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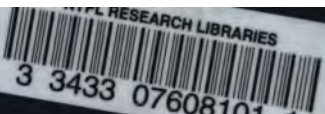
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THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF PAULINA

THE
ENLIGHTENMENT
of PAULINA

—
A NOVEL

BY
ELLEN WILKINS TOMPKINS

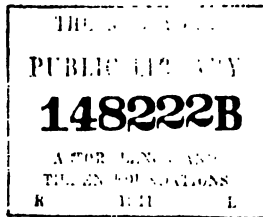
AUTHOR OF "THE EGOTISTICAL I"



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TO
MY FATHER AND MOTHER

11

THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF PAULINA

THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF PAULINA

PART I

CHAPTER I

WHENEVER Paulina changed her position or creaked her chair two pairs of eyes followed her movements. Her husband's look was merely watchful; but the trained nurse managed to convey in her glance a hint of reproach, a rebuke for the indelicacy of her conduct. At least so Paulina thought. She resented this idea, just as she resented her husband's presence in this, her mother's room, just as she resented her own inability to prevent the sudden calamity that threatened to overwhelm her.

It had been a week now; not an eternity as time passes, but long enough for Paulina to realise how empty her life might become. It was love that made her jealous of the other watchers; and love that made her creak her chair to break the steady ticking of the clock, the even, stertorous breathing, the deepening cloud of fear that had settled upon the room; and, in spite of her resistance, bid fair to stifle her.

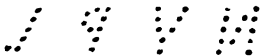
Paulina was not a crying woman. Her sobs tore her within and brought her no relief. Neither was she the type of person who sought and found consolation in prayer. Rather she demanded her mother of her creator. "She is all that I have," was her unuttered cry. "Leave her to me." Her manner was royal as befitted the mistress of a house with a hand-carved stair rail; a house surrounded by a park

that contained a lake whose water supply cost Paulina's husband twenty dollars a day. No, Paulina did not bargain. She steadily reiterated her demand.

The nights were more to be dreaded than the days. In her mind Paulina had divided them into three watches, from nine to twelve, from twelve to three, and from three to seven. The first was the worst, and the last was the best of these watches. When the earliest streaks of dawn lightened the sky Paulina took heart again; and the possible became improbable; the probable, impossible. It would have rested her to have closed her eyes, to have relaxed her body against the cushioned back of a chair; but she was deterred from doing this by the thought that, should she fall asleep, alien eyes might detect a motion—other than the plucking of the coverlet—of those aged hands, and a stranger might minister to a creature who first and last belonged to Paulina. Not that she objected to the trained nurse who, if unsympathetic, was both capable and unobtrusive.

As a matter of fact the nurse was somewhat indifferent to her patient. She was new to her profession; and she was young enough to have a healthy distaste for death and its invariable prelude. She did not particularly care for her employers; and, since there was nothing for her to do but wait, she preferred to let her mind dwell on other things. She had a pleasant vision of her own that was a mixture of a little flat, a vague husband, and a fat baby. She reasoned philosophically that, if you had to nurse, a baby was better than an ill person. Her patient might live a little longer, but she rather expected her to die to-night. Therefore, though her head was in the clouds, her eyes were on the alert, her ears were listening for a sound other than the breathing; and so, instinctively, because it was her duty to watch, she watched Paulina.

Paulina's husband, George Bull, was equally absorbed in his private thoughts. He invested in stocks and bonds, and the market was depressed. The Knickerbocker Trust had failed. It was not the time to lose a night's rest, and if



matters went on like this it would take him months to straighten out his affairs.

Yet he wanted to do what he could for this dying woman. She was very near and dear to him. When she was gone he would miss her sorely; and for him life would lose a big bit of its sweetness. He was not a woman's man, and this woman was different from all of his preconceived ideals. His own mother—he was splendidly loyal to her memory—had been a mountain woman, tall, strong, lean, and flat-chested. She could chop wood or provide for her home as well as the best of the men. She was a wonderful worker—it was really her work that had unsexed her, he thought grimly—and in her rough way she had been kind to her brood of squabbling children. Rising as he had done through the various strata of society, he looked back in amazement at the unlovely figure that towered in the background of his memory. She was made by her strength just as he was made by his dogged determination and the one was the outcome of the other. He saw that clearly.

From an utilitarian point of view Paulina's mother was quite useless. He surmised that once she must have sewed in a dainty fashion or, possibly, she had embroidered. She reminded him vaguely of a bird's egg he had found years ago in a tree in the woods above his old home. It was pale blue, with delicate little dashes upon it, and it made his small collection look poor and mean. She was like that egg, delicate, charming, and easy to crush.

The pity of it was he had half a notion she was not altogether sorry to go elsewhere. She was old, she was blind, she was tired, and, though she had made a brave struggle to live, she was content to go. Her illness was gripping her hard now. Her light form made no more impression on the smooth, firm bed than a fallen leaf did on the tiled terrace.

He wished with a sort of compunction that he had done more for her, and yet all the comforts she possessed he had given. He had never heard her express a wish for any-

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thing. She was always satisfied. That was her nature. To sit and watch and wait with her was the least he could do. She might become conscious again. It seemed unlikely, but the nurse had said that sometimes they did before they died. If she called him he wanted to be there. In the beginning, when he sat by her bedside, she had asked him over and over again, "Son George, am I going to die?" And he had answered, "Not if I can help it, Mother." Then they would both laugh, as if it were the best joke in the world, but she had understood he meant what he said. She must understand, now that she was so near her journey's end, that he had not been able to help it. Yes, if she wanted him he meant to be there.

The clock struck three, and once more Paulina shifted her position. Ordinarily, about now she began to feel hopeful again. It was the middle of the third watch, and that heralded the start of another day. But to-night was different. She was unaccountably depressed; and yet, to her inexperienced eye, her mother looked no worse. Either she herself was out of sorts or else the strain was telling on her. The lights were lower than usual and the room was dark. She hated the dark. It made shadows in the corners of the room, shadows that grew and loomed. They hung about the bed and her husband. The nurse alone was exempt. No shadows were attached to her stiff whiteness.

As Paulina now sat she confronted her husband, and half lowered her head that he might be unaware of her scrutiny. Although she did not know it, when she did this she appeared to her poorest advantage. Her eyes were too close together. Her forehead was too narrow for the rest of her face. It gave her a hard, pitiless expression. Almost you might have said she was not a pretty woman. Yet when she looked directly at you, you forgot this defect, so full, so large, so brown were her eyes. They were her best asset, and went nicely with the lower part of her round, firm face. Then, almost, you might have contradicted yourself, and said she was a beautiful woman. Paulina did not know all of

this; and, just at present, she was not thinking about her face. As usual, though, she was thinking about herself. This night of terrifying silence and shadow had driven home to her, as nothing else could have done, the unwelcome fact that her mother could not, would not live much longer. After that, what then? That was what she wanted to know.

The interminable distance between herself and her husband was bridged now by a bed upon which lay a dying woman. When that was no longer between them, when the dying woman had gone, what would happen then? Her quick brain strove to look ahead, to face this problem. There was no other connecting link. They had no pursuits, no common interest save his passion for making money, and her greater passion for spending what he made. There were no children—she had seen to that—and there were not even the roots of a dead affection that might be breathed upon and brought to life again.

Paulina did not discuss her affairs with her mother whose blindness had not kept her from grasping the situation, but who had the good sense to accept her daughter's hint and remain silent. With a sort of hardy courage she had, however, set to work to do what she could to fill the chasm, and Paulina stood aside and smiled at her efforts. Since she had nothing to build on, and could count on no assistance from her daughter, she needs must construct a web of her own. She worked as indefatigably as any spider, and picked up her broken cobwebs and replaced them with infinite toil and care. But they were only cobwebs and Paulina intended to have a thorough cleaning day and brush them all away; and, when the cleaning was over, each might go his own path unless her husband blocked the road, and claimed the wife whose love he had never possessed. She had always thought of these things but she kept them in the back of her mind, out of sight. Now, in her wakefulness, these ideas quickened within her. It was a possible solution of her difficulty, this thought of a divorce.

Once, as she stared at her husband's heavy figure and

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heavier jaw, she clicked her tongue against her teeth, an ugly sound that was drowned by the noise of her mother's breathing. The woman in the bed was between them still and strove to shield her daughter. Paulina blushed, not for her thoughts, but because she felt as if her mother was cognizant of what was in her mind.

It grew lighter and Paulina heaved a sigh of relief. Now some of the shadows would leave. Already she felt brighter and less oppressed. After all they would not take her mother from her just yet. She needed her. She could not give her up. She forgot about her plans for a divorce, looked tenderly towards the bed, and what she saw made her heart swell in her throat and choke her. For her mother's head was turning on the pillow, was striving to lift itself. Then "Lift" a hoarse voice said; and Paulina wondered who had spoken. The nurse hurried forward; but George Bull was quicker. He slipped his arms under the ill woman's body and lifted her high. He did not doubt that she was dying and needed air. He saw she was fighting hard for breath and was grateful to him; for she clasped his hand in hers. She wanted something else, too. With her head turned in the direction of Paulina she fumbled with the counterpane; and her daughter, reading her thoughts, took the hand, kissed it, and placed her own within the frail one of her mother's.

"George, Paulina," the hoarse voice said.

But Paulina's mother wanted more. She was striving now to lift her daughter's hand; and, at first, Paulina let her have her way. Then she saw George Bull's hand above hers, in fact upon her mother's breast, and at last she understood. Her mother was between them still. She would join their hands together before she died.

Paulina's arm went heavy. It hung a dead weight from that dying hand; and Paulina knew she meant to thwart the mother she loved so dearly. Although it must be frightfully evident just what was happening, she could not, she

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would not give in. If anything, she drew down the hand that strove to uplift her arm.

Paulina's mother had done her best and failed. Suddenly she dropped both hands and cried out in a loud, clear voice, "The dawn! The dawn!" Her head fell back over George Bull's arm, and he did not need the nurse to tell him that Paulina's mother was dead. When he looked to see Paulina, he found she had left the room.

CHAPTER II

PAULINA had not always been in such comfortable circumstances. She had acquired her wealth when she married George Bull, an event that took place some four years ago. Up to that time she had had, to be sure, plenty of bread to eat; but the slices were thin, spread with the least modicum of butter, and never disfigured by jam.

She had lived in the midst of petty thrifts. When she came in from the street she removed her shoes, and put on a pair that would "do" for the house. Her waist was laid aside for a split or darned article; and, within her home, she had actually never sat down in her walking suit.

The Reverend Lemuel Calvin Sprague, Paulina's father, was a Northerner by birth, and an Episcopal minister by choice. He was a tall, thin man, high of forehead, and narrow between the eyes as was Paulina; only, in his case, as the rest of his face was proportionately elongated, and his eyes were blue and deep-set, it gave him a curiously zealous look of single-minded intentness. And he was as intent as he looked, intent on the ennobling duty of purging and purifying his own soul. Throughout his life it was the one ambition that remained unbroken; and to accomplish his object he would have let any number of other souls go to perdition. At least that was his daughter Paulina's private conviction.

Paulina's mother was a Southern woman and an only child. She had lost her father and her fortune during the Civil War. Paulina had a vague recollection of her Grandmother Selden who had died when her grandchild was about five years of age. But for the small savings she had left her daughter, it is likely they would not only have done

without jam, but also without butter for their bread. The sweeping and garnishing of the Reverend Lemuel Calvin Sprague's soul was an expensive item, and one not to be lightly laid aside in discussing the household expenditures. Paulina's mother had been an exceedingly pretty girl. She was soft, and warm, and sweet, and her sojourn in the North had not robbed her of her charm. She had never lost her looks, but had slipped from youth to old age as easily as one changes from summer to winter garments; and her sightless eyes, with their paralysed nerves, were to the last still warm and brown and radiant.

Mrs. Sprague was very happy the earlier years of her married life. Though her husband was only an assistant at a fashionable church, she cared very little about worldly possessions, and she was pretty enough to look well in her simple clothes. She made friends and was content; and, at first, she found the baby Paulina a pleasure, not a problem.

It was the call that made the difference, the call for which she, in obedience to her husband's wishes, had been praying for these six happy years. It had been a long time coming; but the Reverend Lemuel administered the faith rather than preached the gospel, and not many people can view with equanimity an after life of endless punishment. To many persons such a doctrine is repellent, and they encase themselves in a hard shell of real or pretended indifference and scorn the sayings and doings of a merciless creator.

Paulina belonged to that class. Constant dripping had not worn away the stone. She had commenced early to ossify, and so steadily had she hardened that she sometimes doubted if she had ever possessed that disagreeable commodity, a soul. With the death of her mother her love had been extinguished, and what match could be found to kindle the flame again? To an outside observer that love might have seemed a candle light, a dim, wavering thing; but, in justice to Paulina, it is fair to say that she knew it to be a vital spark, and had sheltered and tended it with her own hands.

Although Paulina was not aware of the fact it was the call that made her a problem. She was a heady, turbulent child with an inborn love and desire for beautiful things; and through her ran the narrow strain that had made a religious fanatic of the Reverend Lemuel. She was desire incarnate. She longed passionately for the treasures she could never possess; and her thwarted longings, her lack of worldly goods ate into her mind as a fester eats into the hot, firm flesh.

At the age of eight she said to her mother, "Don't always talk about money and tell me how much my clothes have cost. Why shouldn't my father give me shoes? All the other girls wear them."

An incontrovertible fact which threw the little mother back upon her last resource. She appealed to Paulina and, oftener than not, the child, drawn by the magnet of love, responded to that appeal. If she had expressed it crudely Paulina would have said that she and her mother were in the same boat, and had been put there by the Reverend Lemuel. Mrs. Sprague's shoes were shabby, her clothes remade, her gloves darned and redarned. How could Paulina be antagonistic to a creature who clearly had less than she, and therefore should be profoundly pitied? Mrs. Sprague was the type of woman who needs must have attracted the attention of men, and, just as her friends had wondered many years ago, so the child and the girl Paulina often wondered at her mother's choice of a husband.

When the call came from a little church on the edge of a Western town Paulina's mother wept, not because she had any forebodings of trouble to come, but because she had to leave her friends and the place she had made into a home. Though, of course, she was thankful for the prospect of a larger salary, there was nothing else to compensate her for the life she should leave behind her.

The Reverend Lemuel had no misgivings. While his tearful wife put together their small belongings, with his hands crossed behind him and a set, still look on his face, he

paced the floor of the tiny living-room; and, later, when the baby Paulina and her mother slept, he locked those same hands upon his Bible, knelt upon his knees, and prayed to his Lord. Night after night he dedicated afresh, not only himself to his work, but the better part of his salary to be used in such ways as he thought fit for the church's good. There was one phrase that he dwelt on over and over again. His larger opportunities as rector, not assistant, of a church must entail larger responsibilities on his part. For the betterment of his soul he must deny his body. In these moments of exaltation he contrived to forget entirely the responsibilities of his wife and child. The delayed hopes of several years were focussing upon that call.

So when Paulina's mother took up her duties as the rector's wife, she found she had the same amount of money to expend as before. The servant question, the higher cost of living, the increasing needs of her child were serious problems to be suddenly thrust upon this young wife. Baffled and perplexed, she had no one with whom she could consult. The little flock of men and women under the care of the Reverend Lemuel did not belong to the same type of people that she had known. She felt shy and ill at ease, and, also, she was constantly exhorted to do her best. With a shiver of fear she learned then about the responsibilities of the position; and, at length, she discovered the inflexible spring that animated her husband.

Mrs. Sprague never complained. She did without. Paulina, in a lesser manner than her mother, also did without; but, as she grew older, the injustice of the whole state of affairs struck her keenly. And her father did nothing to win her confidence. "Honour thy father and mother," and "Spare the rod and spoil the child," were the precepts upon which he acted. Prayerfully he chastised Paulina who, defiant to the last, muttered her apologies through set teeth; and glared at him out of her mother's eyes which were, unfortunately, like his own, set too closely together. A rebellious child and a stiff-necked generation, he named her; but,

since she was bafflingly reticent, he had no clue to his daughter's thoughts.

Paulina was concentrating with an intensity as great as his own, with all the volcanic force of youth behind; and she was concentrating against all that he considered most holy and most sacred in life. If her father was the representative of religion, she discarded that same unlovely religion; and, in discarding religion, she discarded the Reverend Lemuel. Later on she repaid him in his own coin. She refused to be enrolled in the membership of the church; and as the days of chastisement and forced obedience were over, and he could not drag his daughter to the communion table, he desisted in his efforts. But when year after year passed by, Paulina saw that the thorn rankled in his flesh. This attitude on the part of his child injured him in the eyes of his congregation. If his own flesh and blood disdained to have anything to do with his church, how could he hope to win others? And Paulina was disdainful. She loathed the Western suburb as much as she admired the Western town that was, as it were, set just beyond her reach; and she loathed the heavy youths, with the abnormally large Adam's apples, who would have paid her some attention had she been willing to permit it. No, Paulina had concentrated. The square peg had made up its mind not to fit into the round hole.

When her mother lost her sight Paulina was twenty years of age; and she began, at last, to recognise the vital spark. There arose in her heart a desire to shield her mother, a desire to protect her, to make the road a little easier for her weary feet.

The Reverend Lemuel was aghast and could not be comforted; for, next to himself, he loved the woman he had married. Paulina struck him in this moment of weakness. Not only did she ask for more money; but, being a practical young person, she demanded that he have his life insured for the benefit of herself and her mother. When he tried to show her the impossibility of this, she was most

unreasonable. She capped his scripture quotations with others equally appropriate; she laughed at the responsibilities of his position; and she even suggested that he was giving away what was not his honestly to give. Pushed to the wall, the Reverend Lemuel rashly agreed to her wishes; but later, since he needs must keep his word to his creator, he broke faith with Paulina. Giving her the extra money she had demanded, he let the insurance go. That simple little act—it could not be called a sin of omission—made him feel most uncomfortable in the presence of his daughter. He was righteously indignant that he should be guilty of such a feeling, and he preached with such fervour on the stiff-neckedness of the younger generation that, three years later, he received another call from a church in the upper part of the state of New York. Paulina claimed the slight increase of salary, and her father was afraid to refuse to give it to her.

Once again Mrs. Sprague was uprooted, only this time she was glad to go. Paulina assured her it was for the best, and she had never been happy in this strange land. Her blindness made her curiously detached and indifferent to all matters. Save that she never listened to her husband's sermons, you might have said that she was becoming religious, so self absorbed was her attitude.

Paulina liked her new location. Pittsford, for so the little town was named, hung on the edge of the big city of Rochester much as a timid child clutches the skirts of its elder sister. It was proud of its dependence, proud of East Avenue, the beautiful street that ran through the heart of the city and, in a certain sense, connected the two places. If Pittsford was unobtrusive, between Pittsford and Rochester were lovely houses of the sort of which Paulina had always dreamed. In their own congregation they possessed one wealthy man, George Bull by name, who had what seemed to Paulina a small-sized palace barely a mile from the church itself. Paulina was fairly content. She had more to spend and was therefore happier,

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since there is no greater nervous strain than making one dollar do the work of five. She even tolerated the Reverend Lemuel. Her mother became her dearest care. Her love and dependence upon Paulina brought out the best that there was in her daughter's character.

Then, most unexpectedly, the Reverend Lemuel died. He was ill only a few days and though, at the last, he knew his wife, he seemed to have forgotten Paulina. Paulina was faintly shocked, even faintly sorry, but her chief anxiety was for her mother who drooped and pined without her husband. The Reverend Lemuel's affairs were in a hopeless muddle, and Paulina was thankful to turn them over to George Bull. He offered to help her; he had been kind to her father; and he often came to the house. Though his hands were large and awkward, though his neck was thick and red, she had confidence in his business ability. If she had been distrustful, his house was a proof of that same ability.

She did not worry about the future. She had never been used to a great deal; and she counted upon her mother's money and the insurance her father had never taken out. When she discovered that her father had tricked her, in her anger, she actually hated the Reverend Lemuel who gave so generously to missions, and who laid by next to nothing for his wife and daughter. Her mother's pittance was all that stood between them and starvation, and her mother was blind.

She set out to find a boarding-house. George Bull helped her again, and offered her a place as his private secretary. Paulina accepted. She was too accustomed to poverty not to know just how far that pittance would go, and her earning capacity was limited. In the exigencies of housework her education had always suffered. She must learn to make two ends meet, that was all.

It was a hard year for her. With her best efforts she could just manage to keep out of debt, and during her daily trips to the city her mother was alone the better part

of the time. It was no wonder that the girl shuddered at the future.

In the spring, six months after her father's death, George Bull proposed to Paulina who, when she refused his offer, could not help a contemptuous note in her voice. For, to her, George Bull was physically unattractive, as useful and as repellent as a kitchen sink. His near proximity was distasteful to her. His hands, with the large pores in the skin, reminded her of heavy sponges; and in the wildest flights of her imagination she had never conceived of herself as anything more than his secretary. Now she felt obliged to give up her place, and here her vanity received a sharp thrust. He endeavoured, clumsily enough, to persuade her to remain with him and, though that was not his object, succeeded in convincing her of her many shortcomings. She was an indifferent stenographer and a poor but well-intentioned bookkeeper. It was all too true, and yet she had fondly imagined that she, and not he, had conferred a favour. It occurred to her that he had created the secretaryship especially for her benefit, a thought that filled her with fury and humiliation. What could she do to make a living? When she left George Bull's office she could not conceive what her next step would be.

He proposed again, and urged her to think it over for a week. Paulina thought; and, thinking, contemplated her half-worn shoes, her shabby skirt, her mended gloves. What could she do to make a living? That was the question. What could she do?

At night, when she lay by her mother's side, her thoughts ran in a different channel. With money what could she not do for this dear one, and George Bull had hinted that the sight might be restored? She saw her mother surrounded by a hundred little comforts, all so deeply deserved, and her soul said to her body, "Dare you, Paulina?"

After a week of vain questioning, Paulina's body replied, "I dare."

CHAPTER III

IT was the exploiting of a coal mine on property adjacent to his own that was the direct cause of George Bull leaving his mountain home. Before then his life had been so devoid of dramatic possibilities that the advent of strangers in the community filled him with boyish interest, an interest so avid and unashamed that it conquered his habitual taciturnity and shyness and drove him to question; and, even when repulsed, to question again. By patient observation and diligent effort he found these people came from a big city "up North." George Bull wrote down the name, Rochester, New York; and with magnificent simplicity decided to go there to live. He said nothing about his project, and it took him a year's work in the mines to collect money enough to pay for his ticket. With native shrewdness he waited until he had some dollars above the necessary travelling expenses, and with a silent farewell, for he judged his family would have no sympathy with his plans, he started on his northern journey.

George Bull preferred not to think of the days that followed. He had known what it was to be cold, to be hungry, to be homesick; and of the three the last seemed to him the worst of these evils. Only the lack of money prevented his return to his home. He sold papers, he shovelled snow and, incidentally, he became involved in a night club where he was recognised at once as that rare article, a green country boy who was eager to learn and willing to work. For a short space he had nothing to do with the plans of his life. By night he attended school; by day he swept and dusted the office of a real estate agent, R. R. Michaelson and Company the firm was named. He thrived under his work

and his avid interest flared forth again until it became a flame that devoured him. In the course of time he became an under clerk, then a chief clerk with a fair living wage to spend as he chose. He spent it on real estate. He bought and sold, bought and sold; and always his luck and his judgment stood by him. He made money; he sent money to his family; and at last he became a member of the firm with an income that he felt could be made to cover a great deal. So eager was he that he needs must spend with both hands. There was the hand that did business for the firm; and there was the hand that, turning away from real estate, reached into the stock exchange and bought and sold as it saw fit. Always his luck stood with him.

When Michaelson, the head of the firm, died, George Bull became trustee of his property, and gave up the real estate business. He felt that the work of a trustee was as much as could be attended to with one hand; for now the other hand was so exceedingly busy on the stock exchange that it couldn't be relied upon even in an emergency. Besides he was forty years of age; he wanted to build himself a home; he wanted a wife; and, above all, he wanted children. He set to work to build himself a home.

George Bull's house was the exact antithesis of its owner. It was as light as he was heavy, as graceful as he was ill at ease. To be sure, it was pretentious for a country dwelling, but it lived up to its pretensions and became one of the show places of the countryside. The wonder of it was that he had been able to secure so admirable a piece of work.

Nobody knew that to George Bull this building represented a vision he had had from boyhood of the kind of house he was going to erect, when he grew big, for himself and that flat-chested mother. At the start it had been a small affair, also the mother had died, which stopped the vision for a time; but, after a little, it had gone on again; and, as he made money, he fed it on the various homes he saw in his travels. Then he went abroad, and its growth

stopped and finally concentrated into the house he now possessed.

He had been very humble about the planning of the vision. He had gone to the best architects, and when they had given their designs he had consulted experts as to the suitability and correctness of their sketches. He intended not to limit its cost, and he meant to have it perfect in every detail.

He had chosen his own site, partly because he saw how he could approach the house through a grove of trees, and partly because of the lay of the land. The vision stood on a plateau of ground that, in the rear, sloped gently down some fifteen feet, halted abruptly in a small pocket of land, and rose again in a woody little hillock. The main road turned at the corner of his ground and ran beside his land; and, though it was a steep hill to climb, George Bull always motored home that way. He got such a fine view of the vision, not to mention the lake that he had cleverly put in the little pocket of land beneath the hillock. It was unfortunate for him that he was never credited with planning his beautiful home; and it would have pained him to know that it was often pointed out as an example of how money could triumph over natural low born taste. Even the lake was supposed to have been designed by the landscape gardener, so impossible was it to associate anything like poetry or sentiment with George Bull's hulking frame. His commonplace exterior was most strongly suggestive of jowl and turnip tops; and therefore, on his part, the building of the vision was probably a mistake. It bred other visions—of women who were suited to such houses—and the lake too was greatly to blame. That encouraged the habit of mooning on a rustic bench, provided strictly for the purposes of rest; and, after you had mooned awhile, you wanted something as beautiful as the peacocks strutting by to sit with you and enjoy the view. At least George Bull was affected that way and, as time went on, the want grew to a longing

and he could hardly wait to get home to his day and his night dreams.

Then Paulina arrived. She was new; she was unlike the women with whom he had been thrown; and she fitted in nicely with the vision and the lake. It seemed to him that she might be within his reach and he set to work to win her confidence if not her love. After he had once decided to make her his wife, he commenced putting her into the picture until, gradually, she became its central figure. Everything else was background to her. She strolled up the driveway; filled his beautiful house; and sat beside him on the bench by the lake. The spirit of Paulina was as tender to him as the real Paulina was tender to her mother. He loved her for this tenderness.

When his opportunity came he grasped it in his large, thick hands, and installed her in his office as his private secretary. Moreover he found work for her to do, not enough to tire her, but enough to make her feel that she more than earned her salt. As she could be trusted with only the simplest trifles, this was very intelligent of him. Occasionally he used her letters, but oftener she made copies of business documents, and these he put aside in a locked drawer of his desk. Though he never needed these copies he valued her painstaking, badly typed efforts.

If Paulina had not looked upon him in the light of the kitchen sink, she would early have had some inkling of his thoughts. His constant kindness, his small acts of consideration, his unceasing endeavour to please were the straws that showed the veer of the wind. But she was blind to these things, or accepted them as a matter of course; and George Bull, unreprieved, continued to worship an imaginary Paulina. He was not even awakened by her manner of refusing his offer, but considered it rather fine of her not to jump at the prospect of ease and comfort. At all events she was not mercenary, he thought proudly. It occurred to him that she might not understand that he intended to provide for her mother; and so he put this to Paulina, all un-

aware that, at last, the woman had realised she was living upon his bounty.

George Bull tasted the very essence of happiness during these days of courtship; since, when he was married, everything turned out so differently from what he had expected. For Paulina was not as brave nor as callous as she had imagined, and she shrank from the person of George Bull. "Let yourself go," urged her saner self. "It's far the easier way." Paulina tried and suffered in trying. She could feel her body stiffen at his approach; she winced under his caresses, remind herself as she would that all this meant bread and meat to herself and her mother; and she spent long, sleepless nights, hands clinched, nerves taut, staring into the darkness, almost afraid to breathe for fear she might arouse her sleeping husband. Little beads of perspiration stood out on her body as she mentally cried to herself, "I can't bear it! I can't bear it!" and, at last, at last George Bull understood.

He was rather good at mathematics was George, and, although to his wife it seemed æons upon æons, he really put two and two together with incredible swiftness. The climax had come by the lake when the real Paulina sat down on the end of the bench where the imaginary Paulina had so often rested. George Bull would have rested, too, perhaps not so far as the other end, since the bench was long, but his wife hastily put her parasol between them; and they sat silently watching the peacocks strut.

"Is it as bad as that?" asked George Bull.

Paulina did not answer, but looked down; and nothing more was said until she picked up her parasol and announced that it was time for dinner, they must go in; and in they went.

Later on George Bull sat down on the bench alone; and, with the aid of the peacocks and the lake, he faced the inevitable, and made an honest effort to reproduce his picture with the vision and the lake the size they were before Paulina came. But, after all, it was a poor reproduction;

for since he did not desire to obliterate Paulina, her blurred form still occupied the central position, disfiguring the picture and overshadowing his beautiful home; and he sat so long in the damp night air that he walked more heavily than usual—back to the vision.

After that, for Paulina, life moved along very smoothly, with only an occasional hitch. She rode and drove with her husband, who knew to a nicety just how much of the seat belonged to him. She entertained George Bull's friends—she encouraged her to do that. She met men—there was always a certain air of surprise in their greeting—who came from a business point of view, and some few who came because they liked and trusted "Old George Bull." Though she could talk with whom she pleased her husband made a triangle of the conversation, and Paulina wearied of his watchfulness. She could not struggle against her aversion; she could only attempt to hide it; and, in her attempt, she paid her respects to the financier, George Bull, who, it seemed to her, played with money as lightly as a juggler tosses his ball. Men, who saw her interest, talked to her of his prowess; and Paulina learned of the "market"; how fortunes were won and lost in the twinkling of an eye; of her husband's ability to turn everything into gold; and most bewildering of all, of certain transactions in the money-making world where stocks and bonds were bought and sold with no actual interchange of money. It was incredible. She could hardly believe this was possible; and she wondered how her heavy, unimaginative husband—for she had never penetrated beneath the jowl and turnip top exterior which she firmly believed to be laid on a foundation of beefsteaks, augmented with segments of pie—could have become such an adept at this difficult game. Sometimes she speculated about his possessions; and, since her mother's death, she had speculated about a possible alimony. Considering everything she felt it would be something handsome. In addition to the alimony she would be free.

Paulina had a certain amount of worldly wisdom of an

introspective sort; but her knowledge of society at large was of a shadowy description, and she knew nothing whatever of divorce. The Reverend Lemuel discouraged such proceedings, not that Paulina intended to pay the slightest attention to this moral quirk of her father's. Besides she had no other husband in view. The men and women in her father's Western congregation had belonged to the class of people who bear and forbear to the end of time. They were heavy; they were coarse; they were unimaginative; they were plain and, alas, they appeared to be her husband's own kith and kin.

What second-hand knowledge she possessed she gained from her maid, Elise, who had actually been divorced. Her husband had been of the wife-beating type, and Elise was wont to discuss him in company with George Bull. The more she execrated the former, the more she eulogised the latter. After a most vindictive tirade she always wound up with, "But what a jewel you have, so silent, so good, so rich!" Paulina, looking askance, said nothing, while Elise babbled on of incompatibility of temper; of statutory laws; of Reno; of Portland, Maine; of the expense of divorce; and, after she had turned the pockets of her brain inside out, Paulina dispassionately sorted through the soiled scraps of rubbish in hopes that she might find something she could use. She was always disappointed at the results of her fruitless research. It was like going into a ready-to-wear shop, with clothes of every size and description hanging about, and finding that each garment was, in its way, a peculiar misfit.

Now that she had determined to leave George Bull it was necessary to decide upon a definite course of action. She found she had to have a reason, a handle for her divorce; and, from Elise's chatter, she gathered that her husband of his own accord did not provide a convenient one. Lacking this handle, this reason, she would have to furbish up a makeshift of her own. She could consult a lawyer, but she was wary of the unscrupulous trickster, and she felt it might

be awkward to discuss a matter of physical aversion with a man of high repute. It would be difficult to explain her view-point.

One morning, some weeks after her mother's death, as she lay in bed she was thinking about this matter. Elise was arranging her breakfast tray and, as usual, was talking about her divorced husband.

"Mrs. Bull, he was an ugly brute of a man," she said.

"I thought you said he was handsome," Paulina objected as she sat upright that the tray might be placed beside her.

"Oh, his face was good enough," Elise retorted sharply.

"Didn't that help?" Paulina queried absently.

"Not a bit. After you are married it's not a face you need." Elise snapped her fingers contemptuously. She always felt inclined to talk to Paulina's eyes.

There was a moment's silence. Elise was thinking of her divorced husband, and Paulina of her maid's words. Paulina looked exceedingly pretty and fresh for the day. She had bathed; her hair was daintily coiffed; she had on a loose, floating silk negligee, covered with lace and innumerable bows of ribbon; and, above all, she was healthily hungry and her face expressed her pleasurable anticipation of her breakfast. She roused herself from her abstraction and took a taste of her grapefruit. It was good, and she said so to Elise. Just at this moment when she was paying most careful attention to the juice, which will spatter, somebody knocked lightly at her door, and George Bull entered his wife's apartment. Elise gave a small start of surprise, and Paulina stopped eating and stared at her husband who sat himself down awkwardly in a chintz covered chair.

"Well," she said, since he seemed inclined to lapse into silence, "what is it?"

George Bull pointed to Elise who, bending over an open drawer, was the neat personification of a question mark.

"You may go, Elise," Paulina said a thought sharply;

and then she announced succinctly to George Bull, "Well, she's gone." There was some curiosity in her voice.

"Last night," said George Bull, looking out of the window toward the lake, "I got a telegram"—he produced it as if in evidence—"telling me that my brother was ill."

"I'm sorry," Paulina perfunctorily filled in the gap.

"And this morning," George Bull's face twitched in an ugly fashion, "I got another telegram. He's dead now."

"Oh," said Paulina.

Her fascinated gaze rested upon her husband's face. Why did he want to spoil her breakfast? She could not help his brother's death, and she loathed a crying man.

"He was my last brother," went on George Bull, for once unmindful of his wife. "They are all gone now. Poor Jim! Something fell on him and paralysed him. There were four of us, and now I am all alone, Paulina." Considering the dampness of his face, he spoke with dignity.

Paulina did not contradict him. She was thinking hard. It was not for this alone that George Bull had come to her room.

"Are you going to the funeral?" she asked at length.

"Yes, I am leaving on the one o'clock train. I'll be gone four days. That's why I wanted to see you."

Paulina picked up her spoon and took another bit of grapefruit. She could not imagine why she had felt so uneasy. Then this was to be a good-bye scene, and it was even possible that George Bull might kiss her. She was so absorbed in refusing an imaginary, intensely repugnant kiss that she lost the threads of her husband's words.

"And you will prepare the East rooms," he finished.

"For whom?" asked Paulina. "You are not going to have the funeral here, are you?"

"The East rooms are for my brother's wife and child," said George Bull.

"Are they coming here to stay?" demanded Paulina.

"They are coming here to live," George Bull replied distinctly, and his face was quite steady again.

Paulina felt the angry blood rush to her temples. She looked down at her plate.

"I thought," she said in a level voice, "that your brother's wife had been a waitress in some summer hotel?"

"That's how she got her education," he assented.

"But," there was the faintest possible sneer in Paulina's tones, "I don't care to have her live with us."

"Why not?" inquired George Bull. "She's as good as I am, and you married me."

Paulina was furiously angry now. The inference that she had lowered herself by her marriage, that she was no better than a Bull hurt her pride. The waitress idea was impossible. It would be politic to try to placate her husband.

"Why should any one live with us? A visit is not so bad, but families are much better separated," she said as pleasantly as she could manage.

"I think we miss your mother," George Bull answered, still staring out of the window.

Paulina did not trust herself to reply. She was trembling now. So her mother was between them still, and George Bull meant to taunt her with the obligation. It appeared she must always shoulder an unpaid debt. She followed her husband's gaze and her eyes rested upon the bench, the lake, the peacocks. They were still strutting. Now and then they uttered a hoarse cry. That was a promise of rain. She pressed a button by her bed, and Elise opened the door.

"I am not hungry," said Paulina. "You may take this tray."

Then George Bull removed his eyes from the peacocks; rose; sighed; buttoned his coat and followed Elise out of the room.

CHAPTER IV

UNTIL the day of her husband's home-coming Paulina gave no orders for the cleaning of the East rooms; but then she set to work with good grace and a certain sense of anticipation.

When George Bull left her room she was in a state of trembling fury, a fury that could have been calmed had it safely ended in an attack of hysteria. As it was, suppressed, choked, a thing that had taken possession of her, she was unable to get the mastery of herself. The thought of food was unendurable to her, and she finally succumbed to a violent nervous headache.

She had Elise, who was somewhat nonplussed at the change in her mistress's physical condition, help her undress, darken her room, and do what she could for her comfort. By the time night had come she had taken more than one headache powder, and at last found the oblivion that she sought.

In the morning the pain had gone, but her head felt too heavy for her shoulders, and her eyes ached and had swollen circles beneath them. She made no effort to get out of bed. Her anger had merged into a sullen resentment that claimed both her mind and her body. She knew she meant not to clean the East rooms and she was dully curious as to what would happen next. She passed the day and part of the following night half asleep, without an acute sensation of any kind, until she was awakened by the chimes of her clock striking the hour of midnight.

Paulina was nervously imaginative, and she had the distinct sound in her ear of some one calling her. She was as

wide awake as if she had stopped in the midst of a conversation to answer an imperative summons. Her head felt light and easy, and she could think without something inside of her brain twisting itself in painful protest at the thought of such a proceeding. She listened for some noise other than the swaying and tossing of the trees upon the lawn, but the house was silent, and two broad, undulating ribbons of moonlight fell across the floor and bathed her room in a silvery brightness. The edge of the ribbon that had slipped athwart her bed lay upon her dressing-table, and she caught the gleam of her silver brush and comb and the smooth flatness of her heavy mirror.

Paulina loved this room and all that it represented. She loved the thick, firm mattress upon which she lay; the warm, fleecy blankets, the embroidered sheets and pillowcases. They were all a part of herself. It was as if she had come into her own. In the soft light she sought and found the monogram, pressed her hand against the initials P. B. and, as she caressed them, thought, a little irately, that many women had been born with these luxuries while she had been obliged to battle for even the necessities of life.

