TALES OF THE CLOISTER

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Tales of the Cloister

by

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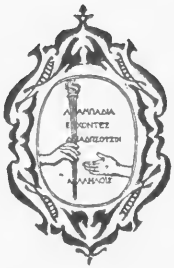
"Tales of the City Room"

Illustrated



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TO

SISTER CLARE

WITH THE FRIENDSHIP

OF TWENTY YEARS

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From Out the Old Life

ISTER GEORGE and Sister Edgar were walking in the convent garden. They had been there less than five minutes, but already, from the little balconies that hung on the gray walls of the old building, wistful eyes watched them. The pupils had always found an inspiration in the fact that the two most popular nuns at St. Mary's were ideal friends and took a daily stroll together in the twilight. May Iverson had written a poem on the subject, and another pupil with artistic tendencies had done the best work of her school life in a sketch which showed the Sisters sitting side by side on the rustic seat in their favorite arbor. Of late this school-girl admiration and interest had been intensified by the foreboding that Sister Edgar could enjoy these evening outings very little longer.

The pupils found the setting for the striking figures as attractive as the young nuns themselves. On three sides spread the wings of the

vast building; on the fourth rose a wall of masonry, so high and thick as to be an effective barrier between the quiet cloister and the great public thoroughfare on the other side of it. In the hollow square thus formed nestled the garden, as quaint in its old-time picturesqueness as if it had been lifted out of mediæval Spain and transplanted in another century to the soil of this new country.

Above the garden stretched the blue sky, now slowly fading into the gray of early evening. In the willows that lined the edges of the tiny lake, sleepy birds answered each other, their drowsy calls mingling with the rustle of the leaves and the cool splash of the fountain. The smooth garden paths that radiated from the lake were fringed with old-fashioned flowers: roses, honeysuckle, and mignonette, with here and there a bed of scarlet geranium that flaunted its aggressiveness brazenly in the rich sobriety of surrounding tones. At one end of the garden a chapel, roughly hewn from solid rock, was covered with a luxuriant growth of moss and vines; near it towered a rustic cross, its base a mass of passion flowers, its arms holding aloft the crucified Christ.

There were infinite sweetness and aloofness in the spot, so remote from all suggestion of the outside world. Within a stone's throw

was life at its greatest pressure—life with its twentieth-century strain and sin and suffering. Here were quiet and peace. There was repose in the dim chapel, in the long, silent corridors, in the rooms where the inmates worked and prayed, in the vaults below these, where many of their predecessors slept their last sleep. The reflection of this peace was in the serene faces of the nuns who strolled along the walks, their slight figures outlined by their severely simple black habits, and their heads innocently erect under their flowing veils. The night air was full of the murmur of their wonderful voices, as characteristic of the cloister as its atmosphere.

The straining young eyes on the balconies singled out their two favorites from the groups below, and watched them as the light grew dim. No pupil had ever been invited to join them in this evening promenade, but, as May Iverson hopefully remarked, there was always a chance that unselfish devotion would yet have its reward. Miss Iverson was seventeen and sentimental. She expected to be graduated at the end of the year. In the mean time she wrote notes to Sister George concerning the bitterness of existence, and put roses on her desk in the class-room, and laid bare her heart to her whenever that dignified woman could be induced to inspect the view, which was not often.

Perhaps it was appreciation of the vivid interest with which Miss Iverson's eyes were following her that made Sister George draw her friend into the shade of a little arbor which was screened by trees and blossoming trumpet-vines. She watched the other seat herself on the bench, and rest her head wearily against the lattice-work behind her. She noticed with a sudden throb the transparent delicacy of the upturned face, brought out so sharply against the background of the long black veil. Sister Edgar's eyes had an unnatural brightness, and two red spots burned in her cheeks, but her features, outlined in the oval of white linen under the sombre veil, had not yet lost the beauty whose fame had gone beyond the convent walls.

"Who is that nun at St. Mary's who Dr. Fletcher says has the face of an angel, the figure of Diana, and the voice of Calvé?" Miss Iverson had once been asked during an evening reception at her father's home. She had given the information promptly, and then indiscreetly repeated the incident at school, with the result that the eminent specialist, Dr. Edward Fletcher, was no longer called to the convent as a consulting physician in important cases. His last visit had been to Sister Edgar, and he had looked grave after his examination of

her lungs. He expressed regret that he was now forbidden the convent and the privilege of helping her.

"It is only the first stage," he remarked to his assistant, more seriously than he usually spoke. "I might have been able to do something to arrest it if the brood hadn't taken fright at the simple admiration of an old man."

"Give her plenty of fresh air," he had said to the convent infirmarian, who stood beside the patient during his examination. "Keep her in the garden as much as possible—and at all events keep her out of the school-room."

Sister Edgar had not been kept out of the school-room, for the reason that she had gently protested against remaining away from it. She found teaching the girls—so many of whom she loved—a distraction from haunting thoughts which were as new as they were terrible. In the shadow of death, life had suddenly grown attractive. She did not analyze this, even to herself, and she gave no outward sign of lack of peace; but Sister George, who had known and loved her in the world as well as in the convent, knew that she was not as indifferent as she seemed.

Sister George stood looking down at her now, an expression of austere affection in her beautiful eyes. For a moment she could not speak,

so sudden and complete was her recognition of the stamp of death on the face before her. The invalid had wearily closed her eyes; she would not have made even this concession to fatigue and despondency in the presence of any other but the one who saw it, and the incident, trivial in itself, was full of meaning. Sister George turned her back for a moment, ostensibly to pull a flaunting crimson flower from its stem, but really to control the tell-tale quiver of her lips. The atmosphere of self-restraint in which they lived had so schooled the inmates of the cloister that even these two women, bound by ties of years of affection and common interest, rarely dropped the veil of reserve even for each other. The invalid's first remark showed that she did not intend to drop it now.

"How drowsy this air makes one, Sister," she said, softly "The place and the hour are so restful that I could go to sleep. Sometimes I think of the garden at night when I am wakeful," she added, a little wistfully: "then it seems as if I could sleep if I were within hearing of the fountain and the rustle of the leaves."

"Have your nights been restless ones?" asked the other at once. It was the first knowledge she had of the fact. Her friend hesitated a moment and looked up with a smile which was almost an appeal. She was about to

speak when the soft tones of an organ rolled through the open chapel windows, in a few chords, struck by a strong hand. Then a voice, deep, rich, and powerful, floated out to them in the notes of an "Ave Maria" they both knew and loved. The invalid's face paled as she listened, and her drooping form straightened.

"Did you know that?" she asked, suddenly. "Did you know that Sister Raymond is to take my place in the choir?"

"Only for a little while," Sister George said, hastily. "Only until you grow well and strong."

"Until I grow well and strong," the other repeated, slowly. There was something almost bitter in her voice and in the curve of her lips. "I shall never be well and strong again, my dear." She stumbled a little in this first confidence over the last two words, so seldom used between them.

"I shall never be well," she repeated, quietly. "You know it; they all know it, and I know it, too, although they seem to think I do not. That is why they have put Sister Raymond in my place. My voice is gone. I shall never sing again."

The voice that had been so beautiful broke a little. Sister George did not speak. Sister Edgar waited a moment for the words that

failed to come, and understood the feeling under her friend's silence. The sympathy so deep, though unexpressed, wrung her soul to an outburst that startled the repressed woman before her.

"I have known the truth for a long time," she hurried on, speaking, even in these moments of agitation, with the preciseness of the cloister inmates. "I am afraid I have rebelled against it. I am still young, and my work is not done. Life is sweet and peaceful here. I have you and my girls and my music. Perhaps it is because this illness has come upon me so suddenly that I am unprepared. I do not wish to give you up."

"You will have us all beyond," murmured the other, faintly. It was what the Reverend Mother had always said to the young nuns who were starting on their last journey. She had seen so many—so pathetically many of them—go. Sister George, always calm and self-contained, had been with a number at the end. She recalled what it had been to say the simple, the conventional things to them when there had been none of this terrible pulling at the heart-strings. Now her lips refused to shape the words, not through lack of trust, but because the human feeling of coming loss was too strong.

"Yes, I know, but not now," murmured the invalid, drooping dejectedly forward in her place. "Not for a long time, perhaps; and I must make the journey all alone. That thought is constantly with me. I lie awake and think at night—not of the mere going—certainly not of the peace and happiness beyond, in which we all believe so thoroughly. That is the horrible phase of it. I cannot get my imagination past the mere act of dying—the suffocation, and the picture of the lonely little cemetery at Palm Grove. It is all wrong, I know. Do not tell me that; tell me how to bear it better."

The woman's nerves, worn by illness, recoiled at the thought. She trembled violently and caught her friend's hand in both her own.

"Margaret," she cried, brokenly, "how shall I gain strength and courage? I do not want to die."

The use of the worldly name, for the first time in all these years, was like a cry out of the old life. The heart of the other woman, which, perhaps, had come to beat a little mechanically under the black habit of the cloistered nun, responded to it as if it were. She sat down and drew the trembling form into her arms, comforting it as a mother might comfort a child crying out in the night. For a moment they remained so without speaking,

clinging silently to each other while the twilight deepened around them and the air throbbed with the rich music of the voice that sang alone in the chapel. Then the training of years prevailed, and the younger sister withdrew quietly from the other's encircling arms.

"You must forgive me," she said. "I have been foolishly nervous, and I am afraid I have depressed you. I must pray for more strength, and you will pray with me, I am sure."

She rose as she spoke, and smiled with almost her old serenity into the other's eyes. She was the calmer of the two, for Sister George, supported by the friendly lattice-work, had let her head droop forward and was shedding the first tears that had fallen from her eyes in years.

"If we could both be called together," she said. "We left the outside world"—she hesitated, the words she would have said beating against her lips. Her friend silenced her gently.

"These problems are too large for you and me," she said. "We must leave them to Him."

She lifted the vines that formed an arch above them, and held them while the tall figure of Sister George passed under. The convent bell was ringing as they walked on, and they saw the shadowy forms of their associ-

ates flitting toward the wing of the building occupied by those who had taken their final vows. The two followed the black-garbed procession into the main corridor of the left wing, and, separating from them there, passed slowly to the chapel. Here the voice of the unseen singer, practising softly in the organ-loft, seemed an audible expression of the silent prayer that filled their hearts as they knelt down together.

In the beginning Miss Iverson had remarked prophetically that the coming of Professor Varick to St. Mary's boded no good to that institution.

"Look at all these susceptible girls," said that sophisticated young person, whose life had been hopelessly blighted at sixteen by a love affair which had kept her awake for three successive nights. "It's eminently proper and highly educative to have the dear old priests instruct us, but to inject a young and handsome man into the curriculum is quite another matter. Professor Varick isn't a day over thirty-eight, notwithstanding those lovely gray locks on his temples, and he's very handsome. Did you ever see such eyes? Then that air of gentle melancholy, as if he had a past! Within a month every girl in the institution will be in love with him. Mark my words."

Miss Iverson had made so many reckless predictions with the same air of prophecy that her associates had ceased to regard them as infallible. It was not easy for one to fall in love with a reserved young disciplinarian whom one saw for an hour only twice a week, and who filled that hour with stern exactions in the line of elocutionary drill. Then, too, there always was some girl on the platform with him, being trained in the art of graceful gesture. The spectacle of this suffering young person, whose gestures were usually made at right angles, was sufficiently exhilarating to distract the mind from sentimental reflections. In addition to these excellent reasons, those idols, Sister George and Sister Edgar, were present, sitting primly on opposite sides of the large exhibition hall in which the lessons were given, each in charge of her respective class and each alertly alive to the conduct and manner of every young person under her charge. So the hearts at St. Mary's continued to beat with their accustomed regularity, and the coming of Professor Varick wrought no harm.

If the young man was conscious of the presence of the two sentinels in the background, he showed no recognition of the fact beyond including them in the grave bow made to the assembled class when he entered and departed.

To them, however, he was a new type, which they studied with interest and on which they had even commented to one another on several occasions. The grace and ease of manner of this man of the world appealed to the dignified nuns; his magnetism and good looks influenced them also, although perhaps they did not realize this.

Of late neither had spoken of him, Sister George remaining silent from the sense that she had exhausted the possibilities of the subject in those early talks, and Sister Edgar following her example because her interest had become deeper than she cared to express. To the dying woman the magnificent strength of the man had appealed from the first with a force not to be understood except by those who stand on the brink of their graves and watch the vigorous pass before them.

"How well he is," she had thought the first time the athletic figure of the professor had faced his class on the rostrum. The idea and the reflections to which it gave rise banished temporarily another thought of a haunting resemblance which had presented itself so vaguely as to have at first no definite place in her consciousness. By some strange association of ideas she recalled the time, "out in the world" and many years ago, when her brother, Lieu-

tenant Reynolds, of the regular army, had carried her a mile, over rough country roads, and with her broken foot in a hastily improvised sling, to the farm-house nearest the scene of the accident in which she had received the injury.

It had been no easy task, for she was then an athletic young person of sixteen. "Jack," the brother whom she had always loved and from whom she had parted with the one great wrench attendant upon her separation from the world, had been enshrined in her regard as the strongest and manliest as well as the most admirable of men. Why she should now recall him so suddenly and vividly, especially in connection with that distant, almost forgotten mishap, was inexplicable. Perhaps it was because Professor Varick seemed so strong. "He could have done it, too," she thought, looking at the sinewy figure on the platform, "and he would have done it as well and as gently. He looks so kind," her semi-conscious reflections had run on, "and very refined. The expression of his eyes is charming. So is his smile. Surely, surely, somewhere I have seen it before."

Her thoughts recurred to the teasing likeness as the lessons went on, and then drifted away to that former life of hers, sometimes as

remote as if it had been lived on another planet and in another age, but now suddenly and vibratingly real again. She and Jack had been happy together in those old days. She was living them over once more one warm spring afternoon while a lesson by Professor Varick was in progress. The murmur of the girls' voices was in her ears, the scent of the convent garden came through the open windows, but all this seemed vague and dream-like. The real things were that pleasant barytone voice, so full of elusive memories, and that face, coming back to her at first dimly, then clearly out of the mist of years.

Sister Edgar suddenly leaned back in her chair. Of course it was Jack's old friend, Arthur Varick, whose very name she had forgotten, but now recalled with a rush of other memories. He was much changed in the fourteen years since they had last met, but he was unmistakably Arthur Varick. His face was older, which was only natural, and very worn and sad, which seemed unnatural when she recalled the blithe youth she had known. She could almost hear again the boyish laughter that had so often come to her ears, in those old days, from the haunts where he and Jack were to be found around her father's home.

She fancied that few heard him laugh like that now. She wondered why.

Of course he would not remember her, or, if he did, he would not recognize her in this silent nun, wrapped in the dignified trappings of her order. She had not seen her own face for many years, save in the absurdly tiny mirror before which the sisters arranged their veils; but she knew that she was much changed. He would not see in this delicate woman with the hectic flush on her cheeks the Diana he had known in the old days, and whom he had petted and loved as a younger sister. It was very pleasant to see him again and to get through him this vivid aftermath of life at home. She smiled contentedly as she dwelt on it. That was why she had so suddenly recalled the forgotten incident of Jack's feat. Arthur had been camping with him on that occasion.

The memory banished that night the legion of ghouls that had been haunting her pillow so long. She and Jack and Arthur Varick lived over the past until she fell asleep and went back to the scenes of her childhood in the first untroubled slumber she had had for a longer time than she dared confess even to herself.

In a period of depression she had found a new friend, or, rather, an old friend had come

back into her life when she most needed him. His return affected her more than she realized. In the intervals between his lessons she lived on this revivified interest which was daily growing deeper. During the actual lessons she looked at him with dreamy abstraction, in which he was vividly present. It was not that she was so deeply interested in him personally, she told herself. It was merely that he was a link between the then and now—his presence was almost a message from her brother. If he had been any other, she thought, it would have been the same.

And then, suddenly, the atmosphere of the convent seemed to stifle her, and her heart cried out for freedom—for a day, at least, away from those brick walls and under the blue sky. Sometimes, in such a mood, she saw her old friend, unconscious of her very existence, pass her chair on his way "back to the world," as she told herself whimsically. Once or twice a half-wish came to her to know more of his interests and his life there. She wondered if that explained her longing to return to her home and her own people—but she did not admit that it did. She listened to the artless prattle of May Iverson, hoping that talkative young person would bring up the subject of the professor of elocution and *belles-lettres.*

Miss Iverson, she knew, had several times met him socially. But the girl did not mention him, and the nun reproached herself, with a deepening of the color in her cheeks, for having hoped that she might do so. The incident had in it a warning which she would have heeded had she been stronger or happier. As it was, she asked herself a little vaguely if she were drifting from the letter or the spirit of her vows, if this interest in the outer world was too deep, if she were losing the religious faith that had been strong enough to bring her where she was. She told herself that she was not. She taught and prayed and did the work allotted to her, and waited for the end. Her thoughts and memories were her own. If she chose to retire into the past during these last months of life, who could question her right to do so?

The change that had come upon her had not been unobserved. The Mother Superior noticed and commented upon her added brightness.

"Do you think that Sister Edgar is improving?" she had asked Sister George, with kindly interest. "Perhaps, after all, she may not be as ill as we feared. Possibly we may even hope to keep her with us, if our Father wills. I have had some thought," she went on, "of

sending her to the convent at Adola, among the pines. Please speak to her about this, and tell me if it would please her."

When the subject of the removal to the pines was broached to Sister Edgar she was so evidently unwilling to go that the idea was at once abandoned. Sister George was not surprised. She had not loved this friend for years without knowing her almost as well as she knew herself. There was something in the other's heart from which she was now shut out. She did not know what it was, but she knew that it existed, and she was content to accept silently and patiently Sister Edgar's reserve.

June came, and the invalid was obliged to abandon her class work. For weeks she had dragged herself from her cell to the class-room and from the class-room back to the cell at the close of the day, with no strength for further effort. Then she had been absent a day, a few days, and again a week, coming back each time with the cheerful assurance that she was "better," given in a voice whose sweetness was almost gone. The pupils followed it all with comprehending eyes. Even the younger ones had seen it many times before.

"They all go that way," said May Iverson, resentfully, to a classmate. "That awful ceme-

tery is full of women under thirty." The tears filled her sharp eyes as she spoke.

Sister Edgar was saying much the same thing at the same moment to Sister George, who sat beside the bed in the infirmary, to which she had at last been moved.

"I am not the first," she said, "and I shall not be the last. I am quite resigned—but we will not talk about it. Tell me of to-day's lesson. Did Miss Iverson improve in her recitation?" And Sister George outlined the incidents of the afternoon, wondering a little at the invalid's interest and her many questions.

"Sister Raymond admires Professor Varick's appearance very much," she added, smilingly. "You know she is taking your place, in charge of the second division. She thinks he has a noble face."

"He has, indeed," breathed the other, unconsciously putting so much of her soul into the words that her friend looked at her with a question in her eyes. The sick woman saw and answered it.

"I have not told you that he was brother John's old friend," she said, simply, "and that I knew him well many years ago. The summer you were in Europe we camped in the Adirondacks. He was there with our family as Jack's guest. When I broke my ankle, and

Jack carried me to Mr. Walton's, he came, too, so full of sympathy and so anxious to help—though there was nothing he could do. He was always so kind. I remember now a thousand things that he did which did not impress me then, for I was only sixteen."

She stopped, for breathing was growing difficult. The other looked at her with a growing comprehension. Much was suddenly explained—so much more than was told in the halting words.

"Then, when he came here," Sister Edgar continued, resolutely, "at first I did not know him, and he has never recognized me. When I remembered him all the past came back, and the old friendship with it, and somehow his being here has helped me through these last hard months. He is so strong and so good! I know he would do anything for me that he could if he knew, but I am glad he does not. He used to call me his little sister, and pretend to tell me all his secrets and ask my advice. I was so proud of it, and I felt so grown up! I believe I advised him freely." She stopped and laughed a little. "And he is unhappy, too. I do not know why, but I feel it. Perhaps that is what has drawn me to him—the thought of his trouble. It seemed as if he ought to tell me about it, as he used to

do when he really had no cares and pretended to have them. And now there is real need of sympathy, I am sure. I have felt—oh, I have felt as if he were a little child that I longed to comfort."

Her voice broke in a paroxysm of coughing, but she went on steadily as soon as it had ceased.

"Now that I am no longer in the class-room, I want you to tell me about him—what he says and how he looks. At times he seems brighter than at others, and smiles the boyish smile I remember so well. I never forgot that, even though I did not care for him." She went on almost fiercely. "Now I wish to know as much of him as I can. That is why I am asking you to tell me of him. And you will do it, Margaret—you will do this for me, whatever you may think." She sat up with sudden strength, and pulled the other's hands away from the face which was hidden in them.

"You are so good," she said, softly. "You wish to say so much, and you say nothing. It is better. Let me talk now, for I cannot talk much longer."

She held her friend's hand against her heart, stroking it absently as she went on.

"It will all be over very soon, and I am reconciled. Do you remember our talk in the ar-

bor that day? How afraid I was to die! That has passed. Afterwards I had other moods, almost as hard to bear. I longed to get away from here. I wanted to die out in the world, with my own people around me. I wanted to be where I was a part of life—as he is. And then I remembered that even if I were in the world I should have to leave it, and that here I am apart from it, and in either case there could be no real life for me. The end that is approaching is the best solution of the problem, of course, for it is our Lord's solution. Do not think I have lost my faith; it was never stronger than now. What would life mean to me—a nun whose final vows have been taken and who had let anything come between them and her? This tragedy is not of my own making; I did not seek it. It came when I was weakest, and I had not the strength to fight against it. I did try to fight when I knew what it was," she added, wearily, "but I could not. Everything came together—my illness, my despair, my sudden longing to go back to the outside, natural life. And then he came. And I remembered him. And the old friendly feeling returned—unconsciously at first—"

The words, which had for some moments been almost inaudible, died on her lips. She was so weak she could hardly swallow the

draught her friend hastened to give her. Then she lay quiet for a long time, and finally seemed to fall asleep.

Sister George was not obliged to decide the difficult question that lay in this last request. Three days later, when Professor Varick was giving his next lesson, she sat in her place with a stricken face that awed even the liveliest members of her class and carried consternation to the hearts of the more emotional pupils.

"Sister Edgar is worse, I know she is," wrote May Iverson in a pencilled note to a friend near her. "If she were not, Sister George would never look like that."

The message went the length of the great hall, carrying in its wake a settled gloom of which only Professor Varick remained unconscious. He was in an unusually light-hearted mood. Half a dozen times the nun who sat looking at him and thinking of her friend dying without her in the distant infirmary, saw on his lips the brilliant smile Sister Edgar had mentioned during their last long talk together.

May Iverson was going half-heartedly through a recitation, when the slow tolling of the convent bell filled the hall. It was the ominous bell whose deep notes spoke of the passing of another soul. Sister George started to her feet as if the sound had been a blow, and

then sank heavily upon her knees. For the first time the pupils saw the serene nun swept out of her dignified calm. They knew she had forgotten where she was, for she counted the strokes, with her face turned towards the convent chapel, and tears falling unchecked on the white linen on her bosom.

A thrill passed over the assembly. Several of the girls began to cry softly. May Iverson turned an appealing face to the professor. He was listening with surprise to the unusual interruption which had so strangely affected his class.

"I am going to ask you to dismiss us for today, Professor Varick," she said, brokenly. "That bell is telling us that our dearest, our very dearest teacher, Sister Edgar, has just died. You know her," she added, "the nun with the lovely face, who always sat down there at the left, where Sister Raymond is sitting now."

Professor Varick showed no annoyance over the abrupt ending of the lesson. His face was grave and his manner very gentle and sympathetic, as he looked down at the wet eyes upturned to his.

"Certainly, I will dismiss the class," he said, kindly. "I think I remember having seen the sister at her post. She sat at the

right side, did she not—or was that the one you call Sister George? Yes? Then I am afraid I do not recall her, after all."

He paused a moment as he was passing Sister George. She had regarded him with a singular look in her wet eyes.

"I am sorry to hear of the loss to the convent," he said, a little formally. "Yet I am Catholic enough to know how you all regard this. In fact, perhaps it is an odd sense of sympathy that makes me feel for the sister. We poor worldlings have to lean on human love for our support. Sister Edgar was spared any of the pain which comes from that being deferred or in jeopardy. It is her spiritual marriage, this death. That is why I feel such a singular sympathy—almost felicitation," he added, with a slow smile of very winning sweetness.

If he had meant Sister George to ask the reason for such enigmatic words, she did not. She marked the sparkle in his eye and the unconscious way in which he straightened himself. Inexperienced as she was, there was no mistaking his meaning nor the buoyant content of the man to whom the Only Woman had at last said "yes."

She lowered her eyes and bowed gravely. He accepted her dismissal of him with equal gravity, bowed, and went his happy way.

The Surrender of Sister Philomene

The Surrender of Sister Philomene

THE whole matter dated from the arrival of the baby.

He was brought to the convent in the form of a large and feverishly active bundle, which, being unrolled, revealed to the eyes of the Mother Superior and her secretary a small boy.

He was about two years old, and had blue eyes, yellow curls, and a constant and radiant smile which disclosed six absurdly small teeth. He had also very fat legs, a large dimple in each cheek, and a manner which was familiar to the last degree.

Having thrown aside his wrappings and pushed them out of the way with the toe of his buttoned boot, he calmly walked over to the Mother Superior, climbed into her lap, laid his yellow head against the stiff linen that covered her bosom, and, with a smile of sweet content, dropped into a restful slumber.

This incident led to his acceptance as an inmate of the institution. Notwithstanding the pathos of his position, so young an orphan, and the fact that the mother who had just died had herself been brought up in the convent, the nuns had decided that they could not take him even for the few months during which his guardian wished him to remain with them. They had intended to convey this information to the trained nurse who had brought him, but the ease and assurance of his manner, his little black dress, and his air of having reached home after a weary journey, checked the words upon their lips. The Mother Superior hastily deposited her unusual burden on a hair-cloth "sofa" that stood in the corner, but she was observed to turn a fascinated gaze upon it even while she retired to the other end of the reception-room for a hurried consultation with her secretary.

The nurse glanced from the sleeping child to the two black-veiled heads so close together, and smiled to herself. She knew full well the fascinations of Frederick Addison Malcolm, aged two. Had he not turned the battery of them upon her since his mother's death, and was not her heart even now wrung at the prospect of parting from him? Of course the nuns would keep him. Who could help it? She

rose to her feet as the Superior came towards her.

"You may leave him," said the nun, gravely—"for a time, at least; we can do no less in memory of his mother."

The nurse kissed the sleeping baby and went away with tears dimming her brown eyes.

The secretary bent and lifted the sturdy figure in her thin arms. It was no light weight, and the effort she made woke Frederick Addison Malcolm from his slumbers. He turned one sleepy blue eye on her, then the other, and a look of supreme discontent settled upon his brow. He sat up with a ruffled countenance, and beat his small heels upon the secretary's stomach. She put him hastily on the floor.

