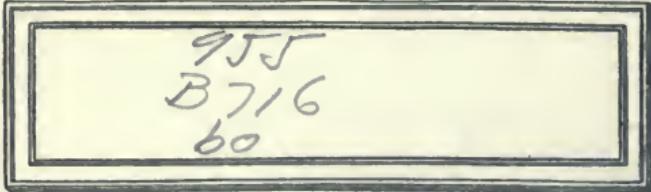
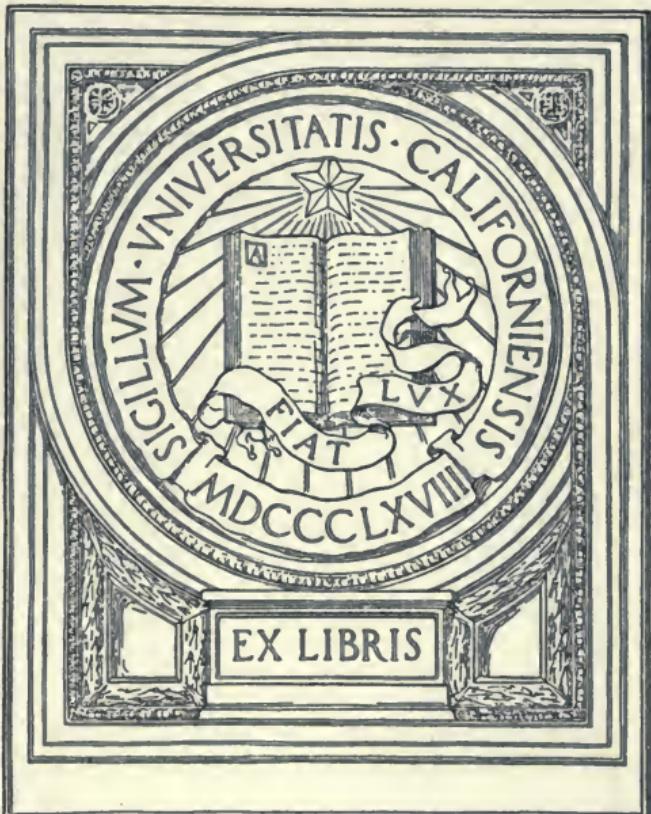


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THE BOOK OF EVELYN



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ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN -

The star of the occasion was calm and confident

THE BOOK OF EVELYN

By

GERALDINE BONNER

Author of

TOMORROW'S TANGLE, THE PIONEER
RICH MEN'S CHILDREN, ETC.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN

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THE BOOK OF EVELYN

WOMEN OF
CALIFORNIA.

THE BOOK OF EVELYN

I

I HAVE moved. I am in.

I The household gods that have lain four years in storage are grouped round me, showing familiar faces. It's nice of them not to have changed more, grown up as children do or got older like one's friends. They don't harmonize with the furniture—this is an *appartement meublé*—but I can melt them in with cushions and hangings.

It's going to be very snug and cozy when I get settled. This room—the parlor—is a good shape, an oblong ending in a bulge of bay window. Plenty of sun in the morning—I can have plants. Outside the window is a small tin roof with a list to starboard where rain-water lodges and sparrows come to take fussy excited baths. Across the street stands a row of brownstone fronts, blank-visaged houses with a white curtain in every window. The faces of such

I

houses are like the faces of the people who live in them. They tell you nothing about what's going on inside. It's a peculiarity of New York—after living in a house with an expressionless front wall you get an expressionless front wall yourself.

From the windows of the back room I look out on the flank of the big apartment-house that stands on the corner, and little slips of yard, side by side, with fences between. Among them ours has a lost or strayed appearance. Never did an unaspiring, city-bred yard look more homesick and out of place. It has a sun-dial in the middle, circled by a flagged path, and in its corners, sheltered by a few discouraged shrubs, several weather-worn stone ornaments. It suggests a cemetery of small things that had to have correspondingly small tombstones. I hear from Mrs. Bushey, the landlady, that a sculptress once lived on the lower floor and spent three hundred dollars lifting it out of the sphere in which it was born.

I am going to like it here. I am going to make myself like it, get out of the negative habit into the positive. That's why I came back from Europe, that a sudden longing for home, for Broadway, and the lights along the Battery, and dear little Diana poised

against the sky. Four years of pension tables and third-class railway carriages do not develop the positive habit. I was becoming negative to the point of annihilation. I wanted to be braced by the savage energies of my native city. And also I did want some other society than that of American spinsters and widows. The Europeans must wonder how the land of the free and the home of the brave keeps up its birth-rate— But I digress.

When you have an income of one hundred and sixty-five dollars a month and no way of adding to it, are thirty-three and a widow of creditable antecedents, the difficulties of living in New York are almost insurmountable. If you were a pauper or a millionaire it would be an easy matter. They represent the upper and the nether millstones between which people like me are crushed.

And then your friends insist on being considered. I had a dream of six rooms on the upper West Side. "But the upper West Side, my dear! You might as well be in Chicago." Then I had revolutionary longings for a tiny old house with no heat and a sloping roof in Greenwich Village— "I could never go to see you there. They would stone the motor," ended that. There is just one slice in the center of the city,

in which a poor but honest widow can live to the satisfaction of everybody but herself. So here I am in the decorous Seventies, between Park Avenue and Lexington, in an eighteen-foot dwelling with floors for light housekeeping.

To enter you go down three steps to a little front door that tries to keep up to the neighborhood by hiding its decrepitude behind an iron grill. That lets you into the smallest vestibule in the world, where four bells are ranged along the door-post and four letter-boxes cling to the wall. Out of this open two more doors, one that gives egress to a narrow flight of stairs without a hand-rail, and the other to the ground-floor apartment, inhabited, so Mrs. Bushey tells me, by a trained nurse and her aunt. There was a tailor there once, but Mrs. Bushey got him out—“Cockroaches, water bugs, and then the sign! It lowered the tone of the house. A person like you,” Mrs. Bushey eyed me approvingly, “would never have stood for a tradesman’s sign.”

I murmured an assent. I always do when credited with exclusive tastes I ought to have and haven’t. It was the day I came to look the place over, and I was nervously anxious to make a good impression on Mrs. Bushey. Then we mounted a

narrow stair that rose through a well to upper stories. As it approached the landing it took a spirited curve, as if in the hope of finding something better above. The stairway was dark and a faint thin scent of many things (I know it now to be a composite of cooking, gas leakage and cigars) remained suspended in the airless shaft.

"On this floor," said Mrs. Bushey, turning on the curve, as if in the hope of finding something better up behind her, "the gas is never put out."

I took that floor. I don't know whether the gas decided it, or Mrs. Bushey's persuasive manners, or an exhaustion that led me to look with favor upon anything that had a chair to sit on and a bed to sleep in. Anyway, I took it, and the next day burst in upon Betty Ferguson, trying to carry it off with a debonair nonchalance: "Well, I've got an apartment at last."

Betty looked serious and asked questions: Was it clean? Did the landlady seem a proper person? Had I seen any of the other lodgers? Then dwelt on the brighter side: It's not quite a block from Park Avenue. If you don't like it you can find some excuse to break your lease. There *is* a servant on the premises who will come in, clean up and cook you

one good meal so you won't starve. Well, it doesn't sound so bad.

And now I'm in I think it's even less bad than it sounded. The front room is going to make the impression. It is already getting an atmosphere, the individuality of a lady of uncultivated literary tastes is imposing itself upon the department-store background. The center table—mission style—is beginning to have an air, with Bergson in yellow paper covers and two volumes of Strindberg. No more of him for me after *Miss Juliet*, but he has his uses thrown carelessly on a table with other gentlemen of the moment. If I am ever written up in the papers I feel sure the reporters will say, "Mrs. Drake's parlor gave every evidence of being the abode of a woman of culture and refinement."

The back room (there are only two) is more intimate. I am going to eat there and also sleep. Friends may come in, however; for the bed, during the day, masquerades as a divan. A little group of my ancestors—miniatures and photographs of portraits—hangs on the wall and chaperons me. Between the two rooms stretches a narrow connecting neck of bathroom and kitchenette.

There is only one word that describes the kitch-

nette—it is cute. When I look at it with a gas stove on one side and tiers of shelves on the other, “cute” instinctively rises to my lips, and I feel that my country has enriched the language with that untranslatable adjective. No one has ever been able to give it a satisfactory definition, but if you got into my kitchenette, which just holds one fair-sized person, and found yourself able to cook with one hand and reach the dishes off the shelves with the other, you would get its full meaning.

Before the house was cut into floors the kitchenette must have been a cupboard. I wonder if a lady’s clothes hung in it or the best china was stored there. There is a delightful mystery about old houses and their former occupants. Haven’t I read somewhere that walls absorb impressions from the lives they have looked on and exhale them to the pleasure or detriment of later comers?

Last night, as I was reading in bed—a habit acquired at the age of twelve and adhered to ever since—I remembered this and wondered what the walls would exhale on me. The paper has a trailing design of roses on it, very ugly and evidently old. I wondered if the roses had bloomed round tragedy or comedy, or just that fluctuation between the two

which makes up the lives of most of us—an alternate rise and fall, soaring upward to a height, dropping downward to a hollow.

Five years ago mine dropped to its hollow, and ever since has been struggling up to the dead level where it is now—the place where things come without joy or pain, the edge off everything. Thirty-three and the high throb of expectancy over, the big possibilities left behind. The hiring of two rooms, the hanging of a curtain, the placing of a vase—these are the things that for me must take the place that love and home and children take in other women's lives.

I got this far and stopped. No, I wouldn't. I came back from Europe to get away from that. I put out the light and cuddled down in the new bed. Quite a good bed if it is a divan, and the room is going to be fairly quiet. Muffled by walls I could hear the clanging passage of cars. And then far away it seemed, though it couldn't have been, a gramophone, the Caruso record of *La Donna e Mobile*. What a fine swaggering song and what an outrageous falsehood! Woman is changeable—is she? That's the man's privilege. We, poor fools, haven't the sense to do anything but cling, if not to actualities to mem-

ories. I felt tears coming—that hasn't happened for years. My memories don't bring them, they only bring a sort of weary bitterness. It was the new surroundings, the loneliness, that did it. I stopped them and listened to the gramophone, and the wretched thing had begun on a new record, *Una Lagrima Furtiva*—a furtive tear!

With my own furtive tears, wet on the pillow, I couldn't help laughing.

II

THERE is one thing in the front room I must get rid of—the rug. It is a nightmare with a crimson ground on which are displayed broken white particles that look like animalcula in a magnified drop of water. I had just made up my mind that it must be removed when Mrs. Bushey opportunely came in.

Mrs. Bushey lives next door (she has two houses under her wing) and when not landladying, teaches physical culture. I believe there is no Mr. Bushey, though whether death or divorce has snatched him from her I haven't heard. She is a stout dark person somewhere from twenty-eight to forty-eight—I can't tell age. I am thirty-three and have wrinkles round my eyes. She has none. It may be temperament, or fat, or the bony structure of the skull, or an absence of furtive tears.

She talks much and rapidly which ought to tend to a good combination between us, as listening is one of the things I do best. From our conversation, or perhaps I ought to say our monologue, I got an im-

pressionistic effect of my fellow lodgers past and present. The lady who lived here before me was a writer and very close about money. It was difficult to collect her rent, also she showed symptoms of inebriety. I gathered from Mrs. Bushey's remarks and expression that she expected me to be shocked, and I tried not to disappoint her, but I couldn't do much with a monosyllable, which was all she allowed me.

A series of rapid sketches of the present inmates followed. Something like this:

"Mrs. Phillips, the trained nurse, and her aunt, in the basement are terrible cranks, always complaining about the plumbing and the little boys who will stop on their way home from school and write bad words on the flags. They think they own the back garden, but they don't. We all do, but what's the use of fighting? I never do, I'll stand anything rather than have words with anybody."

I edged in an exclamation, a single formless syllable.

"Of course, I knew you would. Then on the floor below you are two young Westerners in the back room, Mr. Hazard, who's an artist, and Mr. Weatherby, who's something on the press. The most delightful fellows, never a day late with their rent.

And in the front room is Miss Bliss, a model—artist not cloak. She isn't always on time with her money, but I'm very lenient with her."

I tried to insert a sentence, but it was nipped at the second word.

"Yes, exactly. You see just how it is. On the floor above you, in the back, is Mr. Hamilton, such a nice man and so unfortunate. Lost every cent he had in Wall Street and is beginning all over again. Fine, isn't it? Yes, I feel it and don't say anything when he's behind with his rent. How could I?" Though I hadn't said a word she looked at me reprovingly as if I had suggested sending the delinquent Mr. Hamilton to jail. "That's not my way. I know it's foolish of me. You needn't tell me so, but that's how I'm made."

I began to feel that I ought to offer my next month's rent at once. I have a bad memory and might be a day or two late.

"The room in front, over your parlor, is vacant. Terrible, isn't it? I tried to make Mr. Hamilton take the whole floor through. Even if he isn't good pay—"

I broke in, determined to hear no more of Mr. Hamilton's financial deficiencies.

"Who's on the top floor?"

There was a slight abatement of Mrs. Bushey's buoyancy. She looked at me with an eye that expressed both curiosity and question.

"Miss Harris lives there," she answered. "Have you seen her?"

I hadn't.

"Perhaps you've heard her?"

I had heard a rustle on the stairs, was that Miss Harris?

"Yes. She's the only woman above you."

"Does she leave a trail of perfume?"

I was going to add that it didn't mix well with the gas leakage, the cigars and last year's cooking but refrained for fear of Mrs. Bushey's feelings.

"Yes, that's Miss Harris. She's a singer—professional. But you won't hear her much, there's a floor in between. That is, unless you leave the register open."

I said I'd shut the register.

"I don't take singers as a rule," Mrs. Bushey went on, "but Mr. Hamilton being away all day and the top floor being hard to rent, I made an exception. One must live, mustn't one?"

I could agree to that.

"She's a Californian and rather good-looking. But I don't think she's had much success."

A deprecating look came into her face and she tilted her head to one side. I felt coming revelations about Miss Harris' rent and said hastily:

"What does she sing, concert, opera, musical comedy?"

"She's hardly sung in public at all yet. She's studying, and I'm afraid that it's very uncertain. Last month—"

I interrupted desperately.

"Is she a contralto or soprano?"

"Dramatic mezzo," said Mrs. Bushey. "She's trying to get an opening, but," she compressed her lips and shook her head gloomily, "there are so many of them and her voice is nothing wonderful. But she evidently has some money, for she pays her rent regularly."

I felt immensely relieved. As Mrs. Bushey rose to her feet I too rose lightly, encouragingly smiling. Mrs. Bushey did not exhibit the cheer fitting to the possession of so satisfactory a lodger. She buttoned her jacket, murmuring:

"I don't like taking singers, people complain so.

But when one is working for one's living—" Her fingers struggled with a button.

"Of course," I filled in, "I understand. And I for one won't object to the music."

Mrs. Bushey seemed appeased. As she finished the buttoning she looked about the room, her glance roaming over my possessions. For some obscure reason I flinched before that inspection. Some of them are sacred, relics of my mother and of the years when I was a wife—only a few of these. Mrs. Bushey's look was like an auctioneer's hand fingering them, appraising their value.

Finally it fell to the rug. I had forgotten it; now was my chance. Suddenly it seemed a painful subject to broach and I sought for a tactful opening. Mrs. Bushey pressed its crimson surface with her foot.

"Isn't this a beautiful rug?" she said. "It's a real Samarcand."

I smothered a start. I had had a real Samarcand once.

Mrs. Bushey, eying the magnified insects with solicitude, continued:

"I wouldn't like to tell you how much I paid for

this. It was a ridiculous sum for me to give. But I love pretty things, and when you took the apartment I put it in here because I saw at once *you* were used to only the best."

I murmured faintly.

"So I was generous and gave you my treasure. You will be careful of it, won't you? Not drop anything on it or let people come in with muddy boots."

I said I would. I found myself engaging with ardor to love and cherish a thing I abhorred. It's happened before, it's the kind of thing I've been doing all my life.

Mrs. Bushey gave it a loving stroke with her foot.

"I knew you'd appreciate it. You don't often find a real Samarcand in a furnished apartment."

After she had gone I sat looking dejectedly at it. Of course I would have to keep it now. I might buy some small rugs and partly cover it up, but I suppose, when she saw them, she would be mortally hurt. And I can't do that. I'd rather have those awful magnified insects staring up at me for the rest of my life than wound her pride so.

As to its being a Samarcand—I took up one corner and lo! attached to it by a string was a price-tag bearing the legend, Scotch' wool rug, \$12.75.

It was somewhat of a shock. Suppose I had found it while she was there! The thought of such a contretemps made me cold. To avoid all possibilities of it ever happening I stealthily detached the tag and tore it into tiny pieces. As I dropped them in the waste-basket I had a fancy that had I made the discovery while she was present, I would have been the more embarrassed of the two.

All afternoon I have been putting things in order, trying them and standing back to get the effect. It's a long time since I've had belongings of my own to play with. I hung my mother's two Kriegolf's (Kriegolf was a Canadian artist who painted pictures of habitan life) in four different places. They finally came to anchor on the parlor wall on either side of a brass-framed mirror with candle branches that belongs to Mrs. Bushey. Opposite, flanking the fireplace, are *Kitty O'Brien* and *The Wax Head of Lille*. I love her best of all, the dreaming maiden. I like to try and guess what she's thinking of. Is it just the purposeless reverie of youth, or is she musing on the coming lover? It can't be that, because, while he's still a dream lover, a girl is happy, and she looks so sad.

I was trying to pierce the secret of that mysterious

face when the telephone rang. It was Roger Clements, a kind voice humming along the line—"Well, how's everything?" Roger wanted to come up and see me and the kitchenette, and I told him Madame would receive to-morrow evening.

He would be my first visitor and I was fluttered. I spent at least an hour trying to decide whether I'd better bring the Morris chair from the back room for him. When the dread of starvation is lifted from you by one hundred and sixty-five dollars a month and life offers nothing, you find your mental forces expending themselves on questions like that. I once knew a man who told me he sat on the edge of his bed every morning struggling to decide whether he'd put on a turned-down or a stand-up collar. He said it was nerves. In my case it's just plain lack of interests.

It's natural for me to try and make Roger comfortable. He's one of the best friends I have in the world. I'm not using the word to cover sentiment, I do really mean a friend. He knew me before I was married, was one of the reliable older men in those glowing days when I was Evelyn Carr, before I met Harmon Drake. He has been kind to me in ways I never can forget. In those dark last years of my

married life (there were only five of them altogether) when my little world was urging divorce and I stood distracted amid falling ruins, he never said one word to me about my husband, never forced on me consolation or advice. I don't forget that, or the letter he wrote me when Harmon died—the one honest letter I got.

Everybody exclaimed when I said I was going alone to Europe. Roger was the only one who understood and told me to go. I'll carry to my grave the memory of his face as he stood on the dock waving me good-by. He was smiling, but under the smile I could see the sympathy he wanted me to know and didn't dare to put in words. That's one of the ties between us—we're the silent kind who keep our feelings hidden away in a Bluebeard's chamber of which we keep the key.

I used to hear from him off and on in Europe, and I followed him in the American papers. I remember one sun-soaked morning in Venice, when I picked up an English review in the pension and read a glowing criticism of his book of essays, *Readjustments*. How proud I was of him! He's become quite famous in these last few years, not vulgarly famous but known among scholars as a scholar and

recognized as one of the few stylists we have over here. I can't imagine him on the news-stalls, or bound in paper for the masses. I think he secretly detests the masses though he won't admit it. The mob, with its easily swayed passions, is the sort of thing that it's in his blood to hate. If he had to sue for its support like Coriolanus he would act exactly as Coriolanus did. Fortunately he doesn't need it. The Clements have had money for generations, not according to Pittsburgh standards, but the way the Clements reckon money. He has an apartment on Gramercy Park, lined with books to the ceilings, with a pair of old servants to fuss over him and keep the newspaper people away.

There he leads the intellectual life, the only one that attracts him. He rarely goes into society. The recent invasion of multi-millionaires have spoiled it, his sister, Mrs. Ashworth, says, and on these points he and she think alike. And he doesn't care for women, at least to fall in love with them. When he was a young man, twenty-four to be accurate, he was engaged to a girl who died. Since then his interest in the other sex has taken the form of a detached impersonal admiration. He thinks they fur-

nish the color and poetry of life and in that way have an esthetic value in a too sober world.

But what's the sense of analyzing your friend? He's a dear kind anchorite of a man, just a bit set, just a bit inclined to think that the Clements' way of doing things is the only way, just a bit too contemptuous of cheapness and bad taste and bounce, but with all his imperfections on his head, the finest gentleman I know. *I will* move the Morris chair.

III

LOVE of flowers is one of the gifts the fairies gave me in my cradle. It's a great possession, fills so many blanks. You can forget you've got no baby of your own when you watch the flowers' babies lifting their little faces to the sun.

I bought four plants at Bloomingdales and put them in the front window, a juniper bush, a Boston fern, a carrot fern and a rubber plant. I like the ferns best, the new shoots are so lovely, pushing up little green curly tops in the shelter of the old strong ones. I remind myself of Miss Lucretia Tox in *Dombey and Son*, with a watering can and a pair of scissors to snip off dead leaves. There's one great difference between us—Miss Tox had a Mr. Dombey across the way. I've nothing across the way. The only male being that that discreet and expressionless row of houses has given up to my eyes is the young doctor opposite. He does the same thing every morning, runs down the steps with a bag and a busy air, walks rapidly to Lexington Avenue,

then, when he thinks he's out of sight, stands on the corner not knowing which way to go.

I feel that, in a purely neighborly spirit, I ought to have an illness. I would like to help all young people starting in business, take all the hansoms that go drearily trailing along Fifth Avenue, especially if the driver looks drunken and despondent, and give money to every beggar who accosts me. They say it is a bad principle and one is always swindled. Personally I don't think that matters at all. Your impulse is all right and that's all that counts. But I digress again—I must get over the habit.

This morning I was doing my Miss Lucretia Tox act when Betty Ferguson came in. Betty is one of my rich friends; we were at school together and have kept close ever since. She married Harry Ferguson the same year that I married Harmon Drake. Now she has three children, and a house on Fifth Avenue, not to mention Harry. Her crumpled rose leaf is that she is getting fat. Every time I see her she says resolutely, "I am going to walk twice round the reservoir to-morrow morning," and never does it.

She came in blooming, with a purple orchid

among her furs, and the rich rosy color in her face deepened by the first nip of winter. She has a sharp eye, and I expected she would immediately see the rug and demand an explanation. I was slightly flustered, for I have no excuse ready and I never can confess my weaknesses to Betty. She is one of the sensible people who don't see why you can't be sensible, too.

She did not, however, notice the rug, but clasping my hand fixed me with a solemn glance that made me uneasy. Betty oblivious to externals—what had I done?

"Who was the woman I met coming out of here just now?" she said abruptly.

"Mrs. Bushey," I hazarded, and then remembered Mrs. Bushey was off somewhere imparting physical culture.

"Is Mrs. Bushey very tall and thin with black hair and a velvet dress, and a hat as big as a tea tray?"

"No, she's short and stout and—"

"Evie," interrupted Mrs. Ferguson, sounding a deep note, "that woman wasn't Mrs. Bushey. Nobody who looked like that ever leased an eighteen-foot house and rented out floors."

I had a sudden surge of memory—

“It must have been Miss Harris.”

Betty loosed my hand and sank upon the sofa, that is, she subsided carefully upon the sofa, as erect as a statue from the waist up. She threw back her furs with a disregard for the orchid that made me wince.

“Who’s Miss Harris?” she said sternly.

I told her all I knew.

“That’s just what she looked like—the stage. Are there any more of them here?”

I assured her there were not. She gazed out of the window with a pondering air.

“After all, there *are* respectable people on the stage,” she said, following some subterranean course of thought.

I knew my Betty and hastened to reassure her—

“She’s on the top floor. Her contaminating influence, if she has one, would have to percolate through another apartment before it got to me.”

She did not smile and I did not expect it. Mrs. Ferguson has no sense of humor, and that’s one of the reasons I love her. There is an obsession in the public mind just now about the sense of humor. People ask anxiously if other people have it as Napoleon

used to ask if attractive ladies he had wooed in vain "were still virtuous." It's like being a bromide—Give me a bromide, a humorless, soft, cushiony bromide, rather than those exhausting people who have established a reputation for wit and are living up to it. Betty is not soft and cushiony, but she is always herself.

"I wish you could live in a house of your own like a Christian," she said.

We have talked over this before. This subject has an embarrassing side—I'll explain it later—so I hastened to divert her.

"Why should you be wrought up over Miss Harris? I'm sure from what Mrs. Bushey tells me she's a very nice person," and then I remembered and added brightly: "She always pays her rent."

Betty gave me a somber side glance.

"She's very handsome."

"There *are* handsome people who are perfectly *convenable*. You're handsome, Betty."

Betty was unmoved.

"At any rate you needn't know her," she said.

"Don't you think I ought to say 'Howd'ye do' if I meet her on the stairs?"

"No, why should you? The next thing would be

she'd be coming into your rooms and then, some day, she'd come when somebody you liked was there."

She clasped her hands in her lap and drew herself up, her head so erect the double chin she fears was visible. In this attitude she kept a cold eye on me.

"And all because she's handsome and wears a hat as big as a tea tray," I said, trying to treat the subject lightly, but inwardly conscious of a perverse desire to champion Miss Harris.

Betty, wreathing her neck about in the tight grip of her collar, removed her glance to the window, out of which she stared haughtily as though Miss Harris was standing on the tin roof supplicating an entrance.

"We can't be too careful in this town," she murmured, shaking her head as if refusing Miss Harris' hopes. Then she looked down at the floor. I saw her expression changing as her eye ranged over the rug.

"Where did you get this rug, Evie?" she asked in a quiet tone.

I grew nervous.

"It came with the apartment."

"Get rid of it, dear, at once. I can send you up one from the library. Harry's going to give me a new Aubusson."

I became more nervous and faltered:

"But I ought to keep this."

"Why? Is there a clause in your lease that you've got to use it?"

When Betty gets me against the wall this way I become frightened. Timid animals, thus cornered, are seized with the courage of despair and fly at their assailant. Timid human beings show much less spirit—I always think animals behave with more dignity than people—they tell lies.

"But—but—I like it," I stammered.

"Oh," said Betty with a falling note, "if that's the case—" She stopped and rose to her feet, too polite to say what she thought. "Put on your things and come out with me. I'm shopping, and afterward we'll lunch somewhere."

I went out with Betty in the car, a limousine with two men and a chow dog. We went to shops where obsequious salesladies listened to Mrs. Ferguson's needs and sought to satisfy them. They had a conciliating way of turning to me and asking my opinion which, such is the poverty of my spirit, pleased me

greatly. I get a faint reflex feeling of what it is to be the wife of one of New York's rising men. Then we lunched richly and clambered back into the limousine, each dropping languidly into her corner while the footman tucked us in.

We were rolling luxuriously down Fifth Avenue when Betty rallied sufficiently from the torpor of digestion to murmur.

"To-morrow morning, after breakfast, I'll walk three times round the reservoir."

Roger came at eight. It was the first cold night of the season and the furnace was not broken in. In spite of lamps the room was chilly. It was good to see him again—in my parlor, in my Morris chair. He isn't handsome, a long thin man, with a long thin face, smooth shaven and lined, and thick, sleek, iron-gray hair. Some one has said all that a man should have in the way of beauty is good teeth. Roger has that necessary asset and another one, well-shaped, gentlemanly hands, very supple and a trifle dry to the touch. And, yes, he has a charming smile.

He is forty-two and hasn't changed a particle in the last fifteen years. Why can't a woman manage that? When I was dressing to-night I looked in the

glass and tried to reconstruct my face as it was fifteen years ago. I promised to be a pretty girl then, but it was just the fleeting beauty that nature gives us in our mating time, lends us for her own purposes. Now I see a pale mild person with flat-lying brown hair and that beaten expression peculiar to females whom life conquers. I don't know whether it's the mouth or the eyes, but I see it often in faces I pass on the street.

It was a funny evening—conversation varied by chamber music. We began it sitting in the middle of the room on either side of the table like the family lawyer and the heroine in the opening scene of a play. Then, as the temperature dropped, we slowly gravitated toward the register, till we finally brought up against it. A faint warm breath came through the iron grill and we leaned forward and basked in it. We were talking about women. We often do, it's one of our subjects. Of course Roger is of the old school. He's got an early Victorian point of view; I know he would value me more highly if I swooned now and then. He doesn't call women "the weaker vessel," but he thinks of them that way.

"I don't see why you can't be content with things as they are," he said, spreading his hands to the

register's meager warmth. "Why should you want to go into politics and have professions? Why aren't you willing to leave all that to us and stay where you belong?"

"But we may not have anything to do where we belong. Roger, if you move nearer the corner you'll get a little more heat."

Roger moved.

"Every woman has work in her own sphere," he said, while moving.

"I haven't."

"You, dear Evie," he looked at me with a fond indulgent smile. "You have plenty of work and it's always well done—to bring romance and sweetness into life."

There is something quite maddening about Roger when he talks this way. I could find it in me to call him an ass. All the superiority of countless generations of men who have ordered women's lives lies behind it. And he is impregnable, shut up with his idea. It is built round him and cemented with a thousand years of prejudice and tradition.

"I don't *want* to bring romance and sweetness into life," I said crossly, "I want to get something out of it."

"You can't help it. It's what you were put in the world for. We men don't want you in the struggle. That's for us. It's our business to go down into the arena and fight for you, make a place for you, keep you out of it all."—He moved his foot across the register and turned it off.

"You've turned off the heat," I cried.

He turned it on.

—"Keep you out of it all. Sheltered from the noise and glare of the world by our own firesides."

"Some of us would rather have a little more noise and glare by our own register."

"All wrong, Evie, all wrong. You're in a niche up there with a lamp burning before it. If you come down from your niche you're going to lose the thing that's made you worshipful—your femininity, your charm."

"What does our charm matter to us? What good is our femininity to us?"

He looked surprised.

"What good?"

"Look here, Roger, I feel certain that Shem, Ham and Japheth talked this way to their wives on those rainy days in the Ark. It's not only a pre-glacial point of view, but it's the most colossally selfish one.

All you men are worried about is that we're not going to be so attractive to make love to. The chase is going to lose its zest—”

I stopped short, cut off by a flood of sound that suddenly burst upon us from the register.

It was a woman's voice singing Musetta's song, and by its clearness and volume seemed to be the breath of the register become vocal. We started back simultaneously and looked about the room, while Musetta's song poured over us, a rich jubilant torrent of melody.

“What is it?” said Roger, rising as if to defend me.

“Miss Harris,” I answered, jumping up.

“Who's Miss Harris?”

“A singer. She lives here.”

“Does she live in there?” He pointed to the register.

“No, on the top floor, but it connects with her room.”

We stood still and listened, and as the song rose to its brilliant climax, Roger looked at me smiling, and nodded approvingly. In his heart he thinks he is something of a musician, has season seats at the opera and goes dutifully to the Symphony. I don't

think he is any more musical than I am. I don't think literary people ever are. They like it with their imaginations, feel its sensuous appeal, but as to experiencing those esoteric raptures that the initiated know—it's a joy denied.

The song came to an end.

"Not a bad voice," said Roger. "Who is she?"

"A lady who is studying to be a professional." And then I added spitefully: "Do you think she ought to give up her singing to be sheltered by somebody's fireside?"

Roger had turned to get his coat. He stopped and looked at me over his shoulder, smiling—he really has a delightful smile.

"I except ladies with voices."

"Because they add to the pleasure of gentlemen with musical tastes?"

He picked up his coat.

"Evie, one of the things that strengthens me in my belief is that when you get on that subject you become absolutely acid."

I helped him on with his coat.

My sitting-room door opens close to the head of the stairs. If my visitors back out politely they run a risk of stepping over the edge and falling down-

stairs on their backs. The one gas-jet that burns all the time is a safeguard against this catastrophe, but, as it is an uncertain and timid flicker, I speed the parting guest with caution.

Roger was backing out with his hat held to his breast when I gave a warning cry. It went echoing up the stairway and mingled with the sound of heavy descending feet. A head looked over the upper bannister, a dark masculine head, and seeing nothing more alarming than a lady and gentleman in an open doorway, withdrew itself. The steps descended, a hand glided down the rail, and a large overcoated shape came into view. The frightened gas-jet shot up as if caught in a dereliction of duty, and the man, advancing toward us, was clearly revealed.

I am a person of sudden attractions and antipathies and I had one, sharp and poignant, as I looked at him. It was an antipathy, the "I-do-not-like-you-Doctor-Fell" feeling in its most acute form. It was evidently not reciprocal, for, as he drew near, he smiled, an easy natural smile that disclosed singularly large white teeth. He gave me an impression of size and breadth, his shoulders seemed to fill the narrow passage and he carried them with an arrogant swagger. That and the stare he fixed on us

probably caused the "Doctor Fell" feeling. The stare was bold and hard, a combination of inspection and curiosity.

He added a nod to his smile, passed us and went down the stairs. We looked down on his wide descending shoulders and the top of his head, with the hair thin in the middle.

"Who's that bounder?" said Roger.

"I haven't the least idea."

"Didn't he bow to you?"

"Yes, but that doesn't make me know him. He must be some one living in the house."

Roger looked after him.

"I'm coming up here to see you often," he said after a moment's pause.

After he had gone I went into the back room and lit lights and peeled off the outer skins of my divan bed. I felt quite gay and light-hearted. I *am* going to like it here. With the student lamp lighted the back room is very cozy. I lay in bed and surveyed it admiringly while my ancestors looked soberly down on me. They are a very solemn lot, all but the French Huguenot lady with her frivolous curls and the black velvet round her neck. She has a human look. I'm sure her blood is strong in me. None of

the others would ever have lived in an eighteen-foot house with a prima donna singing through the register, and a queer-looking man, with large white teeth, smiling at one in the passage.

IV

I HAVE seen her—and I don't wonder!

It was on Tuesday evening just as the dusk was falling. I had come home from a walk, and as I climbed the first narrow stair I saw in the hall above me, a woman standing under the gas, reading a letter. I caught her in silhouette, a black form, very tall and broadening out into a wide hat, but even that way, without feature or detail, arresting. Then, as she heard me, she stepped back so that the light fell on her. I knew at once it was Miss Harris, tried not to stare, and couldn't help it.

She is really remarkably good-looking—an oval-faced, dark-eyed woman, with black hair growing low on her forehead and waving backward over her ears. Either the size of the hat, or her earrings (they were long and green), or a collarless effect about the neck, gave her a picturesque, unconventional air. The stage was written large all over her. When I got close I saw details, that she had beautifully curly lips—most people's come together in a

straight line like a box and its lid—and a fine nose, just in the right proportion to the rest of her face. Also she wore a gray fur coat, unfastened, and something in her appearance suggested a hurried dressing, things flung on.

She looked up from the letter and eyed me with frank interest. I approached embarrassed. A secret desire to have all people like me is one of my besetting weaknesses. I am slavish to servants and feel grateful when salesladies condescend to address me while waiting for change. The fear that Betty would find it out could not make me pass Miss Harris without a word. So I timidly smiled—a deprecating, apologetic smile, a smile held in bondage by the memory of Mrs. Ferguson.

Miss Harris returned it brilliantly. Her face suddenly bore the expression of one who greets a cherished friend. She moved toward me radiating welcome.

"You're on the third floor," she said in a rich voice, "Mrs. Harmon Drake."

I saw a hand extended and felt mine enclosed in a grasp that matched the smile and manner. Miss Harris towered over me—she must be nearly six feet high—and I felt myself growing smaller and

paler than the Lord intended me to be before that exuberantly beaming presence. My hand was like a little bundle of cold sticks in her enfolding grip. I backed against the banisters and tried to pull it away, but Miss Harris held it and beamed.

"I've read your name on your door every time I've passed," she said, "and I've hoped you'd some day open the door and find me standing there and ask me to come in."

I could see Betty's head nodding at me, I could hear her grim "I told you so."

I made polite murmurs and pressed closer to the banister.

"But the door was never opened," said Miss Harris, bending to look into my face with an almost tender reproach. I felt I was visibly shrinking, and that the upward gaze I fastened on her was one of pleading. Unless she let go my hand and ceased to be so oppressively gracious I would diminish to a heap upon the floor.

"Never mind," she went on, "now I know you I'll not stand outside any more."

I jerked my hand away and made a flank movement for the stairs. Five minutes more and she would be coming up and taking supper with me.

She did not appear to notice my desire for flight, but continued talking to me as I ascended.

"We're the only two women in the upper part of this house. Do I chaperon you, or do you chaperon me?"

I spoke over the banisters and my tone was cold.

"Being a married woman, I suppose I'm the natural chaperon."

The coldness glanced off her imperturbable good humor:

"You never can tell. These little quiet married women—"

I frowned. The changed expression stopped her and then she laughed.

"Don't be offended. You must never mind what I say. I'm not half so interesting if I stop and think."

I looked down at her and was weak enough to smile. Her face was so unlike her words, so serenely fine, almost noble.

"That's right, smile," she cried gaily. "You'll get used to me when you know me better. And you're going to do that, Mrs. Drake, for I warn you now, we'll soon be friends."

Before I could answer she had turned and run down the stairs to the street.

I let myself into the sitting-room and took off my things. I have neat old-maidish ways, cultivated by years of small quarters. Before I can sit with an easy conscience I have to put away wraps, take off shoes, pull down blinds and light lamps. When I had done this I sat before the register and thought of Miss Harris.

