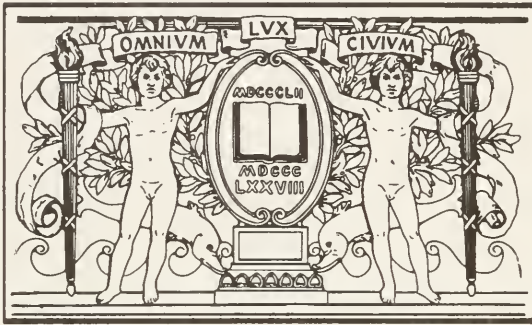


THE LEAVEN
OF LOVE



CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM



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THE LEAVEN OF LOVE



SIBYL

THE
LEAVEN OF LOVE

A Novel

by

Clara Louise Burnham



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

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THE LEAVEN OF LOVE

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CHAPTER I

IN THE PATIO

ON the wide sweep of Regina Beach, the rollers advanced like an army with snowy banners. The March dusk was falling, and in the patio of the mammoth hotel by the waterside a woman's white gown glimmered amid the tropical foliage. There was no one else in the garden. There were few guests in the fashionable resort who were not either afraid of the night air among the palms, or made restless by the hush of the place.

Within the glittering spaces of the hotel, women chattered and exhibited their toilets, or promenaded with their escorts on the long piazzas. Some had sought the famous Southern Californian resort in pursuit of health, some to escape the spring rigors of the North, some for the sweet sake of their favorite out-door sports, and some merely to change the place — though they must keep the pain — of life's boredom.

Of all the throng, but one had come to be alone, and she strolled now in the broad patio

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surrounded by the four walls of the enormous caravansary, threaded with its galleries, deserted at this hour by babies and their nurses, and the mammas who had exchanged *négligées* for dinner gowns and were now seeking pleasure elsewhere.

The young woman in the garden lifted her head, with its coronet of black hair, and the dim light fell softly on fair brow and blue eyes as her glance sought a remote dormer window above her.

“Almost as high as Mars,” she said to herself, glancing further up, at a planet whose brilliant gaze was already shining upon the palms. “I like to be a Martian,” she murmured. “Even if my purse would allow me to come down a floor or two, I should still prefer my garret. Ah,” with a sigh of content, “there is no solitude like that of a crowd. This place is an ideal one for a woman to gather herself together. No one wishes to climb to my attic,” — she lifted her hands toward the palms and took a deep breath of the still, rose-laden air, — “no one, thank heaven, wishes to walk in my garden.” She strolled on idly, bits from the orchestra within occasionally stealing out to her and interrupting the staid melody she began to hum above her breath.

In the Patio

Suddenly, another denizen of the place made himself known. A burst of song from a neighboring tree arrested her, and with parted lips she stood still to listen to the outpouring of a mockingbird hidden deep among the spreading fans of foliage.

A fountain splashed somewhere out of sight. The girl's hands pressed together. The quick light of pleasure that sprang in her eyes at the bird's first low trill slowly faded, and tears gathered there.

Memory waked, and her heart suffered the tightening pang grown familiar. Lines came in her face that robbed it of its girlishness, and her lip was caught beneath her teeth, while drops slipped down her cheeks like rain.

"O God," her heart cried out, "if it could be always night, with no voice near me but the bird's, until I could forget!"

Enamored of his own song, of the stillness, of the darkness and the solitude, the little chorister sang on for pure joy of expression.

"As some musicians play," thought the woman, steeped in the bitterness of her reverie.

The planet above had moved for nearly half an hour on its heavenly course, when the bird's unseen listener awoke from the thoughts which had lured her away from self-control.

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“This is useless,” she thought then, and dried her eyes. “Good-night, dear bird ; I must n’t hear you any longer.”

She knew that outside, across grassy spaces, the sea was booming. It would be a tonic after the temptations of this enervating bower.

With hasty steps she approached one of the exits that gave passage beneath the huge building to the world without. The door was locked. She tried another and another. All were immovable.

There was nothing for it but to brave the lights of the hotel, so she ascended a flight of steps to the first gallery and entered a narrow hallway. In doing so she brushed by two women, one elderly and one young, who passed out into the garden.

“There, did you see who that was, Aunt Phœbe?” asked the girl, in a hushed voice.

“No, I did n’t notice,” replied the elder, as she descended the garden steps with the deliberation of portliness. “Anybody we know — *here?*”

“No, but somebody I’d like to know,” responded the girl, and there was a certain buoyancy and optimism in her tone and manner. “That was Nora Creina.”

“Never heard of her,” returned the other

In the Patio

curtly. "Are you sure we can get through here, Sibyl?"

"Yes, indeed; I've done it lots of times."

"Then hurry up. I suppose it's all right, our coming nosing around this place when we don't pay any board, but I feel easier under my own vine and fig tree — I mean my own palm-leaf fans. For the land's sake, hear that bird! If that is n't exactly like this topsy-turvy country! Even the birds turn night into day. What would we think in North Haddam of a bird that did n't feel any responsibility of going to roost? Sibyl Raynor, what's the matter with that door?"

The girl was shaking a resisting handle.

"Sure enough, it is locked," she replied. "Wait. I'll try another. You stay here."

So Aunt Phoebe waited, fixing disapproving eyes on the tree whence came the untiring flute of the small serenader.

"They're all locked," said the young girl, coming back at last.

"Well, of all —" began the other impatiently.

"Oh, of course they'd have to be at night, with the suites opening out on the galleries as they do. It would n't be safe. I ought to have realized it. Is n't it sweet here?" The girl drew a deep breath. "Let's not go right away. Let's

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find a garden-seat and listen to that precious bird.”

“A garden-seat, and most likely get my best skirt stained green? I guess not. I think it’s awful pokerish here with all these ghostly palms,” went on Aunt Phœbe; “and those ugly cactuses look as though they’d like nothing better than to grab us in the dark. If the Old Boy has a garden, I’ve known just what he raises ever since I saw one o’ those great wicked overgrown cactuses.”

“Listen to the fountain,” said Sibyl wistfully. “Don’t you want to come over to it a minute?”

“No, indeed I do not,” returned the elder emphatically. “’T would n’t be healthy at night. I’m willing to bet without knowing that the water’s stagnant in the basin, and there’s great frog-islands o’ leaves sprawled all over it. I know just the sort o’ fountain these shif’less folks would have. Now if we have a fountain in North Haddam, there ain’t a tree to keep the sun off’n it, and the lawn’s trimmed up nice to the edge.”

The speaker led the way firmly to the nearest flight of steps, and the young girl smiled as she followed.

“Now take me the shortest cut, Sibyl,” con-

In the Patio

tinued Aunt Phœbe, as they reëntered the narrow passage of the hotel.

“All right. Come through here,” and the girl led the way to a door which gave upon a large glass-inclosed piazza.

There the couple again came face to face with the lady of the patio. She, looking from one to the other, met the expectant gaze of a bare-headed young girl and the spectacled glance of a stout woman formally bonneted and gloved.

Instantly Sibyl pressed her aunt’s arm, and to the girl’s surprise and satisfaction, the lady of the blue eyes and black hair hesitated and paused before them.

“Pardon me, but I wish to get out of the hotel,” she said.

“So do we,” responded Aunt Phœbe. “We’re just going right now this way.”

“By that door,” added Sibyl, indicating one in the distance.

“It is locked. I’ve tried it,” said she whom Sibyl had christened Nora Creina. “Everything at that end is locked,” she added, “and I hoped to find some exit here.”

“We must!” said Aunt Phœbe desperately. “It’s a mile and a half back to the hotel office. I know, for I got lost here once before. There

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has n't been anything so tiresome as the Regina Beach Hotel thought of since the World's Fair at Chicago. They say it covers over four acres, and I know I tramped the whole of 'em, one night, when I was here without my niece and trying to sneak out."

A flash, like a smile, came into the stranger's blue eyes.

"That is what I want to do — to sneak out," she said. "I'm a stranger here; but you know the way?" She turned to Sibyl.

"I thought I did — pretty well," returned the girl; "but there is such a confusion of verandas and parlors."

The three hurried first in one direction and then in another, the girls going ahead and Aunt Phœbe hastening after, at her best speed.

"Well," she said at last, in exasperation, "don't you ever ask me to come over here again in the evening, Sibyl Raynor. It's all very well in the daytime, but it's just chaos and old night after sundown. Here we've got to walk way to the state line in the direction we don't want to, before we can begin to go home. Don't let's dilly-dally any longer. I pity the burglar that tries to get in or out of this place. We've got to go up through that 'peacock alley' to the office,

In the Patio

and we might as well do it before we're dog-tired."

Sibyl smiled at the fair, impassive face under the black coronet. "I believe my aunt is right," she said.

The stranger nodded. "Then let us go," she returned.

Apparently she was loath to be separated from these new acquaintances, for the soft crepe of her light gown kept close to Aunt Phœbe's silken elbow as the three approached the music and lights and buzz of many voices in the centre of the hotel.

Many an idle glance followed the trio, and sometimes a prolonged gaze noted the substantial matron whose skirts cleared the velvet carpets well, and whose spectacles gleamed defiance of the world of fashion in general.

On her left tripped a light-footed, brown-haired maiden, fresh as the spring, in a flower-sprigged muslin gown. Her eyes and lips seemed trying vainly to repress expression of the joy of living, while the young woman on the stout lady's other hand hastened by with down-cast gaze and unsmiling lips, her soft, clinging gown trailing on the floor and adding to her slender height.

"Well," said Aunt Phœbe, with a sigh of re-

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lief, when the three had finally emerged through the heavy door and stood in the open air, "I feel as though I'd run the gauntlet. How those folks can stare! If I had as much rubber in my ankles as they've got in their necks, it would come handy a time like this."

She turned kindly to the stranger. It was impossible not to feel that the young woman had been glad of her protection during the last five minutes.

"I hope you live our way," she said. "We'll see you home — just as lieves to as not."

"Thank you very much, but I am staying here. I only wished to get out to the water."

"Well, you'll learn the ropes after a while," responded the other good-naturedly. "We know one thing already: that though this hotel's wide open by day, so as folks can be trapped from all directions, there ain't only one hole they can get out of come night."

The stranger's response to this was a smile which included both her companions, and with a murmur of thanks and a good-night she left them.

"Isn't she lovely!" exclaimed Sibyl softly to her aunt, as they moved homeward.

"She is — a real pretty woman," admitted the latter. "What was it you called her?"

In the Patio

“Nora Creina! ‘My simple, graceful Nora Creina.’ Did n’t you ever hear the song?”

“Never.”

“I’ve met her twice, walking on the bluff, and she has such bewitching Irish coloring, I knew she must be Moore’s ideal. He says:—

‘Few her looks, but every one
With unexpected light surprises.’

Did n’t you notice, when she glanced with a smile at us just now, how radiant she was, suddenly?”

“Real good-looking. Yes, she is. Queer she ’d be knocking about that great barn alone.”

“Barn! Palace, you mean. A barn would be more fitting for a Nora Creina; but this one is in disguise anyway, with her lovely citified gown and her coronet, — and her discontent,” added Sibyl, in a different tone.

“Discontent? What makes you think that?”

“I’ve seen it,” returned the girl. “The song says:—

‘Beauty lies in many eyes,
But love in yours, my Nora Creina.’

“There’s only beauty in hers, no love,” said Sibyl reminiscently.

“Well,” remarked Aunt Phœbe comfortably, “don’t take it to heart. It’s the way of the world. The more folks have, the more they want.

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I'd be willing to bet without knowing, that there's more discontent gathered under the roof o' that babel we've just passed through, than you could find in a county poorhouse. Now look at you! We don't keep the poorhouse — quite, but most girls would have nearly perished of loneliness living as you have, since we came to Regina Beach, and I have yet to see a glum look on your face. Of course if you cared anything about solitaire, it would be easier understood, but you do have about as little — ”

“ Oh, nonsense,” returned the girl, squeezing her aunt's arm. “ Is n't it occupying to go to the best cooking school in the country ? ”

Her companion bridled. “ I won't deny,” she replied modestly, “ that what I know I know.”

“ And can tell,” added the girl. “ Lots of people can't do that.”

“ Well, it's a woman's reputation that she *can*,” retorted Aunt Phœbe, well pleased.

The girl sighed, her thought reverting to the interesting stranger.

“ Won't it be beautiful when people wake up,” she exclaimed: “ when there are n't any poorhouses, neither material nor mental ones ! ”

“ Oh, yes,” returned Aunt Phœbe briskly, “ and it will be beautiful when the moon comes

In the Patio

down out of the sky and lets us play twirl the platter with it.”

The girl laughed and again squeezed the substantial arm on which she was leaning.

“I love you, Aunt Phœbe,” she said.

CHAPTER II

A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE

ON the following day those blue eyes which had impressed Sibyl Raynor were again watching the billows approach the shore in endless procession. Their owner was seated on a rustic seat beneath a tree on the high green bluff above the water, and a book lay disregarded in her lap.

Those waves so full of mystery last night, and threatening in their rush and power, this morning sparkled in sunlight, romping boisterously in the bright air, flinging abroad their spray, plunging on the sand and clutching with foamy fingers at the pebbles.

Fascinated, the blue eyes gazed, and the minutes slipped by until a voice at her shoulder startled the watcher.

“Would n’t that water deceive the very elect?” The voice spoke in mild exasperation.

The blue gaze suddenly rose to a pair of kindly, spectacled eyes that were beaming down on her, and the younger woman rose courteously.

“Good-morning,” she said. Her tone was coldly perfunctory, but perhaps owing to the con-

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fusion of the breakers' roar the newcomer did not observe it. All she recognized was that here was the same lonely girl who had clung to her last evening, lonely once more.

"Sent here for her health, very likely," thought Aunt Phœbe. "She looks pale enough. When will folks find out that you've got to keep a happy heart in a body to get it well! No use sending young folks poking off alone. Wonder how young she is. Interesting face. Might be anywhere from twenty to thirty."

She accepted the young woman's movement as one of reception, and seated herself on the other end of the settee.

"Yes," she continued, "those waves this morning would deceive any Yankee that ever lived."

Her companion's heart sank at this invasion, and she began to consider how soon she might in decency move on to a more remote and safer eyrie; but this motherly soul had been very kind last night. It would be indecent to snub her.

Meanwhile the motherly soul's shrewd spectacles had discerned unmistakable signs in the eyes and lips of her neighbor.

"Something wrong here sure," she thought. "I hope it is only her body. She should n't stare

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at the sea alone. She looks as if she'd done it for hours last night, and now here she is at it again. Satan finds plenty of mischief for idle thoughts as well as hands to do." She smiled benignly on the young woman, who felt it incumbent upon her to respond.

"Why do you say the sea deceives?" she asked.

"Why, it's as like the Atlantic this morning as two peas in a pod. You from the East?"

"Yes."

"I congratulate you," remarked Aunt Phœbe. "My name is Bostwick — Mrs. Bostwick." She looked inquiringly at her companion, who bowed slightly.

"You see I'm a Yankee," persisted Mrs. Bostwick, smiling, "and I'm going to ask your name. It's all I'll ask. Don't be afraid. I ain't a noser; but it's so convenient to know a person's name if you're talking."

Her companion kept silence for an appreciable instant, then she answered with tolerable grace: "I belong to the grand army of Smiths — Mrs. Smith."

Mrs. Bostwick gave her an instant's sharp glance, then continued.

"Just to break a bad promise," she said, "I'll

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ask you another. Were you ever in Southern California before?"

"Never."

"Like it?"

Mrs. Smith lifted her shoulders slightly. "I suppose there is only one answer to that. It is an earthly paradise."

Her stout companion's countenance altered severely. "It's a fraud," she declared distinctly: "a deception and a fraud. There's one word ought to be written across the whole of Southern California, and that word is *Humbug!*"

Mrs. Smith looked her surprise.

"Oh, of course I know it is n't business for me to run it down. I keep a boarding-house back here a little piece. I ought to boom the place for the good o' the house; but it keeps full anyway. Barnum used to say the public likes to be fooled, and there never was a truer word spoken; and as long as they do, my house always will be full and I need n't worry."

Mrs. Smith's cold sapphire eyes met the speaker's gravely.

Her companion received the look with a mental comment. "Yes, my dear, a little prattle won't do you any harm. You know how it is at the theatre," she went on aloud. "Nothing really

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gets into your heart and soul 'cause you know it all ain't so. Well, all those painted palm trees and muslin roses on the stage ain't one bit more imitation than those you see here. Yes, ma'am, every sightly thing there is in this part o' the world was planted here by the hand o' man. The soil was all irritated, or irrigated, or whatever they call it, so 's to make it unnatural, and then those monstrosities set out in it. Good land, what plants! Now I've got a nice rubber plant at home. Why, the neighbors come in to see it, it does so well. The kind they have here would flap over the eaves of my house. I've got a border o' daisies in my garden. A daisy is a modest flower; it's noted for it. Do you suppose there's a modest daisy in California? Well, I guess not. They're on a level with your eyes, and stare at you as bold as brass. My little pots of red geranium make the sittin'-room cheerful. Here, they climb right out o' the ground up to the bedrooms and snoop around the windows. There, we carry a palm-leaf fan to church. Here, they crackle away up in the air, big enough for a giant to use. It's all exaggerated and showy, just like stage doin's. I never go out here without feeling as if I was play-acting. There's more reality, and more nature, and more satisfaction, in one North Had-

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dam dandelion than there is in all the overgrown rose trees in that hotel grounds.”

“Then why are you here?” asked Mrs. Smith, the blue eyes beginning to look amused.

“Because Mrs. McDonald said she’d die if she did n’t see Prince’s Street again,” returned Mrs. Bostwick bluntly. “A Scotch woman has had this house for years, and a friend of mine was out here and learned that Mrs. McDonald was homesick for a visit to Edinburgh, and the friend thought it was the chance of my lifetime to see this part o’ the world and give the children the opportunity. Claude was just out o’ Tech and kind o’ peaked, — I think they do everything there to kill a boy that they can, and when one survives, there naturally ain’t anything in the world that can daunt him. He wanted to go right to work; but I said, ‘No. Come out to California, and I guess we can make enough in that boarding-house to pay expenses.’ I never did such a thing in my life before, but I’ve a knack for cooking, and I thought I would n’t be doing my duty by the children if I refused.” She paused, and seemed to challenge her neighbor to express an opinion.

“How long have you been here?” inquired Mrs. Smith.

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“It’s going on a year.”

“The winter was beautiful, no doubt.”

“Oh—I suppose so,” depreciatingly. “Winter!” Mrs. Bostwick repeated the word with scorn. “I tell you it’s upsetting to my brains not to be able to remember whether a thing happened in February or in August because the weather’s just alike both months. You just let me get back to North Haddam in January. I’m going to build a snow-man in the front yard with my own hands!”

Mrs. Smith smiled. “I hope your children enjoy California more than you do.”

Mrs. Bostwick noted the smile with satisfaction. “They ain’t my children, they ain’t really much relation, though they could n’t be any better to me, nor any dearer, if they were. Their mother was a sort of distant cousin o’ mine. She did n’t have any near folks, and she grieved herself to death when she lost her husband”— The speaker interrupted herself, for she saw her neighbor wince. “Poor heart, dear heart, is that it!” she ejaculated mentally; and from mere surprise and embarrassment her fluent tongue grew more voluble than before, while she averted her face. “She just begged of me to take her children. She was one o’ these people that about worships

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education, and she begged me not to stint on that, but to use what little money she left to prepare the children for life's battle. I've followed her orders strictly, and have got both of 'em out alive, somewhat damaged, but still in the ring, as the saying is. Of course I scarcely kept acquainted with 'em after they were twelve and fourteen, what with preparatory schools and college and all that business, but the last year I've taken lots o' comfort. I'll say one good word for California, it's given Claude just the rest he needed, and it's been good for Sibyl, too; though she's got some queer ideas about folks being able to keep well anywhere if they only know how to think that way. Mrs. Raynor was one o' these poetical visionary folks by nature. I think a body can see it by the names she gave the children. I never could abide the name of Claude anyway. It never meant anything but c-l-a-w-e-d to me, and this boy is one o' those alert, up-and-coming fellows who'd have made a first-rate 'Henry' or 'James.' Mr. Raynor was a real practical, substantial man, and Claude has his traits. Sibyl," Mrs. Bostwick gave an amused and indulgent smile — "I ain't so sure that Sibyl was misnamed. You can't think of her as Jane or Martha, somehow. There are folks, you know,

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that right from the start seem to belong to the poetry of life instead o' the prose; and it don't always mean that they 're trifling, either. There 's birch trees, for instance. They hold their own all right, all white and green and airy as they are among the sober-sided old oaks and pines. And you come to burn a birch log. It makes a first-rate fire, just as warming and cheery as any other wood, if not better, yet it 'll leave only a spoonful of ashes where another log 'll leave a double handful. I don't calculate to cremate Sibyl to find out, but I 'm willing to bet without knowing that she would n't fill anywhere near such a big urn as most girls of her heft."

Mrs. Bostwick laughed comfortably and her companion smiled faintly.

"She has a remarkably winning face," returned the latter in the pause. She was entertained in spite of herself.

"That 's it. That 's what Sibyl is. She 'd win a polar bear right on his own ice. There never was such a child. She seemed to catch some idea when she was n't knee high to a grasshopper that 's stuck to her always. I don't know as Mrs. Raynor was a very religious woman. When I first began to hear Sibyl say her prayers, she seemed like any young one. She never argued

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nor made any trouble. Claude, now, he liked to have the last word about everything. I remember one night he left off the Amen. 'Amen, Claude,' said I. 'Yes,' said he, 'and women too.' As I say, I never suspected at first what was before me with Sibyl; but very soon it began. She had the tenderest little heart in the world, and it just could n't bear anybody's unhappiness. If we'd see even a lame cat in the street, she'd say, 'God will make it come all right, won't He, Aunt Phœbe?' I used to say Yes, yes, to pacify her; but that was always the first thing her mind would turn to, if anybody or anything had anything the matter with 'em. I can see her little face now looking up, so bright and hopeful, and hear her say, 'God'll make it all come right, won't He?' You would n't believe the trouble the child made me that way. I used to get real irritated sometimes. I remember one day in special. A neighbor'd come in, and we were talking real comfortable about there being so much sickness in town, and how stingy Elder So-and-so was to his wife, and how a certain woman who'd come to the village recently had better move out if she did n't want to get into trouble. I never noticed Sibyl playing with her paper dolls in one corner until after my friend

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had gone. Then up came that child, her eyes like saucers and not a twinkle of a smile anywhere. 'God'll make it all come right, won't He?' she asked. 'For the land's sake, what?' said I: for the last thing Mrs. Jones and I had been talking about was a pattern that cost thirty-five cents and would n't fit. 'The sick people, and the stingy man, and the naughty lady?' said she, and her eyes went right through me and I felt myself get red as a piny; though what fault it was of mine, I could n't see. I'd been through a good deal with the child already, and lied many a time just 'cause I could n't tell the truth to those eyes; and I was put out with her to think she'd been in the room and I had n't known it; so I thought it was time she heard a few facts. 'I don't know,' said I, 'whether He will or not,' I said. 'Is n't He good?' said she. 'Of course He is,' said I. 'Can't He do everything He wants to?' said she. 'Of course,' said I, 'but —' 'Would He want to do anything that was n't good?' said she; and Sibyl was n't ever impudent. She'd just taken an advantage of me as usual. 'Does n't He love that naughty lady?' she went on. 'Law, yes, I suppose so,' said I. 'Then I should think you and Mrs. Jones would want to!' I never forgot the way I felt when that young one said that. It

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was always the same ; and if I ever held off and sort of hemmed and hawed and told her we could n't expect to know everything, she 'd finish up, ' Well there *is* God, is n't there ? ' I told her I guessed there 'd never been a Bostwick that did n't know that much. Then she 'd say she did n't see how anybody could stay unhappy. She got me so I never dared mention that there was any trouble in the world. It was a relief in a way when she went off to school and I did n't have to hush up the neighbors when they wanted to tell me something interesting. To cap the climax, this last year at college she 's fallen on some kind of a new religion that seems made for her way of thinking, and she 's as tickled over it as if she 'd come into a fortune. She was laughing the other day over the trouble she used to make me with her theology. ' I shan't bother you any more, Aunt Phœbe,' says she, ' for now I know ! ' ' Oh, of course you do,' said I, ' and so do all the Theosophists and the Buddhists and the Spiritualists and a hundred other sorts o' thinkers ; and there 's one thing *I* know, too, and that is that I 'm glad I 've got a pew in the Congregationalist church that my grandmother sat in ; ' and then I went on, just to try her, and I told her a string o' bad news I 'd just had in a

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letter about folks we know at home. She smiled at me, and her eyes looked precisely as they did ten years ago; but instead of asking me anything, she just took me in her arms and squeezed me without a word. I had to laugh afterward to think how it provoked me. I used to be irritated by her eternal questions, and now I was cross because she did n't ask any."

"If she is happy, don't disturb her," said Mrs. Smith. "Happiness is priceless."

"That's so," returned Mrs. Bostwick, beginning to stir preparatory to rising. "Well, you see I have one o' those tongues that are hung in the middle. I said to Sibyl the other day, said I, 'I have n't any use for a woman that won't talk,' and, said she, 'What immense self-respect you must have, Aunt Phœbe!'" The speaker laughed comfortably. "She sends me out, this time in the morning, Sibyl does; she's bound I shan't stay mewed up in the house, and then afternoons it's her turn."

Mrs. Smith rose as her companion did so. They had been strangers when Mrs. Bostwick found her this morning, and she wondered if every chance acquaintance were thus expansively welcomed into the family by this hearty woman. In Mrs. Bostwick's look there glowed a com-

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fortable friendly warmth as she said good-by. "Poor girl!" she thought, meeting the blue eyes. "Poor little woman! 'T ain't any use to tell her now that she 'll get over it; but she will, she will."

CHAPTER III

“NORA CREINA”

MRS. BOSTWICK moved leisurely across the grass and to the first avenue facing the sea, along whose length rose winter homes set in spacious grounds filled with a variety of semi-tropical vegetation. A fine automobile, whizzing by, stayed her a moment. When the road was clear, she moved on with a grimace. “Pugh!” she ejaculated. “One thing can be said of the rich, these days. There’s no odor of sanctity about ’em.” She walked a block inland, and turned in at the gate of a white frame house set on the corner of the street. It had a pleasant yard, and a porch furnished with hammock and chairs. She passed through the open door and entered the living-room, which Sibyl was putting to rights.

“I kind of suspect I’m late,” she remarked.

“If we were in Massachusetts, you might be considered so,” returned the girl, “but in the bright lexicon of Southern California there’s no such word.”

Sibyl did not pause in her dusting of the tuneless piano, whose keys, if molested by a daring

Nora Creina

hand, instantly meted out a punishment worthy of a far worse crime. "You found the shore attractive this morning, I judge," she continued, touching the ivories gingerly with her cheesecloth, mindful of the proverb, "Let sleeping dogs lie."

"Well, more so than common, I admit. I picked up an acquaintance. Are the vegetables all washed?"

"Insulting question, Madam! Go out in the kitchen and find everything ready to your hand."

"All right." Mrs. Bostwick removed her bonnet and hung it in the hallway. "Three guesses who I've been talking to."

Sibyl smiled. "Claude's new boss?" she ventured.

The older woman reappeared at the door of the living-room with astonishing celerity. "Do you tell me that Claude has taken that position?"

"Yes, he has secured it, much to his joy."

Mrs. Bostwick looked doubtful. "But is n't a — a chiffonier a kind of a servant?"

"Chauffeur, Aunt Phoebe. You'll really have to say 'chauffeur' now that we have one in the family. Claude won't care whether he's a servant or not, so long as he can drive a machine. He's so strong and well now that he would leave us,

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I'm sure, if it were n't for this job. I'm delighted that he has it."

"Well, perhaps it's all for the best," returned Mrs. Bostwick. "I don't know, though, but he might as well go East as to be always in such a condition that we have to wear clothespins on our noses to talk to him. How long is it for?"

"He does n't know. Until Mr. Armitage's chauffeur can come back to him, I suppose. I'm just as proud of the boy as I can be, to think he learned the business and passed his examination and all without letting us know anything about it. It was such a bright thought to put in his time that way while he is waiting to begin the business of life. Some fellows go to Europe. He'll motor in Southern California. Sounds nice, does n't it?"

"Yes. Nicer than it smells," returned Mrs. Bostwick. "You have n't guessed who I talked to," she continued, moving out to the kitchen, followed by Sibyl.

"One of the Congregational church ladies, I suppose," returned the other. "I'm ashamed, but I don't yet know which is which."

"No, ma'am," returned the good lady, and she gave Sibyl such a significant gleam of her spectacles as she threw open the door of the range that the girl had a sudden idea.

Nora Creina

“Not — not Nora Creina?” she exclaimed, with interest.

“The same. Been talking with her the last hour.”

“How did it happen?”

“Found her sitting on the bluff.”

“Watching the pelican, I suppose. Did n’t she laugh at them?”

Mrs. Bostwick gave an inarticulate murmur as she tied on an apron. “It would take more than a pelican’s big nose to make her laugh.”

“Oh, really, is she so serious? What is she like?”

“Well.” Mrs. Bostwick went vigorously about getting the dinner as she talked. “You’ve seen a nice stiff trim shirt-waist that’s been caught and kept in a fog till it’s flabby?”

“Yes.”

“She’s like that. I’d be willing to bet without knowing that that young creature had starch and backbone once, more than the common run o’ girls; but something has turned her into a woman made o’ putty. I thought first it was ill health, ’cause she’s so pale; but I think now she’s lost her husband and it’s recent.”

“So she is married,” said Sibyl, surprised.

“’M h’m. Mrs. Smith. Hard to come down

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from Nora Creina to Mrs. Smith, but such is life."

"What did she tell you? What did she say?"

"Why — come to think, nothing."

"I thought you said you talked with her an hour."

Mrs. Bostwick tossed her head. "You may laugh and twinkle as much as you please. I *did* give her lots o' chances to get in a word edge-ways; but apparently she did n't have any desire to. I knew it was the best thing could happen to her for somebody to interfere with her thoughts — just plain butt in and meddle, as Claude would say. She needed stirring up; any sort was better than none."

"I see. You gave her a mental massage. How did she take it?"

"She rather liked it, I think. She smiled once or twice, one o' these moonbeam smiles."

"I know you did her good. Perhaps you'll see her again; perhaps I shall. She never seems to have any one to talk to."

"Well, I was glad to do for her that once; but I would n't ever go to her again. Her clothes and hands and hair and everything about her show she's one o' the fashionable world; and living at the hotel, she must be rich. Maybe she'd

Nora Creina

rather be alone, and after letting her know we're friendly, it's best to let her choose in case we should ever meet her again."

"I'm going to smile at her, though," said Sibyl hopefully, as she cut the bread.

"Yes, you'd do that whether you meant to or not," returned the other; "but I told her we kept a boarding-house, so in all probability your smile will be wasted."

Meanwhile, Violet Smith, left alone on the grassy bluff, reverted to her occupation of watching the wildfowl disporting themselves in and over the southern sea. With the cheery voice of her new acquaintance still in her ears, it was easier to smile at the antics of the ducks, which watched the approach of a great billow, and as it towered to its fall, took a header straight through it; their little pink feet twinkling swiftly in the air for a moment ere they were engulfed, only to reappear the next instant riding airily upon the sea while the rushing wave broke upon the shore. A hundred times Violet idly watched this manœuvre; watched, too, the absurd pelican, their inadequate little bodies following their burdensome beaks through the air, their serious demeanor appearing to rebuke the frivolity of the rollicking ducks.

"How like people," thought the watcher. "It

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is so hard for the burdened ever to understand the joy of the free." She was thinking of Sibyl Raynor. She recalled the face that even in her brief view of it had impressed her like sunshine; but a blank book is full of possibilities. "She happens to have been born optimistic, and nothing has occurred yet to shake her faith," reflected Violet. She rose suddenly with the restlessness that arose within her. "Wait until she loves! Wait until she loses!" she thought; and began to move along the bluff toward the hotel. She had proceeded but a few rods when hurried steps caught up with her and a man's voice spoke at her shoulder.

"Is this your book?"

The cold look in her face as she turned, melted at sight of the person addressing her. He was a youth of twenty or thereabouts, and his boyish eyes met hers at first impersonally; but his color rose as she regarded him questioningly.

"I noticed you left this on the seat," he said, lifting his cap, "so I ran after you."

"That was very kind," she returned, accepting the volume. "Thank you."

He nodded and strode off quickly, and she, pausing, looked after him.

"That boy looks like somebody," she thought.

Nora Creina

“Who is it?” Her brows drew together. “It must be!” she murmured, considering the coincidence. “That must be her brother. It certainly was C-l-a-w-e-d. I wonder, if I waited here long enough, if I should see the whole family.” Mrs. Smith’s sombre eyes grew wistful as she moved on. “That girl who believes that God will make everything come right! It is easy for the blank book to be optimistic, to believe that all joyous things may be written in its pages.”

The hands of the clock had moved around to lunch time when she entered the hotel, and she sought a table in the corner of the dining-room. As the guests straggled in, she felicitated herself again that in the few days since she came, not one familiar face had troubled her vision.

There was so much in memory against which she must guard her thought that she encouraged the mental picture of the comfortable amateur boarding-house keeper, whose expansiveness had been surprising but not disagreeable.

“I must look out for her in future, though,” reflected Mrs. Smith. “That sort of person soon becomes a hopeless bore. I must find another haunt on the bluff, further away. As for the young girl: the poor little innocent, one can scarcely believe she has come through college

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and kept that baby trustfulness in her eyes. I could not endure her optimism.”

That afternoon, while luxurious Regina Beachites slept, Violet Smith went through the motions of taking a nap; but after staring at her low ceiling until four o'clock, she dressed and, descending the stairs, strolled out of the hotel across the broad piazza and wide lawn toward the long, spacious pier. Everything at Regina is on a grand scale to match the illimitable sweep of ocean. The heads of numerous bathers appearing above the wave attracted her attention, and she sauntered down the pier toward the bath-houses and seated herself on the warm sand to watch the mermaids and men.

Many a gay hour in the past had she spent thus; but looking back to them, that frolicsome girl of the memory picture seemed to bear no relationship to the woman sitting on the sands to-day, looking upon the gayety with alien eyes.

One of the bathers, coming near the shore with his disporting partner, discovered her.

“Say, Sibyl, look!” he exclaimed eagerly. “There’s the peach I told you about.”

“It is,” returned his sister breathlessly, but with satisfaction. “I suspected it was. That’s my Nora Creina. Alone. Always alone.”

Nora Creina

Mrs. Smith noted the especial dexterity of this couple with appreciation, but without recognition. Gradually she ceased to regard the other swimmers, and kept her eyes fixed upon the graceful pair until the girl waded back to the sand and stood wringing the water from her short skirt.

“Ask her, Sibyl. Go ahead,” urged the boy. “Perhaps she’d like to come in.”

The girl came across the beach, and Mrs. Smith watched her approach with some regret that the pretty show was over.

To her surprise the bather paused before her with a greeting. Her heart started in trepidation. Recognition, anything that threatened her solitude, she dreaded; but a second look at the smiling face under the oil-skin cap relieved her fear.

“Don’t you care for bathing?” asked Sibyl. She spoke rather timidly, for the unmistakable hauteur that gathered on the fair face at her greeting was chilling.

“Oh!” Mrs. Smith’s expression changed. “I did not recognize you at first. It is Miss Raynor.” The name came so trippingly from her tongue that she knew she must often have repeated it to herself since the morning. “I used to like swimming very much.”

“If you would care to come in, I’ll wait for

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you," said Sibyl kindly. "My brother is out there to take care of you."

The sweet friendliness in her tone was irresistible.

"Thank you, but I did n't bring any bathing-suit," was the hasty response, while the sore heart marveled; for in her grief it seemed to her that her very outside must signify that no playground had a place for her.

Sibyl understood, but she kept her ground a little longer. "The water is so agreeable here," she said; and some impulse made her sink down, wet and glistening, on the sand beside the unsmiling woman. "Mrs. Bostwick told me she talked with you this morning."

"Yes," returned the stranger, with no change in her formal manner.

"And then my brother found you and gave you your book," pursued Sibyl.

"Was that your brother? It was very kind of him to go out of his way."

"How sad she is! How sad!" thought the girl, yearning over the cold face. "He is having a last play-day," she went on; "to-morrow he takes a position."

"Indeed?" A pause. Mrs. Smith met her companion's disarming smile.

Nora Creina

“And now is n’t it strange that I should meet you this afternoon?” continued Sibyl. “Our whole family in one day.”

Claude had splashed out upon the beach and was approaching. The girl watched her companion closely, ready to take the cue if she turned a friendly eye toward the young man. Under the circumstances, she might have shown willingness to recognize the boy’s existence; but the manner in which she averted her blue gaze was significant.

How was she to chatter with young people! What had a book of life loaded with the record of sorrow, disappointment, humiliation, and defeat, to say to the fair, unspotted pages of blank books like these!

Sibyl rose. “I’m sorry you don’t feel like taking a dip,” she said pleasantly.

Mrs. Smith’s impassive gaze lifted to hers. A feeling akin to anger mingled with her impatience of the girlish face. “God will make everything come right?” “There *is* God, is n’t there?” She knew now that she had been repeating these childish questions ever since Mrs. Bostwick voiced them. Imbecile optimism! As she looked up at Sibyl now, it was with an almost savage curiosity to know how that face would look after the blank book began to bear the inexorable records of life.

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Something in the sapphire eyes made the girl's heart beat faster.

“Beauty lies in many eyes,
But love in yours, my Nora Creina!”

So ran the song, but Sibyl shivered slightly in her wet garb, for the opposite of love seemed gleaming up at her from those dark orbs.

“Nothing doing, eh?” asked Claude, as his sister joined him and they trudged across the sand to the bath-house.

“Oh, such a lot doing, I'm afraid,” returned Sibyl. “I'm sure she's wretched.”

“I'd like to punch somebody, then,” said the boy.

“I don't believe you can. Aunt Phœbe thinks it is her husband.”

“Punch *him*, then.”

“No, no — thinks that he is dead.”