That brought up the memory of George Bull and, in a flash, Paulina saw that Rosie, her sister-in-law, might be the reason, "the handle" that she had been so long seeking. Indeed it made her feel just a little giddy to think how near she had come to throwing away the article thrust so firmly within her hand. What could be a better solution than Rosie? Wrapped in a sudden new found contentment, Paulina surveyed this fresh aspect of the situation, and she felt the heart within her leap upward at its far-reaching possibilities. There was, she argued, everything in propinquity. Place side by side a man eager to love and a woman full of grateful affection, and surely there could be but one result. Especially if before the childless man you dangled a little girl. Oh, it was obliged to work. Rosie had been a country beauty, and she must still retain some remnants of

her looks. Paulina would dress her to suit her style. No expense should be spared in the remaking of Rosie. Paulina was rather glad to think that George Bull might get something, a new wife and the child he had long wanted. Hitherto he had always come out at the small end of the horn.

She closed her eyes and gave a sigh of genuine satisfaction. It was exactly as if she had solved the last of a series of difficult problems. The East rooms should be cleaned at once. As she made this resolve, perhaps because the East rooms had been her mother's, or for some other reason inexplicable to the dreamer herself, she had a sudden, swift vision of her dying mother with George Bull's hand upon her breast. So real was it that she was surprised not to feel the grip of that dying hand, and surprised to see that her own fingers were still caressing the embroidered monogram and the moonlight ribbons still lay across the floor. She attributed this to the thought of the East rooms; but before she could get to sleep again she had to take a dose of ammonia.

By the middle of the next day the East rooms were prepared and ready for Rosie and her child. Paulina herself superintended the hanging and draping of the over-curtains, and gave out the linen laid aside for the use of this apartment. She looked into her linen closet with critical affection. She never tired of thinking how easy it was, this handing out of marked articles that had only to wear out to be immediately replaced by others as fine and as desirable. How different when you had to twist and turn, and perhaps part with your own clean things to spread the bed for an unexpected guest. She had been through all that, and she knew what it meant to have her sheets crumpled and untidy because her father had taken it into his head to ask some out-of-town member of his congregation to spend the night with him. She put the small brass bed that she had peremptorily ordered from town by the side of her mother's, and she smiled at Elise's suggestion that it might be pleasant to have a child in the house.

It looked most attractive and not in the least as it had done in her mother's time. A great many of the smaller pieces of furniture had come from Mrs. Sprague's Southern home, and these Paulina had moved into her ante-chamber. Then, though the bed was the same, the hangings were different; and immediately after her mother's death George Bull had suggested that the walls be repapered and the woodwork repainted. Because she liked to plan and arrange, Paulina had assented; and she had bought fresh furniture to replace that of her mother's; and, all unknowingly, had made the rooms more endurable to George Bull. Clever as she was, she never for an instant guessed that her husband desired to retain the memory of her mother in her own setting and, by obliterating all traces of her, was paying a silent, affectionate tribute to the dead woman.

The desk, however, belonged to the room, and was still full of her mother's papers. Paulina meant to go through all these and burn what she did not wish to save. She had intended to do this before, but had put off the undertaking from day to day, and now the arrival of her sister-in-law brought matters to an issue. No prying hands should touch, no prying eyes should gaze upon Mrs. Sprague's small keepsakes. She would see to that. Half reluctantly she opened the desk. Everything was just as it had been left, and Paulina, who had so often been the eyes for her mother, had an accurate photograph of it in her brain. She emptied the contents of the cubbyholes and drawers into a large basket; and, after she had dusted the interior, she filled it with the paper she kept on hand for the use of her guests. When she had finished, with her basket on her arm, she stood in the centre of the big room and she thought mirthlessly that she had done all she could for her purpose, her aim. Some cynical imp within her suggested that matters might not turn out as she had arranged; and so, to satisfy herself, she reiterated that a "handle" Rosie was, and a "handle" Rosie should remain. Rosie! The very word brought before her

eyes the second-class, shop-girl type the name so often represented. Her lips closed tightly together at the thought.

Back in her own room Paulina looked over the contents of her basket. After all, there would not be much to save. She would burn her grandmother's letters and the love letters of her father and mother. She held the last in her hands undecidedly. If she undid the pink string that, at the request of her mother, she had tied about them, she could learn what kind of a lover the Reverend Lemuel had made; very passable, she judged, from the size and thickness of the letters, and yet it was as if she held her mother's heart within her hand. A tricky sense of honour within her told her that, as she had not loved her father, these things did not belong to her; and, after a little, she laid them on top of the thin, old-fashioned script of her grandmother's. There were bundles of receipts, all old and of no further value, and among these she found a red velvet heart, with pins stuck in it, that she recollected making for her mother years ago. The bulky package, held together by a rubber band, turned out to contain pictures of herself, and, spreading these before her, she saw herself grow from childhood to womanhood. Paulina could not recall the second package of photographs, and she opened it with no small amount of curiosity. As she did so a daguerreotype fell to the floor. She picked it up. Gazing at her were two round, girlish faces, pressed closely together, and the slip of paper about it stated that they were Pauline Selden and Elizabeth Clyde.

Paulina was well acquainted with the name of Elizabeth Clyde, who had been her mother's friend from childhood. Brought up side by side, they had shared their playthings, eaten from the same table, and had often slept together; and whereas the Clydes had a tiny bit of a place, the Seldens had owned a large, rambling old house, with a big garden at the back; and Paulina's mother had a cart and a pony that she drove herself. But, as Mrs. Sprague used to explain, these things would have been as nothing without Elizabeth Clyde to share them with her; and yet, looking it over

in her mind, Paulina judged that it must have been a full ten years since she had heard her mother mention her friend's name. She knew it had developed into a desirable friendship, for Elizabeth Clyde had married Randolph Taliaferro. "By long odds the catch of the town, my dear," quoth Mrs. Sprague. The photographs were portraits of Elizabeth Taliaferro with her child, and of the same child then four or five years of age. Paulina dimly recalled her mother's pleasure at the birth of this child. It had been long years coming, and at once took its place as head of the household.

It was a charming picture of the head and shoulders of a curly-haired little girl, and the inscription on the back was simple and conclusive. "Clyde Taliaferro," it read, "four years of age, red-headed, quick-tempered, and born to command." The mother, Elizabeth Taliaferro, had a straightforward, sweet face even if, thus early in life, she was already too fat to suit Paulina's taste. From her appearance it hardly seemed likely that she had broken off the friendship. No. Paulina felt that it had been her mother's fault; and since it had happened before her blindness it had been a deliberate and not an accidental mishap.

It was an astute and correct guess on Paulina's part; for though Mrs. Sprague had not broken, in the violent sense of the word, she had gently and intentionally dropped the friendship, and it would have been hard to have fathomed her motive for so doing. Perhaps Elizabeth Clyde, quickened by love, read between the lines of her letters and demanded to know more of her life than Mrs. Sprague cared to reveal. Perhaps Paulina's mother feared the consequences of an invitation for Paulina, an invitation that her poverty would force her to refuse without an explanation to a friend of so long standing. Perhaps she desired to loosen her slight hold on her old life, and to remember it only as a happy dream. Whatever it may have been, she acted, as she thought, for the best, and Elizabeth Clyde passed out of her life forever and aye.

Paulina gazed critically at the pictures. Although Elizabeth Clyde had been younger than her mother she was now an elderly woman, and fat. That Paulina knew. And the child must be grown, twenty or thereabouts. It seemed odd that she should possess photographs of utter strangers. Why should they remain strangers, Paulina asked herself? Why should she not go South and meet her mother's people—when she was free and alone? It would be an interesting experience and one could not have too many irons in the fire. She would write to Elizabeth Taliaferro.

It was a letter that required thought, but then Paulina prided herself on being a good letter-writer. Her object in writing was to return the pictures that her mother had prized so dearly, and also to tell of her mother's blindness and death. She did this simply and used the fewest possible words. It was not a long note and she concluded with the wish that some day she might meet this dear friend of her mother's. She did not forget to explain that she was married, and she was careful to give her full address. She was sure to get a reply. Her mother's dear friend! As she adjusted the stamp Paulina smiled.

CHAPTER V

THAT night Paulina dressed with unusual care. It was necessary that she impress Rosie, but it was also necessary that she should not overawe her. Her sister-in-law must be made to feel her deficiencies and yet made to understand that she, Paulina, was more than willing to put things to rights. She wore a soft, dull mourning gown, trimmed with bands of crêpe. It had a little square train that dragged upon the floor and emphasised her height; and she slipped a plaited tucker of white chiffon about her neck. The tucker did away with the general blackness, and the sharp contrast of colours was becoming to Paulina. Loosening her hair, she pulled it forward until it half concealed her ears, and she fastened around her throat a diamond pendant in the shape of a star; only it was so brilliant and twinkling that a real star would scarcely have recognised the relationship. When she had finished she was quite satisfied with her appearance, and she trailed down the staircase with her hand on the carved stair rail. She liked the sharp points of the carving to press into the palm of her hand.

She went into the living-room where she had had a wood fire kindled, and she stretched out her long slender hands to the blaze and snuffed luxuriously at the woody smell. In reality she was a person who required very little heat; but flourished best when exposed to the frosty air. This fall weather with just a bite in the wind suited her exactly. There was an icy strain within herself that rose to greet the frost. It was time for her husband to arrive, she thought restlessly, and it might be well to take advantage of this brief respite and drink in a few breaths of the cool night breezes. So, with the glow of the firelight on her face, she went through the hall, slipped the latch of the door, and

stepped out upon the terrace. The grove of trees looked dark and mysterious, and Paulina, with a thrill, picked up her train and started down the steps. Midway she paused, listened, and heard the steady throb of a motor in the distance. That was her husband, Rosie, the child. Why, they were almost upon her. In a panic of fear she regained the hall and latched the door; but not before she caught sight of the white light of the car as it sped toward the house. Locked in as she was, she was still terrified; and had she been running she could not have panted more breathlessly. It had just come over her that this was a turning point in her life, and that she was closing the door against her husband exactly as she had closed it against the Reverend Lemuel so many years ago.

She stood and listened until she heard the car stop, and then she retreated into the living-room and thrust her cold, trembling body close to the warm fire. She heard the key turning in the lock. The walls of her citadel were tumbling about her, she thought imaginatively, and in a minute George Bull would call her; and she, his chattel, his possession, would answer his summons and go forth to greet him. Her husband was talking now.

"Now, see here, Rosie," he said, "don't you worry about anything. This is your home as long as you are happy and want to live with me."

"You are awful kind, Brother George," a trembling voice replied.

That was Rosie. Paulina straightened up and went to the door. "Come in to the fire," she said. "Here I am." She heard Rosie whisper, "Is this your wife?" and her husband's answer, "This is Paulina." He had the air of correcting a slight mistake.

When they were within the room Paulina busied herself in looking after Rosie. She removed the heavy, ill-cut cloak, the cheap crêpe veil massed upon her sister-in-law's head, and settled her in a comfortable chair in front of the fire. Meanwhile she made a mental inventory of her guest, who

appeared to be a somewhat negligible quantity. Hers must have been the beauty of youth and colouring. Still her eyes were nice and she was slender. That meant a good deal to Paulina. Her sallow little face had a soft, quivering look that Paulina labelled feminine, and she had the trustful air of a child that is being cared for and protected.

While Paulina did these things George Bull did not appear to notice her; but when she was through he said, "Here is the baby, Paulina," and she read the plea in his eyes.

Her first thought was that Rosie's baby did not in the least resemble Rosie, and yet neither was it a Bull. It had a mop of brown curls which gave its tiny face an elfish expression, and its eyes were wide, grey, and heavily lashed. She stooped and kissed it—she told herself she could not do less—and it did not seem at all afraid, but stroked her cheek and said interrogatively, "Muvver's friend?"

Reddening, Paulina took the child in her arms, and if that shrivelled bit of anatomy, her heart, gave a weak flutter at the sight of those baby hands, at the touch of the small, bare feet, she was not aware of the erratic behaviour of this strange organ of her body. She was somewhat excited, since she could not remember when she had last held a child; but, as she balanced it deftly with one hand upon its back, she reflected that this kind of a thing came to a woman intuitively, a legacy handed down from a generation of grandmothers. Being a woman was a matter of nature, not intellect, and she fancied that the most hopeless old maid could, with half a show, develop into a very passable mother.

As she stood, back to the fireplace, with a handsome disregard of the probable scorching of her frock, she had the air of a very modern Madonna, exquisitely gowned, yet none the less a true woman; but so contradictory was her nature that, even as she ransacked her brain in a futile attempt to remember a few bits from the profuse store of nursery rhymes her mother had poured upon her, she was thinking what a useful child this was; how completely its warm little body shielded her from George Bull's brooding

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eyes. She could see he was not in the best frame of mind, and she intended to leave him strictly to himself. The sooner he got over his ridiculous fancies the better for him. Why, if she owned a miniature George Bull she would sit down and cry her eyes out, she thought passionately. No, he could entertain Rosie while she played with this serious-minded baby.

"Will you tell me your name?" she asked, smiling into the grey eyes that were regarding her so intently.

The baby shook her head.

"Please do," Paulina coaxed.

"Got no name," the child answered, and stuck her finger in the dimple in her cheek.

"See here, love," Rosie interposed, "you will tell the pretty lady your name, won't you?"

Once again the little girl shook her head, and Paulina, who was curiously pleased with Rosie's naïve compliment, said laughingly, "The cat's got her tongue, I believe." Then, "She doesn't look a bit like you, does she?"

Rosie's lips trembled. Her eyes filled with ready tears.

"She's not a bit like me. She's just like her father, just like Jim, Brother George."

"So she is," George Bull assented moodily. "The same hair and eyes, and just that trick of staring at you. She's Jim all over."

The baby wriggled in Paulina's arms.

"Down," she said firmly.

Paulina put her on the floor, and the child, staring uncertainly about her, ran to George Bull's chair and looked behind it; and when he would have caught her she slipped away, and commenced a laborious search throughout the room, under the table, back of the chairs, and behind the portières.

"What is she after?" Paulina asked.

"Oh, God!" Rosie moaned. "She's hunting for Jim. He played with her every night. He'd hide, and she'd hunt for him."

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Attracted by her mother's voice, the child stopped; and, even as Rosie wiped her eyes, ran to her and caught her by the skirt.

"Muvver, Jim's gone," she cried, and laughed deliciously.

When they went in to dinner Paulina led the child, and George Bull brought in Rosie.

CHAPTER VI

SINCE Paulina loved to buy, whether for herself or some one else, Rosie's wardrobe progressed with amazing rapidity; and in the matter of dress Paulina might be said to rise to the height of the sublime. She became absorbed in her lay figures; she had a natural gift for the selection of materials and designs; and she had the wit and strength of character to enforce her commands unless her dressmakers could suggest something more daring, more pleasing, more original. In a short time the unstylish countrywoman disappeared, and was replaced by a pathetic, but by no means unattractive, little figure. Garbed in the deepest mourning, with all the proper accessories of widowhood, once again Rosie became appealing, even pretty.

Moreover, she was frantically eager to satisfy her exacting sister-in-law, who had Rosie's stays made "to shorten her long-waisted back," a statement that somewhat puzzled poor little Rosie. "Ugly clothes will never mend a broken heart," was Paulina's trenchant verdict; and Rosie was careful not to mention clothes and Jim in one and the same breath again. She let her hair be banged and arranged to suit Paulina's fancy; and if she shuddered at the wearing of a low-cut dress at an hour perilously near her former bedtime, she kept her doubts and her fears to herself or confided them to George Bull, who was always sympathetic and unfeignedly devoted to her baby. From being too expansive she grew almost too quiet; and Paulina was often aware that she was the object of many a timid, furtive scrutiny.

Poor Rosie could not understand a sister-in-law who was so deeply concerned over her appearance and so apparently indifferent to her happiness. Her own nature was so simple

that it did not occur to her to judge from other than her own standpoint, and when she laid the fault at the door of what she naïvely termed "fashionable life," she believed she had grasped the crux of the difficulty.

To Paulina's surprise Rosie made one point, and that was that she be permitted to make her baby's underclothes, to scallop and embroider them at her leisure. So Paulina had smilingly, even contemptuously, brought her the materials, and said when she was tired of working they could complete the wardrobe in town.

It was Rosie's chance to make good, and she worked with feverish haste and skill. The materials were fine; her time was her own, and Paulina's smile had been like a blow on a hitherto undiscovered, sore bruise. At first, from sheer nervousness, her hands trembled so that she could hardly direct her needle; but as she waxed interested in her work she forgot the irritating smile, and put into the embroidery all her love for her baby, who was the living image of Jim.

"You might let me see your embroidery," said Paulina one day.

"Surely," said Rosie, and as Paulina exclaimed at the beauty of her handiwork her face reddened with pleasure.

"Where did you learn?"

"When I was waitress the ladies at the hotel taught me," Rosie replied innocently.

She was amazed at the effect her words had upon Paulina. Her face flared red and then went white again. Her eyes blazed and drew more closely together.

"While you are living with me," she said in a hard, steady voice, "you are never to speak of having been a waitress. Be careful. You might hurt your—" she stopped for lack of breath, "you might hurt your Brother George."

"I hurt Brother George?" cried the shrinking and thoroughly frightened Rosie.

"Yes, you hurt Brother George," mimicked Paulina.

"How could I hurt him?" said the little widow. "He's been so kind to me."

"You've spent a lot of his money."

It was a nasty speech, but Paulina meant to slap and to quiet at one blow; and in this she was successful, for Rosie sat silent for many an hour. But though silent, she was thinking, and her thoughts were far from happy ones. Living as simply as she had done, she found the conventions, the platitudes, the tiresome details of her present existence irksome, even monotonous. She was always sleepy at dinner, and so much food at night gave her indigestion. Then, added to her physical discomforts, she had the feeling that she was more or less of a thorn in Paulina's side. This feeling she could not reconcile with the gracious person who outdid herself in the effort to enhance her, Rosie's, personal charm; but it was a feeling that was not in the least incongruous with the stern, disagreeable looking woman who did not hesitate to remind her that she was dependent upon George Bull's bounty.

What rankled most in Rosie's breast was the knowledge that she did not desire the clothes, indeed the insolence of their price appalled her. She had been accustomed to a careful country abundance, and to be plunged into the midst of this sea of plenty frightened her. The expenditures were on too vast a scale for her to comprehend, and the waste about her struck a chill to her heart. She was a confiding, womanly little person, and she had spoken to George Bull about his manner of living. She was recalling some bits of their talk, bits that seemed to bear upon Paulina's hateful speech. When she had screwed up her courage to the highest point she asked rather pathetically, "Paulina, can Brother George afford to have me live here?"

"Why can't he?" asked Paulina crisply.

"It costs a lot to live," said the little widow, "and my clothes—they're real pretty, but we must not get any more of them."

"Brother George has plenty of money, and you needed the clothes."

Thus spoke Paulina. She had entirely forgotten the epi-

sode of the morning, and besides she did not dislike Rosie and she intended to utilise her timely arrival to the uttermost.

"But has he a plenty just now?" persisted Rosie bravely. "From what he said to me. . . ."

"What did he say to you?"

Paulina could not help the sharpness in her voice. It could not be said that she was in the slightest degree jealous, but it was amazing that George Bull should confide in a fool, even if that fool was his sister-in-law.

"We were talking about Jim," answered Rosie, who had noticed the edge to Paulina's question. "Brother George is going to build a schoolhouse in our meadow as a monument to Jim; but he hasn't got the money now. He wants to start it right away, but he says he hasn't got an extra penny to call his own. Everything is tied up."

"He can untie it, can't he?"

"I asked him that, and he said he couldn't. He said he couldn't afford to economise either, as he didn't want people to know he was hard up. He said if he fell off the wall all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put him together again. He said his bad luck started with wheat. I didn't understand him."

"Naturally not," said Paulina with an air of great superiority. "He was talking about the market and you couldn't be expected to understand that."

"You get wheat at a grocery store, not a market," said the practical Rosie.

"So you do," agreed Paulina in high good-humour at her sister-in-law's silliness, "so you do; and if I were you I shouldn't worry over George. He always makes money."

"Are you quite sure it's all right?"

"Quite sure," said Paulina heartily.

For money-making she had never met George Bull's equal. Paulina respected money.

"There's another thing," said Rosie, emboldened by her success. "Sometimes I think I am in the way here. You

see so little of Brother George. Now at home it was different. I saw Jim all day long, so we didn't mind having a guest when we sat down at night. I don't mind sitting in my room, Paulina."

"You're not a bit in the way," Paulina assured her inscrutably, yet graciously. "I want you and so does Brother George."

"Now, that's real kind," cried Rosie, and Paulina blushed at the grateful voice.

"Did you and Jim have a farm?" Paulina questioned idly.

"Yes," Rosie nodded her head. "Brother George gave it to us as a wedding present. It was a little house, but it was real sweet and homelike. Every year we fixed it up a bit. This spring, if Jim hadn't died we were going to buy a new rug for the parlor."

"No!" exclaimed Paulina as if to a child.

"Yes." Rosie stopped her sewing and smiled happily. "Jim was set on having everything pretty and nice. He worked hard all day, and so did I. We had a woman come in and help with the odd jobs, but I cooked and cleaned, and minded the baby and made the butter."

"Did you like it, all that work?"

"I loved it," Rosie said simply. "When Jim wasn't working on the farm he helped me, too. Nights we made preserves together. Back of our house there was a spring, and in the summer time I sat there and did lots of things out of doors. The year the baby came I didn't work a bit. We did everything together that we could, and after we got the baby Jim said we were too happy to last. And it didn't last," concluded Rosie.

"Are you lonesome now?" asked Paulina kindly, touched in spite of herself.

"Sometimes," Rosie admitted, "it seems as if I'd give most anything for a glimpse of our mountains, and, except for Rose Baby, I'd be willing to die right now if I could just stand with my hand in Jim's and feed the chickens in our back yard."

She shut her eyes for a moment. The exquisite pain of her idea brought the ever ready tears.

"You're sure I'm not in the way?" she asked again.

"Sure," said Paulina concisely.

There was food for thought in Rosie's words. George Bull was tied up. Even with Rosie for a "handle" this was no time for a divorce.

CHAPTER VII

ARE you ever going to stop embroidering?" Paulina asked as she looked over the pile of tiny petticoats.

"I like to do it." Rosie patted the little garments.

"Well, you make beautiful baby clothes."

"I should like to make some for you, Paulina," Rosie said softly.

"I don't like children."

"You love my Rose Baby."

"I hate her name," Paulina complained. "It's so ordinary."

"Jim called her that," Rosie replied with the mild obstinacy of the weak. "So shall I. But you do love her, Paulina?"

"I like her," said Paulina judicially, "but I don't love her. Besides, she's such a funny little thing. She's different."

"She's just like Jim," said Rosie with a singing note in her voice.

"Most babies take after their fathers, Rosie."

"Yes, I believe they do."

"Well, I don't think George would make a pretty baby." Paulina smiled a superior smile.

"I say Brother George is a fine looking man." Rosie's voice was as defiant as Paulina's had been flippant.

She was not surprised to find herself on the defence again, stung into words by that superior smile. She was always that way now, and yet she could not put her finger upon any openly ugly act on the part of Paulina. Hers were the sins of omission, and she was maddeningly pleasant. Rosie admired her sister-in-law's appearance, but she could not

find it in her heart to love her. It was different with her brother-in-law.

George Bull, to quote his own words, had "cottoned to Rosie at once." She was so small and weak, and he so large and strong. She hung upon his sentences; she deferred to his opinions; and she was inordinately grateful for the favours he bestowed upon her. Her very limpness gave him strength. Lacking the air of refinement, the exquisite courtesy born of good blood and good breeding, Rosie had many of the qualities that had made Paulina's mother so attractive to George Bull. Mrs. Sprague had been pre-eminently a wife and a home maker. So was Rosie, and George Bull, who had hitherto been solely a money-making machine, found it very pleasant to be considered and, as it were, petted at his own fireside.

It was singularly easy for him to look at life from Rosie's point of view; for, after all, were not they both mountain born and bred? Having struggled for himself, he was sympathetic with her efforts. The questions that she asked were not ridiculous to him, and he thought her attempt to overcome her native provincialisms not a matter of scorn but admiration.

Insensibly confidence encouraged confidence. It was pleasant to drop his mask and to say frankly that he was "dead beat;" and once Rosie understood that Paulina was excluded from these little talks, she grew to value their moments together. She never repeated their conversations to her sister-in-law. She had an idea that George Bull wished to shield Paulina; to hide from her his business worries; and there was no doubt in her mind that Paulina did have a most peculiar way of seizing upon a weak point in their discussions and tearing it into shreds. You were afraid not to be convinced. A most peculiar way she had; Rosie had seen that when they first talked about money. Since then, several times, Paulina had asked Rosie was Brother George untied, and Rosie had learned to reply stolidly that she did not know. Paulina always grew thoughtful at this answer;

then laughed and said things must go the same old way, an enigmatic sentence to Rosie, whose brain was not intended to puzzle out enigmas.

It seemed to her that every day George Bull's face was more harassed, more lined, more unhappy. She wondered that Paulina did not see this, too, Paulina, whose secret dreams and fancies were forever lapping and caressing the thought of her probable divorce, her possible alimony. So when Paulina was not around, and these times were not infrequent, Rosie sat with George Bull, and the hour before dinner became the pleasantest part of the day for the pair of them.

Sometimes they played with the baby, and, up in her room, Paulina could hear the laughter and the merriment; could hear it and not lose her superior smile; could hear it and still be content with the road she intended to follow. Undoubtedly Paulina was peculiar.

Lately Rosie had done all the playing. George Bull had a headache. He said so himself. Rosie was playing now, a silly game invented by George Bull. Held securely by Rosie, the baby sat on the arm of the big, green, old-fashioned sofa.

"Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall," sang Rosie. "Humpty Dumpty had a great fall—" here she pushed the baby back until she fell into the mass of sofa pillows waiting to receive her—"and all the king's horses and all the king's men could not put Humpty Dumpty together again," she concluded to an accompaniment of kicks and laughter from Rose Baby.

"Poor old Humpty Dumpty," said Rosie, smiling into her baby's eyes.

"Po' ol' Hump Dump," laughed the baby and wriggled joyously among the pillows.

"George get on wall and Hump Dump," screamed the baby.

"Thank you," said George Bull ironically. "I am already on the wall."

"George Hump Dump! George Hump Dump!" cried the insistent child.

"George does not want to Hump Dump," said Rosie, taking her little daughter in her lap.

"George don't want to Hump Dump," repeated the child dazedly, and sat pondering this strange state of affairs.

"George has a headache. Love George. Poor George." Rosie placed her child within George Bull's arms.

"Po' George! Po' George!" the baby crooned, and nestled her face sleepily against George Bull's coat.

"What do you mean by saying you are on the wall, Brother George?" Rosie's voice was low. Paulina might descend at any minute.

"I'm just up against it, Rosie, and I don't see my way out. For months matters have been going from bad to worse, and I am so tired of it all I can hardly think."

"Are you still tied up?"

"Oh, Lord, yes."

"But you've got this house?"

"That's tied up, too."

"You don't mean it's mortgaged, Brother George?"

"Yes, but it's mine if I don't lose, don't you see. I had to have collateral."

"Yes," said Rosie, who didn't see, and who was wondering what collateral meant.

"Sometimes I put up everything," George Bull confessed.

"Yes." Rosie still strove to bring this talk within her powers of comprehension.

"If you are still tied up, why do we waste so much money?" she inquired luminously. "There's the lake."

"I've thought of that, and to-morrow the water will be cut off. The pipe's broken and can't be repaired until spring."

"I didn't know it was broken."

"It isn't," George Bull said gently, "but we will tell Paulina that it is. If I began to economise openly everybody would know that I was whipped."

"Yes," Rosie whispered.

Here was an unhappy state of affairs. Everything was tied up, whatever that might mean, and though money was admittedly scarce they were prevented from definitely economising. She began to see why George Bull was on the wall and might be pushed off in the twinkling of an eye.

She knew what it meant to retrench. She had often done without, and she fully realised the numbing effect of an expected blow. Why, when two of their cows had died of tuberculosis it seemed as if they could never hope to replace them. Jim and herself stood shoulder to shoulder. She gave up the woman who did the odd jobs; he gave up the man who helped on the farm; and they both did without butter, and sold what they made. In the end they got their cows again; but then there had been no mysterious "Everybody" to interfere with their plans.

She felt, too, that Paulina ought to be taken into their confidence. Her place was by George Bull's side, and were they not cheating her when they deprived her of this privilege? She might be able to offer a suggestion. She was a very clever woman. Of course Rosie knew better than to cross George Bull and, evidently, he had made up his mind to hide this matter from his wife. Perhaps he felt too worried to have more than one thing on his mind, and it might have vexed him to see Paulina pale and anxious. When Jim had been worried Rosie was always anxious, and she never got a wink of sleep. Still, Paulina ought to know. Rosie wanted to think that her brother-in-law was right in his decision, but all the same she felt apologetic to Paulina.

It did not strike her as at all odd that George Bull should tell her these things. Jim had told her at once about the cows, and together they had planned what they could do. Jim always said that two heads were better than one; only Rosie reasoned confusedly that Paulina's and not hers should be the second head. You never could tell how Paulina would take anything. She was as elusive as the baby's toy balloon. As soon as you grasped her she slipped from beneath

your fingers. And she was apt to laugh at everything. Perhaps that was more fashionable. Rosie herself was much more self-contained since she had lived with her sister-in-law.

Secretly Rosie disapproved of fashionable life as illustrated by George Bull and Paulina. Their lack of emotion, their apparent indifference, and, above all, their extremely limited intercourse with each other seemed to her most deplorable. Not that she would have dared to admit such sentiments. Her first thought was not to transgress in Paulina's eyes. She, Paulina, had a way of saying things were "common"—Rosie was hurt and angered by that expression.

Feeling as she did, Rosie could not see her road clear to suggest to George Bull to consult Paulina, and she was immensely gratified that her brother-in-law should trust her with his secrets. It was an acknowledgment of their kinship, an acknowledgment of the invisible bond that held together all mountain folk. Disloyalty to your clan was a monstrous, an unheard-of thing. Wild horses could not drag a word from her lips, Rosie thought fervidly. Instinctively she assumed towards George Bull the same attitude she adopted with her husband, an attitude compounded of gentleness, submission, respect and fidelity. She could never be a prop upon which he might lean, but she could be a pillow for his aching head.

This time, as it happened, she had more to give. She did not come to him empty-handed. In her imagination she saw George Bull delivered from his worries, and hers should be the hands to untie the cords. It was a heaven-sent inspiration. She was surprised she had not thought of it before. As he stared into the fire, his arm about the sleeping child, it seemed to her that he must feel his troubles were at an end. It astonished her that to attract his attention she should have to call him twice.

"Brother George, Brother George," she said, "if you need

more money there's the farm you can sell. Won't that untie you?"

Now George Bull stared at Rosie instead of the fire. She had spoken so simply; she had so gently laid her offering at his feet that he could hardly understand the nature of her proposition. It was her ewe lamb, her single possession, and he knew what a sacrifice her gift entailed. It was her living, all she could count upon outside of the refuge he had offered her. It was the home of her happy married life. Every rock or tree must be dear to her. Every bit of ground must typify Jim to her mind. And she would give all this to him to splash, the tiniest of pebbles, into his sea of debts. There was something very sweet about her innocence of money matters. She still reckoned by her old standards. She counted her farm so much. She had hoped to set him on his feet again. The magnitude of her offer stirred something deep within him. All this she could do for him.

"Suppose you lost it?" he asked.

"I should not care." She dismissed the idea with a gesture.

"But how could you live, you and the baby?"

"I can work," Rosie said fiercely. "I can work. Oh, do take it, Brother George."

"It is sweet of you, Rosie," he had to pick his words for fear of hurting her feelings, "but you keep the farm. It would not help. I am all tied up. You keep it."

"You mean it's nothing?" Rosie's wits were sharpened by distress.

"Nothing!" said George Bull quickly. "Nothing! Your offer? Why, it's everything."

He drew her to him with his disengaged hand.

"You are a good girl, Rosie," he said.

Her ewe lamb. All this she would do for him. So deeply did he feel, he kissed her almost angrily.

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER all, though the water was cut off, Rosie did not have to tell the story of the broken pipe; for the next day Paulina fell ill with the grippe and became extremely indifferent to household affairs.

Of course the weather was to blame. It had been mild, even warm, more like spring than winter; and all unseasonable weather was unhealthy. That, everybody knew. Always by this time of the year the ground was covered with snow, the lake was frozen hard, and this frozen condition lasted until the February thaw. Ordinarily, in winter George Bull required no water for his lake. It was the irony of fate that this year, when he could least afford the expense, the water flowed in and out as silently, but as swiftly, as in the summer time. Once the surface of the lake had been covered by a thin skim of ice, a rather remarkable event considering the generally high temperature, but this had quickly melted—as lately most of George Bull's hopes had melted—and disappeared.

There was a great deal of tonsillitis and grippe about. The doctors said so; the papers said so; and Paulina, who had the grippe, knew it was about.

Paulina was an extremely difficult patient. She was so strong and healthy, so impatient of restraint, so indignant with herself for getting sick, so unwilling to let any one wait upon her, that she succeeded in working up a very respectable fever. She refused a regular nurse, but ungraciously accepted Rosie's offer to help; for, indeed, poor Elise could not be expected to work night and day. At first she was cross and fretful enough. Then, as her aches and pains increased rather than diminished, she sank into silence; and

her temperature went up and down, a nice barometer to show the varying state of her unhappiness.

Sometimes in her softer moments she clung to Rosie, who would have given affection for affection had not Paulina so often repulsed her well-meant advances, repulsed them by her look, her gesture, her recoil from her touch until Rosie told herself that, if it were not for George Bull, she could not endure to wait upon this sick woman.

Sometimes Paulina lay upon her bed and did nothing but glower at Rosie, for all the world as though she had an evil eye, thought Jim's wife. That glower followed Rosie about the room; when she tried to rest herself in an easy chair it enveloped her; and if she drew too near to Paulina, back of the glower she saw rage, hate, and even a great fear of what she could not imagine.

These were the times when the fever got the best of Paulina, although she had striven to the uttermost to keep the upper hand. These were the times when she saw Rosie exercise her devilish ingenuity and, just to vex her, saw her turn herself into a teapot with a handle just a few inches beyond Paulina's reach. The lid of the pot opened and shut, that was Rosie yawning, and the handle was large, thick, and as grey as smoke; and whatever Rosie did, the big loop stuck out far behind and yet, at the same time, very near to Paulina's bed. Near, but not near enough, for try as she would she could never catch hold of it.

When Rosie was not looking Paulina would lean out of her bed, and stretch and stretch; only to have that tantalising handle swerve to the right, to the left, or contract in front of her empty fingers. Then she would get back under the cover with tears of vexation in her eyes, tears of pain, too; for the movement that she made started her shoulders aching, and she could not ask Rosie for a hot water bag, because Rosie was guilty of other things besides turning herself into a teapot. She knew what Rosie was up to. She saw the lid open and shut, the pot tilt over her. That was a cunning idea of Rosie's, but she had no intention of being drowned in

boiling tea. It was a cunning idea that, as cunning as the other idea was selfish. Why should Rosie begrudge her a handle for her divorce when she had wanted one nearly all of her married life? It was pure selfishness and she, Paulina, had to have it. She wept scalding tears of self pity, and she hid the fact that she wept.

When Rosie was not a teapot she made herself very pleasant about the sick-room; but Paulina could not trust her. She was cunning about the boiling tea and selfish about the "handle," and Paulina swore to herself again and again that a "handle" Rosie was and a "handle" Rosie should remain. It was the only excuse for her presence in this house.

All during her illness Paulina was tormented by the phantasies created by her own brain, morbid and disagreeable phantasies that banished sleep and prolonged the fever. Yet these were not her blackest moments; for now George Bull sat with her at the hour he had formerly played with Rosie and her baby. Here again this was due to Rosie's management. Sentimental in the extreme, she arranged all sorts of excuses to leave the husband and wife together; and then, to Paulina's disgust, she would go off happily to her child, quite satisfied that she was doing a good part by Brother George.

Every day George Bull did the same thing with the regularity and monotony of a well-kept clock. He always stopped on the threshold and said, "How do you feel, Paulina?" As he moved across the floor his boots always creaked; and he always sat in Rosie's easy chair, and kept his back to Paulina. Occasionally he read, but oftener he sat silent, staring ahead of him. He was not only her husband; he was a vast, bulky, unattractive mass of human flesh.

Paulina had several methods of procedure. Sometimes she acknowledged these advances with a frigid, "I am better." Sometimes she did not speak at all, and sometimes she feigned sleep; but always she felt surging within her that aversion that grew and flourished until now she could not strangle it. It had swollen beyond her control. It was

a power that threatened her reason; that made the air of her bedroom heavy, with unsaid thoughts, as thick, as stifling, as unendurable as the steam compartment of a Turkish bath.

Once when George Bull entered her room she had actually been asleep. She had never forgotten that day. No more had George Bull. He had come in quietly because Rosie had warned him with her eyes, with her finger on her lips. Then she had stolen out of the room, and he had stood by Paulina's bed and looked down on his sleeping wife.

Paulina did not appear in the least formidable. Her hair was plaited on either side of her face, and lay upon the coverlet. Her chin was tilted a little upward, and her fever-parched lips were parted ever so slightly. The grippe had left shadows under her eyes, and had sketched upon her face a rather pathetic expression of expectancy of pain. That dread, expectant expression touched George Bull's heart, and aroused all his old love for Paulina. He longed to take her in his arms; to cradle her against his breast; and as she belonged to him there was no earthly reason why he should not do these things. There was, of course, his fear of the aversion, that invisible foe forever getting the better of him. If he took this step it would be a hand-to-hand combat with his enemy, a kill-or-cure remedy, and yet. . . . He wiped a bit of sweat from off his brow and sat down, gingerly enough, on the edge of the bed. This brought him a little nearer to her face, the face he could have covered with kisses. Her hands were close to him, and yet so far away. He wiped his face again, and placed his hand upon the coverlet. He touched Paulina's foot. A hot fire flared within him. This woman was his wife, to love, to honour, to cherish. He had done all of that. She had promised to love, to honour, to obey. She had failed miserably if, indeed, she had tried at all.