"Fweddie tan yalk hisself," he remarked, with dignity. He toddled over to the door where the Superior stood surveying him with interest and awe. He looked up into her face and bobbed his head with ingratiating friendliness.

"Fweddie tan yalk," he repeated. Then he slid his dimpled hand into her soft cool one, buried his curls in her black robe, and thought better of his proposition. "But Fweddie would like oo to cawwy him," he added, with a little gurgle of delight over the happy thought.

A slow pink flush stole up to the nun's forehead. She glanced uneasily at her secretary and down at the small autocrat whose hands held her a prisoner. He removed them and lifted his arms to her with a shade of surprise in his blue eyes. Never before had any one held out against them. The baby's little world for a moment reeled under his feet. Then the dignified woman above him bent and lifted him gently.

He tucked his head under her chin, and his dimpled hand stole up and rested against her cheek. She laid her head against his for an instant, and an inarticulate sound passed her lips—the sound every baby knows and every true woman makes when she feels a little body nestling against her heart. The two left the room together, and the secretary followed them down the long dim corridor to the refectory, her eyes twinkling behind her glasses.

In exactly one week Frederick Addison Malcolm was the head of the institution. He decided no questions and he signed no papers, but he gave orders freely to high and low alike, and there was in the land the sound of footsteps hastening to do his bidding. The nuns were not at all sure that this was right. They had many theories on the training of children, and were anxious to demonstrate them on the

"'YOU MAY LEAVE HIM,' SAID THE NUN, GENTLY"

first, and possibly the last subject admitted to their care. But what were theories in the presence of this remarkable infant? One seraphic smile from Frederick Addison upset every resolution and left the soft-hearted Sisters helpless in his presence.

They knew he should not be carried from place to place; he was large enough to walk. Yet when he sat down in a flower-bed or in the middle of the chapel and announced that he was tired, it was obviously impossible to leave him there. At the suggestion of Sister Philomene they tried this plan once or twice. But as young Frederick had immediately fallen into a pleasant slumber, the experiment could hardly be called a success, especially as half the nuns in the institution were unable to concentrate their minds on anything else while it was in progress.

Another point which greatly disturbed them was his insistence on being rocked to sleep. This was a highly improper performance. They all knew that, and each could have quoted excellent authority for the conviction. The thing to do, without question, was to put the child in his crib, tell him he must go to sleep, and leave him there to do it. There could, of course, be no objection to one's remaining outside the door and listening until all was quiet.

But Frederick's conduct made this course impossible. It was not that he cried; if he had they might have summoned strength to leave him. He did not cry. His air was one of pathetic surprise at desertion, mingled with a beautiful submission and an abnormal wakefulness. He lay in the dim room, talking softly to himself, or making a queer humming sound which he seemed to think was pleasingly musical. Occasionally he sat up, and the anxious watchers outside, their ranks constantly augmented by others as anxious, heard a scramble, or the sound of a falling toy or pillow.

Once the thump was so very loud that prompt investigation was made, and the fat body of Frederick was discovered reposing on the floor. He had fallen out of his crib, but he showed no bitterness over the incident. After the baby had been rocked and crooned over for five or ten minutes he was off to the Land of Nod.

This solution of the problem was so simple and so humane that he was thereupon rocked, and there was a spirited rivalry as to who should perform the kindly service. Every nun volunteered but one—Sister Philomene. She was observed to shun the company of Frederick Addison.

Sister Philomene was not sentimental. She was absolutely just, but very cold, and a lit-

tle hard. She had no favorites, and had not even the quasi-intimates that are all conventual life permits. She secretly prided herself on her unbending nature. Had he shared her indifference all would have been well, but right here the fine, subtle irony of the situation was manifest. With the perverseness of Fate, it was on Sister Philomene that the Light of the Convent had fastened his youthful affections.

No one could understand it, and certainly the baby could not explain it. Perhaps May Iverson, a pupil at the institution, came the nearest to the kernel of the situation.

"It is the contrariness of man," she said, positively. "The infant is a flirt, even at this tender age. He is tired of the cloying sweets he is getting on all sides, so he is making love to unresponsive Sister Philomene by way of variety."

Making love he certainly was. At the first glimpse of the austere face of the nun, whose eyes were the only eyes that looked at him coldly, whose lips were the only ones that did not curve into smiles under his, the baby started for her as fast as his chubby legs could carry him. Through the convent corridors and along the garden walks he pursued her, his curls standing on end with joyful excitement,

his six teeth shining, his voice cooing appeals to her to "wait for Fweddie."

She never did. Unexpected doors swallowed her up, dark and unexplored corners wrapped her in mystery, and on the edge of the abysses into which she had seemingly dropped Frederick Addison was wont to pause in wide-eyed wonder. There was comedy in the little drama, but there was tragedy too.

The summer came and went, and Frederick continued on his sunny way. He spent the long days in the garden, rolling his little wheelbarrow up and down the path and over the flower-beds, leaving devastation in his wake, to be freely forgiven. His orbit could be traced by crumbs of the seed-cake he was usually eating, which was fortunate, for he fell asleep in out-of-the-way corners, and had to be discovered by rescue bands. He had for each of his favorite Sisters some weird and mysterious name by which he called her, and to which she proudly answered. The ease and startling familiarity of his manner became intensified as time passed. He demanded songs and "'tories" from the Mother Superior, and took the pins out of her veil and showed a feverish interest in the question of her ears—which, of course, her coif concealed. It was rumored that on one occasion he refused to be comforted until

she had unfastened the linen bands and exhibited her ears to his inspection—but this story was never verified.

When the chilly days of autumn came he still dug in the garden, enveloped in a little tightly buttoned reefer and woollen "leggings," and wearing on his head a hood in which his face shone like a red apple. Frederick Addison believed in fresh air, and got it by his usual method of quietly taking what he wanted.

When the winter snow began to fall and the flower-beds were covered and the birds spread their wings and left him, dreary days began for the infant. He became a "shut-in," and all the attractions of the play-room fitted for him failed to compensate for the loss of the birds and the flowers he loved.

Friends of the young mother who slept under the deepening snows thought of her baby behind the convent walls, and brought him gifts and playthings. The nuns developed a marvellous talent for games of which they had never before heard, and their répertoire of songs and stories adapted to the amusement of small boys grew like a rolling snowball. But the baby was bored and showed it. He turned again to Sister Philomene, but found her as of yore—as frosty as the outside air. Intrepid as he was, he shook in his little shoes

when she turned her cold glance upon him; but her fascination still held and his allegiance to her did not waver.

Then one night he fell ill.

He had not been wholly well for several days. His red cheeks were more flushed than usual, and the hand that lay so confidingly on the faces of his friends was dry and feverish. Unskilled in the meaning of these infantile symptoms, the nuns were still sufficiently alarmed to fill him with simple remedies they used for colds, and to keep him more closely than ever in his play-room. Once each day he was bundled up like an Indian papoose and taken for a turn around the garden walks, but that was all, and when the outing was over they toasted him before the fire until he was warmed through. Notwithstanding these attentions, he continued feverish, and showed an unusual langour and drowsiness. When, added to these symptoms, he developed another, which in any one but Frederick Addison would have been rated irritability, the awe-struck and anxious Mother Superior directed Sister Rodriguez, the convent infirmarian, to take him in hand, watch him carefully and restore him to his usual condition of robust health.

It was a congenial duty, and Sister Rodriguez entered upon it with much zeal. For pur-

poses of observation she remained in the baby's nursery at night, and that pleasant room, so unusual in such an institution, became the Mecca to which the feet of the nuns turned each day during the short intervals in which these busy women could leave the manifold duties connected with their vocation. Sister Philomene alone did not call. Even when she was told that the baby had on several occasions asked for "Chicker Menie" (his name for her), she did not find time to drop in upon him. She would go at once, she explained, if he were really ill; but as the trouble seemed to be only a slight cold, and as he was receiving the attention of the entire community, she thought he would not need her.

One night, toward morning, Sister Rodriguez was aroused by a long-drawn, strangling cough from the crib. She was beside it in an instant. It did not need the child's labored breathing, flushed cheeks, and shining eyes to show her that something was seriously wrong. She recognized the enemy, and with a sinking heart prepared for the battle. She rang for help, and within a few moments half a dozen of the Sisters were with her, and everything was being done in behalf of the strangling baby on whom the croup had fastened so relentless a grip. They at once sent across

the street for the old doctor who came in consultation over serious cases in the convent, and he arrived after some delay.

He entered the room cheerfully, with the evident conviction that there was nothing serious the matter with the youngster who seemed to be upsetting the quiet life of the cloister. But after one look his face grew grave. He set to work at once, with the assistance of Sister Rodriguez, giving hurried directions right and left. Then he glanced round the little circle of anxious faces and spoke.

"There are too many here," he said, brusquely. "You can do nothing, Sisters; take your rest, and we will remain with the child. Sister Rodriguez and I will do what is necessary, with the assistance of — well" he hesitated, glancing from one face to another—"Sister Philomene."

The Sisters looked round in surprise. They had not known she was there. But the austere nun came forward with the coolness and unruffled calm that, by contrast to the anxiety of her associates, had attracted the doctor's attention and decided his choice of an assistant. The others went out reluctantly, leaving the doctor, the convent infirmarian, and the Mistress of the Novices to do battle together for the life that had grown so dear to the sisterhood.

"THEY HAD NOT KNOWN SHE WAS THERE"

It was a long, hard fight. Sister Rodriguez was exhausted before it was won, and the old doctor, whose age told in such a strain as this, looked gray in the early morning light. Sister Philomene alone was fresh and ruddy-hued, showing no effect of sleeplessness or physical effort. The doctor looked at her approvingly as he picked up his hat.

"I will run over to the house now," he said, "and get a nap. My years turn upon me, Sister, and remind me that I am at their mercy. I hope the crisis is passed, but if the child grows worse again send for me. I will be ready to come at a moment's notice. Get Sister Rodriguez to lie down and sleep a little, if you can. She needs it, too. Unless you send for me before, I will come again at eight o'clock. Can you keep watch until then? You know the conditions and the treatment, and I do not like to leave him in other hands."

The nun replied with a quiet smile. He gave her a few more directions and left the convent. She tucked Sister Rodriguez in her little cot at the other side of the room, and, in spite of her protests, made her remain there.

Sister Rodriguez had once been a "novice" under this stern mistress, and the habit of obedience was strong. The child she loved seemed out of danger, and she felt weary and

relaxed. Soon her regular breathing showed that she was asleep.

Sister Philomene sat in a chair at the foot of the crib, facing the small patient. She had never before taken a really appraising look at him. She did it now, as he lay in a seeming stupor before her. The deep flush of the night had given place to pallor, and the little face was almost as white as the pillow on which it lay. Against this whiteness the baby's tumbled yellow curls were very attractive. So were the blue veins in his temples and the pathetic droop of his lips, and the long golden lashes on the cheeks that somehow seemed to have lost all their plumpness in this short time.

Sister Philomene recalled his face as she had always seen it, with the blue eyes dancing, the tiny teeth flashing, the dimples all in evidence, while the baby voice gurgled to her in the pure delight of living. It seemed impossible that this was the same child. Verily Frederick Addison Malcolm, master of all he surveyed at two, had been suddenly overthrown, and his downfall was a tragic one.

Sister Philomene mentally reviewed what she had heard of his history. His father had died within a year of his birth, and his young mother had followed in ten months. She had been a convent girl, and an especial *protégée* of

the Mother Superior. She had no near relatives; she had herself been brought up in the institution, and her last prayer had been that her baby might find a refuge there for a time among the nuns who had been so good to her.

Dying as she was, she had realized what his place would be among them all. Who could fail to love Frederick? She had been right. Only one had resisted his charm, and that was she herself—Sister Philomene. Self-reproach stirred in the woman's soul. If he had died she would have found it hard to forgive herself — she knew that. She made a mental plea in her own defence.

"If he had been a poor or unattractive child," she reflected, honestly, "I would, I think, have felt more interest in him. But he will be rich and is lovely."

She studied him silently. His breathing had become less labored, and the drawn lines in his forehead had relaxed when the pain ceased. As Sister Philomene looked and pondered Frederick Addison suddenly opened his blue eyes full upon her. For a moment there was no expression in them save a deep drowsiness, but as she rose and went to the head of the crib the old bright light flashed in them, and the baby's lips parted in one of his irresistible smiles.

He lifted both arms with a sigh of perfect content.

"Chicker Menie," he said, hoarsely.

She bent over him with one of the rare smiles which so softened her stern face.

"Sister Philomena is here," she said, gently. "Frederick must be a good boy and keep very quiet, or the doctor will have to come again and give him more medicine."

He sat up, his croupy cough filling the room. Sister Rodriguez heard it and ran to him, but he turned from her whom he loved dearly to the sombre eyes of the nun who stood beside him.

"Fweddie yants to be yocked by Chicker Menie," he announced. He leaned towards her, his arms outstretched, his lips quivering, his blus eyes full of the love which the aloofness of the woman had never killed in his baby soul.

"Fweddie chick," he repeated. "Fweddie yants Chicker Menie to yock him."

Sister Rodriguez turned away, her eyes dim.

"If she rebuffs him now," she thought, "I ant afraid I can never feel quite the same to Sister Philomene.

She did not. He thought she had, and the big tears fell on the thin cheeks, for Frederick Addison sick lacked some of the sturdy

"CROONING THE LITTLE LULLABY HE HAD DEMANDED"

pride and independence of Frederick Addison well. The hot drops melted the thin crust of ice over the woman's heart. She leaned forward and lifted him out of the cradle and into her lap, cuddling him to her and kissing his wet eyes tenderly. His curly head crept close to her face, and his little hand stole under the linen that covered her bosom and found a resting place over her heart. The tears still lay on his cheeks, but his lips smiled in unconscious triumph.

The Sisters, coming in the early morning to see how he had fared, checked their steps on the threshold and gazed in awe.

For the first time since the croupy alarm of the night before the baby slept a natural sleep, his damp curls clinging to his brow, his lips parted in his old-time smile, his small hand under the nun's linen neck-band guarding the citadel he had stormed.

And over him hung the transfigured face of his "Chicker Menie," her softened eyes fastened on him with the "mother look" they had never held before, her willing arms holding him in a close embrace, and her voice crooning the little song he had royally demanded before he drifted out on the sea of childish dreams.

As Told by May Iverson

As Told by May Iverson

THIS is a story you must not publish, because it seems so improbable. Persons who don't know anything about convent life—and, for that matter, those who think they know all about it—will say it could not have happened. But, as it did happen right under my own eyes, and I helped it along all I could, I can testify that every word of it is true.

Of course, I cannot tell it in a dramatic way, as writers do; so I will jot down the facts in the best English I know, and if you decide to use it, you may change and polish it up as much as you please. Then if people say it didn't happen, why, just send them to me.

To begin at the beginning. The episode, if that is what it should be called, occurred last year, a few months before I was graduated. I was up to my eyes in work, for, besides the regular course, I had taken French and music and all the other extras, and we were having

Commencement rehearsals every day, and Sister Cecilia was always poking her head into the class-room and announcing that she "wanted Miss Iverson for a few minutes." I played the piano in one number of the programme, and the harp in another, and the zither in something else; and besides all that I sang in two or three of the choruses. I had been with Sister Cecilia so many years that I knew her ways and ideas, and when she was very much rushed I helped her to drill some of the girls.

I don't mention all these things to show you that I was a musical prodigy, but that you may understand that the usual discipline was a little relaxed. I was coming and going from one part of the convent to another pretty much as I pleased.

Well, during those weeks I saw a great deal of Sister Chrysostom. She was a musician, and a good one—oh, if you could have heard her sing! Everybody said she was sure to be Sister Cecilia's successor, and I think Sister Cecilia thought so too, for she was very nice to her and taught her all she knew.

Sister Chrysostom was Sister Cecilia's first assistant, chief counsellor, and general support during those few months, and we girls were glad of it. Sister Cecilia used to get excited and have nervous crises which were very

bad for us all, but Sister Chrysostom never lost her head, nor her cool, calm manner. She had a lovely face and sang like an angel, and looked as if she had had a past. So we girls all adored her and raved over her and didn't mind when she snubbed us, which she did most of the time. There was nothing sentimental about Sister Chrysostom, but there was something very interesting, and I used to look at her and wish I knew what it was. Perhaps that is why I found out.

You know how the "Day School side" of the convent is arranged. When you pass the big double doors that open from the street, you find yourself in a square entrance hall, with a small reception-room at the right and a flight of stairs at the left, leading down to the kindergarten. Directly in front of you are two more swinging doors, and when you have passed those you find yourself in a long corridor, with rows of doors on the right and left. These doors, you remember, all lead into small music-rooms, and in each room a girl is practising on the piano. The din is something dreadful, of course, for each is playing a different thing, and most of them haven't half learned it.

During rehearsal weeks it was Sister Chrysostom's duty to go up and down this long cor-

ridor, dropping into the different rooms and inspiring the girls to fresh efforts. Sometimes she would sit down and talk with them about their music, and point out their mistakes, and correct their technique, and so on. It was really a kind of supplementary lesson, and they adored her so that they actually paid attention to what she said, and got some good from it. Once in a long time she would speak of other things. Of course, the girls were always trying to make her do this, but they didn't often succeed. When they did it was interesting. We used to meet and compare notes. It was plain to all of us that Sister Chrysostom had not stepped right out of a class-room into a nun's habit, as so many of the Sisters had. She had seen life. She was really a woman of the world. She understood human nature—and we could see that our point of view amused her.

In the convent, of course, the greenest girls put on airs, in a way, over the nuns. The least experienced feels that she has more worldly wisdom than the Sisters, and usually she is right. The day pupils live at home and have their evenings for amusement, not to speak of their Saturdays and Sundays. Most of them have big brothers and sisters who are in society, and the girls get more information

from them than they dream they are giving. As for the boarders, they have their long vacations at home—and they make the most of them!

All this has really nothing to do with the story, and I do not know why I am writing it, for you understand these things much better than I do. But I think it came to me because I suddenly remembered how we girls used to sit in the garden and talk about Sister Chrysostom, and how we analyzed the difference between her and the other Sisters, and how cheap we used to feel sometimes when she pricked the poor little bubble of our conceit. Please leave that in about the bubble; I think it's rather good, though perhaps I have heard the expression somewhere.

Well, now I must go back a little. You see I don't know how to tell a story—I don't understand what parts to put first. But from this point on I'll tell things as they happened.

One day in January, Sister Chrysostom came into one of the little music-rooms where I was sitting alone, banging away on the Sixth Hungarian Rhapsodie There were eight of us practising it that week, and we brought tears of anguish to poor Sister Cecilia's eyes. Sister Chrysostom sat down beside me and made as many criticisms as she thought I could bear, and then she leaned back in her

chair, and I knew she was going to talk! Of course I went right on playing—I knew enough for that. If we stopped, Sister Chrysostom always left. But I kept to the first two pages, which I knew pretty well, and played them over and over very softly. Sister Chrysostom saw through it, for her lips twitched; but she sat for a time without speaking, and I played on and waited.

At last she said, "May, do you ever go to the theatre?"

I thought I would drop off the piano-stool! In the first place, she had never called me "May" before; you know how formal they always are. In my graduation year it was "Miss Iverson" with all of them, no matter how many years they had known me, and I hadn't known her a year, for she had just come to the convent the fall before, from some other institution. And then, for her to speak of the theatre!

I kept as cool as I could and answered, as if I thought the question the most natural one in the world, that I went to the matinée every Saturday, and sometimes to an evening performance. I said papa would only let me go in the evening if it was Shakspere or something very good; but that my married sister, Mrs. George R. Verbeck, always gave me

matinée tickets, whether the play was good or not. She knew how I loved to go, and anyhow she's the sweetest thing in the world. I call her my big sister because she's so much older than I am. She's twenty-eight — the poor dear! But she does lovely things for me, and every now and then she buys a box for the matinée and lets me ask my friends. Of course, she has loads of money and can afford it, but lots of sisters wouldn't think of it. I know girls—but I am running away from my story again.

I told Sister Chrysostom all about Grace—that's my sister, Mrs. Verbeck—and how good she was to me, and how she'd do anything in the world for me, but Sister Chrysostom didn't pay much attention. She seemed to be thinking. Then she said:

"Did you ever see or hear of a company called the 'Bannerton Troubadours'?"

I remembered them right off. They had been at the Academy of Music the year before in a play called "Every-day Frolics," or something of that kind. There was no plot—just a lot of singing and dancing, and what they called "specialties." I didn't go.

I told Sister Chrysostom I hadn't seen them, but that they were coming to the Academy again in March, for I had looked up all the

coming plays and made a list for Grace of the ones I wanted to see. I remembered that I marked 'most every one, and Grace laughed when she looked at the list. But I hadn't marked the "Bannerton Troubadours," and I didn't know just what time in March they were coming, for the date had not been set.

Sister Chrysostom hesitated for a moment and then said:

"When you learn the dates I wish you would tell me. There is a girl in that company whom I used to know. I shall be interested to feel that she is in the same city." And then she changed the subject and went back to the old music again, and of course I had to submit. But you can just believe I was excited. And curious? My! But I didn't dare ask her a single question.

One thing pleased me, though, and that was she didn't ask me not to tell. Of course I knew she meant me not to, and I never breathed a word to the girls, though I was dying to, for wouldn't it have simply thrilled them to think Sister Chrysostom knew an actress! I didn't tell a living soul but Grace; I tell her everything. She was interested, but didn't say much.

Well, now, you see, I've got to where I began my story, which was in the midst of the

March rehearsals. At first after my talk with Sister Chrysostom I kept thinking of it all the time; but as the weeks went on I was so busy it dropped from my mind. I had almost entirely forgotten it, though I was seeing Sister Chrysostom every day, when I heard my brother Jack's chum say to him at the dinner-table one evening:

"Let's go to see the 'Bannerton Troubadours' to-night."

It gave me a start, I can tell you! But I didn't dare to show that I was interested, for Jack has the worst way of getting things from me that I don't want to tell. But as soon as I got away from the table I simply flew for the evening paper and found the announcement. "The Troubadours" were in town: this was Monday, and they were to open at the Academy that evening. So you see I had almost slipped up on my promise to Sister Chrysostom. Those dreadful rehearsals had driven everything else out of my head.

However, it was all right, after all, I thought, for she merely wanted to know when they were in town, and I could tell her the next morning. They were to leave Thursday, but anyhow she'd have two days to think about her old friend as being in the same city with her.

The next morning I saw her hurrying along

the convent hall, and I followed her. She looked almost annoyed when I stopped her, for she must have been very busy, but my first words made her attentive enough. When I said "Sister Chrysostom, I want to tell you that the 'Bannerton Troubadours' are in town," her whole face changed. Usually she was so calm you couldn't imagine anything could shake her, and her lips had a queer little curl to them that was almost sarcastic. We girls dreaded it. We used to see it coming and change the subject, whatever it was. We knew we'd made some break. But when I mentioned the "Bannerton Troubadours" I felt as if I had never really seen Sister Chrysostom before; it was as if she had dropped a mask. First she was excited, and her eyes shone and she drew a long breath. Then over her whole face came the sweetest, softest, dearest expression, and her eyes looked as Grace's do sometimes when she's watching her little boy and thinks no one sees her. I could have hugged her—Sister Chrysostom, I mean—but she didn't give me a chance. She caught my hand and drew me into a music-room that happened to be empty, and she closed the door and stood with her back to it. Then she said, "Now tell me all you know about it, quickly."

Well, I told her. It wasn't much, of course, and then I waited to see if she'd tell me anything. She did. She told me the whole story in one sentence. She said:

"My only sister is in that company, May—" and then she added, under her breath, "Oh, if I could see her!"

"Well," I said, "she'll come to see you, won't she?" You know their friends can come and see the Sisters and have a happy visit sitting on the other side of an iron grating and talking to them. I've had to do that once or twice since I was graduated, and it just makes me sick. But I was talking about Sister Chrysostom.

She shook her head and said, very sadly, "No, she does not know that I am here. Even if she did, she would not come." Then all the brightness faded out of her face, and she looked her old self again. Even the sarcastic little lines around her mouth came back. She passed her hand across her forehead, and when she spoke again her voice seemed tired. She said: "Thank you for telling me, May. She is my little sister. She is only twenty now, and I have not seen her since she was twelve. When we were together no two sisters ever loved each other more. I really brought her up until I—came here. My people opposed

my entering the convent, and none of them wrote to me. Four years ago a friend told me Clara had gone on the stage—also against the wishes of the family, of course. She has married a theatrical man, this Mr. Bannerton, and plays the leading part in his comedy, or whatever it is. My friend said Clara asked very particularly that I should not be told of the career she had chosen, as of course she felt that I would disapprove of it. And somehow I got the impression that something was wrong, and I have been miserable ever since."

You can imagine how I felt. I thought of Grace and how awful it would be if she and I were separated. Then the wildest kind of an idea flashed into my mind, and I spoke right out before I had time to think.

"Sister," I said, "if she doesn't come to see you, why don't you go to her?"

I shall never forget the look she gave me. There was indignation in it, and reproach, and something else that hurt me most of all—regret for the confidence she had given me. She turned without a word and opened the door to leave the room, but I caught her hand and held her. I had to get out of this someway, and what Jack calls one of my "lucid moments" came to me. I drew her back into

"'WHY DON'T YOU GO TO HER?'"

the room and talked to her my very fastest, which is pretty fast!

"Sister," I said, "I beg you will at least listen. I know what I say, and I can arrange it all. The 'Troubadours' give a matinée tomorrow, Wednesday. It begins at two and ends at five. The Academy is only six blocks from the convent. My sister will lend me her carriage. I will have it here at three and drive you over there; we'll time it to get there between the first and second acts. You can see your sister, and I'll have you back in the convent within an hour."

Sister Chrysostom pushed my hands away. "You are insane," she said — and then she went to the window and looked out. Wild as the plan was, she was actually considering it, and I could see that she was tempted. I could hardly stand still with the romance of it all. I never thought so fast in my life. She just stood there without saying a word, and I went right on planning.

"I'll tell Grace all about it to-night," I said, "and get her to help us." (My! but I liked that word *us!*) "She will, I promise you; she was graduated at this convent herself—years and years and years ago, but still she remembers it. She'll arrange about the carriage and about getting into the theatre. Sister Cecilia

will be up in the Commencement hall all afternoon, and you'll be on duty in these rooms. If they miss you from one, they'll think you're in one of the others. But they can't miss you, for we won't be gone much more than half an hour."

Sister Chrysostom turned and looked at me with her queer little smile. "How about the portress?" was all she said, but I felt as if she had poured ice-water over me. Of course the portress was the one big obstacle. There she stood, at the door, opening and shutting it and gazing through and through every one that came in and out. And if the last trump sounded, she wouldn't answer it until she had those doors locked and those keys tucked away just so.