CHAPTER IV

A FLITTING

THAT evening Violet Smith walked again amid the deserted beauty in the court of the great hotel. The star-jewels shone brilliant against the velvet of the sky, the fountain tinkled gently in such stillness that each drop was heard in its musical fall. Infinitely soothing Violet found it, wandering through the dusky paths; and she thought of the unseen singer of last night, whose mysterious melody had been too much for her over-wrought soul.

Scarcely had the wonder passed through her mind as to whether the patio were its regular haunt than a trill again pealed forth from the deep recess of an umbrageous palm.

She sank on a flight of stone steps near the tree to listen; and in the midst of a wild, sweet crescendo, a man's impatient voice broke harshly upon the peace of the night.

"I'd forgotten those confounded mocking-birds!" it ejaculated.

Violet turned, and saw shadowy figures on the balcony above her.

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“ Well, I told you there would be something,” responded a woman’s voice impatiently. “ We might just as well have stayed in the front suite.”

“ And I tell you that constant roar of the surf gets on my nerves,” retorted the man. “ I came here to sleep. Talk about Nature abhorring a vacuum ! She abhors silence a great deal worse. I’ve found only one quiet hotel in my whole experience, and that was at the Rhone Glacier. I don’t know why I ever left it.”

“ Oh, daddy, simply because you knew I could n’t sit under a blue ice arch all my life,” laughed the girl. “ Now about this gallery, I told you it was a crèche all day, and if the court is a lively aviary all night, there’s no use in sacrificing those decent rooms we had, and I’m going back to the office this minute before some one else snaps them up.”

“ No, you’re not. I’ll kill that bird, and we’ll stay here.”

“ Kill the bird ! ” The girl gave a short laugh. “ That would be like anarchists trying to kill the king. As if there was n’t always a king ! And there’s always a bird ; and I remember you used to say they sang at any hour.”

“ Yes. I only wish I needed as little sleep as they do,” growled the man.

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“You trust me, daddy,” coaxingly; “I’ll find a good place further away from the waves. I hate it over here.”

Still arguing, the couple vanished into the house, and Violet sat, every muscle rigid, gazing out into the dusk with haunted eyes.

The Armitages — father and daughter. Was there no place on earth for them to choose at this crucial time but her retreat? Belle Armitage! How overwhelming were the associations evoked by the tones of her voice. The woman on the steps sat with white face and dark eyes, staring out into the garden. The pulsing music still rolled amid the palms, but the night had been robbed of its melody — its peace.

Huge as was the famous caravansary, it was still not large enough to shelter herself and her heart’s enemy. What should she do until daylight released her? Lie on one of these seats? Some watchman would find her and question. She held her temples between her hands and tried to quiet the rolling waves of memory, always threatening, and of late held in check in this welcome solitude. A woman’s voice had broken down the slender defenses, and now the waters rolled over her head.

Alone, wretched, she sobbed without tears in the deserted garden. Thousands of miles divided

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her from those who loved her. She had fled from their futile attempts to console ; but at this torturing moment, what infinite relief it would be to feel a human touch of kindness ; a comprehending, silent companionship such as she had known and, in her agony, spurned.

As if the image were waiting the opportunity to claim her recognition, it leaped in among those flashing, struggling slides, in the magic lantern of her thought, and for a moment reigned supreme. The rugged, strongly built frame, the square-jawed face ; the eyes non-committal for all the world except herself. What a yearning light she had last seen in them ! A love and longing almost equal to her own. A pain that had reflected her own. Good old Lester ! If he were but here to-night ! What rest to lose her hands in his ; to let her misery be enveloped in his care. She had refrained from making selfish use of that great love. To-night she would not. That *was* love. There was occasionally something besides selfishness in this cruel, crushing world !

Some vague association stirred in her tumultuous brain. Where lately had yearning love again cast its beams upon her ? Ah, suddenly she knew. It was that young girl ; that foolish, fatuous child, for whom it was enough to know that there was

A Flitting

a God! What difference whether there were or not, since He let his children quiver with anguish and refused to let them die of their sorrow? But Sibyl's face had deposed the masculine one upon memory's screen. It looked upon her now longingly, and she dully wondered why, as she looked back, rocking to and fro unconsciously in the dark, while the bird's song soared heavenward beneath the stars.

Then, like a star that struggles through obscuring vapors, an idea began to shine faintly through the unquiet clouds that thickened and changed in her mental firmament. A hint, a suggestion, a possibility — almost it seemed an invitation from Sibyl's innocent eyes beckoned her. It grew upon her thought. At first overclouded and rebuffed, the little star of hope struggled again sufficiently into sight to claim attention, and the sufferer in the shadows looked up.

“Why not, for one night!” she thought. “There is a possibility that they could take me, and I cannot stay here.”

With sudden haste she arose. The gauntlet of the brilliant hotel must be run, but in these days of fashionably veiled women, it would not attract attention if she drew the chiffon scarf across her hair, half concealing her face. Rising, she entered

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the house and moved quickly up the corridor and across to the great doorway.

She saw a gleam of red locks above the snowy shoulders of a woman talking at the desk, and her sense of suffocation was relieved by reaching the veranda. She ran down the steps and across the bluff toward the seat where Mrs. Bostwick had found her in the morning.

Meanwhile the latter lady was leisurely preparing for bed. Her hair was hanging about her ample shoulders, and luxurious yawns were accompanying the various arrangements which were to make her environment a suitable resting-place for one who, amid the enervating allurements of the southern night, was about to dream of North Haddam.

In the midst of a yawn of appalling proportions she was arrested by the ringing of the doorbell.

“Who’s that at this time o’ night?” she muttered. No guest of the house would ring the bell. “Heaven send it is n’t a telegram!” she exclaimed, with second thought.

The good lady was too thrifty to occupy a front room herself, but she knew the hall bedroom was out this evening, and throwing on a

A Flitting

wrapper while the bell pealed a second time, she hastened thither and put her head out of the window.

“Who is it?” she called anxiously. “Are you a telegram?”

“No,” came a low voice faintly. “I’m” — A long hesitation, then, “Is that Mrs. Bostwick?”

“Yes.” The hostess’s heart beat fast at the sound of the nervous tones. Her children were both out. “There ain’t any bad news, is there?” she faltered.

“I” — came again from below. “Can I see you, Mrs. Bostwick?”

A white-robed woman’s figure retreated from the veranda until she came into sight in the path, and Mrs. Bostwick, seeing the solitary unknown, was not reassured.

“What did you wish, please?” she demanded, with a sternness born of increased fear that this was indeed a bearer of ill-tidings.

“I wish to stay here to-night,” replied Violet unsteadily.

The hostess stared. A hatless woman alone at this hour and asking to spend the night. “I’m sorry,” she answered, in a final tone, “but my house is full. The hotel is near.”

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She began to close the window. "Mrs. Bostwick!" The voice below became imperative. "I am the — I am Mrs. Smith, to whom you talked on the bluff this morning. I have had such trouble to find you. I beg that you will come down and speak to me."

Mrs. Bostwick stared in silence, thought of Sibyl, then said, "Wait a minute," and disappeared.

The attractive stranger was waiting at the door when she opened it, and instantly stepped within, her blue eyes dark with excitement under the airy chiffon that veiled her black hair. "I know how strange this seems," she began swiftly, "but some people whom I cannot meet have come to the hotel. I remembered that you said you took boarders, and on the spur of the moment I started out to search for you. I was misdirected, and have lost half an hour."

Mrs. Bostwick looked as she felt — disapproving as well as astonished. In North Haddam, when people moved, they put on their bonnets and buttoned their gloves. A widow, sad and mourning, as she had found this young woman beside the sea, gave a very different impression from the excited person with the imperious air who confronted her now.

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“My house is full,” she repeated coldly. “You ought not to be running around alone at this hour. The children will be home very soon. I’ll have Claude take you back to the hotel.”

Violet’s heart beat hard with the fear of being thwarted. She realized the erratic appearance of her action and forced a smile. “I see you think my behavior a part of the unnaturalness of Southern California; but if we were in New England, I should have done the same, I assure you.”

Her hostess led the way into the living-room. “Have a seat until they come,” she said; but the expansiveness of her morning manner did not return.

The proud woman confronting her was conscious of her suspicion and disapproval. “I don’t like to detain you,” she replied. “You were retiring. May I not sit here and wait alone? Miss Raynor will remember me.” She placed her hope upon Sibyl now. She was more than ever determined not to return to the hotel.

Mrs. Bostwick suspected this. “They won’t be long,” she answered, and her thoughts moved alertly as she placed herself in a chair by the window.

To her exceeding relief, scarcely a minute had passed when Sibyl and Claude opened the

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front door and, seeing the living-room alight, walked in. Mrs. Bostwick would have preferred a word with them outside; but she was portly, and though she sprang from her chair hastily, she succeeded only in colliding violently with Claude at the door. He caught her in one arm.

“What is this? Football?” he asked, and then both he and Sibyl perceived the guest.

They could scarcely believe their eyes. Mrs. Bostwick in a kimono, her tresses wound into a hasty psyche knot, tête-à-tête with the white-robed Nora Creina. The latter’s veil had fallen about her shoulders. She immediately advanced to Sibyl, who met her outstretched hand cordially.

“Let me introduce my brother Claude, Mrs. Smith,” she said, while Mrs. Bostwick breathlessly regained her poise and the young Tech student smiled over his aunt’s head at the stranger.

“I’ve given you a great surprise,” began Mrs. Smith, seizing the advantage of speaking first. “Something occurred to-night to make me wish to leave the hotel suddenly, and I remembered that Mrs. Bostwick took in wayfarers, so I searched until I found her —”

“But the house is full,” gasped the hostess, interrupting the gracious speech. “I’m very sorry ;

A Flitting

and so, Claude, you are going to take Mrs. Smith back to the hotel now."

"Just this one night," persisted the stranger, and her smile was a sudden illumination which completed the capture of her young admirers. "If you could put me somewhere — just this couch would do — just for to-night."

"And you've forgotten, Aunt Phœbe," put in Sibyl, "to-morrow a good room is to be vacated."

Mrs. Bostwick glared at the girl and started to speak; but Claude exclaimed: "Let Mrs. Smith have my room to-night. I'll sleep on the couch."

The sapphire eyes gave him a look for which he would have cheerfully slept on the piano, and then the guest turned to Mrs. Bostwick, whose reluctance was patent.

"After our talk this morning, is it any wonder that I thought of you and yours as acquaintances — almost as friends?" she asked, with a winning air. "I came here to-night as a matter of business, but circumstances have altered the step into the asking and granting of a favor. To-morrow we will speak of the room —"

"That room's half promised," said Mrs. Bostwick mechanically. "Sibyl does n't know all the business of this house."

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“How could you say that, Aunt Phœbe?” asked the girl when, five minutes later, they entered her room to put it in order for the guest while she moved her own belongings into her brother’s apartment.

“Sibyl Raynor, so far as knowing the world goes, you are equal to a babe unborn.” Mrs. Bostwick faced her companion, speaking low and emphatically. “I did pity that lonely woman this morning, while she seemed so sad; but there’s no rhyme nor reason in what she’s done to-night. Could n’t you see she was just shaking with nervousness? There’s something wrong with a person who will leave a hotel between two days and without her hat the way she has. Why would n’t she go back with Claude? Either because they would n’t take her, or else she’s hiding from somebody. I don’t want her in either case.”

Sibyl was silent, and the older woman spread up the clean sheets with nervous energy.

“I did n’t oppose your giving up your room, because if she was going to stay, I’d feel safer to have her up here than downstairs with the silver.”

“Aunt Phœbe!” Sibyl spoke deprecatingly. “We have seen all along that she was in trouble. Now something has evidently occurred to empha-

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size it, and she needs somebody; she evidently has nobody.”

“I’m keeping a house for straightforward folks that come in the daylight and engage rooms decently and in order. Maybe there’s been reasons for her being alone all the time. I don’t like the looks of it. She told me before you came in that some people she did n’t want to meet had come to the hotel. Why did n’t she take her meals in her room, then, until she could pack up and leave in an orderly way?”

Sibyl was thoughtful. She remembered the look of surprising enmity flashed at her on the beach this afternoon. She remembered the coldness with which her advances had been repelled.

Mrs. Bostwick was thinking too, and after the minute of silence she voiced her conclusion. “Depend upon it, that woman’s as afraid as death of somebody. She looks refined and elegant, but so do lots o’ the folks whose ill-doings get into the papers with their pictures. I sized her up pretty close in the minute or two before you came in to-night, and for all she’s got on a perfect dress, and no jewelry except her wedding-ring and her engagement ring over it, and smells of violets and looks like one with those eyes o’ hers, so have lots of other folks who were con-

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fidence women after all, and ended up in the penitentiary. You'll see to-morrow she won't *want* to stay here, and you might have saved that speech about the room being to rent. By the way, Sibyl Raynor, don't you ever do that again! You'd rent every room we've got to wolves, if they only walked into the house with a little white wool on, and hid their teeth. You'll see she's worn out Regina Beach, and she'll be for leaving; and I'm going to watch the papers steady; and if I see a picture of a high-headed woman with a braided coronet of hair around the top, and big eyes that look as if they were seeing things, I shall take notice; and I shall look for her name!" Mrs. Bostwick paused in her hushed, sibilant speech, and looking as impressive as her kimomo and the psyche knot would permit, pointed a finger at her companion. "And I shan't — find — Smith, either!" she added, glaring at Sybil with prospective triumph.

"Aunt Phoebe, Aunt Phoebe," said the girl, taking gentle hold of the uplifted wrist and drawing it down, "is n't it wonderful how cruel ignorance makes us!"

"Hey?" questioned Mrs. Bostwick, with a surprised snap of the eyes.

"If a poor hunted deer ran into our living-

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room for protection, I pity the hunters that tried to get her away from you.”

“Now none o’ that, Sibyl, none o’ that. There would n’t be any false pretenses about the deer.”

“And we don’t know that there are any about Nora Creina ; but you ’ve been talking as if you ’d be glad to have her proved guilty. *You!* the kindest woman I know.”

“I deny it,” returned Mrs. Bostwick stoutly. “It’s only that I want the truth to come out about everything — the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”

The girl shook her head. “That is what I say. It is our ignorance of the truth that makes us cruel. If Mrs. Smith meets anything here but love and protection, it simply shows the measure of our ignorance.”

Mrs. Bostwick’s lips set in a tight line as she regarded the speaker with a moment’s hesitation. “It is my duty, is n’t it, to guard you and Claude and the rest of my household from prowling adventuresses?” she asked at last.

The term and Mrs. Bostwick’s personal appearance combined to bring a smile to Sibyl’s lips as she answered quietly : “Certainly ; but we should follow her with our love and hope instead of our condemnation even if she must go away,

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and must give her our personal assistance and encouragement. The good Samaritan had no fear. The only fear we should have is lest we 'pass by on the other side.' ”

There was a moment's silence, then Sibyl went on, with a glance around the room: “I think everything is all right. Shall I go down and get her?”

“No,” responded Mrs. Bostwick firmly. She did not intend that there should be any intercourse between these two this night that was not beneath her vigilant eyes.

A word over the banisters to Claude, and in another minute he escorted the stranger to the head of the stairs, where the hostess awaited her.

All imperiousness had left the guest's manner. She was listless, pale, with shadows beneath her eyes. Having gained her point, she cared little for Mrs. Bostwick's coldness, and recognized but indifferently the warmth in Sibyl's kindly looks; but she thanked them both with a wan smile. Good-nights were said, then her door closed and her entertainers heard the key turn in the lock.

CHAPTER V

WHERE THERE'S A WILL

WHEN Violet's first sleep of exhaustion had passed, she came to consciousness, and for a moment did not realize her surroundings. She was in her eyrie in the mammoth hotel. Belle Armitage had arrived. Her heart quickened until the remembrance of her flight stole over her excited thought, calming it with the assurance that she was safe in the sanctum of the girl with the kind eyes. She was in Sibyl Raynor's bed.

"What next?" she asked herself, staring at the window, whose outlines began to be visible in the dawn. Should she return to the East, driven by the same woman who had caused her flight to California? Never. Moreover, where would be the use of such a step? What were the spaces of a continent to the devouring ability of a touring-car? She could not surely avoid Belle Armitage unless she found means to leave the planet. This cottage set back from the sea offered as much probability of seclusion as any spot she could find. The Armitages would not be aware

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of a next-door neighbor, if he chanced to draw breath outside that stratum of society whose existence only they recognized.

Pondering this fact, she came to a decision to remain here. Sibyl need not be permitted to become tiresome. The boy, she had seen on last evening, was easily snubbed. She would have liked to talk to him in return for the good-natured alacrity with which he put himself out for her, but the fatigue from her excitement was too great; and when she made excuse for her silence, there was good breeding in the young fellow's reply, and the manner in which he withdrew to stroll on the porch until Mrs. Bostwick's summons came.

Mrs. Bostwick! Violet smiled faintly at the whitening window as the memory of her hostess returned to her.

"Poor Aunt Phœbe," she reflected. "I am afraid I dislocated some of her most cherished ideals last night. She certainly became a little difficult."

Violet turned her head on the pillow, and weariness of life rolled over her again in waves. She sighed with parted lips, and her lids fell. Troubled sleeping dreams began to mingle with the troublous waking ones, and when next she

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opened her eyes, broad day shone in at the window and she could hear sounds of stirring below stairs. Her heavy glance wandered about the room. Framed photographs adorned the walls. Beside the bed where she lay hung a full length picture of a young man in white flannels holding a tennis racket. Evidently Sibyl liked this picture to be the one on which her eyes first lighted when she awakened.

“The man she has selected to make her trouble, I suppose,” thought Violet, and raised herself on her elbow the better to view the photograph. A second glance revealed Claude’s good-humored, boyish countenance. Violet was conscious of disappointment. No one in this cruel world had a right to such optimism as looked out of Sibyl Raynor’s eyes. Why should she not begin to learn like other people that there could be no genuine happiness in creation; that all who expressed it or claimed it were either Spartans or hypocrites.

Beside the picture and hung a little lower, so as to be easily legible from Violet’s pillow, was an illuminated quotation which she regarded next. She felt scorn in advance of its smooth-sounding platitudes. It was headed “My Prayer;” and she read what followed: —

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“To be ever conscious of my unity with God.
To listen for his voice and hear no other call.
To separate all error from my thought of man,

“And see him only as my Father’s image ;
To show him reverence, and share with him
My holiest treasures.

“To keep my mental home a sacred place,
Golden with gratitude, redolent with love,
White with purity, cleansed from the flesh.

“To send no thought into the world
That will not bless, or cheer, or purify, or heal.

“To have no aim but to make earth
A fairer, holier place,
And to rise each day into a higher sense of Life and Love.”

It was not exactly the sort of thing the guest had expected. Her gaze remained upon it. “Poor little blank book!” she thought. “Separate all error from my thought of man!” She repeated the line with bitterness; and because the fool’s paradise indicated was so far more foolish than she had suspected, and because the “prayer” was more of a fanciful philosophy than an appeal, she read it again.

A soft knock on the door interrupted her.

She sat up in bed. “It may be noon!” she thought.

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Sibyl's voice sounded without. "You have only your evening dress here, Mrs. Smith," it said. "I've brought you your breakfast." And so she had, in spite of Aunt Phœbe's protest that the like was never heard of in North Haddam, seeing that the *alias* above stairs was perfectly able to come down like other folks, and that she might put on one of Sibyl's calicoes.

Mrs. Smith, a flannel negligée the color of her eyes about her, the appetizing tray on a table beside her, regarded the girl-hostess as the latter opened the blinds.

"You are extremely kind to me," said Violet. "I wonder if you would be kinder still."

"Very likely," replied the girl.

"It is a great deal to ask," went on the guest, sipping her coffee, "but the milk of human kindness simply oozes out of you at every pore. I have had the luck to catch you before it dries up."

Sibyl smiled.

"Oh, yes, it will dry up. It has lasted through college life for you, which is a wonder. Perhaps it was your athletics. I have been looking at that picture of you with the basket-ball team."

The girl nodded. "I live over a lot of fun every time I look at that."

Mrs. Smith's eyes rested on the vital form and

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face meditatively. "Yes," she said slowly, "you are strong, and kind, and good, and happy. The best thing that could happen to you would be to die to-day."

Sibyl winced; but the cloud of surprise passed from her face. "Why? You don't suppose I'd stay dead, do you?" she asked. "I think not many people believe that."

"Exactly," returned Mrs. Smith, going on with her breakfast, "else there would n't be so many people. Many a one besides Hamlet has hesitated before that 'perchance,' and found it 'the rub.' But let me tell you what I have to ask of you and see if it is too much. I want some one to go over to the hotel and tell them that Mrs. Smith has been called away suddenly, and ask the chambermaid to pack her trunk."

"But," Sibyl regarded the guest with hesitation, "where is the trunk to be sent?"

"Here." The response came promptly. "I have decided to remain here."

The color rose in the girl's cheeks. "You will have to see Aunt Phœbe about that."

Mrs. Smith broke a piece of toast unconcernedly. "Yes, I'm sorry I shocked her. The room is really to be for rent, I suppose?"

"I — I thought so," replied Sibyl. "So far

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as packing your trunk is concerned, I am entirely willing to go to the hotel for you."

"You are very kind," said Violet absently. She was already thinking of something else. She always carried her point in small matters. "I'll dress," she continued, "and then will you kindly ask Mrs. Bostwick to come up here, or let me come to her?"

Sibyl stood at the foot of the bed, meeting the blue gaze. "I'll do that," she returned quietly, "but you will have to satisfy Aunt Phœbe before I can have your belongings sent here."

"Oh! So bad as that?" asked Violet.

"Yes; and it will be worse than that when she finds that you wish me to go to the hotel to transact your business. You will have to be frank with her."

The girl's gaze was direct, and the warm love-light that played in it so naturally yesterday was not shining.

The white face thrown back against the pillow regarded her hostess curiously. "How about this?" she asked, pointing at the line in the illuminated text which had most aroused her scorn.

Sibyl shook her head. "Aunt Phœbe has n't learned that yet," she answered.

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Mrs. Smith's delicate nostrils dilated. "If you separate all error from your thought of most men, there is very little left to think about them," she said; then her eyes grew wistful as she kept them on the girlish face. "I believe *you* would take me, trunk and all, and ask no questions," she continued.

"Yes, I would," returned the other.

"And yet you don't look at me as you did yesterday," went on Mrs. Smith. "On each occasion that we have met, you have regarded me as lovingly as if I were an old friend. I could not help remarking it."

Sibyl smiled and colored. "Yes; you interested me; and you looked like Nora Creina, Moore's Irish heroine. Do you know the song? You were like Nora Creina, only grown lonely and unhappy. I longed to do something for you."

Violet bit her lip, and her eyes grew misty. For a minute she swallowed in silence. "And you still want to do something for me, I hope," she returned, at last.

"Yes; but" — Sibyl hesitated, "but it must be the right thing."

"I see," remarked Mrs. Smith. "Mrs. Bostwick has been talking to you, and self-preserva-

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tion is the first law of life. That was a very pleasant light that beamed on me from your eyes yesterday. I'm sorry that any one has put it out with cold water."

Sibyl's gaze did not fall. "It is simply that I must not call evil good," she replied, "either in you, or myself, or anybody else."

Violet turned her face into the pillow and gave a laugh that was half a sob. Then she looked up again, still smiling in a way that made her very lovely as she lay there, her heavy black braids lying against the whiteness about her.

"I see. I am on my defense. It is a new sensation. Well, will you lend me a wrapper that I may wear until the trunk comes over? Then I can soon be ready to see your aunt." The smile vanished, and it was the cold, inimical look that Sibyl remembered which accompanied the stranger's next words. "I cannot blame you, I suppose, for listening to her suspicions."

The girl's face did not alter at the changed tone. She went to her closet and brought the wrapper.

"Aunt Phœbe and I do not regard things in exactly the same way," she said. "This is her house and not mine, else you should stay here, whatever has happened; and if it is something

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mistaken and bad, I might help you to destroy it.”

Violet regarded her with increased curiosity. “You think you might!” she ejaculated. “Oh, you poor little blank book!”

Sibyl paused in surprise. “Of course,” she said at last, “I see there is something very unhappy in your life. You are so attractive that it is natural to feel that you could n’t have done wrong.”

Violet’s lip curled. “Indeed? That is not the way attractiveness impresses people, as a rule.”

“It is hard for me to be impersonal,” went on Sibyl, with simple frankness, “when any one charms me as you have: hard to search only for the truth, and not to be influenced by your appearance. I wonder, though,” she went on, after a pause, “why your face has expressed such enmity for me more than once.”

“Has it? I should beg your pardon for that, after such courtesy as you have shown me here.”

“Yes, but that does n’t answer me.”

“Don’t wretched people always hate?” exclaimed Violet suddenly. “Here. Call your aunt at once, please; and remain here yourself. I won’t wait to dress.”

CHAPTER VI

THERE'S A WAY

MRS. BOSTWICK was not far to seek. She was restless from the moment Sibyl disappeared within the guest's room, and with each passing minute grew more dissatisfied that she did not return.

When, therefore, the girl finally opened the door, she met the portly lady energetically mounting the stairs. "I was just coming for you, Aunt Phœbe," she said. "Mrs. Smith wishes to see you." The set of Mrs. Bostwick's lips caused Sibyl to take a step forward and seize her hand. "Careful, dear!" she whispered. "Think if it were I!"

The good lady pushed by her in silence, and in another moment her spectacles were directed toward the bed. She had steeled herself to resist the strong will she had discerned last night, as well as Sibyl's soft-heartedness; and she entered that room with mind fully made up.

The head on the pillow looked so girlish with its hanging braids that it was difficult for her natural kindness of heart not to assert itself; but

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even though Mrs. Smith were pale, she had nevertheless been indulged already in a manner calculated to arouse false hopes, and Mrs. Bostwick was in haste to get her out of the house. In her newly acquired shrewdness she suspected that the guest might feign inability to rise. "Good-morning," she said briefly. "Shan't I wait until you dress?"

"Miss Raynor has been kind enough to consent to go to the hotel to get me something to put on," replied Violet.

"I don't think I can spare her," rejoined Mrs. Bostwick promptly. "She'll lend you a shirt-waist and skirt to go over in, and Claude can bring them back."

It was evident that the speaker had laid this plan deliberately, and was intending to put it through with a firm hand.

Amid all her heart-sickness Violet smiled. The determined gleam in Aunt Phœbe's spectacles and the arms akimbo over her spotless black and white cotton gown bespoke her state of mind. The guest wondered what her friends at home would say to the situation. Absurd as it was, however, it must be met if she were going to stay here; and above and beyond the natural resistance to being dismissed, she did desire to stay

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here. There was a peaceful atmosphere recognizable to her sensitive nature, and she had a strange longing to see the old look return to Sibyl's eyes.

"Won't you sit down, Mrs. Bostwick?" she asked.

The chip on that lady's shoulder was at a perilous angle. "I think I can sit down, if I like, in my own child's room," she thought. What she said was: "It won't be worth while. We'll leave you to dress, and we're both glad if you've rested well, and we'll see you off when you come downstairs."

Sibyl, standing by the window, her back to the room, caught her lip beneath her teeth. "There is neither dishonesty nor cruelty in God's universe," she reflected. "He will help us all to do right."

"I wish to stay with you, Mrs. Bostwick," she heard the guest say. "My behavior has perplexed you naturally, and I must tell you that I left my home a month since under the cloud of a great misfortune. A year ago I felt myself the happiest woman in Boston. When I left there," — she paused for an instant, and Mrs. Bostwick saw the effort for self-control, — "I am sure I was the most wretched. I came out here alone

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from choice, and found comfort in solitude until last night. Certain persons were instrumental in shattering my life. These very people appeared suddenly at the hotel. I considered nothing except that I could no longer breathe there. I recalled that you and Miss Raynor had been kind to me, and that you took in strangers. I scarcely knew whether it were night or day. I only knew I must come. Can't you understand?"

She paused. Sibyl did not turn. Her luminous eyes still gazed from the window.

Mrs. Bostwick sat down in the nearest chair. "So you 're from Boston," she said, in a changed and reflective tone.

The averted gaze returned to her. "Yes," answered Violet.

"And—I can't help how it sounds, but is your name really Smith?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Because somehow you don't look it."

"Yes, my name is Smith and I'm from Boston. Two indications of respectability, aren't they? Oh, I am entirely respectable, Mrs. Bostwick," added the guest, with bitterness. "Too respectable. That has been one of my handicaps from the first."

The misery in the white face was too genuine

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to be resisted. Mrs. Bostwick's suspicions fell from her in a swarm. She was silent for a moment. "Sibyl," she said at last, "Mrs. Maynard has gone. You might go into her room and fix it up for Mrs. Smith. I'll attend to this tray."

Sibyl obeyed, not even sending a glance toward the bed as she passed. When the door had closed, Mrs. Bostwick spoke again. "Is there anything more you would wish to say to me now the child has gone?"

"Nothing." Violet pressed a hand to her dry eyes. "I have asked Miss Raynor to do me the great favor to go to the hotel and ask the chambermaid to pack my trunk and send it over here."

"Well, I guess she can do that," returned Mrs. Bostwick, considering. Her eyes rested on the wedding-ring that shone on the small white hand, guarded by a diamond of clearest water. "There's lots o' troubles in this world worse than death, and if you're passing through one of them, I can only say that time is a wonderful healer, and you must brace up all you can. There ain't anything so bad but it might be worse."

Mrs. Smith looked back at the speaker steadily for the first time. "Yes; it would be worse if my acquaintances at the hotel should learn

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that I am here; so, if Miss Raynor will go? Fortunately, I paid my bill yesterday."

Aunt Phœbe rose. "I see. Well I'll send her right along so 's to set your mind at rest."

She left the room, closing the door behind her, and went into the front of the house, where Sibyl was putting things to rights in a light bright chamber where a sea breeze fluttered the white curtains.

"Well, we're in for it," remarked Aunt Phœbe.

"Yes, she has been sent to us after all," returned the girl, the usual optimism sounding in her tone.

"She's the kind that knows what she wants, anyway; and like all women, she's in a hurry for her trunk. You can run over to the hotel if you want to, Sibyl, and I'll finish up here. Kind o' queer, of course, the whole thing, and I don't exactly like it, sending you around this way; but she does act as if she was in a tight place."

"She certainly does, and I don't mind in the least," returned the girl; and suspecting that Mrs. Bostwick was drifting toward another mutiny now that she was out of the radius of the violet eyes, she made haste to be off.

The morning was fresh and delightful. As

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Sibyl neared the hotel, a motor-car of a deep maroon color stood near where she ascended the steps. An elderly man with sweeping gray moustache and cold eyes imbedded in wrinkles was about to enter it. Beside him stood a striking-looking girl. Her dazzling skin showed brilliant above the leaf-brown of her long coat, and her cap was set firmly upon masses of red hair. She was addressing some remark to the chauffeur, who was busy at the front of the machine when Sibyl approached, and the latter's demure countenance gave no sign of the interest with which she recognized her brother, or the curiosity with which she examined his employers.

Claude, looking up suddenly, saw her and smilingly nodded. Miss Armitage, observing the greeting, glanced at Sibyl a moment, and finding the girl's face interesting beyond the ordinary, her glance altered to a gaze. Their chauffeur was, as she knew, a young gentleman who was boiling the pot by this temporary arrangement, and so she looked with some curiosity at the friend he greeted.

Sibyl's fresh face also attracted the weary eyes of Mr. Armitage. "That's a peach of a girl, Raynor," he remarked when she had passed.

"I think so," answered Claude, going on with his work.

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Miss Armitage gave her father a slight unconscious frown of displeasure. She was of the omnivorous species of young woman, and though the new chauffeur was only a freshly escaped collegian, he was welcome to dream of her by night and worship her by day during the period of his good fortune in guiding her tours abroad; and for this reason would be naturally expected to lose interest in such members of the feminine population as he had chanced previously to know.

But Mr. Armitage turned and looked after Sibyl's figure with his tired eyes, for the light that had sprung in hers as she greeted Claude gave him a sense of refreshment: a whiff of youth and joy had passed, and he looked back at his chauffeur with a shade of envy of that exchanged glance of understanding.

By the evening of that day Violet Smith had settled her belongings in the breezy front room of the Bostwick cottage. She had come down from her eyrie beneath the eaves of the great hotel to dwell among men: had exchanged the mystery and solitude of evenings in the patio for Mrs. Bostwick's hammock-hung porch.

But there was the bluff by the sea where one could always find a spot free from intrusion of aught beside duck and pelican, and here was her

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white room where she would know how to exclude visitors. She had carried her point and was installed. She had run the gauntlet of strange faces and glances at the supper-table, and in the certainty that no one of her acquaintance would be likely to seek this simple home, had endured the experience without annoyance.

The long evening was before her with its lingering spring daylight, and she wandered up the quiet street with a feeling almost of peace at her heart.

“ ‘The world forgetting, and by the world forgot,’ ” she thought, as she strolled on.

Mrs. Bostwick's friendliness of manner had returned. There was more amusement than anything else in Violet's attitude toward her; but with Sibyl it was different. The missing light had returned to her eyes, and each time Violet met them, she sunned herself in it. She still desired to hold off niece as well as aunt, however. Had it not been so, she would have just now asked Sibyl to walk with her in the evening quiet, broken only by the subdued roar of waves and the vesper songs of birds; but the young girl, well introduced owing to Mrs. Bostwick's prattle concerning her yesterday morning, despite her charm, was an irritation to Violet; and she

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promptly rebuked the ever-recurring attraction she felt toward her by the recollection of her imbecile ideas. Violet's state of mind was one of savage impatience with all species of fool's paradise. Facts — she wanted nothing but facts for the rest of her life; the only way not to suffer was to lop away every twig of hope or happiness as it lifted its green head.

Not noticing the direction in which her steps were tending, she suddenly found herself nearing the mountain of the hotel, and quickly turning her back upon it, she began to pace again slowly toward her new home.

CHAPTER VII

SORROW'S PLANTING

PRESENTLY a man's long step sounded behind her. "Good-evening, Mrs. Smith," said a cheerful voice, and in an instant Claude Raynor was beside her, lifting his cap.

She looked up into his good-humored face. "You startled me," she exclaimed. "I do not expect any one here to know me."

He regarded the dark coronet of her hair with admiration, and his thoughts were agog with curiosity. When he had left the house this morning, Aunt Phœbe had been determined on ousting their charming waif, and had replied to his fervent asseverations that she was a queen, with the scornful retort that no man could be expected to know beans when the bag was open, and that as for Claude in particular, she meant to watch him in the next rain-storm to see if his brain made any suggestions as to seeking shelter.

"If you had only held your tongue last night, as you might have seen I wanted you to, we should have got her back to the hotel and no harm done," Aunt Phœbe had said; and now

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here was Mrs. Smith, again pacing the street in a white gown, and with her lovely head uncovered except by the raven waves in which nature had dressed it.

“I hope you are rested after last night,” went on Claude, suiting his step to hers.

“I am, thank you. There is a very peaceful atmosphere in your house. Your sister indulged me by even giving me my breakfast in bed.”

Claude was well aware of this, for it was while the preparation of the tray was going on that Mrs. Bostwick had eased her mind upon him.

The charming widow had still not told him what he wished to know, but he was fain to curb his impatience and take another tack.

“Were you at the hotel a little while ago when I swept up there in grand style with my car?” he asked exultantly.

“No. Have you a car?”

“Scarcely. I’ve begun chuffing one for my daily bread until we get through keeping a boarding-house. Aunt Phœbe and Sibyl are n’t willing I should go East till they do, and I’m glad of it now. It’s great. I’d pay Mr. Armitage for letting me drive it if I could — but don’t tell him so, if you know him.”

The boy laughed, and meeting the eyes uplifted

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to his, noted the flood of color that suddenly rushed over his companion's white cheeks.

"Mr. Armitage!" she repeated.

"Yes, great luck for me. I decided I might put in my time that way, and left my name and credentials at the hotel office, and sure enough, pretty soon along comes this big fish and swallows me, hook and all — but if you know him, be kind enough not to tell him I called him a fish."

"I know who they are. It's not a bad name for him," returned Mrs. Smith, the color fading from her face as they paced along in the evening light.

"Then you've seen Miss Armitage, probably. Whew!" The boy gave a long-drawn exclamation. "Isn't she a stunner!"

Violet's teeth ground together for a moment. "What is she like?" she asked quietly.

"Oh, she's the boss, all right. You can just see she goes through the world commanding everybody to fall down and worship. Her eyes are pretty near black all the time; and I guess if anything crossed her, they'd get there all right. Then she has the dandiest mouth you ever saw — but suppose you're stringing me, and you know her, and mean to tell her everything I say!"

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Mrs. Smith forced a laugh. "I should n't think of telling her; but if I knew her well enough and did so, you've said nothing yet that she would not consider flattering. So you are in their employ," she added, after a moment's silence. "You are going to spend your days with them."

"Oh, it's a dandy car!" ejaculated the boy. "We've driven to Point Loma to-day. You know it, perhaps — that's where they claim to have a little private heaven on earth. I never saw such a beautiful place: such views, such water, such rocks, such grandeur in this velvety, plushy air. They have a whole settlement of white — sort of temples, with amethyst domes that grow more violet from the sky; and the roads are bordered with a close small flower the same color — you never saw anything so lovely in your life. It's no use talking to Aunt Phœbe about it, she'd say North Haddam had it beat to a pulp; but I'm bound Sibyl shan't go back without peeking over the fence, at least. The Armitages know some of the high muck-a-mucks there, and they took me in with them."

The pair were drawing near to the Bostwick house, and Claude began to be surprised that his companion did not offer to leave him and retrace her steps.

Sorrow's Planting

“I hope Aunt Phœbe has some cold victuals left,” he remarked, after Mrs. Smith had murmured acquiescence in the beauty of Point Loma.

“What?” she returned. “Have you had nothing to eat?”

“Oh, Belle said we did,” rejoined the boy irrepressibly. Then he glanced at his companion. “Say, don’t give me away, will you? But Belle does suit her so exactly. No violet born to bloom unseen about her!”

“My name is Violet,” remarked Mrs. Smith.

