

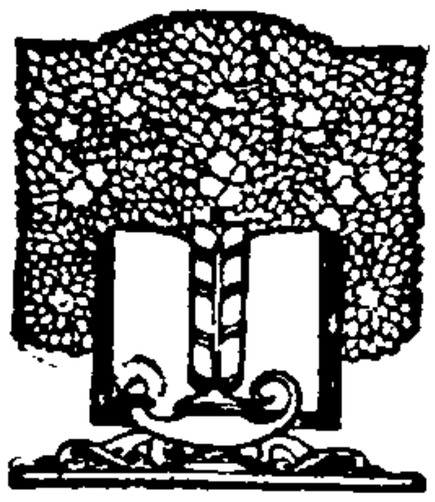
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THE SEAS OF GOD

A Novel

[Armstrong Anne Wetzer]



"... Are they not all the seas of God?"

—*Walt Whitman*

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BOOK I

DREAMING YOUTH

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THE SEAS OF GOD

CHAPTER I

LYDIA stood looking out toward the sunset. She delighted in this hour of the winter afternoon when glow was dying into gloom, in the bare trees etched in all the delicate, lacelike intricacy of their twigs and branches against the deepening orange of the sky; and she was deriving now, from this sad but splendid sunset hour, most exquisite sensations, tinged — pleasurably — with melancholy.

A great evergreen tangle of honeysuckle clung to one end of a narrow porch that ran part way across the front of the cottage. Slats broken, or missing entirely, left conspicuous gaps in all the blinds, and both green and grey paint, blinds and walls, were dingy and streaked from Kingsville's fierce summer suns, and the frequent soot-showers of her winters.

The cottage had no distinction except one of site, and in Kingsville, girt by its blue mountains, a *beau-site* was so common as hardly to constitute of itself any distinction at all. For Kingsville was built on seven hills, an old brick-built Southern town, bristling

with church spires. "Built like the Eternal City on seven hills"—Lydia, when a child, had heard some one say. What a torch to her imagination had been that comparison of Kingsville to far-off Rome!

A time had come when she wondered why she did not hate, instead of love, Kingsville.

She was wondering that this evening, for her glance *would* travel to a neighbouring hill where the old buildings of Ransom College stood silhouetted against the southern sky, the chapel with its little bell-tower crowning the hill-top. At the foot of the hill, in the house surrounded with great magnolia trees, whose chimneys she could make out from the cottage window, she had lived from her earliest memories until Ransom College — where her father had given his best years — had invited his resignation.

She caught sight of her father coming up the brick walk. She had realised his health was declining, but all at once she became conscious that never before had he looked quite like this.

He came in from the porch, shivering, and, saying something about the cold, went over to the open fire, and held his long, thin hands before it to warm them.

Lydia busied herself about the table she had set for supper. Since economy in coal had become a pressing necessity, they used this sitting room for meals as well. It was an irking way to Lydia — her tastes were spacious — an irking, poor-folk's way of managing. But she was not thinking just of that now. The fact was, she could not trust her voice to answer his remark about the weather because of a sudden oppressive sensation

in her throat. She fled to the kitchen to escape the too close surveillance of his eyes.

Here, in an odd flash, she caught herself thinking how remarkable it was that the rosy glow thrown forth into the dusk of the room from the little openings in the front of the cookstove, and the gentle singing of the tea-kettle, should convey to her — homely sight and sound that they were — an impression of something definitely reassuring. . . . It *could* not, could not, be so alarming, really, she said to herself, that look of her father, as for an instant she had allowed herself to believe.

II

She set about slicing a piece of cold boiled beef with feverish activity. To have something definite like this to do, and to do at once, was to make yourself half believe that nothing out of the ordinary had occurred — no terrifying impression just been received! She opened the oven and tested the potatoes to see if they were done. Through a back window she saw her father, who had gone out to the coal-shed in the rear lot, set the loaded coal buckets down half way the short distance from the shed to the steps of the cottage, and place his hand on his back.

Before he could lift the buckets again, Lydia had darted out of the door.

His face was ashy.

"Father, let me carry them!"

"I'm all right." He struggled to smile as he brushed her aside.

She followed him into the kitchen.

"Oh, Father, I wish you'd change doctors! I don't believe Dr. Williams is helping you at all!" she said vehemently, and as she uttered the words a flame of indignation rose in her young breast. Dr. Williams was responsible — that was it — for all these distressing feelings that had suddenly overtaken her. But in her effort to calm her growing fears, she kept saying over to herself emphatically, "Well, if Dr. Williams can't help him, surely *some* doctor can!"

III

When they were seated at supper, her father drew a letter from his pocket, unfolded a check from it, and handed it to her.

"It's for you, Lydia. . . .

"For me?"

Her eyes widened with surprise. She noticed the check was in payment for an article he had written on the "Flora of the Kingsville Region," but she was puzzled to know why he should hand it to her.

"Didn't I see you looking at a suit, yesterday?"

She turned crimson. Then he had seen her looking in the windows at Maxfield's!

"You need a suit, Lydia." He motioned her to keep the check. "And get a 'toque,' or whatever they call those little hats," he added awkwardly, evidently conscious that he knew very little about the intricacies of feminine dress.

As he lifted his cup of tea, she noticed the frayed

edge of his coat sleeve, and the lump in her throat seemed on the point of choking her.

He looked up from his plate, directly at her, and a slight, almost wistful smile passed over his large-featured face, deepening its furrows.

"Lydia, what's the matter?" he asked. "You're not—?"

"No, I'm not!" she broke in with abrupt vivacity, a smile glistening through her tears.

"It's just . . . I'm so pleased . . . about the suit. . . . Oh, thank you, thank you!"

She jumped up from the table, and as she flew by him into her bedroom she bestowed with childish gaucherie a swift, agitated kiss on the thin locks of greyish hair that straggled over his forehead.

IV

An hour later, she persuaded him to put away his writing for the evening — those articles he wrote, alas! so few accepted—and brought out the chessboard.

For Lydia, chess was an expiatory diversion. The long waits for determining whether Pawn should be sacrificed, Knight advanced, or what not, were all but unendurable to her impatient habit of mind. She only proposed the game at times like this when she was feeling vaguely burdened with guilt. For view it as she would, she felt it somehow culpable in herself that she should be exhilarated, as without doubt she was, over the prospect of the suit in Maxfield's windows at which she had gazed longingly — her own!

It seemed to her this evening, as she bent over the chessboard — the light on the table making her bright hair a nimbus about her head — that the silences of the game were longer and more appalling than ever before. The only sound in the room was of the coal in the grate crackling as little flames shot up through its fresh fissures, and she felt, nervously, as though her father could almost hear her thoughts clattering in her brain.

A sudden desire seized her to snatch his big, bony hand hovering over the chess pieces and kiss it. She wanted to express to him in some such savagely affectionate, unmistakable way (before it was too late!) her love for him, her respect, her admiration! Bitter injustice had been done him; he had been sacrificed to satisfy the prejudices of absurd provincial bigotry, and now perhaps he was dying, and those trustees of Ransom College — not the seeds of the fatal disease that were in him — but those narrow trustees, and narrow Kingsville opinion back of them, were killing him! They had forced his resignation from the college, four years earlier, because of a series of lectures he had delivered there on the Descent of Man.

Those Thursday Night Lectures, which he had taken his turn in the faculty in delivering, were a winter's course always offered by Ransom College to the public, an "effort to relate the College to the Town," the College expressed it; a relationship, when it came to lectures, rather gingerly embraced, as a rule, by the Town.

Her father's Thursday Nights had been well attended because already suspicion had breathed over

Kingsville that he upheld those disquieting modern theories so totally at variance with Kingsville's inherited conviction that God, having finished heavens and earth, had *ended* his work which he had made, and rested!

A God still working at his work of creation? — Impossible! Blasphemous!

At least, in some such way, Lydia had scornfully interpreted Kingsville's attitude, every drop of blood in her young body fierce in justification of her father, when the Kingsville clergy, hugging close the Book of Genesis, had openly referred to his lectures, had admonished their congregations of hearty-eating, soft-sleeping Kingsvillians that God was still spelled with a large *G*, nature with a small *n* — they were not to forget *that* — had finally brought pressure to bear on the trustees that had accomplished his severance from the College.

The fire had burned down to a luminous bed of ruby coals, over which little blue flames danced.

"Check!" Professor Lambright's call broke the long stillness.

Lydia's hand, moving to the rescue of her King, was arrested by the sound of steps on the porch, and then a knock.

"The Pooles, probably," she whispered, and before opening the door, she gave to her hair that instinctive feminine touch of adjustment so inevitable at such a juncture.

V

It was not the Pooles.

"Why, Mr. Churchwell!" she exclaimed.

"But you will let me in, won't you, Miss Lydia?" the man in the doorway answered banteringly to her surprise.

He held his soft hat in his hand, and his dark eyes, which swam in a slight mist, looked down eloquently into Lydia's.

An instant before the thought of a visit from the comfortable Pooles had been a prop to her; it was as if the presence of that good but prosaic couple might banish the shadowy form she discerned dimly behind her father; but now the unexpected advent of Ransom Churchwell brought suddenly into the room a great colourful warmth — the lovely radiance of afternoon sun sifting through jewelled windows! They were not isolated now, she and her father! They were related through him, through Churchwell, to all the wealth and warmth of the outside world! The very tones of Churchwell's appealing voice, the graceful movements of his gallant figure, reassured her, while he remained within her ken, of the friendliness of the whole planetary system!

"Interrupting one of your frivolous diversions, I see"— pointing to the chessboard —"but I've brought a book I thought you'd like to look over, Professor Lambright."

He took a volume from the pocket of the ulster he was removing and handed it to Lydia's father.

"Oh! Yes, I've been wanting to see it, Ransom."

Lydia thrilled! She always thrilled to hear her own father call this particular man by his first name, familiarly, Ransom! It seemed to bring Ransom Churchwell mysteriously, entrancingly, nearer herself! When her father had known him a lad, his pupil, of course. But now, in majesty of manhood! Choicest flower of the complacent aristocracy of Kingsville!

Not that Lydia regarded her father unfit to treat with the grandest, anywhere, on equal terms. Little enough she knew, to be sure, of her father's forebears, but they had been gentle — she insisted that to herself, always — and her father a gentleman in something more even than that sense of "high-erected thoughts" and "heart of courtesy," of which surely indeed she knew him possessed. The fact remained, however, quite undeniably, that Ransom Churchwell was the Lambrights' one point of contact with the picturesque reigning class of Kingsville on which Lydia's child eyes, and maiden eyes, had looked with so highly complex a mixture of awe, contempt, hatred, envy!

VI

Professor Lambright held the volume Churchwell had brought him affectionately in his thin hands, turning the pages. Lydia had seated herself on a square stool near the fire.

She had selected this spot, facing her father and Churchwell, and placed her stool over it, because just here the thin carpet had worn thinnest. Of course, each time Churchwell came, things were, of necessity,

a trifle more dilapidated than the time before; but as her eyes made a swift, furtive inventory of the room — the side-table on which an old-fashioned silver tea-set was gleaming in the light of the open fire, the book-shelves with their bust of Goethe, the engraving, after Raphael, which her father had brought years before from Rome (St. Peter asleep between the watchmen, and being awakened by the angel) — she decided there was still that air of refinement in their surroundings so essential to the ease of her fastidious young soul. Her stool well covering carpet-holes, she had no apologies to make — not even to Mr. Churchwell, whose eyes rested on her while he talked to her father.

"But, of course, Professor Lambright, we must let Miss Aristotle read and digest this work first," he was saying, his eyes gleaming mischievously, "so she can determine whether it'll be profitable for you and me to peruse!"

Lydia and her father both laughed. What camaraderie in the three-cornered friendship! How, at once, they all understood each other! It was months since Churchwell's last visit, and yet, now he was with them again, it was as if only a day had passed since then.

It was immeasurable comfort to Lydia that Churchwell sympathised with the views of her father which had branded him dangerous in Kingsville, that he had nothing but approval for those Thursday Night Lectures on the Descent of Man which her father had delivered at Ransom College, founded and endowed by Ransom Churchwell's maternal grandfather.

It was clearly apparent, on Churchwell's part, that he loved to see the sparkling challenge of this girl's eye rise to his, for he continued to rally her.

"Miss Lydia, I don't see how your father and I are going to marry you to a Prince of the Blood Royal of Kingsville, when you will persist in poring over the 'First Principles of Synthetic Philosophy'!"

His quick eye had detected a battered copy on the top of the shelves beside him, a small handkerchief thrust between its pages to mark a place.

"Oh, I'm wedded already, to — to — Herbert Spencer!" she laughed.

The deep, tender tones of Churchwell's voice were still sounding through and through her. She was wondering why his voice always made her feel so queer, so sort of — well, shaky, and perturbed, inside — withal rather a delicious tumult! And she was thinking, too, that it was tremendously clever in him, actually very splendid and cosmopolitan, the easy, jesting nonchalance with which he spoke of the Blood Royal of Kingsville, as if he, himself, were not of the strain. A rare Kingsvillian, truly, who could laugh at Kingsville! — who could find amusing the airs Kingsville's old families gave themselves, when Ransoms and Churchwells were of the oldest among them.

"Yes, you have the youths thoroughly terrified, Miss Lydia!" insisted Churchwell, lifting one eyebrow whimsically. "I heard young Bob Allen saying the other day to my brother, 'There's that little Lydia Lambright, prettier than any of them, but, confound it, I'm afraid of her! She *knows* too much!'"

"Poor Bob!" laughed Lydia. But her pulses had begun beating quickly. Spots, each feeling no larger than a dollar, were burning hotly in her cheeks. She was breathing in with excitement the perfume of Bob's phrase, "Little Lydia Lambright, prettier than any of them!"—but the thing that was really fluttering her most was the way Mr. Churchwell had looked at her when he had repeated it.

Her father, smiling absently at their chaff, had been cutting pages in the "Riddle of the Universe," dipping into it here and there. He rose now, to put more coal on the fire.

"Ransom, you're just back from Washington? . . . How's your case coming on?" he asked, as he turned from the fire.

The men fell into men's talk; and Lydia's thoughts, after a time, again to revolving in old grooves. . . . It seemed ages ago to her, though it was only a matter of five or six years, since she had read the fateful engraved words:

". . . desire the honour of your presence
at the marriage of their daughter
Seraphina
to
Mr. Ransom Craighead Churchwell . . ."

Tear-drenched, secret hours had followed. Who could have told her, better than she knew herself, how futile? How foolish! What right had she, child-to-be-chucked-under-chin, nothing more, to him, to resent this binding to Seraphina for better, for worse, till

death part, of her adored Mr. Churchwell? . . . Yet she had resented it — she was still vaguely resenting it.

Churchwell's voice startled her.

"Miss Lydia, may I speak to your father alone a few moments?"

VII

"That's odd!" she thought, as she went out into her bedroom. "What can he want to see him alone for?"

But instantly she defended Churchwell against a phantom accuser. "It's something good, anyway."

She lit the glass bedroom lamp, and held it so she could see herself in the mirror of the walnut bureau, scrutinising carefully the reflection in its small swinging glass. The voices of Churchwell and her father reached her through the closed door, but more insistent than their low tones were Bob Allen's words buzzing gaily in her ears, "Little Lydia Lambright, prettier than any of them!"

Opening a scuffed leather trunk, she drew out the waist of an old evening gown — one of the few mementoes she had of a mother so mysterious to her when alive, and each year since her death grown more baffling a memory. It released a faint, slightly musty scent, and handling it she became indefinably agitated.

She had never seen her mother wear it; it belonged to days before those she could recall; but once before, playing "grown lady" in her childhood, she had donned this pretty relic, and now she unfastened her childishly-made serge dress, slipped from it, and into the crushed evening bodice of pale green, cut into a

low "V." She was shivering — she could see her breath form into vapour in the frigid air of the room — but she was burning too!

She held up the lamp again — and her heart jumped! It was that girl of Greuze in her father's copy! — gay, dainty, elegant — a cloud of fair hair waved back from an oval face, high arch of crescent brows, a nose delicately aquiline, soft pastel tints of downy skin heightened to rose in the cheeks! She was bewitched by this reflection of a Lydia transformed by a bit of old finery! It pleased her mightily, too, to fancy that in the fluid, glancing, indescribable charm she found in the face in the mirror, she could behold traces of that one of her grandmothers of whom she had a faint but fascinating knowledge. For, however strangely shrouded from her the background of her parents' lives, they had told her one thing, at least — that her mother's mother had been a Frenchwoman.

Peering with eager, parted lips into the swinging glass, she thought she saw, far ahead, a destiny, for this girl she gazed at, wondrous as dreams are wondrous! There was a touch of initiation in the dark eyes looking back at her that gave this promise, some subtle, haunting quality of soul infused with the child quality they had not entirely lost.

She threw up her head to let her eyes drift back over the curve of white throat reflected, she turned from side to side to catch every angle of enchantment. With a little rapturous tremor she wound her arms embracingly about her own shoulders, revealed to her fragile but lovely as they rose above the pale-green bodice.

All at once her father's voice reached her distinctly: "Ransom, I can't accept —"

Then the murmur of both voices again, rising, lowering, as if in contest.

A great wave of shame swept over Lydia. She stripped off the evening bodice and threw it upon the trunk, hurrying back into her dark serge dress.

"Oh, Father!" she cried, kneeling on the floor by the bed, "how could I be admiring myself in the glass when you're dying?"

VIII

"Lydia!"

She sprang up, and hurriedly dried her eyes.

Churchwell was leaving when she re-entered the sitting room. Her father was standing opposite him on the hearth-rug. A singular change had come over his face — an expression of hope. Sun rifted Lydia's gloom, broke over her world again in myriad dancing points of light!

Churchwell, drawing on his gloves, had some last jesting talk with her.

"You will come again — *soon* — won't you, Mr. Churchwell?" escaped impulsively from her as he took her hand.

"I will — soon!" he promised. His eyes, so searchingly sympathetic, so admiring — ah, she could *not* doubt it! — beamed down assurance.

A moment more and he was gone, swallowed up in the darkness outside, though for another moment Lydia stood at the window, looking after him.

CHAPTER II

LYDIA opened sleepy eyes on the grey half-light of a winter morning. She stretched drowsily, dreading to step out of her warm bed into the cold room. She would have loved another hour, but at least she would give herself the guilty enjoyment of just one more minute, two perhaps, or three, of warm dreaminess before she made the plunge into the cold. As her thoughts began to shape themselves more clearly, she was filled with a sense of something agreeable that had happened — or was about to happen. She wondered, more than she had the night before, what Mr. Ransom Churchwell had talked to her father about privately, and why her father had not told her at once, after Mr. Churchwell left, what it was.

Her eyes wandered to a calendar which hung on the wall beside her, and pushing a little farther away from her the inevitable moment of getting up, she began to read the dates on the calendar leaf. With a start, she saw it was the twenty-seventh of January on which she had just opened her eyes — her father's birthday! She had forgotten it! And she was perplexed to know where she could get enough money for a little feast, something out of the ordinary, to surprise him.

A few moments later, she was so absorbed in secret

projects, that she hardly realised he had come into the kitchen, until looking up from the coffee she had ground and was pouring from the mill, she saw him bent over the stove, his hands spread out above it.

"It gets warm here quicker than in the other room," he explained.

It was borne in upon her that only lately had he been so keenly sensitive to cold; their changed relation struck her, too, as it had once or twice before — the wonderful sense of protection the mere presence of her father once had given her, and now he seemed to have become her charge. This compassion for him, that never left her entirely any more, hurt like physical pain. . . . There had been, certainly, that eager spark in his eye the night before, and her glad hope that had swiftly twinned his. But was it still there? Her glance revealed him grey and pinched in the chill morning light.

At any rate, the last thing to do was to let him suspect her fears.

"I do think 'Peter Ibbetson' is perfectly charming, Father," she remarked, as they sat down to breakfast. "I believe it's the most charming book I ever read; I couldn't help crying. And Peter, a little boy in France, in that old garden, oh, I loved that!"

She chattered on, but constantly in the back of her mind while she talked and while her father answered, was the thought that it was his birthday, and she wondered if he remembered that it was.

II

Breakfast over, she arranged the ironing-board, and tested the irons, and as she did so, a memory flashed through her of the sour, conscientious woman who had exercised authority over her earlier years. Just as Miss Barker had patted, pulled, pressed, she was patting, pulling, pressing, now. It seemed impossible for her to get through the weekly ironing without these vivid disagreeable representments of Miss Barker. Her father had married in England, and had brought her mother, English born, of French parents, home to America, and after a time — Lydia did not know how long a time — to Kingsville. A few years later, Miss Barker, who had been housekeeper for his mother, had come to take charge of his own household, demoralised through the chronic illness of its mistress; she had been willing to remain after his removal from the College, when his salary stopped, and his inherited means exhausted, sweeping retrenchment had become necessary.

Lydia supposed long association had made Miss Barker endurable to her father. Æons of association, she thought, would not have reconciled *her* to Miss Barker. Her own antagonism had grown out of something she had but little understood — Miss Barker's constant surveillance to prevent her being alone with her mother.

But her thoughts kept returning to the birthday celebration. Finally, she decided she might dispose of a miscellaneous assortment of old text-books that had

survived her use of them in school. Her father's Christmas present she had purchased with the proceeds from a handful of old trinkets she had sold to a second-hand dealer.

III

Early in the afternoon, he announced his intention of going out while the sun was still bright, and as soon as he left, she put the books into her market-basket, and started off.

She hurried along back streets, hoping that she should meet no one who knew her, but wishing she had courage enough not to try to cover up poverty, not to try to disguise the fact that she was carrying a basket of old books to sell to a second-hand book dealer.

She descended to the heart of the old town, and wound swiftly in and out of narrow streets, dark and malodorous, till she reached the second-hand book-shop.

An old man dragged himself forward and peered at her cautiously as she took the paper off her basket and piled up her books on a table already piled with nondescript battered volumes.

"What do you want for 'em?"

"Oh, what will you give?"

"They ain't worth anything. You know that, don't you?"

"Why, they use the same books in the schools now. . . ." Lydia picked up an Elementary Algebra, a Physiology and Hygiene, a General History, and eagerly showed him.

"Expect me to carry 'em till next September? Bring 'em in then, if you want to sell 'em."

September! Lydia's heart sank. By September there might be no more birthdays to celebrate!

"You can give me something for them, can't you? Anything . . . anything . . . you think they're worth . . ." she added falteringly.

"Worth! They ain't *worth* anything, now." But he made an abrupt concession—"I'll give you a dollar forty for the lot."

"Oh, more than that!" begged Lydia. "Look how many!"

"If you don't want that, pack 'em up!"

He turned his back on her, mumbling something as he walked off; but she called him back and accepted his offer.

He vanished then into a dim recess of the rear shop, and was so unconscionably long in returning with the money for her, that Lydia grew a trifle uneasy. She began examining the lines of dusty books on the shelves along the wall. Suddenly she took down a translation of "Madame Bovary." She had taken hints from her scattered reading that Flaubert's pages might reward peeping into!

"Want it?"

She started at the old man's voice behind her. A quick, unpleasant wave of warmth passed over her, but on second thought she realised that probably he knew less than she the contents of "Madame Bovary."

"How much is it?" she asked, romancing with herself momentarily.

"Let you have it a dollar ten. I ain't makin' those prices every day . . ." His tones had grown bland.

"Oh, I won't take it to-day, thank you," she answered hastily.

"A dollar . . . I'll give it to you for a dollar . . ."

"I'm in a hurry, please . . ." She held out her hand.

His face clouded, but he put the money in her hand.

She drew a breath of relief when she got into the street again, and started toward Maxfield's; but her feet slackened as she reached the corner of Main Street. Here was a shop window she had never been able to resist!

"Law, Lydia, you picking you out an engagement ring?" came a drawling, jocular inquiry from behind her.

Lydia turned around with vexation.

"Oh! Rosa! . . ."

But it was not as she would be seen even by Rosa — gaping in a jeweller's window! She liked to associate herself, in thought at least, with the Grand Class, who entered jewellers' doors, rather than stared hungrily through their plate-glass.

"Where you keepin' yourself, Lydia? Why don't you ever come over?" pursued Rosa familiarly. "Can't you come on home with me now?"

"Oh, no, thank you. I have some errands . . ."

Lydia had tried to make this reply not too icy, yet final. But Rosa Bagster was the kind you couldn't get away from.

"I have to go on. Oh, that's kind of you, I'm sure.

Thank you . . . thank you very much . . .” Disguising, she hoped, with these civil words, her distaste for Bagster invitations, Lydia released herself finally, and hurried on down Main Street. Well, she was paying for that fatal mistake she had made in once accepting an invitation to Rosa Bagster's. That party had settled it for her. . . . If she couldn't move, for one reason and another, in the circle where she coveted to move, she at least didn't need to mingle with Bagsters. . . . They had looked up to her as if she were a queen, timidly, or hysterically familiar, like Rosa herself, but Bagster atmosphere was not at all one *she* would breathe! Better sit quietly at home, opposite her father, reading. . . . And that she had done, since, the evenings of several years past.

IV

She felt a sudden pang of dismay to find the suit she had admired gone from the window when she reached Maxfield's. Perhaps it had been sold!

On the second floor — millinery, corsets, ladies' suits and coats — she was referred to Mrs. Joy. Mrs. Joy would show her the suits.

With a graceful gesture of apology, Mrs. Joy left her other customers. “The brown suit . . .?” Slowly — “The brown suit . . . that was in the window . . .?”

Then with sudden inspiration — “Oh! — I know the very one you mean! So sweet for you, too, with those eyes!” shaking a roguish finger at Lydia. “Now just a moment, and I'm free! On the settee,

my dear," propelling Lydia to a circular settee of plush in the centre of the room.

Lydia watched her — watched and listened, for not to have heard the tones of Mrs. Joy's deep, fruity voice was to have missed much of her quality. People said Maxfield's was Mrs. Joy, and Mrs. Joy was Maxfield's. It seemed not improbable to Lydia as she observed her. Such unctuous resource in the discharge of those responsibilities, commercial, if you will, with which Providence, or Maxfield, had entrusted her! Kingsville, rolling the tid-bit gleefully under its old tongue, declared Mrs. Joy the mistress of Maxfield. Lydia had heard it: and, almost in equal parts, repelled by the idea, and fascinated by it, by Mrs. Joy herself, in the sumptuous flesh, she started thinking of that awful institution — a man's mistress! . . . Kings had mistresses. Successful merchants, like Maxfield, had mistresses, it seemed. Men of the world had mistresses. . . . She wondered if Mr. Ransom Churchwell had ever had — a mistress! . . . It was more agitating than any thought she had ever known before — more torturing, for the moment, than even that feeling she had had about the lawful Seraphina!

But Mrs. Joy was bidding farewell to her departing customers. . . . "So wise of you, Mrs. Copenhaver, to take *both* evening wraps!" Mrs. Joy looked quite sapient herself as she said it, a wrap of black brocade with lining of cerise depending from this plump arm, a mantle of delicate fawn from that — and between her laden arms, her monumental bosom heaving under its adorning passementerie.

She turned to Lydia. "Now, my dear . . ." She swept off.

Lydia was surprised to see her return carrying a suit of green.

"Oh, it was a brown suit . . ."

"Yes, yes, my dear. . . . But you must put on this first. . . . No! no! of course you don't want it! But just to please me! Now, won't you? I must get an idea of your style, so I can give you *just* what's right for *you!*"

She had Lydia's little thin coat stripped off; her little hat with its quill, off; her wavy hair caressingly put back just as it belonged; she had the skirt over Lydia's head; the jacket on her; even the velvet Directoire collar fastened around her throat, while Lydia was still in a state of protest.

"Oh, what a picture!" she cried rapturously. "Made for her, isn't it?" she called to the other saleswomen.

She consulted the cryptic price-mark. "Forty-five! Oh! what value!" Her voice rose astonished, almost pained.

"Let me look again! . . . What! Did I say forty-five? Thirty-five!" she announced.

Lydia's heart quailed. She tried to muster courage to explain that the figure so moderate, it appeared, to Mrs. Joy, was far too high for her own consideration, but the heady, exotic scent emanating from Mrs. Joy's garments seemed to blunt her will.

"I don't like to give you so much trouble," she ventured, starting to draw off the jacket.

"Trouble?" Mrs. Joy rose gallantly to the charge. "Trouble?" Her laughter came in rich ripples, and she placed soft, arresting hands on Lydia. "Why, dear child, I live to take trouble, to serve the dear ladies of Kingsville! I love you! I love every one of you! You know it!" she cried, with an arch expression. "I go to New York for you, my dear! I will have my Kingsville ladies second to none—" Her voice dropped to a whisper. "And I'm going to part with the profits on this little suit! It's too adorable on you! I'm going to let you have it for thirty!"

Lydia braced herself. "But how much is the brown suit?" she asked, a slightly belligerent ring in her voice.

Mrs. Joy called out cheerily, "Miss Hooper, bring me that little brown suit that was in the window, frogs on the jacket . . ."

Lydia's heart gave a leap of relief when its price, fifteen dollars, fell on her ears.

"Nice, natty little suit," Mrs. Joy commended it, as she shaped the jacket on her, "and really more becoming than the green! But a hard time you *would* have, dear child, to find anything *un*becoming!"

She took the address. "Lambright?" She paused, her pencil suspended. "Lambright . . .?"

"From the North, I suppose," she said, at last. "So many Northern people in Kingsville now—"

"I've lived in Kingsville always, almost," Lydia interrupted, with some dignity. "My father's Northern," she added. Of course she would not deny it. But it was irritating the way people in Kingsville al-

ways, smiling it might be, but with lifted eyebrows, pronounced this word — *Northern!* It seemed to her that you never could quite get away in Kingsville from this blight of Northern extraction. . . . If it hadn't been too disloyal, she might have wished countless times that *her* father, *her* grandfather, *her* great-grandfather, had been of Kingsville origin. She felt that then, perhaps, everything might have been so different for her. . . .

Mrs. Joy, the newly purchased suit dangling from her arm, was visited with a sudden remembrance of the name of Lambright.

"Oh! not Professor Lambright who was at the College?" she asked.

Lydia said yes.

"Oh, my dear, excuse me! I didn't dream. . . . But now, my dear, let me give you a bit of advice! I'm old enough to advise you, am I not?" With her flashing teeth, she invited Lydia to contradict .this statement. "We all have our little troubles, dear! Don't brood on yours! We don't choose our parents —"

The look in Lydia's face caused her to pause.

"Oh, my dear," she resumed, recovering herself, "there's worse people in the world than atheists! Kingsville's a bigoted old place! I've come pretty near finding *that* out, *myself!*"— The rippling laughter again, the knowing look, as if, out of the bounteous nature of her, she would be willing to include, with the supposed moral peccadilloes that had caused estrange-

ment of popular approval in her own case, whatever of spiritual peccadilloes in the case of Lydia's father.

V

For some time after Lydia left Maxfield's, she was still stinging with indignation. The presumption of Mrs. Joy! — as if *she* were competent to distinguish atheist from theist! And how had the woman dared class herself (in that profaning inuendo) with a man like her father?

She almost wished she had not bought the suit. She had been disappointed in its appearance once it was on her; it had been anti-climax after the green suit. However, by the time she reached the second-hand bookshop, where she stopped to pick up her basket, she had recalled her father so happy in giving her the check, anticipating her joy in a new suit . . . . After all, she would love it, she said to herself, with a little catch in her breath.

The Market Square was full of loafers when she came to it — negroes and "poor whites." Miserable looking white beggar-girls accosted her with their whining "Miss, gimme a nickel." She made her way hurryingly into the big Market House and made purchases at various stalls.

As she emerged into the narrow, cluttered thoroughfare that ran on four sides of the Market House, she paused, and furtively opening her purse, glanced at the remaining coins — eighteen cents left, counting three pennies . . . it would be enough for a flower or two.

Inattentively picking her way among the hucksters' wagons, one of them almost backed into her and as she sprang ahead to safety, she found herself full against the Churchwell carriage! So near that she could put out her hand and touch Mrs. Ransom Churchwell, whose opulent curves were outlined against the plum-coloured cushions of the victoria. But a sort of haze formed instantaneously over Lydia's eyes; near as she was, she received only a dim, fleeting impression of Mrs. Churchwell's plumes tossing her an aloof recognition.

Her face was aflame, her cheeks still burning when a few minutes later she entered a little florist's shop and inquired the price of roses.

"These?" The young woman in attendance touched a jar of American Beauty roses. "Five dollars."

"Oh, not a-dozen; a-piece . . ."

"Fifty cents, I suppose. These are cheaper," listlessly indicating some others. "Thirty-five . . . twenty-five . . ."

"I was just pricing them," Lydia murmured, turning to go, when the young woman drew out a jar of small rose-buds. "Fifteen cents a-piece for these," she said, and Lydia selected one and paying for it laid it tenderly on top of her marketing.

It was nearly four by the florist's clock, she had noticed, and when she left the Square she flew.

She saw no smoke from the chimney as she approached the cottage. Evidently her father had al-

lowed the fire to go down. Well, when she went in, she would scold him!

But the key was still behind the blind where she had left it. Oh, after all, it wasn't very late. Perhaps he had gone for a walk in the country.

VI

And yet she felt a little uneasy. As she shook her saucepan and clouds of fragrant steam began to rise in the kitchen, she asked herself more and more anxiously why he did not come.

She looked out. The sky was deepening. She coaxed a cheerful blaze in the sitting room grate to welcome him. She had thought — an hour earlier — how gaily she would set forth the little feast in all the best bits of china and silver; but now, as she put the rose in a delicate holder, arranged the candles, and the grapes in their pretty basket, she could not force her mood to any gaiety at all. . . .

It was growing very dark at last, and unable to sit still, she went out on the porch and then on down to the gate. With straining eyes she peered in every direction through the deep, luminous blue of early evening. There were the town lights, outlining, with their silver stars against the blue, old Kingsville's hills and valleys. But nowhere her father. For a moment she thought she would run to the Pooles and ask their advice, but then she realised that such a course would be an admission that she believed something had happened to him. She would not, absolutely would not, yet,

make that admission, and with pounding heart she went back into the cottage.

The minutes lagged agonisingly; but it was always so, she told herself, when you waited for any one, your eyes riveted to the clock.

At last there was a sound on the walk outside, faint, and then distinct, unmistakable. Her heart gave a bound of joy! — all her foolish fears, and here he was.

She ran to the kitchen. Everything must be on the table. In all its splendour the birthday supper should meet his eyes! In a twinkling she had the candles lit, and then, the little festal table full in view, she flung the outside door wide open.

VII

Her father staggered through the doorway.

"Don't be frightened . . ." he managed to articulate, trying to smile — and fell to the floor.

"Father, what is it?" she cried. "Oh, Father!"

He did not answer. She tried to lift him, but he pushed her away.

She ran from the cottage and past the few intervening houses to summon the Pooles. She had forgotten the table, forgotten the feast, forgotten everything except the one overwhelming fact that on the floor of the cottage behind her lay her father. But when, a moment later, she opened the door for the Pooles, the picture that presented itself struck her with shocking force — the two lighted candles twinkling merrily on the supper table, the pink rose up-

holding its head bravely between them, the garnished dishes!

"How silly that table looks to the Pooles!" flashed through her, as she knelt with them beside her father, in an agony of tenderness.

VIII

The doctor and Mr. Poole were with her father. Lydia sat looking off into space, listening for the doctor's return from the bedroom, scarcely hearing the soft, sympathetic things Mrs. Poole said from time to time. Something, perhaps a little stiffening in Mrs. Poole's usually tranquil tones, made her look up.

"I would put away that bottle, dear." Mrs. Poole's eyes, fixed upon the supper table, expressed astonishment, plainly tinged with disapproval, at the pomp, the brilliant circumstance, with which Lydia and her father were apparently in the habit of supping. "I would certainly put it away. There may be others in, and people look at those things so differently, you know."

Lydia rose slowly from her chair, went to the table, and blew out the candles. Then she resumed her seat. "I won't tell her a thing about the birthday," she thought, with intolerance of Mrs. Poole's intolerance. This cheap little bottle of claret had been the gala touch to her feast.

Mrs. Poole rose very gently, and removing the bottle herself, carried it to the kitchen. Lydia could hear the pantry door open, then close.

When the doctor had left, she crept alone into her

father's room. His eyes were closed. She knelt by the bed, leaning her head against his arm.

"Oh, Father, it's your birthday!" she sobbed out, at last.

One of his big, thin hands moved feebly to her hair, and rested there.

CHAPTER III

THE Pooles remained all night, sitting up, and this ominous arrangement, which they had evidently made with the doctor, left no room for doubt in Lydia's mind that her father's condition was regarded critical.

Toward midnight, Mr. Poole, who had been constantly darting to and from the sickroom, came tiptoeing into the sitting room where Lydia and Mrs. Poole had been for a long time sitting silently faced to each other.

"Lydia," he said, already employing that hushed voice which bespeaks the house of death, "I'm going to make a fire in your father's room. It will be better to have one there now."

"Yes, it will be better," she answered in a dazed tone, and started out in the direction of the kitchen.

"Oh, let me get the coal, Lydia."

She turned on him almost savagely. "I'll get the coal," she said, passing on out.

She lit a lantern, and carried it out with her to the little coal-house in the rear of the cottage lot and placed it in the door, while with the big coal-shovel she filled her bucket, scraping up coal-dust as well as coal-lumps from the floor of the shed.

Her eyes travelled in the uncertain lantern light over the smutty shed. How many buckets full were left? — Very few; but as she made her laden way back to the cottage, her lantern throwing a narrow gleam ahead of her in the midnight blackness, she said to herself that neither the Pooles, nor any one else, should see how nearly exhausted the coal was.

The Pooles were the best people in the world, of course; but her place, now, was to keep guard! She would stay awake all night. Strangers, no, nor Pooles, should look into all the pitiful makeshifts to which she and her father had been driven. No one should know that there was scarcely a decent change of linen for her father's bed, with all her darning and patching. She would manage some way — take the sheets secretly from her own bed in the morning, and wash them.

Through the still hours of the long night she sat in an armchair by the fire, Mrs. Poole drowsing opposite her.

But a time came when she felt her head nodding. It would drop down upon her chest, and with a stupendous effort she would prop it up again and shake herself. At length she realised, with bewildered anxiety, that she *was* falling asleep.

She could not tell how long she had been asleep, when she became aware of the sound of muffled voices that at first she took to be a long distance off, and gradually recognised as quite near.

"And, Edwin, wine and flowers on the table, and not fifty cents' worth of staple groceries in this house!"

Mrs. Poole's whisper cut distinctly across the field of Lydia's slowly awakening consciousness. She opened her eyes and closed them quickly again. The Pooles had not seen her, but she had seen them in that weird mingled light when dawn creeps in at the window upon the lamp still lit. They were hovering over the fire together, in eager consultation.

"I'll get some towels when I go home to breakfast and bring them back with me. Would you believe it, Edwin, I can't find a whole towel in this house? Such rags! It's pitiful! Sheets and pillow-cases the same. I've looked everywhere; 'twas the only kind I could find — and mighty few of those."

Lydia winced. She wanted to sit up and say aloud, with her eyes flashed wide open on Mrs. Poole: "I suppose, then, you've been snooping in the coal-house, too! — as you've been everywhere else." But she only lay back perfectly still in her chair, with closed eyes, not stirring a muscle, afraid even lest they should catch the tense intake of air in her breathing.

"Oh, they're *so* unpractical!" began Mrs. Poole again. "I don't know whatever will become of Lydia!"

"So that's what they're speculating on already!" And the shock of the thought coming all at once, and for the first time fully, to her, Lydia wondered, herself, what would become of her if — if —!

"Edwin, do you suppose there's any hope at all?" Mrs. Poole resumed.

"Well, he might last a week or so. It's my opin-

ion, though," he concluded in a hoarse whisper, at once moved and sententious, "that the end'll come any time now."

The *end!* Dumb sobs that had been struggling in Lydia broke with terrific suddenness on the hush of the room.

Mr. and Mrs. Poole sprang toward her.

"Oh, I just woke up!" something prompted her to cry out brokenly between her sobs.

II

In the early afternoon of the dragging day which followed a knock on the kitchen door aroused her.

The driver of a coal-wagon stood at the door.

"Wrong house!" she said hastily.

"No, it ain't the wrong house, miss," he persisted, holding out a slip for her to sign. "*Lambright* —" he read, emphatically, "*Hill Avenue* — *One thousand pounds* — *Paid!*"

"I won't sign it," announced Lydia, and closed the door without further argument.

"All right," the man shouted back cheerfully through the closed door. "I'll put it in the coal-house anyway. Them's my orders!"

Lydia sank into a chair, and bowed her head on the table. The Pooles *had* looked into the coal-house, then, while she slept!

She heard the harsh rattle of the coal on the shed floor as the driver threw it in shovelful by shovelful from his wagon. She stopped her ears. The first —

charity! Oh, why did it hurt so bitterly? Why, why, was she not grateful?

All at once, something struck her with grim humour! "One thousand pounds," the man had read from the slip. Mr. Poole had realised that her father might not live till a whole ton of coal should be exhausted! How canny! — a *half*-ton! How tempered with discretion Mr. Poole's charities were!

But suddenly she marvelled at the wickedness of her own heart that she could analyse even to her most secret self the quality of Mr. Poole's kindness. How good Mr. Poole had always been to her! Why, she had eaten raspberries out of his hand, when she had stood beside him, no higher than his knee, by the bushes in his garden! Who but Mr. Poole had raked and heaped great beds of leaves for her to tumble in, in autumn days long gone by?

Her eyes that had been dry and burning all day long gathered a slight moisture. . . . Mr. Poole was a truly generous man; not rich; half a ton from him was more than twenty tons from — say, Mr. Churchwell.

Churchwell! She wondered if *he* would hear about her father and come to inquire. "Yes," she thought, "he'll come!" Something warm and soft seemed suddenly, as she imaged his coming, to flood her whole being. She fancied his coming right into the little kitchen where she was sitting at the table now with bowed head, lifting her up, so gently, gathering her to his broad, protecting breast, his eyes with their mesmeric gaze looking down into hers, his deep voice whispering to her as he held her in his arms, "My

poor, poor little Lydia!" She trembled with excitement, feeling in a wild transport of joy that his lips were actually seeking hers! Never before had her fancies of him dared so far — to such thrilling intimacy — and it was strange, indeed, even to herself luxuriating in these newborn emotions, that such fancies should have sprung out of this deepest, most hopeless misery she had ever known.

III

She was tapped lightly on the shoulder. She did not look up at once. She had heard some one come into the kitchen, and had felt a slight restiffening of her spirit when she recognised the step as Mrs. Poole's.

"A package, Lydia."

Lydia took the package and carried it to her bedroom, but before she had time to fasten the door she felt Mrs. Poole pushing softly behind her into the room.

"What is it?" queried Mrs. Poole, eagerly.

Lydia without a word began untying the cord around the box she had put on her bed. She lifted the cover, threw back the tissue paper wrappings, and revealed the suit she had purchased the day before.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Poole, leaning her plump, elderly person against the foot of the bed. Framed with its grey curls, her pretty face, in which softness and sharpness were most extraordinarily blended, betrayed unusual surprise. "Oh, oh!" she said, quite playfully, while Lydia remained silent.

"New?" she asked, scanning the suit, and feeling it.

"I bought it yesterday," Lydia replied briefly. She took the suit from its box, and as she walked toward the closet to hang it up, she felt a second inquiry strike, as it were, against the back of her head: "How much did you give for it, Lydia — if I may ask?"

Lydia hesitated; then she answered, her back still turned to Mrs. Poole, "Thirty dollars."

"Thirty!"

"I don't lie, usually," she said to herself, as Mrs. Poole's gently reproachful, "Oh! Very pretty, very," fell on her ears, "but when people ask the cost of things — oh, I *hate* curiosity!"

CHAPTER IV

THE next day trays borne by respectful servants began to arrive at the Lambright cottage; they came not only from the neighbourhood but from distant quarters of the town.

Lydia did not exactly know whether these broiled birds and moulds of jelly and airy tea-rolls were for herself or for her father, but she knew quite well that she, no more than he, could have swallowed a morsel of any of these dishes, proffered, many of them, by rich and important families of Kingsville who had manifested no previous interest in her father except in active opposition to him in the movement of opinion that had effected his removal from the College.

She handled the exquisite napery and china with an odd mingling of defiance and satisfaction, and pondered half-ironically, as she did so, the ways of Kingsville, which she and her father had sometimes analysed laughingly together and which now, no laughter in her, were brought home to her with such poignancy. . . . Illness, fatal illness, death, burial — they were to Kingsville, in ascending scale of interest, what the play, the ball-park, the race-track, the bull-fight, offer to other communities, and the house of illness, the house of death, were always crowded with the old town's help-

ful or curious, friendly or managerial spirits. How eager the discussions by the Kingsville fireside of the mortal malady, the appearance of the "remains"; and how willingly, almost blithely, as conferring some interesting importance upon himself, the Kingsvillian moved to the office of pall-bearer. With what animation Kingsville street-corners speculated on the amount the dead man had "left," and with what zeal was his relict, whether by next marriage or otherwise, disposed of in the carriages that wound home from a Kingsville burying-ground. . . .

Lydia knew that now for their brief day she and her father would furnish wagging for Kingsville tongues.

II

All day long, in unbroken stream, people called, among them faces she could not remember ever to have seen before, and while many only inquired with polite solicitude at the door, others, who had never before been inside the cottage, now pushed their way in and offered their sympathy and assistance with eyes whose roving Lydia was keenly alive to and resented angrily.

As the afternoon sun began pouring into the windows of the sitting room, she saw with uneasiness that the worn spots of the carpet and furniture would be more and more uncompromisingly disclosed, and she pulled the window shades down to the sills of the windows.

"Lydia, I would have the shades up if I were you! The room would be more cheerful." Mrs. Poole took hold of one of the lowered shades to raise it.

"I don't want the room cheerful! I don't want it cheerful, Mrs. Poole!" she cried. "Leave the shades down!"

III

As it drew near to sunset, Dr. Dunbar came. He was a clergyman, a very tall, thin, frail-looking old man. Her father held him in high regard, she knew, and she had always looked up to him with affectionate veneration; but she was on the alert now, wary of every one.

He rose and took her hand as she came into the room, looking down on her with an expression of tender sympathy.

"Lydia, would you like me to see your father?"

"No, no!" She answered vehemently, drawing away her hand.

For an instant he looked at her blankly, then he asked with gentle emphasis, "Lydia, do you think your father would like to see me?"

Swift as thought she placed her back against the door that led into the sickroom.

"My father doesn't need instruction in the art of dying, Dr. Dunbar! He has lived nobly! He will die nobly!"

The frail old clergyman, who in his long life had witnessed many kinds of suffering, took no affront to his personal or to his ecclesiastical importance.

"Daughter, you are right," he said slowly, looking down at her with lenient eyes; "your father needs no instruction in dying. He has lived well. He will die

well. It is not as a clergyman, but as his friend, I had thought —"

Lydia suddenly seized his hand in both hers, raised it to her eyes, and hid her burning face on it.

"Oh, Dr. Dunbar, forgive me, please forgive me," she said low and piteously. "Everything is so terrible!"

She felt him patting her head with his free hand, and she felt a moment's healing in the gentle, generous touch of the soft withered old hand, but with the first creak of the sickroom door opening behind her, she straightened up, instantly mistrustful again, and her eyes, wild and over-wrought, strained at him through her tears.

"But you won't go in, you won't go in, Dr. Dunbar?" . . . They should not say, those people who talked so much, "Professor Lambright gave up those 'monkey' views of his, when he came to die; wanted a preacher with him." No, not if she had to murder some one to prevent, they shouldn't say it!

The old clergyman quieted her. "No, Lydia, I won't go in; but if you want me, or I can help you, at any time, let me know. I'll come."

IV

Dr. Dunbar had gone, and she sat with her elbow on the pine work-table in the kitchen, her head drooped against her hand.

"Lydia, I want to speak to you. . . ."

Mrs. Poole entered and shut the door behind her, circumspectly providing for privacy.

"I hope you won't take anything I say amiss, Lydia. I'm sure no person has your welfare at heart more than Mr. Poole and me."

She seated herself on one of the splint-bottomed chairs. Her smooth face — on which during sixty years only a few, and those the minor, frets of life had done a little light sketching here and there — wore an expression of unusual concern.

"You're doing yourself an injustice, Lydia, you certainly are, to behave to a minister like you did to Dr. Dunbar!"

"I don't respect ministers as much as I do other people . . ." answered Lydia, sullenly, evading the eyes of her accuser.

"Oh, Lydia, how can you say such things? How *can* you?" Mrs. Poole leaned across the table, her eyes full of tears. "I've always been so fond of your father, Mr. Poole and I, both, and we've always hoped that some time the truth would come to him —"

"The *truth?*" Lydia repeated indignantly.

"We've known him seventeen years, and he *was* a good man, but Mr. Poole and I think he ought to have a minister with him now. A minister who was his friend, like Dr. Dunbar, he couldn't object to — to pray with him now . . ."

"Pray with him! Why should any one pray with my father? No better man ever lived than my father!"

"Yes, but — an infidel, Lydia!"

"*Infidel!*" Lydia brought her hand down on the

table with angry force. "Yes, in Kingsville, that's what you call every one who has enlightened views, views you don't understand!"

Mrs. Poole's mouth tightened, there was a twitching in the region of her lapped chins, a great deal of blood had rushed to her face, and the admirable conformation of her nose sharpened to a slight point not ordinarily observable.

"Lydia, you ought to be careful what you say, and how you act! It was not only your father — but your mother — it's my duty to tell you, so you may be cautious — there was talk —"

Lydia, in a distant and stupefied voice, interrupted her.

"My mother . . ."

Then she shook Mrs. Poole's hand from her shoulder, and her eyes slowly gathered a fiercer and fiercer light. "Don't you dare speak of my mother — that way — Mrs. Poole!" . . . Between great sobs, her words broke spasmodically: "You don't know . . . anything . . . about my mother. . . . She was a foreigner . . . and so you didn't understand her . . . any of you. . . . It was just like my father's lectures . . . people didn't understand her . . . any more than they did . . . his lectures . . . and what they don't understand . . . they condemn . . . and they made up mean things about her . . . I suppose . . . from what you say. . . . Oh, Mrs. Poole, how could you be so cruel as to insinuate anything about my mother, now!"

