gaze upon her. He looked at her rather often, but always with an impersonal scrutiny.

"Is she fotched on?" Patent disapproval in look and tone. "I was not aiming to get me wimmin larning."

His diction was curious, richly colored with accent and interlarded with crudities, and yet giving an effect of dignity. Glen thought the fact that he never slighted a final *g* had something to do with it.

Dr. Darrow grinned. "You'll find it's all of a piece, down here, Luke." But he ceased to urge his daughter as a tutor and undertook the examination himself, fitting it in between calls.

The lad had learned to read and write, in limited fashion, at the moonlight school when he was several years younger, before he had dedicated himself to a career of violence, and had retained a good deal, but it was his figuring which amazed the physician.

"By *George*!" He sat back, beaming. "Quick as greased lightning! Got me beat, boy! Have, for a fact!"

It was indeed a matter for marveling. Luke Manders knew little of means or methods or rules, but he arrived at correct conclusions with a speed and accuracy which stopped barely short of magic.

"You keep on like this," the man blinked and chuckled, "and I'll have you keeping my books for me, before you can say 'Jack Robinson!'" He sobered. "Now listen here, Luke. What you want is business college. Just get so you're a little smoother on the reading and writing, and then we'll start you in right off the bat, figuring and——"

"I would be beholden to you," the boy interrupted with a show of eagerness. "I do not crave story-tale and song-ballad larning, suh. I crave *numbers*!"

"And that," said Dr. Darrow to his daughter, following her downstairs, "is just what they do 'crave' generally, those mountaineers—stories and songs. (People claim, you know, that the things they sing and the yarns they spin have come straight down from the real old stuff in Scotland and England—read all about it in a magazine, two—three months ago!) But how he gets this bent for figures beats me! Goes to it like a duck to water, and he's a wiz at it. By gad, he's a wiz! He is, for a fact!"

Miss Ada Tenafee, requested to examine him and give a professional opinion as to the point at which he should start in school, came reluctantly, and only after considerable pleading on Glen's part. Her expression on entering the Darrow's unpleasant sitting room and encountering the young mountaineer was that of a well-bred lady detecting an unclean odor and genteelly endeavoring to ignore it. She was vague and non-committal, and said something under her breath about the probable briefness of his

stay in the lowlands, and Glen, watching her, knew that she was mentally recalling "her own dear father's rather common but very apt simile of the silk purse and the sow's ear."

Luke Manders, for his part, regarded her with frank scorn. It was clearly displeasing to him to find the font of learning guarded by this faded vestal. He answered grudgingly and did himself small credit until the doctor took charge of the quizzing and began to exhibit his prowess with numbers. Then, like a dancer compelled by the lure of rhythm, he performed.

"Well, now, Miss Tenafee," the doctor demanded, "what do you think about that? Pretty keen, huh? With no more chance— Keen, huh?"

"Miz-*za*da" drew in her breath and a small quantity of dull color seeped into her sallow cheeks. "He is indeed—very—very—" she paused, visibly sorting her adjectives, choosing, rejecting.

"Well? *Well?*" the man prodded, impatiently.

The faded gentlewoman had found her word. "He is very *sharp*," she said definitely.

"You've said it!" Darrow was not subtle himself and rarely detected subtlety in others. "Sharp as a lancet! Lemme tell you, this lad's going to get ahead in the world."

"I daresay," Miss Ada conceded, her upper lip spelling faint distaste. "Glen, my dear—I have so many papers waiting for correction...." She half rose, but seated herself again at the doctor's peremptory gesture, and discussed without enthusiasm the question of his grading.

It disappointed Glen to sense the dislike and distrust which her friends felt for each other. She had wanted "Miz-*za*da" to thrill over their golden legend, but the shabby teacher, pausing at the door, took a long, measuring look at the bold and beautiful young mountaineer and returned his frank scorn with a delicate, futile, birdlike antagonism which the girl found pathetically amusing.

CHAPTER V

Dr. Darrow damns the first families with his last breath, and little Miss Nancy Carey meets the young mountaineer.

FROM the time she was fourteen—almost, indeed, from the moment of the first meeting, Glen Darrow knew that some day, when she was old enough, she would fall in love with Luke Manders.

She accepted this knowledge without excitement or self-consciousness, as simply as she accepted the other undebatable facts of her life and circumstances. It was just as another girl might know that she was going to college after she finished high school, or a third, that her aunt would take her abroad when she was eighteen.

She *knew* it, that was all, in a grave preoccupation, in a certain serene young sense of dedication. The thing was settled; it hadn't to be worried about. It would have been amusing to an observer in possession of the facts to see how sedulously both her father and Miss Ada Tenafee avoided all discussion, all mention even, of such a possibility—the man, because he desired it so heartily and feared to frustrate his hopes by forcing, and the woman because she turned from the idea with all the inhibitions of her caste and type, and was craftily aware that opposition would fan the flame.

It was, therefore, a wordlessly understood thing between the doctor and his daughter during the remainder of his life, but he became vocal about it on his profane and painful deathbed. He was hotly and bitterly rebellious at being obliged to die at forty-eight. His heedless habits of finance would leave her pitifully poor: beyond the dull house on the dull street, midway between The Hill and the mills, there would be something under two thousand dollars. Glen would have to leave high school in her final year and go to business college, and to work. Glenwood Darrow had always told himself that presently he would turn over a new leaf, force collections, invoke the law on long outstanding accounts, set his affairs in order and assure the girl's future.... The automobile accident put a sudden and gory period to his plans.

He had been persuaded, after long delay, to give up his elderly horse and his battered buggy and buy a machine, and—once he had been actually won over—the salesman and demonstrator found him juvenilely enthusiastic and a quick if careless and cocksure pupil. The demonstrator found that his store of bright and steady patience would not be heeded in this case: the doctor said—"Yes, yes! I get you! All right! All *right*, I say—Good God, man, do I look like a half-wit?"—at the end of the second lesson and refused a third. He came back from his third attempt with broken bumper and bent fenders, and a chuckling delight in his achievement, though he absolutely refused to take Glen with him until he'd "got the hang of the fool thing in a little

better," and from his fourth trip he was brought home in the ambulance he had summoned so many times for others, and cursed for its tardiness and its meager comforts.

He lived for ten difficult days with the grief-stricken girl and a brow-beaten nurse in attendance, with Luke Manders coming in at night to lift him capably when his position became unbearable, and Miss Ada Tenafee calling conscientiously to inquire every afternoon on her way home from school.

Remorsefully, he laid before his daughter the nakedness of their land. "But it doesn't matter, Dad, dear," she comforted him. "I always expected to work; you know I did. It doesn't matter; nothing matters but *you*!" Her voice broke on the words but she did not cry. She bore herself, from the moment that he was carried into the house, crushed and broken, until he was carried out of it for the last time, with the same composure she had exhibited on the night of Luke Mander's exodus from his mountains. She was, after all, the man told himself with satisfaction and pride, his child; the soft-eyed, soft-chinned Effie had been merely the mild receptacle for her embryonic stage; directly she was born, she was triumphantly *his*, and his child would make her way in the world against any mischance.

She planned with him, steadily: she would leave school and go to business college at once, and fit herself for a job as expeditiously as possible, so as not to draw upon her tiny capital any more than was absolutely necessary. The house, he insisted, she must keep; it would not bring enough to make its sale worth while, and it was a shelter; he didn't want her knocking round in boarding places. He thought she might rent some of the rooms to school-teachers or decent women of some sort; he didn't want her there alone, of course.

Glen opened her mouth to say that she would try to coax Miss Ada from her solitary little room, but stopped herself in time; it would only have irritated him. "Yes, Dad; I can get some one, surely, and I will. I promise you I won't stay alone. You mustn't worry, Dad!"

He told her, clumsily, since praise came unhandily to his lips, what she had meant to him, and his earnest hope that she would be true to the creeds and convictions he had set up for her. Jerkily, pausing often to rest and husband his fast-failing strength, he renewed for her the standards he had given her in her childhood, particularly on the day of the ill-starred valentine party, when she had gone to drive with him after that tragic festivity. She was to remember always that she was as good as any, and better than most; she was to be the champion of the weak—as represented by the mountaineers and the mill people—and she was to pick her friends from among them; she was to "hate'n despise" The Hill contingent, and to "spike their guns by snubbing them before they got the chance to snub her."

And on the last day of all, gruffly and ineptly, he approached the subject nearest his heart.

“Look here, Glen,” he began, “about Luke....”

“Yes, Dad,” she met his eyes steadily.

“You and Luke ...” he managed between battled breaths, “I’m not fool enough, no, nor knave enough, to pull the ‘dying father’s wish’ on you, but——”

The girl wedged another pillow behind his heaving shoulders. “I know, Dad.” The infrequent color had surged up in her golden-olive cheeks, but beyond that single manifestation she was entirely calm.

“You’re only seventeen ... child, still.... Wait till you’re nineteen—twenty— No foolishness in meantime, hear me?”

“Yes, Dad.”

“No hand-holding ... mooning ’round....”

“No, Dad,” she promised earnestly and without embarrassment.

“Well, now, remember ... haven’t made any deathbed promise.... I’m not expecting ... run things ... from the grave.”

“I know,” she soothed him, wiping the sweat from his glistening forehead. “I understand, Dad, dear. *Please* don’t try——”

But he went doggedly on. “You’re free ... free as air ... but if you *do*— Well, if there’s anything to this ‘hereafter’ stuff ... if I’m—anywhere—you’ll know I’m—*glad*!” He scowled at the nurse, bringing his nourishment, and sent Glen out for a breath of air.

He died soon after midnight with his daughter beside him, two local doctors and the harried nurse. Luke Manders and Miss Ada Tenafee, on either side of the hideous sitting room, waited downstairs. His mind wandered a little, toward the last, and he spoke of his wife, of her and to her. “Blue eyes,” he muttered, “blue and soft ... gentle ... kind of sad, some way.... Just see her eyes over the top of the hymn book.... What’s the matter, Effie? Oh, you like that fool rug? G. P. present ... old Mrs. Ludermann, my one wealthy patient.... I figured we’d take it back and get credit for it ... doesn’t go with anything else we’ve got— Oh, all right! All right, I say! Keep it! Good lord, *keep* it!” He murmured snatches of long-forgotten talk, relived a portion of his interview with Granny Manders when she confided her dream of having her son’s *son’s* son “fotched on,” and at the end looked at the girl with clear and unclouded gaze.

“You keep away from that Hill crowd, hear? You mind me! Poor Effie, your poor mother, she came down here as friendly as a fox terrier, and what’d they do? Snubbed her, and cold-shouldered her, and looked right through her, that’s what they did, damn

’em! Crushed her, and broke her heart, and killed her, damn ’em—killed her! Damn their souls!” shouted the doctor with amazing vigor, and, damning, died, entirely in character, as he had lived.

The two doctors, one old and one young, were kind, and the nurse was kind, and Glen was civil in her appreciation, but she turned to her two friends, stumbling blindly down the stairs to find them.

The shabby teacher put thin arms about her and held her close. She knew, she said, none better, what it meant to lose a father.... Glen was to lie down at once, and she would bring her a cup of tea. She had—happily—put the kettle on a half hour earlier, and she pushed Glen gently down into the easiest of the chairs and tiptoed swiftly to the kitchen.

Luke Manders did not speak to her, but he came and stood before her, towering over her like a young pine, and his black eyes were very bright. He took the hand that she gropingly held out to him and held it hard in his own hard hand, and it went through her mind that it was like taking hold of a stalwart tree for support—like leaning upon solid rock, like the strength of the hills. Looking up at him through tears she wondered, even in that hour, if her father had talked to him as he had to her, but she heard Miss Ada’s pattering return and pulled her hand away. She must be careful now with her two friends—her only friends—who were not friends with each other.

The young mountaineer was no longer openly rude to the faded gentlewoman: to the boldness and poise which he had brought down from the heights he had added a grave courtesy which sat well upon him, and he hooded the scorn in his keen eyes. Miss Ada, for her part, was obliged to admit and did admit, very pleasantly, to Glen, that the youth had made amazing progress, not only in his studies but in his adjustment to civilization. There was still, and Glen secretly hoped there would always be something alien, something distinct and different in dress, in carriage, in speech; it set him apart from the savorlessness of the herd. He had made astonishing speed at the business college course, and at the mill, where he had at once engaged the attention of Mr. ’Gene Carey, the genial senior partner, and was constantly being pushed forward.

It was true, as Miss Ada Tenafee had once allowed herself to remark, very casually, that he did not make friends; he had left the frowsy Tollivers, where the doctor had placed him, at the end of his first month, and found himself a tiny, clean room with strangers who were still strangers to him after three years, but this did not lessen him in Glen’s eyes. Her father did not make friends; she did not make friends herself; it was, in her bleak young creed, rather a pledge of fineness not to make friends.

A respectable number of his patients, the two doctors and the nurse, and three or four good-natured neighborhood people came to the brief, drab little funeral, and Glen sat between Miss Ada and Luke Manders. Just as they drove home from the cemetery

Nancy Carey, in a soft blue dress, came down from The Hill with her hands filled with flowers.

“Oh, Glen, I’m so sorry!” she said, hurrying to meet her as she stepped from the machine. “I’ve just heard, half an hour ago (I’ve been in Augusta, you know) and of course it’s too late, but I just thought I’d bring you these!”

“Thank you,” said Glen hoarsely. The encounter unsteadied her—to come from her father’s grave, from his admonitions, and find the Greeks bearing gifts. Nancy Carey had always been gently, languidly pleasant to her, although they had met rarely since the little days at Miss Josephine’s. Nancy had been years away at Northern finishing schools and would soon, the Social Chat of the leading local paper announced excitedly, go abroad for an indefinite tour of the Continent. She had been a sweetly lovely child and she was a sweetly lovely girl, with tints of rose and cream in her softly modeled face and a liquid hazel gaze, and fine, pale brown hair, like a baby’s, curling loosely about her mild brow. There was a tender, a lyric quality about Nancy Carey ... old ballads ... hearts and initials carved on trees ... keepsakes ... lost causes ... early deaths.... She should have been Barbara Freitchie’s gentle best friend.

Miss Ada was fluttered at the call. “Honey, this is *very* good of you,” she blushed girlishly. “Glen appreciates your thoughtfulness. I know I may speak for her!” She laid an admonitory hand on her charge’s arm.

“It is ... very kind,” Glen managed obediently.

“And won’t you step in for a moment, Nancy, my dear? I’m just going to make Glen a cup of strong tea, and she’d be so pleased—we *both* would—” Miss Ada quite clearly thought that grief, at any rate, grief for a person of Dr. Darrow’s caliber, might well be laid aside for the amenities of life when a Carey came to call.

The girl from The Hill was regarding the young mountaineer with mild interest. “Oh, thanks, Cousin Ada,” she said, turning to her—Miss Ada was a connection by marriage in two or three directions—“but I just came to bring the roses and tell Glen how *sorry*— Auntie Lou-May is waiting for me.”

“Then I’ll walk back with you a piece,” Miss Ada slipped her arm through Nancy’s. “And how *is* your dear Auntie Lou-May? Is her sciatica better?—Glen, my dear, I’ll be back immediately.”

“Not much better, poor dear,” Nancy answered prettily. “But she’s such an angel about it, and I don’t like to keep her waiting when I’ve promised to play cribbage with her.”

“Of course *not*!” assented the connection warmly. “I’m sorry you couldn’t stop, but it was just wonderful for you to think of coming!”

“Glen Darrow is a nice girl,” said Nancy vaguely. “I always liked her, some way ... and felt sorry for her....”

“Well, so do I, honey, and that’s why I’m staying with her until she can make some suitable arrangement. It just seems to be my *part* to look after the poor child, alone as she is. Glen has a remarkably fine character, *innately* refined,” said Miss Ada, as she had said of her Simpson mother. “So *pitifully* alone, and almost *wholly* unprovided for——”

“Who was that boy, Cousin Ada?” Nancy interrupted gently.

“Why—why—that is—that isn’t *anybody*, you might say, my dear. He is a young lad from the mountain districts to whom Dr. Darrow took one of his odd fancies. A very peculiar person, Dr. Darrow, and I pray his standards will not affect Glen’s life too seriously. He always——”

“Does he live in the mountains now, Cousin Ada?”

“Why, no, not just now—not at present, that is. He is employed at your dear father’s mill in some small capacity, I believe.”

“Oh ... at the mill....”

“Yes. Dr. Darrow took him there, several years ago, and begged employment for him, and your dear father, I understand from Glen, has been especially kind to him. Your father had a high respect for Dr. Darrow, who did a great deal of quiet charity among the mill workers. But the doctor, unfortunately, had no social standards whatever, and that one must always deplore, and now that he is gone I shall try to guide poor Glen—This impossible friendship, for instance——”

“What is his name?”

Miss Ada Tenafee stared at her young kinswoman. The girl had halted and was gazing back. “Why—Manders, Luke Manders. He——”

“Luke Manders!” Nancy repeated in her languid, sweet voice. “Isn’t that quaint, Cousin Ada? It sounds like a story, doesn’t it?”

“Well, possibly it does,” Miss Ada grudged. “It has not occurred to me, however. The doctor admitted this young savage to his household as an equal—he idealized him in the most absurd way, and prophesied the most impossibly brilliant future for him—but now that Glen is alone, I shall try, tactfully, of course, because the child is loyal to her father and his ideas to the point of fanaticism, to give her a better sense of values. And *your*—graciousness to her to-day, Nancy, honey, will mean more than you can possibly——”

Nancy Carey was looking at that moment even more like a maiden in a ballad than usual; there was a melting sweetness in her hazel gaze and with a distinct sense of

shock the shabby teacher heard her say, with soft fervor—“Cousin Ada, I think he’s the handsomest thing I ever saw in my *life*....”

CHAPTER VI

Mr. 'Gene Carey finds a right-hand man for the Altonia, and Glen Darrow joins the noble army of labor.

IF Dr. Darrow, in the celestial realms of whose actuality he had expressed a deathbed doubt, was cognizant of terrestrial affairs he must have grinned triumphantly and complacently over Luke Mander's swift fulfillment of his prophesies. His progress was little short of being marvelous. He had galloped through business college at a speed which broke all their comfortable records, and his rapid rise at the mill was a never-ending wonder to his fellow workers. He was silent, tireless; he was the first one at work in the morning and the last one to leave at night; work was an obsession with him, a rapture and a dear delight.

"By gad," ejaculated Mr. 'Gene Carey to his superintendent, "you know that boy *likes* to *work*! He does, by the eternal! And you listen to me, Ben, I want him pushed on, fast as he can go!"

The middle-aged and work-weary superintendent was nothing loath. The genial and gentle old owner knew very little more about the actual working of his mill than his daughter did, far away in her Northern finishing school, and Ben Birdsall, a dour and conscientious employee, carried all the load. He was an industrious, slow-minded, well-meaning creature, and after the death of the old superintendent and his own promotion from foreman he had felt decidedly out of his depths.

"I haven't got the head fo' it, suh, an' that's the Lawd's truth," he said earnestly, protesting his advancement. "I'm a willing worker, suh, yo' know that; I'm free to admit it fo' myself, but I'm no office man, and that gal that's markin' up our books, suh, she's a little worse'n what I am!"

Mr. Carey put a kind hand on his shoulder. "Now, now, Ben, you just quit running yourself down! You suit me! I reckon I know honesty and ability when I see 'em. You've been with us——"

"Oh, I know all that, suh," old Ben shook his head. "I'm honest, and I can boss the hands, but I'm no office man. Now, if you was to get rid of Miss Minnie——"

"But what do you reckon you'd find for her to *do*, Ben?" the owner worried.

"Lawd, I wasn't fixing to find her another job, suh! I was just aiming to get her out of this one, and get that boy Luke *in*!"

"I could give her a mighty nice letter, of course," Mr. Carey mused. "Luke, did you say? Why, Ben, do you reckon that boy could do our books, young as he is, and green?"

“He’s young, but he’s not green,” the superintendent contested. “Why, that feller handles figgers as easy as you’n me handles a knife and fork! And he’s right from business college, you might say—two—three years—right hot off the griddle, and you know in time there never was a harder worker.”

Mr. Carey, a little dazed at the suddenness of it, agreed with the proviso that Miss Minnie be provided for, and the thing worked out for Luke Manders as swiftly and smoothly as if Dr. Darrow had motivated it by his wishes, or the ancient granddam who had seen in him “a young-un with a headpiece, smartest of ary Manders ever heerd tell of.” Miss Minnie was comfortably placed in a needlework shop and the young mountaineer climbed up on her stool in the dim and breathless office of the Altonia Mill, and dived deep into the sea of difficulties and discrepancies which she had abandoned to him.

“By gad, Luke,” the owner wiped his steaming forehead, “I never dreamed poor Minnie was getting us into such a snarl! Of course, I knew she was no lightning striker, but her father was my father’s third cousin, and when he died and left her without a penny, why I naturally had to keep an eye on her—blood’s thicker than water— But, good Lord, I believe it’d have been cheaper to board her at the hotel and hire a man here!”

“I reckon so, sir,” Luke Manders agreed with him gravely. Gravely was the word for Luke Manders. He talked gravely, and walked gravely, and worked gravely, and it was to be seen that he thought gravely. There was no jest and youthful jollity in the young man from the mountains. He was as silent as one of the tall trees he had left behind him, and as strong, yet with always the sense of leashed action—action and power. Mr. ’Gene Carey and old Ben Birdsall felt it and leaned on it, and Miss Ada Tenafee felt it and feared it, and Glen Darrow felt it and rejoiced and exulted.

The kindly, rather innocent and futile old owner of the Altonia leaned on him pathetically, but the youth never overstepped; he never presumed for an instant on the man’s amiable familiarity; he maintained the delicate balance of their relationship.

He listened gravely when his employer told him things he already knew, and better than he did.

“I’m going to tell you something that’ll surprise you, Luke,” he said confidently. “I’m no business man. I’ve run the Altonia Mill, man and boy, most of my life, but that’s just because it was sort of wished on me by my father. I never liked it; I never—in a way, I mean—understood it; during my father’s lifetime, I depended on him, and after he left us, why, I just counted on my partner.”

“Yes, sir,” Luke listened respectfully.

“My partner, Mr. Oliver Parker, of Pasadena, you know.”

“Yes, sir.” Luke Manders said *sir* now, very handily, but it carried no servility with it.

“A fine man, Mr. Parker; mighty fine man! Great pity going as early as he did. *I* miss him, I can tell you! Only came on here once or twice a year, but when he did, well, things *moved*! Never saw anybody to equal him. Often wonder,” he mused, “whether that son of his—young Peter—has his father’s brains and his energy. Hope so, the Lord knows, now that *he’s* my partner!” He chuckled. “Reckon he’s not worrying much about the old Altonia! Typical millionaire’s son, from all I hear. *This* was just a drop in the bucket for Parker, of course. He dipped into everything—cotton, oil, mines—and pulled out a plum every time. But I reckon there won’t be many plums for the boy, way poor Minnie let things go, and old Ben kind of slowing down.”

“Well, we aim to pull things up, sir,” Luke Manders promised quietly.

“I hope to the Lord we can,” Mr. ’Gene Carey said fervently. “I certainly do hope to the Lord we can! I’ve got a young lady daughter coming on, and I want to do handsomely by her. I certainly do hope to the Lord we can make the old mill speed up, Luke.”

“That’s what we’re aiming to do, sir,” his new bookkeeper pledged again, gravely, and the senior partner went away heartened.

The next day he listened cordially to the youth’s suggestion that they make a place for Dr. Darrow’s daughter in the mill.

“She has finished business college, sir, and she will be a good worker. I can promise that.”

“But—look here, Luke, didn’t Dr. Darrow leave her provided for? Why, good land, he was the busiest man in town—always saw that old buggy of his rattling ’round!”

“I reckon he never crowded people to pay their bills,” young Manders offered. “She has that house, and a few hundred dollars in the bank, and that’s all.”

Mr. ’Gene Carey rumpled his abundant gray hair. “Shame, that’s what it is—man who spent his life taking care of folks— Well, that’s the way it goes, Luke! Certainly, we’ll make a place for her! Want her in here with you?”

Luke Mander’s dark gaze did not waver. “I was figuring to have her in here at first, sir, till we saw just where we could use her best.”

“Well, you go ahead and hire her, Luke,” the old gentleman was hearty. “You go right ahead and hire her, and if there isn’t anything she can do, why you make up something! Nice girl like that, pretty girl, too, seems to me I remember—red hair?”

“Yes, sir,” said Luke steadily.

“All right, then, I’ll leave it to you, Luke!” He went away well pleased with himself. It would be, no doubt, another case of poor Minnie, but with Luke at the books they could afford a passenger.

He found, however, directly Glen Darrow was installed at the Altonia, that it was not in the very least another case of poor Minnie. The girl was as silent as young Manders, almost as efficient, and with an equally hearty appetite for work. It worried the old gentleman a little; here was a girl who was his daughter's sort—hadn't she gone to Miss Josephine's when they were little tads? Certainly she had! Well, then!—turned out into the cold world to earn her bread and butter! How'd he feel if it was his Nancy, eh? And a pretty piece, too, with that blaze of red hair round her face and those eyes and that skin, by gad! But when all was said and done, Glen Darrow seemed to be the kind of girl who could look out for herself. Pleasant enough, or at least civil enough, but—well, edgy. The doctor had been a crusty old customer; girl was a chip of the old block.

It was a matter of satisfaction to Mr. 'Gene Carey that his kinswoman had gone to live with her within the first year of her orphanhood; Ada Tenafee, he felt as did his Cousin Amos, the head of the clan, was a fine woman, a fine, high-spirited woman, all Tenafee, and a fatherless, motherless girl could not be more wisely and genteelly guarded and guided.

It was, indeed, a most excellent arrangement for the woman as well as the girl: Miss Ada punctiliously paid her board, and—in the first week of her occupancy—sent the yellow slattern Emma-*leen* packing and installed a decent black woman in her place. The hideous house became clean and orderly again, meals were well cooked and served, and the very presence of a Tenafee in a Darrow house had a soothing—almost a sanctifying effect. Glen, feeling the pressure of her father's prejudice, had faithfully tried half a dozen boarders before she asked Miss Ada to live with her—school-teachers, clerks in stores, a librarian—but without satisfaction, and her conscience was clear. She let herself enjoy the gentleness which the faded spinster brought with her, and the increased serenity of daily living, but she held herself sternly faithful to her father's codes. The thing had seemed to arrange itself; "Miz-*za*da" was to come to her; they were predestined to live together.

And she had exactly the same feeling with regard to her position in the mill. Sensing her one woman friend's antagonism to Luke, in spite of her careful tact, she tried honestly to settle herself in other situations—a book shop, the little city's one big department store, a tea room—but the hours, the work, the pay, the surroundings, left something always to be desired, and when Luke told her Mr. Carey would make a place for her at the mill she went gladly. That, too, apparently had been decided for her; she and Luke Manders were to work together. Her father, she felt sure, would be glad to have her there, among his mill people, studying them, befriending them, discovering ways to better conditions.

As for the association with Luke, she approached it steadily, but with a tiny inward quiver of curiosity. Luke had been wonderful in his attitude since Dr. Darrow's death; never by look or word had he betrayed his knowledge of her father's dying wish, or

urged her compliance. He came seldom, especially after Miss Ada's establishment as duenna, and when he came he said little, but there was hardly a waking hour when the girl was not aware of him—his bold beauty, his eagle gaze, his poise, the strength and depth of his silence. "Wait till you're nineteen ... twenty ..." the doctor had said, "and no foolishness in the meantime ... no hand-holding ... no mooning 'round ..." and she had obeyed him. It had been easy to obey him, with the fine austerity of Luke's conduct. It was easy, still, in their close and constant companionship at the mill, for the young mountaineer never relaxed his vigilant curb upon himself. She was aware, however, that there was a curb; increasingly aware. On her nineteenth birthday she woke early to a riotous duet between a cardinal and a mocking bird on a bough beside her window, and they seemed, between them, to be giving rapturous expression to her morning meditations.

"Wait till you're nineteen ... twenty...."

She was nineteen. She had waited. Need she wait any longer? Little as she had been about with boys and girls, few as were her contacts with the young life about her, and meager as had been her romantic reading (even after the doctor's death she had kept on with the histories and philosophies and the fiery weeklies) she knew that theirs was an amazing friendship, an astonishing romance. He had never brought her a flower; they had never sat side by side on stools at the drug-store counter on summer evenings, drinking ice-cream sodas; they had never gone to a moving picture together. He came sometimes to the dull house in the dull street, and they sat on the veranda if Miss Ada was reading in the sitting room, in the sitting room, if she happened to be upstairs—the cheerful, tidy, ugly room with its golden oak and strident carpet, and Effie Darrow's one treasure, the Persian rug, but their talk was always of work, his work, hers, or theirs, if she did not read aloud to him from her father's books.

But that, she told herself, leaping from her bed, taking the frigid shower of her father's prescribing, flying into vest and knickers and the stern simplicity of her business dress, all that belonged to the past, before she was nineteen ... twenty....