Now, unconsciously, he pressed down upon the foot. It stiffened in his grasp. He slid his hand along the coverlet. He touched a marble woman. He touched a figure so tense,

so still that perforce he glanced at Paulina. Here he stopped aghast. Her blazing eyes were fixed upon his hand. Her lips were still parted, yet he could not see her breathe. He hastened to rise from the bed. Always he had been repulsed; but here was an emotion intensified until it was alarming. It would not have surprised him to hear her break into shrill peals of laughter. She was afraid of him. That was the hardest blow of all. He got out of the room so quickly that he did not see Paulina huddle down among the pillows; did not see the tearless sobs that convulsed her person; nor hear her muttered, "My God! My God!" Paulina was not wont to call upon her creator.

This wearisome sickness, this gripe, kept Paulina in bed three full weeks; and so engrossed the household that the emptying of the lake became a matter of no moment whatever. Since stagnant water was unhealthy, the place was drained dry and the stained cement sides and bottom were exposed to view. The gardener, who was a tidy man, turfed to the edge of the cement so that, except from the house, you hardly noticed the absence of the lake. From Paulina's window you saw the whole stretch of ground as it sloped and rose again. Now this view was cut in half by the bared yellow cement. It was a gaping cut in the hollow of the hill, and when Paulina rose from her bed it was the first thing her eyes fell upon. Who had done this, she demanded? Elise explained, and Rosie, blushing under Paulina's scrutiny, told about the broken pipe.

Paulina felt her wrath gather. What was a broken pipe? It could and should have been mended during her illness. Had George Bull lost his mind; and, if so, what was Rosie thinking about not to keep things up to the mark? Was she not, temporarily, the head of the household? It appeared she could not be trusted with even the briefest authority. By the time George Bull had arrived she had become really angry, and said imperiously, "What is the matter with the water pipe?"

"It is broken," said George Bull.

"Then mend it," Paulina ordered shortly.

George Bull looked at his wife oddly. There was something so sharp about her, something so suggestive of a wedge, capable of prying apart even the hardest of substances that, all at once, he saw how foolish, how thin his small excuse had been. She was not to be bargained with or set aside. She did not trouble to ask for an explanation. It had been so easy to confide in Rosie. It was so hard to hint of the smallest economies to Paulina.

"The pipe is not broken," he said gently, even slowly, for it was an exceedingly bitter pill he had to swallow. "That's the excuse we give to the servants. I've lost money lately, and I am obliged to economise."

"Do you mean to keep it that way?" Paulina was openly incredulous.

"I am forced to keep it that way." He felt better as soon as he had spoken.

"Have you lost much money?"

"A great deal."

Paulina's gaze wandered around the room, and finally concentrated, eyes too close together, upon George Bull's face. It was not a particularly kind look, but then Paulina was feeling far from kind. A little neuralgic ache, the parting gift of the grippe, was crawling across her forehead and creeping down the side of her face. It added to her acerbity, not that at best she could have been pleasant when she saw her heart's desire vanish into space. She remembered Rosie's timid premonitions, and she thought bitterly that it seemed impossible to satisfactorily sever her marriage vows. At every turn she was blocked by somebody or something. When George Bull had plenty of money she had her mother to consider. Now that she was alone the money had disappeared, at least temporarily.

"I thought you could always make money," she said insolently.

George Bull's heavy face reddened. It was not what Paulina said, it was her manner that was so offensive. His con-

profession had brought forth not a word of enquiry, not a word of sympathy, and yet so used was he to these sins of omission that he hardly noticed their absence. What he did notice was her voice, her skill in turning an apparently simple question into a deadly affront. It was as if she had shrieked aloud contemptuously, in a call as shrill as a cock's crow, "And you can't even make money, you can't even do that." She had stripped him of all save his self-respect, and now she ripped that garment from neck to hem and tore it from him. He felt his general uncouthness, his lack of birth. It was a dreary outlook and, for the first time he could not fall back upon his bank account. He began to wonder if it were as bad as she said, if it were possible he had lost his knack of making money. He had shown a lack of judgment to plunge as heavily as he had done; still he could not foresee this depression in the "market." All big men had moments of reverses, and he had been, and still was, a big man to every one except his wife. He felt his gorge rise. He would show her what he could do.

"With your infallible judgment," went on Paulina ironically, "I should think you could speculate. If you haven't got any money you can borrow."

"Not without collateral," George Bull replied inwardly. Outwardly he said nothing. His tired, overworked brain was just beginning to assimilate Paulina's words. Plenty of men did make money on speculations. He had done that himself. Why, lately his whole business was a chain of speculations. In the past he had done wonders, but he had always had a backing. Money made money. Now he could not afford to lose a penny, and he had to appear as if he had plenty behind him. Of course Paulina's idea of the money market was crude, at any other time almost laughable. This time there was food for thought in Paulina's words, for as soon as she had spoken he had seen where he might borrow, and he meant to pay a royal interest. As trustee of the Michaelson estate, he had money to invest, perhaps reinvest was the *better word*. He had sold some

of the Michaelson property to splendid advantage, and while he was looking around it was foolish to let the money lie idle. This new arrangement would be a sort of mutual benefit. He would have the ready money and the heirs the royal interest. He could use that money; repay it before it was time for him to send in his accounts and nobody would know the difference. All he needed was the use of a little ready money, he felt convinced of that. He saw he ought to be grateful to Paulina for her taunt. She steadied him, helped him open out a way. He should have to be careful, exceedingly careful, since the money was not his. He would set aside a portion to pay his more pressing debts and he would invest the rest. He would study the market and buy and sell for quick profits. Buy on margin and not aim too high. That was where most men collapsed. They kicked at the moon and missed it. He had seen hundreds of them do just that trick. All he needed was a little caution and a fresh head, a head that could think steadily and evenly, not in brilliant flashes with big, blurred gaps between. Lately he had experienced the sensation of jumping from mountain peak to mountain peak. He hated the feeling. He was beginning to long for the solid ground.

It steadied him to look at Paulina. Just now she was manicuring her nails. Backwards and forwards across her fingers she passed the silver-topped buffer, and her hand was as steady and as regular as the piston of an engine. There was something uncanny about her unconcern. She was apparently indifferent to his financial difficulties, that is, so far as the difficulties were his private affairs; yet there was a force beneath her cool presence and he knew if he encroached on her privileges he would feel the hot blast of her anger. He had no conception of the cruel blow he had dealt her hopes. He thought he understood her attitude. She had to have money, and he had to provide it.

Instinctively he recalled his conversation with Rosie, Rosie who would have given all without any hope of return. That was the mountain peak to which he was clinging just

now. What a contrast Paulina presented to Rosie! Paulina had the most money, for he had taken her mother's little pile, added to it bit by bit—he called that turning it over—invested it in Paulina's name, and left it to accumulate. Looking at the matter all around, he could not find an excuse for her lack of generosity. But how vastly she differed from Rosie and it was appallingly plain what made the difference. One woman cared and the other did not. The second woman was his wife.

He slipped off his peak into the blur with, apparently, no other peak in sight. It gave him a shock to find that he was dissatisfied with himself, and dissatisfied with the idea of borrowing from the Michaelson estate. He was beginning to analyse this feeling which had something to do with Rosie and his refusal of her generous offer, when a sentence as cold and as bleak as the North Wind smote his consciousness. "This house can't be run on air," he thought he heard some one say. He could not justly put the blame on Paulina, for was she not still busily polishing her finger nails? It was his own inward conviction that spoke loudly to him. It was a condition of affairs that might come to pass unless . . .

George Bull found his second peak and hoisted himself painfully upon it. Paulina had to have money and he had to provide it.

CHAPTER IX

PAULINA had to have money and he had to provide it. During the days that followed the making of this resolve George Bull repeated this sentence so often to himself that, in its very repetition, it lost both weight and value. When his head was not aching he could see that something must be done, and done quickly; but for the greater part of the time he felt so ill and harassed that he found it hard to bring his mind to bear upon this all important subject. It vexed him to discover that he had so little control of his will power; and it frightened him to think that, perhaps, he had lost his wonderful gift of absorption.

It was the fear of that loss, and the daily sight of Paulina's maddening face that made him redouble his efforts; that made him mentally cling to his self-ordained peak; that made him, when the inevitable slip and lapse into space came, struggle and strive until he had once again scrambled safely upon it. Paulina had to have money and he had to provide it.

After a while he could think of nothing else. It all happened just as it used to happen. He could feel the black walls shutting round him until, eventually, he stood alone with his problem and, as of old, the problem shouted, "Solve me! Solve me!" There was but one difference. Now it was harder and harder to come out of these trance-like moods and at night they interfered with his sleep; not that he minded that, only it made him infernally light-headed and dizzy. He was tired, too, horribly tired, and he had never felt like this before. He caught himself edging away from the windows, and he never looked over the banisters. It was so easy to jump out, or fall over as the case might be. The

least sudden noise irritated him. That was one thing that was nice about the night. If he did lose sleep it was quiet enough. In the night everything became startlingly, illuminatingly clear. He saw how tremendously vital the situation was. They were all depending on him, he told himself proudly, and he must not fail them. There was the house that could not be run on air; there was the lake, no one knew how he longed for his lake; there were Paulina and Rosie and precious Rose Baby. The thought of the last two always made him choke a bit, while the image of Paulina turned him hot and cold, and filled him with a furious desire to make money and more money, and metaphorically to force his scornful wife upon her knees to do homage to her golden God.

He had definitely made up his mind to take the Michaelson money, and he had definitely determined that it would be an advantage to the estate under his control. Now it only remained to select his investment—that was a better name than speculation—and about this he meant to be absurdly careful. That was also a tremendously vital matter. He had to have his golden bridge to carry him over. If he made a false slip—but he was too clever for that. Still it was fearfully, wonderfully, and hair-raisingly vital.

He began to study the market for his opportunity to slip in and slip out, carrying his booty with him. He saw dozens of chances, chances he could have taken with a backing, but not now. Again and again he hung fascinated over the edge of a plunge, and again and again he retreated and waited. For what? A better chance, a better opportunity.

The investment that appealed to him most was a gold mine, "The Golden Luck" the stock was called, which was financed by some men he knew. While their reputations were not exactly to his liking they were too clever to embark upon an over risky enterprise; and here he had chances of an enormous profit. There was also the chance of an enormous loss, for the fall of a point on a thousand shares of stock would mean the loss of a thousand dollars.

Since the best of stock was often affected by the condition of the market, he meant to put aside something to allow for a temporary depression. This was a matter of precaution because he had to be absurdly careful, for while the "Golden Luck" was a speculation, it was, he was convinced, a safe speculation.

Then there was another question to consider. Would it be wise to take his thousands in a lump sum and put all his eggs into this one basket; or had he rather try a bit here, a trifle there, so that the winnings of one might offset the unfortunate loss of another. Not that he contemplated loss; but he had to think of all the sides of a matter. The loss was a very ugly side that lay submerged like some sharp, jagged point of rock hidden from view but a constant menace to an unwary craft. It took a steady hand at the helm to avoid this danger.

Sometimes he thought he gave too much time to his problem, that its constant importunity threatened his health, his reason. If he laid it aside and put it from him he might be the fresher from its absence, the more able to cope with the exigencies of the situation, and yet he was not confident enough to voluntarily test his refund powers of concentration. To put aside his problem might be to dispose of it forever. He had found it difficult enough to attain his peak. His only salvation lay in sticking to a single point of view.

So through the hours of his business day he pursued the routine of his office work and, even as he planned, fought, and strove to retain his place in the money-making world, he was conscious of an eye turned inward to this secret project of his, the building of his golden bridge.

Since Rosie had been so kind he wished that he might tell her all his doubts and plans; that together they might enjoy the smoothing away of his difficulties; but Rosie knew nothing whatever about business matters and would not understand. Also her feelings might be hurt that he could borrow elsewhere when she had been so eager, so willing to lend. At this juncture if he had any qualms of conscience

about borrowing from the Michaelson estate, he set to work to readjust his viewpoint; and he soon succeeded in convincing himself that it was right and proper, indeed, the only thing to do. It was amazing that he had ever thought otherwise. As for Rosie, if she could have understood, he felt that she would have soon become reconciled to his apparent change of mind; and yet, in spite of this feeling, he preferred not to explain. It would have been difficult, most difficult.

Occasionally he permitted himself the luxury of looking a little ahead when he had drawn in splendid returns from his speculations, and when he should have more time to spend with Jim's wife and child. If he could relieve the immediate pressure bearing upon him, he had no fears for the future, and he foresaw that with Rosie in the house he was going to be very happy. After everything was over he could explain it all to Rosie, and thank her as she deserved to be thanked.

As it was, he begged her not to worry, and to please her drink the milk that she placed upon his bureau. Poor Rosie! Had he but known it she fretted daily over his lack of appetite, over the realisation of the fact that she was adding to his heavy expenses; and she had long ago divined his sleepless nights and wondered if there was anything in the world that she could do to help him. In her own way she kept vigil with him, hour by hour, day by day. Not only was she profoundly grateful to him for his kindness to her, but she was touched by the haggard appeal of the man. She doubted if time would accustom her to the sight of so much mental suffering and dull her anxiety, as was evidently true in the case of Paulina, who never questioned, but accepted everything as a part of the day's work. Perhaps it was, Rosie acknowledged, yet it seemed to her they were passing through a dreadful experience. If George were Jim and she were Paulina; but. . . . She could get no further in her thoughts.

In lieu of a better confidante George Bull talked a great

deal to Rose Baby. Now she came in every morning and watched him shave, and he fell into the habit of giving her a rambling account of himself.

"I tell you what, Baby," he said lathering his face freely, "if Uncle George had jumped in with both feet, and had not been afraid to take a chance, he'd have made a little pile of money by this time."

"What you mean?" asked Rose Baby in one breath and one word.

"I mean I've got to try to make enough money to buy you a new doll." He tried to adapt himself to his audience.

"Don't want doll," said the child angelically. "George put on shoes." And George Bull had to laugh, for was he not standing in his stockinged feet, talking nonsense to a child simply because he wanted to talk to some one, and it was impossible for her to understand, though he really meant criticise, not understand.

When he laughed the baby laughed too; and after the shaving was over, and the shoes duly attended to, she gave George Bull a kiss, laid her soft little cheek against his and, patting him with her tiny hand, said shyly, "I love you," just as Rosie had taught her to do. All of which gave George Bull exquisite bliss and also exquisite pain, since he so ardently longed for a child of his own; and although he intended to keep Rose Baby, it was not as if she were his private possession. It calmed and soothed him to be with her; but it added to his burning desire to make money.

And Paulina always fanned the flame, not through any overt deed, but through her simple indifference. He caught himself studying her; watching her graceful figure; her languid movements; the unconscious uplift of her head as she spoke to him, always more or less indirectly. It was as if she had set him a task to do and did not care if he stumbled or fell by the wayside. She meant him to pick himself up; but it was not her intention to lend him any assistance unless, indeed, she were to caution him to be up

and doing. So far from helping him, sometimes when she passed him in the hall, upon the steps, it seemed to him that her dress clung more closely to her body, so obviously did her personality shrink from his.

When he thought about these things a thousand locomotives roared in his ears; and his hands trembled as if he had the palsy. He was not a man then; but an insane, angry creature and he would have liked to shake Paulina until her teeth chattered, only stopping at intervals to remind her that they would sink or swim together.

Paulina would have been surprised, even frightened, if she had known what was going on about her; but her husband and sister-in-law were so eminently commonplace and respectable that it was impossible to connect them with anything that was tragic or even dramatic. Rosie, just at present, might have been likened to a jar of jam that, from lack of sunning, slowly ferments until, eventually, it gains strength enough to blow off its top, and break its jar, an astounding act on the part of the jam, but not in the least alarming.

George Bull was different. He was a force within himself. He was now a mass of stored-up emotions, all of a combustible order, and needing but a match to set fire to the whole. One could not stand by to watch this explosion. One must pray for sufficient time to cover one's face with a mantle; and, leaving everything behind, one must flee as from a volcanic eruption.

In the end George Bull bought the stock of the "Golden Luck" and thereby placed all his eggs in one basket.

CHAPTER X

WHEN Paulina sent the photographs to her mother's friend, Elizabeth Taliaferro, she had confidently expected an early answer to her letter; but as the weeks wore by and nothing happened she began to think that perhaps her mother had been right, and that this was the one iron that could not be reheated, no matter how hotly the fire might burn.

She was startled to discover that this lack of response was a real disappointment to her, and that she had actually been looking forward to the opening of a correspondence. Perhaps, also, the long delay whetted her appetite for what she could not have; for poor Paulina was so constituted that she must ever be reaching out for something she did not possess.

In her self-ordained loneliness she had builded upon those photographs, and she found it pleasant to know something about her mother's home, her mother's happy—for she had been happy—young life. She wanted to be free; she wanted to go South; she wanted to see her mother's people; and she was tied up as tightly as George Bull and with the same string, a lack of money.

Her mother had not been especially communicative about the past; but something could be left to the imagination, and Paulina was good at guessing and fitting together bits of information. In her thoughts the South became a sort of fairyland where no one worked unless one chose, and the fruits and the flowers bloomed endlessly. She saw herself beautifully gowned, from the proceeds of her alimony, moving in a queenly fashion among the Taliaferros. She saw the people nudging each other and heard them whisper,

"That's Pauline Selden's child. She is a beauty, isn't she?" In Southern cities she had read that they, she meant the inhabitants, always identified you by your mother and, anyhow, she intended to drop the name of Bull. She would be Mrs. Paulina Sprague. She had strongly objected to her father; but she saw no reason not to utilise his name.

The long silence was a blow to her hopes, a stop to the building of her pleasant air castles. She endeavoured to dismiss the subject with her usual nonchalant indifference, a shrug of the shoulders; but it was harder than she expected to get the idea out of her head, and then, just as she had schooled herself to forget Elizabeth Taliaferro, the letter arrived, and up went the air castles again. For Elizabeth Taliaferro exceeded the standard Paulina had set for her, and could scarcely wait to know Pauline Selden's daughter.

"My dear Child:" the writer had started, and then followed a long account of how the package had been misdirected and had reached her only a few days back; and Paulina, who was so fully grown and a most determined woman, was oddly gratified at being called a child, although she was somewhat amused at the thorough way she was being tucked under the wing of her mother's friend. Mrs. Sprague had been Elizabeth Taliaferro's conception of the ideal woman, so the letter said, and it was Pauline Selden's child she wanted to know and was willing to love. This she repeated so often that Paulina, in a rare burst of tenderness, read the letter to Rosie that she might hear what it said of Mrs. Sprague.

"I should like to start at once," and it was the queenly, the well-gowned Mrs. Paulina Sprague who spoke.

"How can you leave Brother George?" exclaimed Rosie involuntarily, and then stopped; for Paulina, brought suddenly to earth, instantly folded her letter, dropped her eyes, and rose from her chair.

"Paulina," Rosie entreated in an anguished voice, "he

looks so very ill." Something prevented her from saying unhappy.

"When I had the grippe I looked ill," Paulina said coolly. "We can't stay well all the time. Don't be a little fool, Rosie. Any one would think you were his wife."

"Well, no one would mistake you for that." Rosie was too anxious to show caution.

"I see you want to take my place," and there was an ugly, underlying note in Paulina's voice; for it did seem vexatious when everything had played into her hands, when she could so easily have pushed the matter to a finish, that she should have to wait indefinitely for her alimony and her Southern trip. She meant not to figure elsewhere as Mrs. George Bull, a hateful name and a twice hateful position. When she left, Rosie was so unhappy that she cried; and welcomed George Bull with a raging headache and red-rimmed eyes and, for once in her life, was thankful that he was too absorbed to notice her.

Nowadays he hardly spoke to any one, not even Rose Baby. To be sure, she still went to his room every morning; but she had learned to amuse herself and she played quite happily, secure in the knowledge that she would not be molested. Sometimes he stopped what he was doing and watched her moodily; and sometimes he forgot that she was there, and tramped up and down the room until he was exhausted and was forced to rest himself. Once when Rose Baby came to kiss him he almost shoved her aside, and had only been recalled to his senses by the sight of the child's frightened face. If a thing like this could happen, he knew how little he could trust himself; and he had petted her in a fit of remorseful tenderness that was, in itself, the outcome of his unhappy frame of mind.

George Bull had good reason to worry. The stock market had not recovered itself as he had expected it to do. It was still shaky, still uncertain. Stock was inclined to go down, not up; and his speculation in particular had slumped so rapidly that twice he had been obliged to rush to the

rescue and bolster up his margin for fear everything would be swept away before his agonised eyes. And still the "Golden Luck" stock was going down, down, down. That was what his tramp said to him daily; and soon, despite his most desperate endeavours, he would not be able to lay his hand upon a penny of ready money. . . . Unless he borrowed from Rosie. If he lost everything he could not do that. And what about the Michaelson heirs? There was no chance now of the royal interest, and there was an excellent chance that he would lose all that he had borrowed. The law had another name for that, and a picturesque costume that went with the name.

Tramp, tramp, tramp. That was why he did not accept Rosie's offer. He could not hope to pay her back. He had never been willing to run the risk with her money. What about the Michaelson money? An insistent question and one that must be answered. Why, he had been so sure of winning. Hitherto he had always won, and the chances that he had been afraid to take had made good over and over again. He would hang on the end, fighting, hoping, struggling.

It seemed as if all the world had risen up against him. He was down on his luck now, and there was always the necessity of keeping up appearances. He was living on the money he had borrowed from the Michaelson estate, but there was very little of that left. Soon he would have to send in his accounts, and unless the "Golden Luck" put him on his feet again he had no possible way of replacing the thousands he had taken. His act could not be explained away. The law had another name for borrowing such as he had done. Tramp, tramp, tramp.

If Rosie knew all he wondered what she would think? It was odd that his thoughts never turned to Paulina's aspect of the situation. He was too stunned to care much what her opinion might be, and she scorned him so completely that she could not hurt him further. Since that day in her room when she had been so ugly about the broken

water pipe, he had been cutting himself loose from Paulina. But Rosie! Rosie trusted him, and so had Michaelson, his patron. The Michaelson heirs were the people he thought about; and yet, wrong as he knew it to be, so frantic was he that if he had known just how to do it, he would have borrowed once more. But not from Rosie, never from Rosie.

What would happen when the blow fell? How could he bear to look into her face, she who had trusted him so completely? If he could get her away from the house. . . . Here he began to scheme and plot again. Rosie must go home for a visit. She must be made to leave him. But how? He put his throbbing head between his hands and tried to pray. Whatever might happen he knew that, in the sight of God, he was a dishonest man; but perhaps the age of miracles had not passed. He had tried so hard. With him it had always been an upward fight and God was merciful, only God, no one else. He was glad Mrs. Sprague was dead, but he had a childish feeling that had she lived this trouble would never have come upon him.

He prayed that God would spare him; that he might be permitted to pass through this fearful ordeal, if not for himself, for Rosie's sake. She trusted him. Tramp, tramp, tramp. Up and down the room he paced, now forming a circle, now making a square, now resting a while, then up and about it again. For the age of miracles had passed, of that he felt certain, and he must extricate himself by his own cunning, the very same cunning that had left him in the lurch in that last speculation. But Rosie must go away. He would say that he felt ill and that the child annoyed him. How the very thought hurt him, hurt him far more than it could possibly hurt Rosie, pained as she would be by his decree. She would obey him implicitly, that is if he could bring himself to say this thing to her. But would she trust him again when he had apparently turned against Rose Baby; and if the trouble blew over, would she be willing to come back to him and lend him her child as gener-

ously as she had done before? When she left he would be entirely alone with his thoughts, and he would tramp, tramp, tramp until they brought him that costume that went with the other name for borrowing without permission.

He thought of Rose Baby's little hands, of her soft cheek laid against his hot, white face, and it seemed to him that to forego this would be expiation enough for any man. But for Rosie he should have liked to have kept the child with him to the very end. She would never have understood and she would have comforted him. Her eyes were so clear, so innocent. They would never accuse him of wrongdoing, and perhaps he would never see her again. He should advise Rosie, when the time came, not to let her child associate with a jail bird. Rosie must be cautioned not to let her compassion outride her common sense. All this was taking for granted that Rosie would feel compassion, while it was quite possible, even probable, that she, when she found out the worst, would loathe him. It was a pretty hell into which he had plunged himself.

If he could only see his way out, if he could only sleep enough to clear his befogged brain, he might yet be able to do something. But Rosie must get away, and that at once. Here he must take no chances. The Michaelson heirs were suggesting settlements. Perhaps they knew he was shaky. Perhaps they were watching him. When they found out. . . . Everything would go then—unless he could hit upon a way to replace the borrowed money. Tramp, tramp, tramp, now forming a circle, now making a square, now resting a while, then up and about it again.

In dull silence Rosie heard that she must leave; but he saw her hand go to her eyes and come down wet; and although it half killed him, he took the wet hand in his and said, "Forgive me, Rosie, I am so very ill." He wanted to say more but for the life of him he could not think of what to tell her.

Then Rosie turned and looked at him, a long, steady look, and though her eyes were wet with tears she saw the piteous

appeal beneath his little speech, and knew there was something here that she could not fathom. It was a look that comforted George Bull, a look that told him although Rosie only partly understood, she had forgiven him for the slight he had put upon Rose Baby.

Two weeks later he took her down and put her on the train; and when he had silently kissed her good-bye, and abruptly hugged Rose Baby, he went home and shut himself in his room. Then tramp, tramp, tramp, now forming a circle, now making a square, now resting a while, then up and about it again.

CHAPTER XI

OSTENSIBLY Rosie's visit was to have lasted two weeks; but as the days dragged by and there was no mention of her return, Paulina grew impatient.

"How long is she going to stay away?" she demanded.

"I don't know," said George Bull.

"She has been gone far longer than she intended."

"Why not?"

"I thought she said she was so very fond of you."

George Bull did not answer this. It did not seem necessary to tell Paulina how thoroughly he understood Rosie; for that might reveal the damaging fact that he had sent her away. She had not confided in Paulina, but had done his bidding and now sat waiting for a word, for a sign from him. Unless he wrote for her she would never come back. He knew that, and he meant not to write. However he might hope for the best, in his heart of hearts he was morally certain things were not going to blow over. No, he sat under the shadow of a great black cloud; and he watched it pile up here, add on there; and always it grew darker and darker. Finally when the horizon was swallowed up, he would disappear from the walks of men to take the place where he now belonged—among criminals. He looked narrowly at his wife to see if these things were as yet written on his face; but Paulina was still complaining of Rosie and her ingratitude.

"Her letters tell you absolutely nothing."

"No," answered George Bull impassively, and here this illuminating conversation concluded with Paulina as much in the dark as ever.

Rosie was not communicative with her sister-in-law, and

her infrequent notes were still, cold, little epistles telling of her health, of the weather, and always ending with the wish that Paulina was well and love to Brother George. Thoroughly commonplace efforts they were, as commonplace as the name of Rosie and all that name implied.

But George Bull, had he been so minded, could have told a different tale; for Rosie wrote to him addressing the letters to his office, and while nothing was said it was tacitly understood that they were for his private reading and that Paulina had no part in it. These were bits of Rosie, voicing the details of her simple life, and they were the only peaceful oases in his troubled existence. He was even guilty of rereading them.

"The house looks fine, Brother George," Rosie wrote, "and the people who rent it are real careful with our things. The man's smart, like Jim used to be, and they've fixed up a tank and now they have water in the house. He said if I'd give the paint he'd do the roof himself; and it is so bright and green you can't help seeing it for miles around. He don't know much about farming; and I had to tell him how to manage the apple trees when summer comes, and show him where our vegetable garden was.

"I sit with his wife some because she don't feel so well; and it makes me think of how lonesome I got before Rose Baby came. Whenever I look at my house I remember how you gave it to me, and how happy we were, Jim and I. . . .

"Every one in the village says our baby is the prettiest child here and yet I don't fix her up a bit. I've put away all her good clothes, and she plays out in her long leggings and that sweet little sweater you gave her. I went to the store and bought her a worsted cap, with a tassel on it, and I pull it well over her ears; for it is awfully cold here in the mountains. The wind sweeps down before you know it, and if you aren't careful your face will get frosted. When the baby is dressed she looks like a little jack rabbit, and sometimes she gets a good colour in her cheeks; you know she was always a real white child. She likes this

place fine; but she's worried that you don't come to see her, and I am learning her some poetry for you to hear. When she chooses, she can sing right sweetly. . . .

"We have had a snow and it is awfully cold here. The mountains are so tall and white. It wasn't a heavy fall so you can see bits of green pine sticking out here and there. I got some snow in a saucer and made the baby some ice-cream. She liked it, too. Jim loved it dearly.

"Then I put on my rubber boots and I tramped down the road; and, all of a sudden, I found I was at the cemetery and there was Jim's grave covered with snow. I wanted to cry, Brother George, and yet I wanted to sing, too, something loud and noble. It was quiet there, I guess I was the only one around, and the grave was so white and pure, and not a bit lonesome looking. It looked sad and solemn, but not one bit lonesome, for that heavy stone, with the cross on top of it that you had put there, just seemed to be taking care of Jim. It made me know that wherever he was, some one was looking after him and protecting him just as you are looking after and protecting me. It made me feel that he was so safe and happy. When the baby gets a little older I mean to tell her all about her father so she can see what a good man he was. It seems to me that every day she gets prettier and cuter, if that is possible. . . .

"Deacon Eldridge died this morning. You remember him? He was always talking about you and saying what a good, steady boy you were. He says your mother was a wonder, and I can see that she must have been.

"The deacon didn't leave much money, but their house is built on a piece of land some people would like to buy for the ground for a big summer hotel. Mrs. Eldridge can get good money for it, only she don't want to sell. She asked me if I stayed on through the summer to come and board with her, and the man who rents our house wants me to come and stay there a month, board free, so his wife can have some company now she's under the weather. He's

away a part of the time. I guess I'll do that, anyway. I'm sorry for her and the man likes Rose Baby.

"How are you feeling, and do you drink your milk every night? . . .

"It's been raining quite a spell and it's so damp and cold that I don't let the baby go out. Next week I am going back home, but I don't know how I'll stand seeing other people moving and living in our house. If the woman wasn't right sick I don't know that I'd go. You know, Brother George, how happy we were, and that woman's happy just like us. It's the sight of all this happiness that hurts me, and makes me think of Jim. Since I've decided to go there I look at the stone cross real often. It comforts me.

"I went to the schoolhouse the other day, and there's no call for a new one, Brother George. There are not many children in the village and you must put off thinking of that for a long, long time, for there's no call for it at all. Perhaps when the baby's grown up they might need it, but not now, not now.

"The mountains are just soaked with rain, and the pine woods look so thick and green. I love here, Brother George, and I am real happy.

"You know we both miss you, don't you? I didn't think it was necessary to tell you that, but have added it to make sure you understand. . . ."

When George Bull could pick out at random a page of Rosie's letters and read extracts like these, what wonder that he was guilty of rereading? It was not that they were brilliant compositions, nor even grammatically correct, nor could it be said that he was wildly interested. It was the spirit permeating the whole that fell like a soft covering upon his raw and shrinking self. It was Rosie at her best, contented, cheerful, and affectionate. If she felt anxious she hid her anxiety under such simple questions as, "Did he drink his milk at night, and was he well?" He was glad she did not say happy.

She was forging ahead, too, making her plans to take up her life in the village until such time as he should think fit to send for her. Perhaps since she could so little bear the sight of his daily suffering it was really true that she was more satisfied there than with him.

Best of all she still wished him to love Rose Baby, for she always spoke of the child as "our baby," and that simple "our" meant everything to him.

To George Bull, a parched and thirsty man, these letters were tiny streams of water held to his fevered lips; but, when all was said and done, what he really needed was a deep pool wherein he might lave himself clean; and, try as she might, Rosie could never provide this for him.

CHAPTER XII

PAULINA had thoroughly disapproved of Rosie's visits to her old home and, as usual, her motives were mixed, half good, half bad. She knew she was going to miss her sister-in-law and the child tremendously. They were unobtrusive; and if she wanted them they were always there. The house was big and empty, and it was pleasant to hear the child's laughter. Rose Baby was charming, Paulina admitted that frankly, far too charming to be a Bull. In the little embroidered frocks Rosie made for her she might have been a tiny princess, and she was an affectionate little thing. Paulina herself often kissed her.

That she would miss the child was Paulina's best motive for wanting Rosie not to leave her. Besides she thought it most undesirable to let her sister-in-law slip out of George Bull's mind; for, after all, she was the woman who was going to alienate her husband's affections. Paulina smiled slightly at the idea. She never lost sight of the neat trick she intended to play upon her husband and Jim's wife. Rosie was absurdly fond of him, and he, in turn, had seemed to appreciate this adoration—there was no other name for it. Paulina had thought her affairs were moving smoothly and then, like a bombshell in her midst, had come this silly visit. Rosie was homesick—she had very little patience with such whimsies.

Occasionally a horrid suspicion crossed her mind that Rosie and George Bull were not as good friends as they had been; but she dismissed that idea as ridiculous. "They are," she argued to herself, "two souls with but a single thought and soon, owing to my brilliancy, soon, two hearts shall beat as one." But if they had not quarrelled why had

Rosie prolonged her visit? An even month had passed now. Paulina looked at her calendar thoughtfully. An even month! She must speak to her husband again, though there was small hope of extracting any information from him.

With this end in view the next morning she ate rather a hasty breakfast, and managed to get downstairs before George Bull went to town. He was not in the dining-room; he was not in the den; he was not in the library; and she was just on the point of ringing for the butler when she caught sight of her husband.

He was standing behind the curtains of the parlour window and he was gazing intently down the driveway. Paulina also gazed, and saw the unmistakable brim of a derby hat appear from behind a tree. The brim was followed by a face, quite an ordinary face, with an acute glance that she felt took in the whole of the house. The head vanished; the driveway was empty. In amazement she looked at George Bull, and discovered that, for some extraordinary reason, he was apparently mimicking the man behind the tree. Now he had shrunk back until the curtains swung soft and free from the pole; an outsider would never have suspected the heavy form back of the silky folds: now his head stole forward: now he stared down the driveway. At the reappearance of the derby brim, back he shrank. It was exactly as if he were playing hide and go seek with the baby. Never before had she seen him behave in such an odd fashion, though he invariably lost his temper when photographers tried to snap-shot the house. This man was of that order, a low type she could see, and he was probably waiting for George Bull to leave and then he would get to work. Her husband did not look out again, but stood mopping his face. In spite of the cold weather he was so large that he was still perspiring freely. The habit was growing on him. He was always mopping now. Finally he turned around, and saw Paulina. His eyes bulged unpleasantly.

"Well!" he said harshly.

"I seem to be down a little early." For some reason she felt obliged to excuse herself. This was no time to mention Rosie. "You haven't gone," she concluded lamely.

"Not yet," George Bull said stilly.

Paulina moved back to the library. What a black humour the man was in, and all because of a stupid photographer. Picking up one of the two morning papers, she sat down and pretended to read. She wished fervently that she were back in her room again. Her husband also sat down and took the other paper; but he was not reading. She knew that. No, he was watching her, and for once she was afraid, not absolutely frightened but afraid. She remembered what Rosie had said about his health, and he did have a most peculiar appearance. Excited as he was, there was no telling what he might do. His whole face was blotched and purple, and the swollen veins stood out on his forehead. His skin was baggy and wrinkled, but when fat people lost flesh they always looked that way. Though George Bull was under weight by a good deal, even now he was far too large. His eyes had a shifty, almost a cunning light in them, but however they might happen to rove about they came back to her, watching her, always watching her.

She stood it as long as she could; then rose and left the room. To her surprise, making no effort to detain her, he laid his paper across his face. His head sank back against the chair. She wanted to think that he was sleeping. It came over her that he might be drunk. She tried to remember whether or not she had noticed a smell of liquor about him; and, slipping into the dining room, she examined the decanters upon the sideboard. There they stood, side by side, and they had not been touched. Paulina had filled them herself, with mathematical precision, just to the cut edge of the rim of the bottle. They had not been touched. Very quietly she turned the key of the cellaret. Everything was in its place. There was nowhere else to hunt, for

George Bull professed to be a teetotaller and kept no wine cellar. Thoughtfully she looked again in her husband's direction. He was moving now and she took good care that he did not see her. As he rose he lurched, and steadied himself by his chair. Passing through the hall, he lurched again, and here the doorway did good service. He was drunk, "drunk as a boiled owl," a common expression of her father's. She had often heard him use it irately when speaking of his erring parishioners. At that moment she was exceedingly like the Reverend Lemuel. The question was where did George Bull keep his supplies? He must have been soaking all night in his room, thought Paulina.

Apparently the cool air did him good; for he walked steadily enough to his car and was driven off. She half expected him to stop and order the photographer to leave the premises; but the big car kept straight ahead. Evidently the man had been frightened away.

She went upstairs and continued her search. She rummaged through his closet; searched his chest of drawers, and even peeped under the trowsled, untidy bed. She found nothing, and yet he was drunk, "drunk as a boiled owl." Like a refrain the words rang in her head. She wished that she might have discovered an empty bottle or so. It would have helped her out with her theory, and she wanted to think George Bull was drunk. That was the normal explanation of his behaviour. Disgusting as a typsy man was, his presence could be avoided; whereas this morning, for the first time in her life, she had been distinctly afraid of her husband. He must be drunk. Almost mechanically she went to the window to adjust the shades. She liked them to present the effect of a horizontal line running straight across the house, and he did not care if there were the difference of a foot or so in their length. As she glanced out she was conscious that a man had walked up her front steps and was even now ringing her bell. It was by the merest chance that she had seen him at all; but, with lightning like rapidity, she had taken in that he was

quite an ordinary young man wearing a derby, and he appeared to be the twin brother of the man behind the tree. He carried nothing whatever in his hands; though, heavens knows, it was easy enough to conceal a pocket kodak. After a short interval he went away, but not before she had surreptitiously peeped at him again. Undoubtedly it was the man behind the tree. The low creature! She went to her room and rang for Elise.

"Find out what that man wanted," she said, and added as she saw the woman's bewilderment, "the one who has just left the front door."

"He wanted to see Mr. Bull," said Elise when she returned. "He was quite put out to find that he was not in."

He wanted to see Mr. Bull. Paulina took the words and, as if to get fresh enlightenment, said them to herself over and over again. He must have seen her husband drive off even if, incredible as it appeared, he had not caught sight of him behind the curtain. How then could he be put out to find that Mr. Bull was not in.

