

# THE SOCIAL SECRETARY



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# The Social Secretary







# THE SOCIAL SECRETARY

*by*

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*The Cost etc. etc.*

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New York  
Grosset & Dunlap  
Publishers

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## The Social Secretary





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### I

**N**OVEMBER 29. At half-past one to-day—half-past one exactly—I began my “career.”

Mrs. Carteret said she would call for me at five minutes to one. But it was ten minutes after when she appeared, away down at the corner of I Street. Jim was walking up and down the drawing-room; I was at the window, watching that corner of I Street. “There she blows!” I cried, my voice brave, but my heart like a big lump of something soggy and sad.

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Jim hurried up and stood behind me, staring glumly over my shoulder. He has proposed to me in so many words more than twenty times in the last three years, and has looked it every time we've met—we meet almost every day. I could feel that he was getting ready to propose again, but I hadn't the slightest fear that he'd touch me. He's in the army, and his "pull" has kept him snug and safe at Washington and has promoted him steadily until now he's a Colonel at thirty-five. But he was brought up in a formal, old-fashioned way, and he'd think it a deadly insult to a woman he respected enough to ask her to be his wife if he should touch her without her permission. I admire Jim's self-restraint, but—I couldn't bear being married to a man who worshiped me, even if I only liked him. If I

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loved him, I'd be utterly miserable. I've been trying hard to love Jim for the past four months, or ever since I've really realized how desperate my affairs are. But I can't. And the most exasperating part of my obstinacy is that I can't find a good reason or excuse for it.

As I was saying—or, rather, writing—Jim stood behind me and said in a husky sort of voice: "You ain't goin' to do it, are you, Gus?"

I didn't answer. If I had said anything, it would have been a feeble, miserable "No"—which would have meant that I was accepting the alternative—him. All my courage had gone and I felt contemptibly feminine and dependent.

I looked at him—I did like the expression of his eyes and the strength and manliness of him from head to foot.

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What a fine sort of man a "pull" and a private income have spoiled in Jim Lafollette! He went on: "Surely, I'm not more repellent to you than—than what that auto is coming to take you away to."

"Shame on you, Jim Lafollette?" I said angrily—most of the anger so that he wouldn't understand and take advantage of the tears in my eyes and voice. "But how like you! How *brave!*"

He reddened at that—partly because he felt guilty toward me, partly because he is ashamed of the laziness that has made him shirk for thirteen years. "I don't care a hang whether it's brave or not, or *what* it is," he said sullenly. "I want *you*. And it seems to me I've got to do something—use force, if necessary—to keep you from—*from that*. You ain't fit for it, Gus—not in any way.

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Why, it's worse than being a servant. And you—brought up as you've been—"

I laughed—a pretty successful effort. "I've been educating for it all my life, without knowing it. And it's honest and independent. If you had the right sort of ideas of self-respect, you'd be ashamed of me if you thought I'd be low enough to marry a man I couldn't give my heart to—for a living."

"Don't talk rubbish," he retorted. "Thousands of women do it. Besides, if I don't mind, why should you? God knows you've made it plain enough that you don't love me. Gus, why can't you marry me and let me save you from this just as a brother might save a sister?"

"Because I may love somebody some day, Jim," said I. I wanted to hurt him—for his own sake, and also because I didn't want him to tempt me.

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The auto was at the curb. He didn't move until I was almost at the drawing-room door. Then he rushed at me and his look frightened me a little. He caught me by the arm. "It's the last chance, Augusta!" he exclaimed. "Won't you?"

I drew away and hurried out. "Then you don't intend to have anything to do with me after I've crossed the line and become a toiler?" I called back over my shoulder. I couldn't resist the temptation to be thoroughly feminine and leave the matter open by putting him in the wrong with my "woman's last word." I was so low in my mind that I reasoned that my adventure might be as appalling as I feared, in which case it would be well to have an alternative. I wonder if the awful thoughts we sometimes have are our real selves



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or if they just give us the chance to measure the gap between what we might be as shown by them and what we are as shown by our acts. I hope the latter, for surely I can't be as poor a creature as I so often have impulses to make myself.

Mrs. Carteret was waiting for the servant to open the door. I hurried her back toward the auto, being a little afraid that Jim would be desperate enough to come out and beg her to help him—and I knew she would do it if she were asked. In the first place, Jessie always does what she's asked to do—if it helps her to spend time and breath. In the second place, she'd never let up on me if she thought I had so good a chance to marry. For she knows that Washington is the hardest place in the world for a woman to find a hus-

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band unless she's got something that appeals to the ambition of men. Besides, she thinks, as do many of my friends, that I am indifferent to men and discourage them. As if any woman was indifferent to men! The only point is that women's ideas of what constitutes a man differ, and my six years in this cosmopolis have made me somewhat discriminating.

But to return to Jessie, she was full of apologies for being late. "I've thought of nothing but you, dear, for two days and nights. And I thought that for once in my life I'd be on time. Yet here I am, fifteen minutes late, unless that clock's wrong." She was looking at the beautiful little clock set in the dashboard of the auto.

"Only fifteen minutes!" I said. "And you never before were known to be less

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than half an hour late. You even kept the President waiting twenty minutes."

"Isn't it stupid, this fussing about being on time?" she replied. "I don't believe any but dull people and those who want to get something from one are ever on time. For those who really live, life is so full that punctuality is impossible. But I should have been on time, if I hadn't been down seeing the Secretary of War about Willie Catesby—poor Willie! He has been *so* handicapped by nature!"

"Did you get it for him?" I asked.

"I think so—third secretary at St. Petersburg. The secretary said: 'But Willie is almost an imbecile, Mrs. Carteret. If we don't send him abroad, his family'll have to put him away.' And I said: 'That's true, Mr. Secretary. But if we don't send that sort of people to

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foreign courts, how are we to repay the insults they send us in the form of imbecile attachés?' And then I handed him six letters from senators—every one of them a man whose vote he needs for his fight on that nomination. They were *real* letters. So presently he said, 'Very well, Mrs. Carteret, I'll do what I can to resent the Czar's last insult by exporting Willie to him.'

I waited a moment, then burst out with what I was full of. "You think she'll take me?" I said.

Jessie reproached me with tragedy in her always intensely serious gray eyes. "Take *you*?" she exclaimed. "Take a Talltowers when there's a chance to get one? Why, as soon as I explained who you were, she fairly quivered with eagerness."

"You had to *explain* who a Talltow-

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ers is?" I said with mock amazement. It's delightful to poke fun at Jessie; she always appreciates a jest by taking it more seriously than an ordinary statement of fact.

"But, dear, you mustn't be offended. You know Mrs. Burke is very common and ignorant. She doesn't know the first thing about the world. She said to me the other day that she had often heard there were such things as class distinctions, but had never believed it until she came to Washington—she had thought it was like the fairy stories. She never was farther east than Chicago until this fall. She went there to the Fair. You must get her to tell you how she and three other women who belong to the same Chautauqua Circle went on together and slept in the same room and walked from dawn

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till dark every day, catalogue in hand, for eleven days. It's too pathetic. She said, 'My! but my feet were sore. I thought I was a cripple for life.'"

"That sounds nice and friendly," said I, suspicious that Jessie's quaint sense of humor had not permitted her to appreciate Mrs. Burke. "I'm so dreadfully afraid I'll fall into the clutches of people that'll try to—to humiliate me."

Tears sprang to Jessie's eyes. "Please don't, Gus!" she pleaded. "They'll be only too deferential. And you must keep them so. I suspect that Mrs. Burke chums with her servants."

We were stopping before the house—the big, splendid Ralston Castle, as they call it; one of the very finest of the houses that have been building since rich men began to buy into the Senate and Cabinet and aspire for diplomatic places,



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and so have attracted other rich families to Washington. What a changed Washington it is, and what a fight the old simplicity is making against the new ostentation! The sight of the Ralston Castle in my present circumstances depressed me horribly. I went to my second ball there, and it was given for me by Mrs. Ralston. And only a little more than a year ago I danced in the quadrille of honor with the French Ambassador—and the next week the Ralstons went smash and hurried abroad to hide, all except the old man who is hanging round Wall Street, they say, trying to get on his feet with the aid of his friends. Friends! How that word must burn into him every time he thinks of it. When he got into a tight place his “friends” took advantage of their knowledge of his affairs to grab his best securities, they



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say. No doubt he was disagreeable in a way, but still those who turned on him the most savagely had been intimate with him and had accepted his hospitality.

“You’ll be mistress here,” Jessie was saying. She had put on her prophetic look and pose—she really believes she has second sight at certain times. “And you’ll marry the son, if you manage it right. I counted him in when I was going over the advantages and disadvantages of the place before proposing it to you. He looks like a mild, nice young man—though I must say I don’t fancy cowlicks right in the part of the hair. I saw only his picture.”

A tall footman with an insolent face opened the door and ushered us into the small drawing-room to the left: “Mrs. Carteret! Miss Talltowers!” he shouted—far louder than is customary or cour-

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teous. I saw the impudent grin in his eyes —no proper man-servant ever permits any one to see his eyes. And he almost dropped the curtain in our faces, in such haste was he to get back to his lounging-place below stairs.

His roar had lifted to her feet an elderly woman with her hair so badly dyed that it made her features look haggard and harsh and even dissipated. She made a nervous bow. She was of the figure called stout by the charitable and sumptuous by the crude. She was richly-dressed, over-dressed, dressed-up—shiny figured satin with a great deal of beads and lace that added to her width and subtracted from her height. She stood miserable, jammed and crammed into a tight corset. Her hands—very nice hands, I noticed—were folded upon her stomach. As soon as I got used to that

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revolting hair-dye, I saw that she had in fact a large-featured, sweet face with fine brown eyes. Even with the dye she was the kind of looking woman that it sounds perfectly natural to hear her husband call "mother."

Jessie went up to her as she stood wretched in her pitiful attempt at youth and her grandeur of clothes and surroundings. Mrs. Burke looked down kindly, with a sudden quizzical smile that reminded me of my suspicions as to the Chicago Fair story. Jessie was looking up like a plump, pretty, tame robin, head on one side. "*Dear* Mrs. Burke," she said. "This is Miss Tall-towers, and I'm sure you'll love each other."

Mrs. Burke looked at me—I thought, with a determined attempt to be suspicious and cautious. I'm afraid Jessie's

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reputation for tireless effort to do something for everybody has finally "queered" her recommendations. However, whatever warning Mrs. Burke had received went for nothing. She was no match for Jessie—Jessie from whom his Majesty at the White House hides when he knows she's coming for an impossible favor—she was no match for Jessie and she knew it. She wiped the sweat from her face and stammered: "I hope we'll suit each other, Miss —" In her embarrassment she had forgotten my name.

"Talltowers," whispered Jessie with a side-splitting look of tragic apology to me. Just then the clock in the corner struck out the half-hour from its cathedral bell—the sound echoed and reëchoed through me, for it marked the beginning of my "career." Jessie went on more

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loudly: "And now that our *business* is settled, can't we have some lunch, Mrs. Burke? I'm starved."

Mrs. Burke brightened. "The Senator won't be here to-day," she drawled, in a tone which always suggests to me that, after all, life is a smooth, leisurely matter with plenty of time for everything except work. "As he was leaving for the Capitol this morning, he says to me, says he: 'You women had better fight it out alone.'"

"The *dear* Senator!" said Jessie. "He's *so* clever?"

"Yes, he *is* mighty clever with those he likes," replied Mrs. Burke—Jessie looking at me to make sure I would note Mrs. Burke's "provincial" way of using the word clever.

Jessie saved the luncheon—or, at least, thought she was saving it. Mrs. Burke

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and I had only to listen and eat. I caught her looking at me several times, and then I saw shrewdness in her eyes—good-natured, but none the less penetrating for that. And I knew I should like her, and should get on with her. At last our eyes met and we both smiled. After that she somehow seemed less crowded and foreign in her tight, fine clothes. I saw she was impatient for Jessie to go the moment luncheon was over, but it was nearly three o'clock before we were left alone together. There fell an embarrassed silence—for both of us were painfully conscious that nothing had really been settled.

“When do you wish me to come—if you do wish it at all?” I asked, by way of making a beginning.

“When do you think you could come?” she inquired nervously.



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"Then you do wish to give me a trial? I hope you won't feel that Mrs. Carteret's precipitate way binds you."

She gave me a shrewd, good-natured look. "I want you to come," she said. "I wanted it from what I'd heard of you—I and Mr. Burke. I want it more than ever, now that I've seen you. When can you come?"

"To-morrow—to-morrow morning?"

"Come as early as you like. The salary is—is satisfactory?"

"Mrs. Carteret said—but I'm sure—you can judge better—whatever—" I stuttered, red as fire.

Mrs. Burke laughed. "I can see you ain't a great hand at business. The salary is two thousand a year, with a three months' vacation in the time we're not at Washington. Always have a plain un-



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derstanding in money matters—it saves a lot of mean feelings and quarrels.”

“Very well—whatever you think. I don’t believe I’m worth much of anything until I’ve had a chance to show what I can do.”

“Well, Tom—Mr. Burke—said two thousand would be about right at the set-off,” she drawled in her calming tone. “So we’ll consider that settled.”

“Yes,” I gasped, with a big sigh of relief. “I suppose you wish me to take charge of your social matters—relieve you of the burdensome part of entertaining?”

“I just wish you could,” she said, with a great deal of humor in her slow voice. “But I’ve got to keep that—it’s the trying to make people have a good time and not look and act as if they were wondering why they’d come.”

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"That'll soon wear off," said I. "Most of the stiffness is strangeness on both sides, don't you think?"

"I don't know. As nearly as I can make out, they never had a real, natural good time in their lives. They wear the Sunday, go-to-meeting clothes and manners the whole seven days. I'll never get used to it. I can't talk that kind of talk. And if I was just plain and natural, they'd think I was stark crazy."

"Did you ever try?"

She lifted her hands in mock-horror. "Mercy, no! Tom—Mr. Burke—warned me."

I laughed. "Men don't know much about that sort of thing," said I. "A woman might as well let a man tell her how to dress as how to act."

She colored. "He does," she said, her eyes twinkling. "He was here two win-

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ters—this is my first. I've a kind of feeling that he really don't know, but he's positive and—I've had nobody else to talk about it with. I'm a stranger here—not a friend except people who—well, I can guess pretty close to what they say behind my back.” She laughed—a great shaking of as much of her as was not held rigid by that tight corset. “Not that I care—I like a joke myself, and I'm a good deal of a joke among these grand folks. Only, I do want to help Tom, and not be a drag.” She gave me a sudden, sharp look. “I don't know why I trust you, I'm sure.”

“Because I'm your confidential adviser,” said I, “and it's always well to keep nothing from a confidential adviser.” The longer I looked and listened, the larger possibilities I saw in her. My enthusiasm was rising.

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She rose and came to me and kissed me. There were tears in her eyes. "I've been *so* lonesome," she said. "Even Tom don't seem natural any more, away off here in the East. Sometimes I get so homesick that I just can't eat or anything."

"We're going to have a lot of fun," said I encouragingly—as if she were twenty-four and I fifty, instead of it being the other way. "You'll soon learn the ropes."