"My dear," Miss Ada remarked with solicitude, "you've hardly sipped your coffee, and you haven't touched your cereal!"

"I'm not hungry, Miss Ada."

Her friend began a soft and anxious clucking. "You're *quite* sure, honey, that you are perfectly well?"

Then Glen Darrow did a startling thing. She jumped up from her place at the breakfast table and made a disconcerting dash for the faded teacher and gathered her into a breathless young hug.

“Yes, Miss Ada, dear,” she spoke with her lips against the gentlewoman’s pallid cheek, “yes! I’m quite sure that I’m perfectly well and perfectly happy!”—and, leaving her wide-eyed and trembling, she sped out of the house and down the hill.

Miss Tenafee rang the bell and directed Phemie to bring her another cup of coffee, and she drank it black. “It’s come,” she told herself unhappily. “It can’t be anything else. She’s made up her mind to marry that young savage, and the doctor has beaten me. I’m helpless ... *helpless*....” she pushed her chair back and the slow tears welled up in her eyes and spilled over and ran down her lean cheeks and the taste of them was salt in her mouth. “She’ll marry him, and I’d rather see her in her grave!”

CHAPTER VII

Luke Manders agrees with her entirely, and Southern Europe contributes some of its culls to the mill, notably one Black Orlo, whose vitriolic utterances the doctor's daughter finds nourishing.

WITH a sag of excitement, a sense of anti-climax, Glen found that Luke was not in his office: he would not return to the mill until late afternoon. This was not surprising, because old Ben Birdsall was shunting more and more of his own responsibilities upon his young assistant, and Luke Manders was doing much work which was far outside the borders of a bookkeeper's position. He went frequently to outlying plantations and nearby towns on the mill's business, and she was accustomed to his absences, but to-day it was disappointing out of all proportion.

But when her own work was well under way the feeling wore off; there was, indeed, an added zest in the delay. It gave her long hours for thinking—for thinking of her father, and of how satisfied he would be with them both, for remembering that day of their first meeting with Luke Manders in his mountains. So long as her mind and memory functioned, she would have that picture ... the dim interior of Granny Manders' cabin with the setting sun in a shaft of concentrated radiance for the boy's entrance, the bold, beautiful boy, gypsy-dark, richly weathered, fearless and free, his gun in his hands, wild as a hawk as his grandam had fitly said, scorning them! And scorning them still, he had come down from his heights to their drab levels, she considered, taking what was best of the lowlands—learning, gentler living, but had kept all that was finest from his forbears and his high hills.

How he stood out, Glen exulted, from the men about him—kindly, futile old Mr. 'Gene Carey, slow old Ben Birdsall, the sallow, spiritless mill workers, even the young blades from The Hill! He was a tall pine among garden shrubs.

Going quietly about her tasks at the Altonia, she pulsated with pride at the thought of him, planning the clear and purposeful path before them. They would read together and study together and work together, animated always by the ideal of service to the mill people and the mountaineers. They would preach Dr. Darrow's sermons of air and clean houses and wholesome food; above all, they would fight for better conditions of labor. There were model mills all through the South—even in the same city, mills where children of working age spent half the day in school and made a fine development, body and brain, and it was Glen's dream to bring the Altonia up to standard, but Manders confided to her that it was in a very bad way, financially. Between the superintendent who died, Miss Minnie, and blundering old Ben, the concern had very nearly gone on the rocks; it would take every effort to set her soundly afloat again.

“And old Carey wants money! You see, it cost him a lot to send his girl to Europe, and now she’s home, and he says she wants to do the house over from cellar to attic,” Luke Manders told Glen. “That’s why he’s putting on the screws.”

“It’s abominable!” she flared. “Grinding down the hands, keeping his mill twenty years behind the times, so that Nancy can have all the things she doesn’t need! Luke, I can’t stand it! I’m not going to stand it! I’ll find a way——”

“Careful!” he steadied her. “I know how you feel, Glen, but we’ve got to be patient.”

“Patient!” She blazed with chivalrous indignation, “I don’t want to be patient. I want to do something *now*!”

The mountaineer shook his head. “Wait. Trust me.”

Her hot blue gaze plumbed the dark depths of his. “I do, Luke! You know I trust you! But why can’t I go to Nancy Carey, and make her come down here and see conditions and contrast them with other mills, and realize— She’s a soft little thing, but she’s gentle and kind, and——”

He cut her short. “Yes—gentle and kind like old Carey’s gentle and kind—when it won’t interfere with their own comforts or profits. Carey’s good-natured; he wouldn’t kick a dog or curse a nigger, but he’ll grind every ounce of work out of his hands and house ’em like swine, and never figure he’s being hard. No, Glen—you wait!”

She was mutinous. “Wait, wait, wait! I’m sick of it, Luke? What am I waiting *for*?”

He considered in silence for a long moment. “Wait till I’m so necessary to him that he’ll have to listen to me.”

“But, Luke, he listens to you now! It’s wonderful the way he talks to you and takes your advice about things! Why, he’d listen to you this minute!” She came close to him, eager, ardent.

“Yes—and laugh at me, and tell me to mind my own business! And my business is to try to get the mill out of the red ink just now. No, Glen,” he said again, gravely, regretfully, “you wait.”

So the doctor’s daughter waited, perforce, and found a fresh outlet for her emotion. There had been a surprising influx of foreigners to the Altonia in recent years, dark-eyed, dark-skinned South Europeans whom Ben Birdsall disliked and distrusted.

“Good Americans is good enough for me,” the superintendent liked to say virtuously. “Bunch o’ soreheads, always kickin’ about something. If it don’t suit ’em here, let ’em go back where they come from! Wish t’ th’ Lawd I dast clean ’em out, but we need ’em!”

Glen found them odd and interesting. There were graybeards among them with simmering passion in their eyes who exhorted fellow workers at stealthy evening

meetings, swarthy youths who flared into open resentment at a word, richly colored, full-breasted girls who moved among the mill workers like sly flames, and one outstanding figure, by reason of fervor and superior intelligence, a man called Black Orlo, who edited a tiny paper named *The Torch*. It came out weekly or monthly, as the editor was able to manage, and was printed in secret on a crude hand press, and while Mr. Carey had ordered its suppression, the sparks still flew, and some of them ignited the red-haired girl.

"Glen," Luke warned her, "I wouldn't read that rag! I wouldn't be caught with it!"

But she continued to read it, for Black Orlo said in vigorous print the things she swallowed back every day of her life, and she found it a safety valve. The man himself, dark, saturnine, unshaven, unsavory, was repulsive to her, but she found his utterances stimulating.

At five o'clock, on her nineteenth birthday, Luke had not returned to his office. She began to lose her hold on the radiant mood of the morning. She had wakened to such a definite sense of occasion but the day had jogged on in its accustomed groove, calmly and colorlessly, and being nineteen did not appear to have any especial significance after all.

Gloriana-Virginia Tolliver, a small putty-colored person at a loom, shot out a lean little claw and caught hold of her skirt as she passed. "Glen," she wheedled, "yo'all was goin' to gimme a fairy-tale book to read out of, and learn me the biggest words. Did yo' jes' pintly fo'git?"

Glen was remorseful. "I did forget, Glory. I thought of it the very last thing before I went to sleep, and I put it right where I would be sure to see it—it's the one I read myself when I was little, you know—and then—" she colored swiftly before the uncomprehending eyes of the child—"I was busy this morning—I mean, something happened to make me forget——"

"Oh, hit's all right!" Gloriana-Virginia reassured her. "Don't yo' go to frettin' yo'sef, Glen! Jes' any time'll do. But I sho' do crave story-readin', an' M'liss', she reckons hit's jes' plumb foolishness." She was a tiny, wizened creature, with curiously shaped hands which did not seem quite human, and her face, with its gentle dark eyes, always made Glen think of the wise and patient countenance of a little monkey. She was her especial favorite of all the mill children and she gave her a repentant hug now, and promised the book without fail for the morning.

The superintendent came hurriedly through the spinning room with an open letter in his hand. His face was red and his mild eyes were round with excitement. He waved an excited greeting to Glen as he went past her. "Say, my ship's come in, Miss Glen! It sho' has! Lawdy, Lawdy, I never suspicioned sech a thing could happen outside the

movies!" He hurried into Mr. 'Gene Carey's private office and shut the door behind him, just as Luke Manders came in from the door which led into the lane.

Gloriana-Virginia bent over her frame in earnest absorption as he came nearer them but Glen turned swiftly to greet him.

"Glen!" It was the simplest of salutations; nothing but her name, yet it restored instantly the sense of impending climax. It was in his voice and in his eyes, and she answered with his name, softly, on a caught breath. "Will you wait? I will walk home with you."

"I will wait."

"I won't be a minute—just to report to Mr. Carey on the Beulah-land cotton—" He went into the owner's office as swiftly as old Ben Birdsall had done, and the long and disappointing day was redeemed.

"Luke Manders, he skeers me," Gloriana-Virginia whispered, peering round her frame.

"Oh, Glory, dear, you mustn't say that! Why, Luke is your best friend! He's trying all the time to make things better and easier for you—for you and all the children, and all the hands—and he has such fine plans for a rest house and playroom and shorter hours—only, of course, that's a secret, and you mustn't tell any one, not even M'Liss' or grand-pap."

"I won't name hit to nawbuddy," the child promised obediently. "But I am jes' pintly skeered of Luke Manders."

"But you *mustn't* be," Glen insisted warmly. "It's just his way, Glory—he seems stern, but he isn't, really. He works so hard, and he hasn't time to stop and talk with you as I have, but he feels just the same as I do, Glory. You believe me, don't you, honey?"

"Yes, me'um." She frowned over a broken thread and her lean fingers twisted it capably. "I b'lieve everything yo'all tell me. But I am jes' pintly *skeered* of Luke Manders."

Glen laughed and hugged her again. "But I tell you you *mustn't* be! I'll bring the fairy tales to-morrow, Glory."

"Cross yo' heart, hope-never-to-see-the-back-o'-yo'-neck?"

"Cross my heart!" She sped away for her hat and coat and slipped quietly out at the side door, waiting for Luke in the lane.

He came in five minutes, old Ben Birdsall trailing at his heels, the open letter still in his hand. She sensed instantly that Luke wanted to be rid of him; there was impatience

in his stride which left the superintendent behind and annoyance in his sharp—"Ready, Glen? Come on!"

But the old fellow persisted. "Wait a minute! Hold on there, Luke! Yo' hold yo' hosses, cain't yo'? I want to tell Miss Glen!"

The girl had started forward, obedient to Luke's word, but she halted perforce when Ben caught up with her, thrusting his arm before her, the letter shaking in his shaking hand.

"My ship's come in, Miss Glen, just like I said! Oh, my Lawdy, Lawdy! Look a' here!" He continued to wave the letter before her. "It's my niece Irene, my sister Hattie's gal! Say, I never suspicioned, when she married that lunger and pulled up stakes and traipsed out west with him—'Uncle Ben,' she says—right here in this letter—'Uncle Ben, you stood by me when I hadn't nobody but yo' and now I'm a' going to pay yo' back,' she says." He began to cry, childishly, wiping away his tears with the back of his hand.

"But—I don't understand, Ben! Has she sent you money?" In spite of Luke's insistent hand at her elbow, she could not begrudge this moment.

"Sent me money? Say, she's sent *fo'* me, that's what she's done—sent money right to the bank fo' me to get me fixed up fine, and fo' my ticket to Californy! 'Uncle Ben,' she says—"

Luke Manders cut in crisply. "Oil. Her husband has——"

"Now, yo' hold yo' hosses," the old fellow pleaded. "First off, they got 'em a little ranch—coupla acres, I reckon, and 'lowed they'd raise oranges, but what with dry years and frosts and hard times, why, they never got ahead. And Albert, he didn't gain like she hoped he would, and say, they was just about down and out, but it's darkest just before dawn, like the saying goes, and if they haven't struck oil! *Oil*—on an orange ranch? Wouldn't that kill you? And a gusher, she says! And now, 'stead of fo'getting the holler log, the way lots would do, why she wants I should come out and live with 'em the rest of my bawn days! 'Uncle Ben,' she says——"

Luke's touch was insistent. "It's glorious, Ben, and I'm so happy for you!" Glen patted his shaking shoulder. "You've worked hard all your life and you've been kind, and it's *right* that this should happen to you! And to-morrow I want to hear all about it, and all your plans, and I'd love to have you read the letter to me if you will!"

They left him smudging the tears into his grimy cheeks and trying to get his disheveled letter back into its envelop. "But say—wait a minute!" He called after them. "I never told you about Luke! He's——"

"I'll tell her," said Luke curtly. "*Come*, Glen!"

“Poor old Ben! Isn’t it wonderful for him? To slave all these years, here, without seeing anything else, and now— Oh, can’t you just picture him out there—*basking* in it all?” She glanced at his absorbed face. “But what about you, Luke? Does this mean——”

He nodded. “Yes. Carey’s made me superintendent. He and Ben were talking of it, just as I came in. At first, Carey figured I was too young, but Ben made him see that I knew the ropes better than any outsider—that I’ve been learning, day in, day out, for five years——”

“Of course you have! Of course you’re capable! Oh, Luke, I’m so glad for you, and so proud!” She met his eyes and almost gasped at the blaze of excitement and exultation she saw there. He was breathing like a runner who has just breasted the tape. “Dad would be so proud,” she added, faltering a little. It was rather frightening to see his silence, his reserve, broken up like this. “Dad always said you would go far, Luke. He had such faith in you. He often said to me——”

They had been walking swiftly ever since leaving old Ben behind in the lane, choosing automatically a quiet back street, and now, turning a corner, they were alone. He caught her wrists in a grip of steel, cutting her sentence short.

“It’s what I was aiming for the day I started to work,” he said, tensely. “Do you hear? I promised myself, then. And now you listen to me, Glen, you listen, and remember. Five years from the time I started in here as a hand, I’m superintendent: in less than five years more, I’ll own the Altonia!”

“*Luke!*”

“You listen to me, and you keep still about it, but you remember what I say!” A new Luke Manders, fiery, implacable—new voice, new eyes, new grasp of iron. Gloriana-Virginia Tolliver’s persistent word flashed into her mind and out again—“I’m jes’ pintly *skeered* of Luke Manders....” It came in of its own volition but she drove it out, loyally, in a panic at herself for harboring it even an instant.

“And your granny!” The image of his ancient kinswoman that day of the first meeting—“hit’s ontelling, what you might do and be, if you was to be fotched on!” How unerringly the old crone had divined power and purpose in her “son’s *son’s* son!”

“Yes, Granny would be satisfied.” He relaxed a trifle, letting go of her throbbing wrists, and she wondered if his mind had reverted to the witch-woman’s threat to “ha’nt him” unless he came to Dr. Darrow. “She would be satisfied.” He repeated it, gravely, and there was reassurance in sensing the return to his normal manner.

He was walking swiftly, with long strides, and Glen, in spite of her fine height, had to take a skipping step now and then to keep up with him. With a touch at her elbow he guided her from the deserted side street into a winding, mounting lane which led, in

rambling, dallying fashion to the back of her house, and looking up into his face again, Glen saw that her hour had come—the hour she had visualized on waking that morning.

She stood still when he did, and met his eyes fearlessly and gladly. There was no self-consciousness, no shyness, no maiden reserves. She was conscious of a deep wonder within herself. Was it like this, then? Not in the few romances she had read! She had known since she was fourteen that she would some day fall in love with Luke Manders, and now she was nineteen, the age of her father's stipulation, and she was falling in love with him, or rather, she had fallen in love with him this morning. Bold, beautiful, fearless and free, the golden lad of their golden legend; she was carrying out her father's last and dearest wish, living and dying. "If there's anything in this 'hereafter' stuff ... if I'm—anywhere—you'll know I'm *glad*!"

Her eyes looked very blue in the sudden pallor of her golden-olive face with its halo of glowing hair. It was not like the books, then; she felt solemn, thankful, uplifted; very close to her father.

Again Luke Manders was breathing like a runner, and again his voice was strange, with another strangeness. There was about him now a warmth and a softness, but they were as implacable as the harshness had been, and as little to be denied. "Remember that first day? How I caught you by your hair and jerked you back?"

"Yes." She was a little breathless. "You said—'Hi, Sis, run duck your head in the Branch! Didn't you know your hair was a-fire?'" She laughed, but he did not laugh with her. Instead, she felt herself swept into an embrace which was compounded of flame and steel, and heard the second of his strange new voices.

"I've never touched your hair since that day, have I? I've never touched you. Not because I didn't want to. Not because I didn't crave to, and hunger to, and thirst to, honing for you, every hour of the day, every hour of the night!" He slipped back into the picturesqueness of his mountain diction; even his accent reverted. He might have been, in that moment, the boy who leaped into the shaft of setting sunlight with his feud rifle in his hands. "But I promised your father to wait, and I've waited. But you are nineteen, and I am superintendent of the Altonia Mill"—it was almost like a chant of triumph—"and I'll wait no longer! I have been aiming for this, just as I've been aiming for the mill, ever since—" Fingers of steel under her chin, lifting it, forcing her face upward. "I'll wait no longer!"

CHAPTER VIII

Miss Ada Tenafee rejoices to have her protégée receive two callers in one afternoon, and Miss Nancy Carey sees Luke Manders again.

IT was with a sense of sanctuary, of what children call "King's X," that Glen gained the backyard of her home, Luke striding beside her, and found the black woman gathering up the towels which had been bleaching on the grass.

"Hi, dar, Miss Glen, honey, yo' procative right in de house!" Phemie greeted her with a husky shout. "Yo' all got comp'ny! Miss Ada, she lookin' fo' you ebery minnit!"

Company? Little company came to the dull house of the doctor's choosing. Some connection of her companion's, no doubt.... At the steps of the rear porch Glen stood still and faced him.

"Luke, I'm so sorry! Sorry and—ashamed! I don't know what to say to you."

"There's only one thing to say to me," he said, doggedly, his face dark. "That you'll marry me, as you've always meant to! As you promised your father! What's come over you, to make you——"

"Oh, Luke, I don't know, myself!" the girl broke in, desperately. "I'm so proud of you, and so devoted to you, and Dad——"

He took imperious hold of her again without a backward glance at the negress, pottering about the mean little backyard. "It's no use talking and explaining!" he said roughly. "For five years I've waited, and——"

With a scared glance at the house and another at Phemie, still stooping over her towels which flapped teasingly in the wind, Glen pulled herself free. "Oh, then you can—you *will*—wait a little longer, Luke! Why"—she caught at a straw of defense—"you're always telling me to wait about the mill, and the children, and all the hands, and making me be patient! Now I'm begging you to wait—to be patient with me, just a little while, Luke!"

"How long?"

"Why—why—how can I tell, how long, exactly? Until I—until— You see, Luke, I can't explain, but I'm not ready! Dad wanted me to wait, and——"

"Till you were nineteen or twenty, he said. Well, you're nineteen."

"I know. Oh, I know how silly and—and disloyal I seem, but if you'll just *trust* me!"

He caught her slim young shoulders again in an iron grip. "Anybody else? Look at me. Look at me, I say! Is there anybody else?"

She met his furious eyes with the sad candor of her own. "No one, Luke. You know that." The black woman, her bright calico apron heaped high with the towels, passed

them and went into the kitchen and she paused until the door had closed behind her. "I—I admire you, and look up to you, and glory in what you've done——"

"But you don't love me?" He was accusing, bitter.

She felt guilty and forlorn and forsaken, and the tears came into her eyes. "Oh, Luke, I love what you *are*, and what you're going to do and to be— And I will marry you! I will! I want to, and Dad wanted me to, but if you'll wait——"

"If it's the Tenafee woman—" he began, between set teeth.

"Miss Ada? No, Luke, no! She has never said a word—we've never talked of you! It's my own fault—my own wicked, ungrateful fault, but I'll try, oh, I'll *try* to——"

"Glen, dear! Oh, Glen!" fluted Miss Ada Tenafee's gentle voice. She opened the door and looked out, her bright face clouding over at sight of Luke Manders. "Glen, honey, you have callers. Good afternoon, Luke!"

He stared at her rudely, consideringly, without answering.

"Oh, who is it, Miss Ada? Callers? For *me*? I was just coming in, and Luke is coming, too. Yes, Luke, *please*—" she laid her hand on his arm as he turned away. She could not let him go like that. "Come in, if only for a minute."

Looking at Miss Ada, reading her quite visible hope that he would refuse, he turned and followed Glen into the house, the teacher fluttering after.

"It's Nancy Carey, Glen, honey, and another old friend of yours! They've been here half an hour, and I gave them tea, and I was so anxious for fear you might be delayed at the mill——"

Nancy Carey, lovely and languid in the doctor's shabby armchair, held up a pale hand. "Hello, Glen! Here's somebody who was crazy to see you!" She indicated the other girl who jumped to her feet and came laughing to meet the mistress of the house.

"Well, look what spring has brought you!" Her voice was high and sharp, and her whole look was of sharpness—her very bright eyes with their darkened lashes, and brows plucked to a tiny black line, the almost mauve of her cheeks and her violent cerise mouth. "Know who I am?"

Glen shook her head. "I'm afraid I don't remember—" she began uncomfortably.

"Don't remember the brat from the Bella Vista who was the solitary guest at your valentine party? *I'm* Janice Jennings. Greetings and hail! At the Bella Vista again, with my grandmother."

"Oh...." Glen was a little dazed. She presented Luke to the two girls, hastily, fearful lest he should stride out in the blackness of his mood and have still further reason for resentment toward her.

Nancy Carey looked up at Luke Manders with her liquid hazel gaze and her soft little mouth smiling widely. “I’ve met you before,” she said calmly.

He shook his head. “I don’t think so.”

“Oh, yes, I have ... right here, just after Glen’s father died!” She waited in soft expectancy for his corroboration, and when it did not come she expelled a quick sigh. “Well, I’ve met you now, anyway.”

Miss Ada was perturbed. The affair had started so beautifully—*two* callers for Glen at once, and one of them a *Carey*—and now the young savage had to walk into the scene, like—as her own dear father would have said—a bull in a china shop. If he must be there and some one must talk to him, let it be the Northern girl: Miss Ada interposed herself swiftly between Nancy and the intruder and talked brightly to her kinswoman.

Nancy got slowly out of the old armchair. “It’s late,” she said vaguely. “You coming, Janice?”

“No, I’ll stay with Glen a while. Thanks for bringing me, old thing! See you to-morrow!” Miss Jennings waved a careless hand.

“Glen, my *dear*!” Miss Ada was almost sharp about it. “Nancy’s *going*!”

“Oh,” said Glen awkwardly. “I’m sorry....” She simply could not pull her mind out of its deep morass of bewilderment and unhappiness for these small amenities.

Miss Ada, to cover her lapses, made a great point of seeing Nancy out, and Luke followed silently.

“Luke,” Glen called after him insistently, “you’ll come back to-night?”

“Not to-night,” he answered briefly, waiting an instant in brooding silence for Nancy Carey and Miss Ada to pass through the gate.

“Which way are you going?” Nancy looked up at him, adding with gentle emphasis, “*I’m* going up!”

“Down,” said the mountaineer curtly.

She stared after him as he strode down the hill, her soft under lip thrust out, and again she gave the quick little sigh.

“Nancy, honey, you are mighty sweet and kind,” Miss Ada was adoring. “You always want to put *everybody* at their ease. I’ll just walk a little piece with you,” she added, and again, as on the day of Dr. Darrow’s funeral, she tripped delicately by the side of her young connection, and again, incredibly, the young connection turned the talk, which Miss Ada would have chosen to be about Tenafees, to the mountaineer.

“Is Luke Manders still in the mill, Cousin Ada?”

“Why, yes; yes, he is still employed there. But you haven’t told me about dear Mary-Lou Tenafee! She’s managing that great plantation all soul alone? My, but she is a remarkable girl, Nancy, my dear! We may well be proud of her. So young, so lovely, widowed so early, yet——”

But Nancy Carey was pursuing her own line with soft ruthlessness. “Then, I suppose he’s doing very well, or he wouldn’t have stayed so long?”

“He—yes, I—I understand that he has advanced. He is, I believe, a good worker. People like that have great physical endurance, you know, and——”

To complete the flash-back of three years, Mr. ’Gene Carey’s daughter made almost the identical remark that she made then, and there was wistfulness in her voice, and soft wonder. “Cousin Ada, I do think he’s the handsomest thing I ever saw in real life....”

Glen, meanwhile, tried to fling off her unhappy preoccupation and listen to her caller.

“So you’ve lost both your father and your mother?” She was brusque about it, but her bright little eyes were kind.

“Yes.” She couldn’t be expansive about it, but she forced herself to be civil. “And your grandmother is still living?”

Miss Jennings laughed. “I’ll say she is! Say, the Grim Reaper is a bum shot, isn’t he? Grammer’s about a thousand and two, and gets crabbeder every minute. Your people were youngish, and good scouts, as I remember. You liked them both, didn’t you?” Glen’s murmur did not stop her. “Well, I liked *my* Dad; I was crazy about him.” Her bright little eyes became noticeably brighter. “I never could see my mother very far. And of course he died, three years after they were divorced, and she married the most sickening, cake-eating, old lounge lizard. Well, so it goes, doesn’t it? Hating the step-papa is the one subject on earth that Grammer and I agree on.”

She was moving restlessly about the room, and her roving gaze came to rest on the Persian rug. “Nice,” she commented briefly. “My Dad collected ’em: I’ve got miles of ’em in cold storage. Well, tell me about yourself! What do you do at the mill?”

Glen hesitated. “I don’t know what to call my position, exactly. I’m Luke’s assistant, really; I help him in any way he needs me. He has been bookkeeper and helped the superintendent, and now the old superintendent is leaving and Luke will have his place.”

“Luke? Oh, yes—the sheik who was just here!”

Glen stared.

“Sheik,” repeated Miss Jennings, mirthfully. “Maiden’s Dream. Very easy to look at, I’ll say. Seems to pack a grouch, though. Well, I see The Hill has kept it up.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I mean, the little snobs are still high-hatting you, just as they did years ago. Nancy Carey admitted freely that she never saw you, but she added handsomely that you were a *very* nice girl. They can’t see you with a telescope, can they?”

“I don’t need them, and I don’t want them,” said Glen, briefly.

“*’Atta* girl!” The Northerner approved. “Tell ’em to go jump on themselves. Nancy’s harmless, though: no real meanness in her. She’s a dumb-bell. Well, then, who *are* your little playmates?”

Glen considered. “Miss Ada—who lives with me—and Luke Manders——”

It was Miss Jennings’s turn to stare. “No kids?”

“Oh, yes, of course—the children at the mill! On Sundays, I take them for picnics, and I teach them——”

“You don’t get me. I mean—girls of your own age—fellows. Don’t you ever step out?”

Glen shook her head. “I work all day, you see, and at night I read and study.”

“Gee ... it sounds devilish,” her guest grinned. Miss Ada had come back into the room, a little breathless and flushed from her brief promenade. “Well”—Miss Jennings consulted a diamond and platinum wrist watch—“Grammer’ll be dragging the lake, if any! On my way!”

Glen surprised herself greatly, and delighted Miss Ada, by asking her to stay for supper. It was partly because the creature was patently friendly, but chiefly because it offered a respite before she must begin to think. There loomed before her a great mountain of doubt and distress and remorse to be tunneled through, and she shrank from beginning her toil. “I wish you would stay,” she heard herself urging.

“Thanks a lot, but I can’t ditch The White Man’s Burden! Her national anthem is ‘I need thee every hour’ and especially at meal times; can’t digest her food unless she has me there to crab at. But listen,—why don’t you come and have dinner with us at the Bella Vista?” Then, as Glen did not reply—“I don’t blame you for not getting a kick out of it—music’s rotten and the food’s nothing to write home about. And every third guest playing hookey from the Pyramids. Say, when the doctors sent Grammer down here they said—‘Wonderful climate! Nobody ever dies there!’ Well, it isn’t *quite* true; they die, but they don’t bury ’em; they park ’em at the Bella Vista. But if you can’t stick the B. V. D.—(that stands for the damn’ Bella Vista) why, there’s that Southern Home Cooking joint——”

“It isn’t that,” Glen interposed. “It isn’t that I don’t like the Bella Vista. I have never been there. It’s just——”

Miss Jennings emitted a shrill little yelp of astonishment. “Never been there? Brought up here, and never been inside the town’s one and only Class G hotel? Page Cinderella! Well, that settles it. Go put on the soup and fish, sweet child of nature, and I’ll lead you forth into the wicked world. But I suppose,” she regarded her with good-humored shrewdness, “you haven’t any soup and fish?”

Miss Ada Tenafee, who thought Miss Jennings was now proposing that they have the first two courses there, stated apologetically that they were merely having cold lamb and a salad that evening, and that she did wish dear Glen would accept Miss Jennings very kind invitation.

“Right-o,” approved the guest. “You shush her along! Listen—I won’t dress, if you’d rather. I’ll go as is.”

Glen still hesitated. It was an unheard of thing ... but it would take up more time; it would interpose a screen of novelty between her and her unhappy cogitations. “I have no evening dress—” she began.

“That’s all right; come in your unspoiled girlish beauty! I told you I wouldn’t change.”

