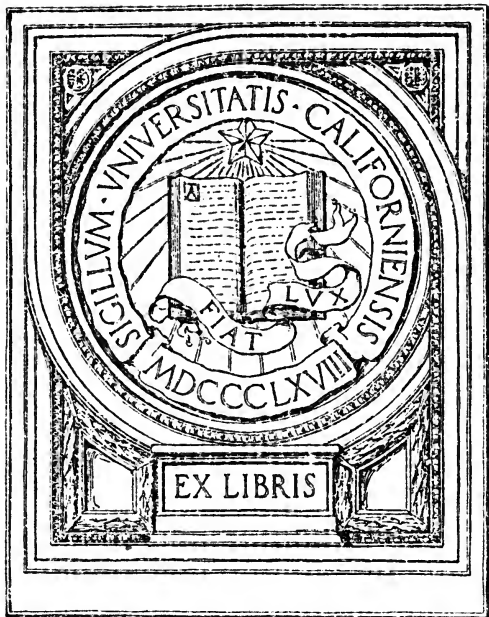


THE  
BELLIVANT ORPHANS

BY  
JANEZ HAYNES GILLMORE

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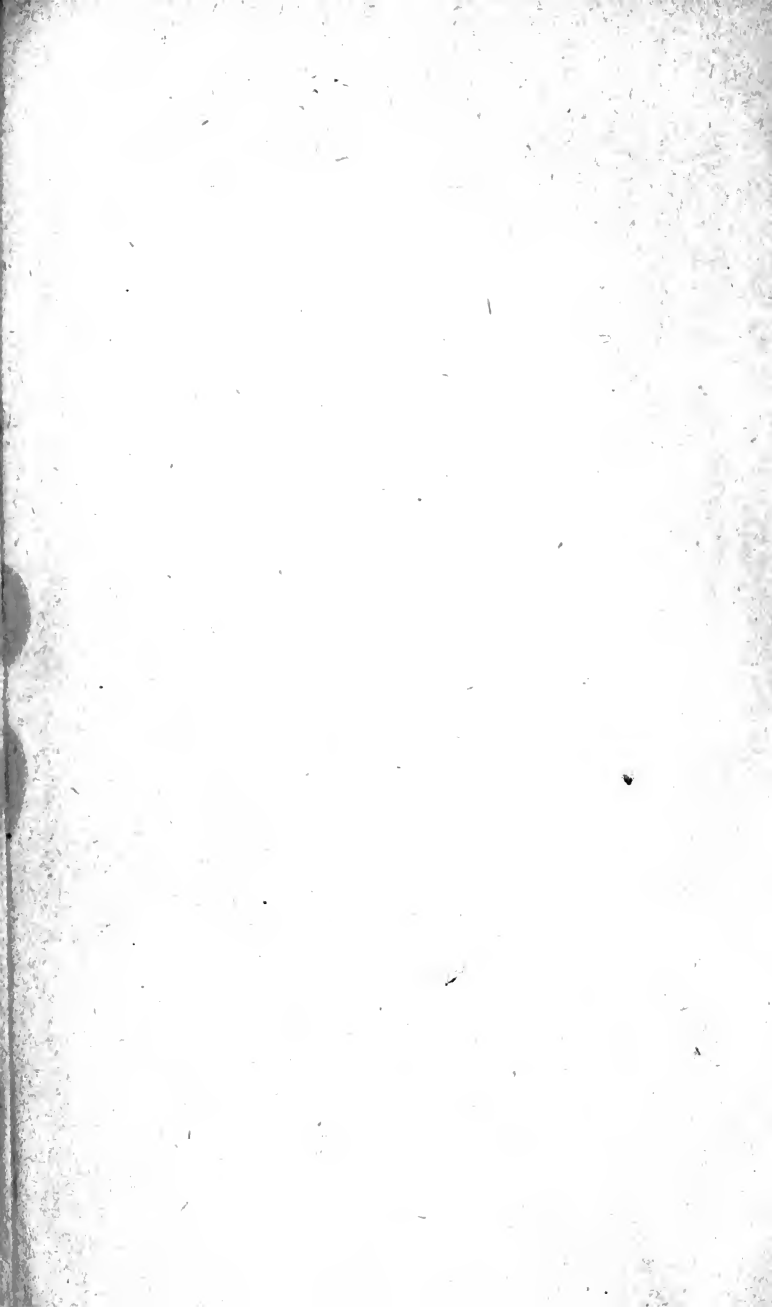
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JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG

# THE OLLIVANT ORPHANS

BY

INEZ HAYNES GILLMORE

Author of "Phoebe and Ernest," "Phoebe, Ernest, and Cupid," Etc.

FRONTISPIECE BY  
JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG



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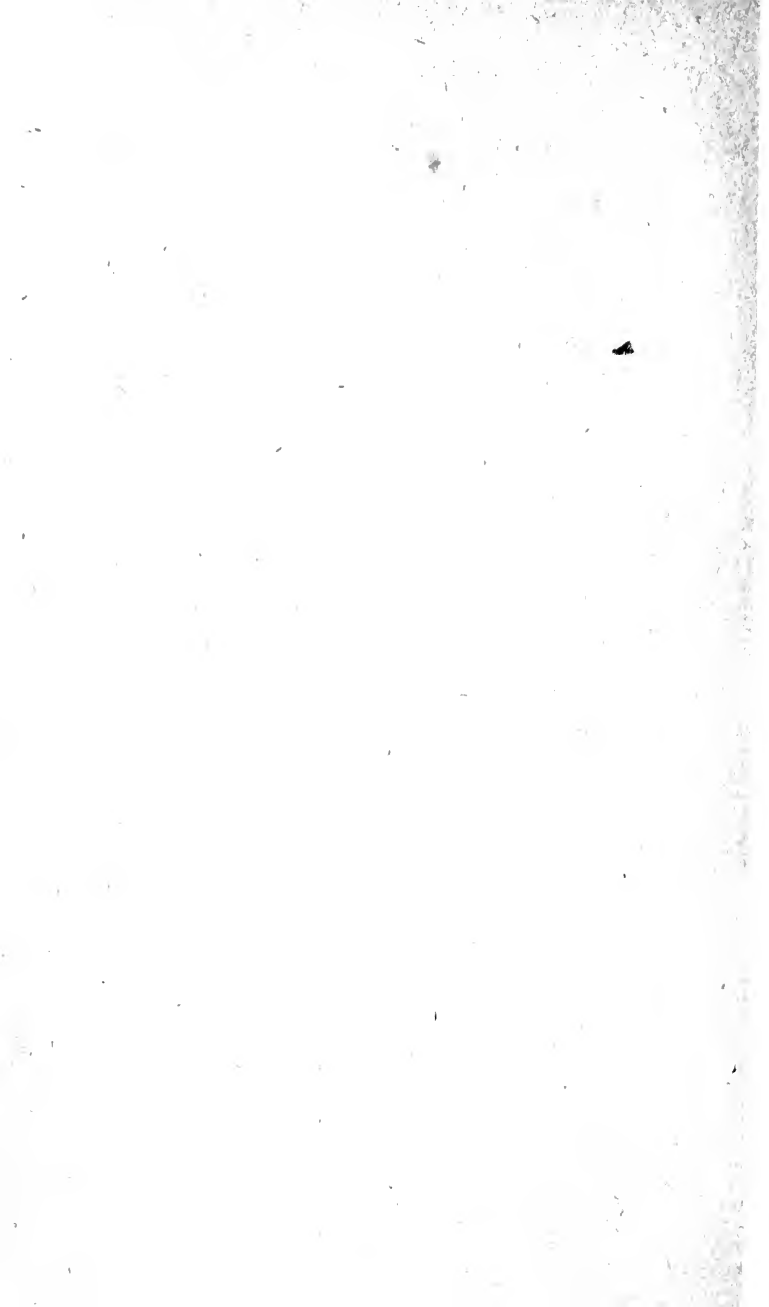
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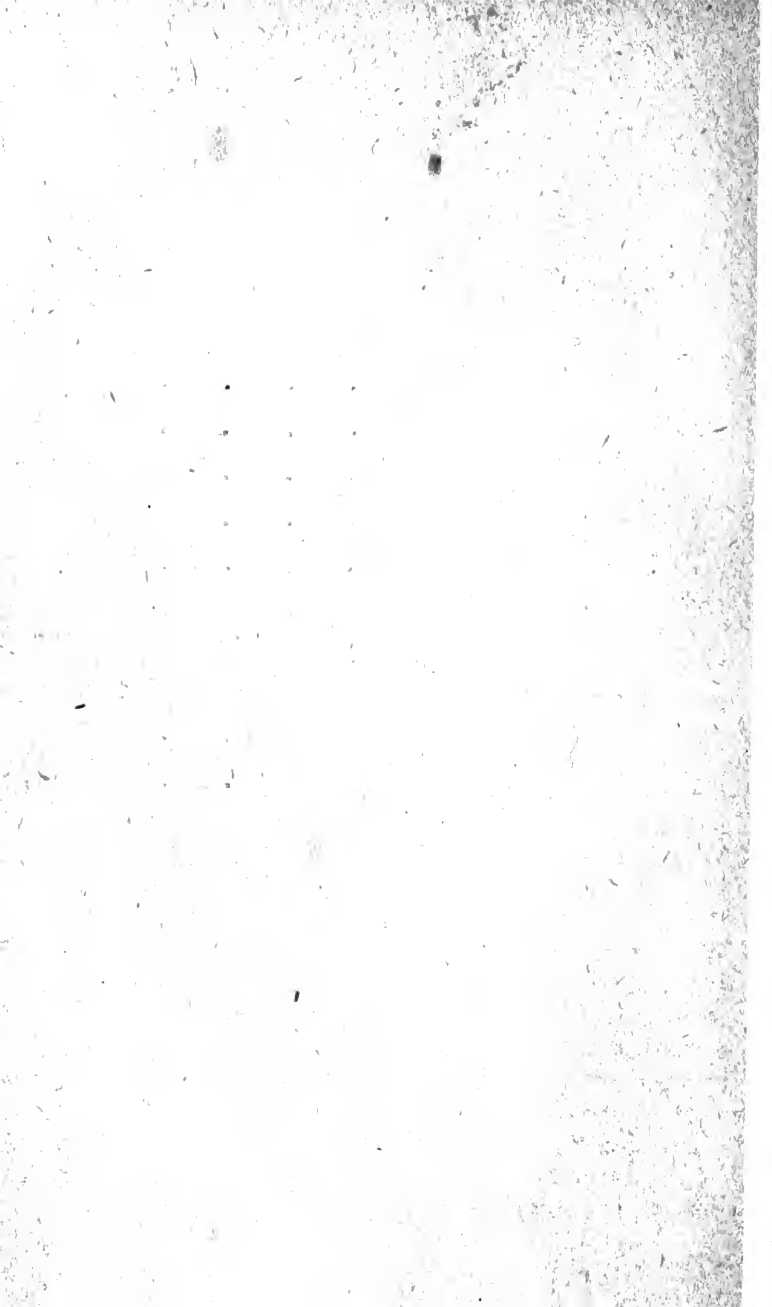
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# THE OLLIVANT ORPHANS

## CHAPTER I

### THE HOME COMING

**T**HEY had expected to return as they came, Ed, Matt, Beckie and Lainey in the first carriage, Ann and Roland with the aunts in the second carriage. But at the last moment, shattered by a fresh outbreak of weeping, Ann had thrown herself between her sisters; and Roland, in what was palpably panic at the thought of segregation, had leaped in behind her. Now they sat huddled close, the three girls facing the horses, the three boys riding backwards. Ann's head, almost buried under the rich disarray of her hair, lay on Lainey's shoulder. They clung so close that they might have been a sculptured group, Ann passionately relaxed, Lainey tense and drawn. When the sobs burst from Ann's writhing mouth, they seemed to run noiselessly up the long line of Lainey's translucent throat until they died on her delicate lips. Roland had settled back in the corner as though asleep, but his swollen lids did not conceal the moist glitter that oozed between his inky lashes.

"I don't want to go back to the house," Ann burst out after the long silence which had been interrupted only by her grief. "I don't want to

go back there—I can't bear it." Ann's slim figure shook as though her words were bullets, and Lainey's slim figure vibrated to each shock.

"Would you like to go home with Aunt Ella?" asked Beckie. Beckie did not give way although her voice was harsh with strain, her face stiff with effort. Her eyes alone showed havoc; they gleamed with the frenzied protest of the wild creature on whom life has unexpectedly thrust cataclysm.

"Oh no, no, *no!*" protested Ann. "I couldn't do that. I don't love Aunt Ella. I want to stay with you. I'm afraid somebody'll *die* if I go away. But I don't want to go back to the house—I don't *want* to. I can't *bear* it."

"We've got to go back, Ann," Ed Ollivant said. He withdrew his gaze from the spot in the door-glass on which, from the beginning of the homeward journey, it had been fixed; it went to Ann for an instant. Ed had not shed a tear. His regular blonde face was as ever freshly-colored and smoothly-handsome, but it looked frozen. Only the lips, under his little golden mustache, pressed so close that they seemed a straight gash across his face. "You wouldn't like to go to a hotel, would you?"

"Oh no!" Ann shuddered; and her shudder overflowed into Lainey's tense body. "But I wish I could go away forever. I can't feel that the house is home any longer. I can't bear to think of living there without mother. I know I shall never go into mother's room without seeing the coffin there and that dreadful black fur rug and those horrible tuberoses Uncle Joshua sent."

"We'll lock up mother's room, Ann dear,"

Lainey promised. "We won't go into it again for years and years and *years*."

"But that won't make any difference to me," sobbed Ann. "Every time I go by the door, I'll remember—— I can't endure to think of seeing it."

"We can go in by the back way, Ann," Matt Ollivant said. "And if you go to bed up the back stairs, you won't have to see mother's room to-night." Matt was not so composed as his elder brother. His skin was splotted; the clear red of his cheeks had spread and mottled. His eyes were puffed; the blue of the pupil seemed to have run into the white. All the sparkle had gone from his crest of red hair. "Don't cry any more, Ann," he begged. "It makes us all feel so much worse." Matt's voice came close to the breaking-point.

"I won't cry another minute," Ann said. "I promise I won't." Nevertheless, she burst into the fiercest paroxysm yet. But immediately she sat up and began to straighten her hair. Weeping had discolored and misshapen her face; but it was to be seen that, normally, she was a pretty girl with huge eyes of a burning gold, and hair chestnut bright at the surface, but so shadowy in the depths that it made incredible the whiteness of her skin.

For a long while nobody spoke. Ed's frigid gaze went back to the door-glass. Roland continued to try to look as though he were asleep. Matt folded his arms, sank his chin onto his chest, fixed his dull eyes on the little window in the back of the carriage. The three girls sagged in various attitudes of apathy. The horses began gradually to take a smarter pace. Outside, a country landscape, colored ardently by the fall, whirled past. The

houses began to come closer together; they passed through a town: again the streets melted away and it was almost country again. Presently the houses pressed in close and closer, changed to apartment buildings. The clang of the trolley began to accompany them now: they were riding through house-packed suburb streets. The driver was openly urging the horses on.

"We'll be home in fifteen minutes," Beckie offered to their preoccupation.

The six pairs of eyes listlessly watched the familiar landmarks slide into view. "Here's Marlowe Place," Beckie said after another long silence.

"Remember," Ann ordered, her hysteria visibly returning. "Remember to go in the back way."

"We won't forget, Ann," Ed reassured her. The carriage turned, slowed. Ed tapped on the window; the wheel ground against the curb. Ed opened the door, leaped out, held his hand up to Ann.

Marlowe Place began in a narrow, alley-like entrance and then broadened into a horseshoe-shaped inclosure which ran around a little elm-encircled park. Half a dozen houses looked onto this park. None of them were old, but they were all oldish in a pleasant, ample, mid-Victorian fashion. The Ollivant house was the least conspicuous: it was the most bromidic. The front elevation was A-shaped; it was elaborately bay-windowed and it was colored an ugly dark maroon with white trimmings. Syringa and lilacs grew untended in the scrap of front yard. A board-walk, some of the boards gone, many of them rotting, and most of them loose, led to a big back yard. There a huge wood-

bine, doing its best to conceal the need of repainting, cascaded over two sides of the house and along the ell. Everything looked old and shabby and neglected; the unkempt vine waving its autumn tatters, the flower-plots with their few sticks of starved plants; even the little summer-house standing between the lilac and the syringa and the elaborate bird-house on the top of a pole. The Ollivants, in their improvised funeral-black, filed down this walk, Ed at the head, Ann bringing up the rear. Ed unlocked the door. Beckie stepped in first. The others followed her, crowding. But once over the threshold, they all stopped stock-still as though they had entered a strange house.

But Beckie took charge. She tiptoed over to the stove and lifted the cover. "Oh, the fire's still going," she commented. "That's good."

Beckie's words were commonplace enough. But she whispered.

Mechanically Beckie began to draw the pins from her hat. Mechanically the two girls mimicked her. The boys removed their coats, tugged off the stiff, cheap black gloves, beginning already to pull white in the seams. Then they all stood still as though waiting.

"How neat it looks here," Beckie said in a disjointed way and still in a whisper. "Everything's back in place. Somebody's been cleaning up. My hair must look like——" She turned and made as though to examine herself in the smoky mirror over the kitchen sink, but her eyes passed unseeingly across its surface. "We might as well put our things in the dining-room."

"Yes," said Ed. "Sure!" He too spoke in a

low tone. But nobody moved. After a while, with a convulsive jerk, Ed started into the back hall. The little procession, hesitating, followed. The door of the dining-room was open.

It was a big, plain room, palpably half living-room and half dining-room. The carpeted floor, the meager hair-cloth couch, the two morris-chairs in oak, a combination-piece of desk, book-case, and plate-rack, also in oak, contributed to its living-room aspect. The pictures, still life in pastel, the big oval table with its darned table-cloth and its heterogeneous china, the ponderous sideboard of black walnut carved with unnatural grapes, and covered with china, salts and peppers, glass vinegar and oil cruets, a tarnished silver cake-basket, and a big silver ice-water pitcher, brought it up to the dining-room level again.

"How nice it looks here!" Lainey said. "Everything's dusted and put back into place. The table's set. There's a fire going in the stove too. Somebody's been working hard since we left. We must find out who and thank her." Lainey spoke in quick gasps, but she whispered too.

"The first thing to do now," Beckie explained, articulating carefully, "is to get something to eat. I'm going to cook dinner. I've ordered a steak. I told them not to deliver it till we got back. I didn't know how long it would take to—— I'll make a big potful of coffee. We'll feel a great deal better as soon as we've got something hot in us."

"That's right," approved Ed. "Want any help, Beckie?"

"Yes," said Beckie. "But first I want Roly to lie down and take a little nap. He looks tired-to-



'death. I'll wake you up just as soon as dinner's ready, Roly."

Roland's eyes had steadily grown heavier and heavier during the long drive. Now he stood staring about him in the bewilderment of a child who has been punished for the first time. He sat down on the couch at once, however, and apathetically watched Beckie mass the pillows. She had hardly covered him with the ragged afghan before his breathing dropped an octave.

"Now, Ed," Beckie went on in whispered command, "you go downstairs and get me some coal. Matt, you go out into the woodshed and chop a little kindling for to-morrow morning. And, Lainey, you and Ann go upstairs and wash up. Then you come down and I'll put you to work."

The five Ollivants followed her instructions implicitly. The death-like stillness in the house broke. From the cellar came—muffled—the sound of coal shoveled into the hod; from the woodshed came—subdued—the sound of wood smashing on the block; from the kitchen came—muted—the clatter of pans, the opening and shutting of drawers. But all these sounds stopped dead at intervals and then went on with an increasing effort towards quiet.

Lainey and Ann went into the big, back room on the second floor which they had shared ever since they were little girls. It had every earmark of the chamber that is trying to be a living-room. Two couches, coming together in a corner, covered with bagdads and heaped with cushions, made a strenuous effort not to look like beds. A table with big drawers that, after use, swallowed up all the articles

of the toilet, did its best not to look like a dresser. A high screen at one corner concealed the washing arrangements. A little spindly, slant-top maple desk, over-furnished with writing utensils, lay open. Its top was covered with framed photographs; they had overflowed in such numbers onto the broad marble mantel that it was like a shrine to friendship. The walls were covered with pictures, pretty girls from magazine covers and magazine illustrations, all passe-partouted.

Lainey went behind the screen, poured the bowl full of water. "You wash first, Ann," she directed. "And I want you to take off that dress and put on something white. I hate you in black."

"All right," Ann agreed docilely. "I hate it too. But," she burst into a sudden passion, "I shall wear black for a while. I wouldn't for the world have anybody think that I was lacking in respect to my mother."

"Nobody will think that," Lainey protested indignantly, unhooking Ann. "If they do, they're no friends of ours. Everybody knows how we——" She did not attempt to finish. After a while, she turned her back on her sister and Ann, with fumbling fingers, unfastened Lainey's dress.

"Why!" Ann exclaimed in almost a natural voice a few moments later, emerging from behind the screen, "what's become of the tea-table?"

Lainey turned from the mirror, her tiny sticks of arms uplifted to her head. She had taken her hair down; her little white face showed only as a crescent under its long thick golden shower. "Why, that's so! I don't know where it is. But the house has been so upset. Perhaps they needed it during

the—it's probably downstairs in moth——” Again she did not finish.

They still talked in whispers.

A door on the floor above opened softly. “Say, Lainey,” Ed's hushed voice floated down, “do you know what's become of the bookcases in our room? Somebody's taken them away and my clothes are all on the bed. Matt says he doesn't know where they are.”

“I don't know, I'm sure, Ed,” Lainey answered, her voice lowered too. “They may have needed them downstairs during the—it's probably in moth—— though I can't think what for.”

“Well, I'll hunt them up later.” Ed's whispered tones were now carefully business-like. “It doesn't make any difference. I only used them to hang my trousers in. I only wondered——”

Ann was now combing her hair in front of the mirror. Ann's hair was very different from Lainey's vapory mane; crisper, coarser, it made halfway to her waist a bolt of solid shadow. Over each ear, however, a lock of hair pulled free, whirled into a flat spiral, lay like a bit of carved jet on the white temple. Lainey had padded her hair flat to her neck after a few careless passes with the comb; but Ann's hairdressing, even at this moment, was not construction, it was architecture. Ann was younger than Lainey, but she was not so small or so slim. There was an incipient peach-like roundness to her contours which matched the peach-like bloom of her colors and the peach-like softness of her surfaces. The cold water had removed the stains of weeping. Only the deep droop of her wide red mouth remained. She pulled on a skirt

of white duck, unskilfully starched to a crackling cylindrical stiffness. Over that came a middy-blouse; she knotted a black tie below the triangle of velvety neck.

Lainey's faded, flat-chested muslin had come on too. And now the hair that she had so relentlessly smoothed down began, by means of flying wefts and strays, to form the natural halo which always floated about her head. That soft tendrilly hair was Lainey's only beauty. Her skin was a little pasty, her features nondescript; her eyes so small and colorless and deep-set that it was only in conversation that you noticed them. But if she were talking you noticed them all the time.

Although the boys' room was the biggest one in the house, it made no effort to look like anything else; it was unmistakably only a place to sleep in. Both carpet and wallpaper had faded to a dreary innocuousness. The chamber-set—drab, ornamented with panels of sky-blue, in turn decorated with bunches of pink roses—had been eked out with derelicts from other rooms; an easy-chair from the hair-cloth set, a broken spring protruding through the seat; a tumble-down mahogany étagère bearing the dusty minerals that Matt had so painstakingly collected in his young boyhood, a swinging book-shelf covered with the cups that Matt had won at tennis. A few rusty guns and swords, revolving about a canteen, made a pretense of filling one wall-space; another showed faded areas the exact shapes of the missing bookcases. Small framed pictures in ugly, haphazard frames, High School diplomas, class-groups, Ed's hunting-crowd, his first deer, hung

at awkward intervals on the gaunt walls. Matt's football regalia, his baseball mask, his class pennant tried unavailingly to give character to the room.

Ed had come upstairs first. He had washed at the little rickety washstand. Now he was changing his suit. He stood in front of the only modern piece the room contained, a tall slim light-colored chifonier spread with toilet articles in ebonized wood, elaborately monogrammed. Matt had ascended from the woodshed after an interval. He too had washed at the little rickety washstand. Now he was shaving. He stood before the drab-blue-rose bureau whose glass rippled like a small pond, sifting shaving powder onto his brush. As yet no word had passed between the brothers.

"Looks like good weather for the World Series," Ed dropped without expression after a while.

Matt cleared his throat. "Yes. I see Callahan favors the Red Sox."

"Well, I guess he's bound to stand by the American League," Ed suggested.

"Sure!" Matt's ripost came prompt on the tail of Ed's comment. "Smoky Joe looks pretty good to me," he hurried on.

"Yes." Ed pulled his suspenders over his shoulders by means of two contortions of his lithe frame. He seized a brush in each hand and attacked his head as though it were a wild beast. At intervals he stopped short; then he slapped at it again. "Yes, but he's up against Matty." This came out with abruptness, as though he had suddenly remembered that there was a conversation to sustain.

## The Home Coming

"Yes, of course, Matty's a great pitcher," Matt interpolated quickly, "but they all get old some time." He lathered his face.

"That's right," agreed Ed. He dropped the brushes.

There came a pause. And into that pause drifted silence, a profound silence, a silence which took on all the significance of noise and went echoing and re-echoing through the stark house.

Matt stared at his reflection in the wavy mirror. Stared back at him a white clown's face of which the blue eyes were turned to black buttons and the white teeth to yellow fangs by the snowy lather. "Do you think the Giants are faster in the paths than the Red Sox?" that clown asked. His words, in the terrible silence, crashed like bombs exploding in an air-shaft.

Ed looked as though he were waiting for the echoes to die down. "When a man goes faster than Hooper, he's going some."

Matt slashed swiftly through the lather. "McGraw says that Carrigan's arm is weak"

"Well, for a poor old cripple—" Ed stopped and with a nice precision selected a tie from the wad which hung over the arm of the gas-jet. It seemed an endless time that he crossed and recrossed it. "—he can still throw out quite a number at second. He doesn't let his arm out unless he has to."

They still talked in husky murmurs.

"Now let's go down and see what we can do to help Beck," Ann said.

Hand in hand, the sisters left the room, walked along the front hall. Ann's foot was on the top

stair when Lainey said: "Oh, but, Ann, I forgot. You don't want to pass mother's room."

"Oh no!" There came a recurrence of Ann's shudder. "I don't. But look, the door's open! Ed must close it—and—and—and lock it. But what's that?" She pointed.

The wall opposite the open door of Mrs. Ollivant's room showed a reflection which rioted upwards in many shreds of red light.

"Why, there must be a fire in the stove," Ann continued. "But that wouldn't make such a blaze. Why, what can it be? The house isn't on fire, is it? Oh, Lainey, I'm afraid."

"I'm not," Lainey said in a resolute voice. And dropping Ann's hand, she ran swiftly down the stairs, crossed the hall, reached the doorway. A moment she stood staring, her soft lips breaking away from each other like the petals of an opening flower. "Oh, Ann!" she breathed. And her "Oh, Ann!" was an exclamation of delight. "Oh, Ann, how lovely it looks! Why, I can almost remember when—Oh, Ann, come down! It's beautiful! Come down! Come down!"

Ann did not hesitate; she flew to her sister's side, peered over her shoulder. "Oh, Lainey!" she said in a wondering tone. And her tone was glad too. "Oh! Oh! It's lovely! Who did it?" Suddenly she raised her voice in a vibrating call. "Beck, Beck, do come here! Something beautiful! Ed, come down! Matt! Matt! Roly, wake up! Do come, all of you! Do come!"

They came. Ollivants poured from all directions, Beckie with a big kitchen-spoon in her hand, Ed in his shirt-sleeves, Matt with a shaving-towel still

tucked into his neck, Roly with the briery thatch of his inky hair standing up in all directions, his eyes still heavy with sleep. "What is it?" they all asked as they crowded into the doorway. "What is it, Ann?" But their own eyes answered their question and there followed an instant of paralysis. Then they broke into another clamor and in it their voices all went up or came down to a natural pitch. "It's Aunt Lottie," said Beckie. "There's our bookcases!" This was from Ed. And "There's the tea-table!" That was from Ann. "How'd they do it so quickly?" Matt asked.

The big front room—originally it had been the parlor, but for years now it had been the scene of Mrs. Ollivant's uncomplaining invalidism—had undergone metamorphosis. The big double black walnut bed had gone. The black walnut bureau, the big black walnut table, the little black walnut table, with their depressing marble slabs, had gone. The glasses, the bottles, the powders—all the paraphernalia of a chronic illness—had gone. The tiny stove which supplemented their recalcitrant old-fashioned furnace had vanished. The night-lamp had disappeared. And in their places—

The fireplace had been reopened; all the brass hearth ornaments had been reinstated; the fire-dogs, the fire-screen, the shovel, tongs, poker, even the old trivet, had been shined until they glittered. The fireplace was piled with blazing logs that flirted fan-shaped volleys of sparks. Over the mantel hung the portrait of General Milliken, their great-uncle. And on one side of General Milliken was a picture of their mother in her warmly-tinted, ripely-curved, blonde bridehood, and on the other a



picture of their father in his magnificently-colored virile prime. Mrs. Ollivant wore a slim, many-buttoned gown of pale blue silk, trimmed with ruffles of thread lace. She carried the fan of pale rose-colored feathers and mother-of-pearl sticks which the family still cherished as a souvenir of her wedding-trip to Paris. Mr. Ollivant wore a suit of fawn-colored broadcloth, the coat long and full-skirted, the trousers wide. On the table beside him lay a pair of fawn-colored gloves and a shining fawn-colored beaver hat. He carried in his hand the slender stick which the family still cherished as a souvenir of the London part of the wedding-trip. On the mantel, in place of the bottles, were a pair of brass candelabra with prism pendants, two pairs of mid-Victorian vases, and the little Parian marble bust of Clytie. These were all that remained of Mrs. Ollivant's wedding-gifts. The big broad, low sofa—its wine-colored upholstery faded and moth-eaten—had been brought down from the garret, heaped with cushions and drawn up to the fire. At one end, within reaching distance, glittered Ann's tea-table. Pushed close to its back, also within reaching distance, the big mahogany center-table, opened to its full width, was piled with magazines and with novels. An evening paper lay on top. On either side of the mantel towered the tall old book-cases that Ed had missed. All the old sets—Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Bulwer-Lytton, Cooper—had returned to their shelves. The piano—it ran slant-wise across the bay-window—wore a brilliant scarf of Roman silk. For many months the piano had stayed closed. Now it was open. A book of music, open too, stood on the rack. Big puffy faded old

chairs, long ago banished to the attic, had resumed their places; old pictures, much tarnished as to elaborate gold frame and much spotted as to broad white mat, had gone up on the wall.

"It is Aunt Lottie, of course," Beckie said as the others still stood staring.

"Hark! What's that?" Ann asked suddenly.

Somewhere in the room a bell tinkled, continued to emit a tiny chime.

Ann dropped to the floor, lifted the valance of the couch. "Well, of all things!" she said. Half of her disappeared for an instant. "A kitten!" she called in a muffled tone, "with a bell on its collar." She emerged holding a microscopic bunch of gray fur, all terrified round eyes and terrified fat tail. It spit vigorously at the assembled company. "Did you ever see such a tiny one and so homely and such an ugly little tyke—isn't it cunning, though?" Ann struggled to hold her prey. "Why, what's this?"

From the kitten's red leather collar hung a string that ran to the couch leg. As Ann straightened up, a big, square envelope tied to the string fluttered from under the valance. "It's Aunt Lot's handwriting," Ann said. "'To Ed and Matt and Beckie and Lainey and Ann and Roly,'" she read. She tore the envelope off the string, pulled the flap open.

The Ollivants still stood huddled in the doorway.

"It's a long letter," Ann explained. "Oh, may I read it aloud?" she begged.

"We'd better sit down!" Beckie said.

The Ollivants filed into the room, seated themselves about the fire.

"Here, Lainey, you take the kitty!" Ann ordered. Lainey obediently lifted the spitting bunch

of fluff to her shoulder. After preliminary prodings with a pair of vicious little claws, he fell asleep there.

“ ‘ My poor little chicks,’ the letter began, ‘ I think you must have wondered why I did not go to Mount Holly with you. But if you did, you know the reason why now. I stayed behind only to do what I solemnly promised your dear mother I would do. She and I have had many long talks in the last few months, and she told me things that, for fear of breaking your hearts, she could never talk over with you. She made me promise that when the time came I would stay at home and make the parlor look as it used to look before she lost her health. She said to me, “ Lot, I can’t bear to think of the children coming home to this bleak room. Unless it is changed immediately, they will always associate my sickness with it. They may even grow to hate it and the house. And I want them to love the place where I have spent the happiest years of my life.” ’ ’ ’ ”

Ann stopped a moment. But she gathered herself together and went on.

“ ‘ And so the instant you had gone, I took Eliza and Ellen over, we went from cellar to attic picking out the things that used to be in the parlor and putting them back in their places. I knew them all and just where they belonged. I cannot tell you how much happier I felt when the room began to look like itself again. You know, for I have told you often enough, that I called on your mother the day after she came out to this house a bride and that we have been dear, dear friends ever since. I have spent some of the gayest hours of my life in that

room. Often in the last few months she has said to me, "Lot, I want you to tell them all the *funny* things that have happened. Ed and Beckie and Matt will remember some of them, Lainey a few, perhaps, but Ann and Roly won't recall any. And I want my two babies to know how happy my life with their father was." " "

At the word "babies," Ann's voice faltered, but she controlled it. Roland gulped too, but he followed Ann's example.

" " And indeed, funny things did happen. Your mother and I have laughed over them even in these last sad weeks. You see your mother and father were happy because they loved each other genuinely. And, oh, how they loved you! Your mother *wanted* all her children. That is the reason, I sometimes think, that you are so beautiful and happy and well. And, oh, she was always so proud of you. "I never had a homely baby," she used to say. And it was true; you were all lovely babies. And so well! All except Ed—and *he* was, just as soon as they discovered they were not giving him enough to eat. I know what kind of babies you were, for I helped to take care of all of you. Many a winter morning I've given Ed his bath in a little tin tub in front of the fire in the parlor. How he did splash! Your mother used to say she would rather wash an eel. Your mother was a beautiful woman in those days. She was the picture of health and she had such high spirits! She always ran upstairs; nobody could induce her to walk and she always sang when she was alone. One night we were playing whist in the parlor, your mother and father, old Professor Marshall and myself. Suddenly your mother ex-

cused herself and went upstairs and your Aunt Martha took her place. We heard the door open and shut several times, but nobody paid any attention to that. It was such a lively house in those days; company was always coming and going. But about midnight, down came old Nursey Simmons. She marched up to your father and said, "Mr. Ollivant, Mrs. Ollivant begs me to announce to you that at last you are the father of a little daughter." It was Beckie who broke up that whist-party. How old Professor Marshall used to laugh about it.' "

"Why, I never heard that story," exclaimed Beckie. And for the first time that day she smiled.

"Your mother was crazy with delight to have a girl after two boys. She was just as tickled when Lainey came. She used to worry, though, because Lainey was such a quiet child. "It doesn't seem natural for her to be so good," she said again and again. Heaven knows Ann and Roly made up for it when they came; they were so mischievous they had to be watched all the time. I've been going through my letters in the last two or three days. We used to be separated—your mother and I—in the summer; but she used to write me beautiful letters. She was one of those people who like to write letters and she told me just the things I wanted to know. I have a great many of them; they're almost like a diary. I came across all kinds of things inclosed in them: locks of hair (oh, Matt had such wonderful red curls; your mother cried when they cut them off), bits of lace that she had learned to do (she always made her baby clothes, herself), samples of dresses she was going to have (she was an awfully dressy

woman, you know). I inclose a picture that I don't believe you've ever seen. I had forgotten all about it myself.'"

Ann shook the letter. "Where is it?" she said. "Oh, I guess it's in the envelope. Oh, here it is." She pulled out a small photograph, a tall slender woman seated, a little girl standing beside her on a chair. "Ann at three years and ten months," was written underneath.

The Ollivants clustered about it. "Oh, isn't that sweet of mother!" Beckie exclaimed. "Mother was a pippin, all right!" Matt remarked. "What a quaint dress!" commented Lainey. "I remember that dress," said Ed. "It was green." "Wasn't I a cunning little girl?" Ann looked pleased and she laughed a little self-conscious laugh. "I never saw that picture. Don't I look cross, though?"

The Ollivants returned to their seats. Ann returned to the letter.

"I want to call your attention to the look on Ann's face. You see the photographer told her to watch the end of the camera to see the little bird fly out. They always told lies to children in order to keep them quiet; the exposure was longer in those days. But in Ann's case, the photographer overreached himself. Ann insisted on seeing the bird *first*. The photographer tried to take her mind off the bird by showing her other things. Your mother sang to her and told her stories. But it was no use. See that bird, she would. She got sulkier and sulkier. Finally, they had to take the picture with that little mad look on her face. Your mother was awfully disappointed. But afterwards she said she

liked it better that way because Ann was always so cunning when she was naughty.' ”

“ You *were* cunning then,” said Beckie, laughing. “ I remember perfectly. You were an awfully mischievous baby.”

“ ‘ Now,’ ” the letter concluded, “ ‘ if you will let me, I would like to come over to-night and have dinner with you. I have the dinner cooking here— a pair of chickens, some hot biscuits, jelly, piccalilly, cake, and a freezerful of ice-cream. Eliza and Ellen will bring the things over. And then, after dinner, we’ll sit together in the parlor and I’ll read your mother’s letters to you. I’ve hunted up all the pictures I have of the family and I’ll bring them over too. Perhaps you will prefer to stay alone, but I think you will want to do this when I tell you your dear mother planned it with me. When you are ready for me, lift the curtain and I’ll start over. Until then, good-by, my chicks.’ ”

“ Oh! ” said Ann in a soft, round voice, “ Oh! ” Her face sparkled like a dewdrop. The others sat, voiceless, moveless. But Lainey’s sunken wanness had begun to color and fire. The dazed perplexity was dying out of Roland’s eyes. Beckie and Matt stared hard at the fire as though a succession of pictures out of the happy past were painting themselves there. Ed alone showed no change. He arose and went over to the window.

And then, with his hand still on the raised curtain, Ed’s frozen rigidity broke. His head dropped into the crook of his elbow; his elbow went up against the wall: he shook.

For a moment not a sound stirred the stillness: the Ollivants stared terrified.

## The Home Coming

Then a log dropped, scattering spluttery rainbow spume. The kitten leaped to the floor in tinkling protest against this anarchy. The bell rang.

Ed lifted his head from his arm, hurried buoyantly to the door.



## CHAPTER II

### STANDING BY

“WELL, I found it,” Mrs. MacVeagh called from upstairs. “I spent the whole morning and the whole afternoon at it, and just as I was about to give up I happened on the peachiest proposition.”

“I hope you didn’t tire yourself out,” Ed Ollivant called back to her. “It’s pretty stiff work going about looking at apartments, Rita.”

“Oh no! I had the car, of course!” The voice was descending; it was accompanied by a brilliant feminine flutter on the stairway. “And there were elevators almost everywhere.” Rita had now crossed the hall to the doorway. Standing there, she swept a profound curtsy. This was one of her tricks when she wore an evening-gown. If she were in walking costume, her hand went to her hat in military salute. Now, arms outstretched, she held the pose for a moment. “Do I look tired?” she demanded.

Ed Ollivant’s eyes lingered for the whole of that moment on the drooping figure of which the slender bust, bare-armed, bare-necked, bare-shouldered, emerged from the center of a petal-like satin skirt and the oval face, pendent to a mass of bronzed-brown hair, almost touched one uplifted satin knee. “No, you don’t look tired, Rita,” he answered.

"You can't imagine what the places were like that the agent showed me. I never was so discouraged in my life. And then I ran into Myra Crosby and she told me about a place in the—where do you suppose?"

"Give it up," admitted Ed.

"The Channing Building," announced Rita triumphantly.

"The Channing Building," Ed repeated. He whistled.

"It's not anything like so expensive as you think. Now listen. It's only a part of an apartment, anyway. People by the name of Peyton rented the whole apartment. Then both their children went and got married on them. They had rafts of rooms they did not know what to do with; so they separated three from the bunch and are letting them. Of course their place is not connected in any way with yours—I mean that you have your own entrance. And you can get it for thirty-five dollars a month. They particularly wanted to rent it to a man."

Ed whistled again. "Lord, that sounds too good to be true. I'm afraid it'll go before I have a chance to see it."

"I was too foxy for that. I cinched it. They were going to be away to-day; but I said you'd come over to-morrow night to see it. It's exactly what you want. One big room for a living room, a bedroom, a kitchenette, and a bath. And a lovely view over the Fenway. Wait a moment! I drew a plan of it the moment I got home, so that I could plan where the furniture would go. It's upstairs." Rita flashed out of the room and fluttered bril-

liantly up the stairs. "If there is anything I love to do, it's to plan furnishings and things," she threw this over the banisters. "I did this house, you know," she called this from the second floor.

Sitting alone, Ed looked about him as though from a new point of view. The big room—it was all dull grays and Gobelin blues—was more solidly than artistically furnished. The broad-seated, cushioned couches, the wide-armed, cushioned chairs, the big tables heaped with books and magazines, the small tables that offered smokes and drinks, the low bookcases with their foreign litter, the few distinguished pictures; it not only had the masculine touch, it had all the ease of a man's club. But, in addition, it had its feminine aspect, bushy-headed golden chrysanthemums in tall opaque vases, long-stemmed violets in low transparent bowls, goldfish, that exactly matched the fruit of the dwarf orange-trees in the window-boxes, in a big bubble of glass on the piano, a tea-wagon which glittered and steamed that the butler had just wheeled in, a smoke-colored Angora kitten with a smashing orange bow who made dashes from time to time at inoffensive shadows. Everywhere was the repose of big unencumbered spaces and vistas, exquisite cleanliness, freshness, comfort, beauty—but above all warmth—luscious, voluptuous warmth. A fire crackled behind the glass screen which covered the big fireplace. But from some invisible source heated air, constantly freshened by the breeze from the open window and constantly laden with the perfume of the flowers, flowed in volumes upon him.

With a sudden gesture of impatience that seemed

to accent a sudden reminiscent scowl on his face, Ed seized a cigarette, lighted it.

"It took me some time to find it!" This came from upstairs. Again came the brilliant feminine flutter on the stairway, accompanied by the clear lightness of Rita's voice. "The wallpapers are simply stunning, by the way." Rita dashed into the room, papers and pencil in one hand, another Angora kitten, orange-colored and with a smashing blue bow, over the other arm. "This is the way I doped it out." Lustrous, apricot-colored gown, sparkling slipper-tips, slim, gleamy shoulders, delicate odor of violets, she deposited herself beside him on the couch. Her big, white hands—she wore rings of diamonds and emeralds—made a swift, vivid panic among the papers. "There, this is the living-room. My idea is awfully *simple* furnishings, but awfully *manny*. Low bookcases like mine built in on each side of the fireplace and a big couch pulled up in front of it—oh, a couch as big as this—you'll have to have that made to order, but it's the only expensive thing. A desk, a table, two or three chairs—I'd get those hour-glass East Indian ones—they're cheap but they have plenty of class. For the bedroom, double white-iron beds in case you want to entertain a guest. In an emergency, you can use the big couch in the living-room. Didn't you tell me you had a chiffonier?"

"Yes," answered Ed, "curly maple."

"You'll need a big, wide dresser. We can easily match it. And a chair or two. Oh, I meant to ask you! Have you anything else of your own? I mean your share of your mother's furniture. Was there, for instance, any nice old mahogany?"

Rita was bending over the paper. Ed was bending over her. He stirred as though uneasily. Before he replied, he blew a volley of smoke-rings over his hostess's head. "Well, of course, I suppose there is a share of the household furniture coming to me if I wanted to claim it. And some of it is awfully good. I mean there's one beautiful desk and some portraits. But I wouldn't like to take any of it away. It puts it up to the rest of the family to replace it. And at the same time, I'd rather like to have some new, up-to-date modern stuff. Lord, you don't know how I long for the conveniences of life."

"Oh yes, I do. I know exactly how you long for them. I was brought up in a family mausoleum in West Roxbury, furnished in the black walnut and hair-cloth period. There wasn't a door in that house smaller than a half-acre, or a window lower than Bunker Hill Monument, and you could only see the ceilings with the aid of an opera-glass. We had to hire a derrick to move the furniture. It was furnished with every mortuary hideosity of the home, including waxed funeral wreaths. The atmosphere was almost as cheerful as a receiving-tomb. Maybe I didn't yearn for new, modern things. When I married Big Chief and he handed me the largest check I ever saw and said, 'Go as far as you like, Chicken,' I all but took the first train out to Grand Rapids. Maybe I didn't make a hole in that check. But, of course, it didn't take me long to realize that antiques are the smart thing now. I'm going to refurnish entirely in Jacobean another year. By the way, have you told your sisters that you are going to leave yet?"

Ed stirred again. And again, before he spoke, he sent a volley of smoke-rings over his hostess's head. "No, I thought I wouldn't until the thing was settled. You see——"

"Oh, I got this furniture catalogue from Daintry while I was downtown," Rita interrupted. "I thought you could look it over to-day. Do you suppose they'll feel very bad about it?"

"Well—of course—I suppose they—at least, it would be only natural——" Ed was not stammering. He was only starting up successive squirrel tracks, translating his own ideas to himself. "But it isn't as if it was going to make any difference financially," he went on, beginning again. He was voluble enough now and he was addressing Rita. "I'll send Beckie a check every week. And you see three of them are independent: Beckie and Matt and Lainey."

"Lainey's the teacher, isn't she?" Rita asked. "What's her real name?"

"Elaine. My mother was very romantic. She took it out on every other child. Rebecca, Matthew, and Ann are all family names, but she named Elaine after Tennyson's poems, and Roland after—search me—Byron, I guess. And me—Lord, how ashamed I used to be of it—after Ravenswood. My real name's Edgar. And many's the fellow's block I've knocked off for calling me it. Yes. Lainey's been teaching about two months."

"Is she pretty?"

"I don't know. I never thought of it."

"Blonde or brunette?"

"Blonde, I should say," Ed answered after an interval of wrinkled concentration. "Lainey's a

strange girl. I don't understand her." Ed's calm broke into an interval of sheer perplexity. "She's quiet and serious—very absent-minded—I suppose you'd call her dreamy. She studies all the time—reads Plato and Browning, and high-brow stuff like that. She's the easiest one in the family to manage six days out of the seven—then, suddenly you'll strike an obstinate streak and nothing can move her—I don't understand her."

"The two younger ones are in High School, aren't they?" Rita went on.

"Yes," said Ed.

"Len Lorrimer pointed Ann out to me on the street the other day," said Rita. "She's awfully pretty, isn't she?"

"Yes," Ed admitted reluctantly, "but she's awfully hard to manage. She's one of those girls who want everything she sees. She's smart though—smart as a whip—makes her own clothes, trims her own hats, and mixes the finest salad dressing I ever tasted." Ed conceded these facts with pride.

"I'm glad," Rita said, "that you've noticed how pretty she is, for others will notice it soon enough, let me tell you. Len Lorrimer got it all right. She's pretty enough to *eat*. And perhaps you'll be interested to know she's a brunette. That way she does her hair is awfully picturesque. I tried it after I got home, but it was very unbecoming. What's the other sister like? What does she do?"

"She's in a dentist's office," Ed answered. "She seems to be secretary——"

"Is she pretty?"

"Not exactly," Ed answered. "But Beckie is very——" He paused and did not finish. A film-

ing stiffness came into his tone, a shadowing hardness into his face. It was as though he began to chafe at these interrogatories.

Mrs. MacVeagh changed the subject immediately. "There, this is the kind of desk I want you to get. It's a standard pattern; but it's big and simple and convenient without suggesting a roll-top. You can go to-morrow evening to look at the apartment, can't you?"

"Yes."

"And I think you'd better tell your sisters pretty soon now."

"Yes, I will," said Ed.

"Where are you going, Ed?" Beckie asked the next night. Freshly-shaven, very elegant in his correct evening-clothes, very handsome in his regular blonde featurings, Ed had just descended from his eyrie chamber.

"Out," Ed answered briefly. Beckie always asked Ed where he was going and Ed always answered, "Out." In fact, Beckie never waited for the answer. Lainey and Ann would never have presumed to ask.

"There's something I want to talk to you about." Beckie lowered her voice, looked about her. "I don't want anybody to hear us. The boys are upstairs and the girls are doing the dishes. Come into the parlor."

Ed followed Beckie. The big, front room was dusty and neglected-looking. There was no fire in the fireplace. The furnace fire had gone out in the afternoon. Matt had rebuilt it, but the house still held the cold in corners—an icy, hollow, paralyzing



cold. The girls had worn blazers to the table, the boys sweaters. They had eaten with silver that chilled their hands and from plates that might have been disks of ice. Ed fastened his gray-silk muffler about his neck, seated himself in one of the straight-backed chairs, his hat and stick in one gloved hand.

Beckie took the couch. "You look stunning, Ed," she said admiringly; "just like a picture in a book." Beckie looked far from "stunning." She was the least attractive of the handsome Ollivant orphans. She had pulled the yellow-and-brown worsted afghan about her shoulders; its woolly tatters offered no mitigation to the tired creases in her dark, high-cheekboned face. Her serge office dress, worn and ready-made, offered no mitigation to the straight lines of her square, flat-chested figure. "It's about Roly," she went on as her brother frowned her compliment to oblivion. "I think he's playing truant right along."

"What makes you think so?" Ed asked.

"Sh—sh—sh!" exclaimed Beckie. "I don't want the girls to hear."

The folding-doors which separated the parlor from the living-room were open. Lainey and Ann had come in from the kitchen for the dessert-dishes.

"—the dance the Tuesday afternoon girls are giving, and so this morning her aunt went to Boston and got her another dress." This was Ann's round note. "Edwina showed it to me this afternoon. Oh, Lainey, it's a darling and so smart. That makes *four* evening-dresses that Edwina Allen has. Oh, I feel so poverty-stricken and so out of it. I'm ashamed to wear that old plaid dress again. Sometimes I think I'd do almost anything for some of

the pretty things I've always wanted. I'm sure I'd steal if I could be certain I wouldn't be found out." Ann's discontent rasped in her voice.

"But, Ann," this was Lainey's soft, clear accent, "what do you care when everybody says you're the prettiest girl in Brookline?"

"Well, of course, I'm not pretty," Ann protested. "My mouth is too big and there's something about the left side of my profile that I positively *hate*. But supposing I *was* pretty, then it seems to me I have all the more right to some pretty clothes once in a while."

"You're the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life," said Lainey, her flute-like tones filling to a volume as robust as her conviction. "Your eyes are like melted gold, and your complexion—— You're so pretty it doesn't make a particle of difference what you wear. Edwina Allen never saw the day she could compare with you. And no matter how shabby your clothes are, they always look different from other girls'. You know how to wear them."

The kitchen door cut off the tail of this discussion.

Beckie tiptoed to the folding-doors and drew them softly together. "Two days ago," she began, turning, "Miss Black in the office took her lunch-hour early. When she got back, she told me she'd met Roly—she knows him by sight, because he's come into the office once in a while. I thought it was mighty queer Roly's being on Washington Street at twelve o'clock. English High doesn't let out until two. Well, when I came to question her, she wasn't quite sure it was Roly; and so I let the whole thing slip my mind. But to-day, as I was standing in the

window, I saw Roly go by on the other side of the street with two boys. That Dink Hardy was one of them. I didn't know who the other one was. Well, it wasn't a holiday because, if it was, Ann would have had one. I haven't said anything to him yet, because I thought you'd better. He'd pay some attention to you."

"All right," said Ed, rising with an obvious impatience to get off. "I'll talk to him to-morrow morning. But don't worry about this, Beck. All boys hook jack, you know."