As I said, the mention of her was chilling, but my blood was up, and I wasn't going to give in now. I set my teeth and went ahead. I said, very airily: "Oh, never mind the portress; I'll arrange about her," and then suddenly another inspiration came to me. Two "lucid moments" in the same day would have surprised Jack. They surprised *me!* I said: "Grace has a long black ulster that reaches to the floor. I'll bring it in a bundle to-morrow morning, with a black hat and gloves and a big black veil. It will all make a large bun-

dle, but perhaps the girls will think it's my valedictory that I've been working on so hard." This was a joke, for I was in high spirits, but Sister Chrysostom never smiled. I think she might have. She merely looked at me strangely, and said very slowly:

"You extraordinary girl—I really believe it might be done." Then she turned, with a queer, almost desperate gesture, and whispered to herself, "It cannot be wrong, for I know the child needs me."

I could hardly believe my ears. Can you imagine it? And doesn't it prove what I said about her being a woman of the world? There she was, taking it quietly, when any other nun— But there is no use of making comparisons, for at the mere suggestion I think any other nun in the convent would have fainted.

She went on very coolly, though there was a queer, excited look in her eyes:

"You could bring the bundle into this music-room, because it is the one nearest the main entrance. It could be put away in the closet until I need it. Just before three I could slip in here, take off my veil and head-piece, leave them in the closet, put on the ulster, the hat, the veil (it must be very heavy), the gloves—" Then she stopped and bit her lips. "But how

shall we get out when I have them on?" Here I actually had another flash. I never did such thinking in my life.

"We'll have Grace herself come for us," I said; "she'll ring and come in the front entrance as usual. She's a privileged character, you know, and she roams about to suit herself, and often leaves the convent by the entrance on the other side of the building. I'll bring her to the music-room where you are, and we'll watch our chance. When the corridor is clear and the portress busy at the door, we will all stroll to the other side of the building and leave by that entrance. The portress there will think you're a friend of Grace's. Any of the Sisters or girls who meet us will think the same thing. Out we go. When we come back we'll come through this entrance, and the portress will think you are some member of the family coming to hear me rehearse. Everything is lax just now on account of these rehearsals. We can do it."

Sister Chrysostom shrugged her shoulders with an odd little gesture she had. It signified her final decision on any point. We girls used to think there was some foreign blood in her veins. Then she said: "We can try it. Will you make all the arrangements?" and walked away without another word.

As Told by May Iverson

I went from school to Grace's house, and found her dressing for a dinner-party, but I made her send her maid away while I told her all about the plan. At first she was horrified and made objections and preached, but in the end she promised to help us, like a dear, as I knew she would. She gave me the ulster and things, and I walked off with the bundle. It made me look like a laundress carrying home the week's wash. I got it up to my room without anybody's seeing it, and all the evening I was so excited I couldn't talk, and when I got to bed I couldn't sleep.

I was at the convent bright and early in the morning, but I had thought better of the bundle, so I carried the things in Jack's dress-suit case. Sister Vincent looked at it as I went in, but I suppose she thought it held music, especially as I walked into the first music-room and left it there. But you may believe I kept the key in my pocket until one o'clock. Then I had a chance to slip it into Sister Chrysostom's hand when I met her in the hall. Her fingers closed on it in the cutest way.

When three o'clock came I was so excited I could hardly breathe, for of course if we were found out I'd be expelled, and I don't know what would have happened to Sister Chrysostom. I rushed into the little reception-room

to the right of the entrance. Its windows looked into the street. There was Grace's carriage driving up, and I saw her get out. Then the coachman drove off, and I knew he was going round to the other entrance in the next block. I slipped back and waited for Grace in the inner corridor, beyond the swinging doors. I heard the bell ring and the big key turn, and the little portress gurgle in her glee at seeing Grace. She likes my big sister; every one does. Then Grace told the portress she would go and find me, and she came swinging along the hall in a very debonair fashion, but when I met her she looked frightened. She said: "You monkey, I'm afraid you're making a lot of trouble for us all." She hadn't time to say more, for I pulled her into the music-room, and there was Sister Chrysostom, and Grace became the woman of the world at once. Mrs. Verbeck is famous for her charming manner, and I was proud of her when I introduced her, but I was proud of Sister Chrysostom, too. They were both as polished as ivory balls, and they deserved credit, for in their hearts they were scared to death.

We helped Sister Chrysostom into the street things, and then I sallied forth to look over the field. I never had such an exciting time in my life, and I believe I would have scream-

ed if anybody had touched me. The corridor was not empty, so we waited a few moments. Then we all strolled out together, Grace and I talking as carelessly as we could. Sister Chrysostom looked very natural in her street things, and that was comforting; I had feared she wouldn't. When we turned off the main corridor into the left wing of the building I thought all was lost, for we met one of Grace's former teachers face to face, and of course she stopped. I drew Sister Chrysostom on, but my heart stood still as I listened, for Sister George said, "Reverend Mother was asking for you yesterday, Mrs. Verbeck; she wishes to see you, I think, in regard to the Commencement music."

Grace adores Reverend Mother, and I thought she would have dropped us then and there and flown to her, but Sister George went on, "She is engaged to-day, but may I tell her you will come to-morrow afternoon?"

Of course Grace said she was at Reverend Mother's service at all times. Then we all breathed again.

I forgot to say that I could not have left the convent by its side entrance if Grace hadn't been with me. Day pupils are not allowed to use it, as it is supposed to be for visitors only. Grace smiled at the portress, who beamed back

at her, and we all three strolled out of the door and into the crisp, cold air. I wondered then, and I've often wondered since, how Sister Chrysostom felt at that moment. Of course we could not see her face under the veil, and she didn't speak. She took her place in the carriage without a word, and we followed her. The coachman had his orders from Grace, and the horses started off with a bound. It couldn't have been much more than five minutes before we were at the stage door of the Academy.

Here, too, Grace had fixed everything. That sister of mine is a treasure. She showed the doorkeeper a pass, and he let us in, and a very grimy boy led us along the dirtiest, darkest passage I've ever seen. Sister Chrysostom caught Grace's arm and said: "You will not leave me for a moment, will you? Do not permit us to be separated."

Grace promised. We both knew how the Sister felt. A sailor clinging to a life-line with the under-tow pulling him down would feel about the same way, I think. The grimy boy knocked at a grimy door and left us standing before it. A voice said, "Come in," and in we went.

I had always supposed that actresses had beautiful dressing-rooms, with soft carpets

"THEN WE ALL STROLLED OUT TOGETHER"

and silk hangings and lovely curtains and flowers. Maybe they do in big cities in the East, but they don't when they come to our Western town. That room was about six feet long and four feet wide, it seemed to me, and dirty! The dust was simply thick. When we opened the door a cloud of it seemed to rise and settle on us. The place was so small that when we went in our elbows actually dug into one another's sides, and I tripped on a stool on the floor and almost bowled over the others like a lot of ten-pins. There was a long looking-glass on the wall just opposite the door, and a girl stood in front of it with her back to us. Of course she saw us reflected there and she turned around. She was dressed except for her gown; she had a blond wig on, and was daubing some red paint on her cheeks with a funny little piece of fur. She looked young and tired, and her lips had a peevish curl.

Sister Chrysostom threw back her veil and went right up to the girl and took her in her arms. "My little sister," she said, "you don't know how I've hungered for you," and there was something in her voice that brought the tears to my eyes. I turned and looked at Grace; her cheeks were wet, too. Then we heard a short laugh, and we both glanced up,

The girl in the blond wig had drawn herself out of Sister Chrysostom's arms and stood looking at her with a queer smile.

"Well, Helen!" she said, in the most off-hand way imaginable. "What on earth brings you here? Have you shaken the convent? I always thought you would if you got a chance. There isn't much convent fever in our blood!"

She picked up the paint she had been using and got in front of the mirror again. "Who're your friends?" she said, daubing away with her back to us, but looking boldly at us in the glass.

Sister Chrysostom could not speak. I think she felt as if she had been struck. She would have preferred a blow. My big sister came forward—if one could be said to come forward in that space. She smiled as sweetly as if the girl had been the Queen of England.

"I am Mrs. Verbeck," she said, "and this is my little sister May. I am afraid you do not understand your sister's position, Mrs. Bannerton. She has not left the convent; we brought her here for a few moments with you, because she loves you, and has not seen you for so many years, and was willing to undergo a great deal to have another look at you. We must take her away almost immediately. Perhaps you would like to see each other alone."

The blond girl laughed again. "What for?" she said; "we haven't any secrets to talk over. At least I haven't. Have you, Nell? And I hope you haven't come here to preach." She put on her dress as she spoke; it was one of the silk, fluffy things that stage dancers wear. It was short and very low, and gave me quite a shock there in the dressing-room. I don't think she had much delicate feeling. She fastened it and fluffed it out and turned round to us with her mouth full of pins. Her whole manner was as cool and off-hand as if two or three actresses from the next dressing-room had run in to see her.

"Well, I suppose you three are up to some lark," she said, with a kind of sneer. "This tale of devotion is all very well, but I notice Nell didn't mind leaving me when I was a kid."

If you print this story you must put in something here about the contrast between the vulgar-looking girl in her cheap finery, and her paint and her bare arms and shoulders, and the beautiful nun who sat looking up at her with such an expression of suffering in her eyes as I hope I'll never see in any eyes again. I can't describe the thing, but I felt it and so did Grace, and we both knew that we were looking at a tragedy.

Sister Chrysostom had been sitting in her chair in a limp heap, as if something that held her up had given way, but she rose when her sister said that about the lark.

"We must go," she said, and her voice sounded as if she were speaking in her sleep, and her eyes looked that way, too. The blond girl laughed again. She had the most unpleasant laugh I ever heard, but she used it often enough.

"Well, that's what I was going to say," she said. "This is all very nice for you people, of course, but I'll get my cue in a minute—"

Sister Chrysostom turned her eyes towards her and yet looked as if she didn't see her. You've seen that expression; it isn't pleasant. Then she spoke, and there was something in her voice that made her sister turn and look squarely at her for the first time.

"Clara," she said, "you have broken my heart and I am glad of it. It is a fitting punishment for the thing I have done—the only punishment I could have felt. If you had received me in the spirit in which I came to you, if you had returned the love I have given you all these years, I should have gone back to the convent exulting. It is true that I left you for the convent; perhaps I did wrong. But you have punished me now for that and for this,

for all the past and all the future. You are not to blame. God has made you His instrument of chastisement. Before I go, is there anything in the world I can do for you—is there anything I can say?"

"Nothing," said the blond girl, briefly.

Sister Chrysostom turned to my sister and held out her hands.

"Take me away," she said, and then she went all to pieces and cried like a little child. "Take me from this place—take me back."

My sister turned her back on the blond girl, and so did I. Grace's face was white and set—I have never seen her look so angry. We drew the veil over Sister Chrysostom's face, and we each put an arm around her and half carried her out into the grimy passage-way. We met the dirty boy coming to give the blond girl her cue, and we heard the orchestra striking into the music I suppose she was going to dance. I glanced behind and the girl beckoned to me. Her face was twisted in a queer way, and her cheeks looked a sickly white under their paint. I went back and she caught my hand.

"I had to do it," she gasped out. "It was best for her and for me. She'll stop caring for me now and be content in the convent. And if I had been nice to her she'd have asked me all sorts of questions that I couldn't answer—

that's the whole truth of it. I'd rather have her think me brutal than—well, than have her know the *truth*. Don't you ever tell her."

Then she began to daub her face again with the paint. The slovenly boy called her, and she pushed me before her out of the room. A short, fat man came hurrying down the passage, and swore when he saw her, and asked what she meant by being late. Her skirts whisked around the corner, and I heard clapping and knew she had gone on the stage.

Well, that is all there was to it.

Grace had helped Sister Chrysostom into the carriage and was telling the coachman to drive fast. We got back to the convent, and Grace left, and Sister Chrysostom and I passed the portress, Sister Vincent, without arousing any suspicion. There were several strangers at the door, and we walked coolly in while Sister Vincent was talking to them. We went into the music-room, and I held the door while Sister Chrysostom took off Grace's things and arranged her own veil. She was talking to herself all the time she did it. She said the same thing twenty times, I should think, like a child learning to spell a word.

"It was a just punishment," she said. "I deserve it—I deserve it."

Her Audience of Two

Her Audience of Two

NE—*two*—*three*—*four*. *One*—*two*—*three*—*four*.

Ernestine's fingers thumped out the time on the old piano, and the tired instrument, worn by the assaults of three generations of small girls, responded with a senile tinkle that was half a squeak. Sister Cecilia may have caught a peculiar touch of depression in the labored repetition as she was passing the music-room. A sudden impulse led her to the door, though the sound made her sensitive nerves wince. It was the duty of her subordinates to supervise the practice of beginners. They seldom came in contact with the Sister whose fame reached far beyond the convent walls, within which her gently autocratic sway in the department of music was supreme. It was her province to criticise the more advanced pupils, to train the voices of the nuns, to direct the convent choir, and, in what leisure remained from these occupations,

to devote herself to the composition of songs. The concert stage and half the drawing-rooms of America were familiar with many of them. They were published anonymously, but the identity of the composer was an open secret, and the convent was the richer for her work. As time passed, she was exempted from many of the routine duties, that she might give herself effectively to the music she loved, and put on paper the masses and aves that welled up in her heart. The pupils adored her. They were not sure she knew of their existence, for her usual mood was one of serene abstraction, but they loved her none the less loyally for her seeming aloofness from them.

"Half the time," said May Iverson on one occasion, "you'd think she didn't know we were alive! But be in trouble and there isn't one of the Sisters more sympathetic. She is something you have to live up to."

Sister Cecilia was the especial friend of the small children in the convent. Their companionship did not disturb her musical reveries, and they followed her about in the garden and through the corridors, drawn to her by some subtle sympathy which neither she nor they could analyze, yet which they felt to the core of their sensitive little hearts.

"She spoils them," said Sister Philomene,

tersely; but there was no proof of this unless her popularity with them. Now, as she stood at the door of the tiny room, her soft eyes had an unusually quizzical gleam. She had known by the dreary, recurrent thump she heard that some infant was in trouble, but had not suspected how deep the abyss of woe until she looked at the picture before her. Ernestine sat practising her dreary exercise. Unmindful of the protests of the yellow keys, she pounded away with dogged energy. Rebellious tears were on her fat cheeks, but her German braids flapped upon her back through the vigor of her efforts. Her plump legs were far too short to reach the floor, but from time to time they made abortive dives towards the pedals through some dim artistic purpose. On her feet were stout German boots, with several inches of heavy woollen stockings showing between them and the sombre frock above. A stiffly starched white pinafore lightened the effect, and the child's yellow hair, blue eyes, and fair Teutonic skin brought all the sunlight to a focus in the corner where she labored. Care weighed upon her brow, and while the nun looked the big tears dropped from her cheeks and splashed on the stained keys; but with unflinching courage Ernestine, aged seven, worked on. Something in her atti-

tude, and the faithful efforts of the chubby fingers, touched the Sister, used though she was to such sad sights. Twenty years of teaching and cloistered seclusion had not dried up the fountain of sympathy in her bosom. She laid a hand on the stiff braids, and, at the touch, the stoical figure relaxed and the unhappy infant looked up as one to whom the deliverer had come. The nun sat down beside her and pinched her pink cheek.

"Is it so very hard?" she asked, lightly. "Or is it because the sun is bright and some of the children are playing in the garden? If that is it, every little girl who ever played the piano has felt as you do, and some of those who are enjoying themselves now will be practising by and by, you know, when you are having your sunshine and play."

She wiped Ernestine's eyes with her handkerchief as she spoke, and talked on cheerfully, ignoring the pathetic sniffles that punctuated her remarks. "Or is it *Heimweh?*" she asked. "You are a little girl from Germany, are you not? And Sister Patience is your music teacher? She told me of you. She says you practise faithfully, and that some day you will be a good musician."

The child gulped heavily at this alluring prospect.

"I must," she said, dismally. "My mother has said so. My mother sings—oh, nobody sings like my mother. And I want her—I want that I see her now."

Her lips trembled again, and an outburst seemed imminent. The nun lifted her quickly off the stool and stood up. She felt a sudden and strong interest in the forlorn baby.

"If your mother sings," she said, "her little girl must learn to play her accompaniments, of course. But you have worked enough to-day. We will find Sister Patience and tell her you need amusement and fresh air, and ask her if she will not excuse you. If she consents, I will find some nice little girl for you to play with. To-morrow you will not be so homesick."

May Iverson's sharp eyes saw the two as they walked down the long corridor that led to the garden. She smiled to herself as she looked after them.

"I wondered how long it would take to bring those two together," she said to the class-mate who was with her; "the child of the greatest living contralto and the nun to whom music is the breath of life. I don't believe Sister Cecilia knows who the child is," she added, "for Ernestine came only last week. But some law has drawn them together, as I knew

it would. Now Ernestine will be a dear little link between the finest musician in the Order and one of the most famous singers in the world. Madame Holstein is singing at the Metropolitan Opera-House in New York now," she continued, expansively. "Later, you know, she is to sing in the West. She has sent her little girl here for a few months because she will not keep her in hotels. I am simply existing until I hear her in 'Le Prophète.' *Fidès* is her best rôle. Fancy how Sister Cecilia would love to hear her," she continued, regretfully. "Poor, dear Cecilia, who lives for music and never hears any but what we have in this convent! It's good, of course, but not to be compared with the singing of great artists like Madame Holstein. She has all that nature and art and years of the best European training can give. New York has gone mad over her. Last Friday night, when she sang *Fidès*, she was called before the curtain eight times! The newspapers are full of her, and I have shown Sister Cecilia all the press notices during the opera season. Reverend Mother wishes her to see them, as the criticisms help her in her musical work. When she discovers Ernestine's last name and knows she is the child of Holstein—" Miss Iverson stopped and smiled in sweet anticipa-

tion. Then she caught her friend around the waist and waltzed her lightly along the polished floor.

"Do you know," she exclaimed, when they stopped, "I have discovered a secret about Sister Cecilia? She is starving for music. That seems absurd, doesn't it, when she lives in an atmosphere of it all the time. But I think I know what she wants—she is hungry for a great orchestra, or a really wonderful human voice. Sister Edgar, whose voice promised so much, died, you know. That almost broke Cecilia's heart. And now, when she reads these notices I give her, and when I describe to her the singing I hear when we go to the opera, it is pathetic to see her face. Several times her eyes have filled with tears. I shall enjoy telling her who Ernestine is."

The revelation was not long delayed, for she met Sister Cecilia in the corridor several hours later, and was rewarded by the light that flashed in the nun's eyes as she told her story.

"Madame Holstein has only this one child," said May, "and she could not live away from her; so she brought her to this country when she came for the season. Ernestine is a dear thing, and her mother wishes to have her where she can see her every month or two. I know all this, because my sister, Mrs. George Ver-

beck, is a friend of Madame Holstein's. They met in Germany, and Grace is to entertain her when she comes here in February. I simply cannot wait, for, of course, I shall meet her."

The nun smiled.

"Dear Miss Iverson," she said, gently, "I wonder how the world will treat you when you go out into it with that boundless enthusiasm of yours. I am afraid you will have many disappointments and disillusions."

May looked after her a little resentfully as she went down the hall. "She actually thinks," she murmured, "that she knows more about life than I do." The reflection cheered Miss Iverson, who sighed in happy contemplation of her vast experience during two summer vacations.

Ernestine soon grew accustomed to her new surroundings, and went through the day with placid contentment on her brow. There were attractive small girls around her, and had she not a fascinating new friend, "The Sister Cecilia," as she called her, who took her for walks in the garden and told her stories and, best of all, listened to Ernestine's own stories of her mother? It was a singular friendship, and the quiet nun heard strange tales of travel and music and musicians and great concerts—vivid little word-pictures unconsciously paint-

ed by the child against the gray background of the cloister. Madame Holstein had travelled far with her chubby little girl, and Ernestine had turned wide-open, intelligent eyes on all she saw. Flooding the picture was an atmosphere of German home life. Herr Holstein, the husband and father, was an eminent scholar, held in Germany by his duties as professor in a large university. Sister Cecilia saw his letters to his child, and liked the simple, fatherly spirit they breathed. They were written in English, and Ernestine was exhorted to perfect herself in that tongue, during the opportunities afforded her so plentifully.

The two strangers whom she had never seen became vividly familiar figures in the nun's life. She saw the quiet professor, living among his books, loving his wife and child in his matter-of-fact fashion, keeping them in mind and heart, yet bearing with much philosophy their absence from him. And far from him, in the scenes she called up, was the radiant figure of his wife, "the greatest contralto in the world," sweeping on in her brilliant and triumphant career, winning fame and wealth and countless hearts by the magic of her glorious voice. She was a dignified and noble woman, if one might judge by the picture in Ernestine's little locket and those

in the leather case that was her greatest treasure. Some of the photographs, taken in various operatic rôles, made the nun turn away with a troubled look in her eyes. These costumes, this acting—surely, they could not be right. Yet that voice—that marvellous voice which God had given the woman—the world must be the better for that. Oh, if she herself could hear it! If once, just once before she died, she could hear a great voice developed to its highest possibilities. For years the longing had been with her. Now it grew and strengthened by this thought-association with the woman who had become the personification of the ideal in her life—still as remote, alas! as if that ideal had never taken form.

Her heart felt heavy at the thought, and her smooth brow clouded. Ernestine, who was chattering at her side on the subject dearest to her, laid her cheek suddenly against the Sister's hand.

"*Ach*, but I wish you could hear my mother sing," she said. "I wish—I wish it more than anything."

The outspoken expression of the longing in her own heart, the touch of the little cheek—perhaps, too, the strain of many rehearsals of a holiday musical programme—had a singular effect on the nun. She tried to speak and

failed. Her lips trembled, and the soft eyes behind her glasses filled. The child looked at her, startled, uncomprehending. A phenomenon had occurred. It could not be—and yet it was. Sister Cecilia was troubled—was sad! Ernestine's little world took on a new coloring, strangely sombre. The Sister, the beautiful and kind Sister whom she so dearly loved, was unhappy, or ill, or tired. What to do for her? A sudden realization of the futility of the sympathy of a little girl settled upon Ernestine. At home, when she was tired, her mother sang to her. Here in this lonely convent, when her dolls were ill, she sang to them. Assuredly, singing was the remedy for those who were sad. Yet who should sing to the Sister Cecilia? The child meditated silently. Sister Cecilia, again mistress of herself, smilingly took Ernestine's hand and led her down the hall.

"Thank you, dear," she said, brightly. "It would be a great pleasure to hear your mother sing, but you know we do not go to concerts or operas."

The grasp of the small hand in her own suddenly tightened. Under the mass of yellow hair much thinking had been going on, and at the Sister's words the music-loving atom trotting at her side was conscious of an inspi-

ration. A smile enlarged Ernestine's round face, but she said nothing. She was a child of intelligence and sturdy German reserve.

Two months later "the Sister Cecilia" sat in her private music-room, putting on paper the notes of a melody that had rung in her ears for days. It was Saturday afternoon, and that wing of the great building was deserted. A February storm of sleet and snow beat upon the windows, but the nun heard nothing of it. Beside her a grand piano stood open, and she vibrated between the instrument and her writing-table, playing a few bars of her music, then writing rapidly with her near-sighted eyes close to the paper. It was not singular that she failed to hear the soft beat of a little hand on the outside of the heavy door—a child's tentative rap. It was repeated, and followed by three distinct strokes from knuckles of a very different kind. Then the door opened, and Ernestine flew into the room, impetuously pulling with her a tall, blond woman, wrapped in heavy furs. The child was radiant. Every dimple was on exhibition, and her eyes danced as she whirled her companion towards the table from which the nun had hastily risen. It did not need the resemblance between the two to tell Sister Cecilia who her distinguished visitor was.

The first words she spoke did that, and the rich tones made the nun's heart beat faster. Madame Holstein spoke English correctly and rapidly, but with a marked foreign accent.

"The Sister Cecilia, is it not?" she said. "It is a great pleasure to me to thank you for your kindness to my lonely little girl. Ernestine has written much of you. I think we share her heart among us—you and I and the dear father in Germany."

"You are most kind," said the nun, gently, "but I have really done little for the child that calls for gratitude. She is good and industrious, and I think she is overcoming her loneliness as she knows us better."

She looked up at the other woman as she spoke with a sweet shyness in her glance. It was the musician's tribute to the genius of the singer. Something in it touched the visitor.

"You will allow me to remain, will you not, a little while?" she asked as she took the chair the nun indicated. "I have had the pleasure of meeting the Reverend Mother, as my little girl calls her. She was good enough to let me come to you in this informal way."

She settled herself comfortably as she spoke, and, loosening her furs, threw them over the back of her chair. They made a rich setting

for her superb blond coloring. Her child, standing beside her, nestled radiantly in the curve of the maternal arm. Sister Cecilia's breath came a little faster as she studied the picture, her hands demurely folded in her lap.

"You must know, Sister," added the singer, "that I have known of you long before my little Ernestine wrote of you. Your name I did not know, or where you were, but your songs—yes, I knew what we musicians all know—that hidden away in some convent a Sister with a soul for music was giving beautiful songs to the world. Many of them I have sung at my concerts and recitals, always with applause of tears. To-day I asked your Mother Superior if she knew the musician, and she told me it was you—you who have been so kind to my baby. Thus, you see, for two things I must thank you—for your songs and for your kindness to my little one."

A lump came into Sister Cecilia's throat. She could not speak. The singer saw and understood. She took off her gloves and walked to the piano.

"Because you are so kind," she added, smiling, "I ask something more of you. I wish to sing several of your songs to you, that you may tell me if I interpret them rightly. Your 'Vesper Song' every one sings differently. Yet it is always beautiful; they cannot spoil it."

She struck the opening chords. Ernestine sat down on the floor beside the piano-stool, close enough to lay her cheek against her mother's skirt. Sister Cecilia rose as if hypnotized, and leaned against the piano, facing the singer. She was white. Madame Holstein smiled back at her with perfect comprehension of the tumult under the calm exterior she presented.

"By the way," she said, "I asked the Reverend Mother if I may sing to you, and she said yes, most graciously. My little girl wished it, and I longed to do it."

She began the "Vesper Song," and as the first wonderful notes filled the room, Sister Cecilia dropped her black-veiled head on her folded arms. Here was the supreme moment for which she longed—come to her at last by the grace of God. How good He was! For this —was this her music? This great, soft, golden river of melody that flowed around her? Had she even so small a share in it as the composer's part? Had she actually written this exquisite prayer that bore one upward on triumphant wings of faith and hope to Heaven itself? She trembled.

On the floor sat little Ernestine in sphinx-like silence, her short legs straight before her, her blond head shining in the rich dark

folds of her mother's gown. Outside, the storm, gaining hourly in fury, hurled great masses of snow against the window-panes. The short winter afternoon was coming to an end, and heavy shadows were already forming in the corners of the music-room. The great singer sang on, adapting her selections to the silent auditor before her; and the nun listened with no thought of time or place or person, with consciousness of nothing in the world except the marvellous art, the glorious voice of the woman, this idol of thousands, who had turned from them all for a little time to sing to her alone.

Madame Holstein whirled about on the piano-stool, and at the sound the nun started and looked as if she had been suddenly recalled to earth. She had not said one word, but her attitude was more eloquent than thunders of applause. Madame Holstein smiled as she looked in her startled eyes.