"Since then," Elise ventured, "a man in a little yellow automobile drove up to the back door, and he also wanted to see Mr. Bull."

Paulina took no interest in the little automobile. It was the presumption of the other creature that held her attention.

"Elise," she asked irrelevantly, "do you think that Mr. Bull looks ill?"

"Yes, Madam," Elise answered promptly.

"What do you think is the matter with him?"

Elise reflected on this question, since an outspoken statement in the kitchen is apt to be the rankest impertinence in the house.

"I should consult a doctor," she said at last, though she had her own private convictions as to the root of the trouble. "He seems thinner for all that he's sort of swollen, and his face is very red."

"Drunk," said an inward voice to Paulina, "drunk as a

boiled owl." So Elise knew it, too; she saw that by her manner. Perhaps her husband had the same little failing. A nice, pleasant lot men were, she thought miserably as she dismissed Elise who wished that she had said more or less. Paulina was displeased, though it was not her maid but her husband who had vexed her.

What should she do? If George Bull took to drinking regularly she'd never feel safe again. Rosie must come back, for she meant not to be left alone in the house with an inebriate. Such a big, strong man as he was. When he stared at her this morning how ugly, and black, and powerful he looked.

Before luncheon she had a quantity of work she wanted to accomplish. Elise had managed to misplace one of her linen sheets, not just an ordinary sheet but one of the very best, made of the finest linen with an exquisitely embroidered top border. While she was searching for this, she might as well go through her entire stock. She wished now she had not wasted so much of the morning hunting for imaginary whiskey bottles. As a matter of fact, at this identical moment, George Bull probably had a well filled flask in his pocket. For all she knew he might have been drinking for weeks. Since Rosie left he had stayed a great deal in his room; indeed, Paulina hardly ever saw him.

She had six embroidered sets of sheets and they were in fine condition. She had bought them last spring and though they had cost a pretty penny George Bull had not whimpered. She'd give him that, he never did whimper. Up to lately he had had a decent temper. Perhaps if you were "drunk as a boiled owl," you couldn't control your temper. When he was in a calmer state of mind she meant to buy some more embroidered sets. It didn't do to let your linen get low.

The missing sheet was, as she expected, with the hem-stitched ones with the embroidered monograms that stood ready for every-day use. She placed it with its mate, and went on with her mental inventory.

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At present there was no real necessity for her to buy anything new; though, of course, if she saw a bargain it would be foolish not to pick it up. Rosie had offered to work some initials for her and Rosie did beautiful work. She could always make her living with her needle. It would not do for her to beg Rosie to return; but she could state matters as they were, and she thought she could count on her sister-in-law's devotion to George Bull. As she planned what was best for her to say she sorted her sheets and pillow-cases into neat little piles; and when she had finished she thought with justifiable pride that she had been exceedingly thorough in her search. It had lasted longer than she had intended it to do, and she was tired, very tired. It might be better to wait until lunch was over to write to Rosie.

Flinging herself upon her lounge, she closed her eyes. She did not know that she slept until, half-consciously, she became aware that some one was in her room. She sat up and stared about her. The some one, she discovered, was George Bull.

Paulina was too astounded to be frightened; and also, though her husband still looked odd, this was a different kind of oddness. His face was no longer red but white, almost a greyish white, and his unseeing eyes went past her, beyond her. There was nothing to break the silence.

"Are you ill?" Paulina asked at last.

"No," said a hoarse voice. The blank gaze did not waver.

"What is the matter?"

"I am a ruined man," the hoarse voice answered.

Paulina rose to her feet and tried in vain to focus those blank eyes.

"Do you mean that you have lost everything?" She spoke distinctly because with a drunken man it was best to be careful.

"Everything."

There was no uncertainty here. Paulina sat down again upon the sofa. This was an overthrow of her hopes, a dis-

aster so overwhelming that, at first, she could not grasp its terrific magnitude. Besides, who would pay attention to the maunderings of a drunken man? She was inclined to think that George Bull was not drunk, but was crazed by liquor. It was impossible that he had lost everything. As an experiment she had better ask about the house.

"This house?" she said aloud.

George Bull did not answer; but lifted his heavy hand and beat it soundlessly upon his knee. She interpreted the gesture correctly. The house was gone. She sat stricken into silence, into something like a realisation of the import of this news. She watched the heavy hand move up and down and, at last, a heavy voice accompanied the hand. It was a terrible voice that cried, "I am a thief, Paulina."

Paulina shrank back as if she had been struck. The terrible voice had gone home. She knew now that her husband was speaking the truth, and that neither he nor she was mad. Since he spoke, anything was possible. It might be that she was penniless.

"Have you taken my mother's money?"

"Not yours, not Rosie's, the Michaelsons'." The heavy hand moved up and down.

"They'll put you in jail for that," Paulina whispered.

There was no response. She listened and heard herself breathe quickly and uncertainly. The telephone on her desk rang shrilly. She hastened to answer it. It was best to forestall the servants.

"Well!" she said. "Mr. Bull is not in," and again, "Mr. Bull is at his office." There was a protest from the other end. "I am sorry, but Mr. Bull never comes home to lunch. This is Mrs. Bull. You had better try to catch him at his office. Will you leave a message?" She hung up the receiver.

They were hot on his heels then. With a quick flash she remembered the man behind the tree, the man in the little yellow automobile. Since her husband was a thief perhaps they were after him. Another horror crowded into

her mind. When George Bull was put in the penitentiary she would be the wife of a convict. She could never bear that disgrace. Anything to prevent that—anything. With fearful distinctness she saw him in his prison garb; she heard herself acclaimed as the wife of this man; and now she could not cut herself loose, or rather it would be ten times more difficult than before. The publicity of the affair would overwhelm her. If only she had not waited to strike when she thought she could get the biggest alimony. She could have wept at her own cupidity.

The telephone rang again. Once more she answered it. Some one else wanted George Bull and must have him. When she had finished speaking she opened her door and stood in the hall listening. Where were the servants, and did they know of her husband's return? She had an idea that they did not—that he had crept in silently and stealthily to tell her his hideous story. The house was quiet. Not a soul was stirring. Somewhere she had read that if you could get a man out of this country, into Australia perhaps, he might never get caught. That was what George Bull must do, and she must help him. She went back into her room and glanced fearfully at the clock. It was perilously near her lunch hour, and at any minute the servants might appear. During her absence she saw that George Bull had not moved. He sat still, with his heavy body sagging forward, his curiously white face staring into space, and now his heavy hand was motionless upon his knee. He had finished his say. There was no need of further speech.

"Does any one know that you are here?"

"No."

She thought quickly. There was Rosie's room. No one would go in there. The blinds were drawn and the room closed. It was the very place.

"You must get away from here." It was clear she had to plan for both of them. "In Rosie's room you will be safe. I'll bring you something to eat, and after it gets dark we'll arrange for you to slip out. There are other countries."

"I mean to do my time," said George Bull distinctly.

Paulina did not argue, and she forced herself to lay her hand upon the coat sleeve that covered the arm of the thief.

"Come into Rosie's room," she said again.

He followed her docilely enough, and she had just time to brush her hair when the lunch gong sounded. She went down promptly. It was her cue to appear unconcerned, her usual natural self, even if at that moment out of the corner of her eye she could see, turning the curve towards her back door, a little yellow automobile. The occupant of the car saw her, she felt sure of that; but he also saw that she was alone and was lunching in the care-free manner of a lady. Her appearance must have been reassuring, for off he drove again. She ate a hearty meal and when she had finished she gathered together what scraps she could get. It was not much, for she had to dodge the officious butler; but it was something, and George Bull could not afford to be particular.

She went into the parlour and peeped out from behind the silken curtains. Her eyes were keen and saw a long way off. About half-way down the grove a figure leaned against a tree. She had no doubt that it was her morning visitor. From where he stood he commanded the gate or the house. Coming or going, a person would be subjected to his scrutiny. She walked up the steps, moving slowly. For once she was at a loss.

Within her room she sat down and gazed around her at the luxurious comforts that were no longer hers. If she had detested George Bull, she had loved these things; and they would all be taken from her, her very belongings would be seized and sold to the highest bidder. Hot, angry tears filled her eyes, and splashed upon her dress. Mechanically, with a swift gesture she dabbed up the little spots of moisture. She should have to begin at the bottom again, and she had a clog tied about her feet. She had a convict husband to drag her down. With her mother's money she could

manage to exist, in some cheap boarding-house, that was. Her very soul squirmed at the idea. Anywhere she went she would be pointed out as the wife of George Bull, the crook, the cheat. Stop, there was one thing she could do. She could give her mother's savings to help George Bull. Then she would be penniless. What a fearful alternative, what a choice was presented to her! She could not decide whether it was better to have an assured income, tiny though it was, and a convict husband; or whether it was better to try to fend for herself, without any stigma attached to her name. She never gave a thought to George Bull's position. It was for herself she had to plan and consider. It struck her that she had been somewhat set aside and ill-treated; for she was convinced that this was a calamity that must have been foreseen; and, likely enough, Rosie was hand in glove with the thief, the common thief. That was what he was, a thief. How low she had sunk! She could not bear that. She must fend for herself. As she took the plate of food in her hand, her face hardened into an exact replica of the Reverend Lemuel's; yet she remembered to open Rosie's door softly. She could not afford to disregard the servants.

George Bull was seated in Rosie's low chair, by Rosie's sewing table upon which lay her work-bag forgotten in her sudden departure. Between his fingers he held an end of the ribbon draw-string that fell from the half-opened mouth of the bag. It made him think of Rosie, kind little Rosie. He was glad he was in this room so full of the ghosts of brighter, happier days. There were his sister-in-law and the child; and there was Mrs. Sprague who had died holding his hand, the hand which had stolen the money of the Michaelsons. O piteous thought, and thrice accursed creature who could do so foul a deed! Mrs. Sprague was not blind now and her eyes were full of pity and sadness. Because he could see her so very plainly, he laid his arm across his face; but she was still there; and he could see she knew just what had happened. He began in a low, babbling

whisper that went through the room to tell her all about it. He did not attempt to excuse himself except to say that he wanted to make good again. She was pleased with that, so he repeated it several times; and each time she had approved. Evidently that was what she wished him to do. He stopped because he was exhausted; but he had promised her to make good, to serve his time.

When Paulina came in he had to travel a great way to come back; and, though she placed the food upon the table, he made no effort to touch it. He wished, a little impatiently, that she would not stand directly in front of him. She was an alien figure in this room of ghosts. Her life was the life of to-day while his, of necessity, must be the life of yesterday with the hope of a far to-morrow. But he meant to make good again. He had promised Mrs. Sprague to do that. He would repay. He would pray that he might be given strength to repay. He would throw himself on the mercy of the court and plead guilty. Then he would do his time—a spasm of pain crossed his face—and after that the far to-morrow. This was what she would have wished, the dying woman whose hand he had held. He would sit in this room until they came for him, that was if Paulina would let him. She was talking insistently. Against his will he was forced to notice her.

“You must take my money,” she said in her hard, cold tone, “and try to set to rights this wretched business.”

He was silent.

“Do you owe more than that?” She flung the question at him.

“Yes.”

“Then take Rosie’s. She’ll let you.”

“It is not enough.”

What huge amount had the man taken? Paulina was astounded at his audacity, and half relieved that her money was not enough. To be dependent solely upon her own efforts was not an attitude that attracted her in the least. Besides, a person as wicked as George Bull should be pun-

ished, she saw that, or would have seen it if she had not had herself to consider. The wife of a convict! Her good name dragged through the dust! Some of the Reverend Lemuel's religious convictions came to her aid. The innocent must suffer for the guilty. They always did; but time was short and she must not forget the man behind the tree, the man in the little yellow automobile. For her own sake she must help her husband escape.

"We shall have to wait until five o'clock," she said. "Luckily the winter afternoons are short. It soon gets dark then. It will be best to try the side windows."

"This house is watched."

"Yes, I know," she grew impatient under his indifference, "front and back. That's why I said the side windows. I'll step out first and look around."

"I mean to do my time."

"You can't," she said indignantly.

"Why not?"

"Because of me," she answered. "Can't you see the disgrace, the mortification I should suffer if you were a convict, put in jail for an ordinary theft?"

"I mean to do my time," George Bull replied inflexibly. "I will repay," his suffering spirit said.

"No, never," she cried.

"Yes," he repeated. He rose to his feet and confronted her. "I mean to try to be an honest man."

"An honest man!" She laughed a low, taunting laugh. "It's a little late in the day for that resolve. Your only chance is to escape."

"I shall not try to escape."

"You shall."

"No."

"I say you shall," Paulina said furiously. "Have you no consideration, no thought for me? You selfish creature! You might do something to make up for the unhappy life I've spent with you. How you tricked all of us! My poor mother. . . ."

"We will leave her out of the question," George Bull thundered.

The dull red flowed to his face. Save where it was flecked with tiny livid spots, his skin turned purple. His ugly mouth, his heavy jaw shot forward. It was as if she were gazing upward at a menacing, jutting rock overhanging her, and threatening her destruction. His blazing eyes devoured her figure. Paulina drew away. The movement infuriated him.

"Get out of my sight," he shouted. "You're no woman of mine."

Paulina was too frightened to speak, almost too frightened to act. She knew the solid wall was behind her. She fell back upon it. Lifting her arms, she spread them starfish wise upon the surface of the wall-paper. Inch by inch she slipped nearer and nearer the door. Out of this dull, solid piece of flesh she had evoked a Frankenstein. At any moment he might spring upon her. How easily he could strangle her with those heavy hands that clutched the edge of the work-table. She kept her fascinated gaze fixed upon the purple face, the massive head that rolled from side to side. She wanted to scream, but she was as soundless as if the choking that she dreaded had actually taken place. Nearer and nearer she crept to the door. He was muttering now. To her terrified ears it was as the roll of thunder. The end of her finger tips touched a wooden panel. She took courage and moved more swiftly. With the blazing eyes staring upon her, following her trembling steps, she edged through the doorway; closed the door behind her; and fled down the hall.

The sound aroused George Bull. The fleeing woman had been his wife, whatever the future might bring forth, and it was thus she had shown her wifely devotion. He thought of his mother's untiring efforts in his father's behalf, and a great sob fought its upward way to his throat and caught there. He saw again the flat-chested, ungainly woman; and heard her half-humorous drawl, "George ain't a looker, but

he's that reliable." Reliable! The bitter mockery of that memory. He squeezed his heavy hands together; sat down in Rosie's low chair; and buried his face in his arms upon the little work-table. The ribbon of the work-bag was spotted with his tears.

PART II

CHAPTER XIII

IT was nine o'clock of a very bright spring morning when the Taliaferros sat down to their usual leisurely breakfast. Since the head of the house did not pretend to start to business until ten or thereabouts, there was no need to hurry the morning meal. Mr. Taliaferro contended that there was never any reason to hurry about anything; but his was a comfortable philosophy not shared by the rest of the household. He was a rather short, rather stout, extremely fair man, with very blue eyes, one of which he was continually winking at his daughter Clyde, an act that bewildered that young lady until she grew old enough to understand that it signified indulgence, if not cooperation, with all her small undertakings. Dearly as he loved his little son, Mr. Taliaferro had never recovered from the shock of delight he had experienced at the birth of his daughter, his first born. Metaphorically he was still at her feet.

Randolph Alston Taliaferro, Jr., had his father's fair colouring; but his face was small and sensitive; and this, combined with his bobbed hair, gave him a preternaturally solemn expression. Although he was five years of age, he was a shy little boy and greatly given to amusing himself. Just at present father and son were eating their oatmeal with a gusto that showed a familiar pleasure in the execution of the deed; while Mrs. Taliaferro, who never took cereal, was reading the newspaper, a breach of etiquette that, as her daughter often pointed out to her, was strictly prohibited by any reliable book on table manners. On this occasion

Clyde could not correct her erring parent; for she was engaged in the ignoble pursuit of chasing small particles of oatmeal to the side of her plate where, with a vicious poke of her spoon, she assured herself of the solidarity of each piece.

"Sam," she said in a tragic voice, "it's lumped again."

"Yessum," Sam assented, gazing mournfully at the solid particles.

"You take this plate, Sam," Clyde said sternly, "and carry it to Aunt Grace. Tell her I say it's only Thursday, and that this is the second time this week she has lumped my oatmeal. Tell her, if it happens again she's got to go."

"Clyde," said her mother warningly.

"Lawsee, Miss Clyde, I dassent do that," the coloured boy stammered.

"You dassent?" Clyde smiled in spite of a second warning look from her mother. "Then you take this plate and put it down in front of her. You needn't say a word. She'll feel enough reproached."

"I wish you wouldn't talk to the servants," Mrs. Taliaferro said when the plate had been carried from the room. "It makes them familiar."

"It's just Sam, Mother."

"I mind Sam more than any of them. He's barely twenty, only a few months older than you are. It makes it hard for me to train him."

"Well, it was awfully lumpy, wasn't it, Father?"

Mr. Taliaferro winked.

"We must do what mother says," he said pacifically. Whereat Clyde laughed and so did her father.

"Clyde," said the little boy, "if you are not going to drink any cream, may I have your share of it?"

"No," Clyde replied promptly, "you might turn into a little cat. That's what cats do, drink all the cream."

"I want it, Clyde."

"Well, take it," Clyde was nothing if not generous, "but don't blame me if you get to be a kitty pussy."

"Mother, will I?" Ranny held the cream pitcher for a moment.

"Will you what?" Mrs. Taliaferro was pouring the coffee now.

"Turn into a little cat if I drink this cream? Clyde said I would."

"Darling, your sister is teasing you."

"I don't want to be a little cat," Ranny confessed honestly.

"Of course you don't," Clyde said, "but that does not matter in the least. The main thing is, what would Polly Wobbles and Margery Wops think of you then?"

Ranny flushed to the roots of his very fair hair, and his upper lip quivered. He looked as if he wanted to cry; but happily, just at this juncture, Sam appeared with a plate of steaming cakes and a pitcher of hot molasses.

"Goody," cried the little boy, "oh, goody."

Sam placed the pitcher and the cakes in front of Clyde who said majestically, "On account of these cakes Aunt Grace may stay another day. Sam, you tell her I say so," and in the same breath, "There's the postman, Sam. You get the letters."

There was not much mail. A couple of advertisements fell naturally to Ranny's share, and Mrs. Taliaferro drew a letter. Clyde fixed her eyes upon the black border and sighed sepulchrally.

"My dime against your dollar that she's coming," she whispered to her father.

"Done," said Mr. Taliaferro sportily.

"It wouldn't be fair to take the money," Clyde owned handsomely, "because it's a sure thing, Ranny, my boy, a sure thing." She patted her father's hand and returned his magnificent wink.

Mrs. Taliaferro committed another "breach of etiquette" and stopped her breakfast to read her letter.

"It's from Pauline Selden's daughter," she threw out in an explanatory way.

Clyde sighed again, and also stopped eating that she might be free to watch her mother's face. Although Middleborough was of two opinions as to Clyde's pretensions to beauty, with one voice it affirmed that she was most peculiar looking. This was partly because she was a distinct type, and partly because she did not, in the slightest detail, resemble either of her parents; but had harked back to an ancient ancestress who, in her day, had been known as a "red Taliaferro."

Clyde's short, thick, curly hair was reddish gold in colour, and her eyes were green, as clear and as translucent as the curve of an ocean wave before it breaks into foam; and not even by the most skilful dressing could she coax them to change their shade. She had a nice, straight little nose and a mouth too large to be pretty, with a short upper lip that helped to make up for the last named defect. Her father called her "Clydie" and Miss Partridge, who sewed at the house by the day, did not hesitate to announce that she preferred to work for "a little, young, keen one like Miss Clyde" rather than some of her larger and more imposing customers.

Mrs. Taliaferro read the letter slowly, so slowly that now and then Clyde felt obliged to take a morsel of her cakes. Nevertheless, she was careful not to lose a single expression of her mother's countenance. Secretly she got a great deal of mischievous pleasure out of her parents; yet though she understood her father's entirely fraternal behaviour, she was sometimes much mystified by her mother's attitude. Mrs. Taliaferro was so easily moved, and so perfectly willing for the world at large to get an intimate view of her feelings. If a train were wrecked or a foreign potentate died, she expressed her horror in a way that impressed the callous Clyde; and in time of sickness or death, such was her aptitude by word and deed that she aroused her daughter's heartiest admiration. Clyde would have given anything that she possessed to be able to copy her mother's manners; but she had finally come to the con-

clusion that she wasn't built that way, and had abandoned all hope of emulating the fine example set before her.

Clyde had all the immature, secretive instincts of the very young; and for fear the public might gaze upon her emotions she had them well wrapped in layers of cotton wool, so to speak. However she might glow within with sympathy, she was tongue-tied at the very moment when she should have spoken forth most loudly; and an attack of sickness caused her as much mortification as if she had burst into tears before the whole of Middleborough. Although she adored her mother, she was totally unable to show her natural affections; and, at times, she developed an aggravating manner that must have tried the sweetest of dispositions. She sometimes felt that she would be much happier if she could let herself go and follow her impulses; yet try as she might, she always returned to her old occupation of wrapping the cotton wool.

As she watched her mother she was following, very accurately, that worthy lady's thoughts; and all the time her busy little brain was questioning, "How can she care, but she does? Why does she want her, when I don't?" Yet she admired her mother for the very things she did not understand. It set her apart and sanctified her.

"Poor child! Poor child!" said Mrs. Taliaferro as she folded the letter.

"Then she's coming?" Clyde was quite pleased because, in her mind, she had anticipated, by the space of a half second, her mother's ejaculation of "Poor child."

"Yes."

"When?"

"Next week."

"She's right upon us." Clyde threw a half-comic glance of despair at Mr. Taliaferro, who promptly slipped his hand into his pocket and produced a silver dollar.

"Why are you giving Clyde a dollar?" Mrs. Taliaferro inquired.

"I am not giving it to her; I owe it to her," Mr. Taliaferro said beamingly.

Clyde picked up the dollar and dropped it in the pocket of her waist. She had not intended to take the money; but since her father put it that way it was wiser not to explain. Her mother would have been distinctly displeased with her had she known they were betting on the chances of an escape from the visit of her dead friend's daughter. Her mother was beautifully loyal. Clyde thought unnecessarily loyal.

She finished her breakfast and slipped into the yard. She always picked the flowers for the house; but she had done that yesterday so this morning there was nothing fresh to cut. When the roses commenced to bloom she would have an abundance of work. Directly in front of the house there was a crescent-shaped bed full of rose-bushes and they were all in fine condition. Underneath a magnolia tree Ranny was building a fort. By his side two small chairs rocked. She could see that his lips were moving busily.

"I suppose," she said to herself, "that Polly Wobbles and Margery Wops are seated in those two chairs. If he were my little boy I shouldn't let him play with imaginary children. It makes him odd."

She was still thinking of this as she went toward the house. Her mother was standing on the porch.

"Clyde," she said at once, "I think I shall go to see Mr. Fellows and tell him all about this." She touched the black-bordered letter. "Will you go with me?"

"Very well," Clyde answered amiably, and went upstairs to get her hat.

CHAPTER XIV

IT was a long walk to the rectory where Mr. Fellows, the minister, lived; for the Taliaferro house was now in the old part of Middleborough, and the town was growing away from it as fast as it possibly could. Since business houses and factories were springing up in every direction, from a monetary point of view this did not matter a great deal; but Mr. Taliaferro honestly loved his home and could not bear the idea of moving elsewhere. He realised that the day was coming when, for the sake of his children, he should have to sell his place; and the thought filled him with a great sadness and a firm determination to hold on as long as he was able to stand the heavy expenses necessary for so large an establishment.

Fortunately some of the old families still lived in the neighbourhood; though Clyde did not care for Mrs. Aylett whose garden adjoined theirs, and maintained that she was a gossiping, disagreeable woman. The Aylett boy was a lad of fourteen. Clyde liked him tremendously, as much, indeed, as she disliked his mother. If Mrs. Aylett ferreted out Paulina's story she would spread it through Middleborough. Clyde frowned at the idea.

After a little Mrs. Taliaferro came down breathless and somewhat perturbed.

"I am afraid this hat is too young for me," she began.

"Not at all." Clyde looked at her critically.

"Is it becoming?"

Clyde was still mentally appraising her mother's appearance. The new straw hat suited her exactly—brought out the blue in her eyes and added height to her plump figure.

"You are a bonny woman and your eyes are like blue-

bells," sang Clyde's heart within her; but as she did not desire her mother to think that she had lost her mind, she only said, "It's very becoming, and makes you look a great deal taller."

"I'm sorry to be so slow," Mrs. Taliaferro hurried down the walk, "but the servants kept stopping me; and I had to be sure some one was watching Ranny."

"He is playing with Polly and Margery."

"Is he?" Mrs. Taliaferro laughed. "He's as good as gold," she declared.

"If I were you I shouldn't let him play like that, Mother. He's an awfully odd child."

"Oh, Clyde!" Mrs. Taliaferro laughed again amusedly. "Now can't you remember how you used to be afraid to walk on any but the light bricks? We never could take you out after a rain. And have you forgotten how you always jumped over the cracks between the blocks of cement paving? You see you feared you might fall through."

"Did I?" Clyde asked stiffly.

"Yes, you were a very odd little girl, and it was an inconvenient oddness. When you went walking with us your father spent his time jumping you over the pavement."

"Oh," said Clyde in a small voice.

When her mother spoke like this she felt young, extremely young. Gently, but firmly, she had been shoved back into her place, the place of a child. It was not an undesirable position; only she was nearly twenty and it was time to grow up. One could not be a baby forever.

"I should like," Mrs. Taliaferro dismissed the vexed question with a wave of her hand, "to have you understand just how I feel about Paulina, and why I want her to stay with us. Pauline Selden, her mother, was like my own sister and a lovely, sweet creature. The Seldens had plenty of money and I am indebted to them for most of the happy days I spent in my youth. Now that Pauline's child is in trouble, and I have something of my own, I want her to come straight to us."

"Well, she's coming," Clyde said sadly.

"You must help me make her visit pleasant," said Mrs. Taliaferro, glancing at her daughter's downcast face. "Put yourself in my place, dear, and you will see exactly how I feel. Now suppose Little Sally had a daughter who was poor and in trouble?"

"Little Sally!" Clyde exclaimed, staring at her mother in open-mouthed astonishment. Little Sally Wickham was her best friend, a soft, round little soul with brown eyes and hair to match.

"It would be a similar case; only, since we lived side by side, I saw Pauline every day of my life."

Clyde still stared at her mother. Little Sally's daughter indeed! Of what in the world was her mother thinking? Why, the whole idea was ridiculous. No, it wasn't either; it was repellent. Nobody wanted to stay a baby forever; but it would be an outrage for Little Sally to have to grow old, old enough to own a grown daughter. And yet how could she help herself? No matter what her wishes were, she had to grow older and older. Clyde had a suddenly trapped feeling, a feeling against the established order of the universe. Now she was not listening to her mother. Little Sally and her imaginary daughter filled her thoughts.

Mrs. Taliaferro was quite unaware of the mental whirlwind she had caused, and went on to explain the situation.

"No one in Middleborough need know about Paulina's husband."

"What, with Mrs. Aylett next door?"

"No, Paulina herself has said what she should like to do. It's in the letter I got this morning. She means to call herself Mrs. Paulina Bull; and, as she is not going out and is in such deep mourning for her mother, everybody will infer that she has recently lost her husband. There is no reason to think that any one will connect her with those unfortunate newspaper articles; and, besides, you know her sister-in-law is a widow?"

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Nothing, precisely." Mrs. Taliaferro was a little vague about this. "It will be much easier and more pleasant to have Paulina pass for a widow; and she, poor child, is in terror of any further publicity; especially here where the whole town knew her mother and loved her."

"It's all right if it works," said the cautious Clyde.

Her mother's words had lifted a weight from her heart. Already she was feeling much happier, much more willing to welcome Paulina. She had dreaded this visit and the endless talk it would arouse. Not that she had any objection to a guest with a story; but there are stories and stories. There was nothing attractive or romantic about thieving. It was a low occupation. Paulina's idea was a good one; and the more Clyde thought it over, the more she was convinced that it would work.

"Your father and I agree that it will be best to tell Mr. Fellows all about it. His opinion is worth having, and she may wish to talk to a minister."

"About her husband, Mother?"

This was an interesting and a novel idea. If Clyde possessed a thieving husband she knew she would never so much as whisper it to a soul; and as for talking it over with a minister, she drew in her breath at the very thought. People were so funny, that is, older people. Already she had classed Paulina with her mother's friends.

"As long as Mr. Fellows comes so often to the house, it is just as well to consult with him; and it may help her to know that he is interested in her."

"It may," Clyde conceded.

She felt that her mother expected her to make some sort of a reply. They had not much farther to go. They were walking on Monroe street now. This was the fashionable street of Middleborough and she liked it immensely. Before long she was apt to meet some one she knew. Clyde was gregarious. She loved a crowd.

"There is another thing I must insist upon," Mrs. Taliaferro was very firm here and laid great emphasis upon the

word "insist"; "and that is that, from now on, this matter is never discussed. We will not talk of it among ourselves; for what is never spoken of cannot be overheard. You understand me, Clyde? I don't want you to mention Paulina's unhappy husband to a single person, not even Mr. Fellows."

"I thought you were going to make an exception of Minnie," Clyde said.

Mrs. Taliaferro looked at her daughter indignantly. It always angered her when Clyde spoke of the Reverend Augustus Fellows as "Minnie," although the victim himself seemed not to object to the familiarity. Clyde had explained that "Minnie" was a contraction of minister; but Mrs. Taliaferro didn't think much of the explanation, and she was absolutely certain that it was most undignified for a young girl to address her pastor in such a fashion. The truth was, Clyde presumed. She dared to do this because Mr. Fellows had spoiled her, and had made a pet of her ever since he came to Middleborough some fifteen years ago.

Mrs. Taliaferro's memory flowed backward. Mr. Fellows had come in the spring, and it had been just such a day as this. He was an Englishman and had lived in Canada; but his wife could not stand the climate, and therefore he had moved South. Mrs. Taliaferro thought Middleborough lucky to get him and lucky to keep him. His wife had lived only seven out of the fifteen years. From the first she had fancied Clyde and she had encouraged her to be pert, not exactly that either, but forward. These facts were, of course, the logical explanation of Clyde's attitude. Clyde had never needed encouragement, her mother thought despairingly. She was quite used to stating her own opinion, and if you didn't listen to her she would simply say her little say over again. That was Clyde.

Now she was beautifully unconscious of her mother's disapproval. That was also like Clyde. She always pretended

that she didn't know anything was awry, as it were, until you were forced to give her a piece of your mind.

"Clyde," Mrs. Taliaferro said, "you know how much I dislike to hear you call Mr. Fellows 'Minnie'."

"Do you?" Clyde was nicely astonished.

"You ought to know since I have to speak of it so often."

"Don't get angry with me, Sugar," Clyde said and slipped her arm within her mother's.

Mrs. Taliaferro melted as, indeed, she generally did. Vexing as she was, Clyde was a most lovable child, and she always had her own way. It was too late now to train her otherwise. With that arm tucked within hers, how could Mrs. Taliaferro be angry with her slim little daughter?

"There, dearest," she said, "you will do as mother wishes, won't you?"

Clyde didn't promise this; indeed she didn't answer at all. A most disagreeable thought had just entered her mind, and she was wishing fervently that she could think of things on time. This was Wednesday, the day Mr. Fellows always devoted to practising the new music for the church. It was an especially important occasion, for he was putting "Lead, Kindly Light" to a new tune, an awfully pretty tune, Clyde thought. She had heard him hum it once or twice. He was going to hate the interruption, and it was all her fault because she knew about it, and should have warned her mother. She thought of the effort Mrs. Taliaferro had made to get ready for this expedition, of the new straw hat, so carefully adjusted; and she told herself that it would be a shame to disappoint the little thing, and stop her, practically, at the very door of the parsonage. She felt immensely better after she had made this wise decision; she forgot about what an odd child she had been—for her mother's speech had rankled—and she instinctively assumed the attitude of being years older than her mother. She knew perfectly well that her mother would not think of intruding on Mr. Fellows; but, metaphorically, she had

thrown the minister overboard, and she did not flinch even when she stood directly in front of the house, and heard the strains of the new tune to "Lead, Kindly Light."

"Mr. Fellows is very fond of music," Mrs. Taliaferro said absently.

"Very," said Clyde. "You go in, Mother. I shall wait here at the gate."

Mrs. Taliaferro did not object to this arrangement; if anything, she was pleased with Clyde's choice. Clyde listened to her elders, and she was inclined to be flippant. Quite undisturbed by the music she walked up the path.

At the gate Clyde waited for her, also quite undisturbed. After she had once made up her mind she hardly ever had any irritating back thoughts or foolish regrets. She reflected that her mother was inclined to get involved when she explained Paulina's situation, and her desire to pass for a widow; and that, as Mr. Fellows was always intensely absorbed in his music on practice days, there was an excellent chance of a complete misunderstanding. Here, again, this did not matter. Thieving was the lowest job in the world. The less people knew about the wretched business, the better for all parties concerned.

The rectory was a small house, set far back from the street, so Clyde stepped into the yard to look at the crocuses looming up through the grass. Mr. Fellows loved his yard, and his bit of turf was beautifully green. So was his carefully clipped little hedge, and he had wonderful flower boxes round the railing of his front porch. She heard the piano stop, save for an occasional note or two, and she felt a little sorry for Minnie who must desire to go on playing, and who was forced to listen to the story of Paulina. The woman was proving herself a nuisance. That was Clyde's trenchant verdict.

Although she did not thoroughly understand the minister, she was honestly devoted to him. Up to a certain point she had placed him in the same category with her parents and had enjoyed his antediluvian views. That was

before she had discovered that Mr. Fellows was enjoying her, and was secretly poking fun at her. It had been a shock to her to find this out; for, heretofore, she had been perfectly sure that her opinions were wise, right, and not in the least laughable. Apparently Mr. Fellows differed with her and, strange to say, she respected him for his astounding view-point. She was most careful how she talked to him, and lately she was convinced she had impressed him—that is, he had appeared impressed when she had expounded some of her theories. He didn't object to her calling him "Minnie" and they were the best friends in the world.

She went to the gate and looked down the street; and, just as she had expected, she saw some one she knew. The some one was Jock McFarland, and he was wearing the green silk tie she had knitted for him. It was most becoming to his dark eyes and olive complexion; but then he was an unusually good-looking boy. No wonder people called him "handsome Jock." He was unmistakably pleased to see her and stopped at once. Clyde's hand was on the gate-post. He put his over it. Clyde doubled up her small fist.

"Take it off 'fore I knock it off," she announced threateningly.

"Dear me, you are suspicious," Jock said indignantly, but he removed his hand.

Clyde did not reply to this accusation. She stepped on the lowest rung of the wooden gate and swayed towards Jock.

"I won a dollar this morning," she said and held open the pocket of her shirtwaist.

"From whom?" Jock asked with interest.

"I lifted it off of Dad," Clyde answered.

"I want to lift something off of Dad, but it isn't a silver dollar."

Clyde lowered her green eyes and stared into Jock's brown ones. Her heart missed a beat or so; her pulse

throbbled a thought more quickly. When she was talking to Jock she always felt like this, and yet. . . . And yet. . . . He was so good to look upon with his clear brown skin and his bright colour. He hadn't a single ugly feature unless it might be that his mouth was too full, too red, too willing to smile and to make pretty speeches. Clyde had never noticed this defect; and she was half frightened, half excited at the heady something that flowed through her veins at the sound of Jock's voice. The odd thing was that when she looked him full in the face, she grew calmer, more like her natural self; but it was an effort to meet Jock's eyes, especially when her inclinations prompted her not to check his love-making. All he needed was a passive encouragement.

Jock leaned against the gate-post.

"I'll be round to-night," he whispered.

"Do," Clyde said clearly. "Little Sally is coming to tea and you may too. Jock, who is that woman across the street? She wants to speak to us."

Jock wheeled about. Opposite them, on the other side-walk, a woman was walking, very slowly, and as if she were waiting for some one. She was big and handsome, and surprisingly well-dressed. Clyde thought she knew everybody in Middleborough, but this woman was new to her. She was so absorbed in her gaze that she forgot to notice Jock, and she was astounded to see that he had taken off his hat and had bowed, ever so slightly, to the stranger.

"Who is she?" she asked.

"No one you know," he replied quickly. "I don't think much of her, Clyde. I shouldn't notice her."

"I don't believe I ever saw her before."

Jock made an odd, exclamatory little noise, and shifted about so that he stood between Clyde and the woman.

"Clyde," he said, "will you go to the next party with me?"

"We'll see," Clyde answered maternally and soothingly. She could not help her eyes twinkling and showing her

amusement. Jock so obviously wanted to change the conversation. Evidently he didn't like the stranger, or else he didn't care to be interrupted. He looked vexed now, and he had lost half his colour. She still regarded Jock as a boy, although, as a matter of fact, he was nearly four years her senior.

Mr. Fellows came out with Mrs. Taliaferro, shook hands with Jock, and patted Clyde on the shoulder.

"I hear you are going to have a widow visit you," he said. "Watch out or she will catch all your beaux."

Clyde laughed. So the minister had agreed to adopt the story. Already he was calling Paulina a widow and her mother's face was beaming. If no one picked a hole in their invention they would get on famously.

Now her mother was speaking to Jock who talked charmingly, as he always did to an older woman. When he told about the supper invitation, Mrs. Taliaferro urged him to come. She was only sorry she had to go out after tea, for she hated to miss one of her own boys. That was how she looked upon Jock, just a little bit as if he belonged to her.

After they left, the minister stood at the gate; and Clyde, as she turned to wave her hand, had an idea that, in the far distance, she caught a glimpse of the big, handsome stranger. It was a trick of her imagination, of course, for this woman was walking towards them, and that would mean that she was retracing her steps.

CHAPTER XV

LITTLE Sally spent the night with Clyde, although her hostess, with commendable frankness, told her that she preferred her room to her company; and after she had safely tucked herself into her half of the big, four-post bed, she explained that she had known all along that Clyde really wanted her.

"We couldn't talk comfortably with so many boys around," said she.

"No," Clyde agreed, "we couldn't; but you know, Sally-kins, that I can't bear to sleep with any one."

"I've been wanting to ask you if you would buy a braid, and do your hair in a coronet?" Sally wisely ignored Clyde's remark.

"They're entirely out of style. Who put that idea in your head?"

"Jock suggested it."