"I'm so glad you use slang," she drawled, back in her chair and comfortably settled. "My, but Tom'll be scandalized. He's made inquiries about you and has made up his mind that whatever you say is right. And I almost believed he knew the trails. I might 'a' known! He's a man, you see, and always was stiff with the ladies. You ought to 'a'

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seen the letter he wrote proposing to me. You see, I'm kind of fat and always was. Mother used to tease me because I hadn't any beaux except Tom, who wouldn't come to the point. She said: 'Lizzie, you'll never have a man make real love to you.' And she was right. When Tom proposed he wrote very formal-like—not a sentimental word. And when we were married and got better acquainted, I teased him about it, and tried to get him to make love, real book kind of love. But not a word! But he's fond of me—we always have got on fine, and his being no good at love-talk is just one of our jokes."

It was fine to hear her drawl it out—I knew that she was sure to make a hit, if only I could get her under way, could convince her that it's nice to be natural if you're naturally nice.

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“Tom” came in from the Senate and I soon saw that, though she was a “really” lady, of the only kind that is real—the kind that’s born right, he was a made gentleman, and not a very successful job. He was small and thin and dressed with the same absurd stiff care with which he had made her dress. He had a pointed reddish beard and reddish curls, and he used a kind of scent that smelt cheap though it probably wasn’t. He was very precise and distant with me—how “Lizzie’s” eyes did twinkle as she watched him. I saw that she was “on to” Tom with the quickness with which a shrewd woman always finds out, once she gets the clue.

“Have you had Miss Talltowers shown her rooms, Mrs. Burke?” he soon inquired.

“Why, no, pa,” replied Mrs. Burke.



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"I forgot it clear." As she said "pa" he winced and her eyes danced with fun. She went on to me: "You don't mind our calling each other pa and ma before you, do you, Miss Talltowers? We're so used to doing it that, if you minded it and we had to stop, we'd feel as if we had company in the house all the time."

I didn't dare answer, I was so full of laughter. For "pa" looked as if he were about to sink through the floor. She led me up to my rooms—a beautiful suite on the third floor. "We took the house furnished," she explained as we went, "and I feel as if I was living in a hotel—except that the servants ain't nearly so nice. I do hope you'll help me with them. Tom wanted me to take a housekeeper, but those that applied were such grand ladies that I'd



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rather 'a' done all my own work than 'a' had any one of them about. Perhaps we could get one now, and you could kind of keep her in check."

"I think it'd be better to have some one," I replied. "I've had some experience in managing a house." I couldn't help saying it unsteadily—not because I miss our house; no, I'm sure it wasn't that. But I suddenly saw the old library and my father looking up from his book to smile lovingly at me as I struggled with the household accounts. Anyhow, deep down I'm glad he did know so little about business and so much about everything that's fine. I'd rather have my memories of him than any money he could have left me by being less of a father and friend and more of a "practical" man.

Mrs. Burke looked at me sympathet-

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ically—I could see that she longed to say something about my changed fortunes, but refrained through fear of not saying the right thing. I must teach her never to be afraid of that—a born lady with a good heart could never be really tactless. She went to the front door with me, opening it for me herself to the contemptuous amusement of the tall footman. We shook hands and kissed—I usually can't bear to have a woman kiss me, but I'd have felt badly if "ma" Burke hadn't done it.

When I got back to Rachel's and burst into the drawing-room with a radiant face, I heard a grunt like a groan. It was from Jim in the twilight near Rachel at the tea-table. "I'm going out to service to-morrow," said I to Rachel. "So you're to be rid of your visitor at last."

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“Oh, Gus!” exclaimed Rachel between anger and tears. And Jim looked black and sullen. But I was happy—and am to-night. Happy for the first time in two years. I’m going to *do* something—and it is something that interests me. I’m going to launch a fine stately ship, a full-rigged four-master in this big-little sea of Washington society. What a sensation I can make with it among the pretty holiday boats!

## II

**D**ECEMBER 6. Last Monday morning young Mr. Burke—Cyrus, the son and heir—arrived, just from Germany. The first glimpse I had of him was as he entered the house between his father and his mother, who had gone to the station to meet him. I got myself out of the way and didn't come down until "ma" Burke sent for me. I liked the way she was sitting there beaming—but then, I like almost everything she does; she's such a large, natural person. She never stands,

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except on her way to sit just as soon as ever she can. "I never was a great hand for using my feet," she said to me on my second day, "and I don't know but about as much seems to 'a' come to find me as most people catch up with by running their legs off." I liked the way her son was hovering about her. And I liked the way "pa" Burke hovered round them both, nervous and pulling at his whiskers and trying to think of things to say—if he only wouldn't use brilliantine, or whatever it is, on his whiskers!

"Cyrus, this is my friend, Miss Tall-towers," said Mrs. Burke. I smiled and he clapped his heels together with a click and doubled up as if he had a sudden pain in his middle, just like all the northern Continental diplomats. When he straightened back to the normal I

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took a good look at him—and he at me. I don't know—or, rather, didn't then know—what *he* thought. But I thought him—well, “common.” He has a great big body that's strong and well-proportioned; but his features are so insignificant—a small mouth, a small nose, small ears, eyes, forehead, small head. And there, in the very worst place—just where the part ought to be—was the cowlick I'd noticed in his photograph. When he began to speak I liked him still less. He's been at Berlin three years, but still has his Harvard accent. I wonder why they teach men at Harvard to use their lips in making words as a Miss Nancy sort of man uses his fingers in doing fancy work?

Neither of us said anything memorable, and presently he went away to his room, his mother going up with him.

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His father followed to the foot of the stairs, then drifted away to his study where he could lie in wait for Cyrus on his way down. Pretty soon his mother came into the "office" they've given me—it's just off the drawing-room so that I can be summoned to it the instant any one comes to see Mrs. Burke.

"I've let his pa have him for a while," she explained, as she came in. I saw that she was full of her boy, so I turned away from my books. She rambled on about him for an hour, not knowing what she was saying, but just pouring out whatever came into her head. "His pa has always said I'd spoil him," was one of the things I remember, "but I don't think love ever spoiled anybody." Also she told me that his real name wasn't Cyrus but Bucyrus, the town his father originally came from—it's some-





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where in Ohio, I think she said. "And," said she, "whenever I want to cut his comb I just give him his name. He tames right down." Also that he has used all sorts of things on the cowlick without success. "There it is, still," said she, "as cross-grained as ever. I like it about the best of anything, except maybe his long legs. I'm a duck-leg myself, and his pa—well, *his* legs 'just about reach the ground,' as Lincoln said, and after that the less said the sooner forgot. But Cyrus has *legs*. And his cowlick matches a cowlick in his disposition—a kind of gnarly knot that you can't cut nor saw through nor get round no way. It's been the saving of him, he's so good-natured and easy otherwise." And she went on to tell how generous he is, "the only generous small-eared person I've ever known,

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though I must say I have my doubts about ears as a sign. There was Bill Slayback in our town, with ears like a jack-rabbit, and whenever he had a poor man do a job of work about his place he used to pay him with a ninety-day note and then shave the note."

I was glad when she hurried away at the sound of Cyrus in the hall. For a huge lot of work there'll be for me to do until I get things in some sort of order. I've opened a regular set of books to keep the social accounts in. Of course, nobody who goes in for society, on the scale we're going into it, could get along without social bookkeeping as big as a bank's. I pity the official women in the high places who can't afford secretaries; they must spend hours every night posting and fussing with their account-books when they ought to be in bed asleep.

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On my second day here "pa" Burke explained what his plans were. "We wish to make our house," said he, "the most distinguished social center in Washington, next to the White House—and very democratic. Above all, Miss Tall-towers, democratic."

"He don't mean that he wants us to do our own work and send out the wash," drawled "ma" Burke, who was sitting by. "But democratic, with fourteen servants in livery."

"I understand," said I. "You wish simplicity, and people to feel at ease, Mr. Burke."

"Exactly," he replied in a dubious tone. "But I wish to maintain the—the dignities, as it were."

I saw he was afraid I might get the idea he wanted something like those rough-and-tumble public maulings of

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the President that they have at the White House. I hastened to reassure him; then I explained my plan. I had drawn up a system somewhat like those the President's wife and the Cabinet women and the other big entertainers have. I'm glad the Burkes haven't any daughters. If they had I'd certainly need an assistant. As it is, I'm afraid I'll worry myself hollow-eyed over my books.

First, there's the Ledger—a real, big, thick office ledger with almost four hundred accounts in it, each one indexed. Of course, there aren't any entries as yet. But there soon will be—what we owe various people in the way of entertainment, what they've paid, and what they owe us.

Second, there's my Day-Book. It contains each day's engagements so that I can find out at a glance just what we've



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got to do, and can make out each night before going to bed or early each morning the schedule for Mrs. Burke for the day, and for Senator Burke and the son, I suppose, for the late afternoon and the evening.

Third, there's the Calling-Book. Already I've got down more than a thousand names. The obscurer the women are—the back-district congressmen's wives and the like—the greater the necessity for keeping the calling account straight. I wonder how many public men have had their careers injured or ruined just because their wives didn't keep the calling account straight. They say that *men* forgive slights, and, when it's to their interest, forget them. But I know the *women* never do. They keep the knife sharp and wait for a chance to stick it in, for years and years. Of



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course, if the Burkes weren't going into this business in a way that makes me think the Senator's looking for the nomination for president I shouldn't be so elaborate. We'd pick out our set and stick to it and ignore the other sets. As it is, I'm going to do this thing thoroughly, as it hasn't been done before.

Fourth, there's our Ball-and-Big-Dinner Book. That's got a list of all the young men and another of all the young women. And I'm making notes against the names of those I don't know very well or don't know at all—notes about their personal appearance, eligibility, capacities for dancing, conversation, and so forth and so on. If you're going to make an entertainment a success you've got to know something more or less definite about the people that are coming, whom to ask to certain things

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and whom not to ask. Take a man like Phil Harkness, or a girl like Nell Witton, for example. Either of them would ruin a dinner, but Phil shines at a ball, where silence and good steady dancing are what the girls want. As for Nell, she's possible at a ball only if you can be sure John Rush or somebody like him is coming—somebody to sit with her and help her blink at the dancers and be bored. Then there's the Sam Tremenger sort of man—a good talker, but something ruinous when he turns loose in a ball-room and begins to batter the women's toilets to bits. He's a dinner man, but you can't ask him when politics may be discussed—he gets so violent that he not only talks all the time, but makes a deafening clamor and uses swear words—and we still have quiet people who get gooseflesh for damn.

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Then there's—let me see, what number—oh, yes—fifth, there's my Acceptance-and-Refusal Book. It's most necessary, both as a direct help and as an indirect check on other books. Then, too, I want it to be impossible to send the Burkes to places they've said they wouldn't go, or for them to be out when they've asked people to come here. Those things usually happen when you've asked some of those dreadful people that everybody always forgets, yet that are sure to be important at some critical time.

Sixth, there's my Book of Home Entertainments—a small book but most necessary, as arranging entertainments in the packed days of the Washington season isn't easy.

Seventh, there's the little book with the list of entertainments other people

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are going to give. We have to have that so that we can know how to make our plans. And in it I'm going to keep all the information I can get about the engagements of the people we particularly want to ask. If I'm not sharp-eyed about that I'll fail in one of my principal duties, which is getting the right sort of people under this roof often enough during the season to give us "distinction."

Eighth, there's my Distinguished-Stranger Book. I'm going to make that a specialty. I want to try to know whenever anybody who is anybody is here on a visit, so that we can get hold of him if possible. The White House can get all that sort of information easily because the distinguished stranger always gives the President a chance to get at him. *We* shall have to make an effort, but I think we'll succeed.

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Ninth—that's my book for press notices. It's empty now, but I think "pa" Burke will be satisfied long before the season is over.

Quite a library isn't it? How simple it must be to live in a city like New York or Boston where one bothers only with the people of one set and has practically no bookkeeping beyond a calling list. And here it's getting worse and worse each season.

Let me see, how many sets are there? There's the set that can say must to us—the White House and the Cabinet and the embassies. Then there's the set we can say must to—a huge, big set and, in a way, important, but there's nobody really important in it. Then there's the still wider lower official set—such people as the under-secretaries of departments, the attachés of embassies, small con-

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gressmen and the like. Then there's the old Washington aristocracy—my particular crowd. It doesn't amount to "shucks," as Mrs. Burke would say, but everybody tries to be on good terms with it, Lord knows why. Finally, there's the set of unofficial people—the rich or otherwise distinguished who live in Washington and must be cultivated. And we're going to gather in all of them, so as not to miss a trick.

The first one of the Burkes to whom I showed my books and explained myself in full was "ma" Burke. She looked as if she had been taken with a "misery," as she calls it. "Lord! Lord!" she groaned. "Whatever have I got my fool self into?"

I laughed and assured her that it was nothing at all. "I'm only showing you *my* work. All you've got to do is to



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carry out each day's work. I'll see to it that you won't even have to bother about what clothes to wear, unless you want to. You'll be perfectly free to enjoy yourself."

"*Enjoy myself?*" said she. "Why, I'll be on the jump from morning till night."

"From morning till morning again," I corrected. "The men sleep in Washington. But the women with social duties have no time for sleep—only for naps."

"I reckon it'll hardly be worth while to undress for bed," she said grimly. "I'm going to have the bed taken out of my room. It'd drive me crazy to look at it. Such a good bed, too. I always was a great hand for a good bed. I've often said to pa that you can't put too much value into a bed—and by bed



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I don't mean headboard and footboard, nor canopy nor any other fixings. What do you think of my hair?"

I was a bit startled by her sudden change of subject. I waited.

"Don't mind me—speak right out," she said with her good-natured twinkle. "You might think it wasn't my hair, but it is. The color's not, though, as you may be surprised to hear." The "surprised" was broadly satirical.

"I prefer natural hair," said I, "and gray hair is most becoming. It makes a woman look younger, not older."

"That's sensible," said she. "I never did care for bottled hair. I think it looks bad from the set-off, and gets worse. The widow Pfizer in our town got so that hers was bright green after she bottled it for two years, trying to catch old man Coakley. And after she

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caught him she bottled his, and it turned out green, too, after a while."

"Why run such a risk?" said I. "I'm sure your own hair done as your maid can do it would be far more becoming."

Mrs. Burke was delighted. "I might have known better," she observed, "but I found Mr. Burke bottling his beard, and he wanted me to; and it seemed to me that somehow bottled hair just fitted right in with all the rest of this foolishness here. How they would rear round at home if they knew what kind of a place Washington is! Why, I hear that up at the White House, when the President leaves the table for a while during meals, all the ladies—women, I mean—his wife and all of them, have to rise and stand till he comes back."

"Yes," I replied. "He's started that custom. I like ceremony, don't you?"

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"No, I can't say that I do," she drawled. "Out home all the drones and pokes and nobodies are just crazy about getting out in feathers and red plush aprons and clanking and pawing round, trying to make out they're somebody. And I've always noticed that whenever anybody that is a somebody hankers after that sort of thing it's because he's got a streak of nobody in him. No, I don't like it in Cal Walters out home, and I don't like it in the President."

"We've got to do as the other capitals do," said I. "Naturally, as we get more and more ambassadors, and a bigger army, and the President more powerful, we become like the European courts. And the President is simply making a change abruptly that'd have to come gradually anyhow."

Her eyes began to twinkle. "First

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thing you know, the country'll turn loose a herd of steers from the prairies in this town, and— But, long as it's here, I suppose I've got to abide by it. So I'll do whatever you say. It'll be a poor do, without my trying to find fault."