"Now," she said, with a fascinating abruptness, "I shall sing to you some operatic music—something from 'Le Prophète.' *Fidès* —I may say it to you frankly—is my best rôle. You do not know the story—no? *Fidès* is the mother of the prophet. In her part is the gamut of a mother's love—the tenderness, the triumph, the sorrow, the suffering, the forgive-

ness—a mother's heart set to music, one might say, dear Sister. See, you shall take this chair a little out of the way; and you, my lambkin, shall remove yourself on your fat legs to a nice corner. Mother is going to do an opera for Sister Cecilia—acting, recitative, arias, situations, and all except the hot, glaring footlights. And I will play some of the other parts for you, Sister. Thus you will get an idea of the music and the opera as a whole."

She moved about the room energetically as she spoke, pushing the chairs out of the way, arranging a *mise-en-scène* to please her, and hastily outlining the story of the opera to the nun as she worked. Her eyes were as bright and her cheeks as flushed as those of her little girl. It was a new experience for the famous prima donna—this impromptu performance in the music-room of the great cloister, and she enjoyed it. No vast audience had ever roused in her the sensation that filled her now. Holstein, like many of her class, was spoiled, capricious, and unreasonable, but the best that was in her came to the surface as she faced those two—her daughter and the nun. She knew that she was giving to the silent singer of the cloister a supreme hour of life.

"First," she said, as she took her place at

the piano again, "we will have the great aria in the second act—*Ah, mon fils.* I will play the accompaniment here, for there is little action. We have only the proud old mother standing behind her son's chair blessing him for saving her life, though to do it he gave up the woman he loved. He sits at a little table with his head on his arms, and she sings:

" Ah, mon fils, ah, mon fils,
Sois béni.
Ta pauvre mère
Te fus plus chère
Que ta Bertha."

Never had the great singer sung as she sang then. The nun held her breath as the glorious voice sobbed itself into silence. And by some trick of imagination—or who shall say how or why?—before Sister Cecilia's eyes rose a vast, bare stage, a table with a broken man drooping over it, an old mother singing her heart out at his side. Tears fell from the nun's eyes on her tightly clasped hands that lay in her lap, but she was unconscious of them.

"Now you hear the 'Alms Song,'" said the singer. "Here *Fidès* thinks her son is dead, and begs in the street for money that she may buy masses for the repose of his soul."

The agonizing cry poured out:

" Donnez, donnez, pour une pauvre âme, ouvrez lui le paradis . . .
Donnez, donnez à la pauvre femme,
Qui prie, hélas! pour son fils."

In the narrow street of the quaint old town the white-haired, broken-hearted mother begged of the passers-by. The nun saw it all, felt it, with the double intensity of religious and musical ecstasy. Almost hidden in the deep shadows of a corner of the room she leaned forward, drinking it in, and lost in it. To the supremest possible extent was she following every shade of the music, every element in the dramatic situations, every beauty of that voice.

"Act fourth," said the singer, softly, "the great scene in the temple where Jean denies his mother." She sang:

" Qui je suis?
Qui je suis? moi?
Je suis, hélas! Je suis la pauvre femme
Qui t'a nourri, t'apporté dans ses bras."

To the right stood the stately figure of the prophet in his white robes, with his followers around him. The music of the wonderful march that preceded the scene still echoed faintly in the ear. But who could hear it,

who could see the prophet and his great train when this music flowed from the lips of his old mother on the left? Madame Holstein looked at the nun's face as she sang, and was satisfied with what she saw there. She was responding to a unique inspiration, and in this bare convent room, with a black-veiled nun held in absolute possession by her voice, she gave herself to her singing with no husbanding of force. It was a new and thrilling triumph. Little Ernestine was placidly sleeping in her corner, but her one listener was affording the famous singer such appreciation as she never had from audience before. She could feel the soul of the woman set apart from the world quiver under the tones with which she charged it.

"There are but two more," she said, "and the best is the last, I think. For here is *Fidès,* singing alone as she awaits her fate in the gloomy crypt where they have cast her under the cathedral of Münster."

"O toi qui m'abandonnes, mon coeur est désarmé . . .
Ta mère te pardonne. Adieu."

"When she sees him, she forgives him, of course," murmured the singer, playing softly Jean's part in the duet that followed. "She

forgives him, and she comes back to die with him at the end, with the final, maternal cry of her big, loving heart.

" Moi, qui viens te pardonner et mourir avec toi . . .
Ah, viens, divine flamme, vers Dieu qui nous réclame,
Porter notre âme, libre de ses erreurs."

The last strain shuddered into silence. The storm, which had seemed tamed to a listening silence, awoke and howled with greater fury. It was almost night. Across the darkening waste of snow that lay in the garden beneath lights appeared, twinkling in the windows of distant wings of the old convent. Madame Holstein walked to the corner where the nun sat, and stood smilingly looking down upon her. Instinctive courtesy roused the Sister from her trance, and she, too, rose, looking at the other woman with eyes that said what her tongue could not speak. Ernestine still slumbered in shameless peacefulness in her corner, her rosy cheek resting against the unsympathetic polished floor. Her mother went to her, bent down and lifted her in her arms. The child was a perceptible burden, but she bore it as lightly and as firmly as a sheet of music when she sang.

"I am afraid my fat baby has lost a little

of mother's singing—the singing for which she has been so very hungry for two months," she said, mischievously. "And now she must be roused to take her bread and milk and drive to the hotel. I must have her there with me while I am in the city," she added, a little shamefacedly. "Perhaps it is wrong, but I have a companion who will take good care of her when I am not home. And you know, Sister, when I come in at night, I wish her in my bed, waiting for me. Oh, the longing for her sometimes, the hunger to feel her dear little body in my arms—" She stopped suddenly, and looked down at her sleeping child with an expression on her face that all the maternal music of *Fidès* had not brought there.

They left the room and went down the corridor together, Madame Holstein still carrying her little girl. The nun walked beside them, answering the singer's light remarks, and thanking her in her sweet, shy way for the music of the afternoon. She was still in a daze, and said little. But the other woman understood.

Hours after the nun had gone to her cell that night, she lay, her eyes open on the darkness, listening to the music that swelled within the four bare walls. Somewhere in the great city outside the silent convent Madame Holstein

was singing—singing to thousands of music lovers. She would have a great triumph, no doubt; the brilliant audience would call her out again and again, as those in the East had done. The wonder of it, the glory of it, that one human voice could sway so many!

Yet, somehow, the picture the nun took with her when she at last fell asleep was not the radiant figure of the great artist smiling her thanks before the curtain, nor the grandly maternal figure of *Fidès*. It was the mother look that had lit Frau Holstein's eyes as she bent over the small, plump, German maid whom she had gathered up in her strong arms—*her* child, sung to sleep by its mother's voice.

The Girl Who Was

The Girl Who Was

HEN Katherine Randolph was graduated at the early age of seventeen, she bore away from St. Mary's the "Cross of Honor," the "Crown," and the worshipful regard of her twenty girl classmates.

The "Cross of Honor" was awarded for her general record as a student and an honor to the institution. The "Crown" fell on her brow to attest her mastery of the field of knowledge known as Christian doctrine.

Miss Randolph wore both the cross and the crown on Graduation day, but in the evening laid the latter and her ribbon-tied valedictory away with a few fitting tears. The cross she continued to wear, at first on the gold neck-chain then in fashion, and later as a pin. She was careful not to lose it, for in addition to its associations and sentimental value, it had practical uses not to be disdained. She once mentioned these to friends.

"You see," she said, with grateful exultation, "this cross gives me admission as a guest at any convent in the world. If I am travelling alone and do not wish to go to a hotel, I need only present myself at a cloister and the portress will give my cross one look and throw wide the doors to it—and myself. Then, some time, when I am ninety or a hundred years old, I may come back to my Alma Mater a battered veteran of the battle of life, with a smooth cross on my weary breast. By that sign they will know me, and gather me in."

Her friends laughed at the light words, but no one could deny that Miss Randolph wore the cross faithfully during the summer following her graduation. Like many convent girls, she found it very hard to keep away from the institution which had sheltered her for years. She felt homesick for it, and the intervals between her frequent visits were weeks to be lived through in the thought of the open cloister doors that lay at the end of them. After this restful, lazy summer she meant to work and win her place in the world. In the mean time it was pleasant to wander through the old garden and discuss her plans with the Sisters.

She had many plans, and was singularly free to carry them out. Her father had per-

mitted her to spend her childhood and girlhood in the convent. At first this had been done in deference to the earnestly expressed wishes of a strong-willed second wife, but as the years went by he became so reconciled to the situation that even the girl's holidays were passed at the homes of classmates. Her father made her a liberal allowance for her expenses and felt that his duty was done. Her proposition to go out into the world and make a career for herself met with his lively approval.

She put the situation frankly before her friends the nuns.

"You see," she said, with much cheerfulness, one warm August day, "I shall be eighteen the last of this month, and then I shall come into the money my mother left me. It is not much, but it is well invested, and will yield an income of eleven or twelve hundred dollars a year. That is almost a hundred a month, and I can go to New York and take singing lessons and live very comfortably on such an income. I must make a home and friends for myself somewhere, and I might as well begin there as anywhere. Later, perhaps, I may go to Europe, if my voice develops well. Sister Cecilia says it is full of promise, and that if I work hard I am sure to succeed."

The plan did not especially appeal to the quiet inmates of the cloister, but they had nothing better to suggest, except that she remain in its safe shelter with them. They did this only tentatively, for nuns are not prone to give such advice to their pupils. The gentle proposal did not appeal to Miss Randolph. She shook her auburn head, and her red-brown eyes twinkled mischievously.

"I must see life first," she laughed. "There is a big, beautiful world beyond these walls, and I want to know what it's like. I must know. For years the longing for it has been in me. If it treats me badly, I'll come home."

So they let her go because they could do nothing else, and the world swallowed her as if she had been a small and succulent oyster. At first, letters from her drifted back into the cloister at close intervals, strange letters, showing how rapidly the girl was turning the pages of life's great ledger. And at longer intervals a letter from the cloister went to her, sweet with the love and prayers of the gentle friends behind the convent walls.

Katherine Randolph used to re-read these letters sometimes, and even think them over a little. But she was very busy, for she wished to see life and the world, and many men

and women showed a sociable willingness to set them before her.

It was a simple matter for the girl with no home influences or close ties to drift into the "bohemian" set—so unique and interesting to her convent eyes. She went with these new friends to New York's music-halls, to its cheap table-d'hôte restaurants, even to French balls and the slums, and felt that she was seeing life. Men and women sometimes looked at her pure face and wondered over its contrast with the rather sophisticated ones around her. Once an elderly woman with white hair and "mother eyes" took it upon herself to give a little advice to the girl with the gold cross at her neck.

"Do you think, my dear," she said, "that these are the best friends for you? There is no special harm in them, perhaps, but they are not in your class and may bring you into theirs. I don't think you would like that, would you? Forgive me for speaking in this way, but if you were my daughter it would break my heart to see you with them."

Katherine listened courteously and even with a little awe. She realized the kindliness of the woman's purpose. It came to her dimly that her mother, had she been alive, might have said the same thing. But she was young,

this life gay, and she was fond of her new friends. She was still sufficiently *naïve* to repeat the incident to them, and they treated it with off-hand good humor.

"The dear old thing means well," said one of them, "but she looks at the world with narrow, old-fashioned eyes. She can't realize that we have such a good time and yet are the 'square' crowd we are. Don't worry about her, Kate; we'll take care of you."

They did for a time, in their characteristic, easy-going way. But old friends fell out of the circle and new ones came, and it grew wider and also deeper. After a year or two "little Randolph" was no longer a novice to be counselled and advised. The "have beens" and the "might have beens" of the press and the stage caught her in their human eddies, and the undertow drew her down. She became a sophisticated young woman, learned New York pretty well on its gay side, talked about human nature, and thought she understood men and women. Her voice developed to the satisfaction of her teacher, who unselfishly suggested that she give it a final polish abroad. She was rather tired of New York by this time; she had lived there four years, and felt that it had few secrets and fewer novelties for her. She sailed for Paris.

There is kinship in the arts, and she drifted into the Latin Quarter life. The rollicking students liked her; so did the painters who taught them. They enjoyed the wit and audacity of the little American. A great artist persuaded her to pose for him, and the picture, on the line at the Spring Salon, was the sensation of the year. It was only a face, a young and brilliant face, framed in a halo of red-gold hair, with brown eyes looking straight at the observer. There was a suggestion of white about the throat, and against this a gold cross. But the genius of the picture lay in the eyes. All of earth that French art and French imagination could put into them was there. Above the gold cross and the soft dimples in cheek and chin, the devil himself looked out of their brown depths. The artist called his picture, with grim humor, "The Convent Girl."

Half-tone reproductions of it filled the art journals of Europe, and were copied in the newspapers and magazines of America. The original of "The Convent Girl" became a subject for newspaper correspondence, stories, and other pictures. Famous artists sought her as a model. One of Paris's enterprising managers engaged her to sing a little song between the acts of a new comedy, and on her

first appearance she became the talk of the clubs and salons.

Her descent was swift, starting, as she did, half-way down the long hill at whose foot lives the demi-mondaine of Paris. A princeling from some petty German state smiled upon her; an Indian rajah succumbed stolidly to her charm; the gayest set of the gayest city in the world was at her feet.

In the course of time one of the magazine reproductions of "The Convent Girl" found its way into the American convent from which Miss Randolph had been graduated. Under it were a few words about the original—now known all over Europe under the sobriquet she had gained from the title of the picture.

The Mother Superior and the girl's former teacher looked at it together for a moment. The face was the face of the pupil they had loved; the eyes were those of the woman who unflinchingly faced the world that had made her what she was. Even the guileless glance of the nuns read what was there, and did not need the illumination afforded by the text. The Superior solemnly tore the scrap of paper into little bits.

"We can still pray for her," she said, slowly.

In Paris, the gay life of the Convent Girl went on with increasing swiftness. Given the

opportunity to achieve the kind of fame she had learned to crave, she grasped it. She began to work and study, taking as her model a notorious French singer whose exquisite art in the singing of unspeakable songs had won unwilling recognition from the people of two continents. The Convent Girl vanquished this singer on her own ground, for the latter had become an old story and the new-comer was young and beautiful. To the *blasé* French there was a fascination in the contrast between the pure lips and the words that came from them, the gold cross always worn by her, and the eyes above it.

"Who is this 'Convent Girl' they're talking about?" an English woman of rank asked her husband. She did not visit the *cafés chantants* of Paris, nor did she read publications which would have told her what she asked. Her husband was very well informed on the subject.

"She is a woman who has the wickedest eyes in all Europe," he said, curtly.

The Convent Girl continued her swift swirling in the Paris whirlpool. Men ruined themselves for her, and women studied the fashions of her gowns. Among her kind she was regarded as a good sort. She gave freely, with the off-hand generosity that involves no self-sacrifice. She posed for one or two promising

young painters and made them the fashion. Occasionally it pleased her to put on a simple frock and go among the poor, giving right and left. This amused her, and she said it was better than chloral. "For I'm sometimes afraid," she added, lightly, "that my recording angel is over-worked."

The stories of her transatlantic success interested New York managers, and flattering offers came to her from them each season. For eight years she declined these; she had "broken with America," she said. She had no American correspondents; she did not even read the American newspapers. Why should she return to her native land when in all its length and breadth it held no friends of hers? Even her old bohemian associates had a meagre sense of propriety. She, the defier of all fit human standards, could have nothing in common even with them. But one day a sudden, unaccountable wave of homesickness rolled over her. She felt a strange longing for the sights and sounds of Broadway; for her Western home —strangest of all, an aspiration towards her old convent itself. Her lips curled in self-scorn. She—a visitor at the convent! That the idea should have found a place in her consciousness showed that something was wrong with her. She wondered what it was. She

had not been well for months—perhaps that was it.

Yet the longing for America remained. It was only a whim, of course, but her life was given up to the gratification of whims. Why not gratify this one? She decided that she would, and perhaps she might know again the gay indifference that alone made her life endurable.

The next day a delighted New York manager received a cable, and within a week the great dailies teemed with the news of "The Convent Girl's" approaching visit. It was a dull season, and the editors were glad to give much space to this subject. The Sunday editions devoted pages to the story of her career, illustrated with the photographs which were already on exhibition everywhere. Flaming posters placarded the city. The woman with "the wickedest eyes in Europe" had at last mercifully consented to turn them again upon her native land.

She had little time for reflection after her arrival. The reporters were on tiptoe for her, and her press agent was feverishly active. She granted interviews right and left, and sat for photographs, and wrote autographs, and attended a few rehearsals, and smiled disdainfully over the hundreds of letters that poured

in upon her. Friendship and respect were not lavished upon her, but there was no dearth of attention and flattery.

Her first night was one of professional triumph for "The Convent Girl." The vast house rose to her, flowers were showered upon her, boisterous applause greeted her repeated appearances before the curtain. She sang in French, and although few understood the current slang of the Paris streets, all felt her strange magnetism and admitted her devilish art. The newspapers which chronicled her success the next morning did not mention the fact that after the performance was over the woman had quietly fainted in her dressing-room, where doctors had worked for hours to bring her back to consciousness. This publication would have hurt "business," her manager, and herself; the reporters were considerate.

The best-known of the doctors who attended her was an acquaintance of her bohemian career in New York. Once or twice in those days she had gone to him with simple ailments. He had come to see the "little Randolph" of years ago, and had tried to find in the brilliant figure on the stage some trace of the girl he had known. In the midst of his reverie he had felt a touch on his shoulder,

and quietly followed behind the scenes the usher who gave it.

She was there, and there, too, was the shadow, at least, of "little Randolph." The paint had been washed off her face, and the gorgeous costume of the evening was replaced by a simple dressing-gown. She lay on a sofa, breathing heavily, her brown lashes resting on cheeks whose pallor was startling. An agitated maid and several superfluous attendants bustled around her.

Dr. Raymond went to work with professional coolness; other doctors came, and they applied remedies until her eyes once more opened on life. The faces of the physicians had been very grave, but they at once took on a smile of professional cheerfulness as the great brown eyes roved in turn to each of them.

"I've been ill," said the Convent Girl, "very ill, I think." She recognized Dr. Raymond, and smiled faintly. "I saw you in the audience. You must make me well. Please come to see me in the morning," and having thus indicated her choice of a physician, she signed to her maid to take her home.

In the morning Dr. Raymond found her dressed, but very pale and with exhausted vitality. She met him with an affectation of confidence that moved him strangely.

"It is only a little thing, of course," she said, with something of her old-time vivacity, "but I can't afford to be ill at all. This has been coming on for a year, I think. I have had queer attacks. Do you suppose it is my heart? You must make a careful examination, doctor, and give me something to build me up thoroughly. Then after a while I will take a rest."

The doctor made the examination skilfully. After it was over he slowly replaced his instruments in their case. He would have given much to avoid the bad quarter of an hour that lay before him.

"Miss Randolph, you must take a rest now," he said, at last.

The woman opened her eyes at the tone and the rarely used name. A singular, rebellious light flashed in them.

"Why?" she asked, tersely. The doctor parried the question.

"You are run down," he said. "Very much run down." She had to be told; half measures would effect little.

"That is why I have called you in," she retorted.

"Miss Randolph," he said, deliberately, "you are in a grave condition. You have a surprisingly small amount of vitality, your

nerves are exhausted, and—your heart is seriously affected. You must give up all work at once, cancel all engagements, go to bed, and let yourself be taken care of."

"And if I refuse?" remarked the woman.

The doctor looked at her. There was a mocking light in her eyes that irritated him. He had tried to be considerate but convincing, and it had not worked. He turned a little brutal.

"Then you will play fast and loose with your life," he said, dryly. "I have warned you; if you choose to ignore the warning, you must bear the consequences."

"You mean that I would probably die?" she demanded, the reckless light still dancing in her eyes. He met them squarely.

"Beyond one doubt," he replied, brusquely, and went away.

She disregarded his warning, as he had known she would do. It did not surprise him to see that she continued singing, and filling not only night but day with feverish excitement. Once she fainted on the stage, and twice her manager had to announce that she could not appear. But she sang, when she did appear, with as much magnetic vivacity and art as ever, and she was always seen after the performance at some restaurant with

half a dozen men around her. Rumors of the frequent collapses circulated, but Dr. Raymond made no effort to see her. During the last week of her New York engagement she sent for him, and the phlegmatic physician was horrified at the change two short months had made in her.

She gave him her hand and motioned him wearily to a chair.

"I did not believe you," she said, "and I did not take your advice. I have seen other doctors since, and they tell me that there is no hope, so I have sent for you that you may gloat over me."

"God forbid!" said Dr. Raymond, shocked at her levity. "I wish with all my heart that I had been, as you thought, mistaken. What are you going to do?" he added.

The woman laughed bitterly.

"Die," she said, with savage directness. "All you doctors say I must. And soon, too. But I am going to do something first, and I have sent for you to help me. If I must die, I will not die here with these—people—around me. I am going home, to my old convent, out West."

"You cannot bear the journey," objected the doctor.

"That is why I have sent for you," retorted the Convent Girl, feverishly. "You must

go with me, and keep me alive until we get there. It is a long journey and a wearisome one, I know. But we can leave here on the 'limited' to-day and get there Friday morning. You must leave your patients in other hands. I will pay you well. I have plenty of money. It is all I have got now," she added, recklessly.

The doctor hesitated, then put a question.

"Will they take you after you get there?"

She touched the gold cross which had never left her neck.

"This will make them," she said. "Do you know, I've had a sense from the first that I should need it—a strange foreboding. Fate took me in hand, God knows why, and made me what I am. I could not help it. You will not believe it, but I tried—at first—and through it all I held fast to this one thing. If they hesitate, you must talk to the Superior. Tell her that since this weakness has come upon me, I have had but one thought, one wish, day and night—to get home—to get *home!* Tell her I long for the peace and rest of the convent and—for the goodness of the Sisters. Tell her I want to repent, I want to confess, I want"—she burst suddenly into a paroxysm of hysterical weeping—"I want to wipe out these horrible years before I go."

"I will tell her," said the doctor, quietly.

He never told what passed between him and the Mother Superior at their meeting the following Friday, but he came away with something more than respect in his heart for that woman with a cloister's purity. He returned to the convent an hour later, his patient with him.

"She is very low," he said, "and only semi-conscious. But she knows you are taking her in. She has kept herself alive through the journey, by sheer, indomitable will, for this alone. You spoke of her receiving the last sacraments. I think you should send for a priest at once."

The Convent Girl heard him, and opened the brown eyes on which already a dull film had gathered.

"I have come back to you, Reverend Mother," she said, gaspingly. "I have come home to—to begin again. Perhaps I can get well here. It is so quiet, so peaceful—so peaceful—" Her voice died away and she lay staring at the bare white ceiling of the room to which she had been carried. The little gleam of consciousness went out. From the distant chapel came the voices of Sister Cecilia's choir, rehearsing the music of the next day. The sick woman heard it and started up, pushing back the hands that tried to hold her.

"Singing!" she cried, excitedly. "Singing! I can sing, too! See, it is time for my turn. And the house is packed. All these rows, black with people—and not one real friend! Oh, I'll sing—*Oui, messieurs et dames. Je veux chanter. Que voulez vous? 'Les Vieux Messieurs'? 'A la Villette'?*"

Dr. Raymond pushed her back on the bed. There was an almost comical look of anxiety on his face.

"To sing those here!" he thought. "They might not understand—but the horror of it!" He glanced at the ascetically bare walls and the crucifix above the bed.

She lay silent for a moment, picking at the white spread that covered her. Her eyes opened and met those of the Superior, fixed on her with tenderest pity. A look of comprehension crept into her eyes.

"No," she said, hoarsely, "no, I won't sing. I am home. Nobody sings at home where things are quiet and restful—restful—and dark. It is only when the crowds are there, and the lights are burning—that one sings."

Dr. Raymond drew the Superior aside.

"There is one point, Reverend Mother, that I unfortunately overlooked when I asked you to take this poor woman into your kind hands," he said. "I forgot that she is not herself, and

may not be until the end. In her delirium she may sing or say things that will be painful to you. Most of it will probably be in French. So I would suggest that you select for her attendants in the sick-room Sisters who do not understand that language."

The Superior inclined her head without speaking. The woman in the bed turned her eyes from one to the other.

"Where is my cross?" she cried, suddenly.

They had removed it when they undressed her, but one of the Sisters got it and placed it in her hand to quiet her.

"Fasten it," she said, "fasten it here, on my breast. Do you know what that cross means? It means home! Some day I shall go home, you know. I've never had a home here. And I shall show them the cross and they will let me in—they will let me in—"

The doctor felt her pulse.

"She is weaker than I thought," he said. "The excitement has told. I will remain—with your permission. It is not safe to leave her now."

The voice from the pillow babbled on of the old school-days, of former companions and classmates, of girlish revels, of the quiet garden, of the little chapel, of favorite Sisters. All the memories of the old convent life seemed

"'I KNOW THAT MUSIC'"

to rise vividly in her soul at the sight of the black-veiled heads around her. Now she was in the class-room, working out some problem on the blackboard. Now she was preparing for her first communion. Again it was Graduation day, and she was reading her valedictory to her assembled friends. Several of the sentences came back to her and were repeated. Through it all there blossomed the rose-hued memory of home — home — home. She was leaving home, or she was coming home, but of the black years that lay between the departure and the return there was not one word.

"She is going fast," reflected Dr. Raymond.

The voices of the distant choir, singing in the chapel, rose mournfully on the music of Millard's Mass. The Convent Girl sat up in bed, her eyes ablaze with sudden excitement.

"Singing!" she cried again. "Why don't I sing? I know that music. I sang it in white. *Oui, mes amis! Attendez.*" And then, from the lips which had sung the songs that disgraced the French stage, the music she had learned years ago from Sister Cecilia flowed like a prayer.

"*Qui tollis, Qui tollis, Qui tollis peccata mundi—*"

To the listeners, knowing not what was to come, it was as if the mouth of a sewer had

opened and poured forth a mountain stream. The faint, exquisite voice sang on:

"*Parce nobis, Domine. Exaudi nos, Domine; miserere nobis.*"

A sudden change caught the doctor's eye. He sprang to the bedside as the voice stopped abruptly.

"The lights are out," she said. "I can't sing—in the dark."

In answer to the doctor's quick signal, one of the nuns hastily left the room. When she returned the chaplain of the convent was with her. He administered the last sacraments, while the brown eyes of the dying woman gazed at him unseeingly.

"She may rally even yet," the doctor said, "for a few hours, but I fear not. I think the end is very near."

The priest, the Superior, some Sisters, and the doctor waited patiently.

"All the lights are out," murmured the Convent Girl, piteously; "how shall I find my way?"

The lids closed, and the thin face was drawn like a child's about to cry. The Sisters had sunk upon their knees. Dr. Raymond stood immovable, his gaze riveted on the seemingly breathless form. There was a heavy silence in the room.

Suddenly her eyes opened wide with a contented wonder in them.

"Oh, the light!" she gasped. "You must let me in. See, I have worn it—always."