“Absolutely appropriate also,” returned her escort, with conviction. “Two lucky shots. I wonder how it happened! Well, we had tea about an hour and a half ago. I devoured enough of those wafers to shingle a meeting-house. Every time anybody looked away I took another; but they did n’t seem to have any effect on me. And tea!” Claude’s grimace indicated his sufferings. “What an apology tea is!”

“You will probably have it daily, and come to consider it the staff of life before a month is over. Mark my words.”

They had reached the Bostwick gate, and Claude observed that his companion waited for him to open it.

The Leaven of Love

“You have come here?” he asked, in a changed and respectful tone of curiosity.

“Why, yes. I forgot you did n’t know it. I am one of the family now.”

“All the better for us,” responded the boy heartily.

Violet Smith went upstairs vexed with herself for her words, for the family idea was precisely the last she had all along desired to convey; and the discovery that there was here still a link with all she had left made her desire it less than ever.

She entered her white, simple room to-night with a sense of its silence and peace; and going to the dresser, lighted the gas-jet and regarded her reflection by the aid of its yellow flame.

“Even that boy calls her stunning, and sees that she is born to fascinate and command,” she mused; “but even that boy laughs at her secretly. There is something fine in him that perceives the quality in her. She and I can never attract the same people. Let each one seek his own level, his own associates. The man—the friend, the acquaintance even whom she charms, is spoiled for me. Why, then, cast one lingering look backward—” The growing excitement of Violet’s thought was reddening her cheeks and bringing light to her sombre eyes.

Sorrow's Planting

A knock at the door sounded and she answered the summons. Sibyl stood there, a pitcher and glass in hand. "I have brought you —" she began, and paused, caught by the alteration in Mrs. Smith's face.

"Why, Nora Creina," she said, with an apologetic little laugh at her own familiarity, "how sparkling you look! California is doing you good."

"Yes, doing me good," repeated Violet, standing back for the girl to enter. "There is a woman here, Miss Sibyl, the very thought of whom is a tonic to me."

"How delightful!" exclaimed the girl, her eyes returning the luminous gaze gladly.

"Oh, no, not necessarily," laughed the other. "Tonics are generally bitter, aren't they? This is a sort of mental quinine mingled with all the acid and stinging ingredients known to human ingenuity. All rolled together into a pill and swallowed, it produces the effect you see."

Sibyl gazed at the guest with a startled fading of her own gladness.

Violet laughed at the open wonder and doubt in the childlike eyes, and she took the pitcher and glass Sibyl had forgotten and set them on a table.

The Leaven of Love

“Do you mean that you hate this woman?” asked the girl simply.

Violet nodded. “As one hates a toad, or a serpent, or any other reptile one would not touch!” she responded; and while Sibyl stared, she continued, a hard light sparkling in her eyes, “and the obtuseness, the insensitiveness of those who are willing to handle reptiles, people for whom they have no repulsiveness, puts them in the same category for me.”

“Oh! Oh! Mrs. Smith,” ejaculated Sibyl, the exclamation drawn from her even more by the expression of Violet’s face than by her words, “what trouble you are making for yourself!”

“I, making?”

“Yes, yes,” replied the girl softly. “We must n’t dare to hate.”

“Must n’t dare take the only relief on earth for such pain as comes to some of us? You baby! You little fool!” Blue fire flashed from Violet’s eyes, and she towered above the girl in her sudden access of passion.

“Yes,” rejoined Sibyl, returning her gaze unmoved. “It would be better to stay in a burning building; safer to court contagion.”

Mrs. Smith controlled herself with an effort. “Pardon me,” she said, ashamed of her outburst,

Sorrow's Planting

and realizing, moreover, that such ebullitions were as liable to encourage familiarity as friendly overtures would be. "I forgot myself. There is a gulf between us; a gulf of experience. Your gentle little rules of life cannot apply to me."

She moved to the door and held it open for Sibyl to pass out; but the girl stood still.

"Mrs. Smith, I understand your impatience with me, but you're wrong; for the child who knows that two and two make four has discovered the same principle and is on as firm a foundation as the mathematician who calculates an eclipse."

Violet Smith's gaze remained fixed on the serious, sweet eyes. "Have you ever had a trouble in your life?" she asked — "I mean beyond the loss of a canary bird, or the cutting of two sleeves for the same arm?"

"I've had no great trouble such as has come to you, but I suffered a great deal for other people until I found the Universal Solvent of trouble."

"And that is —" asked Mrs. Smith, with curling lip.

"God himself," returned Sibyl quietly.

Mrs. Smith shook her head. "I'm not religious," she said briefly.

"And have you had a good time?" asked the girl.

The Leaven of Love

The woman's eyes flashed at her.

"We're living under laws," said Sibyl; "and the great Law that Good works out for us is that either through learning the truth, or else by suffering the consequences of ignorance, we're driven to where we can be taken care of and brought into harmony. You are to-night like a musical instrument that has been wrongly handled by yourself as well as other people until you jangle with discord. It will be so until you appeal to the great Tuner: Love."

"Love!" echoed Violet bitterly. "It has made all the trouble I ever knew. Hate is calm, cool, comforting, strengthening by comparison." The speaker stiffened to her full height, and her fingers whitened on the door she held. "All I ask is never to know love again; to feel no taint or hint of it in heart or brain. You have thought out some philosophy whose theory satisfies you in your inexperience. Wait until it has to stand a strain; then and then only the gulf between us can narrow."

Sibyl smiled at her with shining eyes. "Narrow until we can cross it," she said; "and either I can jump across and hate with you, or you can jump across and love with me. I warn you that whatever comes, I shall not jump across, because

Sorrow's Planting

— if for no other reason — of one sentence in the Bible. This: ‘Every plant that my Heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.’ Not ‘*may* be’ or ‘*ought* to be,’ mind you, but ‘*shall* be.’ My Heavenly Father plants only flowers of love. That I know, immovably; and the rooting up is a painful process. I won’t sow anything of the wrong sort, consciously; and I have known, since the first time I met your eyes out there on the bluff, that you were doing so every day: nurturing sorrow and hate; watering the plants with your tears — those plants that cannot be eternal. The great Law is always working, and this year or next, on this plane or some other, they must be rooted up; which means that they will afflict you sufficiently to make you cease to cherish them.”

Violet’s eyes grew darker as the girl spoke slowly. She tried to hold firmly to scorn of her words; but the cool, assured voice began to confuse her.

“Sit down,” she said, waving her hand toward a chair; and she closed the door which she had been holding wide.

CHAPTER VIII

CONFIDENCES

SIBYL seated herself, and Mrs. Smith took a chair near her.

“ You are a strange girl and talk a strange language,” she began. “ It is as if, in spite of your college career, you had not yet begun to live in this world. I believe no man has touched your life. I looked in your room for his possible picture, and there was none. Had there been, I could say no more to you ; for the vanity of every woman who loves is to believe that no other woman has ever loved so. I was a girl not excessively romantic. I had many interests, and a worldly mother whose shrewd ideas concerning matrimony were carefully instilled into me. It was a state to be plunged into head first ; never heart first. I was not a credit to her teaching, and yet fortune favored me. I fell in love at last with that rush and abandon of sentiment with which tales always invest the man’s feeling for the woman ; never *vice versa* when a happy ending is foreshadowed. The man, while not wealthy, was a favorite socially, and eligible even from

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my mother's point of view. He seemed no more attracted to me than he was to half a dozen other girls, and I had sufficient grace to let no ray of my feeling appear; but the building in which he spent his days became a temple for me; the streets through which he passed thither shone as if the cobblestones had been of gold. His relatives were surrounded with an alluring glamour, and I made a thousand excuses for being in their company. Two men whom my mother highly approved proposed to me, and I had great difficulty in soothing her exasperation at my refusal of both. At last the day came; the night: it was one evening when he and I were of a house party in the country. Thrown with me constantly for several days, he felt suddenly that I was the woman for him." The speaker paused, and looked in musing silence through the star-lit window. "I did not accept him at once. I kept the pent-up ocean of feeling within me still under the control it had known for months. It meant all the world to me, and heaven, and eternity, that I should mean to him what he meant to me. I would not open the flood-gates until I was sure. I asked him to give me two weeks, and he consented. It was a wonderful two weeks for me, and my certainty grew steadily toward

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ecstasy, as he persistently plied the lover's arts, apparently more eager with each passing day for my consent. My mother received him with complaisance, although his immediate predecessor had been richer and therefore preferable." The speaker paused again as memory's pictures burned pitilessly. "Some time after our marriage, one of my girl friends from New York visited in Boston and I entertained her. My husband was in a way a public man, and was brought in contact with many women, but never the faintest breath of unhappiness had touched me until the coming of this girl. She was a blight in our home. She hypnotized him. She passed through my life like a withering blast. He had known her well and without sentiment before our marriage, but it was not in her nature to witness the devotion of so attractive a man to another woman, even his wife, without the endeavor to win him. There is nothing new about the story. It often happens. Little by little she writhed herself into our affairs, and began to create trying situations where he must choose, and let the world see to which he paid allegiance. I made no fight. I again controlled that flood of my tenderness and guarded it from him, for if it were to be worth anything, he must seek it. He

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was tired, nervous, impatient, reproachful. It was the old story: 'Love is of man's life a thing apart, 't is woman's whole existence.' One night he had promised that we should visit this girl in a house where she had gone from ours. We had been going out a great deal. He was burning the candle at both ends, and I knew he could not endure it much longer. I begged that we might stay at home this one evening: told him how tired I was, myself, and tried to attract him to thoughts of the restful hours we might have. I even suppressed my resentment, and said I would telephone this girl and make it right. He replied carelessly that if either of us 'phoned, it would have to be himself. The declaration was fuel to my flame, but I persisted gently that he stay with me, and showed no excitement. I felt that his decision would be crucial. He went. As soon as the door had closed behind him, I went upstairs and packed my clothes without any haste. I knew that if I were busy in the small hours, I should still be alone. It was of no use to go to my mother. She would not submit for one moment to my step; so I ordered a carriage and drove to the house of an aunt who was devoted to me, and too separated from the world, owing to her invalidism, to hear any echoes of its excite-

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ment. I never have seen my husband since that night. It was four months ago."

As she paused, Sibyl, watching her with pained, wide eyes, spoke: "But what did your husband do?"

"He went to my mother, who shared to the full his anger and hurt pride. She implored me to return before it was too late; and she told our friends that I was devoting myself to my invalid aunt to the exclusion of every other interest. She praised me in public and plead with me fiercely in private. I cared less than nothing for the speech of people. I had been cast from heaven into hell, and pin-pricks could not make themselves felt through my torment. If my husband had even then said, 'I love you, Violet, and you only. That other woman is less than nothing to me. Let us leave the town and go to some quiet place away from the city's turmoil where we can learn to forget this nightmare dream,' — but no, his attitude was one of anger and reproach. He took the ground that my action was caprice, and that by the time I repented of it, it would be too late to repair the injury done an innocent girl by the gossip which would fix upon her as the cause of our quarrel."

Violet suddenly rose and paced the floor.

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“Even then, his first thought was for her! ‘An innocent girl’!” She laughed bitterly. “Sibyl, it is true that in every love-affair there is one who loves, and one who is loved. The passive one only goes on daily growing more exacting, accepting each new offering on the conjugal altar as merely his or her due, and the poor fool who accepts fewer and fewer crumbs of kindness in return for the whole sum of her lavished wealth has a choice of two evils. She may continue to endure the pangs of a half-starved existence, or she may cut loose entirely, and exchange ever-recurring disappointment for that sort of blessedness enjoyed by those who expect nothing. There could be but one choice for me. I must have all or —” An eloquent wave of the speaker’s hand finished her sentence.

Violet met her companion’s eyes as they unconsciously followed her restless movements, and presently she came back and again took the chair beside the young girl.

“It was but four weeks after my arrival at my aunt’s house that she died. My mother said my action hastened the end, but it was not so. Again and again my aunt expressed her gratitude for my devotion. She had no children, and she left me money that is giving me independence to-day;

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that will give me independence of all the hateful sordid details of separation. It would n't matter, however, if I had n't it. Nothing would induce me to take one cent from the man I loved."

"Separation —" repeated Sibyl.

"Yes." Violet clasped her hands till each finger whitened. "I long for the day when my desertion shall have set him free from me only less intensely than I once longed for that which should bind me to him."

"And your mother? Surely you can't ignore your mother?"

"I must be firm with her, for we have no common ground. My aunt's will exasperates her, for she would like me to be starved into returning. She absolutely refuses to attach any blame to my husband for what she terms his possible sentimental lapses, they being less than nothing in her eyes compared to the enormity of my furnishing food for the gossips. Oh, Sibyl, Sibyl, I am so alone!"

The girl was already holding her friend's cold hands close, and now the small head with its jetty crown fell on her shoulder and she clasped a sobbing woman in her strong young arms.

"There is a right way out of every wrong situation," she said softly.

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“It’s such a — such a blessing that I have — have the money!” sobbed Violet. “It comes to me every night afresh, the horrible thought that to me, to Violet Smith, this nightmare of divorce has come; and when the transition time is over, I am going to work — to work as long as I have to drag myself through this awful life, a dilapidated, crippled thing without hope in the world.”

Sibyl held her close, and patted her heaving shoulder gently.

Presently Violet drew herself away and attempted to dry her aching eyes. “You see now, with all your kindness, how useless it is for you to think that you can understand my — my catastrophe.”

“True, I haven’t passed through this catastrophe, but” — Sibyl looked off between the breeze-blown curtains — “two and two are four just the same.” Her gaze returned to her companion.

“Dear Mrs. Smith, listen. We are all like the child before the blackboard, confused by the mistake that has entered into his calculation. It seems to him that the example will never come right, yet he can’t discover his error, and so it looks for a while as though the situation were hopeless. All this time is the principle of mathematics conscious of any error? It knows only the

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truth. When the student sees the right instead of the wrong, the problem is solved, and it seems as if the principle of mathematics had taken pity on him, when in reality it never saw any error at all, but knew the truth, and nothing but the truth, every minute. Just so with God's law of Love. It knows only love, only goodness, only harmony, only perfection, and we may avail ourselves of it. When we feel its help, it seems to our sense to take pity on us, 'Like as a Father pitieth his children,' but in reality it knows nothing of discord or pain."

Mrs. Smith shook her head. "I have thought very little about God; but if I had one, and He knew and cared nothing for my sorrow, I would not have Him for my Deity."

Sibyl's shining eyes looked upward from her friend's bowed head. "I would not dare to have a God who knew anything of evil," she said slowly, "for then He would not be Infinite Good. Knowing only the refulgence of eternal verity and perfection, He will lead me to know it too."

The blue eyes, hard and despairing under their reddened lids, looked up into the confident and radiant countenance that returned her gaze.

"There *is* a gulf between us," went on Sibyl, "as you said a few minutes ago. It is a chasm

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indeed, so far as appearance goes, and yet" — she smiled tenderly and took Violet's cold hand again — "that is only an appearance."

"Wait till you have had trouble," returned the older woman.

"I am not going to have trouble," declared the girl serenely.

"How dare you say that!" with a shudder. "At least knock on the wood."

Sibyl smiled. "I have a better place to knock," she answered.

"You were born queer," said Violet, regarding her companion heavily. "Your aunt told me so. You were born with a blind faith, and you have retained it up to years of discretion."

"Yes," replied the girl, "it appealed to me always that either there was a God or there was not. While I was a child, grown-up people assured me that there was; so there seemed but one logical conclusion. When I grew older, I found that I was correct."

A flash illumined Violet's dimmed eyes. "You can see how much He has interested himself in my affairs," she returned.

"Have you ever interested yourself in Him?" asked the girl.

"I certainly have," was the passionate re-

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sponse. "Did any poor wretch ever pray harder than I—wakeful night after wakeful night! Oh, if you knew how your sweetness and confidence exasperate me! The accidental sweetness that was born with you; the confidence that has never been tried."

"Gently, gently," returned Sibyl. "One can't reach even the age of twenty-three without any trials of confidence. You have called me ignorant a number of times." The speaker smiled, and her watching companion could see the tinge of amusement in her clear eyes. "I think the time has come to convict you of a certain ignorance."

"Poor child, poor child," murmured Violet, shaking her head. "No woman can have any experience until she has loved a man."

The amusement became more evident in Sibyl's frank face. "The experienced scholar wrestling with Euclid has no firmer principle to proceed on than has the little girl who knows two and two are four and not five," she answered. "You didn't begin with the right knowledge. For instance, if the trolley-car does n't seize the electric power, it does n't move, does it?"

"No."

"Supposing it stood on the rails imploring the

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power to come to it and give it swift and successful passage to its destination. How long would it wait, do you think?"

Violet shook her head.

Sibyl regarded her wistfully, all amusement gone from her sweet eyes. "When you pray to God, you ask Him to come down where you are — hating a woman — one of his children; punishing another, your husband; resisting another, your mother. Instead of attaching yourself to his Omnipotent Love and moving with it, you ask Him to come down to your tumultuous mortal thought and minister to your hurt heart in ways that *you* shall indicate. Is it any wonder that the car stands still?"

Violet caught her lip between her teeth. "If I had not thought you would sympathize with me, I should never have talked as I have tonight," she said.

"I do sympathize with you," returned the girl. "Have your own ideas brought you happiness? Why not doubt them and try new ones? As I've told you before, you have attracted me from the first, and I would do any right thing I could for you. If you will take my friendship, it is yours; and you can scarcely expect that I shall not try to narrow the chasm between us — that chasm

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which is nothing but an optical illusion. Your life now is like a disordered room. The furniture is in chaotic confusion, and the worst of it is, the windows are so dusty and cobwebby that not enough light can come through for you to see how to move safely in your environment. You strike yourself against this knob and that corner until you are bruised from head to foot." Sibyl held the other's heavy eyes with a loving gaze. "You can't think," she went on slowly, "how I long to take a sponge full of the water of truth and wash those windows — even a small part of one, so that enough light may come in for you to walk by and avoid such hurts."

The two looked at each other for a long, silent space, then Violet spoke slowly: "It is evident enough that you are honest. You make me wish at moments that I did n't know better than to be a fool like you."

After another silent moment Sibyl rose. "I will go away now and let you rest," she said. "Let me leave two sentences with you. You know them well. You've said them many times in church. You never believed them; but they may be believed, and more than that, they may be proved — here and now, in this world: God is Love. God is Omnipotent."

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Violet did not move or speak. She stared through the open window. Sibyl stooped and kissed her cheek, then she went out and closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER IX

OLD FRIENDS

ONE week later, Miss Armitage and her father sat at breakfast on their balcony, facing the sea.

A copy of the "New York Sun" was leaning against the sugar-bowl, and Mr. Armitage read absorbedly while he munched his toast. His daughter, holding a late novel in one hand, sipped from her coffee-cup and its pages simultaneously. The waves lapped the shore quietly this morning, and the ever-radiant, ever-unclouded sun shone down upon the idle population of the great hotel, offering a new day of the perfect weather for which they had ceased to be grateful.

The entrance of a bell-boy bringing the mail caused a break in the reigning silence, and Belle Armitage dropped her book with alacrity to receive the letters.

Her father's expressionless eyes roved from his column to the mail in her hand and back again. She silently placed all that was addressed to him beside his plate, and hurriedly finishing her coffee, pushed back her chair and broke the blue seal of a dainty envelope. Her eyes scanned the open-

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ing lines of the letter carelessly, then she began to read attentively.

“I didn’t realize, my dear, that I had been mum about Dick Chamberlain. It was n’t intentional. You can’t quite expect me to make a tabulated list of all the unlucky wights you mow down on the occasions of your triumphal progress through our sober and sedate city, and keep you posted as to their symptoms and the rate of their convalescence; but since you ask me especially about Dick, I will tell you that I never saw him appear more stalwart and fit than he did this morning. His damask cheek seemed as free from wormy inroads as any I ever saw, and he was as well-groomed and good to look upon as ever. His surplice was just as becoming, and that absurdly golden head of his just as straitly brushed, as if you had never given him a moment’s abstraction.

“No, you are mistaken. There has been nothing intentional in my silence concerning Dick. It is so many years that I have been accustomed to seeing him on the organ-bench at The Holy Saints that it never occurs to me as an exciting circumstance. I admit that when the sermon does n’t interest me I at times console myself remotely with the symmetry of his profile and ear and

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head, but that is because I am an artist: not because I am a woman. Truth to tell, I don't feel that I have any particular call to talk about Dick Chamberlain to you. They adore him at The Holy Saints, down to the last and smallest choir-boy, but they adore their dignity and churchliness more; and nothing in the world except the majestic Mrs. Quayle-Smith's indignant protests and partisanship soothed the powers that were and are into retaining him on that organ-bench. Just how much was accident and how much mischief on your part, I don't know; for I keep out of the swim you love, and neither saw nor heard much of the trouble except that Violet disappeared, and in every little eddy and whirlpool of gossip your name was mixed up with her disappearance. It's horrid for you in any case, and I feel that I ought to tell you that Dick is going off on a vacation. No, he is n't ill. It's only that he has a sinew. We all know that a poor excuse is better than none for Dickie when he yearns to roam; but this sinew is a weeping one — weeping for you or Violet? Which? At any rate, it's genuine, because I saw it myself. He claims that it has been giving him a lot of trouble, and that he has been playing the organ with his feet for weeks; and the upshot is that The Holy Saints with one

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accord are shooin'g him away, and I only hope for your sake he won't happen to choose to disport himself in California. Perhaps Lady Quayle-Smith will accompany poor Sonny. If she does, you'd better embark on the first shallop that touches your shining strand; for in spite of her unswerving defense of him, you may be certain you are not popular with her."

The remainder of the letter scarcely received passing attention from Miss Armitage. Her novel, too, was forgotten, and, leaning back in her chair, she looked off over the sea, a smile touching the corners of her lips.

Her father glanced at the bills beside his plate and then across at the girl in her pale green negligée. The alertness of her expression impressed him. "What 's the news?" he asked, folding his paper.

Her eyes became guarded, and she smothered a yawn behind her hand.

"Nothing," she answered carelessly. "Molly Tyler has written me a little gossip about the Boston crowd. Dick Chamberlain has something the matter with his hand and is going off on a vacation somewhere."

"Gad, if I knew where it was, I'd follow him!" ejaculated Mr. Armitage. "No lagging

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time where Dick is, that is, if marriage has n't changed him. What does Molly say about his wife? Is she through pouting yet?"

"I believe not."

"Confoundedly awkward for him. Why must some women be fools, and some arrant mischief-makers? Branscomb was telling me back in New York that it was some girl — some girl of his own set and station — that came between Dick and his wife, alienated his affections and all that sort of thing. How much was there in that? You ought to have seen something of it while you were there at New Year's."

The color burned high in Belle's cheeks, and she drummed with her letter on the breakfast-table. "A girl as jealous as Violet Smith ought not to marry," she returned. "No man is going to ignore every woman but one, and that is the only sort of devotion that would satisfy her."

Mr. Armitage nodded. "It's a wife's business to minimize her husband's peccadillos, not magnify them before the world. See to it that you remember that, Belle, when your time comes."

The girl shrugged her shoulders. "I'm in no hurry to undertake it," she said. She spoke coolly, but her thoughts were in a flutter. "It's a pity," she added, "that we don't know where Dick will

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betake himself. I fancy it would do him good to take a few spins in our car."

"Write and ask Molly," suggested Mr. Armitage. "If he's trying the Carolinas or Florida, I'll not follow him; but if he is anywhere in California, we'll give him a surprise party."

Father and daughter rose from the table.

"When are we going out?" she asked.

"Not till afternoon. Raynor had to take the machine to town this morning for some repairs."

Claude was in fact at that moment carefully driving his car upon the ferry-boat which plied between the Beach and the neighboring city. He spent some hours at the garage and then returned. As he was moving the car slowly from the ferry to terra firma again, he saw among the crowd leaving the boat a figure that he recognized. Surprise and eagerness lent a glow to his face as he engineered the machine among the pedestrians until he came within calling distance of the man he sought.

The latter carried a suit-case in his left hand, and was just about to board a waiting trolley-car when he heard his name spoken.

He looked doubtfully toward the chauffeur in the red machine from whom the call had seemed to come.

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Claude took off his cap and smiled. "You don't know me in these togs, Mr. Chamberlain."

The man's face lighted pleasantly. "Why, Raynor! How are you, boy?" he ejaculated, and dropping his suit-case, he shook hands with the young fellow.

"I judged you were going to the hotel, and thought you might like a lift," said Claude.

"I would emphatically. I've a game hand, and lifts are what I'm after." He threw the suit-case into the tonneau and jumped in beside Claude, and the machine started. "By the time this right hand concludes to get well, I shall be completely ambidextrous. Well, Claude, who's left you a fortune?"

"Nobody. That's the reason I'm driving another man's car."

"I see. Experimenting with his so as to make no mistakes with your own. Wise lad. Have you toured way from the East?"

"No, no such luck. Same old railroad for me. Say, Mr. Chamberlain, it's bully to see you out here."

"Well, it's bully for me to see a welcoming face. I don't happen to know of any friends in this part of the world just now. What has

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brought you West? To grow up with the country?"

"Scarcely. I expect to get back to my own before so very long. Perhaps you remember when I was in the prep school in Boston and sang in your choir, I had a sister in town with me?"

"Perfectly," replied the older man promptly. As a matter of fact, he naturally had no recollection of it whatever, the whole matter being five years back; but he knew he should remember when Claude had talked a few minutes longer, for it was his policy to make every boy in the choir feel his personal interest, and this was a large factor in the completeness of their loyal devotion.

"I remember one day out at camp you noticed her picture and thought she was a nice-looking kid," went on the boy, who, like all his mates, never forgot the rare expression of a golden opinion from their idol. "She was getting ready for Smith then —"

"I recall it perfectly," said Chamberlain, this time honestly.

"Well, when we both left college, the aunt who brought us up, Mrs. Bostwick, had a chance to come out here and be understudy for a boarding-house keeper for a year, and Aunt Phœbe

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thought it would be the making of us physically, so we all took the road. She's pretty sick of it because she's a confirmed Yankee, and I became restive, so I took this job. How has everything gone with you, Mr. Chamberlain?" Claude looked around at his companion with the old admiration. "Many a Sunday while I was at Tech I was in the back of the church listening. No choir like ours, I tell you."

"Any voice now, Claude?" asked Chamberlain, accepting the compliment with a smile.

"Oh, I howl sometimes. We have a piano at the house, but it's the one Mrs. Noah used when she sang 'Wait till the clouds roll by,' so we omit that branch of art just now."

"There is talk of a celebration of my tenth anniversary at the church next year. If it comes off, I want an auxiliary chorus of my ex-choir-boys. You must be on hand."

"I would n't miss it," returned Claude heartily. "By the way, Mr. Chamberlain, I've never had a chance to congratulate you on your marriage. I wish your wife was here."

"A — thank you." The older man fixed his hat more firmly on his head. Claude was looking at him interrogatively, so he added, "She is — is away just now."

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“Too bad. She’ll have to follow you. It’s great here. I saw you the day you were married, Mr. Chamberlain. Of course I did n’t have any card to the church, but I just cut everything and hung around for an hour so I could get the best spot to see the wedding party go in and come out. I could n’t rest without knowing that you’d got an all-right girl.”

“That was good of you, old chap,” said Chamberlain, in a voice barely audible above the rush of wind and sound of the motor.

“I could n’t see anything when the bride went in except that she was graceful, for she was all a white mist; but when the chimes rang and you both came out— Gee! I’ll never forget it. You set an awful pace for every man that saw you that day, Mr. Chamberlain.”

The other was silent, looking straight forward to the blue of the sea they were approaching, while his companion’s memory returned to the proud, careless bearing of the bridegroom, laughing at the release from the strenuously friendly stares of the congregation.

“I’ll never forget that bride’s face, no matter how many more I see,” went on Claude. “Her eyes had stars in ’em, and her cheeks roses. It was the happiest face I ever saw, though she

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was n't smiling. I remember her hair was dark, and just the way the white flowers made a sort of crown around the mistiness of her veil. I know I thought she looked like the queen of happiness, and I never squirmed again because you had n't put it to vote of the choir. I tell you that woman's face made me glad all through that I knew the man she was walking with, and that all that starriness would n't ever go out. I felt like calling to her: 'Go ahead: hurrah as much as you please. You've got a man that never failed in an undertaking, and everything's coming to you that you expect.'"

Claude smiled rather shamefacedly at his own effusiveness, and keeping his eyes directly ahead, he did not observe the unconscious frown of his companion's set gaze.

"Thank you, Raynor," returned the latter briefly; "you should have had a card to the church."

"Oh, I'm satisfied. I shouldn't have seen you both nearly so well. Ever been here before, Mr. Chamberlain?"

"Never. The church gave me a vacation, and I felt like getting off on the edge of the world somewhere."

"Here you have it, then. How's that for a cot-

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tage?" asked Claude, as they came in sight of the hotel.

"Looks as if there'd be room for one more, certainly," responded the newcomer. "If there isn't, I'll come to your aunt," he added, as the machine swept through the grounds. "Perhaps I shall anyway, if I find this a place of interruptions, for I want to do some work while I'm here."

"Practicing?"

"No, writing. The world has waited too long for a work of true inspiration on the method of boy-choir training."

"Bully!" exclaimed Claude earnestly. "You ought to do that."

"A duty I owe mankind, eh? That's what I thought."

"Oh, it is, though," responded the other. "I'm only sorry we haven't any room at our house just now. When people have once sat down at Aunt Phœbe's table, they don't leave till they have to; and the set that's there at present don't show any signs of moving on."

"Go to! It's shabby of you to whet my appetite like that. Think of a home table in this air! It's probably a merciful providence that your aunt can't take me, though, for there's not even

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tennis and golf for me to help retain my sylph-like proportions."

The speaker clenched and unclenched the exasperating hand, regarding it impatiently.

"Can you write with it?" asked Claude.

"To some extent; but I want to get a stenographer, if I can find one."

"Sibyl — my sister — knows shorthand."

"Great!" exclaimed Chamberlain eagerly. "Do you suppose she would do some work for me?"

"She must," returned the boy promptly, "unless you can find some one else."

"I don't want to find some one else if I can get a sister of yours. Fix it up for me, will you?"

"I'll do my best. How soon would you want her, and how many hours?"

"If she would give me from ten o'clock to twelve every day for a while, I should get on all right."

The car drew up to the hotel entrance and Chamberlain, jumping out, stood looking up at Claude as he talked.

"I've been making notes for some time, and I'm ready to begin to-morrow if she can come. It will be great luck for me if I've found some one so easily."

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“All right. I should think it good luck for her, too. I hope she’ll see it that way. She’s just learned it since she left college, and I should think she’d want to practice on somebody.”

“Left college,” echoed Chamberlain. He gave a short laugh. “I’ve been thinking all the time of the nice kid in your picture.”

“She’s a nice kid yet,” remarked Claude, smiling, and since he saw no difficulty in the situation, his friend saw no reason to introduce any.

“Mr. Armitage does n’t want me until — ”

“Who!” interrupted Dick suddenly.

“Mr. Armitage. This is his car.”

“What Armitage?”

“The father of Belle,” returned Claude, smiling.

“Damn!” ejaculated his friend, so heartily that, although the explosion was scarcely above his breath, Claude’s grin faded and his eyes became curious, meeting Dick’s stare.

“What — ”

“Nothing.” Chamberlain recovered himself. “I’ve come out here to work, and finding people one knows is rather a nuisance, don’t you see? Sure your aunt could n’t take me?”

“Sure,” returned Claude ruefully, “unless she feeds some of them Paris green.”

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“ Well, say, then, old chap, don’t speak of me to the Armitages right away. I want — yes, I want time to think things over ; my work, you know. How is it over there in the city ? ” nodding his head toward the ferry.

“ Bum compared to this. Better stay here, Mr. Chamberlain. Everything will work out all right.”

Dick wasn’t so sure. Like a lightning-flash he saw the appearance of his seeking Belle Armitage in this remote, romantic spot. He had not seen her since the night he returned to his deserted home. She had scurried back to New York, laughing behind her swathing chiffon veil like a mischievous child, when she learned to what lengths Violet had carried her resentment. Belle was a good fellow, but she had not been worth the annoyance and humiliation she had made her married admirer suffer, and now, again, here she was to thwart and disturb his plans. His hand resting on the tonneau, his eyes swept the grandeur of the outlook, his nostrils breathed the inviting air, while he considered jumping back into the machine and asking Claude to deposit him at the ferry.

No. It was too good to leave. To-morrow would be time enough. He would wait and see

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if this devoted lad could furnish him the stenographer he needed. If not, that would be a straw to show that the wind should blow him somewhere else — Santa Barbara, perhaps.

A porter was taking the suit-case from the tonneau. "I'll see Sibyl as soon as I can, and bring you word," said Claude.

"Thank you," returned Chamberlain, and his moody expression as he turned away was not lost on the boy, whose brain worked curiously.

"Think of damning Belle," he reflected.

CHAPTER X

ON THE PORCH

CLAUDE'S times and seasons for home-coming were irregular, and this fact added a cross to Mrs. Bostwick's existence, and caused her to prefer to wait on the young man at odd hours rather than submit to his independent raids on her refrigerator.

Sibyl, seeing his satisfaction in his present occupation and loath to disturb it, tried to be on hand when he appeared, and to relieve her aunt from all care ; but since the evening when barriers broke down between herself and the new boarder, Mrs. Smith had sought her companionship so appealingly that Claude frequently stole a march upon her in her absence.

"Between the two starved creatures I don't know just what to do," she confided laughingly to Aunt Phoebe. "Nora Creina is so hungry for — she does n't know what, and Claude —"

Mrs. Bostwick interrupted. "He knows exactly what *he* is hungry for," she remarked dryly. "Anybody 'd think he had Jack the Giant Killer's sack with him when he sits down to supper."

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Sibyl had not told her aunt anything beyond the facts Mrs. Smith related on the morning when she gave an account of herself; but Mrs. Bostwick saw without surprise that the new boarder was turning to her child as the wilted flower lifts to the sun, and her generous soul would not permit Sibyl to refuse her new friend's invitations to walk or drive, for she was glad on her own part that a companionable being had come into the girl's life.

"Just as long as she don't wear on you with her hard-luck stories," said Mrs. Bostwick once, early in Mrs. Smith's stay. "Of course I know she tells 'em, and I've got one eye on you to see that she ain't devouring your good spirits to feed her own poverty-struck ones."

Sibyl laughed. "Poor Aunt Phœbe! One eye on me to see that I'm not consumed, and the other on the ice-box to make certain that Claude does n't eat up the boarders' breakfasts!"

"Exactly," returned Mrs. Bostwick. "You've hit the nail square on the head. No naps for me."

They were sitting out on the porch one evening: Mrs. Bostwick stretched in her favorite deck-chair, Mrs. Smith lying in a hammock, and Sibyl perched on the railing, her back against a

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vine-wreathed post. Twilight had fallen, and in a neighboring palm tree a mockingbird poured out his little heart.

“It’s my opinion that bird followed you over here, Nora,” remarked Sibyl. “We have n’t heard them lately at night until you came.”

“I’m glad he did,” responded Mrs. Smith. At the bird’s first trill her thoughts flew back to the rose-laden court of the hotel, where his companionship had been all she could endure.

A cheery whistle sounded up the street, and a muffled groan breathed from the deck-chair.

“An empty bag, five feet, eleven inches long, is now approaching,” remarked Mrs. Bostwick, with a martyr’s resignation.

Mrs. Smith laughed. In the last week she had found more than once that she could laugh.

“Oh, I believe Claude thinks that is his bird,” said Sibyl, leaning forward and peering through the dusk, for her brother had paused beneath the palm tree and was whistling a clear phrase. Three times he repeated it while all was silence amid the palm leaves, then the bird mocked him with true intonation.

“It is!” exclaimed Sibyl, with soft delight.

The three listened while first the boy and then the bird whistled the catch. At last Claude swung

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into the yard, setting his music to its words in a lusty baritone: “‘Gee whiz, I’m glad I’m free.’” Then, going on with the song, he sang, “‘No wedding-bells for me.’”

“Claude taught the bird that, last fall,” said Sibyl to her friend; “and the little fellow has been gone so long, we did n’t know as he’d ever come back here. I’ve heard him over near the ferry and at different places once in a while, but I believed he had forgotten it.”

“You chose a congenial sentiment for him, Claude,” said Violet. “No wonder he was willing to sing ‘Gee whiz, I’m glad I’m free!’”

“Yes,” added Sibyl, “but he could never get him to go any further. He was n’t going to slander wedding-bells when he thought of his nest. Hungry, Claude?”

“Well,” returned the boy, pulling off his cap and putting it in his pocket, “now you mention it, I do feel as if I could pick up a bushel or two of most anything. Wait a minute,” putting out a detaining hand as his sister started to slip off the rail, “I’ve something to tell you first.”

He seated himself beside her, and Violet regarded them both from where she lay.

“I have a job for you. Do you want to make some money?”

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“Ultimately,” returned his sister, looking at him curiously. “What’s the matter? Do you want the whole family to go into business? Aunt Phœbe can’t spare me.”

“This is only two hours a day, ten to twelve. You can do it just as well as not. Can’t she, Aunt Phœbe? There’s a man at the hotel wants a stenographer.”

“Young or old?” asked Mrs. Bostwick.

“Oh — about thirty-five, I guess.”

“What are you thinking of, Claude Raynor?” Mrs. Bostwick spoke sharply. “Do you suppose I’d let Sibyl go to that hotel every day to work two hours for a strange young man? I heard you telling somebody yesterday that I did n’t know anything about the ways o’ the world outside my own front yard; that I did n’t know Chauncey Olcott from Chauncey Depew, and a lot more stuff like that; but you can tell those stuck-up Armitages of yours that your sister is every bit as good as they are; and they can just look somewhere else for a girl to do a thing like that. I’m surprised at you!”

Claude caught his breath at the unusual outburst. “Whe—ew!” he ejaculated. “Don’t get a hot-box, Aunt Phœbe. The Armitages don’t know anything about it. He does happen to be a friend

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of theirs, but he did n't know they were here, and they don't know yet that he is."