And she's being as good as her word. She makes me tell her exactly what to do. She is so beautifully simple and ladylike in her frank confessions of her ignorance—just as the Queen of England would be if she were to land on the planet Mars and have to learn the ways—the surface ways, I mean. I've no doubt that outside of a few frills which silly people make a great fuss about, a lady is a lady from one end of the universe to the other.

I'm making the rounds of my friends with Mrs. Burke in this period of waiting for the season to begin. And she

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sits mum and keeps her eyes moving. She's rapidly picking up the right way to say things—that is, the self-assurance to say things in her own way. I took her among my friends first because I wanted her to realize that I was absolutely right in urging her to naturalness. There are so many in the different sets she'll be brought into contact with who are ludicrously self-conscious. Certainly, there's much truth in what she says about the new order. We Americans don't do the European sort of thing well, and, while the old way wasn't pretty to look at it, it was—it was our own. However, I'm merely a social secretary, dealing with what is, and not bothering my head about what ought to be. And as for the Burkes, they're here to take advantage of what is, not to revolutionize things.

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Mr. Burke himself was the next member of the family at whom I got a chance with my great plans. When he had got it all out of me he began to pace up and down the floor, pulling at his whiskers, and evidently thinking. Finally he looked at me in a kindly, sharp way, and, in a voice I recognized at once as the voice of the Thomas Burke who had been able to pile up a fortune and buy into the Senate, said:

“I double your salary, Miss Tall-towers. And I hope you understand that expense isn’t to be considered in carrying out your program. I want you to act just as if this were all for yourself. And if we succeed I think you’ll find I’m not ungenerous.” And before I could try to thank him he was gone.

The last member was “Bucyrus.” As I knew his parents wished to be alone



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with him at first I kept out of the way, breakfasting in my rooms, lunching and dining out a great deal. What little I saw of him I didn't like. He ignored me most of the time—and I, for one woman, don't like to be ignored by any man. When he did speak to me it was as they speak to the governess in families where they haven't been used to very much for very long. Perhaps this piqued me a little, but it certainly amused me, and I spoke to him in an humble, deferential way that seemed somehow to make him uneasy.

It was day before yesterday that he came into my office about an hour after luncheon. He tried to look very dignified and superior.

"Miss Talltowers," he said, "I must request you to refrain from calling me sir whenever you address me."



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"I beg your pardon, sir," I replied meekly, "but I have never addressed you. I hope I know my place and my duty better than that. Oh, no, sir, I have always waited to be spoken to."

He blazed a furious red. "I must request you," he said, with his speech at its most fancy-work like, "not to continue your present manner toward me. Why, the very servants are laughing at me."

"Oh, sir," I said earnestly, "I'm sure that's not my fault." And I didn't spoil it by putting accent on the "that" and the "my."

He got as pale as he had been red. "Are you trying to make it impossible for us to remain under the same roof?" he demanded. What a spoiled stupid!

"I'm sure, sir," said I, and I think my eyes must have shown what an un-

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pleasant mood his hinted threat had put me in, "that I'm not even succeeding in making it impossible for us to remain in my private office at the same time. Do you understand me, or do you wish me to make my meaning—"

He had given a sort of snort and had rushed from the room.

I suppose I ought to be more charitable toward him. A small person, brought up to regard himself as a sort of god, and able to buy flattery, and permitted to act precisely as his humors might suggest—what is to be expected of such a man? No, not a man but boy, for he's only twenty-six. *Only* twenty-six! One would think I was forty to hear me talking in that way of twenty-six. But women always seem older than men who are even many years older than they. And how having to earn

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my own bread has aged me inside! I think Jessie was right when she said in that solemn way of hers, "And although, dear Augusta, they may think you haven't brains enough, I assure you you'll develop them." Poor, dear Jessie! How she would amuse herself if she could be as she is, and also have a sense of humor!

At any rate, Mr. Bucyrus came striding back after half an hour, and, rather surlily but with a certain grudging manliness, said: "I beg your pardon, Miss Talltowers, for what I said. I am ashamed of my having forgotten myself and made that tyrannical speech to you."

"Thank you, sir," said I, without raising my eyes. "You are most gracious."

"And I hope," he went on, "that you will try to treat me as an equal."

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"It'll be very hard to do that, sir," said I. And I lifted my eyes and let him see that I was laughing at him.

He shifted uneasily, red and white by turns. "I think you understand me," he muttered.

"Perfectly," said I.

He waved his arm impatiently. "Please don't!" he exclaimed rather imperiously. "I could have got my mother to—"

"I hope you won't complain of me to your mother," I pleaded.

He flushed and snorted, like a horse that is being teased by a fly it can reach with neither teeth, hoofs nor tail. "You know I didn't mean that. I'm not an utter cad—now, don't say, 'Aren't you, sir?'" "

"I had no intention of doing so," said I. "In fact I've been trying to

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make allowances for you—for your mother's sake. I appreciate that you've been away from civilization for a long time. And I'm sure we shall get on comfortably, once you've got your bearings again."

He was silent, stood biting his lips and looking out of the window. Presently, when I had resumed my work, he said in an endurable tone and manner: "I hope you will be kind enough to include me in that admirable social scheme of yours. Are those your books?"

I explained them to him as briefly as I could. I had no intention of making myself obnoxious, but on the other hand I did not, and do not purpose to go out of my way to be courteous to this silly of an overgrown, spoiled baby. He tried to be nice in praise of my

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system, but I got rid of him as soon as I had explained all that my obligations as social secretary to the family required. He thanked me as he was leaving and said, in his most gracious tone, "I shall see that my father raises your salary."

I fairly gasped at the impudence of this, but before I could collect myself properly to deal with him he was gone. Perhaps it was just as well. I must be careful not to be "sensitive"—that would make me as ridiculous as he is.

And that's the man Jim Lafollette is fairly smoking with jealousy of! He was dining at Rachel's last night, and Rachel put him next me. He couldn't keep off the subject of "that young Burke." Jessie overheard him after a while and leaned round and said to me, "How do you and young Mr. Burke get on?" in her "strictly private" man-



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ner—Jessie's strictly private manner is about as private as the Monument.

"Not badly," I replied, to punish Jim. "We're gradually getting acquainted."

Jim sneered under his mustache. "It's the most shameful scheme two women ever put up," he said, as if he were joking.

"Oh, has Jessie told you?" I exclaimed, pretending to be concealing my vexation.

"It's the talk of the town," he answered, showing his teeth in a grin that was all fury and no fun.

There may be women idiots enough to marry a man who warns them in advance that he's rabidly jealous, but I'm not one of them. Better a crust in quietness.



### III

**D**ECEMBER 27. Three weeks simply boiling with business since I wrote here—and it seems not more than so many days. And all by way of preparation, for the actual season is still five days away.

I can hardly realize that Mrs. Burke is the same person I looked at so dubiously two days less than a month ago. Truly, the right sort of us Americans are wonderful people. To begin with her appearance: her hair isn't "bottled," as she called it, any more. It's beauti-

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ful iron-gray, and softens her features and permits all the placid kindliness and humor of her face to show. Then there's her dress—gracious, how tight-looking she was! A *thin* woman can, and should, wear *close* things. But no woman who wishes to look like a lady must ever wear anything *tight*. To be tight in one's clothes is to be tight in one's talk, manner, thought—and that means—well, common. What an expressive word “common” is, yet I'm sure I couldn't define it.

For a fat woman to be tight is—revolting! My idea of misery is a fat woman in a tight waist and tight shoes. Yet fat women have a mania for wearing tight things, just as gaunt women yearn for stripes and short women for flounces. My first move in getting Mrs. Burke into shape—after doing away

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with that dreadful "bottled" hair—was to put her into comfortable clothes. The first time I got her into an evening dress of the right sort I was rewarded for all my trouble by her expression. She kissed me with tears in her eyes. "My dear," said she, "never before did I have a best dress that I wasn't afraid to breathe in for fear I'd bust out, back or front." Then I made her sit down before her long glass and look at herself carefully. She had the prettiest kind of color in her cheeks as she smiled at me and said: "If I'd 'a' looked like this when I was young I reckon Mr. Burke wouldn't 'a' been so easy in his mind when he went away from home, nor 'a' stayed so long. I always did sympathize with pretty women when they capered round, but now I wonder they ever do sober down. If I weighed a hun-

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dred pounds or so less I do believe I'd try to frisk yet."

And I do believe she could; for she's really a handsome woman. Why is it that the women who have the most to them don't give it a chance to show through, but get themselves up so that anybody who glances at them tries never to look again?

It is the change in her appearance even more than all she's learned that has given her self-confidence. She feels at ease—and that puts her at ease, and puts everybody else at ease, too. It has reacted upon Mr. Burke. He has dropped brilliantine—perhaps "ma" gave him a quiet hint—and he has taken some lessons in dress from "Cyrus," who really gets himself up very well, considering that he has lived in Germany for three years. I should have hopes

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that "pa" would blossom out into something very attractive socially if he hadn't a deep-seated notion that he is a great joker. A naturally serious man who tries to be funny is about the most painful object in civilization. Still, Washington is full of statesmen and scholars who try to unbend and be "light," especially with "the ladies." Nothing makes me—or any other woman, I suppose—so angry as for a man to show that he takes me for a fool by making a grinning galoot of himself whenever he talks to me. Bucyrus is much that kind of ass. He alternates between solemnity and silliness.

I said rather pointedly to him the other night: "You men with your great, deep minds make a mistake in changing your manner when you talk with the women and the children. Nothing

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pleases us so much as to be taken seriously." But it didn't touch him. However, he's hardly to blame. He's spent a great many years round institutions of learning, and in those places, I've noticed, every one has a musty, fusty sense of humor. Probably it comes from cackling at classical jokes that have laughed themselves as dry as a mummy.

We've been giving a few entertainments—informal and not large, but highly important. I had two objects in mind: In the first place, to get Mr. and Mrs. Burke accustomed to the style of hospitality they've got to give if they're going to win out. In the second place, to get certain of the kind of people who are necessary to us in the habit of coming to this house—and those people are not so very hard to get hold of now; later they'll be engaged day and night.



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For two weeks now I've had my two especial features going. One of them is for the men, the other for the women. And I can see already that they alone would carry us through triumphantly; for they've caught on.

My men's feature is a breakfast. I engaged a particularly good cook—the best old-fashioned Southern cook in Washington. Rachel had her, and I persuaded Mr. Derby to consent to giving her up to us, just for this season. Cleopatra—that's her name—has nothing to do but get together every morning by nine o'clock the grandest kind of an old-fashioned American breakfast. And I explained to Senator Burke that he was to invite some of his colleagues, as many as he liked, and tell them to come any morning, or every morning if they wished, and bring their friends.



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I consult with Cleopatra every day as to what she's to have the next morning; and I think dear old father taught me what kind of breakfast men like. I don't give them too much, or they'd be afraid to come and risk indigestion a second time. I see to it that everything is perfectly cooked—and it's pretty hard for any man to get indigestion, even from corned beef hash and hot cornbread and buckwheat cakes with maple syrup, if it's perfectly cooked and is eaten in a cheerful frame of mind. No women are permitted at these breakfasts—just men, with everything free and easy, plenty to smoke, separate tables, but each large enough so that there's always room at any one of them for one more who might otherwise be uncomfortable. Even now we have from fifteen to twenty men—among them

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the very best in Washington. In the season we'll have thirty and forty, and our house will be a regular club from nine to eleven for just the right men.

My other big feature is an informal dance every Wednesday night. It's already as great a success in its way as the breakfasts are in theirs. I've been rather careful about whom I let Mrs. Burke invite to come in on Wednesdays whenever they like. The result is that everybody is pleased; the affairs seem to be "exclusive," yet are not. I know it will do the Burkes a world of good politically, because a certain kind of people who are important politically but have had no chance socially are coming to us on Wednesdays, and that's just the kind of people who are frantically flattered by the idea that they are "in the push."

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Speaking of being "in the push," there are two ways of getting there if one isn't there. One is to worm your way in; the other is to make yourself the head and front of "the push." That's the way for those who have money and know how. And that's the way the Burkes are getting in—getting in at the front instead of at the rear.

It's most gratifying to see how Mr. Burke treats me. He always has been deferential, but he now shows that he thinks I have real brains. And since his breakfasts have become the talk of the town and are "patronized" by the men he's so eager to get hold of, he is even consulting me about his business. I am criticizing for him now a speech he's going to make on the canal question next month—a dreadfully dull speech, and I don't feel competent to tell him

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what to do with it. I think I'll advise him not to make it, tell him his forte is diplomacy—winning men round by personal dealing with them—which is the truth.

Young Mr. Burke—after a period of unbending—is now shyer than ever. I wondered why, until it happened to occur to me one day as I was talking with Jessie. I suddenly said to her: “Jessie, did you ever tell Nadeshda that you had planned to marry me to Cyrus Burke?”

She hopped about in her chair a bit, as uneasy as a bird on a swaying perch. Then she confessed that she “might have suggested before Nadeshda what a delightfully satisfactory thing it would be.”

I laughed to relieve her mind—also because it amused me to see through Nadeshda.

Of course, one of the women I needed

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most in this Burke campaign was Nadeshda. And I happened to know that she is bent on marrying a rich American—indeed, that's the only reason why the wilds of America are favored with the presence of the beautiful, joy-loving, courted and adored Baroness Nadeshda Daragane. The yarn about her sister, the ambassadress, being an invalid and shrinking from the heavy social responsibilities of the embassy is just so much trash. So, as soon as "Cyrus" came I went over to see her, and, as diplomatically as I knew how, displayed before her dazzled eyes the substantial advantages of the sole heir of the great Western multi-millionaire.

As I went on to tell how generous the Senator is, and how certain he would be to lavish wealth upon his daughter-in-law, I could see her mind at work.

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A fascinating, naughty, treacherous little mind it is—like a small Swiss watch of the rarest workmanship and full of wheels within wheels. And she's a beautiful little creature, as warm as a tropical sun to look at, and about as cold as the Arctic regions to deal with. No, I haven't begun to describe her. I'd not be surprised to hear that she had eloped with her brother-in-law's coachman; nor should I be surprised to hear that she had married the most hideous, revolting man in the world for his money, and was suspected of being engaged in trying to hasten him off to the grave. She's of the queer sort that would kiss or kill with equal enthusiasm, capable of almost any virtue or vice—on impulse. If there's any part of her beneath the impulsive part it's solid ice in a frame of steel. But—is there? She's talked



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about a good deal—not a tenth enough to satisfy her craving for notoriety, and, I may add, not a tenth part so much as she deserves to be, and would be if we studied character on this side of the water instead of being too busy with ourselves to look beyond anybody else's surface.

Well, the Baroness Nadeshda has been wild about the Burkes ever since we had our talk. And she has Mr. Cyrus thoroughly tangled in her nets, and the Senator, too. And, naturally, she lost no time in trying to “do” me. She has told Bucyrus what a designing creature I am—no doubt has warned him that if I seem distant to him I'm at my deadliest, and to look out for mines. He certainly is looking out for them, for, whenever I speak to him, he acts as if he were stepping round on a volcano.



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I'm having a good deal of fun with him. I wish I had the time; I'd try to teach him a very valuable lesson. Really, it's a shame to let a man go through life imagining that he's an all-conqueror, when in reality the woman who marries him will feel that she's swallowing about as bitter a dose as Fate ever presented to feminine lips in a gold spoon.