"Oh yes," Beckie replied, "I know that. I used to play hookey myself. It doesn't worry me any. Only if he's going to do it right along, he might just as well leave school and go to work. It does seem so queer—neither Roly nor Ann take the least interest in their studies. Ann's teacher sent her home the other day because she refused to write a composition on 'The Soliloquy of an Umbrella.' Ann says she can't write—not to save her life. Oh, I'm so glad you're here to cope with this. I couldn't. Good-night, Ed."

"Oh, this is great, Rita," Ed was saying an hour later. "This big living-room gets my game. It's a corker. And those wide windows looking off on-to that view. And the window-seats and the parquet floors and the papers and the paint—and that fireplace. I feel like a grand duke. I can give some pretty classy little parties up here. You've got to chaperon them all, you know, Rita."

"Sure," laughed Rita. "That's my graft. I'm going to run this joint. I've planned a house-warming that will be the prettiest party you ever saw. I

tell you what. Just as soon as it gets warm enough we can use the roof. Let's give a tango party up there. Want to see it?"

"Crazy to," smiled Ed. He followed her out into the hall and up a narrow stairway. Another moment and they were leaning against the coping, gazing alternately up at the sky and down on the world. Above the stars lay fine and thick, like piles of silver seeds. Below the city lamps grew large and lush, like strange tropical flowers.

"The automobiles look like beetles, don't they?" Rita commented. "See how fast that limousine is going. Oh, that reminds me. You'd better warn that brother of yours—not the kid—the red-headed one——"

"Matt," Ed suggested.

"That's the one—he's awfully good-looking, isn't he? What does he do?"

"He's with the Chapman Automobile Company, salesman," Ed answered. "What were you going to say about him?"

"That he'll be arrested for speeding if he doesn't look out. We met him last night in Newton—Len Lorrimer and myself. I didn't know him, of course, but Len did. They were going at a great clip. Newton's full of traps, you know."

Ed frowned. "If I've warned him once, I've warned him a dozen times. He runs with a man named Walton who has never yet recognized the existence of the speed laws. He'll lose his license if he isn't careful. I'll talk to Matt to-night."

"How do you like Len Lorrimer?" asked Rita idly. She gave a quick side-glance at her companion's face; her glance held a tinge of mischief.

"Not at all," Ed answered briefly.

"Don't you?" Rita flashed a second side-glance; this one held a tinge of complacency. "I think he's great fun."

Ed made no comment.

"What kind of a boy is your younger brother?" Rita asked. "Roland?"

"Just kid," Ed answered briefly. "Always wearing my ties and thinking I don't know it."

"Then you're not disappointed in this place?" Rita went on.

"Disappointed!" Ed exclaimed. "I feel as if it were the beginning of something I'd never known before. It's awfully tough on a man to have to live with his family, you know. As long as mother was alive, I considered that it was up to me to stay. But of course I've never been able to entertain at all, or to do anything I wanted. They wouldn't mix with my friends any more than I'd mix with theirs. You always feel as if you ought to tell them where you're going every time you leave the house. Not that I ever do. That is, mother had given up asking me. But, at the same time, you——"

"Oh, don't apologize," Rita said. "I understand perfectly. When I tell you that my mother was president of a woman's club, that one sister was an anti-suffragist and the other an anti-vivisectionist, perhaps you get the dope on my home atmosphere. I had too many red corpuscles in me for that high-brow atmosphere. I had about made up my mind that I'd quit, even if I had to earn my own living. Then Big Chief came along and rescued me. Oh, by the way," she turned her face up to his as she pulled the collar of her leopard-coat closer about

her throat; her shining head—to-night she wore her hair banded close—lifted like a seal's from water, "have you told your sisters yet?"

"Not yet," Ed said. "I forgot it last night."

"I think you'd better tell them." Rita smiled. Her white teeth made a brilliant sally into the shadowed softness of her face. "They may change their plans a little if they know you're not going to be with them."

When Ed let himself into the house that night, the light was still burning in the parlor.

"Oh, Ed!" Beckie exclaimed, starting up. "Thank heavens, you've come!"

"What's up?" Ed asked. "What's the matter with you, Ann?"

Ann, lying face downward on the couch, was torn by spasms of weeping. She sobbed aloud. And Lainey, seated near, the tears standing in great drops at the tips of her long lashes, panted and quivered in sympathy.

"Matt's been arrested for speeding," Beckie explained. "He telephoned from the police-station for you to come down and bail him out. That was at ten. We've been waiting here for you ever since."

"The damn fool!" said Ed. "The damn——" And suddenly Ed's smooth brow corrugated with fury. "Everybody has told him that he'd get pinched. I've warned him a dozen times myself. Where's Walton?"

"Out of town—Matt didn't know where. He was afraid to call up the Walton house because Dave had lent him his car without telling his folks.

Do hurry down there, Ed. He didn't happen to have any money with him. He hasn't had any dinner yet."

"And he won't get any breakfast either," said Ed. "At least not until late to-morrow morning. I'm not going to bail him out to-night. Why, he told me only last week that that park policeman—the fat, good-natured one—had stopped him twice and told him he'd pinch him unless he cut it out. I'm glad they jugged him. It will be a good lesson to him. One night in a cell with a fine of ten dollars in the morning will take the speed out of him quicker than anything I know."

"Oh, Ed," Ann broke into another volley of sobs, "how can you treat him so? I cannot bear to think of Matt in a little narrow, smelly cell. And such a hard bed. And oh, what a terrible disgrace. It will be in all the papers, 'Items about Boston.'"

Even Ed's brow relaxed. "Speeding is not a hanging matter, Ann. People are received in the best society even after a third offense."

"Ed, I think you're just too mean for words," Lainey said, the flash in her eyes dissipating the dew on their lashes. "If I only knew anybody who would bail him out, I'd appeal to him even at this hour."

"I'm very glad you don't, Lainey," Ed said grimly, "because I'm determined to give the sport of the family the lesson of his young life."

"But don't you think you're rather hard on him, Ed?" Beckie said placatingly. "He's been there four hours now. We telephoned everywhere for you, Ed. Where were you?"

"Calling," Ed answered tersely.

"And four hours ought to take all the spunk out of him." Beckie stopped and consulted her brother's face. Apparently she gathered no hope from what she saw there; for she said in a resigned tone, "Come to bed, girls. It's no use trying to argue with Ed when he looks like that. Besides, I must be up by six to get breakfast. I'm tired as a dog."

Beckie looked tired. The hollows under her bright dark eyes were so deep they might have been gouged out. All the lines of her face sagged in harmony with the droop of her shoulders.

The three girls followed their brother upstairs. "I shan't close my eyes to-night," whimpered Ann. "I shall keep seeing poor Matt in prison stripes with his face pressed against the bars of his cell."

"Well, I shan't sleep either, but it's because I'm so mad," sputtered Lainey.

"I don't know but what you're right, Ed," Beckie said after the girls' door had slammed shut. "It will be a lesson to him. I'm so glad you came home to-night. I was so worried—I don't know what I would have done without you. I do hope the girls get some sleep, but I'm afraid they won't. I'm so tired—I could sleep standing up."

But, in point of fact, Ann fell immediately into the soft thick kitten-like slumber which she could command at any time. Lainey followed her, almost as quickly, into a dreamland as light and clear and gay as the fairy country of her childhood. Ed tossed and turned for a protracted fifteen minutes and then, after a muttered curse or two, dropped into that well of oblivion to which ordinarily his closed eyes immediately admitted him. But Beckie.



after lying silent and moveless for three or four hours, arose. Seating herself at the window, she watched until the sunrise began to gild the little Place with scanty winter gold.

"I'm glad you decided the way you did," Rita said, three or four days later as they sped in her limousine up Boylston Street. "Of course, the other desk would have *done*. At the same time, I don't think you ever would have been satisfied with it after seeing the more expensive one. There's no economy in buying a thing you don't want. My poor relations have houses filled with lemons that I've bought when I had an economy bug. Now I always get the thing I want—and do the economizing afterwards."

"Oh yes, there was nothing to it," agreed Ed. "After I saw that mahogany one, it was all off with the oak."

"I think we've been doing pretty well with this shopping," Rita went on, "considering that we've only had your lunch-hour."

"I should say we had," said Ed with conviction, "but of course it's all you. I never could have done it so well without your help. I never can repay you."

"How about all those free eats you've been giving me?" said Rita. "Anyway, you don't have to repay me. I've loved every moment of it. Have you told your sisters yet?" she asked after a pause.

"No, I haven't," admitted Ed.

"I really think you ought to tell them," said Rita.

"I suppose I should have," said Ed slowly, "but I don't want to take any definite step until every-

thing is fixed up. For if there *was* any hitch, it would be just as well——”

“But what hitch could there be——” A rising note of alarm reached a crescendo on Rita’s last word. “You’re going to sign the lease for the apartment to-morrow noon.”

“None that I can see,” answered Ed. “I’ll tell them to-night.”

“No more shopping this noon,” decided Rita, “or you won’t get back at two. Just time for a little spin in the Fenway.” She snuggled back into her opulent sables. “Isn’t it a beautiful day? And isn’t it great to be young? Somehow I feel so gay.” She turned her eyes up to Ed’s. “Ed, do you know you’re a good-looking thing? And just think you’re going to have rooms of your own.”

Ed turned, gazed at his companion. Rita was physically brilliant, but she was a cold type. She was like a light which gives illumination without heat. Now an extraordinary animation—an animation pointed by triumph—gave her a misleading effect of warmth. Her ivory cheeks glowed, her hazel-yellow eyes glistened, her bronze-brown hair glittered; it seemed almost to crackle. The wind whipped her lips to a brilliant crimson. “You’re something of a looker yourself, Rita,” Ed said. “I can gaze at you without straining my eye muscles *any*. Yes,” he added, as though her look held some voiceless question, “I’ll tell them at dinner.”

“Where’s Ann?” Ed asked that night when he seated himself at the table.

“Why, I don’t know,” Beckie answered. “She went into Boston to do some errands for me.”

can't guess what could keep her as late as this." Beckie articulated with difficulty; she was hoarse.

"Where'd you get that cold, Beckie?" Ed asked.

"Oh, the other night," Beckie said evasively.

"Well, now that we're all together," Ed began in an awkward voice, "I want to tell you that to-day I——"

"Oh!" Lainey exclaimed, as though Ed's words had hit an unexpected mark in her own thoughts, "that reminds me I bought something to-day." Lainey was obviously happy over her purchase. "What do you suppose it was?"

"What was it?" Beckie asked.

"A man came round to all the teachers in the school," Lainey began in her preoccupied, circumlocutionary way, "selling the most remarkable bargains in books on the instalment plan. They're beautifully illustrated; but as they're in paper covers, they only cost fifty cents apiece. The man pointed out that you could get them bound for a song. I engaged to take three a month." Lainey's eyes overflowed with that blue light which in moments of enthusiasm rescued them from oblivion.

"How many volumes are there?" asked Roland.

"Forty-five," Lainey answered, with the triumph of those who bargain well.

"Forty-five!" exclaimed Matt. It was the first sign of real vivacity from the chastened Matt who had emerged from a prison cell.

"Forty-five!" croaked Beckie. "Why it will take fifteen months to pay for them."

"Yes; but I shan't notice it," said Lainey sweetly.

"The man said I wouldn't."

"Whose works are they?" Ed asked.

"Longfellow's," answered Lainey triumphantly.

"Longfellow in forty-five volumes!" exclaimed Ed. "Oh, my God!"

"Oh, Lainey dear!" said Beckie in a misery that pierced her hoarseness. "Forty-five volumes at fifty cents. That's nearly twenty-three dollars. Why did you do it? Why didn't you wait and ask our advice."

"Well, I thought of doing that," Lainey explained, "but the man seemed to want me to decide right away. And then he was so awfully nice. He went to the greatest trouble to explain it all out. And after he talked for a half an hour, I sort of felt obliged—I can really give you no idea how accommodating he was. He seemed to think it would help me so much in my teaching. He said that he had set in his own home and his children simply would not read anything else."

Ed groaned. "Lainey," he said, "you've gone against a game that you'll be up against for the rest of your life. Business men are visited every hour of the day by agents who want to sell them anything from a corkscrew to an aeroplane. Teachers, in especial, are their marks because you're the easiest people in the world. Now probably those books are illustrated from plates left over from some edition of Longfellow brought out before the war. And think of having forty-five volumes of any one poet! At that rate, you'd have to hire Mechanics' Hall for your library. You'll be stung every week if you don't look out. The only thing for a person as dopey as you to do is simply to refuse to talk to the agents. Once you begin to listen——"

This, at six forty-five, was the beginning of a long harangue of advice. It was interrupted by the entrance of Ann at seven.

"What makes you so late, Ann?" Beckie demanded in a peremptory accent. Perhaps Beckie wanted to draw attention from Lainey's crushed condition.

"I've had the loveliest time." Ann was excited. She was all light and warmth. Her great eyes were blazing golden moons. Her round cheeks were burning rose velvet. Everything else about her shone or shimmered. Her very teeth, between the full scarlet of her lips, made a soft flash like silver. "No, don't help me to any stew, Ed. I couldn't eat a *thing*. What do you think—I've been out to tea. At the Plaza. Oh, wasn't it pretty. Such smart clothes. And such *pippins* of girls! Lainey, there was a girl there who wore a green broadcloth, trimmed with moleskin, that was the loveliest thing I ever—And a lot of Harvard men at a table in the corner. Wasn't it a shame that I didn't have on my other hat! But I went into the Ladies' Room and fixed up my hair. Oh, such a lovely place—they had all kinds of cosmetics there. One girl made her face up right before my eyes and another was smoking a cigarette—I saw it hidden behind her hand."

"But who took you?" asked Beckie.

"Len Lorrimer," said Ann, "and, oh, he was just perfectly lovely to——"

"Len Lorrimer!" Ed exclaimed electrically. "What do you mean, Ann?"

"Why!" Ann exclaimed. "Why—why—what do I *mean*? I don't know what *you* mean. I met

Mr. Lorrimer on Boylston Street and he asked me to go to tea and I went."

"You went to tea with Len Lorrimer?" Ed arraigned her sternly. "Don't you know he's a married man?"

"Why, yes," said Ann. "Of course I do. Everybody knows it. But he's separated from his wife and everybody knows that too."

"But he's not divorced from her," said Ed, "and he never will be. He can't get a divorce. He knows, as everybody knows—Don't let me ever hear of your going anywhere with him again."

Ann tossed her head. "I don't see why I shouldn't," she said rebelliously. "He's been separated from her so long nobody looks upon him as married."

"Nevertheless," Ed ordered crisply, "he *is* married. Don't let me hear of you going anywhere with him again."

The gaiety melted out of Ann's face, taking the light with it. It hardened as it darkened. "He invited me to go to the matinée with him next week. Now why shouldn't I go? I want to."

"Simply because," Ed said in a tone iron with command, "unmarried people can't go about with married people without making talk."

"Well, then," Ann flashed triumphantly, "how about you and Mrs. MacVeagh? I saw you coming out of the Touraine with her once during the tea hour. And I don't know how many times Laine and I have seen you riding alone with her in the automobile. If it's all right for you to go place alone with Mrs. MacVeagh, why isn't it all right for me to go alone with Mr. Lorrimer?"

A brickish-red flush rose slowly over Ed's smooth face; it flowed turgidly under his golden hair. But he held Ann with the steady gaze of his frigid blue eyes. "That's quite a different matter, Ann," he said. "In the first place, I am quite as much Mr. MacVeagh's, as Mrs. MacVeagh's, friend. It would be impossible for me to compromise Mrs. MacVeagh; it would be presumption for me to think so. Her social position is absolutely established; her character above reproach. I am only one of half a dozen men to whom she is equally hospitable. She has absolutely nothing to lose by accepting my escort when her husband is away; and I have a great deal to gain. Lorrimer, on the other hand, is the kind of man I don't want my sister to be seen with. He will lose nothing, of course, by taking you about; but it will hurt you with everybody who knows him. If it is necessary, Ann, I will tell you everything I know about Lorrimer. But you won't want to discuss the subject very long."

"Still," Lainey broke in stormily, "after all the *principle* is the same. And you wouldn't let Ann go about with Len Lorrimer, even if his wife liked it. I cannot see that it is any more right for you than for her."

Of all the Ollivants, Lainey seemed superficially the most silent, colorless, and uncharacterized. But she had the knack of asking perturbing questions. Ed, for instance, was often nonplused by her queries. Now a look—obviously it was bafflement—came into his face. "It all depends on circumstances, Lainey," he said. "And these two cases could never be parallel."

But Ed did not bring up the matter of leaving the family roof during dinner. Perhaps he did not wish to introduce the name of MacVeagh into the conversation again. After dinner, Matt and Roland disappeared in the direction of their various interests. Lainey and Ann received Edwina Allen and Dottie Franklin; the quartette vanished behind the closed doors of their bedroom. Nothing came from their direction but giggles. Beckie built a fire in the parlor, seated herself on the couch there. She drew the big darning-basket to her side, gave the kitten an empty spool to play with, and fell to work. Her cold bothered her; she did not seem inclined to talk. Ed wandered from the living-room to the dining-room, from the dining-room to the kitchen, from the kitchen to the living-room again, his head bent, his brow moody with wrinkles.

Once, "Oh, Ed," Beckie croaked, "what would I have done about Ann if you hadn't been here? She's so headstrong, I can't make her toe the mark. And I hate that Len Lorrimer; he's a snake in the grass."

A deep silence followed. Ed resumed his lonely pacing.

Suddenly he dashed out of the house. At a run he made for the drug-store on the corner, panted into the telephone box. "Give me Back Bay 8786," he said: and at the end of an interval in which he stared frigidly into space, "Is this you, Rita? Say Rita, I've called you up to tell you it's all off about the apartment—Yes, I know, but it can't be helped—Yes, I understand, but it's impossible—Yes you're perfectly right, but it's out of the question—Yes, that's true, but it can't be done—Yes, I get al



that, but I can dispose of it in some way—All right, I'll explain when I see you."

Ed sauntered leisurely back to the house, let himself leisurely in. Beckie's darning still absorbed her. After an interval, she turned to her basket, fumbled a moment among its mending miscellanies. A letter eddied up from among the spools and darning-cotton, came to the surface of the stockings.

"Why!" Ed exclaimed, "that's Aunt Margaret's handwriting, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Beckie. She dropped her eyes and, as though involuntarily, pushed the letter under the stockings.

"Why, I didn't know you'd heard from her," Ed said in a surprised tone. "What's she got to say?"

"Nothing." Even with her hoarseness, it was to be seen that Beckie's manner was offhand.

"Well—can I read it?" Ed's tone was a little nonplused.

"Oh, there's nothing in it, I—I——" Beckie was stammering—quick, curt, decisive Beckie. "It wouldn't interest you."

"Beckie, what's the answer to all this?" Ed demanded. "Don't you want me to see that letter?"

For answer, Beckie held it out to him. He pulled a closely-written sheet out of the envelope:

**MY DEAR NIECE:**

Your dear mother has been dead for three months now and I think the family must be in good running order by this time. Perhaps what I am going to say in this letter may sound premature; but as I must say it sooner or later, I

might just as well say it now. You know that you were named after my mother; and you also know, for I have told you often enough, that you are my favorite niece. Of course we have all known for several years that your mother's days were numbered. I made up my mind some years ago that when the time came, I would ask you to come and live with me. I am often very lonely and I should like your companionship very much. In that case, I should discharge Matty, but although you and I would do the housework together, I should insist upon paying you what I pay her—eight dollars a week. I am sure that is more than your present salary—minus your contribution to the household expenses—amounts to. And of course, when I die, my little house and what I have in the bank will go to you. If however, you cannot see your way clear to accept this offer I shall make no changes in my present will, which divides my money equally among my living relatives. Please let me know as soon as possible what your decision is.

Your affectionate aunt,

MARGARET FOSTER.

“Good Lord, Beckie!” exclaimed Ed, “when did you get this? November eighteen. Last Monday. You must say *yes* to that, Beckie. It's a great opportunity. When are you going to answer it?”

“I *have* answered it,” said Beckie. “I refused.” She resumed her tranquil darning.

“Beckie,” Ed broke the silence after a long while, “what made you refuse?”

“Because I wouldn't leave you alone with all this responsibility, Ed,” said Beckie.

Ed mused an instant, his frigid gaze on the distance. “Well, Beckie,” he said at last, “you can be sure of one thing. I'll never leave you.”

## CHAPTER III

### ANN TAKES CHARGE

“IF there’s anything in this world that I hate, it’s housework. There isn’t one single thing about it that I like—except ironing pretty things and making desserts and salads. Washing I detest, sweeping I despise, dusting I abominate, doing dishes I loathe, and as for getting up as early as this I—Just as soon as I’m twenty-one, I’m going on the stage. I think I’d like to go into musical comedy. I can sing a little and I pick up dancing-steps just as *easy*. I know as well as I know my name I’m not domestic. I’ve altogether too much *temperament*. Len Lorrimer told me that the day I went out to tea with him. I just hate the kind of life I lead here.”

This was the end of a long matutinal harangue from Ann. Now she stopped an instant, but it was obviously only to catch her breath. She sat in one of the kitchen chairs, tilted back against the wall, her big hands clasped behind her head, one foot under her, and the other swinging a shabby buckled shoe from its tip. She wore a little kimono of dimity, delicately-figured and lace-edged, a boudoir cap of a coarse-meshed imitation Cluny trimmed with pink ribbons. The kimono showed a V of velvet neck; the cap unloosed great, rich scallops of shining hair. Her snowy arms came out of her wide

sleeves, round with a girl's soft shapeliness, yet potential somehow of a boy's muscular strength. A flush, deeper than her normal rose-pink, hung heavy behind her skin. Her big eyes threw sparks that were not entirely the effect of the light on her golden irises.

It was cheerless within and without. The fire had begun to crackle, but the little kitchen had not warmed up yet. The frosty window-panes gave fore-shortened, wabbly glimpses of a back yard swathed in snow and dotted with shapeless bushes. Last night's dishes were heaped in the sink. A big pot of something green and odorous was beginning to stew on the stove. Lines of high, green glass jars stood on the table. Beckie—a long-sleeved apron concealing all but the hem of her blue-serge dress—pattered from sink to stove and from stove to table. Lainey stood irresolutely about, managing only in every effort to efface herself, to get in somebody's way.

"I can't think who could have been such an idiot as to put in so much salt," Lainey remarked, obviously turning the subject.

"It must have been you, Ann," said Beckie, without turning. "I salted it once myself and I salted it according to rule."

"I didn't," Ann contradicted her sister instantly. Beckie's back became rigid. "You must have," she said in a stony voice.

"I know I didn't," Ann asseverated.

"Probably I did it," Lainey said with obvious pacific intent; "you know what an idiot I am."

"*You!*" said Ann contemptuously, "as if we'd let you go near anything that was cooking. I don't

care who did it; I know I didn't. And whoever it was," she cast a defiant glance at Beckie's granite profile, "I don't thank her for it. Having to get up at five o'clock in the morning to boil piccalilli over—on Saturday morning, too, when I ought to be allowed to sleep late."

She paused and gazed at Beckie's back. That back was moveless, although Beckie's hand moved swiftly, stirring the pot. Beckie did not speak.

"It's out of the question," Ann went on, "our trying to have such things—jellies and preserves and piccalilli and chili sauce. It's altogether too hard work and it all falls on us girls. And who eats them? The boys! Faster almost than we can make them. And would they lift a finger to help us? Not in a hundred years."

Again she defied Beckie's unyielding back. Beckie's hand had stopped stirring. She was so still, she seemed not even to breathe.

"As for me," Ann continued, "I'd rather go without than work like this to have them. I——"

"Lainey," Beckie interrupted suddenly, "open the door!" Her voice was without expression, but her words came like stones hurled from a sling.

Lainey obeyed her.

Beckie lifted the big kettle from the stove, staggered with it across the kitchen, through the woodshed to the yard. The two girls froze where they stood, watching her in a growing panic. Beckie struck the cover from the garbage-pail, lifted the kettle, poured the contents into it. "When you want any more piccalilli," she said, returning, "make it yourself." She marched into the dining-room, seated herself by the fire, took up the morning paper.

For a moment, Lainey and Ann stared at each other terrified. Then, moving on tiptoe and handling pots and pans as though they were muffled in cotton-wool, they began noiselessly and speechlessly to prepare breakfast. They halved oranges, cooked oatmeal, fried eggs and bacon; but during the process they did not speak a word.

Ed was the first of the brothers to appear. Handsome, elegant, immaculate, he might have come from the hands of a valet. "I wish one of you girls would darn my stockings," he began. "I put on the only whole pair I had left last night."

"Oh, Ed," Lainey said remorsefully, helping Ann to bring in the breakfast. "That's too bad. We've been so busy lately with the picca——" She cut this word off with a frightened snap of her jaw and an involuntary glance of terror in Beckie's direction. "Ann and I will darn them all to-night."

"Also I wish you'd go through my underwear," Ed continued, "and put the buttons on. As a button-remover, that laundry is a wonder."

The four Ollivants drew up to the table. Ed took up the paper that Beckie threw down. They ate their fruit in silence.

"Talk about crab-apples. I should call these crab-oranges, from the size," Ed remarked.

Nobody answered.

"Ah, the familiar burnt taste!" he continued, tasting the oatmeal to which Lainey helped him. "Why do you girls bother to cook any oatmeal if you can't cook it right?"

Again nobody answered.

"Kindly help me to one of those ossified eggs."

Ed seemed to enjoy this jocose vein. "I should think they had been cooked in a fireless cooker."

Still nobody answered.

"Not very long on conversation this morning, are you?" Ed added with the tact of brothers.

For the fourth time nobody answered.

"Then silence like a poultice came," Ed was beginning, when, "Hello, Matt, been pulled lately?" he interrupted himself to greet his brother.

"No," Matt answered lightly, "Wednesday is my day for getting pinched." Matt had arisen in his customary spirits. The thatch of his red hair glittered like a sun and the blue of his eyes shone like a sea; he whistled as he helped himself to the glazed bacon and the petrified eggs. He took up the paper when Ed rejected it, turned at once to the comic section, began to laugh at the first picture, nearly rolled out of his seat before he finished the series.

"Matt," Ann began in exasperation, "how can you laugh like that so early in the morning——"

"Oh, say, girls," Matt exclaimed, ignoring Ann, "I met Lory Mack on the street yesterday. He's in town from Worcester. Can I invite him here to spend Sunday with me?"

Beckie came suddenly to life. "No!" she exploded, "you can't. I'm tired enough working all the week long for this ungrateful family without slaving all day Sunday for strangers."

"All right," said Matt equably. "You don't have to get red-headed about it. I do wish I had some place I could take a fellow to," he added impatiently. "Well, we'll have to go off somewhere together." He returned light-heartedly to his pa-

per; in another instant he was writhing with delight over the drawing of a comic-section dog.

Presently Beckie arose, jerked on her little square, squat, unbecoming jacket, her little round, flat, unbecoming hat, said nothing, and vanished. Ed arose, drew leisurely onto his tall, muscular, graceful figure his smart ulster and his correct hat, dropped a careless "Good-by, sisters!" and disappeared. Matt arose, telescoped his jaunty body with a large-checked raglan, tossed his plush Alpine hat into the air, caught it dexterously on his head, called, "Or revolver, girls," and departed, whistling. Lainey arose, pulled herself into her baggy, mangy fur coat and her stiff felt hat.

"I'll be back from that meeting just as soon as I can, Ann," she said, her voice still low and her eyes still frightened. "It was mean of them to put it on Saturday morning—I don't care if Monday is a holiday." She shut the door softly.

For a long time Ann sat at the table. She did not move. Her eyes were fixed on a spot in the frosted pane.

"Say, Ann! Ann! What time is it?" a voice called from upstairs.

Ann started. "Nine o'clock!" she answered, glancing at the clock.

"If I'd known it was early as that, I'd slept two hours more," the voice continued. Roland Ollivant lounged down the stairs and came into the dining-room. His eyes were swollen, his complexion mottled from too much sleep. But he was handsome in a vivid olive way; his smile was dazzling; he would have looked a Latin if he had not been so heavy in expression, so athletic in shape. Ann



did not speak or move. He examined the table, walked out into the kitchen, returned to the dining-room. Still Ann did not speak or move.

"Say, Ann," Roland asked in a sulky tone, "aren't you going to get me any breakfast? There's only two eggs left."

"No," declared Ann airily, "I'm not. Besides two eggs are enough."

"Not for me," Roland said.

"Then you'll go hungry," Ann announced sweetly. "I'm not the cook for this family."

"Who said you were?" Roland asked in a furious voice.

"Nobody," Ann answered. She added with a soft nonchalance, "Nobody would *dare*, I guess. I'm just stating my position."

"Well, lucky for us you aren't the cook," Roland remarked with the heavy-handed sarcasm of boyhood, "putting most a bag of salt in the piccalilli."

For the effect of this remark, Roland might have thrown a stick of dynamite on the fire. "I didn't do any such thing," Ann said, "and you know it. If you——"

"Yes, you did too," Roland retorted, seating himself at the table. "I saw you. Last night while Beckie was out here in the dining-room."

A frightened expression ran across Ann's face—the look of consternation with which one suddenly remembers a compromising fact. For an instant, her mouth opened wide. Then, "If ever you say the words *salt* or *piccalilli* again in my presence," she burst out, "I'll run away from this family and—and—and—go on the stage and be a chorus-girl."

"Humph," grunted Roland, "swell chance you'd have on the stage! You with ankles like bologna sausages!"

"Roland Ollivant, you—*liar!*" Ann whispered this accusation. Involuntarily she pulled up her skirt and surveyed the trim ankle it revealed. Reassurance, however, brought only a more violent rage. "I shall never speak to you again as long as I live."

Ann flashed out of the dining-room—slammed the door, flashed into the kitchen—slammed the door. She fell on the dishes heaped in the sink as upon an invading army, neither paused nor stopped until she had ranged them, clean and shining, on the kitchen table. From the sink, she transferred her rage to the pantry. She took everything off the shelves, washed them, rearranged the dishes and groceries. From the pantry, she moved to the stove; she shoveled out the ashes, blacked it, polished it until it made the dull old mirror hanging over the sink look like a square of black cambric.

In the meantime, Roland had set himself seriously to the business of breakfasting. He ate an orange, devoured what was left of the oatmeal, finished what remained of the bacon and eggs, rummaged in the black walnut sideboard, found and devoured two bananas, split and blackened, found and devoured a bag of lady-fingers broken and stale. Perceptibly his spirits arose during this toothsome process. He was whistling when he went downstairs to the cellar. He attacked the wood-pile with an alacrity that he rarely brought to it. Standing between a mountain of ashes and a rapidly-growing heap of kindling, he chopped and chopped, varying his shrill whistling

with bass singing and his bass singing with tenor yodeling.

"Will you kindly permit me to pass?" an icy voice demanded suddenly.

Roland turned. Ann stood close, an empty coal-hod in each hand.

"I thought you weren't going to speak to me again as long as you lived," Roland gibed.

This was a fatal reminder.

The sparks that all the morning had been flashing intermittently in Ann's eyes burst into tiny sheets of flame. A deep rose-colored flush hanging behind her white skin burst through, made a purple-red mask of her face. Her lips snapped into two rigid lines. Involuntarily she dropped the coal-hods. Her shoulders squared. Her arms came up to position. Above the elbow they began to bulge with muscle; below the elbow they merged with hard, strong-looking fists. She glared at her brother.

Roland dropped his ax and squared off. His head sank between his hunched shoulders. His fists began to make preliminary rotary movements. His feet engaged in little dancing-steps forward and back, sideways and back. He glared at his sister.

And then suddenly, even as her fist shot forward, Ann's face changed. A look of uncertainty extinguished the tiny sheets of flame in her eyes. A look of perplexity loosened the rigid vise of her lips. Her fists fell to her sides, unclasped. An instant, she swayed irresolutely; then she turned on her heel, made in the direction of the stairway.

Roland watched her, stupefied.

On her way out, Ann passed the preserve-closet. She paused in front of the door, an amateur affair of thin boards, hanging from leather hinges. Here, it was as though another frenzy seized her, almost whirled her about. But she did not turn. Instead—suddenly her right arm swung with a powerful lunge straight from her shoulder to the door. It smashed the middle plank to splintery ruin. When she withdrew her hand, her knuckles ran blood.

But something had gone out of Ann.

She walked with her customary decision across the floor and up the stairs, but she moved in quiet and with dignity. She shut the cellar door noiselessly.

For an interval, Roland stared after his sister. His fists still held themselves up, but after a while they fell of their own weight. He walked over to the preserve-closet, examined the smashed door with a look mingled of rage, surprise, pride, and admiration. Then he returned to his ax and went at the wood-pile again. He did not stop until the last log had been chopped. He whistled; but he whistled low, through his teeth. And after he had finished with the wood, he attacked the mountain of ashes, transferred it by means of the coal-hod to the row of empty ash-barrels in the yard. When the last load had been removed, he filled the hod with coal, took them up to the kitchen. By this time he was whistling in his highest voice and at his greatest speed. He walked jauntily out of the house.

Ann went straight to her room, lay down on the still unmade bed. She sat there for a long

time, her hands clasped under her head, her eyes staring at the ceiling.

Ann's father had been dead for ten years, her mother for three months. For the five years previous to her death, Mrs. Ollivant had been bedridden. The period of Mrs. Ollivant's sickness had not made for smooth sailing, as far as the house-keeping was concerned; but because the children were devoted to their mother, it had a heavenly calm, compared with the troubled period that followed her death. Before, all roughness had been smoothed away by Mrs. Ollivant's gentle firmness; now everything seemed topsy-turvy, helter-skelter, hit-or-miss. Beckie arose at six and prepared breakfast. Lainey and Ann did the dishes. Immediately the entire family scattered for the day, Ed, Matt, and Beckie to their work, Ann and Roland to High School, Lainey to her teaching. Ann and Lainey cooked the dinner, did the dishes again. The boys of course performed household chores. All day Sunday, the girls cleaned house, mended, and cooked; Beckie planned the program of the week's eating.

This was the way things went when the schedule worked perfectly.

But often the schedule did not work well and sometimes it did not work at all; for the Ollivants were young and had other interests. Beckie was constantly going out of town for a night. Lainey accepted occasional week-end invitations. Ann was subject to all the temptations that out-of-doors offered her eighteen years and her tireless activity. Moreover, with nobody at home during the daytime, it was hard to keep the furnace going. Often,

in spite of their care, they came back at night to a freezing house.

All this was the more depressing because there were traditions in the Ollivant family. Mr. Ollivant was able and magnetic, an extraordinary combination of character and personality. Mrs. Ollivant was beautiful, original, high-spirited, vivacious. They were dowered almost equally with the social gift. In the early years of their married life, the Ollivants entertained constantly and lavishly, but with intelligence and originality. Picturesque masquerades, gay sleighing parties, wonderfully cooked dinners, delicious, late suppers, readings, theatricals, tableaux—their first decade was charged with a vivid social conspicuity. It was a proud family exercise to name over the famous people who had slept under their roof. But Mr. Ollivant's fortune declined in middle life; he died suddenly and before he was old. Mrs. Ollivant, physically never the same woman after her husband's death, developed unexpected powers of self-reliance. She manipulated the family funds like a Napoleon, but they dwindled steadily; she came to know the gray obscurity of genteel poverty. Through it all, however, she was a companion to her children; the family life was happy. Her sickness struck a mortal blow at that happiness. Her death destroyed it utterly. With all their remarkable health, their splendid spirit, their notable comeliness, the Ollivants still lived as under a cloud.

Perhaps visions of the family splendor—she must often have heard it discussed—passed through Ann's mind. Sometimes she smiled, but oftener her lips quivered. Once two big round tears rolled

down her velvety cheek, splashed unchecked onto the pillow.

After a long while, Ann arose. Moving slowly, and stopping to study every room, she made a tour of the house, starting at the top. The attic was a mere lumber-room, lying obscured under the dust and cobwebs of years. What there was in it—because of its crowded condition—it was almost impossible to see. On the third floor were two big bedrooms, formerly the nurseries. Ed and Matt shared one, Roland occupied the other. All the run-down, broken, lamed household furniture had accumulated in the boys' rooms as if in protest against their wrongs. Here, in addition, was every evidence of the careless housekeeping inevitable to the Ollivants' present haphazard system. The walls clamored to be repapered, the ceilings to be replastered, the wood to be repainted. Everything was dusty, the rugs needed shaking. Torn carpets offered stumbling traps. The mirrors in the bureaus were covered with water-spots where the boys had slapped with brushes at their wet hair.

On the next floor were four rooms: Beckie's big chamber, a hall bedroom, the one that Lainey shared with Ann, an unfinished garret running over the kitchen. On the lower floor were parlor, dining-room, kitchen. As Ann descended the aspect became more fair. The girls' rooms showed the inevitable feminine effort towards decoration. The living-room was at least comfortable, though shabby, the kitchen invitingly warm and neat. The dining-room alone seemed shabby and stark; it had something of the bare coldness of an institution hall.

Her leisurely tour of inspection finished, Ann fell to work with the suddenness of a cyclone. She went over all the floors with a carpet-sweeper, dusted, made the beds, rearranged much of the furniture. Until she reached the dining-room, her efforts were mainly in the line of conservation; there it amounted almost to revolution. She removed all the table utilities from the black walnut sideboard, covered its mortuary marble slab with an embroidered guest-towel, stood up some bright-colored plates and platters against its back, polished the silver cake-basket and the silver water-pitcher.

Then she attacked the table.

First, she took off the cloth and threw it into the laundry-basket. Then she stood off and surveyed it critically. Finally, she removed one leaf, placed a blue Wedgwood pitcher in the center on a darned and faded embroidered doily. Followed a period in which she obviously cast about her—baffled. Finally, she went to the window and looked out. Something she saw there brightened her eyes. Bare-headed, she ran out of doors, swept away the snow from the Japanese barberry, picked a few branches, to which some brilliant red berries still clung, spent five minutes arranging them droopingly in the Wedgwood pitcher.

Halfway through the process of setting the table, another series of iconoclastic ideas struck her. She took all the silver into the kitchen, polished it. She gathered all the drinking-glasses, washed them a second time, rubbing them until they were almost as clear as the air itself.

By this time it was one o'clock.

Immediately after lunch—she ate it with a look



of resolution crystallizing slowly on her face—she went upstairs, a silver table-knife in her hand. She reached up to the top shelf of her closet, brought down a little iron bank, shaped like an apple and painted red. Half an hour's work with the knife, and she had removed the last coin from its interior; eighty-nine pennies, one fifty-cent piece, two quarters, three dimes, a nickel, and a Canadian piece. With this money clutched in her hand, she visited the corner grocery. She returned in a few moments followed by a grocery-boy loaded with cans of tomatoes.

Two hours later, she was hauling down from the top shelf of the closet the tall green glass jars which five hours before she had so neatly piled there.

“Oh, don't you look sweet!” Lainey exclaimed when she got home at halfpast five that night. “I'm going right upstairs and dress up too.”

Ann wore one of her summer muslins, exquisitely laundered, a broad rose-colored velvet ribbon tied about her hair. The big curls which lay flat to her skin just above her ears shone like satin; her eyes, like golden crescent moons, rocked with suppressed excitement. Her fatigue showed itself only in the increased bloom of her velvety cheeks.

“I *want* you to dress up, Lainey,” Ann said, “for a particular reason. I've been fixing up the house to-day and everything looks so nice.”

“What's the matter with your hand?” Lainey asked.

“Oh, nothing,” Ann answered carelessly. “I bruised it in the cellar. I've been working like a Trojan all day long.”

"I should say you *had* been working," Lainey said a half an hour later. "Doesn't our room look clean—and a fire in the parlor. And, oh, Ann, this dining-room is simply swell with the bare table and the sideboard fixed up. And I love it with the folding-doors open that way. Let's always eat with them open—it seems so sort of spacious and opulent. It makes me feel as if I was being entertained by royalty."

"Well, we will—when we have a fire," Ann conceded.

Lainey stopped transfixed at the kitchen door. "Who made that chili sauce?" she demanded. "Ann Ollivant, you didn't do it all alone by yourself?"

"Yes, I did," Ann said, her eyes dancing. "I looked up the recipe in Mrs. Farmer's and I bought the tomatoes with my own money. It's a surprise for Beck. We'll have some of it with the beans. I've got a salad and I made a floating island for dessert—Roly is so crazy about it. And, Lainey, I'm going to serve the things in courses to-night. I want you to help me."

"Here, Ann," Beckie said a few moments later. "I bought you some silk stockings to-day. I heard you say the other day that you wanted a pair." She tossed the little white-tissue bundle into her sister's lap without looking at her.

"Oh, Beck!" Ann bubbled ecstatically, "green ones! You *angel!* I've been simply crazy for a pair. I was saving up for a maline ruff or I'd have bought them myself. And, Beckie, I *did* put the salt in the piccalilli and I'm awfully sorry I was so hor-

rid this morning. I didn't remember it until Roly told me just when—— But let me show you what I've been doing all day."

"My undying gratitude to whoever washed my brush and comb," said Ed, when they sat down to dinner, and "Say, who's been sprucing up our room?"

"I did." Ann's tone was meek, but her eyes were more than ever like rocking crescent moons.

"For the love of *Mike*," Matt exclaimed, seizing the dish that Lainey placed on the table, "chili sauce! I'm for that!"

"I would like to ask, Matt," Ed remarked sardonically, watching his brother, "whether you consider you eat chili sauce on your beans or beans in your chili sauce?" But Ed's disgust was palpably forced to cover pleasure—as forced as his choler later when over the floating island pudding he remarked to Roland, "Why don't you put all four paws in the trough? You can get it quicker that way."

"Roly is going to have what's left in the dish," said Ann sweetly. "Here it is, Roly. And now," she went on in a stately tone, "when you have finished, I want you all to gather in the parlor. I have something very important to say to you."

"Now, Ann," Ed asked later, clipping the end of his cigar, "what's that proposition you were going to put to us? We're ready to hear it. Fire away!"

Ann had apparently prepared her address. It flowed from her without hesitation, the instant her lips parted.

"Well," she said, "it's this. After you'd all gone this morning, I went through this house from top to bottom into every nook and cranny and hole and corner and closet, from the attic to the cellar. I tried to look at it as if I was a stranger, and I came to the conclusion it was the dustiest, coldest, bleakest, most unhome-like place I ever saw in my life."

"Right so far," agreed Ed, lighting his cigar. "Go on!"

"Then I laid down—lay down, I mean—on my bed and tried to think why it was so and if it *had* to be so and if there wasn't some way that it could be different. I thought for a long time before the answer came to me. But when it did come to me, I knew I was right." Ann paused.

"What's the answer, Ann?" Ed asked.

"It's for me to leave school and run the house," Ann threw at them.

Every Ollivant started and all of them, except Roland, protested by word or look or gesture.

"Can't be done," decided Ed.

"Why, Ann," added Beckie, "I couldn't *hear* of such a thing. You'll graduate next year and I want you to finish your High School course. We've all had High School educations at least, although it would break poor father's heart if he had thought that was all we were going to get."

"I knew this was what you'd say," Ann went on cheerfully. "But it doesn't change me," she continued inflexibly. "I know I'm right and I'm going to prove it to you. In the first place, I hate school. I never did enjoy studying and I loathe all my teachers. They are the kind of people I simply

can't stand—so old and frumpy and behind the times. And Mr. Osborne——”

“Well, Ann,” Ed interposed mildly, “if you think a man's qualifications for teaching depend——”

“I know what you're going to say, Ed Ollivant,” Ann interrupted, “and you needn't say it. I've heard it all and it never has convinced me and never will. ‘Clothes do not make the man,’ ‘It's not what people do but what they are,’ ‘A man's a man for a' that,’ ‘Kind hearts are more than coronets,’ and all that old stuff. People make a hit with me by the way they look and dress and how up-to-date they are. Take Mr. Osborne: if you think a man with red eyelids and an Adam's apple and a mustache like a walrus, who wears an old frock-coat when cutaways are the thing, could ever teach me anything, you are entirely mistaken. I simply wouldn't learn from him because he never could put it over with me that he knew anything.”

“Why, Ann, I never listened to such a——” But it was obvious that Ed was out of breath, words, argument.

“What's more to the point, my reports are getting worse and worse,” Ann went on still cheerfully. “And I don't care. I hate that school, I hate the studies and I hate the teachers. Miss Merrick warned me the other day that if I didn't improve, I would not pass into the Senior Class. I *won't* improve, I can tell you that, for I don't want to get into the Senior Class; nobody can open my skull and put things in it, so you might just as well let me leave school *now*. One reason why I had such a fierce grouch this morning at breakfast was because I had

a row with that old cat of a Miss Norton yesterday. Gee, if I could only go up to school Monday and tell her I'm leaving for good, she'd get a fierce sour-ball herself, just to think she wouldn't have me to blame for everything."

"Cut out the muckraking, Ann, and get down to cases," Ed commanded. "What's your plan?"

"Well," Ann went on eagerly, quieting at once. "I plan to run the house and to do all the cooking. It's too much for Beckie to get up at six o'clock every morning and then work all day. She's tired out now and I don't know what she'll be before spring. And then there's a lot of waste, this way. I think I can save enough out of the household money for you to pay me what you'd pay a maid."

"Is that all?" Ed asked sardonically.

"No. I thought out a whole lot more. And I've come to the conclusion that this house ought to be fixed up. It looks like the very old scratch and I'm ashamed every time a stranger comes in. Of course what I'd like to do is to make it swell and high-brow like Mrs. Damon's place—gold paper, Japanese prints, and Japanese bric-à-brac. I know we can't afford anything like that. But we can do loads of things to it that won't cost so very much, especially if we do them gradually. I'd like to get some new furniture in green wicker, some Navajo rugs, and loads of copper and brass. For instance, the dining-room ought to be repapered in something new and light and modern. I want to get rid of that fierce old ark of a black walnut side-board and have shelves painted white put up in its place. Then gradually, taking the rooms one at a time, I want to fix them up in colors—a pink room

for me, a blue room for Lainey, a red room for Beckie, and blue and green rooms for the boys. I think you boys ought to pay for any changes in your own rooms, all except Roly, of course. He isn't earning money."

"Well," Beckie broke in, "I agree with all you're saying now, Ann. I was thinking, after I got to work to-day, how Matt couldn't bring Lory Mack here over Sunday because we had no place to entertain him. And I've decided that it's a pity to use that great elegant room of mine for a bedroom—just think, it's as big as the parlor. I'm going to fix it all over for a sort of a den where the boys can take their company and when they don't want us girls around. Then I thought I'd go into the little garret over the kitchen."

"No, Beckie, you shan't," Lainey burst in, her eyes flaming blue with excitement, "I tell you what you do. You take our room and Ann and I will go into the attic. I'd love it, Ann, wouldn't you?"

"Lainey, it would be *great!*" exclaimed Ann. For an instant she lost interest in her major thesis. "We can make it sort of bohemian or like a studio—unframed things tacked up on the wall. And really, being over the kitchen, it's the warmest room in the house."

"Then," Beckie went on, "I'm going to give Matt Roly's room, so that Ed can have a room to himself. And Roly can come down into the little hall bedroom next to my room. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"Sure Mike!" answered Roly. "I'd rather be downstairs. It's warmer."

"Only," Beckie said, "I'm afraid, boys, that den

won't be so very pretty, because we haven't any nice furniture."

"Well," remarked Ann, "one thing I'm going to do some day is to go through the attic and see if there isn't something up there that we can use."

"Ann," exclaimed Lainey, still shiny-eyed, "won't we have fun fixing up our garret? Right away I can think of a whole lot of things we can do."

"We'll call it the Studio," Ann said. "And remember all of you to call the 'parlor' the 'living-room'—nobody says *parlor* nowadays. After this, you'll come home to a warm house every night—I don't intend to let the furnace fire go out. There'll be a fire in the parlor too—I mean living-room. And also we're going to have a course dinner every night—Lainey and I are going to manage that. But, listen, I don't care *what* you say, I'm not going back to school Monday. I've quit for good."

Beckie's brow wrinkled and Ed's brow creased, but beyond Ed's evasive, "Well, we'll see about that!" nobody offered remonstrance.

But undoubtedly Ann felt her triumph surging in the atmosphere. Her eyes widened until they seemed like patches of gold inlaid on her white skin. Her teeth made silver glitter in her wide red mouth.

"Well," she said briskly to her sisters, later when they trooped upstairs together, "there's one thing I've made up my mind to. If there's anything in this world I *love*, it's housework. I *adore* to sweep and I'm *wild* about dusting, I'm *crazy* about arranging things and I'm *mad* about setting a table. Some people haven't the slightest knack that way—but it seems as if it was just born in me. I'm domestic by *nature*, I guess."



## CHAPTER IV

### LAINNEY'S GIFT

"IT'S the very first day of December," said Lainney Ollivant. "It's not so very cold yet; there's quite a little Indian summer left. And yet, already, I can taste Christmas and smell it. The air always gets so crispy in the holiday season. It *feels* different too. I guess it's because the spirit of Christmas is about."

Lainney had been walking restlessly about the room, darting now and then to the window and once secretly opening it to sniff the air. She was very different from the every-day, go-to-school, school-teacher Lainney; she was more like some small innocent forest creature who feels within himself the first troubled stir of the spring running. White-complexioned, dull-eyed, uncharacterized normally; at times Lainney was "fey." Which is to say, exaltations of the spirit swooped on her, lifted her high. Even physically, these seizures made her a different person. The hair which ordinarily floated about her brow now bristled like wire; her slim drooping figure had turned tense; it quivered and jerked electrically.

None of the Ollivants shared her excitement. The Sunday calm lay over the household. They sat about the big, fire-warmed living-room engaged in their weekly struggle with the Sunday paper.

That sprawling octopus had been subjected to the usual indignities. Falling upon it first—the proud privilege of his seniority—Ed had torn the sporting page from its vitals. Matt—heir-apparent to this alluring sheet, one impatient eye nailed to Ed's dalliings—managed somehow to read the comic supplement. Roland—heir-presumptive and visibly languishing under the strain of waiting for two brothers—had sought Lethe in the magazine section. Beckie studied recipes on the woman's page; Ann, gowns in the pictorial section.

"Oh, that reminds me," said Ed. He dropped the sporting page. Immediately with the lithe, clean pounce of a panther Matt was on it. "How about Christmas? I shan't be at home this year. I've accepted an invitation to go with a house-party down on the Cape."

"Same here!" At the sound of Matt's voice, Roland leaped out of his serial; but Matt still gripped the sporting page. "Lory Mack asked me up to Worcester to spend Christmas with him. We're going tramping. I thought as long as mother——"

"Well, isn't it queer that we all got invitations?" commented Beckie. "Aunt Margaret is having some of Uncle Hi's relatives down from Fitchburg. And she wrote if I hadn't anything else to do, I might as well come out there. And I thought as long as it was the first Christmas after mother's death—perhaps it wouldn't seem quite so hard—if we took no notice of it."

"I *hate* Christmas," Ann said in a sulky tone. Discontent always brought out a sulphurous element in Ann's beauty. Now the rose-red underlip dragged

sullenly away from the flashing teeth; the leaf-brown lashes pulled the thick lids half over the golden eyes. "Talk about the *joyous Yuletide*. I don't see that it differs so much from Thanksgiving and that's the most God-forsaken holiday of the whole calendar."

"Well, Christmas will be much better this year," remarked Roland, "if you have hard sauce for the pudding instead of that sweetened glue you sprung on us last year. And don't forget to order the raisins—the way you did at Thanksgiving."

"Roly," said Ann in an intense voice, and the lightning in her eyes almost set her lashes afire, "sometimes I think you'll die young—you're so *spiritual-minded*."

"And I don't want stockings for a Christmas present," Roly growled further, ignoring his sister's gibe.

"I agree with you there," Ann said with conviction, "unless they're silk ones. If there's anything I hate, it's a useful present. Handkerchiefs! Underwear! Gloves! My idea of a present is something you never could afford to buy yourself. But if any one's determined to give me a useful gift, please slip me the money and let me select it myself. I always know *exactly* what I want. When other people pick things out for me, they get them wrong in some important detail; and I always think of it when I wear it."

Lainey contemplated her sister in admiration. Lainey was one of those who stare dumbly when asked what they want for Christmas. Lainey could never think of anything she wanted. Lainey liked everything that had ever been given to her.