There was something very unusual about her—something more than her looks. She has a challenging quality; maybe it's magnetism, but whatever it is that's what makes people notice her and speak of her. Nevertheless, she was not *de notre monde*—I apologize for the phrase which has always seemed to me the summit of snobbery, but I can't think of a better one. It was not that she was common—that didn't fit her at all—unsensitive would be a fairer word. I felt that very strongly, and I felt that it might be a concomitant of a sort of crude power. She didn't notice my reluctance at all, or I had a fancy that she might have noticed it and didn't care.

I was sitting thus when Mrs. Bushey came bounding ebulliently in. Mrs. Bushey bounds in quite often, after physical culture, or when the evenings in the other house pall. She wore a red dress under

a long fur-lined coat and stopped in pained amaze when she saw me crouched over the register.

"Cold!" she cried aghast, "don't tell me you haven't enough heat?"

It was just what I intended telling her, but when I saw her consternation I weakened.

"It *is* a little chilly this evening," I faltered, "but perhaps—"

Mrs. Bushey cut me short by falling into the Morris chair as one become limp from an unexpected blow.

"What am I to do?" she wailed, looking up at the chandelier as though she expected an answer to drop on her from the globes. "I've just got four tons of the best coal and a new furnace man. I pay him double what any one else on the block pays—*double*—and here you are *cold*."

I felt as if I was doing Mrs. Bushey a personal wrong—insulting her as a landlady and a woman—and exclaimed earnestly, quite forgetting the night Roger and I had frozen in concert.

"Only this evening, Mrs. Bushey, I assure you."

But she was too perturbed to listen:

"And I try so hard—I don't make a cent and

don't expect to. I want you all to be comfortable, no matter how far behind I get. That's my way—but I've always been a fool. Oh, dear!" She let her troubled gaze wander over the room—"Isn't that a beautiful mirror? It came from the Trianon, belonged to Marie Antoinette. I took it out of my room and put it in here for you. What *shall* I do with that furnace man?"

I found myself telling her that an arctic temperature was exactly to my taste, and making a mental resolution that next time Roger came he could keep on his overcoat, and after all, spring was only six months off.

"No," said Mrs. Bushey firmly, "I'll have it right if I go to the poorhouse, and that's where I'm headed. I had a carpenter's bill to-day—twenty-six dollars and fourteen cents—and I've only eleven in the bank. It was for your floor"—she looked over it—"I really didn't need to have it fixed, it's not customary, but I was determined I'd give you a good floor no matter what it cost."

I was just about suggesting that the carpenter's bill be added to my next month's rent when she brightened up and said an Italian count had taken the front room on the floor above.

"Count Mario Delcati, one of the very finest families of Milan. A charming young fellow, charming, with those gallant foreign manners. He's coming here to learn business, American methods. I'm asking him nothing—a young man in a strange country. How could I? And though his family's wealthy they're giving him a mere pittance to live on. Of course I won't make anything by it, I don't expect to. His room's got hardly any chairs in it, and I can't buy any new ones with that carpenter's bill hanging over me." She smoothed the arm of the Morris chair and then looked at the floor. "It's really made your floor look like parquet."

I agreed, though I hadn't thought of it before.

"You have a good many chairs in this room," she went on, "more than usually go in a furnished apartment, even in the most expensive hotels."

I had two chairs and a sofa. Mrs. Bushey rose and drew together her fur-lined coat.

"It's horrible to think of that boy with only one chair," she murmured, "far from his home, too. Of course I'd give him any I had, but mine are all gone. I'd give the teeth out of my head if anybody wanted them. It's not in my nature to keep things for myself when other people ought to have them."

I gave up the Morris chair. Mrs. Bushey was gushingly grateful.

"I'll tell him it was yours and how willingly you gave it up," she said, moving toward the door. Then she stopped suddenly and looked at the center-table lamp. "He's a great reader, he tells me—French fiction. He ought to have a lamp and there's not one to spare in either house."

She looked encouragingly at me. I wanted the lamp.

"Can't he read by the gas?" I pleaded.

"My dear," said Mrs. Bushey, with a reproving look, "*can you* read by the gas?"

Conquered by her irrefutable argument, I surrendered the lamp. She was again grateful.

"It's so agreeable, dealing with the right sort of people," she said, fastening the last button of her coat. "All the others in the house are so selfish—wouldn't give up anything. But one doesn't have to ask you. You offer it at once."

The count arrived yesterday afternoon, and we are now fast friends. Our meeting fell out thus:—I was reading and heard a sound of footsteps on the stairs, footsteps going up and down, prowling restless footsteps to which I paid no attention, as they

go on most of the time. Presently there was a knock at my door and that, too, was a common happening, as most things and people destined for our house find refuge at my portal—intending lodgers for Mrs. Bushey, the seedy man who has a bill for Mr. Hamilton, the laundress with Mr. Hazard's wash, the artist who is searching for Miss Bliss and has forgotten the address, the telegraph boy with everybody's telegrams, the postman with the special deliveries, and Miss Harris' purchases at the department stores.

I called, "Come in," and the door opened, displaying a thin, brown, dapper young man in a fur-lined overcoat and a silk hat worn back from his forehead. He had a smooth dark skin, a dash of hair on his upper lip, and eyes so black in the pupil and white in the eyeball that they looked as if made of enamel.

At the sight of a lady the young man took off his hat and made a deep bow. When he rose from this obeisance he was smiling pleasantly.

"I am Count Delcati," he said.

"How do you do?" I responded, rising.

"Very well," said the count in careful English with an accent. "I come to live here."

"It's a very nice place," I answered.

"That is why I took the room," said the count.

"But now I am here I can't get into it or find any one who will open the door."

He was locked out. Mrs. Bushey was absent imparting the mysteries of physical culture and Emma, the maid, was not to be found. In the lower hall was a pile of luggage that might have belonged to an actress touring in repertoire, and the count could think of nothing better to do than sit on it till some one came by and rescued him. Not at all sure that he might not be a novel form of burglar, I invited him into my parlor and set him by the register to thaw out. He accepted my hospitality serenely, pushing an armchair to the heat, and asking me if I objected to his wrapping himself in my Navajo blanket.

"How fortunate that I knocked at your door," he said, arranging the blanket. "Otherwise I should surely be froze."

I had an engagement at the dentist's and disappeared to put on my things. When I came back he rose quickly to his feet, the blanket draped around his shoulders.

"I am going out," I said. "I have to—it's the dentist's."

"Poor lady," he murmured politely.

"But—but you," I stammered; "what will you do while I'm gone?"

Holding the blanket together with one hand he made a sweeping gesture round the room with the other.

"Stay here till you come back."

I thought of Roger or Betty chancing to drop in and looked on the ground hesitant. There was a slight pause; I raised my eyes. The count, clasping the two ends of the blanket together over his breast, was regarding me with mild attention.

"But if any of my friends come in to see me?"

"I will receive them—*varri* nicely," said the count.

We looked at each other for a solemn second and then burst out laughing.

"All right," I said. "There are the books and magazines, there are the cigarettes, the matches are in that Japanese box and that cut glass bowl is full of chocolates."

I left him and was gone till dark. At six I came back to find the room illuminated by every gas-jet and lamp and the count still there. He had quite a glad welcoming air, as if I might have been his mother or his maiden aunt.

"You here still," I cried in the open doorway.

He gave one of his deep deliberate bows.

"I have been varri comfortable and warm," he designated the center table with an expressive gesture, "I read magazines, I eat candy and I smoke—yes"—he looked with a proud air into the empty box—"yes, I smoke *all* the cigarettes."

Then we went into the next house to find Mrs. Bushey.

My supper—eggs and cocoa—is cooked by me in the kitchenette. It is eaten in the dining-room or bedroom (the name of the apartment varies with the hour of the day) on one end of the table. The effect is prim and spinsterly—a tray cloth set with china and silver, a student lamp, and in the middle of the table, a small bunch of flowers. People send them sometimes and in the gaps when no one "bunches" me I buy them. To keep human every woman should have one extravagance.

I was breaking the first egg when a knock came on the door, and Miss Harris entered. She came in quickly, the gray fur coat over her arm, a bare hand clasping gloves, purse and a theater bag, all of which she cast on the divan-bed, revealing herself gowned in black velvet.

"Good evening, dearie," she said, patting at her skirt with a preoccupied air, "would you mind doing me a service?"

I rose uneasily expectant. I should not have been surprised if she had asked for anything from one of my eggs to all my savings.

"Don't look so frightened," she said, and wheeled round disclosing the back of her dress gaping over lingerie effects: "Hook me up, that's all."

As I began the service Miss Harris stood gracefully at ease, throwing remarks over her shoulder:

"It's a great blessing having you here, not alone for your sweet little self," she turned her head and tried to look at me, pulling the dress out of my hands, "but because before you came I had such a tragic time with the three middle hooks."

"What did you do?"

"Went unhooked sometimes and at others walked up and down the stairs hoping I'd find one of the inhabitants here, or a tramp, or the postman. He's done it twice for me—a very obliging man."

I did not approve, but did not like to say so.

"There's an eye gone here."

"Only one," said Miss Harris in a tone of surprise, "I thought there were two."

"Shall I pin it?"

"Please don't. How could I get out a pin by myself, and I won't wake you up at midnight."

"But it gaps and shows your neck."

"Then if the play's dull, the person behind me will have something interesting to look at."

"But really, Miss Harris—"

"My dear, good, kind friend, don't be so proper, or do be proper about yourself if it's your nature and you can't help it, but don't be about me. When I'm on the stage I'll have to show much more than my neck, so I may as well get used to it."

"Miss Harris!" I said in a firm cold tone, and stopped the hooking.

I caught the gleam of a humorous gray eye.

"Mrs. Drake!" She whirled round and put her hands on my shoulders and looked into my face with a sweetness that was quite bewitching. "You dear little mouse, don't you know you're one kind and I'm another. Both are nice kinds in their way, so don't let's try to mix them up."

There is something disarmingly winning about this woman. I think for the first time in my life I have met a siren. I pulled my shoulders from the

grasp of her hands, as I felt myself pulling my spirit from the grasp of her attraction.

"I've not finished your dress," I said.

She turned her back to me and gave a sigh.

"Go on, Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi," she said, and then added: "Are you the mother of anything?"

"No," I answered.

"Too bad," she murmured, "you ought to be."

I didn't reply to that. In the moment of silence the sound of feet on the stairs was audible. They came up the passage and began the ascent of the next flight. Miss Harris started.

"That's my man, I guess," she said quickly and tore herself from my hands.

She ran to the door and flung it open. I could see the man's feet and legs half-way up the stairs.

"Jack," she cried in a joyous voice, "I'm here, in Mrs. Drake's room. Come down;" then to me: "It's Mr. Masters. I'm going to the theater with him."

The feet descended and Mr. Masters came into view. He was the man Roger and I had seen in the passage.

He took Miss Harris' proffered hand, then sent a

look at me and my room that contained a subtle suggestion of rudeness, of bold and insolent intrusion. Before she could introduce us he bowed and said easily:

"Good evening, Mrs. Drake. Saw you the other night in the hall."

I inclined my head very slightly. His manner and voice increased my original dislike. I felt that I could not talk to him and turned to Miss Harris. Something in her face struck me unpleasantly. Her look was bent upon him and her air of beaming upon the world in general was intensified by a sort of special beam—an enveloping, deeply glowing beam, such as mothers direct upon beloved children and women upon their lovers.

The door was open and Mr. Masters leaned upon the door-post.

"Nice little place you've got here," he said. "Better than yours, Lizzie."

Miss Harris withdrew her glance from him, it seemed to me with an effort, as if it clung upon him and she had to pluck it away.

"Finish me," she said, turning abruptly to me, "I must go."

All the especial glow for me was gone. Her eyes

lit on mine vacant and unseeing. I suddenly seemed to have receded to a point on her horizon where I had no more personality than a dot on a map. I was not even a servant, simply a pair of hands that prepared her for her flight into the night with the vulgar and repulsive man. This made me hesitate, also I didn't want to go on with the hooking while Mr. Masters leaned against the door-post with that impudently familiar air.

"If Mr. Masters will go into the passage," I said.

He laughed good-humoredly, but did not budge. Miss Harris made a movement that might easily have degenerated into an angry stamp.

"Oh, don't be such an old maid," she said petulantly. "Do the collar and let me go."

I couldn't refuse, but I went on with the hooking with a flushed face. What a fool I had been not to take Betty's advice. Charming as she could be when she wanted, Miss Harris was evidently not a person whose manners remained at an even level.

"Have you heard Miss Harris sing?" asked Mr. Masters.

"Yes, through the register."

"That's a bad conductor. You must come up and hear her in her own rooms some evening."

"If Miss Harris wants me to."

"Mrs. Drake will some day hear me sing in the Metropolitan," said the lady.

"Some day," responded Mr. Masters.

There was something in his enunciation of this single word, so acid, so impregnated with a sneering quality that I stopped my work and cast a surprised glance at him.

He met it with a slight smile.

"Our friend Lizzie here," he said, "has dreams—what I'm beginning to think are pipe dreams."

"Jack," she cried with a sudden note of pleading, "you know that's not true. You *know* I'll some day sing there."

"I know you want to," he replied, then with the air of ignoring her and addressing himself exclusively to me: "Miss Harris has a good voice, I might say a fine voice. But—all here," he spread his fingers fan-wise across his forehead and tapped on that broad expanse, "the soul, the thing that sees and feels—absent, nil," he fluttered the spread fingers in the air.

I was astounded at his cruel frankness—all the more so as I saw it had completely dashed her spirits.

"Rubbish, I don't believe a word of it," I answered hotly, entirely forgetting that I was angry with her.

"Not a bit," he returned coolly, "I've told her so often. A great presence, a fine mechanism," he swept her with a gesture as if she had been a statue, "but the big thing, the heart of it all—not there. No imagination, no temperament, just a well regulated, handsomely decorated musical box. Isn't that so, Lizzie?"

He turned from me and directly addressed her, his eyes narrowed, his face showing a faint sardonic amusement. I wondered what she was going to say—whether she would fly at him, or whether, like the woman I knew, she would hide her mortification and refuse him the satisfaction of seeing how he hurt her.

She did neither. Moving to the divan, she picked up her coat, showing me a face as dejected as that of a disappointed child. His words seemed to have stricken all the buoyancy out of her and she shrugged herself into the coat with slow fatigued movements. Bending to pick up her gloves and glasses she said somberly:

"I'll get a soul some day."

"We hope so," he returned.

"He doesn't know anything about it," I said in an effort to console.

"Oh, doesn't he!" she answered bitterly. "It's his business."

"I'm a speculator in voices," he said, "and our handsome friend Lizzie here has been an investment that, I'm beginning to fear, won't pay any dividends."

He laughed and looked at her with what seemed to me a quite satanic pleasure in his tormenting.

I could think of nothing to say, bewildered by the strange pair. Miss Harris had gathered up her belongings and moved to the door with a spiritless step.

"Good night," she said, glancing at me as if I was a chair that had temporarily supported her weight in a trying moment.

"Good night," said Mr. Masters cheerfully. "Some day go up and hear Lizzie sing and see if you can find the soul in the sound."

He gave a wave with his hat and followed her down the hall.

I shut the door, and am not ashamed to confess, leaned upon it listening. I wanted to hear her at-

tack him on the lower flight. But their footsteps died away in silence.

I cleared away my supper, sunk in deep reflections. What an extraordinary woman! One moment treating you like her bosom friend, the next oblivious of your existence, and most extraordinary of all, meekly enduring the taunts of that unspeakable man. I couldn't account for it in any way except that she must be going to marry him—and that was a hateful thought. For if she *was* rude, and had the manners of a spoiled child, there was something about her that drew you close, as if her hands had hold of yours and were pulling you softly and surely into her embrace.

V

ROGER and I went out to dinner last night, down-town to our favorite haunt in University Place.

I put on my best, a brown velveteen princesse gown (one of Betty's made over), my brown hat with the gold rose and my amber beads. I even powdered my nose, which I was brought up to think an act of depravity only perpetrated by the lost and fallen. When I am dressed up I really do not look thirty-three. But I'll have to buy two little rats to puff out my hair at the sides. It's too flat under that hat. Roger was pleased when he saw me—that's why I did it. What's the fun of dressing for yourself? Some one must look at you admiringly and say, well, whatever it's his nature to say. I suppose Mr. Masters would exclaim, "Gee, you're a peach!" Roger said, "I like you in brown."

I love going down Fifth Avenue in the dark of a winter evening. The traffic of business is over. Motors and carriages go spinning by, carrying peo-

ple to dinners. The big glistening street is like an artery with the joyous blood of the city racing through it, coursing along with the throb, throb, throb of a deathless vitality. And the lights—the wonderful, glowing, golden lights! Two long lines of them on either side that go undulating away into the distance, and broken ones that flash by in a yellow streak, and round glaring ones like the alarmed eyes of animals rushing toward you in terror.

And I love the noise, the near-by rumble and clatter, and outside it the low continuous roar, the voice of the city booming out into the quiet of the fields and up into the silence of the skies. One great, unbroken sound made up of millions of little separate sounds, one great consolidated life made up of millions of little separate life, each of such vital importance to the one who's living it.

We had lots to talk about, Roger and I. We always do. We might be wrecked on a desert island and go on talking for ten years without coming to the end. There are endless subjects—the books we read, the plays we see, pictures over which we argue, music of which I know nothing, and people, the most absorbing of all, probably because gossiping is a reprehensible practise. There is nothing I enjoy

more. If I hadn't been so well brought up I would be like the women in the first act of *The School for Scandal*. Sometimes we make little retrospective journeys into the past. But we do this cautiously. There are five years we neither of us care to touch on, so we talk forward by preference.

Of course I had to tell Roger of Miss Harris and Mr. Masters. It lasted through two courses.

"What a dog!" was Roger's comment.

"Roger," I said earnestly, "do you think she could be in love with such a man?"

Roger shrugged.

"How can *I* tell?"

"But could any woman—any possible kind of a woman? And she's a very possible kind. Something comes from her and finds your heart and draws it right out toward her. She couldn't."

"Perhaps you don't understand this enigmatical lady."

"Maybe I don't understand everything about her, I've only known her a few days. But I can feel—it's an instinct—that underneath where the real things are she's true and sound."

'I can see into Roger more clearly than he knows, and I saw that he wasn't at all interested in Miss

Harris. He looked round the room and said indifferently:

"Why does she have a cad like that hanging about?"

"Perhaps underneath there's something fine in him."

"Very far underneath, buried so deep nobody but Miss Harris can find it."

"Roger, don't be disagreeable. You've never seen either of them."

"Evie, dear, your descriptions are very graphic. Do you know what I think?" He looked at me, smiling a little, but with grave eyes. "I think that you're seeing Miss Harris through yourself. You're putting your brain into her head and your heart into her body and then trying to explain her. That's what's making her such a puzzle."

The waiter here produced a casserole with two squabs in it and presented it to Roger's gaze as if it were a gift he was humbly offering. Roger looked at it and waved him away as if the gift was not satisfactory.

"They look lovely," I called, and Roger smiled.

The squabs occupied him and my thoughts occupied me finally to find expression in a question:

"Roger, what is a gentleman?"

He looked surprised.

"A gentleman? What do you mean?"

"Just what I say—what is it?"

"You know."

"No, I don't. That's just the point. There are lots of things that everybody—young people and fools—seem to understand and I don't. One is the theory of vicarious atonement, one is why girls are educated to know nothing about marriage and children, which are the things that most concern them, and one is what makes a man a gentleman."

Roger considered:

"Let's see—at a blow. A gentleman is a man who observes certain rules of behavior founded on consideration for the welfare and comfort of others."

"It sounds like the polite letter writer. Can a gentleman tell lies?"

"To benefit himself, no. To shield others, yes."

"If he was noble inside—in his character—and uncouth outside, would he be a gentleman?"

"What do you mean by uncouth?"

"Well—wore a watch chain made of nuggets like a man I met in Dresden, and ate peas with his knife?"

"No."

"Then, if he had beautiful manners and a bad heart, would he be one?"

"If his bad heart didn't obtrude too much on his dealings with society, he might."

"Is it all a question of clothes and manners?"

"No."

"You've got to have besides the clothes and manners an inner instinct?"

"That's it."

I mused for a moment, then, looking up, caught Roger's eye fixed on me with a quizzical gleam.

"Why this catechism?"

"I was thinking of Mr. Masters."

"Good heavens!" said Roger crossly, his gleam suddenly extinguished. "Can't you get away from the riff-raff in that house? I wish you'd never gone there."

"No, I can't. I was wondering if Mr. Masters, under that awful exterior had a fine nature, could he possibly be a gentleman?"

"Evie," said Roger, putting down his knife and fork and looking serious, "if under that awful exterior Mr. Masters had the noble qualities of George Washington, Sir Philip Sidney and the Chevalier

Bayard he could no more be a gentleman than I could be king of Spain."

"I was afraid that's what you'd say." I sighed and returned to my squab.

I said no more about it, but when I got home my thoughts went back to it. I hated to think of Lizzie Harris in the company of such a man. If she was lacking in judgment and worldly knowledge some one ought to supply them for her. She was alone and a stranger. Mrs. Bushey had told me she came from California, and from what I'd heard, California's golden lads and lassies scorned the craven deference to public opinion that obtains in the effete East. But she was in the effete East, and she must conform to its standards. She probably had never given them a thought and had no initiated guide to draw them to her attention. Whatever Betty might say, I was free to be friendly with whomever I pleased. That was one of the few advantages of being a widow, *déracincée* by four years in Europe. By the morning I had decided to put my age and experience at her service and this afternoon went up-stairs to begin doing it.

She was in her front room, sitting at a desk writing. A kimono of a bright blue crêpe enwrapped

her, her dark hair, cloudy about the brows, was knotted loosely on the nape of her neck. She rose impulsively when she saw me, kissed me as if I was her dearest friend, then motioned me to the sofa, and went back to her place at the desk.

The room is like mine, only being in the mansard, the windows are smaller and have shelf-like sills. It was an odd place, handsome things and tawdry things side by side. In one corner stood a really beautiful cabinet of red Japanese lacquer, and beside it a three-legged wooden stool, painted white with bows of ribbon tied round each leg as if it was some kind of deformed household pet. Portions of Miss Harris' wardrobe lay over the chairs, and the big black hat crowned the piano tool. On the window-sill, drooping and withered, stood a clump of cyclamen in a pot, wrapped in crimped green paper. Beside it was a plate of crackers and a paper bag, from whose yawning mouth a stream of oranges had run out, lodging in corners. The upright piano, its top covered with stacked music, the wintry light gleaming on its keys, stood across a rear angle of the room and gave the unkempt place an air of purpose, lent it a meaning.

It must be confessed Miss Harris did not look as

if she needed assistance or advice. She was serene and debonair and the blue kimono was extravagantly becoming. I sat down upon the sofa against a pile of cushions. The bottom ones were of an astonishing hardness which obtruded through the softness of the top ones as if an eider-down quilt had been spread over a pile of bricks. I tried to look as if I hadn't felt the bricks and smiled at Miss Harris.

"See what I've been doing," she said, and handed me a sheet of note paper upon which were inscribed a list of names.

I looked over them and they recalled to my mind the heroines of G. P. R. James' novels of which, in my teens, I had been fond.

"Suggestions for my stage name," she explained.
"How does number three strike you?"

Number three was Leonora Bronzino.

"That's an Italian painter," I answered.

"Is it? What a bother. Would he make a fuss?"

"He's been dead for several hundred years."

"Then he doesn't matter. What do you think of number five?"

I looked up number five—Liza Bonaventura.

I murmured it, testing the sound. Miss Harris

eyed me with attention, rapping gently on her teeth with the pen handle.

"Is it too long?"

I wasn't sure.

"Of course when I got to be famous it would be just Bonaventura. And that's a good word—might bring me luck."

"Why don't you use your own name?"

She laughed, throwing back her head so that I could see the inside of her mouth, pink and fresh like a healthy kitten's.

"Lizzie Harris on a program—never!" Then suddenly serious, "I like Bonaventura—'Did you hear Bonaventura last night in *Tannhäuser*'—strong accent on the hear. 'How superb Bonaventura was in *Carmen*.' It has a good ring. And then I've got a little dribble of Spanish blood in me."

"You look Spanish."

She nodded:

"My grandmother. She was a Spanish Californian—Estradilla. They owned the Santa Caterina Rancho near San Luis Obispo. My grandfather was a sailor on a Yankee ship that used to touch there and get hides and tallow. He deserted and married

her and got with her a strip of the rancho as big as Long Island. And their illustrious descendant lives in two rooms and a kitchenette."

She laughed and jumped up.

"I'm going to sing for you and you'll see if Bonaventura doesn't go well with my style."

She swept the hat off the piano stool and seated herself. The walls of the room are covered with an umber brown burlap which made an admirable background for her long body clothed in the rich sinuous crêpe and her pale profile uplifted on an outstretched white neck.

"I'll sing you something that I do rather well—Elizabeth's going to be one of my great rôles," she said, and struck a chord.

It was *Dich Theure Halle* and she sang it badly. I don't mean that she flatted or breathed in the wrong place, but she sang without feeling, or even intelligence. Also her voice was not especially remarkable. It was full, but coarse and hard, and rolled round in the small room with the effect of some large unwieldy thing, trying to find its way out. What struck me as most curious was that the rich and noble quality one felt in her was completely lacking in her performance. It was commonplace,

undistinguished. No matter how objectionable Mr. Masters might be I could not but feel he was right.

When she had finished she wheeled suddenly round on the stool and said quickly:

"Let me see your face."

"It's—it's a fine voice," I faltered, "so full and—er—rich."

She paid no attention to my words, but sent a piercing look over my embarrassed countenance. Her own clouded and she drew back as if I had hurt her.

"You don't like it," she said in a low voice.

"Why do you say that—what nonsense. Haven't I just said—"

"Oh, keep quiet," she interrupted roughly, and giving the piano stool a jerk was twirled away from me into a profile position. She looked so gloomy that I was afraid to speak.

There was a moment's pause, during which I felt exceedingly uncomfortable and she sat with her head bowed, staring at the floor. Then she gave a deep sigh and murmured.

"It's so crushing—you all look the same."

"Who?"

"Everybody who knows. And I've worked so

hard and I'm eaten up," she struck her breast with her clenched fist, "eaten up in here with the longing to succeed."

The gesture was magnificent, and with the frowning brows and somber expression she was the Tragic Muse. If she could only get *that* into her voice!

"I've been at it two years, with Vignorol—you know him? I've learnt Italian and German, and nearly all the great mezzo rôles. And the polite ones say what you say, and the ones who don't care about your feelings say 'A good enough voice, but no temperament.'" She gave her body a vicious jerk and the stool twirled her round to me. "How in heaven's name can I get temperament?"

"Well—er—time—and—er—experience and sorrow—" I had come up-stairs to give advice, but not on the best manner of acquiring temperament.

She cut me short.

"I've had experience, barrels of it. And time? I'm twenty-six now—am I to wait till I'm seventy? And sorrow? All my relations are dead—not that I care much, most of them I didn't know and those I did I didn't like. Shall I go and stand on the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway and clamor for sorrow?"



"How in heaven's name can I get temperament?"

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Amherst

"It'll come without clamoring," I said. Upon that subject I can speak with some authority.

"I wish it would hurry up. I want to arrive, I want to be a great prima donna. I *will* be a great prima donna. I *will* sing into that big dark auditorium and see those thousands of faces staring up at me and make those thousands of dull fat pigs of people sit up and come to life."

She rose and walked to the window, pushed it up and picking up one of the oranges, threw it out.

"I hope that'll hit some one on the head," she said, banging the window down.

"Have you had the public's opinion on your singing?" I asked, feeling it best to ignore her eccentricities of temper.

"Yes. I was in a concert in Philadelphia a year ago, with some others."

"And what was the verdict?"

She gave a bitter smile.

"The critics who knew something and took themselves seriously, said 'A large coarse voice and no temperament.' The critics who were just men said nothing about the singing and a good deal about the singer's looks—" She paused, then added with sulky passion, "Damn my looks."

She was going to the window again and I hastily interposed.

"Don't throw out any more oranges. You might hit a baby lying in its carriage and break its nose."

Though she did not give any evidence of having heard, she wheeled from the window and turned back to me.

"It's been nothing but disappointments—sickening disappointments. I wish I'd been left where I was. Three years ago in California I was living in a little town on the line between Los Angeles and San Francisco. I sang in the church and got ambitious and went up to San Francisco. They made a good deal of fuss over me—said another big singer was going to come out of California. I was just beginning to wonder if I really *was* some one, when one of those scratch little opera companies that tour South America and Mexico came up. Masters, Jack—the man you met here the other night—was managing it. I got an introduction and sang for him, and you ought to have heard him go up in the air. Bang—pouf!—like dynamite! Not the way he is now—oh, no—"

She stopped. The memory of those days of en-

couragement and promise seemed to shut off her voice. She stared out of the window as if she were looking back at them, her face set in an expression of brooding pain. I thought she was going to cry, but when she spoke her voice showed an angry petulance far from the mood of tears.

"I'd never have got such big ideas if he hadn't given them to me. I must come on here and study, not waste myself on little towns and little people. Go for the big prize—that was what *I* was made for." She suddenly turned on me and flung out what seemed the bitterest of her grievance, "He made me do it. *He* insisted on my coming—got Vignorol to take me, paid for my lessons. It's his doing, all this."

So *that* was the situation. That explained it all. I was immensely relieved. She might be in love with him, but if he was not in love with her (and he certainly gave no evidences of it), it would be easy to get rid of him. He was frankly discouraged about her, would probably hail with relief any means of escaping the continued expense of her lessons. The instinct that had brought me up-stairs *was* a good one after all.

"Couldn't you"—I felt my way carefully for the

ground was delicate—"couldn't you put yourself in some one else's hands. Get some one else to—I don't know what the word is—"

She eyed me with an intent watching look that was disconcerting.

"Be my backer?" she suggested.

I nodded.

"No, I could not," she said, in a loud violent tone. "Go back on the man who tried to make me, dragged me out of obscurity and gave me my chance? Umph!" She turned away with a scornful movement: "That would be a great thing to do."

The change was so quick that it bewildered me. The cudgel with which she had been beating Masters was now wielded in his defense. The ground was even more delicate than I had thought, and silence was wisdom till I saw what was coming next. I rose from the rocky cushions and moved to the window.

The light in the little room had grown dim, the keys of the piano gleaming whitely from their dusky corner. With a deep sigh Miss Harris walked to the sofa, threw herself full length on it and lay still, a tall dark shape looking up at the ceiling.

I did not know what to say and yet I did not like to leave her so obviously wretched.

"Shall I light the gas?" I asked.

"No," came the answer, "I like the dark."

"Do you mind if I water the cyclamen? They're dying."

"I do. I want them to die."

She clasped her hands under her head and continued to gaze at the ceiling. I moved to the door and then paused.

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes—" she shifted her glance and looked at me from beneath lowered lids. I again received the impression I had had the evening when I hooked her dress—that I was suddenly removed to an illimitable distance from her, had diminished to an undecipherable speck on her horizon. Never before had I met anybody who could so suddenly and so effectively strike from me my sense of value and importance.

"You can do something I'd like very much—go," the voice was like a breath from the arctic.

I went, more amazed than angry. On the landing I stood wondering. What had I done to her? If I hadn't been so filled up with astonishment I might have laughed at the contrast between my recent satisfaction in my mission and my inglorious dismissal.

My thoughts were dispersed by voices from below,

resounding up through the cleft of the stairs. From a background of concerted sound, a series of short staccato phrases detached themselves:—

"My 'at! Look at it! Ruined! Smashed!"

I looked over the banister. On the floor below stood the count addressing Miss Bliss, Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Hazard and Mr. Weatherby, who stood ranged in their hallway in a single line, staring up at him. In one extended arm he held out a silk hat in a condition of collapse. Their four upturned faces were solemn and intent. Miss Bliss' mouth was slightly open, Mr. Hamilton's glasses glittered.

"What's the matter?" I called, beginning to descend.

The count lifted a wrathful visage and shook the hat at me.

"Look at my 'at."

A chorus rose from the floor below:

"Some one smashed his hat."

"Threw an orange on it."

"He says it came from here."

"I think he's wrong. It must have been the next house."

"It was not," cried the count, furious. "It was 'ere—*this 'ouse*. I am about to enter and crash—it

falls on me! From there—above," he waved the hat menacingly at the top floor.

The quartet below chorused with rising hope.

"Who's up there, Mrs. Drake?"

"Did any one throw an orange?"

"Is Miss Harris at home?"

I approached the count, alarmed at his hysterical Latin rage.

"Who has throw the orange?" he demanded, forgetting his English in his excitement.

"You can have it reblocked," I said comfortingly.

The count looked as if I had insulted him.

"'Ere?" he cried, pointing to the ground at his feet as if a hatter and his block were sitting there.

"Never. I brought it from Italy."

From below the voices persisted:

"Were you with Miss Harris?" This from Mr. Hamilton.

"Yes, I was."

"Did she throw an orange?" This from Mr. Hazard.

"Why should any one throw an orange out of a front window?"

Miss Bliss answered that.

"She might. She's a singer and they do queer

things. I knew a singer once and she threw a clock that wouldn't go into a bathtub full of water."

This seemed to convince the count of Miss Harris' guilt.

"She did it. I must see 'er," he cried, and tried to get past me. I spread my arms across the passage. If he and Miss Harris met in their several fiery states of mind, there would be a riot on the top floor.

I don't like to tell lies, but I remembered Roger had said that a gentleman could lie to shield another. Why not a lady? Besides, in this case, I would shield two others, for I had no doubt if Count Delcati intruded on Miss Harris he would be worsted. She was quite capable of throwing the other oranges at him and the three-legged stool.

"Don't be silly," I said. "She didn't throw it."

The male portion of the lower floor chorused:

"I knew she didn't."

"She couldn't have."

"Why should she?"

The count, with maledictions on the country, the city, the street and the house, entered his room, the Westerners entered theirs and Mr. Hamilton ascended to his. He puffed by me on the stairs:—

"Ridiculous to accuse a lovely woman like Miss

Harris of such a thing. We ought to deport these Italians. They're a menace to the country."

Miss Bliss alone lingered. She is a pretty, frowsy little thing who looks cold and half sed, and always wears a kimono jacket fastened at the neck with a safety pin. She waited till all the doors had banged, then looking up, hissed softly:

"She did it. I was looking out of my window and saw it coming down and it couldn't have come from anywhere but her room."

"Hush," I said, leaning over the banister. "She did. It's the artistic temperament."

Miss Bliss, as a model—artist not cloak—needed no further explanation. With a low comprehending murmur she stole into her room.

VI

THE count and Miss Harris have met and all fear of battle is over. At the first encounter, which took place in my sitting-room, it was obvious that the young man was stricken. Since then he has seen her twice and has fallen in love—at least he says he has.

As soon as he felt sure of it he came in to tell me. So he said the other evening, sitting in the steamer chair Betty gave me to replace the one Mrs. Bushey took.

"You are a woman of sympathy," he said, lighting his third cigarette, "and I knew you would understand."

Numberless young men have told me of their love-affairs and always were sure I would understand. I think it's because I listen so well.

I have a fire now. It was easier to buy coal than argue with Mrs. Bushey. The count stretched his legs toward it and smoked dreamily and I counted

the cigarettes in the box. He smokes ten in an evening.

"She is most beautiful. I can find only one defect," he murmured, "she is not thin enough."

"Isn't she?" I said, in my character of sympathetic woman, "I thought she was rather too thin."

"Not for me," answered the lover pensively; "no one could be too thin for me."

He resumed his cigarette. It was nine and there were seven left. I calculated that they would last him till eleven.

"There was a lady in Rome I once knew," he began in a tone of reminiscence, "thin like a match and so beautiful," he extended his hand in the air, the first finger and thumb pressed together as if he might have been holding the match-like lady between them, "a blonde with brown eyes, immense eyes. Oh, *Dio mio!*" His voice trailed away into silence, swamped by a flood of memory.

"Were you in love with her, too?" I have noticed that the confiding young men expect the sympathetic woman to ask leading questions.

"Yes," said the count gravely, "four years ago."

"You must have been very young."

Such remarks as this are out of character. They

take me unawares and come from the American part of me—not the human universal part, but that which is individual and local.

"Oh, no, I was nineteen." He went back to his memories. "She was all bones, but such beautiful bones. One winter she had a dress made of fur and she looked like an umbrella in it. This way," he extended his hands and described two straight perpendicular lines in the air, "the same size all the way up. Wonderful!"

"Our young men don't fall in love so early," I said.

"They don't fall in love at all," replied the count, "neither do the women. They only flirt, all of them, except Miss Harris."

"Doesn't she flirt?"

I was stretching my sympathetic privileges a little too far. My excuse is curiosity, vulgar but natural. I had never before seen any one like Miss Harris and I wanted to get at the heart of her mystery.

"Flirt!" exclaimed the count. "Does a goddess flirt? That's what she is. Think of it—in this new shiny country, in this city with telephones and policemen, in this sad street with the houses all built the same." He sat upright and shook his cigarette at

me. "She belongs where it is all sunshine and joy, and they dance and laugh and there is no business and nobody has a conscience."

"Do you mean Ancient Greece or Modern Naples?"

The count made a vague sweeping gesture that left a little trail of smoke in the air.