Dear old "ma" Burke hasn't yet yielded to Nadeshda's blandishments. We went to the embassy to call yesterday afternoon at tea-time, and I saw her watching Nadeshda in that smiling, simple way of hers that conceals about as keen a brain as I shouldn't care to have tearing me to pieces for inspection.

The embassy at tea-time is always wild. For then Sophie comes in with her monkey and Nadeshda's seven dogs are racing about. And the Count always

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laughs loudly, usually at nothing at all. And each time he laughs the dogs bark until the monkey in a great fright dashes up the curtains or flings himself at Sophie and almost strangles her with his paws or arms, or whatever they are, round her neck. I don't think I've ever been there that something hasn't been spilt for a huge mess; often the whole teatable topples over. Mrs. Burke loves to go, for afterward she laughs a dozen times a day until her sides ache.

As we came away yesterday I said to her: "What a fascinating, beautiful creature Nadeshda is!"

Mrs. Burke smiled. "When I was a girl," she said, "I had a catamount for a pet—a cub, and they had cut his claws. He was beautiful and mighty fascinating—you never did know when he was going to fawn on you and when

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he was going to fasten his teeth in you. The baroness puts me in mind of my old pet, and how I didn't know which was harder—to keep him or to give him up.”

“She certainly has a strange nature,” said I.

After a pause Mrs. Burke went on: “She’s the queerest animal in this menagerie here, so far as I’ve seen. And I don’t think I’m wrong in suspecting she’s sitting up to Cyrus.”

“I don’t wonder he finds her interesting,” said I.

“Cyrus is just like his pa,” said she, “a mighty poor judge of women. It was lucky for his pa that he married and settled down before he had much glitter to catch the eyes of the women. Otherwise, he’d ’a’ made a ridiculous fool of himself. But I like a man the

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women can fool easy. That shows he's honest. These fellows who are so sharp at getting on to the tricks of the women ain't, as a rule, good for much else. But Cyrus has got *me* to look after him."

"He might do much worse than marry Nadeshda," said I.

"That's what his pa says," she replied. "But I ain't got round to these new-fashioned notions of marriage. I want to see my Cyrus married to the sort of woman his ma'd like and be proud to have for the mother of her grand-children. And I ain't altogether sure we need the kind of tone in our blood that a catamount'd bring. Though I must say a year or so of living with a catamount might do Cyrus a world of good."

Which shows that even love can't altogether blind "ma" Burke.

January 3. I had to do a little schem-

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ing to get Mrs. Burke an invitation to assist at the New Year's reception. It's always the first event of the season, and, though it would have been no great matter if I hadn't been able to get her in among those who stand near the President's wife and the Cabinet women, still I felt that I couldn't get my "pulls" into working order any too soon. Ever since the second week in my "job" I've realized that nothing could be easier than to put the Burkes well to the front, but my ambition to make them first calls for the exertion of every energy.

So, in the third week of December I set Rachel at Mrs. Senator Lumley and Mrs. Admiral Bixby—two women who can get almost anything in reason out of the President's wife. Rachel is about the most important woman in the old Washington aristocracy, and the Lum-

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leys and the Bixbys are in the nature of fixtures here, not at all like an evanescent President or Cabinet person. So Rachel's request set the two women to work. And although the President's wife said she'd asked all she intended to ask, far too many, and didn't see why on earth she should be beset for a newcomer who had been reported to her as fat and impossible, still she finally yielded.

I hadn't hoped to get an invitation for them for the Cabinet dinner, and I was astounded when it came. We had arranged to give a rather large informal dinner that night and had to call it off, as an invitation from the White House, even from the obscurest member of the President's family for any old function whatever, is a command that may not be disobeyed. Well, as I was saying, the



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invitation to the Cabinet dinner came unsought. It seems that the Burke breakfasts are making a great stir politically; so great a stir that they have made the President a little uneasy. Of course, the best way to get rid of an opponent is to conciliate him. Hence the royal command to Senator and Mrs. Burke to appear at his Majesty's dinner to his Majesty's ministers.

Mrs. Burke is tremendously proud of her first two communications from the White House. As for the Senator, he looks at them half a dozen times a day.

I went down to the New Year's reception to see how "ma" was getting on. As I had expected, she didn't stand very long. She cast about for a chair, and, seeing one, planted herself. Soon the Baroness joined her, and young Prince Krepousky joined Nadeshda, and

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then General Martin, who loves Mrs. Burke for the feeds she gives. The group grew, and Mrs. Burke began to talk in her drawling, humorous way, and Nadeshda laughed, which made the others laugh—for it's impossible to resist Nadeshda. When I arrived Mrs. Burke was "right in it."

And after a while the President came and said: "Is this your reception, madam, or is it mine?" At which there was more laughing, he raising a great guffaw and slapping his hip with his powerful hand. Then they all went up to have something to eat, and the President spent most of the time with her.

She doesn't need any more coaching. Of course, she's flattered by her success. But instead of having her head turned, as most women do who get the least bit of especial attention from the conspicu-

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ous men here, she takes it all very placidly. "They don't care shucks for me," she says, "and I know it. We're all in business together, and I'm mighty glad it can be carried on so cheerful-like." At the Cabinet dinner, to-morrow night, she'll have to sit well down toward the foot of the table. But she won't mind that. Indeed, if I hadn't been giving her lessons in precedence she wouldn't have an idea that everything here is arranged by rank.

Jessie—so she tells me—had a half-hour's session with "Cyrus" the other day and gave him a very exalted idea of my social position and influence. No doubt, what she said confirmed his suspicion that I and my friends are conspiring against him; but I observe a distinct change in his manner toward me. He's even humble. I suppose he

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thought I was some miserable creature whom his mother had taken on, half out of charity. I'm afraid I have a sort of family pride that's a little ridiculous—but I can't help it. Still, I am American enough to despise people who are courteous or otherwise, according as they look up to or look down on the particular person's family and position. I guess young Mr. Burke is his father in an aggravated form. Yet Jessie, and Rachel, too, pretend to like him. And probably they really do—it's not hard to like any one who is not asking favors and is in a position to grant them, and isn't so near to one that his quills stick into one.

The Countess of Wend came in to see me this afternoon and told me all about the row over at the legation. It seems that the new minister is a plebeian, and in their country people of his sort

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aren't noticed by the upper classes unless an upper-class man happens to need something to wipe his boots on and one of them is convenient for use. Well, every attaché is in a fury, and none of them will speak to the minister except in the most formal way and only when it's absolutely necessary. As for the minister's wife, the other women—but what's the use of describing it; we all know how nasty women can be about matters of rank. The Count is talking seriously of resigning. I'd be dreadfully sorry, as Eugenie is a dear, more like an American than a foreigner; and I believe she really likes us, where most of them privately despise us as a lot of low-born upstarts. I know they laugh all day long at the President's queer manners and mannerisms—but then, so do we, for that matter. And it's quite

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unusual for Washington, where each President is bowed down to and praised everywhere and flattered till he thinks he's a sort of god—and forgotten as soon as his term is ended. I suppose there's nothing deader on this earth than an ex-President, with no offices to distribute and no hopes for a further political career.

January 9. We had a beautiful dinner here last night—very brilliant too, as we all were going to a ball at the Russian embassy afterward. All the diplomats and army men were in uniform—and one or two of the army men were really brilliant. But none of the diplomats. They say that no nation sends us its best or even its second best. It seems that diplomats don't amount to much in this day of cables. Those who have any intelligence naturally go



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to courts, where the atmosphere is congenial and where there are chances for decorations. So we get only the stiff and stuffs—with a few exceptions. If it weren't for their women—

But, to return to our dinner—Mrs. Burke went in with the German ambassador, and I saw that they were getting on famously. He is a very clever man in a small way, and has almost an American sense of humor. As soon as he saw that she intended what she said to be laughed at he gave himself up to it. “Your Mrs. Burke is charming, Miss Talltowers,” said he to me after dinner. “She ranks with Bret Harte and Mark Twain. It's only in America that you find old women who make you forget to wish you were with young and pretty women.”

Jim Lafollette took me in—the first

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time I've had him here. I must say he behaved very well and was the handsomest man in the room. But he never has much to say that is worth hearing. Though conversation at Washington in society isn't on any too high a plane, as a rule—how could conversation in a mixed society anywhere be very high?—still it isn't the wishy-washy chatter and gossip that Jim Lafollette delights in. Of course, army officers almost always go in for gossip—that comes from sitting round with their women at lonely posts where nothing occurs. And they, as a rule, either gossip or simply drivel when they talk to women, because all the women that ever liked them liked them for their brass buttons, and all the women they ever liked they liked for their pretty faces and empty heads. So, usually, to get an army of-

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ficer at dinner is to sit with a bowl of soft taffy held to your lips and a huge spoonful of it thrust into your mouth every time you stop talking. That's true of many of the statesmen, too, especially the heavyweights. I suppose I'm wrong, but I can't help suspecting a man without a sense of humor of being a solemn fraud.

You'd think American women, at the capital, at least, would be interested in politics. But they're not. They say it's the vulgarity of the intriguing and of most of the best intriguers that makes them dislike politics, even here. I suspect there's another reason. We women are so petted by the men that we don't have to know anything to make ourselves agreeable. If we're pretty and listen well that's all that's necessary. So, why get headaches learning things?

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Of course, there are exceptions. Take Maggie Shotwell. Her husband is a wag-eared ass. Yet in eleven years she has advanced him from second secretary to minister to a second-class power just by showing up here at intervals and playing the game intelligently. And there are scores of army women who do as well in a smaller way, and a few of the diplomats' wives are most adroit, intriguing well both here and at their homes in a nice, clean way, as intrigue goes.

But most of the women are like "ma" Burke, who'd as soon think of entering for a foot-race as of interfering in her husband's political affairs in any way, beyond giving him some sound advice about the men that can be trusted and the men that can't. I suppose if there were real careers in public life in

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this country, not dependent upon elections, the Washington women wouldn't be so lazy and indifferent, but would wake up and intrigue their brothers and sons and other male relatives into all sorts of things. Then, too, a man has to vote with his "party" on everything that's important, and his "party" is a small group of old men who are beyond social blandishments and go to bed early every night and associate only with men in the daytime.

No, we women don't amount to much *directly* at Washington. If Jim Lafollette had kept away from the women and society he might have amounted to something. It's become a proverb that whenever a young man comes here and goes in for the social end of it he is doomed soon to disappear and be heard of no more. The President is try-

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ing to make society amount to something, but he won't succeed. Whatever benefit there may be in it will go, not to him, but to men like Senator Burke. He doesn't go any more than he can help, except to his own breakfasts. But he sends his wife, and so, without wasting any of his time, he makes himself prominent in a very short space of time and gets all the big social indirect influence—the influence of the women on their husbands.

Mrs. Burke's younger brother, Robert Gunton, arrived last night. He reminds me of her, but he's slender and very active—a shabby sort of person, clean but careless, and he looks as if he had so many other things to think about that he hadn't time to think about himself. He looks younger and talks older than his years. He's here to get some sort



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of patent through; he won't permit his brother-in-law to assist him; he refuses to go anywhere—in society, I mean. We rode up to the Capitol together in a street-car this morning, and I liked him.

“Why do you ride in a street-car?” he asked.

“Because it's not considered good form to use carriages too much,” I replied. “It might rouse the envy of those who can't afford carriages.”

“Then it isn't because you don't want to, but because you don't dare to?”

“Yes,” said I. “But things are changing rapidly. The rich people who live here but care nothing for politics are gradually introducing class distinctions.”

“You mean, poor people who like to fawn upon and hate the rich are introducing class distinctions,” he corrected.

He is thirty-two years old; he treats

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a woman as if she were a man, and he treats a man as if he himself were one. It isn't possible not to like that sort of human being.

Invitations are beginning to come in floods—invitations for the big, formal things for which people are asked weeks in advance. And we are getting a splendid percentage of acceptances for our big affairs, thanks to my taking the trouble to find out the freest dates in the season. If all goes well, before another month, as soon as it gets round that we are going to give something big in a short time, lots of pretty good people will be holding off from accepting other things in the hope that they're on our list.

Certainly, there's a good deal in going about anything in a systematic way—even a social launching.

## IV

**J**ANUARY 12. We are all sleeping so badly. Even the Senator, whom nothing has ever before kept from his "proper rest," is complaining of wakefulness. Suppers every night either here or elsewhere, the house never quiet until two or three in the morning, all of us up at eight--Cyrus often at seven because he rides a good deal, and the early morning is the only time when any one in Washington in the season can find time to ride. "It's worse than the Wilderness campaign," said Mr.

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Burke, who was a lieutenant in the war. "For now and then, between battles and skirmishes, we did get plenty of sleep. This is a continuous battle day and night, week in and week out, with no let-up for Sundays." And Mrs. Burke—poor "ma!" How hollow-eyed and sagged-cheeked she is getting with the real season less than two weeks old! She says: "I wouldn't treat a dog as I treat myself. I no sooner get to sleep than they wake me. I think the servants just delight to wake me, and I don't blame them, for they're worse off than we are, though I do try to be as easy on them as possible." She doesn't know how many long naps they take while she's dragging herself from place to place.

On our way to the White House to a musicale she fell asleep. As we rolled up to the entrance I had to wake her.

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She came to with a sort of groan and gave a ludicrously pitiful glance at the attendant who was impatiently waiting. "Oh, Lord!" she muttered. "I was dreaming I was in bed, and it ain't so. Instead, I've got to enjoy myself." And then she gave a dreary laugh.

"Ma" Burke dozed through the musicale with a pleasant smile on her large face and her head keeping time to the music. When we spoke to the President and he said he hoped she'd "enjoyed herself," she drawled: "I did that, Mr. President! I only wish it had been longer—I'm 'way behind on sleep." He laughed uproariously. It's the fashion to laugh at everything "ma" says now, because the German ambassador tells every one what a wit she is. And who'd fail to laugh at wit admired by an ambassador?

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Writing about sleep has driven off my fit of wakefulness. I'll only add that Lu Frayne's in town, working day and night to get her husband transferred from San Francisco to the War Department here. I think she'll win out, as she's got two Senators who've been frightening the President by acting queerly lately. It's too funny! When the new Administration came every one was scared because the rumor got round that he was going to give us a repetition of the Cleveland nightmare. But there was nothing in it; the only "pulls" that have failed to work are those that were strong with the last Administration, and there's a whole crop of new pulls. Well, at least, the right sort of people, those who have family and position, are getting their rights to preference as they never did before. We've



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not had many Presidents who knew the right sort of people even when they've been willing to please them, if they could pick them out.

What a changed Washington it is: so many formalities; so many rich people; so many rich men, and men of family and position in office; so many big, fine houses and English and French servants. "Such a stylishness!"

January 14. Our first big dance last night—I mean, formal dance to show our strength. Everybody was here, and the dinner beforehand and the supper afterward and all the mechanical arrangements, so to speak, were perfect. The ball-room was a sight—even "ma" Burke, tired to death, perked up. Almost all the diplomats, except those nobody asks, were here. And I don't think more than thirty people we hadn't in-

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vited ventured to come. We were all so excited that, after the last people had gone, we sat round for nearly an hour. "Ma" Burke took me in her arms and kissed me. "It was your ball," said she. "But then, everything we get credit for is all yours; ain't it, pa?"