"Hush, hush, Lydia! Hush, dear!"

But Lydia sobbed on even after Mrs. Poole had left her.

All the disquieting suspicions of past years had sprung into life again. Her thoughts were running back feverishly to a day of her childhood, when the word of a malicious little playmate had set her thinking. And just now, on the threshold of revelation, she had pushed away with frantic dread the hand that would have opened to her the gate of mystery. Wilfully she had remained in darkness — she would never know, now, what it was they had said about her mother.

V

When it was night, she took down an old cape that hung on a nail above her, wrapped herself in it, and went outside, sitting down on the kitchen doorstep with her back to the house.

Mrs. Poole urged her tenderly to come in out of the cold and dark; Mr. Poole added his entreaties; even the doctor laboured gravely with her. But Lydia remained obdurate to all appeals. If she could have been alone by her father's side, nothing could have separated her from that sacred place, but she had been helpless to prevent his delivery into other hands.

She got up from the step where her limbs were growing numb, and shivering in the night air which wrapped like a sheet, icy-wet, about her, she made her way around the little house to the front yard, walked slowly down to the wall that separated it from the street, and stood above it, peering off into the darkness,

which here and there under a street-lamp was splotched with half-bright spots, where fairylike the tree-branches threw their tossing shadows. The night was beautiful to her, steeped in delights, exquisite witcheries; even now in her misery, beautiful to her, and moving!

She heard the chatter of approaching voices. Around the corner and along the street came three youthful couples, a gay troop. The girls swished-swished softly, holding up carelessly under their long wraps chiffon and silk dancing-skirts. The young men, gallantly slouching, wore their overcoats loose from the shoulders, exposing white expanses of evening linen.

An agitating blend of perfume — waking her blood to what momentary mad ardours, perilous *wanderlust!* — rose to Lydia with this passing of the party-clad — violet, super-distilled, wafted up to her from a web of lace handkerchief, cigarette fume, scent of jasmine from one of these little dancing-bodices. . . .

The third couple noticed her standing bare-headed, her cape clutched about her, only a little above them.

"Oh, is that you, Lydia? How's your father?" And hardly had her low answer been given —"About the same"— till on they swept, their laughter drifting back to her. Were they laughing at *her?* Surely not, yet the sound of their laughter, following so close their greeting and inquiry, made her feel that they were. How alone she felt! As they passed under a neighbouring street-light, she could detect the bags that dangled from the girls' arms, replete, she knew, with

all the little vanities — high-heels, powder-rags — beloved of her girlish soul, too!

VI

She saw a man's form moving toward her down the walk from the house; nearer she discerned it the sedate, long-coated, rather pompous figure of Dr. Williams; and when this time he said to her simply, "Lydia, you had better come in," all the impulses that had hitherto kept her from her father's room, suddenly gave way to an overpowering eagerness to reach it.

She had never before looked on death, and was to see it now seldom so terrible in its approach. All night, and to almost the last flutter of her father's breath, she watched this agonised battling of his flesh to hold, still, the spirit it encased — of the spirit to struggle free its prison. And she tried, as never before in her life she had tried, to be brave; it was the last thing she could do for her father — help him to die. . . . But when he began at last to beg to be delivered from his torment, she lifted herself from her aching knees, and caught hold of the doctor with sudden desperate strength.

"Oh, doctor, give him something! Give him something!" she implored.

"Anything to alleviate, now, Lydia, would precipitate —"

She broke in on the doctor's measured words frenziedly:

"Oh, *bring* the end, bring it!"

She was silenced by the sound of her father's voice.

In all these hours of vigil — years it seemed to her — it was the first time he had spoken her name, or had seemed to know that she was in the room.

Her gaze fixed with awe on the big wasted figure propped up with pillows in the bed. His eyes were wide open, blue — as she had never before seen them, or known eyes could be, but she saw that they were sightless, for as he said in a low, removed voice, "Lydia, is that you?" the blue eyes staring from his haggard, unshaven face were focused on vacant space.

"I'll go with the dawn," he whispered, after a little pause.

"Turn me . . . so I can face . . . the coming day. . . ."

They turned him so that his face might be toward the light of morning when it came.

Suddenly on the hush of the room the crowing of a cock broke; then a cock's faint, far off answer; then a chorus of cocks, far and near, that sounded strangely ominous, and unearthly, in Lydia's ears.

Her father was speaking again.

"Lydia, I didn't expect to die, yet."

She saw the others fall a little away from the bed, but she had ceased to care what privacies should be overheard. What, at last, were privacies? What was anything to her? What mattered, except that she should save him whatever of anguish she could.

"It's all right, Father. It's all right. Don't worry. I'll get along.

"Father, you know how I love you!" she whispered to him.

He knew. Nevertheless, some impulse, more powerful than she could resist, made her seek to reach him with this last yearning assurance.

"Lydia . . . don't get anything . . . fine . . . for me. Promise. You need all . . . the little insurance. . . . Promise . . . just a plain — coffin."

Her cry died on her lips. A singular and indescribable radiance was suffusing her father's plain face. Ravaged and emaciate, it was touched now to sublime resignation, to the eternal peace; transfigured before her eyes to a beauty more strange and touching and noble than aught she had ever seen or dreamed!

Suddenly she was conscious of a quick movement among the other watchers by the bed. Her father's chin had dropped to his breast — and she saw, amazed, that it was as he had said it would be — the sky streaked with light! It had come — the Dawn!

CHAPTER V

LYDIA accepted with silent docility the small cup of hot broth which Mrs. Poole brought her. It was noon: and she had been lying on the bed in her own room, all through the hours since her father's death at break of day, stunned and lifeless; but as she finished sipping the broth, she asked for Mr. Poole.

"What is it, Lydia, you want to see him about? Can't I see to it for you?"

"No, I want to see Mr. Poole."

Mr. Poole sat down facing Lydia's bed, placing his neat, spare figure quite forward in his chair, almost on the edge of it, indeed.

"Mr. Poole, have you seen about the coffin yet?"

He jumped with the startling directness of Lydia's question, her dark eyes, so big in her white face, straight on him.

"Oh, Lydia, leave all that to me, leave all that to me . . ."

He passed his hand nervously over his head. A lonely January fly, sturdy survivor of a Kingsville winter of unprecedented rigour, persisted, to his evident annoyance, in walking and rewalking the thin strands of hair decorously trained across the bald crown of his head. Lydia wondered, with a vague feeling of

disgust for herself, how at such a moment she could notice anything so absurdly and horridly irrelevant; but with the queer and sometimes quite undignified behaviour of the human mind, she did pertinaciously regard the fly, even the while she put to Mr. Poole her second calm and awful inquiry.

"What kind of a coffin did you get?"

"Oh, a very nice casket, a very nice one."

"Expensive?"

Mr. Poole fidgeted on his chair. "Expensive?" He cleared his throat. "Why, you wouldn't want anything ornate, Lydia! Your father wouldn't want anything of that kind."

"*I* would."

Her eyes, never wavering, bored into Mr. Poole's; they were trying to bore into his skull, into the innermost recesses of his practical and cautious brain; she did not propose to be circumvented by any covert, cheese-paring ideas of his at such a time.

Mr. Poole kept clearing his throat, and again and again uneasily settled his waist-coat.

"Why, Lydia, let me see to these things for you. . . . Let *me* see to them for you!"

She lifted herself from the pillow. She was so violently agitated that her whole body shook. Her dry lips clung together.

"Mr. Poole, I want the handsomest casket in Kingsville for my father, the handsomest one."

Mr. Poole stared at her.

"Lydia, my dear girl!" he found voice at last to exclaim protestingly.

"The handsomest one!" she repeated. "Do you understand?"

"I wouldn't be foolish, Lydia! Your father wouldn't want you to be. . . . Just something neat, and suitable —"

"*Suitable!* — nothing is too precious to suit my father."

"Oh, no, no, of course not, Lydia, of course not! I didn't mean that." His hands as well as Lydia's were shaking.

"Mr. Poole, if you won't promise to get the handsomest one in Kingsville for me — I'll go down and get it myself, from the — the — undertaker!"

But as she finished speaking, and made an effort to rise from the bed, the frightened look on Mr. Poole's face showed her she need no longer fear his resistance.

"Lydia, are there any kin of your father that should be notified?" he asked in a shy, faltering voice, wiping beads of perspiration from his forehead.

It was Lydia's turn to start! She had not anticipated this question, and a wave of painful warmth passed over her cold body.

"I think . . . there is no one . . . at all . . ." she said hesitatingly. "My father has no near relatives . . . living."

As Lydia heard herself speaking these words, she wondered if they were indeed true!

Her moment of abstraction was broken into by a loud, dreary, sing-song voice calling something from the street outside.

"O-h, o-h, I hab, I hab, I hab three kinds."

It was the old black fishman going by, calling out his fish: his cry varied with the luck of his fishing — "Two kinds," "One kind," "Three kinds."



O—h, O—h, I hab, I hab, I hab three kinds, I hab three kinds.

They were the first words lisped by a Kingsville baby: "I hab, I hab, I hab three kinds," mocking the old fishman.

Could it be possible, thought Lydia, as the old darky's long-drawn-out, melancholy strain floated in to her, that things were going on as usual in Kingsville? It struck her as heartless, that people should be buying fish, eating fish, as if nothing had happened!

"O-h, o-h, I hab, I hab, I hab three kinds, I hab three kinds."

How often she had heard the call, and had run down to the gate. "Fresh, Uncle?" she would ask, and with his old woolly head ceremoniously uncovered to her, regularly would come his answer: "Yas 'um, fraish! I cotched 'em dis mornin'!"

The old darky's mournful cry came back to the bedroom faintly now, from a distance. "O-h, o-h, I hab . . ."

It was all she could make out distinctly. A queer, and almost exciting, idea flashed through her; she asked herself whether ever again she would run out and buy from him his "fraish-cotched" river fish.

No, Lydia, never, never, again! When years have passed, when his old black body is mouldering in the blacks' burying-ground of Kingsville, far off in a foreign land you will wake in the deep of night from your troubled sleep, and you will think you have heard the old black fishman of Kingsville calling, "I hab, I hab . . ." But it will be only in your dream, Lydia, that he was calling.

II

"About the music, Lydia . . ."

Mr. Poole had risen.

"About the music, Lydia. Would there be any particular hymns you'd prefer at the funeral?" he asked.

Lydia looked at him wonderingly for the fraction of a minute.

"Hymns?" she repeated after him a little absently.

"I don't want any hymns," she said, rather brusquely, sinking back on her pillow, as if the matter were settled without further ado.

Mr. Poole approached the bedside.

"There must be two hymns at the house, Lydia, and one at the grave," he said, in a firm, dry manner she had occasionally seen before when he was putting through some measure that had met with neighbourhood, or with slight domestic interference. It had formerly made her a little afraid. Nothing dismayed her now.

"*I won't have one hymn!*" she answered him. "I hate hymns!" she exclaimed defiantly.

A little vibrating silence fell between them; and then he began explaining to her the necessary procedures of Christian burial.

"Surely grand old hymns, Lydia, like —"

"No, no!" she broke in on him vehemently. "I don't want 'Lead, Kindly Light,' 'Nearer, My God, to Thee,' 'Abide with Me,' not any of them! I think they're all dreadful! Oh, I hate them all!"

"Lydia! Lydia!"

"Mr. Poole, I tell you I won't have them, not one!"

III

For a long time after Mr. Poole, unalterably shocked, but vanquished, had made his prim exit from the room, Lydia's thoughts ran chaotically; then she sank into a sort of torpor, only conscious of a dull misery, without hope, almost without form, except now and then when she was made sickeningly aware, by some sound that reached her through the walls, of the soft-stepped preparations going busily forward all around her in the cottage.

In the four winters they had lived in the cottage rarely had a fire been lighted in her own or in her father's bedroom; all winter long the two bedrooms had been clammy as caves, but now flames had been set licking up these damp, unused flues, and occasionally when she opened her eyes she wondered vaguely why her bedroom looked unfamiliar to her.

It was a fair-sized room, not very light or cheery at any season of year or time of day. Its paper, a frigid

blue, had begun to peel and drop off the wall in many places. But she had made her girlish attempts to mitigate the room's air of general dreariness. She had hung white muslin draperies at the window and placed them on the dresser, very adroitly arranged them to hide their holes and darns, though their pristine freshness could never be long maintained in the soot laden atmosphere of Kingsville. She had pinned on the wall a little group of black and white magazine cuts, an Annunciation, Botticelli's, Rossetti's Astarte Syriaca — such things, that had taken her fancy. And she had achieved what she regarded a real touch of distinction in her bureautop — a brush, once her mother's, redeeming with its gleam of gold her own scanty array of cheap little toilet implements. What worlds of romance she had woven from nothing more than the images evoked by her mother's name on the back of this beautiful brush — *Aimée*, in half-effaced script.

But now as the day wore on, and from time to time she opened her eyes briefly from a sort of sleepless sleep, and saw all these little treasures that had previously had for her individual and interesting existence, they ceased to have for her that kind of existence. She derived no solace even from the soft pinkish glow from the open fire that was bathing them now; there was only a sort of blankness enveloping things, and now and again a fearful shudder running through her as it came back upon her with overpowering force, the realisation of what had happened. Never to feel her father's big hand clasping hers again, never to catch

again that humorous twinkle in his grave eyes! Could she stand it? Could she live without him? . . .

She heard the door open a little, then further, though still very gently, and in the next instant was aware of Mrs. Poole approaching the bed, two great paste-board boxes in her arms.

IV

Mrs. Poole moved with the resiliency common to big, plump women, but with a step even more buoyant than usual she came over to the bedside, and with a little air of triumph discharged her arms of a load that had evidently been pleasant for them to carry.

"Lydia, people are so kind in time of trouble, aren't they?" she said, placing the boxes beside Lydia on the bed, and lifting their covers.

"Mrs. Wyndham Wood sent them, dear,— everything you'll need. Wasn't it thoughtful of her?"

She lifted out a black dress of some fine woolen material, trimmed with narrow crape bands.

"I don't know Mrs. Wood," remarked Lydia, briefly. She had raised her head to look at the dress, but she let it sink back upon her pillow again, as if she was no longer interested.

"You know *of* her, Lydia," observed Mrs. Poole unflinchingly. "One of the best women in this town . . ." She continued to unload the boxes.

Lydia regarded with suspicious and disdainful eyes each article displayed to her: the black petticoat, the handkerchief with its deep black border, the dull black

gloves, dull black purse, even a dull black fan.

"I'm not going to wear any of those things, Mrs. Poole."

"Oh, Lydia!" Mrs. Poole gasped. "You wouldn't hurt Mrs. Wood's feelings, surely!"

"I'm not going to wear them. My father hated mourning."

Mrs. Poole looked at her silently. A few tears had gathered in her eyes.

"You must decide for yourself, Lydia, of course, whether you'll wear mourning or not," she said, at length, rather quietly. "I've always felt, myself, that there was so little we could do for the dead, I was glad to do *that* for them." She raised her eye-brows slightly.

"I'm not going to wear them, Mrs. Poole."

All at once Lydia saw that the mysterious point she had noticed before was forming now at the end of Mrs. Poole's handsome nose.

"What *will* you wear . . . to-morrow . . . to the cemetery?"

"My new brown suit . . . *he* gave me . . ."

For a moment Mrs. Poole seemed unable to find her voice; then she burst out: "I never *heard* of such a thing, Lydia! And no music! . . . I should think it'd be the last time in the world you'd want to do anything to be talked about, Lydia . . . Well, surely, you'll wear a veil over your face, and hat . . ."

"No, I'm not going to wear any veil."

Mrs. Poole stood erect by the bedside, looking down

almost threateningly at the white face, tearless and immovable, on the pillow below her.

"I shouldn't wonder, Lydia," she said slowly, letting Lydia see that her store of patience had approached perilously near an end, "I shouldn't wonder, my dear, if you keep on like this, if you'd be your own worst enemy!"

CHAPTER VI

LYDIA had asked at last to see Dr. Dunbar, and to see him alone. The fire in the grate had died down and the bedroom was grey and shadowy as he entered it, and groped his way to the bedside. He bent over, to see her more distinctly.

She had consented to put on a wrapper of Mrs. Poole, and her slim figure was almost buried in its voluminous folds. Grief had wrought appalling changes in her face; its pallor was almost the pallor of death; the bones stood out with startling prominence above the hollows that had come in her cheeks; and her sunken eyes gave to her childish face, in its frame of bright, disordered hair, a look singularly aged.

"Lydia, did you want to see me?" asked the old clergyman softly.

She opened her eyes heavily, and looked up at him with a faint, wistful smile. Yes, there was something she wanted to say to him, but whenever she tried to speak, the tightness and excruciating pain in her throat seemed to prevent her doing so.

He sat down close to the bed, and waited.

"Dr. Dunbar, to-morrow, at the funeral," she began at last, slowly, "will you please . . . not to apologise in your sermon . . . for my father's not being . . . a Christian?"

"Daughter, can't you trust me?"

"I can't trust any one."

There was no hostility in her tone. If there was any one in the world she felt tenderness for, now that her father was gone, it was for this frail old minister; he was better, and broader of mind, than the other ministers of Kingsville — she thought that; still, he was a minister, and she must make him understand!

"I've only been to two funerals," she resumed huskily, after a little silence, "and at one of them, the minister apologised, said the man . . . was a good man . . . but wasn't a Christian . . ."

Her breath came with difficulty.

"My father was a Christian, Dr. Dunbar. I know what Christ taught — my father lived what he taught! I never saw him do an ignoble thing, or heard him say an ignoble word. . . . Charity, and humility — that was what Christ taught, wasn't it, Dr. Dunbar? . . . Well, my father was a Christian, then! And those ministers that said he wasn't — they're not worthy to have tied the shoe of a man like my father! Oh, I tell you, Dr. Dunbar, they lack the first requisite of Christianity, themselves,— charity!"

"Daughter, will you listen to me? I want to tell you some things I've heard of your father, to-day."

Very quietly he repeated to her the expressions that had come to him from various quarters, he told her several little stories of things he knew himself, of how, so long as he had had means, her father's hand had gone down joyfully into his pocket for all who had asked, how more than once he had gone to men in

trouble, and in disgrace, and had helped and cheered them.

Lydia's eyes never for an instant had left his face. It was what she had hungered for — to hear from others this unqualified praise of her father. And suddenly she was shaking convulsively — not a sound, but her whole body shuddering with sobs that struggled for outlet.

For a long time he sat by her bedside, neither of them speaking. Her breathing grew deep and regular; but she was not asleep . . . She became conscious that he was softly leaving the room.

She called him, and his hand on the door-knob, he turned back to her.

"I thought you had fallen asleep, Lydia. I hoped so. You need sleep."

She put out her hand to him.

"Dr. Dunbar, I want to thank you for not saying to me that I ought to be glad — glad because my father is 'better off' now!"

There was a faint suggestion of irony in her voice. "That's what the Pooles said to me, and the doctor, and the others, but you didn't say it!"

"No, daughter."

Evidently Dr. Dunbar rated the power of words to convey comfort, at such a time, and to such a young person, not over-high. "No, daughter." He said nothing else.

"I don't know whether he's better off, or not, Dr. Dunbar!" she said, almost in a whisper. "Nobody does! It's unknown! And it's unknowable!"

Dr. Dunbar mutely stroked her hand.

She lifted herself so that she could see him better; she wanted the companionship of his face; but she could scarcely distinguish the dim old eyes that her own wistfully glowing eyes looked up to.

"There are some words — from a poem — that keep going over and over in my head! I can't get away from them! They — they're terrible to me — now!"

"What are the words, daughter?"

She hesitated. She knew that he had opposed the catholic range of reading her father had allowed her. . . . And these words were from one of the books he had thought she should not read.

"Tell me what troubles you, daughter — what the words are, you spoke of."

"'No map there, nor guide,'" she repeated.

"'Nor voice sounding, *nor touch of human hand,*
Nor face with blooming flesh, nor lips, nor eyes,
Are in that land.'"

She gripped the old hand that held hers. It flashed through her that her reason was leaving her! Her voice sounded out in terror in the twilight room.

"Oh, Dr. Dunbar, my poor father!"

All philosophy, all rational theories of death whatsoever, had deserted her. In a crushing agony of doubt and fear, her thoughts reached out and tried to follow her father into that awful region where his soul was voyaging now, into that unknown and unknowable region!

II

"There are other words, Lydia, in that book."

There was a frosty touch in Dr. Dunbar's voice. "I'm going to repeat to you the words that follow those you've repeated, and I want you to dwell on them, and to put the others out of your mind." He repeated slowly and impressively:

> "'My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,
> The Lord will be there and wait till I come on
> perfect terms.
> The great Camerado, the lover true for whom I
> pine, will
> Be there'"

All at once, a feeling altogether different from any she had ever known before came over her. Dr. Dunbar, nearing that "rendezvous"—what faith he had! What trust in his old voice!

Something in her heart seemed to melt, gently; and a light, wan, like moonlight — but better than the blackness that had been — penetrated the mists in which her restive and tormented soul was groping.

She dropped her face on the old minister's hand; no sobs came to rend her; but she began to cry softly.

III

After a time she fell asleep, dreamily conscious of Dr. Dunbar still sitting by her side. She could not remember, afterwards, when he had left the room, but

she woke some time in the night, and found that a blanket had been placed over her. The fire was out, the room perfectly black. She felt Mrs. Poole in bed beside her.

It had been her first deep sleep for several days, and she woke bewildered. For a moment she was so dazed she could hardly realise all that had been happening; — then, sharply, everything came back to her, and her heart began pounding against her side.

The house was so still, Mrs. Poole asleep, and her father's dead body so near her! A strange terror came over her! She had never before been near death.

It was about midnight she supposed. The repulsive word that vulgar and ignorant people use came into her mind — corpse! And an awful fear of the dead body in the next room crept over her!

She felt paralysed! It was like a nightmare — she tried to move, and could not! A huge hand seemed bearing down on her lungs, forbidding her to breathe! That stiffened body, out of which the life had gone, so near to her! And she was alone with it! Mrs. Poole was asleep! She thought she must wake her! She hoped there were others in the house — she must rouse them too! She could not be alone, with that dead body so near her!

IV

All at once, in the midst of her fear, a little picture took form in her mind — coming to her from, oh, so far back in the dim shadow-land of her memory that she wondered, afterwards, how it ever could have

found its way back to her that night: a small figure, herself, she saw, a big figure, her father, in a woods together, leaves falling — it must have been autumn. They were by a little stream, and her father had stooped down by the water's edge, hollowed his hand, and filled it with water, and she drank from his hand, with delight at that wondrous drinking-cup which he had made for her, her wonderful father! Back it came to her, through the mist of years, even the pale sunlight sifting through the branches of the trees upon the big figure kneeling there, and the little figure drinking from his hand!

V

She sprang from bed, and ran through the sitting room into her father's room where his body lay on its improvised bier. There was no light in the room, except such as came from the sitting room through the open door.

A singular and unforgettable odour permeated the room. She knew nothing of such things, and did not recognise it as the odour of a fluid that had been used about the body; she was horrified, but she approached the bier swiftly and without hesitation. She drew off the sheet that had been drawn over the body, stooped and touched her lips to her father's icy forehead. She placed her hands on his folded hands. Then she knelt on the floor, and stroked the sleeve of his coat. She began talking to him in low tones, tears streaming from her eyes.

"Oh, Father, how could I have been afraid of you?

You would never have been afraid of my body! Forgive me! Oh, I'm not afraid of you now!"

VI

She heard steps behind her, and turned toward their sound. Two men were coming into the room. They were neighbours, she saw; she knew them only slightly; one was a man who lived next door; his boots creaked.

The men had both been eating. Even in the dim light she could see that one of them was wiping crumbs from his lips; the other, the man who lived next door, was making a little revolting clicking sound with his tongue and teeth. She remembered vaguely that there was some custom of providing food for those who "sat up" with the dead. But she felt offended. She thought it gross, and disrespectful to her father, that men filling the office these men were filling should desire to eat.

"Honey, you don't want to be *here*, do you?" one of them said, stooping over her.

"Let me stay!"

"Oh, Miss Lydia, I wouldn't stay here!"

The man seemed at loss to know what further he should say to her. He retreated a little, but came back after a moment.

"I reckon Mistress Poole's awake," he said hesitatingly. "I'd better get her to come in here with you, if you feel like you want to stay here, Miss Lydia."

"Oh, no, don't call her . . . and let me stay! It's the last time I can ever be with him!" she said in a quivering voice. "Oh, I'm not a bit afraid!"

One of the men, and then the other, blew his nose vigorously.

They brought an armchair from the sitting room, placed it close to the spot where she was kneeling, and in the dim room she kept her vigil till daylight.

CHAPTER VII

IT had not occurred to Lydia to inquire where her father was to be buried. Looking dully out of the carriage window, she saw that the funeral procession was winding its way through a street skirting the unhallowed but picturesque negro quarter of the town, and proceeding toward the country in the direction of the New Cemetery.

For generations, representative families of Kingsville had buried their dead in the Old Cemetery. English ivy clambered over the trunks of its ancient trees, there was a great central fountain, and clumps of holly stood stiffly guard by its old brick burial-vaults. The Dead must linger long in one spot, as must the Living, to weave the veil of enchantment over their abode, and the New Cemetery had to show as yet only a sparse scattering of shafts on a treeless hillside beyond the town's limits.

She had been in a sort of trance from the moment Mr. Poole had helped her into the carriage; but now she was stung into painful half-life by the realisation that her father was being taken for burial to this bare and hideous New Cemetery. Burial space in the Old Cemetery had been too expensive for her to buy — or so Mr. Poole had decided! . . . She kept her eyes on

her lap. She was utterly helpless in the matter, and she knew it, but she wondered, with her heart full of bitter tears, why she might not have had a few feet of the beautiful Old Cemetery in which to lay her father's body.

II

She seemed still to get the odour of the flowers — the deathly sweet of heliotrope and of tuberose.

"I'm sure it'll be a comfort to you, Lydia, to see how many have sent flowers!" Mrs. Poole had whispered, as she led her into the sitting room where the casket had been placed.

She remembered now, in what seemed to her this endless journey to the Cemetery,— and she remembered it dreamily, as something of years before — that there had been a wreath of white rose-buds, twined with smilax, on the glass lid of the casket, and that on the card tied to the wreath had been scrawled, *With Sympathy,* above an engraved name, *Mrs. Ransom Craighead Churchwell.* She remembered Mrs. Poole's murmuring something about the wreath having been the prettiest piece, she had thought, and so she had put it there; and she recalled her own removal of the wreath, and her placing it on the seat of one of the camp-chairs she had seen stationed in dreadful preparedness about the room.

It had made her think of Mr. Churchwell, this wreath sent by his wife, and a vagrant thought of him ran through her mind again in this silent drive to the Cemetery. She had been puzzled, at first, and inevit-

ably hurt, when he had not called, but his wife's sending the wreath confirmed an explanation she had already made to herself — that he was absent from town, and did not yet know of her father's death.

[II]

Mrs. Poole had said, as they stood together looking down at the face under the glass lid, "How nice he looks, doesn't he?"

She, herself, had noticed how plain and irregular her father's face was, not comely even with the dignity conferred on it by death. Oddly enough, she had particularly noticed something about this waxy yellowish cast of his face in death, she had hardly remarked of it in life — that his nose was slightly crooked, quite perceptibly twisted to one side, and with this observation, his face had become to her by very virtue of its new-found defect more infinitely precious than ever before.

Mrs. Poole had cried all of the time they had stood there together; had kept dabbing her eyes and nose, sniffling and sobbing audibly. And Lydia had been without sound or tear. But as she had looked down for the last time on her father's face, something had seemed to close vise-like about her heart.

The gripping pain was still at her heart, as they drove through the gate of the New Cemetery. She could not imagine that a time would ever come when it would cease.

Mr. Poole helped her from the carriage, and she

alighted trance-like, as she had entered it trance-like from the gate of the cottage.

It was one of those still, sad-coloured days of winter, in which there is no sun, no wind — only a great joyless wash of grey air. Lydia savoured its qualities to the utmost. It seemed to her sinisterly appropriate as a day of burial — the whole world hushed, listening, as if prescient with awful fears!

"Out of one of these still, terrible days, the End of the World will come smashing!" she had said to her father once, half in fun, half in fright, and she remembered it now, as she stood by his fresh-dug grave.

She stood up very straight between Mr. and Mrs. Poole. Her slight figure, clad in the new brown suit, did not sway once. She did not lean on Mrs. Poole, or allow Mr. Poole to support her. Her eyes, staring from her unveiled, ghostly white face, had a look of strange preoccupation, as if looking, she saw nothing; but in reality she saw much. She saw the red clay mounds of other new-made graves here and there on the hillside, heard the cawing of distant crows, noticed how erect, despite his years, old Dr. Dunbar still stood — like the old soldier he was. . . .

She heard him saying something about soldiers, and about battles he had been through in the War, and she heard him say, in a moved voice — "Here, too, was a soldier. He fought battles — battles for what he esteemed the truth . . . and I dare affirm he took his wounds, and bore them, valiantly — more and greater wounds, perhaps, than some of us knew!"

For an instant, after she heard these words, things went swimming before her eyes, and she feared she might not be able to stand longer, but then she steadied herself, and looked again unflinchingly into the faces of those who stood on the other side of the waiting hole in the red earth.

IV

The first small clods dropped on her father's lowered coffin — the immemorial dust to dust. As the sound, not loud, but distinct, reached her ears, there unfolded before her a sudden gloomy and distorted vision of her future existence, stretching ahead of her, long, listless, purely mechanical, deprived of all vital urge. Even sorrow, she believed, after this, could touch her no further. Myopic with present grief, she could not see where joys were waiting for her — those minute, ceaseless joys that reconcile the heart to its certain miseries.

She wondered, vaguely, why it was given to her to know, so young, so much of life. She did not dream how pitifully little of life she knew, as yet! With all her arrogant young belief in her own powers of judgment and foreknowledge, she did not recognise this a moment of destiny — these harsh clay clods rattling down upon her father's coffin! She thought it practically the end of things for her — did not fathom it at all merely the beginning of events that would reach to her grandchildren, and yet to theirs, and so on in endless chain of consequence — with such immeasur-

able complexity are woven the threads of human existence. For her ardent, fledgling spirit was but entering on the earthly adventures her father's spirit had finished.

CHAPTER VIII

A MONTH had passed. Already the early Southern spring was beginning to show itself — blue crocuses twinkled in the grass, jonquils were budded, and birds were busy.

The little cottage had been dismantled; the furniture sold; and the books, with a few other things, packed in boxes and stored in the Pooles' attic.

Lydia, with a sewing-basket in her lap, and Mrs. Poole with a "fancy-work" bag in hers, sat in the Pooles' sitting room. The afternoon was waning, and Mrs. Poole had the place by the west window, to catch the last light for her work of embroidering red cherries on a "centrepiece" of white linen.

Lydia was threading ribbon through the embroidery of a nightgown she had recently made with Mrs. Poole's assistance. She was feeling quite happy, at this moment, with her very feminine occupation. She had, in truth, been dimly conscious of a feeling of general security and well-being ever since she had entered the Pooles' home.

Occasionally Mr. Poole would dart into the room, to disappear as quickly, in pursuit of one of the busy-idle, finicking activities with which he filled his hours

since he had sold his store on the Market Square, and retired from the most dependable grocery business ever conducted in the town.

From time to time Lydia would exchange a remark with Mrs. Poole, or look up from her ribbon threading and let her eyes wander contentedly about the familiar room. It was not a luxurious room; it was certainly not artistic, with its profusion of meaningless ornament, and its stiff Nottingham curtains hanging at every window, in their own and their owners' blissful ignorance of the existence and gospel of an Englishman named William Morris. But it was a very comfortable room for all that, a room that carried Lydia back to the happiest memories of her childhood — all those treasures on the walnut what-not, the stereoscope with its basket of views, the shells which had brought the mysterious roar of the sea to her enchanted ears, the starfish, the kaleidoscope, which shift by shift had wrought for her eyes such wonders with its little glittering particles of coloured glass.

II

The permanent disposition of her future was a subject that had not been openly broached by the Pooles, but their hints — which at first had hurt her — had shown that it was a subject occupying their thoughts hardly less than her own.

Unknown to them, she had already taken steps that committed her to a future course — a career, she hoped: and it was her knowledge that the day was drawing near when she must disclose her plans, and that the

Pooles would be justly reproachful that she had not taken them into her confidence from the beginning, and moreover that the carrying out of these plans would take her a long way from Kingsville, and perhaps for a long time, which made her very gentle to them now, very tractable, and very sweet.

"Lydia, push your hair back from your forehead! Fasten it up!"

Lydia smiled indulgently. She was resolved not to allow herself to be irritated by any of Mrs. Poole's little ways. A dozen times a day Mrs. Poole would say, "Take your hair out of your eyes, Lydia!"—when she herself had not been conscious of its being in her eyes. She said to herself now, "Well, I'll soon be gone!"—and tucked up the offending locks and fastened them with a hairpin.

"There, that's better!"

Mrs. Poole looked out of the window for a moment with a preoccupied air. Then she gathered up her work in the diminutive apron she wore, and crossed the room to consult the clock.

"Later than I thought!" she said a little absently.

She was carefully extracting a thread from a small skein of embroidery-floss when the doorbell jangled. She started slightly at the sound, and drew a deep audible breath of mingled anxiety and relief.

It was Dr. Dunbar.

III

"So it's true Miss Tillie Tallman's going to marry, is it, Dr. Dunbar?" she inquired.

"Yes, the twentieth of June is set." The old clergyman rested his hands forward on the head of his cane. "The schools will lose a good teacher."

"That'll make a vacancy in the schools," remarked Mr. Poole.

"Now isn't it silly of them," said Lydia to herself, "to go about it in this roundabout way! Why don't they just come out and say that they think I ought to try to get a position to teach?"

Mr. Poole glanced at her with a sly smile.

"Might be a chance for you there, Lydia!" he suggested.

Mrs. Poole looked properly surprised, but on the whole pleased, with her husband's suggestion. Lydia, who sat in a big plush chair playing with the fringe on its cushioned arm, smiled.

There was a short silence in the room. It was rather a tense silence.

"Had you thought of a position in the schools, Lydia?" Dr. Dunbar asked gently.

"Not much," she replied evasively.

Mr. Poole lightly cleared his throat.

"Oh, I think no kind of position could be nicer for you, Lydia," he began, enthusiastically.

His wife interrupted him.

"It's not that we're in a hurry for you to get a position, you know that, Lydia . . ."

Lydia was not so sure of that, after all! There had been times in this month she had spent at the Pooles' when she had inferred quite the contrary! But there was no room in her present mind for resentment.

It was filled with interesting, even romantic, pictures of a future she was about to enter. And she was excited, and a little frightened, with the thought that in a moment more she would spring her surprise. Her checks were delicately flushed, her eyes were shining.

Confidence was expressed in her ability to pass the examinations required for a teacher's certificate.

Dr. Dunbar would see two members of the board of education for her, Mr. Poole, a third.

Lydia was relishing the moment, but not without qualms. Every other instant she said to herself, "I'll tell them now!" But just as she had, at last, gathered courage sufficient to make her announcement, Dr. Dunbar broke in on her resolution with words addressed pointedly to her.

"There's one thing, Lydia, that might work against you with the board."

"You mean my not belonging to any church?" she asked quickly.

"Yes, I mean that," he answered, rather dryly.

She glanced at Mr. Poole where he sat with his chair tipped toward the centre table. He was artfully, and with the minute particularity of attention one might give to a new possession, examining a paper-knife, though she could not remember a time when this identical celluloid paper-knife had not been on the Pooles' centre table. How unconcerned he looked — and Mrs. Poole, shading a cherry!

"If you join the Church, Lydia, it'll be the means, I don't doubt, of getting you this nice, lady-like posi-

tion we'd all be so proud to see you in," Mrs. Poole purred.

"I wouldn't like to see you neglect what's so plainly to your interest, Lydia," added Mr. Poole, but Lydia remained with her eyes downcast. "This good opening for you now in the schools."

"*Opening!* Opening to what?" thought Lydia.

Visions shot through her of the dowdy, underpaid, tired-faced school-mistresses of Kingsville!

IV

"There's nothing in the world I'd hate so much as teaching school!" She bit out the words audaciously, with wicked joy.

She felt the room suddenly electrified:

Mr. Poole recovered himself first.

"I don't *think*, Lydia, a person can let their likes and dislikes govern them when it comes to the matter of earning a living!"

She met his eyes unflinchingly.

"Well, teaching's one thing I won't consider, Mr. Poole."

"What *do* you expect to do, Lydia?" he inquired in a challenging tone, after a short and terrible pause.

"I'm going to be a general agent for a publishing company, and travel." Her voice trembled a little.

"*Travel!*" Mrs Poole bounced, the "fancy-work-bag" slipping from her lap. She turned upon Lydia, her face suddenly almost purple.

"You've said nothing — nothing — to us, about this,

Lydia," objected Mr. Poole. "What is this thing — *agent* — you're speaking of?"

"The man was here last week," Lydia explained, "representing the company. I saw the advertisement in the paper, and went to see him, and signed a contract. I'm to travel, and appoint agents to sell their works. . . ."

"Is it a *book-agent* you're thinking of being, Lydia?" asked Mrs. Poole abruptly, and with undisguised scorn.

Lydia answered quickly that it was not.

How insupportable for Mrs. Poole to have asked the one question she had dreaded might be asked! "Now," she thought, "it'll very likely get around Kingsville that I'm going to be an ordinary book-agent!" She set about trying to illuminate for the Pooles the character of a general agency.

"All I'll have to do is to go to different towns and find people who want to become agents, and employ them. I don't sell any books myself. Each person I employ pays me five dollars, for the privilege of becoming an agent — and that's my commission. You see how much I'll make if I get several agents a day."

"Well, I don't suppose there's any use in trying to get you to give up this thing, Lydia, now you've made up your mind. . . ." Mr. Poole shook his head dubiously.

Dr. Dunbar spoke at last, anxiously, and almost to himself: "The travelling . . . the travelling . . . I feel you're too — young, for such a position."

The travelling! Why, the travelling, that was what

she wanted! What but the travelling had made her consider the general agency?

And what, otherwise,— the despised teaching climinated — could she have done?

Man — regarded, she knew, as the one desirable economic solution for woman — she previsioned with certainty — as yet a vague, but wholly glorious figure in her own future. But till he arrived?

Clerk? Measure off two yards of ribbon for Mrs. Ransom Churchwell, and say "Thank you" for the coins Mrs. Churchwell's gloved hand dropped into hers? Not she!

She was suddenly conscious that Mrs. Poole, her work laid aside, was weeping.

Mr. Poole glanced solicitously at his wife, then at Lydia, as much as to say, "There, now you see what you've done, young lady!"

Outright, he said, in a sorely aggrieved tone, "I hardly thought, Lydia, I hardly thought you'd go ahead and make all these plans and say nothing to us, when we're so interested in everything that concerns you!"

Lydia sprang from her chair and placed her hand impulsively on his shoulder.

"Mr. Poole, I never, never, can thank you and Mrs. Poole enough for all you've done for me, but I just couldn't do the things here in Kingsville I knew you'd want me to do. . . ." She stopped, her words choking her.

"Well, when — when'll you have to start, Lydia?" asked Mrs. Poole, with tears in her voice, but resignedly.

CHAPTER IX

IT was the day before Lydia was to leave. Mrs. Poole, who had just returned from market, had called her down to the kitchen, a dark room with grease-spattered walls, over which roaches scampered by day as well as by night — not a room to put heart in a squeamish stomach, but one out of which came much and excellent cookery notwithstanding.

"Some little things for your lunch, to-morrow," she said, separating some packages from her other marketing, and handing them to an old shuffling black woman. "But here — I knew you'd want to go to the cemetery, Lydia — being your last day." She lifted out of her market basket a bunch of purple and white immortelles, and two wreaths of evergreen, aromatic leaves, known in Kingsville as "heart-leaves."

"Mrs. Poole, I wish you hadn't got them," began Lydia, gently. "It was nice of you . . . but I don't want to go."

Mrs. Poole darted a glance at her. "You haven't been oneel"

"But I'd rather not go." She stopped, noticing that the alarming phenomenon of Mrs. Poole's nose was recurring.

"You've a mighty queer way, Lydia, I must say, of showing you mourn your father!"

"But I don't think of him out in the cemetery, Mrs. Poole. And I don't want to."

To her amazement, Mrs. Poole turned, and left her staring rather dazed at all the marketing set out on the table beside her — the wreaths and the dry, stiff immortelles among the eggs and butter and dressed chickens and spare-ribs and bunches of vegetables.

She turned and walked slowly out of the kitchen, returning to the bedroom, where she had been packing her trunk. Mrs. Poole was very angry! It was too bad this little clash had had to come on the last day!

II

But it was true she no longer thought of her father as in the cemetery.

In the first week after his death, when it had stormed at night, it had seemed to her she could not bear it — his poor body, alone, in the darkness and rain! She could see him in his coffin, and she thought that image would never leave her. But she was young and healthy, and soon it ceased to haunt her.

Already he was coming back to her strong and companionable, the father of her earlier memories.

She had come, too, to feel that, wherever he was, all was well with him.

And wherever he was, *he* was not accusing her of any unfaithfulness to his memory. He understood!

He understood everything. . . . He would even understand, if he knew of it, why, four or five hours after that painful moment with Mrs. Poole in the kitchen, she should be standing in front of a mirror in

the Pooles' "spareroom," viewing herself in a new hat — one she had selected somewhat against Mrs. Poole's judgment in the matter of a hat suitable for a general agent.

III

She fastened her gloves, looked a last time in the mirror, and then slipped stealthily down the stairs and out of the house. A delightful bubbling was going on in her heart! The only thing that troubled her to any appreciable degree was the fact that she had told an untruth to Mrs. Poole. She had told her she was going out to do some errands.

But every step she took, now, farther away from the Pooles, she felt another shred of guilt drop from her, and her heart grew lighter and more gay.

Japonica bushes she passed were scarlet with fiery blossoms. A day more, and bloom would burst everywhere!

Her plan was to walk several miles out the River Road, and rest a while, and then on her way back she would meet Mr. Churchwell returning home. He could not suspect anything, because she and her father had been accustomed to taking these long walks, and often, as they returned, had met him. She knew that in fine weather he never allowed his carriage to be sent for him, but walked home from his office in town.

She did not know definitely what she was expecting. But it would be immensely gratifying to have him see her in these new and becoming clothes.

She was not sure she would tell him about the agency.

She would let him know she was going away, but not explain too circumstantially.

He had been called to Washington the very day of her father's collapse, and he had written her, when he learned of his death. No one else had said things to her the way he had said them in that letter.

He had told her something that had been a great surprise to her, that explained the conversation he had had with her father alone that last night. It seemed he had urged on her father the advisability of a surgical operation. He did not say he had proposed to arrange for the expense, but Lydia deduced as much.

She had written many letters in answer to his, and had destroyed them all.

But now that he had returned to Kingsville (as she had read in the *Kingsville Courier*), she had schemed to see him in the only way she could think of that would allow her to see him alone. She wanted to thank him. And then she wanted his eyes looking down into hers, his strong hand holding hers an instant!

IV

She reached the River Road. It began really within the town, which lay along its broad dividing river on the picturesque seven hills, but did not assume its name till it passed the town's limits, and began to show the first of those dignified antebellum mansions that marked it at intervals for eight or more miles into the country.

A half mile beyond the town was the Churchwell mansion, built in the forties. It stood on a knoll, its

grounds rolling away from it with charming irregularities. Its slave quarters, still preserved, were visible from the road.

Lydia had never been inside the house or even in the grounds. As she came to them now, she saw an old black mammy in a Turkey-red gown and white kerchief coming down the winding drive, a toddling child by the hand, another trailing behind.

After she passed the Churchwell place, she walked on for miles.

Whenever she met a carriage, she felt a little uncomfortable. Some of these people might fathom the reason of her walk.

She came to an old place, with an avenue of box, leading from the gate to the house. She caught the acrid odour of the box in her nostrils. Previously she had not liked it, but now it seemed delicious to her. The air was full of scents. She sniffed with delight the new-turned earth.

She paused at a lane bordered with cedar trees — the straight cedars like a double row of marching grenadiers, an escort for the narrow lane between them. Here she and her father had always rested, and then turned home. She looked up the lane as they had often stood and looked up it together.

A little beyond, she found a dry place on the bank by the side of the road, and sat down. She was surprised to find how tired she felt. She sat for a long time on the bank, dreamily happy. She could fancy strong arms cradling her weariness here in the spring sunshine.

There were no houses near in any direction. It was wonderfully still, but she imagined that inside this sunlit silence were millions of little chirping, singing, joyful noises.

After a while, she crossed the road, and leaned on the fence of a field which separated her from the river. She laid her jacket across the fence, took off her gloves, and picked patches of grey lichens idly off the top rail.

The island-dotted river wound below her in slow, willow-fringed curves. She was too far from Kingsville now to see even its smoke.

On the other side of the river, red fields stretched — new-ploughed fields — and sentinel cedars marked to her eye the distant fence rows.

There was no haze in the air. On the nearest mountains was a bloom of wonderful blue, as of blue flowers. And beyond the blue mountains, other ranges faded to paler and paler grey in the distance, vague outlines, at last, merging into the pearly clouds that wreathed their summits. All at once the beauty and wonder of the world burst upon her with an astounding and rapturous shock. She was suddenly inebriate with the joy just of living, breathing. And on the morrow she would step into a world of adventure that was awaiting her — that was calling her. Strange tremors ran through her body, nameless longings born of spring, of youth.

Ah, life! life!

V

She did not know the passage of time, for she read the hours only very vaguely from the afternoon shadows. But she had not gone far on her homeward way till she realised from the light that she had not started back soon enough. Where there was no one to see, she began to run. As it grew dusk, she became almost frantic in her anxiety to reach the part of the road where she had counted on meeting Churchwell. Familiar landmarks were so much farther apart than she had thought. When she came at length to the top of a hill from which she could see Kingsville, its street lights were coming out, and they were still a long way off.

She ran on again, her heart pounding. The fresh evening breeze blew in her face. It seemed to her now as if the only thing she wanted in the world was not to miss this meeting. It had grown quite dark by the time she reached the gates of his home. Lamplight glowed from its windows. In the sky a silver-sickle moon was riding, and Lydia could see the street lights of Kingsville plainly now.

She walked slowly after she passed the Churchwell house. She was tired and breathless. If she should meet him, it would be soon. She hoped it would be on the bridge, a high bridge over a ravine, where several times she and her father had met him.

When she started across the bridge, she saw some one coming toward her from the other end. She could

make out only the bare outlines of a man's form. She grew suddenly faint.

But when she got near to the man, he peered at her hard, and she saw it was some one she did not know.

VI

She dragged on wearily. She began to think of the Pooles — of how alarmed they would be, and the explanation she should have to make them.

The streets were almost deserted. People were at supper, or it was too soon after supper for them to be starting out again.

She turned off at a side street when she reached Ransom College, and came to the house where she had lived as a child. She crept along by the fence, holding to the pickets, and looked through the broad-spreading branches of the magnolia trees toward the French windows on the lower floor.

She kept listening that no one should come upon her. She did not know the people that lived in the house now, but she could see a man reading a newspaper by a gas drop-light on a centre table. A woman, his wife, probably, was laughing and making gestures to a boy and girl who were having fun about something. How secure they looked!

Suddenly Lydia felt a dread of leaving Kingsville on the morrow. She saw nothing ahead of her, now, that she longed for, or even wanted.

She was startled by a faint, rustling sound, close to her — a cat stealing over some leaves that the wind

had swept into a little hollow along the fence. She could smell the leaves, damp and sooty.

She looked up to the window of the little room that had been hers. There was no light in it. She remembered how she had gone back and kissed its walls, when all the furniture had been moved out of the house, the rooms bare and swept, and she and her father were leaving it forever.

A passion of tenderness flooded her as she looked up at the dimly lighted windows that once had been her mother's. She could see her lying on a couch, see the rose-coloured wrapper she wore, the lace falling away from her wrists. She could hear that strange pretty way her mother would call out to her when she opened the door — Barker's vigilance for a moment asleep — "Ah, my adored!" She could feel herself gathered to that soft silken breast!

What was it about her mother?

What was it? What was it that little playmate had hinted to her? And then Mrs. Poole?

Why had her father gone down to his grave with sealed lips? Why did she know nothing of his family — not even whether any of them were living? There were so many things she did not understand. And then there was a suffering she could not name, a new suffering connected more or less consciously with Churchwell.

She dropped her hands from her wet face. "Oh, Father, I wish I could see you again!" she sobbed, and hurried on.

She looked back once.

At the top of the hill she turned toward the Pooles'. The little cottage where she and her father had lived was dark. There was a prejudice in Kingsville against going into a house where some one had recently died.

CHAPTER X

MRS. POOLE had not accompanied Lydia into the car. She was *so* afraid the train would start before she could get off.

Mr. Poole had braved the perils of a snorting, quivering, bellringing train, entered it, and deposited the box of lunch beside her.

"All aboard!" rang sonorously through the car windows.

Mr. Poole gripped her hand.

"Remember, we're home to you — Pooles' is home to you, Lydia!" he said hurriedly, his old voice shaking.

Lydia put her head out of the window and waved. Her depression of the night before had left her. Her dread of what was ahead had vanished, and she was filled with happy excitement.

The crown of Mr. Poole's head, satin-smooth, except for the few hairs trained across it, shone in the bright morning sun as he waved his hat to her.

She saw Mrs. Poole tell him to put his hat back on his head. She could not hear her, but she knew that Mrs. Poole was saying: "Edwin, Edwin, be careful, you'll catch cold!"

Mrs. Poole's eyes and nose were both red. She had

been crying softly ever since they left the house for the station.