“There’s your little buff crêpe de chine, honey!” Miss Ada suggested eagerly. “And my amber beads!”

“’*Atta* girl!” Miss Jennings approved of her cordially. “Well, I’ll beat it now, and you come over as soon as you’re ready. Make it snappy!” She paused at the door. “Say, you won’t run out on me? You won’t ditch me?”

The woman answered for her, excitedly. “She will come, Miss Jennings! I pledge you my word! She will be there!”

Miss Ada was overjoyed. She shepherded Glen upstairs and waited nervously through the period of bathing and brushing, and then slipped the slim yellow dress over her head. “At last you are wearing it!” she exulted. It was rather of a tender subject between them, the little yellow-buff crêpe de chine. Miss Ada, by the exercise of much innocent guile, had contrived an invitation for Glen to attend the New Year’s reception at her Cousin Amos Tenafee’s, and then, knowing that the child had not sufficiently gala raiment, went to the smart little shop in the Bella Vista and dipped recklessly into her shallow bank account.

But Glen would not go. She was stirred and touched and grateful, but she couldn’t go to the pleasures and palaces of The Hill—The Hill which had broken her mother’s heart, her soft-eyed, soft-chinned mother; The Hill which her father had damned with his dying breath.

Miss Ada, passionately desiring a fuller and richer life for her charge, came at last to see that it must come from without, not from the sacred inner circle, and she

relinquished all hope of ever hearing her dear Cousin Amos, high priest and head of the clan, say—"And this is our young friend, Miss Glen Darrow, the protégée of our dear Cousin Ada." Her remodeled desire, thereafter, took the form of distinguished strangers who would see at once the beauty and worth of her child, and she prayed for it nightly, with simple fervor. Miss Ada's god was, after all, a tribal god: when she said—'*Our Father, which art in heaven*,' she had in mind a composite likeness of her own dear father and Cousin Amos, somewhat magnified and glorified, but with the same essential standards and sympathies, and it was necessary, therefore, to pray very earnestly and persuasively to have the child of an obscure (and truculent) Chicago physician receive any special favors.

Janice Jennings might seem, at first glance—a glance staggered by her beaded lashes and her mauve cheeks and her cerise mouth—an unlikely instrument of Providence, but Miss Ada was well aware that fathers, on earth and in heaven, moved in mysterious ways their wonders to perform, and she saw Glen off for the Bella Vista with misty eyes and a pounding heart.

CHAPTER IX

Glen Darrow dines for the first time in her life and tells her hostesses her opinion of Peter Parker of Pasadena; later confides to her sleepless pillow that she doesn't like being touched.

OLD Mrs. Jennings, who welcomed her granddaughter's guest very cordially, wore an orchid dinner gown and an orchid complexion. Her face had at once an oddly tense and expectant look overlaid by a doll-like blankness.

Janice, catching Glen's hastily averted glance, whispered an explanation at the first opportunity. "Grammer's had her face lifted twice. That's what gives her the hard-finish. Kalsomined, just like a wall. Isn't it a scream? But if the poor old girl gets a kick out of it—" she shrugged with a good-natured tolerance. "My child, *you're* a landscape! Good-looking dress. Didn't get it here?"

"It was a present from Miss Ada."

"Well, what do you know about that? You'd expect that poor old White Leghorn to choose polka dots and baby ribbon, wouldn't you. But at that, I can see she's a good egg."

"She has been a wonderful friend to me," Glen flushed loyally, following her hostesses into the glare and blare of the big dining room. There was a merciless blaze of light and on a shallow stage a jazz orchestra was committing musical crimes.

As soon as they were seated Janice leaned across the table and pointed frankly at one of the musicians. "Pipe the bird with the big horn—the one with a permanent wave in it? That's Edward Harrington Du Val—*you* know—they gave him the gate at Harvard and papa pulled the heavy father stuff,—'Not another penny, sir!'—you know the line, but the kid's called his bluff and proved he can pay for his *own* hooch and gardenias. Don't you love it? I'm crazy about him," she finished calmly. He caught her eye and nodded and she shot one thin bare arm straight up beside her head in salute. "Ye ... ay, Eddie!"

"*Babe!*" her grandmother protested.

"What's the big idea, Grammer? You know he's my desert lover." She grinned, and relapsed into coolness as a pallid youth with sleek fair hair stopped beside their table. "'Lo, Ronnie. No. I'm not stepping to-night. Company."

"*I'll* say," he murmured, staring appreciatively at Glen.

Miss Jennings mumbled their names. "He's a blah of purest ray serene," she stated, almost before he was out of earshot. "The Human Lady Finger. They're an awful mess here, except Eddie. Say, on the low down, don't you know any boys?"

“I know Luke.” (Luke, her father’s golden lad, whom she had disappointed and denied so shabbily to-day.) She colored unhappily, the more as she found Miss Jennings’s hard little eyes upon her.

“Oh, so *that’s* it!” Janice pounced.

“What do you mean?”

“He’s your sweetie!”

“No. He—” She could not escape it, then. It was of no use to put on Miss Ada’s little yellow-buff crêpe de chine and come out of her cloister into the dazzle and din of the Bella Vista; the mountain of misery had come with her, moving steadily and implacably behind her, shadowing her, threatening to crush her. She was a wretched ingrate; a traitor; false to her father, and to her friend, and to herself. She got a certain comfort from putting it into determined words. “My father found Luke in the mountains, and he had the greatest faith in him. He was our nearest friend, while my father lived; he is my nearest friend now. I—some day—” she said clearly, “I will marry him.”

“Oh!” The acquaintance of her childhood considered her thoughtfully. “The plot thickens. Got it all doped out, haven’t you? Well, happy days, old thing, but I’d breeze around a little and look ’em over first! And speaking of such, did I tell you I know your boss?”

“Mr. Carey, you mean? Nancy’s father?”

“No, Peter Parker. (Sounds like ‘Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,’ doesn’t it?) *You* know—his dad was old Carey’s partner, and this bird inherited his share of the mill. Met him at Pasadena last winter, and we got talking about the places we went, and when I mentioned this, he mentioned the Altonia mill.”

“His mother is a remarkable woman, in her way,” contributed Mrs. Jennings. “She is president of the Federated Clubs of the whole country, and they say she’s the best woman speaker in America. Of course, that’s all very well for women who like it and haven’t any home cares. As far as I’m concerned—” she gave a delicate pat to the curl which was gummed against her temple—“I never seemed to find time for *clubs*.”

“Peter’s a scream,” Janice took up the tale. “Honestly, I think he’s got the best line I ever heard in my life. You know, he was canned from four prep schools and three colleges, and——”

Her guest’s lip curled. “I hate and detest him more than anybody else in the world!”

Her young hostess laid down her ramekin fork and looked at her with bright mouth open. “Say, how do you get that way? Hate *Peter*? Peter *Parker*? Woman, it can’t be done! Besides—did you ever meet him?”

“No, but I don’t need to meet him to know all about him! I know he’s idle-born, overfed, underworked”—her father’s, vehement adjectives, these—“grinding down the mill workers—the *children* so he can live and travel and—loaf—in lazy luxury!” The color had drained out of her golden olive face and it looked like ivory in its frame of coppery hair. Her eyes blazed, the pupils dilated blackly. “He’s a waster, a parasite!”

“Help!” cried Babe, jovially. “Don’t blame me! Blame the Club President! She brought him up—or didn’t!”

“But, Janice, can’t you see what a cancerous growth people like that are in the life of the nation?” (The violent weekly had contributed this, but she had repeated it until she honestly thought it her own.) “They take everything; they give nothing! They——”

“Hire a hall!” the other girl cut her briskly short. “Say do you mind—Eddie always cuts one number to step with me.” She got eagerly to her feet and went into the arms of the horn player and they moved slowly away together across the polished floor.

“Babe’s a great girl,” her grandmother remarked complacently. “The boys are wild about her, everywhere she goes.” She looked curiously at Glen, still white, and shaking with her fervor. “I met the Parker boy. I think you’re mistaken about him. Maybe you’ve got him confused with somebody else. He’s—I don’t know—kind of a *fascinating* rascal, if you know what I mean.” Her blandly adoring eyes were following her granddaughter’s leisurely progress across the big, ornate room. “Babe can certainly *dance*,” she said, contentedly.

For nineteen, the scene had inevitably its zest in the tang of novelty. Glen assured herself hotly that she despised it all as a virulent manifestation of social injustice, but she had a pathetic hope of cramming her mind so full of new sensations that it would give over its unhappy ruminations for the moment. She forced her attention upon the dreadful, bedizened, pitiful old creature across the table, on the harsh lights, the endless, heavy courses of the meal; the strange, savage music with its throb and thrill and its sly, insinuating cadences, its bursts of jungle joy; the diners; the dancers; Janice Jennings and young Edward Harrington Du Val who had demonstrated that he could buy his own hooch and gardenias, moving so slowly, almost stealthily across the floor, their eyes blankly fixed on space, their mouths unsmiling, their flat and thin young bodies pressed painstakingly close together, their whole air one of calculated ecstasy. She tried to make a vehement reality of it all, and she succeeded fairly well while she was in the midst of it, but back in her bed at last the radiant mood of fifteen hours before came back to her; battered and bruised, demanding sanctuary.

There was no illumination for her through the long night; its impenetrable velvet blackness was no thicker than the bewildered misery in her mind. Why? *Why?* Luke, whom she had pedestaled and pinnacled for five years; whom she had almost worshiped! Luke, who deserved the best, and to whom she had given her shabby

worst. The thing was a bitter mystery; one moment, as gravely, as exultantly as a child waiting for its first communion, she had waited for him to ask her to marry him, ready—oh, rapturously ready—to say yes, the yes which had been waiting for him ever since the day of her father's death; and the next moment she had been shivering, almost shuddering, frightened, unhappy, repelled. She was so bitterly *ashamed*. She repeated over and over, flagellating her sore spirit, that she had failed her father and her friend and herself.

It was not until the first rooster had flung his raucous challenge at the mocking bird, singing deliriously in a magnolia tree, that the solution came to her. It was so startling, so simple, so thoroughly explanatory, that she sat bolt upright with the surprise and relief of it.

She had been perfectly happy and perfectly *ready*, until Luke caught her in his arms. That was it! She didn't like being touched. Her father had been always bluffly undemonstrative, and Miss Ada's endearments were verbal only, and she could remember, as a tiny child, her restiveness under her mother's prolific embraces, and that Mrs. Darrow, little by little, with her sad eyes shining with tears, had given them up. "You are just like your father ..." she had said again and again.

So, that explained it! It was simply that she, like her father, was the sort of person who didn't like kisses. Doubtless there, were many of the same mind. She laughed aloud with the jubilant release from wretchedness. If only it had come to her sooner! Now it was crystal clear; she did love Luke, with her mind, but she didn't love him with—well, with her arms and her hands and her lips, that was all. She could explain it to him to-morrow, and tell him she was ready and willing to marry him, any day, any hour, if he would only please not touch her.

Luke would certainly understand and appreciate it; when she told him that her father, her father, who had meant so much to him—had the same peculiarity, it would justify itself with Luke.

People were different, that was all; consider Janice Jennings and the trombone player who looked like lovers and were not in the least, she felt sure; and herself, who looked up to Luke and—and *idolized* him, but who certainly could not dance with him in that fashion. In the few romances she had read there was a good deal of that sort of thing, to be sure, but she doubted very much if it was so popular in real life.... She exhaled a long, weary, peaceful sigh, turned her hot pillow, slipped her palm beneath her hot cheek and composed herself to sleep.... She was not a wicked ingrate, after all ... she was just ... a little peculiar ... as her father had been peculiar ... to-morrow she would tell Luke ... he would understand ... she did love him ... she just ... didn't like ... being ... touched....

CHAPTER X

Glen trusts to time to correct her peculiarities, and occupies herself with transforming her house to harmonize with her Wishing Carpet.

THE thing which made her situation easier was the fact of Luke's greatly increased activities. If he had been hard worked before he became superintendent, he was now a driven slave, only that he drove himself and rejoiced in the driving. He was alert, intense, obsessed. Mr. 'Gene Carey, who had a long-drawn battle with the flu and regained his strength very slowly, commented regretfully upon it but did not see where he could help matters.

"I wish I could do more, myself, Luke," he said remorsefully, when his daughter brought him down to the mill for the first time, gray of face and slow of foot. "But I'm a poor stick these days and that's the Lord's truth! And I miss old Ben, somehow ... the old fellow was as much a part of the Altonia as the walls and ceilings...." Weak tears filled his eyes. "Old fool—" he muttered, impatiently. "Think of old Ben sitting out there under an orange tree, watching the well gush oil, and we need him so here!"

"We're getting along all right, sir," his lieutenant assured him. "You don't see things neglected, do you?"

"No, no! I should say not! Never saw things kept up better in all the years— It isn't that, Luke; you know it isn't. I just don't want you to kill yourself, boy, that's all!"

Nancy Carey was sitting on the arm of her father's old office chair, one plump, pale hand on his white head. "And *I* don't want to have you kill yourself," she added softly.

"Of course you don't!" The old gentleman beamed, putting his arm about her. "Don't want to see your old Daddy's one and only right-hand man killed off, so *he'll* have to work himself to death, do you? No, of course you don't!" The light died out of his face and he sighed. "Well, I'll be getting along home, Lady-bird! Old Doc's right ... a little goes a long way with me now. But next week, Luke, I reckon I'll be back on the job!"

The next week found him only slightly stronger, however, and Nancy, tyrannizing prettily over him, brought him down for only an hour a day, and presently his physician ordered him into the Canadian Rockies for two months.

Glen, who had secretly hoped that Luke's promotion would mean an upward step for her as well, kept her disappointment to herself. Of course, it didn't matter, really; she wanted to be wherever she could help Luke most, but there would have been great pride and satisfaction in keeping the books of the Altonia. She knew she could do it acceptably; she had taken high marks in bookkeeping at business college. It hurt a little, to have Luke doubt her ability, although he put it very pleasantly.

“I want to keep the reins in my own hands, Glen. If you’ll just keep on with the correspondence and the files, and the thousand and one things I depend on you for—that’ll be the greatest help in the world!”

Luke had been a little difficult, at first, when she had explained the way in which she cared for him, with its prohibitions and limitations; she had been rather frightened, for a moment, but almost instantly he had himself in hand again. She supposed it *was* disappointing, if you were a demonstrative sort of person, to find some one you cared for was not demonstrative, although it couldn’t, she felt sure, be as uncomfortable as the other way about! Luke had a theory which she had no means of weighing and judging, that, directly they were married, she would get over her foolish notions. Girls, he stated sapiently, often had ideas like that.

Glen did not doubt his being right in this matter; Luke was always right. It would have been, nevertheless, a comfort to secure the expert opinion of a woman, some woman who had been successfully loved and married, which qualification, of course, eliminated Miss Ada, even if Glen had been willing to confide in her about her mountaineer. There was nothing for it, then, but time. Time, she knew, would help her to correct her own peculiarities, and time would likewise, she earnestly hoped, so increase Luke’s interests that he would hardly miss or notice the limitations of his wife. *Extremely* busy and purposeful married people, such as she and Luke would be, could not, surely, have very much time left over for the sort of scenes which he had started in the lonely lane, on the afternoon of her nineteenth birthday. She visualized a serene and industrious future for them, filled to the brim with welfare work among Luke’s people and the mill hands, with economic triumphs and a new and model Altonia built on the mistakes of the old.

And meanwhile, her loyalty to Luke was doubled; if she was failing him in one way, she would make it up to him in others!

But there seemed to be margins of time, now, left over from her work, with Luke putting in almost every evening at the mill, and staying often on Sundays, and Glen found herself groping for a fresh interest.

It was Gloriana-Virginia Tolliver who supplied the inspiration for it—fair exchange for the fairy-tale book which was faithfully remembered even on that shadowed day which found Glen nineteen years and one day old.

“Say, Glen,” the child wanted to know a week later, “have yo’all got a Wishin’ Cyarpet?”

“No, Glory! What made you think of that?”

“Why”—she was a little shy about it—“yo’all live in sech a sweet-pretty house an’ wear sech sweet-pretty cloze, an’ do jes’ whatsoever yo’ wishful to do!”

Glen laughed. Her clothes were of the plainest, and she had no illusions about the hideous house her mother had hated. “No, Glory, dear,” she shook her head, “I have no Wishing Carpet.” But no sooner had she said it than a six-year-old memory flashed before her—her question, and her mother’s answer—her pale and plaintive mother, her frail, frustrated mother who weakly wished for things she knew she could never have....

“Glory,” she said, after a thoughtful moment, watching the small wizened face brighten again, “I forgot! There is a rug I used to think was a Wishing Carpet! Of course, it isn’t really, but when I was little, I used to pretend—and even my mother made believe about it.”

Gloriana-Virginia clasped her unpleasant little claws in rapture. “Oh, *Glen*! Would yo’all lemme see hit jes’ *once*? I promise, cross my heart, to be so *keerful* not to dirty hit!”

She went home with Glen that night, and halted in breathless and worshipful admiration at the door of the ugly sitting room, her gaze roaming impartially over the glistening golden oak and offensive carpets but coming to rest on the small, patrician rug. “I know in time hit’s jes’ pintly erbleeged to be a Wishin’ Cyarpet!” she murmured, round-eyed. She dropped to her knees and crept close to it. “I wouldn’t go fo’ to tech hit ... hit’s so sweet-pretty an’ hahn’-sum ... but I kin *remember* hit. An’ some day, when I git me somep’n moughty big’n fine to wish fo’, why, yo’ll lemme come hyar an’ wish on hit, won’t yo’, Glen, honey-heart?”

After she had pattered down the hill her friend stood still, looking at the small section of beauty in her unbeautiful home. “I wish,” she thought rebelliously, “that I could make the rest of the house match it!” And then, quite suddenly and surprisingly, came the determination to do it, and with it a thrill of eagerness and interest. She could not buy more Persian rugs, of course, but she could cleanse her dwelling of its most appalling ugliness, so that her one treasure would have at least a less atrocious background.

Miss Ada Tenafee, eagerly consulted at the supper table, fell in with the plan in the nicest possible spirit of enthusiasm. Miss Ada had shrewdly conjectured that all was not moonlight and roses in the love affair of her enemy and her beloved young protégée, and rejoiced thereat, and she welcomed this fresh interest. Her own room in the Darrow house had always been charming, for she had brought her furniture with her, and she announced now that there were several really good pieces which her own dear father had brought from his ancestral home, stored in the attic at Cousin Amos’ mansion.

“But, Miss Ada!—That would be wonderful, but would you want to bring them here?”

She insisted warmly that she would. (Anything which gave her a firmer hold here, made the home more definitely hers.... Of course, when Glen married the young savage and brought him here, the gentlewoman must go; it would be an intolerable situation. But meanwhile, the deeper she could drive her roots, the better. And she had been aware, lately, of a growing hope.... He came less often and there was a restraint in Glen's manner when she spoke of him....)

"The *first* thing," Glen was glowing with her excited interest, "will be to take all this awful wall paper off and put on something perfectly plain."

"Well, I'd have the perfectly plain in the parlor and dining room," Miss Ada offered, "but don't you think you'd like some quaint little flowered patterns in the bedrooms?"

"Of course! And rag rugs and patchwork-quilts, and rush-bottomed chairs? I've noticed pictures in the back of magazines"—even the hectic weekly was not above running opulent advertisements—"and I read a home decoration article at the library one evening! And little dotted-muslin curtains! I could make them myself!"

"And I could help you," Miss Ada purred.

"And we'll take up all the carpets, and paint the floors—*I* can paint the floors! I've read about how you do it, and it will be *fun*!" The infrequent color was climbing in her clear cheeks.

It was fun, all of it. She flung herself into it with all the energy which she had meant for her new responsibilities at the mill, and for being in love with Luke, and she rose at five and stayed up until midnight many nights, and flew up the hill at noon for a precious half hour. Slowly, very slowly, the old house crawled out of its skin of ugliness and became simple and charming. The two women worked tirelessly; Miss Ada hurried home from school to sew on curtains and covers and valances, and Glen performed the more robust tasks of painting and polishing, of hammering and tacking.

The oppressive wall papers were covered over with a cool gray with a faint glint of gold in it, downstairs, and with prim little patterns of blue and purple rosebuds and humming birds and weeping-willow trees upstairs; the fat magenta and mustard colored flowers in the carpets went away forever to bloom in Phemie's delighted cabin, and the floors, discovered to be surprisingly smooth and well laid, took their coats of serene hues successfully; the windows looked at once demure and arch between their dotted-muslin ruffles. The golden oak, sold to Phemie's friends and neighbors, brought enough to replace it with a few satisfying old walnut and cherry things. There were no museum pieces, but they were honest in line and color, and with fresh upholstering in flowered chintz and hours of polishing took on an air of stable worth. These, together with Miss Ada's beautiful old sofa carved in great bunches of grapes, her own dear father's armchair, which she now brought down from her

chamber, a gate-legged table and a prim rocker and a stern old bookcase and writing desk in one, furnished the house sparingly, almost austerely, but very restfully.

"And now and then, as we feel we can afford it, we will add things," Miss Ada said.

Janice Jennings, who had taken her grandmother to Florida and brought her back again for a final fortnight at the Bella Vista, stared at it in gasping astonishment. Her bright mouth fell open as always in moments of mystification. "It knocks me for a goal!" she admitted freely. "It was the well-known world's most horrible interior, and now it's a darb! I've got to hand it to you, girls!" She beamed on Glen and Miss Ada in turn, and her bright little eyes roved consideringly over the cool and quiet interior. "Now, you need an honest-to-God old clock in the middle of the mantelpiece, and a Dresden China shepherd and his sweetie saying—'*Oh, you kid!*' from each end, and you'll be all set, and I've seen the very things in that old cellar shop on Main Street."

"I know," Glen sighed appreciatively, "but we can't spend any more money just now, Janice."

"Who's talking about your money? I want a finger in this pie! Yes, you can, too, let me do it," she battered down remonstrance. "Gee, I guess this is the nearest I'll ever get to fussing with a home. Grammer wouldn't live in a house on a bet. Sweet, Daddy, but I get fed up on hotels!" She came back in an hour with the clock and the bisque figures and exulted over the air they gave the room, waving away their thanks. "It gives me a tenth interest in the joint, see? You've always got to let me come here, now!" She sat down suddenly and rather limply in Miss Ada's prim rocker; her hands with their very pointed nails, glistening with liquid polish, hung slackly down beside her. "I'll want to head in, sometimes, when I'm sick of everything...."

"I'm sure you will always be more than welcome, my dear Miss Jennings." Miss Tenafee was touched. "Glen and I will always be glad——"

But Janice was on her feet again, winking away the moisture which had dimmed her hard young gaze. "It has me buffaloed—that chair—the whole dump! I'll bet I couldn't smoke in here to save my neck!" She left on the following day, and Glen walked as far as the entrance to the Bella Vista's grounds with her, after her farewell call. "I'll write to you sometimes, Glen," she said, with careful casualness. "Will you answer?"

"Of course, Janice. But—living here, as I do—I won't have anything to tell *you*!"

"Any old time you won't! Tell me when you get any new old junk for the house! Tell me about yourself! Tell me about the sheik!" She watched her narrowly. "Say, remember what I said, will you?"

"What was it?"

"*You* know, all right enough! I said—'Ramble around a little and look 'em over, first!' Listen, Glen, he's easy to look at and all that but—well, give the rest of the world the once over!"

"It wouldn't make any difference." Glen lifted her chin.

"All right; then you'll be all the surer. It was no compliment for Crusoe to pick Man Friday, get me? Gee, I'd like to doll you up and take you 'round a little! I can think of a dozen good eggs I'd like to have you meet! I'd like— Oh, *hot puppy*!" Her bizarrely-colored little face broke into lines of pixie glee. "I'd like to have you meet Peter Piper Parker!"

Glen Darrow registered extreme disgust.

"It would do you good! And it would do him good, to find one girl in the world who wasn't crazy about him! He probably doesn't believe there's any such animal! Of course, after you knew him a little while, even you——"

Glen was quite visibly forcing herself to speak calmly and civilly. "I wish you wouldn't, Janice. I know it's just fun for you, but it's something much more serious with me. It's a matter of principle. He stands for everything I've been taught to despise. He's a waster, and an idler, and a parasite——"

"All right, all right, I got you the first time!" Miss Jennings was cheerfully rude about it. "But it would be *exactly* like a story, wouldn't it?— Haven't you read a million where they start in with hating each other and— Well we'll see! I'll dope it out for you some way, if I possibly can. And in the meantime, happy days, old thing! Promise me you won't make the final clinch without tipping me off?" She shook hands briskly and then gave her a sudden, shamefaced hug. "So long!"

Glen turned back, but she had gone only a few steps when she heard Janice calling to her and waited for her.

"I suppose you know that Nancy Carey has a secret crush on your sheik, don't you?"

"Nancy Carey?" Glen stared and then laughed. The thing was absurd on the face of it.

"All right, laugh; but don't say I didn't hang out the red lantern! She's a dumb-bell, that girl. Solid bone from the beads on up. But that's not saying she doesn't generally get what she wants; the dumb-bells usually do, and the little foxes like me lose out! Well, on your way!"

But once more she hailed her, and this time when Glen walked halfway back to meet her she was giggling. "Say, I never told you about Peter Piper's toast on Mother's Day, did I?"

Glen conveyed coldly that she had not, and that she needed not now repair the omission.

"It's a classic! It's been told all over the map, and printed and reprinted till you'd think the mama would be ashamed to show herself on a platform. Of course, I figure there was a good deal of truth in it, though I'll admit it was a pretty fresh thing to say. Mrs. Parker is a grand old gal, but she's one of these eight-day, self-winding, Do-Gooders—*you* know! Always cleaning up a slum or starting a movement or something, and I guess Peter's just naturally so sick of it he goes the limit the other way. (No, now—you can wait a minute!) You can't high-hat me out of telling my *bun mut*! Well, it was in one of the colleges where they hadn't canned him yet, and the Y.M.C.A. lads were giving a dinner to their mothers, and, of course, Mrs. Parker would be the noblest Roman of them all, and they were nuts to have her, only she was clear across the map, uplifting something, and telegraphed her regrets. Well, then they figured that the next best would be to get her son, and have him respond to the toast—'Our Mothers!'"

Her listener showed signs of extreme restiveness and Miss Jennings laid firm hands upon her.

"Well, in a weak moment he allows he'll do it, and then, on the big night, forgets all about it. There they are, all set, and r'aring to go, and no Peter Parker. So they start a still hunt all over the landscape, including some choice spots where those good little Y.M.C.A. had never been before, and finally they run him down, only slightly the worse for wear, and get him into his uni, and deliver him at the speaker's table. Well, by that time Peter is just about as near sore as Peter ever could be, because he was just slipping into high for a really good night, and this whole thing leaves him cold, and he figures that it's all the mama's fault for being such a front-page special, so when the poor old toast master sees him there at last, clothed and in his right mind, he makes a long and fancy introduction, saying it with flowers and gobs of goo, and tells what pleasure he has and what an honor it is to introduce Mr. Peter Parker, the son of Mrs. Eugenia Parker, the blah to whose blah-blah we owe the blah-blah-BLAH—'Ladies and Gentlemen—Mr. Peter Parker!'

"Well, of course there's a big hand, and Peter Piper rises wearily, and waits till the noise dies away, and then he lifts his glass of lukewarm lemonade and looks at it more in sorrow than in anger, and up on the balls of his feet, like young Mr. Mercury, all set for a get-a-way, and sighs a little, and says—'*Here's to the mothers who bore us ... and still do!*'"

CHAPTER XI

Glen sets the day for her twentieth birthday, and grieves because her suitor is too busy to help her better conditions, while Mr. 'Gene Carey is crushed by the perfidy of Old Ben.

GLEN would have been very lonely in the months which followed if it had not been for her increased activities with the mill workers, and her joy in her transformed house, for she saw less and less of Luke Manders.

She had to fight a feeling of disappointment which bordered sometimes on resentment: Luke's advancement, instead of knitting them more closely together, seemed rather to come between them and force them apart. He was so absorbedly, relentlessly busy! Glen, unhappy over the way in which he drove the hands, had to admit that he drove himself most cruelly of all, and the hardest thing she had to bear was her helplessness to help him. She was bewildered by the fact that her duties, in spite of the tremendous pressure under which the mill was being run, were lighter than ever before. She longed ardently to lift burdens from him, but he constantly assumed more and more of the work which she had been in the habit of doing—even taking over the bulk of the correspondence, and taking full charge of certain of the files. When she protested he was adamant; he had to keep the reins in his own hands; he was so pushed he hardly knew whether he was on "foot or horseback," and it confused him if he didn't keep his eye on all the details.

And when she put a hand on his sleeve and said earnestly—"But Luke, I want to *help* you!" he had an instantaneous transition to the Luke of the lane on her birthday.

"You know how you can help me!" He was almost savage in voice and eyes, in the embrace in which he caught her. "You can help me if you want to—by marrying me! By keeping your promise to your father!"