"Miss Talltowers has certainly done wonderfully," said "pa" in his cautious, judicial way. Then he seemed ashamed of himself, as if he had been ungenerous, and shook hands with me and added: "Thank you, thank you, Miss Augusta—if you'll permit me the liberty of calling you so."

"I never expected to see as pretty a girl as you bothering to have brains," Mrs. Burke went on to say. And for the first time in weeks and weeks it occurred to me that I did have a personal existence apart from my work—the

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books and bookkeeping, the servants and the housekeeper, who is only one more to fuss with, the tradespeople, and musicians, and singers, and florists, and—it makes my head whirl to try to recall the awful list.

“She won’t be pretty very long,” said Cyrus—he’s taking lessons of his mother and is dropping his fancy-work speech and his “made-in-Germany” manners—“if she don’t stop working day *and* night.”

“Oh, I’m amusing myself,” replied I; but I was reminded how weary I felt, and went away to bed. I neglected to close my sitting-room door, and as I was getting ready for bed in my dressing-room I couldn’t help overhearing a scrap of talk between Cyrus and Mr. Gunton as they went along the hall on the way to their apartments.

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"The Tevises were disgusting—they showed their envy so plainly," Cyrus said. The Tevises are trying hard to do what we're doing in a social way, and though they must have even more money than the Burkes, they're failing at it.

"They'll never get anywhere," Mr. Gunton replied. "You can't collect much of a crowd of nice people just to watch you spend money. You've got to give them a real show. There's where Miss Talltowers comes in."

"She has wonderful taste and originality," said Cyrus. Cyrus!

Mr. Gunton sat out most of the evening with Nadeshda. I suppose she was trying to make Cyrus jealous and also to create trouble between him and his uncle. I've not seen a franker flirtation even in Washington. Whenever I

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chanced to look at them, Mr. Gunton was talking earnestly, and she seemed to be hanging to his words like a thirsty bird to a water-pan. And her queer, subtle face was—well, it was beautiful, and gave me that sense of the wild and fierce and uncanny which makes her both fascinating and terrible. I think Mr. Gunton was infatuated—indeed, I know it. For when I spoke of her to him this morning his eyes seemed to blaze. He drew a long breath. “A wonder-woman!” he said. “I never saw anything like her—in the flesh.” Then he looked a little sheepish, and added: “I mean it, but I laugh at myself, too. There are fools that don’t know they’re fools; then, there are fools that do know it and laugh at themselves as they plan fresh follies—it takes a pretty clever man, Miss Talltowers,

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to make a grand, supreme, rip-roaring ass of himself, doesn't it? At least, I hope so." And with that somewhat mysterious observation he left me abruptly.

When I saw him and Nadeshda together so much at the ball I looked out for Cyrus. He seemed bored, and devoted himself to wallflowers, but on the whole was surprisingly unconcerned, apparently. I had him in sight almost the whole evening. Jim Lafollette, who stuck to my train like a Japanese poodle—I told him so, but he didn't take the hint—said that "the gawk," meaning Cyrus, was hanging round me. "He's moon-struck," said Jim. "So your little put-up job with Jessie seems to be doing nicely, thank you." I wonder why a man assumes that the fact that he loves a woman gives him the



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right to insult her and makes it his duty to do it. And I wonder why we women assent to that sort of impudence. There's another conventionality that ought to be stamped out.

I find I was hasty in my judgment of Cyrus. He's a lot more of a man than he led me to suppose at first. I think he might be licked into shape. He ought to hunt up some widow or married woman older than himself and go to school for a few seasons. But perhaps Nadeshda will do as well.

January 17. There were thirty-two at Senator Burke's "little informal breakfast" yesterday morning, including four of the leading Senators, two members of the Cabinet, an ambassador and three ministers, several generals, half a dozen distinguished strangers, four or five big financial men from New York who are

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here on "private business" with Congress, and not a man who doesn't count for something except that wretched little Framstern, who never misses anything free. And our regular weekly informal dance was an equal success in its way. Senator Ritchie told me it was amazing how Burke had forged to the front in influence and in popularity. "And now that the newspapers have begun to take him up he'll soon be standing out before the whole country." So my little suggestion about the wives and families of correspondents of the big papers, which the Burkes adopted, is bearing fruit. And Mrs. Burke is so genuinely friendly and hospitable that really I've only to suggest her being nice to somebody to set her to work. If she were the least bit of a fraud I'd not dare—she'd only get into trouble.

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January 18. I was breakfasting alone in my sitting-room this morning—I always do an hour or so of work before I touch anything to eat—when Mr. Gunton sent, asking if he might join me. I was glad to have him. His direct way is attractive, and he never talks without saying at least a few things I haven't heard time and again. He was in riding clothes, and as soon as I looked at him I saw he had something on his mind.

“Good ride?” I asked.

He made an impatient gesture—when ever he has anything to say and doesn't know how to begin, the way to start him off is to make some commonplace remark. It acts like a blow that knocks in the head of a full barrel. “I was out with the Baroness Daragane,” he said, “with Nadeshda.”

“And Cyrus?” said I.

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He looked at me in astonishment, then laughed queerly. "Oh, bother!" he exclaimed. "Cyrus doesn't disturb himself about *her*, or she about him—and you know it. Miss Talltowers, I love her—and she loves me."

His tone was convincing. But, after the first shock, I couldn't believe anything so preposterous. And I felt sorry for him—an honest, straight man, inexperienced with women, a fine mixture of gentleness and roughness, at once too much and too little of a gentleman for Nadeshda. If I had dared I should have tried to undeceive him. But I'm not so stupid as ever to try to make a person in love see the truth about the person he or she's in love with. So I simply said: "She is a most fascinating woman."

"You think I'm a fool," he went on,







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as if I hadn't spoken, "and I am a—a blankety-blank fool. Did you see her night before last in that dress of silver spangles like the wonderful skin of some amazing serpent? Did you see her eyes—her hair—the way her arms looked—as if they could wind themselves round a man's neck and choke him to death while her eyes were fooling him into thinking that such a death was greater happiness than to live?" He rolled this all out, then burst into a queer, crazy laugh. "You see, I'm a lunatic!" he said.

"Yes, I see it," I replied cheerfully. "But why do you rave to me?"

"Because I—we—have got to tell somebody, and you're the only person in Washington that I know that's both sensible and experienced, wise enough to understand, beautiful enough to sym-

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pathize, and young enough to encourage.”

That was rather good for a man who had had less than a month's real experience with women, wasn't it? I recognized Nadeshda's handiwork, and admired.

“Miss Talltowers,” he went on, “I am going to make a fool of myself, and she's going to help me.”

“In what particular sort of folly are you about to embark?” said I.

“We're going to marry,” he replied. “We've *got* to marry. I'm afraid of her and she's afraid of me, and we'll either have Heaven or the other place when we do marry—perhaps big doses of each alternately. But we've got to do it.”

“You know it's impossible,” said I. “Under the laws of her country she mayn't marry without the consent of her parents. And they'd never consent.”

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“Certainly they won’t,” said he, “unless you can suggest some way of getting the ambassador and his wife round. We want to give her people a chance.” This with perfect coolness. I began to believe that there must be something in it.

“Does Nadeshda know you aren’t rich?” I asked.

“She knows I have practically nothing. In fact I told her I had less than I have.”

“And you’re sure she wishes to marry you?”

“Ask her.”

He was quiet a while, then raved about her for ten minutes, begged me to do my best thinking, and left me. I felt dazed. I simply couldn’t believe it. And the longer I thought, the more certain I was that she was making some sort of grand play in coquetry, which

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seemed ridiculous enough when I considered what small game Mr. Gunton is from the standpoint of a woman like Nadeshda.

In the afternoon I was in a flower store in Pennsylvania Avenue, and Nadeshda joined me. Her surface was, if anything, cooler and subtler and more cynical than usual. "Send away your cab," said she, "and let me take you in my auto—wherever you wish."

As I was full of curiosity, I accepted instantly. When we were under way she gave me a strange smile—a slow parting of the lips, a slow half-closing and elongation of those Eastern eyes which she inherits from a Russian grandmother, I believe.

"Well, Gus," she said, "has that wild man told you?"

"Yes, and you ought to be ashamed

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of yourself," said I, a little indignantly. "It ain't fair to coax an innocent into *your* sort of game and fleece him of his little all."

She laughed—beautiful white teeth, cruel like her red lips. "It's all true—all he told you," she replied. "All true, on my honor."

Every season Washington's strange mixture of classes and conditions and nations furnishes at least one sensation of some kind or other. But, used as I am to surprises until they have ceased to surprise, this took me quite aback. "Do you love him, Nadeshda—really?"

She quite closed her eyes and said in a strange, slow undertone: "He's my master. The blood in my veins flowed straight from the savage wilderness. And he comes from there, and I don't dare disobey him. I'd do anything he said."

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And when we're married I'll never glance at another man—if he saw me he'd kill me. Ah, you don't understand—you're too—too civilized. Now, I think I should love him better if he'd beat me."

I laughed—it was too ridiculous, especially as she was plainly in earnest. She laughed, too, and added: "I think some day I'll try to make him do it. He's afraid of me, too. And he may well be, for I—well, he belongs to *me*, you see, and I *will* have what's mine!"

Yes, she would—I believe her absolutely. And I must say I like her at last, for all her extremely uncanny way of loving and of liking to be loved. I suppose she's only a primeval woman—I believe the primeval woman fancied the lover who lay in wait and brought her down with a club. I begin to un-



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derstand Robert Gunton, too—that is, the side of his nature she's roused.

“Do you believe us?” she asked.

“Yes, I do,” said I, “and I apologize to you. I've been thinking of you all along as—fascinating, of course, but—mercenary.”

“Ah, but so I am!” she exclaimed. “It breaks my heart to marry this poor man—and of such a vulgar family—even among you funny Americans. But”—she threw up her arms and her shoulders and let them drop in a gesture of tragicomic helplessness—“I must have him; I must be his slave.”

I can't imagine how it's going to end, as her people will never let her marry him. Possibly, if “ma” Burke were to persuade the Senator to settle a large sum on her—but that's wild, even if Gunton would consent. I can imag-

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ine what a roar he'd give if such a thing were proposed. He'll insist on having her on his own terms. As if his insisting would do any good!

The last thing she said to me was: "Do you know when we became engaged? Listen! It was the first time we met—after three hours. After one hour he made me insult the men who came up to claim dances. After two hours he made me say, 'I love you.' After three hours—it was on the way down to my carriage—he asked me to come into the little reception-room by the entrance. And he closed the door and caught me in his arms and kissed me. 'That makes you my wife,' he said in a *dreadful* voice—oh, it was—*magnifique!*—and he said, 'Do you understand?' And"—she smiled ravishingly and nodded her head—"I understood."

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I shan't sleep a wink to-night.

January 20. I wish they hadn't told me. If ever a man loves me and wants to win me he must be—well, perhaps not exactly *that*, but certainly not tame. I'm not a bit like Nadeshda, but I do hate the tame sort. I know what's the matter with me now. Yes, I wish they hadn't told me.

January 21. Robert and Nadeshda have told "ma" Burke. She is—*delighted!* "I never heard of the like," she said to me all in a quiver. "I wish I'd known there were such things. I reckon I'd 'a' made my Tom cut a few capers before he got *me*." And then she laughed until she cried. It certainly was droll to picture "pa" capering in the Robert-Nadeshda fashion.

She went to the embassy and told Nadeshda's sister, Madame l'Ambassa-

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drice. "She let on as if she was just tickled to death," she reported to me a few minutes after she returned. "And when I told her that we—Tom and I—would do handsomely by Nadeshda as soon as they were married she had tears in her eyes. But I don't trust her—nor any other foreigner."

"Not even Nadeshda?"

"Ma" nodded knowingly. "I reckon Bob'll keep her on the chalk," she replied. "He's started right, and in marriage, as in everything else, it's all in the start."

January 22. Nadeshda asked Mrs. Burke to give a big costume ball, but I sat on it hard. "I don't think you want to do that, Mrs. Burke," said I, when she proposed it to me. "If this were New York it wouldn't matter so much, though I don't think really nice

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people with means do that sort of thing there. Here I'm afraid it'd make you very unpopular."

"Do you think so?" said she. "Now, I'd 'a' said it was just the sort of foolishness these people'd like."

"Those who have money would," I replied. "But how about those who haven't? Don't you think that people of large means ought to make it a rule never to cause any expense whatever to those of their friends and acquaintances who haven't means?"

"Don't say another word!" she exclaimed, seeing my point instantly. "Why, it'd be the worst thing in the world. Out home I've always been careful about those kind of things, but on here I don't know the people and am liable to forget how they're circumstanced. They all seem so prosperous

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on the surface. I reckon there's a lot of miserable pinching and squinching when the blinds are down."

Cyrus happened to come in just then, and she told him all about it. He looked at me and grew red and evidently tried to say something—probably something that would have shown how poorly he thought of my cheating them all out of the fun. But he restrained himself and said nothing.

Presently he went out and must have gone straight to his father—probably to remonstrate, though I may wrong him—for, after a few minutes, the Senator came.

"My son has just been telling me," he said to me, "and I agree with you entirely. It would be ruinous politically. As it is, if it hadn't been for you we'd never have been able to keep both the



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official and the fashionable sets in a good humor with us." I never saw him so "flustered" before.

"What are you talking about, pa?" inquired Mrs. Burke.

"About the costume ball you were thinking of giving."

Mrs. Burke smiled. "You'd better go back to your cage," said she. "That's settled and done for long ago."

"Pa" looked more uneasy than his good-natured tone seemed to justify—but, no doubt, he knows when he has put his foot into it. He "faded" from the room. When she heard his study door close "ma" said to me in a complacent voice: "There's nothing like keeping a man always to his side of the fence. When 'pa' began to get rich I saw trouble ahead, for he was showing signs that he was thinking himself right

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smart better than the common run, and that he was including his wife in the common run. I took Mr. Smartie Burke right in hand. And so, with him it's never been 'I' in this family, but 'we.' And keeping it that way has made Tom lots happier than he would 'a' been lording it over me and having no control on his foolishness anywhere."

What a dear, sensible woman she is! He's got good brains, but if he had as good brains as she has he'd get what he's after and doesn't stand a show for.

January 24. The whole town is in a tumult over Robert and Nadeshda. People think she's crazy. When Cyrus said this to me I said: "And I think they are—at least, delirious."

"A divine delirium, though," he replied, much to my astonishment. For he's never shown before that he had so

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much as a spot of that sort of thing in him. But then, I'm beginning to revise my judgment of him in some ways. He is much nearer what his mother said he was than what I thought him. But he's young and crude. I find that he likes—and really appreciates—the same composers and poets and novelists that I do. I can forgive much to any one who realizes what a poet Browning was—when he did write poetry, not when he wrote the stuff for the Browning clubs to fuddle with.

Nadeshda is in the depths—except when Robert is by to hypnotize her. “I was so strong,” she said pathetically to me to-day, “or I thought I was. And now I'm all weakness.” She went on to tell me how horribly they are talking to her at the embassy—for they are determined she shan't marry “that

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nobody with nothing." I always knew her brother-in-law was a snob of the cheapest and narrowest kind—the well-born, well-bred kind. But I had no idea he was a coward. He threatens to have the Emperor make her come home and go into a convent if she doesn't break off the engagement within a week.