"Lainey, let's you and I go to the theater Christmas Eve," Ann went on. "I think that's the best way to spend holiday nights."

But before she answered this, "What sort of a Christmas did father and mother have?" Lainey asked. She addressed the three older Ollivants, "I mean when you were children."

"Oh, it was wonderful," answered Beckie. A far-away look put out the light that continually scintillated in her eyes and then it was to be seen that they were a soft, greeny-brown hazel. "I can remember it perfectly. Mother loved Christmas just the way you do, Lainey. She worked for weeks and weeks beforehand, getting everything ready. There was always a tree—a tremendous big one, it seemed to me—but perhaps that was because I was so small—just ablaze with candles. Father was Santa Claus and, oh, how handsome he looked and how witty he was, distributing the presents. People were in gales of laughter all the time. That was Christmas morning and only the family and the old, old friends were there—like Auntie Jennison and Uncle Larry and Lila—and Aunt Lottie and Cousin Emlen and the Murrays. But the rest of the day they kept open house; people were coming all day long. Whenever I hear the sound of sleigh-bells, I always think of those times because so many people drove up in cutters. Father always mixed a punch and mother made a huge Christmas cake. Christmas dinner was simply gorgeous. How beautiful the table looked! Do you remember it, Ed?"

"Yes," Ed answered, "the whole house, for that matter—the parlor was——"

"The thing I remember," Matt's coppery crest—glittering—raised suddenly above the sporting page and his sea-blue gaze—gleaming—went straight into the past, "is the Christmas pudding. Old Joe used to bring it into the room, all blazing up, and father made a point of helping everybody while it was still burning. I used to think that was the most wonderful sight—when I was too little to have pudding—to see people eating food that was on fire."

Lainey's eyes suddenly changed. Lainey's eyes were strange; you did not look deep down into them; you looked a long way *through* them; not wells but tunnels. Now they seemed to snap from their far-away recesses forward to the surface of her face; or was it that they filled suddenly with blue light? "How beautiful that must have been," she breathed dreamily, "like living in a story-book!"

"Just think," Ann said sulkily, "we never had a Christmas tree—Lainey and Roly and me—we never had a *real* Christmas. I wish I could remember some of the *nice* part of the family history. It seems like something unreal when I hear you talk about it. Mother was sick so long and we had to be so quiet that I can't think of Christmas as a holiday—only that you get presents that you don't like and want to throw away and give others that you'd like yourself but can't afford. But I suppose you had such a good time because we were a *real* family, then and entertained and did things together. Somehow I never feel as if I belonged to a family like Edwina or Dottie or Louise."

"I don't think belonging to a family has anything

to do with Christmas," Lainey remarked. "I don't know that I believe in families at all. Sometimes I think they're as much of a hindrance as a help."

This was typical of Lainey; she was always making strange vague statements—not only vague and strange, but a little mad—which the Ollivants, not comprehending, ignored or ridiculed. And Lainey, who seemed equally deficient in humor and in sensitiveness, accepted their valuation of herself; accepted it with a submissiveness so gentle and so unquestioning that it went far towards making for those important qualities.

"And I don't think that presents have anything to do with it," Lainey went on. "Anyway, I love everything about Christmas—Christmas trees and Christmas waits and Christmas puddings. I love Santa Claus and his sleigh and his pack. I love holly and mistletoe. I adore stories about Christmas. To this day, I remember one that I read years ago in an old, old *Wide Awake* called 'Babouska,' and as for Louise's Christmas in 'Each and All'— And every December of my life—" Lainey had the air of one who looks back from high snowy nonagenarian peaks to some far-away blossomy valley of youth. "I've read Dickens's 'Christmas Carol,' the essays about Christmas in Washington Irving's 'Sketch-Book,' and the Christmas chapters in 'Trilby.' I love the story of the shepherds who watched their flocks by night and the wise men and the manger and the chapters about it in 'Ben Hur.' I love to read Phillis Brooks's poem, 'Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem.' It gives me a thrill just to say, *Noël*, and as for 'Twas

the night before Christmas and all through the house'—oh, I think I love it better than Gray's 'Elegy.'"

"*Well!*" Ed exclaimed, "quite a little oration!" His voice held its finest satiric note, but his eyes showed the puzzled expression that always filled them when, in argument, he came to grips with Lainey. "For my part, I hate Christmas. It's a nuisance and a bore. It's a child's holiday anyway. Grown people should cut it out."

"You're wrong there, Ed," Lainey said pleasantly. She was the only one in the family who argued with Ed; the others stood a little in awe of him. Having corrected her brother, she immediately lost herself in her idea. Her lids came down over her eyes so that the lashes made soft blurred stars of their blue light. "Christmas is a spiritual ideal—I've worked it all out. It's the only time in the whole year that we really give ourselves up to thoughts of others. If it weren't for Christmas, I don't believe anybody would ever make a present from one year's end to the other. But Christmas pulls us up sharp and compels us to be unselfish. It's a bother and a trouble—that's why everybody hates it—especially men. But we ought to be bothered and troubled—especially men. The Christmas ideal is to give and receive. The children's Christmas is to receive, the grown people's—to give. Only I suppose it isn't necessarily giving *things.*"

Lainey enunciated this philosophy with the same dogmatic succinctness with which she would have demonstrated a theorem in geometry. The others paid no attention to her; Ed alone continued to listen

with his smile of satiric amusement, his look of speculative wonder.

This was the first week in December. Gradually the last sip of the Indian summer honey went out of the air; and millions of microscopic ice-crystals took its place. The haze melted out of the street vistas, a sharp clearness filled them. The wind began to draw gray cloud curtains over the blue sky, to tie glistening frost gossamers over the green earth. Every day now the tail dropped off the day and pieced itself onto the night.

Some time during the second week in December Lainey remarked casually at dinner, "By the way, I've decided that I'm going to have a Christmas tree this year—on Christmas Eve."

"A Christmas tree!" exclaimed Ed. "A *Christmas tree!* Well, of all— What a foolishness! You're not a child any longer, Lainey. Besides, Beckie and Matt and I are going away for Christmas."

"I know," retorted Lainey, "but Ann and Roly and I aren't. And we never had a tree."

"It will be an awful lot of trouble, Lainey," Beckie warned her sister. "You have no idea how many things it takes to cover a Christmas tree and make it look well. I guess you don't realize how expensive it will be."

"I suppose I don't," Lainey agreed meekly. "Still I intend to have one."

"I think it's perfect nonsense, Lainey," commented Ann. "Lots of the things that you can't buy have to be made for a Christmas tree. You don't know how much work there is in it."



"Probably I don't," said Lainey, "but as I intend to do it all myself, what difference does it make?"

"Anyway," Ann asserted wilfully, "I'm going to the theater Christmas Eve, if I go alone."

"Don't let it leak out, Lainey," Matt cautioned his sister, "that you're going to have a tree all by yourself or people will think you're nutty."

"Well," Lainey continued with her soft-voiced, inflexible obstinacy, "if there's one thing I never bother my head about—it's what people think."

"Well, don't ask me to help you with it," Roly warned her, taking his cue from the others. "I never heard of such a footless thing in my life. Anyway, I'm going to a show with Dink Hardy that night."

By this time, there were two round pink disks in the center of Lainey's white cheeks. "No, Roly," she promised, "I won't ask *you* to help me—or *anybody*. And you needn't feel obliged—one of you—to come to it. But I'm twenty-two years old and this is the first time I've earned money of my own. I've always wanted a Christmas tree ever since I can remember. I'm going to have it this year if I have it all alone by myself, and it takes two months' salary." Her emotion melted slowly. "I do hope," she ended dreamily, "that it's a nice cold Christmas."

This was the second week in December. It was a dying world now. The wind had sealed up sun and sky, it had riveted down earth and water. Above was a gray hardness; below a brown deadness. Between, in a space hollow as a drum, the air lay rigid and frigid.

One night during the third week, coming in late, Lainey sat down at dinner to a plate piled with letters.

"What *is* all that mail about, Lainey?" Ann demanded. "I've been almost crazy with curiosity. Once or twice, I nearly opened them."

Lainey was slitting the envelope flaps with her knife. Without answering, she plunged from one letter to the other until she had read them all. "Oh, everybody's accepted," she said at last, a happy lilt in her voice.

"Who's *everybody*?" came from Beckie. "Accepted for *what*?" shot simultaneously from Ann.

"I guess I didn't tell you," Lainey went on gaily. "I thought it was going to be a pretty lonesome business having a Christmas tree all by myself. So I invited Auntie Jennison and Uncle Larry and Lila—the three Murrays and Cousin Emlen. And they're all coming."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Ed, "did you really mean that noise about the Christmas tree? I thought it was just one of your spells. I haven't thought of it from that day to this."

"They've written such lovely letters," Lainey went on, not even noticing this splash of cold water, "all about how well they remember when they used to come here every year. Lila says she can see the Christmas pudding coming in all blazing up and old Joe's black face grinning above it. Betsy says she recalls particularly how full of green the house was. Yesterday I stopped in and invited Aunt Lottie—she was so delighted that she cried."

"I never heard anything so absurd in my life."

Beckie's tone was deep with disapproval. "You'll have to give them something to eat and you can't any more *afford* it, Lainey."

But Lainey was not listening. "Oh, I do so hope we'll have a snowstorm," she bubbled happily. "Christmas won't seem like Christmas unless everything is white and sparkly."

This was the third week of December. The sky was iron now, the earth lead, the air ice. But somewhere in that frozen void, unseen but felt, hung a stirring—an unease—a brooding—a striving—a discontent.

The night of the twenty-first the door-bell rang just as the Ollivants sat down to dinner. "Oh, there it is!" Lainey exclaimed and jumped, as though the bell had pulled her with wires from her chair.

"What is?" Ed questioned.

"The Christmas tree," Lainey—now halfway to the door—threw over her shoulder. She disappeared.

The Ollivants dropped knives and forks, stared at each other. Then, with one impulse, they stampeded to the hall. The door was wide open. Lainey was standing in the opening. For an instant, the clear, cold wind of December roared in. Then an amorphous mass of green filled the opening. Lainey moved back. "I guess you'll have to open the other half of the door," she said to somebody outside, "it's a pretty wide tree."

"All right!" a man's voice answered. A hairy hand reached down between the branches, unlatched

the other half of the door, swung it back. The hand withdrew; the amorphous mass of green, as though impelled by an invisible force, advanced slowly into the house, slanting the pictures, upsetting the hat-rack. A crisp pungent smell mounted the breeze, flowed in great waves down the hallway. "Right in——" Lainey began, turning. "You all go straight back to the table," she ordered her family sternly, "this is *my* tree."

The Ollivants slunk to their places. But rippling on ahead of them, filling the hall, filling the dining-room, filling the whole house invisible, impalpable, but odorous, like a tidal wave from the forest, surged——

"Lord, how that takes me back!" Ed commented in a low tone. He drew a deep lungful of air. "Fifteen years, all right."

"I used to catch the smell of the tree," Matt said excitedly, "the instant mother opened the nursery door and said we could go down. Do you remember how wild we used to get that last fifteen minutes?"

"I guess I *do!*" exclaimed Beckie. "And when I first looked at the tree—one blaze of candles from top to bottom—I used to feel—as if—I used to think that—as though——" She stopped short. Beckie possessed her kind of articulateness; crisp, terse, forthright it was shot and illuminated with a brilliant mother-wit. But now, apparently, her self-analysis required terms too deft and subtle for her vocabulary. "I felt as if the house was under a magic spell—as if there was a ghost here—or an angel—or a fairy."

"Oh, I do wish I could go in there!" exclaimed

Ann, and she almost whimpered. "I think it's *mean* of Lainey. I wonder where they're putting it. Can you guess, Roly?"

"In the big window, I think," Roland said, listening attentively.

Involuntarily all the Ollivants listened. Sound came from the other room, many sounds, different sounds—but muted, but muffled—smothered shufflings as of branches brushing carpets, crackly scratchings as of twig-tips clutching walls, musical tinklings as of fir-needles tapping glass—a man's hoarse voice, lowered, "Yes, there's the place, lady. But you'll have to make a stand for it—just whittle a hole in a soap-box——" Lainey's voice, breathy, eager, "Yes, it's lovely there. I spent two hours looking at Christmas trees this afternoon and this was the most beautiful one I could find. I wanted one that was——"

After a while, the front door closed; Lainey returned; the Ollivants fell, with convulsive unanimity, on their food. Lainey said nothing and, after a while, they conversed of other things.

"Say, Lainey," Roland offered after the others had gone, "if you want me to make a stand for your tree I can do it *easily*. I've got some old boards in the cellar. And say, Lainey, I'm coming to your tree. Dink Hardy says his mother wants him to stay at home Christmas Eve."

"I'm awfully glad, Roly," Lainey replied. "Yes, it would be a great help if you would make the stand."

This was the twenty-first. On the afternoon of the twenty-second, when Lainey returned from

teaching, Ann, who had obviously been waiting for her, opened the door before Lainey could get her key out. "Come right out into the kitchen," she commanded. "I've got a surprise for you." Her cheeks flaming with what was undue bloom even for them, Ann marched straight ahead. "There!" she exclaimed triumphantly, pointing.

"Oh, Ann!" exclaimed Lainey. "You ducky darling! That's the *greatest* help. I did so want them, and yet I couldn't see where I was going to find the time. I did think of hiring somebody. Wasn't it awfully hot work?"

"Well," said Ann, "the cranberries strung up fast enough. But I bet my right arm will be out of commission to-morrow from shaking that corn-popper, and I think I actually got sunburned from bending over the fire. But somehow—it's the queerest thing—you don't mind hard work when it's for Christmas. And Lainey dear, *of course* I'm coming to your tree. That was all nonsense about my going to the theater. I wouldn't leave you for *anything*. And besides I think it will be great fun having a party of our very own. Just think, we've never had one."

That night, after the others had dispersed to their various engagements, Matt came pussy-footing into Lainey's room. He was carrying a big, white paper bundle; he placed it on the bed. "Lainey," he began eagerly, after he had closed and locked the door, "I got something for your Christmas tree to-day. It's the one thing I particularly remember about—Mother always used to have one hanging from the top of the tree. I guess I went to a dozen places, and where do you

suppose I finally found it? In a little dago joint at the North End."

Lainey was doing her hair; she dropped her brush, came over to the bed. Matt carefully untied the bundle. It was wrapped first in brown paper, then in tissue, then in excelsior; but there finally plumped out—

"Isn't that a *dandy*?" demanded Matt.

"Matt," Lainey said ecstatically, and with an unaccustomed use of slang, "it's a corker! And isn't it darling-*looking*? It's a brunette."

"I suppose that's because it's a ginney," explained Matt.

A little silence fell. Lainey resumed her place at the glass; her brush swished back and forth over her hair, mowing it flat. As fast as it passed from her brow, however, her filmy halo immediately fluttered up, dropped its golden shadow onto her little face. Matt watched her, shuffled, wet his lips, swallowed, turned towards the door, said:

"Oh, by the way, Lainey, I'm awfully sorry I can't be home for the Christmas tree. If I'd have known in time, I wouldn't have made that engagement."

"I'm sorry too, Matt," said Lainey.

This was the twenty-second. The morning of the twenty-third, Beckie came into Lainey's room. She held a pasteboard box in her hand. It was early; Lainey was still in bed; Beckie still wore nightgown and bed shoes. Downstairs, Ann wrestled with the stove. "Say, Lainey," Beckie began in a low voice, slipping into bed beside her sister, "I've got something to say to you I don't want Ann to

hear. To-day I bought something for your tree. Mother used to have them on hers. Where she got them I don't know. I've never seen them anywhere else. I remember them perfectly well because when I was a teeny-weeny tot, I was always trying to get at them. I did manage to pull one off once and they yanked it away from me just as I was starting to bite it. Well, I got the idea into my head to-day that I wanted to get some for your tree. I traipsed way downtown and spent my entire noon-hour hunting for them. And where do you suppose I finally found them—in that little queer toy-shop kept by the German round the corner from Dr. Pierson's office—you remember, I took you in there one day." She lifted the cover from the box.

"Oh, *Beckie!*" said Lainey, "aren't they *lovely?* I never saw anything so beautiful!"

"You hang them," Beckie's enthusiasm still flowed fluently, "from the very tips of the branches. "You can't imagine how they glisten and glitter—they look exactly like ice. And, Lainey, I can't tell you how sorry I am that I can't be at your tree—but you see—I sort of feel obliged—I accepted Aunt Margaret's invitation—and she's such a queer lonely old thing——" Beckie finally got to the end of her stumbles.

"I'm sorry too, Beckie," Lainey said.

When Lainey came down into the dining-room that morning, she found Ed, unwontedly early, examining his paper. Ann was still staving vigorously about the kitchen.

"Why, Ed!" she exclaimed. "How'd you happen——"



Ed's finger went to his lips. "I just wanted to tell you, Lainey," he said in a low tone, "that I left an order yesterday——" The kitchen door opened; Ed's voice lowered automatically—"I'll tell you what mother used to do with it. She put bunches——" The kitchen door shut; Ed's voice automatically rose. "—I left word that it was to be delivered to-day sometime between four and five, when I knew you would be here and could take care of it."

"Oh, Ed! Thank you so much," exclaimed Lainey.

"I'm sorry that I made that week-end engagement," Ed went on, and for the instant Ed staggered verbally—suave, controlled, self-possessed Ed—"or else I'd sure come to your tree."

"I'm sorry too," Lainey said.

"It looks as if you were going to have the snow you wanted," Ed proceeded, smoothly changing the subject as Ann entered. "Old Prob prophesies falling temperature and heavy storms."

This was the twenty-second. That night the unease in the air exploded. The twenty-third broke in a whirl of white. "This will be a one-session day all right," exclaimed Lainey joyously, as she looked out the window. "I'm so glad. That will give me the whole afternoon to work on the tree."

It snowed all that night. It continued to snow all the next day. At noon the storm ceased. When Lainey returned, it was to a house swathed in white, the roof smoothly piled, the sides symmetrically beveled, to a yard filled with cotton-wool bushes and trees. The sharp hard wind had silvered and crys-

talled and diamonded the snow; it had changed the iron sky to a sheet of polished steel; it had filled the air with frozen flame.

"Can't I help trim the tree, Lainey?" Ann entreated.

"No," said Lainey inexorably; "until it's finished, nobody's going to see that tree but me."

And so, boxes and bundles in her arms, boxes and bundles dangling from her fingers, boxes and bundles hanging from all over her, Lainey shut herself into the living-room and, though Ann sulked and Roly languished, spent the rest of the afternoon solitary at her task.

At eight o'clock that night, Ann and Lainey, arrayed in their makeshift evening-dresses, Ann with a coronet of holly in her brown hair, Lainey with a spray of mistletoe at her white neck, awaited their guests. Roland—even now his boy's taste balanced delicately between Ed's correct elegance and Matt's flamboyant picturesqueness—wore his best suit, his freshest tie. Lainey sat still as a statue; at intervals, her little rocker gave a convulsive quiver; but Ann and Roland almost rattled with restlessness.

"I don't think anybody's coming," Ann burst out at last, striking the lowest note of pessimism.

"Well, Ann," Lainey answered, a hysteric rill in her voice betraying frazzled nerves, "give them time. I told them the tree would be a nine."

"One hour more," Ann groaned. "This is the worst about having company—waiting for them to come."

"What time do you want the ice-cream served?" Roland asked.

"About eleven," answered Lainey. "There, there's the bell."

"I bet it's Aunt Lot," said Ann, brightening.

"I don't think so," answered Lainey. "It's too early." She ran to the door.

"An unexpected guest," she announced, returning, stars forming in the depths of her eyes. She stood aside to usher in—

"Beckie Ollivant!" Ann exclaimed.

"I got as far as Watertown," Beckie explained volubly. "And there—All the week, I've been feeling that I didn't want to go to Aunt Margaret's and leave you children all alone here. Still, I didn't want to disappoint Aunt Margaret. But when I got into the Watertown car, it all came over me. Here was Aunt Margaret with plenty of money and entertaining a half-dozen of Uncle Hi's relations. What did they care about *me* or me about *them*? So I just hopped out of the car at the transfer-station, called Aunt Margaret up on the 'phone, and explained how you three would be all alone and—She said, of course, to go right home and here I am. You needn't do anything about those——" she added mysteriously, addressing Ann. "I mean what's in my closet. I'll attend to them myself."

"Lainey said the tree would be at nine," Ann greeted Beckie's gift-laden return from upstairs. "I tell her that was too late. I feel as though I'd been waiting ever since noon."

"Well, of course *I'm* glad she put it late," Beckie said with emphasis, handing her bundles to Lainey. "There, there's the bell! They've come, I guess."

Again Lainey flew to the door.

"Another unexpected guest," she announced, returning. The stars in her eyes were pricking through their irises. She stood aside to usher in—

"Matt!" the others called in chorus.

"Where did *you* come from?" Beckie exclaimed. "When I called you up at six, you were starting for Worcester. Didn't you go?"

"Part way," Matt confessed. "But at the last moment, Lory decided to give up that walking-trip—and—I didn't want to sit round for two days with Lory's folks. Still, I suppose I'd have kept the engagement—but just beyond Natick we got stalled for half an hour—snow on the track. I got so sick of waiting that I just got out and cut across to the trolley. That was about seven. I've been all this time getting here."

"Well, I'm so glad you're here, Matt," approved Beckie. "Now, if only Ed—What time is it?"

"Quarter to nine," said Lainey. "Oh, here comes Auntie Jennison. I can hear her voice."

Fifteen minutes later, they were all assembled. Auntie Jennison, little, silver-haired, strung on wires, with tiny, clearly-shining gray eyes set in a face like carved ivory; Uncle Larry, snowy-haired rosy-faced, bluff, hearty; Lila—Beckie's age—with some of her father's comfortable comeliness and her mother's enduring spirit; the Murrays—also Beckie's age—beautiful, debonair, golden-blond Betsy; dark, quiet, strong-featured Martha; silent, unassertive, pepper-and-salt Bob; slim-waisted, slim-wristed, slim-ankled Aunt Lottie, brisk and vivacious; tall, grizzled Cousin Emlen, soldierly and

impassive. They sat with their laps heaped high with packages.

"Now," said Lainey, "it's just nine o'clock. We'll go into the living-room at once." Her hand went to the seam of the folding-door, faltered inexplicably there an instant.

"Why, there's the bell again!" exclaimed Beckie. "Who can that be?"

Lainey flew to the door. She returned, the stars set in dewdrops hanging from the tips of her lashes; ushered in—calm, handsome, immaculately-elegant in his evening-clothes—

"Ed!" everybody exclaimed.

"I got out of my week-end engagement at the last moment," Ed explained from the midst of the women, who immediately swarmed about him. His words came in spurts, jounced from his lips by violent huggings. "—to start to-morrow—train—expected taken off—stayed to dinner—saw them off—North Station—Did you bring down—bottom—closet—Ann? All right."

Now the doors, moving at Lainey's touch, parted slowly, slid into the walls. And suddenly they were looking into the heart of the holiday. Christmas green garlanded the woodwork, framed the pictures, looped from the chandelier to the ceiling. Directly in front, the tree filled the big window. Over it, like a spray thrown from a fountain, hung the Christmas mist of silver and gold. About it wound strings of cranberries and popcorn. On every spot that offered coign of vantage glistened and glimmered, or glittered and gleamed, or sparkled and shone, or shimmered and sheened, a

rainbow toy. From its top, very pink-tinted as to plump plaster body, very expansive as to blue-and-gilt wings, very brunette as to black-painted hair, swung a Christmas angel. At its foot, bunched masses of crimson-berried holly and white-berried mistletoe. From every branch-tip dropped long, thin, glass icicles.

"Lainey!" Beckie exclaimed, "where *did* you get that angel? Mother always had one—only hers was blonde."

And—

"Lainey!" Ed exclaimed. "Are those the same glass icicles that mother used to have on her tree? Where have they been all these years? Remember the time you tried to bite one, Beckie?"

And—

"Lainey!" Matt exclaimed. "How did you know that mother always put holly and mistletoe round the bottom of her tree?"

"It's time to begin," Lainey said importantly, answering no one of them. "Ed, you are to be Santa Claus."

An hour later, they sat in separate nests of confusion; heavy brown wrapping paper, thin brown wrapping paper, thinner white wrapping paper, thinnest white tissue paper, wooden boxes, cardboard boxes, cotton-wool, excelsior, string, cord, ribbon, rope. Everybody was saying, "Oh, look at this! Isn't it lovely?" And nobody was looking or listening. Everybody was trying to thank everybody else and nobody was succeeding. Everybody was playing with the grotesque toys, of which Matt was the donor, or adorning himself with the Brobdingnagian

brummagem jewelry, of which Ed had apparently bought a job lot.

"Well, Ed," Auntie Jennison said, withdrawing with Aunt Lottie from the racket, "I can't tell you how glad I am that you children decided to have this tree. For years, life has been pretty hard on you. But you're all grown up now, and you're going to pull out of it. But you'll get away much quicker by pulling together than pulling separately. A party like this makes you feel as though you were a family again. Don't you think so, Lottie?"

"It's exactly what I've been saying," Aunt Lottie agreed eagerly. "Nothing would delight their mother more. It's just as if the old days had come back. Why, I suppose I've been to a dozen Christmas trees in this very room. Don't you remember how Jennie used to decorate her father's and mother's pictures? How little she thought that some day these children would be decorating hers!"

They looked in silence for a instant at Mrs. Ollivant's portrait. Robustly slim, richly blonde, sweetness and ardor dwelt in her misty blue eyes, humor and firmness in her curved pink lips. She smiled back at her two old friends from the frame of evergreen that inclosed her.

"Lord, what a gay creature she was!" Auntie Jennison exclaimed.

"I've never seen her like," Aunt Lottie answered simply. "Ann's most like her. Sometimes there'll be tones in her voice or a sudden motion—land, how it takes me back!"

"Lainey's most like her father," Aunt Jennison added. "Lainey and you, Ed. It's queer, too, when you're both blondes."

They looked at Mr. Ollivant's picture. Olive-skinned, jet-haired, gray-eyed, he surveyed them with his keen, amused glance.

"Beckie looks like him too," Aunt Jennison concluded.

"Oh yes. Beckie favors the Ollivants and Roly," Aunt Lottie added, "but somehow you and Lainey, Ed, are more *like* him. My land, what a host he was. He could make a success of any party."

"Matt's the odd one," Auntie Jennison commented, "but he's more like Jen's folks than your father's."

Unconscious, apparently, of the excitement swirling about her, Lainey had spent the whole hour hovering about the tree, attending it as though it were a bride. Now she stood still, dreamily looking up at the plaster angel.

Ed had collected her presents as fast as he came across them. Now he spread them out in a big box-cover, crossed the room to Lainey's side.

"Your gifts, Mademoiselle Noël," he said.

Lainey looked vaguely down. The box-cover offered every high-colored allurements of Christmas mystery; boxes, most of them, and obviously jeweler's some; all wrapped with bright-colored Christmas paper, tied with lustrous Christmas ribbon, fastened with gay-hued Christmas seals, decorated with red-berried Christmas sprigs. Then she looked up again. Twin Christmas trees—tiny—lay reflected in her eyes.

"Ed," Lainey said, meeting her brother's comprehending look, "I really don't deserve any Christmas gifts. I've had mine."



## CHAPTER V

### ROLAND'S FRIEND

“**S**AY, Beck,” said Roland Ollivant with an almost too careful display of carelessness, “can I bring a friend of mine here to Sunday dinner—a girl?”

Roland watched Beckie as, with quick dashing clutches, she picked the glasses from the hot dish-water. He stood, one hand on the door-knob, superficially *dégagé* but visibly poised for flight. He wore his other suit, which meant that he was going out; and he wore his most debonair aspect, which meant that the affair was important. Although he was the youngest of the family, his swart coloring made him seem older than Lainey, and Lainey was older than Ann. He was as picturesque as Ann, but there was an alien Latin olive quality to his coloring. Ann was not olive, she was brown; and she looked like an American.

“What’s her name?” Beckie inquired before she answered. She stopped now, the dish-mop poised in one hand, the soap-shaker in the other, and stared through the rising steam at her brother. Beckie, who knew that Ann had a fastidious distaste to putting her hands in hot water, had insisted on washing the dishes herself. She had, however, brought the pan onto the bared dining-room table. She wore the long enveloping apron and the white

sweeping cap that with her always predicted house-work. Ann and Lainey stood with drying towels in their hands, Ann trim, erect, yet softly curved under her crisply-starched white middy suit; Lainey in a muslin that hung limp and crushed over the right angles of her little figure. They stared at Roland too.

"Barton," Roland answered nonchalantly, "Bird Barton."

"*Bird!*" Beckie repeated. "What a name!"

"It's a nickname," Roland interposed quickly, "her real name's Gertrude."

"Where'd you meet her?" Beckie went on, dropping the soap-shaker into the water and frothing up a whirlpool of suds.

"Oh—out somewhere," Roland answered vaguely.

"Where does she live?"

"In Boston—but she's not been here very long. She's a New York girl."

"Yes—of course you can," Beckie answered at last, inserting the dish-mop under the silver and making with it a brisk clatter.

"New York!" Ann repeated simultaneously. "What kind of a looking girl is she?" she demanded with interest.

"Oh, she's a peach looker all right—a pippin," Roland answered promptly and enthusiastically.

"Blonde or brunette?" Ann continued to probe.

"Gee, I don't know, I never noticed."

"If that isn't just like you, Roly Ollivant," Ann said in despair, "not to notice whether a girl's a blonde or a brunette! Are her eyes blue or brown or black?"

"Search me," Roland answered hopelessly, after a visible plunge into memory. "Like Lainey's, I think. What color are yours, Lainey?"

"*Pink!*" Ann answered scathingly. "How old is she?" she went on in the same relentless tone.

Roland shifted from one foot to the other. "Oh, about eighteen, I guess."

"That means she's twenty-three at least," Ann decided.

"What does she do?" Lainey, soft-voiced, pursued the investigation.

"Don't know," Roland answered, "never asked her. She's a smart girl all right. Knows an awful lot. Talks high-brow stuff sometimes. And Lord, the books she's read."

"I think she must be very interesting," Lainey said with conviction.

"I'm going to see her to-night," Roland went on. "I'll invite her."

"Well, she's a queer kind of a girl, Roly, if she'd come on *your* invitation," Ann remarked in a superior tone. "Wait, I'll write her a note."

Ann dropped her dish-towel, ran over to the big old desk in the living-room. She drew from one pigeonhole a huge sheet of yellow paper, pebbled like a thin layer of granite, a green monogram in the lower right-hand corner; drew from another a massive square envelope with a green monogram in the upper left-hand corner, plucked from one drawer her special stub pen, from another her green ink, from another her sealing-wax paraphernalia. She wrote swiftly in a big broad-stroked hand which, with a superficial effect of clearness, was almost illegible. "There," she said at last in a tone of

satisfaction, "I'll read it. 'My dear Miss Barton: My sisters and I will be delighted if you will dine informally with us Sunday the eighteenth. Dinner is served at two o'clock. Very sincerely yours, Ann Ollivant.' How's that?"

"Just right," Lainey approved.

"I like that *informally*," Ann said. "It sounds so swell—as if sometimes we gave formal dinners. Oh, how I *adore* anything formal. I'd just love to give a formal function some time, wouldn't you, Beck?"

"No," said Beckie with instant decision, "I'd hate it; I wouldn't have a good time."

"Well, you're not supposed to have a good time at a formal function," Ann said impatiently. "You'd like to give formal things, wouldn't you, Lainey?" Ann looked pleadingly at her sister for sympathy with this high social ideal.

"Well, I'd be a little scared, I think," Lainey answered weakly.

"Nothing of a *social* nature would ever scare me," Ann said in a superior tone. "Where does she live, Roly?" She folded the massive sheet, slipped it into the massive envelope, rummaged in the desk for the one-cent stamps, whose green went better with her yellow paper than the two-cent red, addressed it at her brother's dictation, scorning abbreviation even to Massachusetts, sealed it with a fat green seal on the rectangular envelope flap. "There, now I guess she'll know we're nice people," she said with satisfaction, handing it to her brother. "Mail it at once, Roly. Don't wait until it gets all dirty and smells of cigarettes. I'm dying to see what Roly calls a pippin," she announced gaily,

when the front door closed. "I bet she's a scream. Men have such funny ideas of what's a pretty girl."

"Roly has very good taste, though, in other things," Lainey said. "I've often noticed it."

"Yes," Ann conceded, "I really like his ties much better than Ed's or Matt's. I always borrow from Roly."

On Sunday she was far and away the most excited of the three girls. She dusted the living-room carefully, rearranging the furniture for the third time since she had taken charge of the house. She brought out the few family treasures of china and silver for the dining-room. She dressed with particular care as to green silk stockings and manicured nails. She did her hair in three new ways, but reverted finally to her favorite fashion; a braided knob, glossy as a bunch of grapes, mounding behind each shell-pink ear, a scalloping claw, filmy as a burnished shadow, clutching each peach-blow cheek. She did not actually station herself at the window, but she kept casting furtive glances up the empty, brightly-silent Sunday street. When the door-bell finally pealed a quick vigorous signal, she held Roland back for a proper interval. And, "How do you do, Miss Barton?" she said in a formal tone when finally, Roland at her elbow, she opened the door.

"How do you do?" came to Beckie and Lainey in a voice quite as formal as Ann's. It was a cool, clear, silvery-white voice. Indeed, in contrast, it gave Ann's notes an effect of a deep color, of a rich duskiness, of a soft warmth. "Oh, how do you do, Roland," it went on, "now which sister is this?"

Ann? I thought so, although you don't look the least bit the way I expected you to. You never told me she was so pretty," she reproached Roland.

"Well, Roly told me just exactly how pretty you were," Ann replied with an unexpected touch of gallantry.

"Oh, did he?" The clear voice broke into clearer laughter. "I bet he couldn't tell you what color my eyes were." The light tones continued to weave in and out of Ann's fuller ones: "Oh, Roly's the youngest!" "He's only *sixteen!*" "Good heaven. I knew he was young but—isn't he an amusing kid?" Both voices floated out of hearing upstairs. All Beckie and Lainey got was a glimpse of a slim black pony-coat and a little black pony-cap.

Roland returned to the living-room, fidgeted, sat down, fidgeted, got up, fidgeted, lay on the couch, fidgeted, arose, fidgeted. After a long interval, the two girls descended the stairs. Ann introduced their guest.

"It's very nice of you," Miss Barton said with composure, addressing herself to Beckie, "to invite me over here to-day. I haven't been in Boston so very long and this is the first real meal I've had in anybody's house. You do get so tired of boarding-houses and restaurants."

"I should think you would," Beckie said mechanically.

And, "You must come to see us often," Lainey mechanically reinforced her.

"Thank you." Coolly Miss Barton looked about the living-room. "Isn't this charming? This is exactly my idea of a Boston household. It looks

like an illustration for a magazine story of New England. I feel as if I had jumped into 'Little Women.'" Her eyes flashed from detail to detail. "Nice old furniture! Dickens and Thackeray and Scott in faded old-fashioned sets! A Landseer, a picture of Scott, a picture of Washington! And old family portraits!" She stopped in front of one of them.

"That's my great-uncle, General Milliken," Ann said in a tone which, in vain, she tried to render casual.

"Curious!" their visitor murmured, as if to herself. "Generals and admirals all look alike—at least they always have that same air. I have always wondered if it's the expression of greatness or——" She pulled herself up and went on. "I can't tell you how I have enjoyed the thought of seeing a real Boston household. You get so tired of boarding-house furniture."

"I should think you would," Beckie echoed herself mechanically.

And, "You must come to see us often," again Lainey mechanically reinforced her.

"Thank you. Boston is an awfully dead little town, isn't it? Absolutely nothing doing evenings, is there? Of course, there's the theatre, but I saw all the shows that are here now last winter in New York. What do you do evenings? Go to Night School? It's really a very lonely city for a stranger to come to."

"Yes, I should think it would be," Beckie mechanically repeated.

And, "You must come to see us often," Lainey mechanically reiterated.

It was quite apparent, though, that neither of the girls knew what she was saying. Ann tried to cover their abstraction by rushing in with many contemptuous general statements about the New York that she had never seen and secretly burned to know. And while she talked, the others looked their fill at Miss Bird Barton.

Miss Barton was as slenderly figured and as daintily featured as though she had been cut from alabaster with a penknife. A reposeful classicism of contour was shot by a perturbing piquancy of expression. In repose, she might have been a face on a Greek coin, in laughter on a French poster; so perfect was her combination of straight incisive lines and soft vanishing dimples. Her hair hung like a cloud of smoke about her face. Her long black lashes curled away from her gray eyes in such manner as to push her starry gaze forward. Her flexible lips curved up from her little teeth in such manner as to set her smile deep. Light played in and out of her dimples, ran under and over her eyelashes, flashed back and forth from teeth to lips. With this combination a very white skin and very red lips seemed necessary; Miss Barton's skin was strangely white, her lips strikingly red.

After some preliminary greetings she paid no more attention to Roland than as though he had not been in the room. But she continued to do much of the talking. First she discussed New York and Boston with Ann, laughing at Ann's stringent aspersions of the metropolis but not bothering to contradict them. Then she discussed books with Lainey, who lived mentally in a misty world of fiction and poetry. Next she discussed chafing-dish recipes:



with Beckie, who had the born cook's interest in food combinations. Just before dinner, Matt came in and, though obviously dumfounded at the sight of her, managed to acknowledge the introduction. She discussed football, baseball, automobiles, and flying-machines with Matt.

But all through this impersonal chatter her comment returned again and again to the house and its furnishings. She commented on the Sheraton desk, their great treasure, the roomy shabby old-fashioned davenport, the shelves painted white which, in the dining-room, had taken the place of the old black walnut sideboard, the blue Canton plates which were all that were left of Mrs. Ollivant's wedding china, the beautiful old knives and forks with their silver blades and pearl handles which were all that were left of her silver. And again and again her look came in interested question to the severe expression of General Milliken.

After dinner, she continued to hold the conversational reins, but her talk grew a little more autobiographical. In New York, she had done many things. She had been manicure-girl in a smart Fifth Avenue beauty-parlor and telephone-girl in a smart Fifth Avenue hotel. Then she had given up both these positions because she did not like them. Then she had taken the maid's part in a Broadway production; she had worked as a reporter on a newspaper. She had lost both these jobs because she failed to make good. Then, for a while, she had posed for a group of illustrators. She had abandoned this occupation, for reasons she did not state. She had come to Boston on impulse. Here her confidences ceased.

Other details came out. Lainey complimented her on her simple black gown with its edging of fur—she had made it, dyeing herself an old white china silk. Ann spoke of her piquant little fur cap—she had made that, cutting the material from her pony-coat which at first was too long. Beckie spoke of a little, woven, bead watch-chain—she had made that also, crocheting it from some beads her mother had left her.

When Beckie asked her about her manicure and telephone work, she said it was often interesting, but not always pleasant. When Ann asked her about the stage, she said that it was always pleasant, but not always interesting. When Lainey asked her about newspaper-men, she said that they were good scouts, but all drunks; when Matt asked her about illustrators, she said they were good Indians, but all crazy.

“My eye!” she exclaimed suddenly. “You’ve given me such a good time that I’d almost forgotten my deadly habit.” She opened the little bag that hung at her side, fished leisurely in the bottom, brought out a cigarette. “A light, please,” she said to the astounded Matt. And while Matt searched wildly for a match, she fished deeper in the bag. She brought out first a tiny mirror which she propped up on the table, brought out next a diminutive powder-puff, with which measurably she increased that white tone which her type demanded, brought out last a slender lip-stick with which measurably she increased the contrasting red which was also required.

“I had the hardest time getting the right lip salve,” she said casually, still staring into the tir

mirror. "Have you ever noticed that most of them make your teeth look yellow? I guess I sampled fifty-seven varieties before I found this." She lifted her mouth for their inspection, flashed a smile of pearl from its lake of crimson. But before either of the girls could speak, Matt rasped a match alight, held it down to her; she drew in a long breath, blew out the match with the exhalation. It was on this picture that Ed came when he opened the door—an Ed frock-coated, silken-hatted, gloved and carrying a stick, returning from a round of Sunday afternoon calls.

When Roland returned from seeing Miss Barton home, the girls had gone to bed; but Ed was reading in the living-room.

"Come in here a moment, Roly," Ed called curtly. "I want to speak to you. Shut the door!" he added. And as Roland, obeying him, turned a surprised face in his direction, Ed continued. "For Heaven's sake what do you mean by bringing that girl home? Where'd you pick her up? Don't you know a chip when you see one? Don't you realize the difference between the girls you can know on the outside and those you introduce to your sisters?"

It was as though he had struck Roland successive blows on an undefended face; the look of resentment that came into it was dark, like a bruise. "What do you mean—chip?" he demanded. "She isn't a chip. She's as nice a girl as I ever met—and a damn smart one."

"Oh yes," Ed coincided sarcastically, "painted and powdered and smoking cigarettes—actorine,

model, hello-girl, manicure—What the deuce is she doing now for a living? You'll tell me next she's got a rich uncle somewhere who gives her an allowance. Roland, you don't know enough to come in when it rains. Now, until you cut your eye teeth, don't bring any more girls home! Play round with them as much as you want, but keep them where they belong. I'll see that this one doesn't come here again. But she won't want to. She knew I got her number when I asked her those hundred-odd questions."

All Roly's sixteen-year-old pride flared in his heavy blush. He emitted a low growl, half defiance, half embarrassment, all perplexity. "Well, I don't care what you say—she's a nice girl and I like her."

"Were you introduced to her?" Ed demanded.

"No," Roly admitted. "But I don't believe anything you say about her is true. And I'm going to see her to-morrow night."

"See her all you want," Ed snapped at the height of his exasperation, "and as long as you want and where you want except in your own home—you damn young fool, you. You'll pal round with that kind for a while; then you'll cut them out." He dropped his head into his book.

After an instant of rebellion, silent and irresolute, Roland went upstairs to bed.

"Well," Lainey said, coming in late the next night at dinner, "I'm so glad you brought that Bird Barton home, Roly! I think she's an intensely interesting girl. And so beautiful. I want to know her better. I took a great fancy to her and she seemed

to like me. I got a special delivery letter from her at the school to-day, asking me if I'd come to dinner with her to-night. I didn't do that—but I met her after work and walked home with her—that's why I'm so late. She's invited me to come and spend overnight with her next Friday, and I've invited her to come over here and spend Saturday night with us."

Roland, still a little haggard after a troubled night, dropped his eyes to his grapefruit. But Ed—never had his clean-cut blondness seemed more pink and white—raised his look from his paper.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Lainey," he ordered explicitly. "You're not to have anything more to do with that girl."

Lainey stiffened. She turned directly to her brother. All the vagueness went out of her eyes. They seemed to shoot forward to the front of the deep tunnels in which they were set. They became clear, hard, polished like tiny mirrors. "Why not?" she asked.

"Because I don't consider her the kind of girl you ought to know," Ed replied in a rigid voice, "making up and smoking cigarettes and drifting round from place to place the way she does."

"I'm sorry to disagree with you, Ed," Lainey said with composure, "but I do. About the making-up and cigarette-smoking I've nothing to say. I consider that nobody's business but her own. As for the drifting around, as you call it, I admire her unspeakably for that. She told me that as long as she couldn't afford to travel, she was going to

work her way gradually from city to city until she'd been all over the United States."

"Well, she'll have no difficulty," Ed prophesied grimly, "in finding work."

"What do you mean by that, Ed?" There was an icy edge on Lainey's soft voice.

"I mean, I think she's a questionable girl."

"You lie!" exclaimed Roland, jumping to his feet.

"Shut up, you!" Ed shot at his younger brother.

"I think you're mistaken, Ed," Lainey said, with no diminution of her courage. "But as long as you made this charge, I'll ask you to substantiate it with some facts."

But before Ed could speak, "I do not wish to hear them," Ann said virtuously.

Neither Ed nor Lainey paid any attention to Ann. But Ed's golden eyelashes fluttered. "I have no facts," he admitted, "except Roly says that he was never introduced to her, that he picked her up."

"I didn't," Roly contradicted miserably. "At least it wasn't what I call a pick-up. It was on the Nantasket boat in the fall; we were both looking over the rail, and when we passed Nix's Mate she asked me what it was. I told her and then we began to talk and——"

"A method that first came into vogue in the Garden of Eden," Ed interrupted sarcastically.

"All right," said Lainey, "I'm a questionable girl too. Last Saturday, when I went out to Cousin Edith's, I asked the young man next to me where Echo Bridge was. We got into conversation and we talked all the time I was in the car. I always

ask men questions if I want any information. If that's picking up, I must have picked up a hundred men."

The look of exasperation in Ed's face changed to the bewilderment that so often came into it when he talked with Lainey. "It isn't a practice that I recommend to you," he said coldly. "Some man will misinterpret it some day."

"All right." Lainey compressed her lips. "Let him! I'm waiting for *him*."

Ed smiled in spite of himself. "Any man would know you were a good girl. He's only got to look at you."

"You mean that I'm not pretty and that I'm dowdy," Lainey conjectured shrewdly. "I guess you're not paying me a compliment exactly."

"Lainey," Ed said impatiently, "you're talking nonsense and you know you are. However, I don't want that girl in the house and I won't have her here."

"All right," said Lainey, "you don't have to. I don't consider, though, that you've proved anything against her. I'll tell you right here that it doesn't make any difference to me if she's what you call a questionable girl or not, except"—she stopped and chose her words carefully—"if she were a questionable girl and she really wanted my friendship I'd give it to her. I don't see how I could do anything else and pretend to be a Christian. I consider it my duty as a woman to try to make up to those women for the injuries that you men inflict upon them. However, I know this girl is what you call a 'nice' girl. *How* I know I can't tell—but I do. Now, if you don't want her here,

you don't have to have her, but I shall go there next Friday night just the same."

"Lainey." Ed's tone was slightly baffled. "Show some common sense. A woman can't live on air. What does she do for a living?"

"She's a shop-girl," Lainey answered directly. "She calls it store-girl. She's in Morgan Rector's book department. She told me last night when I was helping her on with her things."

"Well," Ed demanded, though this had given him palpable pause, "do you want to associate with store-girls?"

"I want to associate with any girl who's as interesting as Bird," Lainey said without an instant's hesitation. "She's the most lovely creature I've seen in a long time."

"What do you think about it?" Ed turned to his other sisters, his tone definitely nonplused.

Beckie and Ann had been following this contest with interest. At the beginning unmistakably they took Ed's side. Later unmistakably they veered to Lainey's. Now, unmistakable again, they pivoted back to Ed.

Ann spoke. "I don't think I care to associate with shop-girls. People judge you by the kind of people you go with. And we've always been nice people."

"What do you mean by *nice people*?" Lainey demanded. It was strange to hear Lainey use that steely tone to Ann.

"Why," Ann exclaimed in a surprised tone, "what a question! You know as well as I do what nice people are—people who have always owned their own house and had a carriage—the way father



and mother used to. And entertained other nice people and did things in style."

"Oh." Lainey's inflection made Ann stare. "I must be very different from you, Ann. I can't see why we're any nicer than anybody else—Bird, for instance."

"Well, I'll tell you, Lainey," Ann said confidentially, "we're nicer than the Ralstons, for instance, but we aren't so nice as the Meridens. You see, although the Ralstons have always owned their house, they've never kept a carriage—and we have—years ago, of course. But the Meridens not only own their house and keep a carriage, but they've always had a man-servant. And the children were never allowed to go to public school. They always had governesses. Oh, how I wish we'd had governesses! And I do think a man-servant is awfully classy. But that's the difference."

"I see. Perfectly clear." Lainey laughed. It was a strange laugh—dry, harsh, short. "Do you also think we're *nice people*, Beckie?"

"Why, of course I do," Beckie said roundly. "Our ancestors fought in the Revolution. There's always been somebody or other in the Legislature. And we've had a general in the family."

"Of course," Lainey remarked in a voice acidly interrogative, "you don't mention Uncle Sam Talbot who did time—he was a noble article. And then there was mother's cousin, Sally Rand—she was a sweet thing."

"Lainey," Ed remonstrated with a shocked air, "don't refer to family affairs that you don't know anything about."

"Oh, I know all about Sally Rand," Lainey de-

clared, "I always have. Mary Tully told me all about her years ago. And then you must remember that some of our Legislature relatives have been the best little grafters the State has ever produced. I'm wondering whether Bird Barton can afford to associate with *us*."

"I didn't know Uncle Sam ever went to the pen," said Roly with great interest. "What was he in for?"

"Embezzlement," Lainey answered immediately—"a peculiarly unpleasant case."

"I think it's perfectly awful to refer to such things," Ann asserted. "I believe in forgetting them."

"We all believe in forgetting them when it's our own family," Lainey retorted.

"Still, Lainey," Beckie took it up, "it's perfectly useless for you to deny that we are nice people. Our ancestors fought at Concord and Bunker Hill and some of them signed the Declaration of Independence. Why, we're eligible to join the D. A. R. All my life I've felt the equal of everybody. I consider I'm as good as anybody in the United States."

"Perhaps Bird does," Lainey suggested drily.

"Well," Ann said with great conviction, "I doubt that very much. Of course, she's a beauty. And she knows how to dress. But somehow I don't think she has that air that nice people have. You can *always* tell it—it's as if you didn't care a darn for anybody."

"Well, Ann," Lainey said thoughtfully, and she surveyed her sister as from a new point of view, "I don't think you have that air—and I'm glad of it. And, of course, neither Beckie nor I have it—what

ever it is. I don't know what you're talking about, anyway."

"Why, we've all three got it," Ann insisted. "Anybody could tell we were different from shop-girls, just to look at us."

"Another thing." Ed flashed into the conversation again. "Perhaps there's nothing wrong morally with Miss Barton. We'll drop that side of the discussion. Apparently she has no real ambition or stick-to-itiveness. And she's a drifter. Why does she prefer to work in a shop?"

"I'll tell you," Lainey said unexpectedly. She rose from the table with the air of one who has made a decision. "She told me herself to-day. She said that in every other thing that she got into—on the stage, posing, manicuring—she was bothered to death by men wanting to take her out to lunch or to dinner or to the theater. Of course, with her beauty—I gathered often that they were not gentlemen and their attitude towards her was very unpleasant. She said she wants to find a job where her position does not depend on her having to be cordial to the kind of men that she would naturally hate and abhor." Lainey took her fur coat from the chair, pulled it on with two vigorous movements. "She said to-day that nothing so lovely had ever happened to her in her life as the way we took her right into the family without any question. Because—she said—it isn't any fun really working in a department store when you feel you could do something more intellectual if you could only find out what it was." Lainey, without looking in the glass, pulled on her little shabby hat.

For a long instant nobody spoke. Then, "Where

are you going?" Ed asked. His tone was surly and there was a little panic in it.

The mirror-like clearness of Lainey's little, deep-set, blue-gray eyes broke into flame. "I'm going in to Boston to join the Socialist Party. I don't know anything about Socialism, but I want to insure myself one place where I can be certain I shall never have to listen to such talk as I've just heard." She departed in a dead silence.

"God!" Ed said as the door slammed. "A Socialist in the family. There's nothing left for the Ollivants to do now but murder."

"Well," said Lainey a month later, "Bird joined the party last night. She's been going regularly with me to my local. She says Socialism is the only thing that answers all the questions she's been asking herself all these years. We've decided to read Karl Marx together and a whole lot of things. We're going to all the meetings that we can get in this winter, and if we can possibly manage it we're going on to New York the first of May and parade. Oh, I do so enjoy Bird! She's got such a fine mind. And she reads so much. And she's so beautiful. She said last night that she wasn't going to paint and powder any more. She said the only reason she ever did it was because an artist told her once that, with her type, she ought to make her skin as white as possible and her lips as red. Besides, Bird says everybody does it in New York. You don't notice it there. But she feels awfully conspicuous in Boston. I think she's much lovelier without make-up and I told her so. Anyway, we've both decided that in the past women have given too much thought to

'dress and we're going to see if we can't simplify the problem for ourselves. Bird and I are going to try to design some sort of working uniform."

Ann arose to this. "I suppose you've got to be a Socialist, Lainey Ollivant, if you want to, and go about with queer people, though how you stand it is more than I can see. But if you have any idea you are going to wear *queer* clothes you might as well pass it up. I will *never* submit to it."