The boy laughed at some memory. "He's going to write a book; and Sibyl might just as well oblige him and turn an honest penny at the same time. There's something the matter with his hand. So far as the proprieties go, he might come over here instead — he wanted to come here to live. He's some one that you've both seen, and both of you know all about, and when you find out who it is, you'll be sorry you jumped on me. Three guesses." The boy caught Violet's eye as she smiled at him from the hammock. "Very likely Mrs. Smith has seen him. He's well known in Boston."

"Oh, Boston," repeated Sibyl. "Some one Aunt Phœbe has seen? One of your teachers, of course."

"Well—yes," replied Claude, with hesitation.

"Nonsense," remarked Mrs. Bostwick. "How do you suppose we can remember the whole list at both of those schools?"

"He was n't in the schools," replied Claude, smiling.

"Oh, tell us," said Sibyl. "I have n't seen any of your professors for years."

"You saw this one — at church, just before

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we came out here. You said you 'd forgotten what a stunner he was, or something like that ; and I told you he 'd been married the winter before ; and you said 't was ever thus, or words to that effect."

" Claude Raynor ! " Sibyl smiled. " It 's your choir-master. I forget his name."

" That 's it. It 's Mr. Chamberlain. Nobody else."

There came a choking sound from the hammock. Violet felt a hot flush envelop her, while with the lightning processes of mentality she saw her husband following Belle Armitage across the continent. She must not faint. She must hear every word this boy was saying. She clenched her hands in the netting until she drove the nails into her palms.

" Something 's wrong with his hand, and he 's come out here to be quiet and write this book that 's going to teach dubs the way to train voices."

" Modest creature ! " laughed Sibyl.

" Yes, he is," retorted Claude. " It 's I that know all the rest are dubs compared to him. I guess if you 'd been camping with him twice, you 'd know that he is n't any four-flusher. He 's all right, I tell you ; and I want you — "

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“Why, of course, if his wife’s with him —” began Sibyl.

“She is n’t. She could n’t come, for some reason. Sorry, too. I’d like to have had you see her. She’s a peach. I saw her the day they were married. Hair as black as Mrs. Smith’s, and color! Talk about your sea-shells! Gee, she was great! Both of them looked as if they were carrying off the world’s biggest prize.”

“I wish she were here, too,” said Sibyl. “I don’t like to be disobliging to a man you care for so much.”

“He wanted to come to us, as I say; but I told him everybody we had now were stayers. No offense, Mrs. Smith,” a gay nod toward the hammock; “we would n’t lose our Violet decoration even for Mr. Chamberlain; but perhaps he could come over here to do the work every day.” The speaker laughed again at his memory. “The fact is, he might jump at it, for evidently he wants to do serious work and be undisturbed. It surprised me to find what a facer it was to him even to discover that the Armitages were here. He forgot his manners something scandalous.”

Violet’s stricken eyes were glued to the boy’s face.

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“Why, what did he say?” asked Sibyl curiously.

Claude pursed his lips and raised his eyebrows. “There are ladies present,” he remarked.

Violet’s heart, from seeming to stop, was beating thickly. Dick had thrown this boy off the track — that was easy; and he would come here to this house, to her refuge, to work at his manuscripts. Must she fly again by night, like the heroine of a melodrama?

Mrs. Bostwick’s next remark brought some relief.

“I’m sorry to nip your plan in the bud, Claude, but there ain’t room for any authors over here in the daytime. I won’t have the boarders kept off o’ this porch, nor out o’ the living-room. I’d sooner have a case o’ smallpox in the house anyway than a man around in the daytime that’s trying to work and keep things still.”

“Then all is,” said Claude coaxingly, and he strode over to the deck-chair and put his cheek down on Mrs. Bostwick’s forehead, “you’ll have to be the dandiest aunt in the world, as you always are, and take your knitting over to the hotel and —”

“None o’ your soft soap now,” exclaimed Mrs. Bostwick, pushing futilely against him.

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“And chaperon Sibyl from ten to twelve —”

“A likely idea,” said Aunt Phœbe, scornfully pushing.

“No pleasanter place to sit than those piazzas,” persisted Mr. Chamberlain’s ally.

“Will you go in and get your supper, Claude Raynor?” and this suggestion reminding the young chauffeur of his aching void, he abandoned his aunt, and seizing his sister, bore her off into the house.

“That’s just about as practical as a boy ever is,” remarked Mrs. Bostwick impatiently, addressing the motionless figure in the hammock. “I thought by this time Claude would have got over thinking that Mr. Chamberlain’s will was law. I must say that man was a fine influence for the boys, and kept them up to the mark in more ways than one. I used to marvel at the power his opinion had for them. I suppose you’ve been to The Holy Saints, and heard the choir?”

An inarticulate murmur came from the hammock.

“Hey? getting sleepy this early?” Mrs. Bostwick laughed comfortably. “Well, you know Mr. Chamberlain’s one o’ these big strong fellows that boys admire. The nearer a man comes to being a prize-fighter, the more a boy worships

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him. He used to take the choir camping in summer, and he swam with them and entered into all their sports just like one of themselves. He never came down on them for anything except unfair play, and they just made an idol of him. I've no doubt Claude thinks now, if Mr. Chamberlain wants something of us, it would be a small thing to let this house run itself, and that we should all tumble over ourselves to obey his slightest wish. It's one thing to be thankful for that the house is full, and he can't come here."

She paused. All was silence. The figure in the hammock did not stir. The mockingbird had flown.

Mrs. Bostwick leaned forward curiously and peered around until she could catch sight of Violet and just make out that she had turned her face into the pillow.

"H'm," said Aunt Phœbe to herself, with a little grunt of approval. "That girl's nervous system is getting sound enough. To think of her falling asleep as easy as that!"

CHAPTER XI

BY THE WINDOW

WHEN Sibyl had her brother well fed, and had cleared away the remains of the feast, he was still harping on the subject of Mr. Chamberlain and his needs.

“I’ll tell you,” he exclaimed, with inspiration, upon the last of their pilgrimages between dining-room and kitchen. “Why not have Mrs. Smith go over there with you, mornings? She has n’t anything else to do.”

“All right,” returned Sibyl good-naturedly. “As I tell you, I should be rather glad of the practice. I’m in danger of losing my knack; but when Aunt Phœbe won’t, she won’t, you know.”

“Ask Mrs. Smith, then; will you?” persisted Claude.

“Why, yes — I think so. If it would n’t be for too long a stretch. I might make a beginning for him, anyway.”

“Let’s go out and see her now,” said Claude.

Sibyl agreed, laughing at his energy; but when they reached the porch, it was deserted.

“I dare say it is getting late,” said the girl.

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“ You and I can't be trusted in a tête-à-tête these days, we get so few.”

“ Oh, well, you two always have a hair-brushing talk before you go to bed,” returned her brother. “ I know you do. I often hear you buzzing in there. Go on. Ask her to-night.”

Sibyl flushed a little. She had believed those meetings strictly clandestine. Violet seemed loath to go to bed without them. She had ceased battling Sibyl's philosophy of life, and listened with an attitude which implied a desire to be credulous even when she could not understand. The older woman had conceived a great love for this girl, who in her own person seemed to embody all that was innocent and happy in existence.

Supposing it were the innocence of ignorance, it was still joyousness, and Violet, after a protracted sojourn in cold shadows, craved it as the plant in a cellar craves the sunlight.

Sibyl saw this and gave of her abundance willingly, knowing that of herself she could do nothing, and that in being a channel of good to another she could in no way suffer exhaustion, or diminish the infinite supply.

That night, then, after going to her room and changing her dress for a wrapper, she sought

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Mrs. Smith's door. All was silence within, so she opened very cautiously. Darkness reigned, and she was as cautiously closing the door when she caught sight of a white figure by the farthest window.

"Ah, Nora," she said softly, and entered with an assured movement. "So you're star-gazing. I thought you had gone to bed."

Mrs. Smith's black hair hung loosely over her white gown. Sibyl liked to handle its silky abundance, and sometimes braided it for her at night. As the girl crossed the floor the figure by the window held out one hand, and Sibyl pushed a little stool near her.

"Shall I do your hair while you're studying astronomy?" she asked, with soft gayety.

For answer Violet clasped her friend's hand and drew her down at her feet on the little stool.

Sibyl regarded her with sudden attention. "What are you doing here in the dark?" she asked. "There's nothing to see out there. Even the stars have gone under."

"Every one," replied Violet slowly; "and I've been wondering how I could prevent the sun from rising to-morrow."

"Nora — Nora Creina," returned Sibyl warningly.

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“There’s only one way, and how can it be wrong? Has n’t a loving Father provided that gentle way out for a child who cannot bear the torture any longer? Hear the murmur of the sea! How inviting it sounds! How quickly it would be over!”

“Nora, Nora darling, how have you slipped back into this! Don’t you know it would n’t be over? You’ll not get away from yourself. Why not meet what is to be met in your own thought on this plane as well as on another?”

A wild excitement burned in the dark eyes that turned on Sibyl in the dusk, and Violet pressed the girl’s hand painfully as she spoke. “Wherever I found myself in that No Man’s Land, it would not be four squares from where my husband is making love to Belle Armitage.” The speaker’s breath forsook her, and she gasped the name.

“Miss Armitage?” repeated Sibyl, perplexed and wondering.

“She is the one.” Violet paused. “That happy bride your brother remembers” — she moistened her dry lips — “is it any wonder he did not recognize her when he saw her again?”

“What are you saying, Nora! Nora Creina!”

“Yes. Dick Chamberlain has followed her here.”

By the Window

Sibyl gazed at the speaker for a silent space. "You mean that Mr. Chamberlain, Claude's Mr. Chamberlain, is your husband?"

"Yes, yes," moaned Violet. "Oh, to think he has come where they believe no one will know!"

Sibyl was still endeavoring to grasp the idea. "Mr. Chamberlain! Claude's ideal!" she said slowly, and was silent again. "God has sent him here," she added suddenly, with conviction.

"The devil has sent him here!" ejaculated Violet, with passion, "and the devil is waiting for him." She drew her hand from the girl to press it with its mate to her hot eyes.

Sibyl was silent again, but she leaned her cheek against her companion's knee while she realized that it was her brother's employers from whom Violet had fled hither.

Straightening herself at last, she spoke earnestly. "Did n't you hear what Claude said about Mr. Chamberlain's surprise at finding the Armitages here?"

"Certainly. Of course he would do that."

"Why, you *must* believe it," returned Sibyl eagerly. "While I was giving Claude his supper he told me more. He said Mr. Chamberlain actually swore."

Violet gave a weary sigh that was almost a sob.

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“Part of the game, you little girl,” she said; then, with a change of tone: “It is a shame to unveil this ugly phase of life to your eyes.” She leaned forward and took one of her friend’s hands in both her own as she gazed down at her. “You’ve given me peaceful days and nights. I shall love you always, Sibyl; you and your soothing, beautiful, unreal theories; and now, to prove my gratitude, I shall go away; not only because Dick has come, but because I should not be strong enough to stand alone, but should be forever leaning on your strength and courage and opening your vision to ugliness. Life will do that in its own evil time. It is unfair that my burden should afflict you.”

Sibyl returned the pressure of the cold hands. “Does n’t the Bible say, ‘Bear ye one another’s burdens,’ and say, moreover, that the strong shall help the weak?” Then she added firmly, “You must n’t think of going away, Violet. I tell you again, solemnly, God has sent your husband here. You asked me to help you, and I have been working that God’s will should be done. You have even at moments seen something of the truth yourself; have grasped something of its philosophy and logic. Mr. Chamberlain is your husband. Even if you did n’t love him, which you do—”

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“No, no,” interposed Violet.

“It would be all evil for you to run away from him again, now that you know so much better.”

Violet began to tremble violently. “No consideration on earth would tempt me to let him know that I am here.”

“You need n’t,” said Sibyl quietly. “You shall not let him know until you wish to ; but now that God has done this great thing, you must n’t set everything back by rushing away with suspicion and hatred in your heart. Do you believe that Miss Armitage is a desirable companion for your husband ?”

Violet gave a bitter little sobbing laugh.

“Then why leave him to her? There are so many things to take into consideration besides your own pride, your own happiness. You do believe he has come to seek her. I don’t. If he has, he must learn better. If he has not, you — you, his wife who promised to cherish him, must help him on the upward way. You’ve learned in the last fortnight that there are new ways of helping people: something besides pleading, reproaches, tears.”

“I never reproached him. He never saw my tears!” exclaimed Violet.

“But,” said Sibyl, “there was a tumult of re-

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proach and grief beside him constantly — doing its work, its miserable work — so pretentious and so threatening, and in reality so powerless.”

“It drove us apart. It was powerful enough for that.”

“Yes, because you were ignorant and let it. The unreality has set up its scarecrows again. You believe they are such giants that you are willing to run away from them. Violet, dear,” Sibyl leaned against the white gown and looked up earnestly, “we’ll knock them down like ninepins if you’ll help me. They’re not even ninepins. They’re shadows, even if they do rear up and sprawl about until they seem to envelop you.”

Violet moaned. “That was all very well before Dick came. I loved the sound of it; but when I think he is there with her — on the piazzas, strolling by the sea — and you say evil has no power! How can it mean anything to me!”

“Listen, Violet: we’re always hearing it said that So-and-So is his own worst enemy. That means so much more to me now than it ever did before. I love you, dear. I’m going to make every effort I can to prevent your submitting to the paralyzing effect of a fraud. I’ll show you to-morrow an allegory which describes a man who

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wasted years in an iron-bound prison before he discovered that those iron bolts and bars were painted pasteboard, and that one vigorous blow at their apparent massiveness would lay them low. A friend had repeatedly told him this fact, but he would not believe it for a long time. At last he listened, acted on his friend's direction, and stepped out into God's sunlight, a free man. Now I admit that you can give power to the nothingness of evil and hamper yourself miserably; but how can you do it if you are convinced of the truth of those two sentences I gave you? God is Love. God is Omnipotent. To those, add the others that you've said or heard a thousand times in church. God is Omnipresent. God is Omniscient. Where is the room for evil's power? Now let us look at the working of Good already. Mr. Chamberlain has come out here."

"Good? Oh, Sibyl!" Violet made the interruption breathlessly; but there was a note as of desperate hopefulness in her voice.

"Yes, Good. We've prayed for it with the prayer of understanding! 'Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' 'Open your windows, and see if I will not pour out a blessing.' 'Open your mouth, and I will fill it.' You see there is always something for *us* to do. A trustful thing; an

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assured thing ; a happy thing. ‘ Rejoice always.’ That is the Bible command. Mr. Chamberlain has n’t come out here to meet Miss Armitage — not even if he thinks he has, and I believe he does n’t. He knows my brother, in whose house you are. The first person he meets in Regina is he. He wants a stenographer. Claude offers his sister. That is I — your friend — and yet you doubt God !”

“ Sibyl,” — Violet caught her breath, — “ you ’re a wonderful girl !”

“ The telephone is wonderful ; but it was always there, in possibility, even when our ancestors had to send a letter by a man on horseback. We can’t outline anything, understand. We can’t say what God shall do for us, nor limit Him. Even if things do not come out as we expect, at the time we hope for, we have still to *know*. That spirit which says, ‘ Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,’ is the one we still must have ; but it is not one of depression, because we know that Omnipotent Love sends no affliction, and the temporary appearance of it is not met as a visitation from God, as in the old thought, but as a phase in the working out of the problem, the passage from Egypt to Canaan ; and the better and surer we know the difference between appearance and reality, the

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lighter and briefer will be the trial. Go and throw yourself in the ocean, indeed! Ignorant, foolish thought!" Sibyl pressed her friend's hand against her own cheek.

"Strange!" said Violet, her eyes luminous. "It gives me courage to hear you talk, even when I know how helpless you are."

"Certainly I am, and so are you; and our only strength lies in knowing where Omnipotence is. Violet, you *must* wake up and refuse to be hypnotized by fear, which is the only devil there is. Even hate is only fear—fear of being deprived of something. Just realize what our responsibility is. We are thinking something every moment that we are awake. Each one of our thoughts is either a right one or a wrong one. Therein lie our possibilities; for our thoughts govern our actions. Every right thought tends toward that perfect harmony in which we work with God, every wrong one lets go the power, and makes for discord and disintegration. This is n't mere preachiness. It is a working philosophy that has brought new life to thousands and will bring it to you. Dear, I've shown you the books that have been such a help to me. You can study them as well as I. Will you sit down and despair? Won't you fight for your life? Nobody can do it for you."

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Violet's breath came fast as she heard the thrill of earnestness in her friend's voice. "I'll try, Sibyl. I will. Why not? I can but fail."

"That's the one thing you can't do," returned the girl. "Can the student of mathematics fail after he changes the belief that two and two are five for the knowledge that they make four?"

"Then you'll have to show me how to have faith," said Violet unsteadily.

"Certainly. 'Man's extremity is God's opportunity.' 'Do these things and ye shall know of the doctrine.' The first thing for you is to *do*; and I will help you every day. First you must drop your resentment toward Miss Armitage."

Violet said something inarticulate.

"No, not impossible," returned Sibyl, as if she had spoken. "Why should you bear resentment toward her? If she has indulged in error and is indulging in it, she will pay the uttermost farthing; not because God requires it, but because that is the action of evil. That plant that our heavenly Father hath not planted *shall* be rooted up. Meanwhile God's child remains God's child. Evil is an impersonal thing. While you recognize it and combat it, don't attach it to anybody."

A recognizing light came into Violet's eyes. "Separate all error from my thought of man,"

By the Window

she quoted slowly. "That is what it means, then."

"Yes, for error has no entity, no commanding power — no God. Our knowledge of its nothingness is our salvation, and when we give it power by believing in it, and fearing it, we become our own enemies."

"But if she dares to love my husband!" exclaimed Violet, her breast heaving.

"That is misusing the word 'love,' is n't it?" returned Sibyl, more quietly than she had yet spoken. "It can all be met. The whole situation can be met — if you wish it." The girl made the addition significantly. "You must yourself work with God and not against Him."

"I don't know how," passionately. "I don't know how — and oh, Sibyl, I *do* love Dick. I thought it was all over; but the deadly pain in my heart when Claude told —" She turned her face toward the high back of her chair and struggled with sobs.

A sympathetic lump rose in Sibyl's throat and her eyes swam. She patted the hand she held. "He is your husband," she said confidently, "and it is right for you to love him and to be reunited to him. It is n't true that you don't know how to work. We have had many talks,

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and many times you have seemed to grasp the truth and to find peace in the right thought. Are you worse off than Daniel in the lions' den? You are as capable of faith as he, and God will shut the beasts' mouths — all those devouring, threatening things that you hate and fear, as soon as you cease to hate and fear them. You must n't and can't outline what blessing God shall give you, or when; only put your thought in order humbly and prayerfully, and trust and rejoice, becoming like a little child with her hand in her mother's; and your Father-Mother God *will* care for you and save you from every snare."

Violet kept her face hidden, but she pressed Sibyl's hand.

They sat thus for a silent space in the hush of the night. Then Violet spoke, in breaths and brokenly: "Lord, I — believe. Help — thou — mine unbelief."

CHAPTER XII

RETROSPECTION

WHEN the artistic Miss Tyler wrote to Miss Armitage that the loyalty of that great lady, Mrs. Quayle-Smith, would scarcely stand the strain of knowing that her son-in-law had joined his charmer in the far West, she stated a fact which was one of the first considerations to rise before that gentleman when Claude unconsciously threw his conversational bomb.

Dick Chamberlain was a man who, beginning his professional career very young, and happening to command at once the admiration and confidence of his rector, had never known the thwarting and annoyance which so often obstruct the path of the enthusiastic and opinionated church musician. Being possessed of an alert mind and healthy physique, he did not grudge the hard work necessary to maintain the high standard he set up. He was, in business hours, an uncompromising martinet with himself as well as with every one who worked under him, outside the choir as well as within it. Out of working hours he was equally energetic in amusing himself; and every

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member of his world considered him or herself fortunate when they could share any variation of his versatile gambols.

When this bright particular star chose and married the most attractive girl in his set, society sighed while it smiled; and Guy Lester put the consensus of opinion when he remarked that "Dick Chamberlain should be syndicated. He should not belong to any one woman;" but then it was an open secret that Guy had wanted Violet Smith himself ever since her black braids were wound around her head and largely beribboned.

On the day of the wedding Mrs. Quayle-Smith pressed Lester's hand softly, for he had large possessions and she had been temporarily wroth with her child for saying him nay; but she murmured to him that the heart of a girl was a vagrant thing and full of surprises, and walked majestically up the aisle on his arm, content after all with her daughter's choice; for was she not, in common with all the prominent matrons of The Holy Saints, a little in love with Dick herself?

It had been Chamberlain's social motto to let the other man walk the floor, and in this case man was a generic term. A number of women

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had walked the floor on his account. He had singled out one, given her his name, and placed her at the head of his household. The work of life was too strenuous, engrossing, and nerve-wearing, for him to be expected to work also in play-time. To ask him to alter his habit of following the line of least resistance was to suggest the unreasonable. Violet's refinement, her daintiness, her good sense, pleased him continuously. His attitude had always been the nonchalant demand of Fortune that she give him her best. It was only the natural order of things that his wife should be the most charming woman he knew, but there were periods when he could set her on a safe shelf with the sign "Please do not touch," while he allowed some other woman to amuse him.

He occasionally reminded himself that he was fortunate in possessing such a normal, reasonable partner: one who was charmingly attractive, and yet could be only distantly adored by any man save himself.

His acquaintance with the Armitages had been made during a summer in Europe, when he had flirted with Belle and played pool and poker with her father to the heart's content of the latter, but not so entirely of the former. Miss Armitage experienced some twinges when she received her

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friend's wedding cards ; and later, when she visited in Boston, it was not in her flesh and blood to refrain from exerting all her powers to attract Dick.

When the crash came, he was stupefied. Standing alone in his room the night that Violet had renounced him, he recalled, as well as he could, with his careless, irresponsible memory for such things, the events of the past month. One night, after Belle had been especially amusing at some function, he remembered Violet's face as she stood with him in this room, in this very spot, and looked up into his eyes, her own dry and bright.

"Of course we love each other, Dick," she had said ; "but do you care nothing for the dignity of our love?"

He had felt rather uncomfortable, recalling some passages of the evening, but he remembered shrugging his shoulders and requesting the postponement of any curtain lecture, as he had a brute of a day before him to-morrow, including the playing of a choral wedding.

The dignity of their love!

Angry color flooded his face now as he stood there. How much had she cared for it! He counted the cost if she should prove obstinate

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now. How criminally selfish she was! What an impossible position for a church musician!

He walked up and down until the dawn, and as soon as there was the slightest possibility that his august mother-in-law might open her eyes to the new day, he repaired to her house, well-groomed without, but disheveled mentally, and laid his case before her.

Mrs. Quayle-Smith was in bed drinking her coffee, and at the news she set down her cup aghast, and read the note her son-in-law handed her. In this Violet told where she was going, in order, she said, that he might not need to search for her, or be in any doubt of mind, as her step was irrevocable, and she should not see him under any circumstances. She said nothing could come of an interview, as each of them knew the facts.

The lace on the sleeves of Mrs. Quayle-Smith's lilac negligée trembled with agitation, and her eyes flashed angrily. The word "failure" had never been written against her name. Was she to admit now that the marriage of her only daughter had turned out disgracefully? The color poured over her face. "She must come back at once," she exclaimed, "before any one suspects!"

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Dick glowered at her, sullen injury written on his good-looking countenance. "I am willing that she should," he returned. "You must tell her so."

The flash in the eyes meeting his was for him now. "Don't complicate matters by being stupid," ejaculated Mrs. Quayle-Smith. "You have n't lived with Violet a year, I hope, without discovering that she is absurdly intense, and loyal to the verge of imbecility, because the most rudimentary intelligence could n't fail to see it. Nothing but extreme revulsion of feeling could have driven her to this; and it is a revulsion not to be mastered by condescension, I can tell you."

"What — what do you mean!" stammered Dick angrily, his racked nerves driving the blood into his face and himself out of his chair.

"Oh, sit down, you absurd boy!" rejoined the other. "You know better than anybody else how much reason she has. I have watched you amusing yourself from time to time; but we all have our preferences, and if mine had been for the loud and cackling girl, I should have brought Violet up to be one. Personally, Belle Armitage gets on my nerves and I avoid her haunts. It's too late now to inquire how much of a fool you've

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made of yourself. Our only business is to repair damages. They must be repaired. I don't propose to have the public say that my daughter has quarreled with her husband, and any shadow on your name would mean down and out from The Holy Saints. The light that beats on that organ bench is similar in ferocity to the one we hear about, glaring upon thrones. Now you run away and let me dress ; for *I* know Violet if you don't. She always made the mistake of taking life too seriously. She consecrated herself when she married you." The speaker gave a quick, comprehending nod. "I know. It's difficult being asked to live up to that sort of thing these days. It's much more comfortable for a man to have the average wife, one who at least knows when to be deaf and blind — if she does n't care to amuse herself administering counter-irritants ; but Violet is just — Violet. You and I have the hardest game before us now that we ever played in our lives, and unless you utterly divest yourself of all nonsense, we shall lose. You have played very badly up to now — really with an incredible lack of intelligence. It took — you'll pardon me, I hope, but if you don't I can't help it — it took absolute stupidity on your part to drive Violet to this."

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Dick stood, his chin up and his eyes scowling under the vigorous arraignment.

“It will save a lot of time,” went on Mrs. Quayle-Smith, “if you suspend all thought of your own dignity. How much will you have, *en passant*, when it is known that Violet has run away? If she were like other people, the situation would n’t be so difficult; but compared to the disappointment of her love for you, the speech of people will be less than nothing to her.”

“Selfish creature!” ejaculated Chamberlain between his teeth.

His mother-in-law gave a derisive little laugh. “Of course. Men are all alike. Too selfish and pig-headed themselves to be able to take a woman’s standpoint if she dares to wound them even in self-defense. If you ever loved Violet, you probably still do. She is too dignified, too delicate, too pretty, and too much in love with you to have lost your affection in this length of time. There is a way in which the Gordian knot could be cut before noon. Violet has taken refuge with my sister, Mrs. Waters. It is perfectly obvious why she did n’t come to me. If you went there now from here, you would be refused admittance. Your first step should be to break in the door, your next to knock down the man who says, ‘Not

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at home.' Then go upstairs two steps at a time and scatter maids like autumn leaves until you find Violet. Then and there swear that you love her and only her; that all other women are merely ballast in a universe that exists for her; that you regret that curiosity ever tempted you to examine that ballast, and that your night has been misery; and if she does n't go home with you of her own will, that you will carry her off after the manner of a cave-dweller. Oh!" Mrs. Quayle-Smith sighed and smiled, "how absurdly and ridiculously happy Violet would be! Yes, ridiculously; for no man is worth such feeling as hers, not even a wholly engaging rascal like you; but" — the speaker paused and shrugged her plump silk-clad shoulders, "I don't even suggest such a course, much less ask it, because I know your utter inability to do more than mask your anger and humiliation before the world while I struggle with Violet, and tell every lie to our friends which I think will be of any avail."

"Mother!" Chamberlain's deep voice rang out at last, and the indomitable Mrs. Quayle-Smith regarded him.

She had always longed for a son, and it was music to her even now to hear him speak that word. His frowning, white anger was very be-

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coming to him too, and she regarded him with the eyes of a connoisseur.

He spoke sternly. "I'm not going to talk now of my love for Violet; but I do state that I've never for one moment been false to her."

"Poor boy! You make me laugh. No; I know. Not what you and I would term false; but possibly, my dear, you would n't stand there with such self-righteousness if Violet's code had been more like your own. Has she ever told you about Guy Lester?"

"No. I know what all the world suspects. That's all."

"How like her! Violet might have amused herself well during all your preoccupations. The average wife in our set would have fought fire with fire, and had a very good time out of it, too, for Lester is *sans reproche*. Poor girl. She was born into the wrong age for the nurturing of her ideals. Go on now, Dick, and use judgment—use judgment. The steed is out of the stable, but I'm going to steal up and put the bridle on her, simply because I must n't fail."

Chamberlain hesitated, set his teeth, and gazed at the speaker with haggard eyes.

She held out her hand to him, and he rather eagerly came forward and lifted it to his lips.

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“Yes, I like you,” she said sincerely. “I’m very fond of you, in fact. Simply remember that Mrs. Waters’s illness has taken a turn for the worse, and that Violet has been called to her. I shall do my best for your sake as well as for my own.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE RENCONTRE

THE above interview was succeeded by many others when the obduracy of Violet became increasingly manifest. Mrs. Quayle-Smith raged in private and smiled in public. Mrs. Waters's precarious condition gave some plausibility to the situation as her sister presented it, and even when the death of Violet's aunt made the pretense flimsy, Mrs. Chamberlain's mother told tales of her daughter's over-taxed strength and the necessity which drove her away for a rest. The exasperatingly clear understanding of the facts which cropped out frequently among her acquaintance caused the great lady, when Violet actually left the city, to go to her son-in-law's home and remain there for weeks; bolstering his position with her solid influence, attending every church service, and never avoiding the subject of her daughter, poor child, who *so* regretted being obliged to absent herself so long from Dick!

"Talk about an ostrich with its head in the sand," said one member of the congregation to Guy Lester. "Not one ever compared with Mrs.

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Quayle-Smith. Do you suppose the rector believes her for a minute?"

"I don't know just how credulous Mr. Ainslee is," was the response, "but I do know that, luckily for Chamberlain, the rector is as anxious to believe her as she is to have him; so between them they should succeed."

Little wonder that under the circumstances the organist of The Holy Saints welcomed the opportunity to escape from curiosity, enmity, or sympathy, to a haven where he might affect nothing and be once more irresponsible. To reach Regina Beach, therefore, and find it just what he was seeking, to get a taste of its soft yet invigorating breezes, a sight of its sweep of ocean, a sense of its alluring remoteness from the world's hubbub and labor, and then be confronted with the presence of the only people in the world he ought to avoid, was an exasperation. It was not at all in accord with the manner in which Fortune was expected to treat Richard Chamberlain. After a long and faithful ministering to his whims and needs, was it indeed a fact that the jade had turned fickle, and that he need no longer expect her to smile upon him?

Now this discovery of Claude Raynor, and the fact that he had a stenographer sister whom he

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was eager to offer at his master's shrine, was quite as it should be. Chamberlain, like many another powerful man, had that unrecognizing attitude toward obstacles which makes them disappear. Things *did* come his way because he expected them to do so. He had been enraged with Violet for putting him in an intolerable position; he was impatient with Miss Armitage now for having ventured to Regina Beach at so inopportune a moment.

His anger with his wife had long ago melted and given place to a stoical readjustment to the conditions. He was a prominent figure in the eye of scores of influential folk. He must be above reproach; and with a clever, strong mentor beside him, he concentrated his faculties on redeeming the situation and keeping an unflinching front.

No one but himself knew the many hours of darkness when he reviewed the past under pressure of the countless ways, small and great, in which he missed Violet in spite of the blow she had given him, — a blow given, from his point of view, with brutal suddenness. There had been no premonition, there had been no threat. Like a thunderbolt from a clear sky her action had fallen, and come near to ruining his previously unassailable position.

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So he stood in his room, on his arrival at the colossal hotel, and looked gravely out on the vast blueness, too undecided even to be seated in the big wicker chair which, like everything else in the place, seemed inviting him to comfort.

None of the spots where he had spent a day or two on the way here attracted him by comparison with this. Why decide until he was sure? The Armitages might be on the eve of departure. Why had he not questioned Claude? Naturally generous in disposition, and not given to believing ill of others, it was entirely characteristic that he had never blamed Belle Armitage for his disaster. He believed her as careless as himself, and as blind to possible consequences. He even wondered if she had ever heard that her name was connected with Violet's departure; or if any one had told her that this departure was suspected to be permanent. Belle was a good fellow. She would never leave a man if he flirted a bit. On the contrary, Chamberlain fancied that the man whose name she bore would be kept too busy supervising and cataloguing her flirtations to have much time for pursuing his own. He hoped and believed that she suspected no connection between herself and the mischief that had befallen.

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Dinner-time drew near before he decided to make his toilet. This accomplished, his next move was to go down to the hotel office and consult the register. As he did so, he was conscious that this act was another of the train of small annoyances with which he had paid for — he used always to say Violet's ruthless act; he had lately begun to call it his own careless folly.

His will had so long been law, his dominance, professional and social, so long unquestioned, it was humiliating to realize that he was consulting that register to discover if any acquaintance was in the hotel who would be likely to retail his encounter with the Armitages. Not one person whom he knew, save his staunch supporter, would believe it to be accidental.

The register disclosed no threatening name. He was shutting the book when a hearty blow on the shoulder made him turn.

“Dick, my boy, well met! Well met!” Mr. Armitage shook the younger man's hand with enthusiasm, while his tired eyes held a spark. “What good angel led you here! We heard you were rambling, and if I'd had an idea where to reach you, would have wired you at once. Come outdoors and speak to Belle. It was she who dis-

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covered you through the window. Well, well, Dickie-boy, this is good indeed."

Mr. Armitage kept his hand on the younger man's shoulder as they crossed to the doorway, and Chamberlain's thoughts were busy. Evidently no breath of gossip had reached this old friend, whose hearty and affectionate welcome was balm to Chamberlain's hurt pride, and came like a breath from those halcyon days before he was put upon his defense.

Belle Armitage rose from her chair as they reached the open door and took a step forward. She and this man had not met since the evening when the last straw broke the camel's back; for, as was said before, she had discreetly and immediately left the field of victory.

"Where did you drop from?" inquired Miss Armitage, with her habitual drawl, her sharp eyes discerning the new lines of care in her friend's face. Its expression, however, was all geniality.

"Out of your motor-car," responded Dick, with the alertness and keen relish of a situation which always gave him the appearance of getting more out of life than any one else. There were few social occurrences so dry that he could not extract some juice from them, and under the rare circumstance of hopeless sterility, a flash of lightning

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might have envied him the rapidity with which he disappeared from the scene.

Belle lifted her bare, snowy shoulders and her eyebrows. "We've just tumbled out of it ourselves," she returned, lingering nasally on every word.

"Then Raynor did n't tell you? Good boy. Let me congratulate you on your chauffeur." Dick laughed with his customary infectious gayety.

"There it goes," said Mr. Armitage, gazing at his friend with affectionate wistfulness. "The same old offer still holds good, Chamberlain. I'll pay you more than The Saints, to come and laugh for me by the month. So you know Raynor, eh?"

"Yes, indeed. One of my old choir-boys. I ran into him just as I left the ferry, and he brought me over."

"I wonder why he did n't speak of it?" said Belle.

"Wholesome memories, perhaps. Possibly he had dim visions of a fine. By the time my boys' voices change, they are past masters in minding their own business;" and Chamberlain laughed again. "Heavens, Belle," he remarked, in a changed tone, "if I stay here, am I going to bloom like you? I can't afford any more umbum-

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pum, and the pale and interesting is the style most becoming to me."

Roses were blooming high in Belle's cheeks. Her wish was father to the thought that this man had followed her. "I'm no stouter, not an ounce," she replied, lifting her chin; "and of course everything blooms in Southern California. Have n't you used your eyes?"

"Yes, that's the trouble with me," he responded significantly. "I always do."

His look raised the girl to a pinnacle of triumph. Her eyes, cheeks, and lips, in the halo of her golden red hair, were dazzling.

They had not succeeded in setting him against her, then. Even that frightfully candid, insolent Mrs. Quayle-Smith had not been able to make him hold her to account for what had occurred. He admired her as much as ever, perhaps more! He had followed her here. Probably his hand had been but an excuse.

The three dined together that night with many a reminiscence of the varied spots in which their trio had feasted or starved in foreign lands. Chamberlain cast dull care aside with thorough enjoyment of the reaction from the oppression of the last four months; and barely recovered his caution when Mr. Armitage began telling him of

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a motor trip up the coast which they were planning. "Now," added that gentleman, with zest, "you are just in time to join us."

The imposing form of his majestic mother-in-law seemed to loom before the vision of the famous organist.

"Hold hard, hold hard, my dear sir!" he returned. "It is only on the other side of the pond that I can belong to the leisure class. I have come out here to labor."

The older man's face fell. "How is that? You haven't a choir concealed upstairs, I hope."

"No, I'm going to take a modest flyer in authorship; going to get a few things out of my system that will be a relief to me, anyway."

Dick had been sunning himself so contentedly in his native air of approbation, that he realized only with painful effort that even this admission should be hedged about.

"I don't know exactly where I'm going to do this writing. Of course I had to have a look at the famous Regina, but I don't know yet that it will be favorable to concentration. I may not stay here."

"No," thought Miss Armitage, playing with her coffee-spoon. "If we leave, he may do so too. Come with us," she drawled, "and you shall

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work evenings. I'll hold my tongue and roll your cigarettes."

Dick frowned at her smilingly. "What I need is n't some one to roll my cigarettes, but some one to write for me. Have you observed my ornament?" He exhibited the enlarged sinew on his wrist.

"Oh, I'll write for you. That's easy," returned the girl, and Dick in a sudden panic began to consider the situation seriously.

"Do you think you would conduce to concentration?" he returned. "My need is for some one with a snub nose, muddy complexion, and a stringy throat."

Belle lifted her white shoulders again; and Chamberlain, having paid so much tribute to habit, turned to her father.

"That would be a corking trip," he observed. "How soon are you going to start?"

"I don't know that we're going to start," interposed Belle. "My opinion is that father will prefer to tiptoe around your windows, looking in to see when genius ceases to burn so he can carry you off to motor, or play pool, or bathe. The bathing here is perfect."

"Oh, no, indeed. You must go. You ought to go," said Chamberlain hastily.

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Belle turned her eyes toward him languidly. "I suppose it would be rather indiscreet in him to go with us," she thought. "It was awfully daring to come here at all, considering Mamma Smith. I shan't tell Molly Tyler."

"You ought to go with us," persisted Mr. Armitage urgently. "I dare say you've never seen Catalina."

"I dare say I have n't. I dare say I'm the tenderest tenderfoot that ever came west of the Mississippi ; but business first and pleasure afterward."

"How long will it take you to write your good-for-nothing article?" grumbled the other.

"Book, sir, book — volume. Like the boy who did n't know whether he could play the violin because he had never tried, I am uncertain yet whether my Pegasus is full-winged or moulting. You'll have to give me time."