"Jock!" Clyde's scorn was superb. "He's always wanting to make a change."

"Yes, but he's awfully good-looking, Clyde."

"I know he makes love to every girl he meets."

Clyde was brushing her teeth, and she missed the bright flush that dyed Sally's cheek and the soft light that filled her eyes. Also she had just remembered the handsome stranger she had seen in the morning. Jock had spoken to her, and perhaps Sally might know her. She turned out the light and scrambled into bed.

"I am going to give my prayers a holiday or say them afterwards," she said to Little Sally, "because I want to ask you about something; and later I might forget, or go to sleep."

"Very well." Little Sally moved nearer to Clyde who sighed involuntarily.

Sally was such a cuddly little person and she expected to be petted. There was something about her that made you want to squeeze her. Clyde considered herself a poor hand at that sort of thing; but Sally seemed perfectly satisfied, and she never failed to kiss Clyde before she went to sleep. In her heart Clyde knew that she should be disappointed if Sally omitted that kiss. She had grown accustomed to it. That was how she put it.

She described the stranger minutely to Little Sally who said at once, "That's Mrs. Spigg, I guess."

"What a name!" Clyde ejaculated.

Sally giggled. "Joe gave it to her. She passes by our house sometimes, and he can't bear her looks. Spigg isn't her name, her real name, I mean. It's short for stout pig, and that's what Joe says she is."

"Joe is the funniest boy," Clyde said appreciatively. Try as she might, she couldn't see tall, overgrown Joe who was Sally's younger brother and the best company in the world, in any sort of juxtaposition with the unknown woman. Side by side they would still have been as far apart as the poles.

"You see Jock knew her."

"Did you ask him her name?"

"Yes, and he evaded me. He said he didn't think much of her."

"Well, I don't think much of her myself," Sally confessed. "She's too big, and fat, and blowsy for me. She's a Mrs. Spigg all right. Joe often hits the nail on the head."

"Joe's a peach, and when he grows up I think he's going to be exactly like Ned McFarland, full of fun, but quiet and good as gold."

"Clyde," Little Sally's soft body pressed close against Clyde's arm, "do you think you will ever marry Ned McFarland?"

"Don't be an idiot," Clyde answered promptly. "He doesn't love me."

"I know he does," Sally said simply. "It's sticking out all over him, his eyes, his voice, the very way he looks at you."

"How?"

"As if you were something precious."

"Nonsense, he's lots too old for me. He's over thirty if he's a day, and I've known him all my life. He has always come to the house, and I am very, very fond of him."

"Do you like Jock better?"

Clyde's thoughts were arrested by this question. Did she like Jock better? Yes and no, she might have answered; and each would have been equally true. The two men were so totally different. They had not even a surface mannerism in common. Ned was Jock's uncle, for all they were so unlike in appearance; and Jock owed everything to Ned. Ned might have been a deep, quiet river, and Jock a brilliant waterfall; and the mist and the fascination of the spray almost made you forget about the fall.

"Jock's just a boy," she said at last, and she did not notice that Little Sally stirred uneasily at her side.

She said nothing more, not because she was sleepy, but because she did not feel as if she wished to talk. Generally when Little Sally stayed with her, they whispered together until nearly morning. To-night she was not in that humour. She was no longer curious about the handsome stranger; and she liked her bed, and wanted to lie there quietly staring into the darkness. She was not dozing either, for she was perfectly aware that Little Sally was kissing her and she returned the kiss with an affection that was all the sweeter for its slight awkwardness. She lay very still and listened for Sally's even breathing; and she felt the soft body by her side relax, and the hand that held hers gradually slip away.

She was growing restless and there was too much cover over her. She slid noiselessly to the edge of the bed, and then she dropped to the floor. Its polished surface felt deli-

ciously cool to her bare feet. She wanted to get to the window, she told herself. The house was old and the floor creaked, but she could step from rug to rug and avoid those groaning planks. There was no need to disturb any one.

She crossed the room lightly and climbed upon the broad, flat sill of her window. Her groping fingers found a half-emptied bottle of lime drops and she thrust one of the sour candies within her mouth. Now she was quite comfortable, and at night everything appeared so strange, so wonderful. That was it, wonderful. There was no other word for it. When she leaned out she could see around the corner of the house the branches of the big magnolia under which Little Ranny had been playing that morning; and she wondered if Polly Wobbles and Margery Wops were still waiting for their playmate.

The air smelt sweet and fresh, and like newly cut grass. That meant that Uncle Abie had at last started to work on the lawn. It was a pity that he was such a slow poke and so contrary. In the dark she smiled to herself. Uncle Abie was so cross and crabbed, and yet he always did her way. She shut her eyes and incautiously craunched the lime drop; yet Little Sally did not stir. What a sleeper she was, and what a lot of questions she could ask!

It had been funny about Ned McFarland, and Clyde wondered if her friend's guess had been correct. She thought not, indeed she was sure he did not love her now. A year ago he had proposed to her on a bench at the back of the house, near the fig tree. She could remember it most distinctly because she had eaten all the ripe figs in sight; and suddenly it had happened, and she had been horribly embarrassed. It was not a bit the sort of wooing she had imagined she should get some day, and she was glad their friendship had gone on in just the same old way. He had always been so kind, and she wanted him around; but not to marry. You couldn't be frightened at love.

As she looked out toward the street, she longed for some Lochinvar to gallop up and ride off with her, and she wished

that she led a more adventurous life, for, happy as she was, nothing ever happened in Middleborough. People were born; lived; married; and died; and that was about the end of it.

She wondered at the contentment she saw around her. Her mother, for example, had never been anywhere. Why, she had often heard her say that she supposed she should die without seeing Niagara Falls; and it seemed quite likely that she would if she went on with her placid life. A short trip with Mr. Taliaferro, and an occasional brief sojourn at some springs in the summer, made up the span of her existence; and, what was worse, it was borne in on her daughter that her mother did not really care to see the Falls. She was content to stay where her lot had fallen; and the expression, coming from her lips, meant nothing whatever.

If she, Clyde, kept on living in Middleborough she would get like all the rest of the women; and she would probably marry one of the boys she knew so well. Having grown up with them, she found it harder to look upon them in a romantic light. The funny part of it was that no matter how much she might enjoy her visits away, she was so exceedingly glad to get home. Sometimes, in a burst of gratitude, she told herself she wouldn't live anywhere else in the world. Nothing ever happened though, nothing. Clyde looked again, a little wistfully, across her lawn, across the box hedge, and into the quiet street. No, there was no knight waiting there, no champing charger at her gate; and yet she was twenty and, she thought modestly, not at all ugly, even if she wasn't the beauty her mother had been.

She wished Ned McFarland did think her something precious, that was what Sally had said; but, apparently, he had forgotten about the night in the garden, and he wasn't her idea of a marrying man. Now although Jock made love to all the girls, Little Sally, Olive Dunlop, Mary Tyler, and herself, with equal fervour and, doubtless, equal impartiality, he had a way with him. There was no denying that. When

Jock's tongue commenced to wag you had to keep your wits about you, and call him down in time. Lately he had been more serious and—Clyde thought for a word—more definite. Perhaps he was just the same with Little Sally, Olive, or Mary. At any rate he made the blood race through her veins, and kept her tingling to keep up with him, step for step, trot for trot, gallop for gallop. And while he was not the knight at the gate, and owned no prancing charger, he was a very vital interest in her life; and Clyde was at the age that wants to play with fire and cannot understand that it is possible to be burned in the playing.

It was getting late and she was chilly enough to consider the use of the despised bedcovering. She stepped carefully from rug to rug; and gained the bed without a mishap, without a creak.

To-night she had to say her prayers through twice from beginning to end. She was obliged to do this, as, in between times, she had thought about Paulina; had told herself that the woman was undoubtedly a nuisance; and had actually prayed that something might prevent the visit. This was all wrong and Clyde was superstitious. Therefore she repeated her prayers, and did not forget to add softly, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Then because she was really cold, she drew close to Little Sally and immediately fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVI

AS Clyde had foreseen, Mrs. Taliaferro made a great many preparations for Paulina who was to have the yellow room across the hall from Clyde. She had Mammy Ellen polish the furniture and shine the brass handles and andirons; and she brought out a wonderful old crocheted quilt, with heavy fringe sweeping the floor, that she only used for special occasions.

"I like visitors, but I can't bear guests," Clyde grumbled to herself as she rearranged her clothes.

Here was another difficulty and one that took the hospitality out of any one. The old house had very few closets; and, as on that floor every wardrobe was in use, the advent of a guest made it necessary for some one to double up. Having spread herself comfortably over both rooms, Clyde found this naturally fell to her portion.

"I am embittered," she muttered, "thoroughly embittered."

She would have preferred her mother to notice her embittered state; but Mrs. Taliaferro was occupied with her many household duties, and inclined to pay no attention to Clyde who had rather be scolded than altogether ignored. She was careful to keep to her room as much as possible to avoid the small errands the situation demanded; and yet, even there, she was dragged forth, made to arrange a vase of flowers and called upon to admire the fruits of the morning's work.

"I want Pauline's child to have the best of everything," Mrs. Taliaferro said.

"She's got it," Clyde answered fretfully. "Sometimes,

Mother, I wish Pauline had never had a child. It was what I call inconsiderate of her."

Mrs. Taliaferro did not reply to this. She simply looked. Clyde was quite familiar with the expression and knew all that it was meant to imply; and, in her better humours, she had an infuriating way of pretending she was horribly frightened by her mother's fixed glance. Not feeling particularly pleasant, she now turned her back upon Mrs. Taliaferro and, strolling to the window, gazed out into the yard. She was not surprised to hear her mother leave the room.

The outlook from the window reflected the spirit at work within the house; for Uncle Abie sat at the stable door cleaning the harness, and putting the final touches to the carriage that was going to meet Paulina. She was not to arrive until supper time, and the cars ran a block from the house, yet Uncle Abie had to be turned out to welcome this important guest. The Taliaferros' horses were old, sleek, and well-fed; and the victoria, though freshly painted, was as old-fashioned as the house. Counting in the cost of Uncle Abie, they could easily have owned an automobile, and then Clyde could have driven it herself and had a lot of fun with it. When she suggested this idea to her father he had laughed at her plans; and had pointed out to her that her mother was afraid of automobiles. He had said he enjoyed the sedate drives that he took with Mrs. Taliaferro. Her parents had inexplicable views of things and were, on general principles, opposed to all new-fangled ideas. In a short time Paulina would be seated in the victoria, paying calls with Mrs. Taliaferro, and identifying herself with the life of Middleborough.

Clyde often had guests herself; but they were not treated in the same ceremonious manner. They preferred not to be given the handsomest spread and the very best company towels; and her mother was lovely to the girls and let them do as they pleased. It occurred to Clyde that Mrs. Taliaferro hadn't had a guest of her own for a long time; and that she, Clyde, ought to be nicer about Paulina. She

would try not to be embittered, she thought plaintively and a little contritely.

That night Mrs. Taliaferro went to the station to meet Paulina; and Clyde was left with Mr. Fellows who had dropped in to call, and had been coerced into staying to tea. They sat in two big chairs, placed side by side in front of the fire.

"Exactly as if we were a married couple," Clyde said.

"Is this an avowal?" Mr. Fellows asked at once.

"It's a half-way proposal." Clyde's eyes twinkled.

"You mean you need encouragement?"

"Why, of course."

"If I encouraged you, you might not like me half so well. You are so uncertain, Clyde, and I've noticed the more a person advances, the more you retreat."

"I haven't been a bit uncertain to-day," Clyde said briskly. "I've been a perfect little beast."

"Why?"

"I've taken a distaste to Paulina."

"The widow?" Mr. Fellows was genuinely surprised.

"Yes, the widow," Clyde mimicked her pastor's voice. If Mr. Fellows insisted on alluding to their small deception, she could play the game as well as any one. "The truth is we've talked so much about her, and we've worked so hard to make her comfortable; and I can't bear to talk over things, can you? I hate to plan far ahead."

"I thought she was your mother's friend?"

"She's nobody's friend yet," Clyde corrected. "We haven't got even a picture of this woman. She's in deep mourning, you know, and probably looks a sad-faced frump. I shouldn't mind if mother didn't expect me to help entertain her; and I can't see why, when she says herself that Paulina must be about thirty."

"As old as that?" Mr. Fellows threw an exclamation of horror into his question.

"Yes, and what in the world am I to do with a woman of thirty?"

"I can't conceive." As he spoke he crossed one leg comfortably over the other; propped his arms upon the sides of his chair, and drew his finger-tips together. He was beginning to enjoy Clyde, but it would never do to let her find that out. She was frankness itself. She would tell him anything and he was not sure that her honesty was not her best safeguard. "Now let me see. She's too old to dance, to ride, to golf, to tennis, isn't she?"

"Well, I don't know," Clyde answered, somewhat bewildered at the thorough shelving of Paulina. "She's in mourning, you know, and though she's not young, older people sometimes do those things."

"Just occasionally," the minister leaned forward and interrupted Clyde. "But I am sure there is one thing she can do. She can drive."

"With mother?"

"In the victoria."

Mr. Fellows laughed. His kind hazel eyes, with the few fine lines in the corners, smiled at Clyde. Here was a common meeting ground, a joke they could both enjoy. When the Taliaferros parted with their ancient equipage, one of the town's landmarks would go, never to be replaced. He thought the victoria typical of Middleborough. He fervently hoped that Clyde would not get her automobile on those conditions. He preferred the victoria and Uncle Abie. It was impossible to separate the one from the other.

"Minnie," Clyde said impulsively, "I am uncommonly fond of you. You're a sort of safety valve for me. I don't mind what I say to you because, as a minister, you can't repeat it. If you did repeat it you would dishonour your profession."

"Is that the only reason you trust me?"

"No, to be honest I hardly ever look upon you as a preacher. You are so almost human that you are a friend."

"The Taliaferros are about all the family I have in Middleborough, Clyde."

"I didn't say you were the family," Clyde corrected.

"I said you were a friend. Family means relatives and a relative is something you've got to have, whether you want it or not. Sometimes when you've got it, you don't want it. It's just shoved down your throat, as it were; but a friend's different. You select that yourself, from perhaps a big crowd of people. It's twice as complimentary."

"Yes, it is," Mr. Fellows agreed. "If you ever want me for anything you can count on me. We're the best of friends, eh?"

"Yes," Clyde grew pink and embarrassed, "though I don't see why you like me."

"Well," Mr. Fellows smiled again, "I don't mind your always putting your worst foot foremost. You see I know the real you, and it's all pure gold. Some day you will find that out for yourself."

"I am not always nice."

"Surely not!" The promptness of Mr. Fellows' retort was staggering. "There are occasions when I am convinced that you are a direct descendant of his Satanic Majesty; but I am thinking of the other times. There are numbers of other times, Clyde."

"Oh!" said Clyde thoughtfully, and then jumped to her feet. "Why, they are already at the door; and I never even heard the carriage wheels."

"Clyde!" Mr. Taliaferro called. "Clyde!"

"Here we are," Mr. Fellows said easily, moving toward the hall.

"Here we are," repeated Clyde, following after him.

Paulina stood between Mr. and Mrs. Taliaferro, and Clyde saw immediately that both of her parents were a little too short and a little too stout. She herself felt exceedingly small, and exceedingly young and crude. She was grateful for the presence of Mr. Fellows who, even with his stoop, was taller than Paulina; and she knew at once that this was one of the times when she was not going to be very nice.

Of course she ought to go and kiss this tall woman,

"dressed in just the latest agony," as Sally always said; and whose widow's hat, lined with white crêpe, with a small black veil hanging from the brim, was bound to arouse the whole of Middleborough. Here, when people mourned, they covered themselves, face and all, with yards of black drapery; and they shut themselves off from everything. There was one woman whose husband had been dead nearly twenty years; and only lately had she lifted her veil, as it was called. Clyde thought all this ridiculous; and then Paulina was not a real widow, she must not forget that. But Middleborough! What would Middleborough think? She felt a wild desire to laugh, but her mother's eyes were upon her, commanding her to advance, to make the guest welcome. Clyde was faintly sorry to disappoint her mother; and, in the desperate certainty that she was not going to be nice, she instinctively clung to a fold of the heavy portière, that should have been removed had not the preparations for Paulina's arrival interfered with the regular work of the house. She meant to suggest that they go upstairs when she felt the portière press upon her shoulder. Some one was shoving her forward, on towards Paulina; and looking up at the quiet form of Mr. Fellows beside her, Clyde knew it was Minnie's hand that was prompting her, that was forcing her to obey her mother's cue.

"Now perhaps I am going to get a chance to speak to you," she said prettily enough, and held up her face to be kissed.

"You are the little girl of the picture," Paulina asserted. "I can see that you are red-headed. Are you still quick-tempered, and born to command, as the back of the picture says?"

"After you have stayed with us awhile you can be the judge of that. Perhaps my mother maligned me," Clyde answered, and then Mrs. Taliaferro took Paulina to her room and Clyde was left with her father and Mr. Fellows.

"She's not a bit of a sad-faced frump," Mr. Fellows said.

"No," Clyde admitted, as she kissed the bald spot in the middle of Mr. Taliaferro's head, "she's awfully pretty. She ought to be really beautiful, but there's just something wrong with her. What is it, Minnie?"

"Her eyes are a little too close together; yet, strange to say, I don't think it takes away from her beauty." And at the sound of feet descending the steps, the conversation came to an abrupt halt.

Late that night Clyde had another opportunity to speak to Mr. Fellows. They were back in the dining room at the water pitcher, and they had the good sense to whisper discreetly together.

"You don't dislike her now, do you?" inquired Mr. Fellows.

"Yes, I do," Clyde answered moodily. "You know that big arm-chair in the parlour, the one that has a worn place in the seat? Well, Paulina fixed her eyes on that hole and kept them there the entire evening. I suppose we shall have to have the chair recovered; but we wanted to wait until the room was papered. When you go back you watch her, Minnie. Promise me?"

Mr. Fellows promised.

CHAPTER XVII

IF Paulina had noticed the hole in the seat of the chair her regard had been merely observant, not critical. Besides she had always heard that Southern people were singularly shiftless and happy-go-lucky; and she preferred a little local colour. That was what the hole was, local colour; and so was the funny old carriage, and so was Uncle Abie.

She was one of the few passengers to get off at Middleborough, and she recognised Mrs. Taliaferro at once. She had prepared herself for a warm reception; but Mrs. Taliaferro had gone farther than warmth in her affectionate embrace; and, for her size, had been almost impetuous. Paulina, it seemed, did look like her mother, and Mr. Taliaferro had been called upon to corroborate this statement. After he had done this and added the information that Pauline Selden had been a beauty, he had gone off to see about her trunk; and Mrs. Taliaferro had led her away and had introduced her to Uncle Abie.

"Uncle Abie," Mrs. Taliaferro had said, "here is Miss Pauline's daughter I was telling you about. Do you think she looks like Miss Pauline?"

"She am, and she ain't like her," Uncle Abie said sapiently, peering down on them like a small, shrivelled, black crow. "She favours her Pa jest a mite. You mind him, Miss Elizabeth?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Taliaferro.

"I disremember, but it 'pears to me he had blue eyes." He gave a senile chuckle as if overpowered by some recollection. "You shake hands with Uncle Abie, Mistis, he goin' drive you all about de town."

Although she did not want to, Paulina had been obliged

to shake the old coloured hand; and she was glad she had on her gloves and that she had not been contaminated by that coloured touch.

That was the way with Southern people. They did not seem to be able to find a happy medium. They either made a slave of the negro, or treated him as if he were the spoiled child of the house. She had gathered that much from the conversation of her mother and father. The Reverend Lemuel secretly loathed the coloured race; but, as a minister, it had been necessary for him to hide his feelings. Paulina also would find it necessary to conceal her distaste, and she might even have to pretend to like Uncle Abie. She wished he had not known her mother. At the start that forced her to be civil to him.

Paulina and Mrs. Taliaferro stepped into the victoria and waited for Mr. Taliaferro. On his return he unstrapped a little seat from the front of the carriage, and sat facing his wife. Then Uncle Abie gathered up the reins, and they started off.

If the victoria was old it was exceedingly comfortable, and Paulina leaned back and listened to the sweet voice of Mrs. Taliaferro who was already intent on bridging the years that had passed since she had last heard from Pauline Selden.

"You see, dear child," she said, "I want you to be happy with us so that you will pay me a long, long visit. You remind me of your mother, and it makes me feel as if I had a little bit of her back with me again. I think she loved me dearly, and I wondered that she never answered my letters. Now that I know she was blind, everything is explained. I suppose she did not want to tell me that."

"She was very proud."

"Yes," said Mrs. Taliaferro. "My beautiful Pauline!"

"And she was very poor." Paulina's tone insensibly hardened.

"No," Mrs. Taliaferro cried, with a little hurt note in

her voice, "no, and she never let me know. My poor Pauline."

"Perhaps she could not bear to."

"That was it." Mrs. Taliaferro leaned over and pressed Paulina's hand. "But she never forgot me and now that I have found you, dear, I don't mean to lose sight of you again. You must let me take your mother's place with you. It has made me so happy that in your trouble you should have come to me. I can't help thinking that your mother knows all this, Paulina, and that she guided you here."

"Perhaps," Paulina said.

A dull, red flush spread over her face. She was thankful for the darkness, thankful that Mrs. Taliaferro could not be aware that she had been labelled an "iron in the fire," an iron whose only charm consisted in the fact that it might be turned to some account. It was that thought that had prompted her to return the pictures. It had proved such easy work, this utilisation of Elizabeth Taliaferro. She had only to blow and the fire flared forth. Here were comfort, warmth, and pure affection, all for the asking. She meant to take what was offered her and be grateful.

From the time she had found the photographs her fancy had turned to this place, and when she was divorced she had intended to sweep down upon Middleborough and dazzle these Southerners with her wealth and beauty. Now that idea was past. She was poor; she was the wife of a thief; and she had told only the truth when she had written that she could not stand any more publicity.

She had been through some outrageous scenes with George Bull; with Rosie; with the clamouring creditors. The last actually begrudged her the money her mother had left her; and, for that matter, so did Rosie. Rosie had altogether lost her wits, and that she might be near George Bull had planned to live in the city. She was going to work, to embroider, to help support herself and the child. Paulina could not conceive why any one should want to take such a

step when it was her own ardent desire to put as great a distance as possible between herself and the prison walls that held her husband.

The whole affair had been so humiliating, so nerve racking to a woman who had no part or parcel in the wretched business. During the time while George Bull was being tried and convicted, she had had to live. And what a life! She had a tiny hall bedroom, badly ventilated, and none too clean. She hated this, but she hated more the silence that fell upon the dining-room as she entered. They had been talking about her; they had been talking about George Bull. When she thought of all this sordid misery and discomfort and how singularly easy it had been to work Elizabeth Taliaferro, a stifling feeling of shame swept over her; and when she looked into the innocent eyes of her mother's dear friend, she was seized with a wild desire to be liked, actually for her own sake, and not because she was her mother's daughter.

"I have been so unhappy," she whispered, and there was no mistaking the sincerity of the statement.

"I shall make you forget all that," Mrs. Taliaferro answered softly. Then she abruptly changed the conversation and suggested that Paulina watch where she was going, because they were near the Taliaferro home, and her mother had been to many a party in that very house.

Paulina did as she was bidden, and saw that they were driving through a quiet street, dimly lit by gas lamps placed on tall black iron lamp-posts. These were old places here, with grounds and trees, and barely discernible, shadowy old houses. After they had passed a long stretch of box hedge, the fat horses turned into a gravelled walk; and from her side of the carriage Paulina could see a large, crescent-shaped bed of rose-bushes. When they rounded the crescent-shaped bed they stopped; and as she grew accustomed to the faint light, the big colonial house shaped itself before her eyes. It was a solid, durable edifice, and it had

known her mother. Paulina wondered if her mother could see her now, and if the sight made her happy.

"Here we are at home," Mr. Taliaferro said. Helping them out of the victoria, he let them into the house with his own latch-key; and Paulina Bull, as she followed her host and hostess into the vestibule, experienced the odd sensation of being accompanied by some one or something.

"Where you are standing now," her mother's voice seemed to say, "I stood. The same roof that shelters you has sheltered me. Look well about you, Paulina."

Paulina had looked; at the hall that ran through the centre of the house; at the spacious rooms on either side; but suddenly she had forgotten all about Mrs. Sprague, for her glance had fallen upon Clyde Taliaferro and, instinctively, she had divined that here was one person who was not as gullible as her mother's dear friend, Elizabeth. It was not that she had noticed Clyde's reluctance to speak to her. No, she had been too absorbed for that. It was the girl's green eyes that held her attention. At present they were bafflingly transparent; but she saw that they could be as cold and as hard as bits of polished jade. When she had considered Clyde at all, it was always in the light of the child of the house—for, after all, Little Ranny was nothing but a baby—and it startled her to discover that this was a mistake and that, in the future, she had to deal with a distinct personality.

At supper she sat opposite Clyde, who did her fair share of talking; and next to Mr. Fellows, who was making himself most agreeable. It was all infinitely better than she had expected it to be; although, of course, she could suggest numbers of improvements. While the furniture was wonderful, it needed doing over; and it was a crying shame not to take the dents out of the old family silver. It was a pity to be too Southern, too shiftless.

She remembered her premonition that Mrs. Taliaferro would be fat and here she was pleasantly disappointed; for if her hostess was inclined to stoutness it rather enhanced

than detracted from her attraction. She was so placid, so absolutely undisturbed by the petty annoyances of life. Paulina could see that it would be extremely difficult to upset her equilibrium. As she talked, to illustrate her conversation, she had a charming and graceful habit of waving one hand slightly to one side. Paulina watched her, fascinated by this trick. She was beginning to be a little sorry for her own mother. When Pauline Selden married she had lost all this. How she must have hated her narrow life! Paulina could not remember that she had ever had a friend. It was not until the meal was over that she discovered that Mr. Fellows was a minister.

"I should never have thought it!" she exclaimed.

"Why not?" he inquired.

"You don't look like one."

"Oh, come now!" Mr. Fellows protested. "We ministers haven't any special look, you know."

"As a matter of fact, you've more the air of a professor than a parson, Fellows," Mr. Taliaferro put in.

"I think he might have been a writer or an inventor," Clyde observed reflectively.

"It's up to you now, Mrs. Taliaferro," Mr. Fellows said.

Paulina looked at Mrs. Taliaferro quickly. Perhaps she, too, was thinking of the Reverend Lemuel. Perhaps she knew of his narrow dogmatism, of his rooted conviction that all pleasure was sinful. In just a few words Paulina could have described him, exactly as he was, so different from this man before her; but she could not talk this way to these people. Already she had grasped the fact that had there been a family skeleton in every closet of the Taliaferro house, she would never have found out about them from her host and hostess.

However, Mrs. Taliaferro had not given the Reverend Lemuel a thought. She was not the sort of woman to balance her friends, the one against the other, and she could scarcely remember Paulina's father. It had been the shortest possible acquaintanceship, and she could not hope to

like the man who had carried away her Pauline. Moreover, when she considered a subject she did it whole-heartedly, and ruthlessly nipped off any inquisitive shoots of her imagination that threatened to distract her mind. Just now she was considering Mr. Fellows' appearance.

"One's looks need not have anything to do with one's profession," she announced comfortably, "and I don't agree with you at all about Mr. Fellows. He has always been my conception of the ideal minister, in and out of the pulpit, too, I mean," she added a thought confusedly.

"How very odd," Mr. Fellows said, "because, you know, you have always been my ideal Southern woman."

"Oh, Father! Catch the bouquets!" Clyde cried delightedly.

"Well! Well!" Mr. Taliaferro winked at Clyde and, leaning over, caught his wife's hand in his. First he patted it; next he squeezed it; then put it gently back upon the arm of her chair.

It was sweet and natural, and yet Paulina felt herself stiffen and stare. It savoured too much of Rosie's attitude to Jim, to George Bull, and this whiff of her former life was distasteful to her. To her mind there was something crude and raw about this open affection. She glanced at Mr. Fellows and saw that he was watching the scene with a half tender, half humorous smile on his face. Evidently that sort of thing appealed to him, and it certainly showed his intimacy with the family.

She turned to see how Clyde bore up under her parents' behaviour, and once again, quite unexpectedly, she encountered Clyde's eyes. How green, how mocking, how satirical they were! Paulina knew she could not like this girl, and yet it was expedient to patch up some sort of friendship with her. She was not going to let a green-eyed child oust her from her haven of refuge. She resumed the conversation where it had stopped.

"You see," she spoke directly to Mr. Fellows, "for a minister you seem so very broad-minded."

"He doesn't only seem; he is broad-minded." Clyde was so positive she was almost threatening. "Minnie's fearfully liberal, so liberal that sometimes I think he must be unorthodox, as you call it."

"Why, Clyde!" Mrs. Taliaferro was plainly shocked.

"You mean that for a compliment, don't you?" Mr. Fellows asked.

"Of course," Clyde returned. "And you are so clever about it, too. Why, you've managed to hoodwink all the old grannies in the church so that they don't think you liberal."

"Oh, Clyde!" Mr. Fellows protested this time and laughed long and joyously.

Clyde's face reddened.

"You know what I mean, Minnie," she said. "Generally the old ladies object to everything, and yet they let you do just as you please. They don't even mind the newsboys playing baseball Sunday afternoon."

"Who's the best pitcher you've got?" Mr. Taliaferro inquired proudly and significantly.

"Clyde," the minister said promptly. "Without her I should never have been able to organise the team. That reminds me! Don't you want to help me out, Mrs. Bull?"

"I don't play baseball," Paulina answered stiffly.

"Clyde's all I need for that." He ignored the stiffness. "I want a librarian."

"Where's Miss Jessie?" Clyde interrupted.

"Well, she's not as young as she once was, Clyde, and she wants to rest; only she's not willing to let one of the Middleborough people take her place. Of course she hasn't said this, but I know her feelings would be hurt if I suggested such a thing. It would look as if I were trying to shove her aside. She's old and sensitive, you see. Now if Mrs. Bull would help me for a few months, it would be entirely different. She would so plainly be just a substitute."

Paulina felt that every one in the room was waiting for

her answer. Had she come South to be a librarian in a Sunday school?

"I am not a member of the church," she said at last.

"That would not interfere," Mr. Fellows replied at once. "Clyde will bring you down and show you everything."

It was settled. Paulina saw that. Cudgel her brains as she might, she could think of no adequate excuse to get her out of this dilemma. During her entire stay in Middleborough she would have to go to Sunday school. It was going to be hard to live up to the Taliaferros. If they started with Sunday school there was no telling where they would end. The worst part of it was that she had to control her face as she listened to Mr. Fellows' speech of thanks. Mrs. Taliaferro said nothing. She appeared to look upon the whole transaction as a matter of course. Later on, Paulina gathered that, as a girl, her hostess had taught in the Sunday school, and therefore thought it the right and proper thing to do. Clyde's countenance was inscrutable. If she secretly thought that the way was being over quickly paved for Paulina to confide her domestic troubles to Mr. Fellows, a conversation to her mind both harrowing and impossible, her face was gratifyingly blank. She was as well-behaved as if she had been a nice little kitten, lapping an unusually creamy saucer of milk.

When Paulina went to her room that night she was almost content. If it had not been for the Sunday school proposition she would have been entirely satisfied. She was going to hate her work; she was not fond of noisy children; and she would probably have a headache for church. To offset this she liked Mr. Fellows, and she was deliciously comfortable. Her room was quaint and old-fashioned; and the Taliaferros, mother and father, were sweet; though, for that matter, she could not be said to be particularly appreciative of true sweetness. It was not always a desirable acquisition. Sweetness and stupidity so often went hand in hand. Now Clyde was not sweet. Also she was young and attractive. Paulina was forced to

admit the last. In spite of herself Clyde was charming, and while her manner was offhand, it was not rude. Paulina knew that under no circumstances should she consider it rude. As she intended to stay in Middleborough, she meant to swallow Clyde. She hoped that Clyde would not protest.

In her bedroom, across the hall from Paulina, Clyde sat. She was looking mournfully at a run in the knee of her silk stocking and she was talking to herself, a childish habit she had not outgrown.

"Clydie," she said with the lisping accents of a very little girl, "Clydie, Pauline's child is very pretty, very pretty indeed; and clever, too; as smart as the mischief."

She crooked her knee. The run spread. She watched it with mournful interest. When she spoke again it was in her full, natural voice.

"It's dollars to doughnuts those crooked eyes of hers saw this run in my stocking, for all that it's in the middle of my leg. Pauline's child is fearfully clever," she said.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE next day Clyde was up early, and fully dressed a half an hour before the breakfast bell rang. It was not her usual custom to be prompt to meals and her mother sometimes wondered that the servants stood her irregularities as pleasantly as they did; but Clyde had a way with her and ruled the kitchen with a rod of iron. There they worshipped the "Lil Mistis," and she made the most of what was for her an extremely pleasant situation.

In the matter of rising, as well as everything else, she had no happy medium. Either she was the last person to appear, or else she was down ahead of the rest of the family. That did not include Little Ranny who, when the weather was warm, was always in the garden by eight o'clock. This morning was to be an exception. When Clyde opened her door she could hear his smothered chatter and Mammy Ellen's low responses. For his first meeting with Paulina Little Ranny must be kept neat and clean. Because of her mother's partiality for rubber shoes, and her great fear of spring dews, Clyde went unobtrusively down the back steps.

This was a wet morning, so wet she had to keep to the path that twisted and curved like a crooked snake in and out among the flower beds. The garden was old and the shape of the beds had not been changed since the time of her grandfather. Clyde's father had always lived here. It seemed odd to think that once he had been the little boy who had played underneath the magnolia, and raced up and down the winding walks. She could not quite see Mr. Taliaferro in this light. She found it hard to disassociate her parents from their natural mother and father forms.

Taking it all in all, it was a strange, almost a freakish garden. To the front, on either side of the house, there were no flower beds save the one in the horse-shoe that the driveway enclosed. The green turf stretched as far back as the middle of the building, and then the labyrinth started. Clyde considered that the only suitable name for the rest of the garden. Personally she rather liked this arrangement. She was fond of straying down the path with dreamy, unseeing eyes that, in actual reality, did not miss a single detail of the life pulsing about her. The rose, with the small, specked centre, the carelessly broken twig, the tiny cocoon hanging from the leaf, all came within the scope of her vision. Now the foliage was covered with dew. It tipped each blade of grass. It glimmered on every leaf. The whole earth had been sprayed with millions of shining drops.

"You couldn't have done it if you tried," was Clyde's inward reflection as she hung over a patch of jonquils.

And then her green eyes widened and a low cry of pleasure broke from her lips. The blue butterflies had come back. There they were, a pair of them, circling and dipping over the yellow flowers. She thought them the most beautiful things in the world, and she always found them near the jonquils. As soon as the spring came she began to watch for them, and sometimes she grew frightened for fear they had gone for good. They were late this year and she was just getting anxious when they had dropped, two bits of blue sky, into their garden again. By to-morrow there would be more of them. She had seen as many as six together, though, generally, there were only three or four. What a charming combination of colour they made, the fluttering blue insects and the vivid yellow plants. When such sights as this were about, she ought to get up early every morning. So absorbed was she that she might have stood there indefinitely if a shrill whistle had not offended her ear. Clyde knew the whistle, and when she wheeled

around she was not surprised to see Tom Aylett grinning at her from across the hedge.

"What do you think!" he said without the preamble of a morning's greeting. "Father's given me the new colt for my very own. He means to have him broken and then I may use him as often as I wish."

"That's fine," Clyde said with the interest that was the secret of her popularity. She might have been the boy's age so eagerly did she hang upon his words.

"I knew you would want to hear about it." He whistled in sheer glee.

"How did you know I was in the garden?"

"Oh, I saw your 'burning bush' from the window," he gazed at her head in frank admiration, "and I hurried down."

Clyde did not resent this insult hurled at her head. "What's the matter with your face?" she inquired.

"I think I've got the mumps," the boy said simply. "All the fellows at school have had it."

"Why, Tom Aylett," Clyde's voice was a mixture of exasperation and motherliness, "you go straight home. Change your shoes, too, for the grass is soaking. Don't come here again. I've had it only on one side and Ranny might get it."

"I never thought about that," he said, backing off. "I reckon I was so keen about the colt that I forgot all about the mumps. Maybe I haven't got it after all."

"Oh, yes, you have," Clyde was grimly reassuring, "and I hope I won't catch it from you. Good-bye, Tom, I wish the colt belonged to me."

She watched him start toward his house. The morning sun fell aslant the "burning bush" and turned it into a heap of pure gold. Once the boy waved to her, and once he stopped and stared; and, though she did not realise it, he was gazing at her head. At last he disappeared altogether, and Clyde retraced her steps. She walked briskly because

she wanted to warn her mother. It would be foolish to let Little Ranny catch the mumps.

Ranny was down at last. He was seated sedately on a grass cushion on the top step of the porch. Back of him was a round tub of cypress. Clyde crept up behind the tub and, taking a long piece of feathery grass that she held in her hand, she leaned forward and tickled his neck. He lifted an impatient arm and rubbed the spot. Clyde laughed softly to herself and tried again. This time she brushed his ear, and Ranny jumped so quickly he caught her in the act.

"You stop, Clyde!" he shouted angrily.

Clyde glanced about her apprehensively. It would never do to get Ranny in a temper when he was so carefully dressed to meet Paulina. Her mother would be furious with her, and it was wrong of her to tease the child; only, somehow, she could never resist doing it. He was such a good little fellow. That was the difficulty.

"I won't do it any more," she said dropping beside him, "and I've a lot of bright pennies I am going to give you. You might buy some presents for Polly and Margery." The last was an inspiration.

"Polly can't come here," he said dolefully.

"What's the matter with her?"

"She's sick, and when you came, Margery ran away." He was plainly reproachful.

"Which is the nicer, Polly or Margery?"

"Margery's awfully pretty," Ranny said slowly, "but Polly's sweet, oh, so sweet. She needs me to love her more because she hasn't got much hair, just a little, weeny plait." He held up his small forefinger.

Clyde looked down at the little boy. What an imagination he had and how quick he was in his responses. Sally's little brothers and sisters were so different. They loved other children, and the whole neighbourhood squabbled, and fought, and laughed, and cried in the Watsons' yard. Little Ranny never seemed to want company, though when his friends came to see him he was polite enough. Appar-

ently he preferred to be alone and unless he was teased, he was always happy. He played in the garden all day long, and Clyde suspected that generally he had Polly and Margery with him. It struck her he was not feeling very well this morning. His small face had a bleak, lonely expression as if some one had hurt him, and he was such an atom to look like that. Was it possible he missed the ridiculous, imaginary child who, he admitted himself, was not pretty and whose hair was so thin that it made a plait the size of his finger? She wondered what he was thinking about now.