We are tremendously popular. Everybody is cultivating us, hoping to find out the real inside of this incredible engagement. And the ambassador has to pretend publicly that he's personally wild with delight and hopes Nadeshda's parents will consent. He knows how unpopular it would make him and his country with America if his opposition and his reason for it were to be known.

January 30. Nadeshda has disappeared. They give out at the embassy that she has left for home to consult

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with her parents. Robert looks like a man who had gone stark mad and was fighting to keep himself from showing it.

We were all at the ball at the French embassy, Mr. and Mrs. Burke dining there. I dined at the White House—a literary affair. The conversation was what you might expect when a lot of people get together to show one another how brilliant they are. The President talked a great deal. He has very positive opinions on literature in all its branches. I was the only person at the table who wasn't familiar with his books. Fortunately, I wasn't cornered. Cyrus came to the ball from Mrs. Dorringer's, where he took in the Duchess d'Emarre. "She has a beautiful face in repose," he said to me as he paused for a moment, "and it's not at all pretty when she talks. So she listened well."

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I was too tired to dance, as were the others. We went home together, all depressed. "It's too ridiculous, this kind of life," said "ma" Burke, "and the most ridiculous part of it is that, now we're hauled into it and set a-going, we'll never get out and be sensible again. It just shows you can get used to anything in this world—except doing as you please. I don't believe anybody was ever satisfied to do that. Did you ever wear a Mother Hubbard? *There's* comfort!"

I can think of nothing but Robert and Nadeshda. Have they some sort of understanding? No—I'm afraid not.

I forgot to put down that Robert made the Senator go to the Secretary of State about Nadeshda's disappearance. The Secretary was sympathetic, but he refused to interfere in any way. What else could he do?



## V

**F**EBRUARY 1. Last night Robert started for Europe. He is going to see Nadeshda's father and mother. I begin to suspect that Nadeshda has really gone abroad and that she has let him know. He is certainly in a very different frame of mind from what he was at first. But he says nothing, hints nothing. Rachel, who has a huge sentimental streak in her, has given Robert a letter to her sister Ellen—she's married to one of the biggest nobles in the empire, Prince Glückstein. Also,

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she has written Ellen a long, long letter, telling her all about Robert, and what a great catch he is. And he *is* a great catch now, for Senator Burke has organized a company to take over his patents and pay him a big sum for them—it'll sound fabulously big to such people as the Daraganes. For even where these foreigners are very rich and have miles on miles of land and large incomes from it, they're not used to the kind of fortunes we have—the sums in cash, or in property that's easily sold. And the Daraganes have only rank; their estates are quite insignificant, Von Slovatsky says.

“They might as well consent first as last,” said Mrs. Burke to me just after Robert left; “for Bob always gets what he wants. He never lets go. Cyrus is the same way—he spent eleven months

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in the mountains once, and like to 'a' starved and froze and died of fever, just because he'd made up his mind not to come back without a grizzly. That's why the President took to him."

And then she told me that it was Cyrus who thought out the scheme for making Robert financially eligible and put it in such form that Robert consented. That convicted me of injustice again, for I had been suspecting him of being secretly pleased at Robert's setback—he certainly hasn't looked in the least sorry for him. But it may be that Robert has told him more than he's told us. He certainly couldn't have found a closer-mouthed person. As his mother says, "The grave's a blabmouth beside him when it comes to keeping secrets. And most men are *such* gossips."

Mrs. Fortescue came in to tea this

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afternoon. Mrs. Burke was out calling, and I received her—or, rather, she caught me, for I detest her. Just as she was going Cyrus popped in, and she nailed him before he could pop out. She thought it was a good chance to put in a few strong strokes for her daughter. “Of course, it’s very pretty and romantic about Nadeshda,” she said, “and in this case I’m sure no one with a spark of heart could object. Still, the principle is bad. I don’t think young girls who are properly brought up are so impulsive and imprudent. I often say to my husband that I think it’s perfectly frightful the way girls—young girls—go about in Washington. They’re out before they should be even thinking of leaving the nursery, and go round practically unchaperoned. It’s so demoralizing.”

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"But how are they to compete with the young married women if they don't?" said Cyrus, because he was evidently expected to say something.

"I don't think a man—a *sensible* man—looking for a wife for his home and a mother for his children would want a girl who'd been 'competing' in Washington society," she answered. "I don't at all approve the way American girls are brought up, anyway—it's entirely too free and destructive of the innocence that is a woman's chief charm. And as for turning the young girls loose in Washington!" Mrs. Fortescue threw up her hands. "It's simply madness. Most of the men are foreigners, accustomed to meet only married women in society. They don't know how to take a young girl, and they don't understand this American freedom. The wonder to me

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is that we don't have a regular cataclysm every season. Now, I never permit Mildred to go *anywhere* without me or some other *real* chaperon. And I know that her mind is like a fresh rose-leaf."

Cyrus and I exchanged a covert glance of amusement. Mildred Fortescue is a very nice, sweet girl, but—well, she does fool her mother scandalously.

"I should think a man would positively be *afraid* to marry the ordinary Washington society girl who knows everything that she shouldn't and nothing that she should."

"Perhaps that's what makes them so irresistible," said Cyrus.

"Irresistible to flirt with and to *flaner* about with," said Mrs. Fortescue reproachfully. "But I'm sure you wouldn't marry one of them, Mr. Burke."

"Oh, I don't know," he answered.



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“No doubt it does spoil a good many, being so free and associating with experienced men who’ve been brought up in a very different way. But”—he hesitated and blushed uncomfortably—“it seems to me that those who do come through all right are about the best anywhere. If a girl has any really bad qualities anywhere in her they come out here. And if a Washington girl does marry a man—for himself—and I rather think they make marriages of the heart more than most girls in the same sort of society in other cities—don’t you, Miss Talltowers?”

“It may be so,” I replied. “But probably they’re much like girls—and men—everywhere. They make marriages of the heart if they get the chance. And if nobody happens along in the marrying mood who is able to appeal to their

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hearts, they select the most eligible among the agreeable ones they can get. I think many a girl has been branded as mercenary when in reality the rich man she chose was neither more nor less agreeable than the poor man she rejected, and she only had choice among men she didn't especially care about."

Mrs. Fortescue looked disgusted. Cyrus showed that he agreed with me. "What I was going to say," he went on, "was, that if a Washington girl does choose a man, after she has known lots of men and has come to prefer him, she's not likely—at least, not *so* likely—to repent her bargain. And," he said, getting quite warmed up by his subject, "if a man looks forward to his wife's going about in society, as he must if he lives in a certain way, I think he's wise to select some one who has learned

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something of the world—how to conduct herself, how to control herself, how to fill the rôle Fate has assigned her.”

“Oh, of course, a girl should be well-bred,” said Mrs. Fortescue, as sourly as her sort of woman can speak to a bachelor with prospects.

Cyrus said no more, and soon she was off. He stood at the window watching her carriage drive away. He turned abruptly—I was at the little desk, writing a note.

“You can’t imagine,” he said with quick energy, “how I loathe the average girl brought up in conventional, exclusive society in America.”

“Really?” said I, not stopping my writing—though I don’t mind confessing that I was more interested in his views than I cared to let him see.

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“Yes, really,” he replied ironically. Then he went on in his former tone: “Poor things, they can’t help having silly mothers with the idea of aping the European upper classes, and with hardly a notion of those upper classes beyond—well, such notions as are got in novels written by snobs for snobs. And these unfortunate girls are afraid of a genuine emotion—by Jove, I doubt if they even have the germs of genuine emotion. All that sort of thing has been weeded out of them. Little dry minds, little dry hearts—so ‘proper,’ so—vulgar!”

“Not in Washington,” said I.

“No, not so many in Washington; though more and more all the time. Miss Talltowers, will you marry me?”

It was just like that—no warning, not a touch of sentiment toward me. I almost dropped my pen. But I man-

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aged to hide myself pretty well. I simply went on with my note, finished it, sealed and addressed it, and rang for a servant. Then I went and stood by the fire. The servant came; I gave him the note and went into my office. I had been in there perhaps ten minutes when he came, looking shy and sheepish. He stumbled over a low chair and had a ridiculous time saving himself from falling. When he finally had himself straightened up and shaken together he stood with his hands behind him, and his face red, and his eyes down, and with his mouth fixed in that foolish little way as if he were about to speak with his fancy-work way of handling his words.

“Do you wish something?” I asked.

“Only—only my answer,” said he humbly.

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Would you believe it, I actually hesitated.

"I want a woman that doesn't like me for my money, and that at the same time would know how to act and would be—be sensible. I've had you in mind ever since you explained your system for—for"—he smiled faintly—"exploiting mother and father. And mother has been talking in the same way of late. She says we can't afford to let you get out of the family. That's all, I guess—all you'd have patience to hear."

"Then you were making me a serious business proposition?" said I.

"Well, you might call it that," he admitted, as if he weren't altogether satisfied with my way of summing it up.

"I'm much obliged, but it doesn't attract me," I said.

He gave a kind of hopeless gesture.



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"I've put it all wrong," said he. "I always *say* things wrong. But—I—I believe I *do* things better." And he gave me a look that I liked. It was such a quaint mingling of such a nice man with such a nice boy.

"I understand perfectly," said I, and I can't tell how much I hated to hurt him—he did so remind me of dear old "ma" Burke. "But—please don't discuss it. I couldn't consider the matter—possibly."

"You won't leave!" he exclaimed. "I assure you I'll not annoy you. You must admit, Miss Talltowers, that I haven't tried to thrust myself on you in the past. And—really, mother and father couldn't get on at all without you."

"Certainly, I shan't leave—why should I?" said I. "I'm very well satisfied with my position."

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"Thank you," he said with an awkward bow, and he left me alone.

Of course, I couldn't possibly marry him. But I suppose a woman's vanity compels her to take a more favorable view of any man after she's found out that he wishes to marry her. Anyhow, I find I don't dislike him at all as I thought I did. I couldn't help being amused at myself the next day. I was driving with Jessie, and she was giving me her usual sermon on the advantages of the Burke alliance—if I could by chance scheme it through. "You're very pretty, Gus," she said. "In fact you're beautiful at times. Men do like height when it goes with your sort of a—a willowy figure. Your eyes alone—if you would only *use* them—would catch him. And the Burkes would be—well, they might object a little at first

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because you've given them a position that has no doubt swollen their heads—but they'd yield gracefully. And although you are very attractive and are always having men in love with you, you've simply got to make up your mind soon. Look how many such nice, good-looking girls have been crowded aside by the young ones. Men are crazy about freshness, no matter what they pretend. Yes, you must decide, dear. And—I couldn't *endure* poor Carteret when I married him."

Carteret is a miserable specimen, and Jessie's ways keep him in a dazed state—like an old hen sitting on a limb and turning her head round and round to keep watch on a fox that's racing in a circle underneath. Fox doesn't seem exactly to fit Jessie, but sometimes I suspect—however—

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“But,” Jessie was going on, “I knew mama was my best friend. And when she said, ‘Six months after marriage you’ll be quite used to him and won’t in the least mind, and you’ll be so glad you married somebody who was quiet and good,’ I married him. And I love him dearly, Gus, and we make each other *so* happy!”

I laughed—Jessie doesn’t mind; she don’t understand what laughter means in most people. I was thinking of what Rachel told me the other day. She said to Carteret, “It must be great fun wondering what Jessie will do next.” And he looked at her in his dumb way and said: “What she’ll do *next*? Lord, I ain’t caught up with *that*. I’m just about six weeks behind on her record all the time.”

But to go back to Jessie’s talk to me,

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she went on: "And Mr. Burke's not so dreadfully unattractive, dear. Of course, he's far from handsome, and—well, he's the son of Mr. and Mrs. Burke—but though they're quite common and all that—"

I found myself furiously angry. "I don't think he's at all bad-looking," I said, pretending to be judicial. "He's big and strong and sensible; and what more does a woman usually ask for? And I don't at all agree with you about his father and mother, either—especially his mother. No, Jessie, dear, my objections aren't yours at all. I'm sure you wouldn't understand them, so let's not talk about it."

February 3. Yesterday Mrs. Tevis sent for me. That was a good deal of an impertinence, but I'm getting very sensible about impertinences. She lives

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in grand style in a big, new house in K Street—it, like everything about her, is “regardless of expense.” The Tevises have been making the most desperate efforts to “break in” last season and this, and as Washington is, up to a certain point, very easy for strangers with money, they’ve gone pretty far. I suppose Washington’s like every other capital—the people are so used to all sorts of queer strangers and everything is so restless and changeful that no one minds adding to his list of acquaintances any person who offers entertainment and isn’t too appalling. And the Tevises have been spending money like water.

It’s queer how people can go everywhere that anybody goes and can seem to be “right in it,” yet not be in it at all. That’s the way it is with the Tevises. They are at every big affair in town



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—White House, embassies, private houses. But they're never invited to the smaller, more or less informal things. And when they do appear at a ball or anywhere they're treated with formal politeness. They know there's something wrong, but they can't for the life of them see what it is. And that's not strange, for who can see the line that's instinctively drawn between social sheep and social goats in the flock that's apparently all mixed up? Everybody knows the sheep on sight; everybody knows the goats. And all act accordingly without anything being said.

Well, Mr. and Mrs. Tevis are goats. Why? Anybody could see it after talking to either of them for five minutes; yet who could say why? It isn't because they're snobs—lots of sheep are nauseating snobs. It isn't because they're very

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badly self-made—I defy anybody to produce a goat that can touch Willie Catesby or Rennie Tucker, yet each of them has ancestors by the score. It isn't because they're new—the Burkes are new, yet Mrs. Burke has at least a dozen intimate acquaintances of the right sort. It isn't because they're ostentatious and boastful about wealth and prices—there are scores of sheep who make the same sort of absurd exhibition of vulgarity. I can't place it. They're just goats, and they know it, and they feel it; and when you go to their house they suggest a restaurant keeper welcoming his customers; and when they come to your house they suggest Cook's tourists roaming in the private apartments of a palace, smiling apologetically at every one and wondering whether they're not about to be told to "step lively."

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Mrs. Tevis received me very grandly and graciously, though dreadfully nervous withal, lest I should be seeing that she was "throwing a bluff" and should put her in her place.

"I've requested you to come, my dear Miss Talltowers," she began, after she had bunglingly served tea from the newest and costliest and most elaborate tea-set I ever saw, "because I had a little matter of business to talk over with you and felt that we could talk more freely here."

"I must be back at half-past five," said I, by way of urging her on to the point.

"That will be quite time enough," said she. "We can have our little conversation quite nicely, and you will be in ample time for your duties."

I wonder what sort of dialect she

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*thinks* in. It certainly can't be more irritating than the one she translates her thoughts into before speaking them. The dialect she inflicts on people sounds as if it were from a Complete Conversationalist, got up by an old maid who had been teaching school for forty years.

"I have decided to take a secretary for next season," she went on. "Not that I need any such direction as the Burkes. Fortunately, Mr. Tevis and I have had a large social experience on both sides of the Atlantic and have always moved with the best people. But just a secretary—to attend to my onerous correspondence and arrangements for entertaining. The duties would be light, but we should be willing to pay a larger salary than the position would really justify—that is, we should be will-

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ing to pay it, you know, to a *lady* such as you are."

I bowed.

"We should treat you with all delicacy and appreciation of the fact that your misfortunes have compelled you to take a—a—position—which—which—"

"You are very kind, Mrs. Tevis," said I.