Mr. Armitage grunted resentfully. "It's all bosh. There are too many books already. Nobody'll want yours."

"I suspect you're clairvoyant, my dear pal ; but you forget the motive for my great work. You remember the statement of the poet that —

'the wonder grew
That one small head could carry all he knew.'

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Mine won't carry my erudition any longer. It's been a mistake that I have n't cultivated the big head."

Belle lifted her white chin. "Father is peevish, Dick," she smiled, "and your innocent mirth won't cheer him in the least."

"What's the damage?" inquired Mr. Armitage. "I'll buy up the whole edition before it's written."

"Great!" exclaimed Chamberlain, striking the table. "We'll put that in the prospectus. Frederick Lansing Armitage of New York, well-known patron of the arts, has secured the first edition of Mr. Chamberlain's great work in advance in order to —"

"Save him from making a fool of himself," interrupted the patron of the arts, pushing his chair back from the table, for his daughter was rising.

CHAPTER XIV

AUNT PHOEBE CAPITULATES

WHEN, late that evening, father and daughter were separating for the night, Belle kissed her parent as usual, and he held her off for a minute, thinking he had never seen her look so attractive.

“Why in the mischief did n’t you marry Dick Chamberlain, Belle? You had a running start of Violet Smith. What you will probably do is to give me a son-in-law that will bore me to tears; and here it might have been Dick. Great Scott, I should live to be a hundred if I had that chap to play with.”

“I don’t know exactly why I did n’t,” replied Belle demurely, her heart beating with its certainty. “Cupid does n’t observe any rules in his game.”

“H’m,” grunted Mr. Armitage reflectively. “It would be caddish to refer to such a thing, except that Violet has played the boy such a mean trick. I’ve been on the verge of asking him about her a dozen times to-night.”

“And I’ve seen it,” returned Belle alertly. “Surely you ’ll never make such a mistake!”

Aunt Phæbe Capitulates

“But it must seem so strange to him that I don’t,” returned the other, puzzled. “Of course it means either that we are rudely negligent, or else that we know there’s been something disgraceful. Once, when you were away talking with those women, I did give him an opportunity. I said, ‘It’s a pity your wife is n’t here, Dickie.’”

“Father! What did he answer?”

“Oh—said yes, it was a pity, for Violet loved nature.”

“How did he say it, father—how!”

“Let go my arm, child. He said it sadly, I thought. A sort of gloom settled over his face. He did n’t proceed, and I thought of asking who the baggage was that had come between them—thought it might be a comfort to him to talk it out; but I concluded to go slow—”

“Father,” the girl’s eyes were black and her face tense, “unless you promise me on your honor not to mention this subject to Dick again, I’ll not stay here. I mean it. He has had a hard experience, and he has left home to get away from it; not to talk about it. Promise me.”

Mr. Armitage gave a little murmur of surprise, as the flashing eyes came close to his. “Bless my soul, it’s nothing to me unless I can help the

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boy. I suppose he'll tell me, if I can. Go to bed, Silly, and don't get excited over nothing."

When Chamberlain went to the office that night, a letter was handed him in a well-known writing. With the faithfulness of a Casabianca, Mrs. Quayle-Smith was standing guard in his absence; but his face looked careworn as he opened the letter. In the congenial environment of the evening he had forgotten that he needed defense. This is what he read: —

DEAR DICK: — I hope you will have reached Regina Beach by the time this does, for Violet has declared herself at last in the first real letter she has written me. It was posted, as her last note was, at Los Angeles; but I don't believe she is at Los Angeles any more than I am. She has it firmly in her mind that you are infatuated with Belle Armitage. She does not mention names, of course, but she announces her intention to remain away until her "desertion" enables you to become legally free and enter into the new tie. Did you ever hear of such madness? As if you wouldn't have married that aggressive creature two years ago, if you had wished it. I examined my eyes with a hand-glass this morning, and crow's feet are deepening at each corner in spite

Aunt Phæbe Capitulates

of Julie's massage. It is n't Time that 's doing it, it's Violet. She has at last given me an address in Los Angeles, and I shall make haste to use it. As if the same man *could* love a Violet Smith and a Belle Armitage! The supposition is an imbecility on the face of it; and I should think, in common fairness, Violet might give you credit for more taste than to wish to live in the house with a woman who talks through her nose and laughs as a wild Indian war-whoops. Only to recall that shriek makes me cringe. And then, the enormity of Violet hinting at anything so unchurchly as divorce! She must have brooded over her troubles and exaggerated them until she is unbalanced. My poor boy, it is very disagreeable to have to send you this news just at the time you are recuperating; but we would n't have this burden to bear if it had not been for your carelessness, and so, while my hair is whitening, you must take your share of the pain.

Of course, affairs can't go on forever like this. The vestry will have to know the truth before the year is out. Your substitute is doing very well, and the boys are on their mettle so that your vacation shall be peaceful. Peaceful! I have been terribly tempted to answer inquiry with the word that you have gone West to join Violet;

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but I don't quite dare, for who knows, if I did, but that inconsiderate girl might appear here the next day. If only my misguided sister had not provided her with funds; but alas! she did, and so —

The letter diminished to a wail, and the lines showed deeper in Chamberlain's face as he finished it.

With his elbows resting on the table he meditated far into the night. For the first time he grasped the tenacity of Violet's resolution. Sacred memories of their love returned to him; little evidences of her constant thought and consideration. He was conscious of wonder that there was no resentment in his heart toward her to-night, even during the reading of this excited letter.

All for freedom, and the world well lost. He could fancy his wife thus paraphrasing the familiar saying. Her love had been all the world to her. Now that she believed it outraged, the only relief she could find was in the knowledge that no tie of man's making bound him to her. He knew her well enough to comprehend the struggles which had led up to the letter she wrote her mother.

Aunt Phœbe Capitulates

Dick was not narrow himself. He knew Violet to be incapable of narrowness. Her jealousy was of the sort that sought no revenge upon a rival — nothing but absolute withdrawal from the environment; and the need for this was so compelling that not even the destruction of her husband's professional career would deter her. So she was no heroine; Violet was no heroine. Dick recognized it. It would have been convenient for a man constituted like himself to have been married to a self-immolating creature instead of one willing to immolate him. He pitied himself a good deal that night as he made ready for bed.

If only the Armitages would go away even for a short tour, it would relieve the present pressure of circumstances. An inner monitor informed him with impertinent persistence that he should not dally with the situation, but should steer a northern course to-morrow morning before Belle's pretty red head lifted from her pillow; but he informed the voice indignantly that he could n't be so uncivil as that to Raynor, after urging him to persuade his sister into his service.

Where was Violet roaming? His Violet. She had cared more for her own pride than for his career; — but she was eating her heart out somewhere, alone, in spite of his vows. Belle Armi-

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tage, with all her nonchalance, had sparkled with pleasure in his presence to-night ; but the routine and unremitting care and labor of his profession had always been accompanied by a running obligato of the delicate flattery and devotion of women.

The circumstance that gave him further food for thought was that Belle had not mentioned Violet ; and Mr. Armitage only tentatively.

They knew, then, that his wife had gone. It was easy to see that they did not know why. Good friends they were. Good friends ; and their unquestioning cordiality to-night had been as grateful as water in a thirsty land.

The next morning Sibyl Raynor hummed softly while she dressed, and when her toilet was completed, she went to Violet's room and knocked.

"All ready, Nora Creina?" she asked cheerfully, as her friend's sombre large eyes met her own. "Good girl!" Then she paused for an instant, smiling, for Violet clasped her in a wordless embrace.

Presently they stood apart, regarding each other.

"All night long," said Violet, "I have been repeating the words you used to say when you

Aunt Phœbe Capitulates

were a child: ‘God will make everything come right, won’t He?’”

“If you had just left off the question, that would have been a good declaration,” returned Sibyl. “You should have been sleeping.”

“With Dick a few rods away? I could n’t; but, wonderful, wonderful girl that you are, I have been so quiet, so willing to lie there and rest!”

“Are you coming down to breakfast?”

“Yes; I can’t let you bring up the tray.”

“Dear Nora.” Sibyl nodded approvingly. “I think it’s better for you to come down.”

Claude was free to be as luxurious in the morning as Mrs. Bostwick would allow; so Sibyl counted on a private word with her aunt before he should appear. When, therefore, Violet had finished her coffee and returned upstairs, Sibyl persuaded Aunt Phœbe to leave the remainder of the serving to the little maid who came in for that purpose and the dish-washing.

“What’s on your mind?” inquired Mrs. Bostwick, hesitating. “Not that business Claude talked about, I hope, because I’ve decided to put my foot down on it; if that’s all, I’ll go right on with my work. Go up and call Claude, won’t you, Sibyl, and don’t you leave his door till he says he’s up.”

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“I want Claude to sleep until we’ve done talking,” returned the girl, with the quiet that her aunt had learned was significant.

“Hey?” questioned Mrs. Bostwick, readjusting her spectacles.

“The porch is likely to be full. Let’s go out to the gate and stroll a bit.”

The girl slipped her arm through her aunt’s and led her unresisting down the garden walk.

Aunt Phœbe looked at her curiously. “I thought Nora Creina looked sort of peaked this morning,” she said. “What’s happened? Have those folks she was so afraid of at the hotel found her out, or has her husband turned up? I guessed plain enough, from the things she told me that first day, that he was n’t near as dead as he ought to be.”

“You’ll be very much surprised,” returned Sibyl, “to hear that the people she feared are Claude’s Armitages.”

“Land! You don’t say so; but she must have found that out right off.”

“She did. The disturbing event just now is that her husband has come to the hotel.”

“What do you mean! Following those Armitages?” asked Mrs. Bostwick excitedly; “and there’s that handsome girl Claude tells about. So

Aunt Phœbe Capitulates

she's the bone of contention. Don't I remember how the poor woman flew over to our house that night? Why it's as bad as Sodom and Gomorrah! So he's chased after her way out here, has he? The pesky man."

"No; you must n't think so. Claude says he—he was dumfounded when he found they were here."

"So Claude swallowed that, did he?" returned Mrs. Bostwick scornfully; "and yet he thinks *I'm* green!"

Sibyl gave the substantial arm a little unconscious shake in her earnestness. "Claude knows nothing. Listen, Aunt Phœbe. I'm telling you something that Claude must not know about. You'll understand why, when I tell you that Mr. Chamberlain, the great organist, Claude's friend, is Violet's husband."

Mrs. Bostwick's mouth opened to speak, and remained ajar although she was dumb.

"Claude happened to meet him before he reached the hotel yesterday, and through Claude he learned that the Armitages were here; and he showed great surprise, and very disagreeable surprise."

"Do you believe it?" burst forth Mrs. Bostwick.

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“ Yes, I do; but it is naturally hard for Violet to do so.”

“ And do you mean to say that came onto her all of a heap on the porch last night? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And I thought she was asleep! ” Mrs. Bostwick’s face flushed. “ Why, I thought that Mr. Chamberlain was the salt o’ the earth. Claude just about — ”

“ Yes, and he must think so still. I hope you understand, Aunt Phœbe, that there are many reasons for keeping this a secret from Claude.”

Mrs. Bostwick looked vaguely around the walk where they had been slowly moving. “ I wish,” she said, “ that there was some place where we could sit a spell until I can sense the whole thing.”

Suddenly a flash lit up her languor. “ Why did that Nora Creina of yours look me straight in the face and tell me her name was Smith? ”

“ Because it is; her maiden name, and she was expecting to claim it for the rest of her life. Now, Aunt Phœbe, you remember, God will make everything come right.”

Mrs. Bostwick encountered the earnest eyes. “ Well — I hope so, I ’m sure,” she returned, “ but it is a mess.”

Aunt Phœbe Capitulates

Sibyl went on: "When we sing the hymn, 'God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform,' we don't often expect to see the way; but sometimes we can. We can this time. You and I can both help in this matter, and I know you won't refuse."

Mrs. Bostwick held herself very straight and stared at her companion. "Do you mean you want me to go with you and tell that wolf that sits up at an organ in church in all that white sheep's clothing, that his wife is over here?"

"Not for anything," rejoined Sibyl. "The point is this: if good can come from my doing the work Mr. Chamberlain wants done, we ought not to refuse to do it. Claude went to bed expecting that I would ask Violet to chaperon me. I went to her room last night with that intention; and then she told me."

"Do you think I'll let you go near a man like that?"

Sibyl smiled. "Like what?"

"I don't know; but bad enough to break his wife's heart and drive her away from him; and now out here running after the girl who made the mischief."

"We don't know that," returned Sibyl quietly. "The only thing I do know is that he cannot

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come to our house on account of Violet, and so I must go to him."

"I tell you I won't have it," declared Mrs. Bostwick; "besides, if he's honest about being sorry to find the Armitages here, he'll leave town right away."

"Yes, I've thought of that; but Claude says they have been talking of motoring up to San Francisco very soon, and if that is the way good is to work out, Mr. Chamberlain can stay here."

"Well, I've told you you can't go," said Aunt Phœbe doggedly. "He is n't any fit associate for a girl if his wife can't live with him, and if you have n't got sense enough to keep out o' the mud, I shall keep you out."

Sibyl put an arm around the speaker's stocky shoulders as they walked slowly. "I don't dare not to do it, Aunt Phœbe. Are you going to make a law that those two shall not come together again? Can't you see Violet's unhappiness? As soon as I understood the situation, I knew that God had sent me the message that Claude brought last night."

Mrs. Bostwick groaned. "Oh, if you're going to say that, Sibyl!"

"Well, consider. Are n't 'the leadings,' as you would call the events, remarkable?"

Aunt Phœbe Capitulates

Her aunt was silent for a space. At last she spoke. "And to think he's the organist at The Holy Saints, with all those boys under him. Why, Sibyl Raynor," with sudden inspiration, "I know what's happened! I'd be willing to bet without knowing that he's got his walking ticket on account of his doin's, and has come out here to grow up with the country. I'll bet his white gown has been stripped off of Reynard. Of course he would n't tell Claude so."

"Do you think, if that were the case, he would be going to write a book on choir training?"

"You can't tell anything about it. Of course he's got to pretend to be doin' something besides chase after a Jezebel."

"Hush, Aunt Phœbe. The way to find out whether he is in earnest is to take him at his word. We must do it."

"We!" Mrs. Bostwick exploded the pronoun.

"Yes. Think of Violet lying in that hammock last night and hearing Claude describe the beautiful girl his friend married. Think of her with the sudden news of his nearness, and the company he is in. Are n't you willing to do that much for Violet?"

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Aunt Phœbe maintained a short silence and then spoke : “ I don’t know what it would do for her if we should go over there and hobnob with that sly Reynard.”

“ I don’t either. That is none of our business. Our work is to heed the call. And, Aunt Phœbe, you’ll hinder by holding Mr. Chamberlain down on a low plane in your own thought. He is God’s child, as we are. He does n’t want anything but good. He has nothing to do with hypocrisy or unfaithfulness, or any other insanity; and you must know it. You love him, and — ”

“ Now stop right there, Sibyl. I always like to begin as I can go on. I ain’t loving anybody I have n’t ever seen.”

“ How about God, then ? ” asked Sibyl.

“ That’s very different, I should hope, and — and there comes Claude, anyway.”

“ Be careful. You understand,” said the girl softly and quickly, as her brother swung his cap and came down the path to meet them.

“ Is Mrs. Smith willing to go ? ” he called eagerly.

“ No; Aunt Phœbe is, though,” replied Sibyl, regardless of the mutterings which immediately began beside her. “ I should n’t mind at all going alone, because Mrs. Grundy does n’t know me out

Aunt Phœbe Capitulates

here; but Aunt Phoebe won't let me, and I have to mind her, don't I, dear?"

Sibyl squeezed the fat arm and laughed softly.

"Oh, certainly," returned Mrs. Bostwick, the very flash of her spectacles expressing irony. "Sibyl is bound to mind me, whatever she don't do."

"Well, I'm mighty glad it's settled," returned Claude. "I can't help having the same feeling I used to when Mr. Chamberlain asked me to do anything. There was n't a boy in the choir who would n't rather jump into the fire than refuse him."

"He must be a very fine man," remarked Mrs. Bostwick, with dry deliberation; then she went into the house.

CHAPTER XV

THE STENOGRAPHER

CLAUDE went straight to the hotel, and was admitted to Chamberlain's room.

"What are you doing inside here?" asked the boy gayly. "This is Southern California."

Dick, who was reading the paper, lowered his feet and gave his ex-pupil greeting, but he could not explain that he was waiting for information that the Armitages' chauffeur could give.

"We're all creatures of habit, Raynor. Have a cigarette?"

"Have n't the habit," grinned Claude, taking a chair astride. "Well, my sister says she'll do it, Mr. Chamberlain," he added, hastening to announce his success.

"Good business," returned the other.

"She'll be over here in an hour," went on the boy, beaming with the pleasure of obliging.

Dick knocked the ash from his cigarette. "The only question now is whether this will be a good place for my work," he replied. "I meant to play hermit for a while, do you see, and finding friends here alters the situation slightly. The

The Stenographer

better friends they are, the worse it is, you know. Now Mr. Armitage said something last night about a motor trip north. Of course I could n't tell him that it would fall in with my plans exactly, so I thought I'd ask you. Do you think it's settled?"

"Sure thing," responded Claude. "I don't know exactly when, but I know they mean to go soon. They were speaking about it yesterday afternoon."

"H'm. They last night invited me to go with them, but I'm not in the mood until I get this work off my mind. To be frank, I should accomplish more if they went. Mr. Armitage has time to burn, and kill, and annihilate generally, and I've helped him so often in the past that he rather looks to me. See?"

"Well, they're going all right," said the boy confidently. "Miss Armitage is keen for it, and what she says goes."

"All right, then," returned Chamberlain, repressing a suspicion that the fair Belle might have exercised her prerogative to change her mind overnight. "I'll get things in shape for work at once. I thought I might put this table out on the gallery; and if we find ourselves undisturbed, your sister might prefer it. I'm trying

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to get it through my head that the little girl of the picture is no more."

"Oh, no. Sibyl's older than I am, you know." Claude rose. "Well, I must hie me to the garage."

"All right." Dick accompanied him to the door and buttonholed him, tossing his head and winking persuasively. "Push it along, Claude, — the trip, you understand."

"Pushing is n't any way to move Miss Belle Armitage nor any other woman," returned Claude sapiently. "You've got to make them think you don't want to do a thing, if you're specially crazy about it."

Chamberlain gave the laugh which Mr. Armitage wished to engage for his own private delectation. "What! Already, Claude?" he returned. "And you so young!"

The boy nodded his head emphatically. "You bet. If anybody finds his education coming along slowly, let him be a chauffeur awhile. Good-by, Mr. Chamberlain. If we don't get off to-day, I suppose you'll be coming for a spin this afternoon, maybe?"

"It all depends. Everything depends," returned Dick, and he reëntered his prison chamber, through whose open windows this still

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morning came wooing breezes and the deep diapason of the languorous, mighty surf.

The Armitages had come out from breakfast and were standing in the hotel office chatting with friends when Sibyl Raynor and Mrs. Bostwick entered. The latter's black lisle-covered hands were crossed, and from one wrist depended a portly black satin bag. Her spectacles looked coldly by the group while Sibyl made her inquiries.

Mr. Armitage's roving glance fastened upon the fresh-faced girl in the gray gown and hat.

"That's that friend of Raynor's. There's no forgetting those eyes," he murmured to his daughter, whose nonchalant gaze followed the newcomers as they walked across the office and seated themselves to wait. "Ah, but she is a peach!" added Mr. Armitage, removing his look from Sibyl with reluctant courtesy.

Mrs. Bostwick was conscious of Belle's curious gaze. "Those are the Armitages, the first pop out of the box," she remarked, with enough vocality to bring a flush to her companion's face.

Sibyl's heart was hastening as she met the other girl's dark eyes and conquered the resentment that the recognition aroused.

"I do hope Reynard'll hurry up," went on

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Mrs. Bostwick. "I feel as if we were stuck up on wires, sitting here. I saw him a number o' times when Claude was in the choir, but I don't believe I'd know him without his nightgown."

"Oh, please, Aunt Phœbe, speak softly," murmured Sibyl desperately, and then caught sight of the debonair face and well set-up figure of a man in white flannels who was descending the staircase.

"Morning, Dickie," said Mr. Armitage, as the other drew near, and Sibyl watched the gleam of strong white teeth in the answering smile. She found she remembered the blond head with its dominant poise.

He gave only a nod to his friends as he strode past their group with his air of assurance, and Sibyl, in the excitement of the moment, was conscious of Belle Armitage's haughtily surprised eyebrows as his quick glance discovered the two waiting women at a little distance.

Sibyl rose as he approached.

"I see the resemblance, Miss Raynor. How very obliging of you to look so like Claude," he said.

Before Sibyl knew it, her hand was pressed in his with the cordiality of an old friend, and Aunt Phœbe's nostrils dilated.

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“This is my aunt, Mrs. Bostwick,” said Sibyl. “Perhaps Mr. Chamberlain was presented to you in Claude’s day, Aunt Phœbe.”

“I don’t remember it. How do you do, sir,” demanded that lady, with a severe brevity which caused Dick’s lips to twitch. He did not attempt to capture the black glove that clenched its mate, but bowed low.

“So niece is well chaperoned,” he reflected. “That hard-boiled face appears to disapprove niece’s move. Shall we go upstairs?” he asked aloud.

“I’m quite ready,” returned Sibyl.

“Some relatives of one of the choir-boys must have found Dick,” remarked Miss Armitage. “Poor man, he should travel incog.”

“Upon my word, he’s taking them upstairs with him!” exclaimed her father. “What can that mean?”

Belle shrugged her shoulders and stifled a yawn. “Claude knows the girl. You’d better ask him,” she replied, carelessly patting her lips; but her curiosity was keen.

This young stranger wore her clothes too well. Her hat was too good-looking. The violets upon it strayed about in the right spots. What in the world did Dick mean by taking her and her pon-

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derous guardian to his room? Courtesy to an absent choir-boy required less.

Miss Armitage excused herself from her friends and went away on her father's arm, humming a tune.

"Will you go out this morning?" he inquired.

"I scarcely know," she answered. "I'm not fully awake yet. Suppose we wait till afternoon."

"All right. I'll 'phone Claude," replied Mr. Armitage, as they paused at the foot of the stairs. "I might let him go over to town for those road maps. I'm going to have another set-to with Dick on the subject of the trip. It's all rot for him to stay here and write a book that nobody wants when he might far better go with us. When was it you said we must start at latest?"

"I forget just what I did say; it would certainly be no sport to drag you forth against your will." Belle laughed amiably. "You know you're entirely out of the spirit of going since Dick has come;" and the girl's bright eyes accused her father so gayly that Mr. Armitage averted his glance rather shame-facedly.

"Not out of the spirit, exactly," he rejoined, "but I don't see why we might not postpone it a few days and give Dick time to get tired of

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talking shop. He needs to play instead of work. I think he shows it, and it seems — well, not exactly friendly to leave a tried and true play-fellow like that to his own devices.”

“Precisely, honored sire,” returned Belle, with gay irony. “You need n’t make any apologies. You shall stay here and play pool with Dick as long as you wish to procrastinate. One thing we can boast, can’t we, father? We never do bore each other.”

“I bore myself, child. I bore myself,” he returned. “When I see a look in a face like that girl’s upstairs, I wonder; do you know? I wonder!” and the tired eyes gazed at some mental picture.

“Why, that girl is n’t particularly pretty,” drawled Belle lightly. “Nice complexion. Pleasant-looking creature. I have n’t seen, either time, why you admired her so.”

“I admire all happy creatures — admire them with awe. What on earth is there to be happy about?” was the slow rejoinder. “You’re a good girl, Belle, a very good girl; but you’re as restless as a prospector who can’t strike a lead. That girl has struck a lead. One look at her face shows it. She seems trying not to be too happy — or not to show it — or something of that sort. I can’t

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express it exactly, but seeing her suddenly has a strange effect: a sort of pick-me-up, you know."

Miss Armitage shrugged her shoulders. "Dear me. You'll have to ask Dick about this phenomenon. She seems to have picked him up effectually. Her joyous expression probably means that she likes her new hat. I'm sorry my restlessness annoys you so," she added, with lifted chin.

Her father patted her shoulder. "Don't be vexed, my dear. Where would you get any temperament but a restless one? Your poor mother was a bundle of nerves, and I don't need to tell you what I am. Oh, well, we mustn't take ourselves too seriously. I'll call up Rayner and tell him you'll have the machine this afternoon."

He returned his cigar to his lips and moved away slowly. There was plenty of time, too much time — all the time. Miss Armitage ascended to her room, her temporary annoyance swallowed up in curiosity as to what was going on above.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CHOIR-MASTER

As Chamberlain convoyed his visitors up the stairs that led to his apartment, Mrs. Bostwick's countenance did not grow less stern.

"And Sibyl would have come here without me," she reflected hotly. "That high and mighty red head would have stared at her and him coming up these stairs, and that old man who looks as if he got tired o' life in the last generation would have sneered, most likely. Probably he judges every other girl by his daughter."

Chamberlain noted her tightening lips as he and Sibyl accommodated their steps to her deliberation. "Odd, having no elevator, is n't it?" he asked, with the air of apologizing.

"I'm more used to stairs than to elevators," replied Mrs. Bostwick curtly.

Had Richard been himself, he would have been obliged to repress a laugh at her manner; but in the last half hour, since Claude left, one of the fits of gloom to which he was subject had settled upon him with its irresistible, unreasonable accenting of every repulsive, wearisome feature of

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existence, and when the bell-boy had appeared bringing Sibyl's name, disgust of life was so strong upon him that he descended to the office with the full intention of telling her that his plans had changed.

After all, the comments of his old friend on his proposed work were not nonsense. Why should he bother to get out a book that nobody would want, and what did he care how futile and misdirected were the methods of choir-masters in general? All he wanted now, if he wanted anything, was to get away from everybody who might by any possibility ask him a question. Belle Armitage was a bore, and her father a burden. If it were not that duty bade him separate himself from them, the prospect of immediate departure would be the one spot where his cloud would look luminous.

As he descended the stairs, his mind fully made up in its revulsion, he welcomed the good reason for not stopping to speak with his friends. Recognition of the stony disapproval writ large all over Mrs. Bostwick's countenance at first roused his combativeness, then, as the gentle brightness of Sibyl's eyes and smile met him, the decided words of polite dismissal which he had meditated altered to a consideration that it would be rather cavalier

The Choir-Master

treatment for Raynor's sister ; and the next thing he knew, the trio were on their way to his rooms.

Even total disgust of life will yield somewhat to the influence of a joyous spring morning, and the contained gladness of this girl's presence affected him tangibly. It seemed as if the very violets on her hat must be dewy.

"Strange how small the world is," he said, as he held open the door of his sitting-room for the visitors to enter. "Strange that I should come to the far West and run into Claude, and that he should have a sister so very obliging as to be willing to help me."

"Yes," returned Sibyl, "that's true — if anything were strange."

It was an odd reply, and Chamberlain looked at her inquiringly ; but he was not sufficiently curious this morning to ask her meaning.

He placed the best chair the room afforded for Mrs. Bostwick, who sat slowly and grudgingly upon its edge as one who should say : "I commit myself to nothing."

"To tell the truth, Miss Raynor," said Chamberlain, seating himself near her, "I have been weakening this morning, and wondering if I am not on the point of wasting my time and yours."

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“Already?” asked Sibyl.

“Already what?” asked Chamberlain, without spirit.

“Southern California,” she answered. “It is a lotos-eating country. Have you fallen under the spell overnight?” She smiled at him rallyingly. She refused to indulge her suspicion of what had altered his determination. He must not give it up. There was only one influence that could dominate him.

He looked at her, unsmiling.

“Perhaps,” he answered, and there was that in her freshness and resiliency that made him heedless of the despondency in his own tone. It would be bringing coals to Newcastle to assume good cheer in this presence.

“It would not be so much to be wondered at,” went on Sibyl, “especially to any one who knows as I do what a worker you are.”

“Yes, I’m a worker,” agreed Chamberlain.

“It’s quite natural that the reaction in this charming place should be toward the most irresponsible play.”

“Yes,” returned the other, with a dismal inflection which in another mood would have amused himself extremely. “Yesterday I thought I had a mission. To-day, I don’t know whether

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it is Southern California or common sense, I've changed my mind. I think what I need is irresponsible play."

He met the expression of interest in Sibyl's eyes. "I believe," she said, "your intention was to write a book on boy-choir training."

"Well, scarcely a book. It seemed worth while to put down a few facts learned by experience for the benefit of those who have n't been at it as long as I have; but after all it was a fatuous idea. Who wants to be benefited!"

"Once in a while there is somebody," replied Sibyl, "and your work is wonderful."

"H'm." Chamberlain gave a politely perfunctory and instantly vanishing smile. "You have suffered from an enthusiast in the family."

"Oh, yes; but so far as Claude is concerned, I think I've had to listen to more about your biceps than your choir. I have heard the choir many times myself with joy and wonder."

"Really?"

Mrs. Bostwick stirred. "Now what does she want to flatter him up for?" she thought, with irritation.

"Of course you're used to hearing praise of it," went on Sibyl, "and I suppose you are so accustomed to its perfection, and so aware of its

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methods and mechanism, that you scarcely comprehend the great musical pleasure that it gives."

Chamberlain nodded. "It is a good choir," was all he said; but his eyes gained steadiness and lustre. It was his life-work that was being recognized.

"The last time I heard your boys, I remember an impression that it was not only the organ keys that you had beneath your fingers, but a fresh, perfect instrument, which expressed music in entire obedience to your thought. It was more than a perfectly trained choir. It was a type of what the universe will be when all know that they are governed by one mind, and rejoice in it. Harmony knows nothing of discord. Your choir knows nothing of it."

Chamberlain regarded the softly bright eyes, and a normal light began to shine in his own.

"But that's by the hardest, I'll have you know," he said, smiling.

"And is n't that true of us all?" asked Sibyl. "The thoughts of each one of us are like the individuals of a choir, and each person is his own choir-master. I don't think I heard much that your rector said that day, I was so impressed by the object-lesson your boys gave me. Their pure tone; the absolute subservience of each to the good

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of all; the reverence, the sweetness, the strength and delicacy, the comprehension and reflection of the master's thought and its exquisite expression; — and the resultant harmony.”

Chamberlain was unconsciously leaning forward in his chair, and the mask of endurance had gone from his face.

“Whew!” he breathed, covering his profound pleasure with an assumption of lightness. “You make a man glad to be a choir-master. After your transfiguring description, one feels ashamed to remember the prosaic details of the *modus operandi*. To think of an ecstatic *crescendo* being taught by depicting a Limited Express on the blackboard, for instance.”

“Fine!” returned Sibyl, with laughing appreciation. “Talk about details and *modus operandi*! I think each individual finds the necessity for those fast enough when he starts in to train his own choir.”

Chamberlain tossed his head, smiling. “I confess I never had time to think of it, metaphysically.”

“But now that you do, is n't the parallel attractive?”

“Well—perhaps; but I don't know what would become of me if I could n't get away from the

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choir at all, but had one of my own household waiting for me when I finished with the other."

"I fancy there's no escape," said Sibyl, "whatever you may choose to call it. We have all to suffer from discord or else get into harmony. To return to your boys, Mr. Chamberlain, no one disputes that your work is preëminent. I don't see how it can be anything but a good idea for you to set up some finger-posts for others in your line."

The organist looked out the window and then back at the epitome of springtime and violets.

"You inspire a man," he said; then he turned toward his other guest, who was still balanced on the edge of her chair and regarding the wall with a countenance from which all expression was eliminated. What Sibyl meant by pouring all this treacle over a man who ought to be tarred and feathered was beyond her, and she intended to deal with her niece the moment they were alone. "Won't you make yourself more comfortable, Mrs. Bostwick?" he inquired, able by this time to appreciate fully the signs of that lady's demeanor, but puzzled thereby.

She turned the glassy coldness of her spectacles upon him. "I'm waiting to find out if Miss Raynor is going to stay," she answered.

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“And that depends —” he asked, turning to Sibyl.

“On you,” she replied.

“Evidently it is my lucky day,” he said, regarding the girl reflectively. “I wish it were not impertinent, Miss Raynor, to ask what has happened to you to make you look so happy.”

Her level gaze was full of sunlight. “It is n’t impertinent,” she replied. “I’m perfectly willing to tell you. It is because I have found the Choir-Master.”

With all Chamberlain’s *savoir faire*, he could feel himself color. In his professional life he was well accustomed to sharing to a degree the honors of the *matinée* idol. It would not be unprecedented if this fair damsel had long admired him from afar; and familiarity with the situation having bred contempt, he had a robust objection to discovering in this charming girl another alarmingly frank specimen of the genus *ingenuë*. Second thought would have convinced him that she had some occult meaning; but before that second thought had had time to form, she saw his surprise, and leaning toward him with gentle amusement shining in her eyes, she said slowly: “I don’t mean you, Mr. Chamberlain.”

CHAPTER XVII

ON THE GALLERY

THE Armitages' apartments were on the same gallery with Chamberlain's, a fact which Belle's vanity would not permit her to set down to coincidence. The long promenade afforded every opportunity for accidental meetings, and the inconvenient fact that Chamberlain was married formed no bar to the young woman's romantic dreams concerning him. The men and women of her set were too frequently put to the annoyance of applying a homely rule of life to their marital complications: "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

Dick had not succeeded with Violet. Since she had thrown him over in a fit of peevishness, he certainly had every right to try again, and how natural that he should turn to a comrade who had never failed him!

Belle had always felt this man to be the most attractive of her acquaintance, but it had required that the blessing of his good-fellowship should take its flight into marriage with another before it brightened to a positive need.

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She looked in her mirror this morning to reassure herself of her assets, as she continued to wonder what were the claims of those friends of Claude Raynor whom Dick had been induced to take up to his sanctum. What could it mean? A solo boy, probably. Nothing less than a clue to a boy with a remarkable voice would make Dickie commit himself like that. The gray girl! Her father's peach. Nonsense! That girl was well enough, but there was nothing in her looks to induce Chamberlain to take her and that good, countrified mamma upstairs, instead of seeing them in the reception-room. She walked to the window, frowning. Why did not her father come? By this time Raynor certainly had told him who the girl was, and he was probably this minute dallying about the office smoking with some acquaintance instead of hastening here to explain. Men were by nature exasperating. His own curiosity was relieved, so what did he care? Of course she had not expressed any; but had the matter concerned something as remote from her interest as the North Pole, he would have been up here like a shot to talk about it.

Her maid was busily folding garments and putting the room in order. She went out on the

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gallery to brush her mistress's automobile coat and returned.

"Any one sitting there this morning, Folly?" drawled Miss Armitage indifferently.

"Only one lady, ma'am."

"Who? Because if it's that Miss Learing, I'm not going out to read and have her fasten on me again."

"No, ma'am. It isn't Miss Learing. It's no one I ever saw—a large lady."

Belle looked up. "What is she doing?"

"She's sitting there knitting, and she's got her bonnet on like she was visiting."

There were very few bits of knowledge possessed by Miss Armitage which Folly did not share. Likewise she had been in her mistress's employ during the campaign in Boston; so she added, with her eyes fastened demurely on the silken coat: "She's sitting in front of Mr. Chamberlain's window, ma'am."

Miss Armitage felt her rich color rise in the sudden unpleasant puzzle of her thoughts. "Well, there's no danger from a stranger, so I think I'll go out," she remarked carelessly; and picking up her novel, she moved through the swinging glass doors toward her favorite reclining-chair, and moved it until from the tail of her

On the Gallery

eye she could view her surprising neighbor. She at once recognized the matron, who was comfortably ensconced in an armchair, her black silk wrap hung over its back, her veil caught up on the top of her bonnet, and in her busy hands the knitting which had made the black satin bag portly.

“If there ain’t that girl,” thought Mrs. Bostwick; “and that’s hers and her pa’s rooms, I have n’t an atom of doubt. I calculate to tell Sibyl that. It don’t make a lie the truth just to believe it, and I’d like to see her show more intelligence than to think that he was n’t written to by that Jezebel and did n’t come out here a-purpose to see her.”

The knitter thought of Violet as she took her sharp glance at Belle. Her boarder had not until now won more than a negative liking from Aunt Phœbe, whose traditions were all against wives who gallivanted for any reason whatever; but something in the brilliance of Miss Armitage’s complexion in the morning sunshine, and the languid arrogance of her movement as she cast one look toward her neighbor on the gallery, suddenly spurred the combativeness of Mrs. Bostwick’s nature. Violet’s night flight to her own roof took on a new coloring in that moment. “She’s

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a hussy. I know it right now," she thought. "I don't believe, if it had been Sibyl, that I'd have made her put up with it."

Sibyl, with the wisdom of the serpent, had on their way here this morning told Mrs. Bostwick more of the circumstances than that lady had previously known, and Aunt Phœbe's reflections now flew faster than her swift needles.

"Sibyl should have come home to me; but that mother would n't let Violet, poor girl. I don't know as she's to blame for just getting out." Mrs. Bostwick sighed impatiently. "I wish we were quit of the whole business, but 't ain't a mite o' use to say so to Sibyl. David was n't any surer that he had a mission than she is; and there she sits in there with her poor little pebbles, just as sure she'll slay the giant as I am of going home to dinner. Yes, my lady Philistine," Aunt Phœbe sent a quick glance over toward the graceful figure curved in the steamer-chair, "common sense makes me bet on your side; but you've got a righteous enemy in the room behind me that you little reckon with."

Belle, her eyes fixed on the margin of her book in such fashion that she saw each movement Mrs. Bostwick made, was aware of the glance.

"Good woman from Podunk, who are you?"

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she questioned mentally. "Why have you left your daughter alone with Dick? If I don't learn pretty soon, I won't be answerable for the consequences."

Five minutes passed; ten minutes; and the knitter in the sun kept stolidly on. A movement behind Miss Armitage was a welcome relief. She stirred and sat up.

"Well, father, at last," she said, looking at the newcomer.

"'At last,'" he repeated, surprised. "Were you in a hurry for me?"

"Why, yes — no; that is, you went to ask Claude —"

"Oh, of course; so I did; but it's all right."