They were waving, waving. Lydia swallowed hard as she closed the window. She caught a last glimpse of Mrs. Poole's little jet bonnet with its purple pansies, and then the Pooles vanished from her eyes, forever.

II

The train was running faster. She looked out on the old red-brick warehouses she was passing. She caught a glimpse of church spires glistening in the morning sun. Her eyes were riveted to the window. She looked back — Kingsville on her seven hills! Look well, Lydia! You will never, never, see it again!

You were an alien there, really, Lydia, when you called it home. How could it have been otherwise with that fierce nativism that permeated Kingsville? But in years to come you will look back and it will seem to you that Kingsville had been home. Through long years your heart will sicken with yearning for a sight of the spires of Kingsville. In memory you will adore every brick of its old uneven pavements. But your eyes will not look on its spires again, Lydia, nor your feet tread the bricks of its old pavements!

Only in dreams will you flit through its market house, your little basket on your arm! Only in dreams, Lydia, will you peep over its crumbling stone walls at the roses that are blooming in Kingsville's gardens!

CHAPTER XI

AFTER an hour, the train stopped at Pleasantwater. All the way from Kingsville Lydia had been conjuring up agreeable pictures of a pretty creek or river, but when she stepped off the train, she looked around her, and could not discover the imagined stream.

"This way, miss, to the Cumberland Hotel!" "This way to the Mansion House!" the negro porters importuned her.

She gave her little bag to one of them, and followed him to the Mansion House. The lobby, with a row of armchairs turned to the wall, was solitary except for a clerk behind the desk, a young man in a brown checked suit and red tie, who looked hard at her as the porter threw open the front door.

The clerk pushed out a big open book to her. The only travelling she had done had been a few brief trips with her father, but she knew the procedure of registering.

She was annoyed to find her hand trembling as she wrote, *Lydia Lambright, Kingsville,* below the dashing signature of *Max Lowenstein, Baltimore.*

"Be here some time?" inquired the clerk, eying her gaily.

"I don't know." She detested his looks. His erupted face was almost as red as his satin tie, and his hair was ostentatiously "roached"—as Mrs. Poole would have styled the arrangement.

Carrying her bag, he led Lydia through an uncarpeted hall, saturated with the smell of stale grease, and up a narrow flight of stairs, to her room. He entered ahead of her, pulled up the cracked window-shade, and after walking over to the washstand and looking into the pitcher, he helped the porter in with her trunk, and unstrapped it himself. Then to her utter amazement, he closed the door after the porter, sat down coolly on her trunk and began nonchalantly swinging his feet.

"Ever been in Pleasantwater before?"

"No." Lydia smiled faintly. She wished she knew how to get rid of him.

"Think you'll like it?"

"I hope so."

"Say, look here! What you here for, anyhow?"

"I'm an agent."

"Sure enough? What for?"

"I'm a general agent," answered Lydia evasively. "I appoint other agents."

She was growing uneasy. When was he going to leave?

"Been at it long?"

She hesitated an instant. "Some time. Do you know any one here that's ever been a book agent?" she asked. "I'm looking for people who want to sell things."

His jaws, active with chewing gum, relaxed momentarily.

"Old McIntosh up at the Junction," he replied, after a brief reflection.

"How do I get to the Junction?" she inquired eagerly.

"Walk the ties. I'll show you — if you're right sure you want to go!" He stopped swinging his feet, and winked at her.

"Oh," thought Lydia, "you young fool! I'll suppress *you!*"

"I'll have to ask you to leave. I want to get some things out of my trunk," she said, with tart dignity.

He removed himself in a leisurely manner from the high trunk, walked over to where she was standing, folded his arms and looked down at her, narrowing his eyes, and scanning her face and the lines of her slim figure, intimately.

She must not let him see she was frightened, but it seemed to her they must be alone in the hotel, everything was so quiet. She could not hear a sound.

"If there's anything you want, call on *me!*" he said slowly.

"Oh, thank you!" replied Lydia. Her heart was missing beats.

"Thank you," she said again, in a frightened voice, opening the door.

He approached the door, then wheeling abruptly, he threw his arm around her, and fastened his lips on hers.

She tore herself away. Her hat had loosened, waves of hair were tumbling about her face.

"I thought a business woman would be respected anywhere!" burst from her, her eyes blazing with indignation.

"You're a picture of a business woman, *you* are!" he called back to her scornfully, from the hallway.

II

She turned the key in the door. Her hands were like ice. She had but one thought — to get through with Pleasantwater, and away from it, as soon as possible. Nothing in the world could induce her to stay all night at the Mansion House!

She hastily took out of her trunk specimens of the books she was to furnish agents to sell, and started out. As she passed through the lobby, to her relief, the clerk did not look up.

An old brick building, that appeared to be a court-house, was in the square beyond the Mansion House, a row of horses tied to the hitching-posts in front of it.

A countrified-looking man was untying his horse at one of the posts, and Lydia inquired of him the direction of the Junction.

"Which?" he replied interrogatively, staring at her with a dazed air.

"I want to go to Mr. McIntosh's at the Junction. Which way is it?"

He pointed a long finger. "Thar, jest keep straight on up yon way."

"Will I have any trouble finding Mr. McIntosh's house when I get there?"

The man was adjusting the saddle-bags on his horse.

He turned to her, his eyes faintly illumined with interest. "Grandpap McIntosh?"

"I—" she hesitated—"I think so."

"He lives in a yaller house."

"Old man's bed-ridden, same as bed-ridden," he called after her.

Bed-ridden! She stopped a minute, puzzled to know what to do. Bed-ridden Grandpap McIntosh could hardly make much of a success selling either the "History of Famous Women" or the "Imperial Galaxy of Poetry and Art"!

But she decided to go on. Perhaps he could tell her people in Pleasantwater she could get for agents, and where to find them.

III

She had no difficulty in finding the house. There was only one "yaller" house in Pleasantwater Junction.

She scrambled up a clay bank, and had unfastened the gate when a goat came running toward her from the rear of the house, his horns advanced defiantly. For one brief moment she wished she had elected to remain in Kingsville and teach school.

The door of the house opened and a mild voice called out, "Don't be frightened, honey. He's jest a-tryin' to play with you."

Lydia smiled feebly.

The voice called reassuringly—"Come along, honey. He ain't a-goin' to tech you."

Lydia walked up to the door.

"Yes, he's here," the woman who had called out to her answered to her inquiry. "Pore man, he's bound to be here. He cain't git away." She had a pale, serene face, and, except for a slight stain of snuff around one corner of her mouth, looked clean.

"Pap," she roused a gnarled old figure in a chair by the window, "here's a lady to see you."

Lydia sat down in a rocker. The room was scantily furnished with cheap furniture, it had a peculiar and depressing odour, but it was orderly.

The old man turned his face toward her. "You're a book agent, are you?"

"A general agent," corrected Lydia.

"They ain't no difference. I've been both. If there's any advantage with one or tother, it's with the regular agent. It's harder to get people to sell your books for you, than it is to sell 'em yourself."

"Now, Pap, don't you discourage the young lady," the woman remonstrated with him.

But Mr. McIntosh evidently considered he was entitled to diversion when it came his way. "Been at it long — appointin' agents?" he questioned slily.

"Some time."

"Where you been a-workin' at it?"

"Little places up above Kingsville," she answered, falteringly.

"Greensburg — worked it?"

"Yes."

"Well, you got Jake Ross, then, I reckon, to go out for you," he observed, a malicious gleam in his rheumy eyes.

Lydia smiled.

"Didn't you?"

"No."

"You *didn't!* That's quair! Never heard of a general agent going to Greensburg before and not gettin' Jake Ross!"

Lydia's face had flushed. Why should this old man be catechising her? She tried to ask him some of the questions she had come to ask, but she was on the verge of tears, and afraid to speak, lest she should break down.

"Honey," remarked the woman pleasantly, "you look like the book business had *treated* you well!" Her gentle eyes were appraising Lydia's clothes. "How's the most of 'em wearin' the sleeves now in Kingsville? Gittin' any bigger?"

Could it be possible that this flat-chested woman of Pleasantwater Junction, a collection of six houses on a clay bank, was interested in the fashions?

Lydia was momentarily diverted from her misery. Smiling a little, she gave her in detail the latest modes in sleeves.

IV

Then she got back to the business she had come on.

"Oh, give her some names, Pap," the woman urged; "some one she might git to sell her books fer her."

"You know Pleasantwater's got no persons wants to go out as agents, Becky!" he replied snappishly. "I've canvassed this here town for agents time and again."

"Now, Pap, there's Pink Deaderick. She's been a-looking fer something to do."

Lydia wrote down the name of Pink Deaderick. The woman suggested other persons. And although Mr. McIntosh expressed his doubts enthusiastically about each of them, Lydia finally had a list of names written in her notebook.

The woman accompanied her to the gate when she left. When they were outside, she interpreted the ways of the old man — her father-in-law — apologetically. "He has a right smart o' book-larnin', Pap has, but, pore thing, he jest suffers all the time now! You needn't to mind how he goes on. I hope you'll git Pink," she called after her, as Lydia started down the bank toward the railroad tracks.

V

The soft veil of early evening had settled over Pleasantwater's ugly face when she started back to the Mansion House from her last call on a prospective agent. In the quiet streets robins were chirping their close-of-day notes. There were few feet of Pleasantwater that Lydia had not traversed in the course of her day. She was faint, as well as very tired, for in order to avoid a fresh sight of the hotel clerk, she had gone without a noon meal. Though she said to herself that she must not be, nevertheless she was terribly discouraged.

Pink Deaderick had seemed, at one time, on the point of yielding to the attractive arguments in favour of book-selling which she had presented to her. Per-

haps she had been too ardent with her. At any rate, the overtures to Pink had come to nothing. And the others, mostly girls, but some of them men, had listened to her — stolidly unmoved, their eyes full of suspicion.

The smell of fried ham, and of other undistinguishable fried things, met her when she entered the Mansion House, and as she passed through the lobby, she saw the clerk sitting at his supper in the cavernous waste of the dining room. He looked up as she passed. Their eyes met, and dropped.

When she got inside her room, she sank into a chair, her books sliding to the floor.

She was roused by a knock. The porter who had brought her from the station was at the door.

"Bell's done rang!" he announced respectfully.

"I don't want any supper, thank you."

"Dey's a mighty good supper," he stammered solicitously. "Batter-cakes . . ."

"I'm not hungry, thank you." Lydia smiled weakly at him.

The black man's friendly interest had warmed her heart a little. She went over to the bureau where she had placed Mrs. Poole's lunch and sat down to eat her supper.

Already the Pooles seemed a long way from her. She could hardly make herself believe that it was only in the morning they had waved good-bye to her from the station platform at Kingsville. And it seemed weeks to her, since she had come in from her walk on the River Road, the evening before, and the Pooles had been so alarmed because she had been so late, all

their vexation melted away in their anxious hours of waiting.

Her heart was very tender toward them. She could remember so many little kind things they had done for her, and she could scarcely recall at all things they had done or said to provoke her. She did not see, now, indeed, how she could ever have been provoked with them.

Their life had been very tiresome and commonplace to her, so different from all she craved might be put into her own existence, but now, at the end of her first day's journey into the world, what a snug happy harbour the Pooles' home seemed as she looked back on it!

CHAPTER XII

THE train was hours late arriving at Pleasantwater, and was further delayed by its ailing engine.

At the raw, black, unpropitious hour of three in the morning, Lydia arrived at Sparta, and a sleepy darky led her by the light of his lantern to the Bella House, nearly a mile from the railroad station.

She slept soundly for several hours after going to bed, and was awakened by a catbird singing a rich, voluble song outside her window. Sunshine streamed across the floor.

She was surprisingly rested from her fatigue of the day before, and started out buoyantly, with a long list of names furnished her by the clerk, whose sad eyes had at once quieted whatever fears she had brought with her from the Mansion House at Pleasantwater, and had satisfactorily contradicted to her the cavalier ferocity of his huge flowing moustache.

It was an exhilarating day. Light clouds drifted in the sky. Her heart was gladdened by the sight of daffodils in bloom — long, golden, nodding lines of them arow in old gardens she passed. She stepped briskly along through streets that seemed to lead directly into blue mountains at the end of them.

At a little after four in the afternoon, she had

visited every person whose name the clerk at the Bella House had given her. Some had seemed mildly interested, but, warned by her experience with Pink Deaderick at Pleasantwater, she had refrained from overurging them.

At a few minutes after four, standing on a hilltop overlooking all of Sparta, she consulted her list. Two days, and she had not yet employed an agent. In a flash of alarm, she saw her slender roll of bills eaten up by travelling expenses, and no bills earned to replace them.

She decided to go back to the Gobbles. Mrs. Gobble and Dawn had been more friendly to her proposition than any of the others to whom she had presented it. Both mother and daughter had unmistakably coquetted with the idea.

II

The Gobbles exhibited no surprise when they found her at their door again.

"Yes, Dawn likes the idy," Mrs. Gobbles admitted.

There was the same mysterious reservation that Lydia had observed before.

Dawn had been playing the organ when Lydia reappeared, but the three sat rocking together now.

"Well, Mrs. Gobble, if she likes the idea, will you tell me frankly, then, why your daughter can't take the agency? I know she'll do well with it . . ."

Lydia paused, her cheeks rosy, her eyes shining with expectation, for Mrs. Gobble, though still not committing herself, looked distinctly malleable.

"I don't think it's no disgrace, Miss Lambright — if that's what you said your name was —" Mrs. Gobble began with rather a challenging air —"I don't think it's no disgrace, to own to not havin' much —"

"Of course it isn't!" Lydia interrupted encouragingly.

"Well, we jest ain't got the five dollars to pay out for Dawn takin' the agency,"— Mrs. Gobble warmed to a confidential tone —"though I'd like the best in the world to have her, and Dawn's mighty nigh sick to do it!"

Lydia cast through her mind, rapidly. She was distinctly nearer to appointing an agent than she had been before. *This* girl, poor Dawn, a mouth-breather, *wanted* to be an agent!

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Mrs. Gobble," she said, "I'll just credit Miss Dawn with paying me the five dollars. I'll give her the outfit, the books she's to show, and her instructions, and order-blanks, and everything, and then when she's taken a few orders, she can send me five out of what she makes. I think that'll be all right. She can send it to me, care of the house. She'll have the address . . ."

"Well, I don't know, I don't know." Mrs. Gobble was still a little reluctant, though palpably pleased. "I don't guess Mr. Gobble *can* object, though . . ."

The transaction was closed without much further difficulty, and Dawn, a faint tinge of colour struggling to show itself in her pasty cheeks, was duly constituted an agent to sell the "History of Famous Women" and

the "Imperial Galaxy of Poetry and Art," all the papers made out appertaining thereto. With timid gratitude, she accompanied Lydia to the gate, and a little way down the street, where they parted cordially.

III

By the time the distance between Lydia returning to the hotel, and Dawn returning to the home of her parents, had lengthened to two hundred feet, Lydia's elation at having appointed an agent was expiring. She was not certain whether it was the rather touching figure of Dawn that had affected her judgment, or whether it had come about entirely through her eagerness to appoint an agent some way or other. The only thing she was perfectly certain of was that she had done an idiotic thing. How was she to get any money herself, if she credited agents, when her only compensation was to be what the agents paid her? It was not that Dawn would not pay her back, if she earned money selling the works, but — Dawn Gobble would never in the world be able to sell a copy of either the "History of Famous Women" or the "Imperial Galaxy." It wasn't in Dawn Gobble to persuade any one in the world to take anything in the world! She saw that plainly enough now.

She was heartily glad she had not confessed to Mr. Poole that she herself had paid twenty-five dollars for the outfits she was to furnish agents to sell. Mr. Poole would certainly not have approved, for though she had thought it was quite a little sum she had left

after paying her father's funeral expenses, he had intimated he thought it was exceedingly small, and had warned her to be very careful.

As she approached the Bella House she counted to herself the number of days her money would probably last, with the necessary daily expenses of railroad fare and hotels.

CHAPTER XIII

SOME days she was less downcast than others; but taking it all in all, by the time Lydia had travelled ten days, not an illusion regarding general agencies remained in her mind.

With the exception of Dawn Gobble at Sparta, which she never recalled without chagrin, she had not appointed an agent.

She had talked, and talked, and talked, said everything she could possibly think of to say, and in every manner she could possibly conceive of saying such things. Those who had never been book agents, looked on the occupation, and on the arguments she offered for its success, with suspicion, and those who *had* been book agents, looked on the occupation and the arguments with even greater suspicion. She wondered how any one had ever induced any one else to become a book agent, for she knew there were countless book agents in the world.

Of the adventures she had confidently looked forward to when she had contemplated the general agency from Kingsville — she had had not one! Her experiences had been entirely with the poor, not with the abject, suffering poor, but still with the poor — the ignorant, the highly-prejudiced, the hopelessly-common-

place poor. Oh, the rooms she had shown her cheap, showy books in, and smiled and chattered in, and tried to woo, and all but wept in! Would she ever forget the look of them, the shoddy, pitiful look? Would she ever forget those depressing odours of poverty?

Whole days through the spring sunshine she had walked the streets of little towns she had never seen before, going from one such home to another, her certainty growing and growing of how different it all was from what she had expected!

II

But on the evening of the tenth day, as she lifted her head from the wiry plush upholstery of the car seat against which she had been trying to rest, and looked out of the car window and saw everything so lovely in the fading daylight — the delicate pink-and-white drift of blossoming fruit trees, and fields with little new-born calves clinging timidly to the sides of their calm mothers, and little colts practising on their awkward new legs, and little pigs scampering foolishly as their startled snouts sniffed the passing train — as she saw little lambs running after the old ewes, and a pair of "mourning" doves wing-by-wing on a fence rail — as she saw and felt it all, suddenly all the wonder and beauty and interest of the world, and the realisation that it was for her, too, burst upon her as it had that afternoon on the River Road.

Her young heart filled with thirst for life. She longed to see the world, something more than just this

region about Kingsville. She longed to taste experiences far different from those she had tasted.

She counted over every penny in her purse. There was enough to buy a ticket to New York; and Walden, her next stop, was a railroad junction where she could catch a through train.

If she did not buy this ticket to New York, then what? Why, then she would go trailing on, day after day, to one little miserable place after another, and pretty soon all her money would be gone, and she would be stranded at a place something like Pleasantwater, and have to write to the Pooles for money with which to return to Kingsville. *That* she would never do. Never!

She did not know exactly what she should find to do when she reached New York, but a city offered boundless opportunities; and, in any event, whatever she found it would be more to her taste, not harder, or more barren of results, than the general agency.

Except for the thought that she would have to write the Pooles and acquaint them with her change of plans — she pictured their dismay! — this moment was the happiest she had known since she left Kingsville.

New York! One of the great cities of the world!

What millions of young men and women before her, in all countries and ages, had turned their eager shining faces, their glowing hearts, to a great city, just as she was turning her shining face, her glowing heart, to a great city, believing that there, surely there, must be found life!

Shining faces! Glowing young hearts!

CHAPTER XIV

LYDIA paused on the curb, and with her little travelling bag on the pavement beside her, drew a newspaper clipping from her purse and held it close to her eyes. This was the right number, 148. "Refined Christian home with bountiful table." Ordinarily she would have been amused by this combination of advantages which the advertisement offered. But as she had drawn near the city, she had found herself distinctly more terrified than merry, and had selected this advertisement from a long list precisely because of its word — *Christian.* The word seemed to throw a cloak of protection around her.

As she mounted the steps, she was much impressed by the appearance of the house. She feared it would be higher priced than she could afford. But the cab had whipped off up the street. No doubt she could stop a day or two, till she found something cheaper.

Her breath came in odd, quick jerks as she stood in the tiled vestibule waiting an answer to her ring.

Through the frosted panes in the upper part of the double doors she could see some one approaching. A coloured maid opened the door.

"Is Miss Tompkins in?" Lydia's voice trembled slightly.

"Yes."

"I'd like to see her, please."

The maid ushered her through a dangling pair of rope portières into the front parlour.

"What name?" she demanded with sullen impoliteness.

"Lambright — I'm from the South — Kingsville. . . ."

II

Lydia looked around her. There were oil paintings on the walls, and a Venetian scene in water-colours. A high pitcher of metal that appeared bronze stood on a shelf at the base of a long mirror between the front windows. On the rack of an upright piano, a hymn book was open. She stole softly to the piano. The hymn book was open to "Bringing in the Sheaves." She had often heard its vigorous refrain pouring out of Sunday-school windows in Kingsville. "Bringing in the Sheaves! Bringing in the Sheaves!"

She waited nervously. The lights were turned rather low, and the house seemed uncomfortably quiet. A delicate tip! toe! — fall of a mouse's toe not lighter — Miss Tompkins was approaching through the back-parlour, a woman of medium height, plump, her eyes prominent and protruding, and her grey hair arranged about her face in an orderly succession of premeditated curls, not cork-screws, but their lineal descendants.

"Miss Lambright?" she pronounced, with a markedly rising inflection.

Lydia rose, and as Miss Tompkins did not sit down, remained standing.

"I saw your advertisement, Miss Tompkins."

"O—h?" Miss Tompkins put an extraordinary amount of cool surprise into her exclamation. "Sit down, will you? From the South, I believe?"

"Yes, from Kingsville."

"Kingsville? Kingsville?" Miss Tompkins said it over several times. She admitted she had never heard of the place.

"You have references?" she asked, smilingly.

"I just came. . . . I've never been here before."

"O—h?" Miss Tompkins moistened her lips. "I never take any one without references," she said, in a bland but resolute voice.

The colour spread in a hot sheet over Lydia's face.

"Would you be prepared to pay the first week or so in advance, Miss Lambright?"

"What are your prices?" asked Lydia, apprehensively. Under the influence of Miss Tompkins' impersonal smile, it seemed a rather indelicate question. "I just want — a *small* room."

Without answering her inquiry definitely, Miss Tompkins led her up flight after flight of stairs, each floor lighted more dimly than the one below.

On the top floor, she passed to the front, entered a tiny room, and lit the gas. She was out of breath with her climb, but she explained the operation of the gas-heater and of the folding-bed, and stated the price — nine dollars a week.

Lydia counted out the money and paid a week's

board in advance. She could stay two weeks, then, if that was the rate. And by that time, of course she would have a position.

III

It was some time before she was able to sleep after she went to bed — the rumble of the elevated on one side, the clang of the surface cars on the other, and all through the night the muffled roar of the great city — she was actually in New York!

When at length she fell asleep, she dreamed she was in Kingsville. Nothing looked as it had actually looked, but she could see her father's body on its bier. She seemed to be searching everywhere for his clothes, and as she found them they looked perfectly natural, his old pair of shoes, his worn slippers, and his shiny coat with the spots on the front. She could see patches and darns on his undergarments exactly where she had put them. Some one seemed to be dogging her steps. She stuffed the clothes in a grate with frantic haste, poured oil over them, and set a match to them — so that Mrs. Poole should not find them and see how pitiful and shabby they were. The bundle blazed, the fire roared and leaped higher and higher, catching her by the arm! The flames were burning her whole body! She tried to cry out, to make some one hear.

When she woke, she found she had been lying on her arm; it was aching. Perhaps she had cried aloud, before she woke — she was not sure. The tears rolled down her face while she lay in the darkness, longing for morning to come.

When she fell asleep again, she was visited with another, very different dream. She thought she was driving down Fifth Avenue — that apogee of the national elegance which she had heard and read of. She was in an open carriage, a victoria, like Mrs. Ransom Churchwell's, leaning back against the cushions. Throngs of people along the sidewalk were looking at her. Then a "poor-white" girl, such as hung about the Market House in Kingsville, came running after her carriage, calling, "Miss, gimme a nickel!" and another little barefoot "poor-white," with a bundle of rich pine in her arms, came running alongside the carriage, asking her to buy, just as the little pine-sellers ran after people on the streets of Kingsville begging them to buy their bundles of sappy pine, for kindling-wood. She stopped the carriage and took both the beggar girl and the pine-seller up on the seat beside her. Then she woke. It was broad light, and breakfast smells were coming through the transom.

IV

She spent a day full of happy excitement. Intoxicated with the city sights and sounds, with the gorgeous displays in the shop windows, and with the tonic, exhilarating air, she was soon dodging under a horse's nose, grazing a wheel, nimbly and gaily averting death with each street crossed.

At first, after stepping out into this glittering city sunshine, she was uneasy lest the vulgar mark of those days she had toiled as agent was stamped somewhere on her. But as the hours advanced, she felt more and

more purged of the stains of Sparta and Pleasantwater.

She caught more than one glimpse of herself in mirrors of the shop windows, and Bob Allen's words recurred to her with a fresh, agitating, delicious shock —"Little Lydia Lambright, prettier than any of them!"

V

At half-past six Miss Tompkins' dinner-gong sounded. When Lydia reached the foot of the basement stairs, she could see into the dining room. The other boarders were already there; the room was full; and she did not know where to sit, as Miss Tompkins had told her at breakfast that the seat she had then would not be her regular seat. A spectacled woman looked out at her frigidly. Other women who could see the hall door were scrutinising her curiously. The maid who had opened the door to her the night before and another coloured maid were moving loftily among the tables, offering dishes to the boarders.

Miss Tompkins suddenly fluttered out to her, a napkin tucked in her bosom.

"I hope you haven't been waiting long!" she whispered. "I'll put you at the table with Mrs. Kearney, a widow, a delightful lady — I can't think of her brother's name! But no matter, he only comes in to dinner."

She led Lydia mincingly to a corner table, and introduced her, Mrs. Kearney assisting with the name of her brother, McCarthy. He was middle-aged, and a bachelor — as he soon made known to Lydia — a

heavily-built man with a ruddy, large-featured face. When he smiled he disclosed somewhat discoloured teeth. His clothes were good, but he looked un-at-home in them, like a small boy forcibly dressed in his Sunday suit. He had been brought up on a farm, he said; yet he was full of city slang, and intensely interested in the business and pleasures of the city.

"Old Ladies' Home!" he whispered, his eyes twinkling, when he caught Lydia stealing glances at the other tables in the room.

There were only three men present, including McCarthy. One, a pale, youngish man with a pointed beard, wore a high-cut clerical vest. He sat at a good-sized table in the centre of the room, women flanking and opposite him — all widows or spinsters, McCarthy whispered to Lydia — some withered, some still vigorous. They were talking to each other, and to the pale man, always very deferentially to him, of church matters. Occasionally one of them won from him a dry-as-dust smile.

The talk was all very subdued in tone. Even Mrs. Kearney and her brother, who seemed the only live, and perhaps worldly persons in the room, contented themselves with undertones. But they kept up a brisk conversation with Lydia. Like Miss Tompkins, they admitted they never before had heard of Kingsville.

"I guess you won't be leaving Miss Tompkins' for your dinners, after all, will you, Steve?" his sister said, smilingly, glancing at Lydia, as the three of them rose from the table together.

CHAPTER XV

LATE one gusty afternoon, Lydia, who had been a little more than two weeks in New York, dragged herself up the steps of Miss Tompkins' and let herself into the house with her latch-key. She had been out all day in pursuit of what now appeared phantom positions.

As the front door clicked, Miss Tompkins pushed aside the portière that hung at a door in the back hall.

"Oh, that you, Miss Lambright? Will you step here a moment, if you don't mind?"

"You understood, did you not, Miss Lambright," she said, when they were seated in the bedchamber, "that board was to be paid in advance?"

Motes of light danced in the darkness that gathered before Lydia's eyes. She had the sensation of water filling her ears, muffling Miss Tompkins' voice to her, and her own voice seemed to come to her from a great distance as she answered simply, "Yes, Miss Tompkins."

"You overlooked the fact that your third week was due Tuesday?"

"I'll have to ask you to wait till the end of the week, this time, please, Miss Tompkins." As she spoke, waves of heat and of cold broke alternately over her.

She did not know why she had said the end of the week. But she had to say something.

"May I ask, Miss Lambright, why you are in New York? Have you a position in view?"

"Yes."

"Of what character, if I may ask?"

"I'm considering two or three different positions."

An uncomfortable silence ensued. Lydia's eyes, wandering uneasily, took in the ordered frippery of the crowded bedchamber. A vision of the long, tedious, spinster years that had gone to the accumulating of all this litter rose depressingly to her mind. But not with compassion for Miss Tompkins. She hardly accounted Miss Tompkins a human being, like herself, compounded of hopes and fears. Miss Tompkins was a boarding-house keeper, demanding board-money, and she had none to give her.

She started to quit the room.

Miss Tompkins adroitly intercepted her.

"Would it be convenient to pay me — part, of your week's board, Miss Lambright? I have my insurance to meet this week."

With a quick movement, Lydia opened her purse, and handed her a two-dollar bill. "I can pay that much on it."

"Oh! Thank you. Shall I give you a receipt?"

Fingering the bill, Miss Tompkins made a tentative move in the direction of her walnut secretary.

"Oh, no, I don't care for a receipt." Lydia's hand was on the portière, raising it, so that she could withdraw from the room.

"I'm afraid you're getting yourself too tired, my dear."

Lydia smiled faintly. "I have a headache. That's all."

II

As she went through the hall, and up the stairs, she wondered feverishly what she should do now. On the third floor, she found the maid who had let her in the evening she came bent over a book, under one of the gas jets that were always lit in the dusky hallways. A broom leaned against the wall at her side, and the dusting-cloths had slid to her feet. Evidently she had started to do some cleaning, but had stopped to con a lesson. Viola attended school, giving her services to Miss Tompkins out of school hours.

Lydia glanced at the outlines of her woolly head against the light paper of the wall behind her, at her sprawling feet, her sour withdrawal into the Latin text-book on her knees. The picture at once amused and irritated her.

The black girl was reading over her lesson aloud, with parturient throes pronouncing the fiery invective against Catiline, "*O tempora! O mores!*"

Lydia had read the immortal orations under her father's direction. Something irresistibly impelled her to follow up the halting syllables in a light, mocking tone.

"*Senatus haec intelligit! consul videt! hic tamen vivit!*" she repeated. "Can I be of any help, Viola?"

"You needs help yo'self," mumbled the girl, stick-

ing out her lips. She had dropped back into the vernacular of a Southern childhood.

"Oh!" exclaimed Lydia sharply.

She knew Viola was impudent; it was her own fault that she had been insulted!

But she wished she could take charge of Miss Tompkins' ménage for just one day! She would like to prove to Miss Tompkins that blacks, like children, were polite when they were made to be polite, and that their happiness followed in the wake of their enforced politeness. She would like to demonstrate to her the profound simplicities of the black character!

She flung herself on the folding-bed, burying her face in the cool pillow. These black minds were very penetrating, very cute, for all their simplicity. Viola had guessed she was out of money and her board due!

III

She wished she could go to sleep and forget everything. Things were going round and round in her brain. She had answered every advertisement she could find. In some places where she had applied for work she had met courtesy; in others, what she considered brutal rudeness; but courteous or rude, none of the employers wanted her. "References" were demanded, just as Miss Tompkins had demanded "references," and she had no references. She had no special training for anything. The only positions offered her, were to sell things. She could be agent for anything from hose supporters and face creams to encyclopædias.

But she had no money to start with, even if she had wanted to start out again as agent; and her experience with the "History of Famous Women" and the "Imperial Galaxy of Poetry and Art" had given her a distrust of all agencies.

She could get a situation as domestic servant. But death would be preferable to that.

She had been thinking of death, as a solution, for several days.

She pictured herself turning on the gas, and Miss Tompkins finding her body stretched out stiffly on the folding bed. But except for the image of Miss Tompkins' consternation, she derived little satisfaction from the picture.

When she thought of dying, of putting an end to herself, Kingsville came back to her poignantly. These spring nights were sweet there now with honeysuckle!

She did not want to die! She wanted to live!

IV

But how was she going to live? That was the question torturing her.

All at once, an idea struck her. McCarthy! Why wasn't McCarthy a solution?

Every evening she had been with him, usually in his sister's room, talking or playing cards. His sister's room, the best at Miss Tompkins', always had fresh flowers in it, and fruit, and candy, and magazines. And they both seemed to go wherever they pleased,

and to have whatever they wanted. He had taken her, with his sister, to the theatre, and one Sunday she had walked alone with him in the Park. She had not encouraged the extremely personal things he had tried to say to her whenever they were alone together; she liked him, and liked to be with him; but she felt a slight sense of recoil from the robust physical presence of the man. Now, however, she began to think of him in a different way, and a sense of relief crept over her.

When the gong sounded for dinner, she examined herself a last time in the looking-glass. She was exceedingly pleased with the reflection. But she dreaded presenting herself in the dining room. She felt as if the cold eyes of the widows and spinsters would see right through her, and know perfectly why she had dressed her hair in this unaccustomed and rather saucy style, and why she had put on her best dress — made by a seamstress in Kingsville the week before she left there — a delicate grey crêpe, to which she had added a knot of scarlet velvet ribbon she had bought out of a shop window on her first entrancing day in the city.

She felt the boarders stir as she entered the dining room. They were all looking at her. She tried to appear indifferent, as she made her way across the room.

McCarthy rose quickly.

"By George! Some one's a beauty!" he exclaimed half under his breath.

Lydia smiled sparklingly on him. She had recovered her equanimity.

"Where's Mrs. Kearney?" she asked.

He explained that his sister had been suddenly called out of the city.

"Want to go to a good show this evening?" he asked, with marked reluctance turning his eyes to the dish Viola was impatiently offering him.

CHAPTER XVI

THREE hours afterwards, Lydia was at the theatre. A lean, clownish man came out and sang, "Oh, Mr. Dooley! Oh, Mr. Dooley!" The song was new, and the audience kept him to the point of exhaustion repeating with twists and winks, "Oh, Mr. Dooley, Oh, Mr. Dooley!"

The curtain finally descended, and lights blazed on. The orchestra took up the strain now, "Oh, Mr. Dooley! Oh, Mr. Dooley!"

Lydia had laughed herself to tears. McCarthy stooped to pick up her programme which had fallen to the floor, and as he straightened himself, his shoulder brushed hers. A slight shiver ran through her. Neverthless, under the stimulus of the music and her surroundings she was becoming every instant more reconciled to the idea of McCarthy as a solution. He was not romantic; he was the farthest remove in the world, indeed, from all her fancy had ever pictured of a lover or a husband; but in the straits to which she was reduced, the very solidity of his look, the commonness of his grain, seemed a guarantee of her future security.

He regaled her between the acts with stories of other shows, as he called them. She had never before heard

even the names of these actors and singers he mentioned.

The orchestra's sprightly strain of "Mr. Dooley" changed to a soft, tender melody, and, changing again, merged into a warm, sensuous flood of music that seemed to filter through every fibre of her being. McCarthy was looking down devouringly into her face.

She allowed his eyes to hold hers an instant, and then dropped them, feeling the colour hot in her cheeks. Her eyes had said plainly—"I'm yours, if you'll have me!" . . . She said to herself it was an equitable proposition she was offering him. She would give him youth and refinement, and he would save her from destitution.

"I wish I could be here always. I love New York," she said, abruptly, ostensibly studying her programme.

He looked at her quizzically. "Well, can't you?"

"I don't know . . ."

"Sweetheart back in Kingsville?"

"I don't care for any one in Kingsville," she answered pointedly. She raised her eyes deliberately to his. But her heart was less bold than her eyes. She felt it pounding. If not McCarthy, then—*what?*

He leaned close to her.

The house had grown dark. The stage was bathed in rosy light. Bespangled chorus-girls were fluttering about in an enchanted world. A swift impression passed through Lydia's mind that something more unreal was happening to her than was happening on the stage. She heard McCarthy saying to her in a low

voice: "Did you mean that, little girl?"—and she felt his hand, under cover of the dusk of the house, giving her own a fervent pressure.

II

The great green curtain dropped; the orchestra took up again the strains of "Oh, Mr. Dooley! Oh, Mr. Dooley!" Lydia shrank a little away from McCarthy as he assisted her solicitously with her wrap. He looked so rotund, so almost ridiculous, in his short spring overcoat. Suddenly, as she stood pinning on her hat, she was aware of a young woman, at a little distance across the house, trying to attract his attention.

"That young lady's trying to speak to you, I think." She indicated to him the direction of a pink evening wrap.

He bowed and smiled across the emptying seats, waving his gloves, and the young woman, who wore her black hair in a huge "pompadour," waved her programme.

"Say, isn't she stunning?" he asked, his eyes following the pink wrap as it disappeared up the centre aisle.

"Was that her mother with her?" asked Lydia, with an assumption of unconcern.

"Search me!"

Then he didn't know the young woman so well after all. She breathed more easily.

"She's handsome. Is she married?"

"Married?" McCarthy laughed. He was mak-

ing their way aggressively through the pavement throngs. "No — not now."

When they had gone less than a block, he stopped in front of a building from whose windows lights streamed out across the pavement. Couples who had come from theatre were going up the steps.

"What do you say? Let's go in and have something."

"Oh, no, not to-night!"

"No?" McCarthy looked surprised. "You're a funny girl!" he said.

And the moment they had passed on, Lydia wondered why she had refused his proposal. She was convinced she had made a mistake. She wished she dare say, "Let's go back."

III

Suddenly she began to talk with feverish gaiety, about the opera, about anything, clinging a little closer to his arm.

"Oh, I wish it could go on forever and forever and forever!" she exclaimed. "Nothing else, nothing to worry about, just —'Oh, Mr. Dooley, Oh, Mr. Dooley!'" She hummed the song.

They had started down the hill toward Miss Tompkins'.

McCarthy paused under a street lamp, and looked at her.

"Don't you wish it could go on forever?" she challenged him, her eyes glistening.

"I wish some things could!"

"Everything to the brave!" she laughed, as they ascended the long flight of steps at Miss Tompkins'.

Suddenly he linked his arm in hers, and bent over her, trying to look into her face.

They stopped in the tiled vestibule. A dim light shone through the frosted panes in the doors. Lydia was trembling violently.

"Will you give me to-morrow evening — go with me to dinner to-morrow evening?" he asked in a low tone. Before she realised what was happening, he had drawn her to him. "You're my girl!" he said huskily.

"Forever and forever and forever!" she whispered, repeating her wild words of a moment before.

She was saved! She had no horror of him now. But her thoughts were whirling dizzily. The tension of many hours of over-wrought nerves was breaking in her. She felt weak, robbed of volition. With the misty unreality of a dream, she was conscious that he was kissing her.

"I didn't dream, that first night I came, I'd ever be engaged to you!" she whispered, pushing him a little away, so that she could speak.

She felt herself abruptly released. What had happened? Was some one coming up the steps behind them? She looked. But there was no one there.

"Engagement! What idea have you got in your head, little girl?" McCarthy spoke crisply, but his voice was anxious. "I'm no marrying man! You're in the wrong pew!"

Lydia staggered, reaching the doors for support.

"I thought — I thought — oh, I don't know what I thought!" she faltered. "I didn't know men, honourable men, kissed girls — and made love to them," — her quivering words were almost lost in sobs — "unless they wanted to marry them!"

"Oh, look here!" He tried to soothe her, but she drew away from him, searching the door uncertainly for the keyhole. Her body felt like ice, yet her cheeks burned with unbearable fire.

"Look here, little girl, don't take it that way, for God's sake!" he begged.

But she pushed the door open, closed it quickly behind her, and groped her way up the stairs, clinging to the banister.

CHAPTER XVII

LYDIA, pale and wild-eyed, lay staring straight ahead of her at the faded wall-paper. Her undergarments were strewn about anywhere, and on the floor in a dejected heap lay the grey crêpe dress she had donned with such proud assurance the evening before. She caught a glimpse of a scarlet rosette peeping out from its folds, and the sight sickened her.

"Oh, Mr. Dooley! Oh, Mr. Dooley!" came through the window, in a high pert treble. She stopped her ears. She wished she might never again to the last day of her life hear the hateful sound of that song! She had fallen asleep toward morning, and now this butcher's boy had wakened her from oblivion, and recalled everything to her with fresh horror: She hated herself. How could she ever have courage to look McCarthy in the face again?

But what had he meant when he said to her in his hoarse whisper—"You're my girl?" What had he meant by that? If he didn't want to marry her, what did he want her for? Just some one to take out with him in the evenings? to kiss and hold in his arms?

Another idea flashed through her—an idea impossible of belief in the broad morning light that flooded the little hall bedroom.

II

The odour of chops and of weak coffee came through the transom. Another day had to be lived. What should she do? What was left to her to do?

She brushed her hair out of her eyes, rose, and wearily picked up her stockings from the floor. She did not hurry. What if she did miss her breakfast?

She brushed her hair languidly, regardless of the gold flecks playing in its soft lengths. The sunshine, by its contrast, only emphasised her misery. She put on her blouse, and pulled the skirt of her suit over her head and adjusted it. How long ago it seemed since that day she had bought this brown suit from the ebullient Mrs. Joy at Maxfield's in Kingsville! The image of herself in the glass blurred.

She lifted the grey crêpe dress, hung it carelessly on a hook, and left the room. After breakfast, there would be one more place to try for, a secretaryship she had seen advertised, and had not applied for because she had known so well what they would want — that the secretary should know shorthand and typewriting. There wasn't a chance in a million she could get it. But she would try. And if she didn't get it —

III

A light, fresh breeze was blowing as she stepped out of Miss Tompkins'. White clouds were billowing in the sky's clear blue. It was impossible not to be slightly buoyed up with hope as she felt herself car-

ried along on the shining stream of the spring morning.

But noon found her on lower Broadway, her hope again dashed. The secretaryship had been filled; when she entered the office, a young woman, the new secretary, was taking down dictation in shorthand from the man who had advertised for a secretary; so there had been, evidently enough, no chance at all for *her*.

She stood hesitating on the curb for a while after she came out of the office building. At last, she started walking up Broadway, hoping that as she walked along some idea of what to do would suggest itself. But with the hurrying midday crowds jostling her, she found it difficult to think with any clearness. As she came in sight of Grace Church, its delicate grey spire, glittering in the noon sunshine, gave her a moment of keen pleasure, and lifted the apathy that wrapped her.

When she reached Union Square, she thought for an instant of going and sitting down on one of its benches, to see if she could not think out there some plan of future action. But none of the benches were entirely vacant, and the men on them looked seedy and dejected, and she did not want to be near them.

Occasionally she stopped and looked into a shop window, gazing at the articles displayed, but hardly seeing them. She could think of only two possibilities now: to write the Pooles for money, and ignominiously return to Kingsville; or turn on the gas at Miss Tompkins'. Only a miracle, now, could save her from one of these alternatives, and it seemed to her that, of the two, she would rather end herself with gas. Mist

gathered before her eyes, and she had the feeling of being in a trance, as she kept walking along beside others on the sidewalk who were going in the same direction.

As she found herself safely delivered on the pavement, from the vortex of the three streets that meet below the Fifth Avenue Hotel, she looked up at the light façade of the hotel flashing in the noon sun, and something stirred faintly in her. She felt a singular vague sense of protection in its nearness. Kingsville people were in the habit of stopping here when they were in New York. The ghost of something dear and familiar seemed hovering near her.

She paused in front of the ladies' entrance. Why not go up and sit down quietly in the parlour, and try to think out there what she should do? Anything would be better than going back to Miss Tompkins'.

She stood irresolutely under the portico of the ladies' entrance. The porter looked out on her through the glass doors, respectfully waiting for her decision.

She heard something! Was she dreaming? Or had she lost her mind? Her heart almost stopped beating. She heard some one calling her name. She looked around. It was Ransom Churchwell, approaching her swiftly from the main entrance of the hotel.

IV

He caught her hands in both his.

"Lydia, in God's name, what are you doing here?"

"Oh, Mr. Churchwell!" She clung to his hands. He was so tall, so well built, so graceful, so well dressed.

She saw everything about him. Every least thing in his appearance stamped itself on her mind with joy at once exquisite and painful.

"I'm so glad . . . to see you . . . Mr. Churchwell . . . it seems as if . . . I should — die!"

"Lydia, what's the matter? What are you doing here in New York? I thought you were travelling, for a book concern, around in the State, near Kingsville. Mr. Poole told me you were."

"Oh, I have so much to tell you, Mr. Churchwell," she said breathlessly. "I can't tell you here —"

"No, no, not here, of course not. We'll go inside. But wait a minute." He took out his watch. "I have an appointment, very soon."

She wanted to say, "Oh, don't leave me!" She could hardly keep from saying it.

Churchwell smiled reassuringly. "You poor child! You're in trouble! But don't worry another minute — I'll look after you, Lydia! I'll come for you, and we'll go to dinner somewhere this evening, and then you can tell me everything — and whatever it is, I'll fix it up for you! Don't worry any more. Where are you staying?

"I think something told me you were here, Lydia, and needed me!" he said, writing down the address she gave him. "I was talking to a man there, just inside the door, when I realised it was you that had passed. I was surprised, and yet somehow I wasn't surprised."

He looked at her in the old sympathetic way, but, at the same time, in a new, and strangely intimate way.

"You needed me," he said softly, "and I came!"

She was conscious that the old red-faced porter inside the door was watching them. But she did not care. She did not care for, or know, anything, except Churchwell. He was her whole world, and he was standing close beside her under the portico of the ladies' entrance to the hotel.

"It was a miracle I was there, and saw you, Lydia, just as you were passing!"

"A miracle! a miracle!" she said, her eyes shining into his. She was vibrating with the sweetest, most wonderful joy she had ever known.

CHAPTER XVIII

LYDIA had dressed and was listening for every sound. She walked to the window, her limbs weak, and looked down into the street, where the lights were lit now.

Some one rapped. When she opened the door, it was Viola holding out to her a long paste-board box.

"Has — has — any one called for me?" she inquired, taking in the box.

"No'um."

She lingered, and Lydia saw that the girl was curious about the box she had brought up, but she closed the door and untied the cord with trembling fingers. It was the first time in her life she had received a florist's box, and she was delighted, but not greatly surprised. Anything might happen now!

She buried her face in the roses, revelling in their warm, moist, hothouse perfume.

A card caught her eye, and she drew it out from the stems. *Stephen T. McCarthy.*

"So *he* sent them!"

She lifted them nonchalantly from the box, and arranged them in her only available receptacle, the water-pitcher on her washstand. Why was *he* sending her roses? She felt a sense of shame; it was almost as if he were offering her payment for her kisses or for

her frank designs on him that she had let him see! However, as she thought now of the happenings of the evening before, they no longer affected her with quite the same sense of humiliation they had a few hours earlier.

II

It was nearly an hour after Miss Tompkins' dinner-gong sounded when Churchwell came for her. As she hastened down the last flight of stairs, she encountered the prim-visaged lady boarders ascending from dinner, singly and in pairs. They looked beyond her, or aside.

But Miss Tompkins stood at the foot of the stairs, near the doorway leading into the front parlour, apparently waiting for her. Though her face wore its habitual smile, her eyebrows were elevated. "Why, going out *again?*"

"Yes," Lydia smiled. Through the rope portières she could see Churchwell seated in the parlour waiting for her.

At the moment, McCarthy, who had come up from the basement, had turned and was coming toward her. She pretended not to see him. But as she turned from Miss Tompkins into the parlour, she knew that he was advancing toward the hatrack in the front hall, and while she stood talking with Churchwell in the parlour, fastening her gloves, she was conscious that McCarthy was lingering by the hatrack, drawing on his own gloves, and that he was probably listening to what she and Churchwell were saying. She glanced out at his broad back, wishing he would leave.

She heard the front door close behind him, and the next moment she left the house with Churchwell and entered a carriage that was waiting.

It was too wonderful to be true that she should be beside Churchwell in this closed carriage! She was on the brink of she knew not what, and with the closing of the carriage door, little waves of exquisite fear began surging through her blood.

Churchwell turned so he could look more directly into her face.

"Lydia, how beautiful you are!" he exclaimed. "What have you been doing to yourself? You've changed since I last saw you!"

She was wearing the grey crêpe dress, and the scarlet knot of ribbon.

"Oh, you don't know what I've been through, Mr. Churchwell!" she said quickly.

"Tell me, you poor little girl!" He took her hand, and her fingers thrilled through the gloved clasp. "Tell me everything."

"Oh, I've tried so many things, and can't find anything to do, and my board's due, and I'm out of money . . ."

"Out of money?"

"I just have a few cents. . ."

"Oh, my God, Lydia, alone here in the city, without money!"

He released her hand, and drew some bills, a number together, quickly out of his billbook, and pressed them into her hand.

"Oh, no," she protested faintly.

She was conscious of curiously mingled sensations as she felt the bills in her fingers.

"You'll hurt me, Lydia, if you don't take this," he said, and she could see his eyes were blurred with tears. She could hardly remember ever before to have seen tears in a man's eyes. She placed the money in her purse, showing him, her own eyes tear dimmed, how few coins she had left.

"It's horrible to think what you've been through!" he murmured.

Then they were silent. She trembled to feel his arm lightly against hers.

The carriage stopped, and the driver got off the box, and held open the door. Lydia looked up and down the quiet street while Churchwell gave the driver some low directions which she did not try to hear.

III

They entered glass doors, and mounted a broad flight of stairs. In the subdued light of the landing at the top of the stairs a waiter with expansive shirt front stood waiting to receive them, and a boy in red uniform took their wraps. The waiter ushered them into a room glowing under crimson-shaded lights. It was the most beautiful room Lydia had ever seen. The ceiling, which was not very high, was supported by marble columns, and the walls, on delicate bluish-green tiles, pictured cupids and goats disporting themselves in a vineyard. Everywhere the vine of the grape was intertwined. The goats had rose-garlands about their necks and drew little wagons after them that were

heaped with grapes, and the cupids bore great loads of grapes in their chubby naked arms.

Around the room were small alcoves, half open to view, yet with their hangings of crimson silk, having an air of seclusion. A waiter conducted Lydia and Churchwell to one of these alcoves. Its little table was set with two places. Between the places was an arrangement of lilies-of-the-valley mingled with red roses.

"I'm so glad he gave us the table with the flowers!" Lydia said, in a low voice.

Churchwell smiled. "This is our table, reserved for us," he answered quietly. "Are the flowers the kind you like?"

She flushed. The realisation that he had ordered the flowers as well as the table filled her with a sort of terrified delight. But she was conscious of having appeared perhaps a little countrified. It vexed her. She did not wish to be thought so foolishly unsophisticated. She wanted more than anything else to appear attractive in his eyes.