"Oh, Ann," Lainey exclaimed in a placating tone, "Bird and I agreed that we wouldn't actually do anything without consulting you first."

"Well, I guess you'd better," Ann remarked. "I can see what you'd look like if I let you alone, now that you've got that equality bug. There! there's the bell. I guess that's Bird."

It was Bird.

They heard Lainey and Bird start the ceaseless chatter which inevitably accompanied their association. Bird's hat and coat came off. Then, their arms around each other, the two girls appeared in the doorway, sauntered through the living-room towards the dining-room. The firelight poured over Lainey's filmy halo, struck through the bridge of her little nose; it found the stars in Bird's gray eyes, the pearls in her deep-set smile. They stopped halfway; Bird's look arrested itself on the portrait of old General Milliken.

"Ah," she said suddenly in a swelling voice, "I have it! Socialism has translated it to me. It's not the expression of character, nor of a great mental force. That look in his face was in my uncle's face—Admiral Murdock. My uncle's portrait hung in our living-room—until the bad times

came and all our things were sold. I used to think that he was probably the greatest man that ever lived. But I see now that it was not the look of a great man. It's pride-in-power—it's militarism."

"You're right, Bird," Lainey agreed in a tone equally thrilled. "It's the expression of oppression—the look of paid dominance." The two girls gazed for a disillusioned second on General Milliken's beefy, watery-eyed, iron-jawed face.

"Admiral Murdock," asked Ed, "the commander of the Oklahoma—the one who said——"

"Yes," Bird answered in a resigned tone. "The same! Only he didn't say it. A clever reporter said it for him."

"Oh, Bird!" Lainey exclaimed. "That reminds me. I bought two volumes of Karl Marx to-day. Come up to my room. I want to show them to you."

Still arm and arm, still chattering, they drifted up the stairs.

"Admiral Murdock," Ed repeated in a surprised tone. "Why, they're awful swells. I've heard Mrs. MacVeagh tell about them. Bird must belong to a very good old family. I suppose he was her mother's brother."

"Well," Ann said, "it's no surprise to me. You can always tell nice people when you see them. They always have an *air*. I knew from the start that there was something different about Bird. She has what I call a really swell manner, sort of *indifferent* to people."

"Well, for Heaven's sake don't let Lainey hear you say that," Ed remarked sardonically, "or she'll go over to-night and join the anarchists."

## CHAPTER VI

### BECKIE'S JOB

“**I** CALCULATE I've earned a rest,” Dr. Pierson was saying. “I was seventy-five my last birthday—and Henry wants that I should join him in Los Angeles. I'd like to see something of the world before I die. These long cold winters do take it out of me so nowadays and Henry writes about nothing but sunshine and roses.”

Dr. Pierson had to scream to make himself heard; for the canaries were shrilling so loud that their breast feathers vibrated. The squirrel was revolving with a metallic clatter on his tiny treadmill; his body had, indeed, lengthened to a gray streak in which two points of light, his little black shoe-button eyes, gleamed.

“You're quite right, Dr. Pierson,” Beckie screamed in answer. “And I'm glad for you—just as glad as I can be. California seems such a story-book place. I shall love to think of you out there just surrounded by geraniums and calla lilies and palms and all those old Missions—and everything.”

Beckie was standing before the mirror in Dr. Pierson's office. Mechanically she stood there and mechanically she looked into it. She tugged her hat—in shape and color it could not possibly have been more unbecoming—down over her ears. She did not see the harsh line that the crown made, coalescing

perfectly with the seam of forehead and hair; for Beckie never saw herself when she looked into the glass. And now, in addition, a blurr dimmed the brightness of her gaze; she was desperately afraid that that blurr might grow, might run down her cheek.

"You've been a good faithful girl, Beckie," Dr. Pierson went on in his fatherly tones, "and so quick and smart. I don't know what I should have done without you. You've always taken such an interest in my work and it's been such a help—your remembering everybody's telephone number the way you do." His long withered fingers fumbled for a moment in the pocket of his formal black waistcoat. "I want that you should accept this as a sort of little present from me; for I haven't really given you any chance to look around."

"This" was three ten-dollar gold pieces, only one of which comprised her week's pay. To Beckie's moist vision, they shone from little nests of rainbow ruffles; she accepted the gift with the simplicity with which she would have offered it. "Oh, thank you ever so much, Dr. Pierson. It's awfully good of you. I do appreciate it."

"And if there's ever anything I can do," Dr. Pierson concluded, "you write to me at once at Henry's address—2354 Acacia Avenue. Now I must be getting over to see Cousin Martha."

Beckie waited until the outer door shut. She watched the thin, tall, old figure pass the window. It was so frail that it looked like an empty suit of clothes with a head at the top. And the face was like a glassblower's product; the skin had the waxy transparency, the eyes the soft luminousness of age.



Only his teeth, still professionally white and regular, made him human. Through her sense of a material loss, a sharp pang suddenly tore Beckie. Would he live to get to Los Angeles? she wondered.

Then she put on her new spring coat—the shapeless, hueless garment, so scorned of Ann. Now the blurr in her eyes had precipitated and crystallized. Her eyes swam as she gazed about the little office. How often had she dusted and arranged the back-number magazines, how often changed the water in the aquarium, refoddered the birds, scrubbed the squirrel cage, pruned the geraniums and trained the ivy which, starting at the mantel, had crept halfway round the room! Dr. Pierson, who subsisted spiritually on a gentle philosophy of home manufacture, believed that these growing organisms in some mysterious way helped his patients to bear their agonies. The little cabinet of dental instruments and supplies had been Beckie's particular pride; it sparkled with a neatness and a system that was all her own. She was even indulgent of the shabby, wine-velvet chair from which had emerged so many groans of pain or sighs of relief. As for the old dentist himself—part of Beckie's pride in her work was that he leaned so hard on her.

She did not tell the family about the change in her fortunes that night; for they were particularly gay. Ann was sending out cards for the modest tea which she and Lainey had decided to give the following Saturday; she brimmed and bristled with excitement.

"Beckie, what's Jane Forester's address? Oh yes, of course, 59 Linden Place"—"Do you think two kinds of sandwiches will be enough, Lainey?"—"Ed, what does Mrs. MacVeagh serve

at her teas?"—"Oh, of course, you men never notice anything important."—"What's Isabelle Fay's address, Beck?"—"Oh, of course, 98 Lee. Aren't you a wonder about remembering numbers!"—"I wish I could make up my mind about the cake, Lainey. I don't want it frosted or gooey. If there's anything I hate it's to handle mushy stuff when I've got gloves on."—"What's Joe Jordan's address, Beckie?"—"I know what I'm going to do, Lainey. I'm going to ask Aunt Lottie if she'll lend us her ferns. They're awfully thick now and they'll look pretty swell massed in the bay-window."—"Oh, Beck, what is Elizabeth John's address? This is the last I'll ask. It's such a bore looking it up in the address-book."—"That's right. Thanks. You certainly are a wizard."

"I'll tell them to-morrow at breakfast," Beckie said to herself. But when to-morrow came, some unanalyzable instinct kept her silent. She left the house, however, at the usual hour and she carried with her the morning paper. Perhaps she carried with her also the echo of Ann's last words; for breakfast closed in a spirited debate between them.

"I do wish, Beckie," Ann said, "that you'd get rid of that hat. When I think that you paid ten dollars for it, I could bite the banisters! Do you want to know what it looks like?" Beckie did not want to know but Ann told her. "It looks like a bean-pot trimmed with an egg-beater. And as for that coat and dress—well, I haven't the words to describe them."

"Well, Ann," Beckie answered in her usual brisk way, "it doesn't make any difference what a homey girl wears. She's bound to look like the dickers,

no matter what she puts on. If there's anything makes me tired, it's to see a woman with a face like a meat-ax all dolled up. What do you want me to wear—a poke-bonnet trimmed with pink roses and a chin-strap?"

"No, Beckie," Ann said with her succinct sarcasm, "you're not old enough yet to try to look as young as that. Only old hens of about fifty go in for poke-bonnets and chin-straps. And you're all wrong about it's not making any difference what a homely girl wears. It doesn't make any difference what a pretty girl wears."

"I suppose half what you say is right," Beckie admitted, surveying appreciatively her sister's golden-brown beauty. "You could wear a meal-sack for a dress and a waste-basket for a hat and all anybody'd say would be how cute you looked."

"And," Ann went on, ignoring this placating tribute, "you make a great mistake in taking it for granted that you're homely. You're not a beauty, of course, but there's something about you——"

"Oh yes, I know," Beckie thrust in scornfully, "'while not exactly pretty, the bride has an expression of great intelligence and good nature——'"

"What I mean is," Ann went on without pause, "is that you grow better-looking the longer people know you. You're the kind of person that everything depends on what they wear. And you always look like the old scratch. You could be so much more attractive if you only wore the right colors and the right lines. That terrible brown that you've got on now—it's so hard and so hot at the same time—it's the only brown you *can't* wear. And, of course, being short-waisted, you had it made with

a belt a yard wide. If you'd only let me design your things. You see what Bird Barton and I have done for Lainey. She looks like a Poiret manikin nowadays. Then, the way you do your hair would make Billy Burke look a sight—strained back from your forehead into that queer knob on the top of your head. But the first thing you've got to get out of your head is the idea that you're so homely."

"I suppose I could forget it," Beckie admitted without rancor, "if I could smash all the mirrors in the world."

Beckie Ollivant was certainly not a pretty girl, but she was certainly not a homely one. She was a marked physical contrast to Ann who had the lush golden-brown beauty of a girl-odalisk plus a dash of American piquancy, or of Lainey who, though vaguely colored, had the nervous chiseling of a Tanagra figurine. Beckie was almost an Indian type. Her features were so pronounced in their irregularity that the first effect of her appearance was of strength. Later, you discovered that hers was a comely ugliness, latest that it developed a kind of splendor. Her eyes, quite as deep-set as Lainey's and much more brilliant than Ann's, sparkled with a temperamental optimism. Her skin, a clean brown dappled with freckles, glowed with health. Her hair, a real mahogany crisped with copper, would have broken into waves if her relentless hair-dressing had permitted it. Her figure was more strong than shapely, but in action it had a certain compelling vigor; she moved with the quickness, not of a deer but an elk.

Beckie's face grew grave, as she ran over the want advertisements, sitting on a bench that over-

looked the Frog Pond on the Common. But she fell to work at once, marking promising-looking ads in pencil and cutting them out with the little manicure-scissors which she carried in her bag.

"Say, Matt, who's the new skirt in your office?" Ed demanded with interest that night.

"Which one?" Matt asked languidly.

"The strawberry blonde over in the corner," Ed answered. "Pippin! I didn't notice her until I came out."

"Oh, her name's Riley—Theresa Riley—she's been there a week," Matt said. "Flivver too! The old man engaged her. The old man's a mark for any pretty girl. And I must say he's never made a mistake yet—they're all lookers. But they're going and coming all the time. More than half of them haven't got nut enough to fill the eye of a needle, but he won't have a homely girl round. No use for anything but a peach applying for a job in our joint."

"It's my experience that it isn't much use for a homely girl to apply anywhere," Ed said cynically. "There's nothing for a homely girl to do, anyway, but make way with herself—far as I can see. Well, I'm for old Johnson's system myself. If I was running a business, I'd have lookers. Nothing but! Oh, say, Beck, what's Cliff Conroy's telephone number? I want to call him up."

"Lord, what would we do without Beckie to remember all the numbers of things for us?" Lainey said. "That reminds *me*. When does Bessie Week's birthday come, Beck? It's somewhere along here, I know, and I want to send her a card."

Three weeks went by. That day was the first of many days equally fatiguing and disheartening. The impulse not to tell her bad news hardened to a resolution. Beckie bore her burden and her anxiety alone. The only change in her routine from the family point of view was that, on the pretext that she was tired of restaurant food, she took a lunch. She left the house every morning at halfpast eight; she returned every night at halfpast five. She went in good weather immediately to her favorite seat on the Common overlooking the Frog Pond and in bad weather she stayed in the Subway until nine. There she studied the advertisements, cut out those that seemed promising. At nine she went to the rest-room of one of the department stores and replied by letter to those ads which demanded correspondence. The rest of her collection of ads she answered in person.

Beckie had had no previous experience job-hunting. Her position with Dr. Pierson had been her first; it had come to her through a friend. There were one or two traps of the advertising game into which she immediately fell. The work at one place was delightfully easy—merely to fold circulars. Here her strength and quickness stood her in good stead; it promised a fair salary. The first day she folded twice as many circulars as the speed champion of the establishment. But when she discovered that she was expected to contribute two weeks of work before she drew any pay, she balked. She did not return the next morning. In another place the work was almost equally simple and mechanical—coloring photographs. But when she learned that she must first buy the tools of the trade

at the price of three weeks' salary, she balked again. She did not return that afternoon. She spent three days learning to set type in a dimly-lighted, foully-dirty establishment, presided over by a proprietor from whose every look and word she shrank. The fourth day, appearing on the scene too drunk to work, he swore scurrilously at her. Beckie left at once.

After a while, her native shrewdness taught her what advertisements to answer and what to ignore. Unconsciously, she began to sift and classify them. But although she applied at "the above address" wherever it seemed promising, her application was invariably unsuccessful. There were always plenty of pretty girls in the group of applicants; girls who, because of their beauty, wore their clothes with grace and their manners with authority. Beckie used to study them furtively but closely; there was no envy in her look, only a wistful appreciativeness.

After two weeks, Beckie instituted a system of her own. She ransacked the neighborhood into which her first application took her, shop after shop, office after office, floor after floor, just as they happened to come. This process brought her all kinds of experiences. She was refused politely, refused brutally, refused with excuses or without them, ignored utterly. Men received her with their hats on, their coats off, their cigars in their mouth, their feet on the desk. Some of them did not look up at her when they talked to her; others looked too hard. One gentleman, exercising what promised to be genuine courtesy of his sort, delayed speaking while he spat into a cuspidor. But when he did speak it was only to inform her that she was too damned

homely for his business. After this last encounter, Beckie retreated to the Common and sat looking dully over the Frog Pond until it was time to go home.

But although Beckie's experiences continued to pile up an increasing load of discouragement, always in the morning, she left the house with the quick, strong step and the straight, bright glance of her unconquerable optimism. And if occasionally Lainey said at dinner, "Beckie dear, it does seem to me that you look awfully tired when you get home nights. Are you working especially hard?" Ann was quite as likely to cap it the next morning with, "Beckie, I never saw anything like how cheerfully you go to that old office. I can't imagine anything that I'd hate more. Listening to people *yowling* all the time. And as for Dr. Pierson—oh, of course, I realize he's a fine man and all that, but he *looks* so like a dentist. He has what I call a *dental* smile. And just the fact that he wears a Prince Albert—it certainly must be ten years since people have been wearing Prince Alberts. And his collars, turned down with those long points and that funny old, narrow, black tie with the pointed ends! Then, I hate *goldfish* and *squirrels*, and, oh, how those *canaries* would get on my nerves screeching so!"

And even the fox-minded Ann never realized that Beckie no longer offered any ripost to these thrusts.

Beckie was appreciating now some of the inconveniences of the double life. She had to avoid the vicinity of Tremont and Washington Streets during the lunch-hours for fear of running into Ed or Matt. And she was always turning abruptly into



side-streets to avoid friends whom she saw bearing down upon her. Saturday was always a nerve-racking day; for the school-teacher Lainey spent much of her holiday in town shopping with Ann. Beckie's Sundays had become days in which she studied the Sunday papers with a desperate but secret avidity.

"Isn't there *something* I can do?" Beckie asked herself again and again in those early hours of the night when her tired memory marshaled and reviewed the day's experiences. "Let alone having an art or a profession or a business, if I only had a trade like a boy! If there was only something I could tell them I could *do!*"

Regularly every Saturday evening, she turned over to Ann the five dollars, half her salary, which was her share of the family expenses. Beckie never saved money; car-fares and the occasional hot chocolate, to which she resorted as a means of cheer, had eaten into her reserve fund. Of Dr. Pierson's thirty dollars, she had left a little over ten. When that was gone—Not that Beckie's situation was desperate, although to a girl of her sturdy independence it had its desperate side. They lived—the six orphan Ollivants—on the coöperative system. Ed, the oldest, gave, as fitted his larger salary, the biggest weekly sum to Ann, the family housekeeper and treasurer. Matt, Lainey, and Beckie paid equal amounts, but Beckie looked after sixteen-year-old Roland, who was still in High School, and Lainey took care of eighteen-year-old Ann, who ran the house. They were all pleasure-loving and extravagant; Ed often borrowed from Beckie and Matt from Lainey. Somebody was always in debt to somebody else. Of course, Beckie would always

have a home—a roof over her head and her three meals a day—but she did not want to be an object of charity in it.

And so in spite of herself—and Beckie's soul was compact of courage and steadfastness—the grind of continual refusal was beginning to corrode. Often now she had to walk up and down the sidewalk before she could pump up the courage to go into the office and emit her stereotyped "I've come here to apply for work," to meet that stereotyped "What can you do?" And now some of the sturdiness had gone out of her bearing. She drooped a little, sometimes from fatigue, sometimes from hunger, but more often from disheartenment. She looked at the uninterested and impassive gentleman to whom she put her plea with altogether too much entreaty in her deep eyes—the first qualification for getting a job being, as everybody knows, not to seem to need it. And though she took as much care of her personal appearance as formerly, three weeks of tramping in all kinds of weather had not improved her clothes. The bean-pot hat had gone the roughened way of all cheap velvet; the baggy coat had proved to be of a cloth that faded and pulled. But her face always shone from the soap with which she polished it, her shoes were always freshly shined, her shabby gloves carefully mended.

One Saturday, coming in town from Roxbury, a shred of conversation caught her ear.

"And so I just told him that he could have his old job. I wasn't gonna stand for anything like that. I don't have to."

"Well, what do you know about that!" another

voice commented admiringly, "what did he say, May?"

Beckie looked round. Two girls were talking: one little dark, coarsely plain; the other—out of the lethargy of her despair, Beckie stared admiringly. May was a slim, pale-gold blonde, all pearly colorings, all curving contours. Her hair wound about her head like a helmet of thin metal, faintly polished. Under it came a three-cornered expanse of brow; eyes deeply blue, softly shadowed, blackly fringed; a profile frail as a flower; tiny features, tiny teeth, tiny dimples; lips curved, scarlet, voluptuous.

"Oh, he spilled a lot of talk! He said I didn't have to take it that way—that he didn't mean to be gay. But I says to him, I says, 'I don't care what you meant,' I says, 'you've gotta find another fall-guy for this job.'"

"Well, what do you know——" her friend put in admiringly. "Still, May, don't you think you was foolish? It isn't so easy getting a job these days."

"I never have any trouble," May replied, with the languor of conscious power. She removed from her hand-bag a little mirror and a tiny powder-puff; with the latter she filmed her face with an impalpable gauze. "I never am out of work more than two days. I can always get a job somewhere. Besides, you know I can go on the stage any time. Morris Freidenstein says he can get me a place in the chorus. I've only gotta say the word. My mother don't want me to go on the stage, though—and I don't wanna—and I won't unless I get so sick of waiting on customers that I can't stand it any

more. My feet ache me something fierce when I get home nights. But I'm not trying for anything today; I'm going to lay off for a while. Sometimes I wish I didn't get work so easy."

Beckie left the car, retreated to her familiar roost on the Common. She stayed there all the afternoon. "I guess I'm about at the end of my rope," she said once. And she said it aloud. Nobody heard her, however. A squirrel studied her for a disapproving instant before he turned his plumed tail on her and dove into oblivion.

The keynote of that conversation was struck again in her own home Sunday night.

"Oh say, Bird," Ann asked, "I've always meant to ask you how did you come to leave Morgan Rector's to get that swell job you're holding down."

"It came about in the queerest way," Bird answered. "A man named Lewis used to come in to Morgan Rector's occasionally, and one day we got to talking about the books. He seemed very much surprised—at least he said he was—that I'd read so much. And one day he told me that if I'd like a position with the book firm, Robertson-Reynolds, he thought he could get me one. Of course I was delighted, said so, and in a week I got a note from him telling me they would like to see me."

"Just handed you on a gold platter," Ann said. "Well, that's the advantage of looking like a girl on a magazine cover."

"Well, *you* needn't talk," Lainey said, "everybody's always offering you a job. It began, Bird, when we were children, when a man stopped us on the street to ask Ann if she'd like to take the little

boy's part in a revival of 'Rosedale.' And I don't wonder! Oh, Bird, Ann was such a wonderful-looking little girl—with her thick long mop of goldy-brown curls, her great, big goldy-brown eyes and cheeks like Baldwin apples. Well, it's kept up ever since. Before old Mr. Snell got that new secretary he asked her if she didn't want the job. Of course, Ann is awfully able and efficient, just as you are, Bird, but I'm sure neither of you would get work so easy if it weren't for your looks."

"Oh slush!" Bird said.

"Oh pickles!" Ann said.

Beckie said nothing.

"Oh say, Beck," Bird asked lazily, "what's Allie Dean's street number? I've got to write her a letter to-night."

But early Monday morning she was back again invading the business section with a kind of desperate fury. In the middle of the afternoon she opened the door of the Renaissance Art Company—opened the door and stood for an amazed and an abashed second on the threshold.

It was a big vague room into which Beckie looked—and it was filled with shadows. Heavy curtains of a dull reseda-green velvet, hanging in stately folds, shrouded the windows. Gray monk's cloth, divided into squares by a dull wood, covered the walls. Here and there a red print framed in an old green-gold, or a bust carved and colored as from old wood, gleamed from these squares. The furniture emitted a muted copper glow. Slim vases of bubbly and iridescent glass, or broad bowls of an opaque and lusterless porcelain, held foliage of a subdued

bronze. There were three presiding genii in the place. One was a coppery, heroic-size classic blonde who exactly matched the furniture. A second was a lithe, smoky-olive pre-Raphaelite brunette who exactly matched the hangings. The third was a short piquant post-impressionist nondescript who contrasted with everything. The art atmosphere was so thick and their loose draperies so thin that when they moved they seemed to float. And when they came to rest, it was in a sinuous, curved attitude which displayed, by means of a flexed knee, a heelless leather shoe or, by a hand lifted to the breast, a curveless Burne-Jones wrist.

Three pairs of frigid eyes turned to survey the short, squat figure suspended in the midst of the meal-sack coat in the doorway. Three pairs of delicate eyebrows flew to their highest altitude.

"Will you tell me, please," Beckie asked timidly, "where I go to apply for a place here?"

The smoky-olive brunette answered. "Well, I don't know as they want any girl here. I haven't heard anything about it. There's the office, though." An exquisite pre-Raphaelite gesture indicated a flight of stairs leading to a mezzanine balcony.

Beckie timidly attacked the stairs. She walked around three sides of the balcony until she came to an office, glassed-in part way to the ceiling, which bore the name Willard Pray. She knocked on the door. There was no answer. She turned the knob; the door opened; she went in. Inside two men were talking. One, his back towards her, Beckie could not see. The other was sitting in a swivel-chair before a business-like-looking roll-top desk, the vulgarly-utilitarian appurtenances of which contrasted

strikingly with the exquisite æstheticism below. He first blotted out the roar of the street by shutting the window, then turned on Beckie a thunderous brow and a sudden barked, "Well, what do you want?"

"I've come to apply for a position here," Beckie said.

The thunderous aspect of his face, instead of increasing, melted a little. Beckie's heart gave a leap. "What can you do?" he demanded.

"Anything," Beckie lied desperately.

"What, for instance?" the man demanded.

"Everything," Beckie lied recklessly.

The man bellowed. "Stenographer, typewriter, cashier, bookkeeper—quick! What can you do?"

"Nothing!" Beckie told the truth despairingly.

The man surveyed her for a disgusted instant. And Beckie surveyed him for an entreating one. He was short, stocky, strong-looking, with an irregular pugnacious face, healthily colored. His eyelashes were surprisingly long and curly and his square chin was divided by a clean cleft. "We don't need any help," he snapped. He jerked about in his chair in a manner that unmistakably closed the interview.

Beckie shut the door quietly. She made automatically in the direction of the stairway. But for the first time her courage threatened to break. She knew that she must not cry; she held her jaw tight with one hand, the other hung clenched at her side. It seemed a long time before she got to the stairs. Finally she stopped and peered about. She had walked past the stairway, made the square of the balcony, and came to the office again. Evidently the window had not again been raised. The

two men were talking; their words came clear to Beckie.

"—looked kinder pathetic to me," the other man said.

"Yes," answered Mr. Pray, "but I see a dozen like her every day. I have to have good-lookers, Chet. And, Lord, wasn't she homely?"

"Yes, she was homely," Chet answered, "aching homely. And yet——"

Again Beckie made in the direction of the stairway—blindly this time. And now her courage had definitely broken; it poured in streams over her cheeks. She could not descend to face the three successful houris below. She waited, struggling with gasps that tried to turn into sobs. Presently she became conscious that "Chet" had come out of the office and, gazing leisurely at the pictures on the walls, had passed on the other side of the balcony, was disappearing down the stairs. Beckie watched him out of sight. Suddenly her tears stopped. She lifted her head and threw her shoulders back. With a decisive hardening of her expression, she turned, not in the direction of the stairs but of the office. Mr. Pray looked up from his work when she opened the door, but obviously he was too surprised to speak.

"I've come back to ask your advice, Mr. Pray," Beckie said. "I suppose you're too busy to talk with me. But you've got to. I don't care what happens to me. The worst you can do is to send for the police and have me thrown out of your office and I shan't care much if you do. But if you will listen to me, I would like you to advise me just



as you would your sister or any girl you know; for I don't know where to turn next. I'm desperate. I've been nearly a month trying to get a job and I haven't landed one yet, although I've answered dozens and dozens of ads and applied at hundreds of places on the chance that they might need somebody. When I came out of your office a little while ago, I got mixed up so on that balcony that I came back here by accident. I heard you and that gentleman that's just gone out discussing me. I heard you tell him that you couldn't give me a job because I was so homely. That didn't surprise me or hurt me—so very much. For nobody knows that I'm homely better than I do. I've always known it. I've got accustomed to it. But what I want to ask you is, what is a homely girl going to do? It isn't my fault that I'm not pretty. I'd do anything in this world if I could make myself over. Nobody enjoys beauty more than I. I adore it. I can watch a pretty girl for hours. And yet, ever since I can remember, I've had to stand aside and see pretty girls take with the utmost ease all the things that I have to half kill myself to get. I don't begrudge them their good luck, but I do think it's unfair. And then there's another side to it. Sometimes I wonder that men never think that a homely girl might work harder and prove more faithful than a pretty girl simply because she's got to—to hold down her job. I'd work my hands to the bone if somebody would only give me a chance—I'd be so grateful—oh, all the rest of my life I'd—But nobody will. What am I going to do? All my life I've read stories—and heard them too—about beautiful girls alone in large cities having

finally to do dreadful things in order to live—I've always thought that was so terrible. But in the last month I've got a different view on that. For I can't do anything through beauty. What are you going to do if you haven't that chance? You've got to eat just the same."

Mr. Pray's choleric blue eyes had gone from Beckie's face to the brisk scene outside his window. But there his gaze had set; his face had turned to a mask. Now he spoke. "Well, can't you really do anything?" he asked; and though perceptibly he tried to make his voice violent, perceptibly it had become gentle. "Isn't there something you've got on you that's different from other people?"

"I can remember numbers," Beckie answered with the mental limpidity of despair. "It seems to me that I can remember every number that's ever been said in my presence from the day I was born until this moment. In school I could rattle off dates like a phonograph. And nobody in my family ever has to look in the telephone-book or the directory when I'm round. When I go out here, I shan't remember about what kind of furniture there is in this office or what color your eyes are or what the window looks out on, but I shall know that your telephone is 3456 Back Bay, that that picture has a tag with 23743 on it, and that the address of this office is 673 Boylston."

Mr. Pray swung about hard. "*Numbers!*" he said. "NUMBERS! Can you remember numbers? If you can remember numbers, you're the girl I've been looking for for ten years. See here. The pictures in our catalogue run from one to thirty-six thousand. Now, all those girls downstairs can re

member the names of the pictures, the artist, who painted them, the gallery where they are hung, and the city where the gallery is, but there isn't one of them can get the numbers, except the big sellers, without looking them up in the catalogue. I can't myself. And sometimes a bunch of a thousand pictures will come in from the factory that have all got to be numbered and numbered quick."

"Mr. Pray," Beckie said eagerly, "at the end of six months I should know the number of every picture in this place."

"All right," Mr. Pray said shortly. "You're engaged. I'll start you on twelve dollars a week."

"Oh," Beckie remarked casually that night just before dinner, "Dr. Pierson is going to sell out his practice and go to Los Angeles. He gave me notice the other day, and to-day, if you please, I walked right into the Renaissance Art Company and got a job at twelve dollars a week."

"The Renaissance Art Company," Ed echoed. "That's on Boylston Street. You were awfully lucky to get in there, Beckie. I've met Pray. They say he's an awfully hard man to please but he's mighty good to his help. Swell joint, isn't it? When I go in there, I'm always hoping those skirts will tear off some cabaret stuff."

"Looks like an aquarium to me," Matt said. "I'm always expecting one of those dolls to pull out a banana and eat it to prove she can live under water."

"I think it's perfectly charming," Lainey declared. "Those girls always look to me like captive princesses in Maeterlinck."

"Well, I'm glad you're out of that dentist office," said Ann with satisfaction. "I'd just as soon have a job with the morgue."

"Ann," Beckie said privately that night, "you know you said once that you'd like to design some clothes for me and that you'd like to show me how to do my hair a different way. Well, I want you to do that. You see those girls in Pray's dress like pictures. Now I know I can't look like a picture, but I don't want to look like a comic valentine. I've just borrowed twenty dollars from Ed, and I want you to go in town to-morrow and buy some stuff for a dress that will go with walls about the color of a dirty duster and curtains the color of those olives that look as though they were rotten."

The war-horse scented battle. Ann's slumberous eyes exploded with anticipation. "I know exactly what I'm going to get," she announced after a brief interval of silent concentration. "I shall buy it in Chinatown. It will be a sage-green, something with a lustrous surface and very dull, shadowy figure in it of the same color. It's going to be made very high-waisted, with a long skirt that just escapes the ground—that'll make you look tall. The girdle is going to be of tomato-red, combined with gray. The sleeves," Ann went on meditatively, "will be loose and come just to your elbow—your arms are so pretty."

"I shall hate flowing sleeves," Beckie faltered. "But I'll wear them," she added hastily.

"You ought to wear a string of dull red beads," Ann went on.

"Oh my grief!" Beckie quavered. "Necklaces

always make me feel as if I was being hung. But I'll wear it," she added hastily.

"Then I shall teach you how to do your hair." One of Ann's eyes was fixed, half closed, on her sister, as though Beckie were a picture she was painting. "I shall part it in the middle and pull it out soft about your face, and coil it low in your neck. You must wear a hair-net so's to keep it in all day long."

"It will make me nervous as a witch, fiddling with a hair-net," Beckie groaned. "But I'll wear one," she added hastily.

"Miss Ollivant," Mr. Pray called down from the mezzanine balcony six months later (he was reading from a list of figures that he held in his hand), "what's 987?"

"Cimabue Madonna, the Uffizzi, Florence," Beckie answered.

"13426?" pursued Mr. Pray, making a note.

"Vermeer Interior, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg."

"29567?"

"Rosa Bonheur's 'Horse Fair,' Metropolitan Gallery, New York."

"6578?"

"St. Agnes Outside the Walls, Rome."

After a while, Mr. Pray returned to his office. Downstairs, Beckie moved from point to point, replacing pictures in portfolios. The meager light slipped like water down her sage-green dress; but it caught in the ripples of her hair and trembled there in a tawny luster. It could not penetrate to her deep eyes; they were already lighted from within.

A man came into the shop, glanced keenly in passing at her preoccupied face, ascended to the mezzanine.

Beckie, still preoccupied, arose, photograph in hand, and followed him up the stairs. She stopped at the cabinet outside Mr. Pray's office. The conversation of the two men penetrated her absorption.

"Hullo, Chet," exclaimed Mr. Pray jovially. "How's the boy?"

"Fine and dandy," answered Chet. "Say, I see you engaged that homely little thing that applied for a job the last time I was here."

"Whaddye mean—homely?" roared Mr. Pray. "How in thunder can ever you call her homely. That girl's got a bean on her that's the most useful thing in this establishment. Let me tell you her face grows on you. It's got more character in it than all those wax dolls down there put together."

## CHAPTER VII

### ANN'S NEW SET

“YOU don't like Mrs. Peabody, do you, Lainey?” Ann asked, scooping dabs of face cream from the jar and slapping one on each cheek.

“No,” Lainey answered decisively, “I don't. At least I shouldn't quite say that. I don't *dislike* her. She interests me and fascinates me. She's as quiet—and yet I can't take my eyes off of her. I always feel as if there was a bomb in the room and somebody had just lighted the fuse.”

The two girls were alone in their big attic room. They were alone in the house, for that matter. Ed was in Panama. Beckie was staying with Aunt Margaret, Matt commuting with Lory Mack. In this Adamless community, Roly had become a negligible quantity. Ann sat before the big, tall, black walnut bureau, which, in spite of the premeditated coquetry of chintz draperies, still looked like a mausoleum. Lainey sat curled up on the bed, watching Ann. Lainey's dressing was always careless, preoccupied, uninspired, lacking in scenic effect and in dramatic quality. Ann's dressing, on the other hand, developed suspense, climax, color, charm; it was a technical marvel. Now she rubbed the cream off her face with a towel. The color flooded under her white skin; it seemed to raise a nap on it, to turn it to velvet, shot with light. Ann passed a powder-

pad over it; the rose light glowed through a silver gossamer.

"I think she's a wonder," Ann disagreed serenely, "and I like her." Perhaps there was a shade too much of emphasis on Ann's *like*. She let down her hair. It fell heavily like a mantle of fur, short at the ears and ending in a point at her waist. She brushed it with swift, smashing strokes, coiled it.

"But then I like all of those people," she concluded. "What is there about them that you don't like?"

"I don't know," Lainey confessed frankly. "And it isn't that I *dislike* them exactly. It's more that I *disapprove* of them, and yet I hate to say *disapprove* because it sounds priggish. But people always appal me who work so hard to have a good time."

"Well, you don't think having a good time is easy, do you?" Ann demanded, smearing her cheeks with bandoline. "It certainly takes an awful lot of money."

"That's the only thing it doesn't take—according to my idea," asserted Lainey. "And as for the way they work at it—No, it doesn't seem to me that a good time comes that way."

"I should think," Ann said, "being a Socialist and a militant, and all those queer things, that you'd like Bohemians." She pulled forward from the main mass two highly-burnished scrolls of hair, patted them gently onto the bandolined surfaces, thrust above them the huge curved pins that reinforced their position.

"I wouldn't call them bohemians exactly,"



Lainey said, more analytic. "I'd call them *bohemiacs*. I don't know anything about it, of course, but it has always seemed to me that real bohemians would be simpler."

"Well," said Ann with emphasis, "I like them all. The only way I can judge people is by their clothes; and they all wear perfectly stunning things." She drew on a little lace chemisette, which she had made with the assistance of Bird. She adjusted it with quick deft movements of her big shapely hands. She passed the powder-pad over the triangle of neck that this exposed; again the flesh turned to velvet—the color of milk this time. "And, Lainey, I'm tired of knowing shabby people. I've known them all my life. I want to know some smart people for a change—people who do all kinds of things without asking what it costs. And then I do love a spender, and both Commodore Carleton and Mr. Talbot are spenders." She walked over to the bed and picked up the gown of the blue serge suit which she had made with the assistance of a seamstress. Bending and curving so that the hooks would not catch in her hair, she pulled it on over her head, coaxed it to slim smoothness and trimness. She plucked from the bureau the little, round, amusing, extraordinary hat which she had trimmed with no assistance whatever. It looked like an *aéroplane* of black satin with wings of black maline. "Of course, we know nice people; but although they've got plenty of class, they certainly are dull. It seems to me the most wonderful thing in the world that Mrs. Peabody has taken such a fancy to me." She drew on the chamois gloves which were so exquisitely clean because she

had cleaned them herself. "It seems to me that I'm living for the first time in my life."

"Well, don't think for a moment that I'm not glad for you, Ann," Lainey said. Her tone was full of fervor. But as she watched her sister leave the house and walk briskly up the street, the enthusiasm went out of her eyes; they became all doubt.

"First you pull it free from the shell with your fork," said Jimmie Talbot. "Then you salt it. I never add anything but lemon-juice. But seeing you're a beginner, I guess we'll do the regular stunts. Now just a drop of tabasco. Here! *Here!* That's too much. You'll burn the roof of your mouth off. Now a little horseradish. That's right. Squeeze the lemon over all of them. Remember to swallow it whole. Now you're off."

"Isn't it delicious," commented Ann. The mental glow that, with her, always turned to a physical glow now ran through her entire system. She had just encompassed her first little-neck clam and she had a conviction that that hazardous and tingling feat had admitted her to the final chamber of young ladyhood. She ate the rest of the clams slowly, holding her fork with the instinctive grace, half forceful grip, half butterfly caress, with which her large hands closed on all small objects. From time to time, her glance shot through the room, and after each survey her eyes seemed to flash a more living gold, her cheeks a more violent bloom.

It was the scene and the atmosphere in which she had in imagination seen herself a hundred times—the dinner-hour of Boston's biggest and smartest hotel. The room was crowded; the stadium from

which Ann had witnessed her first varsity baseball game had seemed to empty its contents directly into the grill. The big room bulged to bursting with beautiful youth. The Harvard crimson and the Yale blue made a network of color everywhere. And in the air—half a guttural bubbling, half a high-pitched gabbling, crisscrossed with music, burst by jets of laughter and broken by the popping of champagne-corks—the noise pressed on Ann's bewildered sense like a ponderable thing.

"Can you eat your squab without assistance?" Jimmie Talbot asked presently.

"No," Ann confessed, "I can't, but I will. If they only served manicure-scissors, I'd know how to go at it. But somehow it seems so wicked. I feel as if I were eating the canary-bird."

Their own table, Ann decided privately, was as interesting as any. Indeed, the arrival of their party stirred a long rippling wave of turned heads which began at the door and ended only when they sat down. Apparently the table had been reserved for them; it was set for eight and decorated with crimson.

This in itself would provide substance for a talk until midnight with Lainey, but it was not all.

For instance, a gentleman in evening-clothes, whom Ann guessed to be the proprietor and who treated Commodore Carleton with an obsequious kindness, had just presented each of the ladies with a souvenir. Ann's gift was a little figurine in cloth of a Harvard player. It would ornament her bureau, Ann vowed, until she died. Also, from time to time, a concealed orchestra emitted the latest and choicest tango music. Ann had enjoyed this more than anything,

until Mr. Talbot said, "What rotten music! Why do hotels keep up this farce of having an orchestra?"

"I don't know," Ann said, taking her cue at once. "Isn't it an absurd custom?"

Besides all this, everybody except Ann had drunk cocktails. And now, reposing on the floor between her and Commodore Carleton, sparkled a silver bucket, filled with ice, from which emerged a big bottle with a golden top. Ann had not shared the cocktails; she had not tasted the foamy, sparkly contents of the gold-topped bottle. But everybody else had; their glasses had been filled twice. It seemed to Ann that she had never seen people so touchingly happy over a baseball game. Ann was happy too—happier than any of them—but not because of the Harvard victory, because she was where she was.

It was a curious thing about these people—Ann had noticed it many times—they seemed to depend so much on drinks. Always they were just about to have a drink, or always they had just had one. The greatest catastrophe that could happen in their various excursions by sea or land was to strike a dry zone. They were always making detours in their automobile-trips to get to places they had not intended to visit, or to avoid spots they had purposed to explore, according as they turned out "wet" or "dry." But they were very attractive about their drinking. Ann was experiencing a scathing revulsion against the atmosphere of total abstinence in which she had grown up. She discovered that all her life she had been harboring many foolish delusions. She had supposed, for instance,

that when people drank, they began instantly to stutter and stagger. In point of fact, there was no change whatever as far as Ann could see—except for a more lively turn to the conversation after the second round of cocktails. And Jimmie Talbot was always much nicer then. He became talkative, communicative. Ann felt that she did not yet know these people very well, but after a second cocktail Jimmie Talbot dropped remarks all along the line of their tête-à-tête which cleared up much. Only one thing bothered. Commodore Carleton, who seemed ever to have one ear open for their conversation, was constantly interrupting to engage Ann in tête-à-tête. But, although his talk always made Ann laugh, it also made her, as she told Lainey, feel more like sixteen than eighteen.

“You see, Ann,” Lainey had remarked at this, with one of her rare touches of humor, “Commodore Carleton doesn't realize yet that there's at least ten years' difference between those ages.”

Such an episode had just occurred. Mr. Talbot had become communicative. “You see that table over there, Ann?” he said. “Well, look at the girl with the setting hen on her hat. I'll tell you a story about her——” when Commodore Carleton burst in.

“This is to Ann,” he said. Everybody raised a glass and drank deep.

Ann sparkled and blazed, flushed and smiled. “I don't know what you say when anybody drinks to you,” she confided to the table generally, “but it certainly makes you feel important.”

“Oh, Ann,” Commodore Carleton sighed, “if I could only have your spirits on plain water.”

Commodore Carleton proceeded to engage her in one of his little-girl talks. He asked her which she thought the prettiest girl in the room and he agreed with her choice. Ann asked him which he thought the most attractive man, and utterly disagreed with him. The orchestra played a selection from "Hänsel und Gretel," and he told her all about the opera. He said that it was just old enough for Ann and that when it came to Boston he must remember to get tickets for her and her charming sister. To Ann's great delight, he made a note to that effect in a little leather notebook.

At the same time, Ann secretly longed to resume her tête-à-tête with Jimmie Talbot. It would never occur to her to ask Commodore Carleton any but impersonal questions. But Jimmie Talbot had just swung into the mood in which with just a little help from her—the push of an interjected phrase, the pull of a tiny question—he would float into a full current of confidence. There were many definite questions that Ann wanted to ask and many more, as yet vague and unformulated, that would, she knew, hurry in their wake. She was conscious of a great, a burning curiosity about these people.

She had met this set all at once. Mrs. Damon, her nearest neighbor in Marlowe Place, had let the big old Damon house to Mrs. Peabody. Mrs. Damon asked Lainey and Ann to call on her tenants. Lainey and Ann had called—and all the rest had come naturally enough. Party after party had occurred—mainly on Jimmie Talbot's initiative. Lainey dropped out of the combination at once. For, except with Commodore Carleton, Lainey was not mentally at home. Ann, however, was per-

fectly at home. She liked everybody. She could not quite make up her mind which she preferred, Commodore Carleton or Jimmie Talbot. If she inclined a little towards the latter, it was only because, so unmistakably, he inclined towards her. The two men were very different: Commodore Carleton so gracefully slender, so suavely dārk, with so distinguished a baldness and such beautiful manners; Jimmie Talbot so athletically burly, so freshly blonde, with so infectious a gaiety and such beautiful clothes. But Ann was very certain that she liked Mrs. Peabody best of all. She said this to Lainey with a strenuous emphasis every time the opportunity presented. Ann was certain, too, that Mrs. Peabody liked her; although lately they had had little to say to each other. Ann had a feeling that Mrs. Peabody wanted to say something very much—that it trembled on her lips every time Ann accepted another invitation.

Mrs. Peabody was the most amazing person that Ann had ever seen.

She was one of those women who succeed in being wonderful-looking with utterly inadequate materials; a skin naturally pasty, hair characterlessly black and straight, features at odds with all her facial contours. But she had a tall, slim, sharply-curved figure. She moved with the swift effortless dart of a sea creature. Her clothes always seemed the emanation of her personality. And the glassed-over top of her dressing-table supported files of magic unguents in cut-glass bottles and jeweled boxes. And so when, white-skinned, sleek-haired, jet-eyed, carmine-lipped, curved like a Damascus blade, her meager subtle draperies drifting like a

soul-spume, she came floating down the big shadowy parlors of the old Damon house, she seemed to have stepped from one of the Japanese prints in which the room abounded. Socially, she was a strange combination. One half the time she smothered under a listlessness that was the fellow of Commodore Carleton's; again she exploded with a vivacity that left Jimmie Talbot dry and formal.

Of Mr. Peabody, Ann saw very little. He was a tall, thin, bald-headed spectacled gentleman, always in smoking-jacket and house-slippers. He was writing a book—it was Lainey who discovered this—about the influence of Marco Polo on Christopher Columbus. Or was it of Christopher Columbus on Marco Polo—Ann could never remember which it was. But Lainey knew and Lainey said it would be an "epoch-making" book. Mr. Peabody did not do anything in particular beyond spending days at the Public Library and he seemed to have no relation to the whirl of his wife's life. Commodore Carleton and Jimmie Talbot had a very definite relation to that whirl; they were the hubs of its wheels. There were, of course, spokes to those wheels. Three were present: Jock Clarkson, a plump, feathery-haired gentleman whose transparent epidermic softness contrasted strangely with his opaque ocular hardness; Miss Bernice Berringer, the first real chorus-girl, and Miss Rae Leigh, the first real artist's model that Ann had ever known.

Mr. Peabody sat between the two young women. Ann noted with approval the attention they paid him. First one filled his glass with half the contents of hers; then the other augmented it from the bottle. Mr. Peabody passed rapidly from a stage of ex-



treme volubility about nothing in particular through one of great mirth about even less to a brooding silence. Finally he withdrew so far into himself that his eyelids drooped to cover his retreat. "Thinking of Marco Polo," Ann thought scornfully. "Isn't it fierce being a high-brow!"

The two ladies, indulgent of Mr. Peabody's intellectual absorption, devoted themselves thenceforth to the rest of the party. Ann like to watch them, although she stood a little in awe of them. Miss Leigh had never of her own accord addressed her. And Miss Berringer seemed not to look at Ann when she talked with her. Miss Berringer could sink her gaze deep enough into Jimmie Talbot's eyes, Ann observed.

Miss Berringer was a big woman with eyes babyishly round and blue and a voice babyishly round and treble. She wore her golden hair carefully tousled; it was all ripply, glinting ends. Her figure seemed to run from the point of her tiny, big-buckled shoes wider and wider until her square shoulders effected a truncation. Her white lace gown fitted this pyramid so perfectly that it looked as though it would have to be pared off.

Miss Leigh, on the contrary, began at the top with a tiny, flat, smooth, russet-brown head which Lainey said reminded her of a snake that has just succeeded in coiling. And although architecturally she was as straight and compact as a sheathed umbrella, she ran down by means of her flame-colored pagoda dress to a greater and greater amplitude. Miss Leigh was, in some respects, Ann thought, the most wonderful of them all; for she smoked cigarettes all the time. Ann decided that

she must swallow the smoke; it was such a long time after she drew it into her mouth before it emerged, thinly coiling and fluttering, from her nostrils. Ann often wondered if Miss Leigh's strange murky pallor, through which the smoldering eyes seemed to have singled a slit, was the result of this habit. Ann had a discontented idea that her own wild-rose bloom was a little vulgar.

"We're all going to the Pop Concert Thursday night, Ann," Jimmie Talbot said presently. "Remember, don't make any engagement for it."

"No, I won't," Ann said obediently. "Who's going?"

"Oh, all that's here to-night," Talbot answered indifferently, "unless we drop Miss Berringer."

"Oh," said Ann. And her "oh" had a little submerged question in it. She was wild to know why Miss Berringer should be dropped when it so distinctly ruined Miss Berringer's evening if Jimmie Talbot were not present.

"She makes me sick," Talbot went on, as though answering that question. "I hate fat women, anyway. Don't let yourself get fat, Ann, whatever you do."

Ann did not want to get fat. At the same time she thought that Miss Berringer was rather fascinating. She said so.

"And it seems to suit her, being plump—don't you think?" she advanced a little timidly. For the first time in her life, Ann was examining her opinions very carefully before she expressed them.

"Well," Talbot went on, "if she didn't flash that baby-blue stare so often. And that baby-blue voice gets on my nerves. Bernice is a terrible

grafter too. I get so tired of paying for her dinners. Why the other night——”

And then—it was maddening—“This is to Ann,” Commodore Carleton interrupted from the other side. Again everybody raised creaming glasses and drank.

“Dear me!” said Ann, glowing and glittering, “you make me feel like a queen or something. My brothers haven’t any idea what an important person I am.”

“Oh, Ann,” Commodore Carleton sighed again, “if I only could have your spirits on plain water.”

Again he engaged her in a little-girl talk.

The dinner progressed. More and more frequently the glasses creamed full and creamed empty. By and by came coffee and what Ann afterwards described to Lainey as, “little darling glasses of syrupy-looking stuff with golden specks floating through it.” Ann would have loved to taste this, but she declined it.

“Now where’ll we go?” Mrs. Peabody asked at last, dipping glittering nails into her finger-bowl.

What, after all, she loved most about this set, Ann decided, was that their parties never seemed to end. They were always going somewhere else.

“How about the Pop?” Miss Berringer said.

“No, I don’t want to go to the Pop,” Jimmie Talbot decided for them. “Besides we couldn’t get a table now. Let’s go joy-riding. I’ll telephone for the car.”

“Well, for goodness’ sake, Jimmie,” Miss Leigh said, “don’t get us forty miles from a drink, the way you did the other night.”

"Well, did you have a good time?" Lainey, popping her little filmy head from the pillow, contemplated her sister, with drooping eyes, sleepy-sweet.

"Oh, lovely!" Ann sighed. Ann's color was as high, her eyes as brilliant, her lips as fresh, as at six o'clock. "We had a wonderful dinner and then we drove and drove; oh, everybody was so gay. And just think, Lainey, they've asked me to the Pop, Thursday night. I keep thinking they'll get sick of me and drop me. What have I to offer such wonderful people?"

"You've got those eyes to offer them, for one thing," Lainey said, dropping back on the pillow. "They won't get sick of you as long as you keep *them* in your head."

"*Lainey!*" Ann said. But, involuntarily, she turned and met with her own wide flaming gaze the deep golden look in the mirror.

Thursday night at the Pop turned out to be another wonderful occasion. Again their table had been engaged in advance. Again it seemed to Ann that a long wave of turned heads cast up a spray of comment as they took their seats. Mrs. Peabody would have excited notice anywhere. She wore black and white; two colors brought together always in sharp contrast and in curious effects of angles and planes. More than ever, she looked like a study of herself done in the Japanesque manner by some clever painter. She was unusually apathetic. Perhaps for this reason she drank three absinthe frappés in succession. Commodore Carleton who, Ann thought, looked worn, devoted him-

self to her; they talked in low tones. Ann often thought how interesting their conversation must be; Commodore Carleton wouldn't dare to inflict little-girl talk on Mrs. Peabody. It was a small party. Miss Berringer, more than ever like a heroic-size bisque doll, was accompanied by a stranger, a tall, thin, sandy person, a Mr. Roper, who at regular intervals impaled Ann with a long, thin, expressionless glance. After the important matter of the drinks had been attended to, Ann commented regretfully on Mr. Peabody's absence.

"Yes, the old fool," Jimmie Talbot said unexpectedly. "And I'm glad of it. I wish he'd get wise to the fact that nobody wants him, putting the kibosh on perfectly good parties, talking about that prehistoric gink, Polo Marco. I suppose some time he'll finish the rotten thing and then poor Carleton'll have to put up to get it printed."

"But why should Commodore Carleton have to pay for it," Ann protested. "The Peabodys must have a lot of money. See how they spend it."

"Well—yes—of course—but you see——" Jimmie Talbot seemed to lose all oral connection with his thought. "What I mean is—Well, it would be so like the Commodore—he's such a philanthropic guy—to get some publishers to pretend to accept the book—so that Peabody would never know what a lemon it was——"

"Oh, I see," said Ann slowly. And she added blindly, more by way of making conversation than real comment, "Commodore Carleton looks tired to-night."

Jimmie Talbot stopped to finish his high-ball.

"Yes, I guess he didn't sleep any last night. Mrs. Carleton had one of her attacks."