"*N'importe!* But not here. She is a pagan, a natural being, a nymph, a dryad. I don't know what in your language—but oh, something beautiful that isn't bothered with a soul."

I started, Masters and the count, raw America and sophisticated Italy, converging toward the same point.

Before I could answer her voice sounded startlingly loud through the register. For the first moment I didn't recognize the strain, then I knew it—"Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore"—I have lived for art, I have lived for love. We looked at each other in surprised question as the impassioned song poured from the grating. It was as if she had heard us and this was her answer.

My knowledge of nymphs and dryads is small, but I feel confident if one of them had ever sung a modern Italian aria through a modern American

register she could not have rendered it with less heart and soul than Miss Harris did.

Yesterday morning Betty telephoned me to come and lunch with her. Betty's summons are not casual outbreaks of hospitality. There is always an underlying purpose in them, what a man I know who writes plays would call "a basic idea". She is one of the few people who never troubles about meaningless formalities or superfluous small talk. It's her way, and then she hasn't time. That's not just a phrase but a fact. Every hour of her day has its work, good work, well done. Only the poor know Betty's private charities, only her friends the number of her businesslike benefactions.

Walking briskly down the avenue I wondered what was her basic idea this time. Sometimes it's clothes: "There are some dresses on the bed. Look them over and take what you like. The gray's rather good, but I think the pink would be more becoming. I can have it done over for you by my woman." Sometimes it's a reinvestment of part of my little capital suggested by Harry, a high interest and very safe. Once it was an attempt to marry me off. That was last autumn when I had just got back from Europe, to a man with mines from Idaho. When I

grew tearful and reluctant she gave it up and shifted him—for he was too valuable to lose—to a poor relation of Harry's.

We were at lunch when the basic idea began to rise to the surface, Betty at the head of the table, very tight and upright in purple cloth and chiffon, and little Constance, her eldest born, opposite me. Little Constance is an adorable child with a face like a flower and the manner of a timid mouse. She loves clothes and when I come leans against me looking me over and gently fingering my jewelry. She won't speak until she has examined it to her satisfaction. At the table her steadfast gaze was diverted from me to a dish of glazed cherries just in front of her.

The entrée was being passed when Betty, helping herself, said :

"Harry's just met a man from Georgia who is in cotton—not done up in it, his business." She looked into the dish then accusingly up at the butler : "I said fried, not boiled, and I didn't want cream sauce."

The butler muttered explanations.

"Tell her it mustn't happen again, no more cream sauce for lunch." She helped herself, murmuring,

"Really the most fattening thing one can eat."

"Why do you eat it?" said little Constance, withdrawing her eyes from the cherries.

"Because I like to. Keep quiet, Constance. Mr. Albertson, that's his name, is well-off, perfectly presentable and a widower."

So it was matrimonial again.

"That's very nice," I replied meekly.

"We'll have him to dinner some night next week and you to meet him."

"Why do you ask me? He'd surely rather have some one younger and prettier."

"It doesn't matter what he'd rather have. I'll telephone you when the day's fixed."

"Betty," I murmured, looking at her pleadingly.

"Evie," she returned firmly, "don't be silly. The present situation's got to come to an end some time."

"It'll never end."

"Rubbish. There's no sense in you scraping along this way in two rooms—"

"Remember the kitchenette."

"In two rooms," she went on, ignoring the kitchenette. "Of course I don't want you to live in Georgia, but—"

Little Constance showed a dismayed face.

"Is Evie going to live in Georgia?"

Betty turned a stern glance on her.

"Constance, you'll lunch up-stairs if you keep on interrupting."

Constance was unaffected by the threat.

"When is she going?" she asked.

"Never," I answered.

"I'm glad," said little Constance, and seeing her mother's glance averted, stole a cherry from the dish and hid it in her lap.

"From what Harry says, and he's heard all about Mr. Albertson, he seems a perfectly fitting person, forty-five, of very good family and connections, and with an income of thirty thousand a year."

"He'll probably not like me," I said hopefully.

"Oh, he will," answered Betty with grim meaning, "I'll see to that."

I could hear her retailing my perfections to Mr. Albertson and my heart sank. Masterful, managing people crush me. If the man from Georgia liked me, as the man from Idaho did, I foresaw a struggle and I seem to have exhausted all my combative force in the year before my husband died. I looked at little Constance and caught her in the act of popping the cherry into her mouth. It was large and she had

to force it into her cheek and keep it there like a squirrel with a nut. An expression of alarm was in her face, there was evidently less room for it than she had expected.

Betty went ruthlessly on.

"Your present way of living is absurd—you, made for marriage."

I saw little Constance's eyes grow round with curiosity, but she did not dare to speak.

"Made for companionship. If you were a suffragette or a writer, or trimmed hats or ran a tea-room, it would be different, but you're a thoroughly domestic woman and ought to have a home."

Little Constance bit the cherry with a sharp crunching sound. Betty looked at her.

"Constance, are you eating your lunch?"

Little Constance lifted her bib, held it to her mouth, and nodded over it.

The danger was averted. Betty turned to me.

"Marriage is the only life for a normal woman. Judkins, I'll have some more of those sweetbreads."

She helped herself, and under the rattle of the spoon and fork, little Constance crunched again, very carefully.

"And what is the good of living in the past.
That's over, thank heaven."

"I'm not living in the past any more. Betty, I'm—
I'm—raising my head."

Betty looked sharply up from the sweetbreads, and I flinched under her glance. She cast an eye on Judkins, who was receding into the pantry, waited till he was gone, then said, in an eager hushed voice:
"Evie, don't tell me there's some one?"

Never have I been more discomfited by the directness of my Betty. I felt myself growing red to my new rat and was painfully aware that little Constance, now crunching rapidly, had fixed upon me the deadly stare of an interested child.

"Of course there isn't. What nonsense. But time has passed and one doesn't stay broken-hearted forever. I'm not *old* exactly, and I'm—that is—it's just as I said, I'm beginning to come alive again."

"Oh!" Betty breathed out and leaned against her chair-back, with a slight creaking of tight drawn fabrics. But she kept her eye on me, in a sidelong glance, that contained an element of inspecting inquiry. Little Constance swallowed the cherry at a gulp and the question it had bottled up burst out:

"Evie, are you going to get married?"

"No," I almost shouted.

Little Constance said no more, but her gaze remained glued to my face in an absorption so intense that she leaned forward, pressing her chest against the edge of the table. Betty played with her knife and fork with an air of deep thought. Judkins re-entered to my relief.

He was passing the next dish when little Constance broke the silence.

"Evie, why did you get all red just now?"

"Constance," said her mother, "if you're a good girl and stop talking you can have a cherry when lunch is over."

"Thanks, mama," said little Constance, in her most mouse-like manner.

After lunch we drove about in the auto and shopped, and as the afternoon began to darken Betty haled me to a reception.

"Madge Knowlton's daughter's coming out," she said. "And as you used to know her before you went to Europe, it's your duty to come."

"Why is it my duty? I was never an intimate of hers."

I'm shy about going to parties now; I feel like Rip Van Winkle when he comes back.

"To swell the crowd. It's a social service you owe to a fellow woman in distress."

We entered the house through a canvassed tunnel and inserted ourselves into a room packed with women and reverberating with a clamor of voices. We had a word and a hurried handclasp with Madge Knowlton and her daughter, and then were caught in a surging mass of humanity and carried into a room beyond. The jam was even closer here. I dodged a long hatpin, and was borne back against a mantelpiece banked with flowers whose delicate dying breath mingled with the scents of food and French perfumery. When the mass broke apart I had momentary glimpses of a glittering table with a woman at either end who was pouring liquid into cups.

At intervals the crowd, governed by some unknown law, was seized by migratory impulses. Segments of it separated from the rest, and drove toward the door. Here they met other entering segments with a resultant congestion. When thus solidified the only humans who seemed to have the key of breaking us loose were waiters. They found their way along the line of least resistance, making tortuous passages like the cracks in an ice pack.

From them we snatched food. I had a glass of

punch, a cup of coffee, a chocolate cake, two marmons and a plate of lobster Neuberg, in the order named. I haven't the slightest idea why I ate them—suggestion I suppose. All the other women were similarly endangering their lives, and the one possible explanation is that we communicated to one another the same suicidal impulse. It was like the early Christians going to the lions, the bold ones swept the weaker along by the contagion of example.

I met several old acquaintances who cried as if in rapturous delight.

"Why, Evelyn Drake, is this really you?"

"Evie—I can't believe my eyes! I thought you had gone to Europe and died there."

"How delightful to see you again. Living out of town, I suppose. We must arrange a meeting when I get time."

And so forth and so on.

It made me feel like a resurrected ghost who had come to revisit the glimpses of the moon. My old place was not vacant, it was filled up and the grass was growing over it. I was glad when one of those blind stampeding impulses seized the crowd and carried me near enough to Betty to cry, as I was borne along, "I'm going home and I'd rather walk,"

and was swept like a chip on a stream to the door.

It was raining, a thin icy drizzle. Beyond the thronging line of limousines, the streets were dark with patches of gilding where the lamplight struck along the wet asphalt. They looked like streets in dreams, mysteriously black gullies down which hurried mysteriously black figures. I walked toward Lexington Avenue, drooping and depressed, in accord with the chill night and the small sad noises of the rain. I was in that mood when you walk slowly, knowing your best dress is getting damp and feeling the moisture through your best shoes and neither matters. Nothing matters.

Once I used to enjoy teas, found entertainment in those brief shouted conversations, those perilous feasts. Perhaps I was sad because I was so out of it all. And what was I in—what took its place? I was going back to emptiness and silence. To greet me would be a voiceless darkness, my evening companion a book.

I got on a car full of damp passengers. As if beaten down by the relentless glare of the electric lights, all the faces drooped forward, hollows under the eyes, lines round the mouths. They sat in listless poses, exhaling the smell of wet woolen and

rubber and I sat among them, also exhaling damp smells—also with hollows under my eyes and lines round my mouth. That, too, didn't matter. What difference if I was hollowed and lined when there was no one to care?

My room was unlighted and cold. I lighted the gas and stood with uplifted hand surveying it. It was like a hollow shell, an empty echoing shell, that waited for a living presence to brighten it. Just then it seemed to me as if I never could do this—its loneliness would be as poignant and pervasive when I was there, would steal upon me from the corners, surround and overwhelm me like a rising sea. My little possessions, my treasures, that were wont to welcome me, had lost their friendly air. I suddenly saw them as they really were, inanimate things grasped and held close because associated with the memory of a home. In the stillness the rain drummed on the tin roof and the line in a forgotten poem rose to my mind, "In the dead unhappy night and when the rain is on the roof."

I snatched a match and hurried to the fire. Thrusting the flame between the bars of the grate, I said to myself:

"I must get some kind of a pet—a dog or a Persian cat. I've not enough money to adopt a child."

The fire sputtered and I crouched before it. I didn't want any supper, I didn't want to move. I think a long time passed, several hours, during which I heard the clock ticking on the mantel over my head, and the rain drumming on the roof. Now and then the rumbling passage of a car swept across the distance.

I have often sat this way and my thoughts have always gone back to the past like homing pigeons to the place where they once had a nest. To-night they went forward. My married life seemed a great way off, and the Evelyn Drake in it looked on by the Evelyn Drake by the fire, a stranger long left behind. The memories of it had lost their sting, even the pang of disillusion was only a remembrance. With my eyes on the leaping flames I looked over the years that stretched away in front, diminishing to a point like a railway track. My grandmother had lived to eighty-two and I was supposed to be like her. Would I, at eighty-two, be still a pair of ears for young men's love stories and young women's dreams of conquest?

Oh, those years, that file of marching years, coming so slowly and so inevitably, and empty, all empty!

The rain drummed on the roof, the clock ticked and the smell of my best skirt singeing, came delicately to my nostrils. Even *that* didn't matter. From thirty-three to eighty-two—forty-nine years of it. I looked down at my feet, side by side, smoking on the fender. Wasn't it Oliver Wendell Holmes, when asked to define happiness, answered, "four feet on the fender"?

There was a knock on the door, probably the count to continue the recital of his love's young dream. My "Come in" was not warm.

The door opened and Roger entered in a long wet raincoat.

I jumped up crying "Roger," and ran to him with my hand out.

He took it and held it, and for a moment we stood looking at each other quite still and not speaking. I was too glad to say anything, too glad to think. It was an astonishing gladness, a sort of reaction I suppose. It welled through me like a warm current, must have shone in my face, and spoken from my eyes. I've not often in my life been completely out-

side myself, broken free of my consciousness and soared, but I was then just for one minute, while I looked into Roger's face, and felt his hand round mine.

"You're glad to see me, Evie," he said and his voice sounded as if he had a cold.

That broke the spell. I came back to my eighteen-foot parlor, but it was so different, cozy and pretty and intimate, full of the things I care for and that are friends to me. The rain on the roof had lost its forlornness, or perhaps, by its forlornness accentuated the comfort and cheer of my little room.

We sat by the fire. Roger's feet were wet and he put them upon the fender.

"Now, if you'd been plodding about in the rain with me you'd put yours up, too. Hullo, what have I said? Your face is as red as a peony."

"It's the fire. I've been sitting over it for a long time," I stammered.

Just then the register became vocal, with the habanera from *Carmen*.

Roger got up and shut it.

"Don't you want to hear her sing?" I asked.

"No, I want to hear you talk," said he.

VII

MISS HARRIS is going to appear in a concert. She came glowing and beaming into my room to tell me. Vignorol, her teacher, had arranged it—with a violinist and a baritone—in Brooklyn.

"Why not New York?" I asked.

"Not *yet*," said Miss Harris, moving about the room with a jubilant dancing step, "but after this is over—wait and see!"

Great things are expected to come of it. The public's attention is to be caught, then another concert, maybe an engagement in one of the American opera companies—just for experience. It is to be the opening of a career which will carry her to the Metropolitan Opera House. The baritone is another of Vignorol's pupils, Berwick, a New Englander—nothing much, just to fill up. The violinist is a Mrs. Stregazzi, who also fills up, and little Miss Gorringe accompanies. I was shown a pencil draft of the program with Liza Bonaventura written large at the

top—"Yes, it's to be Bonaventura; I had a superstition about it," and the dress is to be white, or, with a sudden bright air:

"I might borrow your green satin—but of course I couldn't. You're too small."

Since then the house has resounded with practising from the top floor. Heavy steps and light feminine rustlings have gone up and down the stairs. Once the strains of a violin came with a thin whine through the register as if some melancholy animal was imprisoned behind the grill. In the dusk of the lower hall I bumped into a young man with tousled hair and frogs on his coat, whom I have since met as Mr. Berwick.

The star is in a state of joyful excitement which has communicated itself to the rest of us. When in the evening she goes over her repertoire, the Westerners and Miss Bliss sit on the bottom steps of their stairs, Mr. Hamilton and the count on the banisters of theirs and I on the top step of mine. A Niagara of sound pours over us, billowing and rushing down through the well, buffeted between the close confining walls. When each piece is ended Miss Harris comes out on her landing, leans over the railing and calls down:

“How was that?”

Then our six faces are upturned and we express our approbation, according to our six different natures.

Our mutual hopes for her success have drawn us together and we have suddenly become very friendly. Mr. Hazard drops in upon me in a paint-stiffened linen blouse and Mr. Weatherby has confided to me the money to pay for his laundry. Mr. Hamilton has smoked a large black cigar in my dining-room, and Miss Bliss has come shivering with hunched shoulders and clasped red arms to “borrow a warm” (her own expression) at my fire.

In my excursions to the top floor I have met Mrs. Stregazzi and Miss Gorringe. Mrs. Stregazzi is a large blond lady with an ample figure and a confidential habit. On our first meeting she called me “dearie” and told me all about her divorce from Mr. Stregazzi, who, I gathered, was her inferior, both in station and the domestic virtues. In his profession—the stage—he was something called “a headliner”, and appeared to be involved mysteriously with trained animals. Since his divorce he has married another “headliner”. It’s like that story of the Frenchman in Philadelphia: “He *is* a Biddle, she

was a Biddle, they are both Biddles." I must ask Lizzie Harris what it is. Miss Gorringe is a thin sallow girl with an intelligent face, and Mr. Berwick a bulky silent New Englander, in the early twenties, who bears a strong resemblance to the bust of Beethoven over Schirmer's music store.

They are strange people, artless as children, and completely absorbed in themselves and their work. They appear to have no points of contact with any other world, and the real part of their world is the professional part. They don't say much about their homes or their lives away from it.

A few days ago they took tea with me, and as they talked I had a series of glimpses, like quickly shifted magic'lantern slides, of their life on trains, in hotels, behind the scenes and on the stage. It seemed to me a sort of nightmare of hurry and scramble, snatched meals, lost trunks, cold dressing-rooms. Maybe the excitement makes up for the rest. It must be exciting—at least that's the impression I got as I sat behind the teacups listening.

Lizzie Harris seemed to find it entralling, everything they said interested her. Mrs. Stregazzi told some anecdotes that I didn't like—I don't want to be a prig, but they really were *too* sordid and scan-

dalous—and our prima donna hung on the words of that fat made-up woman as if she spoke with the tongues of men and of angels. The more I know of her the less able I am to get at the core of her being, to place her definitely in my gallery of "women I have known." I had finally decided that in spite of her tempests, her egotism and her weather-cock moods, there was something rare and noble in her, and here she was drinking in cheap gossip about a set of people she didn't know, and who seem to be a mixture of artist, mountebank and badly brought-up child.

As I sat pouring the tea I felt again that curious aloofness in her. But before it was more a withdrawal of her spirit into herself, a retreating into an inner citadel and closing all the doors. This time it was the spirit reaching toward others and shutting me out, like a child who forgets its playmate when a circus passes by. She listened hungrily, now and then commenting or questioning with a longing, almost a homesick note. When they rose to go, with a scraping of chair-legs and a concerted clamor of farewells, she was reluctant to lose them, followed them to the hall and leaned over the banister watching their departing heads.

She made me feel an outsider, almost an intruder. I was willing to efface myself for the moment and stood by the table waiting for her to come back and reestablish me in her regard. She said nothing, however, but brushed by the door and went up-stairs. In a few minutes Musetta's song filled the house. The next morning she came in while I was at breakfast and asked me to lend my green satin dress to Miss Gorringe, and when I agreed kissed me with glowing affection.

That all happened early in the week. Yesterday afternoon I was witness to a scene, the effect of which is with me still, at midnight, scratching this down in my rose-wreathed back room. It was a hateful scene, a horrible scene—but let me describe it:

Calls of my name descending from the top floor in Miss Harris' voice, took me out to my door.

"I am going over some of my things," the voice cried. "Come up and listen." Then, as I ascended, "It's the scene between Brunhilda and Siegmund in *Die Walkuere*, the *pièce de résistance* of the evening."

I didn't find Miss Gorringe as I expected, but Mr. Masters, sitting on the piano stool and looking glum.

He rose, nodded to me, and sinking back on the stool, laid his hands on the keys and broke into a desultory playing. With all my ignorance I have heard enough to know that he played uncommonly well.

The future Signorita Bonaventura was looking her best, a slight color in her cheeks, confidence shining in her eyes.

"We've been trying it over. Did you hear?"

The weather had been warm, the register closed, so I had only heard faintly.

"Well, it's going to be something great," said the prima donna.

"Is it?" said Mr. Masters with his back to us.

The sneering quality was strong in his tone and I began to wish I hadn't come.

"Go across the room, Mrs. Drake," he said curtly.
"Sit where you can see her."

I obeyed, sitting in the corner by the window. She faced me and Mr. Masters was in profile.

My friends tell me I am completely devoid of the musical sense. It must be true, for I can not sit through *Meistersinger*, and there are long reaches of *Tristan* and *Isolde* that get on my nerves like a toothache. But I *have* some kind of appreciation, do derive an intense pleasure from certain scenes in

certain operas. It was one of these scenes they were now giving, that one in the second act of *Die Walkuere* when Brunhilda appears before Siegmund.

It has always seemed to me that the drama rose above the music, overpowered it. I supposed this to be the fancy of my own ignorance and never had the courage to say it. But the other day I read somewhere the opinion of Dujardin, the French critic, and he expressed just what I mean—"It is not the music, no, it is not the music, that counts in the scene, but the words. The music is beautiful—of course it is, it couldn't be otherwise—but Wagner was aware of the beauty of the poetry and allowed it to transpire."

That is exactly what I should have said if I had dared.

Masters struck the opening notes and she began to sing.

"Siegmund sieh' auf mich! Ich bin's der bald du folgst—
Siegmund, look on me. I come to call thee hence."

What a greeting!

A stir of irritation passed through me. She looked at Masters with a friendly air and sang the lines

with an absence of understanding and emotion that would have robbed them of all meaning if anything could. I wanted to shake her.

Then I forgot—Masters began.

If I was surprised at his playing his singing amazed me. He had almost no voice, but he had all the rest—the wonderful thing, imagination, the response to beauty, power of representing a state of mind. I don't explain well, I am out of my province, perhaps it's better if I simply say he became Siegmund.

As he played he turned and looked at her. His whole face had changed, transformed by the shadow of tragedy. To him Lizzie was no longer Lizzie, she was the helmed and armored daughter of Wotan delivering his death summons. I can pay no higher tribute to him than to say I forgot him, the burlap walls, the thin tones of the piano and saw a vision of despairing demigods.

“Wer bist du, sag’?

Die so schön und ernst mir erscheint?”

Then Lizzie:—

“Nur Todgeweihten

Taugt mein Anblick:

Wer mich erschaut,

Der scheidet vom Lebenslicht.”

My vision was dispelled. No one could have kept it listening to her and watching her. As they went on what he created she destroyed; it was the most one-sided, maddening performance. I found myself eager to have her stop that I might hear him. Before they had reached the end I knew that Mr. Masters was an artist and she was not. That is all there was to it.

She turned to me, proudly smiling, with a questioning "Well".

Mr. Masters, his head drooped, heaved a sigh.

I could not be untruthful. I had been too deeply moved.

"Your voice is very fine," I said in the flattest of voices and looked at her beseechingly.

She met my eyes steadily and her smile died away.

"Only a voice," she said.

"Miss Harris," I cried imploringly. "You are young, you have beauty—" She cut short my bromides with an angry exclamation.

"And no more temperament than a tomato can," Mr. Masters finished for me.

He ran his fingers over the keyboard in a glittering flow of notes.

"You're a liar," she cried, turning furiously on him.

Now, for the first time, I saw her really angry, not childishly petulant as in her orange-throwing mood, but shaken to her depth with rage. She was rather terrible, glaring at Masters with a grim face.

"Am I?" he said, coolly striking a chord. "We'll see Tuesday night in Brooklyn."

I had expected him to answer her in kind, but he only seemed weary and dispirited. Her chest rose with a deep breath and I saw to my alarm that she had grown paler.

"You didn't always think that," she said in a muffled voice.

"No," he answered quietly, "I believed in you at first."

He spread his hands in a long clutching movement and struck another chord. It fell deep into the momentary silence as if his powerful fingers were driving it down like a clencher on his words.

"And you don't any more?"

"No, I've about done believing," he responded.

She ran at him and seized him by the shoulder. He jerked it roughly out of her grasp and twirling round on the stool faced her, exasperated, defiant,

a man at the end of his patience. But his eyes said more, full of a steely dislike. She met them and panted:

"You can't, you don't. Even you couldn't be so mean—" then she stopped, it seemed to me as if for the first time conscious of the hostility of his gaze. There was the pause of the realizing moment and when she burst out her voice was strangled with passion:

"Go—get out—go away from me. I'm sick of it all. I'll stand no more—go—go."

She ran to the door and threw it open. I got up to make my escape. Neither of them appeared to remember I was there.

"All right," he said, calmly rising. "That suits me perfectly."

He picked up his hat and coat and moved to the door. I tried to get there before him, dodging about behind their backs for an exit, then, like a frightened chicken, made a nervous dive and got between them. Her hand on my arm flung me back as if I had been a chair in the way. I had a glimpse of her full face, white and with burning eyes. She frightened me.

Mr. Masters walked into the hall and there came

to a standstill. After looking at the back and front of his hat he settled it comfortably on his head and moved toward the stairs.

Suddenly she rushed after him and caught him by the arm.

"No—no—" she cried. "Don't go."

I couldn't see her face, but his was in plain view and it looked exceedingly bored.

"What is it now?" he said.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I'm so discouraged—you take the heart out of me. I don't know what I'm saying and I've tried so hard—oh, Jack—"

Her voice broke, her head sank. Mr. Master's expression of boredom deepened into one of endurance.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked with weary patience.

"Come back. Don't be angry. Forget what I said."

She began to cry, shielding her face with one hand, the other still holding him by the sleeve.

He sighed, and glancing up, saw me. I expected him to drive me forth with one fierce look. Instead he made a slight grimace and reentered the room, she holding to his sleeve. He dropped heavily on the piano stool and she on the chair opposite, her

hands in her lap, two lines of tears on her cheeks. Neither said a word.

The way was clear and I flew out with the wild rush of a bird escaping from a snare. As I ran down the stairs the silence of that room, four walls enclosing a tumult of warring passions, followed me.

It's midnight and I haven't got over the ugliness of it. What am I to think? The thing many people would think, I won't believe, I can't believe. No one who knew her could. That the unfortunate creature loves him is past a doubt—but how can she? How can she humiliate herself so? Where is the pride that the rest of us have for a shield and buckler. Where is the self-respect? To cry—to let him see her cry, and then—that's the *combe*, as the Paris art students say—to call him back!

I feel sick, for I love her. If she hasn't got a soul or temperament or any of the rest of it that they do so much talking about, she's got something tucked away somewhere that's good, that's true. It looks at you out of her eyes, it speaks to you in her voice—and then Masters comes along and it's gone.

I stopped here, and biting the end of my pen, looked gloomily at the wall and met the cold stare of

my ancestors. I wonder what the men would have said if they had been there this afternoon. I'm not sure—men are men and Lizzie is beautiful. But about you ladies, I can make a guess. You would purse your mouths a little tighter and say, "Evelyn, you're keeping queer company. Whatever you may think in your heart, drop her. That's the wise course." All but the French Huguenot lady, she's got an understanding eye. She feels something that the others never felt, probably saw a little deeper into life and it softened the central spot.

No, my dears, you're all wrong. You're judging by appearances and fixed standards, which is something your descendant refuses to do. Go to sleep and try and wake up more humble and humane. Good night.

VIII

BETTY had the dinner for Mr. Albertson last night and of course I went, for Betty is like royalty, she doesn't invite, she commands. In a brief telephone message she instructed me to wear my blue crêpe and I wore it. Before dinner, in her room, she eyed me critically and put a blue aigrette in my hair.

Mr. Albertson was a gallant Southerner with courtly manners and a large bald spot. We got on very nicely, though he did not exhibit that appreciation of my charms that marked the Idaho man from the moment of our meeting. If, however, he should develop it I have resolved to crush it by strategy. I don't know just how yet—the only thing I can think of at present is to ask him to call and pretend I'm drunk like David Garrick. I'll get a better idea if the necessity arises. I haven't the courage to defy Betty twice.

Betty sent me home in the limousine, without the footman and the chow dog. It was a cold still night, the kind when the sky is a deep Prussian blue and

all the lights have a fixed steady shine. As the car wheeled into Fifth Avenue and I sat looking out of the window, revolving schemes for the disenchanting of Mr. Albertson, I saw Roger walking by. Before I thought I had beckoned to him and struck on the front window for the chauffeur to stop. The car glided to the curb and Roger's long black figure came running across the street.

"You!" he cried, "like a fairy princess with a feather in your hair. What ball are you coming from, Cinderella?"

As soon as he spoke I grew shy. Do the women who have ready tongues and the courage of their moods, realize the value of their gifts?

"I—I—it's not a ball, it's Betty Ferguson's and she's sending me home."

"All right." He said something to the chauffeur, stepped in and the car started. "What a piece of luck. I was coming from a deadly dinner and going to a deadly club. What inspired you to hail me?"

Nothing did, or something did that I couldn't explain. I felt round for an answer and produced the first that came.

"I wanted to talk to you about something."

"Go ahead." He pulled the rug over me. "It's

a nipping cold night abroad. Let's hear what it was you wanted to talk about."

For a moment I thought of telling him of Lizzie Harris and Mr. Masters, then I knew that wouldn't do. Lizzie's secrets were my secrets. I had to tell him something and in my embarrassment I told him the first thing that came into my head.

"Betty asked me to dinner to meet a man from Georgia."

As soon as I had said it I had a sick feeling that he might be wondering why I should stop him on Fifth Avenue at eleven o'clock of a winter's night, to impart this piece of intelligence.

He received it with the dignity of a valuable communication.

"Did she? And what was he like?"

"Very charming. His name's Albertson and he has cotton mills down there."

"Must be a man of means."

"I believe he is."

It was very nice of Roger to take it so simply and naturally, but you can always rely on his manners. My embarrassment passed away. The auto sped out into the concentrated sparklings of Plaza Square, then swerved to the left, sweeping round the statue

of Sherman led to victory by a long-limbed and resolute angel.

"We're going the wrong way. What's Nelson doing?" I raised a hand to rap on the window.

"I told him to take us through the park. Put your hand in your muff. Why did Betty ask you to meet Mr. What's-his-name from Georgia?"

I know every tone of Roger's voice, and the one he used to ask that question was chilly. Betty's plans involved no secrecy, so I said, laughing:

"I think she's trying to make a match."

"Oh," said Roger.

I had thought he would laugh with me, but in that brief monosyllable there was no amusement. It came with a falling note, and it seemed to be a sort of extinguisher on the conversation, a full stop at the end of it, for we both fell silent.

The auto swept up the drive, gray and smooth between gray trees. I could see a reach of deep blue sky with the stars looking big and close, as if they had come down a few billion miles and were looking us over with an impartial curiosity. Across the park the fronts of apartment-houses showed in gleaming tiers, far up into the night, their lights yellower than the stars. It was lovely to glide on, swiftly and

smoothly, with the frost gripping the world in an icy clasp while we were warm and snug and so friendly that we could be silent.

"Isn't this beautiful, Roger?" I said, looking out of the window. "Look on the other side of the park, hundreds of lights in hundreds of homes."

Roger gave a sound that if I were a writer of realistic tendencies, I should call a grunt.

We met a hansom with the glass down, and on an ascending curve another auto swooping by with two great glaring lamps. I felt quite oddly happy; the menacing figure of Mr. Albertson became no more than a bogey. After all even Betty couldn't drag me struggling to the altar.

"Why is Betty so anxious to marry you off?" came suddenly from the corner beside me.

Mr. Albertson assumed his original shape as a marriageable male with a bald spot and a cotton mill, and Betty slipped back into position. I wasn't sure she couldn't drag any one to the altar if she made up her mind to it. My voice showed the oppression of this thought.

"She thinks all women should be married."

"You have been married."

Something was the matter with Roger to say that.

"Well, she thinks I'm poor and lonely."

"Are you?"

I began to have an uncomfortable, complicated feeling. Fear was in it, also exhilaration. It made me sit up stiffly, suddenly conscious of a sensation of trembling somewhere inside.

"I am poor," I said, "that is, poor compared to people like Betty."

"And lonely, too?"

The disturbance grew. It made me draw away from Roger, pressed close into my corner, as if no scrap or edge of my clothing must touch him. I was afraid that my voice would show it and determined that it mustn't.

"I'm lonely sometimes. That rainy night when you came in unexpectedly I was."

My voice *wasn't* all right. I cleared my throat and pretended to look at the stars.

Roger said nothing, but the secret subways of emotion that connect the spirits of those who are in close communion, told me he, too, was moved. The air in the closed scented car did not seem enough for natural breathing. It was like a pressure, something that put your heart-beats out of tune, and made your lips open with a noiseless gasp. I stood it as long as

I could and then words burst out of me. They came anyway, ridiculous words when I write them down:

"But I'll never marry any of them. No matter what they are, or what Betty wants, or how many of them she has up to dinner."

The pressure was lifted and I sank back trembling. It was as if I had been under water and come up again into the air. The spiritual telegraph told me that Roger felt as I did, and that suddenly he or I or both of us, had broken down a barrier. It was swept away and we were close together—closer than the night when we had held hands and forgotten where we were, closer than we'd ever been in all the years we'd known each other. It was not necessary to say anything. In our several corners we sat silent, understanding for the first time, I and the man I loved.

The sharp landscape slid by us, naked trees, spotted lines of light, stretches of lawn grizzled with frost, woodland depths with the shine of ice about the tree roots, and then the flash of glassy ponds.

We sat as still as if we were dead, as if our souls had come out of our bodies and were whispering. It was a wonderful moment of time, one of the unforgettable moments that dot the long material years.

All that's gone before and all that's going to come dies away and there's only the present—the beautiful exquisite present. We only have a few like that in our lives.

It lasted till the auto drew up at my door. We said good night and parted.

Up in my room I sat a long time by the fire thinking of the hundreds of women like myself, the disillusioned ones, in the dark dens of tenements and in the splendid homes near by. I tried to send them messages through the night, telling them we could rise out of the depths. I saw life as it really is, hills and valleys, patches of blackness and then light, but always with an unresting force flowing beneath, the immortal thing that urges and upholds and makes it all possible. I remembered words I used to work on bits of perforated board when I was a little girl, "God is Love." I never understood what it meant, even when I stopped working it on perforated board and grew to the reasoning stage. Tonight I knew—got at last what a happy child might understand—love in the heart was God with us, come back to us again.

IX

YESTERDAY was the concert day and I couldn't go—a bad cold. The house lamented from all its floors, for it was going en masse, even the trained nurse with a usurped right to the sun-dial.

The only way I could add to the festivity of the occasion was to distribute my possessions among that section of the audience drawn from Mrs. Bushey's light housekeeping apartments. It began with the Signorita Bonaventura, who wore my mother's diamond pendant, then went down the line:—Miss Gorringe my green satin (she said it would be horribly unbecoming, but the audience wouldn't notice her), Miss Bliss my black lynx furs, Mrs. Phillips, the nurse, my evening cloak, Mr. Hazard my opera glasses, Mr. Weatherby my umbrella—his had a broken rib and it looked like snow. We were afraid the count couldn't find anything suitable to his age and sex, but he emptied my bottle of Coty's Jacque-minot on his handkerchief and left, scented like a florist's. Mrs. Bushey came last and gleaned the

field, a gold bracelet, a marabou stole and a lace handkerchief she swore she wouldn't use.

Much noise accompanied the passage of the day and some threatening mishaps. At eleven we heard Berwick was hoarse, but at one (by telephone through my room) that raw eggs and massage were restoring him. At midday Miss Gorringe sent a frantic message that the sash of the green satin wasn't in the box. Gloom settled at two with a bulletin that Mrs. Stregazzi's second child had croup. It was better at five. Mr. Hazard's dress suit smelled so of moth balls that the prima donna said it would taint the air, and Emma, the maid, hung it out on the sacred sun-dial. There was a battle over this. For fifteen minutes it raged up two flights of stairs, then Mr. Hazard conquered and the sun-dial was draped in black broadcloth.

At intervals Lizzie came down to see me and use the telephone. She was in her most aloof mood, forbidding, self-absorbed. On one of her appearances she found a group of us congregated about my steam kettle. Our chatter died away before her rapt and unresponsive eye. Even I, who was used to it, felt myself fading like a photographic proof in a too brilliant sun. As for the others they looked small and

frightened, like mice in the presence of a well-fed lioness, who, though she might not want to eat them, was still a lioness. They breathed deep and unlimbered when the door shut on her.

In the late afternoon Roger came to see me. He brought a bunch of violets and a breath of winter into my bright little room. The threatening snow had begun to fall, lodging delicately on eaves and ledges, a scurry of tiny particles against the light of street-lamps. We stood in the window and watched it, trimming the house-fronts with white, carpeting the steps, spreading a blanket ever so softly and deftly over the tin roof. How different to the rain, the insistent ruthless rain. The night when the rain fell came back to me. How different that was from to-night!

There was a hubbub of voices from the hall and then a knock. They were coming to see me before they left. They entered, streaming in, grubs turned to butterflies. The house was going cheaply in cars over the bridge; only the prima donna and Miss Gorringe were to travel aristocratically in a cab.

Strong scents from the count's Jacqueminot mingled with the faint odor of moth balls that Mr. Hazard's dress suit still harbored. Miss Gorringe

had rouged a little and the green satin was quite becoming. Miss Bliss had rouged a good deal and had had her hair marcelled. In the doorway the trained nurse hung back, sniffing contemptuously at Mr. Hazard's back. Mrs. Bushey, Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Weatherby grouped themselves by the fireplace.

"Where's the prima donna?" I asked.

"Coming," cried a voice from the stairs, and the air was filled with silken rustlings.

It was like an entrance on the stage, up the passage and between the watching people, and I don't think any actress could have done it with more aplomb. In her evening dress she was truly superb—a goddess of a woman with her black hair in lusterless coils and her neck and shoulders as white as curds. Upon that satiny bosom my mother's pendant rose and fell to even breathings. Whatever anybody else may have felt, the star of the occasion was calm and confident.

Her appearance had so much of the theatrical that it must have made us suddenly see her as the professional, the legitimate object of glances and comments. Nothing else could explain why I—a person of restrained enthusiasms—should have

broken into bald compliments. She took them with no more self-consciousness than a performing animal takes the gallery's applause, smiled slightly, then looked at Roger, the stranger. I did so, too, childishly anxious to see if he admired my protégée. He evidently did, for he was staring with the rest of them, intent, astonished.