When the waiter, a serious German, whose presence intimidated her, withdrew with the order, she called Churchwell's attention to a small embossed hoof at the top of the menu — *Mephisto's* printed above the hoof.

"Look, it's a cloven hoof! Is *Mephisto's* the name of this place?"

"Yes, *Mephisto's*." Churchwell picked up the menu card, running over it for something he had omitted from his order.

Lydia studied his face — his characteristic Churchwell nose, conspicuous but handsome, his Churchwell

chin with its just perceptible cleft, his dark eyes and hair, brown without cast of black, and his beard showing faintly under the close-shaven skin. . . . And she was here with him, alone, in this enchanted place! She could not understand why, when she was so happy, she should be also frightened — frightened whether at him, herself, the place, she hardly knew!

Churchwell constantly urged her to eat, helping her to delicate portions of the different dishes he had ordered, but she only nibbled her roll, sipped her wine, and played a little with her fork. She wondered how she could be telling him all these things that had been shut up in her for so long. When she told him of the little subterfuges to hide poverty that she had been driven to in the days before and after her father's death, she saw his eyes cloud with tears, as they had in the carriage; and when she related to him her experiences as general agent, he burst out laughing, though in the next breath he exclaimed anxiously, "Oh, you romantic little Lydia, you were never intended to cope with this big world!"

"This morning, when I stood there, where you called me," she continued, "I was thinking of ending it, to-night, by turning on the gas!"

"For God's sake, child!" He laid his hand impulsively on hers. "Lydia, promise me you'll never think of such a thing again."

"Oh, you haven't been through it!" she answered impetuously. "You don't know what it is to be alone in the world, to have nothing, and not to know what to do!"

"*You* never shall again, Lydia," he said slowly, without smiling.

IV

The waiter refilled their glasses. Lydia was fascinated watching the bubbles in the stem of her glass. Every drop of the seething ruby wine was magically alive.

At the window near them the curtains were blown gently into the room by the soft breeze of the spring evening. An orchestra in a balcony was playing a popular air, and some one at one of the tables was humming the air after the orchestra, "The Good Old Summer Time, the Good Old Summer Time."

Whichever way she turned she saw lights dancing up and down before her eyes. Suddenly, she leaned across the narrow table till her flushed face almost touched Churchwell's. She saw his eyes, but she saw these same points of light that were dancing all over the room dancing between her eyes and his.

"Is it the wine?" she asked, smiling, but bewildered. "It's something running clear down to my finger tips!"

V

"Why did you leave Kingsville, Lydia?" he asked a moment later.

"Oh, Mr. Churchwell, how can you ask me that? Why should I stay in Kingsville? What could I do there? *Your* Kingsville and *my* Kingsville are two very different places, you know, Mr. Churchwell! Everything beautiful and desirable there is yours. But

what was there for me if I stayed in Kingsville?" She spoke with agitation, and a trifle scornfully. In the midst of her complex, confused emotions, she felt a touch of the old bitterness at the thought of all she had envied and been shut out from in Kingsville. "A school-room —"

"Heaven forbid, Lydia, that your loveliness should have been buried in a Kingsville school-room!

"Why didn't you answer my letter?" he inquired. "Didn't you get it?"

"Yes . . . I got it."

"Why didn't you answer it?"

"I . . ." she hesitated. "I . . ." She brushed back her hair from her face. "I don't know."

"You *do* know!" He held her eyes steadily with his.

"I did write . . . I tore them up . . ."

"Why?"

"I was afraid . . ."

"Afraid of what?"

"Afraid . . . afraid . . . that I would say — Oh, don't make me tell you!"

"If you hadn't been afraid, Lydia, you would have said — ?" he persisted, in a low, deliberate voice. "What would you have said, Lydia?"

"Don't ask me!"

She looked up at him with the wistful appeal of a child. She felt something in her breaking, and she was trying to keep it from breaking. But she felt powerless, gradually giving way to something stronger than herself. Delicious warmth was in her veins, and some-

thing in her was throbbing madly, at once battling against this man, yearning to yield to him. "Don't ask me."

"Yes —"

"Oh, you know."

"Tell me, Lydia!"

"I love you!" With a little gasp she turned her quivering face away from his view.

"Lydia, look at me!"

She heard his low voice, and felt the pressure of his hand on her own, agonisingly sweet.

"I love you with my whole being, child! I've always loved you."

"Oh, but you think of me only as a child!" she interrupted him passionately.

"No," he answered slowly, "not that way. As a man loves a woman!"

"Tell me," she whispered, "it isn't wrong for me to love you?"

"Wrong? It's the most right thing in the universe, Lydia! We're each other's. Nothing could keep us apart! Think of the miracle of our meeting this morning!"

She was comforted. She heard him murmuring low, worshipful words to her. "I've always thought of you, Lydia, like these lilies — so slim, and delicate, and pure — and then fire glowing in you, too, like these roses! You're just like flame sheathed in pearl, that's what you're like, my darling! You're all that a man can long for in woman, Lydia!"

VI

She saw the little naked cupids on the blue-green walls, and the goats with their garlands of roses, wavering, shifting, merging into each other, all jumbled together as she looked at them. She realised that she was walking between the tables in the main room toward the door by which she and Churchwell had entered and that people at the tables were watching her. She hoped they did not notice that her steps were unsteady, but she did not greatly trouble herself about the matter. It was all right. No matter what they thought. She knew Churchwell was close beside her.

In the vestibule at the foot of the stairs, he held her to him. There was only the dark, quiet street outside, and a waiting carriage, and behind them the blurred strains of the orchestra drifting down from the glowing room above that they had just left.

"Will you trust me, Lydia?"

She heard his voice in her ears.

"I trust you," she whispered, "absolutely!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE fading afternoon light entered softly through *Mephisto's* lace-shrouded windows. A few waiters stood about in the hushed room, watchful and silent. Here and there at a table a man and woman were talking together in low tones, absorbed in each other. Lydia and Churchwell were seated in an alcove, the same they had occupied the first time he brought her to the place, two weeks earlier. They had been talking about his leaving for Kingsville. Lydia was absently twirling the slender stem of the glass the waiter had set before her. Her eyes had clouded.

"There's something troubles me," she said, "something that's so hard to tell you."

A terrible idea had kept recurring to her whenever she was alone in the last day or two — an idea that there was something in common now between her and those strange, loathsome creatures whose painted faces she had seen hurriedly drawing back from the windows at Ann Rogers'— a Kingsville institution (as stable as the Court House) which she had passed countless times going to and from Market.

"Come, tell me what it is, troubling you, Miss Aristotle!"

"Miss Aristotle!" A tear coursed slowly down

Lydia's cheek. "That's what you used to call me in Kingsville . . . when father . . . when we were all there together!"

Her voice dropped, and she looked at Churchwell intently. "Do you respect me — as you did — then?" she asked falteringly.

"Why, my little girl!" He folded her hand in his.

"Because . . . because I always imagined that men didn't think quite the same of women . . . after—"

"Lydia!"

"You know I'm not the same, now, as in Kingsville!" she went on resolutely.

Her eyes had grown big in her flushed, anxious face.

"Lydia, my darling!" he tried to stop her from saying more.

"I'd rather die than think you loved me less — than before!"

"Less? Lydia, there is no other woman in the world, not one, I honour as I do you! If you descended to the gutter, you'd still be little Lydia to me, more pure and lovely, in my eyes, than any other woman in the world!"

Lydia sighed. She was not quite at peace yet, but she wanted to enjoy this last hour, she wanted to forget that she had associated herself even in imagination with those painted, squabbling, terrible women at Ann Rogers'.

II

Churchwell looked at his watch for the second time. "I wish we could have dinner together this evening, too, Lydia. But duties, you know."

"Duties?" she repeated wonderingly.

Her heart was beginning to sink, at the thought that he would soon be on his way to Kingsville. She wished she were going back herself. She was homesick for Kingsville.

"I've been with you almost every evening, Lydia. I must dine with the family, this evening!" His eyes twinkled a little.

"Family? What do you mean?"

His face sobered. "My wife, of course."

"Your wife!"

She pushed her glass away, and sank against the back of her chair.

"She isn't here, in the city, with you?" she inquired breathlessly.

"Yes."

"Has she been here — all the time? That night, you brought me here — first?"

"Oh, she *was* here, I see," she said, when he did not answer her.

"Had *you* been here, at *Mephisto's*, yourself, before — that night?" in the same breathless aloof voice.

"Certainly."

"With her?"

"No."

"Oh, with other women!"

"Perhaps," he admitted, impatiently. "A man's life, and a young girl's, Lydia, are very different things."

"So it seems," she replied slowly. "So I've heard."

An ironic smile crept over her blanched face.

"But, you know, some way I thought —" breathing heavily between her words, "I thought what you told me . . . was true — that you had been waiting for *me* always, that I was — the love of your life, not just one — of many!"

"Oh, Lydia, you *are* the love of my life!" he insisted quickly, with tender solicitude. "There have been women in my life, dear, of course. How did I know you were waiting in the world for me? Most men go through their whole lives dreaming of the incomparable one, and she never comes! How did I know, blessed heart, that your little feet were travelling to meet me? Had I known, there would have been no others!"

Lydia's mouth trembled.

"Lydia, you *must* understand! I've passed the time, yes — I've been a lover of women, in a sense, as all the Churchwell men before me have been. But I know, now, that till you came to me I had never really known what love was! Don't be sad, little Lydia," he entreated. "I want so much to make you happy!"

"But your wife," she repeated. "It's so horrible to me, to think she's been here — all the time! You loved me, and then —"

She covered her face. The beauty and sacredness of their love was irreparably tarnished!

The waiter approached cautiously, but Churchwell waved him away.

"Lydia, you must see things differently," he pleaded with her. "No one is sharing the feeling I have for you. You have all my love! Countless things influence a man to marry — propinquity, or a pretty figure ravishes his imagination, or something of the sort. A man thinks, perhaps, it's love, and then, later, he learns what love really is! I have respect and affection for my wife. She's devoid of imagination, but she's a good woman."

"No, she isn't! She isn't a good woman at all!" Lydia interrupted hotly.

He looked at her all at once with amusement.

"Lydia, if you didn't look so adorable, with those flames in your eyes, I'd scold you for saying that!"

That he could banter at such a moment! "Don't defend her! She isn't good at all! She's had everything all her life, wealth, and position, and a beautiful home — and everything! She's always been protected, and spoiled! Oh, I know her, I know what she's like! And I hate her!"

Churchwell smiled.

"Hot heart, we won't discuss her, please," he said, in a controlled, indulgent voice. "She's the mother of my children!"

"Yes, we *will* discuss her!" Lydia retorted stormily.

But suddenly, dwelling on what he had just said, her face changed, a warm glow overspread it. She leaned across the table. "Oh, it wasn't a virtue in

her — it was her good fortune," she whispered, "to have been the mother of your children!"

"Lydia!" He laid his hand over hers, and they sat silent and reconciled, only their eyes speaking.

CHAPTER XX

IT was some weeks before Churchwell returned to the city. Lydia lived on his letters and on the treasure of her secret memories. But there were hours when she was feverish with unrest, and she was often very lonely, though she still spent many of her evenings with Mrs. Kearney, and with McCarthy, with whom she was again on friendly, but now cautious terms.

One afternoon when she came in from shopping, she stopped at Miss Tompkins' door. She wore a new spring gown of brown silk and a fashionably tailored jacket of light cloth. The long brown plume on her hat drooped gracefully against her light hair. Time was on her hands, and now that she was able to pay her board promptly, she felt less fear of Miss Tompkins, and less active disrelish for her. When she occasionally contemplated what seemed to her the arid waste of Miss Tompkins' life, she even pitied her.

She heard her tipping around in her room, and she knocked lightly. "May I come in?"

Miss Tompkins' permission rang out cheerfully.

"I thought I'd just pay you to-day, Miss Tompkins, as my board's due to-morrow, and I thought of it." She opened her purse and handed Miss Tompkins the amount of her weekly board.

"Won't you sit down?"

"Oh, a minute." She seated herself, and they chatted about the fine May weather, and on kindred impersonal topics.

"It must take wonderful management, Miss Tompkins, to keep a house always running as smoothly as yours does," said Lydia, on a sudden impulse, and with flattering, almost obsequious warmth. "I've had a little experience in housekeeping myself. I kept house for my father."

"Indeed?" exclaimed Miss Tompkins, with the inevitable rising inflection that as inevitably dashed Lydia's spirits. "Your father is dead, I think you said, Miss Lambright?" a little absently, after a brief but rather awkward silence.

"Yes."

"And your mother?"

"My mother's dead, too."

There was something very disquieting in the intentness of Miss Tompkins' eyes. Lydia wished she had not stopped in her room. She got up from her chair, and walked over to a painting of calla lilies, on a black ground, that hung on one side of the walnut secretary. The painting was execrably executed, but in an effort to disarm Miss Tompkins, she affected to admire it.

"It was your — *cousin,* I believe, Mrs. Kearney said, who was here, Miss Lambright?"

"Yes, my cousin."

"Oh."

Lydia turned to go. "I have a letter to write be-

fore dinner," she remarked, feeling suddenly limp, but with an attempt at ease.

Miss Tompkins cleared her throat in the peculiarly delicate but significant manner she had of clearing it.

"By the way, now you're here, there's a little matter I'd like to speak of, Miss Lambright."

Lydia tried to meet her eyes without flinching.

"In the future, if your cousin's in the city, I would rather, when you went out with him, you didn't come in so late at night. It creates comment in the house."

"I didn't know people in the house were discussing me!" rejoined Lydia, with a show of spirit.

"Avoid the appearance of evil, my dear, avoid the appearance!" Miss Tompkins smiled chillingly.

All at once, Lydia perceived that Miss Tompkins was scrutinising the clothes she wore.

After her first momentary reluctance that night in the carriage, she had taken money from Churchwell without hesitation. He was rich. And they loved each other. His thought of her wants and pleasures, and her acceptance of his right to provide for them, seemed to bind them closer. Moreover, all her life she had craved beautiful things, and though occasionally she felt a qualm in spending the large sums he gave her, not because he had given them to her, but because she was unaccustomed to spending such large sums, yet, on the whole, she had revelled in her purchases. With a painful shock, all the delight she had had in her new finery vanished. She felt a little ashamed of it.

She wondered whether Mrs. Kearney, who had teased her about the attentions of her "cousin"— a

fiction Churchwell had invented for her — suspected anything, whether McCarthy did. Had Mrs. Kearney been a trifle less cordial lately?

She moved through the dim halls and looked at the closed doors which shut in Miss Tompkins' other boarders, and a fierce antagonism rose in her against them all.

"What do I care what they say?" she said to herself, shrugging her shoulders.

But she did care — tremendously.

II

Viola, carrying towels to the rooms, stopped her. "Your washwoman's waitin' for you."

A small, pleasant-faced woman was standing outside her door. She might have been old and looked young, or young and looked old. She wore a black jacket, buttoned so tight it had the effect of cramping her narrow chest. A black sailor hat of antiquated shape sat on her wavy brown hair, which was parted over her forehead and twisted into a small tight knot at the back of her head.

"I'm sorry you had to wait for me," said Lydia, throwing the door of her room open. "I've forgotten your name again."

"Stark, Emma Stark. I've had everything to do myself, or I would have been here on the regular day. My Old — that's my old cousin I live with — is sick." She laid out Lydia's undergarments and blouses, beautifully laundried.

"You look tired," said Lydia sympathetically.

The little woman smiled. "Oh, I'm not so tired!"

"Are you German?"

"Yes. My Old brought me over when I was a baby. She wants to go back sometimes. She's worried in her head, since she's sick. She thinks too much about the Old Country! It wouldn't be what she thinks, any more, if she *went* back. They're dead, the ones she knew."

Lydia's heart went out to her with secret warmth. She did not know why it was that these new fears that had taken possession of her were easier to endure in the presence of this little German washerwoman with her patient eyes and gentle voice.

CHAPTER XXI

IT was late afternoon. Lydia drew a chair to the window, and picked up a book, a new novel she had bought in the morning. Churchwell was coming — only one more day now! Between her eyes and the pages of the novel, burning images interposed themselves.

When she could not read, she tried to write a letter to the Pooles. She had only written them one brief note since her arrival in the city weeks before; and she had not given them her address. She found, however, she had nothing to say to them now — nothing she felt free to say.

Through the open window she looked down aimlessly into the street. Some one passed carrying an armful of lilacs. The sight brought to her mind the cousin of her little washerwoman, the old woman who was sick, and homesick for the Old Country, and suggested to her the idea of carrying her some flowers.

She went out and bought at a street corner a big bunch of lilacs and some roses, and started with them to the address the washerwoman had given her.

Everywhere was the feel and sight and smell of spring, the air divinely soft and warm. Even up through the hard, dry city streets, and the myriad throbs of the city life, the colossal throb of spring could be felt. The lilacs and roses in her arm smelled to

Lydia of Kingsville. In a few hours more Churchwell's arms would be about her! She felt them! She was rapturously happy! Churchwell was coming!

The hurdy-gurdies were grinding out, "Oh, Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home!" The town was whistling, "Oh, Mr. Dooley, Oh, Mr. Dooley!" and humming, "The Good Old Summer Time, the Good Old Summer Time!" But everywhere it was bawling, "Oh, Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home!"

Her senses quiveringly alive, it seemed to Lydia the very globe she trod was spinning through joyous space to the splendid rollicking irresponsibility of "Oh, Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home!"

CHAPTER XXII

A BIG, friendly woman answered Lydia's ring and directed her to Emma Stark's flat. A scrubbed, scoured, soapy smell pervaded the whole house. As Lydia came to the top of the last flight of stairs, she looked through an open door, and saw in the fading sunlight Emma seated at supper, at a clean, bare table, opposite an old woman. Some blue and white cooking utensils were arranged on a prim shelf edged with scalloped paper. Metal pots hung in a row underneath. A clothes-horse was laden with freshly ironed clothes. On the wall, beside a flaming print of the Sacred Heart was one of the Virgin Mary, her dolorous face swathed in blue.

Emma rose, a shade of embarrassment in her eyes, greeted Lydia, and placed a chair for her.

A stew of meat and potatoes, half eaten, was on the table, and the remains of a pitcher of beer, but the women would not resume their meal, insisting they had finished.

The old woman looked at the flowers Lydia had brought her with an expression of grim satisfaction in her cavernous eyes. She spoke with a strong German accent, and had little to say.

Lydia chatted gaily. She liked to look into Emma Stark's trustful brown eyes. She could scarcely keep

from singing Churchwell's name aloud to these washerwomen, it was singing with such joyous insistence in her heart. She wanted to share her rich, pulsing joy! She wanted to bestow on these poor washerwomen some of her own largess. In a flash, she saw the whole map of their lives — the washtub, the ironing board, the evening pitcher of beer, Mass.

But as she talked with them longer she saw that they lacked nothing they desired. They had lived seventeen years, they told her, in these same two rear rooms. The house was the most respectable and orderly in the neighbourhood. They had saved money, owned a building in Hoboken. Lydia rejoiced in their content. She wanted every one else in the world to be as happy as she was herself!

An insurance collector interrupted their talk. Emma, excusing herself, took him into the adjacent room to transact her business with him. Alone with her, something about the old woman made Lydia uneasy. She wished Emma would return. She was ready to leave.

"I'm glad you're getting well," she said, at last, to break the silence. "Your cousin was so anxious about you."

Glancing cautiously at the door Emma had gone out of, the old woman whispered in a sly guttural, "*Ach*, she is no cousin! She was my *love-child!*"

Lydia stared. She was shocked — shocked that the old woman had told her such a thing. And the vulgarity of the word, love-child — she saw nothing of its innate beauty.

A sensation bordering on terror crept over her. Former vague alarms shaped themselves definitely in her mind. What if it *were* true? — a love-child beneath her own beating heart!

II

She was on her way back to Miss Tompkins' when she met McCarthy coming from dinner. She was not hungry, she insisted, and much preferred this fine evening outside to dinner in Miss Tompkins' basement or anywhere else. She agreed eagerly to his suggestion that they take a walk. The truth was she did not wish to spend the evening alone with her thoughts.

In the yellow twilight, they walked along Riverside Drive, and sat down on a bench near the great tomb. McCarthy was slightly abashed by her rapidly changing moods, alternately gay, responsive, absent, and even a little contemptuous and caustic. But while she puzzled and teased and played with him, every now and then the word "love-child" leaped into her consciousness.

"Fine, isn't it?" he exclaimed, pointing to the river widening out to the Palisades.

"It doesn't appeal to me," she answered perversely, shaking her head.

"What — that view? Why, it's famous!"

"I reckon *so!*" she replied, with the Kingsville inflection, laughing a little. She was not interested in the view, or in McCarthy.

"So you say that isn't beautiful?" he motioned with

his derby, his forehead red and ridged, dewed with perspiration.

"Oh, I don't say it isn't beautiful," she answered indifferently. "But it's not a view that moves me." She was thinking of the broad, winding, island-dotted river she loved. She saw the red fields and the rail fences and the blue wood-smoke rising from the darky cabins, and the stately mansions along the River Road. She was tired of shops and shop windows. She hated the city parks. She did not like this Drive. Oh, if she could wake in the morning and look out of her window and see those blue mountains she loved, with the faint Smokies beyond them! Her own prodigal, unkept, picturesque country!

"This isn't the beauty that moves me," she repeated absently, her eyes mechanically following the river craft.

He edged closer, looking at her with an ardour that annoyed and oppressed her.

"I know the beauty that moves *me!*" he said, lowering his voice, and gazing caressingly at her delicately tinted face.

III

She got up from the bench. "Let's stroll on," she said.

The dusk was deepening and lights were coming out on the river boats.

They stopped at a little enclosure on the edge of the bluff, leaned on the iron railing, and in the uncertain light barely made out the quaint, time-blurred inscrip-

tion on the monument erected to the memory of "an amiable child"—

". . . Died 15 July, 1797, in the 5 year of his age. . . ."

"Think of it!" exclaimed Lydia, "he's been here all alone for more than a hundred years!" She glanced over to the great tomb, on the other side of the Drive, covering the heroic ashes that had lately been brought to it. "Well, the amiable child will have company now," she said tenderly.

"Say, Miss Lambright," McCarthy broke in, "I want to explain something to you. You know that night—"

"Oh, that's all right. Let's go on."

"No, wait a minute!" He caught her arm just firmly enough to make her pause. "I want you to hear what I've got to say!"

"Oh, don't recall that night!" Lydia looked away from him toward the river rolling silently below, veiled in gathering darkness.

But he persisted. "I'm not such a brute, little girl, as you think I am! I didn't exactly understand what you meant, at first — what you wanted."

Lydia winced.

"I'm going to tell you the unvarnished truth. There's a woman who's threatened to cut up, if I married. And I let her bluff me. But, by George, I've come to my senses!" He wiped his forehead. "I'll be plain with you — you puzzled me. I thought you were straight, all right, till that night, and then I got a different idea, from the way you acted, and talked, and

I'll confess I was surprised, then, when I found you thought I meant marriage. I'd been taken with you all the time, but I thought marrying wasn't in my line.

"But, look here," he went on eagerly. "I'm in love with you, little girl, and no mistake, and I want you to marry me."

"Oh, Mr. McCarthy, let's just be good friends," she answered. It was the only thing that came to her to say. She let him hold her hand, which he did without presumptuous pressure.

"Won't you consider it?" he asked.

"No, I can't! No, no, I can't."

"Look here, I don't want you to get mad at me," he said, after a silence, "but you're too nice a little girl to be — to be starting on the road you've started on!"

"*What* road?" She drew away her hand.

"You know what I mean! I think a lot of you, little girl, and it wouldn't make any difference to me. I think you're all right, a damned sight better, and sweeter, and purer, than some of the other sort, and a man can trust a woman like that, when he marries her, quicker than he can the other sort."

"What are you implying?" she interrupted him angrily.

"Oh, come, I wasn't born yesterday! I've seen a few things and know a few things. And Mrs. Atkinson saw you coming in that night —"

She stopped him. "Mrs. Atkinson — you listen to old woman's talk, do you?" contemptuously, walking away from the little grave and forcing him to follow

her. She refused to say anything else, or to listen to him. She boiled with hatred of every one at Miss Tompkins', of Mrs. Atkinson, Mrs. Kearney, McCarthy.

IV

Under an arc light, he saw that her face was ghostly white.

"I want to tell you something, little girl," he said, when they passed again into shadow, his voice serious and sympathetic, a slight hint of bitterness in it. "I want you to know I'm your friend. Don't despise my friendship too much! You may want to remember, some day, that I'm your friend. Maybe I can be of use to you some day."

Lydia's only answer was a toss of her head. At the foot of Miss Tompkins' steps, she dismissed him.

She heard "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!" issuing in robust staccato from the parlour — Miss Tompkins at the piano, three or four straight-backed spinsters grouped around, lifting their voices, and Mrs. Atkinson and the other clergyman's widow, their hands folded on black-henrietta laps, listening devoutly. The same women who congregated in the parlour for a little while every evening.

Lydia was guiltily conscious that they were watching her as she stopped and looked at the mail on the hat-rack and took out her own letter. When she reached her room, she sat down and pressed the letter to her cheek, holding it comfortingly there, for a long time, before she opened it. All night long, as she tossed

on her bed, half sleeping and half awake, the fervid love-words in the letter sounded and resounded in her ears, like the treble of a celestial symphony. But always below, now blending with the love-words, now sinisterly distinct, a bass rumbled — the gossip that was going on about her in the boarding house.

CHAPTER XXIII

IT was a week since Churchwell's arrival, and he had given his days to business and his evenings to Lydia, but this day was to be hers. They were travelling along the north shore of Long Island.

From the conversations around them they gathered that they had happened on a free excursion, arranged by a real estate company to give prospective purchasers an opportunity to look at their suburban lots.

Churchwell had risen, shortly after their start, and presented his seat to a woman. He was again seated by Lydia, but she had detected shadows of annoyance drifting across his face, not at the sacrifice of his seat, which he had bestowed with unmistakable graciousness, but at the jostlings of under-mannered persons who constantly moved, unnecessarily, he appeared to think, up and down the aisle where he was standing.

"I'm sorry we chose this train," said Lydia. She wanted him to say that nothing mattered, if only they were together.

"It's all right, my dear. This is *your* day," he smiled generously.

"How dainty you are!" He looked approvingly over her linen costume, finished simply at the neck and wrists with bands of lace, and a loose cravat-like black

bow at the throat; he told her she was a delectable contrast to this carful of bouncing women bound on their real estate adventure; and he assured her that her hat, with its wreath of daisies, was wickedly becoming.

She had been just the slightest bit disappointed that he had not commented earlier on her appearance. And she was afraid she herself had been a little tinged in his eyes by the commonness of the excursionists because she had not found them so annoying as he had. She felt a sense of relief when they reached their destination and escaped the envelopment of the excursionists.

II

They left the train, and had the road to themselves that led from the station. At a turn, a long, one-street village came into view, winding down before them, its quaint old houses half smothered in shrubs and vines.

Lydia drew a quick breath. "Oh — how did you know of this little place?"

"I thought you'd like it!"

"I'm so happy," she sighed, "so happy I could die!" They stood in the shade of a great tree whose branches overhung their path, and she looked up at him, her eyes brimming with rapture. It mattered so little now, what the boarders at Miss Tompkins' might be saying!

He seized her hands, and held them an instant against his breast, his eyes avid of her beauty, fresh as the morning light that bathed it.

"If this were the last day of my life," she

murmured, "I should know I had lived, anyway!"

It seemed hardly possible to her that life would allow any one such joy long, the June morning alone with one's lover, in this spot charming as the pictured page out of a story-book.

"Smell them!" she cried, when an old-fashioned rose bush held out to them across a stone wall its gnarled, close-wadded blossoms, the dew not yet gone from them.

They wandered on and on, peeping over gates, and through branches of screening bushes.

Once, seeing no eyes on them,— the houses were wide-separated by their gardens — they joined hands and swung along the village street like a pair of school children. No caper could be too young, too foolish!

"You're not sorry I asked you to bring me, now, are you?" she asked.

"I do wish there wasn't any one else in the world but just you and me," she said, after a while, a thin shade passing over her mood, a trifling sense of insecurity.

"So do I."

He stopped, a sudden gleam in his eyes, and put his hand on her arm.

"I have half a notion . . ." he said, and paused, "half a notion to pick you up in my arms and run off with you, Lydia, to the ends of the earth!"

The image of being captured, crushed hotly, carried fleet-footed away, primitive woman by her primitive man, sent tremors of delicious excitement through her body.

And the perception that he might really be considering leaving everything, for her, woke in her a hope of terrifying joy.

They walked slowly, and came to a tiny white house, with green shutters, hanging on the flank of a hill that rose behind it. In the grass, and along the paths, periwinkles trailed, their glossy vines starred with blue flowerets.

"Oh, how I should love to live in this place!" Lydia rested a moment on the gate.

A woman in a sunbonnet was down on her knees, working among the flowers.

"We were just stopping to admire," Churchwell explained.

"Is this place for sale?" Lydia inquired.

The woman stood up, and came nearer them, a garden trowel in her hand.

"Why, no, I guess not," she replied, looking surprised. "We've rented it from Mr. Green forty-one years last month."

Lydia was aware of a blanched, vacant face at one of the sagging windows.

She smiled, and moved on.

Churchwell had strolled ahead. "Well, did you buy it?" he laughed, as she overtook him.

"Don't tease me! I've built a romance! What if it were ours?" She laid her hand on his arm lightly, but with an air of ownership. "'Periwinkle Cottage,' we'd call it, and I would work in the garden all day, thinking about you, and then every night you'd come home to me!"

He pressed the hand on his arm.

"Suppose I took you in the house . . . when you came home . . . and made you walk very softly . . ." — she felt her face colouring —" because something — *ours* . . . was asleep in a cradle!"

"You little romancer!" he laughed.

An expression was filtering through his eyes that she could not fathom. The only thing she understood clearly was that he had not responded to her thrilling hint as she had expected.

"It's almost noon," he remarked, leisurely regarding the face of his watch. "We'd better get something to eat," he added, carelessly, "though the worst of these picturesque little places is, that they never give you a decent meal!"

III

They walked back in the direction they had come from.

How mysteriously he had receded from her! She glanced covertly at him. How had this gulf suddenly opened between them, united as they were by the radiant ties of their secret relation? How could they have become, all at once, so separated, so casual?

And yet, what had he said, what had he done? He was looking at her as usual.

It was what he had *not* looked, what he had *not* spoken!

They repassed "Periwinkle Cottage." But a chill had crept into the noon sunshine. These quiet old houses looked lonely now. The whole village im-

pressed her now as forsaken, brooding, too still.

All the while, she was praying — praying coweringly — that he had not understood her hint!

"Hungry?" he asked, as they approached the village hotel.

"Not very." The brief words ached in her throat as she spoke them, but she smiled brightly. He should not see the least quiver! She had not been more resolutely proud hiding poverty in the Kingsville cottage from prying eyes, than covering her wound now from *this* Kingsvillian!

"I'm starving!" he laughed, "and with prospects not the fairest!

"I suppose you think I ought not to want any dinner at all!" he said, mischievously pinching her arm as they mounted the hotel steps.

"I didn't!" she answered, warming a little under his teasing tenderness.

"Poor little Bleeding Heart, you'll have so many disappointments in men! They're such miserable brutes at best!"

They followed a sad-miened waiter to the dining room. Lydia thought of the Mansion House at Pleasantwater.

The wretched dinner set before them and the stupid service excited active irritation in Churchwell. Lydia tried to placate him; the quality of one meal did not seem a very vital matter to her; but she felt responsible for the unsatisfactoriness of the dinner, as she had for the vulgarity of the excursionists on the train.

He continued to order the waiter peremptorily about, and finally exploded with disgust at the flies swarming over the table.

"Oh, be a philosopher!" Lydia rallied him, but she laughed nervously.

"Not on an empty stomach! I missed breakfast — catching our train."

She pushed her plate away. "I'm sorry, absolutely sorry, we ever came at all," she said slowly. "I thought it would mean so much to have a day in the country together . . . I've longed for it for weeks. I didn't know how every paltry discomfort —" she hesitated for words to express her scorn, "would upset you!"

There was an instant's silence while they regarded one another hostilely. Then he burst into a laugh.

"Oh, my Hot, Hot Heart, how I do love you!" he exclaimed, his eyes twinkling. "Why, Lydia, you're delicious! So paltry discomforts upset me, do they?"

She had brought him back to good-humour again — happiness mounted once more through all the channels of her own being.

IV

The hours of afternoon found them strolling along the Road of Enchantment, as they named it, a secluded stretch of road they came upon after they left the village, and turned finally with their faces toward the Sound. Once they met some children trooping home

from school. They caught sight of a little schoolhouse across the fields. The children stared, the holder ones making faces at them.

Myriad butterflies led them along their way, the gauzy yellow wings always ahead of them, hovering tremulously over the dust of the road.

Lydia sniffed the fields delightedly; she pulled grasses, and nibbled their tender ends; she sucked honey from the tiny drinking-cups in the clover blossoms.

"What a child you are!" Churchwell caught her in his arms, and showered kisses on her, only the sun for witness.

Banks of dark cloud began to gather; stretches of the road lay in shadow.

Lydia saw vague, smouldering trouble in Churchwell's eyes, but she refused to heed it.

Sometimes she seized his face in her hands, and gazed on it with adoration. His flaws, revealed by the morning, only served to enhance his masculine charm. She glanced sideways at him, while they rested by the roadside. It seemed miraculous to her that they should be together, here, on this Road of Enchantment.

The wind began to blow more chill, and gusts brought scurrying raindrops into their faces. The odour of fresh-moistened earth rose. They hurried along toward a shelter in the distance.

When they came to it, they saw it was a dilapidated roadhouse, with an air of depravity about it, like an aged, abandoned harlot. Rotted boards led from it

across a reedy waste to some half-sunken boats, and tattered window-shades swished in and out of the lower windows.

"Fe, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of pirates!" whispered Lydia, as a rush of wind and rain drove them on the porch.

A woman made them grudgingly free of the house, and they went inside and sat down at a smeary table. On Churchwell's order, a heavy-footed man brought them beer.

Lydia glanced uneasily at the couple mumbling in the rear of the room. But through her fear, she felt a vague pleasurable sense of excitement at the prospect of peril with Churchwell's protecting arm so near.

Having done their duty of patronage, they escaped from the sour, squalid room, found a bench on the porch in a protected spot, and seated themselves to await the end of the storm.

The rattling and banging of loose boards put them out of earshot of the couple inside, and Lydia savoured their isolation cosily, as she crept close to Churchwell, and looked back with him to the Road of Enchantment down which they had come.

The wind finally slackened, but not the rain, and in their long wait, they fell to talking of many things.

"You should have seen Mr. and Mrs. Poole's faces when I announced to them I should hate teaching school! They couldn't imagine any one not wanting to teach! 'Such a nice, lady-like position for you, Lydia,' Mrs. Poole said!" Lydia laughed lightly in recollection.

Churchwell flicked the ash from his cigar, which he had been smoking rapidly.

"What *are* you going to do, Lydia?" he asked, looking ahead of him, at the fields mistily obscured by the rain.

She started. What did he ask her that for? *He!*

"Why, I don't know. I hadn't thought much about it, lately — write, I guess. I'm going to try again to get a position with a newspaper."

"You know you've got to appear to be doing — something, Lydia!" He laughed constrainedly.

"Yes," she answered, quietly. But her brain was seething. Again, she said to herself she must make clear to him, without further delay, the suspicion she had, which she had only hinted to him before. But just as when they had lingered along the Road of Enchantment, she had been unwilling to jar the magic from the hour, so now this moment seemed inopportune to her — this moment when she was struggling to understand him.

V

She took off her hat, and pushed back the moist ringlets from her forehead.

Churchwell flung his cigar into the drenched weeds at the edge of the porch. "Queer," he said, "I never noticed before how much you look like your mother!"

"Tell me about my mother," she said, in a wistful voice.

"She was a beautiful woman —"

"I don't mean that," she interrupted him, a little

impatiently. "I remember how she looked. I mean, how did she impress you? Wasn't there something — different about her? How do you account for it?"

She asked the questions deliberately, but back of their deliberateness there was something hurrying and eager, and she felt herself trembling.

"I used to think, Lydia, that she must be the most attractive and unusual person in the whole world, when I stopped by her couch to speak to her, that year, you remember, your father tutored me."

In a rush of memory, Lydia saw herself a little girl, peeping through a crack in the door at the handsome young man her father was tutoring, then Miss Barker dragging her away.

"Yes, I remember, but what I want to know is — what was the mystery about my father and mother?" She saw Churchwell's eyes were trying to escape hers, but she kept on, "I know she took some drug, morphine, or something, those last years. I suppose everybody knew that, though," she added, a little bitterly.

"I wouldn't talk about it, Lydia. It only makes you unhappy."

"Yes, I want to talk about it! Everything's such a mystery to me! But I'm sure it was my father's marriage that estranged him from his family — don't you think so?"

She held him to an answer.

"I think perhaps it was."

"But why? Why? What did people say?" She leaned toward him supplicatingly. "Tell me this —

'do you think my mother had been an adventuress, or something like that?"

"That was the gossip, Lydia."

They were silent. Only the beat of the rain.

She wanted to know more. But her courage failed her.

"A man like my father, who loved books and nature,"—she brought herself to say—"it seems—it seems somehow an odd marriage for him."

"Your father had a romantic strain in him, Lydia, an adventurous strain. He hadn't always been so placid, I dare say, as those years in Kingsville. I can easily see how he might have thrown up everything for a woman, a woman like your mother, and, dear, I'm sure of one thing"—he threw his arm around her shoulders to draw her nearer him—"I'm sure, even if your mother had a past, as they call it, still she was a woman of rare and beautiful nature."

"Oh, I'm so glad you thought that about her!" she broke in on him, her voice glowing with gratitude. "I think that about her, too! And do you know—if I didn't love you for any other reason, I'd love you because you loved my father! I can never forget that of every one in Kingsville you alone noticed that he was dying, and cared, and took some interest, and tried to save him by planning about the operation for him!"

He had averted his eyes.

"Oh, I can never forget what you wanted to do for him!"

He turned his face completely away from her, resting it on his clenched hand.

"Oh, my God, what would your father think of what I've done for him now? You were the apple of his eye! I swear by his sacred memory, Lydia, that I didn't mean to . . . to take advantage of you, that night I took you to *Mephisto's*. . . . You were so sweet, and so inexperienced . . . you had always interested me so much . . . and I was so happy to help you out of trouble"—his broken words were half whispered—"but I suppose I thought most of the delightful sensations I would enjoy myself, taking an innocent girl like you, in the seclusion of a carriage, to a place like *Mephisto's*, seeing the effect produced on you by the place, and the wine, and the attentions. . . . And when you let me know you loved me, as you did, that wine was too heady for me.

"Damned hound that I am," he ground through his teeth, "I thought I must have you! *Now*, what would your father say? How would he thank me?"

She laid her hand on his shoulder.

"I don't want you to say you took advantage of me!" she said, proudly. "You didn't! I gave myself as freely to you, as you gave yourself to me. And if my father knew—everything, he wouldn't blame you, or me!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ALL the way home, in the black drive from the roadhouse to the station, sandwiched in on the seat between Churchwell and the driver, and afterwards on the train, Lydia in her thoughts kept repelling Churchwell's suggestion that he had taken advantage of her that night she had gone with him first to *Mephisto's*. She could not endure the idea that he regarded her his victim. To think of herself that way, as one despoiled, was to rob their love of its dignity and glory. But she was too weary to talk to him about it.

She slept all night, and till late the next morning, dreamily conscious of sometimes moaning in her sleep. A knock on the door roused her, and she stretched her tired limbs, not quite sure the knock had been on her own door. Viola entered and held out a letter, and a messenger's book for her to sign. She saw at a glance it was Churchwell's writing on the envelope. Strange he should be sending her a letter, a thick letter, at this hour!

She tore open the envelope. To the inside sheet of the letter were pinned five one-hundred dollar bills.

II

"My little Lydia"—she read—"I am sitting down at dawn to write you. I have walked the streets

all night, thinking what was best to do. God spare any other man from having to write words as hard to write, as these I must say to you."

She wrapped a petticoat around her shoulders, over her nightdress. The little room was flooded with sunshine, but she shook with cold.

She read on. "It is not possible for me to undo the wrong I have done you, but no matter how painful to both of us, I feel our relation must end. We cannot, dearest one, be to each other what we wish to be. No matter what insane dreams have from time to time beset me, I know that I cannot ignore responsibilities that circumstances had already imposed on me before you and I realised our love for each other.

"And I see plainly, now, that so long as our present relation continues, no other possibility of life is open to you.

"I want to eliminate myself, in order that you may find a happier, safer life than you can find while I stand in the way. Dear fierce little heart, you will think, perhaps, that with the closing of our chapter there is no further happiness for you, but so much is open to you, Lydia. You will be asked in marriage, and I want to live to see you surrounded by the respect and admiration you can surely command. Sweet as our secret hours have been, I cannot permit you to remain in a relationship which would demand more and more degraded subterfuges as time went on. It would mean that you would deteriorate, inevitably — the most horrible of all thoughts to me. I know the world better

than you know it, Lydia, and I know how swiftly and surely such deterioration comes.

"Be brave, dear. Don't look back too much. Look to the future. Write. I believe you can do so successfully; you have ability, and you will find contentment for the present in the serious attempt to use it.

"By the time this letter reaches you, I shall be on my way back to Kingsville, but I am enclosing an amount sufficient, I think, to take care of you till you have established yourself in some way, but, if not, communicate with me at my office address in Kingsville, marking your letter 'Personal.' I feel I can trust you, absolutely, Lydia, not to try to reopen communication with me, except in case of necessity, and that you will do nothing that could possibly reach the ears of an innocent woman, and bring suffering upon her.

"And now, Lydia, do not think that you suffer alone. I am being punished for all the wrong I have ever done in my life, in the torture of these hours, in giving you up, my own sweet. I have never loved any other, nor shall I, as I do you. Believe that, Lydia.

"And there may be some other life, some other world, beyond this one, where I may call my child *mine*, and I may be hers.

"RANSOM."

III

She finished reading the last page and mechanically placed it under the others. . . . "My little Lydia, I am sitting down at dawn . . ."

She saw the engraved heading, *Fifth Avenue Hotel.*

She saw other black marks on white paper. She kept reading over and over, "My little Lydia, I am sitting down at dawn . . ."

No phrase, no particular part of the body of the letter she had just read, struck her. She felt neither agony nor resentment. No tears came to her eyes. Her hands that held the letter no longer shook as when she had at first handled its pages. If she was conscious of anything at all, it was of numbness gradually stealing over her. There was something dull grey, it might be gaseous, it might be liquid, in which she was beginning to whirl with deadened senses. Suddenly through this medium she saw coming directly toward her the staring eyes of a dead fish. She wanted to scream, but she did not scream. She realised, after the first dazed impression, that they were the protuberant eyes of Miss Tompkins, that Miss Tompkins had entered the room, and closed the door cautiously behind her.

"Why, why, I'm afraid you've missed your breakfast this morning, Miss Lambright!" she said playfully.

Lydia dropped the petticoat from her shoulders, reached for a silk wrapper and slipped her arms into it. She summoned all the forces of her being, but abortively, in an effort to answer Miss Tompkins' simple pleasantry.

"I'll sit down an instant, Miss Lambright."

With a vague sense of shame, Lydia saw Miss Tompkins lift her corset and undergarments and place them on the bed.

"I have an applicant for this room, Miss Lambright — who'll be permanent. You know you've never assured me positively *you* would be." She smiled, feeling her way along carefully.

Lydia's lips tried to move.

"If you wouldn't mind my telling you, my dear, for your own good, there have been so many unpleasant things reported to me, that I think I shall have to ask you to find another boarding place." Her head was shaking like palsy. "I have to consider the feelings of people in my house who have made their home with me for years."

"I'll find another place to-day, Miss Tompkins."

"Oh, your week's not up till Tuesday. I don't want to hurry you!"

"I want to hurry, though," replied Lydia, dully.

"You're not sick, are you, Miss Lambright?"

"No."

As Miss Tompkins, flushing and confused, backed out of the room, Lydia was sensible of a sort of gratitude to her. Miss Tompkins had supplied the thing to stir her out of this strange stupor.

"Well, I've lived, anyway!" she said to herself in a ghostly whisper, staring down at the yellow bills, which had fallen to the floor.

CHAPTER XXV

LYDIA began dressing; she got into her clothes rapidly. A tottering energy had taken possession of her. She left the house, bought a morning paper at a news-stand and walked on with it to a basement tearoom, where she ordered coffee and rolls, and proceeded to look over advertisements of furnished rooms to let. By noon, she had rented a room, and paid for it a week in advance. No references were asked. Before evening her trunk had gone to her new room.

The gong was sounding for dinner, as she came down the last flight of stairs, to leave the house herself.

Miss Tompkins, who had evidently been listening for her, hastened into the hall. "Oh, Miss Lambright, you aren't going to go without saying goodbye?" she called.

Lydia turned partly around. Her little travelling-bag in her hand, she was opening the front door. She was dressed exactly as she had been the day before, but she no longer looked as when she had followed the butterflies down the Road of Enchantment. Her clothes were slightly awry and untidy. She was wilted.

"I hope you'll take care of yourself, Miss Lambright. You're not looking well!" Miss Tompkins looked solicitously into her pale, strained face.

Lydia's ears caught the genteel rustling of the boarders beginning to descend to dinner from the upper floors, and at the sound a more definite emotion shaped in her than any she had known during the day. She wanted to get out of the house quickly, before any of the boarders could reach the parlour floor.

Miss Tompkins had put out her hand. "I'm sure I wish the best in the world for you, my dear."

"I don't want to shake hands with you, Miss Tompkins. There isn't any feeling of friendliness between us. I don't feel any, I'm sure, and I don't see any need of demonstration." Lydia's voice quivered. "There's my latch-key." She pointed to the hatrack, opened the door and went out.

When she reached the street she gave a quick backward glance at the house. Two black faces at the windows of the basement dining room were gaping at her. Even Viola and Jenny knew! "Turned out, that's what I am, of course!"

Before she reached the corner, she turned back once again for a last look at the house that had cast her off in disgrace. A faint feeling of regret stirred in her, not at leaving Miss Tompkins, or the boarders, but at breaking away from the house itself. "I'll never be in that house again!" she thought. "In that vestibule I stood, so frightened, that night I got here! That's where I kissed Ransom Churchwell good-night! On the hatrack in that hall is where I found his letters!"

At the corner she stopped to wait for a street car. There was a blockade, and the cars were long in coming. As she stood waiting, she kept her eyes in the

direction from which McCarthy usually approached when he came to dinner. She had no idea what she would say to him; but the forlorn hope persisted that he would come in sight before her car came. She craved the very real and fortifying sound of his cheery greeting. She allowed several cars to slip by, but, at last, too tired to stand longer, she lifted her cheap little bag, the same she had started with proudly from Kingsville, as general agent, and boarded a car, changing, when she had gone some distance, to another car that took her cross-town to her new room.

II

On the street floor was the grocery shop of Augustus Rathemacher. The floors above were all rented by Rathemacher, who sublet the rooms furnished, except those he and his wife occupied. Lydia had rented a small front room on the second floor, the same floor on which were the rooms occupied by the Rathemachers themselves.

In this room she lived for many weeks following, generally going for her dinner to the *table d'hôte* of the cheap Italian hotel which Rathemacher's adjoined, sometimes to one of the cheap restaurants nearby. She depended on the delicatessen shops with which the neighbourhood abounded for her other meals, eating them with languid interest in the solitude of her room.

She discovered a branch of the Public Library within walking distance, and with the assistance of Rathemacher's signature, secured a card from it, which enabled her to draw books. She tried poetry first, bring-

ing back to her room volumes of the poets she had known and loved best. But she found that the poems which had given her such joy, lulled her, or thrilled her, in by-gone hours, were now, in this hour she needed them most, only words on paper to her. She tried fiction. But after getting through a few pages of a novel, she would close the book, never to look in it again.

Through long summer days, and intolerably long hours of the close summer evenings, she would sit, with a sort of abject resignation, looking out of her window. Opposite was a clock repair shop, a dusty, disorderly place, with unwashed windows. Above it were lodgers, as in her own building, only less respectable than Rathemacher's lodgers; below it, was an antique shop, whose bell jingled every time its door was opened; and easily within range of her eye were bakers', grocers', barbers' shops; in the little holes under them, tailors, toiling early and late, Italian cobblers, and the dispirited entrance to "St. Andrew's Penny Meals for Poor Men"— into which she never saw any poor or other man whatever enter for his penny meal.

But as she had looked at the books, scarcely seeing them, so, though her eyes followed the busy movements in the shops opposite, and in the narrow street below, she saw little except that dim, troubled region she knew she was soon to enter.

III

She had never read Churchwell's letter after the first time. She had tied it in a package with his other letters. But as the days went on, gradually its phrases came back to her, syllable by syllable, marshalling themselves in her mind precisely as they stood in the letter.

Why had he broken the tie? Why had he? He had not lost his love for her — she could not believe that. Nor could she believe — how she wished that she could! — that he had broken it for the reasons he had given her — solely out of consideration for *her* welfare.

Had money been the reason? Had he felt, after his first squandering, that she was costing too much? She remembered one day he had remarked, handing her money as he did so, "You're a royal little spendthrift, Lydia!" She remembered her slight uneasiness, her attempt to give back part of the money, his insistence he was only jesting — insistence she should keep it all, and yet — and yet — there was that little anxiety she remembered, her fear that he had felt she was becoming too quickly habituated to spending. Perhaps he had not, himself, so much to spend as people in Kingsville had always thought; he had dropped a hint of business worries.

Well, if it had been money, she forgave him.

Relentlessly, she went over and over the hours she had known with him, torturing herself with every sweet memory of the past, every bitter realisation of the present.