She was frightened by his vehemence, and still more by her own reaction to it. She took herself firmly in hand; she would not fail him and her father because she was that curious and unfortunate creature, the person who doesn't like to be touched. "But I will marry you, Luke! I will!"

"When?"

Strong walls closing round about her, closing in, nearer and nearer; so near, so close, so tight, that she could hardly breathe, hardly think. "When—when—when I'm twenty, Luke!"

"The day you're twenty?"

"The day—I'm twenty!"

He released her, after a long moment, and flung himself out of the office, and Glen dropped unsteadily into her chair. Presently, however, there came a distinct sense of relief. It was settled, then. On her twentieth birthday. It put a period to evasions and delays. On the day that she was twenty, she would marry Luke, keep her word, please her father.

Meanwhile, in her greater leisure, she went into the Tollivers' home and others of its sort and tried faithfully to water where the doctor had planted, in spite of stony soil. Gloriana-Virginia was ailing, and Glen tried first to handle her case from the angle of the mill.

"Luke," she said earnestly, waylaying the superintendent in the hall, "I think Glory should be laid off for a month. She's so miserable——"

He nodded, frowning. "Looks no worse than she usually does—always was a pindling young one, but she's pretty tough and wiry, and she's a good hand. I'd hate to lay her off now, with these rush orders coming in—she keeps the other kids hustling, too." Then, at the unhappiness in her face—"Just wait till I get the reins in my own hands, Glen! We'll make a model mill out of the Altonia! You wait!"

"But Glory can't wait," the girl was mutinous. "Surely Mr. Carey——"

"You think you know old Carey, but you don't," he cut in harshly. "Mighty soft and mealy-mouthed with you, because he liked your father, but with me, he's always putting on the screws. No use your naming it to him. He'd say—'Yes—lay her off! Give 'em all a month on full pay'—to *you*, and next day he'd give me the wink to put 'em back."

And when Glen raged at the duplicity of the Altonia's owner, again he urged patience. Let her trust him; he would soon be in a position to dictate. Why, that niece of the old man's—the widow—Mrs. Bob Lee Tenafee, wasn't that her name?—she'd been there with a bunch of club women, scolding about conditions in the mill, comparing it with others in the community, and he was soft as silk with her—but what did it amount to? Wait; *wait*!

Then Glen, with a twinge of treachery to Luke, went to the most responsible member of the Tolliver family, M'liss', the maiden aunt.

M'liss' Tolliver had been a tall woman, to begin with, but her shoulders sagged and her chest caved in and her stomach protruded until she had eliminated several inches from her height. She was as flat and thin as a paper doll, her skin was the color of tripe, and her dull eyes were utterly and absolutely devoid of all expression. The shapeless, dun-hued dress she wore was stained with snuff and tobacco juice, and her scanty hair was twisted into a frowsy knot at the back of her neck.

She received without enthusiasm Glen's suggestion that Gloriana-Virginia be kept at home.

“No, me’um, I allus aim to keep young-uns to work,” she stated sagely. “Hit kindly does ’em good to keep movin’. I named hit to Super to put Beany on reg’ler—he’s the least one, that’s been dinner-totin’—but Super, he says they got a lot o’ pesky new-fangled laws ’bout not lettin’ young-uns make their salt!”

Glen let the general issue slide and held to the case in point. “But, M’liss’,—Glory isn’t well!”

The aunt shrugged a lean shoulder and treated herself generously to snuff before she answered. “Well’s she ever was; well’s she’ll ever be, I reckon. Her paw was pindlin’, too, and that young-un was borned sick.”

“M’liss’, listen to me! If you don’t take care of that child—she’ll *die*!”

“Well, won’t we all of us? Old pap, thar—” she nodded toward her sire, dozing in the sun, “he’s daid a’ready, only he don’t know ’nuff to lay still ’twell we bury him! No, me’um,” she spat with languid emphasis, “that Glory-chile, ef she was to lay off, she’d feel a heap sight wuss’n she do now, and what’s mo’, she’d be so plumb spi’lt thar’d be no livin’ with her!”

That evening, with a still greater sense of disloyalty to Luke, Glen sat down at Miss Ada’s beautiful old desk-bookcase and wrote an earnest letter to a certain society, begging them to send an investigator to the Altonia. Its conditions of safety and sanitation, she stated, were far below standard; it was breaking or evading the law in a dozen different directions; it was the worst mill in the community, in the state.

She signed and sealed the letter and sat staring at it unhappily, and once she made a motion to tear it up. Luke would be furious if he knew, and even though she had asked that her communication be regarded as confidential, it would doubtless come out in time.

Luke, driven, cumbered Luke, whom she was already treating so shabbily, who was enslaving himself to put the mill on the right side of the ledger again, needed every hand he had on his pay roll—even Gloriana-Virginia’s small claws—and she was deliberately making trouble for him. He did not mean to be hard. He was hounded by old Mr. ’Gene Carey, that mild-mannered, moist-eyed old hypocrite, who, in his turn, was being relentlessly goaded by Peter Parker of Pasadena, worthless young waster, lolling in luxury (she grew almost lyric, after the fashion of the heated weeklies) on the cruel profits of a business he had never seen.

She felt no resentment toward Luke, only a remorseful realization that his hands were tied, and she must act, now, for them both, and she ran swiftly to the letter box at the corner, dropped in her communication and came back with her chin held high.

The surcease from all her sorrows was her house. It received her like a lover. Sometimes, in the restful dining room, in the quaint chamber, establishing herself for a quiet evening in the sitting room where now the Persian rug seemed to lie relaxed

and at ease, she had the happy fancy that her mother, pale Effie, was there, moving through the transformed house with her frail and hesitating gait. And sometimes there came likewise the thought that Dr. Darrow, crusty and choleric, was stamping after her, hotly and profanely disapproving, loudly lamenting his golden oak and the robust flowers of the carpets.

At those times she flung herself hastily into his books or the vehement weekly, or slipped down the hill to hear Black Orlo's feverish philippics, which always gave her a sort of Charlotte Corday thrill.

Mr. 'Gene Carey was home again, a wholesome color in his face and a spring in his step, when he received the news of old Ben Birdsall's death, and he grieved over it sincerely. "Poor old Ben! Looks like he couldn't stand prosperity! One of those old truck horses that ought to die in harness! Yes, sir, if he'd stayed on here at the Altonia with us, old Ben'd been good for fifteen, twenty years yet, but sitting in the sunshine, picking oranges off the tree, watching the gusher gush, he just naturally slowed down and stopped, that's what he did! Poor old Ben! He was a faithful soul if ever there was one! I miss him. By the eternal, I miss him! Used to look at me with those old eyes of his ... kind of like a dog that trusts you...." He winked and blew a blast into his handkerchief.

Nancy, who came for him every afternoon, patted and soothed him. He mustn't take it like that; wasn't it fine that old Ben had so much happiness before he went? She lifted her lovely hazel eyes to Luke for confirmation of her comforting theory but Luke was not sympathetic. He had no solemn comments to make whatever, and made an excuse to leave the office at once.

His attitude fretted the old gentleman. "Funny thing, Lady-bird, that Luke can't show a little feeling over poor old Ben! I wanted to shut the mill down for a day, in memory of him, or half a day, anyhow, but Luke won't hear of it, and he hasn't a good word to say of the old chap. Can't understand it. Why, if he was *here*, you might say it was jealousy, Luke being so ambitious to do everything his own way, but a *dead* man, Lady-bird! It's—it's *hard*! I don't like it!"

He told his young superintendent that he didn't like it—told him with vigor and feeling, in the middle of a driving, high-keyed afternoon, in spite of his daughter's coaxing hand on his arm.

Luke Manders started to speak excitedly, got hold of himself, paced up and down the room for a moment and then faced his employer gravely.

"Mr. Carey, sir," he began, with something in his tone which made Glen, passing through to the spinning room, stop and stare, "you think it's queer I can't take on over Birdsall. Well, I'm not shedding any tears over a thief."

"*Luke!*" It was Glen who cried out.

Mr. 'Gene Carey's genial old face flushed an angry cardinal. "Now, look here, Manders, I won't stand for that! I won't listen to a word against old Ben, not even from you. You're jealous of him for some reason, Lord knows why, for he was a good friend to you while he was here, and always glad to see you advance! I think it's pretty small business, Luke, when a man's dead and gone, to——"

The mountaineer colored likewise but he held his head high, and there was patience in his voice, and regret. "I'm mighty sorry, Mr. Carey. I wish I could keep still about it all. I'd put the flag at half mast and hang crape over the whole place, yes, and cry like a nigger at a gospel meeting, if I could keep you fooled. But I couldn't, Mr. Carey. You'd have to know sometime, sir. You'd have to know."

It was very still in the stuffy little office of the Altonia, and the old man and the two girls who were looking at him and listening to him seemed to hold their breath. Nancy was the least moved of the three, but her tender and lyrical gaze grew softer, and Glen Darrow paled swiftly, while the senior partner's dark and dangerous flush increased until his face was mottled and congested looking.

"What do you mean?" he managed thickly. "What are you trying to tell me, Luke Manders, about poor old Ben Birdsall, lying in his grave out there in California?"

The superintendent cleared his throat. There was nothing hard about him now. He hesitated, and showed in look and tone and tempo the most unmistakable distaste for his unlovely task.

"I wish I didn't *have* to try to tell you, sir. I wish to God I didn't! You won't believe me, at first. You won't want to believe me. But I can show you the books, and I can show you the files."

After a hectic quarter of an hour, Mr. 'Gene Carey got hold of himself, and was able to listen intelligently, and to take in and assimilate the heavy tidings Luke Manders had brought him. Old Ben Birdsall, the young superintendent told him, as briefly and coolly as possible, had been cheating him for years, pilfering from the Altonia, altering the books, destroying incriminating letters, covering up his perfidy with a depth of guile amazing in a man of his mentality—or of what they had innocently believed to be his mentality.

The old gentleman took it very hard. The two girls, palely listening, were afraid he would swoon in the violence of his grief and indignation, and Glen, witnessing the slow death of his faith in his old retainer, found her heart softening toward him.

Nancy took him home at last, bewildered and broken, and it was arranged that Luke should come to see him that evening, after he had dined and rested, and tell him more of the grim details.

Glen, left alone with Luke, felt a great uprushing tide of loyalty and admiration engulfing her. No wonder he had become almost a fanatic on work, with this

avalanche of debt and treachery sliding down upon the Altonia! No wonder he had seemed ruthless in his zeal to make up for the scandalous losses!

She, too, had liked and trusted old Ben Birdsall, and was shocked at his deep and calculating wickedness, and the whole thing left her dazed and shaken. Timidly, she tried to make Luke see a little of what she was feeling, but he took her words somberly, in a deep preoccupation, and she slipped away, to leave him with his grave and serious responsibilities.

When she came down to breakfast next morning Miss Ada's eyes, never without the look of recent tears, showed signs of fresh weeping. Mr. 'Gene Carey, after a long evening with his superintendent, had fallen into an uneasy sleep, and at four in the morning had suffered a stroke. One side was paralyzed, and he could not speak.

Glen went down the hill to work in a tight-lipped silence. In view of his dreadful physical calamity, added to his business tragedy, and remembering his stout-hearted loyalty to old Ben, it was impossible to keep on casting him for the villain of the piece. She did not idealize him in the least, but she pitied him, and saw him for what he was—a rather futile and pathetic unit in a vicious feudal system. The bulk of her rage and resentment, hereafter, would center on Peter Parker of Pasadena, and directly she reached the mill she found Black Orlo and held earnest converse with him.

Mr. Carey's condition, after a week, was more hopeful. Save for a slight thickness of speech, he was able to talk normally, and the doctors promised that he would be getting about with a cane in three months' time. He was, his daughter told her friends, the vast tribe of Careys and Tenafees and their ilk who "claimed kin," simply angelic in his patience and gentleness, and he showed a touching and pitiful gratitude to his young henchman, Luke Manders.

The superintendent had confessed that he had been putting his own salary back into the business ever since the revelation of old Ben Birdsall's duplicity, and the Altonia's trembling on the brink of ruin: the mill owed him considerably more than a thousand dollars.

"You must keep account, boy," his employer said brokenly. "You shall have every penny back, and interest—yes, sir, by the eternal. Eight per cent! Just let me get in action again—oh, *damn* this fool leg—and we'll work it out! We'll get her afloat again!"

There was no possible doubt of it, Manders assured him, and he was not to worry about his back pay; his expenses were small, and he had saved a good deal. Any time at all would do; he was in no hurry; Mr. Carey was to forget that, and hurry up and get well again. Miss Ada would have been amazed beyond measure at the gentleness, the respect, the veneration of the young savage; it made Nancy Carey's hazel gaze grow liquid and tender.

The weeks went on in a dull procession; Mr. Carey improved slowly, Gloriana-Virginia grew slowly worse; Luke Manders made himself slowly more and more necessary to his employer; Glen Darrow began slowly to accumulate a small and austere trousseau. It was a heavy and languid spring, humid and enervating. Gloriana-Virginia seemed visibly to shrink and shrivel, but she lived so completely in her fairy tales that she was quite literally absent from the body and present with the witches and the princess and the ogres.

"Glen," she whispered once at eleven o'clock on a stifling forenoon, wiping the sweat out of her eyes with a backward motion of her sallow hand, "ef yo'all was to stand on that Wishin' Cyarpet, wishin' so hard yo' jes' pintly bend yo' wishbone, whar'd yo' wish to be *at*?"

The doctor's daughter smiled and opened her lips to reply lightly and in kind, but the pupils of her eyes dilated swiftly and darkly at a sudden thought.

"Glory," she caught the child's thin shoulders in a hard young grip, "Glory, I'd wish to be where I could see what our Peter Parker of Pasadena is doing this moment!"

CHAPTER XII

Mrs. Eugenia Parker, President of the Federated Women's Clubs, bitterly shares Black Orlo's opinion that her son does not amount to much, in which Peter himself cordially concurs.

GLEN DARROW'S bitter wish could hardly have been granted with propriety at that very instant, for the reason that young Mr. Peter Parker of Pasadena was in bed.

It was barely eight o'clock, which meant that he was just settling down into the final, delicious doze of the morning which he always allowed himself after an exceptionally full night. Takasugi, his valet, had not even opened the door a cautious crack to reconnoiter.

But if eight A.M. meant only a deeper dive into the depths of slumber for her son, it meant very nearly the middle of the forenoon to Mrs. Eugenia Parker, President of the Federated Women's Clubs of the United States, eating her well-balanced breakfast from a tray in her study, three floors below. She was awake at five every morning, and arose after a few moments of marshaling her thoughts for the day, did a brisk Daily Dozen to the exhortations of a small, compact, traveling phonograph, got briskly in and out of a stone-cold tub, walked for ten vigorous minutes up and down the graveled driveway, and sat down to her desk.

At eight o'clock her breakfast was brought to her—fruit, dry toast, one slightly boiled egg, black coffee. At nine her secretary arrived and they were closeted until one o'clock, when the president paused for luncheon, either at home or abroad, as the case might be—likewise an austere meal. Afternoons and evenings were given over to official and semi-official duties, and midnight frequently saw her back at her desk for a hasty glance at the late mail, her thick iron-gray hair braided into an uncompromising pigtail, her thick figure relaxing thankfully in the freedom of a perfectly plain kimono of dark gray silk. Mrs. Parker was straightly and inexorably corseted by day and sat always rigidly erect in severe straight chairs, but in the late and intimate hours she leaned back and sighed luxuriously now and then. Nature's idea had been to make her a soft, fat old lady, but Mrs. Eugenia Parker knew that it was not necessary to humor Nature in these little matters, and she was clearing sixty with a satisfying hardness and firmness of flesh. She was a plain woman and well aware of it, and went in for dignity rather than adornment, and there was force and character in her face, as well as much tolerant and unsentimental kindliness. When she presided at conventions the country women noted with surprise and a certain pleasure that her hair was not marcelled, nor were her short and serviceable nails conspicuously manicured, and on her salient chin there was a faint but determined

little beard. Mrs. Parker did not consider that decorative, and sincerely meant to have it attended to, as soon as she could conscientiously take the time.

On that particular morning she read the solid and conservative editorial in her favorite daily with cordial approval, and turned to the little heap of newspapers which had come in by yesterday's late mail and were still in their wrappers. People were always sending her marked copies ... a glance here, a marginal note for her secretary there.... There was a very slim one which was addressed to her son and had been put with her mail by mistake. She wondered, grimly, who could be sending Peter a marked copy ... who could believe that he would be interested.... She was just putting it aside when she noticed that it bore the postmark of the old southern city where her husband—and now her son—owned a half interest in a cotton mill, and after an instant's hesitation (but there was certainly nothing private in a newspaper!) she tore it open and—dividing her attention with her breakfast—began to read.

Twenty minutes later she entered Peter's suite with the sharpest of announcing raps and stood looking through the clever and attractive room to the sleeping porch beyond where a motionless figure lay at ease in a brilliant blue bed.

"Peter!" she said sharply, but the silent form did not even quiver, and she marched upon him with her short, decisive steps and stood looking down at him. It was almost a year since her only son who was likewise her only child had reached the age of twenty-one, and had legally, at least, become a man, but sleeping there in his bright blue pajamas which perfectly matched the enamel of the bed and its very decorative spread, his fair head pillowed on one up-flung arm, he gave decidedly more the effect of fourteen. "And I believe he *is* fourteen, essentially," his mother reflected unhappily. She was in the habit of talking learnedly about juvenile delinquents who were, perhaps, chronologically sixteen, biologically twenty, and psychologically only eight, but it was not until this hour of shame and chagrin that she was willing to include her own offspring in that stern classification.

Peter had been a delightful baby, a charming child, and a most disappointing youth. He was—or he was considered to be—more delightful and more charming than ever, but his parent found him purposeless and utterly devoid of direction. Frankly, she wondered what people saw in him, and whatever it was, she sincerely wished they did not see it, and flatter and fool him and flock about him, to his further demoralization. She was rather sure that he had brains—it was hard, indeed, to see how he could escape them, but he concealed them like a deformity, and if he had convictions on any subject he was singularly adept at cloaking them in persiflage. Sometimes Mrs. Eugenia Parker went so far in her own mind as to wish that he had been old enough to be in the war; it seemed to her that drill and discipline, that hardship and horror, blood and agony, might have developed him, might, in the rubber-stamp phrase, have made a man of him: golf and tennis and polo and mountain climbing and mah jongg had not done so, up to date.

He continued to sleep, a faint smile on his wide mouth which turned up a little at the corners, even in repose, like a clown's painted lips, beneath the pressure of her scorn and displeasure, and presently a sort of resentment rose in the earnest lady, and she laid hands upon him and shook him.

"Peter! Peter! Wake *up*!"

Peter woke up obediently, but by easy stages, and it was several moments before his mother could feel that she had really focused his attention upon the little paper she held in her hand.

He made a valiant effort to keep his eyes open. "Oh, I see.... Yes, certainly I understand, Eugenia...." He yawned enormously and smiled in deprecation. "Sorry! I get you perfectly. Some Red doesn't care for my mill, isn't that it?"

"Peter, that's only part of it, only the beginning! Read it! Read it, and see if you can endure to have such things said of you!"

"Are they libels, Eugenia?"

The Federation President flushed suddenly and furiously. "No, Peter, no; that's the most dreadful part of it. What this man says, in its essence, is *true*!"

"Well, then," said her son, reasonably, "we can't do anything about it, can we, Eugenia?" His mother sat down heavily in a chair beside the bed, and he regarded her warily. "Now, suppose I have my shower, and my coffee, and then we—besides, isn't Miss Dexter waiting for you?"

"Miss Dexter can wait," said the lady levelly. "I want you to read this article about you, Peter."

"But what," he wanted genially to know, "is the big idea? The gentleman thinks and says, probably with much force and emphasis, that I'm no good? Well, that's not a news item, Eugenia. You know it for a fact, and I've long suspected it, so why muss up our minds with it this bright morning?—this pearly dawn!" he added meaningly, pulling his watch from under his pillow. "I hate being harrowed so *early*.... I think my resistance is low at this hour. Don't you think that may be it?"

"My son," she insisted, "cannot you see that I am serious?"

He sighed. "Certainly I can see that you are serious, Eugenia. I have seen nothing else since I have been old enough to make an intelligent estimate of your character, and it has, I might mention in passing, darkened my young life.... However ... to return to the matter in hand, unless this sob stuff is violent enough to be funny, there are lots of things I'd rather read!"

"Peter, I have been very unhappy about this mill for years. I urged your father not to invest in it. I knew—I suspected, at least, from its location—that the labor conditions

would be deplorable, and of late years I have been convinced of it. Nevertheless—and I blame myself severely for it——"

"Oh, now, don't be severe with yourself, Eugenia," he pleaded engagingly. "There's always me to revile, you know!"

"I have been so engulfed in other affairs, in fighting for things in *general*, that the *particular*, in this instance, has escaped me. And now this article, which, in spite of its almost hysterical attack upon you, personally, has a very authentic ring, proves that the Altonia is one of the bad mills."

"I could have told you it was one of the bad mills, Eugenia. Darn' dump's passed its dividends twice, I understand from Judson."

His mother stared. She hadn't supposed, really, that this fritterling knew what a dividend was, but she returned instantly to her text. "I didn't mean bad in that sense, of course, as you know quite well. I mean that it flagrantly disregards the laws with reference to employing children under a certain age, and working children of any age at night. If you will *read* it, Peter——"

"Now I'll tell you what we'll do, Eugenia. You leave it right here—right here beside me on the bed, see?—so I can't possibly lose it, and after I've had my shower and my coffee, and while Takasugi's shaving me——"

Mrs. Eugenia Parker got to her feet and walked to the end of the sleeping porch and stood for several moments looking out into the effective garden which surrounded her house. When she came back to her son her voice was low and steady.

"Will you try to realize what this means to me, personally, Peter? In the first place, because you are my son, and in the second place because, publicly, I stand for proper working and living conditions, compulsory education—law enforcement—and privately, I or at least a member of my family—Peter, we are the accessories after the fact! We are guilty, you and I, of breaking laws, not only the laws of the country, but the laws of common humanity. Peter, are you listening to me? You are not going to *sleep* again?"

"Not if I can possibly help it, Eugenia," he assured her warmly, "but there's something so soothing about your voice...."

She rose again and stood frowning down on him. "Peter, I ask you once more, will—you—read—this article?"

"I'll compromise with you, Eugenia! You read it, and I'll listen!" He propped himself up on an elbow. "It's a long time since you've read aloud to me, isn't it, Eugenia? Remember how I used to want the 'Swiss Family Robinson' twice a year? And 'Pontiac, Chief of the Ottawas,' and 'Thro' Swamp and Glade,' and 'The Prince and the Pauper'? You wouldn't read Frank Merriwell to me—'*Blooey, blooey, and eight*

more redskins bit the dust!'—and I always rather held it against you," he smiled at her cozily. "Now, you go right ahead and get this off your mind, Madame President! Shoot!"

Mrs. Parker sat down again, stiffly, on the edge of her chair. "Peter, will you never grow up?"

"Certainly. I did. I am. There are those who consider me entirely mature. For example, the very determined young lady from Arizona who endeavored to espouse me at Del Monte last month, and the——"

"Peter, *please*!" The consuming terror of her life was that her only son would make a thoroughly unsuitable marriage and he was quite well aware of her anxiety on the subject.

"Well, what do you suppose it *is*, Eugenia? *What* is the secret of my fatal attraction? If I didn't take Takasugi with me, there are times when I should be actually overpowered.... You wouldn't say, would you," he flung back the bright blue spread and sat up in his bright blue pajamas, his fair hair mussed, his arms about his knees, "that I am the caveman type, popularly supposed to be irresistible? It must be my girlish laughter. But to return—I have no objection, I never had, to growing up, a process which carries with it many pleasant prerogatives. But I will not—I will never, and it is useless for you to plead with me and importune me, Eugenia, grow old. Madame President, consider the bleakness of it!" He shivered and dove under his covers again. "Eugenia, I tell you frankly, I'm in a Peter Panic about growing old!"

CHAPTER XIII

Mr. Peter Parker of Pasadena, visiting his mill for the first time, receives the right hand of fellowship and the cold shoulder in the space of an hour.

IT was something less than a fortnight later that there was trouble with the power at the Altonia on a hectic day of high pressured rush. The machinery jerked itself to a standstill, like a faulty mechanical toy, and Gloriana-Virginia, waiting only to be certain that her frame was actually still, squatted thankfully in a corner and bent over her book, a sallow forefinger tracing the words laboriously, her lips moving in a blissful murmur.

Glen, hurrying through the spinning room with a message from Manders, stopped as always for a word. "Well, Glory—you're in luck, anyway!" She leaned down to whisper. "We hope the old power will stay off, don't we?"

"Yes, me'um," the child returned, gratefully. "I sho' do crave readin' fairy tales' stories!"

"But you've read that book ten times over, Glory! I must bring you another one."

"No, *me'um*! Please, Glen, don't yo' take hit away! I crave to read hit 'twel I know hit from kiver to kiver! And this hyar is the 'citingest part!"

"What's happening, Glory?"

"Oh ..." she emitted a little squeal of thrilled delight, "the Prince, he's jes' a-riding up to the Ogre's Castle!"

It was at that very instant, making Gloriana-Virginia a prophet once removed, that M'liss' Tolliver slouched into the superintendent's office. "Feller out thar wants in," she stated laconically.

"Who is he?"

"Didn't say."

"Well, you tell him we don't admit visitors. If he's got business, let him name it." He turned again to the inter-phone and reviled the engine room savagely.

M'liss', pausing long enough for a generous sniff of snuff, trailed out again, to return presently with the ghost of a grin on her lackluster face. "Feller says to name hit to yo' that his business is pleasure."

"Tell him to go to the devil!"

“Gime this hyar kyard,” she drawled, producing a small square of pasteboard with its block letters faintly embossed. “Said he ’lowed mebbe hit’d be the Open Sessymer—whatever that is.”

Luke Manders, still at the telephone, reached for it with his free hand. “Good God A’mighty!” he gasped.

“Is that who ’tis?” Miss Tolliver allowed herself a brief excursion in mirth. “Acts uppity ’nuff to be!”

“Ask him in! Tell him to come in, you fool! What are you waiting for? Bring him here. No—wait—” he looked hastily about the cluttered old office, and frowned. “Ask him to sit down in the front entrance, there—take out a chair for him. Tell him I’ll be with him in ten minutes—five minutes! And hurry up!” He almost pushed her out of the room, but in a surprisingly short interval, considering her rate of speed, she was back again.

“Feller’s gone.”

“Gone? Gone where?”

“How in time’d I know? Jes’ plain up’n went.” She bent suddenly and spat through the window.

“You took all night to—” he began roughly, and then he relaxed, sitting down in the swivel chair at his desk as heavily as Mr. ’Gene Carey might have done, and wiping his brow and his wrists with his handkerchief. “All right. You can go. Get *out*!”

Glen Darrow, meanwhile, returning by way of the spinning room, found a stranger in light and pleasant converse with Gloriana-Virginia Tolliver, who was smiling at him wanly and shyly.

He was a very young man, she saw at a glance, and his slimness and extreme fairness increased the boyishness—the almost childishness—of his appearance. He was dressed all in spotless white, save for the bright blue of his cravat, and he looked cool and serene in contrast to the palely sweating Glory.

“Yes,” he was saying cordially, “I certainly do like fairy tales, and I believe ’em, too! I’ve known the most amazing things to happen!”

“Yes, suh!” Her wise, kind little monkey face regarded him with respectful friendliness. She was lightly dusted with lint and wisps of thread hung here and there on her dress.

He did not hear her approach, so Glen stood still for an instant, looking at him and listening to him.

“I think I didn’t catch your name,” he was saying gravely.

“Gloriana-Virginia Tolliver, suh, but they mos’ gin’er’ly calls me ‘Glory.’”

“They call you Glory....” He bent upon her a thoughtful look. “And how old are you, Gloriana-Virginia?”

“I’m fo’teen, suh.”

“Fourteen?” Then as she nodded. “And how long have you been engaged in what the statisticians call gainful occupations?”

“Suh?” She stared at him.

“How long have you been working here?”

“Oh! Why sence I was erbout six, suh.”

“*Six?*” He seemed to take in facts slowly, the fair young man.

“Yes, suh. You see, nowadays they dassent hire young-uns ’twel they right big. They put the law on us. But I was lucky—I got in befo’ they got all the rules fixed up that-a-way.”

“You were lucky?”

“Yes, suh! My po’ little cousin, Henry Clay Bean, that we mos’ly calls Beany, we’re plumb scared we can’t git him in at all! Mr. Carey, he owns this mill—he won’t let the least ones work, but M’liss’, that’s my aunt, she named hit to Super, and he ’lowed he could sneak Beany in, somehow.”

“Well, that was extremely nice of Super, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, suh,” she agreed a trifle doubtfully. “Super said he could hide when Mr. Carey come by, or ary them club ladies that nose round, an’ Beany kin say he’s jes’ dinner-totin’.”

“Dinner-toting?”

“Yes, suh.”

“Indoor sports of all nations! And what is dinner-toting?”