Her glance appeared to gather up his tribute as her hands might have gathered flowers thrown to her. He was one of the watching thousands that it was her business to enthrall, his face one of the countless faces that were to gaze up at her from tier upon tier of seats.

When the door shut on the last of them, laughter and good nights diminishing down the stairs, he turned to me with an air that was at once bewildered and accusing.

"Why in heaven's name didn't you tell me she was so good-looking?"

"I did and you wouldn't believe me," I answered gaily, for I was greatly pleased. It was a little triumph over Roger with his hypercritical taste and his rare approvals.

The next morning I waited anxiously for news.

I thought Lizzie would be down early, but the others came before her, dropping in as the morning wore away. With each entrance I grew more uneasy.

Mr. Hazard was first, in a gray sweater.

"Well, she looked great. I wish I could have painted her that way. But—" he tilted his head, his expression grown dubious. "You know, Mrs. Drake, I don't know one tune from another—but—"

"But what?" I said sharply.

"Well, it seemed to me Berwick got away with it."

"Do you mean the audience liked him better?"

He nodded, a grave agreeing eye on me.

"He got them when he sang that thing about *The Three Grenadiers*. It made your heart swell up."

He leaned nearer, lowering his voice. "And he got them in that German duet, too."

He drew back and nodded again darkly, as if wishing me to catch a meaning too direful for words.

An hour later Miss Bliss blew in in a blue flannel jacket and the remnants of her marcelle wave. By contrast with her flushed and blooming appearance of the evening before, she looked pinched and pallid. She cowered over the fire, stretching her little chapped hands to the blaze and presenting a narrow humped back to my gaze.

"She didn't seem to catch on some way or other.
I don't know why but—"

She stopped and leaned forward for the poker.

"But what?"

"Well—" She poked the fire, the edge of the flannel jacket hitched up by the movement, showing a section of corset laced with the golden string that confines candy boxes. "She doesn't give you any thrill. I've heard people without half so much voice who could make the tears come into your eyes. I tell you what, Mrs. Drake," she turned round with the poker uplifted in emphasis, "*I* wouldn't spend *my* good money to hear a woman sing that way. If I shell out one-fifty I want to get a thrill."

She was still there when the count came in. He sat between us gently rocking and eying her with a pensive stare. She pulled down her jacket and patted solicitously at the remains of her marcelle.

"She looked," said the count, pausing in his rocking, "she looked like a queen."

"Good gracious," I cried crossly, "*do* drop her looks. I saw her."

The count, unmoved by my irritation, answered mildly:

"One can't drop them so easily."

"But her singing, her performance?"

"Her performance," murmured the young man, and appeared to look through Miss Bliss at a distant prospect. "It was good, but—"

I had to restrain myself from screaming, "But what?"

"It was not so good as she is, had none of the—what shall I say—*air noble* that she has." He screwed up his eyes as if projecting his vision not only through Miss Bliss, but through all intervening objects to a realm of pure criticism. "It has a bourgeois quality, no distinction, no imagination, and she—" Words were inadequate and he finished the sentence with a shrug.

Miss Bliss leaned forward and poked the fire, once more revealing the golden string. The count looked at it with a faint arrested interest. I was depressed, but conventions are instinctive, and I said sternly:

"Miss Bliss, let the count poke the fire."

The count poked and Miss Bliss slipped to the floor, and sitting cross-legged, comfortably warmed her back.

The count was gone when Mrs. Bushey entered. Mrs. Bushey says she understands music even as she does physical culture.

"It was a frost," she explained, dropping on the end of the sofa.

"I know that," I answered, "the paper this morning said the thermometer was twenty-two degrees."

"Not that kind of a frost, a theatrical frost for her. She hasn't got the quality."

"No thrill," murmured Miss Bliss, and no men being present, stretched out her feet and legs in worn slippers and threadbare stockings to the blaze.

I fought against my depression—Mrs. Bushey did not like Bonaventura.

"She hasn't got the equipment," said Mrs. Bushey with a sagacious air. Her eye roamed about the room and lighted on Miss Bliss' legs. "*Are you cold?*" she asked, as if amazed.

"Frozen," answered Miss Bliss crossly.

"How can that be possible when I've done everything to make your room warm, spent all my winter earnings on coal?"

Miss Bliss cocked up her chin and replied:

"You must have had very poor business this winter." Then to me very pointedly: "I wanted to ask you, Mrs. Drake, if you'd lend me your Navajo blanket, just for a few nights. It would look so bad for the house if I was found frozen to death in bed some morning."

I agreed with alarmed haste, but Mrs. Bushey did not seem inclined for war. She smiled, murmuring, "Poor girl, you're anemic," and then, her eye lighting on Marie Antoinette's mirror:

"Yes, Miss Harris'll never get anywhere till she gets some color into her voice. It's the coldest organ I ever heard. Would you mind if I took that mirror away? I have a new lodger, a delightful woman from Philadelphia, and I've no mirror for her—I can't, I literally *can't*, buy one with my finances the way they are. I suppose after this failure Miss Harris'll be late with her rent."

Thus Mrs. Bushey. When she had gone—taking the mirror—Miss Bliss lay flat before the fire and reviled her.

Miss Gorringe came next with the green satin dress. It was upon Miss Gorringe I was pinning my hopes. None of the others knew anything. Miss Gorringe, lifting out the dress with cold and careful hands, looked solemn:

"No, I can't say it was a success. I'd like to because she's certainly one of the most lovely people I've ever played for, but—" She depressed the corners of her mouth and slowly shook her head.

I sat up in my shawls and did scream:

"But what?"

Miss Gorrингe, used to the eccentricities of artists, was unmoved by my violence. She placed the dress carefully over the back of a chair.

"She doesn't get over," she said.

"Get over what?"

I had heard this cryptic phrase before, but didn't know what it meant.

"The footlights—across, into the audience. And she ought to, but they were as cold as frogs till Berwick woke them up with *The Three Grenadiers*. He can do it. He hasn't got any better voice or method but," she gave a little ecstatic gesture, "temperament—oh, my!"

"Has she got no temperament at all?" I asked.

"I've never played for anybody who had less." Miss Gorrингe held up the green scarf. "Here's the sash."

"Not a bit of thrill," Miss Bliss chanted, prone before the fire.

"Can't a person get temperament, learn it in some way?"

Miss Gorrингe pondered:

"They can teach them rôles, hammer it into them. When a person's got the looks she has they some-

times do it. But I guess they've done all they can for her. She's been with Vignorol for two years. He wouldn't have taken her unless he thought there was something in it. And John Masters has been training her besides, and I've heard people say there's no one better than Masters for that. You see they can teach her how to walk and stand and make gestures, but they can't put the thing into her head or her voice. She doesn't seem to understand, she doesn't feel."

I was silent. She did feel, I knew it, I'd seen it. There was some queer lack of coordination between her power to feel and her power to express.

Miss Gorringe administered the coup de grâce.

"She sang the duet from *The Valkyrie* as if she was telling Siegmund to put on his hat and come to supper."

"It's imagination," I said.

"It's temperament," Miss Gorringe corrected. "And without it, the way she is, she'd better go in for church singing, or oratorio, or even teaching."

The dusk was gathering and I was alone when she came down. She threw herself into the wicker chair beside my sofa. Her face looked thinner and two slight lines showed round her mouth.

"Well?" I said, investing my voice with a fictitious lightness. "Where have you been all day?"

"I'm tired or I'd have been down earlier. Have you seen the others?"

With her deadly directness she had gone straight to the point I dreaded.

"Yes, they've been in."

"Did they like it?"

One of the most formidable things about this woman is the way she keeps placing you in positions where you must either lie and lose your self-respect or tell the truth and incur her sudden and alarming anger. I was not afraid of that now, but I couldn't hurt her. I tried to find a sentence that would be as truthful and painless as the circumstances permitted. The search took a moment.

"They didn't," she answered for me.

She turned her face to the window and drummed on the chair-arm with her fingers, then said defiantly:

"They don't know anything."

"Of course they don't," I cried. "An Italian count, an artist, a model, a woman who rents floors."

Her eye fell on the green dress.

"Miss Gorringe has been here."

I nodded.

"What did *she* say?"

I got cold under my wrappings. Had I the courage to tell her? She looked at me and gave a slight wry smile.

"Did she tell you that Berwick got away with it?"

"Some one did. I think it was Mr. Hazard, but he's a painter and—"

She interrupted roughly.

"That's nothing—a big bawling voice singing popular songs. If they'd let me sing *Oh, Promise Me* I'd have had the whole house."

For the first time in my experience of her I saw she was not open with herself. I knew that she had realized her failure and refused to admit it. She leaned forward, her elbows on her knees, frowning, haggard and miserable.

"I'll get the notices to-morrow," she said in a low voice.

It was horribly pitiful. There would be no friendly deception about the notices.

"Vignorol's arranged for several good men to go. He wanted their opinions. They'll give me a fine notice on *The Valkyrie* duet."

"Did that go well?" I asked just for something to say.

"Oh, splendidly," she answered, without looking up. "It's one of the things I do best."

The room was getting dim and I was thankful for it. The dusk hid the drooping and discouraged face, but it could not shut out the voice with its desperate pretense. It was worse than the face.

"Well," she said suddenly, straightening up, "I'll see Masters to-morrow. He's coming to bring me the notices."

There was fear in the voice. I knew what the interview with Masters would be, and she knew, too. In a moment of insight I saw that she had been fighting against her dread all day, had come down to me for courage, was trying now to draw it from my chill and depressing presence. It was like a child afraid of the dark, hanging about in terror and unwilling to voice its alarm.

I sat up, throwing off my wraps and laid my hand on hers.

"Lizzie, don't mind what he says."

Her hand was cold under mine.

"He knows," she answered almost in a whisper, "he *knows*."

"I can get backers for you"—it was rash, but I know how to manage Betty—"better than he ever was, the best kind of backers."

She jerked her hand away and glared at me.

"What do you mean by that? Do you think he's going to give me up? Why, you must be crazy." She jumped to her feet looking down at me with a face of savage anger. "Do you think I haven't made good? Have they," with a violent gesture to the door, "told you so? They're fools, idiots, imbeciles. Masters give me up—ah—" She turned away and then back. "Why he's never had any one with such promise as I have. He's banking on me. I'm going to bring him to the top. He borrowed the money to send me to Vignorol. Throw me down now, just when I'm getting there, just when I'm proving he was right? Oh, I can't talk to you. You've no sense. You're as big a fool as all the rest."

And she rushed out of the room, banging the door till the whole apartment shook.

I lay thinking about it till Emma came to get me my supper. She was right in one thing—I *was* a fool. In my blundering attempt at encouragement I had gone straight to the heart of her fear, dragged it out into the light, held up in front of her the thing she was trying not to see—that Masters would give her up. Fool—it was a mild name for me. And *poor Lizzie*—tragic Bonaventura!

It's night again and I am dressed in my best with a fur cloak on to keep off the chill. I've got to write, not a sudden visitation of the Muse, but to ease my mind. If you haven't got a sympathetic pair of ears to pour your troubles into, pouring them out on paper is the next best thing.

It's two days since I have seen Lizzie. Yesterday I was in my room all day nursing my cold and expecting her, but she didn't come. Neither did she to-day, and all I could surmise was that she was angry with me for being a fool. As I feel I was one and yet don't like to hear it from other people, I made no effort to get into communication with her.

This evening I was well enough to go out in a cab with all my furs and a foot warmer, to dine with Roger's widowed sister, Mrs. Ashworth. I was a good deal fluttered over the dinner, guessed why it had been arranged. It was a small affair, the Fergusons, Roger and I. Preceded by a call from Mrs. Ashworth, it had a meaningful aspect, a delicate suggestion of welcoming me into the family. I blush as I write it. I don't know why I should, or why love and marriage are matters surrounded by self-consciousness and shame. Who was it explained the embarrassment of lovers, their tendency to hide

themselves in corners, as an instinctive sense of guilt at the prospect of bringing children into a miserable world? I think it was Schopenhauer. Sounds like him—cross-grained old misanthrope.

Mrs. Ashworth is Roger's only near relation and he regards her as the choicest flower of womanhood. I don't wonder. In her way she is a finished product, no raw edges, no loose ends. Everything is in harmony—her thin faintly-lined face, her silky white hair, her pale hands with slightly prominent veins, her voice with its gentle modulations. Nothing cheap or second rate could exist near her. She wouldn't stamp them out—I can't imagine her stamping—they would simply wither in the rarified atmosphere. Her friends are like herself, her house is like herself. When I go there I feel strident and coarse. As I enter the portal I instinctively tune my key lower, feel my high lights fading, undergo a refining and subduing process as if a chromo were being transmuted into a Bartolozzi engraving.

As my cab crawled down-town—I need hardly say Mrs. Ashworth lives in a house on lower Fifth Avenue, built by her father—I uneasily wondered if the Bohemian atmosphere in which I dwelt had left any marks upon me. I tried to obliterate them

and made mental notes of things I mustn't mention. Memories of Miss Bliss' golden corset string rose uneasily, and Lizzie Harris, and oh, Mr. Masters! I ended by achieving a sense of grievance against Mrs. Ashworth. No one had any right to be so refined. It was all very well if you inherited a social circle and large means, but— The cab drew up with a jolt and I alighted. All unseemly exuberance died as the light from the door fell on me. I spoke so softly the driver had difficulty in hearing my order and when I walked up the steps I minced daintily.

But it was a delightful dinner. Harry and I were on one side, Betty and Roger on the other. At the foot of the table was Mrs. Ashworth's son, Roger Clements Ashworth, a charming boy still at college. It was all perfectly done, nothing showy, nothing in the fashion. Betty's pearls looked a good deal too large beside the modest string that Mrs. Ashworth wore, which was given to her great, great grandmother by Admiral Rochambeau. The dining-room walls were lined with portraits, with over the fireplace, that foundation stone of the family's glory, Roger Clements, "The Signer."

I thought of my apartment and my late associates and felt that I was leading a double life.

When I came home the house was very silent. Mounting the dim dirty stairs with the smell of dead dinners caught in the corners, I wondered how Mrs. Ashworth could countenance me. But after all, it was part of her fineness that she had no quarrel with the obscure and lowly. If she could not broaden the walls of her world—and you had only to talk to her ten minutes to see that she couldn't—within those walls all was choice and lovely. I would have to live up to it, that was all.

I had got that far when I heard a heavy step and Mr. Masters loomed up on the flight above. The stairs are very narrow and I looked up smiling, expecting him to retreat. He came on, however, not returning my smile, staring straight before him with an immovable, brooding glance. I can't say he didn't see me, but he had the air of being so preoccupied that what his eye lighted on did not penetrate to his brain. As at our first meeting I received an impression of brutal strength, his broad shoulders seeming to push the walls back, his flat-topped head upheld on a neck like a gladiator. I intended asking him about the concert and the notices, but his look froze me, and I backed against the wall for him to pass.

As he brushed by he growled a word of greeting. He was in the hall below when I broke out of the consternation created by his manner, leaned over the rail and called down:

"Mr. Masters, how is Miss Harris?"

"All right," he muttered without stopping or looking up and went on down the lower flight to the street.

They had had the interview.

The house was as silent as a tomb. I stole to the foot of the upper flight, looked up and listened. Not a sound. The rustling of my dress as I moved startled me. What *had* he said to her? I couldn't read his face—but his manner! I wavered and waited, the street noises coming muffled through the intense stillness. Then I decided I'd not intrude upon her, and came in here. Whatever happened she'll tell me in her own good time, and the quietness up there is reassuring. Her anger is apt to take noisy forms. If she had been throwing oranges out of the window I would have heard her. But I do wish I might have seen her to-night.

X

I DIDN'T sleep well that night. The memory of Mr. Masters' set sullen face kept me wakeful. At four I got up, lit the light and tried to read Kidd's *Social Evolution*. Through the ceiling I could hear Mr. Hamilton's subdued snoring on the floor above. It seemed like the deep and labored breathing of that submerged world whose upward struggle I was following through Mr. Kidd's illuminating page.

After breakfast, when no sign or word had come from Lizzie, I decided to stay in till I heard from her. I dawdled through the morning and when Emma was cleaning up went out on the landing and listened. The upper floors were wrapt in quiet. I stole up a flight and a half and looked at her door—tight shut and not a sound. I went down again worried, though it was possible she had gone out and I not heard her. After lunch I opened the register and listened—complete silence. During the rest of the afternoon I sat waiting for her footfall. Dusk came and no woman had mounted the stairs. At

seven a tap came at my door and Count Delcati pushed it open.

The count brought letters from the Italian aristocracy to its New York imitation and goes to entertainments that the rest of us read of in the papers. He was arrayed for festival and looked like an up-to-date French poster, a high-shouldered black figure with slender arms slightly bowed out at the elbows. His collar was very stiff, his shirt bosom a clear expanse of thick smooth white. He wore his silk hat back from his forehead, and his youthful yet sophisticated face, with its intense black eyes and dash of dark mustache, might have been looking at me from the walls of the *Salon Independent*.

He removed his hat, and standing in the doorway, said:

"Have you seen her to-day?"

"No," I answered. "Have you?"

He shook his head.

"I think she must be away. When I came home at six I went up there and knocked, but there was no answer."

There was nothing in this to increase my uneasiness. She came and went at all hours, often taking her dinner at what she called "little joints" in the

lower reaches of the city. Nevertheless my uneasiness did increase, gripped hold of me as I looked at the young man's gravely attentive face.

"Have you seen her since the concert?" he asked.

"Yes, the day after, when you were all in here."

"She hadn't seen the notices?"

I shook my head.

He leaned against the door-post and gazed at his patent leather shoes. As if with reluctance he said slowly:

"I have."

"What were they like?"

"Rotten."

He pronounced the word with the "r" strangled yet protesting, as if he had rolled his tongue round it, torn it from its place and put it away somewhere in the recesses of his throat.

"Oh, poor girl!" I moaned.

"That's why I went up there. She must have seen them and I wished to assure her they were lies."

"Did they say anything very awful?"

He shrugged.

"They spoke of her beauty—one said she had a good mezzo voice. But they were not kind to her, to Mr. Berwick, *very*."

I said nothing, sunk in gloom.

The count picked up his fur-lined coat from the stair rail, and shook himself into it.

"I should wait to go to her when she comes in, but this *meeserable* dinner, where I sit beside young girls who know nothing and married ladies who know too much—no mystery, no allure. But I must go—perhaps you?" He looked at me tentatively over his fur collar.

"I'll go up as soon as she comes in," I answered. "If there's anything I can do for her be assured I'll do it."

"You are a sweet lady," said the count and departed.

After that I sat with the door open a crack waiting and listening. The hours ticked by. I heard Mr. Hamilton's step on the street stairs, a knock at the Westerner's door, and as it opened to him, a joyous clamor of greeting in which Miss Bliss' little treble piped shrilly. Hazard was painting her and she spent most of her evenings in there with them. It was a good thing, they were decent fellows and their room was properly heated.

At intervals the sounds of their mirth came from below. The rest of the house was dumb. At eleven

I could stand it no more and went up. If she wasn't there I could light up the place for her—she rarely locked her door—and have it bright and warm.

It was dimly lighted and very still on the top floor, the gas-jet tipping the burner in a small pale point of light. I knocked and got no answer, then opened the door and went in. The room was dark, the window opposite a faint blue square. In the draft made by the opening door the gas shot up as if frightened, then sunk down, sending its thin gleam over the threshold. As I moved I bumped into the table and heard a thumping of something falling on the floor. I saw afterward it was oranges. I groped for matches, lighted the gas and looked about, then gave a jump and a startled exclamation. Lizzie Harris was lying on the sofa.

"Lizzie," I cried sharply, angry from my fright, "why didn't you say you were there?"

She made no sound or movement and seized by a wild fear, I ran to her. At the first glance I thought she was dead. She was as white as a china plate, lying flat on her back with her eyes shut, her hands clasped over her waist. I touched one of them and knew by the warmth she was alive. I clutched it, shaking it and crying:

"Lizzie, what's the matter? Are you ill?"

She tried to withdraw it and turned her face away. The movement was feeble, suggesting an ebbing vitality. I thought of suicide, and in a panic looked about for glasses and vials. There was nothing of the kind near her. In my lightning survey I saw a scattering of newspaper cuttings on the table among the rest of the oranges.

"Have you taken anything, medicine, poison?" I cried in my terror.

"No," she whispered. "Go away. Let me alone."

I was sorry for her, but I was also angry. She had given me a horrible fright. Failure and criticism were hard to bear, but there was no sense taking them this way.

"What *is* the matter then? What's happened to make you like this?"

"Let me alone," she repeated, and lifting one hand, held it palm upward over her face.

That something was wrong was indisputable, but I couldn't do anything till I knew what it was. I put my fingers on the hand over her face and felt for her pulse. I don't know why, for I haven't the least idea how a pulse ought to beat. As it was I couldn't find any beat at all and dropped her hand.

"I'll have to get a doctor, I'll call the man in the boarding house opposite."

"Don't," she said in a voice which, for the first time, showed a note of life. "If you bring a doctor here I'll go out in the street as I am."

She was in the blue kimono. I didn't know whether she had strength enough to move, but if she had I knew that she would do as she said and the night was freezing.

"I won't call the doctor if you'll tell me what's happened to you?"

"I'll tell you," she said, and raising the hand from her face caught at my skirt. I bent down for her voice was very low, hardly more than a whisper.

"Masters has left me."

"Left you," I echoed, bewildered. "He was here last night. I saw him."

Her eyes held mine.

"Left me for good," she whispered, "forever."

Any words that I might have had ready to brace up a discouraged spirit died away.

"What—what do you mean?" I faltered.

"He and I were lovers—lived together—you must have known it. He got tired of me—sick of me—he told me so himself—those very words. He said he



"Masters has left me"

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was done with it all, the singing and me." She turned her head away and looked at the wall. "I've been here ever since. I don't know how long."

I stood without moving, looking at her, and she seemed as dead to my presence as if she had really been the corpse I at first thought her. Presently I found myself putting a rug over her, settling it with careful hands as if it occupied my entire thoughts.

I do not exactly know what did occupy them. A sort of sick disgust permeated me, a deep overwhelming disgust of life. Everything was vile, the world, the people in it, the sordid dirt of their lives. I almost wished that I might die to be out of it all.

Then I sat down beside her. She lay turned to the wall, with the light of the one burner making long shadows in the folds of the rug. Her neck and cheek had the hard whiteness of marble, her hair, like a piece of black cloth, laid along them. The sickening feeling of repugnance persisted, stronger than any pity for her. I suppose it was the long reach of tradition, an inherited point of view, transmitted by those prim and buckramed ladies on my dining-room wall, and also perhaps that I had never known a woman, well, as a friend, who had done what Lizzie Harris had done. It was the first time

in my life, which had moved so precisely in its prescribed groove, that I had ever taken to my heart, believed in, grieved over, loved and trusted a woman thus stained and fallen.

I will also add, for I am truthful with myself, that when I got up and went to her, all inclination to touch her, to console and comfort her, was gone. For those first few moments she was physically objectionable to me, as if she might have been covered with dirt. Yet I felt that I must look after her, had what I suppose you would call a sense of duty where she was concerned. I have always hated the phrase; to me it signifies a dry sterile thing, and it held me there because I would have been uncomfortable if I had gone. Is it the training women get in their youth that makes them like this, makes them only give their best when the object is worthy, as we ask only the people to dinner who can give us a good dinner back? I heard the sense of duty chill in my voice as I spoke to her.

"Have you had anything to eat since—that is, to-day?"

She did not answer. I bent farther over and looked at the profile with the eyes closed. They were sunken, as if by days of pain. I have seen a

good many sick people in my life, but I had never seen any one so changed in so short a time. I gazed down at her and the appeal of that marred and anguished face suddenly broke through everything, stabbed down through the world's armor into the human core. I tried to seize hold of her, to make my hands tell her, and cried out in the poor words that are our best:

"Oh, Lizzie, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry for you."

It was like taking hold of a dead body. Her arm fell from my hand an inert weight. Condemnation or condonement were all the same to her.

What was I to do? The clock marked midnight. The joyful sounds from below had ceased. I did not like to rouse the others, for, as far as I could see, she was in no immediate danger. She appeared to be in a condition of collapse, and I had never heard of any one dying of that. It was twenty-four hours since I had seen Masters on the stairs. She had had nothing to eat since then. Food was the best thing and I went into the kitchen to get some.

The top floor has what Miss Bliss calls "the bulge" on all others by having a small but complete kitchen. The gaslight showed it in a state of chaos, piles of plates waiting to be washed, the ice-box with opened

door and a milk bottle overturned, some linen lying swathed and sodden over the edge of the laundry tub. I made a brew of tea and brought it to her, but one might as well have tried to make a statue drink. In answer to my pleadings she turned completely to the wall, moving one hand to the top of her head where it lay outstretched with spread fingers. In the faintly lighted room, in the creeping cold of a December midnight, that speechless woman with her open hand resting on her head, was the most tragic figure I have ever seen.

I took the tea back to the kitchen and washed the plates. Also I hunted over the place for any means of self-destruction that might be there. There were vials in the medicine closet that I stood in a row and inspected, emptying those I wasn't sure about into the sink. As I worked I thought, sometimes pursuing a consecutive series of ideas, sometimes in disconnected jumps. It was revolutionary thinking, casting out old ideals, installing new ones. I was outside the limits within which I had heretofore ranged, was looking beyond the familiar horizon. In that untidy kitchen, sniffing at medicine bottles, I had glimpses far beyond the paths where I had left my little trail of footprints.

I didn't know why she had given herself to Masters. Strange as it may sound, it did not then seem to me to matter. It was her affair, concern for her conscience, not mine. What was my concern was that I could not give my love and take it back. It went deeper than her passions and her weaknesses. It went below the surface of life, underlay the complicated web of conduct and action. It was the one thing that was sure amid the welter of shock and amaze.

And I understood Masters, was suddenly shifted into his place and saw his side. He had tried to make her understand and she wouldn't, then on the straining tie that held them had dealt a savage blow, brought an impossible situation to the only possible end. I hated him, if she had been nothing to me I would have hated him. Shaking a bottle of collodion over the sink I muttered execrations on him, and as I muttered knew that I admired the brutal courage that had set them both free.

The dawn found me sitting by her frozen in mind and body. I had had time to think of what I should say to all inquiries: the failure of the concert, the blow to her hopes, had prostrated her. It was half true and quite plausible.

When the light was bright and the street awake I went out into the hall and waited. Miss Bliss was the first person I caught, coming up from the street door with a milk bottle. Her little face was full of sleep that dispersed under my urgent murmurings. She stepped inside the door and hailed tentatively :

“Hullo, Miss Harris.”

There was no answer and she ventured less buoyantly :

“Don’t you feel good, Miss Harris?”

The lack of response scared her, yet she stood fascinated like the street gamin eying the victim of an accident. She had seen enough to do what I wanted, and I took her by the arm and pulled her into the hall.

“She looks like she was dead,” she whispered, awed. “Would you think a big husky woman like that would take things so hard?”

I had prepared my lesson in the small hours and answered glibly :

“She’s not half so strong as you think and very sensitive, morbidly sensitive.”

“Um,” said Miss Bliss, “poor thing! I don’t see how if she was so sensitive, she could have stood that man Masters around so much.”

She went down to dress and presently the news percolated through the house. There was an opening and shutting of doors and whisperings on the top flight. Everybody stole up and offered help except the count, who rose late to the summons of an alarm clock. Mr. Hazard went across the street for the doctor, met Mrs. Bushey on her way to physical culture and sent her in.

I met her in the third-floor hall and we talked, sitting on the banister. The count's alarm clock had evidently done its work, for he eyed us through the crack of his door.

"How dreadful—terribly unfortunate," Mrs. Bushey muttered, then, looking about, caught the count's eye at the crack: "Good morning, Count Delcati. You're up early."

The count responded, the gleaming eye large and unwinking as if made of glass.

Mrs. Bushey's glance returned to me. The smile called forth by the greeting of the star lodger died away.

"If her concert was such a failure and she's sick, how is she going to live?"

I hadn't thought of that. It added a complication to the already complex situation.

"Oh, she must have something," I said with a vaguely reassuringly air. "She hasn't been making money but—"

"Do you know anything positive of her financial position?" interrupted Mrs. Bushey.

It was hard to be vague on any subject with Mrs. Bushey, on the subject of finances impossible. She listened to a few soothing sentences then said grimly:

"I see you don't really know anything about it. Please try and find out. Of course I'm one of the most kind-hearted people in the world, but"—she held her physical culture manuals in the grip of one elbow and extended her hands—"one must live. I can't be late with my rent whatever my lodgers can be."

The count's voice issued unexpectedly through the crack:

"I am late two times now and I still stay."

Mrs. Bushey smiled at the eye.

"Of course, Count Delcati, but you're different. I know all about you. But Miss Harris—a singer who can't make good. They're notoriously bad pay." She turned sharply on me. "What seems to be the matter with her?"

"Collapse," I said promptly. "Complete collapse and prostration."

Mrs. Bushey hitchéd the books into her armpit and patted them in with her muff.

"Those are only words. I'm glad Mr. Hazard's gone for the doctor." She turned and moved toward the stair-head. "And if it's anything contagious she must go at once. Don't keep her here five minutes. The doctor'll know where to send her." She began the descent. "If I'd only myself to think of I'd let her stay if it was the bubonic plague. But I won't expose the rest of you to any danger." She descended the next flight and her voice grew fainter: "I'm only thinking of you, my lodgers are always my first consideration. If any of you got anything I'd never forgive myself." She reached the last flight. "I wouldn't expose one of you to contagion if I never made a dollar or rented a room. That's the way I am. I know it's foolish—you needn't tell me so, but—" The street door shut on her.

The doctor came with speed and an air of purpose. At last he had somewhere to go when he ran down the stairs with his bag, and it was difficult for him to conceal his exhilaration. He was young, firm and businesslike, examined Lizzie, asked questions and

said it was "shock". He was very anxious to find out what had "precipitated the condition," even read the notices, and then sat with his chin in his hand looking at the patient and frowning.

Out in the hall I enlarged on her high-strung organization and he listened, fixing me with a searching gaze that did not conceal the fact that he was puzzled. We whispered on the landing over nursing, food and the etceteras of illness, then branched into shocks and their causes till he suddenly remembered he had to be in a hurry, snatched up his bag and darted away.

That was yesterday. To-night I have brought up my writing things and while I watch am scratching this off at the desk where, not so long ago, I found her choosing her stage name. Poor Lizzie—is there a woman who would refuse her pity?

I can run over the names of all those I know and I don't think there's one, who, if she could look through the sin at the sinner, would entirely condemn. The worst of it is they all stop short at the sin. It hides the personality behind it. I know if I talked to Betty this way she'd say I was a silly sentimentalist with no knowledge of life, for even

my generous Betty wouldn't see over the sin. There's something wrong with the way women appraise "the values" in these matters; actions don't stand in the proper relations to character and intentions. We're all either sheep or goats. Everything that makes our view-point, books, plays, precedent, public opinion, will have it that we're sheep or goats, and though we can do a good many bad things and remain pure spotless sheep, there's just one thing that if we do do, puts us forever in the corral with the goats.

But, oh—I groan as I write it—if it only hadn't been Masters! That brute, that brigand! A hateful thing some one once told me keeps surging up in my memory—Rousseau said it I think—that one of the best tests of character was the type of person selected for love and friendship. I can't get it out of my head. What fool ever told it to me? Oh—all of a sudden I remember—it was Roger—Roger! I feel quite frightened when I think of him. He would be so angry with me for being mixed up in such an affair, or—as he's never angry with me—angry with fate for leading me into this *galère*. He is one of the people who adhere to the sheep and goat theory.

To him women are black or white, and the white ones must have the same relation to the black that Voltaire had to *Le bon Dieu*—know them by sight but not speak.

XI

IT IS three weeks since I have written a word. There's been too much to do, and sleeping about in chairs and on the foot of beds is not stimulating to the brain. We have had an anxious time, for Lizzie Harris has been desperately ill. Doctor Vanderhoff—that's the young man's name—has had no necessity to run to the corner of Lexington Avenue and then wonder which way to go, for he has been in here a good deal of the time. He is a dear, and a clever dear, too, for he has pulled Lizzie back from dreadful dangers. For a while we didn't think she would ever be herself again. Her heart—but what's the sense of recapitulating past perils. She's better, that's enough, and to-night I'm down in my apartment leaving Miss Bliss in charge.

She's another dear, poor little half-fed thing, running back from her sittings to post up-stairs, panting and frost nipped, and take her place in that still front room. How still it's been, with the long motionless body on the bed, that wouldn't speak and wouldn't eat, and hardly seemed to breathe. Sometimes the

men came up and took a turn at the nursing. The count was no use. The sight of her frightened him and he had to be taken into the kitchen and given whisky. But young Hazard was as good as a hospital graduate, soft-handed and footed, better than Mrs. Phillips, who came up once or twice between her own cases, was very superior and nagged about the sun-dial.

When he could, Mr. Hazard watched for the first half of the night and Dolly Bliss and I went into the kitchen and had supper of tea and eggs. We've grown very intimate over these midnight meals. I don't see how she lives—ten dollars a week the most she has made this winter, and often gaps without work. One night I asked her if she had ever posed for the altogether. Under normal circumstances I would no more have put such a question than I'd have inquired of Mrs. Bushey what she had done with her husband. But with the specter of death at our side, the reticences of every day have dropped away.

She nodded, looking at me with large pathetic eyes.

"Often in the past, but now, unfortunately, I'm not in demand for that. I'm getting too thin."

In this close companionship I have found her generous, unselfish and honest to the core. Is our modesty an artificial attribute, grafted on us like a bud to render us more alluring? This girl, struggling against ferocious poverty, is as instinctively, as rigorously virtuous as I am, as Betty, as Mrs. Ashworth, yet she does a thing for her livelihood, the thought of which would fill us with horror. I'm going to put it to Betty, but I wouldn't dare tell her what I really think—that of the two points of view Miss Bliss' is the more modest.

When we were sure Lizzie was on the up-grade, a new worry intruded—had she any independent means? Nobody knew. Mrs. Bushey was urgent and to keep her quiet I offered to pay the top-floor rent for a month and found that the count had already done it. I, who knew her best, feared she had nothing, and it was "up to me" to get money for her from somewhere.

Of course Betty was my natural prey and yesterday afternoon fate rendered her into my hands. She came to take me for a drive in a hansom, bringing with her her youngest born, Henry Ferguson, Junior, known familiarly as Wuzzy. Wuzzy is three, fat, not talkative and spoiled. He wore a white

bunny-skin coat, a hat with rosettes on his ears, leather leggings and kid mitts tied round his wrists with ribbons. He had so many clothes on that he moved with difficulty, breathing audibly through his nose. When he attempted to seat himself on the prie-dieu, the only chair low enough to accommodate him, he had to be bent in the middle like a jointed doll.

I can not say that I love Wuzzy as much as I do Constance. He is the heir of the Fergusons and the conquering male is already apparent. It is plain to be seen that he thinks women were made to administer to his comfort and amuse him in his dull moments. I have memories of taking care of Wuzzy last autumn at Betty's country place when his nurse was off duty. I never worked so hard in my life. Half the energy and imagination expended in what the newspapers call a "gainful occupation" would have made me one of those women of whom *The Ladies' Home Journal* prints biographies.

I carried him down-stairs. It was not necessary, for dangling from the maternal hand he could have been dragged along, but there is something so nice about hugging a healthy, warm, little bundle of a

boy. As I bent for him he held up his arms with a bored expression, then stiff and upright against my shoulder, looked down the staircase and yawned. It's the utter confidence of a child that makes it so charming. Wuzzy relinquished himself to my care as if, when it came to carrying a baby down-stairs, I was the expert of the western world.

As we descended I rubbed my cheek against his, satin-smooth, cold and firm. He drew back and gazed at me, a curiously deep look, impersonal, profound. The human being soon loses the capacity for that look. It only belongs to the state when we are still "trailing clouds of glory."

We squeezed him between us and tooled away toward Fifth Avenue. It was a glorious afternoon and it was glorious to be out again, to breathe the keen sharp air, to see the park trees in a thin purplish mist of branch on branch. Wuzzy, seeing little boys and girls on roller skates, suddenly pounded on us with his heels and had to be lifted to a prominent position on our knees, whence he leaned over the door and beat gently on the air with his kid mitts.

"What a bother this child is," sighed Betty, boost-

ing him up, "I only brought him because I had to. Some relation of his nurse is sick and she went out to see them."

Her only son is the object of Mrs. Ferguson's passionate adoration, yet she always speaks of him as if he was her greatest cross.

Wuzzy comfortable, his attention concentrated on the moving show, I brought my subject on the carpet.

"Dear me, how dreadful," Betty murmured, much moved by the expurgated version of Lizzie Harris' troubles. "Wuzzy, if you don't stop kicking me with your heels I'll take you home."

Wuzzy stopped kicking, throwing himself far over the door to follow the flight of a golden-locked fairy in brown velvet. We held him by his rear draperies and talked across his back.

"It's a cruel situation," I answered. "Everything has failed the poor creature."

"She has no means of livelihood at all?"

"I'm not sure yet, but I don't think so. As soon as she's well enough I'll find out. Meantime there's this illness, the doctor—"

"Yes, yes," Betty interrupted, "I know all that. But it needn't bother you. I'll attend to it."

"Dear Betty!" I let go of Wuzzy to stretch a hand across to her.

"Now, *don't* be sentimental, Evie. This is the sort of thing I like doing. If I could find some one—"

The prospects suddenly palled on Wuzzy and he threw himself violently back and lay supine between us, gazing up at the trap.