IV

Various moods bore down on her — sometimes one of mingled scorn and despair when she said to herself, "And he held out the hope that there was another world — as if I believed such things!" She would feed no hopes on such sop — she was born of too late a generation. Though often, in the twilight, when she sat with her white face in her hands, looking down from her window into the street below, a close-welded, whispering pair of lovers sauntering by, or a father with his little girl holding tight to his hand, brought to her such a crushing sense of her own loneliness, that there would come creeping over her a yearning to believe, as the ignorant believed, in a definite "life to come," where in a real heaven she might relive heavenly hours she had known on earth, where again she might hold to the big, steadfast hand of her father, her own so cold with fear now.

V

Sometimes sick in body, and always in mind, there were hours when she writhed under the memory of the warning Churchwell had given her not to bring suffering to an "innocent" woman. She felt he had contrasted them — his wife and herself! She pictured the "innocent" woman in her beautiful surrounding in Kingsville . . . *he* guarding her, with all his soft devotion, and it seemed to her her heart would burst.

She would wring her hands, and whisper to herself with trembling, contemptuous lips — "I'll not harm

her! I'll **not** embarrass him! He needn't have warned me! Oh, I won't lift a finger to harm his lamb!"

For while that June morning when he had spoken of running off with her to the ends of the earth, she had accepted the idea with mad joy; yet now, some vague but still untarnished ideal of conduct prevented her wishing to unsettle the peace of that other woman. Despite her anger, her questionings, her piercing jealousy, she accepted her portion.

CHAPTER XXVI

LYDIA welcomed the arrival of autumn. The cool days permitted her to wear heavier clothes that better disguised her figure. She had put away the handsome gowns and hats bought with Churchwell's money in the delirious spring days when she was decking herself for his eyes, and in order to attract as little attention as possible wore again the hat she had worn in Kingsville and the simple brown suit she had bought at Maxfield's — very fine it had seemed to her then, and very plain it looked to her now. Unfortunately, the charm of her face, at once delicate and vivid, had become more and more of the kind to pluck by the sleeve the passer-by.

She was returning to her room one afternoon carrying a package she had refused to have sent home for her; the car was crowded, and she stood in the aisle, holding to a strap for support. She might have taken a kind of pitiful comfort from the package under her arm, except that she felt that every one knew her secret, that every sprawling woman, every squirming child, every staring man in the whole long, crowded Sixth Avenue car could look right through the brown paper wrapping and see the little slips and socks and shirts.

"I can never be considered respectable again as long

as I live," she thought, and with a poignancy amounting to physical pain she felt that every one else in the car was thinking that, too.

She was so conscious of many eyes, that she did not notice one particular pair of eyes that were busy about her, till a faint pressure of other knees against her own made her look down. A young Jew was gazing up at her. She recoiled from his bold and sensual eyes, but not before she had seen them, with unmistakable significance, run from her face to her waist and back again. With an instinctive movement of concealment, she let go the strap, and pulled down her jacket. Swiftly as she had done it, she realised she had hopelessly convicted herself, and the flush on her face deepened to scarlet.

The young man rose, and fearing she would attract more attention in refusing than in accepting it, she dropped into the seat he offered her. She tried to look unconscious, but she felt his eyes still roving over her, wherever she turned she felt other eyes watching her, and, finally, unable to endure it longer, she left the car.

It was a perfect autumn afternoon, following a crisp, frosty morning, and as she walked along, her fate seemed to her infinitely more cruel than it had ever seemed before. She did not greatly rebel against the statutes of society, or very specifically consider herself a martyr to them, or believe really that things would ever be very different — woman, alone, would always bear the brand for sins against those statutes. It was only that she saw a beautiful world, brimming with all those possibilities of joy in life she had so hungered

and thirsted for, had just tasted, and now again must evermore hunger and thirst for.

The gracious, tempered October sunshine threw a faint glamour even over this prosaic thoroughfare of deafening elevated and clanging surface car, and made her heartsick for her country, steeped now, as she knew so well, in the languorous, hazy, peaceful loveliness of a Southern autumn.

When she opened the street door, a strong and agreeable odour met her, of vinegar and spices heating together, and at the head of the stairs she saw that the door of Rathemacher's little kitchen was wide open, and Mrs. Rathemacher in a light percale wrapper was bending over a kettle on her gas range. For some time past, Lydia had tried to avoid her. She had begun to suspect that Mrs. Rathemacher was making occasions to talk to her and to ask her questions.

Mrs. Rathemacher turned her warm face from the range, and came to the door, holding a plump hand under the bowl of the big wooden spoon with which she had been stirring. "Making tomato catsup," she explained. "Gus had that many tomatoes on hand, they was spoiling faster than he could sell 'em. A body has to do all kinds of ways, to make the grocery business pay."

"It smells good," Lydia smiled.

Mrs. Rathemacher bent over her kettle again. "Miss Lambright, I got a couple wants your room permanent."

"You can have it to-morrow. I'm going to California."

"California? I got a cousin there."

Lydia made no answer. She wondered why she had said California. She saw Mrs. Rathemacher was through with her, and she went to her room, and locked herself in.

She put her package in a drawer, and tilting the mirror in the bureau as far back as she could, stood in front of it and turned anxiously from side to side.

For a brief moment, she considered going back to the kitchen and throwing herself on Mrs. Rathemacher's mercy, begging to be allowed to remain. In this smell of boiling vinegar and spices, there was a suggestion of something permanent and homelike, which she would be severing herself from forever when she left Rathemacher's. A darting vision showed her herself agonised and alone in the hour of childbirth.

II

It would have been better if she had represented herself from the start as a married woman. She could have said she had been deserted by her husband — hereafter she must call herself *Mrs.* Lambright. She sat down, without taking off her hat or jacket or even her gloves, and began planning how to explain herself in seeking another room. She sat for a long time, thinking, thinking, thinking.

An hour passed, another hour. . . . She unlocked her trunk and delving into a small compartment drew from it a little chamois-skin bag tied with a faded ribbon, emptied out the trinkets it contained, and picked out from them her mother's wedding-ring. Pulling

off her glove, she worked the ring on her own wedding-finger. It was too worn and old-fashioned; she must have a newer looking ring. She carried it to the window, and held it so she could read the half-effaced word engraved inside that had always puzzled her — *Fulfilment.*

Fulfilment! What had been fulfilled? Ah, they too, her father and mother, had known life! And she felt as if something were beating all about her in the air of the room — a peculiar, misty, almost terrifying sense of their near, impalpable presences.

She threw herself on her knees, neither weeping nor trembling, but holding awed communion.

"Don't leave me!" she called aloud, wistfully.

III

After a time, she left the room, locking the door behind her, and slipped through the hall and down the stairs quietly. She remembered a little shop on Third Avenue, below Miss Tompkins', where cheap jewelry was sold, and she decided to buy a ring there rather than at the shop in her present neighbourhood, where perhaps the clerks had begun to notice her.

It was not necessary to pass Miss Tompkins'; but something impelled her to do so. She had not been in the locality for months, and it was like entering a strange city now. When she came to the house, she glanced up at it furtively. Suddenly, there was a slight twitching movement of the lace curtains at one of the parlour windows. As she hurried on down the hill, she remembered McCarthy's calling Miss Tomp-

kins' solemn parlour the "mortuary chapel." If she had only married McCarthy as he had asked her to that evening on the Drive. It would have been Paradise compared to the present! And then came rushing over her consciousness the realisation that even to save herself from what lay before her, she could not have been so base.

She was icy cold and shaking when she stepped into the shop and asked to look at rings. The clerk was a dull-looking young man, for which she was thankful. Most of the rings in the tray he set out on the counter had small, cheap sets in them. Some were chased. None of them were the kind she wanted. He pulled out one after another, pricing them to her from their tags.

"I want to see wedding-rings, please," she said, in a low voice.

His fingers, running over the rings, halted, but he did not look up.

"It's for a friend," she murmured, and then, realising she had said a silly thing, that it was silly to have said anything, she straightened herself, and threw back her head with an assumption of hauteur.

The clerk set another tray on the counter without saying anything, and she singled out one of the rings, without examining any of them, and quickly opened her purse to pay for it.

"Hadn't you better try it on? They're all sizes," he ventured.

She stripped the glove from her left hand.

All at once, she was aware that an old man, with a

magnifying glass screwed in his eye, had turned from the watch he had been examining and was looking at her, and when the ring would not pass beyond the second joint of her puffed finger, a wave of heat passed over her face.

A ring was found that would fit, and she left the shop precipitately. Outside, she slipped it on, throwing away the little box that had held it. A sob caught her, as she felt the ring on her finger. This was her wedding-march — no swelling music, clouds of white, no trumpery dearly-sweet to woman-hearts, no bridegroom whispering in her ear — a little figure, losing only too plainly its virgin lines, slinking along disgraced and alone in the autumn twilight.

IV

She kept thinking of the Pooles. They were always in her mind, and had been for a long time. She did not want them to find out what had become of her. She thought she would write them that she was married, and was going to California to live. She would tell them that whether in the years to come they heard from her or not, she would always love them. All the fussy things about them that had irritated her, when she was with them, had faded away; only their kindnesses remained in her memory. How ungrateful they would always think her! They would never understand, because they would never know! And if they knew, they could never understand, because they were the Pooles.

When she got back to her room, she sat down in the

mellow twilight. She had eaten no dinner and she did not want any. She wanted to think about her country. This wedding-ring she had bought and put on her finger made her think of it in a way she had not before. She was exiled from it now forever, but she could still dream of it. She was a little girl again, trudging along a road in the mountain country near Kingsville. It was a dull autumn morning, and she and her father were watching the slow, pearly mists rise from the valleys. From the wet woods came the mournful tinkle of cow-bells, and a lean "poor-white" boy, tattered and melancholy, was driving cows up the red mountain road ahead of them. Wild morning-glories overran the rail fences and the neglected, rain-drenched gardens. Then the sun, flashing out, touching it all with splendour! . . . Her country! Her face went down on her hands, her whole body heaved. . . . If she could only be there again . . . if she could only feel her father's hand once more on her hair.

Kingsville, steeped in its warm, pensive October haze, rose softly before her; the little dry click of insects everywhere filling the air; the snail's slimy iridescent trail along the bricks of the old walks; honeysuckle clambering over the walls, and roses still blooming in all the gardens.

"And I can never, never, go back now! I can never see Kingsville again!" Yearning, hopeless sobs shook her.

She groped her blinded way to the bureau, drew out the package she had placed in it a few hours before, and spread the little slips and socks and shirts on the

bed. She knelt down, feeling along the hems and the tiny sleeves, the tears streaming down her cheeks till she tasted them salt on her lips.

She did not want to die. Love of life burned in her with a hard, inextinguishable flame, and she could catch a feeble gleam, far, far off, ahead, that would, that must, one day lead her up from these depths. She buried her tear-swollen face in the little garments she had bought for her love-child. Already they seemed to exhale the tender, delicious fragrance of baby flesh, and something in her thrilled faintly to that fragrance.

BOOK II

EXILE

CHAPTER I

IN a car of the Ninth Avenue Elevated, a young woman, whom some might have styled a young girl, had they not looked too close at her eyes, hung to one of the straps, swaying a little with the movement of the car, and steadying herself as the car jerked in and out of station after station on its down-town passage, but in the main manifesting the poise and security of the habituated strap-hanger. It was a little before eight in the evening, and the seats in the car were full. One woman had a pale blue scarf over her head, and carried what appeared to be opera-glasses in a small plush bag; the woman with her wore a spangled scarf over her head. A youngish man in evening dress, with a white muffler inside his overcoat collar, was reading an evening paper. He glanced up, though not impertinently, at the young woman who was holding to the strap over his head. After he had glanced at her several times, he rose, and with quiet insistence gave her his seat.

The young woman was tired, and she was therefore grateful for the seat. Moreover, she was gratified at attention from a man of this man's appearance and manners. She wondered if anything about her own appearance indicated that she was a servant, and she

hoped exceedingly that nothing did. She wore a black cheviot skirt, a black shirtwaist, and a white linen collar with a small black bow at the front of the collar; she wore this uniform because Mrs. Van Antwerp, her employer, required it. She was glad it was completely covered at present by a long ulster of brown woollen material, a garment not totally devoid of style, though three years old. It had taken her a whole winter to pay for it, in instalments, but it was a good garment, and she thought she had done well to buy it. She had a small tippet of brown fur around her neck, and her light waving hair escaped rather alluringly from under the edge of a small fur turban. It was a cheap dyed fur, but she wore both tippet and turban with something of an air. Her gloves were good heavy walking-gloves, a Christmas present from Mrs. Van Antwerp's sister. Her shoes were not new, nor had they been pretty when new, and she hid her feet as well as she could with her skirt. For a number of years she had dressed with a whole-hearted desire to avoid observation. But in the last year or two, she had been gradually giving more and more attention to her appearance. In the last month or two, she had found herself depressed if no one looked at her with obvious admiration as she rode on the elevated to and from her work.

It was almost seven years since Lydia had left Kingsville to seek her fortune. It seemed a lifetime to her since then, and Kingsville almost a dream. In dreams, many, many dreams, in these seven years, she had been back in Kingsville, searching, searching, through the

old streets, up and down the hills, but never finding the houses where she had lived, or the places she was seeking.

To a casual observer, she was not greatly different from the Lydia whom the clerk at the Mansion House in Pleasantwater had forcibly kissed. But there were differences. She had grown in these seven years, was taller by actual measurement. Her hands and feet, though not conspicuously large, were larger than the hands and feet of Lydia, the general agent. Her hair had less gold in it, and it tumbled about her face a little less indecorously than once. Her face had not wholly lost the child look, but it was less vivid than the face of seven years earlier; its tints were not faded, but they were all delicately lowered. When she smiled now, faint depressions appeared in her cheeks. She carried her slim body straight, and well, and she carried her head high, and with a spirited air which indicated that the fires in her, though slumbering, had not yet gone out.

At present her cheeks were brilliant. She had walked rapidly to the elevated station in the sharp winter air. And the little courtesy paid her by the refined looking man who had given her his seat had kept the colour still in her cheeks, as well as added lustre to her eyes.

At Fifty-ninth Street the man left the car. His eyes met hers briefly, but with interest, as he buttoned himself securely into his overcoat and adjusted his muffler for the plunge from the hot car into the freezing air

outside. The women with the light scarfs over their heads also left the car at this station. A good many stations farther down Lydia left the car.

II

She ran down the long steps from the station to the street, straining her eyes eagerly. There he was! — a little boy, at the bottom of the steps, a few feet back from the landing — Lydia's love-child! A red knitted cap, with a long peak hanging down behind, was pulled over his head and down over his ears, and some one had stuffed him into a little outgrown reefer overcoat.

He was worth every bit of pain, suffering, sorrow, bitterness, hard work, she had been through in these seven years — that was what Lydia said to herself every day in the year, and every hour in the day, and what she woke up and said to herself in the dead of night.

"Gee, Mother, you're late! I've been waiting hours and hours!"

He was shivering a little. She bent down and kissed him, his arms around her neck; and then with a covert glance, to be sure none of the "kids" were near, he gave her another hug.

"Let's look at the clock." They glanced in the window of a grocery shop. "Oh, I *am* twenty minutes later than last night! Well, they had company to dinner. Where are your mittens, Blessed? What are you doing with your hands bare this cold night? They're frozen!" She held tight to one of his bare hands as they hurried along.

"I couldn't find my mittens, Mother. I found one, and then I couldn't find *it!*"

They rounded a corner briskly, and started down a street parallel to the one where their room was; it was three squares and a half out of their way, but unless an absolute blizzard was raging, it was understood this was their path home from the elevated station, where he met her every evening when she came from her work. They got a great deal of joy and excitement out of looking into shop windows together, especially out of the window they were headed for. The shop was closed, of course, at this time in the evening, but Peter would choose what he would rather have out of the whole window, and then Lydia would choose what she would rather have.

Sometimes, on Saturday evenings, they would walk over to Sixth Avenue, down it for blocks and blocks, and even up and back the block of Twenty-third Street between Sixth Avenue and Fifth Avenue, looking in the windows there. These Saturday evenings were as much Lydia's occasions as Peter's, or more hers than his, because, taking them all in all, there was more of women's apparel displayed in the windows they passed than of toys. Peter was always sorely tried when he had to look, for long at a stretch, at women's dresses and hats. But sometimes he behaved with exemplary patience and indulgence, and entered into his mother's game at the dress-and-hat windows as gaily and sympathetically as she entered into his at the train of cars, sail boat, and fire engine windows. "Which dress, of every one, would you d'ruther have, Mother?"

he would ask, on one of these evenings when he was humouring her and making concessions to her feminine weaknesses. "*I* think you'd look the prettiest in the pink one!"

He always began tugging at her hand when they got to the first corner after their meeting at the elevated station. It was at this corner the decision was made about passing the shop they were on their way to now. He would pilot her in the direction of the toy window, and she would laugh, as if she had been trapped, when she found herself heading toward it, and he would laugh gleefully, as if he had trapped her. They were great chums.

To-night an icy wind was blowing, and she was exceptionally tired, but though Peter had pulled her with less resolution than usual in the direction of the toy window, she had made no resistance whatever. She had a vague, indefinable feeling that recently she had been in some way disloyal to the little fellow, in her thoughts at least, and she wanted to make up to him for this fleeting disloyalty.

To-night there were some new sets of lead soldiers in the window. There had been infantry before, but now there were cavalry, cavalry gallantly mounted on lead steeds, and artillery as well.

Peter wavered between the artillery and the cavalry. He could hardly tell which he wanted more, but it was against the rules of the game to choose more than one thing out of the window on any one evening.

The game was not played this evening with quite the usual verve. Lydia was slightly abstracted, and what

was more unusual, Peter was slightly abstracted. There were all the hand-tuggings, the grippings, the standings-on-tip-toe to get a better look, the laughter, and the excited, "Mother, you *will* get me one of those, some day, won't you?"—but the key was noticeably lowered. Lydia wondered what was on the child's mind.

She wished, almost wished, these lead soldiers would be taken out of the window. The truth was, what with the new winter underclothing she had to buy him, and the dentist's bill for herself, and the doctor's bill of the year before, for him, still only half paid, and her own car-fare ten cents a day every day in the month, and the room rent, and his food, and what she paid to have him looked after in her absence — well, it took brave managing. No margin for lead soldiers.

III

They left the toy window, and, hand clasping hand, almost ran, the wind from the river in their faces, along the street westward, then around a corner, a block north, and finally doubling cast, a half block to their own number. It was the house where the little German washerwoman, Emma Stark, and her old cousin lived, and had been Lydia's home from the day she had left her room at Rathemacher's more than six years before. She had a decided attachment to the house. It was always clean and orderly, and, with few exceptions, the people since she had lived in it, had been hard working, decently behaving people. Her life having turned out as it had, she thought it fortunate that she had been spared lodging among brawling, squalid families.

There were moments when her heart was full of thanksgiving. She had been by no means continuously miserable all these seven years. She had known serene hours, light-hearted hours, even downright merry hours, and in her motherhood she had experienced deep, ardent, abiding joy.

"Have you been a good boy to-day?" she asked, as they neared the top of the last flight of stairs.

"Pretty good."

Peter dropped his head rather shame-facedly.

"Well, we'll ask Emma and My Old," said Lydia, stopping at their door, which was slightly ajar, giving a light tap, and entering a little way into the room, while Peter hung back, not eager to be present at the inquiry.

The old woman was ironing. Emma, in her hat and jacket, a wool scarf around her neck, was just starting out with a wicker suitcase to deliver some clothes.

"What kind of a boy has Peter been to-day?" asked Lydia.

Emma peeked at him, shaking her finger smilingly. She seldom reported adversely on the young rascal. "He's all right. Come in here, Peter, and get your hands warm. We couldn't any of us find his mittens."

The old woman looked more serious. "*Ach*, Peter, I told you I'd tell your mother! He run off again! He's been out with them bad boys!"

IV

Lydia did not know what was to be done with him. Peter would not stay penned up in the room all day

with the old woman and Emma. Once, he had been satisfied with the trips with Emma to carry or collect the laundry and with the little walk in the morning to put his mother on the elevated, and in the evening to meet her. But since he had made the acquaintance of the "kids"—two older boys in the same house, and the indeterminate neighbourhood gang to which they belonged—he ran off to them every time the old woman's or Emma's eyes were not on him. Punished for it, he went again, and yet again. He was possessed to be with them. He had brought in from them several mouth-filling oaths, with the drastic result that his mouth was washed out with My Old's coarse yellow soap. The problem was growing serious. Peter must have more outdoors, and he needed child companions.

"Well, My Old, we will see about this," Lydia said gravely, and went on with Peter to a little room at the front.

There was barely space in the little room for two single iron beds, each white, one smaller than the other, one along each side wall. On the wall at the side of Lydia's bed were pinned three pictures she had cut from a magazine, reproductions of paintings of Arnold Böcklin, that had thrilled her with strange thrills and in some indefinable way had opened up to her new and hitherto unsuspected worlds. On the wall by Peter's bed were pinned both magazine and newspaper cuts of cowboys, and bucking ponies, of ships, and all manner of sea-craft, and of Indians, Indians in war bonnets, on the trail, old-fashioned, real Indians, all the Indians Lydia had been able to find.

There was a loose strip of rag carpet on the floor, which Lydia had painted herself, and there was a small rocking chair she had painted white, as she had also the frame of the looking-glass that hung above the wash stand. Inside the box of which the wash stand was made, and screened from sight by a cotton valance in a gay pattern of scarlet poppies, were stored all manner of small articles, a fascinating, forbidden place for Peter to rummage in Lydia's absence.

Lydia hung up her ulster and stripped off the tight reefer that Peter was vainly trying to wriggle out of by himself. Then she seated herself in the narrow space between the two beds, and made Peter sit down facing her, in a low child's chair. His face, usually mischievous, was perfectly sober.

"Well, Peter, you've disobeyed My Old again, and disobeyed me, too. What am I going to do about it?"

Peter put one of his hands into his trousers pocket, and drew out a tangle of string, a piece of chewing-gum that had been chewed, two rusty nails, a tin tobacco-tag, and a tiny round looking-glass — in the heart of them all, an unwrapped chocolate caramel, which he extricated and handed to his mother.

"What am I going to do about it?" she had just asked, and he had handed her this disarming caramel.

"My friend give me three of 'em, and I saved this one for you."

His "friend" was the young Russian Jew who kept the news-stand near the elevated station.

"My friend's a very good man," added Peter, anx-

ious to lead the conversation into a safe channel. "He's going to save his funny page for me every Sunday. . . . Eat it, Mother. I saved it for you, 'cause I knew you loved 'em. . . . It's clean — I wiped it on my knickers."

"I'm sorry, but I'll have to punish you, Peter." Lydia looked steadily at him. "You understood you were not to go down —"

"All right, you can punish me if you want to!" he interrupted, his lip trembling. "But I didn't have no fun. The kids said —"

Suddenly he rose from the little chair, crept up against her, and put his arms around her neck.

"Oh, Mother, I did have a regalar father, just like the other boys, onct, didn't I?"

Lydia was silent. For years she had dreaded this moment, and lo, it had come! Her little boy's sobs stabbed her.

"Yes, of course, you had a father!" she said, at last, gathering him on her lap. "Tell me what the 'kids' said, Peter."

"They was talking about their fathers, and I told 'em about my father fightin' Indians, and they said it wasn't so. They said you wasn't married, Mother, and that I didn't have no regalar father, never. Fritz said I was a —" He whispered a word in Lydia's ear. "Oh, Mother, what's *that?*"

"Just a bad word Fritz made up — I don't know what it means." She hugged him tight to her, tears rolling down her cheeks on his shock of fair hair.

"You mustn't pay any attention to what those boys say, they're trying to tease you, they're just jealous because their fathers weren't Indian fighters!"

She began telling him stories, his favourite Indian stories.

"You remember one time, Peter, the Indians thought the Great Spirit was going to give them back all their happy hunting-grounds? Well, they all got together to have a big dance, and they put up a pole in the centre of the camp, and the young Indians that wanted to make themselves brave warriors cut slits in the muscles in their chests — here,"— she illustrated on Peter's plump anatomy —" and pulled buckskin thongs through the slits, and tied the thongs to a rope which was tied to a pole, and then pulled and pulled and pulled, till they pulled the flesh loose —"

"It *did* hurt 'em, though, didn't it, Mother?"

"Hurt them? Certainly! But Indians don't cry."

"Tell me about the squaws bringing 'em things to eat," suggested Peter, looking a trifle sheepish, and wiping his last tears on his mother's shoulder.

"Well, the old squaws brought them dried deer-meat, and dried buffalo-meat — that's what they loved, you know — and tried to tempt them to eat because they were hungry, and tried to tempt them to drink — they were terribly thirsty — but if one of them ate a bite, or drank a drop, or stopped dancing and pulling on the rope for a minute, then the old Indians caught him and —"

"Put a dress on him!" completed Peter, very familiar with the story, " and called him a woman, and he

was ashamed of hisself. Gee, Mother, they was brave, wasn't they, when they pulled a hole in they-selves! I wish't I'd been there!

"Tell me about my father busting up the dance," he suggested, in a lower voice, and a little timidly.

"Well, your father had heard the Indians were getting ready to make trouble for the white people, and he took Swift Bird and Fights the Enemy with him, and Iron Horse and Crazy Heart — they were the Indian police, you know, that made the other Indians behave —"

"I know they was"— impatiently.

"They got on their little Indian ponies, and rode, fast as the wind, over the prairies. They could see the camp fires way off across the plains, flaming up in the dark night, and when they got near the camp, they could hear the tom-toms, going like this"— she made a sound that delighted Peter —"in the medicine-man's tepee —"

"That was Spotted Eagle, the medicine-man. Mother, was I horned then?"

"No, oh, no."

She went on hurriedly with a tale of Spotted Eagle. She said no more of punishment. Peter had been punished enough, this day, with the "kids'" taunts. . . . She could scarcely recall how she had first thought of making his father, of whom he had questioned her, the chief hero of these bedtime stories, but she had invented this father for him and dwelt on his exploits as an Indian fighter till he had become almost as real a figure to her as to Peter himself.

The tale of Fears Nothing she saved to rob Peter's nightly bath of some of its terrors. The ordeal he particularly and regularly protested against was the ordeal of purification. She brought a kettle of hot water from the Starks' room, and in spite of his twisting and struggling, she was succeeding fairly well in keeping him under her hands, when suddenly, in the midst of her story of Fears Nothing roping a wild colt, he asked, "Mother, have you got a picture of him?"

"Of whom?" she inquired, startled.

"Of my father!"

Lydia went on drying his hands with the towel she held in hers.

"Mother, didn't you *hear* me?"

"Yes, I have one, I think," she replied, slowly. "Let me look."

She hunted through her trunk for a photograph of Mr. Poole which he had given her on her last Christmas in Kingsville. Perhaps a bona-fide photograph, any photograph, would be proof to Peter of the existence, once, of a "regalar" father.

She drew the faded picture, a cabinet photograph, out into the light, and looked at it herself. A queer, mistrustful feeling seized her. She had thought it was really a little more dashing than this! But it was too late to put it away now. Peter was on tiptoe, eager to see it.

"Phew!" he exclaimed, with a kind of whistling sound, at his first look.

He stood with his back against his little iron bed.

He had on pajamas Lydia had made for him and of which he was exceedingly proud. His face was very sweet and clean and rosy and shining, after its enforced scrubbing. His bare chubby feet were crossed, and he held the photograph with both hands, studying it.

Finally he looked up, and handed the photograph back to her.

"You can have it, Mother," he said, soberly. "I was goin' to show it to the kids, but I ain't goin' to, now. He don't look — esactly — like a Indian fighter."

Then something he saw in his mother's face moved his sympathy. He reached up and wound his arms around her neck.

"He don't look esactly like I thought he did, Mother, but he looks all right!" he said to her, brightly and consolingly.

"I wish't he'd had on his buckskin suit, though, when he had it tooken," he added, reflectively.

V

He was a long time going to sleep after he was in bed. Lydia arranged a shade on one side of the gas-burner, so that his bed should be in shadow, and seated herself with her work. She was darning the monstrously big holes in a pair of his stockings. Peter kept asking abrupt questions, more or less revelant to their recent conversations. At last, sounds ceased to come from his direction. She glanced at him — he was fast asleep, looking very blameless and cherubic, his red lips a trifle parted.

So after all these years of dignified, and even prim behaviour, the people in the house *did* know that she wasn't married!

"What's ahead of us, anyway?" she thought to herself. "Just this grind, and loneliness, and poverty, forever. Never any one congenial . . . nothing in the world that I crave for myself or for him! What have we got to look forward to?"

She dropped the stocking into her lap. At the end of almost seven years of patient endurance of her obscure lot, fires of rebellion had started in her.

A long fluttering sigh from Peter's lips broke in on her thoughts, the little ghost of a sob. "Poor little chap, he's worrying even in his dreams over whether he ever had a 'regalar' father!"

She laid aside her work, and bent over his bed, pushing the moist hair back from his forehead. His hands were outside the cover. They were still dimpled baby hands, but they were rough and red. She stooped and kissed them.

"Poor little boy, poor little boy!" she whispered to him. "I wish I could take it all myself — all the punishment, if it is punishment . . . all the suffering! That's the worst, darling, you have to suffer, too!"

CHAPTER II

IN the first hour of the New Year, six years earlier, Peter had entered the world. Lydia's final cries of anguish had mingled with the blowing of whistles, the booming, the terrific din, with which the great city regularly greets the coming of the New Year; and athwart the horns and boisterous, drunken merry-making of revellers in the street below, Peter's first cry broke on her ears.

He had been born in this same little room where he lay asleep now in his shadowed bed.

In those hours when Peter and the New Year were being born together, Lydia had cried aloud, wildly and wrathfully, "Don't show me the child when it's born! I never want to look at it! How can mothers love their children, when they've gone through *this?*" But with his first cry — no feeble wail, Peter had vigorously saluted the world he was entering — a wave of celestial happiness passed over her soul. "Oh, it's a real baby!" she cried, incredulously.

Then she had fainted. And when she opened her eyes again, she looked into the nice eyes of a grey-haired doctor, who sat beside her bed, his fingers on her pulse. At the foot of the bed Emma and the old woman were standing, and another woman, with a

bundle in her arms. The streets below were quieter.

"I suppose you don't want to see your son, little mother?" the doctor asked.

"Son!" Lydia laughed, almost gaily. Her thoughts went back to a book she had loved—"Peter Ibbetson." . . . "His name's Peter, Doctor," she said, a strange, wistful light coming into her eyes, hollow with suffering. "Give him to me!"

And the little bundle was laid against her heart.

II

Emma Stark's gentle eyes were the magnet that had drawn her on that day when she had been forced to leave Rathemacher's. She had implored the little washerwoman to find a room for her, telling her a story of having been married, and deserted by her husband. And Emma had arranged everything; she had secured this little room for her, had gone for a nurse and doctor the night of Peter's birth.

Whether it was true, that Emma was the child of this old woman she called her cousin, as the old woman, for some unfathomable reason, had whispered to her on the occasion of her first call, and whether, if true, Emma knew of the fact herself, Lydia had never discovered. She had certainly never asked them questions.

And neither had they questioned her, though at first she had feared the old woman might.

Through Emma, who had been told it at Miss Tompkins', she learned that McCarthy had gone to a western city to live. It was with an odd sinking of heart

she heard that bit of news — one of her few, intangible hopes had vanished. Until she knew he had gone, she had always hoped that some day she might run across him on the street. But from the day she left Miss Tompkins', she had never seen his friendly face. Several years had elapsed now, since she had learned of his leaving the city, and he had ceased to come into her mind, except as a rare, passing thought.

Save at long intervals, she did not, any more, dwell intensely on the thought of Churchwell. And when she did, it was almost entirely in connection with her child. Her mind was singularly free from blame of him for his part in her own fate. But at times, when she had no money to buy for Peter things he needed, or longed for, a very fury of resentment flamed up in her against Churchwell.

One winter, the hardest she struggled through, when Peter had had one child-illness after another, and was inadequately clad, as she herself was, she had written a long letter to Churchwell, saying to herself, angrily and vindictively, that she did not care if it did fall into the hands of his wife! It had been a bitter, passionate letter, pleading for what Peter needed and what Peter wanted. She had poured out on him, with no sparing pen, all she and Peter were going through. When the letter was finished, she had read it over, tears streaming down her face upon its pages . . . and then she had torn it into bits.

In all these years, she had heard nothing whatever of him, nothing of Kingsville. At first, she had been always straining her eyes in every direction, dreading

yet hoping, always watching when she was on the street, always expecting to meet him. There had been but one vivid reminder of Kingsville. On a November afternoon, towards dusk, she was hurrying along with a bundle of clothes she had washed and ironed and was carrying home to a boarding house in one of the West Forties. Peter was not quite two years old then, and she was washing and ironing for their living, under the direction of Emma and the old woman. She was earning very little, and she had not yet learned to manage her slender earnings as well as she learned to manage them later. And she was very shabby, shabbier than any year before or after that; she had sold her best clothes, after Peter's birth, and the jewelry Churchwell had given her, because she had been in pressing need of money; and she had not been able to buy others; she was wearing old things she had brought from Kingsville.

It was a wonderful afternoon for November, and she was breathing it in with delight, after bending over the ironing-board since early morning. She had almost forgotten, for the moment, her miserable condition, when suddenly, nearing the boarding house of her destination, she saw coming toward her a man and woman whom she recognised. They were from Kingsville, a banker and his wife. She had had only a bowing acquaintance with them there; but it flashed across her that she had seen this man standing with bared head on the edge of her father's grave. The thought that they might recognise her almost suffocated her. She wheeled abruptly, when she was almost in

their faces, speeding ahead of them till she reached the corner, where she turned and fled. . . . For days afterwards, she had been filled with excitement, sleeping little at night and thinking all day of Kingsville.

III

But, for the most part, these had been years of such intense activity since Peter's birth, she had been so completely immersed in the problem of earning a living, the present moment had been so insistent, that she had had small opportunity for indulging in wretched reflections on the past, or in adventurous dreams of the future.

For the first two years, she had tried washing and ironing, under the direction of Emma and the old woman, in order that she might be at home with her baby. But while these German washerwomen, inured to the heaviest labour from their childhood, could work early, late, and ceaselessly, support themselves and save money, Lydia had soon found it would be impossible to support herself and Peter in this manner. She was seldom actually ill, but she had not the strength requisite to turn off a profitable amount of this kind of work, and the monotony of it had been almost insupportable to her.

As soon as she had been able to make up her mind to leave Peter for the whole day, she had secured a position as housemaid. From then on, she had paid the Starks for looking after him during the day, and had given them money to buy milk and other simple food for him. She continued to have great difficulty

in making both ends meet, but she was gradually getting along better, and, taking it all in all, was considerably better off than when she had tried to wash and iron for a living.

In the three years from the time she had left off washing and ironing until she had secured her present "place" with the Van Antwerps, which she had held now a year, she had had four "places"; and she had encountered many difficulties, many discouragements, and countless heart-breaking mortifications to her pride in adjusting herself to the status of servant.

But she had constantly gained in experience and skill. She had learned from other servants, by observation, and from mistresses, through instruction. The work itself she had seldom found obnoxious, and often interesting. She pored over cookbooks; and in her room at night, Peter asleep in his little bed, she studied books from a public library, on dietetics, on marketing, on every imaginable subject relating to household economy. She had profited from all these efforts to improve herself, till now at the Van Antwerps', she received better wages than she had ever received before.

And although she did not admire either Mrs. Van Antwerp, or Mrs. Van Antwerp's sister, Mrs. Schemmerhorn, she could not deny that they were just and generous to her.

The duties of both cook and maid devolved upon her; but she did not object to this, as she felt her position much less keenly than where other servants were employed; and the Van Antwerp apartment had every appliance for the speedy and satisfactory despatch of

her work. The laundry work was sent out; a bellboy washed the windows; and a strong Finnish woman came once a week, and laboured the whole day under her direction, shaking and sweeping rugs, polishing silver and brass, waxing and polishing floors.

There were seldom guests, never more than two or three at a time; while no visitor ever spent the night. The Van Antwerp routine, in a word, was never disturbed. Indeed, if the soul of Mrs. Van Antwerp had a passion, Lydia perceived it a passion for that unbroken, comfortable calm which results from routine.

Thursday afternoons she had for her own, the Van Antwerps dining out at some hotel on that evening, according to their custom of years' standing. On Sundays, dinner was at one, so that she had almost the whole of the afternoon for herself and Peter.

Mr. Van Antwerp attended church with his wife and sister-in-law on Sunday mornings, and dined at home on that day. On other days he rarely dined at home, but dined at his club, or elsewhere.

His business had something to do with stocks, securities, investments — obscure symbols to Lydia, familiar only with the tangible business activities of Kingsville, such things as coal, marble, and dry-goods. Whatever it was Mr. Van Antwerp made his money from, he was always flying off at a moment's notice to London or Paris, California or New Mexico, with no more concern to himself or to any other member of his household than if he had been merely running over to Brooklyn or Jersey City.

The arrangements and evident understandings of

this small, stiff, calm household where she was employed, were very remarkable to Lydia — very baffling.

Mrs. Van Antwerp and her sister were originally from the South, they had told her. Mr. Van Antwerp's origin, his reasons for marrying the lady who was now Mrs. Van Antwerp — obviously many years older than he — every aspect of this man, everything pertaining to him, remained to her, after a year's observation, almost a complete, and sometimes rather a stimulating mystery.

CHAPTER III

I

IT was still perfectly dark, and it seemed to Lydia she had been asleep only a few moments, but here was Emma knocking at the door.

"Oh, Emma, it's not time to get up!" she called drowsily.

"Yes, yes, quarter to six, Lydia," came the soft, regretful answer.

She sprang out of bed and lit the gas. Peter's eyes suddenly opened, and he looked up, smiling — thoroughly alive all in an instant. He was always awake, squirming about, wanting to talk to her, exasperatingly crickety, while she was still heavy with sleep.

"Can I get up?"

"No, not yet. Turn your eyes to the wall."

"Jake found a dog, Mother, and he's goin' to keep it. It's a pup, it's awful thin — it's got two sores on it. Wish't I'd found it 'stead of Jake."

A short silence, broken by the faint rustle of Lydia's dressing. She buttoned her coarse muslin corset-cover, and pulled her black cotton petticoat over her head.

"Mother — can I have a dog?"

"Yes, some day." Whatever Peter asked for, she promised. They lived in an indeterminate, halcyon future where dogs, and all things, would be possible.

At least Peter's faith was constant and enormous in this indeterminate but halcyon future. A time had arrived when Lydia's faith in it had begun to waver.

"What kind of a dog?"

"Jake thinks it's a bloodhound, that it's goin' to be. Oh, you mean the kind I want? I b'lieve I'd ruther have a bloodhound, too, or a water spaniel."

They were still talking of dogs a half-hour later when they made their way together down the three flights of dark stairs inside the house, and down the shorter flight from the front door to the street, and along the street itself, which was almost completely dark, except for the light of the street-lamps still burning.

Snow had fallen in the night; the street and sidewalks were white. They could feel ice under the snow, and a fine cutting snow, like powdered glass, blew stingingly into their faces. "Perhaps you'd better go back, Peter."

"Oh, Mother! Please!" beseechingly.

"Well, come on, then."

This frigid, dark-grey, early-morning hour, when she was hurrying along to her work, with all these other working people hurrying to theirs, had never ceased to be a depressing hour to Lydia. But to Peter, his hand tightly, hotly, clasped in hers, running along by her side, the hour was full of magic.

When they reached their parting place, at the foot of the long flight of steps to the elevated station, Peter hugged her, and clung to her for an instant. Hardly any one was about yet, and so he was not afraid of

being discovered in these unmanly demonstrations. As Lydia kissed him good-bye, he caught her face between his hands.

"Mother, do you think it'll be long till we can have the dog?" he asked, his eyes shining eagerly into hers.

To herself, Lydia said, "A dog! Why, you poor little beggar, I can't even get you a lead soldier!"

But to Peter she answered, "Not very long, I hope! A collie, then, we decided! Well, good-bye, good-bye! Mind Emma and My Old! Remember what you promised me! Don't forget, Peter! Because I'll be trusting you all day! Good-bye!"

And she ran up the steps, getting her ticket out of her purse, to have it ready for the turn-stile. She looked back. She could still see Peter, standing at the bottom of the stairs, looking up after her, his rosy face smiling after her, bravely, but a little wistfully, tufts of his fair hair pushing out all around his forehead, from under his red knitted cap. He waved his hand to her. She saw him turn, caught a glimpse of the long red peak of his cap bobbing up and down his back as he started off. Then a swirl of fine snow and the dark street swallowed him up. Something closed tight around her heart, and hurt her sharply. She seemed still to see the long red peak of Peter's little cap bobbing up and down his back, even after she had seated herself, and was travelling along toward her work in the fiercely bright car, with the dense darkness outside. Peter's brave, eager, trusting eyes seemed still to be looking into hers.

II

Breakfast at the Van Antwerps' was understood to be ready promptly at eight. Immediately at eight, Mrs. Van Antwerp, shortly followed by Mrs. Schemmerhorn, would make her appearance in the dining room. As a rule, Mr. Van Antwerp made his appearance not more than a few moments later; but occasionally the ladies had already left the table. It did not seem to make the slightest difference to him whether the ladies of his household breakfasted with, or before, him; neither did it seem to make the slightest difference to the ladies themselves. Not that it was an impolite household. On the contrary.

The clock on the dining room mantel stood at a minute to eight.

Lydia switched on the lights, and a primrose glow overspread the breakfast service.

In her little white cap — a severe and never ceasing humiliation to her unquenchably proud spirit — her only ornament the plain Third Avenue wedding-ring, she gave a last scrutiny to the table. It was almost identical with thousands of other breakfast tables, in thousands of other almost identical, tropically-heated dining rooms all over the city, all over the country from ocean to ocean.

She laid the morning paper beside the ash-tray at Mr. Van Antwerp's place.

To her astonishment, he came in first. She could not remember that it had ever happened before.

She had thought of a Roman Senator, the first time

she saw Mr. Van Antwerp. With his soft, measured gait, his immobile, chilling, epicurean countenance, she had fancied him — with some amusement to herself — wrapped in the folds of a toga.

She had been exceedingly grateful to him, when he had taken no notice of her. For some weeks, when he had had occasion to address her he had called her "Clara," apparently confusing her with the preceding maid, whose name had been Clara.

Her experience in her last "place" before the Van Antwerps' had been distinctly different. The man of the house had waylaid her at every opportunity, had pressed her hand — dusting his study, and had tried to kiss her.

It had been almost delightful when Mr. Van Antwerp had thought it was still "Clara" who was handing him a fresh box of matches.

However, through a succession of emotional nuances, she had grown to regard with some irritation his complete oblivion of her existence as a human being, as a young human being, as a young woman — and personable! It unmistakably piqued her, at last, to be looked on by him as nothing more than one of the pieces of his domiciliary machinery, as merely Clara's successor — the emptier of his ash-tray!

He nodded, almost imperceptibly, and took his seat at the table. As he unfolded his paper, he glanced sideways at her.

Mrs. Van Antwerp came into the room. "Good morning, William." Her voice was heavy, but not devoid of breeding.

"Good morning." Mr. Van Antwerp looked up from his paper very briefly.

With the entrance of Mrs. Schemmerhorn, there was another exchange of good mornings, civil, but not effusive.

Mrs. Van Antwerp was rather comely; her voice seemed not to belong to her own face. Mrs. Schemmerhorn was a tall, angular woman, with conspicuous teeth; an undue proportion of bone material appeared to have gone to her making-up. However, there was a look about her, even more markedly than about her comelier sister, of a forerunning of gentle ancestry; you could no more doubt her quality than the quality of a Heppelwhite chair. Lydia could not conceive a drop of wife-blood or mother-blood ever to have coursed through the veins of these punctilious sisters; could not conceive them ever to have undergone those mysterious, excruciating, exquisite, thrilling adventures leading to and culminating in motherhood. Yet the historical facts were — Mrs. Schemmerhorn mourned a husband, once flesh, and two children who had died in infancy; Mrs. Van Antwerp, twice wed, and during her first marriage twice a mother.

"Did you have a good night, Julia?" inquired Mrs. Van Antwerp. There was always a thorough exchange of experience between them in regard to the night's hours.

"I slept very well the early part of the night. But I heard the clock strike three, four, and five!"

"Well, well! The wind blowing — always keeps me awake, too."

"Your lame shoulder, Carrie," asked Mrs. Schemmerhorn, helping herself to a hot muffin, "how is it this morning?"

Thereupon ensued the sisters' regular breakfast discussion of their ailments, mentioned with eminent refinement but minutely. They gave no little thought to the condition of their aging though still admirably preserved persons.

As usual, Mr. Van Antwerp took no part in their breakfast conversation. He talked less, and ate less, than any other man Lydia had ever known or had opportunity to observe. His breakfast consisted principally this morning, as always, of the morning paper, black coffee, and cigarettes.

Lydia had frequently speculated on his age. He was not young, yet she hesitated to call him old. In a different way, he seemed as stiff and formal as his wife and sister-in-law. But Lydia could imagine his unbending. This morning as she stood by the breakfast table, black-uniformed, white-capped, alert and respondent, the idea of Mr. Van Antwerp's unbending recurred to her. It had been an unmistakable personal glance he had given her, at the moment of his seating himself at the table and unfolding his paper, and she felt a faint fluttering of excitement.

III

The sisters rose from the table together. Mrs. Van Antwerp said, most courteously, "You will excuse us, please, William."

Mr. Van Antwerp looked up from his paper, and as

his wife's straight, broad, black-garbed back, following the straight, narrow, black-garbed back of Mrs. Schemmerhorn, was vanishing through the door into the hall, called out to her, "Carrie, please have a steamer trunk brought up from the locker to-day."

"Eh, William? Sailing Saturday? Well, you'll have a rough passage, I'm afraid." She pointed to the snowstorm racing past the windows.

Lydia withdrew to the butler's pantry. As she pushed through the swinging door, she heard "London, Rotterdam," in Mr. Van Antwerp's odd, rapid, muffled utterance.

Her hands began to shake slightly. She sorted out some silver from the plates she had removed, and placed it in a pan of hot suds.

She could hear the indistinct sounds of Mr. and Mrs. Van Antwerp's voices. They were talking business, one subject in which they seemed to have mutual interest. There was something in the sound of their voices, low and confidentially toned, that she resented vaguely, that was even a little revolting, inexplicably revolting, to her, and she left the silver soaking in the hot suds, and went from the pantry into the kitchen.

She set her breakfast on the kitchen table. Three times a day she ate her meal here, alone, in the kitchen; never without a feeling of protest. But as she sat down to it now, an overwhelming sense of humiliation at her position swept over her.

She pushed her plate away from her, and was looking at it, at the slice of bacon and the muffin, her mind sunk in sudden miserable, mutinous reflections,

when Mrs. Van Antwerp entered. "The list, Lydia."

Lydia handed her a slip of paper on which she had written a marketing list.

She heard the outer door of the apartment click shut. Mrs. Van Antwerp had started; no weather interfered with her marketing; she never ordered over the telephone. Mr. Van Antwerp must be still over his newspaper.

She entered the dining room softly, a tray in her hand. She had countless times entered the dining room under conditions precisely like the present conditions, when Mrs. Van Antwerp had started on her marketing, when Mrs. Schemmerhorn was securely isolated in her bedroom at the opposite end of the apartment, and when Mr. Van Antwerp, as now, was absorbed in his morning paper. For the first of these countless times, she experienced a sensation, distinctly but terrifyingly delicious, of being alone with him. The softly swinging pantry door had shut them in, secretly and provocatively. She started to remove the water-glasses, careful not to disturb Mr. Van Antwerp, but tinglingly conscious that she wished him aware of her presence.

She was lifting the marmalade jar in its silver holder when he dropped his paper, and took the cigarette from his lips. "Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked, in a voice even lower than his customary voice. "I may be gone some time."

Lydia returned his gaze unswervingly. She did not know exactly what he meant, and was afraid to venture on an answer.

"I don't think you were born to this." He indicated with his eyes the tray her hand was resting on.

"Unhappily not!" she answered, smiling, but a trifle scornfully.

"You have a history," he said, slowly knocking the ash from his cigarette. "I thought so!"

"You thought so? When you confused me with your former slave? All those weeks you honoured me with her name—'Clara'?"

An amused smile met hers frankly. It completely transformed the man's face.

"That was rather astute, on my part—I thought," he said, still smiling, and raising his eyebrows significantly. "You didn't perceive that it was a piece of play-acting? Ah, I credited you with more penetration!"

"Perhaps you don't rate your histrionic powers as high as they deserve!" she retorted, with a low laugh. "You were very convincing!" It seemed to her as if some fountain of her being had been unsealed, and was bubbling, bubbling! She would have loved to laugh out gaily, ringingly, had she dared.

"I wish you might see Clara! Only a blind man, or an imbecile, could be guilty of the confusion you accuse me of!"

He relit his cigarette and looked at Lydia deliberately, with candid admiration.

"A man must feign blindness, my girl, to retain his peace of home, when you are in it! And he must be actually blind, to retain his peace of mind! You are a

disturber," he added, slowly, with unmistakable but controlled intensity.

They looked into each other's eyes. Lydia felt her pulses beating fiercely.

In the tense silence, a discreet rustling was heard, and she hurriedly made a pretence of rearranging her tray as Mrs. Schemmerhorn entered.

"My handkerchief — did I drop it at my place, Lydia?" she asked.

When the handkerchief was not found, she seated herself, with a slightly tentative air, in the chair next to Mr. Van Antwerp.

"Well, William, isn't the weather — er — just now — almost unsafe for you to think of crossing?" she asked with polite solicitude.

Lydia had a fleeting, tail-of-eye vision, as she departed with her tray, of Mr. Van Antwerp coolly, reluctantly, with approximative if not actual rudeness, transferring his attention from his paper to Mrs. Schemmerhorn. She saw his eyes had narrowed slightly, and she fancied a sort of frigid, black-flame rage in them. She was enraged, too, enraged from the same cause, and terrified from others.