Her thin hand tremulously sought for the cross upon her neck. Dr. Raymond bent and placed it within her grasp. There was one short flutter of content as she touched it. Then the Convent Girl was still.

Belonging to the Third Order

Belonging to the Third Order

THE friends of Alice Twombly received the news of her decision with enthusiasm mingled with gratitude. A beauty and prospective heiress, she was already sufficiently interesting to add zest to the lives of those around her. As a nun also—there was no end to the dramatic possibilities of the situation! For the charm of it all, they said, lay in the fact that she was not to enter a convent. There she would be shut away behind stone walls, and however fascinating her experience might be, the knowledge of it could not reach the outer world.

As a member of the Third Order, however, she could remain in the world, hold her place in society, entertain and be entertained, and give herself up to such good works as lay ready to her hand. She might even marry, if she wished. In fact, so far as outward appearance went, there would be little or nothing to distinguish her life from that of the usual society girl. She

would wear no habit, of course—though there was a rumor that she intended to dress entirely in white. She would, no doubt, be very strict in the observance of her religious duties as a zealous Catholic; but these, they inferred, merely implied daily attendance at mass and a good deal of prayer in the solitude of her own rooms. How much wiser this compromise, they gossiped, than to immure herself in a convent as she had wished to do after her graduation. And how absorbing it would all be to the looker-on! They sent her notes of good will and congratulation. Then they settled comfortably back in the orchestra chairs of their social circle and waited to see what she would do next.

What she did was to yield to some rather gloomy forebodings. It had not been of her own choice, this compromise so heartily approved by her friends. It made her, she reflected, sadly, neither the nun she longed to be nor the worldling her people wished her. She had pined for the cloister's quiet shelter and had begged permission to follow her choice, yet she had been quick to admit that a certain element of selfishness lay in the aspiration. Why should she leave the father and mother whose only child she was, whose love for her and pride in her were so great, whose willing-

ness to help her in good works in the world was so sincere? Surely they were right in feeling that there was much to be done outside the cloister walls—poverty to be lightened, suffering to be relieved, a good example to be set to those of her own circle whose thoughts were exclusively on worldly things. She did not wish to set herself up as a model, yet perhaps she could show them that life was something more than the gay measure they thought it. She would remain with her people and do her work, but neither her parents nor others realized how great the sacrifice seemed to her. For Miss Twombly was taking herself very seriously, which, perhaps, was due in part to her extreme youth and in part to a lack of the saving grace of humor.

After a year or two had passed, however, she found herself doing with eager hands and a lighter heart the work around her. They had been right — those friends who advised her when she was graduated. The great world held infinite opportunities for a woman with health, youth, charity, and wealth. It was worth while, this chosen career of hers, broken into though it was by the demands of that other social life which must be lived as well. She kept faithfully to the bargain she had made with her father and mother. A certain

part of her time was held for them, for home, for friends and social duties. The remainder was her own, to be spent as she pleased and where she pleased. Society did not know as much about her career as it wished, but it heard and saw enough to be highly diverted. It knew that the charming girl in white was equally at home and equally welcome in drawing-rooms and tenements, with box parties and in hospitals, on tally-hos and in prison wards. Sharp contrasts add spice to life, and here were contrasts to satisfy the most exacting. With it all Miss Twombly was fascinating, and full of charms which made many youths sigh hopelessly and long.

"Sister Alice," as they called her—she had no claim to the title, but society gave it and clung to it as a dramatic accessory to the situation—was strangely wanting in sympathy for these young men. Marriage was not a part of the programme she had arranged for herself. She meant to devote her life, she said, to her Work. This was a frequent remark of hers, and as she spoke her face showed that the decision was sincerely made. She was serenely happy; she felt no need of love or companionship other than that given by her own people and the poor. The very suggestion of matrimony, she told her mother, was almost an af-

front. It was asking her to give up, to the selfishness of one man, her Opportunities for Good. Her mother sighed, but said nothing. Then Dr. Richard Schuyler crossed Miss Twombly's line of vision, occasionally at first, then frequently—and at last it seemed always to include him.

There was no sudden upheaval in the experience—nor was there at first any apparent lessening of interest in her career. In fact, weeks and months passed before she even dimly realized how important a place the quiet doctor was taking in her life. He was a great man in his little world—a wonderful surgeon whose operations were watched and talked about. As she came to know him better, meeting him often in the hospitals she visited, she had a vague memory of having heard much gossip concerning him during her school-days. There had been some remarkable story of a love affair—an unfortunate one—in his early life. That must have been long ago, she reflected. He was over forty now. The age seemed far advanced to the girl of twenty-one. But he was plainly not the victim of a corroding grief. He was cheerful, well poised, ambitious, a little self-centred, she thought, but full of a beautiful sympathy of which she found the practical wake in her visits. Her poor people adored him. From these

and from her society friends she heard of him constantly. He seemed, like herself, equally well known in both circles. She was surprised and pleased to discover that his presence at social affairs she was forced to attend made those functions unusually endurable to her. Of course, she reasoned, the explanation of this lay in the edifying conversations they held concerning their common interests in the slums. His hospitals, her model tenements and settlements, were subjects worthy of the attention of intelligent minds. But subsequently she remembered that evenings equally enjoyable and brief in the passing had been spent by them in animated conversations on topics of music and literature. Her protégés had not been introduced, even parenthetically. The reflection was startling to Miss Twombly, whose conscience immediately touched a warning bell. When Dr. Schuyler met her after that they worried the meat from the conversational bone of Sanitary Tenement Buildings and parted with mutual dissatisfaction. It was at this point that Miss Twombly obviously shunned Dr. Schuyler, while society, with an expansive smile, proceeded to fix its eyes upon the two. Here, also, this tale properly begins.

Love, when it becomes part of the experience of a repressed and self-contained girl with a

Life Work, usually fills up the foreground of her existence as completely as if it were the Sphinx itself. Miss Twombly observed this. She tried to get over or around the tremendous fact that bounded her, but wherever she turned it was there. She was surprised at first, then incredulous, then annoyed, and finally alarmed. Being an introspective and extremely conscientious person, she made an analysis of her mental condition and discovered these things:

That she spent a surprising amount of time in thought concerning Dr. Schuyler — this thought occupying itself with such trivial details as idle remarks he had made, the color of the clothes he wore, a certain expression his eyes took on, the white flash of his teeth as he smiled.

That she was holding imaginary conversations with him, in the course of which she astonished and delighted him by the aptness and brilliancy of her remarks.

That when she made her visits it seemed desirable to go very often to the hospitals he frequented. That when she got there her calls resolved themselves into a strained looking and listening for a glimpse of him and the sound of his voice.

That it gave her great pleasure to hear her

humble friends talk of him, and that she was wont to prolong these conversations to a remarkable length.

That she liked to be alone—and longed to be alone with him.

That she had developed an abnormal curiosity about that vague old love affair of his—and was afraid to ask any one concerning it.

Having discovered that in such lines her inclinations lay, Miss Twombly conscientiously refrained from doing any of these things. She plunged into work feverishly for a day or two, even though at the end of that time she knew she must laboriously fight her battle all over again. It was humiliating to a proud spirit, but it had to be endured. Dr. Schuyler did not materially aid the situation when, having himself fought a similar fight in vain, he came to her like a man and asked her to be his wife.

Alice Twombly took her Life Work as a divinely-appointed mission. Never before had she been tempted from it. Here, she reflected, was a Test, to try her soul. Perhaps, who knows, the devil himself was in it! True, she had taken no vows of celibacy. But who did not know that matrimony blasted woman's career? What of her poor, what of her place in the Third Order, if she became Dr. Schuyler's

wife? He himself admitted that he realized how much he was asking her to give up.

"I am not going to let you answer me at once," he said, with the masterfulness she secretly loved. "You would refuse me off-hand, and we can't have that, you know, before you have given some thought to the attractions of this proposition." He was smiling, but she noticed that he was very pale.

"Let me say at once," he went on, "that there is no woman in the world for me but you. For years no woman has had more than a passing thought of mine. One did—when I was a young man. We were engaged, and she—changed her mind. It was a hard blow, but I got over it. Now I love you as a man loves in his mature manhood. There will never be another woman for me. I will make you happy. I will help you in your work. You shall live your own life—only let me share it. Let me put into it the love that should be in it—such love as no woman can afford to put away from her, no matter what else the world offers her. I have wealth and position equal to your own. Let us combine our opportunities and work together. Promise me you will think of it—that you will not turn me away without letting your heart speak for me. Think it over. That is all I ask—now."

She thought it over. It was with infinite difficulty that she thought of anything else. And in those thoughts what wonderful coloring this old gray world took on! It was a test, she thought, in her young ignorance. She would bear it well, but she would give herself a few days to revel in dreams—to look over her bars at the smiling fields beyond—to know the fulness of the joy that might be hers—before she turned away. She would not yield—she would not give up her people and her work and her gentle cloister friends. Somehow, it was a fixed conclusion with her that she could not have him and them, too. It was well enough to say that he would help her—no doubt he meant it. But she thought she knew herself too well to believe her work could be the vital thing it had been, if he came into her life as he wished to come. Now was the time to show the earnestness of the spirit in which she had joined the Third Order. Now was the time for a Sacrifice. Yet, could she give him up? Her problem seemed a vital one to her; her suffering was very real. She was quite capable of turning away the precious thing that had come into her life. She knew its sweetness, but she did not dream of its real worth.

In the mean time the days had gone by, and

she had not given him his answer. She wrote and specified a certain night when he was to come for it. She told herself reproachfully that she had been neglecting her poor, putting the real things of life from her while she dreamed idle dreams. She thought she despised herself. She repeated this to herself as time passed, and the eventful day came. She would give him his answer that night, and it should be "*No.*" Perhaps, after it, she could settle again into the old routine in which she had plodded so patiently before he came. It should be "No." She wondered if she would better write it, but decided against that. She would see him once more. They would have at least a parting — something to recall in the dreary days to come; and in the mean time she would fortify herself by a little visit to the convent. In the chapel, and with the nuns, she would find strength for the renunciation she had determined finally and definitely to make.

She drove to the old building and waited in the convent garden for her favorite among the inmates—Sister George. The world itself seemed to be in league against her as she sat by the sleepy fountain, for all nature was a love-song that June day. Over her arched the blue sky, and across its mirror birds skimmed, dropping a shower of jubilant notes.

The odor of mignonette and geranium floated to her from the old-fashioned flower-beds blossoming around her. In the trees above the peep of nestlings was heard—even here, where she had come for peace, the birds flaunted their domestic happiness in her face. She wondered whether she was getting a little morbid, and was glad the approach of Sister George interrupted her gloomy reverie. The nun sat down beside her with a smile of welcome, for the two had been friends for years and formal greetings no longer existed for them. It did not need an especially observant eye to see that something was very wrong with the young girl so dear to the nuns, and Sister George looked at her with an anxious sympathy in her glance.

"What is it now?" she asked, gently. "More trouble with Sarah McGuire, or have your plans for the model tenements proved unsatisfactory?"

The girl leaned her head against the lattice-work of the arbor, and a quizzical thought shot across her tired mind. Why approach the subject by devious ways? Why work up to it through Sarah McGuire and the tenements? Why not lay it before this old friend at once and tersely, even though the sudden revelation might startle the gentle nun? She spoke on the impulse.

"Neither," she said, slowly. "It is a love affair." She turned her eyes from the smiling garden and fixed them on Sister George's face with much the same look they had held years before when she had childish confessions to make. The nun's cheeks flushed a delicate pink.

"Really?" she said, and gazed back incredulously. The opening was not encouraging, but the barriers of the other's self-control had been let down, and the recital poured out rapidly.

"Yes, it is," she said. "Don't despise me for it; don't think I am weak and foolish and that I am losing interest in my work and will give it up. Don't think that, for I shall refuse to marry—to-night I am to give him his answer. I have decided, and I think now I shall not even see him again." She broke into a little sob. "Oh, Sister," she added, "it is very hard." There was a volume of unconscious self-betrayal in the last sentence.

The nun stroked her bent head and stared absently at the smooth coils of hair under her hands. What could she say or do? What light had she for such a moment? They of the cloister had long doubted the child's continuance in her chosen career; not that they lacked faith in her, but because they knew the ways of life.

"The man," she hazarded; "he must be good if you care for him."

"He is—he is all that is good," came the stifled tones from the head now buried in her lap. "He is so kind, so generous, he does so much for my poor people. It was through them that I met him, for he works among them too. He is Dr. Richard Schuyler."

The nun looked at the water bubbling in the fountain near them. A gold-fish came up to the surface, and she followed its graceful motions with intent interest until it dropped again to the bottom of the little pool.

"Every one seems to speak of him, and all speak well," she said, slowly. Then she sat for a few moments in silence and deep thought.

The voice of the other ran on, and the nun listened, though her mind was busy. Her brain worked out in detail the situation between the man and the sweet but almost fanatical girl who might give up, if she were permitted, the happiness of a lifetime. It was all clear enough.

"He says he will help me in my work," said Alice, faintly. "I think he would, too, and yet I am afraid we might fail, and grow absorbed and selfish. I put all these things away from me, you know, when I made my profession. Yet now a thousand temptations

have come to me. I go over it all again and again. I picture to myself what life would be with him—and then I turn from it. I once promised myself that I would never abandon my poor people. I shall keep that vow if it kills me. To-night I shall tell him so. You must help me to be strong. It is very hard," she repeated, pitifully.

The nun straightened herself with a sudden air of decision.

"Sit up, Alice," she said. "I want you to look at me." She took the girl's face between her hands and looked deep into the eyes that showed her how genuine the other's suffering had been. There was an unusual tenderness in her manner as she continued.

"I shall try to help you, my dear," she said, "but not in the way you wish. I think—I am almost sure—you should marry Dr. Schuyler. We have felt here that we could not keep you always: we have believed that the One Man would some day come for you. Is he not here?"

She looked steadily at the startled face upturned to her own, and smiled reassuringly at the incredulity it showed so plainly.

"I have been thinking it all over as we sat here," she resumed. "Look at me. No Sister in the Order is more content in her choice than I. Never for one moment have I regret-

ted making the decision that brought me here. Yet even I, happy in my vocation, beg you to think again before you turn away from the love of a good man. Your place is in the world. Your work lies there. Will it be done less well if you have help in it?"

She stopped a moment. The girl still stared at her, surprised beyond speech. Her astonishment was vividly written in her face, and the nun smiled in perfect understanding of her thoughts.

"It seems to me," resumed Sister George, slowly, "that you are in danger of becoming a little morbid in your attitude. Because this step would mean happiness, you feel that you should put it from you. Yet why? God did not put us into the world to be miserable. Dr. Schuyler is a Catholic, and he loves the work you love. Why should you doubt that he will keep his word? He helped the poor long years before he knew you. His interest in them was for them, not recently acquired, or through any wish to please you. He seems the ideal mate for you, dear child—the one who would double your power for the comfort and relief of the poor you love to help."

"I did not suppose you would feel this way," murmured the girl. She felt, indeed, as if a rock that held her up had given way. Yet

she felt, too, strangely buoyant without the support she had expected.

"Why not?" asked the nun, gently. "Am I not human? Should I, because I am happy here, urge you to a life of loneliness outside? For some day, dear little girl, when youth is gone and your parents are dead and your friends have fallen away, life in that big, hungry world would be terrible. Then you might carry into your old age a regret for what you have missed, and regret is a bitter companion for one's declining days."

Alice Twombly listened in silence. How different was the advice from what she had expected, and how sweet! The mellow, beautiful voice beside her was answering all her doubts, quieting all her fears, leading her back to the sane and normal point of view she had so resolutely put away from her. She would take the advice of this good friend who knew what was best. One word from Sister George had always had more weight with her than much advice from others. She would say "Yes," and the world would be brighter and better because there were two supremely happy people in it.

And now that it was decided, let the birds burst their little throats in song! Their flood of melody was merely an expression of the joy

that filled her heart. Oh, Life—what a marvellous thing it was! And what an instructor was this Love, that gave the birds speech which humans understood and made eloquent the rippling water and the growing plants. The very perfume that came to her seemed a message from him. Yes? Why, the whole world was saying "Yes" this moment!

Sister George brought her back to her surroundings with a gentle shake that was a caress.

"Think well, little sister, before you turn Dr. Schuyler from you," she said again. "There is no doubt of your love for him. Even I, shut away from all these things, can read it in your eyes. The very insects around us to-day have your secret, my self-absorbed young friend."

Alice caught her hand between her own and kissed it.

"Thank you," she breathed. "You have shown me the way. I shall take it; I shall say 'Yes' to-night. Yes,—yes,—yes!"

The nun bent and kissed her on the forehead. "God bless you," she said, "and make you happy. About the future you need have, I think, no foreboding. Dr. Schuyler is not a man to break his word." She looked up over the garden as she spoke. For the girl at her side, life was beginning to expand. For her it

was bounded by those high walls, softened by their covering of ivy, but hard and cold under its green mass. Yet she felt no regrets. Alice smiled at her radiantly as they rose to go to the chapel.

"One would think you knew him," she said, dreamily. "You seem to understand him so well." Sister George looked down from her stately height with a curious expression in her gray eyes.

"We have not always lived here, you know," she said, gently.

The slender figure beside her skimmed along the garden path without answering. Miss Twombly had reached the point in her reverie where Dr. Schuyler was ushered into the library, to find her there alone. He would ask for his answer and he would find it ready. She hardly heard the nun's words.

She recalled them as she sat in the library that evening—alone with Richard. The soft evening air blew in through the open windows, and on it was the scent of the growing things outside. High in the heavens hung the moon, the face in it smiling at the two as if they alone, of all those in the world, were looking at it with lovers' eyes. Some one in the neighboring house was playing softly on the piano. The

notes came to them very plainly on the night air. It was a gay little waltz, with the undercurrent of sentiment that creeps into all the music of Germany. Its seductive invitation brought them close together, and they stood at the window looking out at the night, Alice nestling in the strong arm of the man beside her. She studied his face adoringly in the soft light. There was a trace of gray in the dark curls on his well-shaped head. One lock on the left side was almost white. She had noticed it again and again in the last few months, and it had somehow had a singularly vivid place in her thoughts when she considered giving him up. Now, that lock belonged to her with the rest of him. She decided to kiss it at the first opportunity.

Through the portières that separated the library from the music-room came the voice of her father, raised in more jubilant tones than she had heard from him in years. She smiled as she listened. How happy, how joyfully happy he and her mother were over to-night's betrothal!

It had taken all Mrs. Twombly's tact to draw her delighted husband out of the room and to make him grasp the fact that the lovers might like an hour together. He longed to sit with them and smoke and let his eyes rest on

this paragon daughter of his while he talked to the fine fellow who would anchor her forever out in the busy world, safely away from the convent walls he had feared would yet close around her. To him, the convent had been a hungry thing, reaching out long arms to grasp his treasure.

She had made many happy by this choice of hers—herself the happiest of all. Sister George was pleased, too—Sister George, no doubt tucked away now in her little cell, peacefully asleep. At the thought a sudden memory stirred in the girl's mind.

"Dick," she said,—how easily and naturally the name came to her lips!—"do you know that you really owe me to a nun? I had decided to-day to—to give you up. I don't know how I could have done it as I look back now, but I was determined. And Sister George brought me to my senses. She really made a very eloquent plea for you. You should have heard it. And by-the-way," she added, suddenly, "she spoke as if she knew you. I hardly noticed it at the time, but now I recall it. She has been in the convent twenty years, but somebody told me once that when she entered her family lived in Boston. Her name in the world was Margaret Canterbury. It seems too strange to be true, but do you know anything about her?"

Dr. Schuyler was silent. Did he know her? There had been years through which he had felt that death itself could not take her from his thoughts. Days of loss, nights of bitter pain, years of loneliness and longing for the woman who had sent him back his ring and shut herself away from him behind convent walls—all these came back to him now. She had been right to follow the call that came to her; that he had admitted even at the time. She had been young when she plighted her troth to him, and had not known her own mind. Later, as the voice of her vocation grew clear and strong, she had been so frank with him, so honest. He recalled their last interview and the tears in her deep eyes.

Twenty years ago! Had it been so long as that! The time had seemed eternal in passing, especially those first years when he had tried so vainly to seek forgetfulness and peace in work and travel. Margaret Canterbury remembered him, and after all these years had sent to him, from her cloister shelter, this child to take her place. She must still believe in him—she had always believed in him, he reflected, gratefully. She had given him trust and admiration when he asked love. Their engagement had been a mistake, and she had seen it. His mind travelled slowly over the

twenty years. Margaret had felt regret and something like remorse, he knew, over her share in his disappointed life. Her opportunity to make good the loss had come to her, and how promptly she had grasped it! She had given him full measure of good for the harm she had so unwillingly done—full to overflowing. Through the years there had been a little bitterness mingled with the love in his thoughts of her; he was only human. But the last drop of that disappeared in this hour of his happiness and her association with it.

He drew a ring from his finger. It was a heavy gold one, perfectly plain, and on the inside there was an inscription and a date:

"*Margaret to Richard,* 1881."

He showed it to his betrothed, and then slipped it on her finger.

"I knew her—this well," he said, smiling into the eyes of his new love. Then he added:

"When you see her, show this to Sister George, and tell her it never left my finger since Margaret Canterbury placed it there, until to-night. It has been the most precious thing in my life, so now I wish my wife to wear it."

Under the Black Pall

Under the Black Pall

HEN she entered St. Mary's it seemed to her like stepping out of the marching ranks of a great army into the cool shade of a way-side chapel. Life during the two years between her graduation and this return to the convent as a candidate for the veil had been bearing her forward too swiftly. She felt breathless from its rush, panic-stricken from the sense of pressure on all sides, horrified by the contrast between the feverish turmoil of living "out in the world" and the restful serenity of life within the cloister walls. Above and beyond all, a great loneliness had oppressed her in the world. What had she in common with these men and women who smiled at her, talked to her, flattered her, and —cared for her not at all?

Everything in the large city where her guardian lived had seemed very worldly to the convent girl. Those she met had been so selfish, so sordid. She had been pathetically shy and

innocent and inexperienced when she went back to the world from her class-rooms, but these qualities had not protected her from the loss of many illusions. Her companions had taken delight in destroying them. Repeated plunges into the whirlpool had been their method of combating her determination to return to the convent for which she had a longing—strange and inexplicable even to herself—a sort of Heimweh.

When she left the institution she had not been conscious of the breaking of any very close ties. Her strange reserve had not permitted her to form them. But memory's brush laid warm colors on the days that, in passing, had seemed gray enough. Her earliest memories were not of a mother's care, but of that of the nuns in whose charge she had been placed. Even her vacations had been spent with them, by her own choice. Her little world was the world in which they lived. The quiet garden was her fairyland. The dim corridors had been peopled with the creations of her childhood fancies as she played in them on rainy days. In the chapel she had made her first confession, her heart beating so loudly that she fancied the priest and the silent nun in the pew nearest the confessional might hear it and wonder. There, too, she had been con-

firmed — in white, with her little companions around her, and her guardian's family, much impressed, observing the scene from pews considerately near the altar railing.

The years had gone by quickly. She had been conscious of no especial lack in the affection given her. If there had been a vague feeling of its insufficiency, she could not have told why it was so. Her days were busy ones, filled with the crowding incidents of school life that seemed at that time all-important. And then had come the excitement of the last school year and the breaking of the school-girl ties. Her classmates were bemoaning their separation from each other. None expressed deep regret at parting from her. That had been her first little trouble—and it had not seemed small. Hitherto there had been the prospect of reunion and taking up next year the threads that were dropped. Now everything seemed ended. The future stretched before her, forlornly gray and bleak. On the other side of the convent walls lay Life—something to be worked out and struggled over.

Already persons were saying things to her about responsibilities and the duty one owed to one's position, and the good that could be done with money. It seemed she had some money; she had only lightly realized it. But

apparently money imposed duties upon its possessor not to be shirked. She must go out into the world, make her début, and become a part of society. She had been dreaming long enough, her guardian added, as he went on to outline more definitely the career that awaited her. She listened quietly, hearing above his precise utterances the murmur of girlish voices down in the garden, the soft ringing of the chapel bell, the almost noiseless footfalls of shadowy figures moving along the halls. This was home, and she must leave it. But under the regret that she felt and the homesickness that already assailed her there was a semi-conscious thrill of expectancy. After all, she was young; and a new and promising experience awaited her which might bring some of the happiness that had heretofore seemed exclusively the portion of others. Who could tell?

Yet when the moment of parting came she clung to the dignified Mother Superior.

"I do not wish to go!" she cried, in a sudden melting of her habitual reserve. "And I will come back if you will take me, Reverend Mother, when I am of age and my own mistress. You will take me, will you not?" she had asked, with a sudden doubt. The Superior had reassured her gently, smiling with the

calm of one whose life it was to know many partings and to give no undue attention to inevitable pulling at the heart-strings.

"We shall be very glad to have you with us again, dear child," she had said. "You must feel that this will always be a home for you, even if you come to it only at long intervals. You will lead a busy and, I hope, a useful and happy life. Perhaps you can do as much good in the world as here—that is for you to decide. Pray over it earnestly; examine your conscience rigorously. Do nothing in haste. Whether you become one of us or not, we shall always hold you in our hearts."

The gentle words of affection, which meant so much to her because so rarely heard, went with her into the world and became a creed by which she half consciously regulated her life. Those she met were weighed by the severe standard of the convent, and found wanting. The weakness, the frivolity, the strangely elastic point of view of these men and women troubled her; the paganism of society appalled the convent girl who went to mass each morning and lived up to the letter of her religion. She tried to do her duty as it was conceived for her by others. She went to dinners, to balls and parties, and felt at each of them the singular aloofness that had marked her life. There

were, of course, pleasant things in the new life, and she tried to find them. Once or twice she threw herself into the gayeties of the season with an abandon that surprised her friends and horrified her into rigorous penance when the reaction came. It was all a part of the experiment, of the test she had resolved to make. Once only the question of marriage had for a moment seemed of a vital importance it had never worn for her before. It was when the Honorable Edward Carrington, of England, asked her to be his wife. When she said no it was with the feeling that had he sought her with more convincing ardor something in her soul would have awakened. She would not marry unless her heart was touched, and perfunctory attention could not stir that to love.

Through all, the convent seemed to call to her. "We shall always hold you in our hearts," the Superior had said. No one else had ever said as much. Under the most brilliant ballroom music, the notes of the chapel organ throbbed in her ears. No banquet hall was so attractive as the memory of the stone refectory with the silent nuns seated round its simple pine tables. No grounds were so pleasant as the convent garden, with the scent of its homely flowers filling the air. There was her home; there were the hearts that held her. She filled

the vases in her room with garden roses and mignonettes, and her acquaintances marvelled at the taste which preferred these to the sumptuous flowers she might have had. They did not realize that their simple perfume was as if breathed from the cloister to which her heart turned.

Two years passed, and she went back to the convent. It was understood by her friends that she was only "on probation." She was not to take her vows until there had been time to discover that her choice of life should be the cloister and not the world. But she slipped so readily into the little niche awaiting her that there was neither in her soul nor in theirs much question as to her ultimate decision.