"And we realized that in all probability the Burkes would have no further use for your services at the end of this season, as you have been most successful with them."

I winced. For the first time the "practical" view of what I've been doing for the Burkes stared me in the face—that is, the view which such people as the Tevises, perhaps many of my friends, took of it. So I was being regarded, spoken of, discussed, as a person

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who had been bought by the Burkes to get them in with certain people. And it was assumed that, having got what they wanted, they would dismiss me and so cut off a superfluous expense! I was somewhat astonished at myself for not having seen my position in this light before.

And I suddenly realized why I hadn't—because the Burkes were really nice people, because I hadn't been their employee but their friend. What if I had started my career as a dependent of Mrs. Tevis'! I shivered. And when the Burkes should need me no longer—why, the probabilities were that I should have to seek employment from just such dreadful people as these—upstarts eager to jam themselves in, vulgarians whom icy manners and forbidding looks only influence to fiercer efforts to associate with those



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who don't wish to associate with them.

Mrs. Tevis interrupted my dismal thoughts with a cough, intended to be polite. "What—what—compensation would you expect, may I ask?"

"What do such positions pay?" I said, and my voice sounded harsh to me. I wished to know what value was usually put upon such services.

"Would—say—twenty-five dollars a week be—meet with your views?" she asked, and her tone was that of a person performing an act of astounding generosity.

"Oh, dear me, no," said I, with the kind of sweetness that coats a pill of gall. "I couldn't think of trying to get you in for any such sum as that."

I saw that the gall had bit through the sugar-coat.

"Would you object to giving me some

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idea of what the Burkes pay?" she asked, with the taste puckering her mouth.

"I should," I replied, rising. "Anyhow, I don't care to undertake the job. Thank you so much for your generosity and kindness, Mrs. Tevis." I nodded—I'm afraid it was a nod intended to "put her in her place." "Good-by." And I smiled and got myself out of the room before she recovered.

I *wish* I hadn't seen her. I hate the truth—it's always unpleasant.

February 5. Mrs. Burke had thirty-one invitations to-day, eleven of them for her and Mr. Burke. Seven were invitations to little affairs which Mrs. Tevis would give—well, perhaps five dollars apiece—to get to. How ridiculous for her to economize in the one way in which liberality is most necessary. Here they are spending probably

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a hundred thousand dollars a season in hopeless attempts to do that which they would hesitate to pay me six hundred dollars for doing. And this when they think I could accomplish it. But could I? I guess not. To win out as I have with the Burkes you've got to have the right sort of material to work on, and it must be workable. Vulgar people would be ashamed to put themselves in any one's hands as completely as Mrs. Burke put herself in my hands.

Oh, I'm sick—sick, sick of it! I'm ashamed to look “ma” Burke in the face, because I think such mean things about them all when I'm in bed and blue.

February 6. I decline all the invitations that come for me personally. I sit in my “office” and pretend to be fussing with my books—they give me the horrors! And I was so proud of them and

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of my plans to make my little enterprise a success.

February 7. Mrs. Burke came in this afternoon and came round my desk and kissed me. "What is it, dear? What's the matter?" she said. "Won't you tell *me*? Why, I feel as if you were my daughter. I did have a daughter. She came first. Tom was so disappointed. But I was glad. A son belongs to both his parents, and, when he's grown up, to his wife. But a daughter—she would 'a' belonged to me always. And she had to up and die just when she was about to make up her mind to talk."

I put my face down in my arms on the desk.

"Tired, dear?" said "ma"—she's a born "ma." "Of course, that's it. You're clean pegged out, working and worry-

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ing. You must put it all away and rest.” And she sat down by me.

All of a sudden—I couldn’t help it—I put my head on her great, big bosom and burst out crying. “Oh, I’m so *bad!*” I said. “And you’re so *good!*”

She patted me and kissed me on top of my head. “What pretty, soft hair you have, dear,” she said, “and what a lot of it! My! My! I don’t see how anybody that looks like you do could ever be unhappy a minute. You don’t know what it means to be born homely and fat and to have to work hard just to make people not object to having you about.” And she went on talking in that way until I was presently laughing, still against that great, big bosom with the great, big heart beating under it. When I felt that it would be a downright imposition to stay there any longer

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I straightened up. I felt quite cheerful.

“Was there something worrying you?” she asked.

I blushed and hung my head. “Yes, but I can’t tell you,” said I. And I couldn’t—could I? Besides, there somehow doesn’t seem to be much of anything in all my brooding. What a nasty beast that Mrs. Tevis is!

February 12. Mrs. Burke and I went to a reception at the Secretary of State’s this afternoon. We saw Nadeshda’s sister in the distance—that’s where we’ve always seen her and the ambassador and the whole embassy staff ever since the “bust-up,” except funny little De Pleyev. He, being of a mediatized family, does not need to disturb himself about ambassadorial frowns or smiles. It’s curious what a strong resemblance there is between a foreigner of royal blood and



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a straightaway American gentleman. But, as I was about to write, this afternoon the distance between us and Madamel'Ambassadrice slowly lessened, and when she was quite close to us she gave us a dazzling smile apiece and said to Mrs. Burke: "My dear Madame Burke, you are looking most charming. You must come to us to tea. To-morrow? Do say yes—we've missed you so. My poor back—it almost shuts me out of the world." And she passed on—probably didn't wish to risk the chance that "ma's" puzzled look might give place to an expression of some kind of anger and that she might make one of those frank speeches she's famous for.

"Well, did you *ever!*" exclaimed "ma" when the Countess was out of earshot.

I said warningly: "Everybody's seen

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it and is watching you." And it was true. The whole crowd in those perfume-steeped rooms was gaping, and the news had spread so quickly that a throng was pushing in from the tea-room, some of them still chewing.

Afterward we discussed it, and could come to but one conclusion—that the Robert-Nadeshda crisis had passed. But—do the Daraganes think that Nadeshda is safe from Robert, or have they decided to take him in? Certainly, *something* decisive has happened. And if Robert had anything to do with it it must have been stirring enough to make the Daraganes use the cable—how else could Nadeshda's sister have got her cue so soon?

February 15. No news whatever of Robert and Nadeshda. Yesterday the ambassadress came here to tea and said

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to Mrs. Burke that she had had a letter from Nadeshda in which she sent us all her love—"especially your dear, splendid, big Monsieur Cyrus." Mr. and Mrs. Burke are to dine at the embassy five weeks from to-night—the ambassadress insisted on Mrs. Burke's giving her first free evening to her, and that was it.

"I reckon we'll have to go," said "ma" after her departure, and while the odor of her frightfully-powerful heliotrope scent was still heavy in the room, "though I doubt if I'll be alive by then. Sometimes it seems to me I've just got to knock off and take a clean week in bed. I thought I'd never think of drugs to keep me going, as so many women advise. But I see I'm getting round to it. And I'm getting *that* fat in the body and *that* lean in the face! Did you ever

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see the like? I must 'a' lost three pounds off my face. And the skin's hanging there waiting for it to come back, instead of shrinking. I'm glad my Tom never looks at me. I know to a certainty he ain't looked at me in twenty years. Husbands and wives don't waste much time looking at each other, and I guess it's a good, safe plan."

Mrs. Burke does look badly. I must take better care of her. Cyrus looks badly, too. I haven't seen him to talk to since he made his "strictly business" proposition. I suppose he wants me to realize that he isn't one of the pestering kind. I'm sorry he takes it that way, as I'd have liked to be friends with him. He quarreled so beautifully when we didn't agree. It's a great satisfaction to have some one at hand who both agrees and quarrels in a satisfactory way. But

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I don't dare make any advances to him. He might misunderstand.

I've just been laughing—at his cowlick. It *is* such an obstinate little swirl. And when he looks serious it looks so funnily frisky, and when he smiles it looks so fiercely serious and disapproving. Yesterday I hurried suddenly into the little room just off the ball-room, thinking it was empty. But Cyrus and his mother were there, and he was tickling her, and he looked so fond of her, and she looked so delighted. I slipped away without their seeing me.

February 16. We gave our second big ball last night with a dinner for sixty before. It was just half-past five this morning when the last couple came sneaking out from the alcove off the little room beyond the conservatory and, we pretending not to see them, scuttled

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away without saying good night. Major-General Cutler danced with Mrs. Burke in the opening quadrille, and Mr. Burke danced with the British ambassadress—the ambassador is ill. I had Jim on my hands most of the evening—though I was flirting desperately with little D'Estourelle, he hung to me with a maddening husbandish air of proprietorship. I don't see how I ever endured him, much less thought of marrying him. Cyrus Burke is a king beside him. Excuse me from men who think the fact that they've done a woman the honor of loving her gives them a property right to her. Mrs. Burke was the belle of the ball. She had a crowd of men round her chair all evening, laughing at everything she said.

February 17. A cable from Robert Gunton at Hamburg this morning—



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just "Arrive Washington about March 3." That was all—worse than nothing. It is Lent, but there's no let up for us. We only get rid of the kind of entertainments that cost us the least trouble to plan and give, and we have to arrange more of the kind that have to be done carefully. Anybody can give a dance, but it takes skill to give a successful dinner.

February 19. Nadeshda's sister said to-day, quite casually, to Jessie: "Deshda's coming back, and we're so glad. The trip has done her *so* much good—in every way." Now, whatever did *that* mean?

## VI

**F**EBRUARY 26. No news of Robert and Nadeshda. Have been glancing through this diary. How conceited I am, taking credit to myself for everything. I wonder if I am vainer than most people, or does everybody make the same ridiculous discovery about himself when he takes himself off his guard? What an imperfect record this is of our launching. But then, if I had made it perfect I should have had to go into so many wearisome details, not to speak of my having so

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little time. Still, it would have been interesting to read some day, when I shall have forgotten the little steps—for although we've had in all only a month before the season and five weeks between New Year's and Ash Wednesday, so much has been crowded into that time. It's amazing what one can accomplish if one uses every moment to a single purpose. And I've not only used my own time, but Robert's and Jessie's and the time of their and my friends, and that of Nadeshda and a dozen other people. They and I all worked together to make my enterprise a success—and Jim and the Senator, and "ma" Burke was a great help after the first few weeks. Yes, and I mustn't forget Cyrus. He has made himself astonishingly popular. I see now that he showed a better side to every one than he did to me.

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Perhaps I can guess why. I wonder if he really cares or did care—for me, or was it just “ma” trying to get me into the family, and he willing to do anything she asked of him?

But to go back to my vanity—I see that Jessie, Rachel and Cyrus were the real cause of my success. Jessie and Rachel alone could make anybody, who wasn't positively awful, a go. Then Nadeshda, bent on marrying Cyrus at first, was a big help—and every mama with a marriageable daughter was hot on Cyrus' trail. So it's easy to make an infallible recipe for getting into society: First, wealth; second, willingness to act on competent advice; third, get a “secretary” who knows society and has intimate friends in its most exclusive set, and who also knows how to arrange entertainments; fourth, have a

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marriageable son, if possible, or, failing that, a daughter, or, failing that, a near relative who will be well dowered; fifth, organize the campaign thoroughly and pay particular attention to getting yourself liked by the few people who really count. You can't bribe them; you can't drive them; you must *amuse* them. The more leisure people have the harder it is to amuse them.

Looking back, I can see that "ma" Burke passed her social crisis when, on January 5, Mrs. Gaether asked her to assist at her reception. For Mrs. Gaether was the first social power who took "ma" up simply and solely because she liked her.

We have spent a great deal of money, but not half what the Tevises have spent. But our money counted because it was incidental. Mere money won't carry any

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one very far in Washington—I don't believe it will anywhere, except, perhaps, in New York.

I ought to have kept some sort of record of what we've done from day to day—I mean, more detailed than my books. However, I'll just put in our last full day before Lent, as far as I can recall it. No, I'll only write out what Mrs. Burke alone did that day:

7:30 to 10. She and I, in her room, went over the arrangements for the ball we were giving in the evening.

10 to 12:30. She went to see half a dozen people about various social matters, besides doing a great deal of shopping.

12:30 to 1:45. More worrying consultation with me, then dressing for luncheon.

1:45 to 3:45. A long and tiresome luncheon at one of the embassies.



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3:45 to 6:30. More than twenty calls and teas—a succession of exhausting rushes and struggles.

6:30 to 7:15. In the drawing-room here, with a lot of people coming and going.

7:15 to 8. Dressing for dinner—a frightful rush.

8 to 8:30. Receiving the dinner guests.

8:30 to 10:45. The dinner.

10:45 to midnight. Receiving the guests for the dance—on her feet all the time.

Midnight to 6 in the morning. Sitting, but incessantly busy.

6 to 9. In bed.

9. A new and crowded day.

This has been a short season, but I don't think it was the shortness, crowding much into a few days, that made

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the pressure so great. It's simply that year by year Washington becomes socially worse and worse. As I looked round at that last ball of ours I pitied the people who were nerving themselves up to trying to enjoy themselves.

Almost every one was, and looked, worn out. Here and there the unnatural brightness of eyes or cheeks showed that somebody—usually a young person—had been driven to some sort of stimulant to enable him or her to hold the pace. Quick to laugh; quick to frown and bite the lips in almost uncontrollable anger. Nerves on edge, flesh quivering.

Yet, what is one to do? To be "in it" one must go all the time; not to go all the time, not to accept all the principal invitations, is to make enemies right and left. Besides, who that gets

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into the hysterical state which the Washington season induces can be content to sit quietly at home when on every side there are alluring opportunities to enjoy?

No wonder we see less and less of the men of importance. No wonder the "sons of somebodies" and the young men of the embassies and legations and departments, most of them amiable enough, but all just about as near nothing as you would naturally expect, are the best the women can get to their houses.

It is foolish; it is frightful. But it is somehow fascinating, and it gives us women the chance to go the same reckless American gait that the men go in their business and professions.

I am utterly worn out. I might be asleep at this moment. Yet I'm sitting here alone, too feverish for hope of rest.

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And I can see lights in Cyrus' apartment and in Senator Burke's sitting-room, and I don't doubt poor "ma" is tossing miserably in a vain attempt to get the sleep that used to come unasked and stay until it was fought off.

It is Lent, and the season is supposed to be over. But the rush is still on, and other things which crowd and jam in more than fill up the vacant space left by big, formal parties. It seems to me that there is even as much dancing as there was two weeks ago. The only difference is that it isn't formally arranged for beforehand.

I'd like to "shut off steam"—indeed, it seems to me that I must if "ma" Burke is not to be sacrificed. But how can we? People expect us to entertain, and we must go out to their affairs also. The only escape would be to fly, and

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we can't do that so long as Congress is sitting.

February 27. Robert and Nadeshda are both in town, he with us, she at the embassy. They are to be married the twelfth of April. The engagement is to be announced to-morrow. I've never seen any one more demure than Nadeshda, or happier. I suspect she's going to settle down into the most domestic of women. Indeed, I know it—for, as she says, she's afraid of him, obeys him as a dog its master, and the domestic side of her is the only one he'll tolerate. I've always heard that her sort of woman is the tamest, once it's under control. She has will but no continuity. He has a stronger will and his purposes are unalterable. So he'll continue to dominate her.

"Ma" Burke asked him, "How did you make out with her folks?"

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He smiled, then laughed.