"Mrs. Carleton!" Ann exclaimed. "Is Commodore Carleton *married?*"

"Why yes!" Talbot said this after a slight hesitation. But he went on volubly and smoothly enough. "Didn't you know that?"

Ann had not known it; and for one instant she had a sensation of being cheated. The next moment, however, she realized her ignorance was merely the result of her stupidity.

"Well, everybody else does," Talbot went on briskly. "Mrs. Carleton has been an invalid for years."

"Oh," Ann said blankly. It was to recover from this that she said, "Where is Mr. Clarkson this evening?"

"In Chicago. His firm wired him to come. He left yesterday morning."

Ann did not digest this. Her eyes had grown perplexed. Indeed, all the evening, they held a little dulling shadow. Her gaze kept going from Mrs. Peabody to Commodore Carleton and back again. Nobody noticed this. Once Commodore Carleton engaged her in one of his little-girl talks; but obviously his mind was not on the conversation. It concluded with a question from Ann. "Where is Miss Leigh to-night?"

"She's in Chicago," the Commodore answered absently. "She went yesterday morning."

"Well, did you have a good time to-night?" asked Lainey.

"Lovely!" Ann replied, and stopped abruptly.

Silence ensued. "Lainey Ollivant," Ann began fiercely after a while, "if you think I care what people's morals are, you might as well know that I *don't*. I don't care what they're doing so long as they seem well-behaved on the surface. I hate dull people and homely people and poor people and shabby people—women who look as if they did their own work and made their own clothes; and men who are tightwads and high-brows. I hate serious people and refined people. Take Miss Huling, for instance. You'd know she had class just to look at her hats. But I don't care for class any more. I like spenders better than anybody else."

"All right!" A little coo of mirth pulsed through Lainey's sleepy voice. "Don't mind me. What is your next engagement?"

"We're going to Nantasket on Commodore Carleton's yacht," Ann said with the air of one who unfolds a fairy-tale. "We're going to have dinner at a hotel and supper on board the yacht and we're going to sail home by moonlight. It's going to be rather a big party. There will be two automobiles at the wharf to meet us—Commodore Carleton's and Mr. Talbot's, Lainey." Again Ann had the air of challenging her sister, "Commodore Carleton is one of the finest and most delightful men I've ever known."

"Oh, he's a duck," Lainey murmured so sleepily. "Why I'm not dead in love with him, I don't know."

"I never could fall in love with him," Ann said decidedly, "but I'd always like him." Again she threw an explosive at her sleepy sister, "And Mrs. Peabody is just as charming as she can be."

"Yes," Lainey agreed with reservation, "if a

stick of dynamite suspended from the ceiling by a thread is charming."

"Well she *is*," Ann muttered.

The trip to Nantasket was all that Ann expected of it. Only one blot marred the day's joy. And that came immediately after the long gay, sunlit sail down the harbor. They discovered that they were hungry; yet it was too early to dine. Besides, as they had beaten the first of the regular excursion-boats, the hotels had not yet thrown off the night's torpor. An occasional small café showed an open door, a sleepy waiter moving within. They stepped into one of these.

It was a small, clean bare room, each table covered with enamel-cloth and set with a series of articles in heavy pressed-glass, sugar-bowl, pitcher, pepper-pot, salt-shaker, toothpick holder. An old man sat at the desk, painfully adding in longhand a list of special dishes to a pile of printed bills. He came over to their table, a frail, bent, gray-bearded figure. An extraordinary pair of spectacles made him grotesque. The glasses were thick and blue, rectangular in shape, quadruple, hinged so that one glass covered the eye and the other bent around the temple.

Talbot ordered chowder. The old man went to the slide and called the order into the depths. But before bending over he took off his glasses and placed them on the desk. Without them, it was apparent he could see but dimly; he bent and peered and shambled. When the steaming dishes shot up from below, he himself served them, carrying the plates with great caution.



Whenever the old man turned his back, Jimmie Talbot did an imitation of him. The mimicry was perfect, but it made Ann uncomfortable; she was afraid that the victim would turn suddenly and get it. This did not happen, however; Talbot dropped his impersonation with lightning swiftness. Besides, Ann said to herself suddenly, without his glasses the old man was almost blind. In the end she laughed noiselessly with the rest. At the same time, the incident left an uncomfortable stain in her mind. The morning was half over before she completely forgot it.

But what followed would have wiped out an incident far more unpleasant: a long crisp walk over the sparkling sand, dinner in a far-away hotel, the dining-room of which overlooked the sea from a high crag of rock; the invasion later of all the beach attractions, fortune-tellers, skating-rinks, roller-coasters, photographers, and shooting-galleries, the varied and manifold delights of Paradise Park. These events were interspersed with popcorn, peanuts, candy, soda, and hot-dogs. Ann had never seen so much money spent in her life. Last of all came the reëmbarkation, a supper on the water which seemed to be accompanied from beginning to end with fusillades of champagne-corks.

Afterwards, the party divided up into pairs. Talbot took Ann to the bow to watch the dividing waters. They talked for a long time. It grew darker. The others were made to seem very far away by the twilight, by even the heavy plop of the waves against the boat, and the long, sibilant plash that followed.

Stars began to flicker here and there. The moon came up.

"Oh, I'm tired," Ann said after a long while—and she sat down abruptly.

Every physical element in Ann's appearance contradicted this assertion. She had none of Lainey's fragile transparency. Lainey looked like alabaster, silver-white straight through. Ann looked as though, if you were to cut into her, you would strike the golden-yellow of the plum, the scarlet-saffron of the peach. The long hot day had accentuated all her colorings. Her cheeks flared; her eyes blazed; her lips seemed to engage her teeth in a dance of rose madder with pearl.

Jimmie Talbot looked at her critically. "You don't look it," he said, "although you've got a license. But I'll fix you up." Suddenly, as by a feat of legerdemain, he pulled a slender green bottle from one pocket, extracted two glasses from the other. The bottle was white-labeled, golden-headed. The glasses were flare-cupped and long-stemmed. "Come! Have your first drink of the sparkle-stuff with me. It will set you up."

"Yes," said Ann with sudden resolution, "I will." Talbot's capable fingers were already inserting a corkscrew. There came a mimic explosion, the rush into the glass of a fluid, faintly golden, violently creamy. "I'd like to know what I'm waiting for," Ann said scornfully, "putting off tasting champagne."

"That's my idea of nothing to put off," said Talbot. He handed her the glass. The boat slapped a little of its iridescence on Ann's hand; it seemed to her that her flesh tingled. "May this be the

first of many, Ann," said Jimmie Talbot. They both drank, Talbot slowly, Ann, in the spirit of amateur bravado, at a single draught. He filled her glass again; she drank that quickly too.

"Now," she said to herself triumphant but trepid, "if I see double and begin to stutter, I hope I have the sense to keep still about it."

But she did not stutter; for she had no more inclination to talk than at a wonderful drama. And she did not see double; she saw everything with a miraculous clarity as in strange dreams she had experienced. She gazed sometimes at the moon which seemed gradually to come nearer and to swell to a spherical roundness. It inlaid everything with a luminous green enamel. She had a feeling that if she put her hand out, she could touch it. She looked off on the water which gradually stiffened to the consistency of a fabric, heavily embroidered with sparkling bullion. It seemed to scrape the side of the yacht. She had a feeling that she would like to get out and walk on that heaving solid surface. Mr. Talbot did a great deal of feverish ejaculatory talking, Ann a great deal of dreamy moveless listening. Sometimes she lost track of what he was saying; it seemed to merge with the green luster of that spheroid moon or the silvery contours of that substantial sea. And then sometimes what he said came shouted to her ear.

"——but everybody says she leads him a deuce of a life—I know myself how kind Carleton's been—I've been to their house too many times—he's a wonder—if there ever was a prince of good fellows—so generous—everybody—perfect host—charitable—number of people he carries along—wouldn't

believe it—something same situation with my own wife——”

So Mr. Talbot was married. For an instant that seemed hideous. But in a moment Ann had a more terrible sensation—that she had caught herself peeking through a keyhole. But it merged finally with the shine of an emerald moon on an argent sea. The moon began to flatten and the sea to melt.

“—never has understood me—not been husband and wife for five years—her way and I go mine—my kind of people and I hate hers—if it wasn't for the children, I'd get out to-morrow.”

So Mr. Talbot had children. This fact, hatefully alien, also suddenly melted into the silver mesh of sea that had caught a bobbing green moon in its web.

And so on and on. Gradually the moon grew flatter and flatter, and whiter and whiter, until it was only silver moon. Gradually the sea grew thinner and thinner, and duller and duller, until it was only gray water. Wharves slid into view.

Ann stirred and sat upright. “I feel as though I'd been asleep,” she said gaily.

Talbot stirred too, and his movement sent the empty bottle rolling. “Oh, I forgot,” he said, as though that reminded him of something. His hand went to an inside pocket. It pulled out a pair of spectacles, of blue-glass, rectangular in shape, quadruple, hinged. “I swiped them when that old geezer wasn't looking.” He leaped to his feet, slipped them on his eyes. Suddenly he was an old, bent, stumbling, shambling figure, serving an imaginary table.

Ann watched—frozen.

"Give them to me," she commanded suddenly. And Talbot, smiling an assent, whipped the glasses off his eyes, presented them to her with a low bow.

Ed, fresh from his trip, bronzed, clear-eyed, was striding up and down the living-room. "Why, Lainey," he was saying, "they're the worst crowd Ann could possibly run with. I should think Mrs. Damon was crazy—Nobody but a high-brow could possibly have—Carleton's a decent enough fellow, but he's been putting up for Mrs. Peabody for years. Jimmie Talbot's a regular rounder. He's pickled all the time. And when he's lit up, he gossips like an old woman. Peabody's a cold-blooded old reptile who's not earned his salt for ten years. As for Rae Leigh and Bernice Berringer, the least said about them, the better."

Lainey looked interested in these disclosures, but not shocked. "You'd better tell Ann this."

"I'll tell her, all right," Ed said grimly. "Beckie forwarded your letters. Fortunately, I did not get them until I was sailing home. You can fancy what a stew my trip would have been if they'd come before. As it was—What time is it?"

"Twelve," Lainey answered, as Ed scooped out his watch.

"They ought to have been back long before this," Ed said. "And after a day on the water, I should think they'd be too tired to go anywhere else. I can't imagine——"

It was in fact two o'clock before Ann arrived.

"You needn't tell me anything, Ed," she said as she kissed her brother. "I've had a long talk with Commodore Carleton and he's done it much more

beautifully than you ever could. He's the most wonderful man I—although," she added, as one being honest with herself, "I'd guessed a lot of it. I'm through with those people—but not for the reasons you think. I'm late because—after we'd taken everybody home, I asked Commodore Carleton to drive me back to Nantasket in his machine. There was something I had to do at once, because I could not have closed my eyes until it was done. He understood." She glided smoothly up the stairs.

"Lainey," Ed exclaimed in exasperation, "I don't see how you could have been so blind."

"I wasn't blind, Ed," Lainey answered. "I got it all. Not quite in the detail that you have given it—but as an atmosphere and an influence."

"Then, why in God's name——" Ed began. But he did not finish. Despite their temperamental and intellectual differences, Ed and Lainey never had in conversation to finish their sentences.

"I'll tell you why, Ed," Lainey answered the question that had not been put. "You see things are different nowadays. They don't bring girls up the old way any more—sheltering them from experience and making them incapable of grappling with life when it offers a real problem. Ann is a very pretty girl; she's discontented, audacious, pleasure-loving and luxury-loving. She's yearned for such experiences as these, and it's her right to have them—in order to find out—I'm glad she's had them."

"Oh, Lainey," Ed sat down heavily, as though a long tension had snapped, "you don't know what might have happened."

"I know what *couldn't* happen," Lainey said,

“for I know Ann. But whatever occurred, it's Ann's business—not ours.”

At the same time, “What changed you, Ann?” Lainey asked the moment she was alone with her sister.

“Well, I'll tell you, Lainey,” Ann answered. “I still prefer smart people who know how to do things—and spenders—and I still don't care what their morals are. But I've discovered one thing that I didn't know about myself before—I guess I like them to be kind.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### LAINNEY AND THE ETERNAL MASCULINE

“**W**HAT do you suppose I heard to-day?” Ann Ollivant demanded. She suspended her pen over the ink-bottle, a golden star of mischief dancing in each eye, and gazed at the quiet family group.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” Lainney answered for them all, “and I never shall guess. Tell us quick.”

“That’s right—you never will guess,” agreed Ann. “You could have knocked me down with a feather.”

“Oh, do tell us, Ann,” Beckie entreated, interrupting her count and putting her lace down.

“That isn’t all,” Ann went on tantalizingly, bending again to her writing. “I’ve got another piece of gossip that will make your hair curl.”

“Oh, quit your stalling, Ann!” Ed commanded over the top of his book.

“Rubber!” Ann gibed.

“Come across!” Matt reinforced his brother from the other room.

“Rubber!” Ann gibed again. “Wait just one jiff till I copy the T’s.” She bent over a new address-book of a brilliant scarlet morocco, to which, from an old blank-book, she was transferring data.

For a moment, there was no sound in the room but the scratching of Ann’s pen and the fall of the coals in the grate. In one island of light made by



the big student-lamp, Matt and Roly hung wordless, almost breathless, over the chess-board. In another oasis of gold, cast by the Japanese lamp, Beckie resumed her smocking and Ed his reading. Outside the storm was besieging them with wet and clamor; the rain attacked the windows in sheets and jets; a high wind curled with the roar of a flame about the house, buffeted it, rocked it. In the pauses the woodbine tapped at the windows with its bony old fingers, rubbed against the casements, squeaked on the clapboards.

"This will take all the leaves off the vine," Lainey said dreamily. "I'm sorry. Yesterday in the sunshine they looked as though they'd been dipped in wine."

Lainey had just shampooed her hair and was drying it at the fire. She knelt on the hearth, her face to the flame, her hair falling over it in a cascade of molten pale-gold. Wherever the firelight touched this cascade, it also turned to liquid, oozing red through the pale-gold mesh and spreading out in great splashes. Now and then Lainey seized handfuls of hair and worried them perfunctorily.

"Please hurry, Ann!" Lainey's voice came, muffled, through the cascade. "I do love gossip. It's so exciting."

Ann laughed triumphantly. "The first is about Edna Williamson," she began after a while. "She has just announced her engagement to Max Elton."

"*Max!*" said Beckie, and "*Edna!*" said Ed. Their exclamations were simultaneous and their emphases were the same. "Well, I've been expecting it," came from Lainey, and, "I thought it was Miriam Max was after," came from Matt.

"I'd like to know how you could expect it, Lainey Ollivant, when it's been such a surprise to everybody else," Ann answered her sister. "So did Miriam," she answered her brother. "That's what makes it gossip. Of course, the two girls living in the same apartment like that; and Max, being in the apartment above, he saw just as much of one as of the other. Miriam thought he was calling on her. But he wasn't. She's all broken up over it; and they say she's been an awful cat to poor Edna ever since."

"That's the mistake girls are always making," Ed commented, "assuming that a man wants to marry them because he calls on them twice in succession."

"Sure!" Matt agreed. "They're forever doing that. It keeps a fellow from calling a whole lot of places that he'd be going to all the time, otherwise. Check! I've got you sewed up there all right, Roly-Poly Pudding-and-Pie. Why, Tom Lathrop was telling me only the other day that he started to call on a bunch of girls that he liked an awful lot. He was having a good time too. But the first thing he knew, the others kept leaving him alone with the oldest one. He hadn't any matrimonial intentions; so he beat it while the going was good. He says he'd been engaged if he hadn't. But oh, the frost he gets whenever he meets any of them."

"Serves him right!" Roly said with scorn. "Fusser! Calling on girls all the time. I wish the skirt had nailed him. I wouldn't have had any pity for him. *Check!* Who's looney now? I guess I've got you on the run, Matthew-Mark-Luke-and John."

"What's the other gossip, Ann?" Ed demanded.

"Rubber!" Ann gibed for the third time. The mischief in her eyes seemed to liquefy, to splash over and run down to her brilliant lips. "Men are the fiercest gossips ever! Wait till I finish the W's."

"You're quite right, Ann," came, muffled, from the sage Lainey. "Men are responsible for just as much gossip as women." Her hair was almost dry now, but she continued to shake the straight, glinty masses over the fender.

There came another pause, in which the wind drove to shrill crescendo and the rain beat to noisy climax. Ann bent again to the scarlet address-book. Roly's black head—the lamplight made purple runnels through its swart thatch—dipped close over the board. With mingled anger and dismay he attacked his problem. Matt's tawny head—the firelight turned its curling crest to carved copper—was thrown back. With mingled triumph and amusement, he watched his brother. But Ed did not resume his reading, nor Beckie her crocheting.

"Oh come on, Ann!" Ed urged finally.

"Come through!" Matt called.

Ann laughed another tantalizing laugh. "Well," she began importantly, "there's been an awful break between Babe Davis and Sidney Warren. It seems that Babe, somehow, got it into her head that he was crazy about Jane Forrester. When he proposed, Babe was utterly dumfounded. She refused him and Sid got mad and he accused her of encouraging him. Now they're not speaking. Lucky escape for her, I say. For Sid's turned out to be an awful cad. He's going round knocking Babe to everybody."

"Well, Babe certainly let him spend a lot of money on her," Ed pronounced judicially.

"Yes, but he included Jane in all his parties," Ann explained, "and Jane is such a heart-smasher. And Babe isn't especially quick in the head, you know."

With an abrupt movement, Lainey turned about and sat cross-legged on the hearth, her face towards her family. She threw her hair back. It fell to the floor and made there a little basket of turned-up ends. Her faint film of halo began to rise above her brow. Her figure was straight with decision, but her voice was soft with perplexity. "What I would like to know—what I can't see—what I don't understand—how is a girl to know when a man is calling on her, whether he's in love with her or not?"

"What a question," commented Beckie, smocking wildly. "You can always tell. There's something inside you that makes you realize. It's intuition."

"Nothing inside me ever makes me realize how people feel towards me," Lainey said with decision. "I've occasionally had intuitions, of course, but they were just as likely to turn out to be unreliable. In fact, when I trust them, they're always wrong."

"That's because you're such an absent-minded thing, Lainey," Ann explained pityingly. "You see, you don't give your intuitions a chance."

"You must be a very queer girl, Lainey," Beckie said vigorously. "Why, I always go by my intuitions. I've never made a mistake yet. And if I don't stick to my first impressions of people, I always regret it. Now, take that Mrs. Dalton—if I'd only trusted the way I felt about her, the first

time I looked at her! The moment I saw how near together her eyes were, I told you——”

“How about the time you gave that Armenian pedler five dollars to get educated on,” Roland asked in the tone of scientific investigation, “and he swiped the hall-rug on his way out?”

“That was different,” Beckie said stiffly. “I’m not referring to things like that. Anybody might have made that mistake. I mean intuitions in regard to people you’d be likely to know—not foreigners.”

“Well, if a girl hasn’t any more intuition than I have,” Lainey sighed, a little waxen wrinkle coming between her brows, “I still don’t see how she’s ever going to tell when a man’s in love with her—or what’s more important, when he *isn’t*.”

“You’re not supposed to think of it, Lainey,” Ann said with impatience. “It’s very—very—unwomanly. You’re not supposed to have ideas that a man *wants* to marry you.”

“But I couldn’t help thinking of it,” Lainey persisted with her gentle obstinacy. “I couldn’t help having ideas.”

“So much the worse for you, then,” Ann said in a relentless voice. “But you oughtn’t to, just the same. You’re supposed to drift along, paying no attention to what he says or does, letting things take a natural course.”

“And then when he proposes,” an injection of scorn froze the perplexity in Lainey’s tone, “you permit yourself to wake up to the fact that you’ve been in love with him all the time.”

“Yes,” said Ann.

“Yes,” said Beckie.

Lainey stared at her sisters, a thousand tiny indignations blazing in her face. "But—but—but"—apparently she staggered mentally as well as orally—"suppose he shouldn't propose at all?"

"You still would take no notice of anything," Ann informed her.

"That's one of the legitimate risks of the game," supplemented Ed.

"But—but——" Again, mentally and orally, Lainey staggered to silence. "Suppose," she took it up with an onrush of spirit, "suppose, by and by, you wake up to the fact that, by some awful fatality, you are in love with him and he has no intention of proposing to you, what do you do then?" She fixed her deep, blue-lighted gaze on Ann.

"He'd propose," Beckie thrust in grimly, "if you knew your business."

"Anyway, Lainey," Roland called from the other room, "I'd knock his block off for you."

"Not if I was around," Matt said. "The thing to do is to let a man feel free."

Lainey's narrowed questioning, shimmering gaze still held Ann's wide, confident blazing look.

Ann answered when the others stopped. "You do nothing," she said cuttingly, "if you are a lady."

Lainey meditated, a tiny-boned, helpless-looking, bird-claw of a hand on each knee. Her released hair slid in flat straight masses forward over her shoulders, diminishing her face until it was almost lost in shadow.

"It seems to me," she said finally with a sigh, "it's an awful job being a lady."

"I don't find it so," Ann stated superbly.

"*You!*" Roland exploded. "Who ever told you, you were a lady?"

Ann was still superb enough not to answer.

"Fortunately for me," Lainey decided, "I don't have to bother about this question, anyway. Not being the kind of girl that attracts men— Besides, I never intend to marry, anyway."

"They all say that, Lainey," Ed and Matt informed her in chorus.

"Well, it would be a good principle to stick to," growled Roly. "I wish all girls had that idea."

"But I should think for a girl like you, Ann," Lainey continued, ignoring Roland, "that all men find attractive, it would be very puzzling. However, the thing to do, of course, is to assume that no man wants to marry you until he makes a deposition to that effect before a justice of the peace."

"Lainey, I think that's the most immodest—and unlady-like—and mercenary remark I ever listened to," came in bursts of shocked phrases from Beckie.

"Well, all I've got to say," began Ann, "is——"

The long strident peal of the door-bell interrupted.

"Good Lord, who can that be this stormy night?" Ann concluded.

"Oh, my *stars!*" Lainey started with a horrified vigor, "and garters!" she ended in feeble dismay.

"Lainey Ollivant," Ann demanded sternly, "who have you invited here?"

"Some young men that Bird and I met at the local," Lainey answered meekly, "some Socialists. And I had forgotten all about it. My goodness! I'll never pass a general invitation again as long

as I live. They always come at the worst possible time."

"Stand up!" Ann commanded inflexibly.

Obedient, Lainey stood up, slim as a paper-doll in the long, sage-green Chinese sa'am—an heirloom which she had resurrected from the attic. Her hair fell in straight, arrow-like strands, palely gold to her waist; her house-slippers pointed in red V's from beneath her narrow coat.

"No, you're not going upstairs," Ann hissed swiftly. "I'm not going to entertain a group of high-brows when you haven't given me a moment to think of something to talk about. Roll up your hair!"

Obedient, Lainey bulked her hair in her neck, skewered it together; pegged it down.

"Put on your cap!" continued the unyielding voice.

Obedient, Lainey put on the cap. From under the lace ruffle, the hair fell on her forehead, a fine golden fringe like spun-glass.

"Now open the door!"

Obedient, Lainey opened the door. In another moment, she was performing prodigies of confused introductions.

The three young men, thus suddenly thrown into the Ollivant circle, were contrasted types. Opinions differed widely in regard to them.

Mr. Quentin Quigly had just come from Paris, via New York. He was a magazine writer and he was collecting material for an article entitled, "How Shall We Wake Up Boston?" He was the oldest of the three, a young man of a romantic aspect. He was big-featured and fine-featured. He had a



plumpish look, as though he had been modeled with a bold incisiveness in wax and then allowed to melt a little. His brown eyes were full, expressive, and a little languid. His brown hair was thin, wavy, and a little long. He wore brown corduroy trousers, a loose blouse, a flowing tie, and a Stetson hat. Beckie said that he was as handsome "as a Greek god." Ann remarked that he had red eyelids. Roland observed that he was a fathead. Lainey said nothing.

Mr. Worthington Pope had come straight from Millers Falls, Vermont, to Boston. He was a reporter on the *Chronicle*. He was not so tall as Mr. Quigly, but he bulked bigger and he seemed to be cast in iron. His eyes were like wells of black ink, they were so big and changeless and sparkless; and it was as though his hair, brows, and lashes had been powdered with coal-dust. His skin and teeth were so milky that two great patches of crimson on his cheekbones looked like make-up. His razor seemed never to catch up with the black blur of his beard. "Looks like one of those cowboy heroes in the movies," said Beckie. "If he'd only shave his face *more* and his neck *less!*" remarked Ann. "You ought to see him box!" observed Matt. Lainey said nothing.

Hopwood Lee—everybody called him Hop after that first evening—was an Oregonian who was studying at Harvard. He was no taller than Lainey and almost as small-waisted. His shoulders were enormous, as though they had been carved for a much bigger man and then fitted to his torso. He had small, brilliant gray eyes which twinkled humorously through thick brown lashes; big teeth which

glittered—humorously too—out of a wide mouth; a brown top, more like a pelt than hair; a chin like a rock, notwithstanding it was almost divided into two chins by a deep cleft. “Looks like a little boy playing he was a man,” said Beckie. “I hate those two gold teeth!” remarked Ann. “You ought to see him pitch a ball!” observed Ed. Lainey said nothing.

“Beckie,” Lainey said one Sunday morning, appearing in nightgown and kimono at her sister’s door, “may I get in bed with you for a little while?”

“Of course,” Beckie said sleepily.

Lainey pitpattered across the room, threw her kimono over the back of the bed, ripped off her little scuffs on the edge of a chair, slipped under the clothes, snuggled.

Beckie watched her.

Lainey had changed in the last month. Her whole personality had quickened. Her little slim figure had gained a budding salience, her little oval face a deepening intensity. Her mystical gaze had widened; sparks flashed and died in its blue-gray haze. Her lips seemed to have burst into bloom too; they curved up and away from each other like flower-petals. It was almost voluptuous—that contrast of the whiteness and chill of her skin with the curbed, curled crimson of her wide, soft mouth.

Beckie lay with her eyes open for a while, an expectant look on her face. But nothing came from Lainey. Beckie’s eyes gradually filmed; her lids fell.

“Beckie,” Lainey said suddenly. Her clear little

voice fell like a raindrop on the sleep-charged air. "Do you ever think of marriage?"

Beckie's eyes flashed open, scintillated. "Of course I do," she said. "All the time. Or," she corrected herself, "a lot of the time."

"I don't," Lainey admitted in a crestfallen tone, "or at least I haven't much. In the past, I mean. Lately I have. The trouble with me is, I guess, that I never think of anything until I have to. And marriage is—so—so—strange—and—and——"

Lainey stopped. Her voice faded into silence. She sighed. The sigh faded into silence. Beckie waited. Nothing more came. Gradually again her eyes filmed. Her lids dropped.

"Beckie!" Again Lainey called her sister back from the vestibule of dreams. And again Lainey's voice was like the splash in the sleep-saturated air of some chill liquid. "Do you feel as though—marriage—were an experience that you—ought to have. I mean—do you feel—that your life won't be—complete—without it?"

"I should commit suicide to-morrow," Beckie answered simply, "if I didn't think I was going to get married some day. That's the way I feel."

"Do you, Beckie?" Lainey said. She sighed; but then, as though all along she had been afraid that this was the way it would be, she added, "I think Ann's like that, although perhaps she wouldn't admit it. Beckie, do you know I think there's something very queer about me?" Lainey's tone had become grave, sorrowful, a little alarmed. "The thought of marriage fills me with a—a—a—disgust—yes, that's what it is—a *loathing*. I don't mean—what you think I mean—exactly. I mean—Well,

when I go out to see Cousin Edith and walk up Edgemore Street between those two rows of married-looking houses." Lainey was suddenly fluent, facile, articulate again. "You know what I mean; each with a young married couple in it and perhaps a baby or two. And when I see the rubber-plant in the window and the iceman at the back door and the baby-carriage on the piazza and the baby's wash on the line, a sort of feeling of disgust comes over me that—that—well, Beckie, I just *hate* it. I *hate* it—that's all there is to it. It all looks so cut-and-dried, so like the end of things. It looks as though you had accepted a job and bound yourself to keep it until the end of your days; a job from which there'd never be any change—any advance in responsibility or increase in pay. That isn't all, either. It looks as though you'd shut the door in the face of romance and locked out adventure, as though you'd put your youth in a box in the attic. And when I hear Cousin Edith and Cousin Mark talking that married talk about—oh, you know—the train service and don't-forget-to-order-the-coal and be-sure-and-turn-the-gas-down-in-the-hall—oh, Beckie, it gives me a perfectly horrid sensation. Do you feel that way?"

"No," replied Beckie calmly. "I don't know what you're talking about. I love to go out there. It's my ideal of a home."

"Beckie," Lainey said, "sometimes I hate the word *home*. But I guess I'm queer and different from other people."

Beckie attempted no closer translation of this.

"Beckie, I want to ask you another thing. Would you—would you—have ever thought—What I mean is, do you want to have children?"

For a long moment, Beckie did not answer. Lainey said nothing. But the silence was the kind that accumulates each second in intensity. "Lainey," Beckie broke in at last, "I'm twenty-eight. And if by the time I'm forty I haven't had a baby of my own, I'm going to adopt one."

"Oh!" Lainey said, "Oh!" Then again, "Oh!" There were three emotions in those *ohs*, surprise, wonder, compassion. "How strange! And yet it's beautiful. But, Beckie, I don't feel that way. I feel—I wish—I often think it would be so nice if babies came the way mother told us they did when we were children—growing out of water-lilies. Don't you remember the picture that used to hang in the nursery of an opening lily and a little duck of a baby peeking out from the petals. I believed that ever so long. I had a fight with Marie Mapleson when she told me the truth. I thought that that picture was proof. Oh, I think that would be nice. I mean—I don't see why we have to have fathers for our babies. I think they're awfully unnecessary. Now, if I could have a baby all my own without any father, I—oh, I'd love that."

"Well, I wouldn't," Beckie proclaimed down-rightly. "I'd like a husband and a father for it. Who'd support it?"

"I would—if it was mine," Lainey answered with conviction, "I'd find a way. I know I would."

There came another long silence; so long that this time the two girls drifted off to sleep.

"Beckie," Lainey said, coming into her sister's room the following Sunday morning, "I want to talk with you. I'm troubled."

"Well, now," Beckie said, yawning the sleep out of her hazel eyes, "we're getting to it. Why didn't you tell me last Sunday? What's it about? Mr. Quigly?"

"Yes, I tried to tell you," Lainey said, "but somehow I couldn't. No, it's about Mr. Pope."

"What, about him?" Beckie snapped.

"You see, Beck, I don't understand about such things—and I want to do what's right. And you have so much intuition—and I haven't any—I'm a perfect fool. But it began two weeks ago."

"What began?" Beckie demanded. "Lainey, do please be a little more clear."

"Well, two weeks ago, Saturday afternoon, he asked me if I'd go walking with him. I said I would and did. He called for me. After we left the house, he said that he wanted to look at some vacant apartments and would I go with him. Of course I was willing, and he showed me a long string of addresses that he had got from real estate agents, many of them in Brookline here. Well, the long and short of it was that we spent the afternoon at it——"

"Yes," Beckie said. "Go on!"

"Well, it didn't happen in the first one we looked at, but in the second. And I don't know how I got the idea. But presently I found that we were considering these apartments from the point of view—of a—married pair. He asked me all kinds of questions—and Beckie, I can't tell you how queer I felt when he would say, 'Do you like this, Lainey?' or, 'Is this *your* idea of a comfortable apartment?' or, 'Tell me what *you* think. I want to be guided

by *your* opinion.' Always accenting the *you* and *your*."

"What *did* you say?" Beckie asked.

"Beckie, I didn't know what to say. I didn't know where to look. But I kept repeating as often as I could without seeming foolish that I wasn't very clever at that sort of thing, that I knew nothing whatever about housekeeping and hated it, and that Ann was the one to go to, that she was so practical. And so forth—and so forth."

"What did he say to that?"

"Oh, that it wasn't Ann's opinion that he wanted but mine. Now what—you have so much intuition, Beckie—what do you think he means?"

"There's only one interpretation of his meaning, Lainey. I'll tell you now what I've thought all along—Worth Pope is in love with you. I think he's shy, though, and that's his way of showing it. Oh, Lainey, can't you fall in love with him? I should so love to have a wedding in the family."

"Of course I can't—you goose! And yet, somehow, Beckie, I think you're wrong. I can't feel that he——"

"Why, good gracious, Lainey, don't you *know* when a man's in love with you?"

"No. Why should I? No one was ever in love with me before."

"But don't you have a feeling? Don't you realize that he's looking at you when you're not looking at him and that he always knows just what you're doing, always listening to what you're saying, always plotting and planning to get alone with you?"

Lainey shook her head so vigorously that the bed shook too. "No, I've noticed nothing of those

things. In fact, his eyes always seem to have a far-off look, as though he was thinking of something else. No, the only thing he does is to ask me to go to places with him. But so does Mr. Quigly."

"Well," Beckie said, exasperated, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Beckie, what *can* I do about it?"

"Do you love him? Do you intend to marry him? In that case you do nothing about it."

"No. *No.* Of course I don't love him. He reads nothing but the best-sellers."

"Then you should tell him or show him in some way."

"Beckie, I can't refuse a man before he asks me."

"Well, all I know is, it's your duty as a lady to let him know in some way if you don't intend to accept him."

Lainey groaned. "It's dreadful hard being a lady, isn't it Beck?"

"Does Mr. Quigly act that way?" Beckie inquired.

"Oh no, I should say he didn't," answered Lainey.

"He's a comfort. He's always telling me about the other girls he calls on—he must know reams of them. And then he has very advanced ideas about love and marriage. He thinks the present system is all wrong. He says that women ought to have the right to propose marriage just as much as a man. He says that the perplexed conditions of to-day arise from wrong economic conditions. He says that when women have become economically independent, the degrading conditions that surround love and marriage will be done away with. When women have as much to offer men, in the way of prosperity



and ability and earning capacity, as at present men have to offer women, why then the wooing and proposing will come as often from one side as the other. But in these times, in order to facilitate the coming of *better* ones, it is our duty to indulge as much as possible in a free companionship with members of the other sex—I mean, friendship without the thought of love and marriage.”

“Bosh!” remarked Beckie.

“Beckie,” Lainey said, “he’s right and you’re wrong. He’s taking me to a meeting in Newton to-morrow night. Now, I’m going to let you finish your nap.”

It was three nights later that Beckie, coming home late, found Lainey asleep in her bed. When Beckie turned up the gas, Lainey’s lids flashed open, wide. “Is that you, Beckie?” she asked drowsily. Drowsily, too, she pulled herself up to a sitting position, fitted a pillow into her back.

“More trouble?” Beckie asked, her eyes scintillating.

“Beckie Ollivant, you’re enjoying this!” Lainey reproached her sister. Perhaps she was enjoying it herself; for as she plunged into her narrative a smile, delicious with conscious power, showed her little teeth. “My dear, Mr. Pope called me up this afternoon and asked me if I’d meet him in town and go to tea with him. I said I would. I hoped that I might have an opportunity to tell him. He put the hour at two. I thought that extraordinarily early; but when I met him, he asked me if I minded going about to some stores with him. I said I didn’t—never suspecting—you know what an idiot I am,

Beck. And—it seems—he was looking at furniture with the idea of fixing up that apartment and, although he didn't say it in so many words, there was always the insinuation that it was for two—not bachelor housekeeping at all."

"Did he buy anything?" Beckie asked, hanging up her coat and hat.

"No, he only looked at things. But, just as before, he would say, 'What do *you* think, Lainey?' or, 'Remember, I'm depending on *you!*' or, 'Tell me exactly how *you* feel about it.'"

"Well, Lainey, I hope you told him——" Beckie was beginning severely.

"But Beckie, how could I? A man who's made no effort to make love, who never looks at me when he talks to me—well, he's got to give me more of an opening than that."

"Yes," Beckie said slowly, beginning to undress, "I suppose so. And, of course, it isn't as though he'd begun to buy those things. How about Quigly? Is he still talking about other girls?"

"Oh no," Lainey said with one of her rare flashes of humor, "now that he's established an alibi, he doesn't have to. Oh, but Beckie, we went to that meeting together way out in Newton and, my dear, what do you suppose he did?"

"What?" Beckie demanded.

"We were late and he took a taxicab out there."

"A taxicab!" Beckie exclaimed. "It must have cost a million dollars."

"It did," Lainey said. "Eight dollars and ninety cents. Oh, I nearly died—watching that clock-thing jumping round. I told him if my hair turned white, it would be his fault. But he only

laughed. I never saw anybody spend money like that. I told him so. He said nobody else ever had in Boston. He hates Boston."

Beckie bristled. "I'd like to know what he thinks New York has on it—— Do you like Mr. Quigly, Lainey?"

"I do and I don't," Lainey answered in an analytic voice. "I like his ideas, but I'm not sure yet of his character. I mean his ideas are very free and emancipated and noble, but I have a sort of an idea that he would only live up to them so far as they justified him in doing unconventional things. I don't think that he'd suffer for a principle. But, although I like Worth Pope better, I'm more comfortable with Mr. Quigly. There's always a worry hanging over me when I'm with Worth. But I feel perfectly free when I'm with Quentin—knowing that he's not in love with me."

"Yes, all my intuition is that he isn't. But don't let it bother you too much, Lainey. Remember that mother said: if you were a lady, something would tell you how to behave in every position in which you were placed."

"Well, I think some new situations have come up since mother's time," Lainey said without conscious sarcasm, "Oh, Beck, you are such a comfort to me."

The following Saturday when Beckie came home a little early from work she found Lainey a dull, colorless, crushed heap on the sofa. Ann was sitting beside her.

"What's happened?" Beckie inquired.

"Oh, that boulder of a Quigly," Ann answered

viciously. "Didn't I tell you to never trust a man with red eyelids."

"What has he done?" Beckie asked.

"He's proposed to her," Ann answered sternly.

"Proposed!" Beckie said in bewilderment.

"Quentin Quigly! Lainey, are you sure it was Quentin?"

Lainey emitted a little spiritless rill of laughter. "I'll admit I'm absent-minded. But I'm not quite so dopey as that."

"Well, what's all this about, then," Beckie went on. "It's no insult to propose to a girl."

"It was the way he did it—beast!" sputtered Ann.

"I refused him," Lainey explained. "And he got quite offensive. He accused me of encouraging him. I apologized and explained that I did not realize that his intentions were matrimonial and he said that I ought to have known they were. We had quite an unpleasant scene. Ann came home in the midst of it. She could not help hearing it—he talked so loud."

"Talked!" This from Ann. "*Bellowed*, you mean."

"But I don't want the boys to know anything about it," Lainey concluded feebly. "There, there's Ed now."

"Well, I declare, I never thought it was Quentin," Beckie said. "I thought—Hullo, Ed."

Ed did not answer Beckie. "What's all this row about Quigly, Lainey?" he demanded sternly.

"How did you know about it, Ed?" Lainey demanded in her turn; and her voice was no less stern than her brother's.

"I ran into Quigly before coming home," Ed answered. "I saw that he was considerably broken up over something and I asked him what the matter was. He evaded me at first, but I kept at him. Who's that? Oh, Matt and Roly. Finally, he told me the whole story and I must say—Beat it you fellows! Oh, hullo, Hop! Get out, all of you. Lainey and I want to have a talk."

"No," said Lainey, "Stay here!" Silvery flames fluttered her eyelashes; two flakes of solid color burst on her cheeks. "If Mr. Quigly is taking the whole world into his confidence, so shall I. The situation is this, boys: Mr. Quigly proposed to me this afternoon and I refused him. He has taken me about a good deal, as you know, and—yes, spent a great deal of money on me. He accused me of encouraging him, and I told him that I didn't know that he meant to—that he thought of—that he wanted to marry me."

Roly, obviously bored, opened Matt's paper. Matt fell into one of the big chairs and considered the subject, frowning. Hop Lee took a silent position in front of the fire.

"Lainey, I should have thought you would have known that he was in love with you," Ed said accusingly. "Think of how often he's been here."

"Why, Ed Ollivant," there was a hysterical note in Lainey's voice, "it was only a month ago, in this very room, that you and Matt told me that the great mistake girls were always making was to assume that men who called on them wanted to marry them."

"That's true," Ed said. "But at the same time, you've got to show some common sense. There's

a point beyond which—you shouldn't let a man spend so much money on you. Quigly mentioned—not in any caddish way; it just happened to come out in talking about taxis in Boston—that it cost ten dollars bringing you in from Newton the other night.”

“Eight-ninety—to be exact,” corrected Lainey. “Well, all I can say is that I got into this trouble just by following your advice and assuming that he was not in love with me until he told me so. Why couldn't I have supposed Worth Pope was in love with me? He's been taking me about—and spending money on me—if that's any criterion.”

“Well, Lainey, I think he is,” Beckie put in.

“Well, he isn't,” Lainey said. “He telephoned me to-day that he was going to be married at Christmas. He'd got a letter from the girl this morning saying she would. He said one reason why he came out here so often was that I reminded him of the girl. He showed me her picture in his watch. It looked just about as much like me as a *cat*—a little darling, blonde fairy creature. He said he asked my advice about flats and furniture and things because he felt that my taste would be just like hers. At first she said that he'd got to pick out the apartment and all the furniture—but he said, when he wrote her that I was helping him look at things, she decided she'd rather do it herself.”

Beckie laughed. “I *bet* she did. You made that match all right.”

“But,” Lainey went on, addressing her brothers, she had not even heard Beckie, “he never mentioned that girl to me; he wouldn't insult me by making such an explanation. Now, suppose I had taken all

his attentions seriously. It would be a pretty nowdy-do now, with him marrying another girl in two months."

"Well, all I've got to say," Ed promulgated, "is that you acted wisely in one case and like an idiot in the other."

"That's right, Lainey," Matt agreed; "you can't be too careful. You've got to let a man feel free—and you must not seem to be working him."

"Well, Lainey," Roly said, "I'm glad you didn't take Quigly—how I'd enjoy punching that fat head of his! Only my fist would go through and come out the other side."

Hop Lee came into the discussion. "I wouldn't bother about Quigly. Getting engaged is the easiest thing he does. I know at least three girls he's made love to."

"Now, I have a proposition to put to you, Lainey," Hop said later when the excitement had died down. "There's a strike in Beverley and next week I want you to go with me to some of the I. W. W. meetings there. I think there's going to be some grand doings. I wish to announce to you in the presence of your family that, whatever my private feelings towards you may be, I don't consider that you are encouraging me by accompanying me."

"Hop," Lainey said, after an interval of calm consideration, "I accept your invitation. And in my turn, I promise you that, whatever my private feelings towards you *are* or *become*, I shall not consider that these invitations compromise you in any way. But I've had one brush with your sex and I find that the game works out to their advantage any way you play it. And so, in the meantime, go-

ing to those I. W. W. meetings or anywhere else with you, I'll pay my own expenses, if you please."

"*Lainey*," Ann exclaimed, "I never heard such talk in my life. Do you think that's being a lady?"

"Oh, damn being a lady!" said Lainey Ollivant.



## CHAPTER IX

### ROLY COMES THROUGH

“**I**S that you, Ed?” Beckie called and, not waiting for an answer, she added, “Come in a moment. I—we all want to talk with you.”

“All right,” Ed Ollivant answered. He leisurely removed his evening-hat, deposited it on a hook. He took off his smart evening-ulster, drew off the muffler of gray crocheted silk, folded them with the care a girl might have shown, and placed them on the hall-settle. He paused to glance in the long mirror above the seat—glanced critically, though, and only as one who prides himself on being cap-a-pie. His appraising glance might justifiably have developed into a complacent one, for the picture was comely. Tall, slim, Ed’s grace of structure expressed itself in grace of movement, but it was reinforced by a pervading suggestion of muscularity. Equally, his cold, blonde face would have shown almost too correct a line of feature if it had not been informed by a look of power. That grace and that power were the grace and power of steel, nervously carved. He strolled in the direction of his sister’s voice.

It was not on Beckie alone that he came—but Matt and Ann. The doors between the two rooms were open, but the outlines of the rooms lost themselves in gloom. The hanging-lamp, however, dropped a cone of golden light on the bared dining-

room table, on Beckie's tumbled ripples of mahogany-colored hair, on Ann's careful coils and curls and spirals of gold brown, on Matt's virile plume of copper red. The open-grate fire in the living-room—neglected—had died down to a soft heart of rose that pulsed under a filigree of silver ash. But the stove in the dining-room—neglected also—had flared up until a round spot of scarlet gleamed on its bulging front.

That spot of angry scarlet seemed to be the psychological symbol of the discussion; it was reflected in the three faces that lifted to meet Ed's.

Upright in her chair, her face a satiny crimson, her spool revolving rapidly on the table before her, her needles spitting sparks, Beckie crocheted—and crocheted violently, as one whose fingers are trying to keep pace with her racing thoughts. Opposite, her cheeks a velvety pink—before her on the table a basin of water, a tin of metal polish and an array of cloths—Ann rubbed at something she held in her lap—and rubbed with jabs and dashes of vigor as one who is emphasizing her own voiceless argument. Near, sprawled in the big morris-chair, his eyes a brilliant blue in contrast with his scarlet flush, Matt snapped an elastic band, sling-shot fashion, against the arm of his chair—and snapped it as one who expresses not ennui, but mental discomfort.

If Ed got the atmosphere of unease, his composed look gave no sign. He wheeled a big chair from the bay-window, lifted it over the seam where the two rooms met, seated himself in it in an attitude whose correct grace was the very antithesis of Matt's careless relaxation. With the quiet precision that marked all his movements—Ed was a human em-

bodiment of the principle of efficiency—he reached into one pocket of his dinner-coat, brought out a cigarette-case of gold, superbly monogrammed, snapped it open, removed a cigarette, placed it between his lips, dropped the case back into his pocket. Still slowly, he drew from another pocket a match-safe, also of gold, and also superbly monogrammed, snapped that open, withdrew a match, dropped the box into his pocket. Then, quickly he jabbed the match ablaze, lighted his cigarette, tossed the match into the coal-hod. But he paused to draw slowly on his cigarette and to send a volley of smoke-rings fluttering across the table before he spoke. Then, “Lainey not home yet?” he inquired casually.

Beckie had followed this process with the fascinated look which always illumined her eyes when Ed was about. Her lips formed to answer him. But, “No,” Ann answered before her sister could speak. And as though to hold back what Beckie was going to say, she plunged volubly onward. “She telephoned to-day that she would not be at home until Friday. She’s having a fine time with Aunt Margaret. Oh, say—that reminds me. She says that Maddie Perkins brought her over a snapshot that she took of mother once—that time she came here for a week-end. She took it when mother wasn’t looking—just as Roly was coming up the piazza steps. Lainey says the expression is perfectly lovely. You know how mother’s eyes always changed when she looked at Roly. I could always get mother hopping mad by saying that Roly was her favorite child—but he was, just the same. Lainey says she’s going to have some copies made for us—enlarged.”

"I'd like to see it," Ed said. And then, as though consciously aiding and abetting his sister's game, "What are you doing, Ann?"

Again Beckie started to speak. But again—and this time she resorted to gesture—Ann, waving aloft a bowl of silver lined with gold, cut her off. "Ever see that before?" she challenged her brother exultantly.

"The silver service!" Ed exclaimed. And in his clear, peremptory voice was a sudden note of emotion—surprise, pleasure, and a shade—so subtle and faint that it was a mere shadow of a shade—of sadness. "Lord," he added, "I'd forgotten all about it."

"Wait till I show you the rest of it." Ann lifted from the floor and placed beside the bowl a tall ro-tund coffee-pot, a short, squatty teapot, a shorter squattier sugar-bowl, a tall, lithe water-pitcher, a slim, lissome hot-water pot, a low, plump cream-pitcher—all a-shimmer and a-gleam and a-sparkle with the soft luster of old silver repolished. "Doesn't it look lovely?"

"Great!" Ed said. "How did you happen to resurrect it?"

For the third time Beckie started to speak. And for the third time Ann bustled into narrative ahead of her. Beckie closed her lips with a snap, but it was only to straighten and tighten them into a deeper look of resolution. "The funniest way. You see, Bird Barton had a day off. Some old gink in the firm died the other day and the store was closed for the funeral. So we decided we'd go shopping to-day. I met her in town. We went up Park Street from the Subway and Bird happened to stop

in front of one of those old-furniture places—you know what a shark she is for antiques—and if there in the window wasn't a service the spit of ours, all polished up and looking so swell! Bird began to throw spasms over it, and I said, 'Oh, come on and do our shopping, Bird. We've got a service just like that!' 'Where?' asked Bird. 'Search me!' I said. 'Somewhere in the attic, I suppose. I haven't seen it for years.' 'Well, if you aren't a boob,' said Bird, 'and if your whole family aren't boneheads, Don't you know how valuable that Sheffield silver is?' 'No,' I said. 'Well, I'll show you,' said Bird. We went in and priced it, and how much do you suppose they were charging for it? Five hundred dollars. Yes, sir. Bird looked at me and I looked at her, and she said, 'Let's?' and I said, 'You're on!' and we marched straight back from the Subway—mind you we hadn't done a drop of shopping—beat it home, sneaked up into the attic and spent the afternoon hunting for the service. Weren't we sights when we got through! Bird had to take a bath and shampoo her hair. But we finally found it, black as the stove, wrapped up in pieces of old blanket. I've been working on it ever since. My arm is dead, but I can't leave it alone. Gee, doesn't it look swell. To tell the truth, I always thought of the silver service as something old-fashioned and queer. But now I can see that it has all kinds of class—especially if it's worth five hundred dollars. Gee, *doesn't* it look swell, though!" Ann might have been applying the polish to her own eyes, they gleamed with so extraordinary a luster as she surveyed her handiwork. "I've put my hands out of commission, though." She stopped

to examine her long, shapely fingers. "I'll be a week getting my nails back into shape."

"I remember," Matt began. He had abandoned his sling-shot operations with the elastic band. Now he sat upright. His brisk blue eyes took on a reminiscent haze. "Mother always used the silver service and the pearl-handled knives and forks on Christmas and Thanksgiving. I always connect those two—silver service, pearl-handled knives and forks—with holidays and company."

The tension about Beckie's mouth relaxed for a moment. "The last time we used the silver service was on Roly's tenth birthday. Do you remember we had a party for him? That was the last party we ever had in this house. After that, mother put the service away. It was so hard to keep it shined up without any maids."

"We're going to use it every day now," Ann said with conviction. "There are not going to be any *best* things in this house. We're going to have our coffee in the morning out of this and our tea at noon out of this and our cocoa at night out of this." Her hands, gracefully capable, fluttered from pot to pot. "And these are our permanent sugar and creamer. We'll use the bowl for loaf sugar. And after this we are going to use those pearl-handled knives and forks. I hate saving up things for other people to use after you're dead."

"Well," said Ed, "I'm glad you found it. It certainly is a pippin. I advise you to overhaul the attic thoroughly some day and see if there aren't some other things you can dig up."

"We're going to," said Ann, "Bird and Lainey and me—some Sunday."

"Lord, what a gay house this used to be," Matt said, the fog of reminiscence still on his sea-blue eyes. "Something doing every minute. People coming and going—dinners—dances—masquerades——"

Ann set her soft, pouting mouth into a hard, red ripple of determination. "It's going to be gay again some time. You wait!"

Ed flicked his cigarette end into the coal-hod, settled back in his chair. "Well, out with it, Beckie," he said. "What is it and who's it about?"

Beckie's lips unlocked in a flash. "It's about Roly," she answered. "I'm worried to death about him."

"It isn't so bad as it seems," Ann interpolated. "I'm sorry that I told on him."

"How about it, Matt?" Ed turned to his brother. "Advise me to listen to it?"

Matt looked uncomfortable. "Oh, I don't know that it's so very serious, but— Well, I guess you'd better listen to Beckie."

"All right, Beckie!" Ed's tone tempered to resignation. "Fire away! What's Roly been doing?"

"Oh, *everything*," answered the unanalytic Beckie. "It's been going on for weeks and weeks now. And at first I thought I could manage him alone. But it's got beyond me, and to-night I had—oh, a dreadful time with him—he said perfectly awful things. And as for Matt—he swore at me fearfully. So now *you've* got to take him in hand."