"Good heavens, why did I bring him," groaned his mother. "I wouldn't take care of a child like this for millions of dollars. Why *do* nurses have sick relations? There ought to be a special breed raised without a single human tie. Get up, Wuzzy."

She tugged at his arm, but he continued to stare upward, inert as a flour sack.

"What does he see up there?" I said, bending my head back to try and locate the object. "Perhaps it's something we can take down and give him."

"You can't unless you break the hansom to pieces. It's the trap."

I felt of it. Wuzzy's eyes followed my hand with a trance-like intentness and he emitted a low sound of approval.

At that moment, as though fate pitied our helplessness, the trap flew back and a section of red face filled the aperture.

"Is it straight down the avenue I'm to go, Mrs. Ferguson?" came a cheerful bass. "You ain't told me."

Wuzzy looked, flinched, his pink face puckered and a cry of mortal fear burst from him. He clutched us with his mitts and wrenched himself to a sitting posture, then, determined to shut out the horrible vision, leaned as far over the door as he could and forgot all about it. Betty gave directions and we sped along into the line of carriages by Sherman's statue. We had to wait there, and a policeman with gesticulating arms and a whistle caught Wuzzy's attention. He waved a friendly mitt at him, muttering low comments to himself. His mother patted his little hunched-up back and took up the broken thread:

"What was I saying? Oh, yes—if I could get some one who would hunt up such cases as Miss Harris' and report them to me I'd pay them a good salary. Those are the people one never hears about, unless in some accidental way like this."

The policeman whistled and we moved forward. I began to feel uncomfortable. I'd never before told Betty half a story. She went on:

"Of course there's charity on a large scale, or—

ganized and all that. But the hundreds of decent people who get into dreadful positions and are too proud to ask for aid, are the ones I'd like to help. Especially girls, good, hard-working, honest girls."

In my embarrassment I fingered Wuzzy's ear-rosette. He resented the familiarity and angrily brushed my hand away.

"Oh, do let him alone," said his mother. "You can't tell how he'll break out if he gets cross—and I know Miss Harris is all that, in spite of her hat and her looks, or you wouldn't be so friendly with her."

"Charity given to her is charity given where it's needed," I muttered with a red face.

I felt wretchedly underhanded and mean, and that's one of the most unbearable feelings for a self-respecting woman to endure. For one reckless moment I thought of telling Betty the whole story. And then I knew I mustn't. I couldn't make her understand. I couldn't translate Lizzie into the terms with which Mrs. Ferguson was familiar. I saw that broken woman emerging from my narrative a smirched and bespattered pariah of the kind that, from time immemorial, ladies have regarded as their hereditary foe.

It would have been indulging my conscience at

her expense, and my conscience—well, it had to resign its job for the present. It was odd that with a worthy intention and in connection with one of the best of women, I felt my only course was to deceive. All may have been well with Pippa's world, but certainly all was not well with mine. I don't know what was wrong, only that something was. I know I should have been able to tell the truth, I *know* I ought not to have been made to feel a coward and a sneak.

Betty enlarged upon her scheme of benefaction and we drove down the avenue, full from curb to curb and glittering in its afternoon prime. Wuzzy was much entertained, leaning forward to eye passing horses and call greetings to dogs on the front seats of motors. Once when he needed feminine attention he turned to me, remarking commandingly, "Wipe my nose." As I performed this humble service he remained motionless, his eyes raised in abstraction to a church clock. I have heard many people envy the care-free condition of childhood and wish they were babes again. I never could agree with them; the very youthful state has always seemed to me a much overrated period. But as I obeyed Wuzzy's command it suddenly came upon me

how delightful it would be to be so utterly free of responsibility, so unperplexed by ethical problems, so completely dependent, that even the wiping of one's nose was left to other hands.

I left Lizzie early that evening. Miss Bliss and Mr. Hazard were with her and I had a fancy they liked being together without me sitting about and overhearing. I pulled a chair up in front of the fire and mused over that question of taking Betty's money. My discharged conscience was homesick and wanted to come back. In the midst of my musing Roger came in, and presently, he and I sitting one on either side of the grate, it occurred to me that he would be a good person to put in the place of my conscience—get his opinion on the vexed question and not let him know it. I would do it so cleverly he'd never guess and I could abide in his decision. Excellent idea!

"Roger," I began in a simple earnest tone, "I want to ask you about a question of ethics, and I want you to give me your full attention."

"Go ahead," said Roger, putting a foot on the fender. "I'm not an authority, but I'll do my best."

"Suppose I knew a woman—no, a man's better—who was, well, we'll say a thief, not a habitual thief

but one who had thieved once, got into bad company and been led away. And I happened to know he wanted help—financial—to tide him over a period of want. Would I be doing something underhanded if I asked some one—let's say you—to give him the money and didn't tell you about the thieving?"

I thought I had done it rather well. Roger was interested.

"Are you supposed to know for certain he'd only committed the one offense?"

"Quite sure," with conviction.

"What made him do it?"

It wasn't so easy as I thought. Theft didn't seem to fit the case.

"Well—he was tempted, and—er—didn't seem to have as strict a moral standard as most people."

"Um," Roger considered, then: "This seems to be a complicated case. Was he completely without will, no force, no character?"

"Not at all," I said sharply. "He had a great deal of will and any amount of character."

"He sounds like a dangerous criminal—plenty of force and will and no moral standard."

I felt irritated and raised my voice in a combative note:

"Now, Roger, don't be narrow-minded. Can't you imagine quite a fine person who mightn't think stealing as wrong as you or I think it?"

Roger did not look irritated, but he looked determined and spoke with an argumentative firmness:

"Evie, I've always regarded you as an unusually intelligent woman. As such I'd like you to explain to me how a fine person of will and character can steal and not think it as wrong as you or I would think it."

It wasn't working out as I expected and because it wasn't and because Roger was giving it his full attention, I felt more irritated.

"Didn't I tell you he'd fallen into bad company?"

"You did and I've taken it into consideration, but—"

"Roger, this isn't a legal investigation. You're not trying to break up the beef trust or impose a fine on Standard Oil. It's just a simple question of right and wrong."

"I'm glad you think it's simple. This person with any amount of character fell under a bad influence?"

"That's it—he was undermined, and though he was, as I said, a fine person, quite noble in some

respects, he didn't think stealing was so wicked as the average respectable citizen does."

Roger put the other foot on the fender and looked at me with increasing concentration.

"I don't understand at all. Let me try and get to the bottom of it. What did he steal?"

For a moment I stared at him blankly without answering.

He went on. There was no doubt about his giving me his full attention, it was getting fuller every moment.

"If you'll tell me the nature of his theft and under what provocation and circumstances it was committed maybe I'll be able to get a better idea of the kind of person he was. What did he steal?"

"But, Roger, this is a hypothetical case."

"I know it is, but that doesn't make any difference in the answer. What was the nature of the theft—money, jewels, grafting on a large scale, or taking an apple from the grocer's barrel?"

I looked around the room in desperation, saw the blank left on the wall by the Marie Antoinette mirror, and said doggedly:

"He stole a mirror."



"Let me try and get at the bottom of it"

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"A mirror," said Roger with the air of having extracted an important bit of evidence. "Umph—Why did he take it?"

"Roger, what's the sense of going into all these details?"

"Evie," with maddening obstinacy, all the more maddening because it was so mild, "if I'm to give an answer I must know. Did he intend to sell it?"

"Yes, he did."

I was so angry that I felt ready to defend any one who stole anything from anybody.

"My dear girl," said Roger, still mild but also reproachful, "how can you sit there and tell me that a man who steals a mirror intending to sell it is a fine person, quite noble in some respects?"

"I can't tell you. I won't. I asked you a simple question about a man—a man I just made up—and you cross-examine me as if I was being tried for murder and you were the lawyer on the other side."

"But, Evie, I only was trying to do what you asked."

"Well, stop trying. Let that man and his mirror drop or I'll lose my temper." I snatched up the

poker and began to poke the fire. "I've lost it now." I poked furiously in illustration. "It's too aggravating. I did so want your opinion about it."

"Well, then, here it is—"

I stopped poking and leaned forward, so far forward that to keep my balance I had to put a foot on the fender.

"Has one a right to accept pecuniary aid for a person who has committed an offense—the first—without telling the benefactor of that offense? Is that it?"

"Yes."

"I think one has."

"You're sure they needn't tell the benefactor?"

"I wouldn't. If you want to give a man a hand-up why rake up his past?"

I got it at last. My bad temper vanished. I was wreathed in smiles—

"Oh, Roger," I cried joyously, "that's just what I wanted you to say. It's such a relief that we've worked it out at last," and I heaved a sigh and put the other foot on the fender.

I sat for a moment, absently looking down, then I became conscious of my feet, side by side on the brass rail—two small patent leather points. I looked

along the rail and there on the other side were Roger's—two large patent leather points. They looked like four small black animals, perched in couples, sociably warming themselves by the blaze.

"What are you smiling at?" said Roger.

"How near we came to quarreling over an imaginary man stealing an imaginary mirror," said I.

XII

LIZZIE is coming to life, hesitatingly and as if with reluctance. I suppose it's natural for her to be extraordinarily weak, but I never would have believed she could be conscious enough to talk and so utterly indifferent to everything that should concern her. When I told her about the money, saying it came from a friend, she murmured, "That's all right," and never asked who the friend was. She seemed to have no interest in the subject, or in any subject, for that matter. She makes me think of a brilliant, highly colored plant that a large stone has fallen on.

One afternoon last week, when I was sitting by the table in her room reading, she suddenly spoke.

"Evie, how long is it that I've been sick here?"

"Nearly a month. You've been very ill, but you're getting better now every day."

She said no more and I got up and began moving about the room, arranging it for the evening. I was pulling down the blinds when I heard her stirring,

and looking back, saw that she had twisted about in the bed and was watching me. In the dusk, her face, framed in elf locks of black hair, looked like a white mask. I thought she was going to ask me something—there was a question in her eyes—but she made no sound. I lighted the lamp and shifted into place the paper rose that hung from the shade. She continued to follow my movements with the intent observation of an animal. I have seen dogs watch their masters just that way. The feeling that something was on her mind grew stronger. I went to her and sat on the side of the bed.

"Do you want to ask me anything?" I said.

She shook her head, but her eyes were unquiet. Suddenly I thought I guessed. I put my hand on hers and spoke very low.

"Lizzie, the thing you told me that night when I came up and found you here"—I looked into her face to see if she understood—"I've never told to anybody."

She stared at me without answering.

"Do you know what I mean?"

She gave a slight affirmative nod.

"And I never will tell it to any one unless you ask me to."

"I don't care if you tell it," she said with weak indifference.

It was the first gleam of her old self. Whatever she had wanted to say to me it was not that. Other women—the women of my world—would have been fearful of their secret lightly guarded. I don't believe she had given it a thought. Either her trust in me was implicit or she didn't care who knew it. I like to think it was the first.

She settled back against the pillow and made feeble smoothings of the sheet. Still persuaded of her inward disquiet I sat silent waiting for her to speak. After a moment or two she did.

"Have any letters come for me?"

I knew *this* was the question. I got up and gave her the pile of letters stacked on the desk. She looked over the addresses, then pushed them back to me.

"I was afraid he might write to me," she said.
"But it's all right, he hasn't."

I got a shock of displeased surprise.

"You didn't expect him to *write* to you, Lizzie?"

"He might have."

"But after—after what you told me, surely, oh, surely, you don't want to hear from him?"

I was fearful of her answer. If she was waiting, hungering for a letter from him, it would have been too much even for me.

"That's just it—I *don't* want to. It's all in the past, as if it had happened a hundred years ago. I want it to stay there—to be dead."

She looked into my eyes, a deep look, that for some inexplicable reason reminded me of Wuzzy's. I have long realized that my point of view, my mental processes, are too remote from hers for me ever to see into her mind or understand its workings. But I was certain that she meant what she said. My poor Lizzie, coming up out of the Valley of the Shadow, with her feeble feet planted on the past.

A few days after this she was well enough to sit up in bed with her hair brushed and braided, and read her letters. One was from Vignorol asking her why she had not come for her lessons.

She gave it to me, remarking:

"I wish you'd answer that. Tell him I've been sick, and that I'll never come for any more lessons."

I dropped my sewing, making the round eyes of astonishment with which I greet her unexpected decisions.

"You're not thinking of giving up your singing?"

"Yes, forever."

"But why? Surely you're not going to let one failure discourage you."

I was disturbed. From a few recent remarks, I am satisfied that she has no means whatever. She *must* go on with her singing; as Mrs. Bushey would say, "One must live." She could curb her ambitions, make her living on a less brilliant plane.

"I'll never sing again," she answered.

"You might give up attempting the opera, or even concerts. But there are so many other things you could do. Church singing—you began that way."

"Yes, that's it. I began, and I'm not going back to where I began. I'm going on or I'm going to stop. And I can't go on."

I thought she alluded to her lack of means and said:

"Lizzie, I can get the money for you to go back to Vignorol—I can get people who will stand behind you and give you every chance."

She looked listlessly at the wall and shook her head.

"It's no use. I don't want it. Masters was right. I know it now."

"You mean—" I stopped; it seemed too cruel.

But she was minded now to be as ruthlessly clear-sighted about herself as she had once been obstinately blind.

"The whole equipment—I haven't got it. He banked too much on my looks, thought they were going to go farther than they did. If I'd had a great voice—one of the wonderful voices of the world, like Patti or Melba—it wouldn't have mattered about not having the rest. But there are hundreds with voices as good as mine. He thought beauty and dramatic instinct were going to carry me through. He knew I had the one and he thought he could give me the other—train it into me. Nobody knows how hard he tried. He used to make me stand up and go over every gesture after him, he even made marks on the floor where I was to put my feet. And then he'd sit down and hold his head and groan. Poor Jack"—she gave a little dry laugh—"he had an awful time!"

I could realize something of Masters' desperation. To have discovered a song-bird in the western wilds, hoped to retrieve his fortunes with it and then found a defect in its mechanism that neither work nor brains nor patience could supply—it *was* bitter luck.

"He was an artist," she went on. "He could

have gone straight to the top but he lost his voice after the first few years, while he was still touring the small European towns."

I noticed that she spoke in the past tense, her tone one of melancholy reminiscence as if he really *was* dead. She might have been delivering his funeral sermon and placing flowers of memory on his tomb.

"Why couldn't you have got from him what he tried to teach you? I can't understand, you're so intelligent."

She mused for a moment, then said:

"I've been thinking of that myself while I've been lying here. Looking back I don't seem to have given it my full mind and I've been wondering if perhaps I wasn't too taken up with him. I couldn't get away from the real romance, the love-making and the quarrels, first one and then the other. There wasn't anything else in my life. I hadn't time to be interested in those women I had to pretend to be. My affairs and me were the only things that counted."

"But you were so much in earnest, so desperately anxious to succeed."

She gave me a side look, sharp and full of meaning.

"Because, though I wouldn't acknowledge it, I

knew he wanted to break with me and the only way I could keep him was to make good."

"Good heavens, how horrible!" I winced under her pitiless plain speaking.

"Yes, it was," she said gently.

There was a pause. The little palliatives I had to offer, the timid consolations, were shriveled up by that fierce and uncompromising candor. Her voice broke the silence, quietly questioning:

"I suppose you think I did a very bad thing?"

"Oh, Lizzie, don't ask me that. I can't sit in judgment. That's for you, not for me."

She looked at her hands, long and thin on the quilt. Thus down-drooped, her face was shockingly haggard and wasted. Yet of the storm which had caused this ruin she was now speaking with a cold impersonal calm, as if it had all happened to somebody else. My own emotions that swelled to passionate expression died away before that inscrutable and baffling indifference.

"He was a very fine man," she said suddenly.

"Fine?" I gasped.

"Yes, in lots of ways. About his art and work for one thing—he had great ideals. And he was very good to me."

That was the coping stone. I heard myself saying in a faint voice:

"How?"

"Well, for one thing, he never lied to me. He told the truth about the singing, about me, about everything. He wasn't a coward, either. He didn't run away and send me a letter. He came and had it out with me, made me understand."

This time I couldn't speak. Her next words were like the laying of the final wreath on the bier of the loved and respected dead:

"It had to end and he ended it. He didn't care how much it hurt me, or what I felt, or what anybody thought. That's the right way to be—not to let other people's feelings make you afraid, not to be considerate because it's easier than fighting it out. He was a fine man."

That was John Masters' obituary as delivered by his discarded mistress.

The thing I couldn't get over was that she showed no signs of penitence. As far as I could see she was in no way inclined to admit her fault, to bow her head and say, "I have sinned." Her own conduct in the affair seemed to be the last thing that troubled her. Yet I can say that I, a woman with the tradi-

tional moral views, could not think her either abandoned or base. I don't know to what world or creed she belonged, or to what ethical code she adhered, except that it was not mine or anybody else's that I have ever known. Whatever it was it seemed to uphold her in her course. What was done was done and that was the end of it. No strugglings of inner irresolution, no attempt to exonerate or exculpate, disturbed her somberly steadfast poise. What would have been admirable to any one was her acceptance of the blow, and her recognition of her lover's right to deliver it.

As she improved, moved about the room and took her place against accustomed backgrounds, I began to realize that the change in her was more than skin deep. Her wild-fire was quenched, her moods, her beamings, her flashes of anger were gone. A wistful passivity had taken their place, lovely but alien to her who was once Lizzie Harris. Whatever Masters had said in that last interview had acted like an extinguisher on a bright and dancing flame. It made me think of Dean Swift and Vanessa. Nobody knows what the dean said to Esther Vanhomrigh in the arbor among the little trees—only she had returned from it a broken thing to die soon after.

Her lover had killed her; Lizzie's had not quite, but he had certainly put out the light in that wayward and rebellious spirit.

It has its good points, for those people who are to help her find her more comprehensible, much more to their liking than they would the old Lizzie. Roger, for example, has met her again and is quite impressed. It was the other afternoon when I was sitting with her in her front room. The door was open and as I talked I listened for steps that would stop two flights below at *my* door. I had had no word that steps might be expected, but one doesn't always need the word. There are mornings when a woman wakes and says to herself, "He'll come to-day." It had been one of these mornings.

At five, when the lights were lit and I had put on the tea water to boil, I heard the ascending feet. If it was some one for me could I bring them up? Lizzie would be delighted. I ran down and found him standing at my door preparing to knock with the head of his cane. Would he mind coming up—I didn't like to leave her too much alone? No, he wouldn't, and up he came.

Lizzie, long and limp in the easy chair, was sheltered from the lamp glow by the paper rose.

She smiled and held out her hand and I saw he was shocked by the change in her, as well he might be. The only other time he had seen her was the night of the concert, the climax of that little day to which every dog of us is entitled.

All things that are frail and feeble appeal to Roger. Both he and Mrs. Ashworth get stiff and ice-bound before bumptious, full-fed, prosperous people. He sat down beside her and made himself very agreeable. And I was pleased, immensely pleased; could better endure the thought of Lizzie like a smashed flower if by her smashing she was to win his approval and interest.

As I made the tea I could hear their voices rising and falling. Coming up the passage with the tray the doorway framed them like a picture and I stopped and gazed admiringly. It was like the cover of a ten-cent magazine—a graceful woman and a personable man conversing elegantly in a gush of lamplight. The lamplight was necessary to the illusion, for it hid Roger's wrinkles and made his gray hair look fair. He could easily have passed for the smooth-shaven, high-collared wooer, and Lizzie, languidly reclining with listening eyes, quite fittingly filled the rôle of wooee.

An hour afterward, as we went down-stairs, Roger was silent till we got to my door. Then he said:

"She seems very different from what she was that night when I saw her in your room."

"She is different. You don't seem to realize she's been very sick."

"Yes—but—"

I pushed open the door.

"Roger, aren't you coming in?"

"Sorry, but I can't. I'm going out to dinner and I have to go home and change."

I was disappointed, but I wouldn't have shown it for the world. I couldn't help thinking it was rather stupid of him not to have made a move to get away sooner, to have a moment's talk in my parlor by my lamplight.

"From what you told me of her I thought she was rather high-pitched and western."

"I *never* said that."

"Maybe you didn't, but somehow I got the impression. She's anything but that—delicate, fine."

"Um," I responded. These positive opinions on a person I knew so much better than he did rasped me a little.

Roger shifted his hat to his left hand and moved to the stair-head.

"There's something very unusual about her, a sort of fragile simplicity like a dogrose. Good-by, Evie. Good night."

I went into my room. It was cold and the chill of it struck uncomfortably on me. I had a queer feeling of being suddenly flat—spiritually—as a flourishing lawn might feel when a new roller goes over it. It improves the looks of the lawn. That it didn't have the same effect on me I noticed when I caught myself in the chimneypiece glass. What a dim little colorless dib of a woman I was! And how particularly dim and colorless a dib I must look beside Lizzie.

I got my supper, feeling aggrieved. I had never before accused fate of being unfair when it forgot to make me pretty. But now I felt hurt, meanly discriminated against. It wasn't just to give one woman shining soulful eyes, set deep under classic brows, and another small gray-green ones that said nothing and grew red in a high wind. It wasn't a square deal.

Yesterday afternoon Betty turned up and found the invalid sitting in my steamer chair looking at

the juniper bush. Betty had never spoken to her before and they talked amicably, Mrs. Ferguson visibly thawing. I left them, for I want Betty to know her and help her of her own free will, want to eliminate myself as the middleman.

I was in the kitchenette, getting tea again, when Betty came to the door and hissed her impressions in a stage whisper.

"Why didn't you tell me she was so charming?"
Business with the kettle.

"She's one of the sweetest creatures I ever met."
Business with the hot water.

"I don't know why I ever thought she looked theatrical. She must have had on somebody else's clothes. She's a Madonna—those eyes and that sad far-away look."

Business with the toast.

Betty was so interested that she got into the kitchenette with me. The congestion was extreme, especially as she takes up so much room and is so hard. You can't squeeze by her or flatten her against walls—you might as well try to flatten a Corinthian column. I had to feel round her for cups and plates, engirdle her glistening and pros-

perous bulk and grope about on the shelves behind her.

"It's absurd of her fooling about with this music. She ought to marry. Has she any serious admirer?"

"Wouldn't any woman who looked like that have serious admirers? Betty, I can't find the cups. Would you mind moving an inch or two?"

"I wouldn't mind at all if there was an inch or two to move in to. When you have a kitchen like this you're evidently expected to hire your maid by measure. Who's her admirer?"

"Oh, every man in the house."

"Are any of them possible?"

I pried her back from the stove and inserted myself between her and it, feeling like a flower being pressed in the leaves of a book.

"No, not very possible."

"I'll have to see what I can do."

As I poured the water on the tea I couldn't help saying over my shoulder:

"There's Mr. Albertson. He's still unclaimed in the 'Found' Department."

Mr. Albertson hadn't loved me at first sight and Betty feels rather sore about it. She drew a deep

breath, thereby crushing me against the front of the stove.

"No," she said consideringly. "He won't do. He's too old and too matter-of-fact. Besides, I want him for one of the Geary girls, my second cousins, who live up in the Bronx and make shoe bags. I'm not sure which he'll like best, so to-morrow night I'm having them both to dine with him."

Then we had tea and Betty's good impression increased. She went away whispering to me on the stairs that she was quite ready to tide Miss Harris over her difficulties and help her when she had decided what she wanted to do.

XIII

THE weather is fine and we are all recuperating. I must confess the physical and spiritual storm of the last six weeks has rather laid me waste. I haven't felt so much in so many ways since—well, my high water mark was the last year of my married life and that's getting to be a faded canvas. The metaphor is somewhat mixed, but if I draw attention to it it can pass. I'm like that letter-writing English woman who couldn't spell, and when she was doubtful about a word always underlined it and if it was wrong it passed for a joke.

We sit about a good deal in my front room and late in the afternoon Lizzie's admirers drop in. The doctor, by the way, is one of them. He says he's still interested in "the case," poor young man. Lizzie greets them with wistful softness and seems as indifferent to their homage as if they were pictures hanging on the wall. I talk to them, and while we talk we are acutely conscious of her, singularly dominated by her compelling presence.

In all the change in her that quality is as strong as ever. I do not yet know what it is that makes her the focusing point of everybody's attention, but that she is, nobody who has lived in this house could deny. I believe actresses are trained to "take the stage and hold it," but Lizzie has the faculty as a birthright. It is not her looks; I have seen hundreds of women who were as handsome as she and had no such ascendancy. It is not the high-handed way she imposes her personality upon every one, because she doesn't do that any more. It is not her serene self-absorption, her unconscious ignoring of *your* little claims to be a person of importance. It's something so powerful no one can escape it, and so subtle no one can define it—some sort of magnetic force that puts her always in the center, makes her presence felt like an unescapable sound or a penetrating light. Wherever she is she is "it." "Where the MacGregor sits there is the head of the table."

Wednesday afternoon in the slack hours—the rush hours are from five to seven, when the men come home from business—Mrs. Stregazzi, the eldest small Stregazzi and Mr. Berwick dropped in. They had just heard of her illness and came to make in-

quiries. Berwick explained this because Mrs. Stregazzi couldn't. In a large, black lynx turban that looked like Robinson Crusoe's hat, and a long plush coat, she dropped on the end of the sofa tapping her chest in explanatory pantomime and fetching loud breaths from the bottom of her lungs.

Berwick looked morosely at her, then explained: "It's cigarettes—cuts her wind."

"It's my new corset," Mrs. Stregazzi shot out between gasps, "and your stairs."

The small Stregazzi, a little pale girl of ten, eyed her mother for a considering moment, then apparently satisfied with her symptoms, sat down on the prie-dieu and heaving a deep sigh, folded her hands in her lap and assumed a patient expression.

Lizzie's illness disposed of, the conversation turned—no, jumped, leaped, sprang—into that world of plays and concerts in which they had their beings. Mrs. Stregazzi, though still having trouble with her "wind," launched forth into a description of the concert tour she and Berwick were to take through New England. Berwick had made a hit at Lizzie's concert and he'd "got his chance at last."

I sat aside and marveled at her. She must have

been forty years old and she looked as weather-beaten as if, for twenty of the forty years, she had been the figurehead of a ship. But vigor and enthusiasm breathed from her. With the Robinson Crusoe hat slipped to one side of her head and the new corsets emitting protesting creaks as she swayed toward me, she gasped out the route, the terms, the programs, then dabbing at the little girl with her muff, exclaimed:

"And the kids are going to stay with mommer in the Bronx. Mrs. Drake, I've got the cutest little flat at One Hundred and Sixty-ninth Street. Wish you'd go up there some day and you'll see the best pair of children and the grandest old lady in Manhattan."

Berwick growled an assent and Miss Stregazzi, with her air of polite patience, filled in while her mother caught her breath.

"Grandma's seventy-two. She used to sing in the opera chorus, but she's got too old."

Mrs. Stregazzi nodded confirmation, her eyes full of pride.

"That's the way she pulled me along and got my education. Didn't let go of the rudder till I could take hold. Now I do it. It's been a struggle, took

me into vaudeville, where I met Stregazzi and had my troubles, but they're over now. I'm back where I belong and mommer can rest, blessed old soul. I keep them pretty snug, don't I, Dan?"

Berwick gave a second growl and then the conversation swung back to the inevitable topic. I felt as if I were on a scenic railway on a large scale, being rushed perilously along with wild drivings through space, varied by breathless stoppages in strange towns. I never heard so much geography since my school-days or so much scandal since I came to the age when I could listen to my elders. Names I knew well and names I'd never heard jostled one another in those flying sentences, and the quarrels! *and* the divorces! AND the love-affairs! I looked uneasily at the little girl and caught her in the act of yawning. In proof of her grandmother's good training she concealed her mouth with a very small hand in a very dirty white glove. Her mother ended a graphic account of the trials of a tertium quid on the road:

"And he pulled a kodak from under his coat and snapped them just in the middle of the kiss. *That* divorce wasn't contested."

The little girl, having accomplished her yawn,

dropped her hand and said without interest, but as one who feels good manners demand some sort of comment:

"Whose divorce?"

"No one you know, honey. A lady I toured with two seasons ago."

Lizzie and Berwick listened. I had never heard him do anything else. Before I came to live here if I had been told of the excellence of his vocal performance and then seen him I would have shaken my head and said: "That's not the man." A winter at Mrs. Bushey's has taught me that the artist does not have a brand upon his brow like Cain.

His listening was of a glowering unresponsive kind; Lizzie's was all avid attention. It was the first time since her illness that she had shown any animation. A faint color came into her face, now and then she halted Mrs. Stregazzi's flow of words with a sharp question. The projected tour was the thing that absorbed her. She kept pulling Mrs. Stregazzi out of the scandals back to it. There was no envy in her interest. It was to me extremely pathetic, she, the failure, speeding Berwick on his way to success. As might have been expected he was stolidly indifferent to it, but I was amazed to see that Mrs. Stregazzi, whom I was beginning to like, was

untouched or was too engrossed in her own affairs to notice anything else.

Outside at the head of the staircase she paused, and giving a glance at the closed door, said in a lowered voice:

“Where’s Masters?”

Berwick had gone on ahead, the little girl with her arm hooked over the banister was slowly descending. Mrs. Stregazzi’s eye, holding mine, was intelligent and questioning. I saw that she knew and took it for granted that I did.

“He doesn’t come any more. They’ve had a difference—a quarrel, I think.”

“Left her!” She raised her painted eyebrows, and compressing her lips, looked down the stairs and emitted a low “Umph!”

A world of meaning was in that sound, a deep understanding pity.

“I thought he’d do it,” she said, as if speaking to herself. “She couldn’t hold him the way things were going.”

She stood musing, her head slightly drooped. The Robinson Crusoe hat changed its angle and slid down over her forehead. When the fur interfered with her vision she arrested its progress, ramming it violently back.

"I guess she feels pretty bad," she ruminated, still with the effect of thinking aloud. "That man's got a terribly taking way with women."

I felt very uncomfortable. If it was unnecessary to contradict her it was also unnecessary to admit her charges by receiving them in silence. I changed the subject:

"She says she'll never sing again. It's very unfortunate."

Mrs. Stregazzi harpooned the hat with an enormously long pin, tipped by a diamond cluster.

"Never sing again—oh, rats!"

She grimaced as she charged with the pin through a series of obstructions.

"Don't you be afraid, dearie. She'll sing—she can't help it."

"But she's positive about it. She insists."

"Does she?" She shook her head, testing the solidity of the anchorage. "She'll be back singing before the spring. *You* don't know, but it's in her blood. We can't keep off, none of us. And *she!* Just wait. That's all she's made for."

The little Stregazzi had come to an end of her adventure against the newel post. She lolled upon it, wiping the crevices with her fingers, then look-

ing at her gloves to see how much dirtier they were.

Her mother descended a step, paused, cogitated, then turned to me, frowning.

"I suppose he's done nothing for her?"

I saw she meant money. The astonishing rawness of it made me redden to my hair. She waited for my answer, blind apparently to the expression of anger which must have been as plain as my outraged blush.

"As to that—" I began haughtily.

"He hasn't. Well, I'll send her round fifty dollars to-morrow and if that's not enough drop me a line at mother's and I'll forward some more. This is the best contract I've ever had."

When I explained and tried to thank her for Lizzie she laughed.

"Oh, don't bother to tell her about it. It's all in the day's work. If you've got some rich woman interested in her so much the better. But, dearie," she laid her hand on mine resting on the banister, "don't you fret about her. *She'll* go back to the old stamping ground."

When I went back into the room Lizzie was sitting in the wicker chair gazing out of the window. She spoke without looking at me.

"Do you know what I feel like? As if it was night and I was on a ship going out to sea, and as if the land was getting smaller and smaller. I can just see the lights of houses and little towns twinkling in a line along the edge of the shore."

"Where's the ship going?" I asked.

"I don't know and I don't care," came her answer through the dusk.

A knock cut off my reply. It was Roger, dropped in for an hour before dinner. Lizzie rose and was for going, but I urged her to stay and she sank back in her chair, glad, poor soul, to be with us and escape the dreariness of her own thoughts. I lit the student lamp and he and I sat down by it with Lizzie near the window, the light falling across her skirts, the upper part of her dimly blocked out in shadows and the pale patches of her face and hands.

As usual, she said almost nothing and a selfish fear stirred in me that she was going to spoil our hour. It's hard for two people on intimate confidential terms, to have a gay spontaneous interview while a third sits dumb in a corner. I think Roger felt the irk of it at first. He did most of the talking and he did it to me. But as the time wore on I

noticed that he began to address himself more and more to her. He seemed unconscious of it and it set me wondering. Was he—a man not susceptible to personal influences—going to feel that queer magnetic draw? It interested me so much that I forgot to follow what he said and watched him, and there was no doubt about it—he *did* keep turning toward the window, where he could see nothing but a motionless shape and the indistinct oval of a face.

The conversation resolved itself into a monologue, two mute ladies and a talking man.

Roger really did feel it; Roger, who would hardly listen to me when I told him about her in the restaurant. It showed what a force she possessed, and my fancy dwelt on it till I began to see it as a visible thing stretching from her and reaching out toward him. It was an uncanny idea, but it obsessed me, and Roger's voice sunk to a rumbling bass murmur as I tried to picture what it might look like—a thin steady ray like a search-light, or a quivering thread of vibrating air, or long clutching tentacles such as an octopus has, or a spectral arm of gigantic size like the one Eusapia Pallidino conjured out of shape when “the conditions were favorable.” The cessation of his voice broke my

imaginings and I was rather glad of it. Next time I see him I'm going to tell him about them and ask him which of the collection it felt most like.

I wrote all this a week ago, and reading it over to-night it seems strange that I was only amused, strange by contrast with the way I feel about the same thing now. It's not that there's any difference, or that anything has gone wrong, but—well, it was a joke then and it doesn't seem to be a joke any more.

What's made the change was something that happened here this afternoon. It's nothing at all, but it disturbed me. I hate to think it did. I hate to write it did. I hate to have the suspicious petty side of me come up and look at me and say: "I'm still here. You can't get rid of me. I'm bound up with the rest of you and every now and then I break loose."

If I wasn't a foreboding simpleton who had had her nerve shaken by bad luck I'd simply laugh. And instead of doing that I feel like a cat on the edge of a pond with a stone tied around its neck, and I can't sleep. I put out the light and went to bed and here I am up again, wrapped and slippers, writing it out. If I put it down in black and white,

see it staring up at me in plain words, it will fall back into its proper place. An insignificant thing—a nonsensical thing—the kind of thing you tell to your friends at a lunch as a good story on yourself.

I was out with Betty and didn't get home till five. As I came up the stairs I heard voices on the top floor, just a low rise and fall, nothing distinguishing. Since her illness Lizzie keeps her sitting-room door open and I knew the voices were from there. I supposed one of the admirers was with her and went into my rooms and took off my things. Then I thought it would be nice to go up and make them tea. And I went up and it was Roger.

That's all.

Why should *that* keep me awake? Why all evening should it have kept coming up between me and the pages I tried to read? Aren't they both my friends? Why can't they laugh and talk together and I be contented? And it was all so natural and explicable. Roger had come to *my* door and, finding me out, had gone up there to wait for me.

But—oh! Why should one woman be beautiful and one plain? Why should one charm without an effort, be lovely with a flower's unstudied grace, and another stand awkward, chained in a stupid

reserve, caught in a web of self-consciousness, afraid of being herself? Why is Lizzie Harris as she is and I as I am? I can't write any more, I don't get anywhere. I know it's all right. I *know* it, but—something keeps me awake.

XIV

IT'S two weeks to-day since that night when I couldn't sleep. It's been a horrible two weeks—a sickening, disintegrating two weeks. My existence has been dislocated, thrown wide of its bearings, as if the world had taken a sudden wild revolution, whirled me through space, and I had come up dizzy and bewildered, still in the old setting, but with everything broken and upside down.

It began with that visit of Roger to Lizzie's sitting-room. The morning after I felt humiliated, utterly ashamed of myself. It's no new thing for me to be a fool. I permit myself that luxury. But to be a mean-spirited, suspicious fool was indulging myself too far. I saw Lizzie and she spoke about Roger, simply and sweetly, and my folly grew to a monumental size, beneath which I was crushed. And my dread faded as the horror of a nightmare fades when the morning comes, with the sun and the sounds of every day.

I have heard people say that these moments of

relief in a period of anxiety are all that enable one to bear the strain. I don't think that's true. Alterations of stress and serenity tear one to pieces. If you're going to be put on the rack it's better to have no reprieve. Then your mind accepts it, gets accustomed to it and you tune up your nerves, screw your courage to the sticking place and march forward with the calm of the hopeless.

On Sunday afternoon—that was yesterday—Roger and I were to have tea with Mrs. Ashworth. He came earlier than I expected, wanting to take a walk with me before we went there. Lizzie was in my sitting-room, also Miss Bliss, picking over the last box of chocolates contributed by the count. Miss Bliss was not dressed for receiving—instead of the kimono and the safety pin she wore the Navajo blanket, and when she saw him she gave a cry that would have done credit to Susanna when she discovered the elders. I would have seen the humor of it—the model who had posed for the altogether in abject confusion at being caught huddled to the chin in a blanket as thick as a carpet—had I not had all humor stricken from me by the sight of Roger in the doorway. The cry had halted him. He evidently had no idea what had caused it. His eyes swerved

from Miss Bliss to sweep the room in a quick questioning glance. When it touched Lizzie something shot up in it—the question was answered. Miss Bliss made her escape without anybody noticing her, and I heard about the walk and went into the back room to get my outdoor things.