"Ranny," she said, "which do you love the best, Polly or me?"

Ranny hesitated. He was a truthful child and Clyde could be the best companion in the world. He had a passing remembrance of some splendid romps they had had together.

"Margery's nice and so are you, Clyde," he said judicially, "but Polly wants me all the time."

"Oh," Clyde was disgusted. To be weighed in the balance and found wanting was humiliating; especially if your rival was ugly and had no hair.

"Don't I want you always?"

It was a foolish speech to make and yet she could not resist the impulse to question Ranny. It hurt her, too, that he only looked her over and said nothing. Obviously he thought her remark beneath his notice. Naturally she did not always want him, but Minnie was right. She was uncertain. Even a baby like Ranny saw that.

"Do you love mother as much as Polly?" she persisted.

"Of course!" he cried indignantly. "I love her a barrel full."

Behind them some one laughed, a low laugh rich with contentment. Clyde loved her mother's voice but she adored her laugh. If she were quick enough she could watch the blush that accompanied the laughter. Mrs. Taliaferro's colour had gone with her youth; but when she was pleased or touched a faint tint dyed her cheeks with a rose as deli-

cate and as beautiful as the vanishing glow of a crimson sunset. She was rosy now, a pleasant bit of brightness against the sombre background of her guest as they stood side by side in the open doorway.

"I knew my little son loved his mother," she cried.

Ranny ran to her and caught her hand.

"Now speak to Cousin Paulina," she suggested softly.

Ranny did his training credit. Though Clyde could see he was somewhat abashed by the black and white sketchiness of Paulina, he extended his small hand.

"How do you do. I am glad to see you. I do not kiss ladies," he added gravely.

Paulina had stooped over the child, but she straightened up instantly.

"I am glad to meet you, Ranny," she answered with equal gravity.

"Quite took the wind out of her sails," Clyde said to herself.

"He will never kiss any one," Mrs. Taliaferro apologised with her little explanatory gesture.

Paulina smiled at Ranny. He had Rose Baby's trick of silence and she was attracted by his polite indifference. It was plain that he did not desire to talk or to be talked to. She would never have to amuse this child, and it was not likely that his small shoes would ever touch her clothes. He was not the type to climb into her lap or hang over the side of her chair. All the advances would have to come from her. The charms of the Taliaferros' household increased daily. It was not often you were lucky enough to be thrown into daily contact with a boy such as this. Generally children were importunate, and yet, as a guest, you were forced to put up with them. Now this unusual child stood quietly by his mother's side.

"Do you know, Clyde," Mrs. Taliaferro frowned even as she patted Ranny's yellow head, "a few minutes ago Mrs. Aylett telephoned me. She's afraid Tom has the mumps."

"Yes, I know."

Clyde did not think it necessary to mention that she had been talking to the erring Tom. There was no use in worrying her mother.

"Ranny will have to play on the other side of the yard. I don't want him to catch it."

"I don't believe he will. He never sees Tom."

"Mrs. Aylett has asked a favour of me." It was almost as if Mrs. Taliaferro appealed to her daughter. "It seems that the Anti-Suffrage League was to meet at her house the first part of this week, and she wants me to let the ladies come here instead."

"You didn't agree?"

"I couldn't refuse," Mrs. Taliaferro said simply.

"But, Mother, you're not an Anti."

"I explained that to her, but she said it did not matter. They simply want a house that is big enough to hold them, and since I was neutral it was all right."

"It's just a trick to get you to join the League," Clyde cried angrily.

"That is a most unneighbourly speech," her mother said.

Clyde's anger faded. She looked at her mother a little quizzically. If Mrs. Aylett could have known it she had overreached herself. Mrs. Taliaferro cared nothing whatever for suffrage; but a step like this was apt to make her "get her back up," as her daughter inelegantly expressed it. Besides she had always said that she did not intend to war against women. "Let them do as they wish," said she; and Mr. Taliaferro, who heartily disapproved of women going to the polls, was still large enough to concur with the views of his wife. Clyde admired her mother for the stand she had taken. It was a platform that appealed to her girlish sense of justice. She herself was perfectly indifferent to suffrage; but she did not mean to side against it. That was narrow and unprogressive to her way of thinking. Doubtless Mrs. Aylett thought herself extremely clever to utilise Tom's illness to further the cause; but Clyde

knew she had overreached herself and, therefore, she smiled upon her mother.

"We'll have tea at five o'clock and I'll get Sally to help," she suggested amiably.

"Yes." Mrs. Taliaferro smiled.

"And Olive Dunlop, Mother?"

"I disapprove of Olive," Mrs. Taliaferro said firmly. "She is too young to throw herself into suffrage in the way she has done. Any one except Olive, Clyde."

"But she wants to come," Clyde persisted. "She can't see where the Antis have a leg to stand on, and, of course, none of them will invite her to a meeting. It's her opportunity to get information. You want Olive to get information, don't you? Please, Mother."

Now that Clyde had promised to see about the tea, Mrs. Taliaferro's thoughts had long ago left the Antis. She was brooding over Little Ranny and uneasy for fear he might catch the mumps. To have it next door was risky indeed; and her baby wasn't strong. Ranny would always be her baby. Clyde thought her unnecessarily nervous, and often said she worried over pin-pricks. Mrs. Taliaferro knew her nervousness to be a sign of age. She kissed his head and his small face gently, yet with a certain amount of passionate eagerness. She put her arms about him. Metaphorically she was defying the mumps to attack her darling.

"May I have her, Mother?"

Mrs. Taliaferro came slowly back to a realisation of the question. Of course she was not going to quibble about Olive Dunlop who, but for this eccentricity, was a very sweet child. It seemed so unimportant, all this fuss and bustle. She did not care a snap about the whole affair.

"Just as you like, Clyde," she said.

She kissed the child. The breakfast gong sounded. She rose to her feet mechanically and clasped Ranny by the hand.

"If he should have the mumps," she thought.

CHAPTER XIX

CLYDE stood in the middle of the third story front room counting on her fingers. Her hair was ruffled and a black smudge ran across her nose; but she was blissfully unconscious of these defects and had only just stopped ordering about her little army of helpers. Sam had gone, and Paulina and Sally were resting on the uncomfortable edge of a trunk.

"With all the odd chairs we've sent down, we've provided seats for forty-six," she announced at length.

"That's an abundance," Sally said.

"Well, I don't know," Clyde answered. "It's astonishing how many idiots there are, even in Middleborough."

"If you feel like that, why don't you join the Suffrage League?" Sally inquired.

"They are equally foolish and you said so yourself the other day."

"Clyde Taliaferro, do you think you're the only person in Middleborough who has got any sense?"

"If you are going to be ugly, Sally, we had better drop the subject, and, anyhow, it's awfully near the time to be getting ready for the meeting."

"What's in the next room?" Paulina asked.

"The antiques."

"Whose antiques?"

"Ours. The room is full of stuff that belonged to the Clydes and the Taliaferros. Our largest treasure is the marble boy that used to be a fountain, though we have nothing more valuable than the brown Windsor soap that ran the blockade. I mean the blockade during our Confeder-

ate War, you know. We ought to give that to a museum, I think."

"Why do you keep all of these things?" Paulina inquired.

"Sentiment," said Clyde boldly, "an ennobling but inconvenient quality to possess; but Olive's come, I'm sure. I heard the front door bang."

Olive had come and met them as they descended the steps. She was a tall girl with a quantity of dark hair smoothed from her face and gathered into a knot at the back of her neck. She had an eager, alert manner, a shade too intense; yet her smile was charming and she was most cordial in her greeting to Paulina.

"Wasn't it good of Clyde to invite me?" she said.

"I've got mother's orders to keep you strictly in the background until we serve the food. Your presence might excite the ladies," Clyde answered.

"You don't mean that I am not going to be allowed to hear the speeches?"

"No, I mean that after everybody's come you've got to slip in the back of the room where you will not be noticed; and where you will have to stay as quiet as a mouse. We'll be there to keep you company, won't we, Sally?"

Sally nodded.

"And Mrs. Bull?" Olive asked.

"She may do as she pleases. Take a front chair; or sit with us in the rear and probably be asked to step up higher," Clyde said. "But I've got a dress to put on and so has Sally. Come into my room, Olive, while we are getting ready."

"Won't you come, too?" Sally said to Paulina.

"She can't. She's obliged to wear some fine apparel herself. She's a guest," Clyde answered for Paulina.

They lingered a minute and Clyde saw that they were waiting for her to go first. She went into her room and closed the door; and, after a short delay, a loud slam proclaimed the fact that Clyde and her friends had entered Clyde's bedchamber.

Paulina stood still and listened. She could hear them moving hither and thither; and their muted voices, deadened by the walls of the house, sounded to her like the drone of a flock of bees. Now and then the drone was broken by a burst of merriment, and a scuffling noise that reminded Paulina of young puppies at play. It came over her that she was lonely and would have wished to make a quartet of this gay trio. No, that was impossible. Had she been dwelling on a height, and they in the valley beneath, she could not have been further removed from these young girls. With the exception of Ned McFarland and Mr. Fellows she felt that way with all of Clyde's friends. It was as if she stood outside a circle of bright-eyed, light-hearted boys and girls and watched them whirl round and round before her. There was no room for her in the circle, for it was held together by the magic and invisible chain of youth. The camaraderie, the joyousness of the young people were frank expressions of their united state; and there was no way she could force an entrance into the midst of them. She was struck by that fact.

"But all the same it's a divine inheritance and every boy or girl should come into his or her own some day," Paulina said to herself.

Her hands, that were hanging lax by her side, clenched together. She had never known what it was to feel like that. Never in her life had she been young, not even for a single day. Youth, to her, had been purely a physical state; not an overwhelming, bubbling effervescence. And now it was too late. It had gone irrevocably, never to be replaced. Never, oh, the hard, flat finality of the word.

She felt her finger nails press into the palms of her hands. She wanted her vanished youth and it had gone glimmering, just as her childhood had hurried away. It was useless to pray that the feeling within her might be quickened and renewed, for this was something she had never owned. Her heritage had been stolen from her and a mess of bitter porridge substituted in its place. The gra-

cious gift of youth had been denied her; although it belonged to her as justly, as rightly as it belonged to Clyde, to Olive, or to sweet little Sally in the room across the hall. Once more the old hot anger swept over her; but she held herself in check.

"I must not be late," she whispered, and set about her preparations with feverish haste. Besides there was nothing she could do about it now. As well try to chase a comet as to hunt for the youth that, after all, she had never possessed. Not for a single day, had she said? She could go farther than that; not for a single hour would not be overstating it.

After a short interval she heard the girls go down; but Clyde came back and, tapping on the door, offered to hook her dress. Though Paulina had a shrewd inkling that it was Mrs. Taliaferro's thought, she was grateful for this little attention. She could not hope to be one of this gay crowd of boys and girls; and so she must content herself with the crumbs that fell from their table of abundance. She was growing humble in this Southern land, she told herself bitterly.

"This meeting has put your mother to a great deal of trouble," she said.

"No, it hasn't," Clyde laughed a little. "We've washed all the globes in the house, it's true; but then we are always doing that. Now for a regular party we scrub the crystal chandelier. That's trouble for you. All the prisms have to be restrung. It's our first step towards a real party. Now you are finished, and we had better hurry. Mother wants you to receive with her."

Paulina stood by Mrs. Taliaferro's side and was introduced to every one. None of the girls appeared; but Clyde had explained that this would be the case.

"It's on account of Olive," she said. "We are going to sit on the sofa near the door. You come back with us if you like."

Paulina meant to accept the invitation; and, after the

guests were seated, she intended to join the girls on the sofa. Since a steady stream of women was pouring into the room, this place might naturally fall to her lot. She wanted to keep tally of the number; but she was forced to concentrate all her efforts in a futile attempt to focus each face upon her memory. If she ever decided to live in Middleborough these would be her associates; and it would be an achievement to know them by sight. Insensibly she began to compare them with the wives of George Bull's business friends. While these women before her were not so well gowned—indeed, her critical sense warned her that some of them were a thought dowdy—all of them had a poise and a little distinctive manner that assured their social position. Her Northern acquaintances were smarter; but their skins had a battered look as if the colder, harsher climate had toughened them; and their eyes were world-worn and weary. The eyes that confronted Paulina now were innocent, youthful eyes that were sometimes in ill accord with the heavy, matronly figures. This innocency lent a freshness to their expressions that was as pleasing as it was astounding. It was an exception where this did not prove to be true.

"The Southern people lead such simple, easy lives," she thought contemptuously, "and they are so soft that they might have been from birth on smothered up to their necks in their own feather beds."

Here her conscience suddenly smote her; for, only that morning, Mrs. Taliaferro had been talking about the war between the states and had been trying to show her the crippled South. By way of example she had pointed out what it had meant to Middleborough. It had been a strange upheaval in the social world, and some of the very best people had gone under in the struggle.

Paulina watched the crowd press about Mrs. Taliaferro who wore an air of abstraction except when a tiny frown wrinkled her forehead. It was good; it was kind; it was sweet of Mrs. Taliaferro to take them in, a babel of voices proclaimed; and it was also exactly like Tom Aylett to get

the mumps at the most inconvenient moment. It was here Paulina saw the hostess frown; for the safety of Little Ranny was not yet assured, and to Mrs. Taliaferro this was a vital matter and absorbed all her thoughts.

"You needn't worry about mother getting converted," Clyde said to Olive. "I don't know what she is thinking about; but she is not paying the smallest attention to these silly geese," which was a disrespectful way of speaking of her elders that would have disgusted her mother had she been close enough to overhear what had been said.

Evidently there were forty odd women present; for Paulina noted, with some satisfaction, that nearly every chair was taken. A subdued chatter, a flutter of fans, and a scraping of chairs that spelt destruction to the carefully waxed floors, filled the room; and Paulina, under cover of this combination of noises, joined the girls in the rear and was wedged on the sofa between Clyde and Olive. When the meeting was called to order the fans and the chatter ceased; yet the rasping of chairs continued to interrupt the speaker and spoil her most dramatic pauses.

Paulina did not catch the name of the woman who stood before them, but thought she spoke as concisely as her spectacles and her air of thin determination implied.

This notable person started her discourse with a few words of thanks to Mrs. Taliaferro who, it seemed, had come to the rescue in the nick of time and, sheltering the Antis beneath her roof, had welcomed them with her smile.

"But, after all, the Antis are glad of this opportunity to talk of their work fully and frankly," said she graciously, "for it is not unlikely that our kind friend does not entirely understand just what we have undertaken."

This allusion to "our kind friend" was somewhat wasted on their hostess, who, by way of breaking the monotony of the afternoon meeting, had made a sally into the hall; and had snatched a kiss from Little Ranny. She smiled in a perfunctory manner; but before her eyes she saw a gallant little figure, clad in a blue smocked linen, and heard a

correct little voice whisper, "You come out, Mother, if you get a chance."

The deterioration of the age was the gist of the speech and woman's suffrage was, supposedly, the result of that deterioration. The proving of this last statement would have been tedious to Paulina had not the subject been enlivened by whispered comments on the part of Clyde, and personal incidents on the part of the speaker. Towards the last the latter appealed to her audience.

"Suffrage is a menace to the home," said she, "and therefore, I beg each one of you to forget your innate timidity, and do your little best to help. As a child I have often heard the saying that 'If you can't be a bell cow you can follow with the rest.' If every woman took that for her precept think what a noble procession we would make."

"What an unfortunate simile!" Clyde giggled hysterically.

Paulina lost what followed next; for Clyde punched her to look at Olive, whose face was very red and who had the belligerent air of a dog whose tail has just been rudely tweaked. Sally was profoundly bored, Paulina could see, but Clyde was enjoying herself tremendously, and wore the detached manner of a person watching an experiment, the outcome of which was a matter of entire indifference. When Paulina listened once more the talk had settled down to a short discussion of home influence, and finally closed with an invitation to the other women to give their opinions. No one seemed to care to do that, so the speaker took her seat amid much clapping, after which the roll was called; and the meeting adjourned to the following week, when an outline of the campaign would be given.

About this time Clyde, Sally, and Olive disappeared; Sam came in with a big bowl of claret punch; and the girls followed with plates of cakes, sandwiches, and a flat bread, split in half and buttered, that Clyde said was a hoecake; but Paulina knew to be an English muffin. Iced tea was provided for those who did not care for punch, and under the influence of these dainties, for refreshments were not

slated on the Antis' programme, the ladies relaxed the severity of their demeanour; and only mildly censured Olive for her suffragistic tendencies.

"Come to see me," the speaker said graciously, "and we will talk it all out. Perhaps I can smooth away your difficulties."

And Olive, who was burning to retort that there were no difficulties, refused to be drawn into an argument; and though her cheeks crimsoned, promised to think it over.

Then there was another burst of conversation, a final and a violent rasping of the chairs, followed by a general exodus of the guests.

"I call that party a great success," Clyde said as she surveyed the empty room, "and it's exactly as if we had given Paulina a little tea. All of them want to call on her. I heard them say so."

"Do you know I'm glad every one has gone," said Mrs. Taliaferro, smiling contentedly.

"But every one hasn't gone," Clyde put her soft cheek against her mother's, "for Minnie, Ned McFarland, and Jock are on the back porch now. Olive and Sally are with them."

"How did they happen to come here at this time?"

"I invited them, Mother," Clyde said stoutly, "to eat up the scraps, you know."

"I can't see them," Mrs. Taliaferro's voice was firm. "Ranny——?"

"Is asleep."

"How do you know?"

"Mammy Ellen said so."

Mrs. Taliaferro sighed, but suffered her daughter to lead her to the back porch, where she found Mr. Taliaferro and the rest of the party.

"Here we are," the men cried genially.

"And here's a place for you," said Mr. Taliaferro, making a place for his wife on the bench with him.

"It was a very edifying discourse, I hear," Jock said.

"I understand they spoke very nicely of you, Mrs. Taliaferro." Ned McFarland's eyes twinkled gravely.

"I didn't hear them," Mrs. Taliaferro confessed apologetically. "I've been worried for fear Ranny might catch the mumps."

"Aren't you an Anti?" the minister inquired with mock severity.

"I am not anything," Mrs. Taliaferro was still apologetic, "and I have so many little things to think of that I don't seem to take a great deal of interest in these causes."

"We are neutral, we are." Mr. Taliaferro patted his wife on the back.

"Not neutral, old-fashioned," his wife corrected gravely.

"What worries me," Olive said sadly, "is that they give almost the same statistics for and against suffrage."

"How can they?" Sally inquired innocently.

Paulina as well as the men laughed.

"Well, there's one good thing suffrage has done," said Clyde, perching herself upon the railing of the porch beside Jock and Sally. "It's made all the women think. Before they were like so many jellyfish sticking to the ocean's bottom."

"Am I a jellyfish?" Mrs. Taliaferro asked calmly.

Clyde giggled.

"I wasn't exactly speaking of you," she said. "If you are married you do have some occupation, I suppose. It's as plain as the nose on my face that equal suffrage was made for old maids. They need some aim and interest, particularly if there are several in a family. Now you take the Newtons. There are three of them, and everybody calls them 'the Newton girls.' They will never have a chance to grow up now. They are as old as mother."

"Older," Mr. Taliaferro interjected.

"If I were in Emily Newton's place," Clyde was warming to her subject, "I should make a distinctive name for myself even if I had to become an anarchist."

"Don't you do mischief enough as it is, you green-eyed water-witch?" Jock whispered in her ear.

Clyde's hand trembled on the porch railing, and her heart began its silly beating. She cast a sidewise glance at Jock. She saw the bold curve of his mouth and the droop of his eyelids. Jock's eyes never drooped, and yet they never stared. They challenged you; and after that the race began; neck to neck; trot to trot; gallop to gallop. To-night she was not up to that, and she thought it not nice of him to look at her as he was doing. She wondered if any one was watching him. She swept the little circle with her eyes, and Ned was the only person who was actually facing them. He was nearest the porch door, and the light from the hall fell upon his angular figure, his pleasant, kindly face. No one could call him handsome; but, in spite of that, he attracted you. Clyde knew why. He was so straight and sincere that everybody liked him. She wished that he had been seated on a bench instead of a chair, and then she might have sat beside him; or else she wished, violently, that they would go home and leave her. That speech and look of Jock's had made her nerves jump. She was tired and cross; and half sorry that she had asked them here. As if in answer to her thoughts Ned rose.

"We must be moving." He turned to the girls. "May I take any one home?"

"Sally's going with me, and Mr. Fellows has bespoken Olive," Jock said. "You will have to go alone."

"I hate to break up the party," Ned was mildly insistent, "but, later on, I have a business engagement."

"I have to go, too," Olive said.

"And so do I," chimed in Sally.

Clyde had a confused impression of the leave-taking; but Jock shook her hand last of all, and the squeeze that he gave it hurt her. He had no business to behave that way. She must call him down, only it was hard to do that. She wondered what Mr. Fellows would think of her if he knew that she suffered Jock to take such liberties. Suf-

ferred was not exactly the word. Jock was like a volcano. After he had once started, he could not be stopped. She wondered if Mr. Fellows had noticed him this afternoon.

It was a pity that she should have worried about the minister; for Mr. Fellows was in such an absent-minded state that he walked several blocks beyond his own house and had to retrace his steps.

"I never saw any one improve as much as Mrs. Bull has done," he said to himself. "She's lost that unhappy, defiant expression. I should not wonder if the Bull husband had been something of a brute, and probably it's lucky for her that he's underneath the sod. Some men ought not to be trusted with delicate, sensitive women." His face darkened at some inward recollection. He sighed as he entered his door.

All of which went to prove that either Mrs. Taliaferro had, as Clyde had predicted, become involved during her confidential talk with Mr. Fellows about Paulina; or that the minister had been too absorbed in his music that practice day to understand what she had said. Luckily, there had been no bad results. As a widow, Paulina was charming Middleborough; but it was unfortunate that there was no one near at hand to straighten out Mr. Fellows' hasty impressions.

CHAPTER XX

PAULINA did not go to Sunday school for two weeks after she came to Middleborough; for Little Ranny caught the mumps, and Mrs. Taliaferro thought it best to keep Clyde and Paulina at home.

"There are so many children there," she said in a voice that showed she considered she had deprived them of a rare treat, "that we must be very careful. I know how I should feel if Little Ranny had been unnecessarily exposed."

Paulina smiled inwardly.

"Very well," she said with exactly the proper shade of regret, "but we must tell Mr. Fellows not to expect us."

"I've telephoned him," Mrs. Taliaferro answered. "He understands, and he wants you to come to the church this afternoon and help him catalogue the books for the library. Unless he hears from you he counts on your coming."

"What a pity!" Clyde looked vexed. "I promised to go to see Mammy Kinney this afternoon, and she'll be waiting for me. I can't disappoint her."

"No," Mrs. Taliaferro was very decided about this, "you must not disappoint her. Perhaps, Paulina, you would rather wait for Clyde?"

"Just as you say," Paulina spoke slowly, "but I am perfectly willing to go. I fancy he is eager to get the books arranged."

"He is eager to get them arranged," Clyde said. "Tomorrow two of the church societies have to meet in the Sunday school room. That must be why he is going to work on Sunday."

"Then suppose you don't telephone Mr. Fellows and we settle it that I go alone," Paulina suggested.

"That is very sweet of you, dear," Mrs. Taliaferro smiled at Paulina. "You don't know what a pleasure it is for me to have you here. I always wanted another daughter."

"Why, Paulina's blushing," Clyde cried.

"You are so kind to me, Cousin Elizabeth," Paulina said.

As she spoke she could not look at Clyde because she feared to meet her discerning eye; and yet there was something in the fact that Clyde did not altogether like her that piqued her interest and stimulated her to fresh exertions. No matter what she said or did, Clyde remained unenthusiastic; and while this was not outwardly visible, for the girl was always politely friendly, a barrier had sprung up between them which though atmospheric in its quality was, none the less, as tough and as impenetrable as a hedge of thorns. Mrs. Taliaferro's attitude had been much more pleasing. From the first she had accepted Paulina and, to draw them closer together, had begged the girl to call her Cousin Elizabeth.

"Every one here is related," she explained with her charming smile, "and I don't wish you to feel lonesome. You have got to love Middleborough."

"I do," Paulina had said; and some uncontrollable impulse had made her kiss Mrs. Taliaferro. If the skeptical Clyde had been around she could not have done this. She would have felt ill at ease, and as uncomfortable as she did now.

"It's nice of you to help Minnie," Clyde's tones bespoke approval, "and I'll leave you at the church on the way to Mammy Kinney's."

"Do, daughter," Mrs. Taliaferro had said; and then she began to talk of Little Ranny and how pathetically lonesome he had been without Polly and Margery. "He is much happier now that I pretend they send him messages," she added gravely.

"Oh, Mother!" Clyde cried and laughed hysterically.

Mrs. Taliaferro looked a little sheepish.

"I did just as many silly things to please you, Clyde," she said with dignity, "but if you want to make fun of your mother, of course, I cannot prevent your doing so."

"It was such a cunning, darling thing," Clyde said apologetically.

"Don't be a little goose," her mother counselled.

"How can I help being a little goose when my mother's a big goose?" And as Mrs. Taliaferro answered this question by the withdrawal of her presence Clyde trailed after her, singing in an extremely high-pitched, affected voice.

"Goosey, goosey, gander, where shall I wander?
Upstairs, downstairs, in my lady's chamber."

That afternoon when Clyde and Paulina started forth, Clyde reverted to the subject of the books.

"I am awfully glad you are willing to go alone, Paulina," she said. "I hate to leave Minnie in the lurch; but I always visit Mammy Kinney on Sunday afternoon. She's bedridden, you see, and lives with her married daughter; and when they 'go to meeting', she is left by herself, with just Benjy, her six-year-old grandson, to run errands for her. When all the family are sitting around I don't care to visit there."

"I should think not!" Paulina exclaimed with horror.

Clyde laughed outright.

"I don't mind their being coloured if that's what you mean," she said. "They are all nice, but I can't talk to Mammy the same way. She likes me by myself."

"Is it safe for you to go there alone?"

"Of course," Clyde smiled again. "Sometimes I meet one of the boys and he brings me home," she said consciously.

They walked in silence for a few blocks. For Middleborough it was not a particularly wide street, and the poplars that edged the sidewalks were fine, tall, upspringing trees. The houses, too, had quaint little yards, with always

a tree or a bit of shrubbery; and this helped to lend a spacious air and a greater degree of greenness. Had the houses been closer together, or had they been built nearer the sidewalk, the charming effect of the street would have been spoiled. Middleborough could not afford to lose its type, for, after all, its type was Middleborough.

"How fast the leaves are coming out," Clyde said.

"Yes," Paulina looked down the green vista ahead of her, "you are at least a month in advance of the North. It must be wonderful here in summer."

"I like it best now," Clyde rejoined tranquilly. "Later on the leaves get too thick and they lose their fresh color. Then the sun bakes them and we don't have enough rain to keep things fresh; but it's wonderful now, perfectly wonderful. The spring makes me think of the nicest things."

"Such as what?"

"Minnie's bed of sweet violets, for example. They are in bloom now. I'll show them to you." Clyde's voice had lost its dreaminess. "We'll walk up his pathway, and through the side entrance to the Sunday school room; or, as I am late for Mammy Kinney's, it will be better still if you will let me leave you at the gate. Here we are now. You can't get lost, and there are the violets."

"Very well," Paulina said. "As you say, I can't get lost."

Clyde nodded her head and marched briskly off; and Paulina smiled as she unlatched the gate.

She did not stop to analyse her feelings; but she was conscious of being pleased with Clyde for leaving her. She wanted to walk alone up the minister's path and smell his sweet violets. She liked the flower boxes about his porch and, above all, she liked the man himself. This, in spite of his ministerial calling, was a creature of flesh and blood; not a bound together collection of Bible precepts of the most disagreeable order. She tried to imagine how it would have felt to have been reared here among these kindly, but distinctly funny, people; but there was really no place in Mid-

dleborough for the Reverend Lemuel. Since she had been thrown so intimately with Mr. Fellows, and had seen that it was possible to make a combination of a man and a preacher, she had come to the conclusion that there was no place anywhere for her father. It had not been the man's calling but the man himself who had proved so impossible and so objectionable. "Just my luck to have drawn him," she thought bitterly as she stooped to pick some of the minister's violets; and then she saw the minister's shadow fall athwart the flower bed; and, for a few minutes, her own shadow was enveloped in that of Mr. Fellows. Instantly she straightened up.

"I have been stealing your violets," she said.

"You are welcome, but where is Clyde?"

"She had to go to see Mammy Kinney."

"I forgot that," he said quickly. "Thank you for coming to tell me."

"I didn't come to tell you. I came to work," Paulina said simply.

"Without Clyde? Now that was good of you." There was a ring in his voice that proved how good he honestly thought she was.

Paulina coloured high with a pleasure she could not have shown under the espionage of Clyde; and without the embarrassment she sometimes felt in the presence of her adopted Cousin Elizabeth. Never had she schemed to meet this man; never had she connected him, even remotely, with an "iron in the fire"; and there was a tie between them that she did not possess with another soul in Middleborough. He and she were aliens in a strange land. Besides he liked her, she knew, though she was truthful enough to admit that his interest in her might be purely for the sake of the Taliaferros. A delicious sense of well-being and well-doing waxed within her as she followed the minister through the opening in the hedge, into the yard of the church, and down the flight of steps to the door in the side of the building itself.

"I am tremendously glad you decided to help me," he

gave a pleased laugh as he led the way into the Sunday school room, "and if you will wait until I open this shutter, you will see that I am prepared for work. The pens, ink, labels, and mucilage are on the table; and a great many of the books are already sorted into piles, according to the alphabet, you understand. All you have to do is to paste."

"And you?"

"Oh, I must keep on sorting; for though Miss Jessie is as methodical as possible, the children seem to eat up the labels."

"You have a pretty view."

Paulina thought it safer not to comment on the Sunday school room, which appeared to her frightfully bare and unattractive. The furniture was old and badly in need of paint; and the melodeon was small, so small that it had the air of a well-varnished dry goods box. The place was large and clean, with plenty of light and sunshine; but, to her mind, it was nothing more or less than a big barn, and, instantly, she wondered if the minister's salary was as inadequate as the room.

"What a magnificent waste," she said to herself, "of a most attractive man. What a pity to bury a person of his mental attainments in Middleborough."

It was plain to her that Mr. Fellows looked at the matter from exactly the opposite view-point. Obviously the battered desks, the nicked benches, the general simplicity of the whole did not grate upon nor offend an eye that, judging from his flowers, must be keenly alive to the beautiful. His expression was eloquent of satisfaction as he stood in a state of pleased abstraction, staring at the broad shaft of light that poured through the now opened window and filled every cranny of the room. It was as if he saw nothing but the golden sunshine; as if the smaller, vexing details had passed him by. Perhaps that was it. Had they really passed him by, or had he deliberately ignored these trifles as being beneath his notice? Paulina wondered at his satisfaction and his apparent lack of ambition. With the world

before him he had been content with Middleborough. But why? Insistently her brain reiterated this question, and the answer was writ at once in letters of fire. Clyde, that was it, Clyde. It was the secret of his contentment, the secret of his willingness to wait in this quiet spot where, as Clyde often said, nothing ever happened unless, indeed, you were unfortunate enough to die. How skilful he was about it, and how patiently he bided his time!

An angry little mist filled Paulina's eyes as she thought of Clyde, whose hands were overflowing with the bounties of life, having this last gift laid at her feet. It was like giving largess to a princess; giving it, she meant, in the presence of hollow-eyed, hungry beggars. It was not that she thought Clyde in love with the minister; indeed, she doubted if the girl were in love with any one. Clyde, while not exactly selfish, was a self-absorbed young person; and it did seem unnecessary and not quite fair that she should possess so much, she who had done so little. There was no use to prate of justice, Paulina thought sternly. There was no justice. For Clyde to have youth, happiness, love showered upon her while she, Paulina, had been obliged to sell herself to secure the roof that had sheltered her and the food that she had eaten! There was no balance in the scales. It was unfair, palpably and maddeningly unfair.

"As you say, I have a wonderful view," the minister's voice broke in on her reverie, "and in summer I sit here and write my sermons. I can see a far way up the street, and that's company for me; and yet I am a little bit out of the reach of my congregation. If to-day were not 'meeting day,' " he laughed softly, "I could treat you to some singing. My cook sings all day long. Have you ever heard 'Roll, Jordan, Roll' or 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot?'"

"No," Paulina said.

"Well, you are going to have plenty of opportunities." There was a touch of dismay in Mr. Fellows' tone as he somewhat ruefully surveyed the numerous mounds of books. "You may have heard by this time that my Sunday school's

a mania with me; and I'll admit it's my pet hobby. Clyde and Olive and Sally were in the first classes I ever formed; and you can see how good they are to me."

"And do you never get tired," Paulina asked passionately "of warming your hands at other people's fire?"

"No," Mr. Fellows said cheerfully. "I am always glad to find a good fire. An empty hearthstone chills and discourages me more than I can tell you."

Paulina bit her under lip. Her hearthstone had always been empty—if she applied Mr. Fellows' words to herself. That was a foolish trick of hers to always find a hidden meaning in the simplest sentence. In this case it was more than ridiculous. Mr. Fellows was not the sort of man to preach at you as the Reverend Lemuel would have done; and he would never stoop to be guilty of a secret fling. Of that she felt sure; but she also realised that, if she desired to show to advantage before the inhabitants of Middleborough, she must keep a guard upon herself. Their standpoint might be old-fashioned, distorted if you like, yet there was a singular unanimity in their views; and Paulina was convinced that it would be extremely difficult to explain the whys and wherefores of her past life to the good ladies who visited at the Taliaferros' home. She had wished to wash the slate clean and start again in Middleborough. An impossible desire. Always she was stopped, by a chance word here, by a chance deed there, and jerked forcibly back into the dark whirlpool that represented her unhappy childhood and her most unhappy marriage.

"Have you ever thought of leaving Middleborough?" Paulina looked directly at the minister.

"Never."

"You are so unlike these Southern people."

"My dear Mrs. Bull," Mr. Fellows was genuinely horrified, "how can you say such things? These people are my people. I have adopted Middleborough. Don't you like us?"

"Very much," said Paulina. "But, after a big city, the town does seem quiet, and the women . . ."

"Is quaint the word you want, or just old-fashioned?" the minister asked obligingly.

"I wasn't aware that I stopped for lack of words; but Clyde criticises the women and laughs at them because she says most of them are hopelessly out of date." Paulina found herself forced to defend her position.

"Clyde," said Mr. Fellows serenely, "laughs at her own mother; yet woe betide you if you laugh with her. Besides, Clyde does not really mean what she says, and I am sure you misunderstood her. I am certain she did not laugh at Middleborough people as a whole, but singled out types of women who were unfortunate enough to tickle her sense of humour. While just at present her sense of humour is abnormally developed, at heart she is a staunch friend and loves her home."

"She makes fun of everything," said Paulina obstinately contending her point. "She laughs at her mother's 'antiques' as she calls them."

"And yet," Mr. Fellows said, "if to-morrow she inherited those things she would keep every single one of them."

"She jeered at the speaker of the Anti-Suffrage meeting."

"Now, Mrs. Bull," Mr. Fellows protested, "you must not take Clyde seriously. She's very young, you know, and she's in a betwixt and a between state. At present she's somewhat of a cynic and cynicism sets oddly on her young lips. As yet she's not proven. At the bottom Clyde is magnificent; and some day she will finish playing with life and will come into her own. Then Clyde will soar."

"What do you mean by coming into her own?"

"While I know exactly what I mean, I am not sure that I can explain it to any one else," Mr. Fellows said reflectively. "The idea is something like this. Clyde is wonderfully modern, and Mr. and Mrs. Taliaferro . . ."

"Are old-fashioned," Paulina interposed.

"Not at all," Mr. Fellows corrected her firmly. "Mr. and

Mrs. Taliaferro are neither old-fashioned nor modern. They neither accept nor reject the many theories that are choking the atmosphere about us. They never consider theories at all. They have an air of fine indifference to theories that is positively refreshing. Live and let live seems to be their motto. It is most fortunate that Clyde's mother is not old-fashioned. If Clyde had been in any way coerced or intimidated she would have developed into a most objectionable young person. Mrs. Taliaferro is so sane, so sweet, so altogether wholesome that, insensibly, she has restrained her daughter."

"I think I see what you mean."

"Then I have been more explicit than I expected to be. Clyde's youth is the only obstacle in the way of her following in her mother's footsteps. It is difficult to quell youth, Mrs. Bull. It will ever stretch out to something beyond its reach. Clyde is like a growing plant, putting forth a tendril or a leaf, tentatively of course, in a dozen different directions. She wants to know and learn and yet she is not sure of herself; and so she stands 'teetering,' as the children say, in the middle of the board, striving solely to maintain her balance. When she comes into her own she will live less for herself and more for the people about her. It is because I know of her generous nature, of her many fine qualities that I say the day will come when Clyde will soar."

"I don't believe it," Paulina's heart said; and so loudly did this inward voice speak that she glanced obliquely at the minister to see if he had overheard this flat denial of his statement.

"I forgot to say," Mr. Fellows continued, much as if he were handing her the key to the situation, "that once Clyde finds out what she wants, she will see a straight road ahead of her. Whatever she sets her mind upon, she will get. All she needs is an object in life."

"Do you think getting married is her object?"

"Not necessarily. Why, she might throw herself heart

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and soul into championing some cause. I am not quite clear about that. I don't know what Clyde wants; but she is the sort of person to master life, and not have life master her. I repeat, some day Clyde will soar."

He was so deeply impressed by the mantle of prophecy that had fallen upon him that Paulina said nothing more; but, deep within her, as light as the passing of the wind, her inward voice of dissatisfaction whispered, whispered, "I don't believe it."

CHAPTER XXI

AFTER she had left Paulina Clyde breathed a sigh of relief and quickened her steps. She was not fond of sauntering, and she had to do a great deal of it when she accompanied her mother on a walk or a shopping expedition. Clyde had a long easy stride, more boyish than graceful, and she managed to cover the ground in a very short space of time. She was fond of walking alone; and although her feet sought and found the right crossings, it was purely a mechanical act on their part. Left by herself she had quickly sunk into one of her moods of abstraction that made her entirely oblivious of the passer-by. She turned off Monroe street toward the poorer quarter of the city. She still had a far distance to go and she was late.