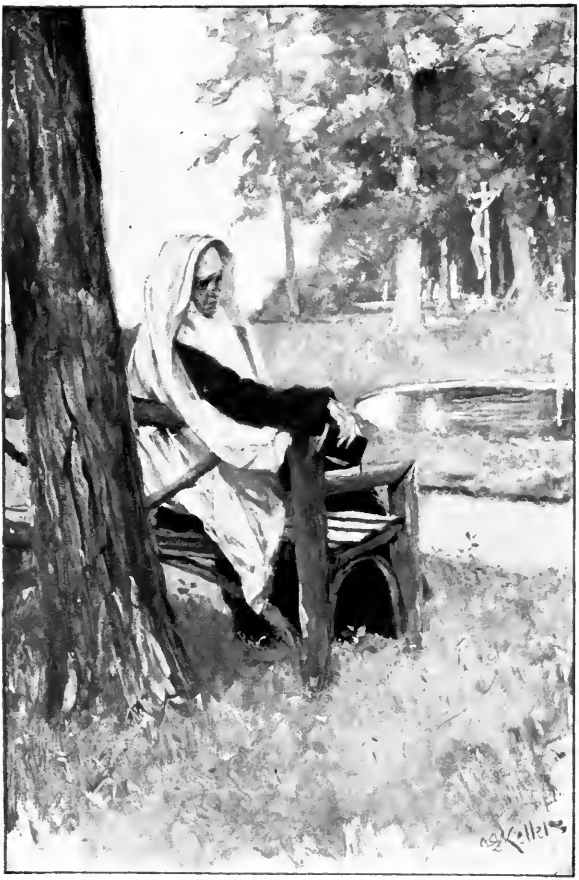
As "candidate" and "novice" the years went swiftly. Some slight relaxation of the rules was made for her. She was permitted to see her outside friends occasionally, and keep in touch with their lives and interests. In the perfect conventual system, where each unit has its special place, she had been assigned to the teaching ranks. She prepared herself for this work with characteristic thoroughness. She became also the first assistant of Sister Rodriguez, the convent infirmarian, and won the deep respect of that gentle nun.

When she took the white veil she was conscious of a quiet exhilaration. She had made her choice and was content. Her eyes testified to this so eloquently that the other nuns looked at her with a soft surprise in their own. One or two of the older ones wondered vaguely whether she realized all that she was renouncing—the wealth, the position she might have had in the great world.

As a white-veiled novice her sphere widened a little. She taught six hours a day, and her pupils accepted her instruction cheerfully and laid the usual offerings of fruit and flowers on her desk. They also deigned to obey her mild commands and to make a reasonable amount of progress in their studies, which added to her serene content. They felt no deep school-girl devotion for her, such as they were wont to lavish on their teachers, but they approved of her in a large and general way, and spoke kindly of her among themselves.

"One can't really love Sister Patience," they said. "She does not want it; and with her manner nobody could. But, cold as she is, she is very just. She has no favorites, and never shows a bit of partiality; we like that."

She adapted herself without difficulty to the strict convent routine. She rose at five, attended mass, and ate her breakfast; at half



SISTER PATIENCE

past eight she was in her class-room. She had an hour for her noonday meal, which was preceded by prayers. She taught until four, finished the work of the school-day, and enjoyed an hour of recreation in the garden. Even here she had no intimates, but took her evening rest indifferently with this or that Sister, as it chanced. After the vesper meal she attended prayers, read, and talked with her associates in the large assembly room, and at nine was wrapped in the deep sleep of youth.

Her acquaintances came to the convent more rarely as time passed. They realized that her decision was irrevocable before the taking of the black veil should shut her off from the world forever. She, too, realized this, and thought of it with an odd sensation which she found it hard to analyze.

Before she took her final vows she was subjected to further tests of discipline, somewhat more severe, and emerged from them triumphantly. After these there was a "retreat," which included a week of silence and fasting. Then the morning of the final ceremony arrived, and the nearest and dearest of those who had known and loved the candidates for the black veil crowded the convent chapel to see them sever the last tie that bound them to the outside world.

Fifty were to do this. The soft notes of the organ filled the chapel, and the friends of the novices turned wet eyes towards the door through which they were to enter. The heavy odor of many flowers was in the air, and clouds of incense rose to the blue dome. Outside, waiting horses pawed noisily in the usually quiet street. Inside, choked sobs were heard—the last lament of mothers, perhaps, whose children were leaving them forever.

The little door to the left of the sanctuary opened, and the long line of white-veiled Sisters wound its way into the chapel, filling the great space left for them back of the altar railing. Their faces were pale, and the days and nights of fasting had left deep lines on their cheeks, but in their eyes was a light that made those who looked at it hold their breath. The friends of Sister Patience saw her in the row nearest the railing. Her back was towards them, but her tall figure and the carriage of her head were not to be mistaken. When she turned at a point in the ceremony they looked at each other. Some change, some singular change, was in her face. But what?

The solemn ceremony went on. Before the altar the priest and his assistants chanted the words of the service. High up in the organ-loft the choir of nuns responded softly. The

row of candidates for the veil rose and knelt, and made their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, while those who loved them, kneeling in the pews behind, looked on with aching hearts.

Suddenly a bell sounded, followed by the soft, muffled fall of the fifty Sisters who were to pronounce their vows, prostrating themselves on the chapel floor. Lay Sisters stretched a great black pall over them, covering them all. In its centre was a white cross, and this, with the outlined figures of the young nuns beneath the sombre cloth, had a strange suggestion of a group of graves. Above the Sisters, dead to the world from this time forth, moaned the cloister's musical farewell to the mundane joys of life.

Sister Patience lay on her face with the others and waited for the signal to rise. At first she had no thought of self. During the early part of the service she had been impressed by the persistent sobs of one person, a woman, and she had sympathized vaguely with another's sorrow. She knew it was not for her. Not one in all that great throng mourned for her. But in her excited mental state this weeping, heart-rending enough in itself, took on an emblematic meaning. Strange fancies filled her mind. She wondered if that was the weak

voice of nature, wailing for those who were to adjure its weakness.

The chapel was full of the stifled sobs of those who watched the scene. The novices were dead—buried beneath that sombre pall, to rise inhabitants of another world. Sister Patience closed her eyes, and the thought came again and again. It ate into her brain. The music seemed to stop. She no longer felt the warmth of the bodies lying near her. Her face rested against the cold chapel floor, and on the background of the scene through which she was passing memory suddenly brought up her past life, like vivid pictures thrown on a screen.

She saw a little child, in a black frock, timidly entering a dimly lighted room. There was something long and black there, and at the head and foot of it wax candles were burning.

The child stood on tip-toe and looked at a sleeping face.

"It is your mother, dear," a voice said. "Kiss her good-bye." The child kissed her, and for years memory never recalled her loss without a sense of the irresponsive, icy lips on which her own had rested.

Then the child stood by an open grave into which a box was being lowered. It was a gray winter day, and falling snowflakes floated

through the air. The child looked at the dull skies above, then at the square black hole before her, and she shivered as the first spadeful of earth fell on the box below.

The scene changed. The child, a little older, lay in a great dormitory. Her bed was shut off, like the others, by muslin curtains, but she could hear whispering voices around her and stifled laughs. It was her first night in the convent; she knew none of the other pupils. One of them suddenly stole in between the curtains, and stood, a white-robed figure, behind the bed.

"You're the new girl," she said, curiously, "and Sister says you're an orphan. It must be funny to be an orphan. Mattie Crane says when you are, you have nobody to love you."

The child buried her head in the pillows and did not answer.

Now she was a young girl, at her guardian's house, and a holiday party was in progress. One of the sons of the house followed her to the alcove where she had hidden herself to look at the gayety of others unheeded in her retreat.

"Why in the world," he said, with the patronizing censure of fifteen, "are you hiding away here? Papa is always telling us to be nice to you, but how can anybody like you

when you act like this? The boys are afraid of you, and the girls say things about you. It is your own fault, too."

She shrank still farther into her corner and refused to leave it. But even the shy pleasure of looking on was gone. She crept away to her room.

Another recollection burned on the mental screen. The lonely child had become a young lady, after painful struggles with the diffidence of youth. She was waiting in the conservatory to be claimed by her partner for a waltz already begun when his voice reached her ear.

"I must leave you, Harry," he said, "and find Miss Everts. I have this dance with her —for my sins, I suppose. Stand by me after it, for I shall want to be thawed out. Did you ever know a girl that was such a lump of ice? She makes my teeth chatter."

The flippant words rang in her ears as she stole away. What was it about her, she wondered, that repelled? She did not know.

Linked with these words in her memory were those uttered, several years afterwards, in the interval between graduation and her novitiate, by the one man whose proposal of marriage had seemed to call for consideration. She had cared for Edward Carrington; had deeply liked

and respected him. With him, at least, there was neither thought nor need of her money. But his words had hurt.

"I do not make love to you as a man would with the usual woman," he had said, "for I realize that it would count but little with a woman like yourself. But you will believe me when I tell you how proud and happy I should be to have you for my wife."

She wondered why he had thought it would "count but little." If he loved her, why should he not say so? She did not know, nor had she ever learned. She never thought of him without pain at the memory of the look in his eyes as he went away.

The lonely life went on. In the world, even in the cloister, there seemed to be drawn around her a circle which no one passed. The mental screen had shown the lonely child, the lonely girl, the lonely woman. The arms of classmates were not thrown around her; the rare caresses of the nuns were not given to her. Admired, deeply respected, she was never loved.

She became suddenly conscious of what and where she was—a nun, making her profession on the floor of the convent chapel, under the black pall, with valedictory strains to the world sighing above her. Why had her mind, which should be filled with uplifting thoughts on so

sacred an occasion, taken a time like this to wander? She called herself sternly before the tribunal of the conscience she had thought so keenly alive.

It was the sobbing of that woman which had done it. Others were weeping, too, but those sobs were from the heart—the expression of love and agony. Some one among her companions was loved like that! She herself had never known love—a mother's, a sister's. No, nor man's for the chosen woman. So she had not to renounce such devotion as her associates were sacrificing in the last act of their worldly lives. That reflection had led to others. No one grieved for her. What she had, she gave. Money, position, liberty—she cheerfully renounced all these. Could she have offered, had she possessed it, great, unselfish, human affection? What was she renouncing except things for which she did not care? Simply turning her back on a life which failed to give her that for which her hungry heart had passionately longed, still longed!

She felt herself trembling. If she had done only this, she had not realized it before; she herself had been deceived. Had she turned from the world to the cloister merely because here there was peace and relief from the unrest of life beyond its walls? Those outside

who knew her, and those inside as well, had felt that she was renouncing much. They had looked almost with awe upon the woman whose religious feeling was so intense that she must give up the riches that her life held for the service of God.

What a mockery—what deceit! Her eyes had been opened—when it was too late! Opened by the cry of a human heart which seemed the outward expression of her own long years of self-repression and bitter loneliness.

She pressed her cheek against the hard floor and moaned. She was a living lie, but it was too late now to confess it. She must remain a lie until the end—a nun mistaken in her vocation, with no love for it in her heart, yet respected by her associates and pupils for the qualities she had not. She was an impostor! Nature or God, or both, had shown it to her here, in the sanctuary she was profaning by her vows.

Above her the music throbbed tremulously. A single voice, Sister Cecilia's, took up the organ's refrain and carried it forward with a suggestion of triumph in the rich tones. Her face was raised to the arched dome of the chapel, and in her pure eyes burned the light of religious exaltation.

Sister Patience, prone under the black pall,

could not see it, but she knew it was there. She had seen it often when Sister Cecilia sang. There had been a reflection of it to-day on the faces of her sister novices. *They* were happy. Their breasts had swelled over their entrance to the cloister—over this sure refuge in His Heart.

Sister Patience looked down the long gray avenue of future years. On the right and left lay cold duty, untempered by the spiritual love which makes such duty sweet, and at its end the convent cemetery, with rows of board-marked graves. After that, what? What for the lie—the impostor?

The young nun's soul contracted at the loneliness and heart-hunger of the years gone by and of the years to come. In her heart rose the most spontaneous prayer of her whole life.

"God forgive me," she whispered. "God—forgive me! And let me give You what I have."

"George," said the Honorable Edward Carrington, with patient calmness, "do you mind letting up a little on those billiard-balls? This knocking them around is getting on my nerves."

His younger brother brought his cue to rest and faced about.

"Your nerves are getting pretty troublesome of late," he said, rather irritably. "You haven't

been yourself for days. I've not seen you like this since we were here before, six years ago."

As the other made no reply, he came over and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Say, old chap," he asked, impulsively, "what's up? Why have we come to America again?"

The older man looked at the boyish face seriously.

"When you were a little beggar, Georgie," he said, "and had a tooth that ached, when it began you used to bite on it to make it worse. Do you remember? Well, that's what I've been doing."

He regarded gravely the puzzled eyes that looked into his. Then he went on, incisively:

"In other words, my boy, I heard that the only woman in the world for me was to bury herself alive to-day. I came to America, and I have seen her do it."

His look had not veered from his brother's eyes.

"I thought you'd got over that, years ago," said the boy, with awkward sympathy, turning his own gaze away.

"I hope when you're older you won't have reason to feel that the Carringtons don't get over such things," his brother replied, slowly.

Then he pulled himself together and grasped the boy's hand with a good English grip.

"It hurt, George," he said, simply.

He let the hand fall, looked at his watch, and added, casually, "It's time we went to dinner, isn't it?"

Between Darkness and Dawn

Between Darkness and Dawn

HE graduation exercises were in progress. Elizabeth Van Nest heard the opening notes of the overture to "Die Zauberflöte" as she walked down the long corridor towards Commencement Hall. Many of her friends and classmates were members of the convent orchestra, and they had practised the music of the graduation programme until even Mozart's melodies beat drearily against the ear. Elizabeth had laughed with them over the seemingly endless repetitions, but now the music took on a sudden and unexpected charm. Her eyes filled with tears, and the hand that held her essay trembled a little. The heavy perfume of the flowers banked against the stage floated out to her. In half an hour she would be standing there delivering the valedictory.

She wondered vaguely if she could do it —if, with this sickening sense of loneliness and loss strong in her, she could say to that

waiting audience the farewell words that had come so easily to her tongue during the rehearsals of the past week. She must do it, and do it well. It was the closing act of her school life, and she ought to leave as pleasant a memory behind her as she took away. In her heart she knew she would. She usually did things well — this calm, self-contained pupil of whom the nuns expected so much. Then, too, she reflected, Sister Estelle would be in the wings with her, and Sister Estelle would help her if she faltered. Dear Sister Estelle, who had never failed her from the day she had been brought to the convent, a little child, and given to the sweet-faced nun as a special charge.

To-day they were to part, she and this woman who had been the strongest element in her life for twelve years—guide, philosopher, teacher, sister, mother, all in one. After to-day she could call at the convent at proper intervals and talk to Sister Estelle—perhaps through the wire grating in the little reception-room. Her heart contracted at the thought. She had never before rebelled against a rule of the great institution, but this seemed very hard. The proper intervals would be far between, she reflected, with some bitterness. She was to go to Chicago the next day to begin the

study of medicine. She had chosen her profession, and Sister Estelle had approved the choice, which was enough. The thinly veiled disapprobation of her guardian and other friends counted for little against that.

She had reached the entrance to Commencement Hall, but she passed it, and, after a preliminary tap, entered a room a few doors beyond. It was empty except for a Sister, in her severe black garb, standing at the window overlooking the convent garden. The nun did not turn. She slipped her arm around the girdled waist and laid her cheek against the stiff white linen that covered her friend's bosom. The little act meant much, for caresses were rare between these two, who understood each other so well without them.

The young girl looked up into the nun's eyes and wondered whether it was fancy or if the lids were a trifle reddened. She dared not think so, for that might mean the loss of her own self-control. Sister Estelle did not approve of tears even when shed in such circumstances as these and by the pupil of her heart.

"How can I get up there and read to them," Elizabeth asked, "with our parting before me? You will help me, I know; tell me that I must do it, and that I shall do it well."

The nun smiled serenely. "Assuredly you

will do it well, my dear," she said, almost lightly. "We cannot have you fail at this of all times. You will do justice to yourself and to us." She hesitated a little. "I will be near you," she added, simply.

The repetition of the familiar assurance that had run like a golden thread throughout the years silenced them both. By a common impulse they turned unseeing eyes upon the smiling garden below, while memories rose before them.

"I will be near you," Sister Estelle had said to the frightened little girl when darkness fell on the first night in the convent walls. "I will be near you," she had repeated at the crisis of the long illness several years later. Elizabeth recalled now those nights of delirium in which the silent, black-robed figure had remained at her bedside to do battle, the child thought, with the phantoms and goblins that filled the room. The gentle Sister had indeed been with her in all the marked episodes of her school-girl life; she was with her now in this last scene. They turned and read the same thought in each other's eyes. The nun took her pupil in her arms and held her there.

"No, dear child, it is not for the last time," she said, with quiet confidence. "I have been with you until now—I shall be with you in

"STANDING AT THE WINDOW OVERLOOKING THE CONVENT GARDEN"

thought and spirit and heart in the years to come. There is nothing I can do for you in the big world outside, but I can think of you and pray for you here every day. In the times you need me you must come to me. They will be many at first, for the world will have unpleasant surprises for you, and you will turn to me, I know—my little one, my little girl."

She kissed the wet cheek upturned to her, and drew her pupil gently towards the door. A ripple of applause rolled towards them from the hall. The orchestra had just finished its selection. They walked quickly down a side corridor which led to the stage wings. The fresh young voices of the convent quartette were raised in the song that preceded the valedictory. Elizabeth Van Nest smoothed her gloves, shook out her white plumage, and looked up into her friend's face with the smile and assurance of her childhood days.

"I will do my very bestest best," she said, tenderly. "Could I do anything else, with you looking on?"

Miss Van Nest's fellow-students at the medical college did her the honor to speculate about her with much interest. She was head and shoulders above them in her work; that they all felt and most of them admitted. It would

have been difficult to do otherwise, with the faculty treating her as a genius given into their developing care. Miss Van Nest had chosen surgery as her life-work, and Dr. Lincoln, the famous consulting surgeon of the clinic attached to the college, made no secret of the fact that he regarded her as a phenomenon. He invariably selected her as one of his assistants in operations, and made curt, illuminative comments to her as the work progressed. He had even been heard to warn her not to study too hard—a caution rarely given by the great doctor, who held the days all too short for the things to be done in them. Notwithstanding this warning, she continued to work eighteen hours of the twenty-four. There were no distractions, for she had few acquaintances and no intimates. Several times a year she left the city for a few days, and it became known in some mysterious way that she spent them in a distant convent with a former teacher to whom she was devoted, and who continued to exercise great influence over her. It was whispered that she had been led to adopt surgery as a profession by the advice of this cloister friend. Dr. Lincoln sniffed openly when the surmise came to his ears.

"She will be a surgeon because she was born one," he said. "She has the brain, nerves, and

hands for it." He loaded her with work, which she cheerfully accepted, and boasted to his colleagues about her, predicting that she would do great things.

She was graduated with honors which would have turned the head of one not so well poised. She did hospital work in Chicago for two years, and then went abroad for four more of supplementary training among the horrors of hospitals in great European cities. When she returned to her own country and established herself in New York, her fame had preceded her. Dr. Elizabeth Van Nest promptly took a place in the front rank of her profession, and enhanced the reputation already acquired by a series of brilliant operations. One of these was performed in Chicago, and while the newspapers were still full of the marvel of it, for the case was an unusual one and the patient a woman of national fame, the surgeon slipped away, leaving no address except in the patient's home.

"The convent again, I suppose," Dr. Lincoln reflected, dryly. "Hasn't she got over that habit yet? It is twelve years since she was graduated." Then his stern eyes softened. "If it's a weakness," he added, "it is her only one, and I wish she had more. She ought to have some strong human interest in her life."

Dr. Lincoln was fond as well as proud of his brilliant pupil.

Dr. Van Nest's heart felt no such need as she rang the convent bell on the afternoon of her arrival in the city of her girlhood. She looked up lovingly at the cold, gray walls, and a film came over the eyes usually keen and steady rather than soft. The familiar little portress of years ago opened the door, and her shy exclamation of recognition and delight was music to the doctor's ears.

"I had no time to write to Reverend Mother," she explained as she entered the little reception-room. "I came West unexpectedly, and did not know until last night that I would be able to leave Chicago to-day. But surely she will permit me to see Sister Estelle without delay. Please tell her that I am here, Sister, and that I am—heart-hungry."

The portress hesitated. "I am sure you may see her, Miss Van Nest—Doctor Van Nest, I mean. You see, we know all about you, even here, and we rejoice in your success. But you must be prepared for some change in Sister Estelle. She — she has not been well."

Dr. Van Nest grew a little indignant. "Why was I not informed?" she asked, quickly. The portress looked at her with a smile which dep-

recated the unconsciously assumed professional manner.

"It was Sister Estelle's own request that you should not know," she said, softly. "You were abroad, and she feared your anxiety, if you knew her condition, might interfere with your work. She believed there was no cause for anxiety. She knew you would come to see her as soon after your return to America as you could."

Dr. Van Nest became again the child of the convent. "Let me see her," she begged. "Let me see her at once—not behind the grating, but here, or in the garden, by ourselves. Please ask Reverend Mother."

The little portress departed, leaving the impatient visitor alone. Dr. Van Nest looked around her with a reminiscent smile. It was years since she had been in this particular wing of the great building, but nothing was changed. The same high polish shone on the waxed floor; the same chairs stood at precisely the same angles in the same corners; the same religious pictures hung on the walls; the same wax flowers stood on the same small table. There was the desk which the child Elizabeth Van Nest used to approach shaking in her little shoes, to be reprimanded for some childish mistake by the nun who sat there.

Here at last there was a change. The nun was there no more. Dr. Van Nest recalled a line in one of Sister Estelle's letters, sent to her in Paris,

"Our dear Sister Raymond has found her reward."

It seemed a long time that she waited. When at last a step came along the hall, she rose and went forward in her impatience. It was the portress, alone, but she anticipated the words on the other's lips.

"I am to take you to the west parlor," she said. "Sister Estelle is not well enough to come to you here. She will see you there alone."

Dr. Van Nest followed her guide without a word. She kept close beside her as they walked through the halls, but the nooks and corridors where she had played as a child had now no memories for her. The gentle portress prattled on artlessly, but the visitor did not hear her words. Her mind was concentrated on the dread of what was to come. She paced the west parlor in a fever of foreboding. Then came a light step, slow and hesitating, but unmistakably the step she awaited, and Sister Estelle stood in the doorway, supported by the arm of Sister Rodriguez, the convent infirmarian. The doctor went forward with-

out a word, took the slender, emaciated figure in her strong arms, and carried it to a reclining-chair. It was a pathetically light burden, though Sister Rodriguez looked with deep respect at the superbly formed woman who bore it, and who had won so enviable a position in the big world that the knowledge of it had penetrated even to the convent pharmacy. She went away and left them together, speechless, the visitor's dark head buried in Sister Estelle's lap.

"Oh, why—why did you not tell me?" she cried at last. The hand that lay on her lap trembled slightly.

"Why should I, dear?" the nun asked. "You could have done nothing — even you could have done nothing for me." There was a caress as well as a compliment in the words. "Weak lungs are not in your line of work. And I was so proud of you, so anxious for you to be the successful woman you are. It is a great gift you have, my dear child — this ability to relieve and save. I could not distract you in your work, as you would have been distracted if you had known. And now I am happy, for I have been permitted to remain until you came, and to see you again."

Dr. Van Nest kissed the thin hands with-

out speaking. Rebellion was in her heart—rebellion against her own helplessness in the face of this disaster. The hollow voice, the bright spots in the cheeks, the brilliant eyes that shone like polished agate under the band of linen across the brow—all these things testified eloquently that Sister Estelle's "reward" was soon to come.

"Can you stay here with me until I go?" the nun asked, almost diffidently. "They have told me"—she hesitated—"that it will be but a short time. Reverend Mother has kindly given her permission for you to stay if your duties will permit."

"I will not leave you for a moment," said the other woman. She added, with an uncontrollable sob: "What shall I do, what can I do, without you? All my work has been for you—to please you. Your letters and your love have made me what I am. In every crisis of my life you have been with me; I could not have met them without you. I have come to you always, and you have never failed me. How can I live on alone?"

The sick woman looked at her with wet eyes. "Listen to me, my little girl," she said. "This may not be so great a separation as you think. The memory of me will always be with you, and you know whether I shall forget you when

I am with God. You know how I would have you act. And if you have some time a peculiar, pressing need of me, perhaps I may be permitted to come to you. Our Lord may grant us this. Why not? When He gave you to me for all these years as the child of my heart." She bent forward and kissed the bowed head in her lap. "Remember," she said, softly. "I promise. If you need me, and if it is permitted me, I will come to you."

Dr. Van Nest, aged thirty-eight, stood at the window of her New York office and looked out at the falling snow. It was Christmas Day, but the season had little holiday significance for the famous surgeon. She had worked as usual, driving in her carriage from hospital to private house, and carrying from place to place with her the constant thought of a white face and a pair of pained, appealing eyes.

When she entered her house late in the evening the smiling maid had pointed to a varied assortment of packages, which had not yet been opened. Large boxes, with the names of prominent florists on their covers, breathed sweetly of the love of friends. Telegrams and notes were piled high on her desk. She unwrapped several of the packages, and her lips set a little grimly over the cards that accompanied them.

"From your grateful patient," she read. "With the deepest appreciation of all your kindness," ran another. "To the dear doctor to whom I owe my merry Christmas," was the inscription of a third. She dropped them with a sigh, looked out of the window, and then, with her characteristic walk, began pacing up and down the long room, her hands clasped behind her and her forehead puckered with thought and anxiety.

"The doctor's worried over some case," the maid reported to the cook. "I can always tell when she's anxious."

Dr. Van Nest's footsteps on the polished floor echoed rather inharmoniously in the large room. On the hearth a bright fire sparkled, but its cheery invitation did not lure her from her restless tramp. Before her there were always the same pale face and dark eyes pathetically full of love and trust. The doctor uttered a sigh that was almost a groan as she at last sank into a chair before the grate and looked into the glowing coals. They formed at once into the outlines of the haunting face.

"I am going to lose that case," she thought, forebodingly. "And I'm going to have a nervous collapse, too," she continued, with grim conviction. "I never felt like this before. I have no confidence in myself. I am as ner-

vous as an hysterical school-girl. And how she trusts me!"

She sat brooding dully for a moment.

"I can't feel as I want to about her case. Is there something I don't foresee?" she went on, putting the situation before herself with rigid truthfulness. "Lincoln agrees with me. So does Dr. Vandeveer. Still, I cannot help feeling there is something under it all that none of us grasps. There is this sense of some unappreciated element in the case which always comes up whenever I think of it. And I—am to operate on her to-morrow. She trusts me as if I were infallible!"