I have explained how the kitchenette and bathroom are a connecting passage between the two larger rooms of the suite. I came back through them, and having left the sitting-room door open, could see at the end of the little vista Roger and Lizzie by the table. As once before I had stopped to watch them, I stopped now, not smilingly this time, but furtively, guiltily.

They were talking together. To watch wasn't enough—I had to hear and I stole forward, stepping lightly over the bathroom rug and half closed the door. Standing against it, I listened. Heaven knows the conversation was innocent enough. She was telling him about a bracelet she wore that belonged to some of those Spanish people she was descended from. I suddenly felt as if I was looking through a keyhole, and had stretched out my hand to shut the door when a silence fell. Then all the acquired decencies of race and breeding left me. I

pushed the door open a crack and peered in. She had taken the bracelet off and given it to him and he was turning it about, studying it while she watched him.

"I've been told it's quite valuable as an antique," she said. "Do you suppose it really is?"

"I don't know about the antique, but I should think it might have some value. The design's very unusual," he answered, and handed it back to her.

She clasped it on her arm, and as she did so, her head down-bent, they were silent, his eyes on her face.

I had never seen him look at any woman that way, but I had seen other men. It is an unmistakable look, the mute confession of that passion which makes the proudest man a slave.

I closed the door and leaned against it. For a moment I felt sick and frightened—frightened at what I'd seen and frightened of myself.

Presently I came into the room and found them still talking of the bracelet. And then Roger and I started for our walk, leaving Lizzie alone.

He suggested that we go round the reservoir and I agreed, stepping along silently beside him. It was a raw bleak afternoon, no sun, everything gray. The

streets were sprinkled with sauntering Sunday people who had a detached dark aspect against the toneless monochrome. They looked as if they were moving in front of painted scenery. The park was wintry, sear boughs patterned against the sky, blurs of denuded bushes, expanses of hoary grass. Along the roadway the ruts were growing crumbly with the frost, and little spears and splinters of ice edged the puddles.

The reservoir shone a smooth steely lake, with broken groups of figures moving about it. Some of them walked briskly, others loitered, red and chilled. All kinds of people were making the circuit of that body of confined and conquered water—Jews and Gentiles, simple and gentle, couples of lovers, companies of young men, family parties with the children getting in the way and being shoved to one side, stiff stout women like Betty trying to lose a few pounds. On the west side vast apartment-houses made a rampart, pierced with windows like a line of forts.

We commented on the cold and Roger quickened the pace, sweeping me along the path's outer edge. Presently he began to talk of Lizzie, leaning down to catch my answers, keen, impatient, straining to

hear me and not lose a word. He is a tall man and I am a small woman and I bobbed along at his shoulder trying to keep up with him, trying to sound bright and interested, and feeling myself a meager unlovely body carrying a sick and shriveled heart.

"No, she'll never sing again," I said, in answer to a question. "She seems to have made up her mind to that."

He swung his cane, cutting at the head of a dry weed.

"That's a good thing."

"Why is it a good thing?"

"Oh, because," he dropped a pace behind me to let a straggling, red-nosed family pass and I craned my head back to hear him. "She's not fitted for that kind of life. It's not for women like her."

"Why?"

He was beside me again.

"She's too-er-too fine, too delicately organized."

I didn't answer. Knowing what I did, what was there for me to say?

"The women to succeed in that have got to be aggressive, fight their way like men. She never could do it."

I again had no response and we fared on, I trying

to keep up, hungry for his next word and fearful of what it might be. It came in a voice that had an artificial note of carelessness.

"What's become of that man you told me about, that man we saw in the hall one night when you first went up there?"

"I don't know what's become of him."

"You haven't seen him lately?"

"No, not for some weeks."

There was another pause. I wasn't going to help him. It was part of my torment to wait and see how he was going to get the information he wanted, to see Roger, uneasy and jealous, feeling round a subject, not daring to be frank. When he could wait no longer his voice showed a leashed and guarded impatience.

"You led me to believe he was a great friend of hers."

"He *was*."

"*Was?* Is he so no longer?"

"No, they've had a quarrel of some sort."

"Umph."

Again a silence. We passed a trio of Jewish girls in long coats who looked me over solemnly with large languorous eyes.

"He was a horrible-looking bounder," he said.

"He was what he looked," I answered.

"Then how," he exclaimed, unable to restrain the question, "*could* he have been a friend of hers?"

He was embarrassed and ashamed, and to hide it cut vigorously at the dead weeds with his cane. Through this childish ruse his desire to know was as plain as if he had expressed it in words of one syllable.

"He was her sponsor. She was a sort of speculation of his; he was training her for the operatic stage. I've told you all this before."

"Yes, I know, but—well, it's a reasonable explanation."

He had been speaking with his face turned from me, his eyes following the slashings of the cane. Now he lifted his head and looked across to the apartment-houses. The movement, the brightened expression, the tone of his voice, told of a lifted weight. He had heard it all before, but then he hadn't cared. Now, caring, he wanted to hear it again, to be assured, to have all uncertainty appeased.

"It was a business arrangement," he said. "Yes, I remember, you told me some time ago."

This time I didn't answer because a thought had

surged up in my mind that had put everything else out—I ought to tell him! He was under Lizzie's spell and Lizzie was as unknown to him as if she had been an inhabitant of Mars. He was charmed by a creature of his own creating, an ideal built up on her beauty and her weakness. Did he know her as she really was he would have recoiled from her as if she had been one of the sirens from whom Ulysses fled. She was the opposite of everything he imagined her to be, of everything he held sacred in woman. John Masters had been her lover. It was appalling, monstrous. *I must tell him.*

And then I thought of her and how she had confessed her secret and I had said I wouldn't tell.

The impulse to reveal it for his sake and the impulse to keep silent for hers, began to struggle in me. I became a battle-ground of two contending forces. The desire to tell was strongest; it was like a live thing fighting to get out. It filled me, crushed every other thought and impulse, swelled up through my throat and pressed on my lips. I bit them and walked on with fixed eyes. As if from a distance I heard Roger's voice:

"From what you said he must be an impossible cad. I knew she couldn't have had him for a friend.

Poor girl, having to associate with a man like that because business demanded it. What a rotten existence."

I had to tell.

"Roger," I said, hearing my voice sound hoarse.

"Yes."

I felt suddenly dizzy and halted. Like a vision I saw Lizzie lying on the sofa, whispering to me that Masters had left her. The inside of my mouth was so dry I had difficulty in articulating. I stammered:

"Wait. I can't walk so fast."

He was very apologetic.

"Oh, Evie, dear, I beg your pardon. You should have told me before. I am so used to walking alone that I forgot."

We moved at a slower pace. The view that had receded from my vision came back. My face was damp and the icy air blowing on it was good. The spiritual fight went on, with my heart beating and beating like a terrible warlike drum urging me on. Now was the time for him to know, before it was too late. We were half-way round—I could get it over before we'd made the full circuit. And then I'd be at peace, would have done a hideous thing

that I ought to do. Now—now! I fetched up a breath from the bottom of my lungs. He spoke:

“That’s why she oughtn’t to go on with this singing. It brings a woman into contact with people that she shouldn’t meet.”

Each sentence seemed to point my way clearer. If he’d had any doubts, hadn’t been so completely without suspicion. But to hear him talk this way! I tried to make a beginning with Lizzie’s whispering voice getting in the way. I couldn’t find a phrase, nothing came but blunt brutal words. There was a moment when I thought I was going to cry these out, scream at him, “Roger, she was that man’s mistress!” Then everything blurred and I caught hold of the fence.

I was pulled back to reality by the quick concern of his voice.

“Evie, are you ill?”

I suppose I looked awful. His face told me so; he was evidently scared. I realized I couldn’t go on with it, must wait till a better time. The thought quieted me and my voice was almost natural, though my lips felt loose and shaky.

“I’m tired, I think.”

“You’re as white as death. Why didn’t you tell

me? Good heavens, what an idiot I am not to have noticed before."

Two men and a child stopped. The intent and glassy interest of their eyes helped to pull me together. I let go of the fence and put my hands, trembling as if with an ague, into my muff. Roger gave the trio a savage look, before which they quailed and slunk reluctantly away, watching us over their shoulders.

"Come," he said commandingly, and pulled my hand through his arm. "We'll go to the Eighty-sixth Street entrance and get a cab."

We walked forward, arm in arm, and I gradually revived. I couldn't come to any decision now. I wasn't fit. I must think it over by myself. My forces began to come back and the feeling of my insides falling down into my shoes went away. Roger was in a state of deep contrition and concern, bending down to look into my face, while I held close to his arm. People stared at us. I think they took us for lovers. They must have thought the gentleman had singular taste to be in love with such a sorry specimen of a woman.

When we reached the Eighty-sixth Street entrance

he wanted to take me home, but I insisted on going to Mrs. Ashworth's. I couldn't bear the thought of my own rooms. Alone there, I would go back to that appalling subject and I couldn't stand any more of it now. We got into a taxi and sped away through the Sunday quietness of the city, sweeping through Columbus Circle and then down to Fifth Avenue. I leaned against the window watching the long line of vehicles. I was empty of sensation, gutted like a burned-out house, and that purposeful procession caught and carried my attention, exercising on my spent being a hypnotic attraction. Roger, finding me inclined for silence, sat back in his corner and lighted a cigarette. He had accepted my explanations in perturbed good faith. We sped on this way, with the glittering rush that swept by my window, lulling me into a sort of exhausted torpor.

The usual adjusting of myself to Mrs. Ashworth's environment was not necessary. I harmonized better than I had ever done before. I am sure every red corpuscle in my blood was pale, and if, on my former visits I had instinctively moved softly, now I did so because I was too limp to move any other way. If refinement, as some people think, is merely

an evidence of depleted vitality, I ought to have appeared one of the most refined females of my day and generation.

Betty was there and Harry Ferguson, Harry obviously ill at ease. I know just how he felt—as if he was too big for the chairs, and when he spoke it sounded like a stevedore. I used to feel that my manner of speech oscillated between that of the cow-girl in a western melodrama and the heroine of one of my favorite G. P. R. James' romances, who, when she went out riding, described herself as “ascending her palfrey.” Betty, I noticed, escaped the general blight. She is too nervelessly unconscious; wouldn't be bothered trying to correspond with anybody's environment.

I sat in a Sheraton chair and watched Mrs. Ashworth's hands as she made tea. The prominent veins interested me. I have heard that they are an indication of blue blood, and though they are not pretty, they suit Mrs. Ashworth as everything about her does. Her hands move deftly and without hurry and she never interrupts conversation with queries about sugar and cream. A maid, who was neither young nor old, pretty nor ugly, an unobtrusive,

perfectly articulated piece of household machinery, made noiseless flittings with plates. Mrs. Ashworth does not like men servants. I suppose they are clumsy and by their large bulky shapes and gruff voices, disturb the rhythm of that beautiful, mellow, subdued room.

Presently I was sipping my tea and looking at Harry Ferguson trying to sip his in a perfect way. I knew that he didn't like tea, would have preferred a Scotch highball, but didn't dare to ask for it. He spilled some on the saucer, then dropped the spoon and had to grovel for it, coming up red and guilty, looking as if he had been caught in some shameful act. I could hear him telling Betty on the way home that it was nonsense taking him to tea—why the devil hadn't she dropped him at the club. And Betty, making vague consoling sounds while she studied the appointments of passing motors.

Then suddenly they began to talk of Lizzie Harris and I forgot Mrs. Ashworth's veins and Harry's embarrassments. Betty explained her to our hostess, and I sat looking into my cup and listening. It was what might have been called the popularized version of a complicated subject—Lizzie as a sad and chas-

tened neophyte who had failed in a great undertaking and been shattered. Mrs. Ashworth was softly sympathetic. She turned to me.

"Roger tells me that she is a charming person and very handsome."

I agreed.

"Pretty tough," Harry growled. Then abashed by the rudeness of his tone, cleared his throat and stared at Roger Clements the Signer as if he had never noticed him before.

"I was wondering," said Betty, "if she could teach singing. You know she has nothing."

I became aware that Betty had not come for nothing to sit on a Sheraton chair and drink tea. As usual she had "a basic idea". So had Mrs. Ashworth—two entirely dissimilar minds had converged to the same point.

"Roger and I were talking about her the other evening," said Roger's sister, "and I suggested that there are a great many women teachers and their standing is good, I hear."

On the subject of the wage-earning woman Mrs. Ashworth is not well informed. I fancy she has admitted the fact that there must be wage-earning women with reluctance. It would be better for them

all to be in homes with worthy husbands. But it has penetrated even to Mrs. Ashworth's sheltered corner that these adjuncts are not always found.

"We could get her pupils," said Betty with determination—she felt Mrs. Ashworth's quality sufficiently to subdue it—"pupils among the right sort of people. And you and I, and some others I know, could give her a proper start."

They talked on outlining a career for Lizzie as a singing teacher of the idle rich. They would put her on her feet, they would make her more than self-supporting. Their combined social influence extended over that narrow belt which passes up through Manhattan Island like a vein of gold. Lizzie would be placed in a position to tap the vein.

If I had suddenly hurled the truth into that benevolent conspiracy, what a transformation! All the interest now centered round that pitiful figure would dissolve like a morning mist and float away to collect about something more deserving and understandable. If I should represent her case as sufficiently desperate they would give her money, but that much more valuable thing they were giving now—the hand extended in fellowship—would be withdrawn as from the contact of a leper.

In *their* case I felt no obligation to tell. What they were doing would not hurt them and it was necessary for her. I came back to the old starting point—to help her, to get her back to where she ought to be, I must deceive and go on deceiving. Unquestionably something was wrong with my world. If I could only have lived in Pippa's or fitted Pippa's philosophy to mine! But could anybody? I wish Robert Browning was in my place, sitting here to-night by the student lamp, half dead trying to decide what is the right thing to do.

Oh, I'm so tired—and I can't get away from it, I can't stop thinking of it. Why did they ever meet? Why did I go down-stairs that afternoon and bring him up? Why did a man—cold and indifferent—suddenly catch fire as he had done? Why couldn't I be left in peace? Why was it he, my man, who had come to bring me back to life and joy? Why? why? why?

XV

THINGS have been in a state of quiescence for the last few days and then, yesterday, there was a new development.

When I say things have been quiescent, I mean on the outside. In the inside I have been as far from quiescent as I ever was in my life. That last year with Harmon wasn't nearly so bad as this. It was just my own affair then. When your heart is breaking you can sit quiet and listen to it cracking and it doesn't matter to anybody but yourself. It's just a chance of fate that you should be a little floating particle full of pain. The world goes on the same and you don't matter.

But when other people's destinies are tangled up in yours, when you have to decide what's best for *them* with your reason and your inclination pulling different ways—that's having trouble for your shadow in the daytime and your bedfellow at night. If I was an indifferent spectator who could stand off and study the situation with an impartial eye, I

could come to a just decision. It's trying to lift myself out of it and be fair that's so agonizing—it's being afraid that I may tell for my own sake, betray Lizzie to save myself.

There are strong, clear-minded people who could think straight to a conclusion, take the responsibility and act, then eat their dinner and go peacefully to bed. I'm not one of them. I've always been the kind who sees both sides and wavers, afraid if they champion one they may be unjust to the other. Last night I was thinking of the girl in *The Master Builder* when she tells the hero that he hasn't "a robust conscience." Then I thought of John Masters and how he broke the fetters of his own forging. They were both right. I can see it and I admit it but I never would have had the courage to do as they did. To hurt and hurt for yourself—no, I couldn't.—But I must get on to the new development.

Betty came yesterday afternoon and took me for a drive. Under normal circumstances this is one of my greatest treats. To be with Betty is always good, and to watch the glory of New York on parade while Betty explains charitable schemes or gives advice on the best mode of life for a widow

of moderate means, has been one of the joys of the winter. Then there were small individual pleasures that I silently savored as we glided along: the springy softness of the cushions, the fine feel of the fur rug, wonderful clothes in show-windows, and wonderful clothes out of show-windows making beautiful ladies more beautiful. And there was an experience that never lost its zest, full of a thrilling significance: when we all stopped, a block of vehicles from curb to curb, and let the foot passengers pass. It assured me we were still a democracy. If we had lived in the days before the French Revolution we'd have gone dashing along and the foot passengers would have had to dodge our proud wheels at the peril of their lives. Now we wait on their convenience. I have seen the whole traffic drawn up while a tramp shuffled across, while we millionaires—I am always a millionaire when I ride with Betty—sat back and were patient. I have always hoped Thomas Jefferson was somewhere where he could look down and see.

Yesterday all joy and interest were gone from it. Odd how our inward vision gives the color to externals; how, when our spirit is darkened, the sun gets dim and the sky less blue. We paint the world

ourselves. I remember after my mother died that for a long time all nature looked gray and my close cozy intimacy with it was suddenly gone. But, that's another story.

Betty lifted me out of a depressed silence by a suggestion; she said it had been germinating in her mind since Sunday. Wouldn't it be better, instead of starting her as teacher, to send Lizzie Harris to Europe for several years to go on with her studies?

"She oughtn't to give up all she's done, and teaching singing when you've expected to be a prima donna yourself, isn't a very exhilarating prospect."

It was so like Betty! Always thinking of something just a little bit better. Mrs. Ashworth never would have got beyond the teaching and it had taken Roger and Betty to get her that far. I straightened up and felt that the afternoon was brightening.

"It's too early for her to throw it up," Betty went on. "She hasn't given it a fair trial. She gets one setback and an illness and then says it's over. I don't believe it is and I want to give her another chance."

"But"—to keep square with myself I had to bring up difficulties—"she declares she'll never sing again."

"Oh, rubbish! We all declare we'll never do things again. Harry and I had a fight last autumn and I declared I'd never speak to him again, and I was speaking—and glad to do it—in two hours."

"Your husband's not your profession."

"No, my dear," said Betty with a smile, "but my marriage is, and being a successful wife is not so very different from being a successful prima donna. I tell you this is all nonsense about her refusing to go on. She's cut out for the stage. The opera bores me to death. I'd never go if it wasn't for my two strings of pearls and the prohibitive price of the box. But I really think, if she was in it, I could stand even *Tristan and Isolde*."

I looked out of the window—wonderful how the gay animation of the street had come back. And it was Betty's idea and Betty was generally right.

"I could suggest it to her," I said.

"That's exactly what I intend you to do, and as soon as possible. I hate things dangling on. Make it perfectly plain to her: I'll undertake the whole matter, give her as long a time as she needs with any teacher she chooses. And don't you see if she's taken out of this place where she's had the failure and been so discouraged, she'll take a fresh hold?"

It'll be a new start in new surroundings, and she'll feel like a new person."

The most sensitively self-questioning woman must have admitted the force of the argument. If Betty's previous efforts to play the god in the machine had been ill-inspired, this time she redeemed herself.

"Very well," I said cheerfully. "As Mrs. Stre-gazzi would say, I'll 'take it up with her' this evening."

Betty took me home and I ran up the stairs. I was like a child hastening to impart joyful tidings. Lizzie was in her kitchen occupied over household affairs. A glass lamp turned too high, stood on a shelf, the delicate skein of smoke rising from its chimney, painting a dusky circle on the ceiling. The gas, also too high, rushed from its burner in a torn flame that leaped and hissed like a live thing caught and in pain. Lizzie, being well enough to attend to her own needs, the place was once more in chaos. I turned down the lamp and the gas, shut off the sink faucet, which was noisily dribbling, and lifting a pie from the one wooden chair, put it on the ice-box and sat down to impart my news.

She listened without interruption, leaning against the wash-tub.

"Well?" I said, as she didn't speak. My voice was sharp, her silence got on my nerves.

"To go to Europe and study," she said dreamily, "that's been the dream of my life."

"Well, your dream's come true, Lizzie!" I jumped up ready to take her in my arms and hug her. "You can go as soon as your trunk's packed."

She shook her head.

"It's too late now."

"Too late!" I fell back from her, unbelieving, aghast—"What do you mean?"

Her face bore an expression of sad renouncement.

"The dream's over, I'm awake."

"You don't mean to say you're going to refuse."

She gravely nodded.

"But, Lizzie, think, listen. You don't realize what a chance this is. Any teacher you may choose, for as long as you like, all worry about money over. I know Mrs. Ferguson, she's never attempted anything that she hasn't carried through—"

I launched forth into a eulogy of Betty, and branched from that into a list of the advantages accruing to the object of her bounty, holding them up, viewing them from all sides like choice articles I

was offering for sale. I was eloquent, I was persuasive, I introduced irrefutable arguments. Any other woman standing with reluctant feet on the verge of such an enterprise, would have ceased to be reluctant and leaped toward the future I pictured.

But Lizzie was immovable. I saw my words flying off her as if they were bird-shot striking on an armored cruiser. She had only one reason for refusing but that was beyond the power of words to shake—she had given up her career as a singer; nothing would ever make her return to it.

I sank down on the wooden chair, my head on my breast, despair claiming me. She went about the kitchen in a vague incompetent way picking things up and putting them down, then suddenly wanting them and forgetting where they were. As she trailed about she drove home her refusal with a series of disconnected sentences, bubbles of thought rising to occasional speech. I didn't answer her, sitting crumpled on the chair—until she had refused, I hadn't realized how much I had hoped.

Presently she swept into the back room, carrying a pile of plates with the air of an empress bearing the royal insignia. I heard her setting them on

the dining-table and then a rattle of silver. She came back and hunted about, feeling on shelves and opening cupboard doors, then said, in the deep tones made for the great tragic rôles:

"Evie, there was a lemon pie somewhere around here. You're not sitting on it by any chance?"

Filled with misery I indicated the pie on the top of the ice-box. In the pursuit of her domestic duties she had thrown a dish-cloth over it. She removed the cloth, and picking up the pie, looked it over solicitously.

"You're going to sup with me to-night and eat this."

The bitter appropriateness of Lizzie feeding me on lemon pie pierced through my anguish—I laughed. I laughed with a loud strident note, leaning my head back against the wall and looking at the smoke mark on the ceiling. Lizzie, pie in hand, stood looking at me in majestic surprise.

"What are you laughing at?"

"My thoughts. They're very funny—you and I, sitting up here alone and carousing on lemon pie."

"We're not going to be alone. Mr. Clements is coming. I asked him to supper and when he looked uncertain tempted him by saying you'd be here."

Roger and I eating lemon pie, dispensed by Lizzie—now the gods were laughing, too.

"I can't come," I said sulkily.

She looked utterly dismayed, as if she had heard a piece of news too direful to believe. If it had been any one but Lizzie Harris I should have said she was going to cry.

"Not come! Why not?"

"Mightn't I have an engagement?"

"You haven't. I asked you if you had this morning."

"I have a headache."

She put the pie on the wash-tub with a distracted gesture, and began beseechingly, her head tilted toward her shoulder, eyes and mouth pleading:

"Ah, now, Evie, *don't* have a headache. The party was to be a surprise for you. I've been getting it together all afternoon. And I ordered the pie especially. *Please* feel well. Mr. Clements has been so good to me and I wanted to return his kindness and I knew he wouldn't enjoy it half so much if you weren't here."

I know every word was genuine. I believe she is still ignorant of Roger's feeling for her. One of the things I have often noticed about her is that

she seems unconscious of, or indifferent to, her attraction for men. I have never heard her speak of it or seen her show any pleasure in it. Small coquettes and flirts, the women who make a study of charming, can not hide their pride of conquest, love to recount the havoc they have wrought. There is none of that in Lizzie. Sometimes I have thought she is so used to admiration that she accepts it as a part of her life, like the sunshine or the rain. Roger, as "a kind man," is just lumped in with the count and the doctor and Mr. Hamilton. And with her blindness to other people's claims she makes no inquiry, takes no notice of the humbler romances of the rest of us. She has never said a word to me about Roger as *my* friend. If she has ever given it a thought she has ticketed him as just "a kind man" to me also.

I lay back in the wooden chair and stared at her with a haggard glance.

"Do you like Mr. Clements, Lizzie," I said solemnly.

She nodded, then reached for the pie and began touching its surface with the tip of a finger.

"Immensely. I don't see how any one could help it. He's so kind."

Her attention was concentrated on what she held. She scrutinized it as if it were a treasure in which she searched for a possible flaw.

"He's more than kind," I answered. Even in my misery I felt a tinge of irritation that she should accept Roger's homage as if he was of no more value than the count or the doctor.

"Of course he is," she replied. "He's so intellectual. And then he has such lovely manners. I think he's more of a gentleman than any man I've ever known."

I thought of Masters. Was she in her mind comparing them? If she was there was no sign of it in her face. She murmured a commendatory phrase of the pie, and holding it off on the palm of an outspread hand, carried it into the back room.

I sat on the wooden chair staring after her. Did she care for Roger? Was she going to transfer her incomprehensible affections to him? It was a hideous thought. She came back and swept about, collecting the feast, and my dazed eyes followed her. How could she do such a thing unless she was so lacking in a central core of character that she was nothing but the shell of a woman?

It was a queer scrappy meal, most of it sent round

from the delicatessen store on Lexington Avenue. Such as it was the hostess offered it with as smiling an aplomb as if Delmonico's head chef had produced it in an inspired moment. No qualm that her chief guest might not enjoy ham and beer disturbed her gracious serenity. Petronius Arbiter treating his emperor to a gastronomic orgy, could not have recommended the nightingale's tongues more confidently than Lizzie did the canned asparagus, bought at a discount.

That Roger enjoyed it was evident. I don't suppose he had ever been at a supper where the ladies waited and sometimes, when the plates ran short, washed them between courses. Lizzie's inexpertness caused continuous breaks in the progress of the feast —important items overlooked, consultations as to the proper order of the viands, an unexpected shortage of small silver. Before we had got to the canned asparagus, I found myself assuming the management. Roger rising and pursuing an aimless search for the beer opener, and Lizzie making rapid futile gropings for it in the backs of drawers and the bottoms of bowls, was distracting to my orderly sense. They couldn't find it anywhere. They had too much to say, got in each other's way, forgot to hunt

and stood laughing, while I took up the search and ran it to earth on a nail in the kitchen.

After that the party shifted its base entirely and became mine. They were glad to relinquish it to me, took their seats with the air of those who know an uncongenial task has found the proper hands. I directed it, grimly attentive, and it was not the least of my pain that I saw they thought I was pleased to do so. If I had ever done any one a deadly wrong he would have been avenged had he seen me—making things pleasant for Roger and Lizzie, ministering to their creature comfort, too engrossed in my labors to join in. I was the chaperon, I was the maiden aunt, I was Mrs. Grundy.

When we reached the last course I found that the coffee machine had not been emptied of the morning's dregs and took it into the kitchen, while Lizzie put the pie on the table. From my place at the sink I could see it, a foamy surface of beaten-egg, glistening against the white expanse of cloth. Lizzie was proud of her pie and refused my offer to cut it. She held the knife poised for a deliberating moment, then sliced carefully, while Roger watched from across the table and I from beside the sink. She cut a piece for me and put it at my place, then

one for Roger. Leaning from her seat she handed him the plate and he took it, the circle of porcelain joining their hands. Over it he looked at her with shining passion-lit eyes.

To me, watching from that squalid kitchen, their outstretched arms were symbolic of their attitude one to the other, the piece of pie, a love potion she was offering. It was "Isolde" holding out the cup to "Tristan". Probably any one reading this will laugh. Believe me, in that moment, I tasted the fulness of despair—that darkening of the dear bright world, that concentrating of all the pain one can feel into one consummate pang.

XVI

I AM convinced now. Roger loves her. Until that supper I had ups and downs—times when I felt unsure, hours when I argued myself into the belief that I was mistaken. But when I came down to my rooms that night my uncertainties were ended. As I lay in the dark I saw everything as clear as crystal. It seemed as if I was clairvoyant, caught up above myself, the whole situation visualized before me like a picture.

Since then there's been only one question—what ought I to do?

Apart from my own feeling for Roger—supposing he was only the friend he used to be—should I let him give his heart and his name to a woman, whom, if he knew the truth, he would put away from him like a leper? Every ideal and instinct that make up the sum of his being would revolt, if he knew about Lizzie and John Masters. I know this, I don't just think it because I want to. According to his code all women must be chaste and all men

honest, and if they're not, he doesn't want to have anything to do with them. It may not be generous, but that's not to the point. He is so made and so will remain. He has been kinder to me than any one in the world—kind and just, as far as he knew. Should I, who could prevent it, stand by and watch him—the illustration isn't flattering but it's apt—rushing toward the precipice like the Gadarene swine?

And then Lizzie is entirely unfitted to be the wife of such a man. She belongs to another world that he doesn't understand and couldn't tolerate. He would think the people she foregathers with were savages. He hasn't seen her with them, he doesn't know how blind she is to the niceties of manners and breeding that to him are essentials. I try to fit her into his environment, put her up in a niche beside Mrs. Ashworth—Lizzie, with her tempests, her careless insults, her impossible friends! Suppose there had never been any John Masters, that she was as pure as Diana, could she ever be tamed to the Clements' standard?

Memories of her keep coming up, throwing oranges out of the window, listening hungrily to Mrs. Stregazzi (fancy Mrs. Stregazzi at Mrs. Ashworth's tea table talking about her corsets and her

cigarettes!) facing Masters like an enraged lioness, weeping against his shoulder and pleading with him to come back. Good heavens, if no man had even touched her hand except in the clasp of friendship, she is not the woman for Roger. And she lived, willingly, proudly, without a twinge of conscience, with John Masters!

That's one side and here's the other:

Lizzie's happiness, Lizzie placed beyond all need, Lizzie the wife of a man so high-thinking and right-doing that everything in her that was fine must answer to his call. Under his influence she might change, become what he now imagines her to be. Women have done that often, grown to love the man they marry and molded themselves to his ideal. Have I the right to stand between her and such a future, bar the way to Eden, an angel with a flaming sword?

I can't.

In utter abandon she told me the story that I can now use against her. She trusted me and I answered her trust with a promise that I would never tell, unless she asked me to. It is true that she said she didn't care if I did tell. But does it matter what she said? Wouldn't I, if I used the permission given

in sickness of heart and body, be meaner than the meanest thing that crawls? Am I to buy my happiness at such a price?

I can't.

If she still had her career it would be different. I could see her going forward in it, certain it was the best thing for her. But her career is over. She is to settle down as a singing teacher, plod on patiently, watch others making for the goal that was once to be hers. She can't do it any more than she can fly.

If I thought that she was vicious, bad at heart, I would be certain I ought to tell. But with all her faults she is generous, kindly and honest. It's her chance—the one chance that comes to all of us. Is it my business to take it from her, to interfere, with my flaming sword, and say, "No, this is not for you. You have committed the woman's unpardonable sin. If you don't feel the proper remorse it will be my place to punish you, to shut you out from the possibilities of redemption. Whatever *you* may think about it, *I* think that you belong in the corral with the goats and I'm going to do all in my power to keep you there"?

I can't.

And so I go on, round and round like a squirrel in a cage. I wonder if the squirrel ever feels as I do.

They come in to see me and say I look ill. Roger is particularly solicitous, wants me to go south for a month with Mrs. Ashworth. I could no more leave this place, and the spectacle of his infatuation, than I could tell him what is making me hollow-eyed and wan.

One of the bitterest of my thoughts is that I know—an instinct tells me—he is really still fondest of me. I am and always will be the better woman for him, the one that in the storm and stress of a life's companionship, is his true mate. His feeling for Lizzie is a temporary aberration. He has been bewitched—La Belle Dame Sans Merci has him in thrall. Some day he will wake from the dream—and then? He will find Lizzie beside him, La Belle Dame Sans Merci directing the domestic régime, tactfully accommodating herself to his moods, taking the place of the undistinguished wife of a distinguished husband.

Oh—why do I write like this! It's low, contemptible, vile. I'm going to stop. I'm going to bow my head and say it's done and give up.

I wrote that two days ago, pressed the blotter over it and said to myself, "The squirrel has had enough. It's going to lie down in its cage."

To-night—it's past midnight and a big moon is shining on the back walls—I begin with a new pen on a fresh sheet to show how the squirrel didn't stop. Poor ridiculous, demented squirrel!

There is a sort of grotesque humor about it, I can stand off and laugh at myself.

This afternoon the count came in to see me with news. His people have sent for him to go back to Rome.

"Have you already learned the banking business as conducted in America?" I inquired. I'm not so sympathetic as I used to be but the count doesn't seem to notice it.

He took a cigarette and answered with deliberation:

"I have now, for four months, pasted letters in a book. It seems that I am to go on forever pasting letters in a book. I wrote it to my father and he sends me an answer saying, 'My son, you can paste letters in a book as well in Rome as in New York. Come back at once. I find this pasting too expensive!'"

I expressed fitting regrets at this paternal interference.

"It is with great sorrow that I leave," said the count sadly, "I have made many charming friends here."

He removed his cigarette and bowed to me. I inclined my head. Our mutual lack of spirits did not prevent us from being extremely polite.

"You, dear madame, have been sweetly kind to the exile. I don't know what I should have done without your ever beautiful sympathy."

I made deprecating murmurs.

"A young man like myself, a romantic, must have a confidante, one who feels and understands, one who has lived." I bowed again in melancholy admission of the fact. "It will be hard to go."

He looked really troubled. His handsome warmly-tinted face wore an expression of gravity that made him seem much older. His eyes, usually alert and full of laughter, were wistfully dejected.

"I have loved her," he said quietly.

For the first time in our acquaintance it seemed to me that the count was speaking from that center of feeling that we call the heart. He appeared no

longer an irresponsible, almost elfish youth, but a man who, as he himself expressed it, had lived. I was impressed.

"Have you told her?" I asked.

He shook his head murmuring:

"I decide to and I put it off. It is too hard. I fear what I may say."

A sudden idea took possession of me. Writing it down in cold blood it sounds like the deranged fancy of a lunatic. At the moment when it came, I regarded it not only as a possible solution of all our difficulties, but as an inspiration. My only excuse is that self-preservation is the law of nature. I was drowning and I caught at a straw.

"Do you really love Lizzie Harris?" I asked in a voice tense to the trembling point.

"Very really."

"More than that other lady, the thin one who wore the fur dress?"

"Much more."

"More than any woman you have ever known?"

"A hundred times more."

We must have presented an absurdly solemn appearance, I planting my questions like a detective

administering the third degree, the count nodding automatically as he jerked out his answers, his eyes fixed on me with an almost fierce stare.

"Why don't you marry her?"

That was my inspiration. It seems to me the most inexplicable aberration that ever seized a sane woman—only for the moment I wasn't sane. One of the curious points about it was that I never thought of Lizzie at all, whether she would want him or not. All I saw was the count transformed into a genie, unexpectedly come to my aid. I make no doubt if she had shown reluctance I would have counseled him to kidnap her as his ancestors kidnaped the Sabine women.

His expression brought me back to sense. He was looking at me with a blank unbelieving surprise as if I had suggested something beyond the limits of human endeavor. If I had urged him to inaugurate a conspiracy against his king or an exploring party to the moon, he could not have appeared more astonished.

"Marry her!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, marry her. You love her, you've just said so."

"Most assuredly I do, to distraction."

"Then why do you look so surprised?"

"But marriage—me?" He laid a finger on his breast and tapped on the top button of his waistcoat, regarding me from beneath raised brows. His expression was that of an intelligent person who can not believe that he has heard aright. It made me angry.

"Yes, you. I could hardly be alluding to anybody else after what you've just said."

"But, my dear lady—" he sent a roving glance round the room as if hunting for some one who would explain, then came back to me. As he met my eyes he smiled, deprecatingly, almost tenderly, the smile with which maturity greets the preposterous antics of a child. "Is it a joke you make?"

"No, it is not," I answered, "and I don't see why you should think it was. When you love a person you marry them, don't you?"

"Alas, not always. I could never marry Miss Harris. She is not of my order."

"Order?" I was the one who ejaculated now.

"Exactly. Whomever I may love I only marry in my order."

My inspiration collapsed, pierced by this unexpected and unfamiliar word. For a moment we sat

regarding each other. I don't know how I looked but I don't think it could have been as abject as I felt or the count, who is one of the most amiable of youths, would have wanted to know what was the matter. If I had had my wits about me I should have pretended it was a joke but I was too ashamed and crushed to pretend anything. In the embarrassing pause I tried to smile, a feeble propitiatory smile, which he answered in kind, brightly and reassuringly. I saw he expected me to go on, and I didn't know how to go on except to argue it out with him.

"What does your order matter if you love a person?"

"But everything. It is, as you say here, what we're there for."

"But you do marry out of your class. Italian nobles have married American women who were without family."

He gave a gay smile, jerking his head with a little agreeing movement toward his shoulder:

"Ah, truly, yes, but with fortunes—large fortunes. We need them, we have not got the huge moneys in Italy that you have here. But the adorable Miss Harris has nothing. Figure to yourself,

Mrs. Drake; she must work for her living. If I come home to my father with a story like that, what happens? He is enraged, he turns me out—and then *I* have to work for *my* living.” He gave a delightful boyish laugh. “At what?—pasting letters in a book? That is all I know.”

“Foreigners are very hard for Americans to understand,” I muttered, wondering if any foreigner of any race would ever have understood why a respectable American widow should offer her friend in marriage to an unwilling Italian count.

He leaned from his chair, pointing the smoking cigarette at me. His melancholy had vanished. He was a boy again, a light-hearted Latin boy, intrigued and amused at the sentimental point of view obtaining under the stars and stripes.