"What is all right?" inquired the girl, ruffling the leaves of her book.

"Why, the road maps. He'll get them before luncheon and send them up. I told him we'd 'phone when we wanted the machine — probably by three o'clock. I felt sure Dick would be through by that time."

"Through what?" asked Belle, her filial respect dangerously strained as it barely prevented her from using her novel as a missile.

"Why, his work; his writing. By the way, that sweet creature is Raynor's sister Sibyl. Nice

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name. Fits her. I'd like to know as much — or rather as little — as that sibyl knows."

Miss Armitage controlled herself, leaned back in her chair, and spoke in her usual drawl. "Dear me, you have a case! Perhaps you'll explain what Claude's sister has to do with Dick."

"Why, I just said, did n't I? It's his book, you know. He told us about it last night. Surely you remember. He told you he had to have a stenographer. Well, Claude's sister is one. Lucky, is n't it, he found one so quickly?"

Belle's color burned high. "Yes, and so exactly to his mind," she replied lazily; "muddy complexion, snub nose, stringy neck."

"Ha, ha, yes, to be sure. So he did say that. We must joke Dickie on his description."

Mrs. Bostwick, although out of earshot of the words, heard the laugh.

"Well, I'm glad he can," she thought. "He does n't look it."

"Hello," said Mr. Armitage, that moment espying the erect knitting figure. "The watch-dog outside the window. Highly correct."

"Claude's mother?" asked Belle, as he paused.

"Why, no, no. He has n't any mother. It's his aunt, you know, that brought them up."

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“I don't know. How should I?” returned the girl acidly.

“To be sure; you did n't hear him tell about it. That's Aunt Phœbe. I was just coming upstairs to tell you that I'd learned the identity of that nice girl, when who should I run into in the office but Guy Lester; so I stopped to chat with him a bit, and it rather threw me off.”

“Lester! Guy Lester!” exclaimed Belle, sitting up again.

“Yes, why not?”

“No reason. Every reason why, I suppose. He's a busy man, that's all.”

“Rather formal, stiff sort of chap, is n't he?” said Mr. Armitage. “I never knew him well, but I'd forgotten that it took an Act of Congress to get him to talk. I suppose he is always thinking about the bank, or the railroads, or the mines, or some other affair of the kind.”

“Oh, he is moody,” remarked Belle, with a shrug; “and then you know he never forgets that he is somebody in particular; and if he were in danger of it, there are always plenty to remind him. I think he's a great bore, myself, and I ask as a favor, father, that you won't try to bring us together.”

“Very well,” Mr. Armitage made a gesture,

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“just as you say; but he’s a fine fellow all the same. He may bore women because they bore him; but I tell you men flock around him wherever he is.”

Belle Armitage’s brow corrugated as she leaned back and again became absorbed in the white margin of the printed page. Lester, whose self-contained scorn of her, last winter, had been the bitter drop in her sparkingly sweet cup. What evil genius could bring Violet’s adorer here now, to discover Dick, and only too possibly excite his caution?

She bit her red lips as she studied the situation, and her father, seeing her absorbed, paced up and down the gallery, his hands crossed behind him.

Chamberlain had so much to consider besides herself. He had risked a great deal in seeking her here, and among his whole circle of acquaintance there existed not one person whose presence at this time would be so awkward as Lester’s. She saw the facts clearly. The only way to keep Chamberlain here now was to carry out the plan for the motor trip at once. They must at least appear to go away. Dick should keep them informed, and if Lester’s stay should prove to be transient, she could vote the trip a failure at any point along the road. She knew it would be

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easier to bring her father back to the locality which held his favorite, than to induce him to leave it. She also knew Chamberlain's pertinacity in any work he undertook, and she began to be glad that he had found a helper in the gray girl, since that would prove an additional anchor to this charming spot. What had the stunning Miss Armitage to dread from a Yankee stenographer, especially in the case of a man like Dick Chamberlain, who had passed unscathed among every variety of charming girl for the past ten years?

Mr. Armitage, in his pacing back and forth, came ever a trifle nearer to Mrs. Bostwick, who, aware of his neighborhood, sat straighter than before, knitting rapidly, her spectacles directed upon the bounding sea with so rigid an expression that a smile curved the mustache of the walker.

"Gad! she was born too late," he reflected. "She should have sat among those dames Dickens tells about, who never dropped a stitch while they watched heads fall at the guillotine. I wonder if we could find a point of agreement. I don't see quite how she could take any exception to the day. Let's try it. The peach belongs to her and has n't been eaten yet."

He paused near Mrs. Bostwick, who immedi-

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ately braced herself against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

“Very fine weather, is n’t it?” he ventured.

“Yes. It would be more of a change if it was n’t,” was the prompt response, during which the spectacles were only for the briefest space allowed to meet the tired eyes.

“True,” returned the man, smoothing his mustache. “We come a long way out of the East to find such, don’t we?”

“Yes, and we’ll go a long way back and stay there — some of us,” Mrs. Bostwick declared. “I like a cloud now and then.”

“You speak as if you would be glad to go.”

“H’m!” ejaculated Aunt Phœbe, and knitted.

“I believe this is Mrs. Bostwick, and if so, we are both interested in the same boy.”

“Yes, I knew Claude was with you,” vouchsafed the other.

“He’s a fine fellow,” said Mr. Armitage, entertained in lieu of other occupation to find himself obliged to work his conversational passage.

“H’m — so, so,” was the cool reply.

“I like his energy.” The speaker sighed. “I had energy once myself.”

“It’s a bad thing to lose,” remarked Mrs. Bostwick impersonally. “The worst of stopping

On the Gallery

working is that you stop playing at the same time.”

“What? Eh? Oh, I see your point. You mean the savor has gone.”

“Exactly. You don’t know you are playing any more.”

Mr. Armitage shook his head with gentle, quiz-zical humor. “Right; but what puzzles me, Mrs. Bostwick, is how a lady who knits the way you do ever found it out.”

Aunt Phœbe thawed sufficiently to pull down the corners of her lips in a brief smile. “I can knit and use my eyes at the same time,” she returned. “I can read—books or faces, either one. There’s rafts of folks at Regina Beach who are disgusted with their playthings. I don’t need to talk with ’em to know it.”

Mr. Armitage looked off upon the sea reflectively. “It is a beautiful playground,” he said, sighing unconsciously, “and we must not expect too much.”

Mrs. Bostwick glanced up at him sharply. Something in his tone and words touched her.

“You have taught a good theory of life to your niece,” went on Mr. Armitage, gesturing slightly with his head toward the room behind them.

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“What makes you think that?” The question came crisply, and the other smiled.

“I’ve been reading faces longer than you have, Mrs. Bostwick. Most of them, I must say, I treat as one must a majority of the books — a glance is enough. You know the genus, and you drop it; but I have seen your niece twice. Her face is rejuvenating.”

Mrs. Bostwick cleared her throat. “I can’t flatter myself I’ve taught Sibyl much. She teaches me my *p*’s and *q*’s now and then.”

“Really?” Mr. Armitage was incredulous.

“She’s got a will of iron, or else I would n’t be here this minute.”

“You disapprove? Now I’m sorry for that. Why should you? If she’s to do such work at all, why not accommodate Mr. Chamberlain — the finest, truest-blue fellow in the universe.”

This, spoken with unmistakable sincerity, caused such a convulsion in Mrs. Bostwick’s breast that she actually stopped knitting and laid her work in her lap, while she lifted her spectacles to gaze directly into her companion’s eyes. They held a spark of interest.

He was surprised by her manner and still more by her words. “Where is your home, Mr. Armitage?”

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“In New York,” he replied.

“Oh,” said Aunt Phœbe. “’M h’m,” she murmured in addition, then picked up her needles and flung the thread of yarn over her hand deftly.

“This man’s a gentleman,” she reflected, “and I’m willing to bet without knowing that no one’s ever told him a word about how daughter saw Boston.”

CHAPTER XVIII

SPRINGTIME

CHAMBERLAIN became very much interested in laying out his work. Like all executive persons, he possessed the power of concentration; and having clearly in his mind the facts he wished to formulate, that morning dictated an Introduction to the little book he planned, and by the time it was finished, it was entirely characteristic that he had forgotten all doubts and questions.

He beamed at Sibyl as she folded her papers preparatory to putting on her hat.

“I have n’t had practice enough to work swiftly,” she said. “I suppose you notice that.”

“Oh, it’s all right; entirely right,” returned Dick, regarding his assistant with open satisfaction. Sibyl’s intelligence, quick comprehension, and even her modest suggestions at one or two points of hesitation had captivated Dick, who appreciated a good instrument, whether musical or human.

“This troublesome wrist of mine is n’t such a bad thing, after all,” he said cheerfully. “I can see that two heads will be better than one.”

Springtime

“Even if one is a layman’s head,” added Sibyl. “I am very glad to be able to help you. Tomorrow at the same time?” she asked, rising.

“Yes, indeed,” returned Chamberlain, with alacrity, as he rose also and stretched himself to his full height. Suddenly she saw that some thought arrested him and took the good cheer from his eyes. “That is,” he added, “I hope you will come if I decide to stay here.”

Sibyl’s heart gave a little bound. “Oh,” she returned. “That is not quite decided, then. I did n’t understand.”

Chamberlain felt himself flush. “I—that is—to tell the truth, this work, while it may not amount to much to any one else, is serious to me. When I work, I work, and when I play, I play; and my plan was to find a place just for a little while where I did n’t know any one. I thought Regina Beach was such a place; but to my surprise I’ve found some very good friends of mine here. They’re the Armitages, whose car Claude drives, and I was telling your brother that if I were strong-minded, I’d take my pen and ink and flee the place till my work is done.”

The embarrassed man was vaguely surprised by the sweetness of the smile Sibyl gave him, and she seemed reflecting as she paused.

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“You will know in a little while what is right to do,” she answered.

“But it seems rather shabby to have bothered you this way, if it proves just for one day.”

“I don’t consider it so.”

“But your aunt will, I’m certain,” said Dick, smiling. “She has a rather masterful look, and I feel that she begrudges you to me.”

Sibyl laughed softly. “She’s a busy house-keeper,” she returned apologetically.

“But why not let me come to you?” asked Dick, with inspiration; then, memory again pulling like a ball and chain, he added, “That is, if I stay.”

“Because it would n’t be convenient,” replied the girl. “We keep a boarding-house, and it is a small place.”

“Yes, I know. Claude told me: told me coldly at the same time that you would not take me in.” Chamberlain’s brow suddenly drew together as he realized what a simple way out of his puzzle Fate might offer. “It would straighten matters beautifully for me if you could take me, Miss Raynor. It really ought to be done. Just think how convenient for you and me both, and how far from the madding crowd and their bubbles! Why, it’s a shame to refuse me.”

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The girl flushed as she shook her head. Her companion looked so big and determined, and was so evidently unaccustomed to submit to obstacles, that she had a sudden panic-stricken sense that he might come in spite of her. She steadied her thought, and met his frown with a kind look that had its root in a profound compassion for him in his problem.

“It’s not possible just now,” she said. She looked down at the gloves she was putting on. “In any case,” she went on, after a considering pause, “there is only one room, a front room, in our house that I feel sure would satisfy you.”

“Who is in it? I’ll go over and bribe him,” returned Chamberlain hopefully.

Sibyl shook her head. “It’s a lady.”

“A lady, eh! Well, what are her plans? Does n’t she know it’s her duty to travel and see the country? Has she visited Catalina yet? I know I shall wax dangerous if anybody else asks *me* that question, but she’s a lady and probably won’t resort to violence. You might venture to inquire. Can’t you move her heart by the tale of a wild-eyed author who wishes to go into retreat? Tell her I’ll swap even: her room for this.”

Sibyl smiled. “You will be surprised by the

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coincidence when I tell you that one obstacle to such heroic treatment is that she is in retreat herself.”

“But mine is different. I want to hide.”

“So does she.”

“But from my friends.”

“So does she.”

Chamberlain folded his arms and half closed his eyes. “My dear Miss Raynor, my right to the room is proved already beyond question. That woman is an impostor, and is pulling the wool over those happy eyes of yours. How on earth has she been able to hoodwink your revered aunt’s spectacles! I take off my hat to her; but I must nevertheless firmly request her removal. People don’t hide from their friends—”

Sibyl raised her eyebrows and laughed up at him.

“Unless they’re writing a book. Is the front room writing a book?”

“She might do so from her experiences; but I don’t think she will. I don’t want her to until it can have a happy ending.”

Chamberlain kept his arms folded, and balanced back and forth gently as he regarded his companion quizzically.

“She has proved herself an able romancer by

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the way she has persuaded you to believe her story. Don't you know that if you went to those friends she is hiding from, you would hear a quite different tale?"

"The chief one is her husband," said Sibyl. "I have met him."

A cloud settled over Chamberlain's face, and the humorous light died from his eyes. "Oh, it's that sort of a story, is it?" He dropped his arms. "Tell her not to write it. They're a drug on the market. Did you give the husband a chance to state his case?"

"He did n't need to. It was easy to see that he was unhappy, too."

"You've met him since she went into hiding?"

"Yes."

"And did n't tell him where she was?"

"No."

Chamberlain's lip curled in a slight smile as he met the wistful gray eyes. "Honor among women, I suppose," he said. "Well, it's quite possible that he did n't wish to know."

"Perhaps," replied Sibyl quietly, "but I doubt it. She is so fine and strong and sweet underneath all the impulsiveness and selfishness that has made her suffer."

Chamberlain raised his hand to his face in an

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involuntary movement to hide the expression of his lips. "So the front room has not made you wholly partisan," he said, "and you are not quite prepared to order boiling oil for the husband."

Sibyl gave a little nod. "He has his boiling oil fast enough without any ordering from a third person," she answered. "The law works inexorably. 'With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.'"

Chamberlain frowned slightly in his surprise. This girl with the face of a child was a thinking being, and could still be happy!

"But it is such a satisfaction that there is only one thing we can be sure of," she said more lightly, "and that is that everything will come right."

"The only thing, eh?" rejoined Dick, with a laugh. "Your short life certainly must have been a merry one. My experience is that we can be sure of just the opposite."

Sibyl flushed a little under the scornful incredulity of his tone, but she ignored it. "Then I shall simply wait, Mr. Chamberlain, until I hear from you again?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied slowly. "I think we must leave it so. I've tasted blood, though, and I crave to go on. It's great to be able to hold forth

Springtime

while the other fellow has n't a ghost of a chance to talk back."

He mentally lauded Sibyl for refraining from the very obvious question why he could not play with his friends in the afternoons, since he was planning to work only in the morning. She had tact and breeding, this sister of Claude Raynor's, and a level head so far as her work was concerned. Her mental balloon-ascensions certainly served some purpose if they gave that ineffable expression to her face.

"You say everything will come right," said Chamberlain, as she moved toward the swinging doors that led to the gallery. "Here is a handicap, and no joke, that I'd like to see come right."

Sibyl regarded the wrist he lifted. "It certainly can come right, if you wish it."

"If I wish it," returned Dick blankly. "Well, Miss Raynor, there are some cats in the congregation at home quite capable of making that speech; but it comes strangely from a kitten like you."

"You do wish it, then?" she asked.

He frowned, smiling. "I've disciplined your brother for less impertinence than that," he remarked.

"Shall I try to banish it for you?"

"You are very good; but there have been

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enough weights dropped on it already to crush anything less ambitious.”

“That would n’t be my way,” returned the girl.

“Try your way, then — any way — every way. I can be grateful, if I can’t be hopeful.”

As he spoke, Chamberlain opened the door upon the gallery, and to Sibyl’s surprise she saw her aunt standing at the rail with Mr. Armitage, to all appearances chatting amicably. The black satin bag was again portly with the folded knitting, and Mrs. Bostwick’s spectacles had lost their glassy stare.

“Good combination,” remarked Chamberlain softly. “Why should n’t they amuse each other — if I stay. Mr. Armitage,” as they approached, “I want to present you to Miss Raynor.”

“Ah, good-morning,” said Mr. Armitage, turning, his vague glance brightening as it rested on Sibyl. “And how goes the book? Half done by this time, I dare say.”

Sibyl nodded at him. “‘Well begun is half done,’ they say,” she returned; “so I suppose we can answer yes.”

At the same moment Belle Armitage emerged from her rooms, and her father moved toward her. “You must meet Raynor’s aunt and sister, my dear,” he said.

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“Has genius burned satisfactorily?” drawled Belle, when she had nodded greeting. She flashed a glance at Sibyl and then at Chamberlain. “Ah, I can see it has by the way Dick’s hair is rumpled. Does he stand this way, Miss Raynor, while he dictates?” and she posed in an oratorical attitude, with her head thrown back, one hand thrust inside an imaginary vest, and the other behind her.

“Miss Raynor,” said Chamberlain, “you will find a sad amount of skepticism among my friends here; but we know what we know.”

Belle laughed. “Poor Dickie! Misunderstood genius!”

The little party moved through Chamberlain’s room and down the stairs; then Mrs. Bostwick and Sibyl took their departure.

Miss Armitage and Chamberlain came out on the piazza with them and stood side by side to speed the parting guests.

Presently turning, with some light remark on their lips, they came face to face with Guy Lester, who, unwitting of their presence, had just stepped out the door.

The rencontre under the circumstances was a shock to Chamberlain. Painful color surged to his hair as he read the scorn and disgust in Lester’s eyes. His hand had involuntarily started forth

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at the recognition of his old friend, but it dropped and tightened as he returned the other's nod.

Lester bowed also, unsmiling, to Miss Armitage, and would have passed, but she would not permit it. She felt that this was the tide in her affairs, and that if she did not take it at the flood, incalculable mischief would ensue.

She paused before the squarely-built man, extending her hand, and Lester was forced to take it while he held his hat rigidly in the other.

"Why, Mr. Lester. You here?" she said, with evident pleasure. "I begin to think Regina Beach is the most wonderful place for surprise parties! Dick walked in on us yesterday when we supposed him at the other end of the continent, and to-day you! Just in time, too, both of you, else you would have missed the extreme pleasure of seeing the Armitages. Father and I are off for a motor trip of indefinite length. We had it all planned before Dick came, and we urged him to join us, but in vain. He has come out here to work. Would you believe it?"

"No," replied Lester, as she paused humorously; and the curtness of the negative was so disconcerting that she rattled on.

"He was even ungentlemanly enough to say he

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did n't know that we were here. Now should n't you think he might have hesitated at that?"

"I certainly should," replied Lester, his gray eyes and square chin confronting her steadily and ignoring Dick.

She flushed, and floundered amid her sentences, desperately anxious to produce her impression. "He is — he has — simply refused to be of the party, and — and — my father is disconsolate. Are you on your way up the coast, Mr. Lester? Have you your machine here? We should be so glad to take you with us as far as you care to go."

"That would be scarcely outside these grounds, Miss Armitage," was the deliberate response; then, as if to soften his rudeness: "It is very pleasant here—and I have some business, too, which must be finished. Good-morning."

He passed by, replacing his hat; and the man and girl he had left stood for a silent space with hot cheeks. A deep, steady fire of resentment burned in Dick Chamberlain's eyes, and his hands were plunged deep in the pockets of his white coat.

His companion's heart beat fast. Guy Lester's opinion of her was of infinitesimal consequence; but she dreaded its effect on Dick.

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“What a disagreeable creature he is!” she hazarded after a moment, her foot tapping the piazza and her eyes fixed upon the sea. Tears were pressing up from the depths of her humiliation, and the fear lest Dick should be estranged.

He was studying her and receiving enlightenment from the little scene. “*Qui s’excuse s’accuse!*” Her anxiety was a revelation. She knew quite well that she had caused his disaster, though, with characteristic chivalry, he still held her innocent of intention.

“You’re a good fellow, Belle,” he said. “You always were. You did your best just now. I appreciate it.”

The gentleness in his voice was such a relief that the tears welled over and she endeavored to wink them back.

“Oh, Guy Lester is nobody,” she returned carelessly, her face averted, “even though he does take himself so seriously.”

Chamberlain’s next words surprised his hearer strangely. “He loved my wife once, very devotedly,” he said quietly; “and he despises me now as a poor guardian of a great treasure.”

Belle turned to her companion with eyes that shone dangerously.

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“So was she a poor guardian of a great treasure,” she replied, with low intensity.

Dick caught his lower lip between his teeth as he received her gaze for a silent minute.

“You had a right to follow me here,” she added. “Violet gave you the right by her action.”

Dick met the brilliant eyes in amazement. Belle was very handsome at this moment, but the revelation of her thought staggered him.

“So you believe that I knew you were here,” he returned, speaking quietly. “I did not. I want you at least to give me credit for not being a cad. There is n’t a man of your acquaintance who would willingly expose you to such misjudgment of a situation as Lester’s just now.”

“I tell you I don’t care for him,” she returned, her heart beating heavily.

“You should,” returned Chamberlain. “Lester is a fine fellow.”

“Don’t talk to me this way, Dick,” piteously. “What do you mean by it?” Her tone sharpened, and her face was averted again.

“I mean that it is about time for me to stop being criminally careless. Does your motor trip really begin to-morrow?”

“Did n’t you hear me say so?”

“Yes, to Lester. What do you say to me?”

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“I say that, since you wish it — yes.” She was breathing so hard that her companion could see her nostrils dilate.

“Surely you perceive that we can’t both stay!” exclaimed Dick, surprised by her evident resentment.

She suddenly turned back to him. “You are wise, of course,” she answered, with a soft change of manner. “It won’t do — yet.”

Her eyes startled him even more than her words. He saw what she believed; what she expected. Like a bitter comment upon the fact arose the memory of Guy Lester’s strong face a minute ago. It had remanded them both to the dust-heap.

Every atom of pride in Chamberlain’s being arose in arms. While he had believed Belle innocent and ignorant, she still charmed him. Now, every fibre of him shrank; and he suddenly remembered many instances in which he now saw that calculation had underlain her apparent impulsiveness.

“It won’t do, ever, I’m afraid,” he returned, with a sort of courteous carelessness. “I fear we’ve killed the goose that laid the golden eggs of our good-comradeship, Belle.”

“Never is a long time,” she answered, panting and smiling above the pang that tore her.

Springtime

“That little girl who was just here, Miss Raynor,” remarked Dick reflectively, “said that we could be sure of only one thing in this world.”

“It used to be two,” interrupted Belle, with an effort at flippancy.

“Yes, I know; but she said the one thing was that everything would come right, some time.”

“What a wonderful girl! A sibyl indeed!”

“Yes, it’s easy to say; but I hope, Belle, that the fine woman in you will never bear the slightest touch hereafter of this trouble of mine, and I hope you will forgive me for letting it come near you.”

“O Dick!” she cried out, and it was fortunate that at this drowsy noon hour they were alone in the broad stretch of sunny veranda, for her voice rose hysterically. “Don’t talk of my forgiving you!” She hid her face in her hands. “You know — you *know* —”

Her very heart seemed to rise in her throat and choke her. There was a short, pulsing silence; then she turned and fled into the house.

Dick strode to the piazza rail and stood there, frowning.

He did know at last. Miserable thought drove him as low down into the valley of humiliation as even Guy Lester could have desired, and he wandered there long, heavy-laden.

CHAPTER XIX

THE UPWARD PATH

MRS. BOSTWICK carried herself with great stiffness as she and Sibyl moved away from the hotel.

“It makes me feel as if we were a party to it, to leave those two standing there alone,” she said. “Perhaps you ’ll tell me, Sibyl Raynor, why you purred over that man until he began to think the sun rose in his head and set in his heels.”

“Because I wanted him to write his book,” replied the girl, smiling demurely.

“Oh, that was the game, was it!” retorted Aunt Phœbe. “Nothing would do but to drag us over there day after day, I presume.”

“Something else might; but that had offered, and I felt pretty sure it was error to give it up.”

“With the siren waiting for him out the window, I suppose so,” admitted Mrs. Bostwick. “I know just as well as if I ’d seen her at it, that when she gets to floating around the shore with that bright hair of hers, she could n’t be any worse if she had a fish-tail.”

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Sibyl shook her head, busy with her thoughts. "It is perfectly true that he came without knowing that she was at Regina, and I'm very hopeful," she said.

Mrs. Bostwick grunted scornfully. "Were you ever anything else?"

"Oh, yes, indeed." Sibyl laughed. "For instance, in my most optimistic moments, I never pictured you and Mr. Armitage exchanging confidences by the sad sea waves."

"He's very much of a gentleman," returned Mrs. Bostwick judicially. "Of course, he has n't the backbone of a man who does n't own an automobile, but I'd be willing to bet without knowing that he is n't a party to his daughter's capers. He looked me in the eye and praised Mr. Chamberlain up to the skies. When he left us there in the office just now, I felt like giving him the wink to come outdoors with those two, and stay by 'em."

Sibyl lifted her shoulders with a little deprecating movement. "I could n't help thinking, myself, of the old saying: 'Pull Dick, pull devil.' I feel certain Dick is pulling."

"And that siren will never let go," added Aunt Phoebe — "not till she has to. Did you notice the way she flashed those eyes of hers

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around on us all? I suppose she judges you by herself.”

“Yes, I thought of my Nora Creina song again:—

‘Lesbia hath a beaming eye,
But no one knows for whom it beameth;
Right and left its arrows fly,
But who they ’re aimed at no one dreameth.’

Miss Armitage plays Lesbia very well to our Nora Creina. It’s no sort of matter, Aunt Phœbe,” added the girl; “everything will surely come right.”

Sibyl had preëminently what the poet describes as ‘a heart at leisure from itself, to soothe and sympathize,’ and realizing Violet’s state of mind as the young wife waited at home for their return, she was not surprised, when they came in sight of the house, to see a familiar figure standing at the gate.

“There ’s Mrs. Smith-Chamberlain,” observed Aunt Phœbe. “I expect she’s been in a perfect twitter the last two hours—that is, if she still cares a mite for that scamp. Why, what’s she doing? She sees us. What’s she going in the house for? Putting on that she’s indifferent, I suppose. I don’t much believe it. I think most women that had ever been married to a man

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like that would find it kind of hard to forget him.”

Her companion smiled slightly and said nothing. Their serving-maid had been taught to make many of the preparations for dinner, and Sibyl was at liberty to go directly upstairs. She hurried to her friend's door and knocked. A voice said “Come,” and she entered.

Violet, intensely pale, her dark eyes dilated as she watched the opening door, stood in the middle of the room, her hands pressed together.

The two hours of Sibyl's absence had been an eternity. It seemed an incredible thing that the girl's face could express its usual serene good cheer, if she had indeed been face to face with Dick and heard his voice and met his smile; so incredible that Violet leaped at a conclusion.

“You did n't find him,” she said, her words and breath struggling together.

“Certainly I did,” returned Sibyl cheerfully, closing the door behind her.

Another plunge of the wife's heart sent the blood streaming over her cheek and brow, and her eyes seemed straining to see into her friend's very thoughts.

“Come and sit down.” Sibyl drew the other by her cold hand to the nearest seats.

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“First of all, my dear, he told the truth to Claude,” she said. “He did not know the Armitages were here.”

Violet shook her head, unable to speak.

“Oh, give me credit for some wits, too,” went on Sibyl, patting her hand. “I’m not so dreadfully ‘easy,’ as Claude puts it. I was after facts myself, — or what Mr. Chamberlain thought were the facts, — and I know what I’m talking about. We’ve been chatting and working for the last two hours, and have written the Introduction to the book. Here it is.” She held up the papers in her hand, and Violet regarded the roll with startled eyes.

“How does he look, Sibyl, — tell me!”

“Well, when we first went in, to use an Aunt Phœbe-ism, he was ‘blue as a whetstone,’ and much inclined to give up the book.”

“To have more time for — her,” breathed Violet.

“Shame on you, dear,” said Sibyl lightly, but giving the hands she held a little shake. “You’re a great worker in the truth, aren’t you! Here is this poor man who made a silly mistake, and I’d be as willing as Aunt Phœbe ever was to bet without knowing that he has paid for it with interest. Here he is, having run away from his conspicuous position to rest from the galling sit-

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uation and do a little congenial work that will occupy his mind, and he finds he has jumped out of the frying-pan with the usual result. You think he sought the flames; but you would n't if you saw how pleased he is to get hold of my nice little shorthand, and how he 'd like to sing, 'Oh, promise me,' etc., if he only dared. The Armitages have been meditating a motor trip up the coast, and if they take it, *our* coast is clear. If they don't, it is evident that he feels he ought to go away at once. He was so embarrassed, the poor soul! between his desire to stay, and his fear of promising that he would."

Violet listened eagerly, eyes fastened on Sibyl's. How passing strange it was to hear any one refer to the brilliant and successful man of her knowledge as "poor soul!" Dick had known his fires also, doubtless.

"Did you see — her?" she asked.

"Yes." At sight of the other's expression Sibyl slowly shook her head. "And you do not hate her, you know."

"Did she seem — happy?"

Sibyl gave a strange little laugh. "Oh, no. That sort of girl has n't found out what happiness means. That is why it ought to be so easy not to hate her. She seemed gay enough."

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“ Did you see ” — the speaker’s breath deserted her for an instant — “ him with her ? ”

“ Yes ; but, Violet, listen ! ” and Sibyl’s light voice grew solemn. “ Listen to the right thought and refuse to listen to the wrong. We are neither of us afraid. If we love enough, we cannot fear. You’re through with the destructiveness of fear and hate.”

“ I know it,” returned the other piteously. “ Be patient with me, if I’m worth it.”

“ I’ve another prescription for you,” said Sibyl. “ Begin to think more about Mr. Chamberlain than about yourself.”

“ I’ve tried with my whole strength for five months not to think about him,” returned Violet passionately.

“ Yes, you believed that was necessary ; but now you see clearly that he needs you more than ever before in his life ; and your thoughts of him must be strong ones ; unselfish ones — not of what he can do for you, but of what God has done for him : created him in his own image and likeness, a perfect man who cannot fall. ‘ Judge not according to appearances, but judge righteous judgment,’ and righteous judgment is knowledge of the truth about him.”

The natural color was returning to Violet’s

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face and the stricken look fading from her eyes.

“One thing alone,” she answered slowly, “should make me believe in your God. He has given me your friendship.”

Sibyl pressed her hand.

“But it is a tremendous thing to change my despair to hope,” the young wife went on. “I shall be dashed in pieces if I fall a second time.”

Sibyl’s look was almost sad in its wistfulness. “Fear again, Violet, and fear for yourself,” was all she said, but her friend flushed.

“Forgive me,” she begged contritely. “I see it. I will do better. God will make everything come right! Keep saying it.”

“Yes, we’ll say that; but we can’t say when, nor how, and that is the trial of your patience and your faith. Mr. Chamberlain is to send me word by Claude if he wants me to-morrow; and it all depends on whether the Armitages go or stay. If they go, he stays. If they stay, he goes.”

“Where — where is Dick going?”

“I don’t know, and neither does he.”

“Listen, Sibyl. This is n’t weakness. Surely we must face facts as they appear. I can see that if he was surprised by finding — her, he would

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feel that he must go away, but it might be reluctantly ; he might care for her still just as much. Don't scold me. If I had seen them together as you did to-day, I should know ; but all I have is my memory of the times when he set me aside for her. Dick is a gentleman ; he would not compromise her. He would naturally leave now unless she did, yet he might care for her just the same."

"I see your point, of course," returned Sibyl. "I saw them together only for a minute, and he was naturally friendly toward her, and she chaffed him a little about his book. That was all. There was nothing for a stranger to gather from their manner except that they were old friends. Your work lies entirely with your own thought, Violet. Turn on these personalities whenever they rise to torment you. Know the all-power of good and the powerlessness of evil, and know that that ends your responsibility. 'Man may plant and water, but God giveth the increase.' Build no air-castles ; plan nothing. Don't limit God by arranging in your own mind what you would like to have happen. He will attend to the outcome. The Bible is full of the promise of that. 'Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you,' is one

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putting of it. 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,' free to be restored to your husband, or freedom from him, but peace in either case.'

Violet lifted the girl's hand impulsively to her own cheek. "I'll try — conscientiously," she answered. "He did n't come out here to find her. He did n't."

"No," Sibyl said; "that is certain."

Violet remained in the house or on the piazza the remainder of the day. To think of roaming abroad in her usual fashion made her heart leap with excitement. The mental picture of her husband leaning back in the tonneau of the Armitages' car and spinning along under southern skies with her rival rose like a demon to torture her, and she bravely met it with the sword of spirit which Sibyl had put into her hand.

"Not to care what happens to Violet Chamberlain," was her unspoken prayer; "to let God do all the caring, and to trust, and to know."

Oh, this "knowing" of a new language; this beginning of a new book of life; this rejection of all that was unfit for its pages. What a pulling down it meant of standards which she had once considered high!

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from

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whence cometh my strength." With what humility and earnestness must she lift her unseifed thought toward the new standards, the shining whiteness of whose lofty peaks lay always in the sunlight of heaven!

CHAPTER XX

LESTER'S DISCOVERY

SIBYL, left to herself that afternoon, went to the bath-houses and took a dip in the sea.

Having an errand to do at the grocer's on the way home, she was returning along a back street when she heard her name loudly called. "Oh, Miss Raynor, just one minute!"

She looked up, and recognized the mistress of one of the lodging-houses of the place: a woman who had befriended Mrs. Bostwick's strangeness in the early days of their stay. A man was standing on the piazza with her, and he, observing Sibyl's pause, made a hasty adieu and, running down the steps, came across the street to join her. She saw a broad-shouldered figure with square jaw and steady gray eyes, which regarded her attentively as he lifted his hat.

"I wish to ask you," he began, and then paused, for he suddenly realized that the girl he was accosting was not the sort one arrests by hello-ing. "I beg your pardon," he went on, in a different tone. "I really had no idea that my friend across the way was about to call to you. I am

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making a tour of the lodging and boarding houses in Regina, searching for a friend whom I expected to find at the hotel. That woman told me of an address not on my list — Mrs. McDonald's house. She had just spoken of it when you came in sight, and she exclaimed: 'There she is now,' and instantly called you. What did she mean? May I ask if you board at Mrs. McDonald's?"

"My aunt, Mrs. Bostwick, is keeping the house temporarily," returned the girl.

"Then you can tell me if there is a Mrs. Chamberlain living there," said Lester quickly; and Sibyl, taken by surprise, could not control the change that crossed her face.

The man's sharp eyes perceived it.

"How is it," she asked, after a pause, "that you do not write, or inquire at the post-office, if there is some one here you wish to find?"

"I have done so. I have just found my letters at the office unclaimed; but I believe she is here — and thank heaven you are a lady and will help me find her!" he finished, as if to himself.

Sibyl glanced across the street. "Shall we walk on?" she asked. "Mrs. Wiseman is watching us."

Lester, convinced that his goal was reached, glanced as often as he dared at the fresh face

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beside him. He found instant and unreasonable consolation in the hope that these sweet eyes had cast their friendly beams upon the wandering one: that Violet had found a friend.

Sibyl regarded her companion with serious consideration.

"My name is Lester, Guy Lester," he said, in a crisp, masterful manner.

"Yes?"

"I thought Mrs. Chamberlain might have mentioned me to you, for we are old friends."

He could see that the girl beside him was reflecting upon the situation and endeavoring to come to a decision. Her aunt kept the house where Violet was staying; but his companion's voice, speech, and carriage impressed him as belonging to his own stratum of social life. Instinctively he felt that she knew Violet's story.

He waited patiently for her to break the silence, and at last she spoke.

"There is no one at our house who calls herself Mrs. Chamberlain, and if she has not asked for her letters, it must mean that she does not wish to be intruded upon."

"But she should be," he answered. "I discovered that she had come to Regina Beach, and the place gives such a sense of remoteness that I felt

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it would hold her: that she must still be here somewhere.”

Sibyl spoke again. “If we have with us a lady who is living under an assumed name, I wonder that you tell a stranger of it so frankly.”

“It is not assumed. It is her own — Smith. I saw it on the hotel register; but” — with a sudden burst of frankness — “I wish you would trust me without further preamble. You may. I would n’t hurt her for any consideration; but I must see her. I must assure myself of her well-being.”

The earnestness in the impetuous words caused Sibyl to look at her companion still more closely; and he, returning her gaze, felt a warm gratitude to her for existing in a spot where she could be a solace to the wounded heart.

“Trust me,” he said again. “I am an old friend of Mrs. Chamberlain and all her family.”

“Her mother has sent you, perhaps?” asked Sibyl.

“No,” was the curt response. “I should not have come for her sending.”

Sibyl read the signs of the darkening brow, and sighed. She dreaded to have a new mind harboring the old hatred approach Violet.

“I will trust you, Mr. Lester,” she said, “and

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ask you to trust me sufficiently to do as I say. Mrs. Chamberlain and I are friends. She has told me the trouble that brought her here, and if you will go back to the hotel now, I will tell her that you have come, and I promise that she will write you at once and say whether she wishes to see you."

Lester shook his head and smiled as Sibyl stood still to give him the opportunity to leave her.

"Impossible, Miss —"

"Raynor," supplied Sibyl.

"Miss Raynor. Do you think I have waited four months to find myself walking in Mrs. Chamberlain's direction only to turn back at the crucial moment and perhaps allow her to escape?"

"I have read you wrong, then," returned Sibyl coolly. "I judged that you were a gentleman, and would not see a lady against her will."

Lester's smile became more pronounced, his spirits rising in the knowledge of Violet's proximity. "Ladies do not always know what is good for them," he replied, amused by Sibyl's effort at severity. "This one must not refuse to see me, so I prefer to take her by surprise. I will escort you home, if you will allow it. If not, I will again take up my line of search alone."

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Sibyl, looking into the square-jawed face, abandoned hope of persuasion.

“You will not be allowed to do any harm,” she said slowly.

“I certainly shall not,” agreed Lester, surprised by the declaration, and they moved on.

They were very near the house now, and had but to turn a corner in order to see it.

Sibyl kept silence as they walked, mentally busy in handling the situation ; and Lester, stotically accepting what he believed to be the manifestation of her displeasure, marched by her side. They turned the corner of the street and he gave a great start.

Violet, moving along the walk, was facing them.

“Violet !”

“Guy !”

Her face was as white as her gown as he seized her cold hands, and Sibyl paused uncertainly.