"Well, get to the point, Beckie," Ed prodded his sister impatiently.

"I'm getting there," Beckie insisted. "In the

first place, he's so grouchy all the time that there's no living with him. And saucy! And the things he says to me—and Ann—well, they're the limit. I could overlook that, because boys are queer cattle, and Roly—mother used to say that Roly had 'cycles' when he was as bad as he could be."

"Well, believe *me*," Ann interrupted crisply, "Roly's present cycle is *some* cycle."

"But," Beckie went straight on, "he's taken to staying out late. Night after night he doesn't get in until nearly twelve o'clock. He manages to beat you, Ed, by about five minutes. When I ask him where he's been, he just says, 'Oh—out!' or, 'Oh, with Dink!' or, 'Oh, just round!' Not that he's any different from you two. I'd never think of asking either of you where you'd been. But Roly's only a boy and he's got to tell me where he goes until he's eighteen. For one thing——" Having run down a little, Beckie glanced off the main line of her argument. "I don't think Dink Hardy is a good influence for him."

"I guess Dink's as good an influence for Roly as Roly is for him," Ann put in scornfully. "Probably Mrs. Hardy is doing her best this very minute to get Dink to stop going with Roly."

"Well, I'd like to hear her say anything like that!" Beckie bristled. "Dink Hardy doesn't know what to *think* until Roly tells him."

"Much you know Dink," Ann continued, still scornful. "That innocent mild way he has is just put on when grown people are round. Dink Hardy is a *perfect devil*. I didn't sit in front of him in school for one whole year for nothing. Why, once he took every hairpin out of the back of my hair



and me not realizing it. It took him nearly a whole study-hour to do it—he was so careful about it. When Old Charley suddenly called on me for something and I stood up, all my hair came tumbling down. I never was so mortified in my life. I could have *murdered* him.”

“Well, anyway, I wouldn’t have known what those two boys were doing all the time,” Beckie said, “if Angie Hardy hadn’t told me at church the other day. They bowl and play pool every night of their lives.”

She stopped to note the effect of this appalling revelation on her brothers. Ed stood the shock with exemplary composure. Matt mimicked his brother’s unnatural calm.

“Somebody’s got to put a stop to it,” Beckie went on. “Roly’s so tired mornings, it’s all Ann can do to get him off to school in time. He’s late two or three times a week. And he sleeps all day long Saturday and Sunday. First thing we know he’ll be down with a fit of sickness.”

“Not as long as he eats the way he does,” interposed the clear-visioned Ann. “More likely he’ll be expelled from school. I don’t believe he gets any of his lessons. He *never* studies. I think that’s what he’s working for—to get dropped. He hates school. He wants to go to work. Not that I blame him! I hated school worse than anything on earth.”

“Well, Roly’s got to keep on going to school until he graduates,” Ed said curtly. “Where is he now?”

“He hasn’t come in yet,” Beckie said.

Ed pressed open the slim, plain gold watch which

he slipped from his pocket. "Quarter to twelve. I'm early to-night."

"He'll be here any moment now," Beckie prophesied. "You see if he isn't. He'll try to beat you, Ed, by a few moments."

"Where does he get the money to bowl and play pool with?" Matt inquired.

"Oh, he does odd jobs," Ann answered vaguely. "Aunt Lottie gets him to do things for her. And some of the other neighbors occasionally. Then I think he generally wins in pool and bowling from Dink. Dink always has plenty of spending money, you know."

"That isn't all," Beckie went on. "He's got so careless about his personal appearance! He doesn't brush his clothes or black his shoes—or wash his face, I was going to say. I'm so ashamed of him when I meet him on the street—he looks so untidy. Lainey says—There! Here he comes now."

A key grated in the lock of the front door. The door jarred, swung open.

"That you, Roly?" Beckie called.

"Yes!" answered a sullen voice.

"Come in here a moment," Beckie went on; "we want to speak to you."

Roly waited to take his things off. In marked contrast with Ed's leisurely carefulness, he dropped his creased and mussed coat in a heap, threw his cap on top of it. "What do you want?" he growled.

"We've got something to say to you," Beckie said in a conciliating voice. "We've been talking you over and we want to give you a little advice."

Roly seated himself on the arm of a chair. He

looked unkempt. His clothes needed pressing. His linen was soiled. His shoes were muddy. His tie raveled where the knot came. Whatever his experience since he left his sister earlier in the evening, it was apparent that it had not wiped away his sense of antagonism. The heavy purplish-red flush on his handsome dark face seemed to accent the sullen look of his mouth. His tumbled hair, falling in a torrent down over his forehead, seemed to intensify the scowl between his heavy brows. Under the defiant expression lay fatigue; heavy hollows were gouged above his cheekbones, incipient hollows beneath them. At Beckie's words the glare in his big hazel eyes concentrated to a fiery glitter.

"You're very kind," he answered with the heavy sarcasm of youth, "but I don't need any of your old advice. And if it's just the same to you, you can keep it, thank you."

"Now, Roly," Beckie still placatory, was beginning, when— "Cut out that rough stuff, Roly," Ed interrupted. "How about this bowling and pool-playing?" he demanded sharply.

"What do you mean, 'How about it'?" Roly came back with equal sharpness.

"I mean this: Are you bowling and playing pool till midnight three or four nights a week?"

"No," Roly answered with a heavy defiance. "I'm bowling and playing pool five or six nights a week—as many times as I get the chance. I'd like to know whose business it is what I do?"

"Well, I'll show you whose business it is," Ed retorted hotly. "For I'll make it *my* business. You're to cut that out. See?"

Roly glared at his brother. "No, I don't see," he said. "What's more, I won't cut it out."

"You'll cut it out," Ed said threateningly, "or I'll know the reason why."

"You'll know the reason why, then," Roly assured him. "And you'll know it now. You're not my father or my mother. They're both dead and there's nobody got any right to tell me what I can do or what I can't do. And if you think you can keep me from going where I want, you're welcome to try it."

The brothers for an instant looked singularly alike. It was as though the same expression of an ancestral defiance gleamed through Ed's golden sculpturesque regularity and Roly's bronze-red virile swarthythiness.

"I'm head of this house," Ed announced. "And I intend to be master of it. I consider myself your guardian until you come of age. Now, you're going to stop this late-hour business if Matt and I have to take turns watching you."

"That's what you'll have to do to stop it," Roly prophesied. "I've been my own boss ever since mother died and I intend to keep on holding the job."

"All right. You try doing what you please," Ed advised. "You understand you are to be in this house every night at ten o'clock. You are to get up every morning when Ann calls you at half-past seven. You're not to be late to school. And you're not—what are the other things?" He turned to Beckie and Ann.

Roly glared at his sisters. "Tattle-tales!" he hissed.

"Oh yes, Roly," Beckie faltered, "if you only would be a little more careful about your appearance."

"Yes, that's it," said Ed. "You're to brush your clothes every day and shine your shoes and comb your hair and put on a clean collar and do all the things your mother taught you to do."

"You ought to think, Roly," Ann said dulcetly, "of what mother used to say to you, 'Remember that you are a gentleman's son!'"

Roly set his teeth. "Well—if you—don't give me—a pain," he emitted slowly. "With me without—" He stopped abruptly, but he began again. "—asking me to—" He stopped again and glared about at them all. "—when—" For the third time he stopped. "Oh, go to hell, the whole crowd of you!" he concluded. He rushed out of the room and up the stairs. His door shut with a crash that resounded through the house.

"Isn't he the *sweet thing*?" Ann commented, rising and removing the silver service to the sideboard. "That isn't a circumstance to the way he treats me. *Golly*, doesn't that look grand? Now you have some idea what I have to contend with mornings getting him out of bed. He swears something awful, and the things he says to me! Doesn't that make the rest of the stuff on the sideboard look like a rummage sale? I'm going to can that tin cake-basket to-morrow. There used to be a time when I could lick him. I'd like to take boxing-lessons off a real pugilist—so I could knock him down once or twice."

"That's hardly the way to teach him manners, Ann," Ed said icily.

"I know it isn't. But it would be a lot of satisfaction to me," Ann replied. "I'm pretty strong for a girl, you know." She pushed up the sleeve of her Russian blouse, doubled up her fist, flexed a snowy arm, and contemplated a swelling biceps with pride. Her brown eyes flashed stars of amber.

"Let me see, to-morrow's Saturday," Ed went on in a business-like tone. "Of course he'll sleep late, but I'll see that he gets up Monday morning, Ann, and to-morrow night, Beckie, I'll be home to see that he gets in at ten. Matt, we'll take turns standing guard. You're to be on the job Sunday night. I'll take Monday, and so on until we teach that young gentleman that we mean what we say."

"All right," answered the good-natured Matt. But he hesitated. It was obvious that the job was distasteful to him.

"Now, don't you be too severe with Roly tonight," Beckie admonished her brother anxiously the next morning. "You know mother always used to say that you couldn't drive him."

"You leave the whole matter to me, Beckie," Ed replied. "If I'm going to stop this business, I've got to do it in my own way."

But Beckie departed to work with a face full of misgiving. "I hope Ed won't fight with Roly tonight," she said to Ann on her return.

Ed did not fight with Roly that night. He had no chance. It was Saturday, and Roly returned to the house neither that day nor the next.

"Where have you been these last two nights?" Ed demanded Monday night, as Roly, with an appearance of elaborate indifference, seated himself at the table.

"I stayed with Dink," Roly answered sullenly.

"All right. We'll have that statement substantiated," Ed remarked. He went to the telephone. "What's the Hardy's number, Beckie?" he asked.

"Copley, 5643," Beckie answered.

"Copley, 5643," Ed echoed into the transmitter. "Copley, 5643?" he questioned presently. "Oh, is this you, Angie? . . . Good evening. . . . May I speak with your mother? . . . Oh, good evening, Mrs. Hardy. . . . This is Ed Ollivant. Pardon me for troubling you at this late hour, but did my younger brother week-end with you? . . . Oh, yes. . . . I see. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . That was very kind of you. . . . I wanted to know in the interest of a little problem in family discipline. We're going to break up these late hours. . . . You're quite right. . . . I agree with you absolutely. Do you mind helping the thing along by not asking him again? . . . Thank you. You are very kind. . . . Thank you. . . . I appreciate that. . . . Thank you. Good-night!"

Ed strolled leisurely back to the table.

The dinner ended in a silence unusual with the noisy Ollivants.

"Where are you going?" Ed demanded as Roly passed into the hall.

"Out!" Roly answered without an instant's hesitation.

"Do you understand you are to be back by ten?"

"I understand I'm to be back when I damn please," Roly blazed.

"You'll give me your promise to be back at ten or I'll go with you," Ed answered.

Roly stared at his brother for a baffled second,

his face the battleground for all the conflicting forces of futile young fury.

"I'll be back," he admitted sullenly after a while.

He kept his word as Ed, who was there to see that he did, attested the next morning. And he kept it the next night—but in this fashion. The easy-going Matt being on guard, Roly entered the house exactly at ten, but noiselessly through a back window. Noiselessly he stole up to his room. Matt napped and waked and dozed and waked again on the couch until Ed, coming home at three in the morning, shook him to consciousness. The brothers retired, breathing a vengeance which they reiterated sulphurously at breakfast to their sisters. In the midst of the meal Roly appeared, calm as a May morning. At the onslaught which greeted him, he announced jauntily that he had been in bed ever since ten the night before.

"You play a trick like that on us again," Ed threatened, white with wrath, "and, by God, I'll give you the damnedest hiding you've ever had in your life. Now, where were you, and what were you doing?" he demanded.

"None of your business," Roly answered promptly.

Ed contemplated him for one instant in silence and his watch for another. Then, "I'll attend to your case to-night," he promised in the silky voice of his most dangerous mood.

"Oh, Roly," Beckie said in a distressed tone after the older boys had gone, "what are you being so bad for? You know what Ed's like when he gets mad."

"You mind your own business," Roly suggested.



"You girls got me into this with your tattling. And now you can keep your mouth shut. And as for Ed—I guess I can lick him if it comes down to cases."

Wednesday night Roly did not come home at all, nor Thursday night. Beckie was almost sick with worry, and even the unperturbed Ann began to look dubious. "Now don't you girls get cold feet," Ed cautioned them. "I called up the school to-day. They said that he had been there both days—not even late. He'll have to come home some time, if it's only for a change of underwear. I'm going to starve him out. And when he does show up——"

Friday night Lainey made an appearance. "Oh, Lainey!" Ann and Beckie began at once. "We've been having a perfectly terrible time with Roly!" They poured the whole story out on her haphazard, Ann ruthlessly interrupting Beckie's tale and Beckie as remorselessly tearing the narrative from Ann. "And where do you suppose he is?" they concluded in unison.

Lainey's small, pointed, blonde face remained absolutely unperturbed. "I'll tell you where he is," she answered calmly. "He's at Cousin Lucy's."

"How did you know?" Beckie asked.

"Why, he came into the school one afternoon to borrow some money to pay his fare out there."

"Did he say anything about this trouble?" Ann demanded.

"Not a word."

"Well, I must say that was game of him," Ann commented approvingly.

"Roly's been at Cousin Lucy's all the time," Beckie began the instant Ed and Matt appeared

that night, "and Lainey says——" She poured Lainey's story, second-hand, into their ears, an illogical Beckie-esque burst of narrative, much interrupted by comment and conjecture. Lainey did not contribute further data. She was very thoughtful during dinner. Afterwards, curled upon the couch, in front of the fire, in the faded green Chinese coat and the little red slippers which were her costume of relaxation, she seemed deliberately to maintain her quiet mood. Once only she forced herself into vivacity.

"Oh, I want to show you that picture Maddie Perkins took of mother," she said, hurrying out of the room. "I'm having one framed for Roly," she added, returning from a breathless run upstairs. But even through the subdued comments, "Oh, isn't that lovely!" "Oh, how sweet she looks!" from the girls, "Gee, that's fine!" and "Lord, isn't that natural!" from the boys, Lainey remained pre-occupied.

"What's got into you, Lainey?" Ann asked once. "Generally we can't hear ourselves think when you come home from anywhere, you've got so much to tell us."

Lainey made no response. But when Ed and Matt arose to leave for the inevitable nocturnal adventuring, she said, "Wait a moment, boys; I've got something to say to you." Her manner was peremptory, and suddenly the veil of her preoccupation began to lift. "It's about Roly," she began. She paused, punched a pair of sofa-cushions into a pliable mass between her shoulders, leaned back. "I'd like to do some talking now." Suddenly ignoring the cushions, she sat upright, bringing her slip-

pered feet to the floor in a tiny stamp, her calm entirely gone, a little feminine pillar of interested exposition.

"I don't believe you've gone about this matter in the right way," she said. "I've been thinking about Roly ever since he came in to see me. Not that he said, as I told you, that there was anything wrong at home or that I suspected there was any trouble. It was the fact that, for the first time in his life, he borrowed money from me which set me to considering his case. Do you remember mother used to say that although you always had to manage Roly, it was easy enough to do it, because he could always be led through his affections."

"Didn't I tell you the other night," Beckie interrupted triumphantly, "that mother said you never could drive him?"

"Mother had her own system of disciplining him," Lainey went on. "There was a time, I remember, before she was ill. Roly was only ten, but his share of the work was to fill the wood-basket from the cellar. He did something naughty—I've forgotten what it was—and—— Do you remember how mother punished him?" Lainey addressed herself to Ed.

Ed shook his head.

"She punished him by getting the wood herself. Roly nearly died. Finally, he came to her, crying, and begged to let him help her. Roly is, I am convinced, much the least demonstrative of us all, but, on the other hand, I think he craves affection more than any of us. And no wonder. Think how crazy mother was about him. Why, she *never* stopped talking baby-talk to Roly. He remained her baby

to the last day of her death. Do you remember when he first began to speak, he called himself 'Doddy-Boy' instead of 'Roly-Boy'? When mother was alone with him she always called him 'Doddy-Boy.' I've heard her. And Aunt Margaret told me that she never referred to him in any other way. And how she petted him. The instant he'd open the door from school she'd call, 'Is that my baby?' And when he was home she always moved her chair so she could keep her eyes on him. She used to go over his lessons with him every night. She just wrapped him round with thought and care and love and tenderness. Just think what mother's death must have meant to him—to have all that stop short and forever when he was only sixteen. It must have hit Roly harder than any of us."

The group made involuntary movements of protest. "Oh, *Lainey!*" Ann exclaimed indignantly.

"Oh, I know what you're going to say," Lainey anticipated. "Nevertheless, I'm telling you the truth. The rest of us had our various interests which we took up and threw ourselves into—hard—in order to forget. But poor little Roly had nothing outside—only school and the other boys. And then again the rest of us sort of pair off or group off together—Beckie and Ann and me—Ed and Matt—but Roly seems so alone, a boy after three girls and at the tail-end of the family. We all love Roly—love him dearly, of course—but he's out of the sphere of our companionship from his very youth. He must be lonely. He can't help being lonely. And he misses his mother terribly. I don't think he knows what's the matter with him. But it accounts partially for his grouches."

"But, Lainey," Beckie said in a subdued tone. It was more as though she were defending herself than accusing Roly. "He's grown so careless about his appearance. You've no idea how he looks and when I speak to him about it——"

"It was rainy the day Roly came to see me," Lainey said. "As he sat, I noticed that a little puddle formed under one of his shoes. When he changed his position, I saw that there was a hole in the sole. Has it ever occurred to you that mother has been dead for nearly a year and we haven't bought Roly any new clothes yet? He had only the hand-me-downs that come from here and there—Uncle John's shirts, for instance. He's wearing practically the same clothes he wore when mother died. They're so spotted and threadbare that naturally he takes no interest in them. And you all know how much Roly enjoys smart clothes and what good taste he has—how fond he is, for instance, of nice shades of brown."

"Well, of course," Ann admitted, "he does look awfully shabby. But then, boys of his age always look like the dickens."

"Dink Hardy doesn't," Lainey said. "Another thing!" she added. "Do you realize that although we insist on his staying in school, it has never occurred to us to give him an allowance? There are certain things a boy has to have and has to do—but Roly never has the money for any of these things. He has to depend on getting a chance to do odd jobs Saturdays—his holidays. No wonder he's crazy to go to work to earn some money. No self-respecting boy wants to live under those conditions."

"But you must realize that that isn't all of it,

Lainey," Ed said. Ed's tone was as non-committal as his icy, impassive face. "He's bowling and playing pool until all hours."

"That's his only source of income," Lainey declared, and then, "What else is there for him to do?" she demanded. "He doesn't want to stay at home and just listen to our talk and meet our callers. They don't interest him at all. He wouldn't be normal if they did. We've simply got to find something better for him to do. We never do anything for Roly's entertainment." She paused. "I bet if you were to ask Roly about it to-night, he'd say there wasn't one of us cared a pin for him."

"What would you advise us to do, Lainey?" Ed broke the pregnant hush that trailed Lainey's last word. There was a sarcastic emphasis given to the word *you*, but he waited for his sister to answer.

"I'll tell you," Lainey answered promptly.

When Roland opened the door about noon Sunday morning, the house seemed wrapped in calm: But as he stole to his room on the second floor there came from the girls' room a chatter—Beckie's low, cello-like tone, Lainey's soft bird-like accent, Ann's decided treble. From above floated fragments of a bass dialogue between Matt and Ed. Roly opened the door with care, slipped into his room with quiet, shut the door with caution, turned—

From the arm of one gas-jet there hung on a stretcher a suit of clothes, one of Ed's smart tweeds—brown. Under it, neatly shaped by wooden trees, was a pair of shoes, brown. From the other gas-jet hung, also on a stretcher, one of Matt's overcoats, a rough, loosely-woven cloth—brown. On the

dresser-top lay a pile of new stockings—brown. From the dresser-frame dangled four new ties—shades of brown.

Roly stared at these objects, one at a time. Then, suddenly, unconsciously attracted, he raised his eyes.

Stuck into the frame of the mirror were five envelopes. They all bore his name.

Roly stared at these notes, one at a time. Then he opened them as they came to his hand.

“Say, kid” (this was signed Matt), “I thought you might like this coat of mine, as I’m through with it.” “Dear Roly” (it was Beckie’s long, plain hand), “it has just occurred to me that you might need stockings. Put on one of the silk pairs to-day. They’re for Sunday.” “Dear Roly-Poly” (in lead pencil from Ann), “the ties are from me. I got them at Weld Swinnerton’s—those you and I liked so much that time we went in there. Believe me, they took *some simoleons*. But I should worry. I took half the cash out of the housekeeping allowance. We’re going to have jello, canned peaches, rice, cottage, tapioca and bread pudding for dessert for a month. Don’t say anything about this to the family.” “If this suit is too large (this was Ed’s small, neat script), take it to my tailor. The shoes will fit you, as they’re a little small for me. I haven’t worn them yet. In the coat-pocket you’ll find something. It’s a present from the family. Go into Boston Monday and stock up on what you need. After this you are to have an allowance of two dollars a week.”

Roly stared at this last note for a long time. Then he turned to the coat of Ed’s suit, slipped his hand through the pockets. In one he struck a long

manila envelope, unsealed. Out of it, at his touch, fell—clean and new—paper money, two yellow twenties, one green ten.

Roly stared at the bills, turned them over, stared at them again.

Finally, his eyes came back to the bureau to the only unopened envelope. "Roly, darling," Lainey wrote in her undeveloped schoolgirl hand, "my present is on the wall."

Roly stared at this only an instant. Then his eyes lifted, wandered to the closet-door, over the windows, across the space at the side of the bed to——

The picture that Lainey had had framed for Roly was hanging there. Mrs. Ollivant, seated under a big, low-hanging vine, had raised herself upright in her invalid's chair. The ends of the long scarf of white lace that she wore on her head had fallen forward, framing softly her look of eager anticipation—the shining eyes, the smiling lips. Obviously, she was waiting to welcome somebody who was coming up the piazza steps—perhaps Roly did not have to be told who.

Lainey tiptoed across the hall to Roly's room. But with her hand on the knob, she paused. Suddenly she bent her head to listen. A scared look zigzagged across her face, opened her eyes wide, set her lips to trembling. She paused irresolutely.

After an instant she tiptoed back. "We won't disturb him," she said to her sisters. "He won't want to see anybody for a while." She busied herself rehangng the clothes in the closet. When she emerged her own eyes were red.

Later, Roly's door opened and shut with a buoy-



ant slam. The bathroom door opened and shut with equal force. There came from it the sound of a vigorous splashing, mingled with a shrill whistling, which always indicated Roly's tenancy of the tub. When he appeared at dinner, he was wearing Ed's suit and shoes, a pair of Beckie's stockings, one of Ann's ties. His face and hands shone with a scrubbed cleanliness that might have been the reflection of his immaculate linen. His teeth made a dazzle almost phosphorescent in his vivid olive skin. His hair, freshly shampooed, flew about his face like a jetty hurricane. All the glare had gone out of his eyes; they were filled with an electric sparkle.

"Welcome, little stranger!" Ed greeted him carelessly, without looking up from his paper.

And, "Hullo, kid," Matt threw over his shoulder.

And, "Oh, you there, Roly?" Lainey called from the living-room. "We've got apple-dumplings and hard sauce for dessert. Ann made them specially for you."

And, "Yes—and pipe the silver service, Roly," Ann said. "The last time we used it was on your tenth birthday, when mother had a party for you."

And, "Roly there?" Beckie called from the kitchen. "Then dinner's ready."

Roly looked at each of them. Then he gulped as with a sudden resolution.

"Just wait a jiff while I telephone, Beck," he begged. He bounded into the parlor. "Copley, 5643," he called. . . . "Is this Copley, 5643?" he questioned. Roly talked loudly and distinctly, as though to a louder audience than the one at the other end of the wire. "Oh, hello, Mrs. Hardy; is Dink there? . . . All right. . . . Oh,

hullo, Dink. Say, Dink, what do you say to our joining that new gymnasium in Brookline? I was just thinking it would be a good scheme to cut out all this bowling and pool-playing. That doesn't get a fellow anywhere and keeps him out late besides. I'd like to do some running. I hope to go in for the school-track team in the spring and I might as well begin to train now. I've always thought I'd make a half-miler. Say, Dink, just let you and me run all winter and we'll beat one-fifty-two in the spring—*easy*."

## CHAPTER X

### MATT LOOKS UPON THE WINE

"**T**HERE it is!" Beckie exclaimed, rushing to the window and throwing up the sash. "Listen!"

"No. That's only a train," Ann contradicted, following her. "Our clock's fast. *There*, there it is. Listen!"

"That's an auto," Lainey explained, joining them. "No, the clock's right. I asked Ed to set it just before he left. *There, there* it is. Listen!"

The three little necks craned to a listening angle. The three little heads dropped to a listening attitude. The three little faces sharpened to a listening expression.

"Isn't the snow wonderful to-night?" Lainey said dreamily as nothing happened. "How strange everything looks!"

At first sight, the world was strange—as though a flood of molten marble, engulfing it, had hardened and set to a silver glisten. And Marlowe Place in particular might have been the studio of some Brogdingnagian sculptor. Sheds showed the shapes of prehistoric earth-monsters. Bushes reared the fronts of prehistoric sea-monsters. Trees spread the wings of prehistoric air-monsters. The houses looked like enormous heads of which the bodies, enormous too, stood upright underground. They

wore—these heads—caps of snow, gigantically hooded and brimmed, veils of snow titanicly scalloped and tucked, mufflers of snow, ponderously rolled and folded. The air covered the scene like an enormous crystal. And over the air arched a sky of clouded quartz set with a few large stars carved from steel and a big round moon cut from diamond.

At second sight, however, the scene turned human again. The windows of the houses were sheets of gold. They were broken by dimly-seen circles of green, tied with bows of crimson, that hung between frost-filmed pane and lace-filmed curtain. Here the shadow of a tree, bearing the magic fruit of the season, candles, garlands, toys, was etched in black on the shades. There, a laughing profile suddenly silhouetted itself on the curtain, vanished again.

“How quiet it is!” Lainey went on. “It’s as though everything was listening for something.”

A wind, knife-sharp, came zizzing through the place. The stars flamed. The moon flared. The trees bent, became each the center of a miniature white storm, righted themselves. Far-away a sleigh-bell tinkled. Then the world became still again.

“There it is!” Beckie exclaimed joyously. “One, two, three, four!”

“Five, six, seven, eight!” Lainey chimed in with her.

“Nine, ten, eleven, twelve!” Irresistibly attracted, Ann joined the chorus.

The bells flooded the universe with vibrations. They shattered the crystal of the air, beat downward, caught the world in an iron grip, shook it, beat upward, crashed against the sky. A solitary motor-horn in the distance let out a long liquid glis-

sando. It floated on the air like a ribbon, wound itself mellowly through the twelve-tongued cry of the bells. The vibrations caught it, tore it to films of sound. The films dissolved, disappeared. The bells stopped. The vibrations died. The world turned silent again.

“Happy New Year!” Lainey said.

“Happy New Year! Happy New Year!”  
Beckie and Ann took it up.

They shut the windows and turned back to the seats at the living-room fire. The two rooms still bore their holiday decorations. A Christmas tree, glittering red and green, blue and silver, under the torrent of gold which seemed to pour from its peak, stood in the corner. Wreaths of holly decorated the windows. A bunch of mistletoe hung between the two rooms. Garlands of green wreathed the pictures of Mr. and Mrs. Ollivant. But the tree had begun to shed its shining, pungent plumage; the blood-red holly berries had blackened and shrunk; the frost-white mistletoe berries had wizened and withered. On the hearth was a pan of molasses candy that Ann had made and a little blue-and-white pot of tea that Beckie had brewed. The three empty cups sat beside them.

“We must take all those green things down before Twelfth Night,” Lainey said absently, “or the goblins will get into them. Just think,” she went on in an awed tone. “It’s another year. *Another* year! How mysterious that sounds! Oh, isn’t life wonderful! And the world—and space—and time—and—and—and everything! Why, it’s just as though we were all on a raft in a stream and the stream were carrying us on and on and on—straight

into eternity—we don't know where or why or how or *anything*. And it wouldn't make any difference if we did know—we'd have to go, just the same. Every once in a while we pass a lighthouse and that's the New Year. And the queer thing about it is that, although the lighthouses are always the same difference apart, the older we grow the nearer they seem to get together."

One of Lainey's "fey" moods was on her. A silvery flame had kindled at the far end of the long, soft, gray tunnels that were her eyes. It fanned in waves of color through her pale cheeks and ran in sparkling cascades through her filmy hair.

"Lainey Ollivant!" Ann said scathingly, "the boys say you're a nut when you go on in that dotty strain. And sometimes I agree with them. Now, talk sense."

Lainey accepted without a murmur the prevailing opinion of her. "Well, anyway," she remonstrated mildly, "perhaps you'll admit that time flies."

"*Flies!*" Ann repeated. "Flies! That's just what I won't admit. I should say not. Flies! It *creeps*. I never saw anything go so slow as time does. Why, it was ages before I got into my teens! And now that I'm getting toward twenty, it's slower than ever. I suppose it is because I've always expected that something would happen to me when I grew up. But, of course, I know better than that now. Nothing ever happens in this hateful, horrid, hideous old world."

From a light note of exasperation, Ann's voice had sunk to the roundest depths of her nineteen-year-old pessimism.

Her statement brought immediate contradiction

"Now I think lots of things happen," Beckie remarked placidly. And "Why—why—why," Lainey positively stuttered. "Things are happening all the time—every minute."

"What, for instance," Ann demanded in a bitter tone. "Tell me one thing that's ever happened to me—or us."

Lainey did not answer. But perceptibly she probed her memory for data.

"I'll tell you why nothing ever happens to us," Ann went on scornfully. "It's because we haven't the sense to *make* anything happen. Why didn't we have a New Year's party to-night, for instance?"

"A New Year's party!" Beckie exclaimed with visible shock. "Why, I wouldn't know how to give a New Year's party. Besides, you know—well—we never have had parties."

"I know we haven't," Ann agreed, "but that's no reason why we shouldn't. I never had a New Year's celebration in my life and I never went to one except in a church or a hall—a *watch-meeting* or something stupid like that. But then, that's Boston. Don't I wish I lived in New York! Edwina Allen was there last New Year's and you ought to hear her tell about the party she went to in a restaurant. There were twelve of them and they had to reserve the table *weeks* beforehand and they could order nothing to drink but champagne. The place was simply jammed with the most gorgeously dressed people you ever saw in your life. Edwina said the evening-wraps alone were the most wonderful creations—the kind you only see in shop-windows in Boston. She said she never saw so much champagne in her life. She didn't know there was so

much in the world—it flowed *like water*. They gave all the ladies the prettiest favors you ever saw. And just before twelve, the waiters went round handing out bushels of confetti and those paper streamers and great big balloons and, oh, I can't remember all. And when the New Year sounded, a girl all in tights came out of a great clock in the corner and everybody cheered and fox-trotted and lame-ducked and sang and drank healths and you shook hands with *perfect strangers*—and then they all went out on Broadway and walked way up-town, and there were simply billions of people tooting horns and throwing confetti—and everybody talking to everybody—even the policemen. Oh, Edwina said it was the most marvelous sight she ever saw in her life.”

“It must have been just like the night before Bunker Hill Day in Charlestown,” remarked the guileless Lainey.

“Bunker Hill Day—Charlestown!” Ann said in the height of civic scorn. “That’s just as much as you know about such things, Lainey—comparing a bum holiday with a real carnival. There was *class* to this New York celebration. Actors and actresses there—and wonderful show-girls, and artist’s models and famous people of all descriptions. I don’t know why I had to be born in Boston.”

“I don’t know why you knock Boston so,” Beckie commented indignantly. “I’m sure it’s a beautiful city. Mother used to say that she traveled on three continents and she never saw anything anywhere so beautiful as Boston Common covered with snow and the moon shining on it. And I’m sure I agree with her.”



"Have you ever lived in any other city?" Ann demanded ruthlessly.

"No," Beckie admitted reluctantly.

"That's the answer to why you think so."

"But everybody says so"—Beckie again rose and battled—"even people who've traveled."

"If they're Bostonians of course they do. Well, I'm glad you like Boston, Beckie, seeing you've got to live here. I call it a dead, cold, slow little burg and I'm going to get out of it just as soon as I can. I'm going on the stage if it's necessary." This was Ann's deadliest threat.

"But think of the culture here," Beckie remonstrated.

"Culture!" Ann repeated. "*Culture*. Who wants culture. Culture's gone out. My goodness, when I think of Boston, I don't blame people for being I. W. W.'s."

"Why don't you join the I. W. W., Ann?" Lainey suggested. Lainey, a little humorless normally, could on occasions develop a subtle strain of sarcasm. "Things happen to them."

"The I. W. W.," Ann repeated in a wearied voice. "The I. W. W. There's a lot of class to the I. W. W., isn't there?"

"I'm thinking quite seriously of joining it myself," said Lainey.

"Lainey Ollivant," Ann said in tones round and full with horror, "I will not stand for it. Think of having an I. W. W. in the family. It's bad enough your being a Socialist—but when it comes to being an I-Won't-Work—and picketing—and talking from soap-boxes on street-corners—and breaking machinery—and everything—I can't see when you were

going in for such queer things you didn't take up College Settlement work. College Settlement is perfectly correct. Lots of real society people go in for that—or even suffrage. But *Socialism!* And as sure as you get to be an I. W. W., Lainey Ollivant, you'll go to jail, you mark my words. Why, I never tasted champagne but once in all my life," Ann reverted to her original grievance. "And then I had only two teeny-weeny glasses. It was on board Commodore Carleton's yacht. That crowd drank champagne an awful lot. I always refused it. Now I wish I'd drunk every glass they offered me."

In the height of her recklessness, Ann seized her little boudoir-cap and dashed it on the floor. "I'm sick of nothing happening," she announced.

She was a monument to discontent at that moment, her warm lips pouted to their most scornful fullness, her big eyes lighted to their most scornful blaze. Ann was the only one of the Ollivant girls who made a point of having *négligée* clothes. Now she wore a little, straight, flat, medieval-looking garment of a satin-surfaced exquisitely-faded rose. She had cut this down from an old evening-wrap of her mother's that she had found in the garret, just as she had cut her slippers down from a pair of high, pink-kid shoes which she had found there. The rose tones brought out all the lusciousness of her type—the tawny notes in her hair and brows and eyes; her anger seemed to superimpose upon that lusciousness an amber glitter. For an instant, her two sisters looked—little blonde Lainey—pale and neutral-tinted—bigger, darker Beckie—thick and dull in comparison. Then, as indignation colored them, Beckie's vigorous deep-toned brownness took

on a brighter fire, Lainey's frail light-shot blondness a heavier warmth.

"I've never tasted champagne," Lainey asserted with an air of fiery rectitude, "or anything intoxicating. I don't believe in drinking—or at least in women drinking—not until they're married, anyway."

"I'm for temperance," Beckie insisted with a look imperious with obstinacy. "Mother always was."

"Well, I'm not," Ann said. "I hate temperance or anything that prevents you from doing what you like. If there was a bottle of champagne in this house at this moment," she glared at her sisters, "I'd drink it," she paused and added with a visible access of recklessness, "even if I got drunk."

"Oh, Ann!" exclaimed Lainey, scandalized.

"I guess it's about time for us to go to bed," Beckie suggested in a disapproving tone.

"Well, as long as there's nothing else to do," Ann agreed, "I suppose we'd better." Her revolutionary spirit turned suddenly to listlessness. "Come on, Lainey."

Lainey did not move. Instead, "Hark!" she exclaimed. "Somebody's at the door. One of the boys is coming home."

Somebody *was* at the door. Plainly there came through the silence the sound of a hand on the knob. A key clinked in the keyhole, scraped across the door-panel, slithered back in irresolute dashes over the wood, clattered in uncertain peckings at the keyhole again. The door opened suddenly. Somebody stumbled up the top stair, tripped over the threshold.

“Well, whoever it is, I should think he was blind,” Ann remarked with captious intent. “Oh, it’s Matt! Hullo, Matt! Happy New Year!”

“Happy New Year, Matt!” Lainey and Beckie chorused.

“Happy New Year, girls!” Matt responded. “Happy New Year!”

He stood in the hall for an instant, removing his hat and coat. He seemed to have trouble with both. The hat, as though possessed by a spirit of contrariety positively human, refused to be hung up. It fell from his hand twice and he was, each time, a long while in recovering it. “I request you to hang on that hook,” Matt finally addressed it in a tone of steely courtesy. It obeyed. The coat was even more unruly than the hat—perhaps because Matt tried to cram it into the narrow drawer in the settle. It rolled and rippled and bulged out of his hands. Finally, he changed his mind as to its disposal, “Will you kindly stay where I put you?” he asked, hanging it with exquisite care beside his hat. The coat also obeyed.

“Happy New Year, girls!” Matt repeated absently as he entered the room. He made for a seat in front of the fire. He walked with perceptible care and precision, but the furniture kept getting in his way. A big chair reached out a treacherous arm and pulled him over. A table put forth a stealthy foot and tripped him up. The couch started openly to bar his progress. He overcame all these obstacles, but only by the employment in equal quantities of strategy and diplomacy.

“Oh, do for goodness’ sake pick up your feet, Matt,” Ann rebuked him sharply once.

"I shouldn't think you knew where you were going."

"I don't," Matt admitted, still weaving towards a chair. And he laughed uproariously as at a joke on himself. But his face sobered instantly. A cunning expression wiped the mirth out. "I don't know where I'm going," he admitted again, "but—" he paused and swayed a little, "but," he added impressively, "*I'm on my way.*" He contemplated his three sisters in silence as though marking the effect on them of this revelation. It produced no effect whatever and Matt seated himself in a chair by the fire.

His face was flushed. His hair, which usually rose to so trim and rampant a crest of red, had rumbled and tumbled into the curls that he always tried so hard to smooth out. Beginning at the nape of his neck, they seemed to be running hard uphill over the round of his head to inundate his brow with their copper torrent. His eyelids dropped half over his eyes. Those eyes were dulled, although they held little quicksilver glints of mirth. His lips, as though he had lost control of them, kept breaking into smiles. These smiles widened until they broke and vanished. Suddenly without warning he threw himself back into his chair and burst into a roar of laughter. "Happy New Year, girls!" he said.

Matt's laughter was infectious. The three girls laughed with him. "You must have been having a good time to be so happy, Matt," Lainey commented in her little voice.

"I think you're silly," Ann remarked in her round notes. "What have you been doing?"

"Oh, a lot of things," Matt answered vaguely. "Been round to a lot of places—seen a lot of people—been round a lot—seen a lot—but——" He stopped and appeared to grope for something he had forgotten. For a moment, his head dropped. His eyes, half closed, closed entirely. A look of cunning introspection crossed his face. Then obviously he got what he was searching for. "*I'm on my way!*" he pronounced impressively. Again he stared hard at his sisters. Immediately another mood caught him. "Happy New Year, girls!" He burst into roars of laughter.

But his sisters did not laugh with him this time. "Oh, do stop, Matt," Beckie exclaimed. "I don't think that joke is funny any longer."

"I didn't think it was funny at the beginning," Ann remarked caustically.

Matt's eyes opened wide again. The mirth melted slowly from his face. In its place came a delicious dewiness as of complete relaxation. The little quicksilver glints of mischief vanished from his eyes; they became softly hazy. His lips kept flickering into smiles, not of amusement but of happiness. "I think it's awful funny," he said. "Happy New Year, girls! Happy New Year, girls! Happy New Year! This year and next year and nexz year and the year after that and the year after that and so on forever and ever and ever—andevery—andevery—andevery—anever—anever—anever—happy—New Years-girls—happy-New Years-skerls—zappy-year-skerls—zappy-skerls!"

This protracted effort was a little too much for him. He fell back in his seat, pulled himself forward with a jerk, fell back, sagged and stayed

sagged. His eyes opened, closed, opened again. "Zappy!" he commented, "sounds like a puppy-dog." His eyes closed and stayed closed.

Neither of the girls replied. Ann stared hard but movelessly at her brother, the full red lower lip gradually falling away from the pouting red upper one until a double ripple of pearl appeared between them. Her eyes opened wide until the whites appeared about the golden irises. Lainey stared hard and movelessly too, the look of wonder in her face concentrating gradually to alarm. Her eyes did not open, but they darkened until they became panic-spots. Beckie stared but not movelessly. She came with a snap to an upright position. Her eyes narrowed as they studied Matt.

For a noiseless interval, they all stared together at the sagging figure. The clock tapped madly, the fire splashed frantically as though trying to distract their attention. Then the three pairs of eyes—golden-brown, gray-blue, hazel-green—met in an exchange of looks. Suddenly a deep flood of crimson pushed forward through the thick velvet of Ann's white skin. But through the delicate thinness of Lainey's transparent contours the blood raced backwards, draining them of light and life. Beckie's did not change in color, but her expression set into strange lines and hollows.

Beckie spoke first. She did not speak, really. She motioned with her lips. "He's drunk," they gestured.

Her sisters looked at her for what was obviously an interval of paralysis. Lainey sat frozen—a little image carved in ice, of horror. But Ann's terror translated itself finally into speech—speech as

silent as Beckie's. "What shall we do?" her lips motioned.

"Get him to bed," Beckie signaled back. With an air of resolution, she arose. She bent over the recumbent Matt, fast asleep now and smiling in his sleep, shook him. "Wake up, Matt!" she commanded. "It's time to go to bed."

Matt opened one eye, then the other. He stared meditatively up into his sister's face. "Time to go to bed?" he questioned in a voice perfectly clear and exquisitely articulated. He appeared to consider the matter judicially. "Time to go to bed? Time to go to bed? All right! All *right!*" He snapped the *right* so straight into Beckie's face that she rebounded from the charge. Suddenly he half closed his eyes. The cunning look came back into his face. "*I'm on my way!*" he confided impressively. Again mirth wiped off this seriousness and he laughed. "Zappy-year-skerls!" He roared.

The little image in ice that was Lainey arose from her chair, placed itself at his side. "Stand up, Matt dear," she begged touchingly, "we'll help you."

"This way!" Beckie commanded. She took one arm. Lainey took the other. As they moved toward the hall, Ann fell in behind.

Matt walked steadily under this compulsion until he reached the hall settle. That seemed suddenly to recall his early struggle. "I request you," he addressed his hat in the tone of a steely courtesy, "to hang on that hook. Will you kindly stay where I put you?" he remarked to the coat.

"Up the stairs, Matt dear," Lainey pleaded as with a child.



“All *right!*” Matt agreed good-naturedly. And up he went, leaning first on Beckie, then on Lainey. “One step after another,” he commented in a perfectly clear voice at one period of their progress. The clearness vanished, however, as he proceeded to embroider this theme. “Jus think—one step affer anozzer—one-step-affer-anozzer—onestepaffer-anozzer.”

This refrain entertained him more than any previous one. He held to it through their hobbling, stumbling progress up the first flight of stairs, through their swaying, weaving march through the hall, and their jerking, battering ascent of the second flight. “Aw-ways-one-step-affer-anozzer-girls. Jus-zink-of-zat-zat’s-life—awways-one-step-affer-anozzer—affer-anozzer—aff-anozzer—av-anozzer—av-anozzer—sounds like a biscuit.”

He was absolutely docile, however, during this excursion, and he continued to be docile when they reached his room. Of his own accord, he fell immediately into the big chair, and under the compulsion of his condition into a deep sleep. Ann removed his collar and tie, Beckie his coat and waistcoat, Lainey his shoes and stockings.

“That’s all we can do,” Beckie whispered at the end of these ministrations. “Let’s get him into bed.”

Matt responded to a violent shaking long enough to rise at their bidding from the chair, to navigate across the room, to flop onto the bed where he apparently fell into a state of coma. But as they opened the door, his eyes opened. “Zappy-Year-skerls!” he said, “Zappy skerls! Skerls—skerls—sounds like a fish!” He dropped his lids for good.

Beckie was equal to closing the door with calm and quiet. But only that. She flew in the wake of her panic-stricken sisters to the living-room. The three girls dropped into chairs and stared wide-eyed and gap-mouthed at each other—panting.

"That's the most dreadful thing that ever happened to me in my life," Beckie breathed in an instant.

"I never was so frightened in all my existence," Ann intoned, "for if there's anything I have a horror of, it's a drunken man."

"Thank God, mother didn't live to see this!" Lainey whispered.

Ann's tone grew bitter. "I thought all the terrible things that could possibly happen to the Ollivant family had happened. But I was wrong, I see. It remained for us to raise a drunkard."

Lainey set a hopeless blue-gray gaze on a point in space. "Who does he take it from, Beckie?" she asked mournfully. "Do you know?"

"Oh, I know," Beckie said in despairing tone. "I *know*. Only too well. I hate to tell you two girls this. Because I know you've never realized it. But I guess I've got to so that you can get what you're up against. Uncle Warren was a drunkard in his youth. I've always known it—though mother never knew I knew. Josie Hill told me one night when she slept with me. She was awfully ashamed the next day and made me promise I wouldn't tell and I never have till now. Aunt Josephine had an awful time with him for years. He'd come home two or three nights a week that way and she'd have to put him to bed. Suddenly, without any warning

he stopped short though, and they were very happy their last years together."

"Poor Aunt Josephine!" Lainey exclaimed. "Poor, poor Auntie! That's why she had that sweet, sad, patient look."

"I suppose that's the way Matt will be," said Ann. "Just imagine having to put him to bed two or three times a week. Well, the boys will have to do it. I won't."

"I don't know what Ed will say," Beckie went on in a frightened voice. "I'm almost afraid to tell him. It will be an awful shock to him. Ed's so correct and so fastidious. He'll have no mercy on Matt."

"And Roly," Lainey interpolated somberly.

"Thank goodness Roly was in bed and asleep," Beckie ejaculated. "We must keep it from him just as long as possible—it will be such a terrible example to him. I suppose he's bound to know some time, though."

"Yes, don't let Roly know," Lainey begged. "It's awful to lose your faith in anybody. I never can respect Matt again."

"Do you suppose," Ann burst out in an accent of horror, "that anybody *saw* him? I should simply *die* if Mrs. Damon knew it."

"Or Aunt Lottie," Lainey said in a kindred horror. "It would break her heart. She's always been so fond of Matt."

In silence the three girls considered these two possibilities.

"Well," Ann broke it abruptly, "I guess the best thing we can do is to go to bed. I'm all in."

This has been a *swell New Year's Eve* for us, I must say."

The three girls filed upstairs on tiptoe. They whispered their good-nights. They closed their doors with the utmost care, Lainey and Ann even undressed in the dark. Beckie, however, turned on all the lights in her room. As she moved about, undressing and hanging things up, her feet were leaden with utter exhaustion. But, in bed, new strength seemed to come to her. She turned and tossed, tossed and turned, readjusted her pillow a dozen times. The clock struck one, two. Beckie got up and wandered aimlessly about the room. Suddenly a little pattering footstep sounded outside in the hall. The knob turned. The door opened. "Are you awake, Beckie?" Lainey's tearful voice called. "Can I come in?"

"Oh, *do* come in, Lainey," Beckie answered. "There isn't a drop of sleep in my body." She arose and lighted the gas.

Lainey appeared in its illumination, standing in the doorway. She wore her little shabby fur coat over her nightgown. Her hair, parted in the middle and combed straight down over her ears, fell in two flat stiff braids of pale gold. Its ends, tied with blue nursery-ribbon, made little paint-brush points at her waist. Lainey's eyes were red. Her mouth—so deeply hollowed in the shadowy corners, so fully curled at the crimson center—hung slackly.

"Is Ann asleep?" Beckie asked.

"Yes, she went to sleep right away," Lainey answered in a dead voice. "But I haven't closed my eyes. And then I heard you get up and I thought probably you felt the way I did—you'd rather talk

with me than just lie and think. Who's *that*? Oh, Ann, you frightened me to death! Oh, *Ann*, did I wake you up?"

"No," Ann answered dully. "I haven't slept. I can't. I feel—I feel—well, I haven't felt so badly since Matt was arrested for speeding and Ed wouldn't bail him out and he had to spend the night in jail among common criminals. I try to think of other things and sometimes I do and then right in the midst of it, it all comes over me—and—and—and, oh, I feel as though a ton of coal had fallen on my mind."

"I've been thinking too," Lainey said, "thinking and thinking and thinking—turning it all over. Isn't there some way Matt can be cured?"

"I've been wondering about that," Beckie replied, a little dash of hope in her voice. "Of course there are those places where you go and they cure you up. I shall talk to Ed to-morrow about sending Matt away before this thing grows on him. Ed will agree with me, I know. If we have any trouble with Matt, I shall simply *insist* on it and, Lainey, I want you to back me up. If it's necessary, I'll go to Verbeck Wales and Company and ask them to hold Matt's place open for him. I'll tell them that his whole future depends on his conquering this habit now. Remember, you've got to stand by me, Lainey."

"Oh, I will, Beckie," Lainey promised with fervor, "I *will*. You may be sure of that. I've got a hundred dollars saved up towards going to Europe. I shall offer it to Matt. I shall *make* him take it."

"The trouble with those cures," Ann said with a tragic pessimism, "is that they don't *always* cure.

Take Miriam Fales's brother. He came home apparently all right and they thought the whole thing was settled for keeps. But one month from the very day he came home, he got dead drunk."

"I know," Beckie admitted wanly. "It didn't work with Roy Baker, either. But in case the cure fails, there are other ways, I'm sure. I read the other day of a man who used to get drunk and his wife put whiskey in every bit of food she cooked for him—coffee, bread, stew, meat, pie, pudding—*everything*. Of course she had to cook his food separately. But when he asked her what made everything taste of whiskey, she lied and said she didn't know. Well, he got so sick of the taste that he just naturally stopped drinking. I was wondering if we could try that."

"I'm sure Matt would get onto that," Ann declared with a hopeless convincedness.

"The worst of it is—oh, you two don't know all—but I've got to tell you—I can't keep it any longer." Lainey's revelation came in frantic impulses of voice. "Matt doesn't get it all from mother's side of the house. I didn't think I'd tell you this at first, but I guess we'd better know the whole situation. Father's cousin, Abner Smart, used to drink. Once while I was staying with them over a Fourth of July—oh, I wasn't more than fourteen—he came home drunk as a *lord*. His lodge was having some sort of celebration. Cousin Lily was awfully mortified and, of course, I was scared almost out of my five senses. She begged me not to tell anybody and I never have. And I never would now, if Cousin Abner wasn't dead. So you see, Matt gets it from father's side of the family as well as mother's."

"I never suspected Cousin Abner," Beckie said. "It'll be doubly strong with Matt then, I suppose," she sighed a long heavy sigh, "with two inheritances like that. Well, all I can say is what you said, Lainey, I'm glad mother didn't live to see this night."

"What shall we do?" Lainey asked helplessly.

"I guess we'd better go back to bed, for one thing," Ann answered with a sudden weary burst of impatience. "It doesn't do any good to chew it over like this. And we certainly can't do anything to-night."

"All right, Ann," Lainey agreed with her accustomed docility.

"Good-night, Ann," Beckie said sadly. "Good-night, Lainey."

"Good-night, Beckie," her sisters chorused desolately.

Ann, in the little wooden shoes which Aunt Lottie had brought her from Holland, clattered back to her room; and Lainey, in the little straw scuffs which she had bought in Chinatown, shuffled behind her. The two girls got back into bed.

"Good-night, Lainey dear," Ann concluded tragically.

"Good-night, Ann darling," Lainey answered mournfully.

Lainey lay for a long interval perfectly straight and rigid. Then, no sound coming from Ann's side of the bed, she began to submit to the nervous pressure which was shooting her arms and legs in all directions from her body. Finally, she lifted herself up, sat on the edge of the bed for a while, arose, walked over to the window.

The moon had disappeared, but all the stars ban-

ished by its light had reappeared. They hung close over the pearly glisten of the snow. Lainey's exhausted tear-wet gaze wandered into that shoal of tiny fires, tangled there.

Suddenly her door pushed open.

"Is that you, Lainey?" Beckie's voice called in a faint wisp of a whisper. "Can I come in?"

"Yes," Lainey answered in a thin thread of sound. "No, I'll come to your room, so's not to wake Ann."