She was so absorbed that it was a surprise to find that she had reached her destination. Mammy's daughter was comfortably off, and lived in a nice, little house set high on a terrace that formed the yard. The terrace was divided into two mounds, the one above the other, and when Clyde first saw them she had said at once they must be two long graves. Now they were gay with geraniums; nevertheless, she could not get over this first impression, and she thought these flowers too gay to plant above a corpse.

Opening the door, she went down the hall to the back parlour that had been selected for Mammy because it had the Southern exposure; for Mammy was a star boarder and could have everything to suit her fancy. Mrs. Taliaferro paid the board and the doctor's bills, and Mammy had a little money of her own to spend on small comforts. Also she was so exceedingly clever at darning, and could do such dainty hand-sewing that she could still earn something;

even if she were paralysed from her waist down and, save for the occasional use of a wheel chair, bedridden for life. Lightly as Clyde stepped, Mammy Kinney heard her.

"Is that you, Mammy's lamb?" she called out.

"Yes," Clyde said as meekly as if she had been Little Ranny and not her wilful self.

She pushed open Mammy's door; sat down in the chair beside the bed; and leaned against the spotless white tidy that Mammy kept washed and ready for her visits. Benjy brought a carpet hassock for her feet; for if Mammy treated Clyde like a baby it was a royal infant at whose knees the whole world might worship unashamed. In return for these attentions Clyde produced from the inner recesses of her blouse a set of folded paper soldiers which she bestowed upon Benjy, who immediately left the room. She could hear him crooning to himself outside Mammy's window as he examined his treasures.

"Benjy's a nice little boy," she said.

"Yes," Mammy assented, "he's a good boy, but he's mighty dark."

"Why, his father's dark, Mammy."

"Yes," Mammy said, "he comes by it natural; but, somehow, Honey, I never did hanker after a little, black, smutty-nosed nigger."

Clyde looked at Mammy with quick sympathy. Mammy was the colour of old ivory, and it did seem hard that she should have a tar-baby grandson. While her own children were as light skinned as herself, they hadn't her fine nose, her regular features. Clyde considered Mammy a beauty, and up to now, unlike Mrs. Taliaferro, she had never been saddened by the thought that Mammy was too near white to be happy. Clyde never thought about such things. To her mind Mammy Kinney was a lady, whereas Mammy Ellen was just a good, faithful old soul. She could never have loved Mammy Ellen, and she adored Mammy Kinney. She adored her slow, tender voice—Mammy had lived too long with white people not to speak almost correctly—and

she adored her rather autocratic manner, and her pink-palmed hands. Now as Mammy Kinney sat up in bed, she looked every inch an aristocrat. Though the sheets and pillow-cases were spotlessly clean and uncrumpled, Mammy had contrived to appear still more spotless, still less crumpled. She wore an immaculate kerchief about her neck, immaculate cuffs on the sleeves of her plain black waist; and, as a sort of crowning glory, upon her head she had placed an immaculate white turban that rested upon but did not hide her white hair. Truly it was indeed hard that this woman should own a little, black, smutty-nosed grandson.

"Your Ursy doesn't feel as you do, does she?" Clyde asked. "She couldn't, else she wouldn't have married Big Ben."

"Big Ben's a good husband, and he worships the ground Ursy walks on. If you are going to get married, Honey, you want a man who loves you more than you love him."

"Why, Mammy?"

"So that you can keep him, Honey. 'Tain't any pleasure holding what comes so easy, so men seem to think. You are just obliged to be happy if he worships you, and you don't break your heart over nothing; but naturally condescends to put up with him."

"Betty's husband is light, isn't he, Mammy?"

"He's a no-'count nigger," Mammy said shortly, "and he's always hanging around other girls. Betty's my own child and I've told her again and again not to stand it; and that goes to show what happens if a man don't love you more than you love him."

Sometimes Clyde thought indignantly that her mother never told her any interesting facts about life; and sometimes she thought pityingly that Mrs. Taliaferro might not know anything to tell. It was so different with Mammy Kinney who was Clyde's idea of a fount of wisdom. Now she had let drop two distinct suggestions into Clyde's brain. First that it was better to be loved than to love; and second that, after you were married, you had to keep a man's affec-

tions. The latter was worthy of the gravest consideration, and Clyde honourably admitted that this was a matter beyond her mother's ken. There seemed to be no question of holding Mr. Taliaferro; but that might be because, like Big Ben, he was a worshipping husband. How would you set about holding a man's affections, and how furious it would make you to be reduced to such depths? If such a thing happened to her what should she do? Fight, just as poor Betty was fighting now? Yes, undoubtedly, that was if she loved the man. It presented to her a new view of matrimony; for, hitherto, she had divided the wedded state into two classes, the happily married and the divorced. Divorce, she had been taught to believe, was a last resort; and since there were few divorced people in Middleborough, that meant that all the rest were happily married. You had to fall back upon divorce if, for example, the man had beaten you to a jelly as must have been true in the case of poor Paulina. Else why should she desire a divorce? Even under such extreme circumstances it was an unfortunate ambition for Paulina to possess. As far as the feelings of Middleborough were concerned, it was just as well they were passing her off as a widow. Middleborough would have deplored such desires in Pauline Selden's child.

Now Clyde had learned that there was a third state, the state where you strove to hold your husband's affections; and, instinctively, she began to put her friends to the test. Ned McFarland, Minnie, Jock? She stopped here. Jock loved girls and would always love them. If she were married to Jock would she have to hold his affections? She hoped not. Would she try to hold his affections? That was another question. A flare of feeling ran over her. Yes, she would try. She would fight with her back to the wall until they forced her upon her knees. But did she love Jock? She wished she could have put that question to Mammy Kinney.

"What made you so late?" Mammy asked.

"We've got Miss Pauline Selden's daughter staying with

us, Mammy, and I had to leave her by the church. Mother said you knew Miss Pauline Selden."

"She was right pretty and Miss Lizbeth loved her."

"Well, her daughter's right pretty, too; but somehow——" Clyde stopped because she was ashamed to speak unkindly of a woman who had been so cruelly ill-treated by her husband.

"You don't remember Miss Pauline's house. It has been pulled down now. It had a high stone wall around it, and a fountain in the middle of the garden."

"Yes," Clyde said absently, watching Mammy's hands that were, in spite of the Sabbath day, knitting away so busily. It was a beautiful thing she was working upon, a glorified wash-rag, Clyde thought.

"I am making this for you." Mammy's eyes followed Clyde's glance.

"What is it?"

"A wash-rag."

"It's a beauty," Clyde said longingly, "but there's nothing the matter with the last ones you gave me."

"They must be yellow by this time," Mammy said with superb disdain. "I am going to make you six new ones. You give the old ones to Little Ranny."

Clyde flushed with pleasure and gratitude. She rose from her chair and sat down on the edge of Mammy's bed.

"Mammy," she said childishly, "you love Clydie, don't you?"

"God knows I do."

"You haven't forgotten that night I sprained my ankle, and you were so good to me. You were always so good to me."

"I wish," for once Mammy's slow voice was a little hurried, "I wish I could be good to you now."

"Why, you are," Clyde said in honest surprise and, leaning over, patted Mammy's hand.

Then she sat silent with a smile on her face, and her hand clasping Mammy's pink palm that she so much admired. She

was thinking how astoundingly good Mammy had really been, and how she had given the best years of her life to serving her. Of course she had been well paid, but money could not buy love; and Mammy did not hesitate to say that Clyde was nearer and dearer to her than Ursy and Betty, her own children. She looked affectionately at Mammy and found the old woman's eyes fastened upon her; and, with a quick flash of insight, divined that Mammy was thinking the same thing, thinking it not reproachfully but yearningly. It was genuine mother love that shone in Mammy Kinney's eyes, love for the child that, though she had not brought into the world, she had reared and worshipped; and, in worshipping, had not forgotten to respect.

Clyde was grasping a great deal this afternoon; her tendrils were pushing out in every direction. In Mammy's eyes she saw resignation and, above all, an almost holy love for the child whose affection she so greatly craved. Generally she found no answer to her problem, but this one was easy to solve. Just so surely as she belonged to her mother, just so surely did she belong to Mammy Kinney. The colour and position of the latter had nothing to do with the matter. As she had freely taken, so she must freely give. She gazed deep into those humble, yearning eyes.

"Mammy," she said, "you know I love you, don't you?"

Mammy nodded her turbaned head.

"Would you," Clyde asked a thought tremulously, "would you like to kiss me, Mammy?"

Mammy's hand trembled in hers; but she answered firmly and clearly, "There's no call for it, Honey. You are a grown lady now. There's no call for it."

"What's a call got to do with it?" Clyde cried and threw her two arms about Mammy's neck.

CHAPTER XXII

JOCK came all the way to Mammy Kinney's to join Clyde, who met him at the door.

"I shall speak to Mammy," Jock said, and Clyde blushed as she led the way.

"You look fine, Mammy," Jock sat down unceremoniously on the edge of the bed, "and you are so dressed up I shouldn't be surprised if you were thinking of getting married again."

"I've been married once," Mammy replied with pleased dignity, "but I don't see why you don't get a wife, Mr. Jock?"

"My girl won't have me."

"Have you asked her?"

"No," Jock confessed, "I haven't, but there's no use asking her. I might be a gate-post for all she cares. If she refuses me, the fat's in the fire and you are enough of a cook to know what that means."

Mammy looked at Clyde thoughtfully.

"You are a man of small understanding, Mr. Jock," she said disdainfully, "if you take one 'no' for an answer."

Jock flushed brightly.

"Well, I'm not a man of small understandings, and I shan't take one 'no' for an answer. You hear me, Mammy?" Jock rose to his feet and stared at the old woman.

"Yes, I hear," and, for the first time, there was an edge of doubt in Mammy's voice.

It was evident that Jock was well satisfied with the stand he had taken; for he repeated his asseverations once more before they left the room, and again to Clyde after they had started homeward.

"I'm not a man of small understandings, and I shan't take one 'no' for an answer. I hope you entirely comprehend what I mean by that, Clyde?"

"For all I know you may have been born a man of small understandings," Clyde said calmly, "and you can't very well alter the way you have been born."

"Oh, can't you?" Jock ejaculated.

Clyde looked at him provokingly. Her green eyes shone. Mammy's conversation had given her a distaste for love-making and matrimony; and this, coupled with a firm determination to try Mammy's theories on her friends, encased her in an armour of indifference. Jock was overfond of girls. That put him in the class with Betty's husband; but it was a curious fact that though he loved her more than she loved him, he was not in the class with Big Ben. Jock's love-making was a series of whirlwinds of feelings; and it should be more like a steady, drenching rain, Clyde thought practically; the kind of rain that soaks you through and through until the very soles of your boots ooze water. Jock didn't belong here. In fact Clyde was uncertain how to classify him. There were tremendous hinterlands of feelings within herself that she had never tried to explore; and she let Jock drift into that shadowy region. As it was, she felt provoking; and so she set about to provoke.

"No, you can't alter the way you've been born," she mimicked Jock's very intonation.

Jock recognised this mimicry. At another time he would have laughed. This time he glared.

"The trouble with you," he said shortly, "is that you haven't any heart."

"I don't ever mean to let it run all over the garden patch, and wrap itself around any old weed," Clyde retorted angrily, with a deadly significance.

They stopped on the narrow, mean, little sidewalk and confronted each other. Had they been children they could not have been more indifferent to the curious passer-by. Luckily it was a side street, and there was no one near at

hand to gape at the two vivid young faces, both thrust forward, both crimson and hot with childish, futile anger. Clyde's red hair bristled like the comb of an angry rooster; and Jock's cheeks were swollen with his ever-growing wrath. Ever since Jock had come to Middleborough it had always been the same. As children they played together; as boy and girl they still played together; for though they had outgrown their childish games they had not outgrown each other. Above all, they had not outgrown quarrelling. They would never outgrow that. Their natures were two bright bits of steel that met and clashed; and met and clashed again, amid the flying of sparks and the noise of the conflict. Sometimes when she was with Jock, Clyde had the oddest feelings.

"Switchback sensations," she said to herself in a vain effort to fathom her own emotions. "All ups and downs; and sweeps and dashes; and, best of all, a terrifying excitement."

Some of these ideas passed through her mind.

"What a quarrelsome boy you are," she said.

"You will always find temper in a red-headed girl," Jock answered.

"Woman, not girl," Clyde corrected.

"Devil, not woman," Jock burst forth.

His puffed up cheeks collapsed. He had the air of having evicted not a word but a weighty missile from his mouth.

Clyde was struck by the ridiculous aspect of the situation, by the laughable appearance of Jock's cheeks as he hurled the word "Devil" at her.

"Come now," she said smilingly, "don't you think we are very silly?"

"If you were married to me," Jock spoke between closed teeth, "you shouldn't behave this way."

"If I were married to you," Clyde replied impishly, "I should get a divorce." Then she giggled, yes, giggled, as if the prospect of a divorce attracted her.

"You won't find that so easy," Jock's tone was ominous.

"Just when were we married?" Clyde queried sweetly.

Jock did not reply to this. He essayed to look dignified and only succeeded in looking sulky. They resumed their walk; turned a corner; and started toward the west. If they had not delayed to bicker they would have caught the sunset at its best.

"I suppose," Jock said with exceeding bitterness, "that this means we go the short way home?"

"Well, I had intended to stop by Sally's. All those children have had the mumps, but it's just as you wish, Jock."

"Just as I wish!" Jock flung back. "As if you cared what I wished. You know what you are like, Clyde Taliaferro. You are a fountain that doesn't give any water. You tantalise, but you don't refresh."

"Shouldn't you like to be the little tin dipper tied about my spout?" Clyde asked with appalling flippancy.

Jock would have preferred to burst forth again but managed to control himself. There was everything to lose and nothing to gain by quarrelling with Clyde, he thought. It was not always possible to secure her undivided companionship since she was a sociable soul, and leaned toward a trio rather than a duet. At night there was generally a "bunch of fellows" hanging around the Taliaferro home, and he didn't count Ned nor the minister. They often sat with the family. He was not in the least alarmed about the minister; but he couldn't help being sorry for Ned. He saw that Ned was in love with Clyde and had been for a long time; still he didn't have a shadow of a show. He just sat. A girl expected a man to do better than that. Ned had curious, odd ideas about women. He considered them infinitely better than men, and he treated them with the utmost courtesy. That was well enough; but girls wanted a little dash, a little bit of pep as Clyde put it. Ned didn't have any pep. Jock pitied Ned. Poor old Ned.

In consideration of all these things he let the subject of the fountain drop; and they talked about the fast vanishing sunset. On this safe topic they regained their normal poise

and, without any further controversy, they reached the Watson residence.

Little Sally was so unfeignedly glad to see them that a beautiful colour flared into her cheeks. So round, and sleek, and smooth was she that she might have been a little beaver, and she could work, too, could Little Sally, courageously and to much effect, as a beaver would. She set to work now to provide tea and cake and biscuits for her guests.

Clyde could see that Jock's appreciative eye took note of Sally's soft hands as they moved about the tea-table, and she said to herself again, "Betty's husband." Instinctively she sighed as she drank her tea and admired Sally who, with her face aglow, sat talking to Jock. She could not but admire Jock also. He was so exceedingly handsome, so exceedingly well-made that she felt vexed with Mammy Kinney for telling her about the unfortunate Betty.

"After all," she reflected sensibly, "those were not white people. It's not a bit the same thing."

"Won't you have a piece of cake, Clydie?" Jock asked.

He rose from the table and, taking the plate of cake, handed it to her. He completely shut off Little Sally from her view.

Clyde felt a twinge of compunction. If she had not been nasty she had been, to put it mildly, exceedingly aggravating this afternoon. Jock didn't often call her Clydie. That was her father's pet name for her. For a softened minute she lifted her eyes to thank him. Her heart leaped to her throat. Betty's husband suffered a total eclipse. Then the race began. Glance for glance; trot for trot; gallop for gallop; they were off and away again.

For the rest of her visit Clyde knew that her conversation was wild and distraught with the most inexplicable lapses into silence that could only be covered by eating another biscuit, another slice of cake. Since Jock was watching her she had to do this with a certain gusto. She really did not want the food; and she was sure that was what

made her feel so stuffy and ill at ease, at least she hoped that was the explanation of the hemmed-in, uncomfortable sensation that filled her with a mad desire to open all the Watsons' windows. As it was impossible to gratify this desire she said she must go home; and when she kissed Little Sally good-bye, she was not surprised to find that her hostess' face was as hot as her own.

"I knew the room was close," Clyde said to herself. "I hope I haven't caught cold."

She confided to Jock that the Watsons' parlour was stuffy, and he said at once that it was an infinite relief to get into the cool, fresh air. He grew eloquent on the subject of Clyde's appetite.

"That cake was for the Watsons' supper," he said, "and you ate it all up."

"So I did." Clyde laughed as she reflected that it was likely Jock was right in his surmise.

"And you swallowed the biscuits whole."

"I wasn't a speck hungry either," Clyde said pensively.

"Heavens!" Jock cried. "I shudder to think what would have happened if you had been in good form."

"I might even have swallowed you," Clyde said even more pensively than before.

Jock looked at Clyde queerly.

"If you were walking with Ned, Clyde, and the streets were as quiet and as deserted as they are now," he said solemnly, "you'd take his arm. You often take Mr. Fellows' arm."

"Mr. Fellows is a minister," Clyde was seized with the strongest objection to taking Jock's arm, "and I've known him always."

"And Ned?"

"Sometimes I get afraid of the dark alleys," she admitted, "and then I take Ned's arm."

"But you never take my arm?"

"That's a compliment to your courage."

"No," Jock said, "it's because you don't like me. I've noticed it for some time."

"You are talking nonsense, Jock." It had never before occurred to her what a long walk it was between her house and Little Sally's.

"No, I'm not," Jock reiterated. "If you liked me you'd take my arm."

"If you want to make a foolish point, very well." Clyde was exasperated, but she slipped her arm through Jock's. The hot blood rushed to her face. Through the silent air the click of her boots, as they hit the pavement, smote upon her ear with maddening regularity.

"Clyde," Jock whispered, "what's the use in fighting against me this way? You know you love me. I can read it in your eyes. I can. . . ."

Now Clyde's whole head was reeling. The moment that she had been staving off so long had arrived; precipitated, she had the sense to perceive, by her careless and trivial remark, "I might even have swallowed you." It was a story book case of cause and effect, something like the long rigmarole she had once learned about the battle that was lost for the need of a horseshoe nail. It was odd that she should think of such silly things with Jock's words vibrating through her like the swell of an organ. Did she, or did she not, love Jock? "Yes" and "No" cried the clamouring voices within her. He had stopped talking, stopped rather abruptly it seemed; but she still vibrated, just as any instrument vibrates long after the playing ceases. "Yes" and "No" suggested the mocking voices of her inner self. She stole a furtive peep at Jock and, to her amazement, found that he was not paying the least attention to what she was doing. While it was too dark to see his face closely Clyde divined that suddenly he had become on the lookout for something or somebody. She, too, meant to be alert. Where he looked, her eyes followed. Just ahead of them another couple walked, sprung up from the sidewalk, Clyde thought in perplexed astonishment. Though no one had

passed them, the deserted street was not as deserted at it appeared. The houses were as tightly shut as ever, but she had forgotten the cross street that was now hardly a half block away. This couple must have strayed from its badly lit depths. She had not overlooked their existence for the simple reason that they had just begun to exist. She wondered who they were. They were walking arm in arm, and the woman was the larger of the two. Clyde was sure she did not know them, sure after the most careful scrutiny of their unfamiliar backs; and yet she was frantically eager for them to reach the next lamp-post. So was Jock. In some subtle way Clyde saw that this was the reason why Jock had stopped his love-making, and that for some remarkable reason he was keyed up to an amazing pitch of interest in these other wayfarers on this deserted street. But why? But why? What connection in the world had they with those two shadowy figures? It was a riddle with no answer as far as she was concerned.

They had quickened their steps that they might identify the pursued who, at last, stood out clearly in the light of the gas lamp. It was Mrs. Spigg that they were chasing, of that there was not a shadow of doubt in Clyde's mind, and the boy with her was really quite young, about Jock's age. He might be her son.

Instinctively Clyde started to withdraw her arm from Jock's. It was an involuntary movement that she made, regretted almost as soon as it had occurred, because Jock was so exceedingly touchy this afternoon. To her surprise there was no opposition to this act of hers. Their arms swung to their sides. It was as if they had separated by mutual consent, as if they had unexpectedly fallen apart and were going to continue to fall. A chasm opened up between them.

After that there was not much conversation. They walked on, almost in silence, and before them Mrs. Spigg loitered. They set their pace by hers. Obviously they meant not to pass her. Clyde was glad to reach her house.

CHAPTER XXIII

BEFORE all the books were catalogued Paulina had been twice more to the Sunday school room; and yet again "to minister to the sick and needy," Clyde said, which put prosaically meant to settle what volumes must be discarded, and what could be neatly repaired and made respectable citizens of their former home, the library bookshelves.

On this occasion Ned McFarland accompanied them; and explained his appearance by stating that he had been to see Mr. Fellows on business and thought he might be useful in replacing the books.

"I'm Miss Jessie's right-hand man," he announced, "and you needn't hesitate to trust me. I know where A stops and B begins; and Miss Jessie has already asked me, when you are through, to bring her down to see how the books look. You can't be too careful."

"Are you a teacher, too?" Paulina asked.

"I'm the organist. I play the melodeon and lead the singing."

"Why, I had no idea you were musical," Paulina said.

She was honestly surprised. Ned McFarland did not suggest music and Jock did. She could see Jock had temperament while Ned was steady and, apparently, as unemotional as a government mule—the expression was Clyde's own and had been intended as a compliment to Ned's steadiness. Paulina considered it a very doubtful compliment. She was pleasantly disappointed in Ned.

"You don't call playing on that melodeon and leading the children's singing being musical, do you, Mrs. Bull?"

he inquired now with a twinkle in his eye. "I have a very different conception of the word. I love music, it is true; but I am not musical. Mr. Fellows is. When he plays he forgets he's in the land of the living; and there's a great deal of difference between getting the soul out of an instrument and just hitting the keys. That's all I do, just hit the keys."

So the tall, stoop-shouldered minister could get the soul out of an instrument; though, to be sure, Paulina thought cynically his business was to get souls; and he ought to be an adept in his profession, since he wasn't young and, in Middleborough, there were not many amusements to divert him from his self-chosen occupation. It was just possible that an instrument might be easier to cope with than an obdurate human being. Paulina did not belong to the yielding type, and she had baffled the Reverend Lemuel long enough to appreciate that there might be a great many thorns in the pathway of plucking souls. She looked at Mr. Fellows as he stood by Clyde's side, and she wished that she might hear him play. Clyde, the favoured, had heard him, and could hear him at any time. She wondered what sort of music he fancied; what, for example, could make him forget he was in the land of the living; and just what manner of soul he preferred to evoke. In the same breath she wondered what it was that made Clyde so attractive to men; for, after all, she wasn't a beauty, not by any manner of means. Her eyes were unusual, most unusual, but they were also most uncanny. Sometimes they were positively unpleasant. They were not unpleasant now. As she talked to the minister, they were almost tender. That was because she loved Mr. Fellows. Or did she? At that moment Paulina would have given ten years of her life for the privilege of knocking off the top of Clyde's head, and examining her remarkably quick little brain.

"The invalids are in a very bad shape, Minnie," Clyde was saying sadly. "The Katy books are gone, and the Alcotts and Peppers are fearfully battered."

"Perhaps the vestry will give us something," Mr. Fellows said consolingly.

"The vestry always skimps the Sunday school." Clyde had a habit of saying what other people thought.

"Have you forgotten our new bookcase they gave us last Christmas?"

"I don't call that being generous," Clyde retorted. "I always thought you paid for half of it."

"You must not be so quick to jump at false surmises," Mr. Fellows corrected.

"You've got a very clever way of avoiding real issues," Clyde answered with spirit. "Now did you, or did you not, give some of the money that paid for that bookcase?"

Mr. Fellows looked helpless. Paulina, as well as Clyde, could see his guilt stamped upon his face. She flung herself into the breach.

"It seems to me that every one in the church does something," she said.

"We are a gigantic trust, Mrs. Bull," Ned McFarland spoke with the utmost solemnity, "and while we don't hope to run all the other churches out of business, we are booming, positively booming." To Clyde's great delight he intoned the last "booming."

"After you once get in Minnie's clutches, Paulina," she cried, "you are exactly like a fly stuck on a sheet of fly paper. If you want to, you may wiggle; but you can't escape."

"It is to be hoped Mrs. Bull will not want to escape. You see my reputation." Mr. Fellows was absolutely unabashed.

"I shall not try to escape. I don't even intend to wiggle."

"That's right," Clyde approved. "Never start a losing fight."

"Why, I thought you fought for the pure love of fighting, Clyde," Mr. Fellows said innocently.

"I've learned that's not the best plan," Clyde declared. "I don't get half as hot as I used to get." She blushed

because she had an untimely recollection of getting exceedingly hot on the afternoon she walked home from Mammy Kinney's with Jock. She meant to forget that afternoon. It had been uncomfortable and most mysterious.

They were seated now, working away at books that might be made fit for use once more. There was plenty of work for all, and a wonderful amount of conversation. Bewildered by the innocent raillery, Paulina listened in silence. Clyde, it seemed, loved to sing and didn't have any voice; and yet Mr. Fellows encouraged her to keep on trying.

"I wish, Minnie, for your sake, it could be a little better," Clyde cried.

"If it were any better I couldn't stand it," Mr. Fellows confessed.

"It's distinctive, and rather foreign in its way," Clyde agreed with modest pride, "like the skirl of a bagpipe, or the beating of a tom-tom. I never sing in church because Emily Newton has a nice, ladylike voice. She sits right behind us, and if I started to sing she would be fearfully annoyed. In Sunday school I let myself go and have a perfectly elegant time."

"I don't take very much interest in playing the melodeon until you start to sing, Clyde," Ned McFarland said, "and then I nearly work my feet off, pumping away to try to make as much noise as you do."

"Do you?" Clyde asked.

She looked carefully at Ned's long, sober face. Its outward aspect was reassuring, and the minister's countenance was grave, too grave. Her cheeks reddened. She led the laughter against herself.

"Ned McFarland, you don't mean you have to drown my voice?" she demanded.

"I never even hear you," Ned apologised handsomely. "I wanted to get a rise out of you, Clydie."

Clydie. The nickname from Ned McFarland's lips did not make Clyde's heart jump as in the case of Jock; but it did arrest her attention. It signified to her that Ned had

forgiven her for that miserable night in the garden and was as fond of her as ever. She wished he would call her Clydie oftener. She liked him in exactly the same way she did the minister. He had a great many of the same qualities.

In the midst of this merry give and take Paulina sat silent. She could hardly reconcile her ears to what she had heard, and she would never have known she was in a Sunday school room if its flat, drab walls had not forced themselves upon her vision. It surprised her that the Reverend Lemuel, unyielding as ever in his burial robes, did not appear in their midst to exhort them against such secular language; to remind them, in words dipped in vinegar, that they were in the body of the church. They were desecrating the temple. How he would have shuddered, if a corpse could shudder, at Clyde's light, innocent laughter. "Why, Mr. Fellows is as unlike a minister as possible," Paulina cried to herself in honest indignation. "Then you can trust him," her heart answered. She could not forget that she had not been able to trust the Reverend Lemuel.

How her father would have loathed Clyde, she thought; loathed her lapses into childishness; loathed her maturity; loathed her affectionate, intimate familiarity. He would have put her down with an iron hand. It was irreverent to be familiar with a minister of the Lord. Clyde would have had a short shrift here. But would Clyde have presumed to be familiar? Paulina herself had been rebellious, but never familiar. She had no leanings that way. Her whole soul had cried out against, not toward, the Reverend Lemuel. There was a big step between rebellion and familiarity. No young people had ever worked for her father as these young people worked for Mr. Fellows. There was a magnetic quality about this man. She, who had hitherto scorned religion, felt, perhaps, there might be something in it. She was impressed by the fact that Mr. Fellows believed just as her father had believed; yet holding the two men side by side in her thoughts, she was struck by the opposite views of their belief. She had seen apples like that, red on one

side and green on the other. It was a pity that she had always been given the unripe half. It had been poor food for a rebellious girl. For the first time she was beginning to see that there was a crooked twist in her outlook on life.

"A penny for your thoughts, Mrs. Bull?" Ned McFarland said.

"I was thinking," Paulina answered slowly, "that it was pleasant to use the Sunday school room this way. To laugh, and talk, and make merry here seems much better than shutting up this room, and bringing it out just for Sunday."

"Who does do that, Paulina?" Clyde asked.

"My father did. He was a minister. He never allowed meetings to be held in the Sunday school room."

"Where did you meet?" Clyde inquired.

"In the living-room of our house. They were all older people. There were very few young people in our church."

"Did your father use his house as a matter of convenience, or did he think it wrong to use the Sunday school room?" Clyde was determined to get at the root of the matter.

"He thought it wrong to hold meetings in the Sunday school room. He considered that the church as a building was dedicated solely to church services."

"What an unpleasant parent," Clyde said to herself; she had no idea what consolation Paulina would have derived from the utterance of these words. She thought of Mr. Taliaferro and his confidential wink; and she felt tolerant, even sorry, for Paulina.

There was an awkward silence broken at last by Mr. Fellows.

"I think, Mrs. Bull," he said gently, "that if you will look into it you will find that, fundamentally, all ministers are alike. They have one common object, one common ambition to unite them; and though they approach that object, that ambition, by different pathways, at heart they have the same desire to further the work of their God. Their methods may differ since each man, we must remember, has

his own view-point, his own peculiarities. Feeling as I do that every man can best use the tools fitted to his hands, I should be doing wrong if I did not open my Sunday school room, and encourage the young people of my congregation." It was as if he apologised to Paulina and her absent father for the laxness of his views, for the apparent levity of his conduct; while, at the same time, he showed plainly that he meant to continue.

"Minnie's off again," Clyde said to herself. She might have had reference to a horse which had suddenly broken its halter and had cantered smartly down the street. She was not aware of the least disrespect in her mental attitude; indeed, disrespect to Mr. Fellows was a situation beyond her powers of thought. As a matter of fact she loved Mr. Fellows to be "off again." She was proud of him now, and she was glad to discover that he secretly agreed with her that Paulina possessed a most disagreeable parent.

"It would be nice if the age of miracles had not passed," she said, "and the Lord sometimes spoke to His people, as He did in the ancient days, you remember. Then every one would know exactly what to do."

"The Lord does speak to His people," Mr. Fellows said, "and as often as He did in the ancient days. It is we, His people, who will not hear Him; or, if we hear, we will not heed."

"Was this Mr. Fellows?" Paulina asked herself. Assuredly not. It was rather the trumpet call of some saint declaring a faith as old as the ages. Just so righteously sad and stern might the angel of the Lord have looked as he drove Adam and Eve out of Eden. Mr. Fellows' voice echoed and vibrated through the big, empty room like the long sustained notes of a clarinet. His quizzical, slightly detached manner had sloughed away. He was the fighting minister now, the embodiment of the church militant. It was no wonder he held his congregation in the hollow of his hands. He was ready to battle for his faith. He asked no quarter in his fight for souls.

Paulina was surprised to see that Clyde and Ned McFarland were not as deeply stirred as she was, and then she reminded herself that this was nothing new to them. They had often seen this transformation take place. They had often heard and responded to that trumpet call. Such doctrines were strange to her. She had been troubled to her yeasty depths; troubled and made to feel ashamed, if only for a minute, in her own eyes.

"I think, Minnie," Clyde said, "that is a wonderful idea. It makes you think," she concluded simply.

"Thank you, Clyde," Mr. Fellows said.

"Why don't you preach a sermon about it?" Clyde asked.

"Perhaps I shall," Mr. Fellows answered.

"Clyde," Ned McFarland interposed, "have you noticed how much work Mrs. Bull has done? She hasn't stopped a second to rest, and observe the pile of books in front of her. While we talk, she works. Don't you feel reproached?"

"How did you manage to accomplish so much, Paulina?" Clyde asked.

Paulina did not answer. Feeling as she had felt, she found it impossible to join in, what seemed to her, a most trivial conversation about the necessity of repairing old books. She prided herself on her lack of sentiment, nevertheless, she could not understand Ned's and Clyde's attitude.

If Mr. Fellows had succeeded in making Clyde think, there were no outward symptoms of inward disturbance. Perhaps she was accustomed to the introduction of such topics into her every-day life. Ned was also gravely unconcerned. They seemed perfectly satisfied to take up the discussion of their library; and they were greatly stirred over the spending of various sums of imaginary money donated by what Clyde dubbed an "economical vestry." Ned could select the books for the boys; Clyde, for the girls, and they would go together to the bookstore. A consultation on the spot was helpful.

Mr. Fellows approved of these arrangements. He showed

his interest by a suggestion here, a proposition there; but though he had changed; had lapsed into the kindly "Minnie" again, Paulina could not rid herself of the disturbing impression of Mr. Fellows, the preacher of the Gospel and the servant of the Lord. It was his thought that everything had to be referred back to Miss Jessie. Nominally she was still the head of the Sunday school.

"She expects you to call upon her," Ned McFarland said to Paulina.

"I can't go alone." Paulina was positive about this.

"Will you go with me, Mrs. Bull?"

It was the minister who spoke with such flattering quickness. Clyde had intended to offer, but Mr. Fellows had been quicker. He was taking a great deal of trouble to be nice to Paulina, and Paulina was pleased. She even stopped working.

"I shall be delighted to go with you, Mr. Fellows," she said.

"How about next Thursday?"

"Oh, don't go on Thursday," Clyde begged. "I've promised to help Sally mind the Watson children. Their nurse is going on an excursion."

"Every other afternoon next week is filled," Paulina hoped she detected a note of satisfaction in Mr. Fellows' voice, "and it would not do to keep Miss Jessie waiting. You go with us another time, Clyde."

"Then we have decided on Thursday?" Paulina asked.

"We have decided on Thursday," Mr. Fellows replied

CHAPTER XXIV

IN all small towns that have risen above the littleness of villages, and have not yet attained the dignity of big cities, life moves in a certain quiet routine. There are the inevitable daily duties to perform; the inevitable round of weekly and monthly meetings to attend; and the inevitable series of small social entertainments to which every one is invited, and to which every one goes.

Middleborough was no exception to this rule. It had its duties, its meetings, its entertainments; and since it was a Southern town, and had not sprung up in a night, it boasted ancient customs and ancient traditions that could either be tied clog-like about the feet, or clapped wing-fashion upon the shoulders of the rising generation, who were placed in the awkward situation of accepting the said customs and traditions; because, otherwise, it would be sheer presumption to think it could hope to do better than its elder.

Middleborough was deeply ingrained in the habits of hospitality; Middleborough was strongly imbued with the spirit of reverence for her former beaux and belles; Middleborough was glad to take back into her arms that which had originally emanated from herself. Paulina's mother had become a tradition; but Pauline Selden's daughter was an actual reality. It was the duty and pleasure of Middleborough to receive her. It was not necessary for Paulina to make friends. Was she not Pauline Selden's daughter? What need had she of a better guarantee?

Middleborough, to be sure, was sadly puzzled by Paulina's mourning. It was impossible to ignore her lack of sombreness, her handsome apparel, her hat lined through with white crêpe. Middleborough would have wished to

hold up its hands in horror at this travesty of widowhood; but Middleborough was charitable. It pitied Paulina. It made allowances for her Northern rearing. It was surprised that so good a thing could have come out of Nazareth. Above all, Middleborough was essentially human. Had Paulina been plain of face and awkward of form; had she been ill-bred and unaccustomed to the ways of gentlefolk; had she, in short, been thoroughly unattractive, and still persisted in garbing herself in garments that did not mourn, Middleborough could not have sat silent. It would have been forced to speak its mind, and it far preferred to be charitable. It smiled upon Paulina. Paulina smiled back.

It surprised her to find how astonishingly easy it was to smile, especially as, at first, she had looked with some disdain upon the home of her mother's childhood and youth. While from a shopping or a commercial point of view she still considered it a poor little town, she had sense and discrimination enough to detect a certain fine flavour in Middleborough, a flavour she was not used to, a flavour that tickled and refreshed her jaded palate. Paulina had always felt immeasurably above the people with whom she had been thrown. Here she met her equals. She might secretly mock at what she assumed to be their obsolete ideas and ideals; she might inwardly smile at their quaint customs; but she bowed her head in acknowledgment of their birth and breeding. She was forced to admit that, from a social standpoint, she found Middleborough charming. Sometimes she wished that she had not been so frank with the minister the day they had been together in the Sunday schoolroom. Yet since Mr. Fellows liked her, all was well, she told herself and she prepared to forget her hasty criticism of Middleborough. She was a spent rower who had managed to draw herself away from the strong current of the river into a quiet, sheltered inlet, where she might rest upon her oars. Paulina wanted rest and yet more rest. She was well content.

Had not her mourning interfered Middleborough would have liked to have been intensely hospitable to Paulina. As it was, it did what it could. It hit upon the happy plan of inviting her to a meal, a Sunday dinner or a lavish supper, and while it was spoken of as "just the family" there were always one or two extra guests. Mr. Fellows' congregation had a single inspiration, which was to entertain Paulina and the minister at one and the same time. It was a wise and far-seeing thing to do, and it was Paulina's widowhood that suggested the idea. A minister was fit company for all who were plunged into affliction. Before the day had rolled around for her to call on Miss Jessie, she had dined once and supped twice with the minister.

"It's very hard on you," he said seriously, "to meet me wherever you go."

"I hope you don't feel that way about it," Paulina replied still more seriously. "Now I am so glad to see you that I am aggrieved when I am invited out and find you are not coming to the party. You are the most intimate friend I have in Middleborough."

"Very soon you should be intimate with at least half of Middleborough. Young people make friends easily."

"Do you call thirty young?"

"Why not?"

"I feel a thousand years old," Paulina said bitterly.

Mr. Fellows noticed the bitterness. In spite of his somewhat distraught manner he was keenly observant, most attentive when he appeared most inattentive. He was accustomed to take the meagre facts doled out to him by his parishioners, and to patch them together until he formed a valuable, if not entirely accurate, picture of the whole.

"Relatively speaking, you seem young to me," he said, "but since you object to that word, how about youngish?"