Lester was too agitated to speak, looking on the changed slenderness of his friend’s face, accentuated by its sudden pallor.

“How did Sibyl happen to find you ?” asked Violet unsteadily, when she could speak.

“I found Miss Raynor,” replied Lester, his speech crisp even through its huskiness. “She

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tried faithfully to lose me, but failed ; and so — Violet, I've found you." He ended with a break in his voice.

"Have you been trying, Guy?" she asked gently. "You know I wrote you not to."

"Yes ; but flesh and blood can endure only so much. I tried to fish the truth out of the pack of lies going about concerning you, but it was impossible, so I could n't bear it any longer without seeing for myself. You've been ill, Violet."

She gave a strange smile as a little color crept back to her face. "Yes ; but," she laid her hand on Sibyl's arm, "this child has shown me where healing was, and I have found it."

At her words and look a great joy banished the creeping anxiety that had begun to weigh down Sibyl's heart.

"I'll leave you, Violet," she said ; and with a brief nod of adieu to Lester, she moved on to the house.

"That's a rather charming girl," said Guy, looking after her.

"You put it very mildly," returned Violet.

"Bless her, if she has helped you!" he exclaimed ardently, looking back into the blue eyes.

"I believe," said Violet, "that if it had not

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been for her, I should by this time have been trying my fortune on some other plane.”

A spasm of pain passed over the man's face, and he did not speak.

“Come to the veranda,” continued Violet. “We shall have it to ourselves.”

They moved up the steps to the piazza and placed themselves on a wicker divan.

“See what I have just found at your post-office,” said Lester, taking three letters from his pocket and putting them in his friend's hands.

“From you,” she remarked, reading her own name on the envelopes. “My letters all come from Los Angeles under cover. How did you know I was here?”

“Your mother told me you were in Los Angeles, so I knew it was probable that you were not,” returned Lester dryly, and Violet colored; “but it gave me a clue to work on, and I know your acquaintances there, and — well, I found you.”

He paused, looking at the boarded floor for an instant and then back at his companion.

“I've made only one failure in the things I've undertaken in my life,” he went on, “but that one is the chief. I wanted to take care of you, Violet;

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and you were not willing. Now I have come again — ”

“ Hush, Guy, you must n't.”

“ Yes, I must, this once,” he went on quietly, “ and then I will go away until the proper time.”

As she listened, Violet began nervously tearing the unopened letters she held.

“ You need not have been afraid to read them,” he said, without moving.

“ I'm sure of it,” she answered ; “ but to what end, now that we can talk ? I understand you. I know you want to take care of me, and know what perfect care it would be ; but that love that grew in my heart for Dick is the only sort that makes marriage possible.”

“ Did you find it possible ? ” interrupted Lester doggedly. “ A woman of your sort does n't throw over husband, mother, and the opinions of her friends for a trifle.”

Violet's cheeks burned painfully. “ I know, but — but to-day I'm not quite the same woman who did that.”

“ You mean you are relenting toward that cad, that hypocrite ? ” asked Lester between his teeth.

“ Oh, I see everything so differently,” returned Violet.

“ Then you are making a colossal mistake,”

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was the quick reply. "I'm going to tell you, for it would be false kindness to conceal it. Your — no, I'll never call him your husband! Dick Chamberlain and Belle Armitage are over at that hotel together now."

Lester braced himself to take the consequences of the heroic treatment which was to clinch Violet's revolt. Of course she would start and weep, perhaps faint; and he dreaded a scene, but it was his way to grasp the nettles along life's pathway.

Her eyes as he met them now, courageously, amazed him to speechlessness. They were full of a sweet seriousness, and her lips smiled faintly.

"I know it," she answered, her hands toying with the scraps of paper.

"You know it," he gasped at last; then, a triumphant idea surging through him, "You're glad!" he ejaculated. "You have ceased to love him, and you have your proofs, now."

Violet colored deeply. "No, no. It is n't as you think. They have met here accidentally."

Guy stared. "Oh, indeed," he returned at last, with wrathful irony. "And pray, do they know they have you for a neighbor?"

"No. They have no idea of it."

Lester gave a short laugh. "I believe you there."

Lester's Discovery

“I know what you think, Guy; but Dick has only lately arrived. Sibyl—Miss Raynor has been doing some stenographic work for him. Her brother is acting chauffeur for Mr. Armitage while his man is absent. I have in the strangest, most unexpected way, means of knowing the facts in the case, while Dick has no idea that I am here. You look skeptical, and I am far from blaming you; but you are about to have proof. To-morrow either the Armitages will leave Regina Beach, or else Dick will. You will see.”

Lester was studying her face as she talked. “Violet,” he said suddenly, “you are changed. You are thinner, but it is n’t that. You have been through a shattering experience, but—you’re not shattered. What is it? Is such a thing possible as that you are taking comfort out of the fact that Dick is here?”

“Perhaps,” she answered reflectively.

“You care for him still, then,” said Lester bitterly. “It seems it is as difficult for one man to estrange a woman as it is for another to win her.”

“‘For better, for worse. Until death us do part,’” quoted Violet slowly. “I have not paid much attention to those vows.”

“You repent of leaving him, then?”

The Leaven of Love

“No — I can hardly say that,” she answered, “for sometimes the longest way round is the shortest way home.”

There was silence while he gazed at her, wondering.

“That young girl who brought you here, that young, fair, inexperienced slip of a thing, has altered all my views of life with her philosophy.”

“What is her philosophy?” asked Lester.

“I would rather not try to tell you; but she will, if you ask her. I speak the new language bunglingly, but I begin to understand it. A baby knows that the fire is warm before he can say so. She has kindled a fire on my altar which I am trying to keep burning.”

Lester shrugged his shoulders and bit his lip.

“Well, — if it brings you happiness, Violet.”

She shook her head, still with the faint smile. “I am learning not to make conditions. Happiness may not be the first fruits, but blessedness will be, if I am faithful.”

“You have embraced a religion: some of these new ideas going about.”

She smiled. “And did n’t we need new ideas?” she asked. “Think of being able to believe in an omnipotent power for Good.”

Lester's Discovery

“Is that where you have come?” returned Lester, studying her.

“I hope so,” she answered, with humble seriousness.

The man's heart yearned over her. “Poor little Violet,” he thought, “the more fragrant for being crushed.”

His companion felt her color rise under his searching eyes, and her heart yearned, too, for him; for she knew his disappointment.

“I have permitted myself to hope again,” he said, “and I'm not yet convinced that you don't need me. That girl with the sweet eyes has held out a straw to you, and you have grasped it rather than drown; but, Violet,” wistful tenderness sounded in his voice, “straws don't keep people from drowning; and when yours breaks in your fingers, give me the right! won't you, dear?”

“Guy, you're so good to me, and always were,” she answered, with fervor. “Looking back, it seems to me that you, more than any one I've ever known, have given me an idea of perfect human protection and consideration; then think, with that standard of comparison, of what it is to believe in the care and protection of an Omnipotent One. We've been churchly, Guy, but have we ever been confident and full of faith?”

The Leaven of Love

Not I, until now I am learning. Many a night, after a tiring function, I have leaned back and let you think for me and take care of me. Now, when torturing thought arises such as once left me haggard, I have learned to relax and know that the only part I have in the problem is to think right and God will take care of me."

Her face, so speaking and wistful as she leaned toward him, made a lump come in Lester's throat.

"Very well, Violet," he answered. "It is no strain on my faith to believe that the Almighty looks after you; but He works by instruments, and when you want me, I shall be ready. When something happens to disturb this serenity, when the waters go over your head, remember me. I'm a life-raft, not a straw."

There was affection in Violet's eyes as she shook her head at him thoughtfully. "You'll have to learn that all that is mortal breaks like a straw," she answered.

He smiled. "You're inoculated, certainly," he returned.

"Oh, let Sibyl talk to you, Guy," she begged.

"To me, my child! Voluntarily let myself in for a sermon from an infant phenomenon?"

"You'll stay to supper with us, at all events?"

"Gladly," returned Lester, and he promised

Lester's Discovery

himself a private word of warning in the ear of this intrepid young woman who, in the insolence of her inexperience, had rushed in where angels feared to tread. His ire rose as he thought of her, and of the influence she had won over the credulity of a tired, nerve-worn, and broken-hearted woman, instilling unfounded hopes from which the waking would be bitter.

“What are your plans, then, Violet?” he asked.

“I’m letting God plan,” she answered.

“‘Heaven helps those who help themselves,’” said Guy.

“Yes,” she replied, with serenity. “That is why I am sure it will help me. Sibyl has taught me how to help myself.”

Lester’s lips tightened, and an unconscious frown drew his brows together. “I should like to have some talk with her,” he said.

“Oh, do!” exclaimed Violet softly. “After supper, ask her to go for a little walk, will you? She will understand that you would like to talk to her, since I have told you how much she has meant to me.”

“I’ll ask her,” replied Lester, with an intonation which boded ill for the infant phenomenon.

CHAPTER XXI

EN ROUTE

THERE was little sleep for the organist of The Holy Saints that night. Since the climax of the scene with Belle Armitage, all the props with which he had still supported some consciousness of his own dignity and his own injuries had fallen away. For the first time he faced the situation from his wife's view-point, and in the slow, dark hours her image grew brighter and more inaccessible. Unfortunately, so he considered, the same pure sense which in a woman of Violet's stamp holds other men at a distance, can elude a husband as well. She was the only woman in the world for him. He knew it now far better than on the day he sought her hand. He admitted miserably that always, beneath his pride and anger, a hunger for her had gnawed from the moment that he discovered his deserted home.

As he lay staring into the invisible dark, the sea mourned every mistake and weakness of his year, accused him of even misleading the seasoned society girl whose flattering bait he had swallowed with fatuous vanity. He turned from

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the remembrance of her raised, hysterical voice, to the cool, serene memory of Sibyl as she stood before him crowned with violets and radiant-eyed. He hoped with curious earnestness that the day would bring him that strange girl again.

While the sea mourned over the disgust that Guy Lester took no pains to conceal, and suggested that its reflection in Violet's averted eyes would some day torture him in reality as it did now in imagination, he turned desperately to the consoling joy and confidence in Sibyl's face as she talked of his work and held him up to the thought of its best manifestation.

His knowledge of Belle made him shrink with the thought that an indisposition following her excitement and mortification might retard their plans. Not even for the sake of Sibyl's help could he remain here one day longer unless the Armitages' departure was instant.

Even the rising of the sun could not infuse cheerfulness into the dirge the waves were sounding over the burial of hope, and joy, and self-respect.

Chamberlain dragged himself wearily out of bed and jerked a blind over a dagger of sunlight thrust insolently through the windows.

Later, he had breakfast served in his apart-

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ment. The servant was surprised by the ferocity of the order which deterred his motion to set the table out on the gallery.

Gloomily Chamberlain sat down to his coffee in the shaded room, and the sounding waves introduced into their dirge an extra plaint regarding the humiliation of this compulsory solitude.

“This is the last,” he thought grimly. “I’d rather rusticate in the Hoboken Tube than here.”

A knock at the door interrupted his dismal meditation, and to his surprise, Mr. Armitage walked in, fully dressed even to his cap.

“Good-morning!” exclaimed Dick, with exaggerated cheerfulness, intended to offset his entombed effect.

“Great heavens, man!” responded his visitor testily; “why don’t you open your blinds? You’re not ill, I hope.”

“Yes. Brute of a headache; but it’ll pass off. What does this early-bird act signify? I admit that ‘we’re all worms’ is my doctrine this morning, but how did you happen to detect it, and make such an unerring attack?”

“Oh, don’t say a word! You were away yesterday afternoon, so you didn’t know Belle had an ill-turn that I thought would keep us here

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a few days, anyway ; but Gad ! it seems to have acted like a tonic. She 's had insomnia ever since five o'clock this morning. She 's made Folly pack up everything, and sent a bell-boy over with messages to Raynor, and we 're to take the road, like gypsies, before the sun is high. I give you my word I 'm half asleep, and I expected to have to shake you to tell you that we were about to shake you. If you were going, old chap," added Mr. Armitage regretfully, his hand falling affectionately on the other's shoulder, "I'd wake up. 'T is n't too late yet, thanks to the fact of your having disposed of an early worm too. Belle did n't expect you'd be awake, but she sent her *au revoir*."

— Chamberlain shook his head, meanwhile mentally cursing his stars to think that he was tubbed and dressed and entirely fit to see the tourists off, instead of being decorously insensible upon his pillow as Belle had evidently planned.

"I find it 's easier in the long run," went on Mr. Armitage, "to fall in with a girl's crazy notions, if they 're only occasional, and I must say for Belle, hers are; but I don't like leaving you. It's such nonsense, too. You would n't have a headache if it was n't for that foolish book of yours ; and say, Dickie, nobody knows

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when we 'll come back, or whether you 'll be here if we do. Belle did n't want me to come in and disturb you at all; but I was determined to speak to you before I left, because I wanted to tell you, my dear boy," the older man took Chamberlain's hand with a strong pressure, which was returned, — "I wanted to tell you that I'm deeply sorry for this — misunderstanding with your wife that I hear about. I don't know her well, but if she 's worthy of a reconciliation, I hope you 'll both see happy days again."

"Thank you, Mr. Armitage," returned the other, white but steady-eyed, as the two stood facing each other in the shaded room.

The sea without groaned heavily over the situation, in the pause which Dick finally broke:

"My wife is the best — the sweetest — the purest woman that ever loved a fool," he declared slowly.

Mr. Armitage regarded him during a reflective moment.

"Perhaps you remember," he said at last, quizzically, "the story of the recently bereaved widower who, when the minister spoke to him in like laudatory terms of the departed, replied: 'Yes, Jane was all that you say, but — I did n't like her!'"

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Chamberlain shook his head slightly, and the tightly set curve of his lips did not soften.

Mr. Armitage's gaze warmed to affection as he read the signs of his friend's face.

"All right, then, my boy," he went on presently; "go after her again, and this time when you get her, keep her."

"I'll keep her if I ever get her," was the devout reply.

"Pooh! Nonsense!" scoffed the other. "What has a man like you to do with 'ifs'? I thought there was something wrong with you yesterday, when you preferred to tramp by yourself rather than help me spoil the California roads."

"I regret it now," returned Chamberlain. "I did n't know I was losing my last call for a spin with you."

"Oh, don't say that. We may be back any day. Now you stop this breakfasting in a dungeon and then burying your nose in a superfluous manuscript. Get out, boy. Get outdoors and find that girl."

Mr. Armitage looked with concern at the palor of Chamberlain's face and the circles about his eyes.

"She does n't wish to be found," was the answer.

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“Oh, twaddle! There’s too much consulting of women’s whims at the present day. Go after her and take her home, willy-nilly. She has probably cried her nose red by this time wishing you would. If you stay here, you’ll get side-tracked with that stringy-throated stenographer of yours. I know if I tried to write a book with her, it would turn into a sonnet. It’s my opinion —”

“Mr. Armitage,” interrupted a woman’s voice, speaking outside the door, “Miss Armitage is waiting.”

“Bless my soul!” exclaimed the culprit. “She made me promise not to stay a minute. You’re coming with me, of course, to say good-by?”

So Chamberlain followed perforce down the stairs and through the quiet hotel, outdoors to where the machine waited.

Belle Armitage, her face swathed in a veil, was sitting in the tonneau, her foot tapping the floor as the minutes dragged, while she wondered feverishly what might be passing between the two men. Her heart bounded at the unexpected sight of Dick. Through her chiffons she could perceive that his night had not been better than hers.

“Why, Dickie!” she drawled. “What does

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this mean? Did father drag you up and dress you?"

Her father responded testily: "It means that the next time you'd better take him with you, instead of me. If a man wants to breakfast at sunrise, let him. As for me, you've ruined my digestion for a week. How about you, Raynor? How did your aunt like having the house knocked up in the small hours?"

"It was n't, sir. Miss Armitage sent me word last evening."

"Well, you minx, you did n't tell me of it!" grumbled Mr. Armitage, climbing to his place.

"No, I thought you might not sleep as well. Good-by, Dickie. Take all sorts of care of yourself."

"By jiminy, he looks as if he needed to," thought Claude.

"You'll have a great time," said Chamberlain, and his effort at heartiness was valiant. "Good luck to you, and pity the laboring class."

Mr. Armitage groaned. "You could n't laugh a little for us, could you?" he asked dismally.

"In about ten hours," returned Chamberlain, "you turn your ear in this direction. My mirth always waxes toward evening."

Claude Raynor's satisfaction with the state of

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affairs emanated from his entire person. He beamed upon Chamberlain now.

“I was to say, if I saw you, that Sibyl will come over after dinner instead of this morning.”

Dick regarded his ex-pupil with unconscious envy. Was he ever as young as that? Was he ever as happy as that? There was enough resemblance to his sister in Claude's face to suggest again the consoling of her presence.

With spiteful burst of sound the machine got under way. The modern Phœbus, elated as he who drove the chariot of the sun, conducting his earthy freight — the vanity-sick daughter, the stomach-sick father; and a heart-sick man stood and watched the departure.

The big red machine turned slowly, and then, moving with ever-increasing swiftness until it vanished smoothly from sight, seemed a burden that was being lifted and moved away from Chamberlain's own soul; and he stood for minutes, passive there, to realize the relief, and to wonder that the mere fact of its vanishing could so alter the atmosphere of his surroundings. He consciously enjoyed strolling leisurely the length of the piazza. The sea suspended its pessimism, and sparkling in the sunlight, began to suggest with

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a dash of spirit that Sibyl's advent would bring an inspiration to work ; that they could have the table out on the gallery to-day, and that no disturbance was likely to occur.

In the midst of the subtle exorcising of clinging miseries of the night and morning came a surprise positive in its nature. Chamberlain had traversed the long walk and, returning, approached the hotel door, when out of it came Guy Lester. The latter nodded in friendly fashion quite as if the past six months had been only a dream.

“Good-morning,” he said ; “but I believe all the mornings are as good as this. It's a great place.”

Lester's face at the best of times was non-committal ; but the active disgust which had animated it at their last meeting was effaced. Chamberlain regarded him, unsmiling. A strange resentment filled him.

“Lester saw them go. Am I being patted on the head because I am not in the red machine?” he thought, and making a brief reply, he re-entered the hotel.

Lester, his hands crossed behind him, sauntered down the steps to the path and walked slowly toward the street. He had been impressed by his friend's haggard appearance, and his reflections

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were novel ones as he walked. The training of his thought during Violet's engagement and marriage stood him in good stead since yesterday's awakening from the lately indulged dreams. He had himself well in hand. His walk and talk with Sibyl last evening had extended long and far; and from an attitude of superiority and resentment he had been led through stages of incredulity, impatience, and final interest.

Violet had been waiting for them on their return, and her eyes, as they met his, were so eloquent of her desire to see that Sibyl's ideas had influenced him, that he had not the heart to dampen her transcendental hopes.

Instead, he sat down with the two and talked with them for hours longer.

Scarcely ten minutes following his and Sibyl's return to the house, Miss Armitage's note had come to Claude, summoning him to an early morning start next day, and the triumph and faith in the faces of the two women revived in his memory this morning as he stood in the hotel office and witnessed the departure of the touring-car.

"I wonder," he thought, a quizzical smile touching the corners of his lips, "what Belle Armitage would say if she were told that it

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was the irresistible activity of Good which was bundling her out of Regina Beach.”

“A present-day sibyl,” he reflected reminiscently as he strolled. “Talk about the courage of one’s convictions!” He laughed at some memory. Lester was a lawyer, though not in practice, and he shook his head, musing on the logic of Sibyl’s premises and conclusions. “There is one witness who can’t be shaken,” he reflected. “Poor Violet! What chance had her common sense when once she succumbed to that line of reasoning?”

CHAPTER XXII

THE TOP JACKSTRAW

LESTER was amused at his own interest in the new ideas presented to him. "It's this place, I believe," he considered, as he moved slowly along the bluff watching the waterfowl disport in and above the surf. "If that very interesting girl had brought me to task like that in Boston, I'm sure I should have been able to call my soul my own and treat her indulgently. There is something very delicate and delightful about her, even though she is a bit didactic. I can see — I can see," he mused, "how Violet, revolting from a soiling experience, welcomed eagerly this clean place for her thought to dwell. She has made a better thing of it than Dick, anyway, if faces tell tales."

On the afternoon of the same day he left the hotel again and moved in the direction of Mrs. Bostwick's house. At one point he paused, looking out upon the rolling sea, and his meditations were broken in upon by the greeting of a girl's voice.

"For what will you sell those thoughts?" it

The Top Jackstraw

asked, and turning, he saw Sibyl and Mrs. Bostwick passing on the walk behind him.

Lifting his hat, he approached with alacrity to greet his new friends. Mrs. Bostwick regarded him with unaccustomed interest. She had learned only this morning that he was *the* Guy Lester. Even in North Haddam his name was known.

"Well," said Lester. "The touring-car has left."

"Yes?" returned the girl, without surprise.

"Mr. Chamberlain sped the parting guest, early though it was," went on Lester.

"That is good," replied Sibyl, and they both smiled.

Guy broke the silence that followed. "He *looked* like a combination of the day after and a fever convalescent."

"Poor soul!" murmured the girl.

Mrs. Bostwick had been present during a part of last night's lengthy interview, and Lester knew there were no secrets from her. He spoke again: "The unregenerate would infer from his appearance that the parting was a severe strain."

Sibyl laughed happily. "The unregenerate would be mistaken," she replied. "If you are on your way to see Violet, don't talk that way to her."

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“I held out a flag of truce to the gentleman,” went on Lester. “I said something distinctly agreeable to him. He stared, and muttered, and left me. In the light of all I learned last night, I should hazard the opinion that goodness and truth are not agreeing with him.”

Sibyl lifted her shoulders. “Error does n’t like Truth. It fights it as long as it can; but when the victim gets uncomfortable enough, he stops lending error his belief, and then the sky clears.”

“You are on your way now to help him with — a book, I think you told me?”

“Yes; a book on boy-choir training.”

Lester nodded. “It will be worth while. He knows the last word on that subject.”

“Oh, yes. His work is glorious.”

“He is a good deal of a man, after all,” said Lester. “It has been his misfortune to be pre-eminently decorative: so many goods in the show-window mentally as well as physically. It has led to a lot of foolishness; but there is character there, and if you can lead him into his right place in this spiritual game of chess you’re playing, he will be —”

“Wait, wait,” interrupted Sibyl. “I don’t like that. I tried to make it very clear to you last evening that Violet and I both know it would

The Top Jackstraw

be wrong to direct one coercive thought toward him. You understand that, I hope?"

"You would n't hypnotize him for his own good?"

"No one was ever hypnotized for his own good," returned Sibyl. "In one matter I have directed helpful thought to Mr. Chamberlain, but it was because he expressed a wish for help."

Guy Lester's eyes rested reflectively on the speaking earnestness of the girl's face. "I see plainly," he said, "that you will have to talk to me a great deal more."

Her grave lips broke into a smile. "But not now," she returned. "We're forgetting ourselves."

"I never expected to be so interested in Dick Chamberlain again," said Lester.

"Very well, you shall have a bulletin," promised the girl, as they moved away.

Mrs. Bostwick spoke oracularly. "The way things have happened to us out here is amazing."

"And you count meeting Mr. Lester among the pleasant ones, don't you?"

Aunt Phoebe sniffed. "Well, it's the first one fit to tell of, anyway," she returned; "and I guess folks 'll find it pretty hard to believe

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that we've stood and talked with him by the side o' the road just as if he was nobody."

"I have n't given you much chance to talk to him, have I?" remarked Sibyl.

"That is n't any matter. He kept looking at me real pleasant out of his eyes. I'm out o' patience to think I did n't put on my other gloves. Who'd have the least idea of a man like him wandering around over here so sort o' simple."

"Well, I rather hope he won't go to see Violet this afternoon. You won't have Mr. Armitage to talk to to-day. Mr. Lester ought to come with us and keep you company."

"Keep me company!" repeated Mrs. Bostwick, her fingers clutching tighter the satin bag. "One thing, though," hopefully, "I have to take off my gloves to knit, and I've got clean ruching in my sleeves, if he *should* happen —"

When they reached the hotel veranda, Chamberlain, throwing down a newspaper, came forward to meet them.

"Mercy, the man does look sick!" thought Aunt Phœbe. "I wonder if Mr. Lester's right, and it is that creature going away that has upset him so."

Sibyl's bright, quiet greeting was just as Chamberlain had pictured it. Confidence and happi-

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ness were incarnated in her eyes as she took in the signs of his countenance with its forced smile.

“You look fit for work,” he remarked enviously. “I don’t know whether my thinking-machine will run or not, this afternoon.”

“I’m sure it will,” she answered. “You have n’t to manufacture your material. It is all ready.”

Having reached the upper gallery, Mrs. Bostwick stood rather uncertainly when she found that the writing was to proceed to-day in the open air.

“Where would you like to have me sit?” she asked. “I don’t know as you want me eaves-dropping. I might take a notion to bring out a choir-book ahead o’ yours.”

Chamberlain gave the ghost of his bright smile. “I hope you know, Mrs. Bostwick, how much I appreciate your giving time to aid and abet my work.”

Aunt Phœbe sighed unconsciously. “Oh, well,” she returned philosophically, “this seems to be the top jackstraw just now.”

“The — what?” he asked.

Mrs. Bostwick pursed her lips. “Mr. Chamberlain, don’t you know that life ain’t like any-

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thing so much as it is like a game o' jackstraws? In order to keep a good conscience, you 're bound to lift off the top one carefully, no matter how interesting some underneath ones look, nor how eager you are to get at 'em. It takes patience to play the game right and wait to get down to 'em in the regular course. Some of us cast covetous glances for a matter of hours, some for weeks, and some for weary years. My niece there," added the speaker dryly, "thinks she's learned ways o' pushing the work along and saving worry and weariness."

Chamberlain turned toward Sibyl, who had already seated herself at the table.

"She looks it," he replied. "Let me place you down here by the rail, Mrs. Bostwick. You won't be obliged to listen to me, and moreover you can see farther along the shore."

Aunt Phœbe followed obediently, and when she was comfortably seated beyond earshot of the others and had taken out her knitting, the host returned to Sibyl and took his place opposite her at the table.

A silence followed, during which the girl, busy-ing herself with the papers, felt his eyes upon her face. He finally realized his own action, for a rosy color stole over her cheeks.

The Top Jackstraw

“I am staring at you brazenly, Miss Raynor, for your aunt’s words have set me to speculating again. You made some suggestive remarks yesterday, implying that you found a lot of satisfaction in life. A happy disposition would account for that, I suppose. A happy disposition!” He shook his head. “That was one of my assets too, once upon a time. Wait till you’ve lived ten years longer!”

Sibyl smiled. “Don’t you prophesy any dismal things for me!”

“It would be a mean trick. Strange how much dog-in-the-manger spirit there is in most of us. You and I,” went on Chamberlain, “sitting on the opposite sides of this table, symbolize the absolutely opposed condition of our minds this morning.”

“Not opposed,” returned Sibyl. “Say contrasting. How can we say opposed when we both like so much the work of lifting this top jackstraw?”

“Upon my word,” returned Dick, “it’s mighty good of you to like it. Tell me, just to gratify an innocent curiosity, do you go into everything with similar zest?”

“No, indeed. Lots of things are mostly duty. This is mostly pleasure.”

The Leaven of Love

“It’s like luck coming my way,” said Chamberlain, shaking his head. “I’d like to see how you look when you’re moved by a stern sense of duty.”

Sibyl laughed quietly.

“What did your aunt mean by saying you had some labor-saving invention for circumventing the weariness of life. Is it patented? There seem to be a number of us who need it.”

“It is n’t an invention,” replied the girl, meeting his eyes fully. “It’s a discovery; and as free as God’s love.”

“Oh!” He lifted his eyebrows and looked away. “If it is as intangible, I shall have to make shift to go on lifting my jackstraws in the same old fashion.”

Sibyl said nothing and took up her tablet and pencil.

He looked back at her serene face. “She’s the strangest girl I ever met,” he thought; “the happiness in her eyes is as invincible as it is unforced. I wish there were any way of bringing her and Violet together. One can’t resist the infection of her presence.”

“I haven’t forgotten what you said yesterday about the Choir-Master,” he remarked aloud; “and now again your reference to God shows

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that you have some very emphatic and satisfactory religious ideas."

"I have," answered the girl.

He waited, but she said no more.

"Women do seem to have a faculty for that sort of thing," he went on at last. "Like having a good cry, it seems to be a monopoly of the sex."

There was another short silence, then he pulled his notes toward him. "I thought this afternoon we'd tell them how to choose voices," he began, — "if this rocky head of mine will let me. I have to admit being particularly done up to-day. I don't like to indulge in any physical ill, for, as all roads lead to Rome, everything takes delight in going to the weak spot and making my hand —"

He lifted the member by force of habit and looked at his wrist. He blinked as his gaze met the smooth surface. Strange he could make the mistake of looking at the wrong hand. He lifted the other. After a glance he passed his fingers across his hot eyes, then held both wrists before him and stared from one to the other.

"Well, I'll be" — he began slowly. "Did I say a minute ago luck was coming my way? Miss Raynor, look at that! my hand has come right." He opened and closed it with concen-

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trated interest. "I didn't know that was the way those things acted."

Lifting a pleased glance, he encountered Sibyl's.

"That is the way all discord vanishes when the Choir-Master leads," she answered.

He stared at her, astonished by her words and manner. "You're not surprised," he said.

"I'm not; but I'm very glad."

"You behave as if you knew something about this."

"I do."

"Miss Raynor," a quick severity sounded in Chamberlain's voice, "I'm not superstitious; I begin to suspect that you are. One can't help hearing something of the novel *isms* going about."

Sibyl's face lost none of its serenity as she answered: "You said yesterday you would be very glad to be rid of that trouble."

"I am; by natural means."

"That is all that has been used." The girl regarded the haggard face compassionately. "Mr. Chamberlain, if some one should tell you that a wrong interpretation, or a discordant note, or a false rhythm noticeable in your choir was impossible for you to rectify, what would your answer be?"

The Top Jackstraw

Something in her face and voice swept a chord in the man's being, and for the moment he could not answer except by a shake of the head.

"You would know that you could, and you would prove it. I should guess, from the disappearance of this physical obstruction, that you have recently seen and repented of some fault, and have put the discord out of your life."

Dick gazed. He was strangely moved. "My life is a jangle of discords," he declared.

Sibyl nodded seriously. "Your faulty choir-boy has to see his mistake before you can show him how to rectify it. So the Leader of us all, dwelling in harmony, can win us only when we see and are willing to renounce discord. The Bible says 'Cease to do evil' before it says 'Learn to do well.' It is easy to perceive that you are under some mental strain. You don't need" — Sibyl paused to give her final slow-spoken words weight, — "you don't need to remain there!"

Chamberlain gave a little laugh. "I understand," he returned. "You are bitten with the encroaching occultism of the day; but upon my word, if you have had anything to do with the relief of my wrist, I am no end obliged to you."

Sibyl clasped her hands on the table, and her

The Leaven of Love

clear gaze met the conventional mask of courtesy behind which Chamberlain had retreated.

“Do you believe in God?” she asked.

“Really, Miss Raynor, I’m not on the witness-stand.”

“I feel very sorry for you,” she said simply. “When you tell me that you want help for the conditions which are troubling you far more than that weeping sinew did, I’ll show you how to find it.”

Chamberlain started. “Who has told you —” he began, his society manner dropping from him.

“You, yourself, both yesterday and this morning. Your life *is* a jangle of discords. You have said it, and that was unnecessary, for you look it.” Sibyl’s eyes smiled. “The Choir-Master is ready when you are. Supposing your case was that of one of your boys.”

“It’s not parallel. My boys are subject to control — to discipline — to fines.”

“And aren’t you? Haven’t you been disciplined? Haven’t you been fined? The most recent one was imposed no longer ago than the watches of the past night, if one may guess. But you know very well that your chief success with the choir comes from the love of them, and their

The Top Jackstraw

love for you. The fines and the discipline do not form the motive-power that gives you your grand results. Have n't you often waited for a boy to be ready to receive the substantial help which you are eager to bestow upon him? So the supreme Choir-Master is waiting for you now — here — to-day."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CHOICE OF VOICES

CHAMBERLAIN'S main sensation, as he listened to his stenographer, was astonishment, — astonishment that she should dare knock at the door of his skeleton closet, and that her manner of doing so could be sufficiently impersonal to rid her act of indelicacy.

He cleared his throat, tempted to make a confidante of her, but shrinking with the remnant of his pride.

“You are very interesting,” he said, after the pause, “but the afternoon is slipping away, and we are not attending to the top jackstraw.”

She made a little deprecatory movement. “You must decide,” she answered, smiling; “but the question is, what *is* the top jackstraw?”

He dropped the hands that had taken up his notes and became absorbed in regarding the girl for a thoughtful moment.

“I wish my wife knew you,” he said.

“Claude told me about your wife,” she replied, — “your bride she was, when he saw her.”

“If she were here in my place,” went on

The Choice of Voices

Chamberlain, "I think she would welcome your — allegorical ideas: these transcendental reflections do seem to appeal to women."

Sibyl shook her head lightly. "It seems as if it must have been a practical idea which persuaded the manifestation on your wrist to vanish."

The organist regarded his hand again involuntarily. "You are a very strange girl," he said. "There is some unusual power about you."

"Yes; I understand a little how to be a channel for power, but there is a good time coming when it will be usual to understand it."

Chamberlain tapped softly with a pencil on the table and leaned back in his chair.

"You seemed yesterday very much interested in this embryo book of mine," he said.

"I am — extremely," was the reply.

"But it is not uppermost in your mind this afternoon. I suppose you are elated at the disappearance of that weeping sinew."

"I should suppose you were the one to be the more elated about that," replied the girl; then she added: "Mr. Chamberlain, you meant so much to Claude for a long time, and I heard about you so frequently, it is quite impossible for me to feel toward you quite as a stranger.

The Leaven of Love

It does n't require especial insight to perceive that you are under some mental strain. It is good to be rid of the weeping sinew, but there is something weeping within you that is far more serious. If you wished to tell me what it is, I feel that I could show you where to get help. God's children need not dwell in the shadows; and if your perplexity, or sorrow, or fear, were removed, you would be in better shape to write a book; but if you do not feel yet that it would be a comfort to talk of this, you will find that I can centre my thoughts with you at once on 'The Choice of Voices.'" She smiled as she paused.

Chamberlain, leaning back in his chair, regarded her wistful, expressive face out of the tops of his eyes, the tips of his fingers together.

"Are you a mind-reader?" he asked.

"God forbid!" she replied devoutly. "Step into your room an instant. Look in the mirror and see if I need to be."

"So I wear my heart on my sleeve, then?"

"People who have not had many experiences to conceal frequently do," she returned.

He smiled slightly. "That is a kind putting of it," he said. "Why, may I ask, do you feel so sure that you could help me if I were egotistical enough to make you listen to my woes?"

The Choice of Voices

“Because,” returned Sibyl, “there is n’t one human being who need have a despairing or even a discouraged moment.”

“H’m,” returned her companion. “How your sex loves to exaggerate!”

“It always comes back to the same question, Mr. Chamberlain. Is your God a far-off idol who wound you up at birth and left you to run as best you might until you should run down? Or is He the God of the Bible: omnipresent Love?”

“I have n’t thought much about Him, to tell the truth; but I put up an excellent service in his honor once a week. That should count for something.”

“All doing of our duty thoroughly counts for something.”

“What is it you ’re after, Miss Raynor? Would you suggest that I pray myself out of my difficulty? I don’t understand the earnest kindness of your interest unless you have an idiosyncrasy for saving souls. I don’t mean the least impertinence, and I prove it when I speak to you of the unspeakable.” Chamberlain bit a lip inclined to unsteadiness before he went on. “My wife and I disagreed to such an extent that she left me. That is my sorrow.”

The Leaven of Love

Sibyl waited, her hands clasped on the table before her, but he did not go on.

“It was a damaging thing for you in your position,” she said, “even if it was not a great personal loss.”

“It was a great personal loss,” returned Chamberlain briefly.

“Then if so to you, probably it is an equal loss to her.”

“I’m afraid not. She has made no sign. She asked me not to seek her, and pride made me obey. I don’t know where she is.”

He managed to speak in an even, unemotional voice, and at the close he lifted his lowered gaze and met the sunshine of joy and confidence in the eyes beaming upon him.

“It is entirely a matter of your own consciousness,” Sibyl said reassuringly. “Only know that you repent your share of whatever mistakes separated you, know that false pride will not be allowed to speak in your heart, and that you long for your reunion for *her* sake, — for what you can do for *her*, — and then know that God is immanent in your affairs: strengthening every good, unselfish thought, working steadily to the elimination of all discord and the realizing of harmony. It is n’t music when your boys are

The Choice of Voices

feeling after the right note or expression, it is n't life while discord is uppermost in our thought. You have suffered enough to be willing that all the weeds of pride and resentment should be pulled up and cast behind you. It is the beginning of good things, Mr. Chamberlain. Believe me."

As Dick looked curiously into her sparkling eyes, he was fain to believe her. It did not seem to be the light of fanaticism burning there.

"You mean," he said, "that you think that I shall get back my wife?"

"I mean that if your thought is right, you'll get what is best for you, and it will bring you satisfaction. The great point is that you must begin with your own consciousness, and not with what you think somebody else ought to do."

"That's reasonable, if one is going in for metaphysics at all. The fact is, Miss Raynor, you've caught me down on hard pan. I'm humble enough to try anything."

"Humility is a grand instrument to work through, Mr. Chamberlain. Your wife is going to be restored to you."

"Listen to the sibyl!" he returned, with an effort at lightness, but color streamed over his pale face.

The Leaven of Love

Something in the girl's eyes broke down the remnant of his reserve.

“In the last two days,” he said, “a vital change has taken place in my thoughts on this subject. It was a crushing change, however, for it left no doubt as to my wishes, and paralyzed my hope of fulfilling them.”