"I'm awake," Ann interrupted in a mere ripple of voice. "I can't sleep. I've been keeping still so's not to wake you, Lainey."

Lainey pulled down the shades and lighted the gas.

Beckie had wound her long hair into a grotesque knot, had skewered it with a single hairpin to the top of her head. She had evidently put on the first thing in the closet that her flying fingers had found—a mackintosh. Beckie's eyes glared in her face. Her teeth tore at her lips. Her hands plucked at each other.

"I can't get my mind off it," Beckie declared wildly, "seems as if I had no control over my thoughts."

"I can't, either," Lainey admitted frantically. "My head is going round like a top."

"I don't believe I ever'll sleep again," Ann prophesied crazily. "Think of having a *sot* in the family!"

"I've been wondering," with an obvious effort, Lainey pulled herself together, "if there wasn't some other way of handling this situation. Couldn't we make home so attractive to Matt that he'd want to spend his evenings here. Then he *couldn't* get



drunk. Don't you think it would be a good scheme to have some parties, for instance, and invite all the people he likes."

At the word *parties* a little fire of animation flared in Ann's face. "I think that's a wonderful idea," she approved with a tiny jet of vivacity.

"Because," Lainey went on earnestly, "there's nothing really *criminal* about Matt. He likes nice girls and harmless times and all that sort of thing. I think that with care we could wean him from his present associates, whatever they are. For I'm sure somebody's responsible for his downfall. Matt's such a good boy."

"Oh, take it from me, it's that crowd of Alice Downing's," Ann interpolated with a touch of her natural causticity. "I don't like them and never did."

"I agree with you," Beckie said stoutly. "It's not Matt. It's the influences about him. Matt is naturally a good boy. He never would get drunk if somebody hadn't tempted him. And probably it was a woman. Well, I guess that's what we'd better try to do—to look after his evenings. I think that's a splendid idea, Lainey dear. I feel a lot better. I guess I'll go to bed. I think I can sleep now. Good-night, Lainey. Good-night, Ann."

"Good-night, Beckie," her sisters chorused.

Ann took her place on the inside of the bed. Lainey took her place on the outside. For a long while, Ann lay perfectly silent, snuggled into the little round kitten-like heap into which she always fell. Then, suddenly she began to tremble. The trembling became a frantic shaking. She pulled herself up with an elaborate care, climbed cautiously

over Lainey, snatched a covering from the couch, ran to the door, rushed with an accelerating speed to Beckie's room.

"Beckie, Beckie," she called, the pulses of panic beating in her voice. "Are you awake? I'm coming in."

"Yes, I'm awake. I haven't slept," Beckie admitted wearily. "Oh, Ann, you mustn't take it so hard." She pulled her sister down on the bed.

Two short, thick braids of chestnut hair fell, one on each side of Ann's face. Ann's hair was not nearly so thick as Lainey's, but it seemed thicker because it was coarser. There were broad pale-pink ribbons on the ends of her braids and broad pale-pink ribbons on her nightgown. No matter what Ann's state of mind, she always prepared herself for bed as for a state function. She had thrown over her nightgown an old camel's-hair shawl of cream and dull blue, which had been her mother's. One corner dipped over her forehead. Huddled and shaking in the shawl, her face with its big dark mournful eyes, its white skin, blanched of its velvety wild-rose color beginning, in spite of her unflawed youth to show black shadowings of the night's strain—she looked like some tragic girl-peasant.

"Don't let Lainey hear us," Ann said in the midst of a volley of sobs. "Oh, is that you, Lainey? Haven't you slept, either?"

"I couldn't sleep if my life depended on it," Lainey announced in a stony voice. She sat down beside Ann, threw her arms about her. "Don't cry, Ann," she implored. "Please don't cry."

"I can't stand it any longer," Ann sobbed. "I think of Matt up there—sleeping in his clothes—

d-d-d-dead d-d-d-drunk. I's so afraid it's a jug-jug-jug-judgment on me. The last thing I said be-b-before he came into the house was that if there was a b-b-b-bottle of ch-ch-ch-champagne here I'd drink it all. I'm going to sign the p-p-p-pledge to-mor-row."

"Of course it's not a judgment on you, Ann," Beckie said indignantly. "If it's anything, it's the sins of the fathers. I'm glad you're crying, though. It will relax that awful t-t-t-tension." Beckie's own voice quivered.

"Yes, Ann," Lainey reinforced 'her sister, "Beckie's right. It will do you good to cry. Cry all you want to. Cr-cr-cry till you c-c-can't cry any more." Lainey's own accent began to break.

"Now, we'll all feel better," Beckie said after a while. "I guess we can sleep now."

"Yes, Ann dear," Lainey took up Beckie's plea. "See, the light's beginning to come in the window. Let's go back to bed."

"All right," Ann said with unaccustomed docility. "Good-night, Beckie," she added mournfully.

"Good-night, Ann," Beckie answered sadly. "Good-night, Lainey."

"Good-night, Beckie," Lainey replied desolately.

Outside the air of that first day of the new year seemed to flash and sparkle. A golden sun was pouring flame jewels through the still clearness. A blue sky dropped blue shadows onto a white world. Snow-birds cluttered and fluttered. Sleigh-bells caroled and chimed. Snow-shovels scraped and grated. Occasionally snow fell from peaked gables with a long steady roar. Occasionally icicles broke

with a short brittle clink. From everywhere rang the cries of the coasters. From everybody came the call, "Happy New Year!"

Inside, the three girls—pale-faced, wan-eyed, slow-motioned—went through the movements of getting breakfast.

"I'm trying to think how to break it to Ed," Beckie said. "I expect it'll about half kill him—the disgrace and everything. I never dreaded anything so in my life."

"When is he coming home?" Lainey inquired listlessly.

"Any moment now. He said he'd be here for breakfast. A box just came addressed to Matt. I wonder what it was? I put it upstairs against his door. There, there's Ed now."

Ed's key cut cleanly into the lock. The three girls stood for an instant petrified.

"Is that you, Ed?" Beckie quavered. "Oh, he's going upstairs first," Ann whispered. "He'll wake Matt," Lainey hissed.

Beckie fired. "Well, perhaps Matt will have the manhood to confess what he's done. But——" Panic seized her. "—we'd better go up there. There's no knowing what might happen."

The three girls hurried out into the hall. The defiant Beckie in the van, the listless Lainey in the rear, the covering Ann between, they stole up the two flights of stairs. In the upper hallway, Beckie paused, her finger at her lip. Involuntarily, they put their arms round each other, set to statue stillness.

From the boys' room came not only Ed's clear voice, but Roly's sleepy accent and Matt's sleepier one.

"What's the matter with you, Matt?" Ed demanded with the flattering frankness of brothers, "You look like something the cat brought in."

"I feel worse than that," Matt admitted. "Get me some water, will you, Roly? And say, let me have the first bath, will you, Ed?"

Matt sat on the edge of the bed, his head in his hands. His lack-luster hollowness showed a marked contrast to Ed's equable tinting. Ed's freshness was of the kind that no amount of late hours ever seemed to dim, but to-day even Ed looked a little sunken. Roly, still in his pajamas, showed the freshened coloring of twelve hours' sleep.

"How did you happen to go to bed with your clothes on?" Ed inquired calmly. "Splifflicated?"

"Search me," Matt said. "Yes, I must have been jagged last night. I can't seem to remember anything about it. I went off with some people——"

"Alice Downing's crowd?" Ed questioned idly, smashing his thick golden hair with smart slapping strokes from two military brushes.

"No, I don't know who—a gang of fellows—three drummers in the hardware business that Gus Clark introduced me to. We went—well, I don't know where—and did—well, I don't know what. And I got home—well, I don't remember when—and got to bed—well, I don't remember how. Did you put me to bed, Roly?"

"No."

"Then the girls must have."

"You were soused all right," Roly grinned broadly. "I heard the girls helping you upstairs. I was too sleepy to get up. You were saying some-

thing about one foot after the other—over and over again.”

“Gee,” Matt said, “I must have been pickled.”

“You ought not to have come home drunk,” Ed rebuked his brother. “I should have thought you’d have known better than that. You must have frightened the girls half to death. You know women are all bugs on this question. They’ll have you in the D. T. ward inside of a week.” He turned to Roly. “Remember, kid, if you ever get drunk—don’t come home. Go somewhere. Go anywhere—and stay there—but *don’t come home!*”

“I’ll never get drunk,” Roly growled. “I hate the taste of the stuff.”

“I didn’t intend to get tight, Ed,” Matt said. “It was an accident. Generally, you know three drinks make me so uncomfortable I don’t want any more. Lord, I’m sorry. I wouldn’t have thrown a scare into the girls for anything. What’ll I say to them?”

“Don’t say anything. Let *them* do the talking. They’ll *talk* all right. If they don’t pack you off to a cure, you’re lucky.”

“Now, how did it happen?” Matt interrogated himself irritably. He clutched his head and thought hard. “Seems to me somebody mixed up a glass of beer, cocktails, whiskey, gin, and every other damn thing in sight and dared me to drink it. I did—and I went out soon after.”

“You kept saying, ‘Happy New Year, skerls!’ coming up the stairs,” said Roly, still papably enjoying his brother’s situation.

“Gee!” Matt said, “I must have been stewed.”

“The first time I ever got loaded,” Ed remarked reminiscently, “I came home too. Fortunately,

father and mother were away. Perhaps it was just as well, because it bothered me so, I never—well, I've always kept watch on myself ever since. Oh say, Matt, here's a box I found outside. It's addressed to you."

Matt languidly untied the string, tore away the paper, lifted the cover. "My shoes!" he exclaimed. "Why, where'd they come from? What did I wear——" He peered about on the floor. "Where'd I get those shoes? Say, I must have bought myself a new pair of shoes. Look at them! Well, I'll be—— Swell-looking kicks all right! What did I pay for them?" He hunted languidly for the slip. "Twelve dollars. *Twelve dollars!* I can't afford to buy twelve-dollar shoes. Hell, I'd just bought myself one new pair!"

"You get drunk often enough," Ed promised, "and you'll be one of our classiest dressers!"

"Gee!" Matt said, "I must have been pie-eyed."

Their arms about each other, the girls still stood frozen, a little Niobe group of terror.

Suddenly Ann looked at Beckie. Beckie looked at Lainey. Lainey looked at Ann. A quiver zig-zagged across Lainey's face. It flashed through the air and spread to a ripple at Ann's generous mouth. The ripple widened, caught on Beckie's wan look, broke into a smile. Beckie covered her lips with a smothering hand. Ann filled her mouth with a gagging handkerchief. Lainey dropped her head to an inhibiting shoulder. Suddenly the group broke apart. The fragments made silently down the stairs. In the living-room, Ann threw herself on one chair and laughed. Beckie threw herself on an-

other chair and cried. Lainey fell on the couch and both laughed and cried.

When the three brothers came down the stairs, the girls had set the table. "Happy New Year, skerls!" Roly called. "Happy New Year, spoys!" Ann answered. "Come to breakfast!"

Mutual understanding wrapped the Ollivant family in its peace.



## CHAPTER XI

### BECKIE HEARS HER MOTHER'S VOICE

“WELL, but *Beckie*,” Ann was saying and the degree of her exasperation could be gauged to a nicety by the degree of her emphasis, “*everybody* dances the new dances now. They aren’t called the *new* dances any longer. It was all right to stand out against them two years ago. In fact, it was rather smart. Everybody was doing it! But *now*—good gracious—*nobody’s* doing it. Why, people will look upon you as a fossil and a bonehead.”

Her authoritative manner—Ann sat very straight as she delivered this pronouncement—her working-clothes—plain skirt and middy-blouse of khaki—gave her a look of severity. But that look was nullified by a smile—ill-suppressed—of delightful anticipation on her red mouth and a flash—not suppressed at all—of rapturous excitement in her golden eyes.

Beckie was also in the clothes sacred to the mornings of Sundays and holidays. An apron, full, long, all-enveloping, with big pockets at the sides, concealed the sturdy active lines of her figure. A little sweeping-cap of dotted white muslin held flat every red-gold coil, every bronze-brown loop of her mahogany-colored hair. She, too, sat very straight, but the flash that came into her eyes was pure indignation. “Nevertheless,” she asserted, “I shall never dance them.”

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"Oh, Beck, if you aren't a scream!" Ann commented absently. "Oh, thank goodness, here's Matt. Sit down in that seat, Matt, and don't move out of it."

"Ed isn't here yet," Matt remonstrated. He passed his hand over the faint, reddish-gold stubble on his chin. "Say, while you're waiting for Ed, let me go upstairs and shave."

"You don't leave this room, one of you, once I get you here," Ann said in a relentless voice.

"I've never thought you'd desert me, Lainey," Beckie went on. "Why, when I saw you fox-trotting the other night——"

Lainey in morning costume too—long, slim, straight Chinese sa'am in a strange old green, pointed, heelless Turkish slippers in a gold-embroidered scarlet, her filmy hair, hanging in a loosely-woven braid to her waist—smiled radiantly.

"I'm crazy about them, Beck," she admitted. "They're so—so—so, well, I don't know how to describe it—so *exhilarating*, so full of variety and action. You feel almost as though you were making a design when you do them."

"You may *feel* exhilarated," Beckie said, "but I'd hate to tell you how you *look*. I don't know what mother would say."

"She'd probably say——" interrupted Ann. "Oh, thank goodness, here's Ed."

Ed, the coolly-colored and finely-chiseled; Ed, the freshly-shaven and sartorially-trim; Ed, the handsome, frigid, and impeccable, entered at a saunter. "Now, what's all this about?" he asked as he seated himself on the couch.

"I'll tell you as soon as Roly gets through his breakfast," Ann said.

"I've nearly finished," Roly called from the dining-room. "Go on without me. I can hear what you're saying."

"I'll wait until you finish," Ann said with weary patience. "If I start now, I know you'll interrupt, calling for everything you can think of."

"All right," Roly said with an unexpected alacrity. "Just to prove that I'm a sport, I'll come right now in my half-starved condition." He looked longingly, however, at the coffee-cup drained to a half-inch residuum of sugar, the grapefruit shell scraped to a white dryness, the big bowl emptied of a heaped abundance of breakfast-food and the plate cleaned of a generous helping of ham and eggs. Finally, as one who tops off with a delicate morsel, he seized a banana and ate it in ravenous mouthfuls as he strolled into the living-room.

Raven-black as to hair and brows, coffee-brown as to eyes and skin, satin-smooth as to texture, but boyishly heavy as to expression and boyishly indeterminate as to feature, Roly seated himself between the golden-topped Ed and the copper-crested Matt.

Ann heaved a long sigh. "I've got you together at last! And heaven knows it's been *some job* finding a time when I could herd you into one room. If a holiday hadn't come along, I don't know what I should have done—and that alone ought to convince you that what I am going to tell you is the truth—all of us having different work and different friends and different engagements and different *everything*, not to speak of——"

"Oh, for the love of Mike, Ann," Ed broke out

impatently. "I've got an engagement. I've got to be down——"

"There, there you are again!" Ann interrupted with a pessimistic triumph. "You want me to hurry up. You always do. You've got an engagement. You always have. Everybody else is going somewhere. They always are. That's the reason I've come to the conclusion that something's got to be done about this house. You all act as though you were doing one-night stands and this was a bum hotel you were staying at. Not that I blame you. It's so shabby and dingy and old-fashioned and *horrid* that—well, it's just got to be fixed up—that's all there is to *that*. You remember that, over a year ago, soon after mother died, when you decided that you'd let me leave school and take charge of the housekeeping, we made a great many *very grand* plans about doing the house over. And we did do a few, dinky, little things. For one thing, we got rid of that fierce ark of a black walnut sideboard and put up shelves. Then we had it all planned for Beckie to move out of the big front room into our room, and for Lainey and me to move into the back room and fix up the big front room into a living-room for you boys. Well, did we do that? Yes, we did—*not*." Ann swept the circle with a withering glance. She made no effort to suppress the golden scorn that flared in her eyes. The flare died down, however, as she continued equably, "And a good thing, too, because all my ideas then were fierce. Green wicker and Navajo rugs and pink, red, blue, yellow, and green bedrooms. You see Bird has taught me a lot about interior decoration and now I see what this place *really needs*."

"It seems to me," Ed said in his most icy tone, "that Bird Barton has put a good many ideas into your head."

"Bird puts ideas into *everybody's* head." Lainey rushed to the defense of her friend. "She can't help it. She's so full of originality it just bubbles over onto other people."

"Bird admits," Ann explained—again with patience, the noble patience of the reformer this time—"that ever since she entered this house, her fingers have itched to get at it. She says that the lines and proportions of it are perfectly beautiful, but that the things in it are—she's right too. Nobody knows that any better than I do. I *loathe* it. Well, just to show you how I feel about this joint—I won't go to call on that wonderful-looking Mrs. Farrington who's taken the Smedley place just because I'm ashamed to have her come here and see this awful furniture. I should simply pass away when I saw her looking at that terrible oak combination of desk, bookcase and plate-rack in the dining-room. What first put me onto *that* was once when Mrs. Peabody called and I got the expression on her face when she piped it. I knew she was counting the mirrors in it."

Ed contemplated his youngest sister with the quizzical amusement which was the sunniest aspect of his formal blonde regularity. "So you've chosen the nineteenth of April for this Declaration of Independence?"

"I've chosen it," Ann declared hastily, "because it's a holiday and the only time I could get all of you together."

The note of rebellion inside was echoed by the note

of rebellion outside. Huge, black, bullet-like rain-drops were drawing thousands of inky lines across the landscape, reducing the fresh green of the park and yard and lawns, the warm brown of the streets and paths and alleys, the faded colorings of the pleasant old houses to a vague, moist, composite smudge. Overhead was a sky black and hard as iron. In spots the iron thinned and lightened to silver. At times the sun would melt a hole in that silver and pour cataracts of boiling gold over its edges. Then the bullet-drops would change to a faint dallying mist. The whole world would whirl in a golden glitter. Dapples of blue, incredibly soft and tender, would spot the sky. An instant of this splendor, then the silver edges came together, thickened to iron, the blue dapples disappeared, the thudding downpour would begin again.

"Oh, what a wonderful day!" Lainey said dreamily. "It doesn't know what it's going to do from one moment to the next. But it's doing *something*. Oh, I can't express it exactly, but it makes you understand rebellion and revolution."

Ann groaned. "Oh, for goodness' sake, Lainey, don't get started on Socialism. What has weather to do with anything like that?"

"If we decided to make the changes," Ed interposed artfully, "what is it you propose and what's the damage?"

Ann took a paper from a table beside her. It was covered at one edge with neat lines of writing and at the other with trim files of figures. Evidently she knew these statistics by heart; for although she held the paper in her hand, she did not look at it. "I want first——" she began.

"Oh, say, I'm not going to stay through all this truck," Roly protested, "I don't care what you do with the house. Besides, Dink and I are——"

"Oh—well—go!" Ann ordered. Apparently too indignant for articulateness, she watched Roly hurry through the dining-room, seize one more banana, and depart eating it. But her powers of expression came back with a rush when the door closed. "I do think," she said as one who, after years of careful research, lays down an important dictum, "that boys are the most degraded of God's creatures. We were taught in zoölogy that an ameba was the original low-brow—but what the most ignorant ameba that ever lived has on Roly I'd like to know. Still," she added with another one of her sudden drops to equability, "I'm glad he's gone. What good would he be in an esthetic discussion like this? Now, to begin with, I want this house to be repapered and repainted from top to bottom."

"Excuse me one moment, Ann," Matt said seriously. "I'd just like to ask you what you think your last name is—Morgan or Rockefeller?"

Ann's little teeth came together in a click of exasperation. "I knew some knock like that was coming. Of course, it wouldn't occur to *any of you* to wait until I told you a few things. I know just as well as you that it sounds as though I wanted to spend the whole Rockefeller Foundation. But if you'll only listen to me as long as three minutes without interrupting, although——" she stopped and shot her golden glare about the circle—"I know that will strain your breeding to the utmost, you will see that it is not going to be so expensive as it sounds. Now, for instance——" She was at equilibrium again and

running at full speed. "You remember that time Bird and I went through the attic, looking for the silver service. Well, just the little rummaging we did then convinced Bird that there were all kinds of things up there that were wonderful. Well, she and I have been exploring Saturday afternoons and Sundays ever since, cleaning the place up, throwing out old truck and digging up stuff that we could use and planning what we could do with it."

Matt groaned. "I bet there won't be a comfortable chair in the house."

"There, there you go again." Ann's eyes shot another succession of golden lightnings through the group. "Handing out the knocks before you know anything about it."

"Shut up, Matt!" Ed ordered good-naturedly. "Go on, kid!" he said to his sister. "What did you find?"

"Well, in some ways it was a disappointment. Of course, I had a vision—and so did Bird—of ancestral mahogany, silver, glass, pewter, Chippendale, Sheraton, Hepplewhite——" Ann waved these exotics of a new vocabulary with a nonchalance more impressive than triumphal banners. "Well, nothing like that materialized—only one old couch, broken and pretty shabby—Sheraton though and Bird says it's a wonder. We're going to put that in—— But to go on—we found a beautiful old bureau of mahogany and maple with the original brasses. We're going to put that in—— Oh, I'll come to that later. Then we discovered a set of old Windsor chairs with nine sticks at the back—Bird says they're rather uncommon. We're going to put those in—— But I'll come back to them. And what do you think?"



Bird said—you never saw anything like Bird—and stuck to it that there ought to be a maple table somewhere to match those chairs. We hunted *high and low*—it wasn't in the house anywhere. But Bird is a *perfect ferret* where old furniture is concerned. Where do you suppose we found it? In the woodshed behind that fierce old wardrobe that's been there since the year one. That table is a perfect pippin, hexagonal in shape and duck feet. Bird says it will finish up gloriously like old-gold satin. We're going to put that in—— But first let me tell you—of course we found other things in the attic—I mean bric-à-brac. But I want to go on about our plans.”

Lainey actually bounced. “Ann, if you stop one instant I shall burst,” she said. “And you haven't finished a single sentence.” Her deep-set, blue-gray eyes had begun to shine with the liquid light of her excitement. Even Ed and Matt, though by this time smoking calmly, had begun to show a conservative masculine excitement. “Go on!” Ed urged. And, “We're listening,” Matt prodded.

Beckie alone sat very still and straight in her chair.

“In the first place——” Ann began. Under encouragement, her manner had assumed a bustling importance. “We want to repaper these rooms in a plain cartridge. I hope I don't have to tell you that this kind of paper, big-figured like that, is an offense against art. If I could have *my way* I'd have gold paper and black paint; for I simply adore gold. But that would be too expensive. So as we can't have that, Bird and I decided on a golden-brown cartridge for paper and a soft *gleamy* ivory

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for paint. Then I'd make a clean sweep of the furniture. I mean all the dining-room stuff, that awful combination of settle and hat-rack in the hall."

"Oh Lord, Ann," Matt remonstrated, "that hat-rack is very convenient, especially getting in late when it's dark. I like it."

"I gathered that," Ann answered crisply, "that night you came home drunk. You actually talked to it. I thought you were going to hug it." Ann never lost a chance to remind Matt of his single fall from abstinence. "No," she continued inflexibly. "That hat-rack must go. If Mrs. Farrington should come to call, she'd think there was no class to this family the instant she laid her eyes on that unspeakable atrocity. No, we're going to put the lovely old Sheraton couch that we found in the attic in its place. We're going to clean out the closet under the stairs in the hall and you are to hang your things there. Of course it'll take me at least a month to teach all of you that. I'll have to stand over you with a gun! And, oh, my land, the fights I'll have with Roly!" Ann's eyes softened to self-pity as in imagination she surveyed the thorny road that leads to an esthetic ideal.

"How about this furniture?" Ed indicated the living-room in which they sat.

"I'm coming to that," Ann promised. Her manner became slightly didactic, her voice pedagogic. "Bird says that though none of this is valuable from the collector's point of view, still it's perfectly *harmless*—good, solid, old mid-Victorian stuff. And she also said—the most *comfortable* furniture ever invented. Bird says she thinks it's the funniest

thing how all the Victorian stuff looks so much like Queen Victoria herself—dumpy and fat and domestic and roly-poly—but not a bit of *temperament* about it anywhere.”

“How the *hell* can furniture have temperament?” Matt growled.

“Ask Bird,” Ann answered sweetly. “Why, Bird says that that Sheraton desk”—she pointed to the great family treasure—“is simply *sizzling* with temperament. However, all this furniture must be recovered—you see yourself how worn and moth-eaten and faded and spotted it is. Now up to this point, all I’ve talked about is *spending money*. Here’s where we begin to save it. *Bird and I are going to do the upholstering ourselves*. She knows how and she is going to teach me. And we’re going to upholster everything smooth, not button it down. Bird says all those little buttony hollows are inartistic and unhygienic. That’s the furniture.” Ann stopped and ran her eye down the written list on her paper. Then she put the paper down, and folded her arms. “Let me see. Oh, we’ve got to get rid of nearly all the pictures in this room,” she announced with a convincing effect of calmness.

“*Pictures!*” Ed repeated. His voice thrilled with emphasis and he stared at his sister—hard.

“Not the *paintings!*” Matt demanded. His tone also tingled with emphasis and he looked at his sister questioningly and threateningly.

“Not the *portraits!*” Lainey exclaimed. Her words also vibrated with emphasis and she had the air of one about to contemplate sacrilege.

“Oh no. Not father’s and mother’s,” Ann replied. “Of course not. They’d stay anyway. But

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Bird says they're really very nice—they've a great air of *authenticity*. She says that whoever painted them was a good artist. The *drawing* is quite as good as the *color* and both are exceptional. And as for the frames, she says she's never happened to see any like them—so elaborate and yet so *chaste*—she just loves that swell green-gold they've faded to."

Under the pressure of so much new vocabulary, the Ollivants turned as with one accord and—as from a new point of view—surveyed the two portraits. In her pale-blue silk, with its deep flounces of thread lace, her fan of pale-rose ostrich-feathers and sticks of mother-of-pearl, Mrs. Ollivant, warmly, robustly blonde, met their look with a gaze tender, soft, and misty-blue. In his long frock-coat, carrying a shining hat, gloves, and a stick, Mr. Ollivant, richly-olive, sternly dark, sustained their glance with a keen-visionsed, gray-eyed humorousness.

"Say, do you know it never occurred to me what a peach father was!" Ann said, "or what a swell dresser until Bird called my attention to it. I was showing her the family photographs and she said father's clothes were very elegant and smart. Of course I've always known that mother was a looker. How queer how you've never really noticed things you've been brought up with!" Ann's voice had become a little dreamy. But it immediately became business-like again. "Yes, we keep the portraits. But"—she waved her right hand in the direction of the right wall—"it's the scrap-heap for 'Washington on Horseback' and 'Sir Walter Scott in His Study.'" She waved her left arm in the direction of the left wall. "It's the ash-barrel for

Landseer's 'The Monarch of the Glen' and for 'From Shore to Shore.'". She folded her arms. "And we're going to *can* General Milliken."

She paused as though waiting for the storm to break.

It broke.

"Nothing doing, Ann," Ed said with decision.

"I won't stand for that. The General's picture has got to stay."

"Sure it has," agreed Matt. "Why, it wouldn't seem like home if when I came into this room that old duffer wasn't glaring down at me as though he'd like to beat my block off."

"Oh yes, Ann," Lainey said with stressful accent that had a soft quality of uncertainty in it. "I *do* think you ought to keep General Milliken. It doesn't seem quite respectful to get rid of him." She turned to her elder sister, "What do you think, Beckie?"

Beckie did not speak for a moment. But it was not because she lacked words. It was only that she was choosing from the hordes that fluttered to her lips. "I think—well, I don't know what I think—I mean I know well enough but I don't know how to put it. I never—I—I—I never listened to anything like this in all my life. I shouldn't think, Ann, that you had one atom of love or respect or reverence in your heart. And the rest of you aren't much better. To want to change our home all over! Why, I should hate it! I don't want it to look any different. Of course, I don't object to repapering and repainting, but when it comes to getting rid of my father's and mother's furniture and taking away the pictures that I was brought up with—es-

pecially the portraits of my ancestors—well, I'll *never* give my consent."

"That's all nonsense, Beckie," Ed said decisively. "Why, you'd never get anywhere or do anything if you held by those sentiments. I don't feel any particular love for the Scott or the Landseer or the others. But I do agree with you when it comes to the General's portrait—I draw the line there."

"What do you like about it?" Ann demanded. And for an instant her patience cracked. "He isn't so very much of an *ancestor*. I mean he doesn't go so very far back. Father and mother both knew him. And the technic is perfectly dreadful, Bird says."

"What business is it of Bird Barton's, I'd like to know?" Beckie demanded stormily.

"*She* said it was none of her business," Ann answered, "and she didn't say one word about it until I *dragged* it from her. Will you tell me what you like about it?" Ann continued with a resumption of her magnanimous patience.

Deep silence fell. Outside the sun smashed a blue hole through the black sky. Cascades of gold pouring through changed the inky downpour to a diaphanous golden mist.

The family surveyed the portrait of General Milliken.

The General presided over the mantel. He wore his uniform and he stood upright, one hand on his sword, the other resting on the table. The portrait lacked physical authenticity in a very important regard, in that the General seemed to be two-dimensional. The face was only a rigid stark mask, although full justice had been done to its beefy,

watery-eyed, iron-jawed expression. The body was but a stiff, hard façade of unwrinkled uniform, although, down to the last round of glittering brass button and the last inch of gleaming gold braid, that uniform had been painted with conscientious care.

"Well, I've never thought he was so very *good-looking*," Lainey said after a moment. And again her voice wavered with that soft uncertainty. "And, of course, since I've joined the Party—(There was only one party with Lainey nowadays, the Socialist)—"I do *hate* militarism. I confess the figure is a little stiff." Both bird-claw-like hands pressed flat on her knees, her braid falling over her shoulder, she bent forward and contemplated the portrait with a gaze deepening in concentration.

"Yes, it is stiff," Matt agreed. "I've always had an idea that the General posed only for the head—that they just rigged up some dummy for the body."

"It's an insult to any dummy," Ann laughed ironically. "He looks to me like those weird things that ventriloquists hold on their laps. I expect him to say, 'Good-evening, audience,' any moment."

"No, they didn't use a dummy," Ed explained. "I remember hearing Aunt Elmira tell about it. The General posed for that picture—but he was sick!"

"*Sick!*" Ann repeated. "He was *dead!* You never can convince me that that's the picture of a live man. They took him out of his coffin and stood him up and——"

"*Ann!*" Beckie interrupted sternly.

Ann subsided. There was another interval of silence in which the golden mist suddenly precipi-

tated to an inky downpour and the blue gash in the sky closed up hard and black again.

"Ann is right," Lainey said with a tumultuous conviction. "It's a dreadful piece of work. He does look like a corpse and anybody can see that he was a hateful, horrid, militaristic, capitalistic old tyrant. I can just imagine how he'd love to be called out against labor, and I can almost see him clubbing the I. W. W."

"Well, *something's* got to be done about the I. W. W.," Ann vouchsafed. "What do you think about the portrait, boys?"

"All right," Ed said with a sudden amenability. "Go as far as you like, Ann. I never saw him. I have no particular love of him. Only don't throw him away. Put him in the attic. Somebody may want him some day. How about it, Matt?"

"Beat it, General!" Matt saluted airily. "Retired—to the attic."

"Why, Ed Ollivant! What do you—— And you too, Matt! You can't really mean——" Beckie was inarticulate, but her indignation throbbed through her voice. "How can you say such things? In the first place, I consider him a very handsome man."

"Handsome!" This from Ann. "Why, Beckie, he looks like Joe Weber will when he's dead."

"I'll never give my consent to it," Beckie declared.

"We're only putting him in the attic, Beckie," Ed explained. "What's the rest of your plan, Ann?"

"Not much beyond what I've told you. Th



point is this: Bird and Lainey and I will do what work we can—upholstering and putting the old furniture into shape. But the papering and painting ought to be done by a professional. What I want the family to do is to agree to share the expense equally after I subtract from it what the furniture brings.”

“I won't give one cent towards it,” Beckie said, very quiet now—and white.

“All right,” Ann answered. “It's going to be done, though, Beckie. You're outvoted. Four of us is a majority.”

“What pictures are you going to have in this room, Ann?” Ed asked. It was apparent that with each moment Ed imbibed more and more of Ann's iconoclastic spirit.

“Very few!” Ann answered. “We're going to leave mother's and father's pictures just where they are. We're going to put one of the big mirrors over the mantel and the other just opposite over the couch in the hall—so they'll reflect and re-reflect in a perfectly *darling* way. And that's all. Of course we found some things in the attic, but I don't want you to see them until they're in place. I do wish,” she went on in a preoccupied way, “that we had something for that big space there.” She pointed into the dining-room. “I would like one smashing bit of color there. And so would Bird. You could see it from this room. I don't know exactly what. *Bird* says a big group of Japanese prints and that *would* be lovely, I think. Only Japanese prints are so expensive. Besides, I'd rather have something modern—I mean futurist—something different and new and—and—and——” Ann's eyes palpably darkened

as she sought in her mind for descriptive phrases. They lighted as she found them. "Something mysterious and *wild* at the same time—if you get me."

"We don't," Matt said promptly.

"But anyway, I can let that wait. An inspiration will come to me some time, I know." Ann spoke now with the serene authority of genius.

"How soon will this be done?" Ed asked.

"I calculate that it will take about a week to do all the papering and painting. And I don't want you boys to come home at all. Ed, you can go to the club—or somewhere. And, Matt, you can go to Lory Mack's—or somewhere. Cousin Edith says she'll take Roly, and Roly always loves to go there because she gives him layer-cake frosted and lined with goo for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Bird is coming to stay here and we four girls will work like mad."

"You needn't count on me," Beckie said with lips so dry that they seemed to parch the words that crossed them. "I won't do one thing towards changing this house over if you're going to sell any of mother's furniture. I don't blame you two girls so much; for you don't remember the days when mother took such an interest in all these things. But I shall never forgive you two boys, for you do remember."

"Oh, Beckie!" Ann said impatiently, "what's the use of being a back number? I love my mother and respect her memory. These things were nice enough for her time, but they're simply *loathly* now. I've got to live here and I want it to look pretty according to my ideas, just as she did, according to hers. I thought for a long time, I'd like to give a

party—a reception or even a dance—Maud Evans says she'd lend me her Victor any time—and she's got all the latest fox-trots. But I never would as long as these atrocities remain in this house."

"There, now you see how it goes," Beckie said in a voice stony with her grim triumph, "these new dances in my mother's house. I think they're awful and I know she would. They're like those terrible futurist pictures that you and Bird are so crazy about. They are simply horrible. They don't mean anything and they're an insult to Michael Angelo and Rembrandt and Botticelli."

"Oh, bother Rembrandt and Michael Angelo," Ann said flippantly. "Old flub-dubs! As for Botticelli, if he wasn't a futurist, I'd like to know who was?"

"I feel—I feel——" Beckie stammered. "It's as though I was losing my home. I shall never have the same love for it again—never—never."

"Oh, yes, you will, Beck dear," Ann declared easily, "when you see how swell it looks. Don't worry about that. Well, now——" Her golden eyes were rocking with joy. "I've got to call Bird up and tell her the results of this conference. We begin work here next Monday. Oh, I'm going to have the time of my life." Ann seized Lainey and they one-stepped madly about the room.

The black sky broke lengthwise and inundated the world with sun. The sky became one huge ceiling of foamy blue. The air turned to a crystal globe filled with liquid gold.

Beckie went up to her room. She immediately fell to work there, sweeping and cleaning. Picture-glass, windows, paint—everything that could be

washed—walls, furniture, bric-à-brac—everything that could be dusted—closet, bureau, desk—everything that could be rearranged—received its full share of attention. Yet Beckie's mind was not on her work. Her eyes looked off into space frequently and blurred at what they saw there. Sometimes she had to bite her quivering lips back to their normal firmness. At last, bathed, combed, dressed, she seated herself at the little oak desk, drew from a drawer, which she first unlocked, a book. That book bore the name, "Diary." But it was not a diary; it was really a commonplace book. For, although Beckie frequently wrote in it, it was more often dedicated to recipes, quotations, pasted newspaper clippings than to personal confessions. But such as it was, Beckie had kept one like it ever since her early teens. There were at least twenty of these butcher-paper-covered blank-books stacked in her closet. To-day she wrote:

"Mother dear, they are going to change the house all over and put away or even *sell* many of the things you loved so much. I did not agree to it. I never will. And I will not help. I shall be loyal to you and your ideas forever and ever and ever."

When Beckie came home Monday night, a smell of dampness, mixed with a smell of paint, hung on the air. The dampness came from the top floor where the paperhangers had begun their work and the paint came from the lower floor where the painters had started theirs. Dinner was one long orgy of chatter between Ann and Lainey and Bird about the refurnished house. Beckie alone remained silent.

"Don't you want to come out in the kitchen," Ann

asked when they arose from the table, "and see the things we've brought down from the attic, Beckie?" There was an unusual note of pleading in her voice.

"No," Beckie said stiffly. "It would only make me feel bad. I loved my mother too much to enjoy what you're doing to the things she cared for."

The entreaty in Ann's voice changed to resentment. "Oh, for goodness' sake, do cut out that line of talk, Beckie. I loved my mother just as much as you did. But I can't love *things* the way I love *people*. That's the only difference between us."

Immediately after dinner, Beckie locked herself in her room.

"I don't know what they're doing, mother," she wrote in her diary. "I haven't looked. I can't. I never was so unhappy in my life."

Beckie did not come home Tuesday night. By Wednesday night the damp smell had descended and the paint smell ascended one story. Again the dinner-talk bristled with the details of shopping expeditions and of the domestic revolution.

"Don't you want to come out in the kitchen, Beckie," Lainey asked gently, "and see what we've done with the furniture?"

"No, thank you," Beckie replied with firmness and dignity, "I'm not interested."

Again, immediately after dinner, she went to her room.

"It's like coming into a tomb, mother," she wrote in her diary. "I feel as though everybody in the family was dead. I can't stand it."

Thursday Beckie did not come home. By Friday night both the damp smell and the paint smell had disappeared. The two lower rooms were closed.

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The girls ate in the kitchen: Ann and Lainey and Bird still full of their shopping and their restoring; Beckie again starkly silent. This time they did not ask her to inspect results, although three times Bird's lips closed over what was obviously bitten-off entreaty. Afterwards, Beckie wrote in her diary:

"It's all gone, mother dear, the home you loved so much. I don't want to stay here any longer. I can't."

When Beckie got home early Saturday afternoon, the house was silent. Evidently the three girls had not returned from their final shopping raid. Beckie went straight to her room, waited only to take off her hat and coat before she pulled out the huge old-fashioned trunk from her roomy closet.

After five, the front door opened, letting in a three-ply fabric of girl-chatter. But after the first start, Beckie paid no attention to the gay sounds that drifted up to her. She finished her packing. She bathed and dressed. She put on her hat and coat—slipped out of the house.

"Oh, Beckie dear, is that you?" Aunt Lottie exclaimed as the door to her living-room opened. "Well, I am glad to see you. I haven't seen hide nor hair of one of you since you started fixing the house over. I see Ann going off to Boston every morning—my stars, she looks happy! And I saw all three girls come in just a few minutes ago. I expect Lainey's been shopping all day too, seeing it's Saturday. Isn't this early for you, Beckie?"

"Yes. I took the afternoon off for—for some

thing. I thought I'd run over for a few minutes. There's something I want to talk over with you."

Beckie sat down in one of the big comfortable morris-chairs and Aunt Lottie resumed the other. Aunt Lottie's hair was white, but somehow her head, like her trim ankles and her slim waist, had managed to conserve a girlish smallness. She was knitting and every movement vibrated with energy and efficiency. A long, bright-colored, closely-woven band was emerging from under her needles. A ball of many-colored worsteds lay in her lap. Her needles clinked and clattered and sparkled. She talked on, however—and with a briskness that perfectly matched her movements—after her first keen glance at Beckie's gray face.

"I don't know that I ever saw a prettier set of girls than Ann and Lainey and Bird," Aunt Lottie went on. "Ann and Bird are perfect beauties. Lainey isn't a beauty exactly, but she's real refined-looking. She'll be prettier, too, when she fills out. But it does seem as though Ann grew handsomer every minute of her life. And she's the spit of her mother. Every expression, every movement!" The gray eyes that were so sharp and so kind at the same time seemed to lose focus for an instant. Aunt Lottie took off her glasses and wiped them. "I admire to watch her. She's more like your mother than any of you. Your mother was as quick as a cat, but sometimes I think Ann's even quicker. You and Lainey are Ollivants through and through, but Ann's a Carr from A to Zed."

"Yes, she is like mother," Beckie said a little drearily.

"She was over here a fortnight ago with Bird

and I asked them to show me those dances that the papers are so full of. So she and Bird danced some for me. I didn't see anything wrong with them. But it was just like Ann to be wild about them. She's a pretty dancer too. That's just the way your mother would have been—many's the time she's danced all night long. She would have been dancing every one of them if she'd been alive and well. Why, I remember when roller-skating came in—your mother was a bride—and she took it up at once. There was an awful lot of talk among the Ollivants. Your father's three aunts—the Ollivant girls—awful dried-up old maids they were too—made *enough* to-do about it. So your mother just took them to the rink with her one day, without telling them where they were going. At first they were hopping mad when they found out where they were. But after they'd watched a little while, Mattie—she was the youngest—said she was going to try it. She put the skates on—she'd always been a fine ice-skater—and off she went like a bird. What's more, she got a husband out of it. A gentleman there was so taken with her skating, he hunted round till he found some one who could introduce them, and if you'll believe it, they were married six months afterwards to the day."

Beckie was only half listening. She was gazing about her. For an instant her face relaxed. The setness about her mouth softened. The grimness about her eyes melted.

"I always love to come into this room, Aunt Lottie," Beckie said. "It reminds me so of mother. I've come over here so many times with her. Now that they're changing the house over, it will be about



the only place left where mother used to go that stays just as it was when she was alive."

It was a room pleasantly reminiscent of the "cozy" taste of a past generation. The paper and carpet were both "bright" in design, although an effort to harmonize them was apparent. The furniture was all of a highly-polished, mirrored, much-carved oak, the curtains of a big-figured, scalloped, much-starched lace. Walls were covered with pictures, mantels and tables with bric-à-brac—the heterogeneous, haphazard collection of a lifetime. Books herded in trim brilliant files in glass cases. Mineral specimens clustered in neatly-labeled groups in glass cabinets. But a certain spirit, not alone of use but of tender care, pulled all this together into an atmosphere of comfort. Alien details of sound and movement helped; the grandfather's clock ticking sturdily in the corner, the blossoming plants thriving lustily at the windows. A huge, gray cat, wise-looking and fastidiously-groomed, snoozed close to the register. A canary hopped from the floor of his cage to the perch at its top, emitting the occasional screeches of his joy.

"Well, I guess I think that myself," Aunt Lottie agreed. "More often than you would, perhaps. For this room has associations with your mother that you don't know anything about. You see, she and I refurnished our houses at the same time. One reason why we were such great friends was that, although in all other things we were as different as chalk is from cheese, we were alike in one thing—we loved modern furniture. When I inherited this house, it was full of old-fashioned hair-cloth that had belonged to my Aunt and Uncle Hepburn.

Yours was fitted out just the same way when your mother married your father—your grandfather Ollivant's things. Of course I was my own mistress and could do as I pleased."

Aunt Lottie gave a sudden pull to her worsted. Released, the ball bounded from her lap, rolled a rainbow streak through the air and hit the cat in the head. He opened one somnolent eye, contemplated the blazing intruder with a cynical distrust, then closed it again.

"Phillips Brooks hasn't got a drop of play in him," Aunt Lottie murmured disapprovingly. She nodded in the direction of the cat. "I guess I've got to get a kitten. The trouble is, though, training them not to hurt Tamagno." She nodded in the direction of the canary. "Of course I was my own mistress and could do as I pleased, but your mother had the hardest time making your father understand that it wasn't irreverence why she wanted new things. Land, she used to talk to me by the hour how she hated that old black walnut stuff—she said they had enough marble in the house to fit out a graveyard. She was always making up epitaphs that ought to go on them—you know what a trainer she was. She loved bright things—so did I. And so when she finally convinced your father that she was right, we both went into Boston, shopping every day for two weeks. My land, weren't we tuckered out at night! And the money we spent! She was always egging me on and I was always urging her. We both got oak. We both loved it because it was so bright and we each bought two morris-chairs. One thing your mother could not do was to get your father to sell the black walnut sideboard. It was all carved

with bunches of grapes. So your mother gilded them. That brightened it up a lot, and she always covered the top with some beautiful piece of pongee and écru macramé work. But so long's she couldn't have the sideboard, she got that handsome piece that's in the dining-room, the desk and bookcase and plate-rack combined. She said she was going to buy the piece that had the most mirrors in it. 'Oh, how I do love the golden glow of that oak!' she'd say to me. 'Why, do you know, Lot, I love gold so much that I'd like to live in a house that was carved out of a gold nugget.' "

"Yes, I guess Ann *is* like mother," Beckie observed. "She said the other day she'd like to paper the two rooms downstairs in gold."

"There, didn't I tell you!" Aunt Lottie exclaimed triumphantly.

But Beckie did not answer. A change had come into her face that was not entirely the soothing effect of Aunt Lottie's placid reminiscences. It was as though she were hunting through her mind, finding and correlating ideas. The grandfather's clock nicked a whole quarter of a minute out of the silence before she spoke. Finally, "So father didn't want mother to make changes," she stated more than questioned.

"I should say he didn't. And when it came to repapering, just the same fuss! But she finally convinced him. But, land, he never could refuse her anything, in the long run. The paper on the house when she first came to live in it was all that old plain cartridge. I was brought up with it and I hated it just as your mother did. I see it's coming in style again. There won't ever be an inch

of it in *this* house. And when all those beautiful figured papers became the rage, your mother was crazy about them. She got a different kind for every room. She always chose designs of flowers and ribbons. And such lovely borders as she picked out—the deepest she could find. And she got a paper with as much gold in it as possible for the parlor. The dining-room had a dado. She loved that more than anything. She said it gave her a chance to have two kinds of paper and two kinds of borders in the same room.”

“Ann’s going to have plain cartridge-paper,” Beckie said. There was a troubled wonder in her voice, a dazed uncertainty in her face.

“I want to know!” Aunt Lottie exclaimed. “Well, well, how things come back, don’t they? Seems as though the generations go through the same experiences. But speaking of changes, I guess the only quarrel your mother ever had with your father was about your great-great-grandfather Ollivant’s picture. You never saw that. And a good thing too. It was a dreadful-looking picture. Your mother couldn’t endure it. She said it depressed her—he was such a melancholy-looking creature. Then the paint was all cracked and peeling and it had an awful measly-looking frame. Your mother finally got rid of it, but not until your father and she had quarreled over it. She told your father that the picture looked like old Warren of the Museum as *Dr. Pangloss*. You won’t remember Warren, my dear, but your mother and I used to see him in everything he did—a fine actor.”

“I’ve heard mother speak of him lots of times,” Beckie interpolated.

"Well, fortunately, General Milliken died and left your father a portrait of himself. Your mother was delighted with that. She said she didn't care what the picture looked like, as long as it had all those gold buttons and braid in it. She said she always fell dead in love with uniforms. General Milliken sort of took the place of your great-great-grandfather Ollivant, as you might say."

"Ann doesn't like that picture," Beckie murmured. "She says he looks the way Joe Weber will when he's dead."

Aunt Lottie's laugh, girlishly gay, filtered through the room. "Isn't that your mother to the life? She always saw the comical side of things too. Oh, I never did anything but laugh when I was with her. I used to come home dog-tired just from laughing. Many's the time I've said to her, 'Jen Ollivant, if you make me laugh again, I'll leave the house.' One of the most lovable things about your mother—and, oh, how it did amuse your father—was the way she loved change. She was always rearranging the furniture in the rooms. Now I wasn't that way at all. As soon as I'd bought this furniture, I was perfectly contented. I decided what the best place was for every piece and they all set to-day just where I put them when they came into this house, thirty years ago. Now if your mother was alive, I expect she'd be wanting all the new things that are coming in. I often think what good fun she and Ann would have together; they'd be hand-in-glove in the changes Ann's making now. Of course the younger children don't remember her when she was so gay, but you do."

"Oh yes," Beckie said fervently, "and so beau-

tiful and kind. I often think of one thing. Mother always called me, 'My pretty little daughter,' and Lainey, 'My clever little daughter,' and Ann, 'My merry little daughter.' I see now that she called me 'pretty' because she didn't want me to know that I wasn't pretty. I was almost grown up before I realized the truth. I'm glad she did that; for I did love beauty so. It would have broken my heart then to think I wasn't pretty. I don't care so much now."

"Handsome is as handsome does," Aunt Lottie promulgated with a sage briskness. "You're good-looking enough, Beckie, and your hair is beautiful. And you're as smart as a whip and as bright as a dollar. Besides, you've looked twice as good, ever since you let Ann choose your clothes. That queer brown is very becoming to you and you do your hair so much softer. What was it you wanted to talk over with me?"

"Oh, nothing," Beckie said evasively. "Only about the house. But I see Ann has told you."

"Oh yes," Aunt Lottie declared. "She talked it over with me ten days ago. I'm sorry your mother isn't alive to see it all. She'd be so proud and happy."

"Well, I guess I'll be going now," Beckie said. "Dinner must be most ready. Good-by, Aunt Lottie."

"Good-by, Beckie. Tell Ann I'll be over to-night to see how the house looks." The silver glitter in the carefully-kept little hands died as Aunt Lottie suddenly stopped knitting. "Beckie," she said softly, "I'm going to tell you something now. It's a secret though. And you must never tell the others. Promise me."

"I won't," Beckie promised.

"I often accused your mother of it, but she never would admit it. It is the truth, though. You were her favorite child."

A soft light came into Beckie's clear-gazing, hazel-green eyes, burst there into their fullest scintillation, blotting out all their sadness. A warm color spread out under her clean-looking, freckle-dappled skin, wiping away all her fatigue. "Oh, thank you for telling me, Aunt Lottie. Good-night!"

As in a dream, Beckie proceeded across the street through a purple-misty spring dusk in which the stars flickered like fireflies and the street lights glimmered like moons. As in a dream, she entered the house and ascended the stairs. But once in her room, she awoke to feverish action. She unpacked her trunk with a cyclonic speed and a clock-like efficiency, put everything back in its place.

From downstairs presently came the noise of the arrival of the three boys. Beckie ran down to join them.

The beautiful old Sheraton couch, newly-upholstered, which had taken the place of the hat-rack in the hall, bore a confusion of hats and coats, although the closet under the stairs held open a welcoming door. The three girls—Ann all glittering, Lainey all gleaming, Bird all glowing with excitement—were receiving the praise of the boys.

"It certainly looks swell, Bird," Ed was saying.

And, "Class, Ann. Nothing but," Matt reinforced him.

"Gee, I suppose I'll get used to it, some time," Roly grumbled. "But now I feel as though I was in a hotel or an art-museum or something."

## 278 Beckie Hears Her Mother's Voice

Fires were blazing high in both rooms; gas was shimmering low. The double light extracted the last atom of warmth from the new velvety, golden-brown paper and the new velvety, brown-and-black upholstery—diffused that warmth in the atmosphere. Everything seemed to catch the light: the old gold-framed mirrors placed opposite and throwing back and forth shadowy, constantly-changing visions of the excited young faces; the old candelabra, lifting lighted candles and dripping rainbow-faceted prisms; the gold-satin surfaces of the old maple table and the old maple chairs; the bureau of maple and mahogany with the old hand-carved brasses set in it and the old silver service set on it. On the table daffodils fluttered their golden wings, standing straight-stemmed in low, green Chinese dishes, and on the piano a pair of gold-fish pursued their endless, sinuous quest in a bowl, like a bubble. Garret-loot—a framed sampler, a pair of silhouettes, some Staffordshire groups, a few old vases—added notes of faded color. The portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Ollivant smiled on the scene.

“You see the keynote of this room is gold and brown,” Ann explained. “It only needs one thing—a great splash of color over there. Something that would strike a *discord*—this is all a little *too harmonious*, if you know what I mean.”