IV

An hour and a half later, in the course of her morning routine, she entered Mr. Van Antwerp's bathroom. The sight of the flesh-brushes, sponges, toilet-waters, unguents, had always affected her in a peculiar and not agreeable way. Something in her recoiled from the

idea of a man submitting himself to the elaborate and calculated toilet this bathroom implied.

She was not free this morning from the usual recoil, the usual slight distrust, as she put his Sybaritic bath-room to rights. But she was in the grip of intricate emotions. She hardly knew if she were wretched or happy, disgusted and depressed, or wildly jubilant. It seemed to her that she was all of these things at once. She kept saying to herself, "I'm glad he's going, day after to-morrow! I'm glad he's going to be gone a long time! I'm glad there probably won't be a chance for another word alone between us! " And all the time, she knew she was not glad he was going, not glad he was going to be away a long time, not glad there would be no further chance for secret words or glances.

She said to herself that it was coarse and low, this significant conversation with Mrs. Van Antwerp's husband in Mrs. Van Antwerp's home. She had felt self-conscious and ashamed when she confronted her on her return from market; and she was uneasy at the very thought of Mrs. Schemmerhorn. But all the time, despite her self-reproaches, her apprehensions, she was faint and dizzy, with the sound of Mr. Van Antwerp's low-spoken words still in her ears, with the memory of that singular gaze, at once so frigid, so burning!

She touched a button, flooding the oval face of the bathroom mirror with dazzling light, and studied her face in the mirror before which Mr. Van Antwerp performed the rites of his morning toilet. A resolute scrutiny revealed tiny lines in her cheeks, like almost imperceptible leaf-veinings; faint lines encircled her

throat, and horizontally across her forehead were other faint lines. Radiating from the tails of her eyes were lines still exceedingly delicate . . . but a few more years, other lines would join these . . . crow's-feet! And what chance, then, for another fling at life, with all its sweet perils!

Finishing her work in the bathroom, she returned to the bedroom, and dusted the white woodwork of the window-sill which each morning had accumulated a powdering of coal dust from the outside air. Great clouds of snow were still flying past the window. She was safe and warm here, inside the apartment. But what about Peter? Was he safe and warm, too? Of course! Peter was all right! Why did she keep worrying about Peter?

She looked down through three stories of space into the street. Only a few people were in sight. A delivery wagon was passing, the great patient horses lifting their feet cautiously from the icy street. . . . Peter's face came back to her as she had seen it when he held her face in his hands and asked, "Mother, do you think it'll be long till we can have the dog?" She saw the long peak of his red cap bobbing up and down his back, as he started off in the swirling snow. She tried to shut out the sight. But she could not shut it out. It was such a simple sight, yet something about it hurt her almost unbearably.

Down in front of the apartment house was a little parked space in which two historical gentlemen in bronze were supporting each other. In the summer, when the shrubbery was in leaf, the two historical gen-

tlemen were almost obscured by foliage. The snow had drifted on their feet now. But Lydia was not thinking of them. She was thinking of Peter. Peter's clear eyes were looking directly and compellingly into hers. She had said to him, "I'll be trusting you all day, Peter!" And all day, Peter would be trusting her, too! Could she betray him — that brave, wistful little chap? She had placed on him the eternally ineffaceable stain of bastardy — had she not wronged him enough? — her love-child!

Then, the next moment, a white, chiselled face, looking strange, potent things, pierced its way between her face and Peter's face — shut Peter's face away from her. . . .

Then Peter's eyes again, and Peter's rosy face, Peter's little roughened hands, and Peter's big head with its shock of fair tousled hair! . . . And again Lydia said to herself, with renewed resolution, and almost ferociously, "We can't have dogs, Peter! So many, many things we want, boy, we can't have! But we've got each other! And I'll work for you, just as I've worked for you all these years, Peter. I'll be straight and honourable, and I'll make up to you, darling, just as far as I can, in every straight and honourable way I know, for bringing you into the world! I'll do it! We'll live for each other, Peter, and we'll live and work straight!"

CHAPTER IV

MR. VAN ANTWERP came home from Europe in the first week of March, but hardly had he landed when he sailed for England again. In his two or three days at home, he had been completely absorbed in business, and had spent even fewer hours in the apartment than he usually spent there. Lydia had just caught his eyes on hers — during the first breakfast — for one fleeting instant, when Mrs. Schemmerhorn, looking up from her plate, had immeshed both pairs of eyes in her own.

He was in Europe now. Mrs. Van Antwerp and Mrs. Schemmerhorn had gone to Atlantic City for their yearly sojourn there of one week in the month of April; they had both expressed to Lydia the hope that she would take a good rest in their absence, which she had interpreted as a suggestion that she should enter on her duties in the apartment with renewed vigour on their return. Well, as a matter of fact, she had been going through her work for some time, not really negligently, but certainly listlessly. Doubtless they had noticed it.

The week of her vacation was half over, and she was seated in her bedroom, sewing a lace collar on a dress she had bought a few days before. She had paid five

dollars and eighty-nine cents for the dress and in the shop it had looked pretty, but now it frankly looked its price.

She had borrowed the money from Emma to buy it, and little by little, as she could spare, she would pay it back. But as she sat sewing on the dress now, she was conscious of a dull resentment in connection with the loan. The slight reservation in Emma's manner, when she handed the money to her, was as if she had said, "*We* wear our clothes till they are worn out before we buy new ones." Not, to be sure, that she had said anything at all.

Lydia darted her eyes off her sewing. Emma had knocked, and entered, without waiting for her to answer. Oh, dear, what had Peter done *now?* She was certain it was something in connection with Peter.

Emma's cheeks were pink, and her brown eyes were faintly troubled. She nervously patted an iron-holder she held in her hands.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Lydia, but did Peter bring our stove-blacking over here?"

"Stove-blacking! What would Peter want with your stove-blacking?" Lydia asked impatiently, as if stove-blacking were the last thing in the world Peter would touch, when she knew, perfectly well, that no human mind was ingenious enough to fathom where Peter's budding desires and Peter's magnificent overplus of energy might lead him. But then Emma, even Emma, whom she sincerely loved, and knew she loved, had irritated her more than a little in these last few weeks. Who had *not* irritated her, lately, when it

came to that? Her mind was like a raw wound — the least touch galled it.

"Peter's out with the boys," she said, sulkily, as if trying to prove an alibi for him. She knew that neither Emma nor the old woman approved of Peter's ever being downstairs with the boys, and at this moment it gave her a slight, malicious satisfaction to make Emma understand she was managing Peter herself.

"Yes, but he was up again, after he went down," replied Emma in her quietly sweet, long-suffering voice. "He was around the shelf where we keep the stove-blacking, and now it's not there. I thought he might a-brought it in here. It's a new box. I'd just put it on the shelf before Peter came in," continued Emma, not often so persistent.

The old woman came shuffling through the door, and stood beside Emma, glaring at Lydia. Apparently Peter had, at last, put too strong a strain upon her regard for him. "*Ach*, he took it, for sure! He takes everything, that boy!"

"Takes everything!" Lydia was aflame in an instant. "What do you mean?"

"He lost the hammer and them good shears we had!"

Lydia was furious with Peter, but more furious with his accusers. "I'll replace whatever Peter's lost," she said haughtily. "I'll see that he doesn't bother you much longer!" she added, with only a vague idea what she intended by this threat.

The old woman lubbered back across the hall. Emma withdrew murmuring soothingly.

"All this fuss about a box of stove-polish!" Lydia said to herself. Reason would have told her that to these German washerwomen, passionately neat, passionately frugal, a box of stove-polish was as important as any of the importunate issues of her own life to her. But she was not listening to the voice of reason.

She heard Peter stamping noisily up the stairs. He was whistling, his smiling face, his mop of flaxen hair, his hands and clothes, all bearing damnatory evidence to the recent accusations against him — from head to toe he was smeared with blacking.

Lydia seized him angrily. "What did you mean — to dare take their stove-polish?"

Peter's jaunty air vanished.

"What did you mean? What did you mean?" shaking him roughly.

"I needed it," Peter gasped.

"Needed it!" She was almost in tears, and the immediate occasion, as she dimly realised, was by no means the real occasion — the storm had been gathering in her for months. "Oh, you —" She paused for a word.

Peter supplied it.

"Brat!" he finished, with satanic divination, looking her saucily in the eye.

Lydia stared at him, stupefied — this sinner of her own blood, not yet separated from his baby-teeth, wholly unterrified, even humorously relishing the situation.

She burst into tears.

Peter subsided into a scared quiet. "I had a accident," he said.

"Accident! What kind of an accident?"

"I couldn't help it, Mother." His lips began to tremble. "They was a nail sticking up — it teared a hole in my stocking."

"Your new stockings!" Lydia exclaimed almost despairingly.

Peter courageously turned the rear of his leg for her inspection. A great gap appeared, and the plump calf, laid bare in the opening, was heavily smeared with black. A casual glance could scarcely have detected where black stocking stopped, blackened leg commenced.

"What on earth!"

"I wetted the box and blacked my leg with it so the hole wouldn't show," explained Peter quickly.

"So *that's* what you were doing with the stove-polish!"

Suddenly Lydia sniffed. "Peter!" She sniffed again, dismayed now. "Peter, what's that in your pocket?"

Peter drew something from the pocket of his knickerbockers and held it out tenderly in his grimy little hands. "I found it under the electric light!" It was a dead English sparrow.

"Peter, how horrible!" Lydia snatched the bird from his hands.

"Mother, Mother!"

She threw the window open and hurled the dead sparrow down through space.

Peter threw himself on the floor, sobbing passionately.

"Get up, Peter! Stop your crying!"

He lifted himself heavily from the floor. Tears had washed rivulets down his smeared cheeks, still infantile, exquisite, of rose-petal texture. "It's . . . it's . . . the only pet . . . I ever had . . . in my life!" he brought out brokenly between his sobs.

"Pet! Why, you couldn't have that bird for a pet, Peter! It was dead — and — and coming to pieces!" Her voice softened.

"I was goin' to stuff it. Jake knows how, he's got a stuffed robin-bird. And now you throwed it away! Mother, I hate you!"

"Oh, Peter!" She tried to draw him to her.

"I *hate* you!" he reiterated, fighting away from her.

He threw himself on his little bed, and Lydia picked up her sewing.

II

Peter was not part and parcel of herself; he was something quite distinct from her, thinking hostile thoughts of her, looking hatred at her! A long distance separated them now.

Now and then a dying sob smote her ears. He was eating his stormy little heart out over the loss of the dead English sparrow. His cheap, shabby clothes, his scuffed, stubby little shoes wrung her heart. She detested herself for having bought this new dress, she detested herself for her impatience, her violence, with him. Who was she, to have guardianship over a child?

Why, she was the veriest child herself in her dealings with Peter. Other women — were they children, too? Or was she, alone, among women, a shameless child? Oh, everything was wrong! If only she and Peter could lie down to-night in this little room, and never wake!

Some time during the night, she was wakened by a small arm stealing about her neck, by a choking, penitent voice. "Mother, Mother, I love you! I told you I hated you, Mother, but I love you better than anything else in the world. I *don't* hate you, Mother! I said I did, but I don't!"

There in the dark, that April night, life was re-created good to Lydia. Since Peter's first cry, ending her travail, that mad New Year's morn, nothing had sounded in her ears so ineffably sweet as this little reassuring voice.

Peter's love, that precious love of her love-child, the feel of this little soft arm around her neck — ah, what more did she need?

CHAPTER V

IT was Sunday morning. Lydia was dusting the books in the library of the Van Antwerp apartment. She loved to handle them; they were not new, and every book had *William Van Antwerp* written on its fly-leaf, histories, classic essayists and poets, a sprinkling of classic fiction and many French and German works. They were merely an item of furniture now; no one except herself seemed ever to look at them.

The room with its unused books, its formal, unused air, had always faintly depressed her, but this morning, she felt a great charm in it. It was shimmering with the morning sunshine of May, and the fragrance of lilacs arranged in vases and jars brought back Kingsville to her with painful delight — brought back Churchwell and her love for him. Seven years since that one brief rapturous love-passage in her life, with its disastrous ending. She wondered how — starved as she was for love, life — burning with a thousand intricate desires — she had ever been able to endure the long, dull, weary, humiliating, menial years that stretched behind her. "I'm going to live — again — before it's too late!" she said to herself dizzily. "I'm going to live! I'm going to live!"

The day before Mr. Van Antwerp had come home

from Europe, and this morning he had departed startlingly from Van Antwerp custom; he had not accompanied his wife and sister-in-law to church. At breakfast, he had announced his intention of going to his office, instead, to look over some correspondence.

Lydia had a vague, perturbed notion that this announcement concerned herself.

The ladies were at church now.

She listened tremulously for sounds.

The outer door of the apartment opened and her hand, running over the mantel with her dust-cloth, came to a standstill. A warm exquisite faintness swept her. She heard some one moving softly along the narrow hall of the apartment, and then through a magic haze she saw Mr. Van Antwerp standing in the doorway. He wore a frock coat, and removing his silk hat, held it in his gloved hand. His ceremonial attire awed and charmed her. She knew that tinging her cheeks and flaming in her eyes were youth and ardour and allure.

In the doorway, only a few feet from where she stood in this silent, sunlit room, perfumed with May, was a man whose white, carven face fascinated her beyond all reason or resistance! He fascinated her because she had known few men, and this man was different from such men as she had known. He fascinated her because she felt that he knew intimately all those vast, secret, labyrinthine phases of life whose existence she knew so little about, and was intensely curious about. Above all, he fascinated her because overwhelmingly powerful forces in her own nature,

which had lain dormant for years, were reawakening wildly, clamouringly. And at this moment of their reawakening, nature offered her Mr. Van Antwerp, mature, highly sophisticated, dissipated, baffling.

She was delirious with the thought of the fires that frigid exterior might cover. She was intoxicated with a sense, long denied her, of personal power. She, herself, was to release the fires under that sheath of ice!

Mr. Van Antwerp walked across the room to where she stood, still with her hand on the mantelshelf, and drew off his gloves.

"You understood I would come back?" he asked, almost in a whisper, with his slight but transforming smile.

II

And then, a brief awkward silence obtained. Lydia felt at sudden and singular disadvantage. He had come back to see her alone, and momentous things were trembling in the golden air of the room. Yet her cap and apron marked off an impassable gulf between herself and this man in his irreproachable Sunday morning elegance. She felt a servant before him.

"I've always been opposed, on principle, to intrigues of this sort—" He made a gesture indicating he meant within the walls of his home. "But what would you?—when Lydia enters!"

He had never before called her by her name, and it gave her an odd start, keenly pleasurable.

He regarded her quizzically, and after a few jesting commonplaces, began questioning her, not rudely, but

with unconcealed curiosity. She told him that she enjoyed dusting his books.

"You're a reader, then? Novels, I suppose," he suggested.

"Not always."

"What else, for instance?"

"Oh, many things — Pater, Matthew Arnold, Schopenhauer."

"By Gad!" He drew a cigarette from his case, and lighted it. "By Gad! — Pater — Schopenhauer — and *this!*" He motioned with his cigarette to her dust-cloth.

"You think Pater and Schopenhauer would prevent my dusting your apartment properly?" she asked, smiling a little.

"No, probably not. I should say not." He blew a long column of smoke from his lips.

Suddenly his face sobered. "My girl, it's astounding to me that you're doing the sort of thing you are!"

"It used to astound me, too! It's still like a dream to me — that I am. But I wasn't trained to do anything. I had to do what I could. There was this, or clerking in a shop."

He threw his cigarette into a cloisonné jar. "Never in Christ's world were you intended for *this!*" he said, and drew her slim fingers away from the dust-cloth they were still clinging to. He held them delicately in his.

"Not pot-wrestler's hands, Lydia, oh, no!" he exclaimed. "They attracted me even before your face did!"

He lifted them to his lips and kissed them lightly. "You will never lack a lover — while these hands remain to you!"

He drew her gently to him. "I'm saturated with you, my girl!" he said, in a barely audible voice. "You haven't been out of my mind a moment since that morning — last winter . . ."

With a sudden movement, she released herself and drew a little away from him, placing her hands against the lapels of his coat.

"Oh, Mr. Van Antwerp, I've been like a nun, for years! I don't know why I can't resist you! But don't think I give up like this . . . to any one . . . just at a word! I swear! I swear — I haven't been like that! I'm not like that!"

"No, no, no . . ." he soothed her, drawing her to him again. "No, no — I don't think that!" He smiled reassuringly into her troubled eyes. "Do you suppose, for one moment, my dear, that you would interest me as you do, if I thought you were any ordinary little drab?"

She felt against her burning check the cool contact of his. "Let me look after you, dear, and make life a little more worth while to you!" he said, caressingly. "Let me look after you, now, my girl, my lass!" he whispered.

CHAPTER VI

AT first, it had been very wonderful to Lydia — like one of the transformations of fairyland, to have money again, to keep Peter at boarding-school and be able to pay his school bills promptly, to send him to a "boys' camp" in vacation-time, to dress him well, to dress herself richly and fashionably, and to have a luxurious little apartment she could call her own.

More than two years had passed now since that Sunday morning in the month of May that had so completely altered the complexion of her life.

And sometimes, yet, it seemed a miracle to her that it was her own hand, this delicate hand, lying idle in her silken lap. In her rare moments of reflection, she knew herself a changed creature inwardly, even more momentously than these jewelled fingers outwardly betokened. If she had not lost in the course of these two years whatever delicate reserves of character she had once possessed, if she had not lost all her early ideals, she had at least banished most of the ideals, and hidden the delicate reserves securely in some inner chamber, and refused to remember that they were there. Looking back, as once in a long while she did, on her relation to Ransom Churchwell, she felt that she had been a very pure and innocent young person at the time in her life when he was her lover.

Life was a far different thing to her now, and men far different beings, from what she had once thought. Through the bitter, poverty-stricken years in Kingsville, after her father had been forced to resign from Ransom College, and all through those obscure years when she had worked for herself and Peter, first as a washerwoman, then as a house-servant, she had kept her belief, despite her own cruelly-disappointing lot, in the essential sweetness and goodness of life, and in the essential goodness and cleanness of the human heart. But after two years and a half of Mr. Van Antwerp's tutoring, and the tutoring of men she knew through him — or, in the last year, men she knew through other avenues, she no longer believed in the essential cleanness and uprightness of the human heart. And she laughed at the idea of a purpose that made for good running through the universe!

Everywhere under the fair, glittering surface of things, she saw the world saturated with vice the very existence of which had been unguessed by her through twenty-seven years of her life. Back of their distinguished manners, their correct morning clothes, their frock coats, their immaculate evening attire, men appeared to her, alike, incorrigible beasts. Society pretended not to know this. Wives of the bosom were perhaps genuinely ignorant of it. Women, such as she had become, knew it for a desolating certainty.

At times, she was inclined to think that Life was the diabolic perpetration of an Arch Joker. She did not know where she was drifting to, or what end this Arch Joker had in store for her. . . .

She loved the perfumed luxury that surrounded her, she loved the beautiful soft gowns and the jewels she wore, she loved to see plays and operas and pictures, loved to buy things for Peter which "the other boys had." But her life, if she stopped to think of it — she tried frantically not to stop and think of it — she loathed. She loathed it, but she had made it for herself, with conscious efforts, and with success, and she did not see how to escape from it now. Except in moments of desperation — lulls that inevitably occurred now and then in the course of her feverish hours — she did not genuinely desire to escape from it. She could hardly conceive herself going back to that dull, laborious life she had known before. Occasionally, she dwelt briefly on the idea that another miracle might some day intervene in her behalf. Another shift, and perhaps she would be lifted out of this life into another life where she would be as comfortable materially as in her present life, but where she might enjoy respectability. She jeered at respectability; but in her secret heart she ceaselessly and passionately craved it. Perhaps some day, before she had lost her youthful charm and her power, she would meet a man who knowing all there was to know about her would wish to marry her. Such luck actually did come, sometimes, to women like herself . . .

II

One November evening, after dinner, she dismissed her maid, and at a little after seven o'clock was entirely alone in her apartment.

She moved about restlessly from room to room, altering the position of a chair or cushion here, with the toe of her slippered foot sliding a rug a few inches to right or left there, adjusting a fold of drapery, straightening a picture, turning on or off lights, everywhere studying the effects of her new furnishings in her new rooms. She had been in the apartment barely three weeks, and she was still extracting from its novel vistas something of the excitement a child extracts from a new toy.

The early autumn she had spent in Europe with Mr. Van Antwerp, who was still abroad, endeavouring to dispose of American property to foreign capitalists; and the three weeks since her own return, she had spent in a veritable debauch of reckless buying.

At the door of the long and narrow hall, the entrance to two rooms which opened into each other through a wide arched doorway, she paused.

"Charming, charming!" she exclaimed aloud.

"Enchanting!"

But she stamped her foot, in its prodigiously high-heeled slipper, with impatience. Charming as it was, she was dissatisfied, oppressed by a vague discontent that was constantly with her. More than this, at present, there was a definite, pressing anxiety in regard to money. Those dining room chairs with their high carved backs and their cane seats and cane panels, those chaste pieces of Colonial silver faintly illumining the dark buffet, these rugs, soft with the bloom of time, which her dainty slippered toe pushed around on the waxed floor, that spreading dome of topaz glass over-

hanging the dining table, and these Tiffany lamps shedding their lovely glow of daffodil over the little salon — all this had cost a great deal of money!

Spending, acquiring beautiful things, was, of course, one of the principal diversions and one of the principal rewards of her existence. And it was extraordinary how rapidly the amount of money she required had increased. What she had spent a year ago, six months ago, seemed absurdly inadequate for her present needs. And here, in the last mail, in the heart of a whole sheaf of bills, had come a letter from Mr. Van Antwerp, telling her that it looked as if his "deal" was not "going through," and warning her about her expenditures — warning her now, just when her expenses had all increased — and these unpaid bills! After all, what right had a man to expect loyalty from a woman in her position? Mr. Van Antwerp had spent a lot of money on her, all told, but what sacrifices would he make for her? Bah, none! And why should she make any for him?

The telephone-bell rang. "Yes, this is Mrs. Lambright. . . . Yes, yes, this is she! *Who?* Miss Stark? Oh, well, have her brought up," she answered, impatiently.

She had never been back to the house in the West Thirties since the day she left it and put Peter in a boarding-school in the suburbs, and she had not laid eyes on the queer old woman, mother or "cousin" of Emma Stark, since that tragic day of leave-taking. But occasionally Emma came to see her, and she looked forward to seeing her at the present moment with sen-

sations of curiously mixed pleasure and vexation.

Emma had come dressed in her Sunday garments. She always came so. Once it had made Lydia ashamed, but now Emma in her Sunday clothes had no particular effect on her; though it did flash through her that the tight-fitting black jacket Emma wore was exceedingly like the jacket she had worn the first time she had ever seen her, at Miss Tompkins', almost ten years before; and that the small black velvet hat, trimmed with a cheap, bedraggled feather, was perched grotesquely high on Emma's head, as if it had accidentally alighted there, exactly as the little black sailor hat had been perched on her head then.

With her arm around her, Lydia led her through the hall into the softly glowing salon and seated her in a luxurious chair upholstered in old-gold moiré.

She bolstered herself with cushions on the divan. Her filmy, clinging black gown revealed almost identically the silhouette of her girlhood, slender but nowhere angular. Diamonds sparkled on her breast and on her restless glancing hands. Her lips were vivid with blood alone, but her cheeks, with their faint depressions, showed that rouge had gone to assist their own too-great pallor.

"I'm afraid you were going out somewhere, Lydia."

"Oh, no!"

"Or expecting company," faltered Emma. "Perhaps I'd better go, and come back another evening." She made a movement to rise, but Lydia with smiling force held her in her chair.

"Sit still, Emma! I've been hoping you'd come

ever since I got back, and I'm awfully glad of an opportunity to sit still myself. I'm dreadfully tired! I've been rushing around every minute since I landed, getting things settled. Well, what do you think of my new apartment?"

Emma, sitting uncomfortably in her fine chair, was taking in the unreal splendour of her surroundings with dazed eyes. "Oh, Lydia, I never seen such a pretty place!" she replied, at last. But fear, and even pity, a sort of divinely patient pity, tinged her eyes.

Lydia read the expression with a feeling of irritation. But she chattered gaily about places she had recently visited, about little things that had happened on her voyage, going and coming, and about trifling experiences, amusing or annoying, she had had in settling her new apartment. She showed her some European postcards, in which Emma took a mild but polite interest.

III

"How's Peter?" Emma asked shyly, when the postcards had been exhausted. There was a certain timid deference never absent from her manner to Lydia.

"Peter? He's flourishing."

"Has he been in to see you, since you came back?"

"No, not yet. He's coming Saturday, to spend the day with me." She hoped Emma would not ask her if she had been out to see him since her return. She had not been, because he was more contented when she did not visit him or let him visit her too frequently, and perhaps she, too, was more contented the less she saw of him.

"Are you still pleased with the school, Lydia?"

"Oh, yes, it's all right. Peter's well — that's the main thing. And I guess he's learning a little — the names of the Saints, anyway!" She laughed a trifle uneasily. "But come, I'll show you something!"

She rose from the divan and led the way into the hall.

"Oh, wait a minute, let me get the key."

She returned with a key, unlocked a door next the door that led into the salon, and turned on the lights. The room was full of games and toys.

Emma stared in astonishment.

"You see I haven't *forgotten* Peter! Won't he go wild when he sees it?"

"Is he going to stay with you — *here?*" gasped Emma.

Lydia shot a swift, resentful glance at her. Sometimes Emma infuriated her. "He's not to spend the night," she rejoined sharply. "It's just a room for him to have for his, when he comes in to see me."

On the floor was a gay Navajo blanket, and on the blanket in a big coil were yards of miniature railroad track, and a miniature engine. "It runs by electricity. Isn't it clever?" Already her tone was kind again; she was sorry that she had spoken angrily to Emma the moment before. "When Peter comes, he can roll up the rug and lay the track out on the bare floor. I knew he'd want to do that himself."

"Does Peter know about it?" asked Emma, her face painfully flushed.

"No. It will all be a surprise to him when he comes

Saturday! Look!" Lydia pointed to the broad frieze of the wall-paper. Indians in war-paint, mounted on lean, fiery ponies, were tearing around the four walls of the room.

"You can almost hear their war-whoops, can't you? Peter will go mad for joy when he sees them!" She said it almost wistfully.

Emma walked from one thing to another in the room, looking at them with a sort of stupefaction. She tried to smile, but she said nothing except that now and then she uttered a faint, involuntary exclamation of surprise.

On a table in front of the double windows was a large rectangular aquarium. Gold and silver fishes were swimming about in it, and in and out of the windows of the toy castle on its pebbly bottom.

"See the two little turtles, Emma? And the pollywogs and the snails? Oh, I had them put in just everything. Peter won't have to go down to the Battery Aquarium now, will he? He'll have an aquarium of his own!"

They turned away to another larger table, on which was an array of lead soldiers. They were waiting for Peter's hand to lead them into action. "He won't see another thing in the room," said Lydia, "when he catches sight of *these!*"

"That's right, for sure! Peter always loved soldiers the best of anything!" Emma answered softly. It was the longest speech she had made since Lydia ushered her into the room.

Lydia avoided moments of reflection as she would

have avoided a plague, but, unbidden and overpoweringly strong, came to her now the memory of Peter in the old days gazing yearningly into the shop windows at little lead soldiers and tiny lead cannon like these. A vision, both sweet and cruel, rose before her of that little Peter in his shabby, outgrown reefer, hotly grasping her hand as they looked together into the shop windows, those clear eyes of Peter upturned to hers, and his trustful, "You'll get them for me some day, won't you, Mother?" And she had got them for him — at last! But, oh, God, how had she got them?

She linked her arm in Emma's — it was good to feel Emma's arm in hers. Emma could make her angry, but she was the one person in the world she trusted entirely.

All at once, Lydia felt something give way within her. Her eyes were brilliant and dry and tearless, but she felt that in another moment her heart's anguish must break forth. She dared not remain an instant longer in Peter's room. The ghastliness of having such a room — here — in this apartment!

She hurried Emma out of the room, locked the door, and dropped the key into a small drawer in the dressing-table in her bedroom. She did not want to sit down and talk to her, but Emma took the chair she offered her, and she felt compelled to sit down, too. After a moment's forced talk, she rose, walked over to the chiffonier and took out some packages.

"I thought My Old might like this," she said, unfolding a silk shawl with deep fringe, and holding it up. "You take it to her with my love, Emma."

"Oh, Lydia, it's too handsome!"

"No, no, it isn't! She can put it away in her drawer and look at it, if she doesn't want to wear it. This is for you," opening a case and handing Emma a brooch in the design of a butterfly. "I got it in Paris . . . and these souvenir spoons, one for each of you, are from the Fatherland. Oh, don't thank me — Here's the mail!"

She glanced carelessly at the envelopes a bell-boy brought in, except one, which she tore open.

"It's from Peter. He writes such funny letters!"

She spread out the pages of Peter's scrawled, ink-splotched epistle, and read aloud:

"*Dear Mother:*

"I was terbil homesick for you yestarday and last night. I have got an awful toothache. I got 5$ you sent. I want to see you so bad. Let me come Saterday sure. There is a store here now. they sell candy cake pie and a number of little refreshments. I will write you a short letter every day and put them together it will make a great big letter. I want you to do the same. You havent done as you promised me you don't write me hardly ever. Only if you only say hellow I will be glad to get it. I wish I could see your face just in one look for one minute. it seems as if you didn't care much about me. you dont let me be with you even in vacashun times you dont seem ever to want me. I am very tired every night and have to be woke up with two shakes in the morning to get my eyes open. It dont seem true I am going to see you

Saterday. I am afraid mebbe I dreamed it but Brother said you wrote I could come to you Saterday. I can find your new house. Don't worry I can find any place you are. I wish you would have a picture taken and put it in a locket. I would always have it next my heart. I mean it to. its seirous.

" PETER LAMBRIGHT,
" your loveing son.

" P.S. How I wish I could be with you tonight.
" P.S. Good luck to you."

Before Lydia had finished reading the letter, it did not seem funny to her. She had hardened herself to countless things, but lines like these from one of Peter's untidy letters were stabs in her heart. She had become very pale except for the rouged spots on her cheeks, and the hands that held Peter's letter were trembling visibly. She had often had letters from Peter like this . . . what was the matter with her? . . .

Emma sprang from her chair.

" Lydia, are you sick?" tears streaming down her cheeks. " Lay down on the bed!" She stroked Lydia's half-bare arm with her big, rough hand.

" I'm all right. . . . It's over now. I'm always letting myself get too tired." Lydia smiled. " Don't let Peter's letter worry you, Emma. All children at boarding-school are like that, homesick more or less." It consoled her slightly to speak consolingly to Emma.

" Of course I can't have him with me."

Emma nodded. " Of course not."

They had never before spoken to each other candidly with regard to Lydia's situation.

"The little fellow's better off with the Brothers," said Emma, looking at Lydia with an odd, steadfast look.

Lydia turned her eyes away uneasily, and glanced openly at the little boudoir clock among the fittings of her dressing table.

CHAPTER VII

AS she let Emma out of the door, Lydia admitted a youngish man in evening dress. He raised her fingers to his lips in the foreign manner and kissed them fervidly. His red lips were in striking, almost disquieting contrast to his milky skin and blond beard.

He removed his overcoat and put it on a chair with his hat and gloves, and then turned and placed his hands lightly on her flimsily clad arms.

"I thought you had forgotten my existence!" she said. "Where have you been, if I may inquire?"

"The same place you've been — Paris!" There was a slight defect in his speech, akin to a lisp. "I caught a glimpse of you one afternoon, about a month ago, in the *Rue de Rivoli* — going into *Rumpelmayer's.*"

"Really? — But you're ambiguous, my dear man — you or I going into *Rumpelmayer's?*"

"You."

"So near me, and didn't reveal yourself!"

"You were well cavaliered," he replied, a little offishly, dropping his hands from her.

She made a slight grimace, and shrugged her shoulders. She had played fast and loose with this man, blown hot and cold on him, and he still endured it,

though always with the manner of a grudge against her. She did not know how much longer he would endure it, and did not care greatly, except that he was a man of fortune, without ties, frankly infatuated with her — and she was in desperate need of money! Considering everything, she had best be very charming this evening, not allow herself any caprices with him, any captiousness.

"I have only a moment," he remarked, running his fingers caressingly through his long hair. "I am on my way to the Opera.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, following her into the little salon. "Lovely! You've really shown taste!"

"It surprises you — that I should show taste!" She laughed, but her eyes were keen, almost hostile.

He folded his arms, assumed an attitude, and looked around him critically — all his mannerisms were absurd and disagreeable to her.

"You've attained splendour, in a small way, without tawdriness," he pronounced gravely.

"Tawdriness! Tawdriness!" she repeated, mockingly.

She lit a cigarette and threw herself upon the divan. Her hair, catching a light from above, was like a net of gold. She swung her elevated foot in its black satin slipper with the extravagantly high heel, a brilliant scarlet heel, back and forth impatiently.

"Tawdriness! You expected tawdriness?"

"I didn't say that." He scowled at her slightly, and continued to examine the furnishings of the rooms that were open to his view.

"Tawdriness!" she said, going back to the word, and pronouncing it slowly. "Your sense of the fitness of things suggests, I suppose, Mr. Beauvais, that a cage, a cage like mine — a gilded cage, in the popular phrase — ought to be tawdry! Refined taste seems hardly compatible — eh?" With the cigarette between her fingers, she let the smoke issue toward him impudently through her closed teeth. Her vivid lips were apart and smiling, but there was a cynical gleam in her eyes.

He looked puzzled, and a little disgusted.

"'Why do you want to be — so unnecessarily nasty?'— why don't you ask me that? I can see you're thinking it! I've shocked your delicate sensibilities, haven't I, dear?"

"Are you trying to insult me?" he asked slowly, his lisp distinctly noticeable. "I didn't stop here this evening to be insulted."

She rose abruptly from the divan and approached him with a little fluttering, undulating movement.

"Oh, it was just foolery! I'm going to be good, now, very, very good! I don't know what made me so horrid!" She touched her fingers to his cheek. "I must be a nice, gracious hostess, mustn't I? — my house-warming, too! Now, you're æsthetic, Louis," she went on; "studied at the *Beaux Arts* and all that sort of thing — what about my rugs? I crave your opinion of them! No reds or blues, you see!"

Flicking an ash from her cigarette, she pointed out with the toe of her slipper the orange, the pale yellows, faded greens, and patches of black in the velvety sur-

faces of the three rugs that lay rather far apart on the polished floor. "What do you think of them?"

He continued to look wounded, but gave her his opinion of the rugs — launched into a dissertation on Oriental rugs.

She knew he was happy now — soberly riding a hobby.

"They're rather exceptionally good — in colouring. You must have spent some time finding them —"

"More than time! In fact —" She held the gilt tip of her half-smoked cigarette rakishly between her lips. "In fact, I'm thinking of going into the hands of a receiver! Are you qualified for receivership, Louis?" She was very close to him, she knew the perfume of her was in his susceptible nostrils, and she pressed her advantage. She looked at him tantalisingly.

"Lydia . . ." He held out his arms.

She felt as if she could not endure the panting ardour of his face, at once so anæmic, so sensual. But she did not move.

"Debts, too, Louis?" she asked, with an arch, dazzling smile.

"You know the conditions!" he answered whisperingly. "I won't share you!" The veins stood out blue and prominent on his white forehead.

She looked at him without flinching, her bare white breast rising and falling rapidly.

All at once, her hate of the man rose in her overpoweringly, hatred of his soft, womanish flesh, of his small feet — of which, oh, disgust of disgusts! — he

was proud — hatred of his blond beard, of his silky, self-adored locks, hatred, unbounded contempt, for something in the man's character! Swift as thought her mood changed.

"Come — let me show you something!"

He followed her.

"Look!" She pointed to a big carved chest of dark wood that stood one side of the chimney in the dining room.

"You see," she said, lifting the heavy lid, "it's big enough for a sarcophagus!"

She closed the chest, and seated herself on it.

The man stood in front of her, his arms folded, waiting to see her whim revealed, an expression in his eyes of mingled desire and resentment.

"Do you remember a story about a bride long ago in Italy — hiding in a chest like this, during her wedding revelry, when they were playing hide-and-seek? And the chest locking on her? And years afterwards, her skeleton, wrapped in bridal finery, discovered in the chest? Do you remember that story? . . . Well, some day I'm going to crawl into this chest, and let the lid drop!" She was slipping her rings up and down on her trembling fingers.

"Are you losing your mind?"

"I hope so!" She shrugged her shoulders.

But as he made a movement of annoyance, a movement to leave, she put out her hand. "Listen! listen! You must hear me!" Her cheeks were flaming with more than rouge now. "My maid will come

some morning, and there'll be no trace of where I've gone . . ."

"Haven't you derived enough entertainment, now, from this fantastic talk you're indulging in?" he asked, freezingly. "I didn't stop here this evening to be treated to this —"

"No, I suppose not!" she interrupted him, with a slight sneer. "But now you're here, let me show you it's true — that it's large enough to hold me!" She got up from the chest, and put her hands on the lid to lift it again, but he restrained her, turning her around to face him.

"What sort of silliness is this? Are you mad?"

"Yes, a little mad! She laughed scornfully in his face, and shook off his hands. "But what I want to ask you is — does it occur to you how uncomfortable you'll be, when you read the news of my disappearance, knowing that I'm shut up here, dead, in *this?*"

He looked at her with positive stupefaction.

"Will you come back to this little *appartement de joie,* point out this chest, and say — 'Here she is, in this chest, poor little thing! *I* knew her!' Will you come back and say it? *No!* — Oh, I know you — you're all alike! Your dear, pure, innocent, protected aunts and cousins and sisters and mothers and wives might hear of it!"

All her smouldering bitterness at her position had burst into blaze, her bitterness toward the class of women from which she felt herself forever ostracised.

She laughed hysterically. "Amusing, isn't it?"

His look of stupefaction had grown to one of alarm.

"Yes, yes, you ask me to give you everything, everything I have to give!" Her voice for the first time threatened to break. "You ask me to give you everything, and the one thing I want in the world, you wouldn't give me — the chance to be some one again! I know! I know! You want me to give you all of me, all I have to give — my soul's lost — but my body . . . all for you . . . for you alone . . . and then *you* — Oh, why do I talk?" She covered her burning face.

"You're not yourself — you're dissipating too much."

She dropped her hands from her face.

"I was never more myself," she answered calmly.

"You're drinking too much," he said sternly.

"I haven't been drinking. It isn't drink." She sighed deeply. The fire and contempt had gone completely out of her eyes. She felt extraordinary exhaustion.

He eyed her curiously. "How many persons are you, Lydia?"

"Several," she answered nonchalantly.

II

They returned to the salon, and he seated himself beside her on the divan, protesting he must be gone, but lingering.

Suddenly and irrelevantly, she remarked: "I haven't any books, you see, not a book!"

She waved her hand through the rooms.

"Not a book! To some people, a book is like a pipe of opium — they read to forget! But I can't read that way! I must be at peace, before I can read! When I sit down now with a book, instead of forgetting, I begin to remember! So I don't read now — I just live, live!

"I don't read books any longer," she went on wildly, "but I'm going to write a book — 'My Apologia'! It will be a thick volume, perfectly candid . . . furnish data . . ."

"What nonsense are you talking now?" he asked, his brows knit, his nostrils distended.

"Nonsense?"

He rose, and moved hurriedly toward the hall, mumbling — "I've had enough of this!"

She leaned forward on the divan, bathed in the mellow light of the lamps, the slim grace of her black figure sharply defined against the soft golden background of the cushions behind her. There were brilliant spots of colour in the picture she made — her lips, her cheeks, her high scarlet heels.

The man was departing from her in wrath; she absolutely detested him — but perhaps she had gone too far! Not yet was she ready to burn her bridges behind her. Not yet could she dispense with him!

"Louis!" she called after him, softly, but imperiously.

He did not answer.

She rose and passed swiftly into the hall, where he was lifting his overcoat from the chair. . . . She knew the witchery she could summon at will . . . she knew

his vanity and the magic words with which to woo him back . . . she knew her beauty . . . knew the terrible, remorseless power she could exert . . . knew the male — the eternal masculine . . .

III

"Where does this door lead to?" he asked, pausing at a closed door in the hall, as she accompanied him to the outer door of her apartment, when he was leaving.

"To a closet," she replied quickly.

"A closet?" He measured with his eye the wall space that extended beyond the door. "I don't see how it can be merely a closet." He turned the door knob. "Why do you keep it locked?"

"Would you like to look in? I advise you not to insist! You remember Bluebeard's secret chamber! Well, there might be a row of men, hung up in here — by their beards!"

With laughter and jest she drew him on, past the locked door.

But when the last clasp of his moist, nerveless hand had been endured, when the door had clicked behind him, and she had heard the elevator door open and slam shut, and knew that he was descending, gone . . . she leaned wearily against the wall, filled with loathing of him, profound loathing of her life . . . deathly disgust with existence.

She almost reeled along the dim hall till she reached the locked door of Peter's room. There, with her hand on the doorknob, a crushing wave of homesickness for Peter swept over her. In all the big, dark,

hideous universe there was but one spot of clean, shining light — Peter, looking up at her with trusting, adoring eyes.

She could see a big dormitory, a dim night-light burning in it, a brother in black womanish garments gliding along stealthily between the rows of narrow white beds, Peter's big shock head on one of the pillows, and the pillow wet with tears — Peter's homesick tears! Her very heart was being torn out of her body.

Those scrawled post-scripts in Peter's dirty, blotted little letter stood out to her — "Good luck to you!" — "How I wish I could be with you to-night!"

CHAPTER VIII

IN the mood of despair that had followed that mood of remorse, that longing to be delivered from her life — a man's voice over the telephone had asked her to meet him, and she had seized the suggestion eagerly. She could not remain in her apartment, alone with her frenzied thoughts.

They were in a small private room of a restaurant, and she was talking gaily. Her companion was a hunchback. He was dressed conspicuously, as though out of sheer bravado to court attention to his deformity; a diamond flashed from his shirt front, and a diamond and ruby ring blazed on one of his large, finely-formed, hairy hands. Across the room, he produced a curious effect of being a young man, almost a boy, but near, he was seen to be almost an old man. The unmistakable and touching mark of the hunchback was upon his face.

Lydia knew very little about him, except that his name was Faidley, that his home was in the West, that he was rich, that he drank heavily and spent money recklessly. She knew him through Mr. Van Antwerp, who had brought him to see her with the idea that Faidley's frank, erratic talk would amuse her.

At present, Faidley was far advanced in intoxication, though at intervals talking lucidly, even luminously.

He had ordered a number of expensive dishes, which Lydia had barely touched, and he had not touched at all.

The door into the hall opened now and again, to admit a waiter, or the obsequious manager. Faidley was giving them enormous tips for the most trifling services — flourishing his great roll of bills.

"Witch!" he exclaimed, when the manager and waiter had both withdrawn, "witch, so old Van let you come home from Europe ahead of him, did he? Damned if I'd let you out of my sight, witch, if you were mine!"

He cocked his grey, curly head on one side, a sly, humorous expression in his blurred eyes. "Too damned pretty, *you* are, little one." He chuckled and nodded his head at her in an admiring but thoroughly maudlin fashion. "Too damned pretty!"

Lydia leaned back against the glistening lining of her velvet cloak, hung over her chair, and laughed across the table at him. She wore a wide hat of dark velvet, with a snowy plume.

"Where'd old Van find you, kitten? He won't tell! Heh? *You* won't tell, either?"

He began talking half to himself, looking down into the glass he had drained and was handling shakily. "You're a rare one, kitten — you're the blue flower in the garden of sports. You're from good people, too, good people . . . good people. . . ." He kept repeating it, smiling knowingly.

"How do you know?"

"How do I know? Hands and ears, that's how I know! They tell blood every time!"

He fell into a revery.

"Old Van trots us all out to see you," he resumed. Suddenly he looked up. "You know that girl shot herself?"

Lydia started.

"Hah, what's the matter with me? I mustn't make injudicious — injudicious"— he had difficulty in pronouncing the word to his satisfaction —" injudicious — *that's* it! — disclosures! . . . But don't *you* ever shoot yourself on Van's account, kitten — hear me? He ain't worth it; we ain't any of us worth it, comes to that! But I see one of the dears shooting herself for *me!*" He laughed ironically, broke off laughing, and seemed to meditate an instant. Then, "Drink, drink your wine, Lydia!" he said peevishly. "Brace up, brace up!"

Exhorting her to "brace up," he settled into a more hopeless heap himself.

II

Lydia had seen men intoxicated, but never before been alone with a man so abjectly drunk as Faidley now. In a thick, barely intelligible utterance, he was flattering her in one breath, half-humorously berating her and trying to quarrel with her in the next. It was a question only of moments now before he would be on the floor. She was by no means certain of her own movements — the walls of the room were swim-

ming round her — but she summoned her scattering wits, and touched a button.

"Bring a pot of coffee, very strong, the strongest you can get!" she ordered the waiter, indicating with her eyes the figure of Faidley, who was resting his head on the table, his grotesquely long arms sprawled across it in an attitude that hinted at collapse.

The hunchback paid no attention to the waiter's presence, or to Lydia's order to him. But a few moments later, when the manager came into the room, with the waiter and coffee, and held a whispered conference with her, he lifted his head, and poured forth a torrent of profane abuse.

"Think I'm drunk, do you?"

Lydia laid her hands on his and talked to him coaxingly. "Have your coffee, now — please! Oh, please — with me! I don't want to drink mine alone. Let me pour you a cup."

He smiled at her, a foolish, befogged smile. Then an idea struck him, and abruptly pulling himself together, he sat up, and began articulating indistinctly but with vehemence —"Give me that — give me that — damned pot of coffee!"

Lydia made a sign to the waiter, and he hurriedly rearranged things, setting the metal pot and the small, heavy cups in front of the hunchback.

To her consternation, Faidley lifted the pot as high as his long arm would extend, and poured the coffee in a wavering, splashing stream down into the cup. She sprang back, as the scalding liquid glanced on her bodice and dropped on her hands. It was useless to

interfere; Faidley had the coffee pot in his possession; it was his whim to handle it; and although deformed, he had the broad shoulders and strong arms of a big, normally-built man; he was enormously strong; and with the temporary revival of his physical and mental faculties, he was eager for trouble. He poured a second cup, laughing with demoniac glee. Lydia also laughed. It was a ridiculous if disgusting sight.

Suddenly he was seized with violent hiccoughs. "Pretty sight, eh? — ain't it? . . . pretty sight — a hunchback in his cups," laughing bitterly between his hiccoughs.

He turned to the manager, who was asking instructions of Lydia with his eyes.

"Get out of here!" he bellowed. And he flew into a rage again, quarrelling and cursing. But before the manager and waiter had left the room, he pulled out his big roll of money, and, with contemptuous good-humour, tossed a bill at each of them.

"Here, give me your money! I'll keep it for you!" Lydia said softly, when they were gone. "You're throwing it away! I'll keep it for you!"

"You keep it for me . . . you keep it for me . . ." he muttered thickly. He handed the roll of bills to her without protest. And she thrust it down into the open bosom of her bodice. She felt it there, against her fevered, naked flesh — a hard, unyielding, tantalising mass.

She was anxious now to sober him sufficiently to get him away and back to the old-fashioned hotel where he always stopped and where she knew he would be well

taken care of till he was himself again. She made him drink cup after cup of black coffee, calling several times for a fresh pot.

"How much more . . . of this stuff . . . are you going to make me take?" he asked, at length. His blood-streaked eyes were shot with amusement. "I'm floating now. Why, good God A'mighty, I'm floating — in a sea of coffee!"

For a little while, he had better command of himself. He expressed himself more coherently, cursing his deformity, and blaming on it his beastly lapses.

"What difference does it make, anyway? Who respects Alex Faidley — more than they would a cursed little Jack-in-the-box? See here — ain't that so? And I'm a man — man's desires and powers and sensibilities . . . but, by God, no woman's ever looked on me except with horror! Think I don't know it?"

"Oh, no, no, Mr. Faidley, they don't think of you that way, they don't! *I* don't — I'm sure!" As a matter of fact, he *was* repugnant to her because of his deformity, but she had suffered much, and her soul knitted swiftly to another soul that had suffered. "They admire your — your originality — just as I do — and personality — and everything like that! They don't think about you — the way you say! I swear they don't!"

"What a damned little liar you are!" he replied hoarsely, raising her slim fingers, sparkling with jewels, to his lips. "Your pity's sweet, little one, but — bitter-sweet — bitter-sweet!"

He slowly lifted his head, his tears dropping upon

her hands. "You're a good little girl," he said, "a good little girl."

A bewildered, slightly troubled look invested his features, and now that the twinkle was absent from his eyes, Lydia noticed how lined with suffering his jester's face was.

"I'd be content to sit on your doorstep all the days of my life, little queen, if you'd let me — just to let your dress brush me — as you passed in and out."

He began genuinely weeping, and presently grew utterly incoherent again, his head and shoulders wagging with limp uncertainty from side to side. His intermittent talk became more and more indistinct, and he settled heavily against the table, dead, apparently, to everything about him. But when Lydia rose, "Where are you going?" he asked crossly.

"I'll be right back." She tapped him reassuringly on the head, and left the room.

The floor rose in billows to meet her feet. She passed closed doors, from whence came boisterous sounds, and descended a short flight of stairs at the rear of the hall, to a small dressing room, entered it, and bolted the door. The room was dimly lighted with one small gas-flame, and was pervaded with the scent of sachet-powder, Jickey, and other stale, nameless odours. There was a small looking-glass hanging above a stationary wash-stand. She looked into the glass but could not get a distinct image of herself. She felt a little sick, and everything was hazy and more or less unreal to her. On the edge of the dirty marble basin was an open powder-box half filled with pink

face-powder, and several discarded scraps of soiled chamois-skin were scattered about. She opened the gold-mesh purse that hung from her wrist, drew out of it a minute powder-box and tiny puff and dusted powder over her face. She did it mechanically. It was not precisely what she had come for — here — to this room. . . . An idea had struck her a few moments before, at first dimly, then more vividly, and she was more or less resolutely in pursuit of it now. . . . She was not sure she had the strength — the "nerve" — to carry it out! She was dizzy . . . her heart was beating too fast . . . she had an unpleasant, actually painful, sensation of suffocation. She reached down inside her bodice and, drawing out the hunchback's big roll of bills, counted them hurriedly, with shaking, icy fingers. Bills of small denomination were on the outside of the roll, inside — fifties and hundreds — as nearly as she could tell in her agitated state — eleven hundred or twelve hundred dollars in all. . . . She needed money — at once.