“Why, suh, why—dinner-totin’, that’s jes’, well—” she strove for simplification in the face of this amazing ignorance—“hit’s jes’ plain *dinner-totin’*, that’s all! Jes’ totin’ dinners!”

“Ah! Carrying dinners!”

“Yes, suh!” She beamed encouragement on the dullard. “Cy’arin’ er totin’—hit’s pintly th’ same!”

Glen Darrow stepped suddenly forward.

“Good morning! How do you do?” The stranger spoke quickly, regarding her with keen interest. “Are you connected with the mill?”

“Yes,” she answered eagerly. “I’m the superintendent’s secretary.”

“Well, now, that’s awfully nice for the superintendent!” he remarked cordially. “I suppose it’s all right for me to wander about a bit and look things over. Want to get an idea—study conditions—all that sort of thing, you know——”

The hope in her eyes warmed to a glad certainty. “Oh, then you *are*——”

“Certainly I are—am! What?”

She lowered her voice so that not even the child could hear. “You’re an investigator?”

He considered it thoughtfully. “Well, I daresay that’s what you’d call it. At any rate, investigating at the moment.”

Sudden color flooded her golden-olive cheeks and she impulsively held out a hand which the youth took very willingly.

“Oh, I’m so glad! So glad and thankful that you’ve come!”

“I’m so glad you’re glad,” he said cordially.

“I wrote so urgently,” she said in a low tone. “I couldn’t understand why they didn’t send some one— I asked them to—to consider my letter as confidential, and if you don’t mind— Will you please not mention to—to the superintendent or to the owner that I sent for you?”

“That shall be our secret,” said the young man solemnly and a little bewilderedly, retaining her hand.

“But I will show you everything, and tell you everything, and help you every way I possibly can!”

“Well, that sounds fair enough,” he said reasonably. “And whom have I the pleasure——”

“My name is Glen Darrow.”

“Glen Darrow!” The fair young man repeated it with evident pleasure. “Glen Darrow ... you sound like a piece of Scotch scenery, but you look even nicer than that.”

Glen retrieved her hand gently and rather absently. “This is the spinning room, and this little girl——”

“Gloriana-Virginia and I have already met, thank you very much. Well, Glory,” he spoke to the child who had dipped into her book again, “what’s happening now?”

“Oh, suh, hit’s jes’ so fine hit’s purely my delight! The Prince, he’s jes’ come to the Ogre’s castle and found the Princess!”

The youth in spotless white laughed aloud. “Sounds like a bit out of a Hollywood continuity, doesn’t it?” He looked at Glen with appraisal and approval.

She had not heard him, or at least she had not taken in the sense or the nonsense of his words. “I expect you’ll want to go all through, first, and then take it room by room,” she said absorbedly, “and talk with the hands, after hours, of course, in their homes. I could give you a list——”

But he had not paid any more attention to her words than she had to his. He was looking at her with a growing intentness, and his mind was still on Gloriana-Virginia’s last sentence. “The Prince and the Princess and the Ogre’s castle,” he repeated. “We’re all set! But where’s the Ogre?”

“I could meet you somewhere—” Glen was going on earnestly.

“You could meet me *any*where!” the youth interrupted her warmly. “You can date me out for any time or place! We can——”

The door opened abruptly and Luke Manders, only a trifle late on his cue, strode in. “Oh, there you are, sir!” he said thankfully. “I’m right sorry that fool woman was so slow in asking you in! I was afraid you’d left, and I’ve been hunting everywhere—Mr. ’Gene Carey has been sick—I reckon you know that—and he still doesn’t get down here. But I’m his superintendent, Luke Manders, and anything I can do for you, Mr. Parker——”

Glen, who had been staring in astonishment at Luke’s cordiality to the unknown investigator, so utterly at variance with his rule of “No Visitors Allowed,” caught her breath at sound of the name. “What? What did you say, Luke?”

“Oh, Glen!” He turned to her and handed over the card which he was still carrying. “This is Mr. Peter Parker, and that fool, M’liss’ kept him waiting outside till— This is Glen Darrow, Mr. Parker, who——”

“I already know Miss Darrow,” said the young owner genially, “but I should enjoy shaking hands again, now that we are formally introduced.” He advanced toward her and held out his hand engagingly.

The girl put both her hands behind her. “And I know *you*, Peter Parker,” she said whitely. “I know you—*now!*”—and with a long look of concentrated scorn and contempt at the fair face and the white clad figure of the amazed young man she turned and flung herself out of the room.

“Well, now, Mr. Parker, it’s right sultry to-day,” said Luke Manders hastily, seeking to cover up his assistant’s rude exit, “and about dinner time, and I reckon you’d rather go on back to the hotel now and come here later in the afternoon when it’s cooler, wouldn’t you, sir?” He started toward the door, to lead the way. “I’ll fix it so I’m free, then, to go over things with you.”

“That’s awfully nice of you, old top,” Peter Parker stopped looking at the door through which Glen Darrow had vanished and regarded his superintendent genially, “but I don’t want to bother you.”

“No bother at all, sir,” he assured him, still moving toward the door as the whistle blew shrilly for the noon hour, “and anyhow, we’re quitting for dinner now——”

“But I didn’t breakfast until ten, you see,” the youth explained, “so I can, without actual suffering, wait until one or one-thirty for my luncheon, and I shall enjoy just browsing about by myself.”

“But I could explain——”

“Of course you could,” his employer agreed gratefully, “and I’ll wager you’re one of our best explainers, but even at that, I probably wouldn’t get you. You can’t think what a fool I am about machinery ... and my friend, Gloriana-Virginia can tell me all I need to know for the present ... all that I can *assimilate* on a day like this....” He screened a yawn and fanned himself with his exquisite panama. “And here comes my messenger!”

M’liss’ Tolliver was crossing the room at her slouching gait and gave him a brief, incurious glance of recognition. She was followed by a very little boy, and a tall, stooped old man came after him, a large dinner bucket on his arm, and both hands engaged with the wheezing harmonica at his mouth which was producing, with gaps here and there which needed to be filled in with memory or imagination, a time-honored tune:

“*There is a hap ... py land ...*
Far ... far ... a-way....”

It was not a very positive assertion, rather a tentative statement which was open to question.

“Yo’ quit that, Pap!” his daughter snapped at him, snatching the bucket from his arm. “I ’low I’ll ‘happy land’ yo’, ef yo’ don’t leggo that dawg-gawn tune! Hyar, yo’ Glory, and Beany, pitch in and eat!” She sat down on the floor with her back against the wall and the two children squatted obediently beside her.

“This is the quickest way out, sir,” said Luke Manders, pointing to the door which led into the lane.

“Now, look here, old son,” Peter Parker grinned at him engagingly, “you know I’ll have a lot better time by myself! I can see all I want to see without troubling you for a minute, and I promise you faithfully not to get caught in the machinery! All I want to do is watch the wheels go round for a little while, and then I’ll call on Mr. Carey, and then I’ll be off again for the great open spaces!”

“Oh—then you’re not—not going to make a long stay, Mr. Parker?”

“Not if I keep my health and agility,” he looked without pleasure at the scene about him. “I have come, at the earnest request of a very earnest parent, to have a look at my mill, and having had it, will be very swiftly on my way again.”

“I see,” said Luke Manders. “Very well, then, sir—if you should want me, I’ll be in the office.”

“The possibility is extremely remote,” said the visitor, “but I shall be greatly obliged if you will send the assistant to me at once.”

“Who?”

“The assistant—your assistant! Our assistant! The girl with the sunset hair, who left us recently, with so much emphasis.”

“Glen Darrow?” The dark face of the mountaineer seemed to darken still further as the blood mounted in it.

“That is, I believe, her singularly picturesque name. Tell her, if you will be so kind, that I desire her presence immediately.”

The superintendent started to speak but changed his mind quite visibly, and said, after an instant’s burdened pause, “All right, Mr. Parker, sir,” and went into his office.

Peter Parker renewed his fascinated study of the Tolliver family. “And you,” he addressed the old man, “are what is called a dinner-toter?”

The old fellow hung his head. “Jes’ beginning to-day, suh. Super, he ’lows I’m jes’ pintly too old fo’ any good use.”

“Well, yo’ air, Pap,” said his daughter. “Yo’ sho’ air, and ef yo’ keep on pestering me with that tarnation tune——”

Gloriana-Virginia, her wise little monkey eyes soft with sympathy, patted her grandfather’s sleeve with her sallow claw. “Jes’ think how fine hit’ll be to set in the sun and rest, Gran-pappy!”

He brightened. “That’s so, Glory, and jes’ think how much time I’ll git fo’ my practicing!”

“Glory, yo’ hesh yo’ clack and *eat*!” her aunt rebuked her.

The child picked up a chunk of cold corn pone. “Hit’s quare, M’liss’, some way; I figger and figger ’bout my dinner and how good hit’ll taste, and then, when hit comes, I cain’t eat skurse a bite.”

“Hit’s kaze yo’ so plumb full o’ lint,” M’liss’ explained to her indifferently. “Beany, he kin eat what yo’ don’t want.”

Young Mr. Parker turned his attention to the very little boy and asked him gravely how he did.

“I’m right peart, suh,” the child answered solemnly.

“You are? Well, I might state in passing that you hardly look the part, old-timer. You wouldn’t romp home with any blue ribbon from a Better Baby Contest, would you?”

“No, suh,” he assured him earnestly.

“And what’s your name?”

“Henry Clay Bean, suh.”

“But folks mos’ giner’ly calls him Beany fo’ short,” his cousin Glory added.

“And you’re a dinner-toter, too, Henry Clay?”

“Not no mo’, suh,” he corrected him pridefully. “Super, he put me on when he laid gran-pappy off. Glory, she’s going to learn me.”

“Well, now, that’s awfully nice of Glory, isn’t it?”

“Yes, suh.”

He had never seen such a solemn child. Gloriana-Virginia’s wise little face lighted swiftly at the suggestion of mirth, and M’liss’s saturnine countenance was capable of grim comedy, and the old man had a mild and toothless smile which gave him the effect of an elderly infant, but Henry Clay Bean was a study in utter sobriety. Young Mr. Parker made the face which had added materially to his childhood fame, but while Glory gave a little squealing giggle the small boy was impassive.

“Was it an election bet, or do they dock you for ribald laughter, Beany?”

[163]“Yes—no, suh.” A faint frown knitted his forehead for an instant but his round eyes never left his questioner’s face. He was suddenly lifted and flung to a seat on a white shoulder. “And you know, Henry Clay, there are those who consider me a comedian?”

“Yes, suh.”

“Where do you suppose that young woman is, Beany, to whom we issued a royal command? Suppose we go in search for her!” He started toward the office, but the door opened and Glen stood on the threshold. “Ah, here she is, now! A little slow, but——”

“I am not coming in answer to your order, Mr. Parker,” she said levelly. “I just——”

“But you came,” he said indulgently, “and that is, after all——”

“But I didn’t come—” she was white still, save for two dabs of furious color on her cheekbones and her eyes were almost black, but she fought hard for control.

“Oh, I get you! You just came to say that you’re not coming? You will recall, however, that you offered to show me and tell me and teach me, and suggested that we make a date for this evening? Any hour which you——”

“I came,” she cut into his persiflage, “because I had to tell you how I hate you and despise you——”

“Why, you didn’t have to tell me that,” he said in gentle surprise. “It seems very un——”

“—for what you are and what you do, and the life you live,” the words came swiftly with the beat of little hammers, “and because you are idle-born and overfed and underworked, and because——”

“Help!” cried young Mr. Peter Parker feebly, putting Henry Clay Bean on the floor, and staring at her like a bewildered child, hurt but stoutly conscious of rectitude. “It’s simply a case of mistaken identity, that’s all! You’ve got me confused with somebody else. Why, I’m one of the nicest fellows you ever knew in your life. Aren’t I, Gloriana-Virginia?”

“Oh, *yes*, suh!” Glory moved close to him with a positively protective attitude and lifted a reproachful look to Glen’s bitter face.

“I don’t see how you can possibly hate and despise me already! Why, it always takes people years to do that, and very few ever accomplish it at all, after a life of earnest effort. I must reluctantly hand it to you for a fast and snappy worker!” He dropped his gaze to Gloriana-Virginia who had slipped a comforting hand into his. “Glory,” he lowered his voice, “what is the matter with this young woman? First she gives me the right hand of fellowship and endeavors to date me out and then— Is she quite all right, mentally, do you think? So young, so fair, and yet so—” he raised his wistful eyes to the doctor’s daughter once more and considered her in a long, reproachful scrutiny. Then at the swift illumination of a thought he flung back his head and laughed long and heartily, and Glory’s wise little face registered happy relief.

“By gad,” he gasped, “by gad, you know I believe *you* sent me that article in *The Torch*!”

Glen Darrow gave him back his look with one of scorn and loathing before she answered him, very steadily, without lifting her voice.

“*I wrote it!*”

CHAPTER XIV

Peter soaks up impressions and rather fancies himself as a comedian, but neither Glen Darrow nor Henry Clay Bean find him funny.

MR. 'GENE CAREY was at first petulantly annoyed at the unannounced visit of his young partner. "What's he want to come bursting in on us like this for, Luke? Why couldn't he write and tell us, and see if it was convenient? What's the telegraph for? Now I suppose there'll be the deuce to pay, when he finds out how behind we are!"

But the superintendent, who had reported promptly, before Peter Parker had made his call, was inclined to take the matter more lightly. Young Mr. Parker, he stated with a curling lip, was not the sort to take an intelligent interest in details; he had come, he said, to please his mother, and he would, Luke felt sure, go—very swiftly—to please himself. "All he wants to do, sir, is fool round and talk to the young ones. He won't bother us at all. Said himself he was a plumb fool about machinery; didn't even want me to show him over the mill and explain things. No, sir, I figure that after we just tell him about Ben Birdsall, and how pinched we've been, he'll be satisfied. After all, with his money, this little old mill's just a drop in the bucket!"

The old gentleman wagged his head. "Yes, but his daddy was mighty careful to count the drops, Luke! There wasn't one leaked away that he didn't spot it!"

"Well, this kid isn't like that, sir. If you want my opinion, he don't hardly know he's alive! I think if we just treat him right, and let him poke around to suit himself——"

"We'll have him to dinner, Lady-bird," Mr. Carey addressed his daughter. "Or—better still—we'll have him move right up here from the Bella Vista, that's what we'll do! Good idea, Luke?" His henchman heartily approved. "That'll spike his guns," the senior partner chuckled. "You go telephone right this minute, Lady-bird! Can't raise much of a row about things when he's eating our salt, eh, Luke?"

"No, sir," his lieutenant approved once more. "I'll be getting back, sir—million things to see to, and the power was off for an hour just when we're snowed under with rush orders!"

"Too bad, Luke, too bad! Mighty trying on you, I know that, and you shouldering the burden all alone. But it won't be long, now! I'm getting out in the garden every day, Luke." He brightened. "Sounds good—'rush orders!' Things certainly are picking up, by the eternal!"

"Yes, sir," Luke agreed soberly, "but of course you understand that orders don't always mean profits, sir. We're so deep in the hole now——"

"I know," Mr. Carey sighed, "I know ... old Ben Birdsall ... who'd have ever dreamed ... if it'd been my own brother...."

Nancy came back from the telephone to report that Mr. Parker thought it was no end good of them; he would be with them well in advance of the dinner hour.

"Let's get some young people in to meet him, Lady-bird!" her father beamed. "Let's give the boy a good time. After all, he's my friend Parker's son, and he's my partner, and even if he is kind of a whipper snapper, why— Who'll you ask, Lady-bird?"

"I'll have Cousin Mary-Lou, anyway," Nancy offered, "and another girl and two men. Dad, dear," she stood looking at him wistfully with her tender and lyric gaze, "what would you think about asking Luke?"

"Asking him what?"

She colored delicately. "Why—to dinner. He's been so devoted and faithful and unselfish, Dad, dear——"

The old gentleman stared. "Why, Lady-bird, what an idea! What would your Cousin Mary-Lou think? What would any of your other guests think? What—what are *you* thinking of Nancy?"

She hung her head. "I'm thinking of how he worships you, Dad, dear, and how he works early and late, and goes without his salary, and never spares himself——"

"I know, I know, I know all that," he rejoined hastily. "No man ever had a better superintendent, nor more loyal, and when the old Altonia gets on her feet again, I'll make it up to him, Nancy, I will, by the eternal! He won't lose by his faithfulness, I promise you that! But when it comes to asking him to *dinner*, Lady-bird, why—Luke, you know, Luke's just wild mountain stock, one jump away from the feuds and moonshine. If Dr. Darrow hadn't taken a fancy to him, and seen how smart he was, as a youngster, he'd still be climbing over the rocks and taking pot shots from behind a tree!"

Her hazel eyes filled slowly with tears and her chin quivered. "You needn't *scold* me about it," she murmured. "It was only because he's been so——"

He patted her soothingly. "There, there, Lady-bird, Lady-bug! Now, now! Of course her old daddy understands! It was just that you didn't stop to think, that's all!"

"I didn't—stop—to think," sobbed Nancy Carey.

They liked young Peter Parker from Pasadena, his senior partner and his senior partner's daughter, and all their guests. They found him so amazingly juvenile and so merry and amiable and so intriguingly different from any one they had ever known.

"Cousin Mary-Lou," who was the eighteen months' widow of gallant Bob Lee Tenafee who had died a gentleman's clean and speedy death in the hunting field, decided to give a house-party for him at her plantation, "Beulah-land." Her Cousin 'Gene had dropped a hint in her ear, and Mary-Lou moved swiftly. "You surely don't

want to prowl around that stuffy old mill for more than a day, Peter Parker," she said in her soft, caressing voice, dropping her *r*'s in the authentic manner poor Effie Darrow had adored.

"I do not," he agreed gratefully. "I came at the earnest request of my earnest parent, and after an earnest once over, I shall exit merrily."

"Then shall we say to-morrow? Can you all come in time for dinner to-morrow?" the young widow gathered up the other diners in her brown and velvety gaze.

"Oh ... not to-morrow, please!" The guest was deprecatory. "I couldn't stall Eugenia off with one day, you know!"

"Eugenia?"

"My female parent—Madame President, of the Federated Clubs. Surely you've heard of Eugenia? An excellent person in her way—" he turned gravely to his shocked host, "and I feel for her an esteem bordering upon affection, but she has the fatal defect of superseriousness. Some one from here very thoughtfully mailed me a marked copy of a jolly little paper called *The Torch* and——"

"*The Torch?*" Old Mr. Carey laid down his knife and fork and the choleric flush flooded his convalescent pallor. "Confound them, sir, the greasy——"

"Dad, *dear*," Nancy warned him softly, "you're not to get excited!"

"Miserable, beetle-browed, chicken-livered scum of the earth! Wish to the Lord we didn't need 'em so desperately! I wouldn't have a one on the premises! They're always holding their meetings in dark alleys and plotting and planning, and upsetting the hands. And they dared to send you— Was it the one with a scurrilous article on yourself, my boy?"

Peter nodded. "The very same little valentine!"

"Cousin 'Gene," Bob Lee Tenafee's widow wanted to know, very seriously, "are you going to let a thing like that go unpunished? I think it's abominable."

The old gentleman brought his good fist down on the table with a resounding thump. "No, Mary-Lou, no, by the eternal! I'm going to run that rascal down if I have to get a detective from New York! I'll show 'em that they can't act like Russia in America! I'll——"

"Oh, please," said his young partner winningly, "don't cheat me out of the fun of doing that for myself!"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Why, that I'd like to run the ruffian to cover myself! Alone and unaided!" Mr. Peter Parker looked round the pleasant circle, fervent young ferocity overlaying an inward smile. "It sounds to me like the utterance of a singularly abandoned criminal."

“I’ll wager a thousand dollars,” Mr. Carey stated handsomely, “that it’s ‘Black Orlo’! He’s the ring-leader.”

“‘Black Orlo’!” Cousin Mary-Lou repeated. “Sounds like bombs and midnight murders, doesn’t it? Why do you keep such a creature about, Cousin ’Gene?”

“I don’t want to, Mary-Lou—the Lord knows I don’t want to, but he’s the leader, as I say, and if we fire him, the whole crew of foreigners’ll walk out with him, so Manders tells me. But as soon as we get things—well, running a little smoother—” the genial old face clouded over with unhappy thoughts of Ben Birdsall— “I’m going to clean house, at the Altonia! Yes, sir, by gad, I’m going to clean house, and sweep out the scum!”

Peter Parker wrote to his mother that night of his charming first impressions; the Careys and their friends like people out of a delightful book; the Carey girl would melt in your mouth, and there was a young widow who filled the eye most pleasantly. How would she like to have him marry a handsome young widow and settle down to be a country gentleman on a plantation? He rather felt himself slipping. The mill wasn’t bad at all; of course, it hadn’t the characteristics of a rest cure or a summer resort, but what would she? And there were certain aspects of it—he grinned over the paper—which he found very fascinating and meant to pursue further. Meanwhile, he was soaking up impressions and having an awfully good time and he was no end glad she’d prodded him into coming, and he was her loving son.

He spent delightful days prowling about, amiable figure in his spotless white with his bright blue tie, driving with Nancy Carey, playing cribbage with his senior partner, riding with Cousin Mary-Lou Tenafee over her gracious acres, dining with the people he had met on his first evening at the Carey’s house, wandering aimlessly through the Altonia, stopping always to talk to Gloriana-Virginia Tolliver and Henry Clay Bean, and making a languid but persistent pursuit of Glen Darrow.

“Look here, young woman,” he admonished her, “do you realize that you are at large but by my clemency?” And then, before the doctor’s daughter could give voice to her indifference as to exposure and her continued and accentuated scorn of him, he held up a benign hand. “Do not tremble, maiden. Your dark treachery is safe with me.” It was the manner of a feudal lord withholding punishment from a criminal vassal, and it infuriated Glen Darrow. “I may, of course, decide later to make an example of you, for what my parent would call the principle of the thing, but I can assure you, for your comfort, that your present exemplary conduct is steadily softening my rage. The respect and admiration which you find it impossible to conceal, the pretty timidity of your approach, your shy advances—” He ceased, and shook his head sadly. “Now, I ask you, Gloriana-Virginia, do you consider it well bred for her to quit the apartment in such a truculent manner, banging the door behind her?”

“Oh, suh,” Gloriana-Virginia pleaded, “Glen, she’s so moughty sweet and mannerly, most whiles! I kaint *see* why she acts so ornery to yo’all!”

“Do you think it is possible, Glory,” he inquired gravely, “that she doesn’t *like* me?”

The child hung her head. “’Taint in reason, suh, but Glen, she—she jes pintly b’lieves eva’thing Super tells her.”

“Ah, and Super tells her——”

She dropped her voice to a whisper. “Super, I heard him tell her yo’all was allus hollering fo’ money. I jes’ pintly know that’s a sinful lie, suh. Hit’s true in reason yo’ got to have plenty fo’ yo’ sweet and sightly cloze, but I know in time yo’ wouldn’t never be mean about hit!” She lifted her wise little monkey eyes from a rapturous contemplation of his purple and fine linen to give him a smile of confidence.

That was, perhaps, the thing which enraged the superintendent’s assistant more than anything else—the way in which Gloriana-Virginia and Beany and old Pap Tolliver, and a dozen other mill children adored him. She strove with them, conscientiously, but while they listened obediently they clearly disbelieved her. It was bitterly unjust, she told herself, after all her concern for them, her fight for them, after all that her father had done—to have them follow him as the youngsters of Hamelin had followed the Piper. A silly joke, a supposedly funny grimace, and they burst into shrieks of laughter scarce in their languid lives; a tray of ice-cream cones and they pattered after him like puppies; selling their birthright of hatred for a mess of patronage. Gloriana-Virginia raptly and tediously worshiped him, but there was a small grain of satisfaction in the fact that Henry Clay Bean, though sharing his cousin’s affection for the junior partner, evidently considered him as tiresomely silly as she did herself. Not a giggle, not a chuckle, not a smile, could young Mr. Peter Parker of Pasadena wrest from him, though he tried with the persistence of a vaudevillian plugging a new act.

“You know,” he said confidentially to Glen on one occasion, “I believe his mother marked him ... she might have been frightened by a funny paper....”

His prime favorites were Glory and a dusky shepherd of sheep, the Reverend Romeo Bird whom he had met in his first ramble through the negro quarters. He spent many long and lazy hours in the sunshine with him, drawing him out on theology and religion. They appeared to have much the same habit of body, young Mr. Parker from Pasadena and the Reverend Romeo, but while the youth was just as peaceful and as stationary in his mind, the dusky preacher was careful and troubled about many things.

He was almost overcome when the strange young gentleman took a seat in a rear pew of his church one Sunday morning, accompanied by Miss Janice Jennings who had brought her grandmother to the Bella Vista for a fortnight on their way home

from Florida. She had met him on the green and leafy Avenue of The Hill with a squeal of delight.

“As I live, it’s Peter Pan! ‘The Playboy of the Western World!’ *What* are you doing here?”

“If it isn’t Babe Jennings!” He reflected her pleasure. “Look what spring has brought us! Greetings and hail!”

“But what, I ask, are you doing here?”

“Plying my trade.”

“That of lotus eater?”

“That of mill owner in good and regular standing! Down there,” he waved a hand toward the Altonia far below them, “toil my minions! I watch ’em. By the sweat of my brow, once removed.”

“*’Atta* boy! Where are you going now?”

“To the darky church. You can come if you promise not to emit the loud guffaw that speaks the vacant mind.” He fell into leisurely step beside her. “Babe, I’m for this place a million! And the people! Crazy about ’em.”

She considered him darkly. “If you’re crazy about Nancy Carey I’m off you for life.”

“Why?”

“She’s a Dumb Dora.”

“But *very* easy to look at, you grant me?”

“I grant you. But something less than nothing to listen to. Peter, *don’t*! Dead above the ears. Wouldn’t get you at all.”

“Like the Ancient Mariner, you feel—Stoppeth one of three?”

“No, that’s too high an average. But speaking of your minions, you have one called Glen Darrow.”

“Ah? Have I?”

He knitted his brows. “Let me see ... sort of secretary to the handsome super, isn’t she?... Red-headed, as I remember.”

“Don’t lie to me, Peter Pan. Any old time that you haven’t noticed Glen Darrow! Listen! I’ve known Glen since we were little squabs in primary school, and I want to tell you—” She told him briskly and vividly, and when she paused——

“Speak on; you interest me,” said Peter Parker.

They were arrived at the little brown church. “Well, that’s the whole scenario, Peter Pan. You’ll have to do your own continuity.”

“Meaning which?”

“Meaning—” she stood still and put one thin hand with its pointed and glistening nails on his arm, and her bright eyes under their plucked brows were steady and serious. “Say, listen, Peter Pan, she’s there a billion, Glen Darrow. What more do you want? Beauty—gobs of it; brains to burn; good blood; pep ’n ginger, *I’ll* say! And a straight shooter if ever there was one in a crooked world!”

He made a start toward following the dusky worshipers but she held him. “*Listen*, Peter. What’s the use of fooling round till you’re grabbed off by some bird-headed débutante? They’ll get you yet. Nearly did, myself, remember?”

He nodded cordially. “Rather a narrow squeak, wasn’t it?”

“You heard my panting breath close, close behind you! But if I can’t have you myself——”

“You can’t, darling,” he was gently adamant about it.

“Then there’s only one Jane in all the world I’ll root for! Peter, on the low down, we don’t amount to a terrible lot, you and I and the rest of our breed. And adding two of us together makes it twice as nothing. But if we can close in on something like that, either of us, both of us, though I’ve never yet met a he—one—well, old thing, think it over!”

He steered her into a rear pew. “Yours of the 18th ult. received and contents noted and in reply would say, shall take matter under immediate consideration and keep you advised on same,” he said briskly, just as the Reverend Romeo began to boom the announcements for the week.

Bellboys from the Bella Vista, smart housemaids in exuberant sport clothes, comfortable laundresses and cooks, grave men and women with yellow skins and tragic eyes, toothless old crones who swayed ceaselessly to and fro and kept up a constant wailing, clean and shining children with round and solemn eyes. It was singularly peaceful in the small brown house of the Lord ... it was a good place to think, and to feel things out.... The fervor of the rich, teary voices....

The Reverend Romeo prayed violently on a text of his own. “Yo’ mus’ go by de junction ob de church!” Tirelessly he pursued his simile home to its lair. On the journey through life whose terminals were Heaven and Hell they must go by the junction of the church, and they must keep their tickets—applied religion—in their hands. “Keep yo’ ticket in yo’ han’!” he thundered. “Ain’ I seen yo’ on de earf’ly train, when de conductor come atter yo’ ticket, an’ yo’ hunt in dis pocket *an’* in dat pocket, an’ fumble an’ fuss and look in yo’ hat, an’ break out in col’ sweat? Das’ des’

de way wif yo' religion. Yo' 'low yo' got hit, kaze yo' sho had hit once, but tain' whar yo' kin fine hit easy!" He reinforced himself with a swelling breath. "Yo' mus' keep yo' ticket in yo' han'!"