She threw back her head with an air of rebellious hopelessness. Before her came the picture of the patient as she had looked during the preliminary examination of the day before. She had come out of the ether repeating a portion of the Apostles' Creed.

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty," she had murmured; then, suddenly, "And I believe in Dr. Van Nest, too; oh, I do believe in her. I believe in Elizabeth."

The consulting surgeons had smiled irresistibly, the little incident revealed so fully the discussion that must have been waged in the patient's home. Her friends had urged a man surgeon for the operation. But Dr. Van

Nest had been conscious of an unfamiliar lump in her throat. For the first time in her professional experience she was not feeling sure of herself. She wondered whether the patient had felt it, and whether these lynx-eyed male colleagues had any suspicion of it. Her strong white hands were as steady and as deft as ever, but she felt her heart sink. Was she to fail now, for the first time, and on this friend of her heart—this friend who had come, it seemed to her, to fill the place of Sister Estelle, dead these eight years? The sufferer would permit no one but her to operate. This life, so dear to her and to others, lay in her hands—and for the first time in her experience she shrank from the responsibility. She felt suddenly cold, and held her hand to the blaze. It shook visibly. Dr. Van Nest sprang to her feet with an exclamation of anger.

"Fool that I am," she said. "I am letting myself go to pieces. I shall be in fine condition for to-morrow's work." Her eyes filled with sudden, rare tears. "She is the only being I love," she breathed, "and I am going to lose her. First, Sister Estelle. And now she must go—and under my hands at that."

Her thoughts flew to the grave in the convent cemetery out West, marked by a simple pine board darkened by the storms of many

seasons. A childlike longing for the familiar touch and voice, so dear in the years gone by, overwhelmed her. She felt like the panic-stricken little girl of thirty years ago—the child who had been calmed and cheered by a white hand and a soft, reassuring voice.

"'I will be near you, dear,'" repeated the doctor, sadly. "If she could be near me to-day, she would pull me out of this condition I'm allowing myself to get into. Oh, for a moment with her here and now!"

She looked up almost expectantly, as if she had uttered the words of an incantation. The little clock ticked steadily on the mantel, the fire crackled on the hearth, and the wind of December sang its elfish song at the windows. That was all.

She resolutely pulled herself together and rang the bell. Night had fallen, and lights were flashing from the windows of the neighboring houses.

"Bring me something to eat, and then I am going to bed," she said, when the maid appeared. "I must have a good night's sleep —if I can."

She seemed to have slept for a very short time, when she awoke with every sense alert. It was yet night, but through the large win-

dows hygienically open at the top she could see the pearl-gray shadows that preceded dawn. On the hearth the fire burned low, but each object in the room was distinct in the dim light. The clock ticked cheerily. She could not quite distinguish its face across the room, but as she strained her eyes in the effort it struck five.

It was not usual for her to wake at this hour, but she experienced no surprise or annoyance. Instead, she was conscious of a vague but trustful responsiveness. She let her eyes roam slowly around the room, and smiled to herself. Fear and unrest had left her; she felt composed, wholly at peace. She threw back the covering and sat up. As she did so a soft hand touched her own. It was years since she had felt it, but she recognized it at once, and without the slightest shock or fear her mind adapted itself to the experience. She turned quickly and saw Sister Estelle standing at the side of the bed. She was a little in shadow, but her tall figure in the sombre habit of her order was clearly defined, and under the white band across her brow her dark eyes shone luminously. The smile with which she met the doctor's eyes was the old sweet smile of long ago—loving, reassuring, and touched now with a peaceful gratitude which her first words explained.

"You are glad to see me," she said, quietly —"and you are not afraid."

The doctor put the hand to her lips and held it there. It was firm and cool, and there was the same velvety texture which the school-girl of twenty years ago had secretly admired. She echoed the other's words.

"Afraid, Sister?" she said. "Of you? Never in the world. My heart is too full of love and gratitude."

She bent nearer to the other as she spoke, but as she did so the nun's figure drew slightly away. The movement did not hurt her. She understood, and there could be no thought of disappointment in the presence of that steadfast, loving smile. She sank back on the pillow with a sigh of perfect content and happiness.

"You have come," she murmured. "You said you would, and I have looked for you all these years since you left me."

"You did not need me before. You thought you did at times," added the nun, "but you did not. Could you think that I would fail when the hour came? You need me now, and I am here."

"Tell me of yourself," begged the doctor.

The Sister shook her head. "That I am here, through God's mercy, tells you that all

is well with me. I have come to tell you what you need to know—things that will help you," she said. "You have reached a crisis in your career. To-morrow will be the turning-point. If you had failed in the case of your friend, you would have turned morbid and introspective; you would have lost confidence in yourself. You will not fail. I have come to tell you so. The case is as you have diagnosed it, with the one additional element which you have dimly felt throughout, but could not place. You had a similar case in Paris—Madame Bertrand's. You made notes of it at the time. They are in the lowest left-hand drawer of your desk, hidden under old newspapers and clippings. They will give you the key to the situation."

Dr. Van Nest drew a long breath. "I have it now," she cried. "This is almost the same case. They are so rare, it is odd that I should have two of them in my experience, but not as strange as that the recollection of the other should not have come to my tormented mind. I remember the other one perfectly."

The scientific interest of the discovery obscured for a moment the full realization of the strange experience through which she was passing. Sister Estelle resumed:

"The operation will be a success," she said.

"'YOU ARE GLAD TO SEE ME?'"

"Your friend will regain her health. So sleep, dear child, and wake calm and strong for the work you have to do."

Dr. Van Nest threw out imploring hands. "Do not leave me yet," she begged. "How shall I know in the morning that it was not all a dream? How can I tell then that you truly came to me as you promised, and that it was not a fantasy of the night?"

Sister Estelle smiled. "To-morrow you will find your note-book. That will supply what you need. But that you may know the sweetness of our Lord in letting me come as I promised, you shall have an unmistakable sign that I was here. Peace be with you."

The clock chimed the quarter, and Dr. Van Nest looked wide-eyed at the place where the nun had been. The coals in the grate had turned to ashes. The gray of the eastern sky was quickening into light. Through the open windows came sounds of the awakening city, the blowing of distant whistles, the rumble of wheels borne in on the cold, bracing air of the day that was just born. Some were already at their work. Dr. Van Nest closed her eyes, sank back among her pillows, and fell asleep to prepare herself for hers as she had been told.

It was late when she awoke, and she had to dress and breakfast rapidly to keep several

morning appointments. She was almost herself—quick, alert, clear-eyed. She pushed resolutely into her mental background the memory of the night's experience. This was the close of the nineteenth century, and she was a *fin de siècle* product. Visions could hardly be taken more seriously than to gather from them such comfort as they might yield. She smiled and sighed at the same time as she entered her library at two that afternoon. She had to go to her friend's house at three to perform the operation, but in the interval she would look in the old desk that held the accumulated notes of years, and see what her note-book said. Her hand trembled a little as she unlocked the lowest left-hand drawer.

Far back in the corner, dust-covered and hidden under some French journals, was the forgotten note-book. But this was broad daylight, and the life of the great city was going on outside of her library windows. It had merely been a logical trick of memory, she reflected, that had brought the thought of the book to her while she slept, and had connected it with Sister Estelle.

She sat down and plunged into its record. Yes. Here was the case of Madame Bertrand. She read with close attention, absorbed in the purely scientific interest of the subject. Sud-

denly she gave a little gasp of satisfaction, and made two or three notes. Her dream, if a perplexing psychical freak, had proved a profitable aid, and it was sweet to have dreamed of Sister Estelle as coming to her in her need.

A wave of perfume—sweet, heavy, full of memories, was borne in upon her sense. She looked up wonderingly and inhaled it deeply. The air was perfumed richly with mignonette. There was none in the room, none on the desk, none in the old note-book she was reading. No mignonette was near her that cold December day.

She went to the window and leaned forth. The perfume failed her utterly. It did not come from without. From somewhere in her room it rose in such a whiff as she had not known for years. There had been a great bed of it in the convent garden; it was Sister Estelle's favorite flower.

Sister Estelle's favorite flower!

Dr. Van Nest's heart gave a great leap. The perfume was still with her and around her. Her nostrils and lungs were full of it—as full as they had been the day Sister Estelle had been laid away in a grave which the doctor's own hands had lined with the simple flower the dead nun loved.

For one moment she was rigidly motionless, her mind working, not feverishly, but with intense activity. It had been no dream! Sister Estelle had really come to her in the hour of her trying need, as she had promised. Here was the sign which was to convince her how peculiar a privilege she had been accorded in that personal visit of her old convent guardian. It brought a certainty as great as Dr. Van Nest had ever known in her life.

She rose to her feet and stood erect, her eyes shining, a beaming confidence written on her face. She looked at her watch. Quarter of three! With swift despatch she threw on her coat, drew on her gloves, and put on her hat. Then, with a quick, long breath, she grasped firmly her surgeon's case, walked briskly to the door and flung it open. It closed after her with a sharp click.

The Ordeal of Sister Cuthbert

The Ordeal of Sister Cuthbert

ISTER PHILOMENE, mistress of novices at St. Mary's, fingered nervously the letter she held in her hand. The envelope, addressed to Sister M. Cuthbert, lay face upward on the table before her. She looked at the firm, clear writing and smiled ironically when she realized that she was studying the characteristic slope of the letters in an absent-minded endeavor to read from them something of the writer's personality. This interest in chirography was the nearest approach to a hobby in the life of the self-contained nun. It seemed singular, however, to her that it could encroach ever so slightly on her attention when her mind was engrossed by a painful problem.

She frowned reflectingly and opened the drawer of her desk. Another letter, addressed to herself, lay in it. She took it out, drew it from its envelope, and spread it open on the table beside the first. Then, with a deepening

of the line between her severe, straight brows, she carefully reread them both. The second was written in the stiff, angular hand of age. It exhibited no elegance of style, but the cry of a human heart was in it:

"DEAR CHILD,—You will grieve to hear that your father cannot remain with us much longer. He gets weaker all the time, and the doctor says he cannot live more than a few days. He is conscious, and knows us all. He knows he is going to die, but he will not talk about it, or let us say a word about the salvation of his soul. You know how much I want him to die a Catholic. I have hoped and prayed for fifty years that he would be converted, and you have hoped it, too, ever since you were old enough to know what it meant. But he says he will die in the Protestant faith his mother taught him.

"It breaks my heart. Even Father Murphy is almost discouraged. He thinks there is just one hope for your father, and that is you. If you come and talk to him, he may listen. He loves you, and you might be able to do something with him. I cannot bear to think of his death unless he changes. How can I live alone without any hope of meeting him in heaven? He keeps asking for you all the time. Come home and see him. The Superior will send you home, I know, if you tell her this. Write and let me know when to expect you. There is no time to be lost. MOTHER."

"If I go, Sister Rodriguez is the only one

who could take charge of my duties," reflected Sister Philomene. "That would mean that Sister Cuthbert would have to take her place in the infirmary."

She read again, slowly, the letter addressed to the novice:

"*Sister M. Cuthbert.*

"DEAR MADAM,—You will pardon the intrusion of a friend who writes in your interest. I feel it my duty to inform you of the very alarming condition of your mother. Yesterday at the request of the family I and several other physicians held a consultation over her case. There was only one opinion. Unless a marked change for the better comes within forty-eight hours, we must look for the end. I regret to say there is little probability of such a change, but there is one chance for her, and that, it seems to me, rests with you.

"A pathetic feature of your mother's illness, and one which, as an old friend of the family as well as its physician, has moved me deeply, is the fact that in her delirium she constantly calls for you. In her conscious moments she insists with the unselfishness you know so well that you be not summoned to her, as such a call at this time might interfere with your duties in the cloister. She has made the family promise not to send for you. I, however, am free to follow the dictates of heart and reason, and I refuse to see her agonizing for her daughter, whose presence at this juncture might afford the one chance of her

mother's recovery, without doing what I can to secure her that boon. Now you have the facts. You will do as you think best—and in any event you will pardon the interference of a friend who has known you from your childhood.

"Respectfully yours,

"HENRY C. SEDGWICK."

"Sister Cuthbert must take as much of Sister Rodriguez's work as she can while I am away," reflected Sister Philomene, slowly. "Her mother is a good Catholic, and will die happily in the Church. She herself realizes that her daughter's duty lies here. The case is clear to me; I hope it will be to Sister Cuthbert. And yet—it is hard, for she must be told of it, and her love for her mother is the strongest I have ever seen."

She quietly returned the letters to their envelopes after this brief summing-up of the question. It was part of her routine work to read the correspondence that came to the nuns under her care, and the duty frequently brought in its train harassing problems and responsibilities. It had never brought her a harder one than this. Before her rose the face of the young novice, at work in happy unconsciousness of the clouds that hung over the dear home she had forsaken. She was in the infirmary assisting Sister Rodriguez, the convent infirma-

rian, and had proved a tower of strength to the fragile nun whose health had failed sadly during the year. In fact, it was a question whether Sister Rodriguez herself would not soon be forced to swell the list of invalids under Sister Cuthbert's zealous care. She had to hurry from the wing of the convent where the sick nuns lay to the dormitory that held the ailing pupils, and her days knew little rest. The pupils submitted to her tender ministrations with touching docility. In fact, it was whispered that the presence of this popular novice in the infirmary had brought about an alarming increase in the list of applicants for its shelter.

Only Sister Philomene fully understood the far-reaching influence of the ascetic novice in whose deep eyes burned the light of intense religious fervor. Sister Philomene knew why the other novices went to Sister Cuthbert in their trouble, rather than to her. It was Sister Cuthbert who soothed them, who quieted their fears, who prayed for them and with them when doubt or trials assailed them. It was Sister Cuthbert's simple piety, so deep and so moving, which, by the mere fact of its holiness, had brought many to a realization of their religion as the most important element in their lives.

"She can do more with them than I can,"

Sister Philomene had reported to the Superior. She recalled the remark now as she waited for Sister Cuthbert to respond to the summons she had sent.

"I wonder how she will take it?" she thought. "She will do her duty—there is no doubt of that. But will this experience do her good or harm?" She started almost guiltily at the sound of Sister Cuthbert's gentle tap on the door, and when the young nun had entered and stood awaiting orders with respectful, downcast eyes, her superior found it oddly difficult to speak. When she spoke, the words came slowly.

"We have both had bad news, Sister," she said. "We must pray for each other, that God may give us strength to bear it rightly."

She handed the two letters to her and bade her read them. Sitting in her big chair, she noted with her steady, clear eyes every change of expression on the other's face. There were many. Sister Cuthbert had unfolded her own letter first and glanced at the signature. Then, with a quick flush and a word of apology, she laid it down and read the other slowly and carefully. She looked up when she finished, with a sweet, modest sympathy in her glance. Her reverence for her superior had something of awe in it. She was about to speak, when Sister Philomene said, quietly :

"Read your letter, Sister Cuthbert."

There was silence in the little office, broken only by the ticking of the clock, marking off the slow, precious moments of the cloister. Sister Cuthbert hurried through her letter, growing white as she read. At the end, she raised her eyes quickly to meet the grave gaze fixed on her.

"I must go," she said, breathlessly. "I ought to go. Reverend Mother has promised that I may obey a call like this from my mother." Her voice was choked and her features looked ghastly in the dim light of the little room. "I may start at once, may I not?" she added, turning towards the door.

Sister Philomene rose and laid a lightly detaining hand upon her arm. This was one of the crises to which she was accustomed, and she knew how to meet it. Sister Cuthbert was very human, she reflected, after all.

"Wait," she said, gently. "You have forgotten something. Your mother is dying a good Catholic, with all the consolations of religion. My father is at the point of death, and is not a Catholic. I shall submit both these letters to Reverend Mother. If I go, there is no one to take my place but Sister Rodriguez; there is no one but you to take hers. It will have to be for both of us what

Reverend Mother decides, but I should be glad to have your own heart select now what later may be imposed as obedience."

Sister Cuthbert sank upon her knees and laid her forehead against the carved arm of the chair from which her superior had risen. Tears poured from her eyes.

"Forgive me," she said, chokingly. "Forgive me—and may God forgive me. I was selfish; I thought only of myself. I must stay. And I will pray for my dear mother here—" she stopped. The older woman slipped a strong hand under her arm and helped her to her feet.

"You have chosen wisely," she said. "It is well that you made this sacrifice voluntarily—well, indeed. But your ordeal may come later. Go to the chapel and pray for strength to bear it."

She heard the door close and the soft steps of the novice recede in the distance. There was an unusually mild expression in her keen gray eyes as she went to the Mother Superior with the two letters. She submitted them without a word.

In the dim chapel of the convent Sister Cuthbert knelt before the altar and prayed chokingly. In her short, serene life no such grief as this had come to her before, and the an-

guish of it rolled over her like a great wave. Yes, she would do her duty—with all her soul would she do it. But could she bear the pain? Could she live through the next few days, hearing in her ears the voice of her mother calling to her in her delirium—as she heard it now, as she would hear it day and night—until the end? Seeing her mother's face, the soft brown eyes looking for her so eagerly—looking for her whom they would never see again. She would not go—no. She would stay, as duty and her own will dictated. But could mind and body stand the strain? Could she listen to that voice, that dearly loved voice, calling, calling—and calling in vain? It was in her ears now, in the silent chapel. Would she ever cease to hear it if she did not obey it? Only one short half-hour had passed since she read that letter, and already she seemed to have gone through the suffering of a long life. Could she bear it? Or was it some awful dream, some hideous fantasy of the night from which she would mercifully awake? If that was it— Oh, God, for daylight! She felt as if she might shriek aloud. Never had she been conscious of the restraint of convent walls till now. Was she losing her mind? Was she going to succumb to the assault of one great affliction?

Ah, but such a grief—and such a mother! True, she had left her mother. She had given her up when she heard the call to the cloister, and they had both realized, the two who loved each other so fondly, all that separation meant. But her mother had been well and strong and happy in the love of her husband and her other daughter. At the stipulated intervals her letters had come to the convent without the maternal tenderness and the home atmosphere they breathed ever causing a regret in the nun's breast. But now, in sickness, in sorrow, in death—oh, if she could be there, with her mother!

Sister Cuthbert sank lower before the altar. She had forgotten where she was; almost forgotten what she was. She drooped, a huddled mass of black, under the white veil that told of her probation.

Yes, she reflected stanchly, her place was here, and here she would remain. Was it only yesterday she had been so happy? Now she felt like a prisoner, for her mother lay dying outside the walls within which, by her own act, she had shut herself away. She had come, and her mother had wished her to come. Were they both wrong in feeling that here her life-work lay? Never! A thrill of the old ecstasy in her choice filled the nun. Across the

black of her horizon a blue line appeared dimly. She straightened herself, buried her face in her hands, and prayed again. And as she prayed the clouds that had obscured her soul were dissipated and peace came to her.

Thank God, it was only a passing storm that had struck her. Through all she had not really wavered in her choice. This was her life—this the ideal life—she, one of those gloriously privileged to share it. If she had seemed to waver, it was because the strongest human love she knew was threatened. She had been weak, she would be strong; she had rebelled, she would be submissive. Tears rolled down her cheeks, but they were those that fall when the storm has spent itself. After their soothing flow, the young nun raised her head as a flower straightens itself under an April shower.

She was alone in the chapel. That was fortunate, she thought. No other eye had seen her struggle, no one but her Maker knew how far she had fallen below the standard she had set herself. But she would go on from this point unfalteringly. The dear mother would understand—she who always understood. Even here, she would see—and how much more beyond! What was this little life, this little world, that one should mourn over a few years of separation? After it came the enduring peace

of perfect union. Sister Cuthbert looked up at the altar; in her eyes burned their habitual look of exaltation. The suffering of the hour had left few traces on her serene face. It was over. She had struggled; she had conquered; she could endure. She leaned her head against the low railing with a parting prayer of resignation and faith.

"Into Thy dear hands, O Lord, I place myself utterly; and there, too, I place the dear mother whom I love more than anything save Thee. Be Thou the more with her, now that Thy will keeps me from her."

Her eyes were wide open, but she no longer saw the altar and the familiar surroundings of the chapel. Instead there came before her vividly an old Colonial house, towards the entrance of which she seemed to be walking up a garden path. The door opened. She entered the house, passed through the wide hall, and up the broad steps that led to the second floor. At the head of them she turned to the right and entered a large, square room. She moved with accustomed steps, for she knew every inch of the way, and all the objects on which her eyes rested were the familiar surroundings of her early years. It was her home.

The room she entered was full, but no one heeded her. She walked its length to the bed

between the windows opposite the door, and took her station at its head. In the bed lay her mother, with closed eyes; she seemed to breathe, but that was all. Dr. Sedgwick held the sick woman's hand in his, counting the pulse. Beside him stood a strange man with a professional air whom the nun had never seen before. At the foot of the bed knelt her father, his face hidden in the counterpane, and her sister Edith sat in a large chair near him, her head buried in her hands. The physicians talked softly, but the nun could not hear what they said. This did not surprise her, nor the fact that no one observed her entrance. She looked steadily at her mother's face and saw the eyelids flicker. The physicians bent over their patient. They worked rapidly. Something was done; something that looked like a battery was applied. There was a quantity of apparatus near the bed, unfamiliar to her. At last the mother's eyes opened. She alone of those in the room saw the black-robed novice at the head of the bed. Over her face flashed a look of recognition and delight.

"Katherine," she gasped. "You have come —how good—dear child—now I can die content."

She smiled the old familiar smile, and closed her eyes. Over her face a gray shadow fell. Even as the nun looked the features seemed to

stiffen. The doctors stepped back, and Dr. Sedgwick, going to the man at the foot of the bed, put a sympathetic hand under his arm and helped him to rise. Edith, who had sprung to her feet, sank down again with a bitter cry. The strange doctor drew the sheet gently over the still face on the pillow.

And now there were tapers burning about that placid face.—No!—This was the convent chapel, and the tapers were those that burned dimly on the altar. It had grown dark and cold. She was still upon her knees. She heard the sound of the vesper bell.

Oh, the tender mercifulness of God! She had given up seeing her mother after the long, rebellious outcry of her weak, human heart. And then He had taken her to her mother, who had seen her and had died in peace. She seemed not to touch the floor as she walked down the long aisle and out of the chapel to the main hall beyond.

One of the nuns met her and spoke as she passed. Sister Cuthbert replied with her usual sweet dignity, but her expression, in the white light of the electric globe overhead, breathed such exaltation that the nun stopped and looked after her with reverent wonder. Sister Cuthbert went directly to the room of the Mother Superior and told her experience.

In the days that followed, the influence of Sister Cuthbert, always benign, had in it in the sick-room a new element which even the most careless of the girls felt strongly. In the past she had helped, strengthened, and comforted. Now she seemed to uplift as well—to bear others upward by the gentle force of her own spiritual ascent. If there had been any criticism of her in the old days, among those most severe of critics, the school-girls, it was that she was visionary.

"She is not human enough; she is not one of us," they had said. "She lives in a rarefied atmosphere. Her sympathy is not the sympathy of understanding; it is sympathy in the abstract—a regret over something she has never known and only half gets."

Groping around now in their puzzled minds for an explanation of the change in her, they decided that the new element was a human one—the sympathy of perfect understanding. But with it was an increase of the spiritual quality which had always characterized the young nun.

"She is more ecstatic in her moods than ever," said May Iverson, slowly, "and yet, somehow, she is more of us. What an atmosphere she gives out! Her mere presence is like a prayer. The expression is not new,

but how it fits!—how well it fits! She is going through some experience, take my word for it; something we know nothing about."

Sister Philomene returned a week from the day she had left. Her father had passed away, but one look at her face made Sister Cuthbert feel that her mission had been successful. There was no time for conversation between the two on the subjects so near to both. Sister Cuthbert made her verbal report with her usual sweet conciseness, and, though Sister Philomene felt the subtle change in her, she could ask no questions.

The afternoon of her return the portress brought Sister Philomene a message and a card. The card read:

HENRY C. SEDGWICK, M.D.

The message, conscientiously delivered by the little portress, was rather a lengthy one. The gentleman, she said, was the physician of Sister Cuthbert's family. Sister Cuthbert's mother had died a week ago, and the doctor wished to tell the young nun of her affliction and give her some details concerning the last hours of her mother's life. He had not made the journey for that purpose; professional business had brought him to the city near the con-

vent, and he had driven there on the chance that an interview might be granted him. And because he was to come, her family had not yet written her of their great loss. Sister Philomene made her decision promptly.

"Ask him to be so kind as to wait," she said to the portress, "and tell Sister Cuthbert I would like to see her." She glanced sympathetically at the young nun when she responded to the summons.

"Dr. Sedgwick is here to see you," she said, "and to tell you the details of your dear mother's—death. We will go to him together, if you would like it." She straightened the papers on her desk very carefully as she spoke, and listened, with a little quickening of her steady heart-beats, for some sound from the other woman. There was none. Sister Cuthbert was silently moving towards the door. She stepped back as she reached it, and stood aside for her superior to precede her. Sister Philomene looked at her as she passed, and something in the nun's expression made her catch her breath. Sister Cuthbert was almost smiling.

The doctor, awaiting them in the prim little reception-room at the right of the convent entrance, was stalking up and down the highly polished floor, bending his shaggy head

over the wax pieces on the small tables, and scrutinizing with his near-sighted eyes the paintings and embroideries on the wall. He dreaded the fifteen minutes before him with his keener realization of the cost of the kindly impulse that had made him come. But the sense of personal tax faded away as he turned to greet the young nun he had known since she was a child. He held out both hands, and she laid her own in them. Then he bowed gravely to the Sister who accompanied her, and placed chairs for them both with punctilious courtesy. Not a word had been spoken, but his quick eyes had already taken in every detail of the novice's expression, and he, too, wondered.

"You can surmise my melancholy errand, Sister," he said, gently. "Your dear mother died a week ago to-day—the day you must have received the letter I wrote telling you of her illness. You could hardly have reached her in time, you see, even had you started at once. I thought there might be some comfort to you in hearing of her last hours, and so I have ventured to make this call."

"You are very kind," said the nun, softly.

Dr. Sedgwick rubbed his glasses. He was conscious of a sensation touching on irritability. Was this the warm-hearted girl he had

known—this woman who had not one tear for her mother's death? Or was it another illustration of the drying-up of all human impulse which he believed convent life entailed? He unconsciously took on his most professional manner as he continued.

"There was no pain or suffering at the last. But one rather extraordinary thing happened. Your mother, as I wrote you, had been calling for you constantly. Just at the end she became conscious, and she thought she saw you. She spoke to you and died happy in the belief that you were with her."

"I was," said Sister Cuthbert, quietly; "I was there." She lifted her eyes as she spoke and fixed them on the doctor's face. He regarded her with professional calm.

"Sister Cuthbert means," interrupted Sister Philomene, gently, "that she was there in spirit and sympathy. Her duties kept her here. It was unfortunate, but we could not permit her to go."

"I was there," repeated Sister Cuthbert, with quiet conviction. She seemed not to have heard the other woman's words. She spoke slowly, as one who describes a picture and wishes to overlook no detail.