“It is you who are hard for us to understand—so loving money and so loving love. And which you like the best we can’t find out. For us one is here and one is there.” He pointed with the cigarette to two opposite corners of the room. “Miss Harris I adore but I do not marry her.” He planted his romance in the left-hand corner with a jab of his cigarette. “And I marry a lady whom I may not love, but who has fortune and who is of my class.”

He planted her in the opposite corner with a second jab. "They are so far apart." And he waved the cigarette between the two, with a sweep wide enough to indicate the distance that severed sentiment from obligation.

That was the end of it. I pulled myself together and led the conversation into a comparison of national characteristics. I don't know what he thought of me, probably that I was a horrible example of what can be produced by a romance-ridden country.

When I think of it now (if I cared a farthing what happened to me) I would be quite scared. I wonder if I've inherited a queer strain from any of my forebears. They don't look like it, but you can't tell from portraits and miniatures. In their days it was the fashion to paint out all discreditable characteristics as, in ours, it is the highest merit to paint them in. Could it be possible that one of those pop-eyed, tight-mouthed women ever swerved from "a sweet reasonableness" and bequeathed the tendency to me? I've read somewhere that while the inclination to wrong-doing may not be transmitted, the weakened will can pass on. Is my lunacy of to-day, my distracted waverings, my temptations to disloyalty, the result of some one else's lapse from the

normal? (The lamp's going out. With the room getting dim I can see the moonlight in a clear wash of silver on the windows.) It wasn't the little Huguenot lady. But her husband opposite, the formidable Puritan in the wig, was one of the jury who condemned the witches. That may be it. His cruelty is coming back to be paid for by his descendant—the poor old witches are getting even at last. Perhaps my descendants will some day writhe in atonement for my faults. But I have no descendants! I never will have.

It's the lamp's last sputter—going out as I'm going out. In a minute it will be dark, with the moonlight filling the gulfs of the backyards and I, alone in the night, listening to the stillness, wondering if I was only created to be an expiatory offering.

XVII

AS soon as Betty heard that the European offer was refused she turned her attention to the lessons. Bustling about, making appointments, talking over reluctant mothers, forcing people to study singing who never thought of doing so, she is an inspiring sight to everybody but the object of her campaign.

Lizzie makes me uneasy. She has shown no enthusiasm, taking it all for granted as though busy ladies could not better employ their time than by helping her to fortune. Betty thinks it timidity, that she is distrustful of herself. I know better. Her languor conceals a dreary disinclination. She has never said a word of thanks to Betty or Mrs. Ashworth. Once or twice I have suggested that they have taken a good deal of trouble and she might—I have always stopped there and she has never asked me to go on. What is the good of telling a person they ought to have feelings which nature seems to have left out of them?

Last night Roger came and after a few moments with me suggested that we go up-stairs and talk over the new work with her. I wouldn't, said I was sleepy and wanted to go to bed. When he had gone I lowered the lights and sat waiting to hear his footsteps coming down. I waited an hour and a half, and then they came, descending the creaking staircase, passing my door, and going on to the street. That wasn't a good night for sleeping. In the small hours I got up and tried to read. The book was painfully appropriate, *The Love Letters of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse*. I read them till I heard the milkman making his rounds.

There is something horribly humiliating about women's love-letters. When the passion is unrequited, or half requited as it was with De Lespinasse, they are so abject. She made a brave stand, poor soul, tried to find Guibert a wife and pretend she didn't mind. But when she began to sicken to her death, all her bravery vanished. Those last letters are like a shrill frenzied wail. And she was a very first-class woman in love with a very second-class man. I suppose it's a sort of sex tradition that we should adore and adhere in this ignominious way. We've had it hammered into us that to love

and cling was our mission till it's grown to have a fictitious value, and we feel if we don't love and cling something is wrong with us. And what's accomplished by it—who is benefited by our useless suffering?

The other evening down-town in the dusk I passed a girl waiting on the corner by a show-window. The light fell full on her face and I knew by her expression why she was there—a rendezvous with her young man who was late. She was angry, close-lipped and sullen-eyed. I could read her thoughts—she was going to tell him her opinion of him, be haughty and frigid, give him a piece of her mind and leave him. Just then he came slouching up, a lowering surly cub, and when she saw him she couldn't hide her joy. Her anger vanished at his first word. She'd have believed anything he told her knowing in her heart it was a lie. She hardly wanted his excuses, so glad he'd come, so pitifully, slavishly glad.

It's shameful, crushing, revolting. Here am I, the heir of all the ages in the foremost files of time, feeling just the same as that subjugated shop-girl. Roger up-stairs with Lizzie, and I can't sleep, and can't eat, and can't stop caring, and worst of all, if

he wanted to come back to me I'd open my arms to him. Talk of the forward march of women! When the cave man went forth to find a new wife, the old discarded one left in the corner by the fire felt just the same as I do in the opening of the twentieth century.

But now, as Pepys says, to bed. I'll sleep if I have to take a thumping dose of trional which I was taught in my youth was even more wicked than powdering your nose.

This afternoon Lizzie went forth to give her first lesson and I stayed in to wait for her. I was anxious about it. If the survival of the fittest prevails among educators as it does in the animal kingdom I felt sure that Lizzie as a teacher would not survive. Her pupil is the spoiled child of fortune, sixteen, with a voice as small as her *dot* will be large. Betty had conjured me to make our protégée give up the black tea-tray hat and I had tried and failed. Before her haughty and uncomprehending surprise I had wilted. No one would have had the courage to tell her why she should look meek and unassuming. As it was she had dressed herself with unusual care, even to the long green earrings which I hadn't seen for months. She was more like the duchess in an

English comedy cast for Broadway, than a penniless music teacher being pushed up the ladder.

As I sat waiting Miss Bliss came in—wrapped in the Navajo blanket. She threw it back and stood for me to admire, very dainty in a new pink blouse with a Pierrot frill encircling her neck and a broad pink ribbon tied round her head. Boyishly slender, her arms extended to hold out the blanket, she had the fragile grace of a Tanagra figurine—a modern Tanagra with a powdered nose and a dash of carmine on the lips. When I told her she was pretty she blushed, dropped the blanket on the floor and herself on the blanket, and said a girl owed it to herself always to look her best.

"You might meet a man in the hall," she murmured, mechanically reaching for the poker, "and what's the sense of looking like a slob?"

When she poked the fire a belt held down the back of the blouse. The kimono jacket, the safety pin and the golden corset string were gone, if not forever, at least till their owner was safely landed in her own little flat with her own little husband.

Our gossiping stopped when we heard Lizzie's step on the stairs. She entered without knocking,

sweeping in and slamming the door. A brisk nod was all Miss Bliss got and my greeting was a curt "Hello, Evie." She threw herself into a rocker, and extending her feet beyond the hem of her skirt, sunk down in the chair and looked at her boots. In her hand she held a bunch of unopened letters.

I was keyed up for something unusual but I hadn't seen her in this state since her illness. We waited for her to speak, then as she showed no inclination to do so I remarked, with labored lightness:

"Well, Lizzie, how was it?"

"Beastly," she answered, without looking up.

"Was your pupil a nice girl?"

"No."

"Was she disagreeable?"

"I don't know, but I detested her. A little, simpering, affected idiot. *Sing*—that fool!"

She lifted her head and looked round the room with a wild and roving eye. Her glance, raised high, avoided us as if the sight of her fellow humans was disagreeable. Miss Bliss cleared her throat and stirred cautiously on the blanket. She

knew where Lizzie had been and was exceedingly anxious to hear her adventures in the halls of wealth, but didn't dare to ask.

"It really isn't of any consequence what she's like," I soothed. "Just take her as a matter of business."

"Matter of business!" She struck her hands on the arms of the chair with a slapping sound and jumped up. "What have I to do with business?" Then she walked to the window and stood drumming with her fingers on the pane.

The quick nervous tattoo fell ominously on my uneasiness. Miss Bliss sent a furtive masonic look at me, and glanced away. With an elaborate air of nonchalance she patted her frill and picked at her skirt, and finally, unable to stand the combined pressure of our silence and her own curiosity, said boldly:

"What kind of a house was it?"

Lizzie answered slowly, pronouncing each word with meticulous precision:

"It was a large, shiny, expensive house. It was a hideous house. Nobody who was anything, or ever expected to be anybody, ought to go into such a house."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Miss Bliss, artlessly amazed. "I read about it in the papers and they said it cost millions and had things in it out of kings' palaces."

To this there was no response, and Dolly Bliss and I began to talk together. We chose a safe topic—a bargain sale of stockings at Macy's. We tried to invest it with a careless sprightliness, which was difficult, not so much because of the subject but by reason of the tattoo on the pane. It was like an accompaniment out of tune. We couldn't seem to give our minds to the stockings while it went on, even when we raised our voices and tried to drown it. Suddenly it stopped and we stopped, too, dropping the stockings and eying each other with fixed stares. Each of us was determined not to look at Lizzie and it took all our will to refrain.

She began moving about behind us, and we tried a new subject—the count's approaching departure. We said nice things about him, echoed each other. I remarked that he was a charming person, and Miss Bliss remarked that he was a *very* charming person. We had to make a great effort. It was almost impossible to keep it up with that woman padding about behind your chair like an ill-tempered tiger.

When a sudden unexpected sound of tearing paper came from her, I jumped as if the tiger had made a spring at me. She was opening one of her letters. It loosened the tension. We suppressed gasps and took up the count again, more as if he was a human being and less as if he was the center piece at a dull dinner-party. Lizzie's voice, loud and startled, stopped us.

"What do you think of this—Mrs. Stregazzi's married Berwick!"

The count fled from our minds like an offended god. We ejaculated, "Berwick!—Mrs. Stregazzi!" and sat stunned.

Lizzie consulted the letter:

"Last week in Portland, Maine. She says, 'We're as happy as clams and everybody predicts a great future for Dan.' "

"Well!" I breathed and looked at the other two. Lizzie's temper was gone, a shared sensation made her one with us.

"Did you ever!" she murmured as any ordinary young woman might have done.

"Why she's fifteen years older than he is."

"More like twenty. She's not so young as she looks."

"Good gracious, how extraordinary!" I fell back in my chair aghast before this evidence of a woman's daring. "And those two children, *and* the grandmother!" Mrs. Stregazzi's dauntless courage began to pale when I compared it to the bridegroom's.

"Maybe he wanted a home," Miss Bliss hazarded.

"A man may want a home but he doesn't want a ready-made family in it."

It was my place in the trio to voice the sentiments of that staid and unadventurous middle class, which is described as "the backbone of the country."

"Singers don't want homes," said Lizzie, "they're in the way."

"It must have been love," I said in an awed voice. "Nothing else could explain it."

For a moment we were silent, each deflecting her glance from the other to an adjacent object. I don't know why it should have been, but Mrs. Stregazzi's reckless act seemed to have depressed us. Any one coming into the room would have said we had had bad news.

Miss Bliss broke the spell, emerging from depths of thought in which she had been evolving a working hypothesis.

"I don't see why it is so strange," she said ponderingly.

"You don't?"—the backbone of a country in which all men are free and equal does not bend readily—"with that disparity and he just beginning his career?"

"No, I don't." She was sitting cross-legged, holding an ankle in each hand and rocking gently. "I'll tell you just what I think—I believe they were lonely. Lots of people get married because they're lonely."

"She had a mother and two children."

"She took care of them, they weren't companions. Berwick's a companion, likes what she does and works at the same thing. It's great to have a person like that around." She nodded, with shrewd eyes shifting from one face to the other. "I've seen a lot and I've noticed. All sorts of people get married, and it comes out right. It's not just the young ones and suitable ones that pull it off. It'll be fine for Mrs. Stregazzi to have him to go round with, and it'll be fine for him to have her to think about and talk things over with."

"They can help each other along in their work," I admitted.

"They can be fond of each other," said Miss Bliss.

She ceased rocking and looked out of the window, the shrewd eyes growing dreamy. Our appearance of depression returned, a shade darker than before. Mrs. Stregazzi and Berwick might have shown a dashing disregard for public opinion, but there was no reason for us to look as if we had heard of their mutual destruction in a railway accident. If we had been waiting for their mutilated remains we couldn't have appeared more melancholy. Miss Bliss heaved a sigh and observed:

"It's a great thing to have some one fond of you."

Lizzie and I didn't answer, but we gave ear as if the Delphic oracle had spoken and we were trying to extract balm from its words.

"And it's a great thing to be fond of some one yourself."

Our silence gave assent, but the oracle's wisdom did not seem to cheer us. We sat sunk in our chairs, eying her morosely. Her imagination roused, she ranged over the advantages of the married state:

"Just think how lovely it would be to know there was some one who cared whether you were sick or well, or happy or blue. Wouldn't it be great to

have some one come home in the evening who was going to be awfully glad to see you and who you were just crazy to have come? And when work was slack and you were losing your sleep about money, wouldn't it be grand to know there was a feller who could chip in and pay the bills? Oh, gee—" she dropped her eyelids with the ecstatic expression of one who glimpses ineffable radiances. "Well, I guess yes."

An answering "yes" came faintly from me. The ecstatic expression flashed away, and she turned, all brisk negation:

"Oh, Mrs. Drake, *you* don't know what it is. *You're* well fixed with money of your own. But girls like us"—she pointed to Lizzie, then brought her finger back to her own knee upon which she tapped in bitter emphasis—"we've got only ourselves. We've got to make good or go under. And it's fight, fight, fight. I've had to do something I hated since I was sixteen and now she"—with a nod at Lizzie, "has got to do something she hates."

Lizzie, sunk in the chair, eyed her like a brooding sphinx. She met the gaze with the boldness of the meek roused to passion:

"You do hate it, Miss Harris. You've done as



"How lovely it would be to know there was some one who cared!"

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good as say so. And it's new now, you're only beginning. Wait till you come home every evening, disgusted with it all and everything and everybody; when it's bad weather and you feel sick and nobody cares. Wait till you have to stand anything they hand out to you, and not say a word back or you'll lose your job. I know. I've tried it and it's tough. It's too much. Any man that 'ud come along and offer to take you out of it would look all right to you." Her boldness began to weaken before that formidable gaze. She became hurriedly apologetic. "I'm not saying there *is* any man. I'm only supposing. And I don't mean now. I mean after you've been up against it for years and years and the grind's crushed the heart out of you."

There was no answer, and the oracle, now openly scared at her temerity, scrambled to her feet. In the momentary silence I heard the distant bang of the street door. She heard it too and forgot her fear, wheeling to the mirror for a quick touching up of her hair ribbon and frill. When she turned back her color had risen to match her reddened lips and her manner showed a flurried haste.

"I got to go—several things to attend to—my supper and some sewing to finish." She didn't bother to

be careful of excuses. The man who hoped to acquire the legal right to pay her bills was waiting below. She went, trailing the Navajo blanket from a hanging hand.

Lizzie drew a deep breath and said:

"She's right."

"About what?"

"About me."

"You mean the teaching?"

"I do. It's a dog's work."

She rose and faced me, sullen as a thunder-cloud.

"But you've hardly tried it."

"I've tried it enough. There are plenty of women who can scratch along that way and be thankful to Providence and pleasant to the pupils. Let them do it. It's their work, not mine."

She turned from me and went to the window, but not this time to drum on the pane. Leaning against the frame she looked out on the tin roof. The angry contempt of her face suggested that the millionaires Betty was collecting were gathered there, unable to escape, and forced to hear how low they stood in the opinion of their hireling.

"I am an artist. Those people," she made a grandiose gesture to the tin roof, "don't know what

an artist is. They think they're condescending, doing a kindness. *I'm* the one that's condescending—I do them not a kindness but an honor, when I enter their houses and listen to the squawking of their barbarous children."

"You can't expect them to think that."

"I don't, they haven't got sense enough. That woman, the mother, came in while I was there. I've no doubt she thought she was being very agreeable. She asked me questions about my method." She gave me a sidelong cast of her eye full of derision. "I sat and listened, and when she was done I said I didn't discuss my method with people who knew nothing."

"Oh, Lizzie," I groaned. "You didn't say that?"

"Certainly I did. Only that. I was polite and patient. If I hadn't felt so disgusted and out of spirits I'd have spoken to her freely and fully. But it wasn't worth while."

"But they won't stand that sort of thing. They won't have you again."

"I don't intend to go again. I couldn't endure it for five minutes. I'd rather sweep a crossing on Lexington Avenue."

"There aren't any crossings on Lexington Avenue,

and if there were, you don't know how to sweep. What will you say to Mrs. Ferguson and Mrs. Ashworth?"

She shrugged with an almost insolent indifference.

"I'll say I don't like it. That's enough, isn't it?"

"Lizzie, I beg of you to be reasonable. They won't go on helping you if you disappoint them like this."

"Then they can stop helping me—I'm not so immensely charmed and interested in them. They try and force me into things I don't want to do. They take it out of my hands and then come smiling at me and say it's all arranged. So it is—to their liking but not to mine."

"It's your profession, the only thing you know. What else could they do?"

"Let me alone."

It was like beating yourself on a brick wall. I felt frantic.

"But *what's* going to become of you? You've got no means of livelihood."

She shrugged again.

"I don't know. But one thing I do know and that

is that I won't do slave's work for you, or Mrs. Ferguson, or any one else in the world."

I didn't know what to say. I might go on talking all night and not make a dent on her. Demosthenes would have turned away baffled before her impossible unreasonableness.

It was getting dark and I could see her as a tall black silhouette against the blue dusk of the window. There was only one suggestion left.

"Are you going to take Dolly Bliss's advice and marry?" My voice sounded unnatural, like somebody else's.

"Marry?" she echoed absently. "I suppose I *could* do that."

"Is it that you can't make up your mind, Lizzie?"

"I don't know," she murmured again, this time as if she wasn't thinking of what she said.

I rose with shaking knees. It was the critical moment of her fate and mine.

"Don't you want to?" I almost whispered, drawing near her.

Her answer made me stop short. It came with a tremor of fierce inner feeling, revolt, rage and desperation, seething into expression:

"Oh God, how I hate it all!"

"Hate what—marriage?"

"No, everything that's around me. Those women, this damnable work—no money—no hope! I'm crazy with the misery of it. It's like being bound down and smothered. I want to get out. I want to be free. I want to do what I like and be myself. You're trying to make me into some one else. You're crushing me and killing me. I'd rather be dead in my grave than go on this way."

She burst into frantic tears, savage, racking, snatching the curtain about her and sobbing and strangling behind it. The room was nearly dark and I could see the long piece of drapery swaying as she clutched it to her. I tried to pluck it away, and through its folds, felt her body shaken and bent like a tree in a tempest. I had never heard such weeping, moans and wails, with words coming in inarticulate bursts. I was frightened, caught her hand and drew her out of the curtain which hung askew from torn fastenings. She pushed me away and threw herself on the sofa, where, under the vast circumference of her hat, she lay prone, abandoned to the storm.

I stood helplessly regarding her, then as broken

sentences came from under her hat, took out the pins and held it before me like a shield, while she gasped in choked reiteration that we were killing her, that she hated us all, that she'd rather die than give another lesson. If her paroxysm hadn't been so devastating I would have lost my temper at the outrageous injustice of such sentences as I could catch. I tried to say something of this in a tempered form, but she shut me off with an extended hand, beating it at me, calling out strangled execrations at Betty and Mrs. Ashworth and the mother of her pupil. If any one who did not know the situation had heard her, they would have thought those worthy and disinterested women had been plotting her ruin.

There was nothing for me to do but wait till her passion spent itself, which it began to do in sighs and quivering breaths that shook her from head to foot. When I saw it was moderating I told her I would get her some wine and went to the kitchenette, leaving her with drenched face and tangled hair, a piteous spectacle. In a few moments I was back with the wine-glass. The room was empty—she had gone leaving the black hat.

I picked it up and sat down on the sofa. We certainly had got to the climax.

I didn't count—with my hundred and sixty-five dollars a month. I could retire into any corner, and live forgotten and love forlorn like Mariana. But Lizzie—? She couldn't sing, she wouldn't teach, nobody could help her. Marriage was the only way out. As I sat on the sofa, absently staring at the hat, I had a memory of a corral I had seen at a railway station in a trip I once took to the West. It was a pen for the cattle that came off the range and had to be driven into the cars. The entrance was wide, but the fenced enclosure narrowed and narrowed until there was only one way of exit left, up a gangway to the car. The comparison wasn't elegant but it struck me as fitting—Lizzie was on the gangway with the entrance to the car the only way to go.

"I wish to heaven she'd hurry and get into it," I groaned.

XVIII

I HAVEN'T seen her for two days. Yesterday morning I went up-stairs to leave the hat, found her door open and her rooms empty. Emma says she has been out most of the time. I waited in all afternoon, expecting to hear Betty on the telephone in a state of wrath about the pupil. Also I had my ear trained for the postman's light ring. At any moment I might get a letter now from Roger, announcing his engagement. Why should not Lizzie's absences abroad be spent in walks with him?

As usual the anticipated didn't happen. Betty did telephone but in amiable ignorance of her protégée's revolt. She had run to earth a second pupil, who would be ready the following morning at eleven. Would I please tell Lizzie and did I know how the first lesson had gone? I prevaricated—I can do that at the telephone when Betty's stern gaze is not there to disconcert me. I was really afraid to tell her, and besides, I, too, was getting rebellious. Let Lizzie manage her own affairs and fight her own

fights. I said cheerfully she would tell Betty about it, and hung up the receiver wondering what would happen. Then I wrote a note to Lizzie about the new pupil, went up-stairs, knocked, and getting no response, pushed it under the door.

For the rest of the day I sat waiting like a prisoner in the death cell.

This morning, when I leaned out of the back window and looked down on the damp soil and bare shrubs of the yard, I felt the first soft air of spring. The sunlight slanted on the brick walls, the wet spots on the walk around the sun-dial shrunk as I watched them. On the top of a fence a scarred and seasoned old cat, at which Mr. Hamilton was wont to throw beer bottles, stretched lazily, blinking at a warm inviting world. I leaned farther out—tiny blunt points of green were pushing through the mold along the walk. Mrs. Phillips, sure in her ownership of the yard, had planted crocuses. Winter wasn't lingering in the lap of spring—he had jumped off it at a bound.

I turned from the window and went into the front room, wondering vaguely why winter should always be a male and spring a female. The tin roof was dry, the hot bright sun had licked up the sparrow's

bath. Across the street a line of women from the tenements were advancing on the park, pushing baby carriages—buxom broad-hipped mothers with no hats and wonderful coiffures of false hair. It was a glorious morning, the air like a thin clear wine. I put on my things and went out.

The street showed sunny and clear, fair bright avenues inviting the wayfarer to wanderings. Children sped by in groups and scattering throngs. Smart slim ladies strolled with dogs straining at leashes. Friends met and stood in talkative knots, motors flashed by attended by the fluttering of loosened veils. On the fringe of benches along the park wall the idle sunned themselves, lax and lazy. Down-town, where the women shop, men would be selling arbutus at the street corners. Soon naughty boys with freckled noses would trail in hopeful groups along the curb, holding up stolen lilacs to ladies in upper windows—yes, spring had come.

I bought a bunch of daffodils at the florist's and went into the park. The first hint of green was faint on the lawns, and points of emerald were breaking out along the willow boughs. Through the crystal air the sounds of children at play came musically—little yaps and squeals and sudden sweet runs of

laughter. The glass walls of the casino were a-dazzle, and revolving wheels caught the sun and broke it on their flying spokes.

I was near the lake when I saw Lizzie. She was walking up a side path that crossed mine, her head down, her step quick and decided. She didn't see me and I stood and waited. Then her eye, deep and absorbed, shifted, caught me, and she came to an abrupt halt. For the first startled moment there was an indecision about her poised body and annoyed face that suggested flight. If I did not share her dismay, I did her surprise. This was the hour set for the second lesson. Of course she might have told Betty that she would give no more, also she might have been hastening to the tryst with the new pupil. You never could tell. In answer to my smiling hail she approached, not smiling but looking darkly intent and purposeful.

"Which way are you going?" she said, by way of greeting.

I have been called a tactful person, and acquaintance with Lizzie has developed what was an untrained instinct into a ripened art:

"Nowhere in particular. I'm just strolling about in the sun."

Obviously relieved, she said:

"I'm going over there—" pointing to the apartment-houses across the park. "I have business on the west side."

The new pupil lived on the east side. So she really had given it up.

"You've told Mrs. Ferguson that you won't give that lesson—the one she telephoned about?"

A sudden blankness fell on her face.

"Didn't you get the letter I put under your door?" I cried in alarm. I couldn't bear just now, with everything failing me, to have Betty angry.

She nodded, looking down and scraping on the ground with her foot. Then slowly raised her eyes, and glimpsing at me under her lashes, broke into a broad smile.

"I forgot all about it."

"Oh, Lizzie! How could you? If you've made up your mind to end it the least you could do was to let her know. That's really *too* bad."

"Yes, I suppose it is." Her hasty contrition was far from convincing. "Perfectly awful. I ought to be punished in some painful way. Look here, Evie, dearest, I'm in a hurry. Why can't you just pop into a taxi and go down and explain it to her?"

"I'll tell you why I can't, simply and clearly—because I won't."

"Goodness, how provoking of you." She didn't seem at all provoked. Her only concern was to get away from me and go to the mysterious business on the west side. She bent sidewise to catch her skirt and moved away. "Then I will, this evening, to-morrow morning—"

I caught her by the arm.

"Lizzie, listen. Mrs. Ferguson is my best friend. I made her do this and I can't have you treating her so rudely. I thought, of course, you'd told her."

She laid her hand on my detaining fingers, and as she spoke in her most coaxing manner smoothed them caressingly, detaching them from their hold.

"Dear girl, I know all that. Every word you say is true. And I'll fix it, I'll straighten it all out. There won't be the slightest trouble."

"Will you telephone those people?" I implored.

My hand was dislodged. She drew away.

"Indeed I will, the first moment I get." She paused, arrested by a thought. "What's their name? I've forgotten." Then backing off: "You telephone them. You see I can't now and I don't know when I'll be near a booth. Say I'm sick, or have left

town, or anything you like. Just any excuse until I can attend to it. Good-by. I'll probably come in and see you this afternoon."

She turned and made off as quickly as she could, a tall vigorous figure, moving with a free swinging step. I stood and watched her hastening down the path between the trunks of the bare trees. There was not a trace upon her of the tempest of two nights before. It might never have been. Her whole bearing suggested coursing blood and high vitality. She was very like the irresponsible and endearing creature I had known when I first went to Mrs. Bushey's.

I gave up my walk and went home to send the telephone. As I hurried along I wondered where she could be going and why she seemed so light in spirit. I was in that feverish state of foreboding when the simplest events assume a sinister aspect. The thought crossed my mind that she might be going to elope with Roger. It would be like her to elope, and though it would be very unlike him (about the last thing in the world one could conceive him doing), he might have become clay in the hands of that self-willed and beguiling potter.

"Well," I thought, "so much the better. It'll

be over." And I decided the best thing for me to do would be to go back to Europe and join the spinsters and widows in the pensions.

I sent the telephone, trying to soothe an angry female voice that complained of a morning "utterly ruined." I sent another one to Betty, who was also discomposed, having heard from the mother of "the barbarous child." Betty wouldn't believe her, had evidently championed the teacher with heat. Betty is a stalwart adherent, a partisan, and I foresaw battles in high places.

The afternoon drew to a golden mellow close and I lay on the sofa waiting for Lizzie. I hadn't relinquished the idea of the elopement but it did not seem so probable as it had in the morning. Anyway, if she hadn't eloped—if she did come in to see me—I had made up my mind I would ask her pointblank what she intended to do about Roger. It was one word for Lizzie and two for myself. I really thought if things went on the way they were, I should go mad. Not that it would matter if I went mad, for nobody depends on me, nor am I necessary to the progress or welfare of the state. But I don't want to be an expense to my friends. And I don't know whether one hundred and sixty-

five dollars a month is enough for maintenance in an exclusive lunatic asylum and I know they would never send me to any but the best.

When a knock came I started and called a husky "Come in." The door opened—there had been no elopement. Roger stood on the threshold, smiling and calm, which I knew he wouldn't have been if he was a bridegroom. Marriage would always be a portentous event with a conscientious Clements.

Whatever I might be with Lizzie I couldn't be pointblank with Roger, though I had known him for fifteen years and her for six months. I explained my trepidation by a headache and settled back on the sofa. He was properly grieved and wanted me to follow Mrs. Ashworth to the south. I saw myself in a white dress on a hotel piazza being charming to men in flannels and Panama hats, and the mere thought of it made me querulous. He persisted with an amiable urgance. If my opinion of him hadn't been crystallized into an unchangeable form, I should have thought him maddeningly stupid. I began to wonder, if the present state of affairs lasted much longer, if I wouldn't end by hating him. I was thinking this when Lizzie came in.

I had never seen her, not even in the gladdest days

before her illness, look as she did. The old Lizzie was back, but enriched and glorified. She entered with a breathless inrush, shutting the door with a blind blow, her glance leaping at me and drawing me up from the cushions like the clutch of a powerful hand. It seemed as if some deadening blight had been lifted from her and she had burst into life, enhanced and intensified by the long period of hibernation. Her lips were parted in a slight, almost rigid smile, her eyes, widely opened, had lost their listless softness and shone with a deep brilliance.

Roger gave a suppressed exclamation and rose to his feet. I think she would have astonished any man, that Saint Anthony would have paused to look, not tempted so much as held in a staring stillness of admiration. She was less the alluring woman than the burning exultant spirit, cased in a woman's body and shining through it like a light through a transparent shell.

"Lizzie!" I exclaimed on a rising note of question. I had a sense of momentous things, of a climax suddenly come upon us all.

"I've been to Vignorol," she said, and came to

a halt in front of me, her gaze unwavering, her breast rising to hurried breaths.

"How do you do, Miss Harris," said Roger, coming smilingly forward. He had the air of the favored friend who shows a playful pique at being overlooked.

The conventional words, uttered in an urbane tone, fell between us like an ax on a stretched thread. It can be said for him that he knew Lizzie too little to realize what her manner portended. He evidently saw nothing except that she was joyously exhilarated and looked unusually handsome.

She gave him a glance, briskly quelling and containing no recognition of him. It was her famous piece-of-furniture glance, to which I had been so often treated. It was the first time Roger had ever experienced its terrors and it staggered him. In bewilderment he looked at me for an explanation. But she was not going to let any outside influence come between us. I was important just then—a thing of value appropriated to her uses.

"I've been two days fighting it out, trying to make up my mind to do it. And this morning, when you met me, I was going there."

"Well?" I was aware of that demanding look of Roger's, which, getting nothing from me, turned to her. That was useless, but how was he to know?

"I sang for him," she said, the brilliant eyes holding mine as if to grasp and focus upon herself every sense I had.

"Lizzie!"

The premonition of momentous things grew stronger. Underneath it, in lower layers of consciousness, submerged habits of politeness made themselves felt. I ought to get Roger into the conversation.

"I sang better than I ever did before. And Vignorol, who used to scold and be so discouraged, told me I'd got it!"

"Lizzie!"

For a moment we stared at each other, speechless, she giving the useful pair of ears time to carry to the brain, the great news.

Then the subconscious promptings grew too strong to be denied and I said:

"Mr. Clements will be as glad as we are to know that."

Thus encouraged, Roger emerged from his astonishment. He was not as debonair as at the be-

ginning, also he evidently wasn't sure just what it was all about, but he seized upon the most prominent fact, and said, without enthusiasm, rather with apprehension :

"This doesn't mean, Miss Harris, that you're thinking of returning to your old profession?"

Her look at him was flaming, as silencing as a blow. I don't know why she didn't tell him to hold his tongue, except that she was too preoccupied to waste a word. He flinched before it, drew himself up and backed away, dazed, as he might have been if she really had struck him.

Having brushed him aside she went on to me. The main fact imparted, her exultation burst forth in a crowding rush of words :

"It wasn't my voice—but that's better, he says it's the long rest—it was the other thing—the temperament, the soul. It's got into me. I knew it myself as soon as I began to sing. I felt as if something that bound me was gone—ropes and chains broken and thrown away. It was so much easier. Before I was always making efforts, listening to what they told me, trying to work it out with my head. And to-day! Oh, Evie, I knew it, I felt it—something outside myself that poured into me and

carried me along. I could just let myself go and be wonderful—wonderful—wonderful!"

She threw out her arms as if to illustrate the extent of her wonderfulness, wide as she could stretch, then brought her hands together on her bosom, and, with half-shut eyes, stood rapt in ravished memory.

We gazed mutely at her as if she were some remarkable spectacle upon which we had unexpectedly chanced.

"I sang and sang," she said softly, "and each time it was better. Vignorol wouldn't let me go."

"What did he say?" I asked.

"He kissed me," she murmured dreamily.

Roger in his corner moved and then was still.

"But what did he suggest about you? What did he want you to do?"

My mouth was dry. Sitting on the edge of the sofa I clutched the sides of it as if it was a frail bark and I was floating in it over perilous seas.

"Go back to where I belong," she said, and then came out of her ecstasy and began to pace up and down, flinging sentences at me.

"Try it again and do it this time. He says I can, and I know I can. Oh, Evie, to get away from all this—those hateful pupils, those hideous lessons—



-eniora williamson brown

"I could just let myself go and be wonderful!"

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those women! To go back to my work, be among my own people." She brushed by Roger, her glance, imbued with its inward vision, passing over him as if he was invisible. "It's like coming out of prison. It's like coming to life again after you were dead."

She had expressed it exactly. She *had* been dead. The mild and wistful woman of the last two months was a wraith. *This* was Lizzie Harris born again, renewed and revitalized, now almost terrible in her naked and ruthless egotism.

"What will you do?"

"I don't know. I haven't thought yet. Vignorol wants me to study with him for nothing, pay it back when I make good. But that doesn't matter now. I can't think of anything but that I'm home, in my place, and that I can do it. They were all disappointed in me, said I'd never get there. I can. I will. Wait!—Watch me. You'll see me on top yet, and it won't be so far off, either. I'll show you all it's in me. I'll wake up every clod in those boxes, I'll make their dull fat faces shine, I'll hear them clap and stamp and shout, 'Brava, Bonaventura!'"

She cried out the two last words, staring before her with flashing eyes that looked from the heights

of achievement upon an applauding multitude. In the moment of silence I had a queer clairvoyant feeling that it was true, that it would happen, and I saw her as the queen of song with her foot upon the public's neck. Then the seeing passion left her face and her lip curled in superb disdain.

"And you wanted to make a *singing teacher* out of me!"

She swept us both with a contemptuous glance, as if we were the chief offenders in a conspiracy for her undoing. I was used to it, but Roger, the galled jade whose withers were yet unwrung, winced under her scorn.

"But Miss Harris," he protested, "we only—"

"Oh, I'm not talking to you," she said brutally. "You don't know anything about it."

"Certainly, if you say so," he replied.

There was a moment's pause. I did not like to look at him. You can bear being insulted if no one else sees it, but one old friend mustn't witness another's humiliation, especially when that other is unable by temperament and training to hit back.

Lizzie, having crushed him like an annoying and persistent fly, wheeled toward the door.

"I must go. I can't stay any longer." Then in

answer to a question from me, "Oh, I don't know where—out to breathe. I can't stay still. I want to walk and feel I'm free again, that I'm not cramped up in a dark hole with no sunshine. I want to feel that I'm myself and say it over and over."

She went out, seeming to draw after her all the stir and color that she had brought in. It was as if a comet with a bright and glittering tail had crowded itself into the room, and then, after trying to squeeze into the contracted area, swishing and lashing about and flattening us against the walls, had burst forth to continue on its flaming way.

I fell back on the sofa feeling that every nerve in me had snapped and I was filled with torn and quivering ends. Stupidly, with open mouth, I looked at Roger, and he, also stupidly but with his mouth shut, looked at me. I don't know how long we looked. It probably was a few seconds but it seemed an age—one of those artificially elongated moments when, as some sage says, the measure of time becomes spiritual, not mechanical. I saw Roger afar as if I was eying him through the big end of an opera glass—a tiny familiar figure at the end of a great vista. The space between us was filled with a whirling vortex of thoughts, formless and

immensely exciting. They surged and churned about trying to find a definite expression, trying to force their way to my brain and tell me thrilling and important news. Then the familiar figure advanced, pressed them out of the way, and taking a chair by the sofa sat down and demanded explanations.

I couldn't give them. I couldn't explain Lizzie to him any more than I could to Betty or Mrs. Ashworth. I remembered him, before he had met her, telling me in the restaurant that I was seeing her through my own personality, and now *he* was doing it, and he'd never get anywhere that way. I wanted desperately to make him understand. There was something so pitiful in his dismay, his reiterated "But why should she be offended with me. What have *I* done?" And then hanging on my words as if I was some kind of a magician who could wave a wand and make it all clear. Nothing would have pleased me more than to be able to advance some "first cause" from which he could have worked up to a logical conclusion. But how could I? The lost traveler in the Australian bush was faced by a task, simple and easy, compared to Roger Clements'

trying to grasp the intricacies of Lizzie Harris' temperament.

I was sorry for him. I was sorry (the way you're sorry for some one inadequately equipped to meet an unexpected crisis) to see how helpless he was. I tried to be kind and also truthful—a difficult combination under the circumstances—and make plain to him some of the less complex aspects of the sphinx, only to leave him in dazed distress.

He was alarmed at her evident intention to go back to the stage, couldn't believe it, wanted me to tell him why an abandoned resolution should come back like a curse to roost. He couldn't get away from his original conception of her, had learned her one way and couldn't relearn her another. It was at once a pathetic sight and an illuminating experience—the man of ability, the student, the scholar, out of his depths and floundering foolishly. The mind trained to the recognition of the obvious and established, accustomed to fit its own standards to any and all forms of the human animal, coming up with a dizzying impact against the mind that had no guide, no standard, no code, but floats in the flux of its own emotions.