"I don't know—exactly," he said. "They couldn't talk my language nor I theirs. So it was all done through an interpreter. And he was Mrs. Dean's brother-in-law, Prince Glückstein, and a regular trump. He saw them half a dozen times before I did. When I saw them everything was lovely. They left me alone with her after twenty minutes. Finally it was agreed that we should come back on the same steamer, her brother accompanying her."

"But why on earth didn't you cable us?" she demanded.

"I did," he replied.

"But you didn't tell us anything," she returned.

"I told you all there was to tell," he replied.



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"You only said you were coming," she objected.

"Well," he answered, looking somewhat surprised, "I knew you'd know I wouldn't come without her."

I'm glad he didn't get it into his head to "take after" me. A woman stands no more chance with a man like that than a rabbit with a greyhound.

February 29. "Ma" Burke is dreadfully ill—has been for two days. The doctors have got several large Latin names for it, but the plain truth is that she has broken down under the strain she seemed to be bearing so placidly. She didn't give up until she was absolutely unable to lift herself out of bed. "I knew it was coming," she said, "but I thought I had spirit enough to put it off till I had more time."

It wasn't until she did give up that

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Her face really showed how badly off she was. I was sitting by her bed when "pa" Burke and Cyrus came in. I couldn't bear to look at them, yet I couldn't keep my eyes off their faces. Both got deadly white at sight of her, and "pa" rushed from the room after a moment or two. The doctor had cautioned him against alarming her by showing any signs of grief. But "pa" couldn't stand it. He went to his study, and the housekeeper told me he cried like a baby. Cyrus stayed, and I couldn't help admiring the way he put on cheerfulness.

"I'll be all right in a few days," said "ma." "It wasn't what I did; it was what I et. I'm such a fool that I can't let things that look good go by. And I went from house to house, munching away, cake here, candy there, choco-

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late yonder, besides lunches and dinners and suppers. I et in and I et out. Now, I reckon I've got to settle the bill. Thank the Lord I don't have to do it standing up."

Cyrus and I went away from her room together. "If she wasn't so good," said he, more to himself than to me, "I'd not be so—so uncertain."

"I feel that I'm to blame," said I bitterly. "It was I that gave her all those things to do."

He was silent, and his silence frightened me. I had felt that I was partly to blame. His silence made me feel that I was wholly to blame, and that he thought so.

"If I could only undo it," I said, in what little voice I could muster.

"If you only could," he muttered.

I was utterly crushed. Every bit of

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my courage fled, and—but what's the use of trying to describe it? It was as if I had tried to murder her and had come to my senses and was realizing what I'd done.

I suppose I must have shown what was in my mind, for, all of a sudden, with a sort of sob or groan, he put his arms round me—such a strong yet such a gentle clasp! “Don't look like that, dear!” he pleaded. “Forgive me—it was cowardly, what I said—and not true. We're all to blame—you the least. Haven't I seen, day after day, how you've done everything you could to spare her—how you've worn yourself out?”

He let me go as suddenly as he had seized me.

“I'm not fit to be called a man!” he exclaimed. “Just because I loved you, and was always thinking of you, and

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watching you, and worrying about you, I neglected to think of mother. If I'd given her a single thought I'd have known long ago that she was ill."

Just then Mrs. Burke's maid called me—she was only a few yards away, and must have seen everything. I hurried back to the room we had quitted a few minutes before. "You must cheer up those two big, foolish men, child," she said. "You all think I'm going to pass over, but I'm not. You won't get rid of me for many a year. And I rely on you to prevent them from going all to pieces."

She paused and looked at me wistfully, as if she longed to say something but was afraid she had no right to. I said: "What is it—ma?"

Her face brightened. "Come, kiss me," she murmured. "Thank you for

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saying that. We're very different in lots of ways, being raised so different. But hearts have a way of finding each other, haven't they?"

I nodded.

"What I wanted to say was about—Cyrus," she went on. "My Cyrus told me that he don't see how he could get along without you, no way, and I advised him to talk to you about it, because I knew it'd relieve his mind and because it'd set you to looking at him in a different way. Anyhow, it's always a good plan to ask for what you want. And he did—and he told me you wouldn't hear to him. Don't think I'm trying to persuade you. All I meant to say is that—"

She stopped and smiled, a bright shadow of that old, broad, beaming smile of hers.



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"I'd do anything for you!" I exclaimed, on impulse.

"I'm afraid that wouldn't suit Cyrus," she drawled, good humoredly. "He'd be mad as the Old Scratch if he knew what I was up to now. Well—do the best you can. But don't do anything unless it's for his sake. Only—just look him over again. There's a lot to Cyrus besides his cowlick. And he's been so dead in love with you ever since he first saw you that he's been making a perfect fool of himself every time he looked at you or spoke to you. Sometimes, when I've seen the way he's acted up, like a farmhand waltzing in cowhides, I've felt like taking him over my knees and laying it on good and hard."

I was laughing so that I couldn't answer—the reaction from the fear that she might be very, very ill had made me

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hysterical. I could still see that she was sick, extremely sick, but I realized that our love for her had just put us into a panic.

“Do the best you can, dear,” she ended. “And everything—all the entertaining here and the going out—must be kept up just the same as if I was being dragged about down stairs instead of lying up here resting.”

She insisted on this, and would not be content until she had my promise. “And don’t forget to cheer pa and Cyrus up. I never was sick before—not a day. That’s why they take on so.”

I think I have been succeeding in cheering them up. And everything is going forward as before—except, of course, that we’ve cut out every engagement we possibly could.

It’s amazing how many friends “ma”

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Burke has made in such a short time. Ever since the news of her illness got out, the front door has been opening and shutting all day long. And those of the callers that I've seen have shown a real interest. This has made me have a better opinion of human nature than I had thought I could have. I suppose half the seeming heartlessness in this world is suspicion and a sort of miserly dread lest one should give kindly feeling without getting any of it in return. But "ma" Burke, who never bothers her head for an instant about whether people like her, and gets all her pleasure out of liking them, makes friends by the score.

I'm in a queer state of mind about Cyrus.

March 3. "Ma" Burke was brought down to the drawing-room for tea

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to-day. She held a regular levee. Those that came early spread it round, and by six o'clock they were pouring in. She looked extremely well, and gloriously happy. All she had needed was complete rest and sleep—and less to eat. “After this,” she said, “I’m not going to eat more than four or five meals a day. At my age a woman can’t stand the strain of ten and twelve—my record was sixteen—counting two teas as one meal.” For an hour there was hilarious chattering in English, French, German, Italian, Russian, and mixtures of all five. I think the thing that most fascinates Mrs. Burke about Washington is the many languages spoken. She looks at me in an awed way when I trot out my three in quick succession. And she regards the women as superhuman who speak so many languages so fluently that

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they drift from one to the other without being quite sure what they're speaking. There certainly were enough going on at once to-day, and a good many of the women smoked.

But to return to Mrs. Burke. When only a few of those we know best were left this afternoon, and Nadeshda was smoking, Jessie, who is always so tactful, said to Robert: "I'm glad to see that you don't object to Nadeshda's smoking."

Mrs. Burke laughed. "Why should he?" said she. "Why, when we were children ma and pa used to sit on opposite sides of the chimney, smoking their pipes. And ma dipped, too, when it wasn't convenient for her to have her pipe."

"Do *you* smoke, Mrs. Burke?" asked Jessie, with wide, serious eyes. "I never saw you."

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"No, I don't," she confessed. "Tom used to hate the smell of it, so I never got into the habit."

Nadeshda was tremendously amused by what Mrs. Burke had said about pipes. "I didn't know it was considered nice for a lady to smoke in America until recently," said she. "And pipes! How eccentric! Mama smokes cigars—one after dinner, but I never heard of a lady smoking a pipe."

"Ma wasn't a lady—what *you'd* call a lady," replied Mrs. Burke. "She was just a plain woman. She didn't smoke because she thought it was fashionable, but because she thought it was comfortable. As soon as we children got a little older we used to be terribly ashamed of it—but *she* kept right on. And now it's come in style."

"Not *pipes*," said Jessie.



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"Not *yet*," said "ma," with a smile.

When I thought they had all gone, and I was writing in my "office" for a few minutes before going up to dress, Nadeshda came in to me. "Ma" Burke used often to say that Nadeshda's eyes were "full of the Old Scratch," but certainly they were not at that moment. She was giving me a glimpse of that side which, as Browning, I think, says, even the meanest creature has and shows only to the person he or she loves. Not that Nadeshda loves me, but she has that side turned outermost nowadays whenever she hasn't the veil drawn completely over her real self.

"My dear," she said in French, "what is it? Why these little smiles all afternoon whenever you forgot where you were?"

I couldn't help blushing. "I don't

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quite know, myself," I replied—and it was so.

"Oh, you cold, cold, *cold* Americans!"—then she paused and gave me one of her strange smiles, with her eyes elongated and her lips just parted—"I mean, you American women."

"Cold, because we don't set ourselves on fire?" I inquired.

"But yes," she answered, "yourselves, and the men, too. Never mind. I shall not peep into your little secret." She laughed. "It always chills me to grope round in one of your cold American women's hearts."

"I wish you could tell me what my secret is—and that's the plain truth," said I.

She laughed again, shrugged her shoulders, pinched my cheek, nodded her head until her big plumed hat was

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all in a quiver and was shaking out volumes of the strong, heavy perfume she uses. And without saying anything more she went away.

March 4. Cyrus and I sat next each other at dinner at the Secretary of War's to-night. It has happened several times this winter, as the precedence is often very difficult to arrange at small dinners. Old Alex Bartlett took me in, and as he's stone deaf and a monstrous eater I was free.

Cyrus had taken in a silent little girl who has just come out. She had exhausted her little line of prearranged conversation before the fish was taken away. So Cyrus talked to me.

"She's grateful for my letting her alone," said he when I tried to turn him back to his duty. "Besides, if I didn't meet you out once in a while

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you'd forget me entirely. And I don't want that, if I can avoid it."

"Thank you," said I, for lack of anything else to say, and with not the remotest intention of irritating him. But he flushed scarlet, and frowned.

"You always and deliberately misconstrue everything I say," said he bitterly. "I know I'm unfortunate in trying to express myself to you, but why do you never attribute to me anything but the worst intentions?"

"And why should you assume that every careless reply I make is a carefully thought out attack on you?" I retorted. "Don't you think your vanity makes you morbid?"

"You know perfectly well that it isn't vanity that makes me think you especially dislike me," said he.

"But I don't," I answered. "I con-

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fess I did at first, but not since I've come to know you better."

"Why did you dislike me at first?" he asked. "You began on me with almost the first moment of our acquaintance."

"That's true—I did," I admitted. "I had a reason for it—didn't Nadeshda tell you what it was?"

He looked frightened.

"Be frank, if you want me to be frank," said I.

"I never for an instant believed what she said," he replied abjectly. Then after a warning look from me, he added —"*Really* believed it, I mean."

"And what was it that you didn't really believe?" I demanded.

He looked at me boldly. "Nadeshda and one or two others told me that you and your friends had arranged it for me

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to marry you. But, of course, I knew it wasn't so."

"But it was so," I replied. "You were one of the considerations that determined my friends in trying to get me my place."

"Well—and why didn't you take me when I finally fell into the trap?"

I let him see I was laughing at him.

He scowled—his cowlick did look so funny that I longed to pull it. "Simply couldn't stand me—not even for the sake of what I brought," he said. And then he gave me a straight, searching look. "I wonder why I don't hate you," he went on. "I wonder why I am such an ass as to care for you. Yes—even if I knew you didn't care for me, still I'd want you. Can a man make a more degrading confession than that?"

"But why?" said I, very careful not



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to let him see how eagerly I longed to hear him say *the* words again. "Why should you want—me?"

He gave a very unpleasant laugh. "If you think I'm going to sit here and exhibit my feelings for your amusement you're going to be disappointed. It's none of your business *why*. Certainly not because I find anything sweet or amiable or even kind in you."

"That's rude," said I.

"It was intended to be," said he.

"Please—let's not quarrel now," said I coldly. "It gives me the headache to quarrel during dinner."

And he answered between his set teeth, "To quarrel with you—anywhere—gives me—the heartache, Gus."

I had no answer for that, nor should I have had the voice to utter it if I had had it. And then Mr. Bartlett be-

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gan prosing to me about the Greeley-Grant campaign. And when the men came to join the women after dinner Cyrus went away almost immediately.

I am *so* happy to-night.

March 5. Cyrus came to me in my office to-day—as I had expected. But instead of looking woebegone and abject, he was radiant. He shut the door behind him. “*You*—guilty of cowardice,” he began. “It isn’t strange that I never suspected it.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, not putting down my pen.

He came over and took it out of my fingers, then he took my fingers and kissed them, one by one. I was so astounded—and something else—that I made not the slightest resistance. “It’s useless for you to cry out,” he said, “for I’ve got the outer door well guarded.”





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I started up aflame with indignation.  
“Who—whom—” I began.

“Ma,” he replied.

“Oh!” I exclaimed, looking round with a wild idea of making a dart for liberty.

“Ma,” he repeated, “and it’s not of the slightest use for you to try to side-step. You’re cornered.” He had both my hands now and was looking at me at arm’s length. “So you are afraid to marry me for fear people—your friends—will say that—I walked right into the trap?”

I hung my head and couldn’t keep from trembling, I was so ashamed.

“And if it wasn’t for that you’d accept my ‘proposition’—now—wouldn’t you?”

“I would not,” I replied, wrenching myself away with an effort that put my

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hair topsy-turvy—it always does try to come down if I make a sudden movement, and I washed it only yesterday.

“What gorgeous hair you have!” he said. “Sometimes I’ve caught a glimpse of it just as I was entering a room—and I’ve had to retreat and compose myself to make a fresh try.”

“You’ve been talking to your mother!” I exclaimed—I’d been casting about for an explanation of all this sudden shrewdness of his in ways feminine.

“I have,” said he. “It’s as important to her as to me that you don’t escape.”

“And she told you that I was in love with *you!*” I tried to put a little—not too much—scorn into the “you.”

“She did,” he answered. “Do you deny that it’s true?”

“I have told you I would never accept your ‘proposition,’” was my answer.



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“So you did,” said he. “Then you mean that you’re going to sacrifice my mother’s happiness and mine, simply because you’re afraid of being accused of mercenary motives?”

“I shall never accept your ‘proposition,’” I repeated, with a faint smile that was a plain hint.

He came very close to me and looked down into my face. “What do you mean by that?” he demanded. And then he must have remembered what his proposition was—a strictly business arrangement on both sides. For, with a sort of gasp of relief, he took me in his arms. I do love the combination of strength and tenderness in a man. He had looked and talked and been so strong up to that instant. Then he was *so* tender—I could hardly keep back the tears.

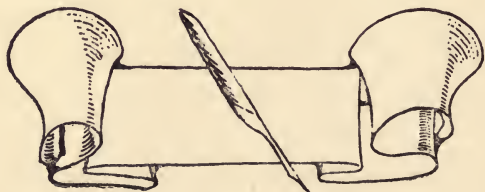
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"Wouldn't you like me to tell mother?" he asked. "She's just in the next room—and—"

I nodded and said, "I never should have caught you if it hadn't been for her."

"Nor I you," said he. And he put me in a chair and opened the door. I somehow couldn't look up, though I knew she was there.

"I don't know whether to laugh or cry," said "ma" Burke. "So I guess I'll just do both." And then she seated herself and was as good as her word.















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