She counted out about six hundred dollars from the inside bills, rolled them in a separate roll, and, wrapping her little lace handkerchief about them, thrust them far down inside her bodice, placing the remaining bills just inside her bosom and easily accessible.

She had never before in her life appropriated even the most minute object that belonged to another. . . . She reasoned with herself now that if she did not take this money, it would be all thrown away on waiters and servants and profligate women in the next few hours, or some one else would filch it, the whole roll, perhaps.

She reasoned that Faidley had plenty of money, cared little how it went . . . would give her as much as this if she asked him for it.

Yet she was at pains to reassure herself that Faidley would never know *she* had taken this six hundred dollars! He would think, when he was sober enough to think anything about it at all, that he had squandered it in some crazy way himself . . . she was at pains so to reassure herself, but her heart continued to beat with strange, almost frightening rapidity, her breast fluttered with strange, novel trepidations as she made her way back to the room where she had left him, opened the door, and saw him sunk in helpless drunkenness, his curly head dropped on the table, his hideous, pitiable back toward her as she entered.

III

He raised his head. "Come here . . . sit down. . . ." He spoke with the maximum of effort, rolling his head around in the most unseemly fashion, and his clouded eyes were dreadful to look upon. "Sit down . . . I want to give you a little advice . . . want to give you a little advice. . . ."

Lydia dropped into a chair, leaning toward him.

"You see . . . you see what a beast I am, confound it . . . you see what drink makes of me, little one! You leave it alone . . . take my advice. You're drinking too much yourself . . . you've got to quit . . . it'll ruin you. . . . You think you've got to drink — eh, don't you? But you don't! You cut it out, you pretty little ——l"

He had called her by the unspeakable name, the name loaded with the infamy and iniquitous associations of ages. A terrible shudder ran through Lydia's whole body. A dazzling, hellish light flooded her. She saw herself the most unholy of living creatures. Within her a voice cried brokenly—"Why was I born? Why was I ever born?"

IV

What happened next she could not afterwards recall with much clearness. She had only a clouded remembrance of bursting into violent sobs, of the hunchback's trying to console her, wiping her eyes and face with his handkerchief, clumsily but tenderly . . . a dim remembrance of Faidley and herself in some way getting away from the place . . . of her paying the bill out of his money . . . of the waiter and the manager helping him between them to a taxi-cab . . . a dim, disgusting, unforgettable memory of the hunchback inside the taxi-cab with her, crazed and whimpering, as they sped through the dark, deserted streets . . . and then a memory of leaving him at his hotel . . . handing to the night-clerk Faidley's money—that part of it she had left him.

She could recall, misty as a dream, the taxi-cab leaving her at the apartment house where she lived, and how she had made her way through the familiar entrance hall, past its walls with the bright green panels of brocaded satin, past its white marbles and big mirrors . . . she could recall tripping, some one picking her up . . . a bell-boy bringing her up in the elevator,

unlocking her door for her and leading her into the hall, turning on lights. Oh, depths to which she had fallen!

CHAPTER IX

IT seemed to her as if she were just tossing in a sort of burning half-sleep the night through, but when, at length, she became conscious that the faint morning light was coming in through the window, she knew she had been asleep, for she had dreamed — a dream still unfaded, tangible.

She saw she had only half undressed herself; she had not taken her hair down, and the hairpins were hurting her head; her throat was parched, and an evil taste was in her mouth, but she was too inert even to ring for a glass of water. . . . And she was miserable . . . in her dream, her father had appeared to her. . . .

She could hear the maid moving around softly in the apartment, though the door that led from her bedroom into the hall had been closed.

Her eyes roamed over the room. It was a white room, almost as white as a hospital room. It had been her fancy to have it so — no roses, no pink trappings — trappings of Aphrodite. There were no pictures in the room, no mere ornaments, no frippery. The bed-draperies were entirely white and simple, as were the fine, transparent draperies at the window. But it was an expensive whiteness, an expensive sim-

plicity. The multitude of toilet accessories on the dressing-table were of ivory embellished with gold. Through an open door gleamed a white bathroom — tile, enamel, glass — the acme of luxury.

Over this elegant whiteness of chamber and bath were scattered in dissolute confusion feminine garments, outer garments and intimate inner garments. A sense of utter degradation assailed Lydia. . . . In that dream, still so vivid in her mind, she and the hunchback were issuing together into the dark street from the door of the resort where they had been together; they were both staggering, when suddenly her father stood on the pavement in front of them, looking only at her — at her long velvet cloak, her beautiful, costly furs, the sweeping plume of her hat, her jewels, the rouged spots on her cheeks. A light from somewhere illumined his face, that kind, homely face — so infinitely sad, so troubled, amazed — "Why, Lydia, are you a ——?" calling her by the name Faidley had called her by, the name that had branded her in her own thoughts forever!

II

Her thoughts went back to her father's death-bed. She saw again that wondrous and beautiful transfiguring of his plain, spent face . . . the unearthly sound of cocks crowing was breaking across the dreadful hush of the room, Mr. and Mrs. Poole and other neighbours were standing about. . . . She heard again those words wrung from her father's heart, the last words

his lips had uttered—"Lydia, don't get anything fine for me. Just a plain coffin. . . ."

How she had loved him, how she had respected and admired him! . . .

There was a step in the hall. The maid tapped at the door. She feigned sleep. Sick and wretched as she was, she wanted to be alone. For a long time she had directed passionate efforts towards escaping her thoughts. Now she was facing them with desperate courage, no longer hiding from herself how debased she had become.

Her dream — *was* it a dream? She had little faith in so-called psychic experiences, but she had not thought of her father as alive, close to her, for a long, long time, and now — this dream!

The old craving for his sane, strong, dear presence stirred in her! How vivid he was to her all at once! What happy hours they had known. But how long ago it seemed — that life they had led together. How far in the past, how dim, shrouded, seemed Kingsville. So much had happened since — in her outward life, and even more truly in her inner life. It was but a child she had read about in a book, a girl in a dream, that Lydia of fast-blurring outlines, the Lydia who had lived in Kingsville.

And yet at the thought of Kingsville, she was all faintly a-thrill. It was always so; her memory of Kingsville had the troubling fragrance of a May night. Always, always, she would pine for the old, proud, self-satisfied, picturesque Southern town throned on its

seven hills. No other spot on earth could ever be so sweet to her, so glorified by her imagination. She would yearn always, till the hour her eyes gathered over them the film of death, for the sight, the smell, the feel, of Kingsville. But it could never be for her again. Not even her dust, the dust of her flesh she had so polluted, could lie there and mingle with the dear red dust of the hills of Kingsville.

III

But Saturday would bring Peter! This was Thursday. How could she wait the dragging moments till that blessed medicine — Peter — arrived! Peter's coming made it possible for her to live, to face the truth, to plan.

She tried to formulate definite plans for getting away from her present life. It took possession of her, as her supreme longing, to have Peter with her again.

How should she proceed? . . . how start again?

Of course she could go back to the sort of work she had supported herself and Peter with before. She could go back to a little mean hall bedroom, in a cheap lodging-house, up flights and flights of stairs, have washer-women and drivers of delivery wagons for her neighbours . . . all that old nightmare once more, Peter in the streets again, with gutter chums — oh, no!

When she came to consider, it was the same difficulty facing her that had faced her ever since the day her father's death left her a young girl, alone, in Kingsville, without resources. She was not trained to

earn a living in any way compatible with her tastes and temperament, and in the days since she had begun her own struggle, all lines of endeavour had become highly specialised, were becoming more and more specialised all the time, so that the problem was far more difficult now than in those days when she had started out as general agent.

The more she thought about things, the more impotent she felt. Everything seemed impossible to her except to drift along, sometimes in the depths of misery, as at present, again, reasonably satisfied with her existence, and its rewards, such as they were.

But then, the dream, her father's face, Peter! No, no, she could not remain in this life! She must stiffen herself, make a supreme effort, break from it, and establish herself decently again.

Whom could she consult? Which of the men she knew could she go to with such a problem? They would laugh at her. Mr. Van Antwerp certainly would. They would think she was not in earnest, or betray a lack of interest — boredom, possibly. They would think her silly, to consult them on such a bit of business, and she would feel silly herself.

Of all the men she knew, Faidley, alone, occurred to her as a man whom she might consult without fear of misunderstanding. Drunk or sober, and for all his foul, bitter tongue, he was a big-hearted man. Yet at the thought of him — she quailed. The money! Suppose he should accuse her! . . . With a tremendous effort, she dismissed the thought of him.

Perhaps she might consult some minister of the Church, some pure, broad-spirited clergyman like old Dr. Dunbar in Kingsville.

But almost immediately she wondered at herself that she could have entertained the notion for even an instant. Clergymen were far from sacrosanct to her, as a class, and how would she know where among them to seek a Dr. Dunbar?

Another idea came to her. Why not go down to old Trinity Church, and there, removed from all the suggestions and pressures of life in her apartment, think things over. Perhaps in that dim, silent interior some plan would suggest itself to her.

But scarcely had she formed this intention, than the established habits of her life asserted their familiar, insistent sway over her. The *masseuse* arrived. Under her skilful fingers, Lydia fell into a light sleep and woke from it a few moments later with a vague, comforting sense of recovered well-being. . . . Those perplexing, insistent problems that had harassed her appeared now less perplexing, less insistent.

While her nails were manicured and her hair shampooed, she gave the maid directions, paid bills, looked over newly-purchased *lingerie*, answered calls at the telephone, in a word, transacted innumerable small businesses of the kind with which the hours of every morning were filled.

The full tide of her day had caught her, and the only things that seemed very real to her and not to be put aside were these small, importunate matters of every day. The ideas she had entertained a short

while before of going to a minister, of going down to Trinity Church to meditate, now seemed rather theatrical, a little absurd, and altogether impossible.

Her maid brought in a florist's box, opened it, and handed her Louis Beauvais' card.

"Paper flowers!" she exclaimed disdainfully, merely glancing at the showy, long-stemmed chrysanthemums. "I detest them!"

The little manicurist looked up with shy wonder from Lydia's finger-nail she was filing. "Oh, I think they're swell!" she said, her eyes following covetously the expensive flowers the maid was carrying from the room.

"Why, you can have them!" Lydia exclaimed impulsively. "Leave them in the box, I'll give them to Theresa!" she called after her maid.

Bonnie wheeled resentfully in the doorway. Her rights to participation in all the fat spoils of an irregular household were threatened.

"Oh!" said Lydia, good-naturedly, "so you're not going to let Theresa have all of them! Well, leave half in the box for her, the other half you can have."

The little manicurist beamed adoring gratitude. Lydia loved to make such girls happy. A great lack in her life was the companionship of women, and in a small degree she supplied it by friendliness and generosity to the working women she came in contact with, by winning regard and admiration from saleswomen in shops, from her *corsetière*, her dressmaker, the milliners who caressingly tried their creations on her *chic*, satisfactory head.

She chatted gaily with Theresa. Every moment as the morning advanced she felt a little better, a little more sure of herself, of her powers, of the attractions of mere living.

And Theresa flattered her. Her nails were "perfect," her hair was the "loveliest" Theresa had ever "worked with."

So the glib *masseuse* had fed her with compliments earlier in the morning.

CHAPTER X

SHE had bought a ticket earlier in the week for Ellen Terry's lecture on "The Children in Shakespeare's Plays." She could not imagine a very engaging discourse on the children in Shakespeare; she could barely recall that there were children in Shakespeare's plays. Moreover, a man who often discoursed interestingly to her on bygone as well as present-day actresses, had warned her. "Don't, don't see her now! Ah, you should have seen her years ago — what a delight she was then!"

But she must have entertainment of some sort this Thursday afternoon; and she confessed to curiosity about an actress whose name had been one to conjure with for generations. She confessed to more than a little curiosity about a woman, the passing of whose youth old men could speak of now in tones of sad, almost resentful regret, as if, with the passing of Ellen Terry's youth, had "passed a glory from the earth."

The stage of the Broadway Theatre was arranged with a simple reading-desk against a dark velvet curtain. Ellen Terry came out, paused in front of the velvet curtain — a tall, fair-haired, big woman in grey-green satin, a rather singular, floating garment. She wore one ring, the Henry Irving ring. Her eyes held

Lydia's chief attention. They were not large or dark or especially clear or luminous, they were not at all the sort of eyes to which power is commonly attributed, yet Lydia quickly perceived that it was in her eyes had lain, lay still, part of the spell Ellen Terry exercised over countless men and women. Oddly enough, the character of these eyes seemed to lie in some inexplicable way in their very characterlessness. Lydia could not define the impression they made on her, but it was an extraordinarily strong, extraordinarily pleasant impression.

After the lecture was over, she could not repeat a single thing Ellen Terry had said about the children of Shakespeare's plays.

But she had speedily discovered that the matter of Ellen Terry's discourse was of no importance whatever. The importance was in Ellen Terry.

She found herself drawing her handkerchief from her muff, and at first furtively, and then more openly, mopping her eyes. She found her breath catching in little sobs. What was she crying about? Ellen Terry was reading, or talking, in those friendly little interspersions she made in her reading, of nothing particularly sad, of nothing particularly intended to be touching.

"Why is my face wet with tears?" Lydia asked herself.

She could not tell exactly why, not for a moment or two, but then she knew that they were tears of sheer gladness. It was so good that the world had in it Ellen Terry! That great lady would never know her.

But the desolating loneliness from which she had suffered so long — even from her solitary childhood in Kingsville — seemed suddenly dispelled. Ellen Terry was in the world! In the same world with her! She could never be so lonely again.

And they called her old! — this big, roguish woman moving back and forth in front of the velvety curtain in her big, free, impulsive way. Why, how could they call her old? Could you call sunshine old? Could you call the tumbling music of a little fall of water you came upon in the woods old? Could you call that fresh, liquid, jubilant note of the wood-thrush in spring — could you call it old? No more could you call Ellen Terry old! She was the morning sunshine that glinted through a chink in your blinds and played in those dazzling globules of delight on your chamber wall! She was the mysterious, delicious rustling of tree-tops! She was like a force of nature, she *was* a force of nature — eternally fresh, beautiful, spontaneous, regenerative! Given to the borne-down hearts of men to gladden them, uplift them, revivify them!

II

It was over. Ellen Terry had finished the last page of her discourse, she had smiled her final frank, boyish smile at her smiling but tear-misted audience. Because some nice little boy in the audience had asked her to — she had recited "The quality of mercy is not strained," and so forth, as only Ellen Terry could, and only Ellen Terry ever would be able to recite it.

Lydia was out in the street again, walking rapidly

and lightly along Broadway, with a great throng of other people who had come pouring out of the theatres. The air was crisp and exhilarating. The street lights and the lights in the shops glittered through the waning daylight.

More than the invigorating November air exhilarated her. She had never before respected herself merely for being a human creature, for she had never fully understood what a human creature might be of joy and light to others, until this bright radiance of Ellen Terry had fallen on her.

CHAPTER XI

AS she walked over to Fifth Avenue and entering a fashionable hotel made her way to its brilliant tearoom, the brave radiance of that other human creature was still upon her. Alone at her table, and silent, except for a few words interchanged with the waiter, she had a sense nevertheless of participation in the vivacious scene around her. She had been in this tearoom on certain afternoons before when her own separation, her isolation, from her kind, from the kind certainly that attracted her, womenkind particularly, had borne down heavily upon her. But, this afternoon she was neither depressed nor lonely. As she sipped her tea and leisurely ate the cakes she had selected from a tray of pretty cakes offered for her choice, and as she met glances from neighbouring tables, it was almost impossible for her not to nod and smile at these fellow mortals. She felt a strange new sense, very delightful, of human fellowship. After all, we mortals, all so weak, and all so strong, too, were not so far separated from one another. . . . The room seemed full of friends to her — such a nice, new, rather funny sensation it was! Her mind was teeming with fresh perceptions. There were all sorts of noble, sunny possibilities, vague, to be sure, to which she as a human creature might still attain.

She finished her tea, paid the waiter, tipped him liberally, and walked through the crowded rotunda to the main entrance of the hotel, where she lingered a moment, buttoning the last button of her gloves, adjusting her long stole of fur a little closer before she emerged into the nippy air. A swift procession of people brushed by her in and out of the hotel. The eyes of men met hers with frank admiration and with lingering inquiry. But the furtive seeking of her own eyes was more a matter of habit than of actual intent. She was not bent at the moment on adventure. She was merely relishing, half-unconsciously, the admiration she excited, as, in the absence of wholesome food in her life, she fed on the fulsome flattery of the *masseuse* and of the little manicurist. With a slight return of bitterness to her ever-fluctuating heart, she wondered whether all these people who stared at her knew what she was . . . and, in a more practical vein, she was debating with herself whether she had better take the Fifth Avenue 'bus, or walk. She wanted the nearness of the great human stream in the street, and in the 'bus, of all places she knew, she felt least sense of human kinship. She was still wavering, when she became conscious that a couple approaching the hotel from the street were staring at her. The woman's big, black eyes, bold but effulgent, had fixed on her a look of half-recognition, and her companion, who seemed hardly more than an appendage to her own stylish toilette — a small, prosperous, though insignificant-looking man — was peering at Lydia through the thick lenses of his spectacles in an apparently puzzled effort to place her.

She was aware that the big, bold-looking woman had called the little man's attention to her.

In a flash, she realised that it was Mrs. Joy — the Mrs. Joy who controlled and pervaded Maxfield's in Kingsville — the invincible Mrs. Joy, who would have patronised royalty. She recognised the little man with her as Maxfield himself.

Mrs. Joy pushed through the heavy revolving doors, and seized her hand. "My dear, I know you perfectly — *perfectly!* Yet I can't call your name!"

"I don't think you can remember me, Mrs. Joy — I lived in Kingsville years ago," replied Lydia, outwardly composed, smiling a little.

"So stupid of me not to recall your name — but no one would ever forget your face, my dear! I said to Mr. Maxfield — 'There's some one I know, that beautiful woman there in the door!'"

"My name was Lambright."

Mrs. Joy seemed at a loss. "Lambright? Lambright?" She turned to Maxfield, who with smiling patience was awaiting the disclosure of Lydia's identity. "You remember that name?"

He looked questioningly first at Mrs. Joy then at Lydia. "Lambright? — I think I recall the name." But he offered no further elucidation.

"Lambright!" Mrs. Joy exclaimed triumphantly, seizing Lydia's hand afresh. "Of course, of *course!* — Professor Lambright who was at the College, who —" She checked herself, but with the next breath, "You were the little Lambright girl, *of course!* Didn't I sell you a pretty little suit, my dear" — her

voice dropped sympathetically—"just a day or so before your father died?"

Lydia admitted that she had.

"You've married, of course!" Mrs. Joy enveloped her in her luxuriant, plausible smile.

"Yes."

"Your name *now*, dear?" with a lift of her black eyebrows.

"Still Lambright!" laughed Lydia, entirely self-possessed. She understood nowadays how to meet these moments. "I took my own name back."

"So sensible, too, my dear! Of course you had no attachment to the *other* name! " Mrs. Joy's voice had all the rich cadences Lydia remembered in it of yore. "You're living here — in New York?"

"Yes. Won't you come with me, both of you, to my apartment, and have dinner with me?" Her heart beat tempestuously. "I want to hear about Kingsville."

"Oh, my dear, how we would *love* to do that! How *sweet* of you to ask us! How *perfectly* sweet of you! But you see we only came up on business, a flying trip, to look at a bankrupt stock, and we're going back this evening — the nine o'clock train, and we have an appointment, a business appointment, for six-thirty sharp! But my dear, why can't you go right up now with us, to my sitting room, and have a little visit there. Oh, yes, yes, there's quite time enough."

The sitting room proved a spacious, gorgeously furnished apartment. On the mahogany table was an enormous cluster of American Beauty roses in an os-

tentatious cut-glass vase. The merchant — an elderly man with rodent features and a small self-depreciatory moustache — seated himself beside Mrs. Joy on the couch. Lydia said to herself with some amusement that Mrs. Joy had lasted rather well! She looked hardly a day older than when she last saw her.

At first Lydia's inquiries were of a cautious and general character — Had Kingsville grown? Had it changed much? But finally she asked of the Pooles — Did Mrs. Joy know anything about them? — How they were? — Mr. and Mrs. Poole who lived on Hill Avenue.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, they've been dead years, *years!*"

"Not — not both of them?" Lydia asked, shocked, incredulous.

"Yes, yes, indeed! Died very near together. I remember so well because I attended to her widow's mourning for her — such a pretty old dear, wasn't she? — and he hardly cold in his grave, yes, actually, hardly cold in his grave, before the old lady followed him — heart, or something of the kind, I think they said. You knew them, did you?"

Lydia smiled pluckily, but there was an ache in her heart. Why had it never occurred to her that the Pooles might be dead? She was wrung with remorse. It seemed to her that nothing else in her life was so unforgivable as her ingratitude to the Pooles. She was afraid, now, to ask of old Dr. Dunbar. He, too, was dead, of course.

II

But there was one curiosity clamouring for satisfaction — one question she wished to ask above every other. "Mr. Ransom Churchwell," her pulses were throbbing, "he is — well? And handsome as ever?"

"Oh, my dear, *handsomer*, handsomer than ever! His hair snow-white, you know! By the way, I have two gowns and an evening wrap — very smart! — right there in my trunk now that I'm taking back to *Mrs.* Churchwell! She wanted something — unusual, don't you know, and she always counts on me for that sort of thing! She's really quite the smartest dresser in Kingsville now!"

It was not of Ransom Churchwell's wife that Lydia wanted to hear. "The Churchwells are happy, I suppose?" she ventured to throw out, at last, as a feeler.

Mrs. Joy's lips closed over her glistening teeth in an indulgent grimace. "Oh, well, you know how those things are in this day and time, my dear! It's a day of liberty, don't you think so? I don't think Mrs. Churchwell bothers herself much about his little — deflections, so to speak! The Churchwell blood, you know! She had to expect that sort of thing." She shook her big head mischievously. "Oh, yes, he's quite a ladies' man still."

The little merchant broke in with a loud guffaw of laughter. "Decidedly yes!" he agreed, the first words he had offered. "I should say so — a ladies' man!"

After all these years, resentment . . . jealousy, a devouring flame, leaped within Lydia.

Before she left the hotel she had telegraphed Ransom Churchwell—"Can you come to me at once?"

CHAPTER XII

SWIFT as wires could bring it, she had had his answer; he would leave Kingsville on the first train.

In the hours since, the hours of the intervening day and of the two intervening nights and now of this day — Saturday had come — it seemed to her that she had lived through every emotion of which the heart is capable.

She had sent a long telegram to the head brother at Peter's school; Peter was not to come to her on Saturday; she would wire not later than Sunday morning when he *might* come; he was to be assured it would be very soon, very likely she would come out to the school for him herself Sunday or Monday. She did not dare dwell on Peter's inconsolable childish grief when he knew the Saturday visit he had been counting on was to be postponed.

But it was out of the question that Peter should be present during the first moments of her meeting with his father.

Ransom Churchwell, Peter's father! With every moment that brought Churchwell nearer, it was harder to believe.

She was waiting for him now in almost delirious excitement. She saw the objects about her through a

haze like the quivering haze of intense summer heat. She was so weak she could scarcely walk across the room, and water stood out in little beads on her hands and forehead. She had dressed herself with great care; she was afraid that she might look old to him — and not as he remembered her.

She had put on a gown of some crêpy white fabric, girlishly fashioned, and she had tried to do without cosmetics, but without them her face looked featureless and unattractive to her and she had at last to resort to the accustomed aids.

She had left off diamonds and her more glaringly expensive ornaments, but she had not denied herself certain effective adjuncts to her appearance — shoes of emerald green leather; an antique jewel at her throat on a narrow black ribbon, a curious jewel of green enamel and brilliants; and an antique ring, companion to the jewel at her throat.

II

It was four o'clock. She had counted that he might possibly arrive at four. Perhaps the train was late — in that blessed way she remembered Southern things had of always being late! She felt as if she could not endure the suspense much longer. Her mind flew back to the brief lines of his telegram — "I am coming, Lydia, first train. Arrive New York Saturday three-thirty. Ransom."

Ah, he was the same Ransom Churchwell — that warm, spontaneous, appealing-to-be-forgiven touch — "I am coming, Lydia!" Who but Ransom Church-

well would have put it that way? Wild longing took possession of her; followed swiftly by dread, gnawing fears.

And when at length she knew that it was he whom she heard the elevator stopping at her floor to let off, *he*, ringing the bell of her apartment, Ransom Churchwell, the god of her childhood, the worshipped love of her maidenhood — the father of Peter, her poor little beloved Peter, something hard and icy touched her heart. A wave more of hate than of love swept through her as she heard him ask for her at the door in his deep, unchanged voice, that magic voice and intonation of the South!

She reached for a cigarette, lit it hurriedly, and blew a thin column of smoke from her lips. He did not move from the door where the maid had left him, he did not speak her name, nor she his. In all the passionately turbulent years of her life nothing had been like this moment — this interminable moment. He stood looking at her, and she, half-reclining against the cushions of the divan, at him, the soft light of late afternoon shining over the roofs and chimneys of the great city and softly through the windows back of her.

III

"He does not look as I thought he did! . . . He looks old!" A slight pang of pity for him shot through her heart. Yet she realised and with another, very different pang, that he looked thoroughly well-conditioned, not like a man who had known suffering or deprivation of any kind. And of all the percep-

tions and emotions crowding on her, something queerly like pride was in her observation that in his clothes and bearing he was wholly like the city men her eyes were accustomed to now.

The most curious thing to her was, that it did not seem to her that this *was* really Ransom Churchwell — this tall, graceful man.

And she was vaguely conscious that similar unrealities were oppressing him as he stood silent, his head a little bowed.

"Lydia, I came — as you asked me to — didn't you?" he said finally, and the tones of his voice, deep and tender, with the indefinable charm of the Southern cadence, made him again seem real to her, as when she had caught the first sound of his voice at the outer door.

"Won't you have a chair?" she said, smiling coolly, and with the hand on which shone the antique ring, a big blur of green and brilliants, she motioned to the chair nearest the divan.

He took the chair she indicated, answering her with a smile as slight and casual as her own. Their hands did not extend to one another in greeting, and their eyes met with something akin to hostility. Indeed, it seemed to her, that here, where she had but to put out her fingers and touch him, he was worlds and worlds separated from her, farther from her than he had ever been — even in Kingsville when she had looked off from afar at him across the impassable gulf which had separated them then.

This unexpected sense of his distance and separation

from her was agony. The old savage desire for exclusive possession seized her. She felt she would rather die than have to continue to live with the knowledge that he was no longer *hers!*

"Won't you smoke?" She held out to him her gold cigarette case.

He shook his head. "No, not now, thank you," his eyes puzzled, and displeased or sad, she could not tell which.

She rose quickly from the divan, forcing a little laugh. "Ah, perhaps you don't fancy my Russian tobacco, my cigarettes are too mild for you! " She offered him his choice of Egyptian and Turkish cigarettes and of several English and American brands. But he answered her lightly that if she really wished him to smoke, and would pardon his incivility, he preferred his own manufacture to any other, and taking a pouch of tobacco and a book of papers from his pocket, he filled and rolled a cigarette with the familiar movements she recalled as characteristic of him. Curiously enough, with this perfectly trivial performance, he became all at once thoroughly himself to her.

But before she bared her own heart, he must bare his. "Is Kingsville — the same old Kingsville?" she asked, with a laugh, but her heart beating convulsively.

"It hasn't changed — beyond recognition!" His smile was a trifle ironic.

"I always think of it," she said, with deliberate malice, puffing slowly at her cigarette, "I always think of it as the quintessence of the provincial — as the

most deliciously narrow-minded, self-satisfied town the sun ever shone on!"

A gleam of amusement came into his eyes. "Yes, very provincial," he assented indulgently. "Very old-fashioned and provincial. The only place on earth, I suppose," slowly, "where there are still any of the virtues left!"

"I'm sure you refer to feminine virtues — those that are left!" she retorted. "Kingsville men were never distinguished for their virtues, were they?"

A look of understanding passed between them. Through the tense stillness she heard the muffled roar of the street traffic outside and she could hear with extraordinary, almost irritating distinctness the sharp ticking of a clock in the room.

He broke the stillness. "Lydia, I have some natural curiosity. Why did you send for me? Can I be of use to you? I judge you've left your husband, from the fact you've taken back your name."

She looked at him. astounded. "My husband!" she breathed. And then she saw him start.

"Good God, you're married, aren't you?"

A ghost of a smile flitted across her face. "Married? Not exactly. . . ."

"You don't mean to say — you were *never* married? Why, you wrote the Pooles —"

"Yes, I wrote the Pooles —" she interrupted him, her voice ominously calm.

"Why, what does it mean, then? You've evidently been very successful — in *some* line!" His eyes ran swift and puzzled over the luxurious rooms.

"Yes, very successful!" she answered slowly, in a barely audible voice.

Everything inside her seemed somehow breaking up, leaving her naked and defenceless before him. Her lower lip was quivering — quivering exactly as long years ago it had quivered when Miss Barker scolded her for a torn or soiled dress.

"Very successful — in an old, old line!" she said. Her eyes were riveted on his with strange wistfulness. . . . And then he sprang from his chair and had her in his arms. And to her the whole roof of the universe was riven, and heaven descended!

"My poor little Lydia!" he cried brokenly, holding her to him, comprehending everything. "My poor little Lydia!"

CHAPTER XIII

"OH, you poor little fierce heart, what you've passed through! And your beauty and charm not damaged, dear, no, not a bit!" He held her face in his hands and gazed at it.

They had been talking now a long time. It seemed, they both said, as if, if they talked together the rest of their lives, they would never finish all that they had to say to each other.

She had disclosed to him her life, almost without reservation, and he had understood her, and all the motives that had actuated her, even better than she had ever understood herself. She had told him things she had not dreamed would ever pass her lips. And in the telling, there was a feeling of victory, not shame, victory over herself. From this confessional, she was to arise cleansed, with power to begin life anew, aright.

But there was one burden on her soul that she did not cast off — the theft of Faidley's money. Ransom Churchwell could forgive her all the infamous things she had revealed to him — she could still be his love, his "little Lydia," after it all. But she would never be the same to him again — if he knew her a thief! He would always think of her, always see her, a thief. No, she could never tell him. That knowledge she must bear alone.

II

For the second time he said: "The miracle to me, Lydia, is how you have ever lived through it all!"

She had told him of her struggles through the first years after Peter was born; had told him a little, not much — some reticence here she barely comprehended held her back — of those stupefied, trancelike days, in the little room over Rathemacher's grocery-shop, before Peter's birth; told him of buying the wedding-ring and putting it on her finger and wearing it for years, and with that he had broken down and sobbed. She had told him how in the evenings after her day's work, she and Peter would play their exciting happy-sad game of choosing out of the shop-windows what they would have for theirs, if they could. "My poor little babes!" he had cried, in an agony of remorse. . . .

They talked, now, both of them, as if all the troubles were over, as if, now they were together again, all of evil and sorrow that had been in the past was over forever, as if there were no more problems of existence to be faced. To Lydia, for all the sadness of it, the hour was so rich, so happy, it seemed to pay for all the suffering she had ever known.

III

"You don't see how I endured it, you don't see how I've ever lived at all, with the disgrace and ignominy, and those years of humiliation when I was a servant . . . and everything since. Why, Ransom, life's so

queer — I've found out that! I've had moments, I have them every day, I don't know whether I can explain to you exactly, but the street lights reflected in long, shining paths across the pavements on a wet night, or a scent you catch that brings back something in the past to you, or just the dry crackle of leaves under your feet in the fall, or the outlines of trees, like those tall, graceful, delicate trees you see in France, with their little trembling tuft of leaves at the top — why, little things like that — move me — I can't tell you how — to such unbounded delight! And they're always occurring, every day, so that you can live along . . . and endure things . . . the other things! And then, of course, I've had — Peter! He's bad sometimes, very often in fact, he's a real boy, but . . . well, he's just Peter; I can't describe him! Really, you can't imagine how adorable Peter is!"

"Oh, yes, I can, too! He's the son of an adorable mother!"

He held her close, in an impassioned embrace, till she was almost impatient of his ardour — she wanted to tell him all about Peter. It flashed through her that his two children, his legitimate children, the two born before she left Kingsville — she did not know what children there might have been since — would be big lads now. Violent jealousy for Peter's rights gripped her — Peter who had known nothing of all the benefits of Ransom Churchwell for a father that those other boys had known. Every atom of the universe was glorified since Ransom Churchwell had come back into her life; but down in the deeps of her heart was

a love for Peter, Peter whom she had worked for, whom she had suffered with — more tender, more utterly inalienable, greater than any other love she could ever know. It welled up very strong in her now.

"He will be so disappointed — poor little chap — that he couldn't come to-day. It's been months since we've seen each other, such a long time — for both of us!"

And then, for the first time, she broke down completely herself, and cried softly and a long time, her head on Churchwell's shoulder — his stroking hands, his lips on her wet cheek, striving to console her.

"But you see — Peter — I know how he is," she answered chokingly to Churchwell's sympathetic words, "I know just how he is — he's had so many disappointments, and he's so stormy and intense . . . his heart will be broken! He won't believe in me any longer! He'll be so desolate, and feel so deserted — he'll want to die! Oh, I know, I've been through it all . . . what he's going through —"

"Hush, hush, dear, I know! I know! You've been through so much, and now the flood-gates are unloosed at last! I know! But Peter's only a child — you can make it up to him, you can make him forget it in a minute — you can see him to-morrow! It's all right, it's all right, little Lydia, don't cry any more! We'll make it up to Peter to-morrow!"

He even teased her a little, and told her he was jealous of Peter, and that if she didn't stop crying, he should have to go, and Peter would have to come and take his place, as he could not make her happy.

After a while, she smiled once more, and they talked together again of things in the past, and in the present — not yet of things in the future.

The room was dark now. Lydia rose, turned on the lights in one of the softly-shaded lamps, and left the room. She did not want him to see her face stained with tears.

IV

There was one point in their talk that did not satisfy her. An old suspicion that had haunted her ceaselessly during those numb, lonely days when she was waiting for Peter's birth came back now to torment her with fresh force, no matter what they spoke of, no matter how resolutely she tried to put it away from her.

"Ransom, I want you to tell me one thing —" she said, fixing her eyes on him solemnly. He was sitting by her, her hands fast in his, telling her with every breath all she was to him, all he had suffered in losing her from his life . . . how poorly existence had compensated him for giving her up. "Ransom, tell me one thing. You must not shrink from telling me, for I'm sure I could forgive you anything. Why, look what you've forgiven *me!* But I must know — you can't believe how it's tormented me all these years! . . . Ransom, did you suspect my condition when you sent me that last letter — when you left me . . . here . . . alone?"

His hands tightened on hers convulsively. "Lydia, for God's sake, how can you ask me that? I've been

reprobate enough, God knows, but I'm not entirely devoid of decency!"

She wanted to believe him. Oh, never had she wanted anything more in her life! "You swear — you swear it — Ransom? That you didn't suspect anything?"

"I swear it! I swear it! I swear by everything holy that I did not dream —"

"No, no, don't swear by everything holy, Ransom," she broke in on him, in a low voice. "An oath by the old God that no one believes in any longer, that you don't believe in yourself, only you're afraid to say so, because . . . because you're a Kingsvillian — an oath of that kind, the old kind, doesn't satisfy me! I must know, oh, Ransom, I must *know* the truth! I must know the truth! There's only one name I know you wouldn't swear falsely by, it's not God's, it's not God's! It's my father's!" she cried. "It's my father's name!" She felt Churchwell's hands loosen their hold on hers and her heart died within her. "Swear by the name of my father, Ransom!"

His lips worked, but they uttered no sound. He moved away from her, freeing himself from her touch, even from the contact of her garments.

"You have my answer," he said, at last, in a toneless voice.

She hid her face. She could not look on his shame.

After a long while, he said, speaking as if he were lifting some great load on his breast with every word he uttered — "I couldn't swear falsely . . . by the name . . . of my friend . . . your father. . . ."

Terrible, endless moments passed. Then he spoke again, "You know me a coward. There is nothing lower for a man to confess to, than what I've confessed to — what you *made* me confess to! I wasn't man enough to confess it otherwise. A coward there, too, you see!" he added, with bitterness, almost with resentment.

Looking up, she saw that he had bent over, dropping his head into his hands.

"Ransom," she said falteringly. She did not know just why she spoke his name. She was flooded with such strangely mingled, contradictory emotions. "Ransom!" But she could not say more. Everything in the world had become suddenly utterly hopeless.

"I don't know, Lydia — I don't know but it's more contemptible to try to explain than to keep silent. But I want to say, anyhow, that though I did suspect something — from what you threw out . . . that day we were in the country — I had an idea you'd be able to take care of things all right, yourself — if I left you money to see things through with. All men, I suppose, dread such complications. . . . No, no, I'll take that back! I won't implicate other men! I won't undertake to say how they feel or how they would act under similar circumstances! I won't implicate other men in my guilt! Perhaps I'm the lowest of my sex. . . . I don't know . . . but anyhow, I didn't dream things would go on . . . and there would be a child. . . . I suppose I didn't properly estimate your innocence . . . and I thought that if I provided you with

money, you'd get along all right. . . . Of course, I can't remember exactly the line of reasoning I followed at the time . . . it's a long time ago. . . . But I knew through it all, I loved you, as I'd never loved any one else . . . and as I never shall love any one else. . . ."

With this expressionless, passionless statement of his love for her, something more completely reassuring swept over her than had in moments of his most burning declarations. . . . Afterwards, many times, she was to bring back to her mind the way, precisely the way, he was speaking to her now of his love for her, bring it back to cherish it — the most radiant jewel in her memory of him.

"I knew how I loved you," he went on. "I knew it was getting — dangerous, for both of us, the way the attachment was growing . . . and of course there were many things to be taken into consideration . . . with both of us . . . and so it seemed the only thing was . . . to break off. . . . And soon afterwards I heard from Mr. Poole you were married — you'd written them. I didn't doubt it — you believe that, don't you? — and I was greatly relieved that it was so!"

V

Several times, in his slow, painful, toneless talk, Churchwell had dropped into the Kingsville vernacular. How odd the once familiar expressions sounded in Lydia's ears! "I don't reckon," he said, rather helplessly, "I don't reckon there's anything lower for

a man to admit than — cowardice, but such as I am, Lydia, I offer myself to you, for your use, as you will with me. I'll try to atone the best I can for all the suffering I've brought on you — for what I've caused you to become — I'll try to atone for my cowardice! I'll give my life, the rest of it, to making everything as — good, for you, as I can, for you and the boy!"

"Oh, Ransom, Ransom!" she cried, "oh, don't look the way you do, don't look the way you do! That's all I ask! Oh, my dearest, my beloved, my one love, why, don't you know I forgive you? Oh, I forgive you everything! Suppose you were cowardly, you didn't know what it would all lead to — and . . . and, Ransom, never mind, never mind, forget everything — except our love! Except *that!*"

She drew him to her arms and rained kisses upon his drawn face. She lavished endearments on him in a frenzy of love and pity. She could not bear to see him so abased before her. "Oh, Ransom, my darling, my lover! We're not gods and goddesses! We're just men and women . . . and we're capable of so much that's bad, but then we're capable of so much that's good, too! And you're so big and generous and splendid in a thousand ways! Oh, my own love, how could I live at all in your sight — think of *that*" — she whispered — "with the wickedness you know of me — if I hadn't found this one blot on your escutcheon!" She wrapped him in her love, comforted him, brought him back after a while to a better esteem of himself, into close sympathy with her. . . . At last, they could smile together again, talk and plan.

VI

He spoke of nothing else so earnestly now as of atonement. At first, she had hardly understood him, hardly dared understand what he meant. He had given, he said, the best of his life to others who had claims upon him, now *her* claims should be considered. He could provide for his wife and children well — they would have the home, and he would arrange that they should have by far the greater part of all he possessed. For his little *new* family — at this they both laughed, though a little shyly — he would retain only a little, enough to start with, but he would give himself, and all his energies, to them — all the years to come — to them!

They talked of things practically, and joyously, and finally almost with exaltation. It was as if they had been snatched from barely-averted death back into the full warm tide of life; they could not be thankful enough for their escape, happy enough. He was to go back ,to Kingsville the next evening, where — secretly as possible, there was no need to raise a hue and cry till he was actually gone — he would make arrangements. It was quite useless, he said, to consider divorce, because there were no legal grounds on which he could secure a divorce from his wife, and she was so constituted that she would never procure one from him, particularly if she thought he desired it. He did not speak of his children except in a general term as his "children," and a certain timidity restrained Lydia from questioning him.

At a rose-decked, exquisitely appointed table, their dinner was served them, a dinner brimming full, overflowing with happy excitement. Of the two of them, Lydia felt he was the more intoxicated with all these anticipations. Neither of them ate or drank much, and she assured him laughingly that she had not supposed anything in the world could diminish a man's zest for his dinner! He praised her taste in the meal that was served, and she received his praise with a queerly mingled shame and pride. They talked of old days together . . . spoke of *Mephisto's*, in hushed voices, remembering the torrential passion of their first, fresh love. *Mephisto's* was gone out of existence now, she told him, closed forever. But their love, they whispered to each other, that had survived *Mephisto's!*

And then after the coffee and liqueurs and cigarettes they planned again. She got out her Baedeker's and they studied maps. For now they were considering in what country they would begin their life together. He thought it had better be an English-speaking country; except a fool college French, and precious little even of that, he was able to speak only his own language; and they would have to depend to a great extent on his future activities, because the property that he felt justified in converting into cash would only support them for a short time. He wished to provide too well, rather than not well enough, for those left behind, and she agreed with him heartily. They, he and she, must make the material sacrifices, because they would have always the great compensation — their love! . . . Would she be afraid to face poverty with

him? Oh, no, no, no! After what she had known, how sweet poverty would be with him, her lover, Ransom Churchwell, hers now forever!

They talked of Bermuda and of the Bahamas, of Jamaica and Canada, and even of Alaska. They spoke of England, but England, they realised almost at once, was not for them! England was too staid, too law-abiding to the marrow of her, for such as they, more or less vagabonds henceforth. No, not England.

Australia they dwelt on longer and with more hope, looking over together routes and steam-ship sailings. . . . But all that could be settled in the days immediately to come. "While I'm gone, you, Miss Aristotle," he said, with something of the old mischievous look in his eyes, "you, with your ubiquitous knowledge, can be weighing the relative advantages for us of these different countries!"

"The only thing I fear, Ransom, is that some day, when you can never go back any more, you'll feel this terrible homesickness for Kingsville that I feel, and —"

"For Kingsville — the 'quintessence of the provincial'— wasn't that what you called it?" he interrupted her, pinching her cheek. "So you think that *my* provincial soul will never be content away from the congenial provincialism of its native place!"

"Seriously, Ransom, nothing, nothing, has been harder for me to bear than the thought that I can never go back to Kingsville again! You see you don't know yet what that feeling is — *exile!* I could never describe to you what it feels like, but it's an awful rest-

lessness that never leaves you, a burning envy of every one who can stay there, who can live in Kingsville when you can't, and it's a dull pain in you somewhere that never ceases, never, day or night! Why, Ransom, there have been times when I've felt I'd rather — I'd rather "— her voice shook with stifled sobs —" be back in Kingsville and be one of those miserable little waif dogs that used to pick up scraps around the Market House than to be the grandest person in the world anywhere else!"

"Lydia, poor little child! You'll have a part of Kingsville with you all the time, after this. A poor part, but a part. Perhaps this poor part can make up to you . . . a little. . . ."

"You'll think it's ridiculous," she began again, when she could command her voice once more, "you'll think it's ridiculous, but it's true — what do you suppose I loved the best in London — the pictures in the National Gallery? No — the smell!"

He laughed.

"Yes, actually, the smell, that smell that every one else hates! And because the smell of London is just like the smell of Kingsville! It's the soft-coal smoke and something soft and damp in the air. Why, the first time I went to London, I was simply mad with joy . . . and sadness, too, because it smelled like — home!"

Her voice caught again, with her last word.

"You're thinking about Kingsville, now!" he said. "Your eyes are a thousand miles away!" He bent over her and kissed her absent eyes.

She smiled happily, though a little wistfully.

"Why, here!" he teased her, "I see I'm going to be even more jealous of Kingsville than of Peter!"

She laughed and snuggled closer to him. There was something so comforting in his breast for her head, weary with trying to worry out life alone, in the feel of his strong arms about her.

"I'll tell *you* the truth, now, child of my dreams," he admitted, bending over her again, "*I* don't feel any such passion for Kingsville as you confess to!"

"But you don't know —"

"Oh, I don't think I ever should, under any circumstances. You've idealised Kingsville, Lydia!"

"Oh, no," she objected, "it was just that way years ago, when I lived there, even when I was a little child — I hated the place, but all the time I absolutely adored it — just as you adore people and hate them at the same time! . . . Of course, I was only an alien there, really, and there's no place else in the world, I suppose, where an alien is more truly an alien than in Kingsville!"

"I have an idea, Lydia, that perhaps it is just because you were an alien that you've accumulated all this sentiment about Kingsville. Why, the place is full of my aunts and cousins — the whole population is my —"

"'Kin'!" — she supplied, her eyes smiling up at him. She knew the word he would have used.

"Yes, 'kin'l The town was founded by my ancestors and all that, and yet, frankly, it won't give me much of a wrench to leave Kingsville — itself." — his

voice faltered a little, but almost immediately he went on in an ordinary tone—"I know Kingsville better than you do, Lydia; I have no illusions about Kingsville! Oh, I can live away from Kingsville, I promise you!"

"I always thought it must be the height of happiness to live where your ancestors have lived, and your aunts and cousins, all your kindred, around you. . . . I've always been so solitary myself. . . ." Her eyes looked off into space again.

"It's far nearer the height of happiness to dwell where your love dwells — wherever that is!" he whispered. "And never mind, treasure, Peter and I'll be aunts and cousins to you! You shall never be solitary any more!"

VII

The hour of leave-taking came; and now he spoke to her openly of his wife. "I'm not afraid it'll hurt her, except her pride," he said. "I've treated her with consideration, I think, during our married life, the sort of consideration she wanted, and I believe she has affection for me — we've never bickered, she's not the fury you are, child of my heart, so there have never been any scenes. But I believe once the blow to her pride is healed — and it will be — she'll get a great deal of sympathy, the whole town will give it to her — she'll be all right. She's a woman to whom her own physical comfort is the supreme consideration in life. Fortunately I won't have to interfere with that. I can leave her enough to assure that permanently, and

so I don't think I shall be doing her an irreparable wrong in removing myself! You think, Lydia, because I've never known poverty or any special deprivation in a material way, that I haven't tasted any of the bitter of life, but I have! Why, dear, one moment, such as I've known with you, has had more joy in it for me than the whole sixteen years with her put together!" They were standing in the long, dimly-lighted hall, and he held her slim, white-clad figure to him. "Your little finger, the very tip of your little finger, child," he told her, huskily, "is more precious to me than all of her — ever was!"

In the midst of the wonder of it — that it was all just as it had been before, all those years ago — the torturing delight, the same exquisite, wild ecstasy — Maxfield's coarse guffaw smote on her ears again, "A ladies' man — I should say so!" She savoured with whirlwind fury other women clasped in his arms as she now! "Oh, Ransom, I can't endure, I can't endure it, the thought of the women — in these years we've been separated! Tell me, tell me, you didn't *love* them, any of them, those women, since . . . since . . . you left me. . . ."

He crushed her to his heart. "When will you ever understand? Oh, my sweetheart, my sweetheart, in my heart has been but one image — yours! Many, many times, in these years we've been separated, I've waked in the dead of night with your name on my lips! Oh, you *must* understand, child, that you, you alone, have fulfilled the dreams of my youth and my manhood!"

Their lips met. "Till to-morrow!" he whispered. And then she was alone, staggered with happiness, though a feeling of the unreality of all that had happened stole over her as soon as he had vanished, as soon as flesh and blood he was removed from the touch of her fingers.

CHAPTER XIV

IN the morning, they were to take the train out to Peter's school. How overjoyed Peter would be to see them! Lydia was quite sure Churchwell would win Peter; but she was not to reveal at once his identity; Peter must be gradually prepared for the announcement that the Indian fighter, his father, had not after all been killed, but was here, alive and well, to live with them forevermore. She and Churchwell would have to do some rehearsing together on the details of those Indian fights in which she had made him so gallant a figure.

They could invent between them some explanation to account for the years of his absence and silence. Peter would not, she thought, interrogate them embarrassingly. He would sense at once, in the uncanny way he had of sensing such things, that there was some mystery here he was not intended to solve, and he would not attempt to solve it, at least not through them. She realised with a shock that he would always be mystified about his parents and their past lives, just as she had always been about hers. But, at any rate, he was going to have a great deal of recompense now in a happy future — in a "regalar" father such as he had envied the "other boys," in a real home, at last, somewhere.

II

In the morning, she heard Churchwell's voice at the door much earlier than she had expected. Why had he come so early? A feeling of foreboding came over her. She was not ready to join him, but without changing her delicate negligé garment, her hair tucked up carelessly, she ran with a faint outcry to the door of the little salon.

"Ransom!" The name froze on her lips; she put out her hand to the door-frame for support. All she was to learn, she learned then, the instant her eyes beheld him. He was rising from a chair, weakly and uncertainly; his face was ashy and haggard; he looked like an old man. There was a defenceless look in his imploring eyes.

But it was not pity for him that convulsed her body! Later, not then.

A kind of unholy lightness seized on her, an ecstasy of fear, hate, despair!

"Why didn't you send me a note — again — with some bills in it? It would have been easier for you — wouldn't it?" she asked.