All through the long and fervid sermon grizzled old negroes in the forward benches ejaculated their approval. "*Now*, yo' say hit!"—"Das de Gawd's trufe!" One aged man in the quaint high hat of another day sat leaning far forward, his ear cupped in his hand, and at a point which pleased him he would give vent to a strange, wild cry, beginning on a high, shrill note and ending on a bark—"*Eeeeeee-OW!*" A witch-like woman, bent almost double, chanted a psalm like a low dirge.

"Yo' all come hyar to hyar 'bout Heaben," boomed the shepherd, "but I des' pintly don' b'leeve yo' raidy fo' dat talk! Yo' hone fo' to hyar 'bout de Golden Streets, when de *Po*lice gotter lead yo' froo de streets ob dis town. Yo' crave to hyar 'bout de shinin' robes ob white, an' yo' gwine pawn yo' raggety coat fo' er swig ob gin!"

"*Eeeeee-OW!*" barked the patriarch in the high hat.

"*We-is-kill'-fo-dy-sake-all-de-day-long*," wailed the old woman.

"Yo' honin' to hyar me speechify 'bout de Pearly Gates, an' yo' kaint negotiate froo yo' *own* gate at night! We was shapen in iniquity an' bawned in sin! Dere's no cullud man is puffick! Dere's no *white man* is puffick!" Several of the forward sitters screwed round in their seats to regard Peter Parker with chastened triumph, and the Reverend Romeo announced the collection. In order to praise the liberal and shame the stingy, the names of contributors and their contributions would be read aloud. The choir sang meltingly above the noise of shuffling feet and clinking coins, and the ancient crone announced that she wished to stand on the sea of glass, harping on the harps of God. The clerks stood forward and read the result of the harvest.—"An' *tain dolluh* from de white gennelmun!" There was a rustle of gratification, and then an aggrieved rumble from the rear, and a hasty addition. "An' B'rer Napoleon Butler, tain cents!"

There was a vehement hymn to conclude. "*Wash me*," *the* dusky congregation sang, "*and I shall be whiter than snow!*" Ah, that was like them, the visitor considered. Not snow-white, after a life of ebony, but *whiter* than snow!

(Thus young Mr. Peter Parker of Pasadena, unaware that the exuberance of language was the Psalmist's and not their own.)

Taking a cordial farewell of Miss Jennings at the Bella Vista, he thanked her warmly for the big little idea she had given him. He would take pains to observe the young woman.

"Yeah—you never noticed her till I called your attention to her, did you, old dear?" she derided him. "So's your old man! Well, go to it, Peter Piper! Snappy days!"

CHAPTER XV

Mrs. Eugenia Parker receives that lowest form of human expression, an anonymous letter, and pays the doctor's daughter a call.

MRS. EUGENIA PARKER arrived at the Bella Vista with that lowest form of human expression, an anonymous letter, in her neat pigskin portfolio.

It had reached her just as she was closing a convention in Chicago, and she had caught the first possible train. It was clearly typed on a sheet of plain white paper, and was brief and unemotional.

"Your son," it began abruptly, "is making a fool of himself over a mill girl. It is the talk of the town. For her sake, and for his safety, you had better call him home."

Mrs. Parker telephoned to the Carey house as soon as she reached her room, but was told that her son, together with Miss Nancy, was enjoying a house-party at Beulah-land, the plantation of Mrs. Bob Lee Tenafee, and was not expected back for several days. She hung up the receiver with an expression of reprieve. "It will give me time," she thought, compressing her earnest lips.

The next morning Glen Darrow received a letter on Bella Vista paper, written in a clear and forceful if rather old-fashioned hand.

MY DEAR MISS DARROW,

I should like very much to call on you with reference to a matter of great interest to us both. As you are employed during the day I will, unless I hear to the contrary, come to your house at six-thirty to-morrow, Friday. Trusting that this will be convenient for you,

I remain,
Sincerely yours,
EUGENIA ADAMS PARKER.

Miss Ada's observant eyes noted that Glen changed color as she read it. It had been a high-keyed fortnight for Miss Ada; she had not seen Peter Parker except at a distance, but she had heard him described with scorn and contumely by her young charge every morning at breakfast and every evening at supper, and she burned with indignation at the annoyance—the *impertinence*—which the young upstart continued to inflict upon Glen Darrow. She was almost goaded to the point of going to him, herself, and appealing to his better instincts (of whose existence she had grave doubts) and at other times she considering protesting to Mr. 'Gene Carey, whose chivalry would certainly extend to a young gentlewoman in his employ.

But Glen seemed entirely capable, it was to be admitted, of fighting her own battles with zest and something which closely resembled enjoyment. The bitterest thing about

her encounters with her young employer was the fact that it was not until hours afterward that she thought of sufficiently caustic and biting replies....

The serious aspect of it all, which she did not reveal to Miss Ada, was that Luke Manders was blackly, murderously jealous. She tried earnestly to make him see the absurdity of his attitude, to convince him of the patent fact that the junior partner was merely by his farcical attitude of admiration, choosing the most perfect method of making himself objectional.

"I have eyes in my head," the mountaineer reiterated. "I'm not a born fool. If you can't see he's crazy about you, I can. And he's got everything in the world to offer you. I've got eyes to see that, too."

"Luke! You know I wouldn't—*couldn't*—even if he——"

"Well, there's only one way you can prove it to me!" He shut the door of the office and stood with his back against it, and caught hold of her and pulled her to him.

"But I'm—I'm going to prove it to you, Luke! On my birthday! The—the very day I'm twenty! I——"

"Prove it *now*! To-day. That's how you can prove it, and that's the only way!"

They were very difficult minutes. She came out of the scene shaken and unhappy, and Luke flung himself out of the room in a dark and silent fury, and Peter Parker came in by the other door, leaving it open behind him, so that he was a silhouette against the greenness of the lane. Ever since learning of old Ben Birdsall's perfidy the youth had been taking a keen if clumsy interest in the business end of the Altonia, idling about the office and asking childish questions, to the intense irritation of the superintendent.

"If he knew anything, sir," he complained to Mr. Carey, "the Lord knows we'd be glad to have his help, but just to have him nosing round, asking fool questions——"

"I know, I know, Luke," said the senior partner sympathetically. "It's mighty trying on you, I can see that. And the doctor won't let me go down for another week or ten days, so I can't help you out. But we can hardly throw him out of his own office, can we? Might look," he chuckled, "as if there was something we didn't want him to find! Something we wanted to keep covered up! But I'll tell you, Luke, the young folks are going to have a house-party out to Beulah-land, and that'll keep him amused, I reckon!"

And now the junior partner regarded the superintendent's assistant with delight. "I am glad to see you," he beamed. "It's amazing, how cleverly you arrange these little secret meetings of ours!" He stepped nimbly after her and got between her and the door.

Glen moved toward the other door, slowly, so that it might be quite clear that he was not succeeding in flustering her, and he followed her just as slowly, and again prevented her exit.

"I'd better put my hands behind me," he said wistfully, "because if I don't, I shall touch your hair.... I've always wanted to ... but I don't want to unless you want me to!" He waited hopefully, and then sighed a little. "It would be a very simple way for you to give a great deal of innocent pleasure, you know. A fellow could warm his hands in your hair ... he could warm his heart in it...." He smiled at her, a little uncertainly, with his wide and humorous mouth, and passed gently from the room by the other door.

Glen Darrow stood staring after him; it was a strange chance, a plethora of episode, which gave her two scenes with two different suitors in ten minutes in the same dingy old office, but they were poles apart, for one was the golden lad of the golden legend, her father's familiar friend, the splendid young savage, the bold and beautiful mountaineer who had made full use of his time and talents, and one was the slim and fair young waster, the cumberer of the earth, on whom she and Black Orlo were utterly agreed.

And now, at her breakfast table, she held in her hand the businesslike note from his mother, stating that she would call on her with reference to a matter of great interest to them both.

After an instant's hesitation she handed it over to Miss Ada, and the faded gentlewoman read it hastily and trembled with indignation.

"Glen, dear, do you suppose"—the little dabs of color which always marked excitement stung on her cheekbones—"is it possible that this woman has the effrontery to think that you are interested in her son?"

"That is exactly what she thinks, Miss Ada. Some one has told her how he has been following me about—it's very probable that she has a detective watching him all the time, to protect him," the doctor's daughter finished with a curling lip.

Miss Tenafee bridled. "What shall you do, dear? Send her word that you are engaged at that hour? Let her come, and leave me to deal with her?" The spinster put herself into fierce italics.

"No," Glen answered her, levelly, "I shall see her, and I shall talk to her, myself. I shall be—*glad*—to talk to her! It will be—interesting."

"Of all the impertinence!" her friend sputtered. "Very ordinary people, without doubt, who have nothing but their money——"

"I wonder," the girl gave a tight-lipped smile, "just how she will try to handle me, Miss Ada? Will she be stern, or conciliatory? Do you suppose she'll shed tears and

beg me not to ruin his life? Or will she offer to make a settlement on me if I will let him go?"

"Glen, *dearest*—don't say such things!"

"That's what she's coming for, Miss Ada, to rescue her son from the clutches of a mill girl. The only wonder is that she didn't simply order me to appear at the hotel!"

Glen thought of little else during the day. Over and over again she enacted the scene in her mind and rehearsed her set speech. She could not quite decide whether to let Mrs. Parker speak first, to permit her to plead or to threaten as the case might be, and then to deliver her broadside, or to hold up a hand before the Federation President could open her lips, and say—"Perhaps we shall save time, Mrs. Parker, if I tell you at once that your son's pursuit of me has been wholly without encouragement. Indeed, I have let him see—so plainly that only a defective mentality or a deliberate insolence would fail to be convinced of it—that I feel for him only the greatest dislike and the deepest contempt, not only for what he is, but for the life he leads, and for everything about him!"

She committed the speech to memory, and when she came home to lunch she rehearsed it before her looking-glass, and she repeated it as she hurried up the hill at six.

Miss Ada had set the stage. The quaint and charming sitting room was in perfect order; there were bowls of flowers on the gate-legged table and on the desk-bookcase, a basket of delicate needlework, and two irreproachable books, and she wore her gray silk and the good lace and the jet jewelry which had been her father's mother's.

"My dear," she said with unaccustomed firmness and finality, "I have decided that it will be best for me to receive Mrs. Parker."

"But, Miss Ada, *I* want——"

Miss Ada held up a thin hand. "I said 'to receive her,' my child. I will come down first, after Phemie has admitted her. I will seat her, and greet her; I will exchange a few words with her—enough, and of a sort, to let her see that you are not without protection, and then I will summon you, and retire!"

Miss Tenafee followed her program perfectly. Glen, waiting in her bedroom with the sprigged wall[191] paper and the hooked rugs, heard the firm step on the porch, the sharp jingle of the bell, and Phemie's unhurried tread. There was a pause, during which, she knew, Miss Ada was entering from the dining room, and then, for something over five minutes, the vague murmur of faintly heard voices. This was followed by Miss Ada's light and ladylike ascent of the stairs, and her flute-like tones, a little louder than usual—"Glen, my dear, a Mrs. Parker is calling. She says she has an appointment with you. Can you see her for a few minutes?"

As Glen passed her she gave her arm a feverish squeeze.

Mrs. Parker was standing when Glen came into the room, looking at the desk-bookcase. “Oh!”—she turned sharply, “Good afternoon, Miss Darrow!”

“Good afternoon,” the girl returned colorlessly.

“I—I was just looking at this interesting old piece of furniture,” the caller remarked. “It is, as of course you know, very unusual, very rare, in design.” She coughed. “I greatly admire——”

“It is not for sale,” the doctor’s daughter stated coldly.

“Certainly not! I—I had no such thought. I merely noticed—I have some very good things myself, but nothing quite of that order, and I always admire——”

It was a surprise to have the great lady speak so jerkily and hurriedly, but it did not carry the amazement to Glen Darrow that it would to the thousands who had heard Mrs. Eugenia Adams Parker on the platform. It was, nevertheless, a distinct disappointment. It would have been more satisfying to have her haughtier, more regal....

“I was talking of you with a mutual acquaintance, Miss Darrow, and— May I sit down?—” She chose the armchair of Miss Ada’s own dear father as Glen nodded permission, “Miss Jennings, who is likewise staying at the Bella Vista. You were schoolmates, she tells me.”

“For a brief period,” Glen disclaimed gentility. “Then I left Miss Josephine’s and went to public school.”

“That was an excellent move, I feel sure,” Mrs. Parker approved. “I am a hearty supporter of the public schools, Miss Darrow, and feel that no normal child should be deprived of that fine, well-rounded, democratic training.”

(“That,” Glen told herself, “is put in to show me she is not a snob, and that she’s not objecting to me because I’m poor!”) She was meeting Mrs. Parker’s eyes more steadily than Mrs. Parker was meeting hers, which proved that she was dominating the situation, though it was possible that the young idler’s mother was not unmindful of the charm of the room, and that she found something to warrant more than a passing glance in the girl herself.

She spoke with painstaking enthusiasm of the beauty of the day and of the landscape, and regretted that this was her first visit further south than Baltimore, where she had conducted a convention several years earlier, of which Miss Darrow might have read, but it was disconcerting to Glen, to have the oppressor of the poor, the glutted tyrant whose heel was on the aching neck of the toilers, hesitating, and repeating and correcting herself.

Glen began to feel very uncomfortable. She was not going to feel sorry for this thick-bodied, sternly corseted, gray dowager, that was certain, but it was equally certain that much of the zest would go out of the affair if Mrs. Parker, as seemed only too probable, should beg and plead instead of threaten. It would be a relief to get it over with. "You said you wished to see me on a matter of interest to us both, Mrs. Parker."

"Yes. Yes, I did, Miss Darrow." Her voice steadied, but a slow and difficult red rose in her plain face. "It was, as you surmise, about my son."

With a rush, almost as if she feared she would not do it if she hesitated, Glen flung herself into her speech. She remembered it perfectly, and did not miss a syllable of it. "Then, perhaps we shall save time, Mrs. Parker, if I tell you at once that your son's pursuit of me has been wholly without encouragement. Indeed, I have let him see—so plainly that only a defective mentality or a deliberate insolence would fail to be convinced of it—that I feel for him only the greatest dislike and the deepest contempt, not only for what he is, but for the life he leads, and for everything about him."

Mrs. Eugenia Parker's embarrassed color ebbed slowly out of her face, and left her almost alarmingly pale. She opened her severely plain handbag and took out a good-sized handkerchief initialed with a small block P and wiped her lips. Then, without a word, she rose from the Tenafee chair and stepped to the window, and stood looking out into the glow of the setting sun.

("She's so surprised she doesn't know what to say," Glen thought. "Now she won't have to beg or threaten or bribe, and it just takes her breath away.") It was a surprise, and tumbled over all her preconceived ideas like ninepins, but a greater surprise was in store. Mrs. Parker faced about, and against the brightness of the window was merely a silhouette; it was impossible to see her features until she moved nearer.

"I—I expected—I thought—even before seeing you—after talking with Miss Jennings, that you would say that—at least"—she turned now, and the light was on her instead of behind her, and the amazing, incredible fact was plain: the President of the Federated Clubs was weeping—"or at least—that you would *think* that," she finished with a little gulp. "I—I could not see how it could be otherwise. But I—*hoped*. The saying is that love is blind, Miss Darrow, but when you have lived as long as I have, you will know that that is not true; love, if it is worth anything, is Argus-eyed for faults in its object. I know, none better, what Peter's faults are." She blew her nose and swallowed twice. "I have seen them bud and blossom, and I have deplored them more than any words can tell you. But in spite of them—and they are not mean or cruel or low faults, Miss Darrow, I must say that in his defense—in spite of them, many people have found that he has endearing qualities. I—I have found it so myself, in spite of my constant disapproval of his idleness and his lack of guiding ambition. Have you—have you, by any chance, watched him in the presence of children and animals and old people? That is said to be a sign of *something*, isn't it? I have never

known him to do an unkind or ungenerous thing, unless, of course, in the sense that he has not awakened to any constructive activity. That would make his faults of omission, rather than commission," she was warming to her theme, regaining a little of her platform poise. "Of course, I know that there is nothing, up to date, in his history or achievements to inspire faith in a young woman of your type, but I have always dreamed of the day when he might fall in love, and with a girl who would set his feet on the upgrade."

Glen Darrow, looking at her and listening to her, had turned as pale as the President of the Federation. Twice she essayed to speak, but produced only a faltering murmur.

"What he needs—all he needs," the older woman went on, "is an awakening; something to jar him out of this absurd pose of persiflage. I have been in such *terror* that he would be attracted by one of the girls in his young set; you know the type I mean; it would put the final seal upon his uselessness. But if a girl with character and purpose could possibly come to care for him, to see through the youth and nonsense of him what I honestly believe to be there"—the tears were coming again, faster than before, and she had to devote an instant to their disposal. "I beg your pardon; I am not an emotional woman, and rarely give way to my feelings. But—Miss Darrow—I suppose it is a waste of breath to ask you to reconsider—to ask if you think there is any chance that you might change——"

It was still bewilderingly hard to find words and produce them, but Glen shook her head with its brazen glory of copper-colored hair.

"I hadn't much hope," it came desolately. "But I find it much harder, now, to give up what little hope I had. Oh, Miss Darrow," she stepped toward the doctor's daughter who retreated a little as she advanced, and halted, by a pixie trick of circumstance upon the Persian rug, "I wish, I wish more than any words can express to you that you could find it in your heart to marry my son!"

CHAPTER XVI

Gloriana-Virginia proves that it was really a Wishing Carpet, after all!

OTHER plans were being made for young Mr. Peter Parker of Pasadena at almost the same moment. Cousin Mary-Lou Tenafee had coaxed her Cousin 'Gene Carey to allow himself to be driven out to Beulah-land for the last day of her house-party, because it would be a nice change for the dear old thing, and because she wished to confer with him upon a pleasing matter.

She herself mixed a toddy for him in her husband's study while her guests were dressing for dinner, and watched him fondly while he reveled in it.

"By gad, Mary-Lou," he said appreciatively, "I swear Bob Lee couldn't have done better himself! My dear child, I wonder if you realize what it means to have such an excellent cellar in these—these——"

"Dry or dangerous days?" the girl widow smiled. "I think I do, Cousin 'Gene. It certainly insures popularity."

The old gentleman got to his feet with some difficulty, for the paralyzed side was still cumbersome. "Your popularity would be insured on a sea of lemonade, my dear," he toasted her gallantly.

"But isn't it nice I don't have to prove it for a long time to come!" The grandfather's clock which had belonged to a Bob Lee Tenafee three generations earlier struck seven and she came swiftly to her point. "You know, Cousin 'Gene, I've been thinking a lot about Nancy, lately."

"You have, my dear?"

"About her future, I mean. Now, it isn't because I don't think you're going to be fit as a fiddle again in no time, and live to be a hundred!" she met the sudden change in his expression merrily. "It is just because she's such a beauty, and all the men are mad about her, and she's so sort of—innocent and trusting and *tender*—girls aren't like that, nowadays, Cousin 'Gene——"

"She is the image of her sainted mother," he declared mistily.

"Yes, I know, and loving her as I do, I want to see her find just the finest and best and most splendid fellow—and I feel that we—that you and I must, well, sort of arrange things, Cousin 'Gene. You see, Nancy *is* so sort of trusting, she could easily be—be—well, sort of romantically carried away—" Mary-Lou Tenafee hadn't the faintest intention of disclosing the little scene at the mill which had given rise to these apprehensions unless it was absolutely necessary to startle the old gentleman into action, but before her mental vision as she spoke was the sight of Nancy Carey's hazel gaze upon Luke Manders, her plump, soft hand white against his dark sleeve as she

pleaded with him not to let her father stay down more than an hour on his first visit to the Altonia. “What I have in my mind is this, Cousin ’Gene: wouldn’t Peter Parker and our Nancy make a pretty pair?”

“Well, by the eternal! That young——”

“He’s a sweet lamb of a boy, and being your partner makes it awfully nice, and those millions would be very easy to take, wouldn’t they?”

“My daughter’s happiness,” he began, majestically.

“Your daughter’s happiness wouldn’t be mussed up a bit by a million or so! Think what it would mean to you, when you’re not well, and things going so badly at the mill, to know that her future was secured!”

“Yes, I know, Mary-Lou, it would be a God’s blessing if I could feel—but—is he interested?”

“He’s *ready* to be—time, place, and girl—I’ll manage that. I’ll set the stage, Cousin ’Gene!”

“My Lady-bird! I wouldn’t influence her by a feather’s weight if her heart——”

“Of course not—nor would I! I’m the *last* woman in the world to urge anything but a love[201] match.” Mrs. Bob Lee’s brown and velvety gaze grew bright and glistening. “But he’s mighty interesting because he’s different, and don’t you ever think for one second that he’s anybody’s fool!”

“Well, now, I never thought that, exactly, but I did think he was pretty—simple, Mary-Lou!” The old gentleman was kindling rapidly to the idea.

“Then you have another think coming,” said his kinswoman, merrily. “That simplicity stuff is just the smoke screen he throws up so he can size us up from behind it!” She took his arm and led him to the dining room where her guests were waiting. “We’ll matchmake, you and I, won’t we? We’ll wind ’em round our fingers!”

“You little rascal,” he chuckled, warming more and more as he saw his Lady-bird and his young partner standing together in a gentle silence before the great fireplace, “we will, by the eternal!”

It was three days later that Glen took matters into her own hands and brought Gloriana-Virginia home to her own house.

“Hit ain’t a mite o’ use,” her aunt commented sourly. “Jes’ let that young-un get down, and hit’s no telling when we’ll get her up agin; jes’ like a cow. Long’s she keep’s going, she’s all right.”

“M’liss’! ‘All right!’ How can you say that? She’s tired to *death*!”

“That young-un was borned tired, I reckon.[202] Never did have no spunk. Favored her maw and her maw’s folks.” Miss Tolliver treated herself liberally to snuff and allowed that it was rather hard for her to be deprived of her niece’s earnings in order that she might gallivant around and enjoy herself.

“I’ll pay you whatever Glory would earn while she’s with us,” said Glen, hotly. “And you know perfectly well she’s not going to gallivant; she’s going to stay in bed late every day, and lie in the hammock, and rest!”

“Hit ain’t in reason that she won’t be plumb spi’lt,” the aunt repeated her grievance. “I ’low I’ll have to train her right sharp when she kindly comes home to her own kin again!”

Miss Ada regarded the spectacle of a Tolliver in the tiny guest chamber without enthusiasm, but the child was so meek, so humble, so cringingly grateful that she was not able to hold out against her for very long, and treated her with a gentle condescension which Glory received adoringly, and black Phemie, after a sniff or two at “po’ white trash in er quality baid,” settled comfortably to the task of fattening her, and took a professional pride in the process.

M’liss’ kept severely aloof, while Henry Clay Bean and pap sneaked in almost every day to see Glory, but the real thrill was the evening when[203] Phemie left the supper dishes to answer the doorbell and came padding upstairs with a rather shocked expression, a card held daintily between a damp thumb and forefinger.

“Mist’ Peter Parker to call on Mis’ Glo’anna-Virginny Tollivah!”

Glen and Miss Ada were sitting in the tiny guest room, Glen with the inevitable fairy-tale book, and the teacher with her needlework, and the girl flushed hotly.

“Phemie, tell the gentleman that Glory has gone to bed.”

There was a wail from the house guest. “Oh, Glen, please, *pretty* please, lemme see him! I jes’ been pintly honin’ to see him, Glen! Seems like he was gone to Beulah-land for a solid month and I was plumb scared I wouldn’t never see him no mo’!”

“But, Glory, dear, the doctor said you were to go to sleep early!”

“I been honin’ to see him,” said the child again, and burst suddenly into tears.

“Dear, dear,” Miss Ada clucked, “she mustn’t do that! I don’t suppose a few moments, my dear— She could just put on the little wrapper I made her yesterday— it’s very warm, you know—” Ever since Mrs. Parker’s amazing call Miss Ada had undergone a sea change toward the Parker family. “I will take her down, if you wish.”

[204]“I will take her myself.” Glen put on the pale pink flannel kimono and the pink felt slippers which were Glory’s chiefest new treasures, and carried her capably

downstairs, greeting the caller coldly. “She can stay only a few moments. The doctor wants her to go to sleep very early.”

He advanced, before she could deposit her burden in the big chair, and took Glory in his arms where she snuggled down like a contented puppy. “Seems like hit was a plumb year....” she sighed.

“I won’t keep her very long,” he promised. Then he looked delightedly about the grave, quaint room. “Babe Jennings told me, or tried to, but she missed it. And which,” he addressed himself to Gloriana-Virginia, “is the Wishing Carpet?”

She pointed with a sallow and boney forefinger. “That thar, suh! Ain’t hit mighty sweet and sightly?”

“It is, truly, and it looks very potent to me.” Still carrying her carefully, he stepped over to the rug and stood by design where his mother had lately stood by chance. “I wish,” he said gently, his eyes on Glen Darrow, “I *wish* that you could manage to be a little nicer to me....”

Glen had told herself, after her civil and secretly shaken parting from Mrs. Parker, that nothing was changed; she had been mistaken about the woman; she was not an oppressor; her low and sensible heel[205] was not upon the neck of the toiler; she was indeed (Mrs. Parker had talked with her at length on labor problems and conditions and what her clubs were striving to do for their betterment) even as Dr. Darrow had been, the friend of the submerged. It was possible to be sorry for such a woman who was the mother of such a son, but it was not possible or necessary to change one’s opinion of that son. She had thought it all out clearly in a night which held little of sleep, but now, seeing him here in her beloved room, standing upon the lovely low-toned rug her pale mother had loved, with Glory cuddling thankfully in his arms, it was not quite so clear.

“I wish,” he began again, but she interrupted him, speaking quickly and harshly, with something of panic in her voice.

“I cannot change my convictions. My father brought me up to believe certain things, to have certain standards——”

“And he made a wonderful job of it,” he admitted cordially, “but after all, you know, your father was—yesterday—and we are to-day, and to-morrow!”

The doctor’s daughter shook a stubborn head. Here in this room which pale Effie would have adored, facing a youth from the world she worshiped, Glen would be true to Glenwood Darrow’s[206] creed. She faced him steadily. “My father is dead, but he taught me to be a good hater.”

“And I am alive,” said Peter Parker, “and I shall teach you to be a good lover.”

There was a little pause, delicate as a bubble; a breath would break it, and the three of them, the boy and the girl and the sick child, seemed hardly to breath. Then there was a shattering; a heavy step on the porch and a sharp knock at the door, and the door's opening.

"Super!" gasped Glory, hiding her face against Peter's neck.

"'Evening, Manders!" Peter was briskly pleasant. "Want to see me?"

At his curt and scowling negative Glen spoke quickly. "Mr. Parker came to see Glory, Luke. Will you—won't you sit down?"

"No. I want to see you. Get your hat; we'll walk." His short sentences had the value of pistol shots in the quiet, charming room. "I'll wait outside." He went out onto the veranda, closing the door loudly after him, and Glen ran upstairs and came down again immediately, pulling on a sweater.

"Miss Ada will come for you in a few minutes, Glory," she told the child, and to Peter Parker she said a very low "Good night!"

After the sound of the retreating footsteps had died away Gloriana-Virginia put up a small yellow[207] claw and touched his face. "'Scuse me, suh, yo' all better put me down! I'm right heavy. Oh—have yo' got a mis'ry somewhar?"

He sat down in the Tenafee chair and established her upon his lap. "Yes, Glory, I've got a misery, somewhere, but it isn't going to last!"

"Oh ... I'm right glad, suh...." she sagged suddenly.

"Glory! What's the matter? Don't you——"

"Hit's all right, suh!" She grinned wanly at him. "Don't yo' go fo' to fret. Hit's jes' that I'm so tired ... seems like my bones is all soft ... they won't hold me up no mo'...."

"I expect you'd better go back to bed," suggested her caller uneasily. "Shall I carry you up?"

"Oh, not just yet, suh—please—*pretty* please! Hit's so nice and mannerly here in this sweet-pretty room.... Oh, thar's Gran-pappy! Hyar him a'-playing his tune?" There was the shuffle of old feet on the veranda, and the faint wheeze of the accordion.

"*There ... is ... a ... hap ... peeee ... land.*"

"Shall I ask him in?"

"Oh, no, suh—he's jes' pintly too skeered to come in, and M'liss' she'll be sho' mad at him, but he knows music is my delight...."

Mr. Peter Parker looked at the clock which Janice[208] Jennings had contributed to the completion of the room. “Five minutes more,” he announced, “and then I’ll carry you up. Are you warm enough?”

“Oh, yes, suh....”

“Then, what makes your hands feel so cold?” he fretted.

“Oh, they’s allus kind o’ cold, suh, but I’m feeling right peart. Only, I ’low Super’s tur’ble mad at me fo’ laying off jes’ now, with rush orders on ... mebbe he won’t take me back no mo’....” Her eyelids dragged and she seemed to get them up again with difficulty.

“Glory, can you keep a secret?”

“Reckon so, suh.....”

“Well, the old mill’s coming down! The Altonia’s going to be pulled down!”