“I don't,” said Roly promptly, “and I bet a dollar you don't, either.”

“But I can't think what,” Ann went on, unheeding this gibe. “Something futurist, though. What do you think of it, Beckie?”

“I think it's perfectly lovely, Ann,” Beckie said with the warmth of complete conviction. “I think



you've done a wonderful job and I'm as sorry as I can *be* that I didn't help you. But it was only because I thought it would be a sort of—disrespect—to mother. I see now that it isn't and I know she'd like it. I'm just as crazy as I can be about it. And I'll tell you what I'll do, Ann. A young fellow came into the office the other day who'd just come from Paris. He is a futurist artist—a pupil of Matisse. He was up against it and he wanted Mr. Pray to buy one of his pictures. It seems Mr. Pray knew him once—they peddled fly-paper together years ago when they were awfully poor. Well, Mr. Pray bought one of his pictures. It's a terrible thing, I think. He calls it 'THE SOUL IN TRANSIT.' Mr. Pray bought it, but he won't have it round. He said that if any of us wanted it to take it. Nobody wanted it and there it is. I'll have it sent home Monday. You'll love it, Ann—so will Bird. The name he signs is Yvanne, but his real name's McGillicuddy."

"*Yvanne!*" repeated Bird. "Do you mean to tell me that Yvanne is begging people to buy his stuff? Oh, Yvanne's a wonder. His color is most remarkable."

"Oh, *Beck!*" Ann exclaimed. "If you aren't a darling. I can't wait until Monday. What does it look like?"

"It looks like a badly-built spiral staircase," Beckie answered, "or a broken flying-machine."

"Oh, how wonderful!" sighed Ann. "I hope it has plenty of color. What color is it?"

Beckie wrinkled all over her face with the degree of her concentration. "Scarlet," she said immediately, "a lot of scarlet. And blue—a deep cobalt

blue. Let me see," she began to go more slowly—"orange and green. Oh yes, dashes of a pinky-yellow or a yellowy-pink. And—oh—I almost forgot—loads and loads of purple."

"Doesn't that sound swell, Bird?" Ann commented with rocking eyes. "It'll strike just the right single note of discord."

"It'll strike several, from Beckie's description," remarked the sardonic Ed. "Sounds to me like a brass-band tuning up."

Later: "Oh, by the way, Ann," Beckie said, "I've decided to learn the new dances. But I'm going to a teacher and get them right."

"Oh, do, Beck," Ann applauded. "Oh, and ask him to teach you the squirrel-jump first. It's the only one I can't seem to get."

Later: Beckie seated herself at her desk. First she took down from the mantel the framed picture of her mother that always stood there. It was the last studio picture for which Mrs. Ollivant had posed—the old-time cabinet size. It purposed frankly to record a new dress, a trained tight-fitting gown of black velvet with fichu and cuffs of real lace. Beckie looked at it long, but she smiled all the time.

Latest of all, she opened her diary. "It's all right, mother dear," she wrote. "I feel as though I'd heard your voice."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY

IT was very quiet in the garden. It was that ineffable instant when golden day, half swooning, melts into the arms of ebon night. And it might have been that marvelous moment when jocund spring, standing tiptoe, receives the kiss of tragic summer. Starless, the sky still held its peacock blue-green against the dusk, although from its depths bubbled a half moon, pearly like a tear. Stirless, the air was like a still liquid through which the lighted windows showed like rectangles of gold-leaf pasted onto the house. Occasionally a breeze zig-zagged across the grass and caught in the vines that covered the ell, producing a faint green vibration in their filmy tangles. But always on the way back it gathered the perfumes of too many flowers, staggered, sagged, died of its weight. Now and then, one plaintive bird called to another plaintive bird; and then the air would explode with twitters and flutters. But always the last note was a drowsy cry, ending in sleep.

Ed Ollivant reached into his pocket for a match. He lighted his pipe. Head back, hands clasped behind him, his pipe curling downward, hugging the line of his chin, the smoke weaving upward, unrolling a pale-gray ribbon, he contemplated the scene.

From the kitchen came the sound of dishes being scraped and stacked.

A breeze stronger than the rest blew the curtains aside. Snatches of talk came through to Ed.

“—formal, I’d just love to have it *formal*—be a family once more. You’d enjoy them too, Bird—especially Mrs. MacVeagh, Mrs. Farrington, and Miss Littledown. They’re great swells. You know what I mean. They’ve got the air that swells always have. You can tell that the instant you see it.” The curtain rustled back, slapped against the screens, blew outward again. “—always like this. I’ve had this same feeling every spring since I’ve been old enough to think. I’m always expecting something wonderful to happen and it never does.”

This was Ann’s voice. Her notes swelled to their normal round fullness, but in their depths quivered something alien—a kind of wistfulness.

“Yes, I know. I’ve been through that enough times myself. And it doesn’t happen. It can’t be done. Other things do, but not that wonderful, glorious, unexpected surprise that you’ve been waiting for all your life.”

These were Bird Barton’s words. And her tone also had the flute-like clearness with the dash of cynicism that normally characterized it.

Ed Ollivant strolled leisurely down the path to the back fence. His three sisters, under Bird Barton’s tutelage, had performed miracles in the yard. And yet all they had done, seemingly, was to remove the rotting old board-walks and to destroy the mangy old flower-plots. It was all grass-grown now, broken irregularly with bunches of flowers. The snowdrops and crocuses had gone, but the hyacinths, daffodils, and narcissi were in the full flutter of their

spring blooming. The vines that inclosed the yard on two sides as with a green waterfall remained untouched. In one corner, as of old, the lilac-bush would swing its inverted cone of perfume and blossom against the globular pink-and-white mass of the apple-tree. In the other corner the syringa would glimmer white against the vague cloud of the smoke-bush. Between them stood, undisturbed but repainted, the little hexagonal summer-house, a ruffle of boldly-carved wooden lace trimming its roof, a series of plump wooden acorns hanging from its points, a golden weathervane, in the shape of a galloping horse, curveting at its peak. And beyond the little two-storied bird-house, repainted also, gabled, towered, turreted, many-windowed and many-doored, still maintained its perch at the top of a high pole.

Leisurely surveying all these things, Ed walked back to the house. He looked very handsome against that background of spring and in that atmosphere of twilight. His new gray suit carried a characteristic note of a conventional smartness. But there was a touch of personality given to his aspect by the vigor with which his long-fingered hands manipulated his pipe and the frankness with which he threw back his handsome, correctly-featured blonde face to sniff the encompassing fragrance.

From the kitchen came the hiss of hot water pouring into the dishpan—"I feel so discouraged about"—the clink of glasses being dipped into it and hastily withdrawn—"all very well to do the house over"—a loud splash as the silver dropped into the water—"keep asking myself what good it has done"—a loud rattle as the dish-mop swished it

about—"what's it all for"—a loud crash as the silver dumped into the draining-pan.

Again Ed walked the length of the garden. He no longer looked upward to sniff the air. His eyes were filmed with meditation. Years ago, this had been a very different kind of a garden. Along all the fences blazed a screen of morning-glories and in front of them, as though on guard, stood files and files of sunflowers. The center, cut into circles, squares, and triangles, bore old-fashioned flowers, geranium, balsam, zinnia, marigold, heliotrope, fuchsia, Johnny-jump-ups, lemon verbena, and dusty-miller. Perhaps, as he walked back and forth, Ed Ollivant saw the genius of the place—the gay spirit who had called all these quaint growths into being, and had reveled in their heterogeneous color—a tall, blonde woman, robustly slim in an afternoon-gown of organdie muslin, striped in black vines and figured in purple iris, a broad flapping leghorn hat, trimmed with black velvet ribbons and bunches of lilac—a watering-pot in one hand and the tail of her skirt in the other. And beside her a little chap, bareheaded, in white piqué kilts, white socks coming halfway over bulging, brown, scratched legs, and black ankle-ties fitting over short, plump, stubby feet—a little, pudgy chap, blue-eyed and snub-nosed dotted with freckles and capped with gold, who tugged at the watering-pot and chirped unavailingly over and over, "Let me do it, mother."

Could that little chap be himself?

Again he came back to the door. He seated himself in the old rustic seat. The curtain flew back, rattled, flapped. With a sudden impatient movement, Ann reached forward, jerked it up half

way. Framed by the window-square and lighted by the kitchen-lamp, the two faces came out like a portrait: Ann all peach-like colorings, velvety surfaces, rounded contours, chestnut hair, golden eyes, scarlet lips—flower of the discontent of her late teens; Bird, incisively but delicately cut, faintly but exquisitely tinted, hair smoky-dark and curling, eyes gray and star-set, lips soft and faintly pink—blossom of the cynicism of her early twenties.

“—hasn't been through it herself? I tell you, Bird, that unless you have a father and mother—or a lot of money—you have no social standing whatever. And oh, how I do hate being nobody! I want to be somebody—you know what I mean—to *count*. The other two girls don't mind it. Beckie doesn't seem to think of it at all. Poor Beckie, she's never been a girl really. When she was my age, she was waiting hand and foot on poor mother, who had just begun to be ill. And I don't think Lainey ever thinks of these things, either. But Lainey and I aren't the least bit alike. And, in fact, Lainey's different from other girls. She loves to read more than anything else. She'd rather read than eat. And she's simply crazy about suffrage and Socialism and labor and those awful I. W. W.'s. You are too—but, then, you like clothes and entertaining and going places and smart things. Now I'm only a regular girl, although I've never had a chance to feel like one. Maybe I'd be interested in direct action and votes for women and minimum wage if I'd ever had the chance to do the things other girls do. But now they just bore me and that's all there is to it. I don't want to uplift anybody and I'm not interested in the worthy poor. It isn't so bad

about *clothes*. I mean I'm not so unhappy as I might be about the way I dress. Of course I don't really *prefer* to make my own gowns and trim my own hats. I'd much rather go into one of the Boylston Street shops and pick out just the suit and hat that I like. But as long as I can't do that, I'd rather have the things I make than cheap, ready-made suits all covered with buttons and braid and little tabs and everything—or the gowns that a bum dress-maker would turn out. And sometimes I really love the little hats that I trim for myself. And often I think my little dresses have a sort of air to them. Wait a moment, I've got to empty this water—it's getting cold."

"You're perfectly right, Ann," Bird answered. "You're very original. With a little training at a smart establishment, you could make wonderful clothes."

Again came the hiss of boiling water as Ann refilled the dishpan. The clatter of china punctuated her talk, as a steady stream of plates, cups, and saucers flowed from her hands to the draining-pan and from the draining-pan to Bird's towel.

"But it's a fact," Ann presently took up her narrative, "that I never get a chance to entertain the way I'd like to. You don't know, Bird, how desperate it has made me at times. Why, when I got in with that Peabody set last summer, I was nearly crazy with delight just because they did such jolly things and spent so much money. When it began to get to me that there was something queer about them, I closed my eyes to it at first. I wouldn't admit it to myself because I didn't want to see anything that would make it impossible for me to go about



with them. And then things happened that I couldn't pretend not to see and I had to cut them out. Ed would have *made* me, anyway. But you don't know how I enjoyed being with people who were doing expensive things all the time."

"Oh yes, I do," Bird answered. "You can't have lived in New York and been poor there without knowing what the joy of spending money is. The only thing I do maintain about New York is that, although you can spend *more* money there than in any place I know, trying to have a good time, you can also spend *less* there than anywhere else—and still have a good time. Boston is very different in that respect. It's like all small cities. People have their good times in their own homes, shut off from the world. There's something compressed and tight and selfish about it. Now a metropolis is different. It's generous and hospitable and open-handed. It has a human lovable quality. It's like people who've known the experience of being down-and-out. It understands as they do. It takes you right into its heart and asks no questions. Beside it, smaller cities seem cold and cruel and suspicious and narrow-minded."

The peacock sky darkened suddenly. It was as though some power standing in the wings of the sidereal stage had switched off a whole row of lights. Fire seemed suddenly to blaze up behind the pearly moon, changing it to crystal. And suddenly, as though they had been thrown against it from behind, the sky was peppered with stars—little crystal stars holding a tiny taper of light. A pair of bird-cries made little liquid drops of sound in the silence. Still Ed sat quiet in the rustic seat. His pipe went

out. He reached for a match, started to strike it, and then, as though he thought better of his intention, dropped it back into his pocket.

"Why, Bird," it was apparent that Bird's generalization had flowed smoothly through Ann's mind, catching on no snag of interest there, "I have no social standing *of any kind*. I'm just house-keeper for this family. Father and mother made this house a center for a lot of people. We were somebody then. But that's all gone. We're nobody now—especially me. The rest of the family have their good times, but they always have them away from here. Their work has brought them into contact with interesting people. I don't mean Roly, of course. He's too young to chase round with anybody but a lot of little High School boys and girls that don't interest me any. Still, if mother was alive and well, I know she'd want to exercise some supervision over Roly's associates—she'd be giving little parties for him all the time. Take Lainey, though. Lainey has rafts of friends that she's made at High School and through her teaching. She enjoys them immensely. I don't care for them very much—they're too—sort of *serious* and *high-brow*. And Beckie knows slews of people that she's met through the relatives. They don't interest me, to be sure—they're too—kind of—*countrified* and *back-number*. Matt too—Matt has an awfully good time. He's always going off on automobile-trips with people. You see Matt's such a sport. He understands any motor. He's a crack shot. And then, being such a dandy tennis-player—Who do you suppose he's been chasing round with lately? Eunice Littledown. I don't suppose you know who she is—not having been

long in Boston—but she's a real swell and an awfully original girl."

"I've seen her name in the social gossip," Bird answered. "Tennis-player, isn't she?"

"Oh yes," Ann answered. "A perfect wonder. And then she rides horseback and runs her own machine and drives a four-in-hand, golfs, swims, raises French poodles. She plays tennis a lot with Matt. Then take Ed—he's so good-looking and well-dressed and such a good dancer, and has such beautiful manners, he's awfully popular. Why, Bird, Ed knows people who are being mentioned in the society gossip right along. And that Mrs. MacVeagh he runs with so much is *always* being roasted in Town Tattle. Gee, doesn't she give the smart parties. But as for me, I haven't any crowd. There's no chance for me to meet anybody."

Here Ann interrupted her own monologue with a loud splash as she poured the dish-water into the sink. She continued to talk, however, as she scrubbed the tables, rinsed the draining-pan, wrung out the dish-rag, put the dish-towels on the stove to boil.

"Why, right here in Marlowe Place, there's a Tuesday Afternoon Club; nine girls who have the dandiest times. Maybe you've heard us mention them: Edwina Allen, Edna Williamson, Miriam Naylor, Marie Mapleson, and that gang. Jane Forrester's president. They give teas together and get up subscription-parties, luncheons, theater-parties. Why, just a little while ago, they got up a Bazaar of all Nations for suffrage—Ed and Matt helped—they wore Dutch costumes. The Tuesday Afternoon girls asked me to join them when they

started, two years ago. But I didn't have the clothes to go round with a crowd like that, nor the money. I don't know that I would have enjoyed it, but I would have liked to give it the once-over. I used to know them quite intimately when I was younger—when things you wore didn't count so much—but now I never seem to see them, except when I meet them on the street. They're just as nice to me as ever—only we haven't the things in common that we used to have. There's another thing about it. I never meet any men of my own age. I'm not man-crazy, but I think it's every girl's right to know men. Well, I can tell you, Bird, the other day, when I met Len Lorrimer on the street and he asked me to go to tea with him—— And I would have gone if I hadn't promised Ed I wouldn't. You see this Len Lorrimer is a married man who doesn't live with his wife. Well, all I know is that I can't stand this very long. Some time I'm going to run away and go on the stage."

Again the sky darkened. And now the power, standing in the sidereal wings, had switched off huge areas of light. The crystal moon changed to a silver moon. The fire behind it toned to a uniform metallic glare. The crystal stars changed to silver stars. The tiny lighted tapers turned to little metallic twinkles. A cloud raced across the moon, caught on its horns, clutched it, muffled it, with a smoky gauze. More stars leaped into place—more and more—until the sky, clogged with heavy glittering masses, began to sink closer to the earth. The last liquid bird-note dented the silence.

"Now we've got to hustle, Bird," Ann concluded, "to get to the theater in time."

Ed arose, strolled leisurely out of the yard. Still bareheaded, he strolled to the apothecary-shop at the corner of Marlowe Place. He shut himself in the telephone box. "Give me Back Bay 8786," he demanded briskly. "Oh, Thomas, is Mrs. MacVeagh at home? Ask her to come to the telephone, please. Is this you, Rita? Say, Rita, I want to ask a favor of you?"

It was a prolonged talk. "The twenty-fifth, then," Ed concluded. "Don't forget, will you?"

He strolled back to the house.

"Lainey," Ann called. "Beckie. Oh, wake up! Do wake up! Beckie! Lainey! *Lainey! Beck!*"

The little blonde head stirred first. Lainey's lids, thin as the petals of new-blown white violets, lifted slowly from eyes vague as the hearts of new-blown purple violets. Lainey's hair hung away from her head like an empty golden bag that tapered to a long, loose plait. Lainey did not rise. The little brunette head stirred next. But Beckie came to an upright position immediately, her stiff-lashed lids snapping up from her green-brown eyes, her mahogany-brown hair parted from her forehead to her neck, erupting in two tightly-braided horns, one over each ear. "What is it?" she demanded crossly. "*Ann Ollivant*, look at that clock. I'd like to spank you. The only morning I have to sleep too."

The sun could not have been many minutes above the horizon. The sky was blush-pink with the dregs of dawn. The air was blush-soft with the dregs of dew. The May world glittered prismaticly. The tiny gossamers that covered the grass bubbled moon-

stones, the cascade of vines that flowed from roof to garden scattered diamonds.

"Oh, Beckie, don't get cross," Ann wheedled. "I've hardly slept all night—I mean only in patches. I'm so excited about it. And I didn't wake you last night, though I was simply dying to talk it over. Bird wouldn't let me. She's fast asleep now. But I couldn't keep it another moment."

"Keep *what?*" Beckie's eyes had lost their last film of sleep. But Lainey's lids began to droop over her eyes. "Don't you dare go to sleep, Lainey Ollivant," Ann admonished her sister. Lainey's lids flew open again.

Ann's eyes seemed bigger than usual. They gleamed with a fire that blazed higher and higher each moment, as though the very Torch of Joy were burning there. Her cheeks seemed pinker than usual. They foamed with a rose color that grew deeper and deeper every instant, as though the very Fountain of Happiness were playing there. She might not have slept, but she was youth and freshness incarnate as she sat there, tubbed, nightgowned, and negligéed.

"Well, hurry up," Beckie grumbled. "Tell us."

"Ed wants to give a party," Ann announced. "He says it's time we did some of the things that father and mother used to do. And you can say what you like, Beck, but it's because this house has been done over—and looks so swell—that he wants to show it off to his friends."

"What kind of a——" Beckie started to ask.

"He doesn't know," Ann answered. "He's left that all to us."

"When did he——" Lainey began.

"Last night," Ann answered. "Bird and I were getting something to eat after the theater when Ed came in. He sat in the kitchen and talked with us for nearly an hour. He said for me to go ahead and do it right and he'd pay all the bills. Why he almost gave me—*carte blanche*——"

"Who's he going to——" Beekie made a second attempt.

"Everybody," Ann answered impressively. "He said to make out a list *at once*—so's to be sure to leave out nobody."

"What did you decide to——" Lainey also made a second attempt.

"A reception," Ann responded. "Bird and I talked the whole matter over before we closed our eyes and both of us *dead* for sleep. At first we thought of a tea—but that would have to be in the afternoon and would leave out all the men. Then we thought of a dance—but really these rooms aren't big enough. That would mean hiring a hall and then nobody'd see the house all fixed over new. Ed didn't *say* as much to me, but Bird and I both got it that he was dying to show the house to Mrs. MacVeagh. For, of course, although Mrs. MacVeagh has loads of money and she's as smart as she can be, I doubt if she knows a Hepplewhite from a Sheraton." Ann's eyes flashed a golden scorn of that condition of gross ignorance from which she herself had emerged only a few months before. "Besides, Bird and I both thought a dance wouldn't be formal enough for a first function—and I'm crazy to give something formal—so we decided on the reception."

"When will——" Lainey began for the third time.

"Ed wants it the twenty-fifth. I'm going to get right to work on that list. I want all the address-books in the family. Then we'll all have to get together and talk things over—there'll be a lot of important matters to decide—what we'll wear, for instance. You two have simply got to have new dresses. I am—if I have to pawn something. I'm going to wear pink. Bird says she'll wear white. Lainey, you ought to have blue, and Beckie——"

"All my life," Beckie said, doing a little interrupting on her own account, "I have wanted a black evening-dress trimmed with shiny silver stuff."

"Well, for *once*," Ann announced with a high sense of relief in her voice, "you and I agree on *something*, Beckie. I was going to say black. Then we've got to decide what we'll have to eat and what form the invitations will take—and everything. Now you can go to sleep, if you want to."

When Beckie and Lainey entered the dining-room for the late Sunday breakfast, they found the rest of the family all there ahead of them. Ed, with his eternal air of being perfectly dressed for the occasion, was hurrying through one paper; Matt, in the baggy corduroy trousers and the blue flannel shirt, which with him spelled relaxation, was tearing through another; Roly, in knickers and his High School sweater, was calling loudly for food. Ann sat at the foot of the table, address-books, to the number of four, piled in front of her. Her excitement had seeped to the farthest corner of the room, but she was still pouring it out. She interrupted



herself long enough to place on the table the traditional Sunday breakfast of New England: baked beans, warmed over from the night before; brown-bread, delectably-toasted; fish-balls, deliciously-browned; piccalilli; chili sauce. The rest of the family fell on the food with the zest of delayed breakfasters, but Ann confined herself to a cup of coffee that was mostly hot milk. Alternately she turned the pages of the address-books and shot questions from brother to sister and back again.

"Now what shall we have to eat at the party?" she demanded suddenly. "That's a question I want you to think *hard* about."

"Well, if you're asking me," Roly said, completely burying a fish-ball in piccalilli, "I don't have to think at all—ice-cream—bananas—griddle-cakes with maple syrup—and floating island pudding."

"I'm *not* asking you, Roly," Ann announced stormily. "And you'll oblige me by keeping out of this discussion. *Floating island pudding!*"

"Beer and hot-dogs for mine," Matt answered with an equal celerity.

"Oh, my goodness, what a family!" Ann exclaimed. "Matt, don't you understand this is a *formal* function. It is to be swell. *Hot-dogs!*"

"I should say something *dainty*," said Lainey the pacifist. "Little delicate sandwiches, ice-cream in pretty shapes, and darling little cakes."

"Men don't want anything *dainty*," interposed Beckie with the contemptuous superiority of those who have cooked for the other sex. "Men want substantial things—cold meats, and salads and pickles and olives and cheese and sardines."

"Oh, heavens, Beckie!" Ann groaned, "you sound

like a delicatessen. Why don't you say boiled dinner or clam-chowder? This isn't a *barbecue*. It's a function. It's to be *formal*. You don't bother whether people get enough to eat or whether they like it or not—you just give them the correct thing."

"Why don't you wait and discuss this matter with the caterer, Ann?" Ed suggested.

"I guess I'll have to," Ann admitted scathingly, "if this is all the help I'm going to get from this family. My goodness, I've never suspected how little class there is to you."

"What do you do at a party like this?" Roly asked, as one who desires information. "Play games?"

"Oh, certainly," Ann answered in a tense voice. "Of course. Kissing games—post-office—pillow—clap-in-and-clap-out—spin the plate—— What a family! Roly, do you know what the word *formal* means?"

"No," Roly admitted. "But I know one thing. I'm not coming to this party until you hand out the grub."

"That'll help some," Ann said darkly. "Now," she added with a new impetus, "we'll decide who's going to be invited."

"I stipulate," Ed interposed, "that you invite all the neighbors in Marlowe Place."

"All right," Ann agreed with a sigh. "Of course I know I've got to do that. It means, though, that old Mrs. Gookin will be here promptly at nine to stay until the last one goes. And everybody'll have to shout into that ear-trumpet."

"And all the relatives," Beckie added.

"I suppose so," Ann agreed with another sigh

"And we've got such a million of them and such homely ones. And then they're all so fat and take up so much room. And I suppose Aunt Margaret will wear that fierce black satin with the jet, that she's worn ever since I can remember. Oh dear, why couldn't it be fixed so you could choose your own relatives." Her voice trailed into the silence of despair and then suddenly leaped into enthusiasm again. "Probably they'll have to take early trains. I've been going through all these address-books, making a choice—weeding out—you know what I mean."

"Doing *what?*" Lainey demanded.

"Weeding out. Good heavens, Lainey, you don't suppose I'm going to ask *everybody*. There's that Mike Milligan—that I. W. W. friend of yours. You don't think I'm going to invite a man that's always getting arrested?"

"Why not?" Lainey asked.

"Oh, my grief, Lainey, are you going to carry Socialism into your *private life*? I thought Socialism was something you just believed in and let it go at that. It's all right, I suppose, when it comes to crops and railroads and banks and stocks and bonds, but it certainly is going to put *parties* on the blink. Why, he wouldn't know what to wear or how to act. Do you think he'd want to come, boys?" Ann's voice melted from conviction to entreaty as she turned to her brothers for reinforcement.

"If he thinks there's going to be anything to eat, he'll come," said Matt. "Sure! If he's a regular I. W. W."

Ann groaned. "And, Beckie, I wasn't going to invite that queer Miss Larkin, who has St. Vitus's

dance so her nose twitches like a rabbit. And, Matt, you certainly don't expect me to invite Gus Clark, after the way he took you out that time and got you drunk."

"If you don't invite Mike Milligan," began Lainey.

"If you don't invite Almedia Larkin," began Beckie.

"If you don't invite Gus Clark," began Matt.

"Don't invite me," they all ended in chorus.

Ann stared for an interval of silence in which palpably exasperation grew to rage and boiled over. "All right," she agreed finally, "I'll invite everybody we know—that red-headed grocery-boy with the harelip and the piano-tuner with the glass eye, and the gas-man, whose false teeth jump up and down when he talks—and the ash-man and the ice-man and the policeman on the beat. Well, the party's ruined for *me* with all those lemons coming." There came another interval of silence, in which, obviously out of the ruins of her plans, Ann built another hope. "Do you think Mrs. MacVeagh would care to come?" she asked Ed. "And Mrs Farrington?" she asked Lainey. "And Miss Littledown?" she asked Matt.

"I think probably Mrs. MacVeagh will come," Ed answered with an elaborate indifference. "I know nothing about her engagements, of course."

"I'm sure Mrs. Farrington would like to come," Lainey said. "She's always so sweet and lovely."

"I don't know anything about Miss Littledown," Matt replied, "except that she's a good sport, if ever I saw one."

"Well then," Ann announced, as one who make

noble concession for the good of the majority, "I suppose I might as well get the invitations out. Perhaps the lemons will be sick or something, though I never heard of such a case. Bird and I looked up the correct form in the etiquette-book. I'll start writing them at once."

"You'd better have them printed," Roly suggested. "Nobody can read your writing."

"*Printed!*" Ann breathed. "What a family!"

"The invitations are out," Ann announced the next night. "Do you suppose people will have the sense to answer them?"

"No," Roly answered readily. "They'll probably wait to see if something better doesn't turn up."

"I started to go down to the caterer this morning," Ann said, talking straight through Roly's remark, "and on the way a wonderful idea came to me—to ask those girls—you know the Misses Colby—who've opened that little tea-room on the Boulevard—to cater for me. I went in to see them and they were perfectly lovely about it. They said that they would love to do it, as they were dying to work into this sort of thing. They said they'd come up here some morning and look over our table things. They said they liked to use the family's own stuff wherever it was possible—so it wouldn't look *hired* and *rubber-stamp*. I told them frankly that our china and silver was awful. They looked disappointed, but they went perfectly wild when I described the Sheffield plate set. Well, we talked for a long time and we designed, if I do say it myself, the most *artistic eats* you can possibly imagine."

"When do you pass round the grub?" Roly

asked with interest. "I was talking with Dink to-day and he says he doesn't want to come till then."

Ann's glance must have sawed through Roly's skull, but she went on, blithely ignoring him. "And I called up Miss Walker and she's coming day after to-morrow for a week. Then I went in town and got samples of dress-goods. I'm going in early to-morrow morning again. So, you girls can be making up your minds to-night what you want. I'll meet Bird at twelve to-morrow and, Beck, you at one. Lainey, I suppose you'll trust to Bird's and my judgment. Now you must remember that all next week will be given over to dressmaking. I'll work with Miss Walker all day and the rest of you can help evenings. At least Beck and Bird will. Of course you won't be good for anything, Lainey."

"Can't I read aloud to you while you're sewing," Lainey asked in an agony of good-will. "I'm just starting 'Marcus Aurelius' again."

"If there's anything that would drive me out of my skin quicker than being read to while I was sewing," Ann was apparently addressing the cosmic spirit, for she glared into space, "I'd like to know what it is. '*Marcus Aurelius!*' What family!"

"The acceptances are beginning to come in," Ann announced the next day. "I got Mrs. MacVeagh's and Mrs. Farrington's and Miss Littledown's in the first mail. Oh, such smart stationery—so elegant and simple—wait-till I show you. And Mike Milligan. He wrote from the I. W. W. headquarters and he inclosed a sticker which said som-

thing about no hops being picked in California till two men were out of prison—I forget their names—and asked me if I wouldn't write to the governor about it. And, say, Beck, I went into Maddox, Lennon's, and got some silver stuff that put it all over that we saw at Candler's."

"All right," Beckie said obediently.

"And, Lainey, Bird and I decided we wouldn't let you get that deep-blue stuff you liked so much. We chose a paler blue—with a silver thread—oh, it's wonderful, it's like a night sky smothered in moonshine. You never saw anything so lovely."

"All right," Lainey said docilely.

"What do you think happened to-day?" Ann asked the next night. "Aunt Lottie came over this morning and insisted on our borrowing her two maids for the party—Hattie and Josie. Of course I was delighted. Aunt Lot makes them wear such correct aprons and caps and they're such *swell*-looking darkies. And then—what do you think?—she said we'd simply got to use her chest of silver and her set of black Chinese. You remember it—it's that English ware—oh, beautiful—flowers and pagodas in Chinese coloring against a background of coal-black. Well, at first I wouldn't hear of it. But she said she'd run all the risk of breakage. She said it was the first real entertaining we'd done since long before mother died and she wanted it to be right. Well, when she talked of mother, the tears came into her eyes and, of course, I said yes, right away. Aunt Lottie says she's going to have a new dress too—a black and white foulard. Oodles of acceptances came to-day."

“Well, wonders will never cease,” she greeted them the next night. “Of all things that I didn’t expect. Old Mrs. Gookin called this morning and asked me if I didn’t want to borrow her tulips for the party. She says she calculates that they’ll be in full bloom then—they’re a little late. You know she has boxes and boxes—she’s a wizard at making them grow. At first I couldn’t think of it, and then, suddenly, I saw how wonderful they’d be against that new brown paper—how they’d just light the house up. And I said yes. And then the next moment, Betsy Murray called up and asked me if I didn’t want to use their brass candlesticks. She remembered hearing me say how I loved candlelight. You know she has wonderful candlesticks—some beautiful sconces among them. Of course I said yes. She’s going to express them out to me the day of the party. Well, Aunt Lot’s maids and silver and china and Mrs. Gookin’s tulips and Betsy’s candlesticks were too much for me. I beat it right down to the Misses Colby. They were perfectly wild—they say they’re going to pull off a party that’ll make people open their eyes. And then on my way back, I met the Tuesday Afternoon girls all pouring out of Edwina’s. And they stopped me and they were so nice, said they were all coming. They kept asking me if they couldn’t help, and finally, I don’t know how it came about—I didn’t propose it, they offered it themselves—they asked if they couldn’t serve as floaters—to circulate round at the reception and introduce people and see that everybody had a good time. Of course I said yes, and now I don’t feel the least bit worried about anything, because



they all said they'd be here on the dot of nine. Wads of acceptances came to-day."

"People have been calling me up all morning," Ann announced the next night, "to ask if they could bring friends who were visiting them. It was awfully nice the way they'd put it. 'I wouldn't ask if she weren't a charming girl,' or, 'I wouldn't bother you if he weren't a very interesting man.' But oh, the awful scare Mrs. Hunter threw into me. She said she wanted to bring a cousin—a man. And, at first, I thought it was that one who has epilepsy and I had a vision of him throwing a fit in the midst of the party with Mrs. MacVeagh there and Mrs. Farrington and Miss Littledown. Well, I nearly threw a fit myself right there at the telephone."

"What do they do when they have fits?" Roly asked in what was apparently a spirit of scientific inquiry.

"Oh, gnash their teeth and roll their eyes and kick," Ann answered with a superb assumption of complete medical information.

"Say, if *he's* coming, I'm coming," Roly announced with interest.

"He *isn't* coming." Ann cruelly dashed his hopes. "It wasn't that one. It's a poet that's coming. Yes, the way they all said, 'I wouldn't think of bringing a bore to *your* party,' made me awfully happy."

"Oh, that reminds me," Roly broke in. "Dink Hardy's mother asked me to-day whether it was to be the twenty-first or the twenty-fifth—she couldn't tell from your writing which it was. You know, Ann, you never dot your *i's* or cross your *t's*. I told

you, you ought to have the invitations printed—you're such a bum writer."

"Oh, my stars!" Ann ejaculated, "suppose they come on the twenty-first instead of the twenty-fifth. Oh, *what* shall I do. Well, I won't be home that night. I won't face them."

"Put a sign in the window," said the care-free Roly, "'Party Thursday.'"

"Now," Ann groaned, "I shall live in torment until the party's over. Rafts of acceptances came to-day."

"Well, this afternoon I called up a few people that I hadn't heard from," Ann said the next night, "and they all said my invitations read for the twenty-fifth; so I'm not bothering about that any more. That one is probably the only invitation that I did so badly. All I've got to worry about now is the weather. Oh, Aunt Margaret called me up and she told me she was going to have a new dress for the party. It sounded perfectly royal as she described it and it must have cost billions of dollars—purple-velvet brocade on cloth-of-gold—swell goods but, oh, the way it's going to be made! She'll look exactly like Queen Victoria. Except that she's going to wear that fierce set of lava jewelry that she bought in Naples on her honeymoon, forty-sever years ago. Still with that dress and all that lovely hair, she'll give the party a lot of tone—if she'll only keep her mouth shut. But the moment she says, 'ain't a-going to,' and, 'I can't tell nawthing about it—well, that make-up isn't going to do her a bit o good. Oh, I'm so tired of dressmaking. Slews o acceptances came to-day.'"

Out of this confusion emerged the night—a night clear and warm, moonless but full of stars.

The two lower rooms thrown open, gleamed with light, and rioted with color. On walls and tables glittered candles in sticks of lustrous colonial brass and simple colonial shapes. On the piano and mantels fluttered masses of tulips, blood-crimson and butter-yellow, rising straight and trim from their sheaths of green. The bared old maple table in the dining-room glistened like a hexagonal section of massy gold. Against it came out, in startling contrast, Aunt Lottie's dishes of black Chinese. Here, too, glittered candles and fluttered tulips. Lainey, Ann, and Bird, in their slim evening-gowns, made a mass of color to which Beckie's black-and-silver contributed another heightening note. Ed, in evening-clothes, with his inalienable air of a care-free royalty performing a standardized function, strolled about as though waiting for the program to begin. Matt, also in evening-clothes, with his inalienable air of an important official performing a new duty, leaped from room to room, carrying out Ann's last orders. Roly, not in evening-clothes, but unnaturally clean, brushed, and polished, surveyed everything with a strong expression of disapproval.

Suddenly, a paper appeared in Ann's hands. "Now get together all of you, family," she commanded, "right here in front of me. I've some last instructions to give you. I've made out a list of things you're *not* to do. Now listen! To begin with, you're to remember, first, last, and always, to keep it formal. I can't impress that on you too often. *Keep it formal!* For that's the only way,

we can make a success of this party. I have no advice to give you, Ed, for you're the only member of the family that I can *always* depend on to do the right thing. Except this, please don't say anything about *dancing*; for the party will *degenerate* the moment you do anything like that. I want this to be absolutely correct. Now you, Matt—if you feel thirsty, don't you go out and get beer from the ice-chest, the way you're always doing. And, Beckie, don't you ask for coffee in a big cup, the way you did once at one of Aunt Lot's teas. And I nearly died of mortification when you did it too. Lainey, don't you dare mention the word *Socialism*. And if you say the letters I. W. W., I shall scream and faint. As for you, Roly, no matter *what* you start to say, don't say it. It's sure to be some fierce break. I have had all the chairs, as you see, moved out into the kitchen. Nobody is to sit down."

"Suppose people ask for chairs?" Matt queried.

"Tell them to leave the house," Ann answered.

"And don't let them form one of those ghastly circles," she went on, her speed unimpaired. "If they do, I shall call up the police or put in an alarm of fire—anything to break it up. I *will not have* one of those circles."

"Well, how are they going to talk comfortably?" Beckie demanded.

"They're not to talk comfortably," Ann answered. "They're to talk *uncomfortably*. This isn't a party where you're supposed to have a good time."

"Suppose," Ed suggested gravely, "we should find a group enjoying themselves."

"Separate them at once," Ann said with her first gleam of humor.

"Now don't say anything," she concluded, "that would shock Mrs. MacVeagh, Mrs. Farrington, or Miss Littledown. And, remember, KEEP IT FORMAL!"

This was at eight. At nine Ann was saying, "Well, I know it's going to be a failure. In the first place, I can tell by the way I look. Did you ever see anybody so yellow and haggard and hollow-eyed? Why didn't I get some rouge? I never can be entertaining when I know that I don't look well. And in the second place, I can tell by the way I feel that nobody's coming. You can always tell when nobody's coming—there's a kind of dull, shivery, empty, vacant, dead feeling in the atmosphere. Those rooms seem like an empty prison to me. And in the third place—oh, my goodness, there's the bell! I wonder if Hattie'll hear it. Of course she won't. She's not accustomed to the sound of our bell. You go to the door, Matt. Oh no, don't do that. Tell Hattie, somebody, will you? She isn't hearing it. Yes, she is. No, she isn't. Here she comes. Remember, KEEP IT FORMAL!"

At halfpast nine a score of people had arrived. The banished chairs, as though exorcised by a prestidigitator's skill, had reappeared, had formed a perfect circle in the front room. At one side Mrs. Gookin, flourishing her ear-trumpet, held a small group of the neighbors in a shouted conversation. At the other side Aunt Margaret, fearfully and wonderfully gorgeous, presided over a small court, made up of relatives. Lainey circled about Mrs.

Gookin, translating timidity and inarticulateness into the ear-trumpet. Beckie wove about Aunt Margaret, answering that lady's loud-voiced—and ungrammatical—questions. Ann stood in the background, glaring frenzied-eyed into space. "I don't care what happens now," she hissed once to Bird. "The Tuesday Afternoon girls have failed me. I know Mrs. MacVeagh and Mrs. Farrington and Miss Littledown aren't coming and it doesn't make any difference what anybody does. They can hold a *temperance meeting* if they want to."

At quarter to ten there were thirty people in the room. Still the circle maintained an unbroken perfection. Still the two groups refused to mix. "Did you ever hear anything like those Tuesday Afternoon girls not being here yet?" Ann asked Bird in a bitter tone. "If ever I trust to—— Oh, my goodness, there's Mrs. MacVeagh's motor! Matt, Matt! Mrs. MacVeagh's coming up the steps. Get rid of those chairs."

"How can I?" Matt demanded. "People are sitting on them."

"Pull them from under them," Ann ordered in a distracted tone.

"Where'll I put them?" There was a note that approximated hysteria in Matt's masculine tone. "I mean the people."

"Throw them out the window—the chairs, I mean," Ann answered. "I'll hold her upstairs talking while you get them to stand up—the people, I mean. Praises be, here come the girls."

At ten there were nearly a hundred people in the two rooms. Tall, lithe, brune, piquant, very pic-

turesque in her cherry and gold, the center of a group of men, Mrs. MacVeagh was filling the room with her staccato chatter and her fluting laugh. Pretty and gay, the Tuesday Afternoon girls were circulating briskly.

"Thank heavens," Ann said, "that terrible circle is broken up. Oh, Ed, here comes Mrs. Farrington. Who's that getting out of the motor with her? *Mike Milligan!* Well, what—when—*how* did she know him?"

At quarter past ten the rooms were filled. Slim, delicate, blonde, exquisite, very elegant in her evening-gown of black and white, the center of a group of women, Mrs. Farrington was radiating an atmosphere of cordiality to which the whole gathering unconsciously responded. The Tuesday Afternoon girls had succeeded in introducing the relatives to neighbors and neighbors to relatives; they had broken the two groups; mixed them.

"If only Miss Littledown would come," Ann confided to Bird, "I'd be perfectly happy. Oh, there's her car now. My gracious, isn't that a wonderful gown—that combination of dragon's blood crimson and saffron-yellow? Now the party's going to be a success."

Color flashed like rose-velvet banners in Ann's wan cheeks, light flashed like golden signal fires in her dull eyes.

At halfpast ten the rooms were impassable. At eleven the maid began to pass the food which, according to Ann, she and the Misses Colby had "designed"—salads carved with calyx and corolla

that looked like flowers set in crisp nests of tiny lettuce leaves; ices molded with stem and leaves that looked like fruit surrounded by lustrous shavings of frost candy; tiny sandwiches that were as pretty as cakes; tiny cakes that were as brilliant as jewels; coffee that ran melted topaz.

Presently people began to leave—the elderly relatives first, the elderly neighbors next. “It’s been a great success, Ann,” Aunt Lottie whispered, her eyes wet. “I wish your mother and father had been alive to see it.” “I never tasted such victuals in my life,” Aunt Margaret announced in megaphone accents. “I must have et about a dozen of them little sandwiches.” “Now, you children, keep it up, after we old folks have gone,” Mrs. Gookin commanded in stentorian tones. “You can’t be young but once, you know.”

Suddenly the room was half empty.

“Say,” Ann suggested, “why can’t we dance? Maud, can’t the boys go over to your place and get the Victrola?”

There came dancing and dancing and more dancing.

In the midst of it, Ann went out into the kitchen to dismiss the maids. She found Mrs. MacVeagh and Matt, sitting opposite each other at the kitchen-table, dividing a bottle of beer. She stopped to talk with them. In the living-room the dancing stopped suddenly. The music did not start up. As Ann re-entered the dining-room, there came a burst of applause. Mrs. Farrington, at Mike Milligan’s request, was giving the peroration of a talk which she



had delivered that night at the I. W. W. headquarters—"Free Speech Fights in California." At its close dancing started again. Suddenly there was a clatter outside on the stairs. The living-room doors flew open to admit Miss Littledown and Ed in the Dutch costumes left over from the Bazaar of All Nations. Amid plaudits, they executed a spirited clog.

Then came dancing and dancing and more dancing.

This was broken by a sudden raid on the ice-box for beer and on the kitchen-closet for crackers and cheese.

Then came dancing and dancing and more dancing.

It was two o'clock before the last guest left. It was three before Ed, Matt, and Roly, still dropping remarks, mounted the stairs to their rooms. It was four o'clock before Beckie, Lainey, and Bird, still gasping comments, crawled into bed. Five o'clock found Ann, still sparkle-eyed and joy-flushed, sitting at the window.

"Oh, it was so beautiful," she sighed. "Just the way I wanted it to be—so smart and correct and formal at first, and so gay and unconventional and informal at the end. Anybody can have a stiff dull affair, but it takes *a real social instinct* to give a party that's full of pep. I guess we've inherited father's and mother's gift that way. Weren't Mrs. MacVeagh and Mrs. Farrington and Miss Littledown lovely?"

She waited.

"Yes," came almost inaudibly from her listeners.

"Just think of Mrs. Farrington talking to the I. W. W.'s. I can't get over that. It's simply impossible nowadays to keep up with what's the correct thing to do. You can do almost anything, though, and get away with it, if you've got social position. And, oh—just think of me forgetting this. Jane Forrester said I simply must reconsider my refusal and join the Tuesday Afternoon Club. Ed was standing near and she appealed to him—and Ed said I must and I'm going to. Later, Ed told me he'd pay any extra expenses about entertaining. Wasn't that sweet of him, Beckie?"

She waited.

"Yes," came in sleep-laden notes from Beckie.

"And I thought Miss Larkin was perfectly *dear* in that quaint little, black-and-white striped soft silk and that nice old lace and all those amethysts and that darling bunch of pansies. She looked like a real swell. You hardly noticed her St. Vitus's dance. Mrs. Farrington was so nice to her. And I don't know what I would have done if Gus Clark hadn't helped Matt get the chairs out that time. And, oh, Lainey, you didn't tell me that Mike Milligan was such a peach dancer. I could *die* fox-trotting with him. Did you do the hesitation with him?"

She waited.

"Yes," came in drowse-filled accents from Lainey.

"I feel just like a regular girl to-night," Ann went on, her vivacity unimpaired. "I feel five years younger all of a sudden. I had a conviction that I never was going to have any youth. But now I'm really going to have it. Isn't that lovely, Bird?"

She waited.

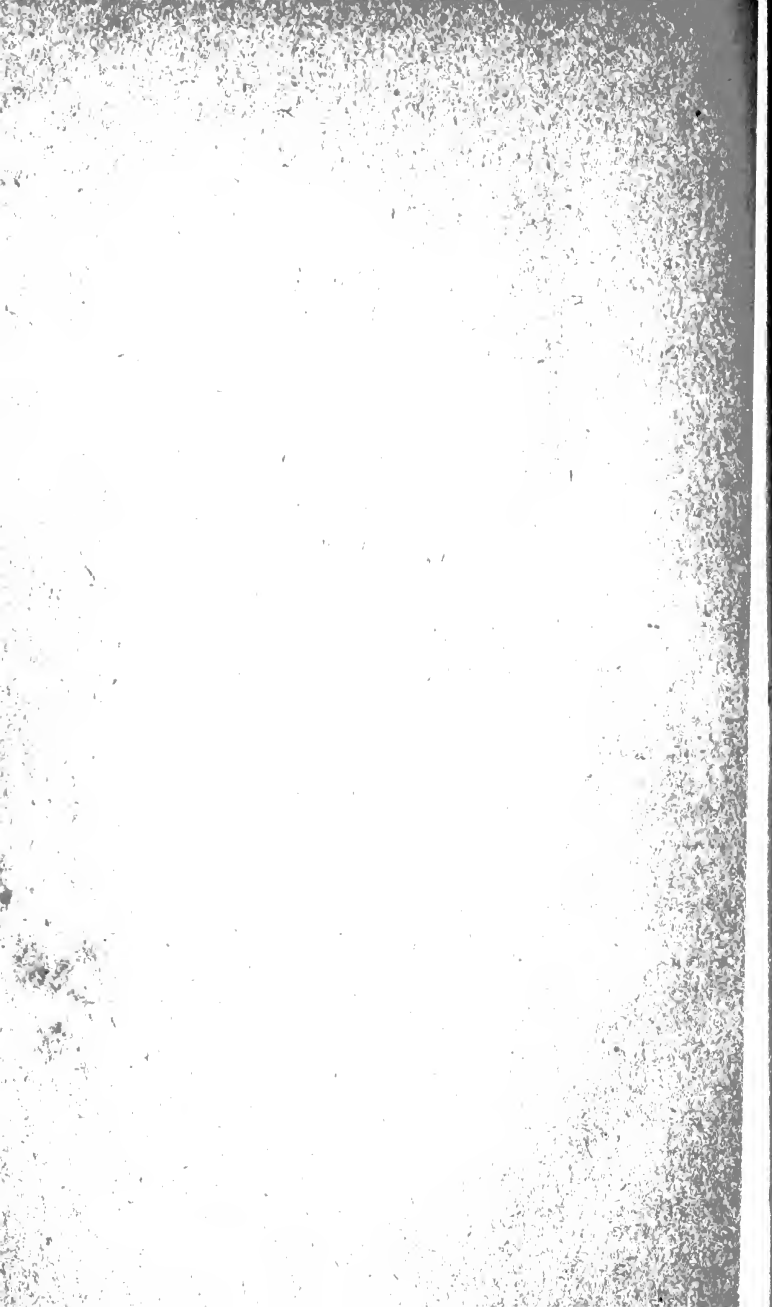
"Yes," came in slumber-drenched tones from Bird.

There followed a long interval of silence.

An old moon, like a wrecked ship white-sailed, was careening on a sky like a violet sea. Swarms of stars, like tiny silver birds, hung about that ship; myriads of clouds, like filmy fairy fish, floated in that sea. A breeze brought the breath of the hyacinths into the room; then the daffodils. A bird dropped a little jewel of sound into the quiet air, another and another, until the world was full of wide-awake peepings. Suddenly above the furry tree-line appeared a rose-gold disk.

"But best of it all is," Ann concluded—and this time she spoke softly, as though she were addressing the rising sun—"we're on the map again. The Ollivant family has come back."

THE END



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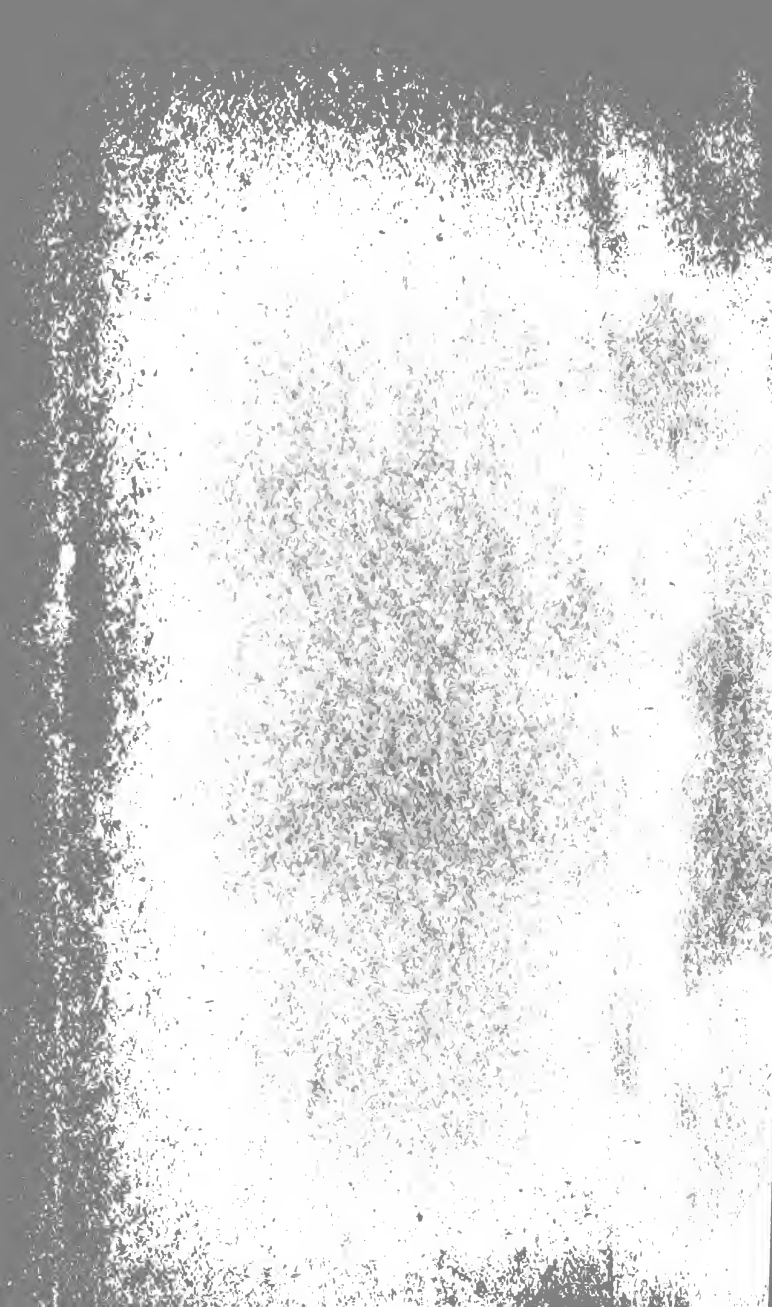
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