"Lydia!"

"Oh, you don't need to tell me anything! I know everything you have to say! I'll spare you saying it! But don't wait for the night train! Don't linger to make any explanations to me! Fly to safety — to the arms of your wife whom you must save from all inconvenience, now you've had the night to think it over! I can stand these blows! I'm used to them! I'm ac-

quainted with the whole gamut of perdition! But not your wife, your spotless Seraphina —"

"You don't understand, Lydia. There are others —"

"Yes, *others!* Your children, your Kingsville children — those with Seraphina's pure blood in their veins! Not Peter, it's not Peter you're thinking of!" she cried.

He came closer to her, until they were only an arm's length apart. "One of my children, Lydia, is afflicted! I can't —"

"Don't tell me anything of your children — *those* children! I'm not interested in them — nor their afflictions," pitilessly. "There's only one of your children that interests me — and he's afflicted, too, past cure, afflicted with every drop of blood in his poor little body — 'Churchwell blood'! The famous 'Churchwell blood'!" she taunted him, almost in a whisper, through her colourless lips.

"I forgot everything last night, Lydia," he managed to say, managed to make her hear. "I forgot reason and honour and everything. . . ."

"Honour!" she repeated jeeringly.

"Yes, honour," he said steadily. "You must sit down and let me talk to you sanely."

"No, I won't let you talk to me sanely! What do I want of sanity?" She stamped weakly on the floor. "I don't want to hear anything you have to say, not anything!" The silken folds of her negligé had fallen apart, disclosing her bare throat and breast and the lace of her night-dress. "I don't want to hear any-

thing!" she reiterated passionately. "You came back into my life, into this gilded hell where I live — yes, oh, yes, I'm talking coarsely, my life's not been as guarded as Seraphina's, I've words in my vocabulary doubtless she doesn't need in hers. You came back into my life and raised my hopes — oh, Ransom, Ransom," she buried her face in her hands, "you raised my hopes to heaven!"

He tried to put his arms around her, but she thrust him away from her.

"And now . . . now . . . you've come to tell me that, after all, it's better just to let me stay in hell — where you found me, than to disturb Seraphina's peace! I have the means to kill you," she said, lowering her voice to a whisper; "I have the means — near at hand! A woman in my position wouldn't live, you know, without the means to put some one else or herself out of existence quickly!"

"Take your pleasure with me, Lydia," he answered, not without dignity. "Death is not terrible to me, now. It is only life that is terrible. I would have finished myself last night, after I left you, when I realised everything — the ruin I should work whichever way I acted! If I were seeking merely the easy thing to do, I would have put an end to myself —"

"Oh, I'm not so sure of that! Not so sure of that!" she laughed derisively in his face. "These 'Southern gentlemen' — their 'chivalry' — their bravery — it's a myth, largely! I doubt very much if you have the courage to put an end to yourself!"

Suddenly she stopped herself.

Through the closed windows came faintly the sound of church-bells.

"Church-bells!" she exclaimed. "Do you hear them? They're calling you back to pass the plate at St. Mark's next Sunday morning — as usual!"

He tried to break in on her, tried to explain why he could not desert his responsibilities in Kingsville, why that brief, ecstatic dream of theirs the night before, of some secret corner of the world where they could be each other's forever, was impossible. When he insisted on providing in future for her and Peter's maintenance, she repulsed his offer with fury. He tried to make her understand that his love for her had never been greater or more pitiful than at this moment, but she would not let him put the weight of his finger on her. She would hear nothing. She commanded him to leave her. "This is my dwelling-place — you dictate who shall come into your house — I dictate in mine!" She would not see his outstretched arms, or heed his entreaties, or listen to her name whispered over and over.

III

The outer door closed behind him. He had taken her at her word. Her eyes looked blankly in the direction he had gone. He must come back, if only for a moment! She must touch him! She must feel his lips, his arms! She must hear him call her "Lydia" just once, again!

"Ransom, come back! I can't live without you, Ransom! Come back!"

She listened. Were those his returning footsteps she heard in the hall outside her apartment? They died away. . . . She could hear the elevator ascending and descending, ascending and descending. Men in silk hats and women in handsome clothes were starting out to church, and little proper children in nice Sabbath garments. She heard the church-bells clanging again. The room was full of sunshine, Sabbath sunshine, subtly different from week-day sunshine. . . . Church-bells and Sabbath sunshine. . . . But for her the sun was blotted out forever. Ransom Churchwell was gone, irrevocably this time, out of her life.

BOOK III

THE GLEAM

CHAPTER I

MASSES of ice floated by in the turbid Arno on which the windows of the Pension Paggi looked down. For Italy, it was a winter of extreme severity, and the *confort moderne*, which the Pension Paggi advertised, being of course a quite relative expression, was not interpreted by beautiful Signora Paggi, nor furnished her patrons, in terms of heat. There were the same inadequate provisions for heating this otherwise delightful — and its delights were many — Pension Paggi, that Lydia had known so well in her childhood and girlhood in Kingsville. After all, there must be much that is alike in all Southern climes. She found a sort of tantalising pleasure, here as elsewhere, in fancying even the least resemblance to that old Southern town in her own country which she would never see again.

Indeed, days with fiercely hot sun that kept breaking in on the snow and storms of this Florentine winter were very like those springlike, sweet-promising, fickle days she remembered of a Kingsville winter.

She had dreamed all her life — as who that dreams at all has not dreamed? — of Italy. And now she was in Italy. There had been the first few, almost inevitable, shocks. She could not reconcile herself at once

to the Southern churches, to their motley outer garb, their convict's stripes of black and white; to an inner aspect of them she found bare and forbidding, or on the other hand, and more often, too frivolously gorgeous. She felt she must always love better the great grey churches her eyes had beheld first, the great churches of England and of France, athwart whose mysterious inner gloom she remembered rich dark rays piercing slantingly through jewelled windows. She felt she must always care more for Northern churches and like better Northern galleries — she was fatigued with Holy Families and Saint Sebastians. She derived small joy from Botticelli's delicate minor tones, and no particular pleasure from his sad, visionary faces. She marvelled that people so much loved the Della Robbias with their vivid, uncompromising yellows and blues and greens — their sweet naïveté had not yet touched her.

Nevertheless, when she rose these winter mornings, her bed chamber flooded with sun, and looked out to the hills across the Arno, those velvet Tuscan hills, silvery with their ancient olive orchards, when she looked up at the tall, solemn cypresses that in gloomy grandeur pointed the sky from the hill of San Miniato, she said to herself, catching her breath, "There is no place else in the world so beautiful as this!"

And as a turn of a dark, narrow street in her morning wanderings brought her an unexpected and enchanting vista of Brunelleschi's great dome or of Arnolfo's slender, flower-like tower, as she came upon a peeling way-side fresco of the Virgin, the blink of a little light before some dark street-corner shrine, or looked up to

a sky — never so blue before — as she heard in her ears day-long that soft, incomparable melody of Italian voices — such life, laughter, sobs, colour — such very tissue of drama everywhere — she would say to herself, again breathlessly, "No, no other land like this!"

So she said, too, when alone, or with Mr. Van Antwerp, she looked down from windings of the Viale de' Colli to Florence shimmering below in the afternoon sunshine, or from the heights of Fiesole, where on a lofty terrace they often had their tea — Florence far below, all her towers and domes bathed in the rosy light of the setting sun, the Arno winding through like a silver ribbon.

But for the healing of this Italy — in whose beauty she had been so soon thereafter immersed — she did not know how she could have lived through the weeks — three months past now — since Churchwell's second coming back into her life had left the world empty. She believed she could hardly have continued to live but for Italy — and Peter.

One evening towards the end of February she stood at her chamber window watching the lights on the hill of San Miniato opposite as one by one they pierced with silver the purple dusk. She wore a strand of small pearls and a narrow black fillet bound her hair, and over the delicate violet of her thin gown she had thrown a white evening cloak edged with fur, for she was perpetually chilly, and in the evenings and mornings sometimes suffered acutely from cold. She had left off wearing her more conspicuous ornaments, and though she thought she looked more attractive with

cosmetics, she had for the time given up using them. She wished above all things to be considered a lady by the people at the Pension Paggi.

The door that led into an adjoining chamber was slightly ajar, and she could hear Mr. Van Antwerp, who had just come in, moving around soft-footedly in his room, dressing for dinner, she presumed — she had not seen him since morning.

In the afternoon mail she had had a letter from Peter, forwarded from a Paris address. She smiled to herself. The letter was unusually brief for Peter — but how like Peter!

"*Dear Mother,*

"You said they wasnt theives in this school but they is. I found my skates. I found them on a boy and he has now got 2 black eyes and a bloody nose.

"Your loveing son

"PETER LAMBRIGHT

"P.S. I knew they was mine I had a mark on them. Peter."

Poor, impetuous Peter — how many battles were ahead of him. Well, he forgave as quickly — that was to be remembered.

Between Lydia and the silver lights up on San Miniato, between her and dark-flowing Arno below, Peter's face thrust itself, his face as it had impressed itself upon her in the days they had spent together in her apartment after Churchwell left her. For she had clung to Peter then. In his little-boy innocence, and in his boundless happiness at being with her again, his

delight with the treasures she had prepared for him, he had been her stay during those terrible days. She had thrown herself with a desperate assumption of gaiety into Peter's pleasures. But when she had sent him back to school again, she could not endure the desolation of the apartment without him; she could not endure the never-abating restlessness, the incessant, feverish thoughts, day and night, of Churchwell. Finally, in a moment of desperation, when she felt that unless she had an immediate change of scene and thoughts, she must make an end of her own life, she had taken passage to Europe, surprised Mr. Van Antwerp in Paris, and persuaded him to bring her to Italy.

II

This evening as she stood waiting till dinner should be announced, yielding herself to the sad loveliness of the Florentine winter dusk, she had more than the thought of Florence, of Peter, or of Churchwell — who clung ever a ghost to her side — to occupy her mind. About a week earlier an American couple had arrived at the Pension Paggi; previously, Lydia and Mr. Van Antwerp, under the name of Lambert, had been the only Americans in the house. Except to note with a slight uneasiness the fact that the new arrivals were Americans, Lydia had paid no attention to them until she heard some one refer to them as Mr. and Mrs. Lambright, and learned, through inquiries she made of Signora Paggi, that they were from the American town that had been her father's early home.

How extraordinary that here at Pension Paggi in Florence she should have come upon, and for the first time in her life, a kinsman of her father!

For she was convinced that he *was* a kinsman. There was an unmistakable resemblance in the walk, the hands, in the somewhat gaunt outlines of face and figure, and notably in a slight crookedness, a slight twisting to one side, of the bridge of the nose, which, curiously, she had marked first in her father's beloved face when she had looked down on it through the glass lid of his coffin.

A prey to all sorts of irrational notions and fears, she was afraid at first the man might discover her own identity, and reveal to the Pension Paggi, where she and Mr. Van Antwerp had been treated with consideration and cordiality, that they were not man and wife. Soon, however, she realised that it was quite unlikely that this Mr. and Mrs. Lambright should know anything whatever about her, or be able to discover, far less disclose, anything she wished hidden.

Now, she suddenly decided to seek from them some knowledge of her father's early life and of his alienation from his family.

The door into Mr. Van Antwerp's chamber opened wider, and, turning, she saw his white shirt-front, defined by the black of his dinner-coat, gleaming faintly in the dusk of the room. He came over to the window, remarked that she was looking unusually pretty, that he liked her face without rouge, and kissed her briefly and undemonstratively.

After dinner she went with him to the *fumoir* where

coffee was served to them, to a young officer of the Italian cavalry, and to a very old Russian gentleman who had joined them. The shabby *fumoir* — whose four long windows looked out from the rear of the house on the Via Corso de' Tintori — with its big lounge, its commodious chairs, its writing tables, litter of newspapers and periodicals, and its ugly stove, was the warmest and — except to noses squeasy to tobacco-smoke — the most genuinely comfortable room in the house.

Lydia sipped her coffee leisurely, listening to the talk of the three men, although, as they were conversing mostly in French, she did not understand much that was said. It felt good to her to lean back against the cushions of the lounge. She was not ill, but recently she had been subject to attacks of sudden exhaustion. She went about every morning sight-seeing a little, usually alone, for Mr. Van Antwerp was not disposed to sight-see, nor was Florence new to him; in the afternoons she drove, and often then he accompanied her; but she rarely came in from walk or drive that she did not choose the *ascenseur* rather than the one easy flight of stairs to her room. Very often after the most trifling exertions she would be dewed with perspiration, and when a sharp sound struck on her ears she would feel a tingling of pain sweep the whole surface of her body.

The old Russian gentleman inquired, in his halting but chivalrous English, if she were perhaps a little ill this evening. She shook her head, smiling brightly on him. She thought him the most charming old man she

had ever met. He was so old, and his bleached old countenance so purged of earthiness, that his constant interest in her, his charming old gallantries to her, she found altogether delightful. She could be perfectly natural with him, responsive, vivacious, fanciful, as her mood was. With the younger men about her, who — what once would have been a source of gratification to her — gave indisputable evidence of her attraction for them, she held herself more in reserve.

When she rose after the coffee service was removed, the old Russian rose too and insisted on accompanying her to the drawing room. Mr. Van Antwerp remained in the *fumoir* with the young cavalry officer; he seldom appeared in the drawing room; he was a man who enjoyed men, or women — never men and women. Sometimes Lydia wondered, from a way she caught the young officer now and again looking at her, if Mr. Van Antwerp, in *fumoir* confidences, had ever betrayed to him that she was not his wife. She considered it by no means impossible.

Once Mr. Van Antwerp had been high-priest to initiate her into the mysteries of an unknown world. But mysteries had vanished, and with their vanishing, a large measure of whatever fascination he had had for her. His character, a singular compound, had once been itself a fascinating mystery; there was something in him that always suggested to her a monk who had forsaken the cloister, turned worldling; he presented curious survivals of a scholarly-trending, even perhaps ascetic youth, but sport had overtaken and supplanted scholar in him. She was never quite able

to make him out. However, she was no longer interested in even trying to understand him.

Since she had been again with Churchwell, enwrapped — for all the tragic ending of them — in those unforgettable hours of rapturous love and understanding, she had found something vitally, and almost unendurably, disparate between herself and Mr. Van Antwerp. He was always, she knew now, in a state of greater or less intoxication, and though she had never seen him even verge upon hilarity, never seen his white, carven face lose for a moment its whiteness, its icy immobility, yet now she recognised readily his states of greater intoxication, and there had not lacked in these weeks together in Italy certain moments of horrid disenchantment. Moreover, a day had arrived when she did not hide from herself that he bored her. His sly stories, she had once thought so daringly clever, thrice-heard had palled on her.

III

There was a little stir of pleasant excitement as she and the old Russian entered the drawing room. With her arm clinging in his they formed a charming picture. The Russian, although somewhat stooped with his great age, had not lost the distinction of his bearing. Lydia was as straight as a wand and carried her head with the slightly haughty, slightly challenging air which was characteristic, but there was something soft and faintly troubled in her glance, something blended with her quick smiles that was instantly and indescribably appealing. From her pallor and the hollows in her

cheeks, her tenure of life appeared hardly more certain than the old Russian's.

Every one in the room seemed anxious to pay some little attention to one or the other of them. How pleasant it was, Lydia thought to herself. Yet how secretly ill-at-ease their kind treatment made her feel! How different it would all be, if they knew — knew who she was and the facts about her! She was never free, indeed, from a shamed sense of imposing on these kind and delightful people, and the assumed name she and Mr. Van Antwerp were under was of all possible dissemblings the most hateful to her.

She was always in demand for the card-table, but this evening she said she was too tired to play. As a matter of fact, she was scarcely more tired than on other evenings, but she had a definite and agitating plan in mind and she must be free to carry it out.

A game was made up without her — the old Italian colonel, who invariably played, whoever did not — hardly less belligerent in aspect at the card-table, one could believe, than in the old days under Garibaldi; the spirited but amiable young man from Vienna; the Russian princess, unpretentious and agreeable; the pretty, white-haired lady from Dublin, whose bright eyes gave false, bright promises of her intelligence.

Lydia picked up a battered copy of a Tauchnitz novel from one of the tables and sat down near the fire, a few smouldering knots of wood in the big fireplace. The old Russian, after chatting with her a few minutes, betook himself to a stale copy of a Parisian journal he had found somewhere in the room, and pres-

ently fell into a doze over it. A British matron, of the type *sans peur, sans reproche,* was knitting rigorously at an interminable strip of white lace. A Scottish spinster was entertaining callers. The pretty daughter of the pretty lady from Dublin was strumming on the piano. A German couple had a map of Italy spread on a table before them and were mastering it with Teutonic thoroughness. A gentle Dane, professor in the University of Copenhagen, was looking over some Uffizi photographs.

With all its occupants, the room was not noisy; its hush was broken only by the soft strumming on the piano, the low murmur of conversation from a distant corner of the room, or by an involuntary cry of joy from the young Viennese when a good hand was dealt him, or an exclamation of fiery impatience from the veteran of Garibaldi when his partner, the Irish lady, led from the wrong suit, which was not infrequently. Lydia looked up at a framed legend that hung on the wall near her which recorded,

Pension Paggi Honorée Dans L'An 18 — De La Présence Des Souverains D'Italie.

Ah, Pension Paggi! There had never been anything else in her life of its kind so pleasurable as her weeks at the Pension Paggi. . . . But now it must soon be over, Pension Paggi — and Italy! And her life, her future life, what of that? . . . Her problems grew not easier but more difficult as time progressed.

Across the room, on a sofa and quite alone, also

pretending to read, sat Mrs. Lambright. Lydia sent furtive, perturbed glances in her direction, trying to summon courage to walk across the room and introduce herself. The lady was unmistakably a trifle piqued. The old guests at Pension Paggi had not opened arms to her quickly enough, quite warmly enough, perhaps! How fortunate Lydia had been — unworthy she! — she blushed at the thought — to have been so swiftly gathered into Pension Paggi's fold. She got up, holding her white cloak around her, smiled on the card-table, which gave back smiles in return, glanced around at the different hands, and, a vivid spot of colour in each cheek, made her way to the sofa where Mrs. Lambright sat.

"Our names — I am Mrs. Lambert — are so similar . . . and compatriots . . . we should know each other, should we not?" she said, smilingly extending her hand.

Mrs. Lambright, a voluminous blonde, responded cordially. Her husband, she explained, was writing letters. He wasn't well, and Florence they found too cold. It had been much milder, a former winter they had spent here. They were considering leaving for Egypt, but then you froze to death in Cairo, too, of course, when it *was* cold there . . . and so on.

Lydia listened perfunctorily, while she gave herself another moment to gather her scattered forces. Her checks were burning. "There used to be — Lambrights in the town where I lived — Kingsville," she remarked carelessly when there was a moment's pause.

The woman beside her gave a slight start. "Kingsville! Are you from Kingsville?"

"Yes, that is I lived in Kingsville when I was a child. . . . There was a Professor Lambright there — at Ransom College."

Mrs. Lambright raised her eyebrows and laughed lightly and with a little embarrassment. "Oh, yes — my husband's brother, Girard Lambright!"

Something closed tight around Lydia's heart. Her father's brother, here, only a few yards from her! She had not dreamed it could be nearer than cousin!

"Did you know him?" Mrs. Lambright asked. "Or his wife?" she added with a significant smile.

"I knew them a little . . . or at least their little girl."

"Oh!" She looked at Lydia with increasing interest. "The child, yes! Was she pretty?"

Lydia smiled faintly. "Not very. . . ."

"The mother was a beauty!"

"Yes, I remember her. . . ."

"You say you don't live in Kingsville now?"

"No, I left there years ago."

"He's dead — Girard Lambright. Did you know it?"

"Yes, I'd heard it."

"You knew about his wife, of course? He ruined his life for that woman!"

"I remember there were rumours . . . but I don't think I knew anything definite. . . . I was only a child. . . . She killed herself, at last, I think I heard."

"Pity she didn't do it earlier, before she murdered Mrs. Lambright!"

"What!"

"Oh, it amounted to that! She absolutely died of a broken heart — Mrs. Lambright, I mean, Girard's and my husband's mother — all the disgrace of the thing! You didn't know the facts, then? Why, we heard it all came out in Kingsville and that the woman was completely ostracised there!"

"She was an invalid," Lydia interposed feebly. "What was her history? I don't know, except the vague rumours."

"Oh, she was simply notorious! English, you know, or English and French. Her mother was a French dancer, and notorious before her, thoroughly depraved. After she lost her youth and beauty, she turned virtuous, nominally virtuous at least, the mother I mean, married an Englishman, went to England to live, and then this daughter, Aimée, who married Girard, and who was kept in a convent in France during her childhood, outdid her mother in notoriety. When she became perfectly abandoned, Girard had the misfortune to meet her, and became infatuated with her!"

Lydia was listening with terrified attention. Her aunt — oh, how queer, her aunt! — had paused for breath.

"He was a perfectly impractical man, governed by the most quixotic impulses, just the man for that sort of woman to get hold of. Of course she worked on his feelings, and he thought it was the noble thing to

marry her and try to rehabilitate her — absurd, you know; you can't rehabilitate a woman of that sort! But she was clever! They said to meet her you wouldn't know she'd ever had a vicious thought. The bomb burst when Belle Lambright came home a few weeks after Girard and his wife. She had been abroad with her husband for several years — the same time Girard was abroad — and they'd learned everything about the woman. Oh, I shall never forget all the excitement! I wasn't married then, but Judge Lambright's grounds and my father's adjoined. It nearly killed the Lambrights! There the woman was — right in the house — one of them, so to speak — and going to have a child! Heaven knows *whose* child!"

Lydia's lips blanched. "*Whose* child? It was his, wasn't it? — her husband's?" she faltered, striving to force a smile.

"Whose?" An expression of amusement crossed Mrs. Lambright's broad, pink face. "Well, I guess Girard Lambright would have been delighted if he could have been sure *he* was the father!"

The room grew black before Lydia's eyes. The voices from the card-table, bidding in more or less broken English, "one heart"—"two diamonds"—"no-trumps"— came to her from across some vast abyss. Her father, her dear father whom she had walked with on the River Road, whose poor wasted hand she had held in hers that winter dusk when he had looked out to see the dawn of Kingsville come for the last time — was not her father! The last props of her existence had fallen from under her.

And it was her mother who had doomed her father to suffer what he must have suffered, her mother who had doomed her to suffer what she was suffering now!

IV

"Judge Lambright ordered them out of the house!" the woman beside her was saying. "Belle and the other sisters were in perfect accord with their father — very spirited girls — like the Judge. My husband was several years younger than Girard. He was at college, and so of course wasn't forced to take a stand one way or the other, at the time."

"You spoke of the mother — that it killed her," Lydia ventured in a voice that to her own ears sounded hollow and far away.

"Yes, she took it harder than any of them, though in a different way. She was one of those mild women who never would believe evil of any one and she was wrapped up in Girard — actually wouldn't believe the things they told her of the woman he married and wanted the Judge and the girls to do nothing. She used to write to Girard as long as she lived, and when she died she left him his share of her property. But to the day he died Judge Lambright never allowed Girard's name to be mentioned to him."

"There was a Miss Barker, I remember, who used to live with the Lambrights in Kingsville," Lydia said slowly, with a great effort.

"Oh, yes, Barker! Sour woman, but extremely loyal to Girard. After she came back from Kingsville, no one could ever get a word out of her about Girard's

wife. She wouldn't discuss her at all, or the life they led. You see old Mrs. Lambright brought Barker up, made a little more than a servant of her, and when she was dying, she asked her to go to Kingsville and look after Girard's house. Of course, I always felt some sympathy for poor Girard — he was the victim of a designing, depraved woman — but one thing I never could condone in him —"

"What was that?" asked Lydia, quivering with fear yet eager to hear.

"His naming that child — for his mother — Lydia!"

"Yes," Lydia agreed, a wraithlike smile illuming her pale face and quickly dying out again. She had never before known she was named for any one in particular. It came to her in a rush of feeling that hereafter there would be a little tender association to her of her own name with the name of that good and forgiving woman, her father's mother. . . . *Was* he her father?

"Pardon me for suggesting it, but, if you don't mind, don't mention Kingsville or knowing the Lambrights to my husband when you meet him! He's in a very nervous state at present. He didn't know of Girard's death till several years after it occurred — I'm sorry he ever heard of it at all — and he's been more or less possessed of an idea ever since that he, or some of them, ought to have looked him up and effected a reconciliation — purely morbid idea, of course, as I tell him constantly, but you know how people are when they get in a low state of health and possessed of an idea of that

kind — you can't reason with them! By the way, what became of the child? We never heard."

"I don't know. . . . She left Kingsville . . . disappeared."

"Went the way of the mother, doubtless!"

"Doubtless!" Lydia repeated in a low voice, and then . . . her body floated off into space. . . . What was happening to her? Every one was talking at once, at first loud, and then low. . . . Peter — was so far away — in America — thousands of miles away! — What would become of Peter? . . . She was lying against some one's soft breast, and she saw indistinctly the scared face of the young Viennese somewhere near her . . . and then her own bed chamber in Pension Paggi . . . and her narrow bed . . . Caterina, the maid, chafing her feet . . . tears, she could not help, coursing down her cheeks . . . and beautiful Signora Paggi bending over her, with her face of an angel, murmuring to her with all the rich tenderness of her noble heart — "Oh, I am so sorry, I am so sorry!"

CHAPTER II

LYDIA did not know whether she had fainted or not, but she knew she had suffered some sort of collapse, and when she recalled her talk with Mrs. Lambright, and realised what had happened to her she felt that she could never again see any of the people at the Pension. She allowed no one to enter her room except Caterina, Signora Paggi, and Mr. Van Antwerp, and her concern with Mr. Van Antwerp was merely to induce him to make arrangements for their immediate departure.

A few mornings later, they were seated in an omnibus on their way to take the early morning train to Rome. She had a last glimpse of the soft, dark beauty of Signora Paggi, could still feel the warm, last pressure of her tender hands . . . a glimpse of Caterina, weeping and waving. . . . Now Pension Paggi became a blur to her as she looked back through the windows of the omnibus . . . she could barely distinguish the servants still clustered before the door . . . then a corner turned and Pension Paggi . . . Lungarno — vanished.

Her eyes caught sight in another moment of Perseus holding aloft the Medusa head, and then the lovely Loggia vanished . . . Piazza Vittoria Emanuele cut

across . . . Via Strozzi traversed . . . Santa Maria Novella's marbles glistening in the morning sun . . . then all that had meant Florence to her — vanished. A thought flitted through her mind of the morning she had left Kingsville and looked back, her eyes lingering on its spires that were glistening in the morning sunshine. How little she had dreamed, then, that she would never again look on those church-spires. How full of hope she had been! How steeped in beautiful girlish dreams! How simple life had looked to her, and how easy and certain of conquest the big, unknown world as she waved good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Poole. . . . And now, rattling over the stones of Florence this winter morning, sunlit too, how intricate and baffling life was, whichever way she turned how impossible of happy solution.

Her eyes followed absently all day long what passed outside the car window. Already Florence had become almost a dream, and it was almost like a dream that she was approaching Rome. It came back to her with faint amusement how in their provincial pride Kingsvillians had been wont to compare Kingsville on her seven hills to great Rome on its famed seven hills. How that comparison had fired her childish imagination. Rome! The Eternal City!

But now that she was actually approaching Rome, her mind was passionately preoccupied. She could think of nothing but what she had heard of her mother — of her grandmother! She was descended from a line of courtesans. It made her own life loathsome to her in a way she could not before even have imagined.

What if Peter, half unconsciously suspecting but still, with the generosity of childhood, adoring her, should grow up, and learn about her mother at the Pension Paggi! If his adoration should turn to the feeling she harboured now against her mother. . . . He had written her in one of those exuberant childish outbursts of homesickness that often occurred in his letters—"I wish you would have a picture taken and put it in a locket. I would always have it next my heart." How could she bear it, if the image of her beloved face should some day become a shame and a horror to him!

II

Mr. Van Antwerp touched her lightly on the arm.

"Perugia!" He leaned slightly over her and pointed out the window to a city on a high hill.

Perugia!

She smiled absently, and following his pointing finger saw a city seated on a hill, like a pictured city, a city in an old engraving. Perugia. She hardly took it in.

Occasionally Mr. Van Antwerp looked up from the newspaper he was reading, and bestowed a light caress on her, teased her a little, called her "Our Lady of Sighs," then he went back again to his newspapers.

As they approached Rome, a first sight of a Roman pine, lifting on high its great emerald head, shocked her with its beauty into a momentary joy.

Monte Rotondo . . . and then, soon after, the first glimpse of St. Peter's dome. . . . In the lives of most

men and women that first glimpse of St. Peter's — Rome! — was a moment to remember for years afterwards. But now to her all precious realisations of the present were denied.

III

In the days that followed, Mr. Van Antwerp never questioned her, never seemed curious, and was never outwardly perturbed at a change in her she knew he could not have failed to notice. However, he suggested now, as indeed he had suggested in Florence, though he had never insisted on it, that she should see a physician. He even professed a willingness to accompany her to see the sights of Rome, but she refused this as decisively as she had refused his suggestion of a physician. She knew that he detested sight-seeing, and that he would speedily find ways — other than sights — to occupy himself here, as he found ways to occupy himself in other foreign cities, whether or not he had business interests in them. Moreover, his presence gave no especial comfort to her; on the whole she preferred to be alone, with her own thoughts, miserable as they were.

Sometimes she sat almost a whole day at the window in her room in the little hotel in the Via Nazionale, thinking and thinking of her present situation and of her past, watching with tepid interest the busy street outside — nursemaids, long, gorgeously-coloured ribbons streaming from their caps, the *Bersaglieri*, topped with their queer, ridiculous cock's-plumage. Small, ill-conditioned horses all day long and more than half the

night toiled up the steep hill of the Quirinal on the slope of which the little hotel was situated, often slipping on the wet paving-stones, volleys of abuse pouring out on them as they struggled up to their wretched bleeding shins. This was Rome. She scarcely realised it more than this. . . . If she leaned out of her window she could see a little way down the street, at the foot of the hill, the tall shaft of an ancient column rising from Trajan's Forum. Quirinal! Trajan's Forum! What words of magic they had once been to her.

Try as she would, she could not revitalise Rome. It had been more alive to her when a child she climbed the hills of Kingsville with Rome in her mind than now when she climbed its own hills, wandered about its vast Forum Romanum, gazed at its broken columns, knew that her steps were following the Via Sacra, knew that she stood on the threshold of what once had been great Cæsar's house, or Nero's golden house; now that she passed under triumphal arches, heard murmurs all about her of Peter and of Paul. Yes, down that hill came Cicero, there walked and jested Horace, along this Appian Way moved a sumptuous Roman triumph, yonder flitted Vestal virgins, on this spot, where she stood in the great arena of the crumbling Coliseum, quivering Christian martyrs crouched, hearkening to the shouts of "The Christians to the lions!" But never once in these soft, misting spring days was she shaken out of herself. Her unhappiness overshadowed to her even Rome.

IV

The old Russian at the Pension Paggi had urged her to visit the garden of the Villa d'Este at Tivoli, and several times since their arrival in Rome, she had proposed to Mr. Van Antwerp that they should go there together. She had not asked or wished him to go with her elsewhere, but she felt a little timid at the idea of making this excursion outside Rome alone. He had smiled, teased her a little, and put her off. He had discovered acquaintances in Rome, and was spending hours with them, hours of every day and every night, just how and just where she did not know, or inquire, any more than he inquired of her how she spent her own hours.

It was still early when she left the Porta San Lorenza one morning for a solitary journey to Tivoli. All the way from Rome she had the tram almost to herself. The day was slightly overcast, but as she looked out of the tram window, out over the Campagna through which her way lay, miles and miles of waste, desolation, only a Roman pine here and there, or an arch of the ancient aqueduct, gradually she felt something of the pathetic grace of the lonely Campagna stealing softly into her heart. She felt herself in some obscure way in sympathy with, even comforted by, these pensive wastes, this great wash of grass and dull sky that closed her in on all sides, like a sea.

The sun struggled through the clouds as the tram approached Tivoli. The tramway mounted higher and higher, through olive groves whose gnarled trees with

their grey-green leaves, silver now in the sun, moved her to the delight that the silvery olive groves on the hills about Florence had moved her to, the delight that trees above everything else in nature had always moved her to.

When she stepped out of the car at the gate of Tivoli, she was sensible for the first time in many weeks of a good feeling of hunger. Her watch showed her it was almost eleven o'clock, and she asked a *facchino*, one of the importunate hangers-about at the Porta Santa Croce, the way to a place where she could get lunch.

The sunshine grew brighter and as she climbed a steep hill, stopping now and again to rest, and wound her way through narrow ancient streets, she breathed more easily, the choking in her throat and the oppression on her lungs were a little lightened. An old gaiety, long a stranger there, stirred in her heart.

It was a rather dirty place she had been directed to for her lunch, in the central Piazza of the town. Hens ran about on the tiled floor, scurrying in and out of the door, sometimes almost under her skirts. But nothing annoyed her. The lunch seemed to her appetising and excellent. And it seemed friendly and good to have the hens cackling about as she ate her omelette, her macaroni — *ai pomi d'oro* — her beefsteak, and drank her glass of pale amber *Lacrima Christi*. She did not feel in the least lonely here in this homely little *ristorante* she had never seen or heard of till a few moments before. She did not know exactly why she should feel less miserable than she had been feeling for

many days, but for some reason she did feel a trifle better and more natural — the blessed sensation of the beginning of recovery after a long, perilous illness.

Her father would have liked a queer little place like this friendly *ristorante*. And as the memory of him came to her in this natural and pleasant way, it flashed through her that, after all, she had not lost her father. Even if he were not her father, still he was something that had been very near and dear in her life and he would always be. Just as she would always long to feel that he really was her father, so doubtless for years he had longed to feel that she really was his daughter. That upon both their hearts had been laid the same burden of doubt and longing brought him closer to her and united him to her more tenderly and strongly than he had ever been before. All at once some of the horror she had carried around with her for days and days lifted from her.

She paid her bill, slipped a *lira* into the hand of the smiling waiter, and with his musical, ardent "*Ah grazie, grazie, grazie, Signora!*" still sounding in her ears, she stepped out again into the noon sunshine of the Piazza del Plebiscite, and made her way to the entrance of the Villa d'Este.

V

She descended from terrace to terrace; peeped at little half-hidden lakes, at stone balustrades and broken images of stone reflected in their lovely waters; glimpsed mossy statues in cool, dripping grottoes;

through a chink in a wall of trees beheld St. Peter's dome, shining in the noon sun, far away across the Roman plain that stretched below her; she gazed enchanted at a hundred fountains whose white jets rose sparkling in the green gloom that enshrined them; and at last she stood at the foot of the garden of Villa d'Este and looked back, up terrace after terrace, up the long flights of stone steps she had descended, looked up through high, narrow walls of green, past the grey of stone, green of trees, jets of sparkling water, to the white villa crowning it all, shining above, looking down on its tier on tier of matchless garden. . . .

No one had told her it was like this!

She slipped some money into the willing fingers of the custodian, asked him to leave her, and taking off her travelling-coat she threw it across a stone bench, embroidered with lichens and with little delicate grasses and flowers, and sat down on it.

She was alone in the garden — a garden that had been quick with almost four hundred springs, that had been mellowed and blended by the suns and dews of almost four hundred summers, by the rains and frosts of almost four hundred winters, a garden built by the great builders of gardens in the age of the Renaissance. . . . Patches of sunshine fell about her. A slender jet of water sprinkled her with its diamond drops of spray where she sat. Tall cypresses lifted themselves in their gloomy grandeur above her to the sky. The flashing white of the villa looked down from above — ah, she had never seen or imagined a place

like this! It burst upon her that nothing, no, not even her sins, could alienate from her the great heritage of the world's beauty.

How rich she was! She had been banished from Kingsville — by her own acts had banished herself — forever. Even so, how rich she was! Sky, earth, trees, fountains, all this glory hers, too!

Some words she had read in "Leaves of Grass," long since, brief lines "To a Common Prostitute," in this moment of heightened consciousness, winged their way back to her — *Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you. Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you and the leaves to rustle for you . . .* and other words from somewhere in the same book — *Whoever you are, you are he or she for whom sun and moon hang in the sky!*

She had mutilated her life; her mother, her mother's mother, they too, had mutilated their lives. In a sense, she was an outcast, and would be forever, from what had been so dear to her. Even so, for her sun and moon hung in the sky!

The birds were silent. Only the dark cypresses of Villa d'Este whispered softly above her in the noon stillness. Lydia's eyes rested on the ancient tessellated path under her feet. Her sins passed in review before her. They assumed to her present mind almost equal magnitude; her sins of the flesh, her ingratitude of long ago to the Pooles, her impatience with Peter and her separation from him, and her theft from Faidley. She could not analyse or separate them now. She did not seek to palliate them to herself. She had

sinned, sinned grievously, put her mind and body to degraded uses . . . been disloyal, unclean, selfish —

But as she dwelt on her sins, still other words came to her from that book of Walt Whitman — the book that in Kingsville no one had dared speak of aloud. The words had meant little to her when she read them. But now they came freighted to her — *The earth remains jagged and broken only to him or her who remains jagged and broken. . . .*

If she could cling to that, courage would not fail her! She wanted to stand up and shout for gladness. She had been liberated from a long and terrible darkness. The future opened up before her, all at once, broad, almost limitless in possibilities, even for herself. To various souls various visions. If she could cling to this vision that had been flashed on her here in the noon stillness and solitude of beautiful Villa d'Este, no longer need the earth remain jagged and broken to her, because no longer would *she* remain jagged and broken!

CHAPTER III

LYDIA suddenly lifted her head from the pillow. It was night, or early morning. What was it she'd heard? — the old fish-man of Kingsville calling out his fish in that droll, familiar, long-drawn-out strain — "O—h, o—h, I hab, I hab, I hab three kinds!"

Unconsciously, she must have uttered some exclamation, for Mr. Van Antwerp, who had apparently just come in, entered from his adjoining bedroom. She was aware of his rather slight figure in evening dress approaching her bed along the path of pale light that streamed across the darkness of her room from his own lighted chamber. He seated himself on the bed and took her hand in his. She was bewildered, and hardly knew where she was.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Oh, I heard the old fish-man calling, the old fish-man in Kingsville!" she exclaimed, breathlessly. "I heard him plainly!"

"What, my girl? What are you saying? Where do you think you are? You're dreaming!"

"No, I wasn't dreaming! I heard him!"

Then she woke more fully, and realised she must have been asleep and dreaming. But her heart was

still fluttering. She could still hear the old darky's cry, as it had sounded in her ears only a moment before — "O—h, o—h, I hab, I hab three kinds!"

Outside her window — all that darkness outside was — Rome. She could hear a poor horse slipping on the paving-stones, struggling up the hill. Of course, the Quirinal Hill . . . Rome . . . Mr. Van Antwerp sitting on the bed at her side — the other had been only a dream! But how queer, it had been so vivid! She felt as if she had actually been there, just a moment since — back in Kingsville!

Mr. Van Antwerp drew her, warm with sleep, her hair tumbling about her shoulders, into his arms. She felt his cool, smooth cheek against hers, and then suddenly she was entirely herself, and fully conscious of her surroundings and of the significance of the present moment. She repulsed him gently.

"Don't, don't!" she said. "I have something to tell you — right away — right now! I tried to stay awake till you came in, but I must have fallen asleep. I was so tired, packing —"

"Packing!" he repeated in surprise.

"Yes, I had the maid help me, and I'm all through. I want to leave to-morrow morning . . . well, perhaps it's morning now — *this* morning, then, for Naples. I'm going — home. There's a steamer to-morrow. I want to take it!"

II

"What is this — whim, my girl? I have arranged for our passage on the boat two weeks from to-morrow.

And I've made other — arrangements — it isn't — convenient — for me —"

"I don't want *you* to go now!" she broke in. "I want to go home alone! It's what I wanted to tell you — I'm going . . . to leave you, for all the time —"

"What do you mean?" he asked, in his rapid, muffled utterance. She felt that his hands holding hers were not quite steady, and in the half light she could discern his white face, only a few inches removed from her own, working slightly.

"Why, I'm breaking off — the past! I wish everything good and happy for you that can possibly come to you, but as soon as it's morning I'm going to leave you, forever —"

"In what have I been remiss, Lydia?" he asked, his hands tightening. But before she could answer, he had answered himself, self-reproachfully. "In much, I know!"

"Oh, it isn't that, it isn't that! It's just — I can't live this way any longer!"

"I've never spied on you, Lydia. I've trusted you completely. . . ."

She winced.

"But I've felt, ever since you came to me in Paris, the change in you. I've recognised that you were very — unhappy . . . preoccupied. Be honest with me, Lydia, have I failed to hold your interest? Are you — in love with some one? Is it that?"

"Oh, no, it isn't that . . . it isn't that — making me leave you!"

They were silent an instant.

"What is it?"

"Oh, I can't live any longer — in this degradation —"

"You're too intelligent, too — enlightened, Lydia," he interrupted, "not to know that there's quite as much degradation, if you call it that, in wedlock!"

"Yes, I know, I know. We've talked of all that. I know that many married women are only 'legalised prostitutes,' as you call them, but it's all the other things that grow out of this sort of life *I* lead! I don't know, I don't suppose I'll ever understand clearly just how far people have a right to give up to the desires of the flesh that drive them — but it's the other things, the things that grow out of such a life as mine — the deception, the lying, and . . . and everything . . . all the other degradations that follow inevitably! The married woman, even though she may be a 'legalised prostitute,' doesn't have to resort to all the subterfuges that a woman — like I am, does . . . she doesn't have to become so corrupt in all the rest of her nature!"

"I don't think you're very corrupt, dear!" he said to her, smiling faintly. "You're very sweet to me, my girl!" He raised her hands to his lips and kissed them, one and then the other. "You're the loveliest bit of womanhood that I've ever been privileged to know!"

"Oh, I'm . . . I'm a lot worse — even than you know!"

"No, no, no, no!" he hushed her, kissing her on the lips.

As he kissed her she felt the first small dent in that brave new armour she had buckled on only a few hours earlier in the garden of Villa d'Este.

"I've neglected you, my girl . . . I'm far from impeccable . . . I formed habits, selfish ones — in my years of bachelorship, and in my years of married life that have been virtually bachelorship . . . I'm an unworthy man — basely unworthy of the worthy father who begat me . . . but —" He broke off, leaned over and gathered her close to him. "I can't give you up, my girl, you're in my blood, my brain! I can't give you up, my lass!" he added, in a barely audible whisper.

III

"You mustn't try to dissuade me!" she protested, struggling to resist him, and to resist herself. "Oh, I don't pretend that I see the truth even now in a great white blaze, or anything like that — I suppose only great minds see the truth that way. I only see a little glimmer of truth — what seems to me truth — but you must let me follow that — that glimmer!" she faltered. "It's taken me such a long time to realise that we have to renounce what's dear to us in order to gain what's dearer — dearest of all — self-respect, and the respect of others! I've heard it, and read it, all my life . . . and yes, I've known it all my life . . . but it's never had any force with me before! There's a Russian proverb, 'As the character is, so is the fate!'— I've felt sometimes fate was unjust to me, but at last I've realised what that proverb means —

I've made my own fate! My character has been my fate! And I seem to see, now, what I never did see plainly before — why the world clings to its Christs as it does — to the men who come to declare to us we must lose our life to save it! Perhaps the doctrine wasn't new to the world even when Jesus Christ came to teach it; men have to be told it over and over. He only re-enunciated it for them, but he gave up his life to emphasise it!"

She was almost sobbing.

"Oh, I know how it seems to you — my setting myself up as a spiritual director — how ridiculous and — profane!" She was holding him away from her, at the same time holding to his shaking hands supplicatingly. "But I've got to tell you how things seem to me now . . . why I'm leaving you! . . . I love luxury . . . no one ever loved it better, and I love to see the beautiful places in the world, and to have an existence full of colour and romance and excitement . . . I was born craving and adoring such things . . . but I've got to give them all up now . . . all those desires and leanings . . . I've got to earn a living again, any way I can, honestly, for my little boy and myself. . . ."

"You're not strong enough now, my girl!"

"Oh, yes, I am! My body's not ill, except as my mind has made it so! It's the 'maladies of the soul' that have been killing me! I'm stronger already — now that I've made my decision. I'll soon be well!"

Except this one argument regarding her physical strength, he offered no arguments against the decision

she had announced; no reproaches, no criticism or even comments on all she had said to him. He only pleaded with her, with low-voiced, persistent, passionate intensity, pleaded with her to remain in the relation she bore him. When grey morning twilight succeeded the darkness of night in the room, the struggle between them had not ended. Sounds from outside, the exclamations that punctuate every hour of Italian life, and the soft cadences of Italian street-chatter, began to rise from below through the open windows. There was something weird and even almost terrifying to her in the sight of Mr. Van Antwerp revealed in this chill light of dawn, still in his evening attire, his face so strangely moved out of its habitual calm. Dissipated and inordinately selfish undoubtedly he was, in many ways the puzzle to her he had always been, but she saw him going through an anguish such as she had endured in the hour when she had realised that Churchwell, the one person to whom her heart had ever freely communicated, was lost to her forever. And something of the early power he had asserted over her, he reasserted now. And then he could insure her the material comforts of existence. She was very much alone in the world; if she left him, she must go forth again to unknown but certain difficulties.

But she fought her fight — the battle with him, and the harder battle with herself. Sunlight of the spring morning was breaking over Rome, when she stood up before him — shaken with pity, with something akin to love for him, with perilous drawings of her flesh toward him, but invincible to all his pleadings and appeal.

Steadfastly she prepared to follow into a new life the little flickering glimmer of truth she believed she had discerned—"*The earth remains jagged and broken only to him or her who remains jagged and broken!*"

CHAPTER IV

A FEW weeks later, Lydia was seated in a train moving toward the great Southwest. Peter was at her side, watching with intent interest all that flew by the car window. Occasionally when something especially attracted him, he would turn to her with an excited, "Look, Mother!"

She was thinking as he sat here at her side that, no matter how long she might live, she would never forget the day of her arrival from Italy — the moment when in the big bare reception room of the Brothers' school, under the escort of one of the black-skirted Brothers, Peter appeared at the door — his face rimmed with dirt, and between his smiling red lips the gap created by a missing front tooth — evidently recently shed — his blouse soiled and torn, his knickerbockers in sore need of mending — but what a light of joy in his clear, shining, surprised eyes as he spied her, under a ghastly pictured crucifixion, waiting for him! Nothing would ever be more beautiful to her than Peter at that instant!

She had sold all her possessions from which she could realise anything, and she had also a little money she had accepted, reluctantly but what seemed to her

of necessity, from Mr. Van Antwerp. She and Peter were on their way to a growing health resort in the Southwest, where she had learned of an opening, a house to take charge of, rooms and meals — a boarding house — not to put too fine a point upon her enterprise.

She thought of her early dreams of life — how entirely they had excluded such an inglorious rôle for herself as the one she was now preparing to assume. Well, she had been — worse things, far worse! She tried never to lose sight of that, to rejoice in the present opportunity, and to look forward hopefully. She had had some experience in the practical problems of housekeeping and marketing. She trusted she would prove equal to the undertaking ahead of her.

The train was passing through what seemed to her a very ugly state, dotted with hideous new buildings, frame buildings or buildings constructed of cement blocks, a flat, treeless country, under a cloudless sky, and a ceaseless wind blowing over it. She hoped that the point of their destination — it was more than a day's journey yet before they reached it — would be more attractive than the country they were journeying through to it. She wondered if Peter found this new country disappointing. Probably not. He was seeing so much he had never seen before, even Indians — tame Indians, in white men's garments, but Indians!

Peter had never once questioned her about his father, or asked her to tell him any of the old Indian

tales, since that evening, while they were still living among the washerwomen in the West Thirties, when he had confided to her the taunts of the "kids." She was afraid the "kids" had implanted in his mind doubts that would never be uprooted.

Ah, no knowing what thoughts were hidden back of those eyes looking out of the car window, those pathetically trustful young eyes, so eager for the adventure of life, so unafraid of it as yet! No knowing what dreams in that big tousled head of his — dreams of the life he was going to carve out for himself!

II

Well, she was taking him with her now to a part of the world where barriers of social distinction were not yet so impassable as in older communities of the world. Perhaps she and Peter might still have a chance of friends, the kind of friends it would be pleasant to know and be associated with. Of course, they would not enjoy a very exalted position even in this new place to which they were going, and she would be more or less haunted always with the fear that some one who knew things about her which she wished hidden would appear and reveal them. Then, too, she had not attained a very great age even yet; she was by no means drained of all her hasty blood . . . she was not sure exactly how much strength she could muster to a supreme testing of herself. And, above all, the problems of existence still offered much to perplex her; she did not see a clean-cleft path which willy-nilly

she should follow. She saw what seemed the truth, as she had told Mr. Van Antwerp she saw it, merely as a glimmer, fluctuating, dying down now to the smallest, feeblest-glowing ember, now leaping briefly into clear flame.

But, at any rate, she felt, somehow, stronger to fight the fight of life than she had ever felt before. She hoped devoutly that she would not succumb again, weakly and shamefully succumb, as it had occurred to her might happen, at some unexpected point of attack.

Her lips touched lightly Peter's shock of fair fine hair, a touch so light that the little boy was not conscious of it. His eyes were following with unabated interest what passed outside the car window, and Lydia's eyes, above his head, were following what his followed, looking out on the wide windy prairies through which they were passing. Life would never be entirely easy — evidently life was not intended to be that. But she was going to work hard, going to make herself respected in this new place that was to be their home.

Her eyes were dim with tears, but there was far more of happiness and hope in her heart than of fear and sorrow. She wanted, more than anything else in the world now, to save Peter, if she could, some of the humiliations and the sorrow she had known in her own life, and she hoped that she would have strength to live henceforth so that in years to come, if Peter should ever learn things of her past such as she had learned for a certainty about her mother that evening

at the Pension Paggi in Florence, he would have gained such respect for her, that he could still love her, and would be able to forgive her.

THE END

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