"She died between four and five o'clock," she continued, "in her own room. The bed had

been moved between the two large windows. You were there, and another man I had never seen before, who seemed to be a doctor, too—both standing at the left side of the bed. You held my mother's hand and counted her pulse. Father knelt at the foot of the bed, with his face buried in the bedclothes. My sister Edith sat on a chair near him. When you were giving my mother some stimulant she revived and saw me. She said, 'Katherine—you have come—how good—dear child. Now I can die content.' Then she—fell asleep, and you helped my dear old stricken father to his feet."

Comprehension dawned on the doctor's face. "Oh, you have heard from your father or sister, after all," he said, more briskly and with an air of relief. "They said they would not write, as I was to tell you personally. But I see they have given you minute details."

"No one has written," said the novice, simply. "I have not heard one word." She was very erect, and her pure tones had the throbbing quality of a cello string.

"I saw it all—the whole scene—as I knelt before the altar in our chapel, where I had been praying God for strength to do my duty here. He gave it—and more. He took me there, my mother saw me, and I saw her die. I told Reverend Mother of it that night—just

as I have told it now. Oh—the glory of it, the goodness of it, the miracle of it! Do you wonder that I can endure her death after that? Do you wonder that I can smile, though she has gone?"

Sister Philomene started to her feet. Her serene face was transfigured by a reflection of the light that shone from the face of the novice. She crossed herself. Without doubt or question she accepted the experience, as Sister Cuthbert had done, as a manifestation of the divine love and mercy. Her lips moved as she prayed silently. Sister Cuthbert, too, was praying. Both seemed to have forgotten that they were not alone.

Dr. Sedgwick took his hat and turned it doubtfully in his hands. He looked at the inspired faces of the nuns and his eyes dropped as he bowed his farewell. Here was something new in his experience. Give him time and he could explain the thing, he thought. In fact, half a dozen explanations suggested themselves as he went slowly down the steps that led from the convent entrance to the street. The novice was in an overwrought, nervous state at the time of the—er—vision, he reflected. She knew the house and the room, and some telepathic signal might have come to her at the hour of her mother's death. But she had

described the scene so accurately! How could she know the mother's very words, and that little incident of his helping the broken husband to rise?

Dr. Sedgwick stopped a passing cab and jumped in. His nerves were on edge. He did not like to meet these supernatural experiences on a bright, warm day in the beginning of the scientific twentieth century. The clang of the cable-car was in his ears, the shouts of quarrelsome cabmen rising above it, yet in these most prosaic surroundings that strange experience kept obtruding itself. Dr. Sedgwick put it away at last by a strong effort of will.

"Too much work, not enough nourishment, I'm afraid," he reflected, practically. "What she needs is a change of air, rest, and good food." This was satisfactory as far as it went. But no sooner had the doctor nicely adjusted his point of view than he recalled, with surprising vividness, that scene in the death-room.

Oh, the radiance of the dying face as the woman had looked up at that empty corner: *"Katherine—you have come—how good—dear child. Now I can die content."*

What had she seen? Dr. Sedgwick brusquely turned away from the answer.

Saint Ernesta and the Imp

Saint Ernesta and the Imp

MAY IVERSON took one long, appraising look at the child and dubbed her "The Imp." It was the Imp's first day at St. Mary's, but the obvious fitness of the name was realized before the week had passed, and the pupils adopted it enthusiastically, regardless of the stern disapproval of the nuns.

The Imp was just ten. According to May Iverson, who seriously asserted that she had analyzed it, the blood that flowed in the Imp's veins was in equal parts French, Russian, Spanish, Tartar, and Indian. There was some color for this extravagant statement in the Imp's appearance, which was overwhelmingly foreign. Her great, dark eyes illumined a very olive skin, and the mass of hair that waved above them in riotous confusion was jet black and fiercely curly. The strict rule of the convent demanding smooth hair was violated by these flamboyant spirals, but even as the nuns

noticed them the Imp was violating so many more important rules that they held their breath and gave thought and prayer to the human problem before them.

The Imp arrived at St. Mary's late Saturday evening and was at once put to bed. The strangeness of her surroundings kept her quiet that night, much to the surprise of the nuns as they afterwards recalled the fact. But in chapel Sunday morning, during the eminently elevating discourse by Father Fabian, this unnatural self-control of the Imp gave way, and within half an hour five fat little girls lifted their voices and wept aloud, and were ignominiously led down the middle aisle in full view of the scandalized congregation. Two of the victims were observed to cling close to each other and walk with a peculiar, side-long motion. It was subsequently revealed that the new pupil had tied their blond braids together with a dexterity and unyielding strength evidently due to long practice. Her attentions to the others were less original, but no less obnoxious. She had merely thrust a hat-pin into the plump arm of one, dropped a slate-pencil down the back of another, and made a face of such awful ferocity at the third that she shrieked aloud in terror from the rude shock to her nervous system. The Imp had

selected plump victims because their rotund and placid appearance irritated her. She was herself excessively thin and abnormally restless.

These incidents, all of which occurred within one brief but exciting half-hour, brought home to the nuns the fact that little Mercedes Centi, the new pupil, might be an element of discord in their peaceful retreat. They discussed her with forebodings during the interval between high mass and the noon meal. It seemed rather soon to adopt stringent measures of punishment; she had not been with them twenty-four hours. They decided to try moral suasion; and so for an hour and a half that afternoon two of the Sisters pointed out to the Imp the error of her ways while she watched, with the strained interest of one lost to all else, the gyrations of a large "blue-bottle" that buzzed about the window-panes. It is to be feared that she lost some of the edifying discourse directed to her, but the nuns afterwards felt that some of it must have found a place in her consciousness; for later in the day Mercedes called the other pupils around her while she unpacked her trunks and generously gave them most of her earthly possessions. These gifts were afterwards recalled by the nuns, and it was intimated to Mercedes that she might

need her own dresses, *lingerie*, and books; but the incident was an encouraging one, suggesting that the Imp was not all bad. She might have, must have, redeeming qualities.

The correctness of this view was demonstrated as the weeks went by. During the most exciting days the quiet community had known in years, the nuns added to their store of information concerning the nature and characteristics of Mercedes Centi. It was a difficult lesson they were learning, for the experience of each day upset the carefully formed theories based on that of the day before. But out of it all, in the end, one truth loomed large. Never in the history of St. Mary's had so bad a little girl been sheltered in its walls —and never in the history of the world had a bad little girl shown so many fascinating qualities. These latter glowed tenderly, like a rainbow after a storm, but, unlike that curve of promise, they had no fixed time for their appearance, nor were they subject to any law. The manners of Mercedes, when she chose to be good, were those to make one weep with joy. Her generosity was proverbial; she scorned a lie; she loved animals; she was the friend of all helpless things—except her teachers! For the rest, there were periods when for weeks the Imp went about like a small human Ve-

suvius, breeding desolation by her fiery eruptions.

It is not the purpose of this story to tell the things the Imp did: this is a moral tale. But one nun after another succumbed in the struggle with her until throughout the length of the great building there was a demand, without one dissenting voice, that the Imp be removed. There were reasons, however, as the Superior knew, that made her removal a difficult matter. Her father had frankly declared his offspring's failings, and had warned the Sisters that her presence would not add to their comfort. They had quieted his doubts with suave assurances, strong through memory of other small tartars conquered and reclaimed. Then he had paid a year's tuition in advance and departed for South America, both he and his daughter bearing their farewell with suspicious cheerfulness. He was a widower, and there were no relatives, so far as the nuns knew, to take the child in his absence. She was on their hands!

The Imp's class teacher had a mild attack of hysteria when this ultimatum was announced to her, and her despair was shared, though less wildly, by the other Sisters whose duties brought them into daily association with Mercedes. The pupils openly rejoiced. The Imp was trying at

times even to them, but there was no denying that since her arrival life had taken on fuller, richer tones. They suffered frequently, but soon learned to do it with no more complaint than was strictly necessary.

A puzzling feature of the Imp's case was her entire lack of human affection. Not one pupil, not one Sister, had ever touched the stormy heart of Mercedes Centi. Other little girls went about with their arms around each other's waists and wrote notes to each other, and then quarrelled and sat for hours in a stricken grief that all might see. Every little girl had some favorite nun on whose desk she laid her offering whenever a box came from home, and whom she followed about as constantly and as devotedly as circumstances and the Sister would permit. But the Imp stood ostentatiously aloof and showed open scorn for these fine feelings she could not share. Nun after nun tried her blandishments in vain. Small girl after small girl made friendly advances, only to be spurned. In cold self-exile from the isle of friendship, the Imp followed what May Iverson called "her career of danger and daring."

On one occasion only did she show a temporary interest in human companionship. She had met Sister Ernesta in the garden—Saint

Ernesta, as the girls called the oldest and most venerated Sister in the convent. Sister Ernesta was almost eighty, an age few nuns attain. Her active share in the work of the community was over, but her benign influence permeated the place like perfume, and pupils and nuns alike worshipped at her shrine. Saint Ernesta had grown more collected in herself with the passing of the years: the long life of which she was so near the end seemed like a dream as she looked back at it. Few things except her devotions were vital to her now, yet there was something very beautiful in her face as she sat waiting for the final summons. When she took her rare walks down the long halls or through the garden paths, her gentle smile was unfailingly given to every pupil she met, but few of the girls could boast of the honor of a word from her. Universally loved and venerated though she was, Saint Ernesta's aloofness from the community was almost as marked as that of the Imp, though from so different a cause. So, when she one day stopped and spoke to the latter in the garden, even the Imp was conscious of the greatness of the moment and of a swelling of the chest. The Imp had captured a tadpole from the tiny lake in the convent garden, and was watching its development with the zest of the born naturalist.

It and some caterpillars she had also separated from their kind furnished material for an instructive discourse, but Saint Ernesta was too wise for that. The child hardly realized how much she was learning from the simple words that fell from the nun's lips, but she herself was at her best in the half-hour that followed, and several times Sister Ernesta looked at her with an unusual gleam of interest in her old eyes.

With some other than Mercedes the episode might have been the beginning of one of the strong friendships so often formed between pupil and Sister. Not so with the Imp. If she felt the human impulse, she crushed it, and made herself unusually obnoxious for several days to make up for it. She even took care at first to disappear when she saw Sister Ernesta approaching; but this tendency wore off after a time, and the two had several meetings, during which the Imp was confessedly on her guard. The talk between them was entirely impersonal and had to do with any living thing but Man. The subject of obstreperous little girls and their obvious duties was carefully avoided. From the first Sister Ernesta seemed to have a strange insight into the heart and mind of the Imp. She showed this, too, during the discussion about the child so often held in

Open Council. For years Saint Ernesta had spoken there but rarely, and only when the special weight of her age and long experience seemed required. Now, to the surprise of the convent community, her voice was suddenly raised in defence of the Imp, and she showed an understanding of the little girl's nature which awed her associates. The Imp, whose mental processes none had been able to follow, seemed an open book to the venerable nun. Again and again she did the things Sister Ernesta had said she would do under given conditions. Again and again the problems which her complex nature suggested were solved by the nun through some instinct which she could not, or would not, reveal. She herself saw little of the child, but she grew to know her better and better from the nuns' daily recital of her escapades. And several times, when certain sad tales were told of the Imp's misdoings, the awe-struck Sisters distinctly saw Saint Ernesta's lips twitch, and once her thin old shoulders shook with something that seemed like, but obviously could not be, amusement. The nuns marvelled, but not long; for reflection needs a quiet atmosphere, and the Imp chose this time to crown her career at St. Mary's with a more audacious exploit than any of which she had yet been guilty.

High in the tower of the many-sided convent building hung an old bell whose tones for fifty years had called the nuns to mass each morning at five o'clock. It was rung only once again during the day—for vespers in the afternoon. During the remainder of the day smaller bells were sounded to remind the Sisterhood of the duties allotted to the passing hours. The bell-ringer was Sister Harmonia, a gentle nun who had climbed to her lofty post twice every twenty-four hours during the fifteen years she had dwelt in the cloister. It was a long journey to the top, in the dark, up the spiral staircase that wound like a narrow corkscrew to the platform just below the bell. A great key on Sister Harmonia's belt unlocked the small door that led to the tower, but the hinges of that door were rusty and the lock was old and loose. No precautions were taken to guard the place, for the darkness, the loneliness, the dust, and the suggestion of the presence of mice and bats offered few attractions even to inquisitive school-girls.

The Imp passed the door one day on one of her various tours of inspection, and noticed the sagging lock and the absence of a sentinel. It would have been a simple matter for her clever fingers to pick the lock. A glance proved this, and even as she looked the Imp's hands in-

stinctively reached forth to do it. But a second thought made her pause. She could not lock it again, and the act would be at once discovered. Was it worth while—now? Was there not perhaps a better time? Mercedes Centi reflected, and, having done so, turned her back on the little door and went away with light, buoyant steps. For several days thereafter the Imp was observed to feel a strong but discreet interest in candles. The inspector of the dormitory, Sister Italia, noticed this, and her heart sank. Something was in the wind, but what? She carefully confiscated the candle-ends the Imp had concealed under her little bureau, but even as she did so she felt she was but deferring for a time some new and deadly move.

The Imp discovered her loss a few hours later, but it did not disturb her. She had another candle-end in a second hiding-place, and it was her distinct purpose to use it that night as soon as the dormitory was silent and Sister Italia, in her distant corner, was asleep. Nights were trying times for the Imp, who did not sleep well; it was an exceptional occasion when she did not rouse the long-suffering Sister Italia by some startling and absurd demand. But to-night she was so quiet that the tired nun, who should have known better, thought she was asleep, and

dropped off herself with a sigh of exhaustion.

It was just midnight when the Imp arose. The great dormitory was very still. Not a sound came from any of the small, white-curtained beds snowily outlined by the dim light that burned at the far end of the room near Sister Italia's curtained retreat. The Imp threw her little woollen wrapper over her nightgown, thrust her bare feet into the woollen slippers by the bed, grasped firmly her candle and three precious matches she had secured, and, with movements as lithe and noiseless as those of a cat, stole along the wall, opened the door, and found herself in the wide corridor outside. There, too, a light burned dimly, and there was a chance that the Sisters who formed the convent watch and patrolled the wings of the great building at night as a guard against fire or other calamity might see her. Fortune favored her. The long hall was deserted, and the Imp flashed through it like a meteor, then down a side extension, and finally to the wing where the tower was situated. It was a February night and bitterly cold, but what was physical discomfort to Mercedes Centi, sustained by her lofty mission? A little work with a penknife, and her fingers opened the door that led to the tower, and in another moment she

"SHE RANG SLOWLY AND STEADILY"

was making the ascent, her lighted candle in her hand.

There was a strong draught in the tower, and the feeble flame flickered perilously. Her wrapper caught under her feet as she toiled up the narrow, crooked stairs, and it seemed to her that the sleeping nuns, in their distant wing of the building, must hear the creak of the old boards under even her light weight. But she kept on until she reached the top. There, still clinging to her precious candle with her left hand, she seized the bell-rope in her right. In another moment the solemn clang of the great bell filled every corner of the silent building. She rang slowly and steadily, with a careful imitation of Sister Harmonia's systematic and painstaking method.

Far below, in the cloister wing of the convent, the nuns turned sleepily in their narrow beds. Five o'clock! The night seemed strangely short, and they felt unrefreshed. But no doubt disturbed them. Every morning at five o'clock during all the years of their cloister lives they had risen at the summons of that bell. They dressed drowsily and filed slowly along the halls to the dark, cold convent chapel. Even Sister Italia was among them.

The Imp did not defeat the purpose of her work by overdoing. She was too artistic for

that. The bell tolled exactly the usual number of strokes. Then she crept down the stairs and along the corridors and, softly, into her own dormitory and her little bed. The girls still slept peacefully, for the five o'clock summons meant nothing to them. It was not till agitated footsteps sounded in the halls outside, and voices were heard, and the door of the dormitory opened to admit an excited band of nuns that any of them awakened. Then they sat up with a pleasant thrill of expectation. Of course it was the Imp. What had she been doing now?

In the minds of the entire community the same culprit had been unerringly arraigned. It must be the Imp. Who else would have called them up at midnight for five o'clock mass. Who else would have dared to break open the door of the tower? Sister Harmonia, the first to see the fraud, had hastened to give the alarm that something was wrong, and a number of the Sisters had gone with her to the tower and found the candle-grease and the burned matches and the open door.

The majority of the Sisters went humiliatedly back to bed. The matter was serious, of course, but nothing could be done that night. A few came with Sister Italia to the dormitory and turned their steps to the bed where the

Imp lay. Had there ever been before such sweet and restful slumber? Nestled cosily in her cot was Mercedes, her long, black lashes resting on her olive cheeks, her dainty hands sweetly clasped outside of the cover, the counterpane rising and falling with her regular breathing. The nuns were not touched by this spectacle of helpless innocence further than to look at each other, baffled. They dared not wake the child, yet who but she could have done this thing? They stole silently away.

The next morning the Imp, decorously intent upon her task in the class-room, was summoned into the presence of the directors. Even her dauntless spirit quailed when she faced the three nuns who sat awaiting her — a solemn conclave, called together only for cases of paramount importance. It was by no means the Imp's first appearance before them, but that reflection did not cheer her. She shot one keen glance at them out of her black eyes, then fastened those eyes upon the floor, and fell back upon her strongest defence, absolute silence. Not a question would she answer, not a word would she say. They accused, they pleaded, they reasoned—all in vain. Mercedes was silent. Several times before she had taken this stand. In one surprising case she was after-

wards discovered to be innocent of the special charge made against her, and the memory of this sadly complicated the present situation. Everything pointed to her guilt, but her silence might mean injured innocence—the silence of one too proud to deny a baseless charge. They dismissed her for a time, with no outward indication of the bewildered dismay that filled their hearts, and she strolled back to her classroom to take up the congenial and temporary rôle of little sunbeam and bright, studious child.

A general sigh went up in the council-room that afternoon when the case of Mercedes Centi again came up for discussion. This time the problem was a really vital one. Should they punish her for an act not proven, or should they let her go unpunished and thus demoralize the school and encourage her to fresh outbreaks? The circumstantial evidence was against her. She had been secreting candle-ends for several days before the escapade. Sister Italia testified to finding and confiscating a number of them. But—and here at once was a point in favor of the defendant—she had taken them the very night of the bell-ringing, leaving, so far as she knew, no others in the child's possession. Again, though the steps leading to the tower showed traces of candle-

"THE NUNS DRESSED DROWSILY"

grease, no traces of candle or drippings were found in or around the Imp's quarters.

One of the nuns rose and spoke. The guilt of Mercedes seemed so established, she said, as to need little discussion. In their hearts all knew she had done this thing. She should be punished, and in a way that would make a lasting impression. She suggested, as a just penalty, that Mercedes be forbidden to attend the great annual holiday entertainment given by the pupils to the nuns in the large hall of the institution. It was, next to the commencement, the event of the year, and to be kept away from it would be a severe punishment, even to the Imp, who had recently taken a deep interest in the rehearsals and had herself a small part in the musical programme. There was a murmur of approval and a little buzz of comment which the quiet voice of Sister Ernesta silenced. She had risen from her chair and stood looking around the circle of faces in which she saw only dark distrust of the Imp. There was an unusual erectness in her pose, and her soft, low voice was very steady as she addressed the Superior.

"May I speak a few words?" she said, gently. "I am interested in this child, as you may have seen. I have met her many times; we have had little talks in the garden. I have

begun to think that I know her a little—that I perhaps understand her. It may be that we have not studied her carefully enough to find the soft spot that must be in her."

She hesitated a moment. At her last words the eyebrows of Mercedes' class teacher rose on a very human impulse, but she quickly controlled them. It was Saint Ernesta who was speaking, and who continued now, a little brokenly.

"I agree with you that some notice should be taken of this child's act—or her evident association with it. But it should be done in an unusual way. The situation is novel. It should be met in an effective fashion. I have a suggestion with which I hope you will agree. Let me act as proxy for my little friend. Let her go to the entertainment; let me remain away. Let her understand that I am taking the punishment for her—that I will continue to take it from now on until she publicly confesses or denies her share in this affair of the tower. If she can be made to realize the spirit in which I am doing this, and I think she will, for she is very clever, we may touch her wayward little heart."

She sank wearily into her chair. She had spoken more than in years in defence of the small outlaw who had put herself beyond the

pale of interest and affection. She must feel a strong inclination toward the child, the nuns reflected. But why? What could these two—Saint Ernesta and the Imp—have in common? They puzzled over the problem even as they unanimously assented to the venerable nun's plea. They were not at all sure it would succeed, but harder hearts than the Imp's might well be touched by it, and, on the whole, they were sanguine as they separated.

To May Iverson was given the delicate task of informing the Imp of the important decision reached in her case. It is due Miss Iverson to add that none of the dramatic features of the situation were lost sight of in the interview she had that afternoon with the silent culprit. She pictured to the child the scene in the council-room, where the old nun had risen in her defence. She reminded the Imp of Saint Ernesta's age and increasing feebleness. On that dear, venerable back were laid the heavy burdens of the Imp's misdoing. How long must it bear them?

Mercedes followed her discourse with acute working of her alert mind and Southern imagination, but, if she was touched, she made no sign. She merely looked at May oddly out of her black eyes and intimated that she had no personal interest in the conversation. May

watched her with more annoyance than surprise as she walked away. "Has that child a heart?" she mused. "Never. There isn't a symptom of one—the little wretch! What can dear Saint Ernesta see in her?" She pondered gloomily over the Imp's unregenerate attitude as she went to consult Sister Cecilia concerning her own share in the musical programme of the entertainment to be given the next week.

During the days that followed the Imp went her way in icy aloofness from her associates. She did nothing out of the common, for which grace her teacher devoutly gave thanks in her nightly orisons, but neither did she show signs of the regeneration they had hoped to see. Several times she met Saint Ernesta in the halls and passageways, and once the old nun stopped. But her remarks were on the subject of an injured bird the Imp was carefully treating in the conservatory, and her friendly inquiries after the health of the pet were very civilly answered by Mercedes. Then the two went their separate ways, and the Imp sought diversion from the nervous strain of virtue by carefully cutting off the yellow curls of the girl in front of her in the French class. The teacher was near-sighted, the victim engrossed in her book, and the other pupils silent from sheer ecstasy.

The child who always sounded the alarm when the Imp began operations was ill that day.

Those who felt that the Imp might relent before the entertainment were disappointed. She was present, and Sister Ernesta was not. The nun's large empty chair was there, however, conspicuously placed at the end of the first row of Sisters, and Mercedes saw it as she stood with a band of little girls singing with glad hearts the class song, "In Heaven We Hope to Meet." The Imp went through her part of the exercise with suave self-possession. Nothing could have been more exemplary than her behavior. She was modest, graceful, conspicuously courteous to her associates. Every grace of manner she possessed, and they were many, was in evidence throughout the afternoon. But there was absolutely no indication that she realized her melancholy position until one of the older pupils, in a brief address of affection for the Sisters, mentioned several by name, and at the close of her remarks glanced toward the empty chair.

"We feel a deep regret," she said, "that one of our beloved Sisters is not with us to-day, yet we give thanks that her absence is due to no failing of her health or strength. She has remained away as an expression of her affection for one of us, now here. We miss her very

much, for as long as we can remember she has been with us on these occasions. Yet her influence is with us as vividly as if she herself sat in that empty chair, smiling on us as she has smiled for years—as we pray she may smile on us for many years to come."

That was all. Sister Cecilia raised her baton and the convent orchestra burst into the jubilant strains of the Spring Song. A few of the smaller girls were ostentatiously wiping their wet eyes, but the Imp preserved an unruffled immobility. She held her programme very tightly, and her olive skin had taken on a lighter hue, but her black eyes looked down at the faces below her with merely polite interest in their glance.

May Iverson stole away from the hall as soon as she could escape unnoticed and went to Sister Ernesta's room. The nun sat by a window gazing past the snow-covered garden into the blue-gray winter sky that hung above it. She smiled at the young girl as she entered, and looked questioningly into her glowing face. To May there was deep pathos in the lonely vigil and the hope that brightened it.

"I came to tell you, dear Sister Ernesta," she said, sadly, "about that extraordinary child. She is quite unmoved and is having a very pleasant time—" She stopped abruptly.

"THE IMP CONQUERED AND REPENTANT"

Feet were flying along the hall, and as she spoke the last words the door burst open with no preliminary rap. Into the room a small but extraordinarily active bundle precipitated itself. It flew across the floor, dropped on its knees beside Saint Ernesta's chair, buried its head in the nun's lap, and burst into a storm of passionate tears. It was the Imp—the Imp conquered and repentant, but making her amends tempestuously, as she did all else. Saint Ernesta laid her tremulous, transparent hands on the mop of hair in her lap and turned on May a meaning glance she was quick to understand. The girl left the room hastily and closed the door behind her, but even as she turned away she heard the Imp's voice raised in strange, choked words, new to the vocabulary of Mercedes Centi.

"Oh, Sister," it said, "dear Sister, I am sorry. Forgive me. I will be good. I will always be good."

May Iverson hurried back to the Commencement Hall. Mingled with her satisfaction at the outcome of Sister Ernesta's experiment was her wonder at the sympathy and understanding that lay behind it.

"How did she know?" she asked herself. "For years she has not taught, and she has not seemed to notice us. Yet now she takes

a child that has baffled the entire convent and promptly finds the key to her nature. I wonder why?"

She ventured to ask Sister Ernesta in the evening. The nun was tired, for an hour's talk with the Imp in an absolutely new phase of feeling had exhausted a vitality none too great at best. And after it they had gone together to the great hall and, side by side before the large audience of Sisters and pupils, had stood together as the Imp made her public confession and apology. It was a picture not to be forgotten—the venerable nun and the child facing their little world, hand in hand, while Mercedes Centi, never again the Imp, laid the white foundation-stone of her future admirable career at St. Mary's. The Saint was very pale and looked older and more feeble than ever before in the fading light of the late afternoon. The erstwhile Imp seemed very small and very moist and sadly pathetic, but the courage of her ancestors was still in her, and she uttered her confession in a clear voice, with her head and shoulders well back. Subsequently she kissed several little girls who seemed to wish this demonstration—and this was the capstone of the monument of self-abasement she so gallantly raised that day.

May Iverson still seemed to see the picture

as she hazarded her question that evening. Saint Ernesta looked up at her from the low chair in which she was resting, and a twinkle appeared in her faded brown eyes, as a sudden spark flashes out in the twilight. She hesitated a moment, and then she laughed—such a spontaneous, natural, gay laugh as no one had heard from her for years. She wiped her eyes after it, with a staid and distinctly apologetic smile.

"Inquisitive May," she said, "I will tell you. I know that child—every impulse in her, every oddly twisted side of her—as well as I know my breviary. Why? Well, that is a secret, but you shall have it. Because, a little matter of seventy years ago, I was as exactly like her as this bead is like its mate. I—was—just—as—bad—as—I—could—be!"

She observed May Iverson's awe-struck look, and a smile of reminiscent glee lit her sweet old face.

"Remember, though," she added, encouragingly, "we have both reformed!"

THE END