The small, lean body stiffened. “Then, whar at’ll we all work, suh?”

“*You* won’t work anywhere! You’re never going to work again, Glory,—nor Beany! And the rest of the kids—the big ones—will only work half a day, and go to school and play the rest of the time, and there’ll be a gymnasium and a swimming tank and a lunch room and—” He broke off, considering her with concern. Was she fainting? He’d better get her upstairs and into bed! He rose with her, and she opened her eyes again.

[209]“Please go on an’ finish hit, such—that sweet-pretty fairy tale you was a-tellin’ me.”

“That was no fairy tale, Glory! That’s coming true—cross my heart! Now, bed for yours, but first, don’t you want to make a wish on the Wishing Carpet? It will come true.”

“Cross yo’ heart again, suh, sho’ an’ sartin?”

“Cross my heart!” He stood her upon the Persian rug and knelt beside her, steadying her. (Gad, but this was a very sick child!—Weak as a cat! He was going to get a doctor here immediately!) “Now, then, shut your eyes and wish hard!”

“*There is ... a ... hap ... pee ... land*——”

Old Pap Tolliver’s accordion made a plaintive prophecy, but it was drowned in the sudden and raucous blast of the mill whistle.

“Extry help!” The wise little monkey face contracted painfully.

“Wish, Glory!” (She *was* fainting, by gad!)

But words came again. “I wish ... I wish ... I never had to hyar that old whistle agin....”

She hung in his hands.

“Glory!” He tried to make her stand on her feet; he even gave her the tiniest shake, in his terror.

“Gloriana-Virginia!” He must have shouted, for there was the sudden patter of hasty feet upstairs, on the stairs, coming down; a heavy scurrying in from the kitchen, a wail of negro woe.

[210]“Glory!”

“Fo’ de Lawd! Glory!”

And drifting back, very faintly, as if the accordion was moving off, motivated by old Pap’s stumbling steps——

“*Far ... far ... a-way....*”

[211]

CHAPTER XVII

Young Peter sees something he never saw before, and Glen finds that her theory about herself was wrong.

NEVER before in all his life had he seen death. When his father died he was away at school, and by the time he reached home the primal mystery was merged in funeral solemnities. He had left a brisk, genial gentleman who had very little time for anything, and he came back to find a white and silent personage lying in chill state who appeared to have time and to spare, but the actual transition escaped him.

Nothing had escaped him here. One moment the wise, kindly little monkey-like countenance was a sentient thing, and the next moment it was a death-mask; one instant it asked questions and made wishes, and in another instant—were its questions answered and its wishes granted?

Although he had never seen death, he had looked many times into the bright face of danger in his happy and heedless wanderings. Danger added a fillip; death, he felt, had a gallant bearing, a clean and shining face. This was death with a difference,[212] mean and sordid, sly and cheating; what old Norsemen called "a straw death." This child had found death before ever she had found life; it was unfair. It made him uncomfortable, indignant, furious. After the frantic quarter of an hour of alarums and excursions, of telephoning and talking, the quiet which ensued was horrible to him. Miss Ada was waiting below to break the news to Glen, and he kept vigil beside Gloriana-Virginia in the prim little guest chamber upstairs, and there rose up in him a hot young rage of grief.

He had liked the quaint, ugly, little thing ... he had planned such jolly plans for her! He turned back the sheet and looked at her. The wise little simian face was as tired and as kind as ever, no more so, and no less. Here was no bidding for tears; to the unlovely pathos of her life had been added the unlovely pathos of her death, that was all. But to Mr. Peter Parker of Pasadena, sitting there in the deepest discomfort of his cheerful young life, things his mother had told him, articles she had read aloud to him by main force, paragraphs here and there, obtruded themselves into his consciousness. He wanted intensely to go away, but Miss Ada had taken it gravely for granted that he would remain until the child's aunt arrived. He dropped the sheet over her again, but it seemed as if he could see through it, as clearly as through a window pane, and[213] the small yellow face and the ugly, misshaped claws and the wizened body became the piercing mouthpiece of her kind—the rest of them in the mill—his mill—and other mills, and cotton fields, and beet fields, and factories and prune orchards, and oyster sheds.

Once he had seen in a private collection a very vivid and terrible painting in which the headless body of a young girl, surrounded by flaming torches, was borne through the

streets of Paris to inflame the mob, and it came to him now that he would like to take Gloriana-Virginia's body in that fashion and carry it through the length and breadth of the land, until he made all the—what had Glen Darrow called him?—idle-born, overfed, underworked people feel what he was feeling now! And Glen Darrow should go with him, and rouse them with him, and—and *be* with him! He had forgotten in the acute emotion of the last hour, the thing which had become quite clear to him that evening; he had been groping toward it, of course, ever since that first day, when she had faced him so gamely and gallantly and said—"I wrote it!"—but it had not assumed the final certainty until he had seen her going away with Luke Manders. He knew now, without any shadow of doubt, what he wanted, and whatever he had wanted, for more than twenty-two years, he had gotten. It would not be easy, perhaps, but he didn't want it to[214] be easy, for he was tired, tired to the marrow of his bones of easy things....

He came out of his meditation with a start to find her standing on the other side of the bed.

"Thank you," she said very gently. "Thank you for staying. You can go now." It was not a dismissal but a release. There were tears in her eyes but she was not crying. "M'liss' will come, and I am here, now." She lifted the sheet for an instant, and her firm chin which was like her truculent father's quivered, and for a long moment Gloriana-Virginia Tolliver's two friends stood on either side of her, looking down at her, wordlessly. Then Glen covered her again. "If only I hadn't left her!"

"You mustn't—it was—very quick," he said clumsily. "I—I'm certain she never knew. She was wishing—on your Wishing Carpet—" he saw a tiny spasm of grief contort the girl's face for an instant—"and then it—it was all over." The fluent young man could not, apparently, find anything more fitting than the old rubber-stamp phrase. Perhaps, for the first time in his nimble-tongued experience, he was finding words inadequate for his needs, for he came slowly round the foot of the bed and stood very close to her, without speaking at all, in a gentle, companionable silence.

Gloriana-Virginia, who had worried so about their[215] feud, might well be satisfied, there beneath her sheet; at last they were, as she had "honed" to have them—"sweet and mannerly."

It would have delighted her to see him lean nearer, and lift one of Glen's hands, and look at it gravely before he turned it over and placed one rather diffident kiss in its palm.

It would have surprised her to see the assured and flippant youth silent and shy; it would have astonished her still more to see Glen Darrow color slowly and softly, to see her mouth tremble, but she could not have seen, even with her wise little monkey eyes wide open, her first friend's inner tumult. She could not even have surmised the wild, sweet panic with which Glen Darrow made the second great discovery of her

life, namely, that she did *not* dislike being touched. It invalidated earlier statements to Luke Manders and convictions to herself; it gave the lie to that distressful scene in the lane, almost a year ago, on her nineteenth birthday. If it lifted her out of the classification of the queer and the strange and the abnormal, it did something else, likewise; it made it shockingly clear that it was only the person who mattered ... it started a trembling and a rumbling and a cracking at the foundations of a dream castle builded six years ago.

The color seeped out of her golden-olive face and left it as nearly white as it could ever be, and she[216] drew her hand away. M'liss' Tolliver was coming noisily up the stairs, very vocal in her grief.

"Let's go down," Peter Parker whispered. "There are a million things I must tell you, and ask you, and——"

Glen shook her head. He had asked her no question in words, but the downright truth of her was beyond any mincing maidenliness.

"No," she said clearly, "I will stay here. It—is no use. You see, I promised my father when he was dying. I am going to marry Luke Manders next month—the day I am twenty years old."

Mrs. Eugenia Parker rang the Darrow doorbell an hour later and Glen herself admitted her.

"My son told me," the Federation President began at once, as if fearing she might be denied admission, "of the death of the little girl. He is greatly grieved, for he was deeply interested in her."

"I know he was," said Glen gently.

Mrs. Parker looked rather startled at her tone. "I came to see if I might be of service to you."

"Thank you, no," she said, still more gently. "Everything has been done. Her aunt was here, but she has gone home again. I asked them to leave her here."

"You will have the funeral?"

"Yes—here. Day after to-morrow, because that[217] will be Sunday, and her friends will be free to come." Then, at what she saw in the older woman's face, she said—"I'm not regretting Gloriana-Virginia, Mrs. Parker. She is infinitely better off, of course. But I am rebellious"—she did not know that she was giving voice to Peter's

bitter reflection beside Glory's body—"because she had to die before she ever had a chance to live!"

"Yes, I know!" the president concurred with warm sympathy. "But there will be no more Glorys. I mean—conditions are steadily growing better, people are rousing——"

"That won't bring her back," said Glen, unsteadily.

"No. But—to our shame be it said—reforms are only born of human sacrifice!" she stopped short and looked at the girl. "You have your hat on— Am I keeping you?"

"I was going down to the mill."

"I thought you were not running the mill at night this week."

"We have not been, but the whistle blew just as I came home—I don't understand it. I thought I had better go down."

"Then, may I walk with you as far as the hotel?"

"Surely. I will just speak to Miss Ada—" She came back in an instant, and they set off down the hill together, and the doctor's daughter was silent.[218] What a night! Peter Parker under her roof, in her dear house; Luke Manders finding him there, and the terrible scene which had ensued, Glory's death; the bewildering, breath-taking discovery that one might intensely dislike being touched by one person, and then, in the case of another person, not dislike it in the least, but on the contrary——

Mrs. Eugenia Parker was not silent. She talked heartily of conditions of working and living, North, East, South, and West, and paid warm tribute to the fine progress the Old South was making.

"And that is why it distresses me so to find my son's mill—at least, the mill of which he is part owner—so far below standard! Mr. Carey's cousin, a most charming young widow, Mrs. Tenafee—I daresay you know her? No? Well, she called upon me, and I found her thoroughly awake to the situation. The club women are accomplishing wonders, I understand."

They had reached the entrance to the Bella Vista's grounds, and halted.

"Good night," said Glen, still with the new gentleness in her voice.

But the Federation President continued to talk. It was an exquisite night, windless and still, white beneath a fulling moon, and somewhere in the hotel's gardens a mocking bird was singing, and the busy and purposeful lady seemed loath to call it a day.

[219]"I have not yet visited the mill at night. I believe I shall go down for a little while. Peter is there, and I can come back with him."

So they went forward again, side by side, companionably, Mrs. Eugenia Parker and the young woman who had penned the vitriolic editorial in *The Torch* about her son.

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[220]

CHAPTER XVIII

Mrs. Eugenia Parker has the doubtful satisfaction of seeing her trifling son in action for the first time.

STILL gently, the doctor's daughter agreed with the President of the Federated Clubs that conditions of living and laboring were being steadily bettered, that the woman's vote, already making itself definitely felt, was to be the world's greatest power for constructive good—this in the lady's able platform manner—but while she listened with every evidence of well-bred attention, what she really heard was two small speeches which repeated themselves over and over again in her mind and her memory——

"*My father is dead, but he taught me to be a good hater.*"

"*And I am alive, and I shall teach you to be a good lover!*"

Could he, she wondered, fearful with a delicious fear. Had he begun already? She lifted her hand and looked at the palm in the clear light of the moon. There was nothing there, of course. Absurd! She had known there wouldn't be. It was only a trick of[221] high-strung nerves which made the center of it throb and glow.

Desperately, in a panic, she set herself to determine a course of action.

If Peter did not go away at once, she herself would go away—away somewhere to hide and to wait for her twentieth birthday when Luke could come and marry her, and everything would be settled forever. She would have kept her two promises and her father—if he still had any cognizance of terrestrial things—would be satisfied. She put a firm period to her meditations at that point. She did not try to picture a lifetime with Luke, but clung doggedly to the feeling that, if she acted loyally and faithfully, things must come right.

Luke Manders, the splendid young mountaineer; Luke, the doctor's discovery and pride; the golden lad of their golden legend.

Luke, Luke, Luke!

Surely, if she kept saying it over and over, it would fill her mind, and there wouldn't be room for anybody—for anything else, and the silly place in her palm would stop pulsing, pulsing....

"Well, here we are!" said her companion, briskly. "A delightful night for a walk, and I have enjoyed it extremely. I try very hard to do a certain amount of walking every day, but in my intensely busy life it is apt to be crowded out."

[222]Luke Manders, scowling blackly, met them at the door. He greeted the mother of the young part owner with scant civility and was pushing past his assistant without a word, but she detained him with a hand on his arm.

"Luke, I heard the whistle, and I came as soon as I could. You heard about Glory?"

He nodded, making no comment.

She waited for an instant, as if expecting a word of condolence, and then went on. "But, Luke—I thought we were not going to work nights this week?"

He turned on her with more anger and impatience than he had ever displayed in all the history of their friendship, their courtship. Why wouldn't they work nights? Weren't they far behind and snowed under? Didn't they have to get out those rush orders or throw up their hands? Was he working anybody any harder than he worked himself? Hadn't she common sense enough to see the necessity of it?

It was not so much a matter of ugly words as ugly voice and manner; not so much the substance of what he said, but the sound of it—the snarl in his tone, the hot bitterness in his eyes. He caught himself up suddenly, muttered something—a scrap of apology, perhaps—and flung himself into the spinning room.

[223]Mrs. Eugenia Parker looked after him with grave displeasure. "What a very morose and ill-tempered young man!"

The ancient loyalty reared its head, in spite of embarrassment and chagrin. "He is not like that, usually," said the girl. "He has never spoken to me like that in all my life. It is just that he is under a dreadful strain. I don't know how much you understand about this situation, Mrs. Parker, but the mill is in a very bad way. Mr. Carey is—not efficient, and the old superintendent, a man who'd been here forever and was absolutely trusted, had been systematically robbing the Altonia for years."

"My word!" said the lady, impressed.

"Yes. It was a dreadful blow to Mr. Carey. It caused his stroke, the doctors thought. And you can imagine what a state things were in when Luke Manders took charge!"

"And my husband, and later my son, as absentee owners, shirking their share of responsibility," the Federation President admitted sturdily.

“Yes,” Glen was honest about it, “that has made it much harder, of course. I don’t know the details; Luke has never really had time to explain to me, and he insists on carrying all the burdens himself.” Pride warmed in her voice again. “You can’t picture how hard he works—harder than any other three people under this roof!”

[224]“I fancy,” the older woman was cordially approving, “you do not waste many moments yourself.”

“Well, I work as hard as I can, but Luke doesn’t let me help him as much as I wish he would.”

“I always consider,” said Mrs. Parker firmly, not to be lured into commendation of a person she disliked as much as she did the splendid-looking, saturnine superintendent, “that the test of a good executive is his ability to surround himself with capable assistants, and then delegate a reasonable amount of work and responsibility to them. When people lose poise and become irritable——”

“Oh, but he doesn’t, ordinarily!” Glen insisted quickly. “I have never seen him like this before. Why, he had no intention of running the mill to-night, when I saw him, early this evening—he must simply have worried and worried about it until he couldn’t bear the inaction. He had to be *doing* something, even though he’d decided we were too short handed to run night shifts at present.” She looked earnestly into the other’s face, expecting understanding.

“Some one, Masefield, I believe,” said Mrs. Parker rather grudgingly, “has said that ‘energy is agony expelled.’ Ah—” she had looked over her shoulder at a sound—“there is Peter now, with Nancy Carey and the Jennings girl from the hotel!”

They made a pleasing group, the three modish[225] young persons in evening clothes, if rather out of drawing in the dingy Altonia, and Nancy was an excellent foil for Janice Jennings’s hard-finished smartness.

“’Lo, Glen! Evening, Mrs. Parker!” the girl from Pittsburg greeted them. “What am I doing here, you ask—the butterfly in the ant hill? Or, should you say, grasshopper? Less picturesque but possibly more accurate. Well, I decided to see how the other half lives. Nancy had been dining with me at the B.V.D., and I persuaded her to bring me slumming. *Pretty* place you have here, Glen! The House Beautiful!”

Little Miss Carey merely trailed her heavy white lids over her hazel gaze and smiled faintly; it was amazing, how seldom Nancy spoke.

“But I think I’ll go back to the fleshpots, if any. Peter is a flop to-night; a flat tire. C’mon, Nancy!” Miss Jennings shot a sharp glance from the young part owner of the mill to the superintendent’s assistant. “In spite of Peter Piper’s pleas, I insist—” She stopped and stared at Pap Tolliver, advancing toward them at his shambling gait, his accordion under his arm, and a twist of grimy paper in his fingers.

“Page Rip Van Winkle,” said the northerner softly.

“Say, Glen,” the old man quavered, “I plumb[226] fo’got to give yo’ th’ letter feller gimme fo’ yo’!” He tendered the note apprehensively. “M’liss,’ she jes’ purely took my haid off!”

“Never mind, Pap,” Glen comforted him, taking it curiously. “When did you get it?”

“This mawnin’,” said Pap Tolliver, hanging his head.

“Oh, well, it probably isn’t so important,” she was opening it.

“Not Rip Van Winkle,” Janice Jennings whispered, “but a nice, mild old billygoat. Perfect! His beards part in the middle when he speaks! I’d adore to watch him eat!”

Glen Darrow was staring at the paper in her hand. “Who gave this note to you, Pap?”

“Why—” he scratched his head—“I disremember ’zackly who ’twas, Glen! One o’ them furrin’ fellers ... all pretty much of a muchness, they are.”

She leaned nearer to him, put a hand on his shoulder, gave him a slight shake. “Pap! You must remember! Was it—Black Orlo?”

He grinned delightedly. “Yes, me’um! That’s hit! That’s jes’ who hit were! Or leastways,” his face clouded over, “*one* o’ them furrin’ fellers....” He grasped the handles of his accordion and shuffled away, and his inevitable tune came back to them furtively and faintly, in little wheezing gasps.

Glen had kept her eyes resolutely away from Peter[227] Parker, but he was watching her intently, and it seemed to him that she had paled. He stepped forward quickly.

“What is it?”

She shook her head. “I don’t know—I must see Luke!” She turned and ran toward the office, her employer at her heels, his mother and the two girls following after.

“Why the mob scene?” he asked, looking back at them, but they pressed forward, and presently they were all in the dingy room where Luke Manders held despotic sway.

The superintendent was at his desk, and rose at sight of them.

“Luke,” said his assistant, “I think we had better dismiss the hands! I have a note here—some one gave it to Pap Tolliver—” She smoothed out the crumpled, soiled half sheet of cheap notepaper and read the message aloud——

“*You keep away from mill at nights.*”

“Well, what of it?” Manders demanded truculently. “Some sore-headed Slavonian—” He dismissed it with a gesture.

“But, Luke, you know you posted a notice that we wouldn’t work night shifts this week, and——”

“What of it?” The mountaineer was trying hard to be civil, Mrs. Parker considered, but without marked success.

[228]“Luke, I’m frightened! You know there have been threats. And this week, when—as they supposed—the hands would not be here at night—would be the time they would choose for—for wrecking the mill! Luke, *please* send them all home!”

He shook his head. “Can’t do it, Glen! Up to our eyes in a rush order, you know that as well as I do! We can’t——”

“I think we’ll dismiss the hands immediately, Manders,” said Peter Parker quietly.

“You are quite right, Peter,” said the Federation President, regarding her offspring with surprised respect.

The superintendent started to speak and caught himself. He might have been, in childish fashion, counting ten before he spoke. “Mr. Parker, you’ll have to excuse me if I don’t take orders from you in this case. I know our needs a good deal better than you do, and I know how much attention to pay to a bluff like this—” he took the note from Glen’s hand, tore it contemptuously, and dropped it into the wastebasket.

Janice Jennings, her thin bare arms folded, leaning against a small cupboard set cornerwise, noted with amusement the look of rapturous admiration and approval which Nancy Carey bent upon Manders, and the grieved shock in Glen Darrow’s eyes.[229] The girl from Pittsburg was having an exceptionally good time.

“*Peter!*” His mother’s tone was admonitory.

“Sit tight, Eugenia,” said her son, and then, addressing himself to the superintendent’s assistant, “Will you be good enough to ring the bell or press the button or blow the whistle—whatever the signal is for ‘All ashore?’”

“Yes!” Glen Darrow started toward the door, but halted sharply.

Miss Jennings had emitted a small shriek. Her feet seemed glued to the spot on which they were placed, but she had risen on her toes and was leaning forward, away from the corner cupboard, looking back at it over her shoulder, her bright little eyes as wide as possible.

“Say, listen, is there a clock in here?”

“There’s the clock,” said Manders, pointing to an ancient timepiece on the wall.

“No—in here! In this cupboard! *I tell you I hear it ticking!*”

“There are clock-work bombs—” Mrs. Parker cried out.

“You’re on, Eugenia,” said her son cordially. “Manders, clear the building instantly, and then open this cupboard! Snap into it!” They could all hear the ticking now, they were so quiet.

There was an instant when the tall young mountaineer[230] seemed incapable of action, his rich coloring drained from his face, his piercing gaze dulled to a curious blankness: then he plunged for the door.

“Wait! Give me your keys!” Peter shouted, and Glen went after him calling.

“Luke! Luke! Give me the keys! We’ll get it out while you tell the hands! *Wait*, Luke!” She ran after him, down the hall, calling his name. Her voice came back to them, sharp, agonized.

Nancy Carey clasped her plumply pretty hands on her breast and her soft gaze was misted over. “Oh,” she breathed, “he is going to save the hands!”

“He is going to save himself!” Janice Jennings amended briskly. “Come on, Nancy!—Us for the Paul Revere!” She shepherded her swiftly to the door and out into the hall. “You go through those rooms and yell your head off! I’ll take this side! Beat it, dumb-bell!”

There were left then, in the dingy and unbeautiful office of the Altonia, only the President of the Federated Women’s Clubs of America and her trifling son, and the unseen thing which was ticking softly and swiftly behind the locked cupboard door, and in that tense moment they seemed to be taking each other’s measure.

“Comes down to a family party, doesn’t it? On your way, Eugenia!” commanded the youth crisply.

[231]She shook her head. “When you go, Peter—after you’ve got it out.”

“*’Atta* boy, Madame President!” He grinned at her sunnily, picking up the heavy stool on which Luke Manders sat to keep the Altonia’s books and advancing on the cupboard.

“Wait!” Glen was back, breathless, her face crimson. “There are some other keys here—” She tore open a desk drawer, fished out a jingling bunch and flew across the room, fitting one after another into the lock with steady fingers.

Peter Parker took the keys away from her. “Good girl, but this is my Roman holiday. You take Eugenia out into the great open spaces, will you, please? And Eugenia, will you please take care of Glen for me—extra special care? This is a solo act. Your presence is distinctly not requested!” He looked over his shoulder at them reprovingly. “Darling dumb-bells, did you hear what I said! Out! You aren’t helping a bit, and you cramp my style! But at that,” he chuckled tenderly, “it is to be admitted that you are there a million! Page Molly Pitcher!” He threw the keys, jingling, to the floor. “Not a leaf stirring! We crash the gate! *Out*, you nit-wits!”

The old, warped door of the little closet splintered into fragments at the first blow.

"There she is!" He crowed in triumph, lifting[232] out a crudely fashioned box. "Common or garden variety! A child can run it! Steady, girls—back, please! 'Way for the Lord High Executioner! Sports of all nations—opening bombs in the Sunny South!" He was in the hall; he was at the door, out of the door, in the lane, running ... running ... running....

"Back! Keep *back*!"

He was far ahead, but his voice seemed to stay behind with them as they ran after, holding each other back, urging each other on.

"All right!" Janice Jennings screamed to the mill hands, herded in the narrow halls, fighting their way to the doors, falling over the threshold—"It's all right, I tell you! He's got the bomb out! Everything's all right!"

That was, however, a debatable question, for the instant her sharp and imperative voice was silent something happened far down the lane. There was a dull detonation, and a brief flash of flame, and the flying figure went suddenly down to the earth and was still, and Glen Darrow, leaving Mrs. Eugenia Parker behind, went forward in a spurt of speed.

When they came up to her, Janice Jennings and Nancy Carey and Luke Manders, the President of the Federated Clubs, and the crowding, clamoring workers from the Altonia, they found her seated on[233] the ground with the broken and bleeding thing which had been young Mr. Peter Parker of Pasadena in her arms, his blood on her hands, on her face, on her blazing hair, but she rose at once, without a word, relinquishing him to his mother.

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[234]

CHAPTER XIX

Glen Darrow, being her father's daughter, decides that promises are made to be kept.

SHE steadily refused to see him in the fortnight which followed. During the first frightened days of consultations and hourly bulletins Miss Ada telephoned constantly for news, and the girl received her reports gravely and gratefully. He had a fighting chance; he would live, but he would lose an arm: the arm would be saved but the hand must go: he would keep his hand, or the greater portion of it: he wasn't even going to lose a finger, and there would be only one small scar on his forehead!

All evidence pointed clearly to Black Orlo. He had been known to make threats, audibly, and in the blurred pages of *The Torch*, and he had never been seen since he handed Pap Tolliver the note for Glen Darrow. The law was utterly unable to pick up a clue.

As soon as he was able to see visitors Peter sent for Glen, imperatively at first, then humbly, and at length wheedlingly, but although he wrote that Babe Jennings and Nancy Carey and Mary-Lou Tenafee[235] had each been granted a royal audience, the doctor's daughter stayed away.

"I believe," he told his mother reflectively, "that you'll have to go and get her for me."

Mrs. Parker looked up from her letters and considered him. The remark was reminiscent, some way, and she sent her trained memory to the card index of her mind. He looked even younger and fairer than usual with his convalescent pallor and his bandaged head, his pale blue silk pajamas and his blue brocaded dressing gown—endearingly like the little boy of eleven who had— That was it! Peter with a broken leg in a cast, Peter sending a telephone summons and then a beguiling little note and then a maid to bring the small sweetheart of the moment, and all these failing, making the calm statement to his mother—"I believe you'll have to go and get her for me!"

She had gone, amusedly, and rather annoyed at herself, but the nurse was very particular that he shouldn't bring his temperature up by fretting.... A pink, thick, unpleasant little girl, she had privately thought her, while she overawed the very ordinary mother and brought the child back in triumph for a half hour's visit. "You sent me for a girl once before, Peter, do you remember? When you were eleven, and had broken your leg?"

"Did I, Eugenia? Yes, of course I did—the little[236] fat Dorothy Something-or-other—the Sheba of the hour! And you got her, I remember distinctly."

"I got her, Peter," she shaded the pronoun. "But this, considering ages and circumstances, is a rather more difficult order!"

"Wouldn't you like to get Glen Darrow for me, Madame President?"

She straightened the magazines on the table into a trim pile, evening the edges carefully. "Yes, certainly, Peter," she said pleasantly. "I will be very glad to ask her, of course."

"Come here!" It was imperious, impertinent, cajoling. "Look me in the eye, Madame President! Wouldn't you like to get Glen Darrow for me?"

"My son," said his mother huskily, her keen gaze dimming for an instant, "there's nothing in the world I'd like so much."

"*'Atta* girl, Eugenia," said her only child cordially. "You're a good egg. You'n me both."

She considered him gravely. "You are serious?"

"Heaven helping me, Mrs. Parker, I shall never be serious, but I want Glen Darrow more than I can possibly express to you without becoming unduly lyrical."

She regarded him in silence. Never, since his tiny childhood, had he given her so much happiness as in the weeks following her arrival at the Bella Vista. He was taking an interest which all his[237] persiflage could not disguise in his mill; he had fallen in love with a fine and worthwhile young woman; and in the crowded hours of glorious life which she had so ardently desired for him he had shown his mettle. He had faced hideous danger blithely and gallantly, risking his life, very nearly giving his life—that happy and heedless life which she had deplored as worthless—for mill workers of whose existence he had been unaware a few weeks earlier.

Peter had changed. Peter had developed. She was not going to delude herself with exaggerations; sudden conversions seldom lasted, but she had evidence, at least, of his potentialities, and that gave her faith and patience. She put on her stern gray felt sport hat and rang for her car, and her chin with the faint, persistent little beard (which she sincerely meant to be rid of whenever—if ever—she had a day to spare!) looked even more salient and determined than usual.

Peter had sent for Henry Clay Bean earlier, and the solemn little boy arrived just as the Federation President was leaving, and she halted for a kindly word with him. (She earnestly hoped that her son's interest in the child went further than his vow to make him laugh if he had to take a correspondence course in circus clowning to accomplish it.)

"Hello, Jest and Youthful Jollity!" she caught[238] Peter's greeting as she went out. "Nods and becks and wreathèd smiles. The loud guffaw that speaks the vacant mind, eh, old top?"—and Beany's puzzled, respectful, "Ye-as, suh!"

In exactly three-quarters of an hour she was back, looking very grave.

"Well, Mrs. Mercury?" Peter hooded the anxious eagerness in his eyes. "At first glance, you appear to be alone."

"I am alone, my son, and I bring you bad news." A slight, quickly controlled tremor passed over the slim figure in the blue brocaded dressing gown, but she proceeded with the bracing directness for which she was famous. "Peter, she was very gentle and very kind; she inquired for you with a great deal of interest and was sincerely glad to know of your improvement, but—she is going to marry the superintendent of the mill on the seventeenth of next month—the day she is twenty years old."