I repeat I was sorry, immensely sorry. Such is the inconsistency of human nature that I was filled up and overflowing with sympathy at the spectacle of my own man, once my exclusive property, hurt, flouted and outraged by the vagaries of my successful rival.

A eight o'clock that evening I was in my sitting-room when I heard her come in. She did not stop at my door but went up-stairs, a quick rustling progress through the silence of the house. It was very still, not a sound from any of the rooms, when I heard the notes of her piano, and then her voice—“*Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix.*” The register was shut, and I stole to the door and opening it stood at the stair-head listening. Before the aria was over I knew that what she had said was true. Lizzie had found herself.

After a pause she began again—*O Patria Mia* from *Aïda*. I tiptoed forward and let myself noiselessly down on the top step, breath held to listen. As the song swelled, the cry of a bleeding and distracted heart, the doors along the passages were softly opened. Up and down the wall came the click of turned latches and stealthy footsteps. Mrs. Bushey's lodgers were not abroad, as I had thought.

The stairs creaked gently as they dropped upon them. When *Patria Mia* was over we were all there. I could see the legs of Mr. Hamilton and the count dangling over the banisters above me. On the bottom of the flight Mr. Weatherby sat, and Miss Bliss and Mr. Hazard leaned against the wall, looking up with the gaslight gilding their faces.

In the silence that fell on the last note no one spoke. There was no rising chorus of praise as there once had been. I don't think we were aware of one another, each rapt in the memory of an ecstatic sadness. The cautious foot of Mrs. Phillips stealing along the lower hall made me look down and I saw her stationing herself beside young Hazard, and that Dolly Bliss' face shone with tears.

She went on—*Vissi d'Arte, Vissi d'Amore*, Musetta's song; the habanera from *Carmen*, Brahms' *Sapphische Ode*, sounding the depths and heights. Between each piece we were dumb, only the creaking of the banisters as Mr. Hamilton shifted, or the sniffing of Miss Bliss when the song was sad, fell on our silence. We never saw her. She was at last the diva, remote, august, a woman mysterious and unknown, singing to us across an impassable gulf.

As long as I live I shall never forget it—the narrow half-lit passages, the long oval of the stair-well, on the bottom step of my flight Mr. Weatherby's back, broad and bent, as he rested his elbows on his knees. Against the whitewashed wall below Mr. Hazard with his eyes fixed in a trance of listening; Mrs. Phillips, her head pressed back against the wall, her lids closed, and Dolly Bliss' little face bright with slow dropping tears.

We were Liza Bonaventura's first audience.

XIX

THE next morning, while I yet slept, she came knocking and rattling at my door. When I let her in she upbraided me for having it locked, unmindful of my sleepy excuses that as the street door was generally open all night it was wisdom to keep one's apartment firmly closed.

She was in the blue kimono over her nightgown, and when I got back into bed—for it was too early for breakfast—sat down on the edge of the couch and told me that she had decided to accept Mrs. Ferguson's offer to send her to Europe.

I had expected some move but hadn't dared to hope for this. It was impossible to hide my agitation, to wipe the expression of startled excitement off my face. She paid no attention to me, would not have noticed if I had fallen flat in a dead faint, so engrossed was she in her plans. Staring out of the window with narrowed far-seeing eyes, she developed her program, oblivious of the fact that I was not answering, more like a person thinking

aloud than one consulting another. When she finally paused, I said hoarsely, afraid to believe it:

"Mrs. Ferguson may have changed her mind. You wouldn't hear of the offer when she made it."

She treated the suggestion as preposterous.

"What an idea! Who ever heard of any woman changing her mind on such a subject."

"You've changed yours," I answered faintly.

"I'm different, and besides I've changed it for the better. She'll be only too glad to send me. Why think of what it means to her! She'll be known as the patron of one of the greatest living prima donnas. That's a thing that doesn't happen to everybody. Is the morning paper down-stairs? I want to see what steamers are leaving this week. I'll go as soon as I can get off. Oh, I won't meet anybody, and it doesn't matter if I do."

The door closed on her and I fell back on the pillows like a marionette whose wire has broken. Limp as a rag I lay looking up at the ceiling, and out of my mouth issued a sigh that was almost a groan. It was all I had power for. The tension snapped, I suddenly felt myself invaded by a lassitude so deep, so vast that it went to the edges of the world and lapped over. I would like to have

been removed to a far distance and lain under a tree and watched the leaves without moving or thinking or speaking. I would like to have stayed in bed and looked at the dusty circle of cement flowers from which the chandelier hung, for years and years.

She came hastening back with the paper, tore it apart, and spreading it on the table read the shipping advertisements. Several steamers were due to sail within the week. She decided on the best and throwing the paper on the floor, said briskly :

"I'll see her about it this morning before she goes out. There's no need to bother about it before breakfast. I'll just take a cup of coffee down here with you and then go up and dress. Let's get it now."

I rose, telling her to set the table while I dressed. She put on two cups, each trip to the table impeded by the paper, over which she trampled with loud cracklings, then she gave it up and followed me, talking. My toilet, performed with mutilated rites owing to its publicity, took me from room to room, with Lizzie at my heels. When I shut the door on my bath, she leaned against it and through the crack gave me her opinion on the rival merits of Paris and Berlin as centers of musical study.

While I was making the breakfast she stood in the entrance of the kitchenette, then, squeezing by her with the coffee pot in one hand and a plate of toast in the other, she did not give me enough room and the toast slid off the plate and was strewed afar. She picked up a piece and sat down eating it, her elbows on the table, while I gathered up the rest. Hot and disheveled I took my place opposite while she watched me, biting delicately at her toast, benignly beautiful and fresh as a summer's morn.

She was stretching her hand for her cup when a disturbing thought made her pause. She dropped the hand and looked at me in consternation:—her big trunk was no good, it had been broken three years ago coming from California.

"Oh, well"—a happy solution occurred to her and she held out her hand for the cup—"I can borrow one of yours. That large one with the Bagdad portière over it. I'll return it as soon as I get there. You don't mind loaning it to me, do you, dearest?"

I gave it, warmly, generously, effusively. It wasn't like giving Mrs. Bushey the lamp. There was no necessity for diplomatic pressure. I would have given her my jewels, my miniatures, my last cent in the bank, my teeth like Fantine, each and

all of my treasures, to have her go. Nobody knows how I wanted her to go. It was not that I had ceased to love her—I will do that till I die. It was not that I had hopes Roger would forget her—he may be as faithful as Penelope for all I know. I was unable to stand any more. I was down, done, ended. I wanted to creep into my little hole, curl up and lie still. I wanted to look at the wreath of cement flowers for years. I wanted immunity from the solving of unsolvable questions, respite from trying to straighten out what persisted in staying tangled, freedom to regain my poise, reinstate my conscience, patch up the broken pieces of my heart. An immovable body had encountered an irresistible force, and though the immovable body was still in its old place, it had been so scarred and torn and tattered by the irresistible force that only rest would restore it.

That was two days ago. In the interim there has been no rest—I have spent most of the forty-eight hours in taxicabs and at telephones—but relief is in sight.

Lizzie is going.

It is all arranged. Betty has dispersed the pupils and renewed her European offer. Between taxicabs

she caught me here yesterday and told me that few women have the privilege of being the patron of one of the greatest living prima donnas. The privilege sat soberly upon her and she was going to make herself worthy of it by giving one of the greatest living prima donnas every advantage that Europe offers.

In the afternoon Lizzie and I went down to the steamship office and bought her ticket, and then to the banker's to draw the first instalment on her letter of credit. It was a royally generous letter and I said so. Lizzie didn't think it was too much and went over a list of expenses to prove it. She is to go to Berlin—Vignorol wanted Paris but as a dramatic singer she preferred Berlin. I gathered from a casual remark that Vignorol was hurt at her desertion of him and his country. But this didn't trouble her.

"Vignorol! I don't see that it was so kind of him to want to take me for nothing. It would have made him. He's only known here in New York now and as my teacher he would have been known all over the world."

The steamer sails the day after to-morrow and this afternoon I sent up the trunk. I had offered

to come in the evening and help her pack and then backed out. In an offhand manner, as she was sorting piles of sheet music, she said Roger was coming in after dinner to say good-by. She seemed engrossed by the music, gave an absent-minded assent when I said I couldn't help that night. I could not tell whether she had at last guessed and was exhibiting unusual tact or whether she was still unconscious. I knew that every minute of the next day was filled and it would be Roger's only chance to see her alone. It was difficult to imagine him proposing in a room littered with his lady's wardrobe. But love is said to find out a way and if a man's in earnest he can put the question just as well in a fourth-floor parlor full of clothes, as he can by moonlight in a bower.

I had been waiting for this interview, braced and steeled for the announcement. It was the final trial and I was going to go through with it proudly and stoically if I died the day after. I did not feel quite as if I should die. Hope springs eternal in the human breast, that's why we don't all, sometime or other, commit suicide. Hope upheld me now: with a career beckoning she might refuse him. It was but a sickly gleam. No woman, comprehensible

to me, would ever put the greatest career the world offers before Roger Clements. The hope lay in the fact that Lizzie was not a comprehensible woman.

With great inward struggle I preserved my pride and stoicism through the rest of the afternoon. They were still with me when, in the evening I lay down on the divan bed, whence I can hear all ascending footsteps. The wreath of cement flowers gradually faded, and the daylight sounds of the house were absorbed in the evening quiet. Night had possession of the city for what seemed an endless time when I heard him going up: from the street, past my floor, up the next flight, and the next, then the far faint closing of Lizzie's door. Rigid in the dark I pictured the meeting—the room with its high blaze of gas, the open trunks and scattered garments, and Lizzie with her smile and the enveloping beam of her glance.

It was profoundly still in the back room, only the tiny ticking of my watch on the table. The old tomcat, who at this hour was wont to lift up his voice in a nuptial hymn, had gone afield for his wooing. The parlors and bedrooms in the extensions were quiet, their lighted windows throwing a soft yellow light into my darkened lair. Our little

bit of the city held its breath in sympathy with me, prone with fixed eyes, seeing those two in the parlor.

Would he work up to it in gentle gradations, gracefully and poetically as men did in novels, or blurt it out in one great question which (for me at least) would have made life blossom as the wood did when Siegmund sung? They would probably stand—people didn't sit when such matters were afoot—and if she said yes would he take her in his arms then and there? Under the same roof, just two floors above me, they might be standing now, enfolded, cheek to cheek. Pride and stoicism fell from me and I pressed my face into the pillow and moaned like a wounded animal.

The watch ticked on. It was evidently not going to be short and tempestuous. Roger was an unhurried person and he would probably proffer his suit with dignified deliberation. I was certain, if he was successful, he'd come in and tell me on the way down. I couldn't see him passing my door and not remembering. The place was dark, he might think I was asleep and go by. I got up and lit the lights, thinking as I stretched up with the match, that they were signals telling him I was here, waiting, ready to wish him joy.

Then I looked at the watch—only just nine. He might be hours longer. I could spend the time in preparation, be ready to meet him with a frank unforced smile.

I went to the back window and looked up at the stars for courage. The sky was sprinkled with them—big ones and bright pin points. For centuries they had been gazing down at the puny agonies of discarded lovers, unmoved and cynically curious, winking at them in derision. The thought had a tonic effect. Under its stimulus I straightened my ancestors, askew after a morning's dusting, and touched up the bunch of daffodils on the table. Then the effect began to wear off. I reached for the watch—twenty minutes past nine.

If she had refused him it would have been done by now. Lizzie wasn't one to spare or mince her words. I'd better get ready for him. I went to the mirror and saw a ghost, and the stars' stern message was forgotten. That I should some day be dust was not a sustaining thought now when I was so much a suffering sentient thing, sunk down in the midmost of the moment. I brushed some rouge on my cheeks and smiled at the reflection to see

if I could do it naturally. It was ghastly, like the grimace of a corpse that had expired in torment.

Then suddenly I dropped my rouge and gave a smothered cry—I heard Lizzie calling my name. For a moment power of movement seemed stricken from me. I had not thought that she would be the one to tell me. She called again and I opened the door and went into the hall. Her head was visible over the banisters.

"Have you got the key of that trunk?" she said.
"It's packed and I want to lock it."

It was a ruse to get me up there. Even Lizzie wouldn't announce an engagement at the top of her voice down two flights of stairs. I found the key and mounted, holding to the hand-rail. It seemed a long climb. When I got to the top I had no breath, though I had gone slowly, and I trembled so that I was afraid she would notice it, and laid the key on the table.

The trunk was packed, its lid down, and another, open, with garments trailing over its sides, stood in the middle of the floor. Round it lay the unpacked remains of Lizzie's wardrobe, in mounds, in broken scatterings, in confused interminglings. If a

cyclone had descended on neat closets and bureau drawers, scooped out their contents, carried it with a whirling centripetal motion into the center of the room, took a final churning rush through it and dashed out again, the place could not have presented a more wildly disheveled appearance.

In an unencumbered corner, an eddy untouched by the cyclone's wrath, Roger stood putting on his coat. We looked across the chaos, bowed and smiled. I knew my smile by heart. Roger's was something new, rose no higher than his lips, leaving his eyes somber, I might say sullen. Lizzie, without words, had snatched up the key and knelt by the trunk. She looked untidy, hot and rather cross. They certainly had not the appearance of lovers.

I fell weakly into a chair and awaited revelations. None came. Roger buttoned his coat, Lizzie made scratching noises with the key. There was something strained and sultry in the silence. Could she have refused him? One of the disappointing things about people in real life is their failure to rise to the dramatic expression fitting to great moments. Had I been in a play I would have used words vibrating with the thud of my own heart-beats. What I did say was:

"Have you had a nice evening?"

"Very," said Roger with a dry note.

"Have we," murmured Lizzie, busy with the key.

"I'm sure I don't know. I've not had time to say a word to Mr. Clements."

"I'm afraid I've been rather in the way," he remarked, the dry note a trifle more astringent.

"Well, the truth is you have," she answered. "Are you sure this is the right key, Evie?"

The gleam of hope brightened into a ray. I sat forward on the edge of the chair looking from Lizzie's bent back to Roger's face, which had reddened slightly and had a tight look about the mouth. I am, by nature, a shy and modest person, and under normal conditions the last thing I would do would be to force another's confidence. But I *had* to know. I had to drag the truth out of them if it came with a shriek like the roots of the fabled mandrake.

"Haven't you talked *at all?*" I exclaimed, with an agonized emphasis that might have betrayed me to a child of twelve.

They did not appear to notice it. Roger moved from his corner, picking his way round a clump of boots that had been whirled near the sofa.

"Talk?" said Lizzie, still engaged with the key. "How can people talk when they're packing to go to Europe? There! It's in and it turns. Thank goodness the lock's all right."

She rose and surveyed the room with an intent frowning glance.

"That," pointing to the other trunk, "I'll begin on now and finish to-morrow. This," turning to the full one, "is done. I'd better lock it at once and get it out of the way."

She turned back to it and gave a series of tentative pushes at the lid which rose rebelliously over bulging contents.

Nothing had happened! She hadn't let him speak—he hadn't dared—no opportunity had offered? What did it matter how or why? The sickening thudding of my heart began to grow less. I leaned my elbow on my knees and my forehead on my hands, feeling at last as if I was going to be Early Victorian and swoon.

Under the shadow of my fingers I could see Roger's feet stepping carefully among the boots. Skirting tangled heaps of millinery, they arrived at the trunk. I dropped my hands and watched while he addressed himself to Lizzie's back.

"Good night." He stretched out his hand. "Good-by."

She turned, saw the hand and put hers into it; then, for the first time smiled, but not with her habitual rich glow.

"Good-by. I'd ask you to stay but there's really too much to do. I've got to have to-morrow free to finish up in."

The hands separated and dropped. His back was toward me and I was glad of it.

"Perhaps we'll meet again some day."

"Oh, surely." The abstraction of her look vanished, her smile flashed out brilliant and dazzling. "But not here, not this way. You'll see me soon in my right place—behind the footlights."

He murmured a response and moved toward the door. She turned back to the trunk, pressing on it and then drawing back and pressing again. He passed me with a low "Good night, Evie," and I answered in the same tone.

He was at the door when she ceased her efforts, and drawing herself up with a deep breath, called peremptorily:

"Come here, Mr. Clements."

He stopped, the door-knob in his hand.

"What is it, Miss Harris?"

She stood back from the trunk, flushed and irritated.

"Just sit on this trunk, please. It must be locked to-night."

Her eye on him was as the eye of a general or a subaltern, impersonal, commanding, imperious.

He met it and stood immovable. In the fifteen years I have known him I had never seen him look so angry.

"Hurry up," she said sharply. "I'd ask Evie but she's not heavy enough."

He answered with icy politeness:

"Miss Harris, I am very sorry, but I've already stayed too long. There are other men in the house, who will surely only be too happy to sit on your trunk whenever you choose to command them," and he opened the door.

"Oh, very well, if you're going to be so dis-obliging," she answered, angry now in her turn. Then to me: "Come over here, Evie, and help. If we both press as hard as we can I think we can do it. I don't care to wait till the morning. I want this locked now."

I rose obediently and began to steer my way

through the cyclone's track. Roger came in, shutting the door with a bang.

"Mrs. Drake's in no condition to make such exertions. She's been ill and oughtn't to be asked to do such things. Evie, don't touch that trunk."

"That's perfect rubbish. I'm not asking her to *lift* it. Come on, Evie."

I stopped, looking helplessly from one to the other. They glared at each other, his face pale, hers red. They seemed on the verge of battle and I knew what Lizzie was like when her temper was up.

"Oh, don't fight about a trunk," I implored.

"I've not the slightest intention of fighting about anything," said Roger, looking as if, had a suitable adversary been present, he would have felled him to the ground. "But I won't have you making efforts that are unnecessary and that you're unable to make."

"You talk like a perfect fool," said Lizzie, with the flashing eye of combat I knew so well.

He bowed.

"I'm quite ready to admit it. But as a perfect fool I absolutely refuse to let you make Mrs. Drake help shut that trunk."

"Then do it yourself."

As usual she had the best of it. Roger knew it and bore upon his face the look of the bear in the pit at whom small boys hurl gibes. When she saw the symptoms of defeat she began to melt.

"It'll not take five minutes—just one good pressure on this corner. There's a hat box that sticks up and has to be squeezed down."

With a white face of wrath Roger strode over the clothes and sat on the trunk. I have never believed that he could be ridiculous, my Roger hedged round with the dignity that is the Clements' heritage, but he was then, boiling with rage, perched uncomfortably on the sloping lid. A hysterical desire to laugh seized me and I backed off to my chair, biting my under lip, afraid to speak for fear of exploding into a screaming giggle.

They were unconscious of anything funny in the situation, one too angry, the other too engrossed. With a concentrated glance she surveyed the trunk, directing the bestowal of his weight. When she had finally got him in the right place, she knelt, key in hand, and in answer to a curt demand he rose and flopped furiously down. To the protesting crunching of the hat box, the lid settled and the click of the lock sounded.

"Done," she cried triumphantly, falling back in a sitting posture on the floor.

Roger got up.

"Have I your permission to go?" he asked with elaborate deference.

"You have," said his hostess, and from the floor looked up with a bright and beaming face from which every vestige of bad temper had fled. "Good-by—good luck. And remember, the first performance I give in New York I expect to see you applauding in the bald-headed row."

As the door shut on him my laughter came like the burst of a geyser. Lizzie, still on the floor, looking at me with annoyed surprise, made it worse. When she asked me in a hostile voice kindly to tell her what the joke was, it got beyond my control and I became hysterical. It wasn't very bad—I always do things in a meek subdued way—but I laughed and cried when I tried to explain and laughed again.

When she saw there was no use ordering me not to be an idiot, she got up, grumbling to herself and began on the second trunk. She kept stepping round me carrying armfuls of clothes, trailing skirts over my knees, leaning forward from a kneel-

ing posture to jerk blouses, cloaks and petticoats from the back of my chair. I tried to retreat into corners, but she worked in wide comprehensive sweeps, wherever I went coming after me to find something that was under my chair or upon which I was sitting. Finally she used me as a sort of stand, throwing things on me and plucking them off, muttering abstractedly as she worked.

I was recovering and she was inspecting a skirt outheld at arm's length when she said musingly:

"I hadn't the least idea Roger Clements was so bad-tempered. He's just a self-sufficient cross-grained prig. Gets into a rage when I ask him to sit on a trunk. I can't stand that kind of man."

I bade her good night and went down-stairs.

The lights were burning high. I put them out and laid down on the bed. My laughter and tears were over. Fatigue, anger and pain were sensations that existed somewhere outside me, in a world I had left. I seemed to have no body, to be a spirit loosened from fleshly trammels, floating blissfully in prismatic clouds.

I floated in them, motionless in ecstatic relief, savoring my joy, knowing the perfection of peace, till the windows paled with the dawn.

XX

I WRITE to-night in a hushed house—a house that holds the emptiness that follows the withdrawal of a dynamic presence.

Lizzie is gone.

As her ship bears her away to future glory, we, the hewers of wood and drawers of water, sit here recuperating from the labors of getting her off. In its hour of departure the magnet gave forth the full measure of its power and we bent our backs and lent our hands in a last energy of service. No votaries bowed before the shrine of a deity ever celebrated their worship with more selfless acts of devotion than Mrs. Bushey's lodgers in speeding Lizzie on her way.

What did Mr. Hazard's unfinished order matter when Lizzie, having forgotten to order the express-man, one had to be sought up and down the reaches of Lexington Avenue? Of what consequence to Miss Bliss were broken sittings, on the proceeds of which she could have lived for a week, when Lizzie's traveling dress was found to be in rags and had to

be mended by some one who knew how? When the count rendered his tribute in fruit and flowers, did he stop to consider that the money was part of the fund reserved for his passage home, and now he would have to travel second cabin? No one thought of anything but the departing goddess. They were proud and glad to deny themselves that she might go, grandly serene, amid clouds of ascending incense.

As for me, after that night of respite, I became a body again, a body whose mission was the preparing of another for the great adventure. She drew me after her as the fisherman draws the glittering bit of tin that revolves from the end of his line. The simile is not entirely satisfactory because I did not glitter, but I revolved, round and round, as the fisherman's hand pulled or eased on the line. I sewed, I packed, I unpacked, searching for forgotten necessities. I was down-town, executing overlooked errands, I was up-town, cooking hurried meals in the kitchenette. My voice in the morning called her to breakfast, my good night was the last sound on the stairs as I left her room, grown bare and bleak, losing its character, as one by one the signs of her occupancy vanished. I had

no time to feel, to be glad or sorry. Even the passion to have her go was overridden by the ruling instinct that while she was there I must serve. And though the poet tells us there are those who can do this while standing and waiting, I evidently was not one of them.

As we demonstrated her power by the zeal of our devotion, her arrogant exactions increased in a corresponding ratio. She was never more aloof, more regally indifferent, more imperiously demanding. The call of her destiny had come to her and she heard nothing else.

Her stay with us had been only the bivouac of a night, and we the passers-by she had encountered in the moment of halt. With the goal in sight we lost what small significance we had and assumed the aspect of strangers, by whose fire she had rested, in whose tent she had slept. Already, before she had gone, we had faded into the limbo of the useless and outworn. Henceforward, from our humble corner, we would watch her mounting on others as she had mounted on us—climbing higher and higher with never a backward glance or a wave of her hand to the little group who strained their eyes for a sign of remembrance.

Some day the others would find her out and be angry, cite to their friends proofs of her ingratitude, grow bitter at the memory of their unappreciated efforts, add her to the list of forgetful great ones who took all and rendered nothing back. From a deeper knowledge of her I would never know their disillusion. The thought that she felt no love for any of us had for me no sting. I even went farther, agreed that it was not her place to feel it. Arrived at last at the heart of her mystery, I could keep my memory of her fair and untarnished, untouched by efforts to fit her into a frame where she didn't belong.

She was not, as they would think, a heartless and cruel fellow of ours, but the creature of another species, thinking in a different language, seeing life from a different angle. What we were trained to accept as right and just, she had no power to recognize. Custom and tradition had formed a groove in which we walked unquestionably onward. She wandered at will in a world expressly created for her, peopled by shades who had no meaning apart from their usefulness. Environment that had molded and put its stamp upon us made no impression upon her invulnerable self-concentration. We held a

point of view in common, responded automatically to established ideas and inherited impulses. She saw no claims but her own and moved upon what she wanted with the directness of an animal. The bogies with which we were frightened into good behavior—public opinion, social position, loss of respect—she snapped her fingers at. Her only law was the law of her own being, her standard, a fierce and defiant determination to be true to herself. Restraints and reticences, subtleties of breeding, delicacies of conduct, imposed on us by the needs of communal life, were not for her, selected and set apart to be that lonely figure in the crowded companionable world—the people's servant.

That was what I at last knew her to be—an instrument for the joy, the recreation, the entrancement of that great, sluggish, full-fed Minotaur, the public. For this purpose nature had fashioned her, eliminating every characteristic that might render her unfit, pruning away virtues that would hamper, uprooting instincts that would interfere. As Wordsworth saw the All-Mother saying of a worthy specimen, "I will make a lady of my own," so, seeing Lizzie, she had said, "I will make an artist of my own," and had set about doing it with thoroughness.

From the beautiful outer case to "the hollows where a heart should be" she was formed to be the one thing—a cunningly framed and articulated mechanism for our entertainment. To us—whom she so lightly regarded—she was foreordained to carry a message of beauty, call us from our sordid cares, and base ambitions, catch us up from the grayness of the every day to the heights where once more we caught a glimpse of the vision and the dream. That we should work and sacrifice to help her to her place, she, unconscious but impelled by her destiny, felt, and made me feel. And having gathered up our tribute she had left us, not ungratefully, not having taken all and given nothing, but in her own time and in her own way to pay us back a hundredfold.

I thought it all out in the cab coming back from the steamer, and I was content to have it so.

I had gone down to see her off—she wanted me and no one else. We had passed up the dock amid throngs of passengers and presently there were stewards and cabin-boys running for her luggage, and officers discreetly staring. When we bought the ticket I had seen on the list the name of a countess, and I learned that she was a royal lady traveling

incognita with a maid. Everybody thought Lizzie was the countess and I the maid. I looked the part, trotting at her heels, carrying a large bandbox covered with pink roses that had been overlooked in the final scramble. She had a triumphal progress, everything made easy, boys bearing the count's flowers going before her up the gangway, and I following with the bandbox that nobody had offered to take. Before I left I saw the royal lady leaning on the railing, a pale person with the curling fringe and prominent eyes of the typical British princess. Nobody paid any attention to her, but when we went exploring about the decks, looks followed us and whispers buzzed.

As the big ship churned the water and ponderously moved off, I stood on the pier's edge and waved to her. I was the tiny unit in the crowd—the nameless, humdrum, earth-bound crowd—for whom she was to weave the spell, and create the illusion. Through a glaze of tears I watched her, tall and splendid beside the dowdy princess—my beautiful Lizzie, a real princess, going imperially to claim her crown.

The windows are open and the spring night comes in, soft as a caress. In the basement of the apart-

ment-house some one is playing *Annie Laurie* on the accordion, and in the back yards the servants are chatting in the kitchen doors. From Mr. Hazard's room, below me, I can hear a low murmur of voices. The others are in there talking it over, all, I know, singing the praises of Lizzie, voicing hopes for her success as deep and sincere as prayers. I can fancy them, reclining on chairs and sofas, worn out by their labors and feeling blankly that something has gone out of their lives. A wild disturbing chord in the day's melody is hushed, a red thread in the tapestry has been withdrawn.

I feel it, too.

And so the tale is ended. I don't think I shall ever write any more. In the autumn, when I started this manuscript, I just intended to put down the happenings of a lonely woman's life, to read over on evenings when looking back was pleasanter than looking forward. Now, without intending to, I have written a story, which is not my fault, as the story happened to intrude itself into the lonely woman's life, greatly to her surprise, and a good deal to her sorrow. But this is the finish of it. There is no more to tell. The heroine has gone, if to come back not the same heroine. The hero—

you know as much about him as I do. And the author—well, the author is just where she was, a widow of thirty-three, doing light housekeeping in an eighteen-foot apartment. It can't be much of a story because it hasn't got anywhere; nobody has died, nobody has married. So to myself—for I am going to put this away in a trunk and never let a soul see it—I make my bow as an author.

Good night, Evelyn Drake. As a sadder and wiser woman I take my leave of you. Good-by.

EPILOGUE

THIS has been a day of coincidences. They began in the afternoon and ended an hour ago. And now, past midnight, in my sitting-room looking out on the lights of the Rond Point, like Bret Harte's heroine, "I am sitting alone by the fire, dressed just as I came from the dance"—only it wasn't a dance, it was the opera.

But to get to the coincidences: This afternoon I was unpacking an old trunk full of odds and ends that I brought when we came to Paris last autumn, and at the bottom of it I found the manuscript I had written four years ago at Mrs. Bushey's. I laid it on the top to read over in some idle moment when Roger wouldn't catch me. For though we've been married three years and talked over everything that ever happened to either of us, Roger doesn't know the whole story of that winter.

Of course I *have* asked him if he wasn't really in love with Lizzie, and he always laughs and says he wasn't, that he was attracted by her and interested in her as a type. I don't contradict him—

it's best to let men rest peacefully in their innocent self-delusions. Besides, if I pressed the subject we might have to go on to Lizzie and Masters, and that's the part of the story he doesn't know. Sometimes I've thought I'd tell him and then I've always stopped. Why should I? It's all come out right. Lizzie has traveled along the line of least resistance in one direction and reached success, and Roger has done the same thing in another and reached me. She *must* be happy if fulfilled ambitions can do it, and we *are*, with each other and last year—to crown it all—our boy.

Well, I won't go into that—I get too garrulous. When a woman of thirty-six has a baby she never gets over the pride and wonder of it.

We came over to Paris last autumn for Roger to do some reading in the Bibliothèque Nationale, and took this charming apartment near the Rond Point. On bright mornings I can look into the little park and see Roger Clements IX sitting out there in his perambulator studying Parisian life. The day suddenly strikes me as unusually fine and I go out and sit on the bench beside him and we study Parisian life together, while his *nou-nou* knits on a camp-chair near by.

- Bother—I keep losing sight of the coincidences which are the only reason I began to write this. To resume:

During these four years we have tried to keep track of Lizzie. It was difficult because, of course, after the first few months, she stopped writing. If it hadn't been for Betty we should have lost her entirely, but Betty, being the source of supplies, did know, at least, her whereabouts. I may add, en passant, that Mrs. Ferguson stood by her contract to the end and now is enjoying the fruits thereof. If she isn't known as the patron of the greatest living prima donna, she is known as a lady who made a career possible to one of the rising singers of Europe.

It was two years before Liza Bonaventura made her first hit, as Elizabeth in *Tannhäuser* at Dresden. Then we could follow her course in the papers. I was as proud as if I'd done it myself when I read of the excitement her *Tosca* created in Berlin. After that there was a series of triumphs in the smaller cities of Germany. She sang *Carmen* at a special performance where the royal family of something or other (I never can remember those German names, if I did I couldn't spell them).

were present, and the kinglet or princeling of the palace gave her a decoration.

After that the papers began to print stories about her, which is the forerunner of fame. Some of them were very funny, but most of them sounded true. I don't think her press-agent had to do much inventing. All sorts of distinguished and wonderful men were in love with her, but she would have none of them. There were some anecdotes of her temper that I am sure were genuine: how she once slapped a rival prima donna in the face, and threw her slipper at the head of a German Serene Highness who must have lost his serenity for the moment.

When we came over here we had first-hand accounts of her, from Americans who had been traveling in Germany and were bursting with pride and enthusiasm, and foreigners, who knew more and were more temperate, but admitted that a new star had risen on the horizon. "The handsomest woman on the operatic stage since Malibran," an old French marquis, who had heard her as *Tosca*, told me one night at dinner. Then some Italians who had seen her *Carmen* were quite thrilled—such temperament—such passion! Only Calve in her prime had given such a dramatic portrayal of the fiery gipsy.

Opinions were divided about her Brunhilda. A man Roger and I met at the house of a French writer, where we sometimes go, told us that in majesty and nobility she was incomparable, but that her voice was inadequate. Still, she was young, hardly in her full vigor, with care and study, aided by her magnificent physique, she might yet rise to the vocal requirements and then—he spread out his hands and rolled up his eyes.

To-night I have come from the opera after hearing her in *Carmen* and the effect is with me still—the difficulty of shaking off the illusion and getting back into life.

When I looked round from my seat in the orchestra and saw that house, tier upon tier of faces, hundreds of small pale ovals in ascending ranks, all looking the same way, all waiting to hear Lizzie, I couldn't believe it. The great reverberating shell of building held them like bees in a hive, buzzing as they found places whence they could see the queen bee. Through my own quivering expectancy I could sense theirs, quieter but keen, and hear, thrown back from the resonant walls and hollow dome, the sounds of fluttered programs, rustling fabrics, seats dropping and the fluctuant hum of

voices—the exhilarating stir and bustle of a great audience gradually settling into stillness. They couldn't have come to see Lizzie—so many people? I was dreaming, it was somebody else.

The curtain lifted, the illuminated stage was set in the gloom like a glowing picture. Figures moved across it, voices sang, and then Carmen came with the red flower in her mouth and it *was* Lizzie.

She was changed, matured, grown fuller and handsomer, much handsomer—her beauty in full flower. Her voice, too, was immensely improved; a fine voice, full, clear and large, not, as she had once said to me, one of the world's great voices, but enough for her, sufficient for what she has to do with it. It is she, her personality, her magnetic and compelling self, that is the potent thing.

Just as she used to seize upon and subdue us at Mrs. Bushey's, she seized upon and subdued those close-packed silent ranks. From the brilliant picture, cutting the darkness in front of us, she reached out, groped for and grasped at every consciousness, waiting to receive its impression. The other singers lost their identity, faded into a colorless middle distance, as we used to fade when Lizzie came among us. She held the house, not so much

charmed as subjugated, more as the conqueror than the enchantress. As the opera progressed I, with my intimate knowledge of her, could see her gaining force, could feel her fierce exhilaration, as she realized her dominance was growing secure. Her voice grew richer, her performance more boldly confident. To me she reached her highest point in the scene over the cards, her face stiffened to a tragic mask, the cry of "*La Mort*" imbued with horror. I can't get it out of my mind—the Gitana, terrible with her lust of life, suddenly looking into the eyes of death.

I don't know how to write about music, but it wasn't all music. It was the woman, the combination of her great endowment with her power of vitalizing an illusion, of putting blood and fire into an imaginary creation, that made it so remarkable. Her portrayal had not the vocal beauty or sophisticated seduction of Calve's. It was more primitive, farther from the city and closer to the earth. It seemed to me more Merimée's Carmen than Bizet's. Of its kind, I, anyway—and Roger agreed with me—thought it superb.

When it ended and she came before the curtain there were bursts upon bursts of applause and

"bravas" dropping from the galleries. I dare say I will never again see a dream so completely realized. Then the house began to empty itself down that splendid stairway, a packed, slow-moving, voluble crowd, praise, criticism, comment, flung back and forth in the excited French fashion. I was silent, holding Roger's arm. A short fat Frenchman behind me puffed almost into my ear, "*Quelle femme, mais, quelle femme!*" A woman in front in a Chinese opera cloak, leaned back to say over her shoulder to a man squeezing past Roger, "*La voix est bonne, mais n'est pas grande chose, mais c'est une vraie artiste.*" And an angular girl at my elbow, steering an old lady through cracks in the mass, murmured ecstatically to herself, "*Mon Dieu, quelle temperament!*" That was the word I heard oftenest, temperament.

So in a solid brilliant throng we descended the stairs, all engaged with Lizzie, discussing her, lauding her, wondering at her—Lizzie, whom I had seen in the making, learning to be the *vraie artiste*, wounded, desperate and despairing that this might be.

At the stair-foot—this is the last of the coincidences—the crowd broke into lines and clumps, scat-

tering for the exits, and through a break I saw a man standing by a pillar. He was looking up at the descending people, but not as if he was interested in them, in fact by the expression of his face I don't think he saw them. It was John Masters.

If he hadn't been so absorbed he would have seen me for I was close to him. But his eyes, set in that fixity of inner vision, never swerved. He looked much older, more lined, his bald spot grown all over the top of his head. Though the glimpse I had of him was fleeting, the crowd closing on him almost directly, it was long enough for me to see that the change was deeper than what the years might have wrought. It was spiritual, diminished will power, self-reliance grown weak. Shabby, thin, discouraged, he suggested just one word—failure.

My hand involuntarily shut on Roger's arm and I whispered to him to hurry. I could not bear the thought of meeting Masters—not for my sake but for his. I couldn't bear to look into his face and see him try to smile.

It is nearly one. Roger is writing in his study and Roger Clements IX is sleeping in his crib by my bed. How strange it all is. Four years ago not one of us, except Lizzie, the impossible and ir-

responsible, had the least idea that any of us would be where we are now. It was Lizzie, fighting out her destiny, who crowded and elbowed us all into our proper places, Lizzie, rapt in her vision, who brought us ours.

This is the real end of my manuscript. It *has* got somewhere after all. I can write "finis" with a sense of its being the fitting word. But before I do I want to just say that I made up my mind to-night, while we were driving home in the taxi, that I'll never tell Roger now.

FINIS

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