“That is because you thought you had to work alone; when the Father who made and loves you, an omnipotent Father, who is only waiting for you to be ready, is going to take your hand and guide you to your right place. Does that sound to you like a bit of woman's sentiment? When you have proved a few times the practical efficiency of right thinking, you will find yourself led out into a large place where everything looks different. Our grandfathers would not have even listened to tales of wireless telegraphy; and now a new principle, a new power, more transforming and far-reaching than electricity and just as demonstrably active, has been discovered by a few; but the many still waste time in skepticism. A bad man can send a wireless message and have it received correctly; but it is only the honest, sincere, and unselfish thought that is in harmony with this eternal active principle and can receive and pass on its lasting benefits. If I seem

The Choice of Voices

preachy—” added Sibyl, in a different voice, and as she spoke, her companion noticed Guy Lester step out upon their gallery.

So noticeable a cloud passed over Chamberlain's face at the sight that the girl involuntarily turned, and Lester, catching her eye, lifted his hat as he proceeded across the gallery and, pausing beside Mrs. Bostwick, seated himself on the rail near her.

“You know Mr. Lester?” exclaimed Dick, in surprise.

“Why not?” smiled the girl. “From your tone I should judge I ought not to.”

“We have no cause to love each other,” said Chamberlain briefly.

“Oh, what a mistake!” returned Sibyl. “Suppose there were a pipe through which you were expecting water to flow to you — water that you needed, without which your land would wither. If the pipe were stopped with some obstruction, would you say you had no cause to clear it out? Hate, coldness, even dislike, are obstructions holding back just so much the blessing pressing toward you from the fountain of all Good. It has to trickle around such rubbish, and can dole out only a starved supply instead of the flood that is your heritage.”

The Leaven of Love

Chamberlain felt like pinching himself to make sure he was not dreaming that Guy Lester sat yonder on the piazza rail, and — what? Yes, he was about to hold a skein of wool for Aunt Phœbe!

“Would you mind telling me,” he ejaculated, “how long you have known Lester?”

The girl’s color rose faintly. “Why is it so strange that we know him? We’re all good Yankees. How delightful it would be if the fact of my knowing him should help bring you two together!”

Sibyl looked so pretty in her earnestness and embarrassment as Dick studied her and the situation, that he received an inspiration. Perhaps this was what had brought Guy out here.

“Have you ever,” he asked aloud, “exploited these ideas of yours to Lester?”

“Yes, I have talked to him.”

Chamberlain reflected. If Guy were indeed captivated by this unusual girl, he was no longer moping because of Violet. Something had made a vital difference between his manner of yesterday and that of to-day. Dick had supposed it was entirely due to the fact that the Armitages had not borne him off in their train. Possibly

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now another factor had influenced his erstwhile friend.

“When did you have your last talk with Lester?” he asked.

“Last night,” replied Sibyl; and in spite of herself, as the thought of last evening with Violet as its central figure crowded upon her memory, she could no longer meet Chamberlain’s gaze. Her glance fell and her color rose, much to her own annoyance.

“I wonder,” remarked Dick dryly, “if you did not persuade him to pull some of the rubbish from his pipes. It’s slightly out of character for him to seek this gallery when he knows I am here, and to — to eat out of your aunt’s hand, as it were.”

“I am perfectly sure,” returned Sibyl seriously, “that he would be very glad of a renewal of your friendship.”

Dick’s brow knotted and he suddenly leaned forward, his elbows on the table. The gaze he bent on Sibyl was piercing, for he thought he understood. “Then look here, Miss Raynor,” he said, in a low voice, “he told you.”

“Told me what?”

“That we were not friends.”

“Yes.”

The Leaven of Love

“Then he told you the reason. You knew when you came here this afternoon of the trouble between my wife and me.”

Sibyl's heart beat fast. “Yes,” she answered quietly.

“You've known it all the time; perhaps Claude knew it.”

“No; nothing of it. He suspects nothing now. Why should you be excited, Mr. Chamberlain? Is it any harm for me to share the knowledge possessed by all Boston?”

Dick nodded thoughtfully. “A nice character Lester has given me, doubtless,” he said.

“I did not learn about your trouble through Mr. Lester. He has not breathed a word against you,” replied the girl, her clear eyes again meeting her vis-à-vis with calmness.

Chamberlain looked into the lucid depths for a long, silent minute. “You have upset all the plans I had for working this afternoon,” he said at last, “and you behave almost as if you had some definite idea of what a man in my position ought to do. I confess frankly that for the first time in my life I have a profound desire to do something and don't dare to do it.”

“Well,” Sibyl smiled. “You know what it is that Shakespeare says makes cowards of us all.

The Choice of Voices

If you repent your share of the mistakes that separated you from your wife, and feel that you honestly intend to avoid them in future, your very humility will be the means of bringing her back to you."

"How? Not by my sitting here in Regina Beach and writing a book on boy-choir training."

The girl laughed softly by reason of his tone and the scornful glance he turned on the manuscripts.

"Perhaps," she returned, becoming serious again. "Who can tell? The chief thing is to know that every good and unselfish impulse you have in the matter is working in harmony with Omnipotence. Get all the rubbish out of the channel and know that nothing can prevent the manifestation of harmony in your life."

Chamberlain stirred and looked down. "The rubbish is out, so far as I know," he returned. "I have but one wish — but the fear of meeting scorn and coldness is what deters me from starting out to-day to find her. I'd rather prolong the doubt than meet that certainty."

Sibyl's lips drew together and she gave a confidential little nod. "You are on the highroad to happiness, Mr. Chamberlain," she declared. "You say you have no idea where your wife is?"

The Leaven of Love

“Not the least!” Then as the girl’s demure, smiling gaze continued, he exclaimed: “What do you mean! Have you?”

Sibyl nodded slowly.

He pushed his chair back from the table and sprang to his feet. “Where is she?” he demanded, and his pale face grew dark with color.

“I have a clue, Mr. Chamberlain. Please sit down.”

“Tell me, Miss Raynor. I’ll go at once. After all this friendliness on your part, would you detain me?”

“Please leave it to me,” said the girl, while Lester and Aunt Phœbe looked up at the sound of the scraping of the chair on the boards and the heightened voice. Sibyl continued quietly, though her own cheeks were brightly rosy, “I can find out more in an afternoon than you can in a week.”

“You are in communication with her?” The tall man towering above the seated girl looked down upon her with eyes that burned.

“Yes. Mr. Chamberlain, please sit down.”

Dick obeyed. In fact, a sudden unsteadiness of his entire system made the act convenient. He leaned his elbows on the table, and very pale, again stared at the girl whose self-possession

The Choice of Voices

seemed to falter, for she smiled and hesitated and looked away.

“When will you communicate with her, then?”

“At once,” replied Sibyl.

“Let us go. You will telegraph. Tell her that I — how shall you word it? How will you make her willing to receive me?”

“Leave it to me. I promise to succeed.”

“You are the — the strangest girl. Let me go with you, at least.”

“Please don’t. I don’t need any one; but — but if I should, I would rather have Mr. Lester.”

“Oh — you would?” replied Dick, regarding her faltering eyes and changing color curiously.

Sibyl suddenly met his gaze again, firmly. “Don’t guess, don’t suspect, don’t worry,” she said. “God is making everything come right.”

“How long — when shall I hear from you? I will come home with you now and wait for your news.”

“No, Mr. Chamberlain. Give me this afternoon. I may need even longer. I promise that before ten o’clock to-night you shall hear from me, and it will be good news. You’ve waited months. Be patient now for a few hours. Give me your word not to try to find me before then?”

The Leaven of Love

“If I must,” returned Dick, after a pause.

“Trust me. Why should n’t you?”

“Why, indeed!” exclaimed Chamberlain, in a burst of gratitude. “When an angel forsakes her harp long enough to come to earth, heal a man’s game wrist, and give him courage in place of despair — why not?”

CHAPTER XXIV

SIBYL'S NOTE

AUNT PHŒBE was in such a state of excitement over the prospect of telling her familiars in North Haddam that Guy Lester had held a skein of wool for her, and so devoutly thankful that the clean ruching in her sleeves made the experience wholly triumphant, that she had been but vaguely moved by the signs of disturbance at the table.

Guy Lester, however, while maintaining his attitude of respectful attention to Mrs. Bostwick's remarks, kept a vigilant watch upon their neighbors, and when he saw Dick stride across the gallery and Sibyl coming toward them, it required heroic self-control not to dump Aunt Phœbe's cherished wool into her lap as he rose to his feet.

Mrs. Bostwick looked up, to perceive her child approaching. "What is it, Sibyl?" she asked, annoyed by the interruption, for she had not finished describing certain sins of omission on the part of the North Haddam school-board. "What's the matter? Not through already, I should hope?"

The Leaven of Love

It was on Lester that the happy eyes beamed as Sibyl made reply: "All through for to-day."

"Why! 't ain't worth while coming over for such a few minutes," grumbled Aunt Phœbe. "Do you think it is, Mr. Lester? We had n't but just got sat down."

Lester smiled. "Sometimes it is quality instead of quantity that counts, you know, Mrs. Bostwick. I should judge by Miss Raynor's face —"

"You can't judge a thing by Miss Raynor's face — ever. She's like that old emperor that fiddled when Rome was burning."

Lester laughed. "Smiles, and smiles, and is a villain still, eh? Who would think it?"

Sibyl looked down at the gloves she was pulling up over her arms. She made a rare picture as she stood thus, her lips touched with the sweetness of her knowledge, and Guy Lester appreciated this to the full.

"It sounded a minute ago," said Mrs. Bostwick, "as if Mr. Chamberlain was finding book-writing some exciting. What happened, anyway? Was he taking you for a choir-boy that did n't suit him? It looks as if he'd gone off now to sulk. I tell you, Sibyl," — Mrs. Bostwick's reluctance to abandon the school-board had by this time given way to a realization of the present

Sibyl's Note

circumstances, — “I tell you right now that if that man ’s dismissed you, he won’t get you back again. Do you understand?”

“Yes ’m,” returned the girl demurely, and her eyes flashed a laughing glance at Lester. “Now let ’s go home.”

“Not till I ’ve finished this skein,” returned Aunt Phœbe. “Hold a little tighter please, Mr. Lester.”

“Yes, let ’s go right now, Aunt Phœbe,” persisted Sibyl softly. “I won’t hurt the wool. See?” She slipped the skein from Lester’s fingers and knotted it deftly while Mrs. Bostwick looked on in protest.

“What *is* the matter, Sibyl?” she asked curiously, and she gazed along the gallery toward Chamberlain. “Ain’t we going to even say good-by to him?”

The girl shook her head, and Guy Lester, with one glance toward the immobile figure of his friend, followed her into the hotel and down the stairs. When the three had arrived in the office, Sibyl turned to Lester and held out her hand.

“Everything we could wish for them is about to occur,” she said. “Please stay here now, but come to us at eight o’clock. I will tell you more then.”

The Leaven of Love

Lester's non-committal eyes were for once alight with interest. "I was intending to walk home with you," he said.

"Yes, thank you; but please don't. Good-by until eight o'clock."

"Perhaps you 'll kindly explain," said Mrs. Bostwick, as soon as they were walking away from the hotel.

"Yes, dear. I've only been waiting for a chance."

Mrs. Bostwick listened to the girl for a few minutes with rapt attention.

"Looks promisin', don't it?" she remarked at last. Then her thoughts taking a rapid and practical turn: "He can't ever live in that front room of ours, Sibyl. He'd bump the gas fixture with his head and the walls with his shoulders."

The girl smiled. "A bridal couple would be rather conspicuous in our house, too," she returned.

On that afternoon, before going to the hotel and holding wool for Mrs. Bostwick, Guy Lester had attempted to visit Violet; but upon calling at the house, he had been told that she was out.

Knowing that the Armitages had left the beach and that Dick would be busy with his work, Vio-

Sibyl's Note

let had gone to the shore with her books ; and when Sibyl reached home so much earlier than had been expected, she was disappointed to find no sign of her friend.

“It is right,” she reflected, meeting her own impatient thought. “God is taking care of it. Perhaps Mr. Chamberlain will go to walk and they will meet somewhere, and I need not plan for them.”

She picked up some sewing, went out on the porch, and tried to take her thought off the pair who had occupied her so long.

Mrs. Bostwick, whose mental processes were never swift, was waking up more and more to the situation. She was endeavoring to do a piece of work which kept her in the house ; but being periodically carried away by some fresh consideration, she swooped out upon Sibyl from time to time to relieve her mind. On one occasion Mrs. Quayle-Smith was the subject of her thoughts.

“I tell you, Sibyl,” she said, “it’s going to be a tremendous relief to that high-headed mother o’ Violet’s to have this thing turn out right. She’s just standing there in The Holy Saints like Samson, holding up the pillars o’ the temple on her own shoulders ; and she don’t know what minute it’s coming down around her ears. I’d be will-

The Leaven of Love

ing to bet without knowing that when the strain 's off her, she 'll go to bed for a month."

Sibyl laughed quietly over her hemstitching. "What a prophecy!" she exclaimed. "I think she's made of too stern stuff; and anyway, why should n't people thrive on happiness?" but echo answered, for Mrs. Bostwick, like a huge pendulum, had already swung back into the house.

It was nearly five o'clock when Sibyl at last saw her friend coming up the path from the sea. She waited a moment, her hands resting on her dropped work, and smiled musingly. So husband and wife had not met. The girl rose and moved out to the street. The slender, graceful woman with the uncovered head saw her, and waved her hand.

The musing smile remained on Sibyl's lips as she walked. What changes had come since first she was charmed by that other girl — so attractive, from the black coronet of her soft hair and the Irish blue of her eyes, to her dainty little feet!

As Violet advanced now, those feet that once lagged so sadly sprang to meet Sibyl, and the once cold and unexpectant gaze flashed with warmth.

Sibyl's Note

“ ‘Beauty lies in many eyes,
But love in yours, my Nora Creina!’ ”

thought Sibyl happily.

Violet embraced her, hunger in her glance. “And what to-day?” she asked. “I should have come home sooner. I did not expect — What is it! Why do you look so?”

“We’re going to lose you,” returned Sibyl. “I’m trying to look sad.”

“How? Why?”

“Because Aunt Phœbe says, and very truly, that his head would bump the gas fixture in your room.”

Violet’s eyes glowed, then suffused. “I’ve been trying to be so good this afternoon; so patient,” she said. “Is Dick at the house? Tell me! Don’t I need to be good any longer?”

Sibyl laughed merrily. “I think you’d better — just the same. Dick is n’t there. He does n’t even know that you are; but I’ve broken it to him that I can reach you, and he is waiting at the hotel in a state of mind which certainly deserves some reward.”

Violet began to tremble, and her face, which had paled, flushed again.

“I must send for him,” she faltered. “No, no, I can’t!” wildly. “The house is too small.

The Leaven of Love

There are too many people. They would wonder so. There are too many people everywhere!"

"I know. I've been thinking it over. There is only one spot in Regina Beach that is sure to be deserted at a given hour."

"What spot? What given hour?"

"Come home," said Sibyl, "and pack. It will give you something to do until the given time."

"When is it — wonderful girl?"

"To-night — say about nine o'clock."

"To-night?" Violet bit her lip to steady it. "Oh, what did he say! Tell me everything — every word. Are you sure he wants me?"

Sibyl lifted her shoulders. "He almost convinced *me*; and I think he will you, entirely. Men are such flatterers."

"To think that you can tease me!" said Violet, laughing and crying as they moved along together. "To think that we are as happy as that!"

"His wrist is healed, too," said Sibyl. "The swiftness of the work seems to indicate the letting go of some stubborn thought."

"Was he happy about it? Was he surprised?"

"Very much surprised; but he is absorbed in one idea now. Isn't it beautiful that you know

Sibyl's Note

your responsibility, and hereafter will be able to protect him and yourself?"

"Yes, yes," responded Violet, a catch in her breath. "Thank God he will get a wiser woman than the one who married him."

A couple of hours later, while Chamberlain was sitting at table in the dining-room, a bell-boy brought him a note. It was from Sibyl, and he read: "Please meet me in the reading-room of the hotel at nine o'clock; I shall have something interesting to tell you."

He ate no more, but rested his elbows on the table, and his forehead on his hands. Claude's sister had good news for him. His excited thought buzzed with queries. How and where could she have met Violet? How well did she know her? What could have been Violet's reply to the telegram? She must have softened. Would she actually allow him to come to her?

The earnestness and sweetness with which Raynor's sister had interested herself in the matter recurred to him with wonder and gratitude. He read the note again. Sibyl would not have written so unless she had the best of news to impart.

The blood rushed through his veins as he thought that perhaps even to-morrow he should

The Leaven of Love

see Violet. He closed his eyes. He had in the past excused many an uncalculating and irresponsible act on the ground that he was temperamental. So was Violet temperamental. He had adored her for it; but she would have been for that very reason better off in the care of a level-headed, unimaginary, well-balanced fellow like Lester. He clenched his hands at the thought.

“One more chance, Violet!” he breathed. “Give me one more.”

In fancy he saw the train of blessings that would follow in the track of a reconciliation with his wife. Sibyl's declarations came back to him; and spontaneously his heart lifted in an unspoken prayer to the great Choir-Master.

He looked at his watch. It was now eight o'clock. An hour to be lived through. He sprang up from the table, went out of doors, and running down the steps in the light of a brightening moon, started for the long pier which ran far out into the sea.

At a quarter to nine Sibyl Raynor and Guy Lester were sitting together in a corner of the hotel reading-room.

“Everything worked beautifully, did n't it?” said the girl. “I'm so glad he was n't in sight.”

Sibyl's Note

"I had no fear of it," returned Lester. "I'm a male human animal myself; and the species does n't sit around a hotel office when it is in suspense."

He regarded his companion with an unsmiling satisfaction. She was sparkling with happy excitement, and as usual, to his curious admiration, absolutely unconscious of herself.

"Mrs. Bostwick told me to-night," he said, "that your stay here is liable to terminate soon."

"Yes. She received a letter from Mrs. McDonald to-day, saying that she would arrive almost immediately. Aunt Phœbe is nearly as happy as Violet." Sibyl's thoughts sped back to the Chamberlains. "I don't see how they're going to manage," she said, "unless they leave Regina Beach at once. He can't come to us where everybody knows Violet as Mrs. Smith, and it would be embarrassing for her to stay here where she so lately registered under that name."

Lester laughed quietly at the puzzled pucker in the girl's forehead. "Love will probably find a way," he replied.

Sibyl laughed too. "I suppose, considering that they have been married a year, I don't need to take care of them."

"Not after the next few minutes," returned

The Leaven of Love

Lester. "By the way, the witching hour approaches." He looked at his watch. "I'd better evaporate. *Au revoir*. I'll return when the coast is clear."

He had been gone but a couple of minutes when Dick Chamberlain, nearly as white as his clothes, entered the room and looked about with nervous quickness. Catching sight of Sibyl, who nodded to him from the corner where she was sitting, he strode across and seated himself beside her on the tête-à-tête.

"Miss Raynor," he began softly, but with intense excitement, "is my wife in Regina Beach?"

"Yes," returned the girl.

"Something came to me not ten minutes ago: what you said about a woman in retreat at your house. Is it Violet?"

"Yes."

"How long has she been here? How long have you known her? What message has she sent me?"

"She wishes to see you."

Chamberlain sprang up. "I'm ready," he said briefly.

"But she is n't there now." Sibyl rose too, for his upthrown head towered too far above her for their hushed speaking. "Our house swarms

Sibyl's Note

with people, who all know a woman with lovely black hair and blue eyes as Mrs. Smith."

Chamberlain set his teeth, and Sibyl saw how she hurt him. She noted, too, that curious eyes began to seek them. "Come away from here," she added. They moved out into the corridor. "Your wife waits to see you," she said, then, "and I'll show you where she is."

Once more Violet Chamberlain moved amid the hush of night in the deserted patio of the great hotel. A mockingbird still haunted the palm tree, and to-night he was welcoming the silvery moonlight with long, liquid trills. The fountain fell with a lulling rhythm.

Violet pressed her hands against her happy heart, for each minute brought her lover nearer, and it seemed as if it would fly from its prison.

She lifted her eyes to the starry sky and the remote window which had known her miserable waking nights.

"'A new heaven and a new earth,'" she murmured slowly; and then she saw a tall figure come from the door of the hotel out upon the gallery. He ran down the steps, stood still for a moment, and his searching eyes caught the whiteness of her gown.

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They sped toward each other.

“Violet! Sweetheart!” murn ured the man.

“Oh, Dick, Dick!” was all she could reply.

Each had planned many things to say, but famished as they were, that close-locked embrace filled each heart too full for words. The fountain wept for joy and the bird sang praises. The moon shone down upon the roses and all the languorous beauty of the southern night.

“We’ve lost a little time, Violet,” said Dick, pressing the silky head back against his white sleeve and looking into her eyes. “It was my fault. We shall never lose another minute, my love.”

“We’ve awakened from a dream,” she answered. “It was never anything else. We loved each other all the time.”

“‘All the time,’” he echoed; “and now it is for eternity.”

“Yes,” she sighed, returning her cheek to its resting-place. “Dick, I want never to take my head off your shoulder.”

He winked back a tear and held her closer as he gave a soft, broken laugh. “Eternity is a long time,” he answered. “You may get tired of it. I never shall.”

CHAPTER XXV

BEFORE THE DAWN

ONE Saturday, when Mrs. Quayle-Smith was taking her coffee in bed as usual, her maid brought in the mail.

The great lady had wakened this morning under an unwonted cloud of depression. She shrank from the ordeal of another day.

“I suppose the nearness of Sunday is enough to account for it,” she reflected dismally. “The strain is telling on me. I can’t stay at home tomorrow. I had the headache last Sunday. It won’t do to have another so soon. I loathe the thought of letters, Julie,” she said to the maid, with a fretful turning away of her head. “Give me a mirror. I know I look a fright.”

The girl laid the letters on a table and obediently brought the hand-glass. “No, indeed, Madame,” she returned soothingly; “but if Madame would permit the little plasters on the forehead — Madame has frowned during the night.”

Mrs. Quayle-Smith gazed in the mirror and examined the vertical lines between her eyes. “No

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wonder I frown at night!" she replied. "When one is obliged to smirk all day, one naturally strikes an average."

"But if Madame would permit —"

"Very well," interrupted the lady wearily, casting from her the unflattering glass; "to-night you shall plaster me. What are the postmarks of those letters?"

The maid looked. "There is one from New York, Madame, and one from Regina Beach, and one from Los Angeles."

Mrs. Quayle-Smith groaned. She was aware that her maid knew her to be under a mental strain; but she fondly believed that the girl did not suspect its nature. "Well, give them to me," she said, "and take the tray. I will ring when I need you."

She seized the Los Angeles letter first. It was not in her daughter's handwriting and she dropped it, thinking she must have taken up the wrong envelope; but one by one she threw the others from her. Dick's brief bulletin could wait; and finding the Los Angeles postmark again, she opened the letter.

Glancing at the signature, she saw the name of a prominent member of her church whom she knew to be traveling in the West.

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MY DEAR MRS. QUAYLE-SMITH [it read], — I thought I must write you because we had such a pleasant glimpse of Mr. Chamberlain a short time since. It was a great surprise to see him come into the hotel dining-room. What a delightful time he will have with the Armitages at Regina Beach! Naturally he didn't tell us that he was on his way there, but he mentioned it to one of our friends, and you know, dear Mrs. Quayle-Smith, that those things always will *out* just as surely as murder. I dare say I am giving you your first knowledge of his plan, but we all in the church admire you so much, I for one cannot bear to see you deceived. You may depend, however, on my discretion. Excepting to you, I shall be silent. The Armitages arrived at Regina Beach not very long ago. Belle has just written from there to a girl friend of ours here, but of course she said nothing of the rendezvous.

Mrs. Quayle-Smith's face was scarlet. "Cat! Cat!" she ejaculated, and crushed the letter in her strong, plump hand. Tossing it aside, she seized the thin inclosure from Regina Beach. She felt certain that the rencontre, if such there had been, was purely accidental. She could not wait

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for Dick's version, and tore open his letter with hands that trembled.

DEAR MOTHER [she read], — The charms of this spot have not been at all exaggerated. If I find I can be quiet enough, it will be a perfect place to do my work. A young lady here is going to do the writing for me, and the thing should go swimmingly.

I know you will pardon a brief letter, understanding my limitation.

Hoping all goes well,

Your affectionate DICK.

A long, low groan escaped Mrs. Quayle-Smith's lips, and tears began to slip unregarded down her cheeks and fall among the laces and ribbon of her negligée. Her nerveless hand dropped the letter, and her vague eyes indicated a broken spirit. She murmured to herself with lips that worked piteously: "I believed in you, Dick. I was honest! My poor little Violet! It has been a vain fight; but it's over now. My poor little girl! After all my suffering, and managing, and scheming, he gives me no better reward than to keep a tryst with that creature at the first opportunity. How could I have been so deceived!"

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She began to sob quietly. "Why was n't I more trustful of my own child? I shall write her at once, and we will go abroad together. Dick has exchanged his birthright for a mess of pottage!" The weeping woman shuddered. "The awful deliberation of this move shows clearly my frightful mistake. Very well, I'll lie no more for him. The mask shall be torn off, and by my own hand. Supposing Mrs. Laidlaw had not written me! I should still have been guarding that ingrate; but I've not the least idea that she will confine her information to me. More than likely the news will have crept like wildfire throughout the congregation by to-morrow."

Mrs. Quayle-Smith shrank physically from the imagined words and glances. "I can't face it, and I won't!" she reflected; then an idea occurred to her which she welcomed desperately. "That's it. That's what I'll do! I'll send for the rector to-day. No one else shall tell Mr. Ainslie. They shall all know that I am undeceived and have no desire to shield such an offender. Let them dismiss him. I know they'll do it as quietly as possible. How can such a splendid man be such a fool!" and as the thought of her son-in-law rose again, the picture of that proud head brought low had power even now

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to force a fresh burst of tears from her eyes. "Violet and I will go away. I shall write her at once and beg her pardon. How could Dick, of all men, do anything so sneaking; such bad form; so vulgar. He should n't have Violet again, not if he went on his knees to me and gave up all thought of that creature. Getting her to write for him! How brazen, how — yes, how totally unlike Dick! He was always such a *man*. Any underhanded methods seem so foreign to him;" and Mrs. Quayle-Smith's wound bled afresh. She rang the bell.

Julie appeared at once, and her mistress asked for writing-materials. She wrote a note to the rector asking briefly for half an hour of his time, saying she had something of importance to tell him, or she would not disturb him on a Saturday.

She sent the note to the coachman, with orders to drive to the rectory and bring Mr. Ainslie back.

"Now, Julie," she said, when the business was transacted, "make me look as if I had n't been weeping."

The discreet maid finally had her mistress arrayed; but do what she would, Violet's mother, crushed by her disappointment and grief, was

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totally unable wholly to control the fountain of her tears.

“Leave me, Julie,” she said at last, when she was settled in her pleasant morning-room. “I am always run down in the spring. I seem to be completely unnerved this morning. When Mr. Ainslie arrives, send him up at once.”

Mrs. Quayle-Smith, when she was alone, covered her swollen eyes with her handkerchief. She was momentarily overwhelmed with the consideration of the grief she must impose upon the rector. All her own sorrow, she knew, would be shared by this devoted old friend of her son-in-law; and while she could take Violet and run away, putting the sea between themselves and all these complications, Mr. Ainslie must face, besides his own personal sorrow, the disastrous loss of his choir-master: the pride of The Holy Saints.

Misery loves company, but Mrs. Quayle-Smith was too sincerely attached to the polished, courtly clergyman, who for twenty years had been a star at the dinner-parties of herself and others of the elect, not to feel unmixed regret at dealing him this unavoidable blow.

“What an ending to an awful winter!” she reflected. “Whatever Violet may have suffered of loneliness and heartache, at least she has

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escaped my position in the forefront of battle — never able to give a sincere look or word to anybody.”

In a few minutes the expected knock sounded and her old friend entered. Julie was close behind him, and at once disappeared, closing the door with quiet celerity.

Mrs. Quayle-Smith rose, the hanging velvet ribbons on her soft silken gown swaying as though they felt her nervousness.

She bit her lip at sight of the tall figure with its slightly bowed shoulders, smooth-shaven face, and the eyes that always seemed lifted under the weight of the projecting brows above.

“Dear Mr. Ainslie, I hope I did n’t disturb you too much?”

He took her offered hand. “An impossibility in your case,” he replied, her sorry plight making his voice unwontedly gentle.

A flood of associations swept her at his tone. Must all the success, the pride, the happiness, be things of the past? Oh, it was a dream! It could n’t be a reality that she should never again hear that voice express affectionate satisfaction in Dick’s achievements.

Involuntarily she fenced with the situation.

“I am so absurdly unnerved this morning,”

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she said, with a little hysterical sob that was half a laugh. "I don't know myself, really."

"I'm sincerely sorry," replied the rector, taking a chair near the one into which she had sunk, trembling.

"One is apt to feel some letting down at this time of year," she went on tremulously, "but — but I don't seem to remember any previous weakness so pronounced as this."

How was she to tell him! How was she to meet those eyes that had loved Dick so long — and tell him!

"You have had a hard winter," returned Mr. Ainslie quietly; "harder than usual."

She gave him a quick glance through tears. How much did he suspect? How much might he have suspected all along? At the same moment she perceived that he was holding a telegram in his hands.

"You have a telegram there," she said, startled. "Have you — have you —" Her voice died away, and a sickness crept over her which brought her near to fainting.

Some zealot had wired the rector of The Holy Saints the manner in which his organist was spending his vacation, and her good friend had felt it kindest to bring her the news. Her dim

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gaze remained glued to the tragic yellow envelope.

“I beg your pardon,” returned her visitor. “My regret at discovering your indisposition made me forget. Your maid handed me this for you just now.”

Telegrams were of common occurrence in Mrs. Quayle-Smith’s existence, and this one at once lost its significance. From being a threat it altered to a reprieve. For another minute or two she need not talk.

“You will excuse me, then, if I see —” she began.

Mr. Ainslie opened the envelope and handed her the inclosure.

She took it, leaned back in her chair feebly, and lifted her lorgnette. As she examined the message for a rather surprising length of time, her visitor took advantage of the opportunity to glance surreptitiously at his watch. All the signs prognosticated a rather lengthy interview, and he had an important appointment to keep. No slight matter had caused the collapse on the part of this indomitable pillar of his church, and he would be loth to leave her a moment before she wished it. Absorbed in calculation of the time at his command, he looked up as Mrs. Quayle-Smith

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stirred, and saw her place the telegram on the table beside her.

She drew herself erect in her chair, and pressed her handkerchief lightly to her eyes again. When she took it away, a faint smile touched her lips.

“It proves a surprising lack of vanity, does n't it, Mr. Ainslie, for me to exhibit myself to you in such an undignified, swelled-up state?”

“My dear Mrs. Quayle-Smith, pray don't mention such a trifle as appearances. If there is anything in the world that I can do for you —”

“You poor man! I've actually driven you to use a sympathetic tone! It was so inconsiderate of me to let you come in and find me a perfect Niobe and never explain myself. Unluckily, tears of joy can make one look as great a fright as tears of sorrow.”

“Joy? Why! You relieve me wonderfully.”

“Yes, indeed. I know you will forgive me for dragging you from your study, for you were always so fond of Violet.”

“Of Violet? Well, rather! What about the dear child?”

Mr. Ainslie's heavy brows rose and fell in some bewilderment. Instead of the trembling being of five minutes ago, whose very words were labored and who could not meet his glance, there

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sat before him the familiar friend, with the customary indestructible self-possession which was wont to carry all before it. Except for the facts that her eyes were strangely swollen, and that with all her self-command she was obliged to converse through her aristocratic nose, there was no longer anything extraordinary in Mrs. Quayle-Smith's bearing.

"You don't know," she proceeded, with an assumption of frankness, "what serious anxiety I have endured the last months on Violet's account. Of course the child had never had any experience of sickness and death — her poor father having passed away when she was so young. I've never said much about her condition, but the state she has been in ever since Mrs. Waters's death has given me great concern. She has had a desire to be alone that was so unnatural in a young person. Of course it was a sort of nervous prostration ; but not wishing to see either Dick or myself was so morbid that we could scarcely speak of it to our friends. I refrained from telling even you all that was on my mind. Now, just this morning, I've heard that she is so much better — that she is practically recovered since Dick went out to her."

"Dick went out to her!" Mr. Ainslie leaned

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toward his hostess in such excitement that she lifted her eyebrows.

“Why, certainly,” rejoined the great lady calmly. “Didn’t he tell you? Where would Dick be likely to go to spend his vacation except to his wife?”

The rector bit his lip, and recovering himself, leaned back in his chair. He perceived that his friend insisted on a decorous playing of the game.

“They’re having the most delightful time at Regina Beach,” went on Mrs. Quayle-Smith suavely. “You know how charming it is out there. It’s like a second wedding-trip for the dear children.”

“I’m very glad. I’m sure I’m very glad,” murmured Mr. Ainslie over and over, his eyes roving from his hostess’ disfigured countenance to the telegram lying face down on the table.

“I suppose I didn’t realize,” went on Mrs. Quayle-Smith, “how deep my anxiety has been for my little girl; for the relief from the strain quite upset me this morning, and I felt as if I could n’t wait to tell you — you and Dick are so closely related in your interests.”

“And shall continue to be so, thank God,” responded the other devoutly.

Very soon he rose to take his departure. His

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hostess walked to the door with him. She gave a little deprecatory laugh.

“Forget my funny eyes, won’t you, Mr. Ainslie?”

He took her hand and regarded her long. They had been boy and girl together, and shoulder to shoulder had weathered many of life’s storms. Never had either so narrowly escaped shipwreck as this time.

“I shall not forget your happy eyes, Ruth,” he answered slowly and solemnly; and lifting her hand to his lips, he kissed it.

“Thank you, Charles,” she said, in a low voice.

When the door had closed after him, she turned the key in the lock, and her trailing skirts sounded a silken frou-frou as she hastened back to the table to read and reread the lines on that scrap of yellow paper, more precious than any check signed by a multi-millionaire.

We are thinking of you with love, best of mothers. It is heaven on earth here. Expect letter.

VIOLET and DICK.

Mrs. Quayle-Smith looked off, and a light illumined her gaze as she anticipated the morrow and the nonchalant and gracious remarks that

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she would let fall in productive places. Mrs. Laidlaw's wildfire, provided she had started it, would be met by an all-conquering counter-flame which would extinguish the other's feeble flicker as the full sunlight puts out a candle.

CHAPTER XXVI

“JOY AND GLADNESS”

WHEN Mrs. Quayle-Smith received the letter, she found it to be in her daughter's handwriting. It was dated at Catalina Island, and read as follows:—

DEAREST MOTHER, — We will not write the volume that would be necessary to tell all that you will know some day, but you saw by our telegram that Dick and I met at Regina Beach. We were both ready to accept life's happiness again and find it doubly precious. Guy Lester was there too, and a girl named Sibyl Raynor, who brought Dick and me together, so you can faintly imagine how dear she is to me. Guy also is discovering that she is a pearl among girls, and when you know her, you will be as glad as I if the pearl can fit in that strong setting. I speak of them now because they were both so good to us. We ran away from Regina as soon as we found each other, and took the beautiful trip north to Los Angeles. They say the scenery is lovely. Dick and I looked at each other. We

Joy and Gladness

came over here to Catalina, and the only thing that I can remember on the short voyage besides Dick, was a flying-fish. It was the most fairy-like, exquisite thing I ever saw — the iridescent little creature soaring so swiftly over the billows; but perhaps flying-fish only look that way when Dick is holding one's hand. Here, we go out to the submarine gardens and look at each other. Then we go over to the golf course and look at each other. I hope we shall work off a great deal of it before we get home, else Dick won't be able to play the organ unless I hold his hand, which would be just as hampering as a lame wrist, and the congregation would have a right to complain that he had come out here only to exchange one trouble for another. By the way, his wrist is well —

Here the feminine handwriting ceased and Chamberlain's careless chirography took up the word.

How could one of my sinews weep when every fibre of my being is rejoicing? Blessed mother, best of friends, I hope the remainder of my life will reward you for all you have done for me during this winter of our discontent. If Violet was charming before, and you and I always

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thought so, she is ten times more so now. She even looks more beautiful than you ever saw her. To my great delight, she is willing and even eager to come home; and I long to be in my place again. Miss Raynor, whom Violet mentioned above, is the girl who was writing for me on my book when that important work was interrupted by my sudden ascent into paradise via Los Angeles. Miss Raynor and her family are ready to return East, so she will visit us awhile and go on with the stenographic work for me. I don't like staying away from the choir long at this season. I shall send word to the church very soon.

There was not much more in the letter, but Mrs. Quayle-Smith could feel the return of her youth while she read it.

She reflected on the possibilities connected with the strange girl, not altogether with satisfaction. "Guy Lester is the last man on earth to marry a typewriter," she thought. "Violet calls her a pearl, but dear me, when even the flying-fish wore a halo, what can one expect!"

Mrs. Quayle-Smith preserved a dignified and gracious calm before the world during that period of joyful anticipation of the home-coming of her

Joy and Gladness

children ; but even her *sang-froid* was put to the test on the first Sunday of reunion in the stately old church. Again the famous organist of The Holy Saints was in his place.

In the pew beside Violet stood Sibyl, and the hand of the former stole over that of her friend as the white-robed choir entered and passed near them in the processional. All, even to the tiniest boy, felt the inspiration of that master touch upon the organ, and were conscious of the *rapport* between themselves and the recovered leader whom they now approached. Earnestly, and in glorious accord, the voices rang : —

“ On our way rejoicing
As we homeward move,
Hearken to our praises,
Oh, thou God of love !
Is there grief or sadness ?
Thine it cannot be.
Is our sky beclouded ?
Clouds are not from Thee.”

The Chamberlain pew, where Mrs. Quayle-Smith sat with her daughter and Sibyl, was the cynosure of all eyes. The rector preached a scholarly discourse that morning, but even his brain did double duty at periods.

Guy Lester, standing alone in his pew, was not lonely. When the choir arose for the anthem, he

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looked across at Sibyl and Violet, and he saw the meeting of their eyes. The sun streamed through the rose window in shafts of purple and gold, while with full harmony the inspired words rang forth, pealing along the arches a heavenly promise : —

“And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”



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