Peter Parker drew a long breath. “I doubt it greatly,” he said. “And now, Eugenia, I have one more chore for you. Will you go to the largest and most complacent bank you can find, demand to see the president (modestly mentioning that you’re a president yourself—all us prexies together!) and ask him to send me the expertest expert accountant and auditor he has in stock?”

“But, Peter, you are hardly well enough, I think—and[239] besides, can’t Mr. Carey tell you anything you wish to know?”

“Mr. Carey can’t tell me *anything* I don’t know,” her son stated serenely, “with the possible exception of the time in which Cotton Belle won the quarter in ’99. Will you be fleet, Eugenia?”

His mother still hesitated. “I suppose you know, Peter, that your mill is in a very bad way, financially. Poor Mr. Carey seems greatly distressed over it. I understand from him that, owing to the dishonesty of a tried and trusted employee, the Altonia is and has been on the brink of failure.”

“You understand from old Carey that he understands from Luke Manders that such is the mournful fact, Eugenia.”

Her eyes narrowed. “What do you mean by that, Peter?”

“I mean, oddly enough, exactly what I say. *Carey* understands from *Manders* that the mill is on the rocks.”

“But—isn’t the superintendent in a position to know?”

“*I’ll* say he is!” admitted her son heartily.

She studied his guileless young face for a long moment of silence. “Peter! Do you mean——”

“I shan’t know for certain what I mean until you bring me the expert above mentioned,” he chided her gently, and the Federation President, with a little[240] gasp, hurried from the room the second time that day to do the imperious bidding of her flippant son.

It was on the following Sunday afternoon that Miss Ada Tenafee came fluttering upstairs to tell her protégée that Mr. Peter Parker was calling.

Glen had been sitting in her primly charming chamber with the purple rosebuds and weeping willows and humming birds on the wall, with her hands folded in her lap, looking out of the window at the magnolia tree where a cardinal was making liquid inquiry—“*What cheer? What cheer? What cheer?*” She stood up quickly and turned a paling face to her friend. “I can’t see him, Miss Ada. I—*can’t*!”

“Oh, honey, you must!” the spinster urged emotionally. “The chauffeur had to almost carry him up the steps, and the nurse is waiting in the machine, and he looks—he

looks—" she choked over it—"like death on a pale horse riding! He says he asks for only five minutes. Glen! You must go down, dearie!"

He was sitting in the Tenafee chair, and when the girl came into the room he got up promptly, but with some difficulty, and he swayed a little as he faced her.

"You shouldn't have come," said Glen very low.

"I had to come. You wouldn't come to me."

"I couldn't."

"You *wouldn't*."

[241]Miss Ada, peeping down on them from the upper hall, thought how amazingly, appealingly young he looked ... indeed, they both did ... like a pair of anxious, unhappy, desperate children.

"Do you—feel stronger?" Glen managed.

"My head aches most of the time," he admitted plaintively.

"I'm sorry."

"Then will you sit down in that chair and let me sit on the Wishing Carpet and put my head in your lap? I have the feeling that it would help a lot."

She shook her head, scarlet cheeked.

"Did my mother tell you my plans for making over the mill and what I'm doing for Beany since—" he lifted a hand to his bandaged head—"the slight concussion of what we doubted very much was there?"

She nodded, "Yes; she told me. And I want to tell you—I was going to write you—I want to take back—" she came to a standstill, her eyes on the floor.

"I don't know what you can take back," said Peter Parker gravely. "You've never given me anything except hating and despising and——"

"It's that I want to take back. I want to tell you that it wasn't true, what I said about you in *The Torch*," the doctor's daughter told him very low,[242] "and that I know it wasn't true, and that—I'm sorry."

"Then it isn't because you still despise me?"

"No; oh, *no*!"

He put his hand on the neat bandage again. "I can't exactly remember which I've actually said, and which I've only dreamed of saying, and planned to say," he fretted. "So, even at the risk of repeating myself, of boring you, I think I'd better tell you—do you mind if I sit down?"

"Oh, please!"

“Thank you.” He looked younger than ever, leaning back in Miss Ada’s own dear father’s stately chair. “I just want you to know, you see, in case I have not mentioned it to you before, that I think your hair is like a burnished copper shield ... and a sunset—not a pinky, pale, insipid sunset but a splendid, stormy, gorgeous one, and like a flame, and that flame is searing me and scorching me and devouring me, and I *want* it to! I love you so much that I’ll do anything you wish—and be anything you wish. I’ll take you over the world, or I’ll let you stay here. You can build model mills—” he frowned, and getting unsteadily to his feet walked to the Persian rug and stood upon it. “I wish somebody would make a good job of blowing up the Altonia or burning it down, so I could start in and prove to you——”

[243]“You don’t have to prove anything to me,” said Glen Darrow very low, “because I believe—everything. Oh, why didn’t your mother make you understand? I am going to marry Luke Manders the day I am twenty years old. I promised my father, when he was dying, and now—” she crimsoned suddenly. “I know what you think—what you must think of him. Of course,” in spite of her, there was a faint curl of the lip, “he said he was only going to get the doors open to get the hands out——”

Peter took a swaying step toward her and shook his head. “Old pins pretty weak and wobbly. Mind coming a little nearer?” When she came close he put his whole hand and his bandaged hand on her shoulders. “I am going to ask you three questions, and you will tell me the truth because you are true.” He drew a long breath. “Do you love him?”

“No,” she answered forlornly.

“Do you love me?”

“Yes.” It was a whisper, but she met his gaze unfalteringly.

Peter put his hands resolutely behind him. “You darling!” He barely breathed it. “Well, then,” he went on briskly, “if I can prove to you that your father wouldn’t want you to marry him, will you marry me?”

“Oh, but you can’t!” she wailed. “Luke was[244] everything to Dad; he adored him. You see, he found him when he was——”

“Answer me!” Peter Parker commanded. “If I can prove it, will you marry me?”

Wide-eyed, drawing in a scared breath, the doctor’s daughter moved her head slowly up and down.

“Thank you,” he said gravely and courteously. “Now, will you ask Hopkins to come and give me an arm to the car? I’m going to be awfully busy for the rest of the day and night!”

[245]

CHAPTER XX

Peter Parker of Pasadena is less of a fool than has been popularly supposed, and the golden legend is discovered to be tarnished brass.

THE junior partner of the Altonia caused his nurse and his mother a good deal of anxiety that late afternoon and evening, and when he announced his intention of going to the mill at two in the morning they spoke darkly of using force. In the end, however, as had been the case for twenty-two years, he had his own way. Hopkins more nearly carried him to and from the machine than he had in the afternoon, when Miss Ada was so dewily moved, and the nurse, a plain and middle-aged person with a fancy for saving her patients, went doggedly with him, in spite of pointed remarks as to the inadvisability of such action, and Mrs. Parker added herself firmly to the party.

"You girls spoil the picture for me," he fretted. "I don't expect—I don't ask—to look like Hawkshaw, but I can't even *feel* like him when you personally conduct me in this fashion. Mr. Heminway," he greeted the stoop-shouldered, pessimistic-looking person who was waiting for him in the office,[246] "you will pardon the intrusion of these extremely superfluous but thoroughly well-meaning ladies? They have sworn by the Nine Gods that they will sit quietly in dim corners and blend with the shadows while we are busy, and we shall be busy, I fancy, until the black east pales to pearl, for this may be the only time for a week when the night shift is not working."

Mr. Heminway, who wore a green shade over his eyes and an alpaca office coat which hung very badly in the back, owing to the stooped shoulders, and looked as if nothing unpleasant could ever surprise him again, coughed apologetically.

"I took the liberty of finishing up without you, Mr. Parker," he said. "I had two of my staff helping me—they've just gone home. I don't think you'll need to stay much longer than it takes you to run over these figures. As a matter of fact," he took in the presence of the nurse and the president with some perturbation, "you might just as well go now, and take these papers with you."

"There is no possible doubt, then?"

Mr. Heminway made a sort of clucking sound. "No possible doubt," he stated heavily. "I am amazed, and I am shocked, beyond words," and he clucked again, expressing amazement and shock very graphically.

"And old Ben—what's his name?"

[247]"Birdsall."

"Old Ben Birdsall is cleared?"

“Absolutely, sir!”

“Well, I believe that’ll be a comfort to my senior partner,” said Peter. “He has moaned over Birdsall every time he’s mentioned him.”

Mr. Heminway shook his head. “He will be glad, yes; Ben was a faithful old soul. But this—*Manders*—” he clucked again—“this will be a blow, sir, a blow!”

“Well, I’m counting on your help in letting him down just as easily as possible,” said Peter, pocketing the sheaf of papers as his mother and his nurse closed in on him from either side. “I will meet you here to-morrow at—shall we say three o’clock?”

“Three, sir,” Mr. Heminway agreed, and went away, stooping, and clucking mournfully to himself.

They managed to keep Peter in bed until ten the next morning but only after his mother had promised to deliver two ladies to him at eleven and eleven-thirty—Mrs. Bob Lee Tenafee and Miss Ada. Mrs. Parker had better luck with them than with the doctor’s daughter; they came on the dot, willingly and cordially and curiously.

With Miss Ada, who had the earlier appointment, Peter Parker was very gentle and very brief. “Will you give Glen a message for me at lunch, Miss Ada?”

[248]“Oh, indeed I *will*, Mr. Parker,” the spinster assured him fervently.

“It’s very simple; you will just say, please, that I want *her* to know from me, first, that I have proved it.”

Mystified but obedient, she repeated it carefully—“You want *her* to know from you, first, that you have proved it.” She rose from her chair and smoothed her shabby gloves. “Very well, Mr. Parker. I have a good memory, and I shall not forget a syllable. I will bid you good day,” she smiled a little wistfully.

Peter, not quite steadily, hurried to open the door for her. “Thank you, and forgive the silly secrecy. I want her to know first, but—you will be glad for us—and with us, when you know, too!” He lifted her hand to his lips, and she flushed to a delicate old rose. “And you *will* let me take you to call upon my Cousin Amos Tenafee?” she fluttered.

“The very day I am presentable,” he assured her, a finger on his helmet of bandaging.

He was rather more expansive with Mary-Lou Tenafee, though he gave her the facts of the case very simply and swiftly.

“Well,” said Bob Lee’s widow, shaking her smartly sleek head, “I’m surprised—and I’m not! It always did worry me to have Cousin ’Gene push and pull that wild mountain boy into such speedy[249] promotion. He’s a baa-lamb, my poor Cousin ’Gene. Goodness, if I ran Beulah-land the way he runs his mill—*your* mill, too, I’m sorry to remember, Peter,” she gave him her pretty, comradely smile.

He liked Mary-Lou Tenafee enormously; she seemed to him with her beauty and grace and charm, her firmly and capably run plantation, her sweetly and sternly reared little son, Bob Lee, II, her keen, sane interest in the affairs of her own small world and the big one beyond, a symbol of the New South. "The least jiggle, and I'd have been in love with her," he reflected now.

"That's perfectly all right; I want to tear the Altonia down and rebuild, anyway. And I'll want your help, Mary-Lou."

"You'll have it, Peter Piper!"

"About part-time schools and playgrounds and all that stuff, getting the right people interested, I mean."

"The right people are interested already, Peter," she said loyally. "Don't think we're proud of mills like the Altonia! The leaven's working, I promise you! Well, but—you've told me this about Luke Manders so I can break it to Cousin 'Gene?" She made a rueful face.

"No," he shook his head, "that wasn't exactly my idea. You see Heminway—the shark from the bank—will tell him, and show him all the figures, and[250] make it a lot clearer than I could. But I thought, perhaps, if you could just drop a hint to Nancy—" He colored suddenly and the effect was startling in his very pale face.

Mrs. Bob Lee blushed as hotly as he did and caught her full lower lip between her teeth. "Then—you've noticed, too," she said unhappily. "It wasn't just my imagination."

"Girls," Peter stated sapiently, looking away, "girls get silly little crushes ... don't amount to anything, of course ... get over 'em just as fast...."

Mary-Lou got up from her chair and came to stand beside his, and when he rose she put her tanned, beautiful hand on his arm. "Peter, you're a dear. But Nancy's a dear, too! She's absolutely sweet, Peter—innocent—why, she's a hold-over from the befo' the wah days. They aren't making that model any more, in girls!"

"You said something!" he agreed heartily.

"And she's awfully pretty, don't you think?"

"Melt-in-the-mouth!"

"And this—this little infatuation—no, that's too grave a word, Peter—fancy, that's all it is, silly little crush, as you said, just as a girl might have for a man in the movies, *you* know——"

"Of course."

"It won't last, Peter; you just said so yourself,[251] and especially now, when she knows he's a thieving rascal. Peter, couldn't *you*? I'd like mighty well to have you for a cousin! She'd make you the most adorable wife!"

"Mary-Lou Tenafee," said Peter Parker soberly, "knowing your tribal standards, I'll say that's just about the handsomest thing that ever happened to me! But there are two reasons why I can't manage it! You, yourself, are one, my dear. I'd be head over heels this minute, if I weren't fathoms deep in love with Glen Darrow."

"*Glen Darrow!*" She gave a little gasp and stared at him.

"Glen Darrow. From the first moment, almost."

Mrs. Bob Lee sighed. "Well, of course—she's a mighty fine person, I reckon! I've heard Cousin 'Gene Carey say wonderful things about her, and Cousin Ada's devoted to her. But, Peter—it *would* be a lot more suitable; you know that. And we certainly would love to have you in our family."

Peter leaned suddenly nearer and kissed her enjoyingly. "Mary-Lou," he said softly, "your Bob Lee must have hated to die and leave you!"

She accepted the kiss without surprise and returned it amiably but absently. "I reckon he did, Peter Piper." Tears glittered suddenly on her dark lashes. "I reckon he did," she said again and slipped away.

[252]At four o'clock that afternoon she came into Mr. Carey's office where Peter had just preceded her, and where the senior partner had been closeted for a devastating hour with Heminway. She ran to her Cousin 'Gene and put an arm about his neck, and laid her warm cheek against his.

"You—you know about this, Mary-Lou?" he blinked at her, stammering, dazed.

She nodded. "Yes, honey; Peter told me. But we're not going to fret about it. Good riddance to bad rubbish, Cousin 'Gene—and we've got Peter!"

Mr. Carey got heavily to his feet. "Poor white trash!" he said thickly. "A lying, thieving knave. I shall shoot him down like a yellow cur!" Dark blood suffused his face.

"No, Cousin 'Gene, *no*! You can't do that!" Mary-Lou soothed. "He isn't worth the mess it would make you, Cousin 'Gene, honey. Now, just sit down, and we'll talk it over!" She pushed him gently back in his chair, crossed to a window and opened it wider.

Peter followed her. "Did you tell her?" He whispered it.

"Peter, I couldn't; she hasn't been home all day. But I'm going right back there now, and wait for her. I thought she might have come here for Cousin 'Gene."

[253]“Like a yellow cur,” the old gentleman was repeating. “I shall shoot him like a yellow cur.”

“He deserves it, sir,” said Heminway clucking, and lifting his green shade to fix his mournful eyes on the senior partner. “He deserves it.”

“But I think we won’t, just the same, for several reasons, and the best of them is that he won’t be within range. I told him our findings early this morning—sent him a note—and I expect he has, by this time, gone extremely hence.” Peter Parker smiled cheerfully at them. “It seemed to me much the simplest and pleasantest way to handle the situation.”

Mr. Carey struggled to his feet again with a roar of baffled rage, just as the superintendent’s assistant came into the room. “Confound you, sir,” he shouted, “what right had you——”

Heminway coughed apologetically. “I took the liberty, gentlemen, of having him shadowed, ever since we began our investigations. There need be no publicity, in case you decide not to prosecute, but I felt it well to—to control the situation in the meantime.” He wetted his lips. “I think you will find he has not left town.”

Glen Darrow stepped forward. “He is here, now,” she said. “Luke Manders is coming down the hall.” She spoke very clearly and steadily, and Peter fixed anxious eyes upon her.

[254]She met his look gravely. There was no color in her golden-olive cheeks, and there was an air of shock about her, of bewilderment, but there were no tears in her eyes and it seemed to him that the horror was overlaid with gladness.

Mr. ’Gene Carey wrenched open a drawer in his desk but Peter Parker was quicker and cleverer, and slipped the pistol into his own pocket. “Steady,” he warned.

The door opened gently and Nancy Carey came in, with Luke Manders close behind her, and made a little soft rush toward her father. She was all in pale pink, with a babyish pink silk hat.

“Lady-bird,” he said sternly, “this is no place for you. Mary-Lou—Glen, will you take her away?”

But his daughter fluttered closer to him until she seemed fairly to melt against his breast. “This is my place, Dad, dear,” she murmured, lifting her mild and tender gaze. “And I’ve come to beg you not to be hard on Luke.... I know he’s made bad mistakes, but he’s sorry, and you *mustn’t* be harsh, Dad, dear ... you *can’t*, because I love him ... because he’s my husband.”

[255]

CHAPTER XXI

Once more, The Wishing Carpet justifies itself, and Henry Clay Bean breaks the solemnity of a lifetime.

MRS. BOB LEE took competent charge of the situation. Before dark she was making the rounds of the Tenafee clan with all its ramifications. Her color was high and her eyes very bright, and she held her head gallantly.

"Now, Cousin Ada," she said crisply, when she reached Glen Darrow's house and marched briskly upstairs to the spinster's room, "there isn't a bit of use in taking it like this! You're just making yourself sick, when we've got to hold up our chins and act like a Family!" (She seemed actually to sound the capital F.)

Miss Ada was reclining on her bed with a cold compress on her forehead and she answered only with a shuddering moan.

"Exactly," said her connection. "That's just how I feel, but it's not the way I act, Cousin Ada." She sat down wearily and pulled off her tight little persimmon-colored felt hat and ran her fingers through her bob. "*Lordy!*" she sighed gustily. "Been to[256] all the tribes and kinnery, bucking them up, putting a face on the affair."

"But—Mary-Lou, how *can* you? There isn't any face to put on it," Miss Ada wailed. "What is Cousin 'Gene going to *do*? Can't he have the marriage annulled?"

"Not without first slaying the dumb-bell, bird-headed blushing bride—which would be rather a good job, if you ask me."

"Mary-*Lou*!"

"Well, it would! Sickening little fool!"

"But what shall we say to people?"

Mrs. Bob Lee made a grimace, kicked a little tufted hassock across the room and sank her voice to honeyed sweetness—"Isn't it the most romantic thing you ever heard in all your born days? It positively sounds like a story—and it looks like a movie! That gorgeous young mountaineer, worshiping his employer's daughter, hopelessly, of course, and our blessed little Nancy—she's always been sort of different, don't you know, from the run of modern girls, dreamy, idealistic—losing her heart— No, he won't stay on at the mill. Peter Parker, the junior partner, has a lot of innovations he wants to make, and Cousin 'Gene's going to put the turtle-doves on 'Evergreen,' that big old plantation he took over ten years ago—remember? He's always wanted to develop it, and it just works out beautifully.[257] Yes, it *was* a surprise, at the very last, though I had been suspecting for a long time——"

She jumped up and gave herself a brisk shake. “Plain and fancy lying taken in here! Now, you get up and bathe your eyes and powder your nose, Cousin Ada, and put on a fine public front, and I’ll drop in to see you now and then, and we can blow off steam in private.”

Her kinswoman dragged herself off the bed and got feebly to her feet. “I pray God,” she said fervently, “that I shall never have to see him again as long as I live! I could not *endure* it.” The traditional little dabs of crimson stung on her cheekbones. “And aside from the crushing shame of it for the Family, think of his perfidy! He was betrothed to Glen Darrow—she was to marry him next month, and he was—or he seemed to be—in his savage fashion, quite mad about her.”

“And still is, I’ve no doubt,” Mary-Lou nodded. “That is the ugliest part of it all, Cousin Ada. He merely married that poor little nit-wit Nancy to save his skin. Well, he’s lost Glen, and he’ll see her married to Peter Parker, and I imagine that’ll be the rack for him, but—oh, *golly*,” she kindled to the thought, “if my Bob Lee was alive *he’d* manage some nice, natural-looking way to murder him!”

Miss Ada had made herself presentable by the time Glen tapped at her door and told her supper[258] was ready. They went down to the quaintly clever little dining room in silence, and in almost unbroken silence they ate black Phemie’s savory meal. Sometimes Miss Ada pressed her handkerchief to her eyes for an instant, and she took little beyond three cups of extra strong tea, and Glen’s frank and hearty young appetite was in eclipse, but whenever she met her duenna’s eye she smiled faintly and shyly. It was a totally new smile for the doctor’s daughter, and Miss Ada noted that she had put on the dress of pale buff crêpe.

The spinster went upstairs directly they had finished and Glen sat alone in the sitting room. She felt a strange and curious sense of shock, of unreality. She did not seem to hear or to see distinctly; it was as if all the former facts, the tangible things of life, were separated by a daze of distance....

She tried to make herself summon the events of the day in an orderly review—Miss Ada’s fluttering delivery of Peter’s message, and her instant conviction that she was free, Heminway, with his green eye shade and his black alpaca office coat, and his prim, henlike clucking, and Mr. ’Gene Carey’s rage and grief, her own horror over Luke, over the breaking, the shattering, no, the besmirching and befouling of the golden legend which was overlaid, shamelessly, radiantly, with gladness, the amazing,[259] theatric entrance of Luke and Nancy Carey, Peter Parker’s wordless grasp of her hand, Miss Ada’s tearful prostration....

But the events of the day refused utterly to march in line; they serpentined, they hurdled, they paper-chased, they flew dizzily, waving dazzling-bright wings....

"*I'm not fool enough, no, nor knave enough, to pull the 'dying father's wish on you,*'" Glenwood Darrow had said, and—"*Well, now remember, you haven't made any deathbed promise!*"

He would understand; he must be—understanding. And her mother, pale Effie, would go further; she would not only understand but rejoice. Tears stung suddenly in Glen's eyes; she wished she could have her there, in the grave and charming room, sitting in the sedate little rocker on the Persian rug, to tell her everything that was to be....

She thought Peter would come to her soon after eight, but she did not want the hour to come too swiftly and she looked often at Janice Jennings's clock on the mantel in a swiftly mounting panic of happiness. There was a stumbling step on the porch and she sprang up, flushing hotly, and sat down again, laughing at herself. Old Pap Tolliver had never been able to grasp the fact that Gloriana-Virginia was actually and forever gone; he crept over, sometimes, after dark, and huddled in the shadows[260] of the porch with his wheezing and short-breathed harmonica, or the wailing accordion. "She craves to hyar my tune, Glory does," he apologized. "I won't pester nobody."

"*There is—a—hap ... pee ... land....*"

It was a quavering but very positive assertion, and his listener agreed with him absolutely.

"*Far—far—a ... way....*"

Ah, there he was wrong! Not so far away—traveling swiftly up the clock! At eight, or between eight and eight-thirty, before nine at the very latest——

But at a quarter after eight that evening the Altonia Mill was blown up, and calling became, for the time, a lost art. Glen stayed at home, though all the rest of the community rushed down, even from The Hill, that abode of the blest, to the blazing building. The telephone rang just as she was leaving the house and she ran back to answer it.

"It's all right," said Peter Parker's voice blithely. "There wasn't a soul in it. I know, because Heminway and I left ten minutes before it happened (I rather think he—they—counted on my spending a long quiet evening there) and we went all through, and there was nobody. The watchman was gagged and tied, but at a decent distance. He wasn't hurt. Don't come down, *please*. Just—wait for me."

So she waited, as nearly pale as her rich coloring[261] would ever make possible, and trembling, alternately shuddering with the horror of it, and pulsing with thankfulness at the miracle of his escape, and presently there was another step on the porch and she sprang up again, rosy and starry-eyed, and Janice Jennings walked in, grinning derisively.

“Sorry, old thing! Me. Me, only. Not yet but soon. He sent me up here, away from all the excitement (I *adore* fires) to tell you he is coming very soon. I thought you might almost have guessed it, but he was very firm with me.” She sighed. “Sunk, without a trace, Peter Piper is, and he glories in his shame.” She sat down in Miss Ada’s father’s chair and looked about her appreciatively. “One nice room, I’ll tell the hotel and Pullman world....” She sighed and shut her bright little eyes with their heavily beaded lashes. “Well, I suppose you’ll let the vestal virgin stay on here, so you can see it when you come back for Old Home Week at the model mill?”

“I—we haven’t—nothing is settled yet,” said Glen flushing still more warmly. If only she would go away before——

“I’m not going till he comes,” grinned her guest, “but I’ll go then, on my honor as a gentleman! He made me promise to park here till he came. I think he’s afraid you’ll vanish into thin air, or that the sheik, having wrung the lily neck of his bride, may[262] come to collect his first love. And while we are on that pleasing topic, was I or was I not right about Nancy and the apostle? Certainly I was right. And was I right about Peter Parker? Again yes. (Is there no limit to the woman’s perspicacity?) Well, my child,” she studied her critically, “that hair of yours is now going to be your best parlor trick. I can just imagine the drool the society editors will write about it. And won’t they have a marvelous time dressing you? And doing your rooms for you, and your motors—” she broke off and stared. “I actually believe it hasn’t occurred to you until this moment that you can have anything and do anything and see anything and go anywhere you want, from henceforward and forever!”

“It—frightens me!” said Glen, paling.

“Well, I’d like a chance to be scared to death that way, myself,” Miss Jennings lighted a cigarette. “Ah—he comes!” She leaned back in the great chair enjoyingly.

Peter Parker came quickly up the steps and across the porch and into the room, with Henry Clay Bean following solemnly at his heels, and he looked at Glen and away again, and greeted the other girl warmly.

“’Lo, Babe! Thanks a lot for coming and staying.”

She got lazily to her feet. “But thanks still more[263] for going, eh, wot, old top?” She paused and looked from one to the other. “No, no, positively, in spite of your pleas, I must exit merrily! I’m going back to the fire.”

“It’s under control,” Peter stated.

“Just my luck! Well, then, back to the B.V.D., and I bid you a very good evening!” She went close to Glen and gave her a brisk hug. “I could *vivisect* you!” she said between grinding teeth. “Peter Pan, darling, you’re too maudlin to realize now what you’re letting yourself in for—with a mother *and* a wife full of good works!”

“I shudder,” he said, shaking his head.

“When you get too fed up, send me an S.O.S. and we’ll throw a party. Happy days, old dear!” She kissed him thoroughly. “Don’t wince, Glen. I’ve kissed Peter many times before, and with any sort of luck I expect to kiss him many times again! Cheerio!” She sped away and left the three of them alone together, the pale youth with his bandaged head, the glowing girl with the flame of coppery hair about her face, and the small, preternaturally grave child.

Peter Parker walked to the Persian rug and stood looking down at it. “After to-night,” he said, “we’ll have it framed and hung on the wall. It’s entirely too potent. Remember how I wished that somebody would make a good job of burning down the[264] Altonia? It isn’t safe to have the thing about, for one drops wishes as a tree drops leaves.”

“Have you any idea who it was?”

He shook his head. “Perhaps your little playmate Black Orlo, sneaking back to complete his chore; perhaps one of his chums. It doesn’t matter. We must make gestures of inquiry of course, but in reality I’m pleased to the bone. And now,” he stopped and looked at the child, “Henry Clay, would you like to go out and sit in the front seat with Hopkins?”

“I *’druther* stay with yo’, suh,” the little boy replied earnestly.

“Very well, then.” He sighed slightly. “We will regard you merely as part of the stage setting.” He stepped on to the Wishing Carpet. “Now, Beany, old son, you’ll see how this thing works! I wish,” he said solemnly and urgently, holding out his arms to Glen Darrow, “I wish you would come here.”

She came to him, walking slowly and steadily, her eyes on his face.

“You see, Beany?” He caught her in his arms so that she, too, stood upon the rich and mellow tones which had delighted Glenwood Darrow’s pale bride. “I’ve never kissed you, have I? I’ve planned, and pictured, and imagined, and of course, when I was off my head—but I’ve never actually kissed you, have I?”

[265]She shook her head, but the little place in the center of her palm gave a sudden warm throb.

“No. We are arrived, then, at the longed-for, dreamed-of moment when I begin to kiss you.”

She stirred in his arms and they tightened about her.

“I am still frail,” murmured Peter Parker reproachfully, “and I *wish* you would remain quite still while I ... begin ... to ... kiss you....”

There in the quaintly lovely room which fragile Effie Darrow's yearnings had brought into being, with Miss Ada, blushing, tearful, creeping out in her crocheted slippers to hang over the stair rail, looking and listening, with the Altonia perishing in cleansing flame, with Mrs. Eugenia Adams Parker exulting in her room at the Bella Vista, and Janice Jennings, halted on a dim street, smudging her vivid make-up with a torrent of wild weeping, with a mocking bird tuning up for his night's engagement, they stood upon The Wishing Carpet in a high oblivion of young joy.

But a sound, so strange and unwonted that it pierced even that armored moment, made them turn and stare.

Henry Clay Bean was laughing!