"Horrible."

"It's not my choice," Mr. Fellows reminded her.

Paulina laughed. The hard, ugly lines about her mouth relaxed.

"I don't see how I can talk that way," she said almost contritely, "when every one has been so kind to me. If I were a stranger and had left my native home, I should come straight to Middleborough and have the inhabitants take me in."

"It's just possible they might not take you in."

"Absurd! They've been lovely to me."

"So they have, but that's partly because you are Pauline Selden's daughter. It's the quality I admire most about Middleborough people, they stick by their own. Now I am well acquainted with Pauline Selden."

"I wish you had really known her," Paulina said.

"I wish I had."

"She was so sweet," Paulina whispered.

"I am sure she was," Mr. Fellows said.

Paulina's face softened; and as the resemblance to her mother increased, the earmarks of the Reverend Lemuel diminished. She was pleased that Mr. Fellows had heard of Pauline Selden in the glory of her young girlhood, not as a blind woman dependent upon George Bull for support. Here a hundred voices proclaimed her beauty, a hundred tongues told of her goodness. These were her mother's people. Paulina looked the minister directly in the eyes with the soft, warm, tender look she had sometimes bestowed upon Mrs. Sprague. Then almost you might have said that she was a beautiful woman. It is to be noted that Mr. Fellows did appraise her as a beautiful woman.

"When I first came to Middleborough," he said under the influence of that look, "the old Selden house was still standing. It was occupied by some people named Folly and they sold it to a family of Shepherds. Then it stood empty for a couple of years and, finally, it was pulled down."

"How long ago was that?" Paulina asked.

"About eight years ago, I think," Mr. Fellows replied.

"The way I happen to know so much about it is that I took a fancy to the old place, and I felt that I could not see it often enough."

"Was it so pretty?"

"Not pretty but charming, just my idea of a home. The house had a great, wide, square hall that opened up to the roof; and a wide staircase ending in a gallery that led to the bedrooms. You could stand in the gallery and look down into the hall, and, at the back of the house, there was a wonderful old yard with some fine trees in it. There were two I noticed in particular, with planked seats in their lower branches."

"They were named Pauline and Elizabeth," Paulina said.

A dozen little forgotten incidents crowded into her mind, incidents that Mrs. Sprague had told her all those years ago, little incidents that she considered too trivial to remember. She was like a piece of ground that was being upspaded. Who could tell what might come to light? Those trees! Until now she had absolutely forgotten them.

"Ah, I see," Mr. Fellows said, "named for your mother and Mrs. Taliaferro. And there was the dolphin, the ungainly iron dolphin that rose from the middle of the fountain."

"There were four little dolphins at its side, marking the four points of the compass." Paulina felt another dead memory come to life.

"After the Shepherds left I often walked around the old garden; and then some boys plundered the house, and so they locked the gate. You can see I have always known Pauline Selden. It makes me a family friend."

"Yes," Paulina said.

Here was another link between herself and Mr. Fellows, a link of which she had not dreamed. It seemed odd to think that he, not she, should have seen her mother's home, should have sat in her mother's garden. It was odd, but it was pleasant. It was a distinct link and while she exclaimed to herself at the oddity of the matter, it was really the pleasant side that kept cropping up in her mind. She thought of it now, and she thought of it later as they sat in Miss Jessie's parlour; and as they nibbled the cakes the

minister had insisted upon demanding as soon as he entered the house. How pleasant, pleasant, pleasant, murmured her subconscious mind. Whether it was due to the constant reiteration of the word Paulina did not know; but she felt that she herself was growing pleasanter every moment.

Miss Jessie, clad in her best grey silk, rested on the extreme edge of a small, straight-backed chair, a chair that if it were touched up a little, Paulina thought regretfully, could be made into a gem. It had a black lacquered frame, a cane seat, and vines of roses and ferns running wild over the lacquer. Even the small legs were ornamented and it was one of a set; Paulina saw the others in different corners of the room. Miss Jessie sat as stiffly as if she had been a dart, a silver dart, since her hair was white, and glistened as if it had been freshly sprinkled with silver mica.

"I say, my dear," she said to Paulina, "that your mother was my Sunday school scholar, and a sweet, lovely girl. It was a pleasure to teach her. I had six girls in my class and I found that number as many as I could handle. It was before your time, Mr. Fellows, and, of course, I was very young myself; but in those days all the young people worked for the church."

"I think my young people do very well," the minister said deprecatingly.

"Fairly well, fairly well," Miss Jessie conceded, "though they don't go to church at night as often as they might, and there isn't a one I would trust with the library. You came just in the nick of time, my dear."

"I hope you are going to like the way the books are arranged."

"I know I shall," here Miss Jessie was graciousness itself, "for my young friend, Ned McFarland, tells me that you followed precisely my own plans."

"We did."

"It seemed to me that I had divided up the spaces as well as it could be done," Miss Jessie spoke with pardonable egotism, "and you must take good care of the things

until I get back again. Has any one told you that you resemble your mother?"

"Every one says that."

"And to think," Miss Jessie said pityingly, "that you should have had to live North all your life. It is too sad."

"The climate is very nice," Paulina said, "a little cold in winter; but the summers are delightful. You have been to some of those Northern resorts, haven't you, Miss Jessie?"

"I have never crossed Mason and Dixon's line in my life."

"Some summer you must try one of the Northern places."

"Never," Miss Jessie exclaimed with an energy that was almost frightening. "I can't imagine myself going North. I dislike the Yankees. The South is good enough for me. Why, during the war when the Yankees marched through Middleborough, and every house had to show the United States flag, I made mine into a door-mat that I might wipe my feet upon it as I went in and out of the house."

"I never thought about that," Paulina said.

"Young people rarely think," Miss Jessie retorted.

An angry red mounted to Paulina's cheek. What a silly old lady, she thought contemptuously, who could hark back to a war fought all those years ago, and speak with pride of belonging to the beaten side! An extremely silly old lady! It was a wonder people put up with her vagaries. It was her age they humoured, of course, her age and her increasing infirmities. She flashed a glance of understanding at Mr. Fellows, and was bewildered to find that he was gazing upon Miss Jessie with pleasure, and with something akin to admiration in his eyes. She would have liked to think that she was mistaken; but in reality there was no doubt in her mind; only a terrific shock at discovering that some quality in Miss Jessie's sentiments had appealed to the minister. What could he see to admire in this opinionated little old woman?

"We must all make allowances for Mrs. Bull, Miss Jessie," he said exactly as if she, Paulina, had been in fault. "She

takes a Northern view of our South. After she has been with us a while, you'll see she won't be tempted by the North. We must do our best to make up to her for the time she has lost. Imagine, if you can, what it must mean to her not to have lived in Middleborough?"

"I can't imagine existing under such circumstances," Miss Jessie replied solemnly.

Had Paulina been a child who had lived its small span of life in an underground cave, with never a glimpse of the sunshine; and, surviving this, was still a sane, normal specimen of childhood, Miss Jessie could not have looked at her more sadly. It is even possible she was a fraction annoyed by Paulina's virility.

"In spite of my feelings," she said briskly, "I can't help hoping that this young person, during her stay here, will learn to appreciate what she has missed."

"I am sure," Mr. Fellows replied with infinite relish, "that this young person already appreciates the charms of Middleborough." His eyes twinkled as he delicately stressed the words "young person."

"I do appreciate Middleborough," Paulina laughed.

As the minister said, you had to look at matters relatively. Perhaps she was a young person after all. Perhaps. . . . She stopped for sheer lack of imagination. She could not pretend to conjecture what might happen next; but perhaps. . . . The vague hiatus that followed was full of pleasant nothingness. Pleasant! Again the use of the term; yet it described it exactly, pleasant nothingness.

"I can quite understand, my dear," Miss Jessie spoke inquiringly, "that, as yet, Middleborough means nothing to you; but how about your mother? Didn't she often long for her Southern home?"

"She often spoke of it," Paulina said slowly.

Her memory carried her back to her childhood, her girlhood, her womanhood. She had been correct in her answer to Miss Jessie. Though Mrs. Sprague had often spoken of her Southern home, in all her life Paulina could not re-

member that her mother had ever expressed a longing for Middleborough. Just why was that, for longed she must have? Paulina was not used to groping in the dark like this. She found it actually hurt her to think of her mother's longing. It hurt her more to try to explain her mother's silence. She began to see dimly that she had not measured up to the best and the fullest in her intercourse with Mrs. Sprague. She had loved; but she had not always sympathised. She had not troubled to think what life had meant to this woman who had given her birth. She had concerned herself solely with her own dissatisfactions, her own unhappiness, her own ceaseless desires and thwarted cravings. Meanwhile her mother had longed, but never complained, never. Paulina felt there was but one apology she could offer Mrs. Sprague.

"Until I came here," she said, "I don't believe I ever understood about my mother. I did not know it before; but now I see that all her life she longed for Middleborough. She never complained, never."

It was a relief to voice her thoughts. There was something fine and noble about this. She must make clear Mrs. Sprague's attitude. Poor Paulina! It was hard for her to apologise, even to her dead mother; and harder still for her to realise what a small reparation she was offering for those long years of splendid silence.

Miss Jessie rose from her black lacquered chair. She came to Paulina's side and patted her hand. Those pats made Paulina feel young, too young, made her feel like a forlorn, lonely little girl who was being comforted.

"Come to see me often, dear," Miss Jessie said. "I'm old and I'm cross, but I loved your mother. We can talk of her." Her old eyes were full of moisture.

"Ah," said Paulina softly.

She felt strangely moved. It had been worth while, the offering of this humble apology. Her mother understood; Miss Jessie understood; and Mr. Fellows understood. It seemed to her that he always understood; that, with him,

explanations were so many superfluous words. His quick perception was probably due to his ministerial calling, or was it a gift? She preferred to think it a gift. When she remembered the Reverend Lemuel, she knew it was a gift. She wondered how she had contrived to forget the Reverend Lemuel.

It was not a visit but a visitation they paid Miss Jessie. It surprised Paulina that she was not bored, that she allowed Mr. Fellows to override her half-hearted efforts to bring the call to a close. When they left the afternoon was gone; but, after all, there was no reason to regret the spending of an afternoon. She had nothing to look forward to, she thought forlornly.

"And now," Mr. Fellows said, "I shall show you where your mother's home used to be."

"Have we time? I can't be late for supper."

"You couldn't be late for the Taliaferros' supper," Mr. Fellows answered.

Paulina laughed again. She was getting accustomed to the odd meal hours, and some Taliaferro was always missing, generally Clyde.

"If Clyde is at the Watsons' there is no telling when she will return," Mr. Fellows declared.

"She really seemed to want to mind the children," Paulina said.

"That's easily explained," Mr. Fellows smiled. "The Watson children don't have to be minded. They want to be amused, and Clyde loves to play. They all play together; Sally, Clyde, Joe, and all the other ninety and nine small Watsons."

"It's odd that Clyde and Sally are such friends," Paulina observed.

"No," Mr. Fellows said, "they fit in perfectly. Clyde's mentality is far greater, but Sally has quantities of common sense. She's a sweet, unselfish girl, and a fine companion for Clyde."

"Clyde does not really like me," Paulina said.

"I can't see how you got that notion." Mr. Fellows was vexed and plainly showed it.

Paulina did not answer and, by common consent, they let the subject drop. In fact they did not mention Clyde's name for the rest of the afternoon.

After he left Paulina in good time for the Taliaferros' supper, Mr. Fellows started to group together the facts of her life. He always did this with the members of his congregation, and surely now Paulina was a sort of parishioner. He did not disguise from himself that she interested him, and that he intended to see a great deal of her. He turned over in his mind what data he had acquired. She had a sweet and lovely mother, a fanatical father, and a brute of a husband. She was now a widow and singularly alone in the world. She's poor and proud, he thought pityingly. With the Taliaferros she must feel content, if not happy. They would be good and kind to her, and they might induce her to settle in Middleborough. The last idea pleased him. He could not think of a better place for a small income.

CHAPTER XXV

THE days slipped into weeks, and the weeks into months, and every one almost forgot that an epidemic of mumps had swept over Middleborough. Almost, but not entirely, for Mrs. Taliaferro could not forget with Little Ranny's pale face before her. Illness had gone hard with Little Ranny. It transformed a healthy, silent little boy into a languid, tearful child who walked very rarely, and sat a good deal in his mother's lap. There was nothing the matter with him, the doctor had said, but he must be amused and kept out of doors as much as possible. There was the garden. Nothing could be better.

Nothing could have been better; only, unfortunately, Little Ranny had turned against the garden, and would have none of it. He had been so eager to get out of doors; he had so painstakingly set the three chairs against the big tree; and he had waited and waited. When he came in he was crying and could not be comforted; for Polly Wobbles and Margery Wops were not in the garden and, without his boon companions, the place was as nothing to Little Ranny.

"They have absolutely disappeared," Mrs. Taliaferro said sadly.

"How could they disappear," Clyde argued, "when they never existed except in Little Ranny's imagination?"

"Well, they have disappeared to him," Mrs. Taliaferro said, "and he is almost heart-broken."

All of which was perfectly true; for though Ranny refused to talk about his former playmates, he drooped and pined for their society. Even the self-absorbed Clyde saw that. She waited until she was alone with her brother.

"See here, Ranny," she said, "why don't you stick a flag

into the ground, under your tree I mean, so that Polly and Margery will know where to find you?"

"Find me, Clydie?" the little boy asked.

"They think you've gone away," Clyde said, "you've been sick so long, and so they have stopped coming here."

"I wasn't away. Mother talked to them every day."

"I think mother got mixed, and they didn't understand her. Depend on it, they will come back."

"When?" Ranny asked rapturously.

"I don't know," Clyde answered, "perhaps not until the summer's gone, but they are sure to come back."

"Sure, Clydie?"

"Sure," Clyde said easily. It was a long time before the fall and, of course, the ridiculous children might come back. Why not? It all depended on the strength of Little Ranny's imagination.

It was quite a triumph for her the day she installed the child under his favourite tree, with Mrs. Taliaferro on one side of him; and on the other, two empty rockers swaying in the breeze. To Clyde there was something very pathetic about those empty chairs. True they had never been filled; but, for the first time, Ranny must see them as they really were, two small vacant chairs. She had made a splendid flag for Ranny and she planted it firmly in the ground, in full view of the street. She was confident the child had taken a mournful pleasure in the whole proceeding.

Paulina was not surprised that Little Ranny had sickened. Had she been asked she could have truthfully said that it was a matter of wonderment to her why all the inhabitants of Middleborough had not been prostrated by the hot mid-day sun. Spring had come early that year, and after the first of May some hard rains had followed. Then the heat set in.

Unaccustomed as she was to the climate, Paulina suffered from the weather; yet though she lost flesh and acquired circles under her eyes these defects added to her beauty. As her face grew in delicacy, she lost her look of hard viril-

ity; and in Middleborough she had learned the art of smiling, and had practised it so assiduously that it was no longer an effort but an impulse. Because she was so much prettier, Clyde noticed her changed appearance.

"Though Paulina looks so pretty, she needs the garden as badly as Ranny does," she said to her mother who forthwith ordered her guest to sit with her beneath Ranny's tree.

Paulina also had moments of silence; for, in her heart, she was not altogether satisfied with her position. There was such a thing as wearing out her welcome, and she had been a long time with the Taliaferros. Affecting her as the heat did, she would do the right and sensible thing if she went to one of the Southern Springs during the summer—some of them must be within her means—and, returning in the fall, find a place to board in Middleborough. It was a mistake to run the risk of becoming a burden to any one. It depressed her to think of these things; it depressed her to have her course laid out for her apparently so straight and true; for, whether it was the right or the wrong thing to do, she knew she could not bear to leave Middleborough. She was happy and she was content, a strange state of mind for Paulina. In spite of the heat she intended to hold fast to that happiness, to that unnatural contentment. It was an awkward subject to discuss; but she screwed up her courage and told Mrs. Taliaferro she must leave her.

"Has the heat made you ill, dear?" Mrs. Taliaferro inquired solicitously.

As best she could, Paulina explained.

"Why, I thought you meant you wanted to go to the mountains," Clyde said.

"Are you not happy with us?" Mrs. Taliaferro asked.

"Happy!" Paulina cried. "In all my life I have never been as happy."

For a minute she wished she were the age of Little Ranny. It would have comforted her to have been able to have

burst out crying. That, of course, was the fault of the heat. Little Ranny also felt like crying.

"If you are not ill, and if you are not going to the mountains, you must stay with me during the summer," Mrs. Taliaferro said decidedly. "I have promised to let Clyde visit some of her school friends, and you must not leave me alone, Paulina."

"Trying as I am," Clyde said complacently, "my mother misses her only daughter."

"Have you already forgotten that you are to be the other daughter that I have always wanted?" Mrs. Taliaferro asked Paulina.

"I never forget," Paulina said unsteadily.

No more did she. The image of herself as she wrote to her mother's dear friend, Elizabeth, rose before her eyes. Like the recurrence of some bitter taste the memory of the way she had planned to exploit the said Elizabeth swept over her. She was singed by the light flame of her own self-contempt. But why? She had been skilful enough to carry out her plans; she had opened up the old friendship; she had descended upon Middleborough; and, without a question, her board and her lodging had been given her. There was no reason why she should not pat herself upon the back, and congratulate herself upon this very successful undertaking. Had there been a single hitch anywhere? Common sense answered, "No," acclaimed it loudly and vociferously. Nevertheless, Paulina recognised a hitch, a hitch that could never be smoothed away. The hitch was Paulina. The change was within herself. It was the effort to square herself with the Taliaferros that prompted her offer to leave their house. She must not take advantage of their kindness; she must not utilise her mother's dear friend, Elizabeth. This change of opinion had been brought about by the affection showered upon her, by the realisation that though she had come to scoff, she had remained to admire. Had Mrs. Taliaferro been Clyde; young, alert, keen-eyed, Paulina would have felt no compunction. But

Mrs. Taliaferro was not Clyde. There was a fineness in her sweet serenity, in her unvarying thoughtfulness, in the very gesture of her smooth, soft hands that bespoke what she was, a loving, sympathetic woman. There was a wide-eyed innocence, a confiding trustfulness about her that reminded Paulina of Mrs. Sprague. Struggle against it as she might, she could not help the growth of this feeling of shame in the presence of her mother's friend. It somewhat marred the pleasure of her visit to Middleborough.

Mrs. Taliaferro observed her embarrassment and hesitation.

"If you will consent to stay with me, dear, it will be a real act of charity," she said with exquisite delicacy. "We can't get on without Paulina, can we, Ranny?"

"Where is she going, Mother?" Ranny asked gravely.

"Nowhere." Mrs. Taliaferro nodded reassuringly.

Ranny's lips had quivered, and it would never do to upset Ranny. She shook her head at Paulina who flushed still higher with confusion. The child had taken a fancy to Paulina.

"I like the favour of her," he said in unconscious mimicry of Mammy Ellen.

He often sat with Paulina, and sometimes he talked to her in his odd, old-fashioned way. He was never the least trouble and he reminded her of Rose Baby. In her own way she had been rather fond of Rose Baby. She was also rather fond of Little Ranny. Now it seemed to her that she was trading on his affection; was making use of it as she had intended to use the affection of Elizabeth Taliaferro; as, in reality, she had actually used the affection of Elizabeth Taliaferro. An aftermath of remorse could not wipe away this smirch. She rebelled at the thought of Little Ranny, though it suddenly struck her that she was growing unnecessarily squeamish. As usual in the house of Taliaferro Clyde sounded the finishing note.

"Of course Paulina will stay, Mother," she announced confidently. "Even Minnie says she's just made for Middle-

borough, and that she's better company for you than a rocket like I am. That's how he spoke of me, as a rocket."

"Well, you know, darling, I can't always count on you," Mrs. Taliaferro said.

"Of course I'm no good, Mother, but I might be much worse. Just think how much worse I might be," she leaned over the back of the chair and kissed her mother rapidly, "and besides we are not discussing me but Paulina."

"Paulina can't do better than follow her minister's advice," Mrs. Taliaferro said.

"I am going to follow my minister's advice," Paulina cried in an honest burst of gratitude and relief.

Afterwards she wondered if Clyde really wanted her to stay; though had she gone to the girl with the direct question, it is doubtful if the outspoken Clyde would have known how to frame a truthful answer.

"She is going to stay with us all the summer," Clyde said to Jock that afternoon, "and then I can go away and visit as long as I wish. Mother says so."

"That will be fun for the rest of us," Jock observed gloomily.

"Of course Ned and Minnie will miss me," Clyde said, smiling sweetly into space.

"Oh, of course," Jock growled. They were seated on a bench in the garden, and he picked a pebble from the neatly gravelled walk and flung it into the nearest flower bed.

"Destructive," Clyde breathed gently.

"If you are trying to get a rise out of me, you won't succeed," Jock said pointedly.

"No?" Clyde queried.

"No," Jock returned nonchalantly, and smiled.

Clyde smiled, too, smiled mischievously. Jock was in a good humour and they were going to have a pleasant afternoon together. While she was glad of this, she half missed the underlying note in his voice; but lately she had had an overdose of thrills and she had been most uncomfortable. There was such a thing as an excess of switchback riding.

She recalled the walk home from Little Sally's, and then she banished this recollection from her mind.

"Although I am so crazy to take a trip," she said, "I am always frantic to get back to Middleborough."

"We'll be waiting for you, Clydie."

"Are you going anywhere this summer?"

"No," Jock answered.

"Well, you ought to take care of yourself. I don't believe you exercise enough, Jock. You don't look up to the mark," Clyde said in a motherly little voice.

Jock threw another pebble into the flower bed.

"Anybody that's chasing you, Clyde, gets plenty of exercise," he said thickly; and threw a third stone, so accurately, and with such force that he broke a flower off from its stalk.

Clyde watched him, fascinated. Evidently she had been mistaken, and they were not going to have a pleasant afternoon. The old note was in Jock's voice and brought with it the old uneasiness. She rose to her feet. She deliberately misunderstood the purport of his words.

"See if you can catch me now," she cried daringly, and flew down the gravelled walk. It had been her intention to head for the magnolia tree where Little Ranny was playing; but, in her excitement, she took the wrong turning and found herself flying towards the back of the garden. That meant she had to run a long way before she could get to Little Ranny, and for once she longed for the child's company. Any third person would have done and only Ranny was available. Eventually she would sit awhile with the little boy. She was young enough to enjoy the running exactly as a child might have done, and the sound of Jock's feet behind her added zest to the game. It struck her that with so far to go she might get caught before she could join Ranny; and, in view of this contingency, she decided to cut into the path near the rosebushes, and try to reach the bench. Surely if she gained the bench she would have beaten Jock.

As she took the cut she glanced over her shoulder, and found that Jock was gaining on her, perceptibly gaining on her. She doubled around a rosebush, and looked again. The distance between them was steadily decreasing. A fine determination to get the best of her pursuer swept over her. The colour rose to her face and, while she panted a little, she redoubled her efforts. It was worth her while to win this race. Apparently Jock was of the same opinion; for he, too, quickened his speed. For the time being they both forgot the heat. In the distance Clyde could see the much desired bench. She felt she would have given her most treasured possession to reach that haven before Jock did. There was a bare possibility of her so doing. Her green eyes glowed. Ah, to beat Jock! She laughed softly to herself; and, as she laughed, her foot slid on a treacherous pebble and she all but fell. It took a minute to recover her balance, to gather herself together, and then Jock's hand fell upon her shoulder. With boyish force he wheeled her around in the pathway.

"I've caught you, Clydie," he said with astonishing gentleness.

Clyde stood opposite Jock. She was so breathless her shoulders rose and fell beneath his grasp. It was hard, with victory so near at hand, that she should have been tripped by an insignificant little pebble. Yet though she was beaten, though she was caught, she admitted it was not as bad as she expected it to be. For once Jock did not seem inclined to crow. Instead he was almost grave, a strange state for him.

It came over her that "handsome Jock" was a mild term to apply to her victor. At this moment he was superlatively good-looking, absolutely beautiful. He, too, was breathless from the chase; he, too, panted as it were; and with every breath he drew, the red blood crimsoned his olive skin. His eyes gazed into hers, and suddenly Clyde knew that a silence had fallen upon the garden. Gone was the cheep of the birds, the rustling of the wind through the

trees. She was alone with Jock in a limitless universe. They were two disembodied spirits floating into space. They were two stars alone in the heavens; two stars that drew always closer together; that, eventually, in the common course of events, would touch each other. Jock was nearer now. He had never taken his hand from her shoulder; his arm half encircled hers. They were drifting closer and closer together. Presently the two stars would touch. Clyde was scarcely conscious that she was moving forward. Jock's face was very near, but not too near. Any minute the stars might very softly, very gently touch. What then? Then their lips would meet. Not a leaf moved in the garden. Any minute . . .

"Clydie," a shrill little voice cried, "Clydie, oh, Clydie."

Clyde jerked back her head. It was a relief to find that her feet rested upon solid ground. After all they were not two stars; but just an ordinary boy and girl, excited and over-hot from running. But Little Ranny was in trouble. He stood before them flushed and tearful.

"Margery came," he cried, "and runned away from me." He wept piteously.

Clyde knelt down beside him and put her arms around him.

"She'll come back," she soothed.

"But I'm afraid she won't, Clydie. Are you sure?" he wailed.

Clyde felt his hot face.

"You may stay with me until she comes," she promised.

"I'm tired. I want to sit in your lap," he sobbed.

"So you shall," Clyde said gently.

She led the child to the bench and took him in her lap. Poor little fellow! His best friend had run away from him and his feelings were hurt. More than ever Clyde felt that she hated those imaginary children. She petted Ranny almost as sweetly as her mother could have done; and Jock, frowningly impatient, waited nearby. He was kicking the

gravel now and the scrape, scrape of his feet made Clyde nervous.

"Do you intend," he demanded at last, "to keep that child all the afternoon?"

"Yes," Clyde answered unswervingly.

"What attention will I get?" he asked sulkily.

"All that's good for you," said the somewhat ruffled Clyde.

"Then I might as well leave."

"That's just as you like," Clyde answered with spirit. She even pretended she did not hear Jock's departure.

She would never be able to express how grateful she was to Little Ranny. She was honest with herself. In another second she would have kissed Jock. Her face burned with the humiliation of that thought.

"Because I didn't want to do it," she said to herself.

"Well, you didn't," something within her whispered comfortingly.

"But for Ranny, I would have done it," she confessed.

"But for Ranny, yes," the unknown comforter agreed.

But for Ranny, this catastrophe might have befallen her. But for Ranny! Dear Little Ranny!

CHAPTER XXVI

IT did not take long for Paulina to find that summer had come to stay. The hot weather, made all the more unendurable because of the sudden transition from cold to heat, fell upon Middleborough in a spasm of blind fury; and baked the ground, and yellowed the foliage, and scorched the inhabitants until they literally dropped upon their knees and prayed for mercy. Mrs. Taliaferro assured Paulina that it was an unprecedented spell, and Paulina wanted to think this was true; but as she watched the women hurrying up their summer plans, she told herself that perhaps her hostess was an optimist about the weather as well as everything else.

When the temperature rose higher it brought with it a stifling humidity; and often Paulina thought despairingly that she might be driven to fly from Middleborough. It comforted her a little to see how philosophically the Taliaferros treated the heat. They kept to the house, drank cooling drinks, and opined that the first summer weather was always the worst. You felt it more, they said. As a matter of fact the whole of Middleborough accepted and accommodated itself to hot discomfort; and a new type of life sprang into existence before Paulina's eyes, a life that began its day after sundown, and lasted into the small hours of the night. Even the children stayed indoors all day long, and came forth at twilight to race about the dimly lit streets, and play hide and seek behind the tree boxes. It was a novel experience for Paulina to see an unabashed people seated upon the steps and porches of their houses. There was an informality about Middleborough that amazed her.

On the first of July the Sunday school closed; and Pau-

lina discovered, with a pang of amusement, that she missed her work tremendously and that she meant, if Miss Jessie permitted, to be librarian another year. She judged there would not be much difficulty about this. In spite of her erectness, in spite of her quickness of thought and tongue, Miss Jessie's days were numbered. Plainly all she strove to do now was to try to delude herself into thinking that she was still a valuable addition to the Sunday school. Perhaps she did not even delude herself; but intended to play the game, as a player should play it, to the bitter end. She superintended Paulina, and Paulina suffered the superintendence; and, in return, learned a number of things about her mother. Mrs. Sprague had been as light-hearted, as free, as happy, as irresponsible as Clyde, as Olive Dunlop, as Little Sally. Then life had shut in on her, and jostled her, and finally shoved her into a corner. "But it wasn't life," Paulina contended hotly within herself. "It was the Reverend Lemuel." It had been a slow, relentless process, the deadening of Mrs. Sprague, and with it all she had never lost her courage nor her sweetness. "I'd have killed him," Paulina thought bitterly. An unfilial speech, had she made it; and a twice even threefold unfilial thought that had unfortunately been woven into the very warp of her being. She found herself liking Miss Jessie; and it occurred to her that it might not be a bad idea to persuade the old lady to take her as a paying guest. Some day she should have to leave the Taliaferros. She hated to think of that. She spoke of her plans to Mr. Fellows.

"It would seem a good arrangement," he said impersonally. "I have been happy here," he added.

"I can't see what you get out of it," was on the tip of Paulina's tongue to say; for, had she been a man, she knew she could never have stayed in placid Middleborough.

She got no further than her thoughts. Suddenly she remembered Clyde. He might get Clyde. Clyde was as inscrutable as a sphinx, as uncommunicative as a bit of stone coping. She begrudged Clyde Mr. Fellows, as strongly as she

begrudged Clyde her youth. It seemed to Paulina that her capacity for feeling had increased since she came to Middleborough. It was as if the flood-tide of her emotions was at its height. It was an effort to keep herself within bounds. Whenever she connected the minister with Clyde a wave of passionate resentment swelled within her, a resentment against a girl who, she had the justice to admit, if she had been the recipient of many bounties, had nothing whatever to do with the bestowing of these favours.

"It's not fair, nor just, nor right," so ran the ceaseless undercurrents of her thoughts. She felt herself aggrieved, and she had an inexpressible scorn of what Mrs. Taliaferro so often alluded to as a "benign providence." Paulina would have been much more apt to dub it a "malign providence."

It gave her actual pleasure to think of Clyde's prospective trip. Then she would play at being the daughter of the house and she was not going to be lonely. Mr. Fellows had assured her of that.

"There's a great deal of moving about at night," he said vaguely, "and I shall drop in often to cheer you for the loss of Clyde."

Clyde looked at the situation from an entirely different standpoint.

"If you don't watch out, Minnie," she confided ingenuously, "Paulina will be dumped right on you. Of course, as a minister, you have to bear a great deal; but don't let yourself be imposed upon."

"I don't mind Mrs. Bull being dumped on me," the minister answered smilingly. "I think her a charming woman, don't you?"

"Well, yes," Clyde said with the air of making certain mental concessions.

"You know you like her much better than you did?"

"There's no doubt about that."

Clyde could be honestly enthusiastic here; for Paulina did try to make herself agreeable, and she had been most

useful in the selection of Clyde's clothes. Clyde tried not to forget these obligations, and yet she found it difficult to do away with first impressions. Her attitude of mind gave her a guilty feeling, especially when Paulina showed such willingness to help her get ready for her summer trip.

"I can't imagine what's the matter with me," she said to herself, "but there are just some people that you can't love, and Paulina is one of that kind." Here she felt guilty again since, by no stretch of the imagination, could she have been said to have made the smallest effort to love her guest.

After she had cautioned the minister about Paulina she set about her preparations with a light heart; and departed on her journey in such a swirl of excitement that she entirely overlooked kissing Paulina good-bye; and might have forgotten her beloved father had he not accompanied her to the station where he, surreptitiously, amid violent winks, bestowed upon her a little wad of bank-notes and a good handful of change. Whereupon Clyde hugged him with undisguised affection and said, for the fortieth time that day, that he was the best father in the world.

It was quieter after Clyde left the house, and the hurry and bustle that always accompanied that young person's goings out and comings in died away. Whatever hurry and bustle Middleborough had ever possessed also died away. As time went on a great many of the houses were boarded up, and it was hard to find an acquaintance among the very few women who drifted through the deserted streets. Almost every one took a short holiday. Not many people stayed in Middleborough during the entire heated term.

Thus early summer passed; midsummer slipped by; and late summer arrived, bringing with it the hope of fall weather; and still Paulina was happy and content. Now that she had grown accustomed to the heat, she no longer felt ill and half dizzy; and she had discovered that if she husbanded her strength, and avoided the midday sun, she could do pretty much as she wished and suffer no ill effects. In the morning she sat with Ranny and Mrs. Talia-

ferro in the garden, and watched the child play with Polly and Margery who had returned to their tree.

"It was the flag that brought them back," the little boy whispered to Paulina every day. And Paulina had learned to whisper back so that Polly and Margery might not hear her and be offended, "I am so glad, Ranny, so glad."

In the middle of the day they ate dinner and after that a great stillness settled upon the Taliaferro home. Ostensibly Ranny was the only one who was put to bed for the purpose of sleeping. As a matter of fact the whole household slept. Mrs. Taliaferro was willing to confess that she napped, and Paulina was conscious of a wild desire to doze, and did doze, although she did not own up to it as openly as Mrs. Taliaferro did. Outside the yard was : : quiet as the house, and after the table was set for supper the lower floor was absolutely deserted. Paulina knew because one day, when she had on her wrapper, she had gone down the back steps to get some water; and as far as she could see there was not a single soul on the place. Clyde would have called this dull. Paulina called it peaceful.

In the quiet afternoon hours when she was not sleeping, Paulina thought a great deal about her life. Lately her past had not been so importunate; had not clamoured so persistently at the door of the present. It had merged more into the background of her existence, a smutty wall against which she could not lean, it is true, but all the same a thing of bygone days, behind and not before her. There was comfort in that reflection. She thought of Rosie and the child and she wondered how they fared. She had received a letter from Rosie, an indignant epistle that had made her furiously angry. Then Rosie was at the Christian Association looking for cheap lodgings. She embroidered beautifully; her prices were reasonable; she had already more orders than she could hope to fill. If Paulina had hearkened to the indignant epistle she could have been at Rosie's side. The two of them could have formed a benevolent association with the single purpose of enlivening George

Bull's prison life. In spite of the lure held before her, Paulina had kept silent; and she had mentally appointed Rosie a committee of one to attend to this side issue. At present she was engaged in washing her hands of the whole affair. She often fell asleep over these difficulties, and she was often thoroughly disheartened, since she saw no way to make the crooked straight—there was a neat play on words here—no way to adjust the situation to her liking. She felt little concern for any one else. Let them do as they pleased. They were a second-class lot, Rosie, George Bull and, doubtless, even the charming Rose Baby. There was nothing second-class about Middleborough. Paulina recognised that.

Sometimes in the late afternoon she drove with her Cousin Elizabeth, but not as often as she would had she not Mr. Taliaferro to consider. In her self-imposed rôle of being agreeable Paulina did not forget to notice small details. If she went, Mr. Taliaferro stayed at home; and, besides, she had no great fancy for the victoria. Occasionally Ned McFarland and Mr. Fellows took her out in a trap that they explained was the best they could get in Middleborough; and as both of them had a liking for lanes rather than roads, Paulina saw a good part of the land that lay immediately outside of the town. While it was not a particularly pretty, rolling country, there were some nice bits here and there, and she was in an appreciative mood. She developed a passion for old fortifications and honeysuckle, an odd mixture that she often found together; and she arranged the flowers for the house as gracefully as Clyde had ever done.

In her mind's eye she had a charming picture of herself as she descended the porch steps to pick the flowers from the garden. She carried a basket on her arm and she wore gloves to protect her hands from the thorns. It was a charming, gracious picture, and she was not displeased when Mr. Fellows chanced to see her perform this little duty.

Then there was always a late supper, and afterwards the

callers dropped in. They were the scattered remnants of the society of Middleborough; but they were all pleasant and it was amusing to see them flock together. You grew lonesome, they said, and, anyhow, the summer was the time to be sociable, and so their calls must be promptly returned. Paulina was kept busy returning visits, since every one made an effort to be nice to Pauline Selden's child. Paulina oftentimes felt that she was beneath the shadow of her mother's wing. While most of Clyde's young friends were away, Ned McFarland came to see her twice a week, Jock never, and Mr. Fellows rarely missed a day.

"He's as regular as clockwork," Mrs. Taliaferro said proudly. "He's always like that in summer."

This speech disappointed Paulina, who would have preferred to think that she herself was the attraction; still it was a comfort to know that if he did not appear in the morning, he would undoubtedly come in the afternoon or night.

She experienced the same type of feeling that Mrs. Taliaferro had for the postman, a feeling of more than expectancy, a feeling that perhaps this might be the best event of the day. Taking it all in all, she preferred his night visits; for if there were many people on the Taliaferros' porch Paulina and the minister sat in the garden. It was sweet and peaceful there. Peacefulness, that was the keynote Paulina thought she wanted; though, of course, she considered with a good moon the garden was more than peaceful. It was beautiful with a tender beauty that entranced Mr. Fellows and saddened Paulina. These were the hours when she felt most plainly that she was not the daughter of the house, that she longed most ardently to hold on to her few perfect moments, to grip them and keep them with her always. Alas, that was not possible! She wished with all the fervour of her fervid being that she might put out her hands and stop the days, hot and disagreeable as they were. She felt as if she were letting time slip through her buttered fingers; as if she might, if she made the effort, hold on to

her happiness, for happy she was. Happy, oh, miracle of miracles, happy and content.

She hardly knew this new Paulina who loved the night hours, the night silences and shadows that were ever fitfully illumined by the darting fireflies. She had gazed at her own beautiful lake, at her own beautiful trees, at her own beautiful peacocks, and she had gazed unmoved. The sight of the Taliaferros' garden, silvered by the moonlight, made her soul swell within her. Its beauty hurt her, and beauty should not hurt. It was, as Mr. Fellows said, "tender beauty." Once, on the impulse of the moment, she had turned to ask the minister about this; but he, too, sat silent with an odd, uplifted look on his face. She felt, at the same instant, a sense of intrusion and a sense of companionship. She saw that Mr. Fellows was moved by the beauty of the garden.

And so when Mrs. Taliaferro came to bid her good night, and, putting her arms about her, asked her anxiously if she felt bored or lonesome without any other young person in the house, Paulina could reply truthfully, from the bottom of her heart, "I love Middleborough, and I am happy here."

She sealed this speech with a kiss. Now that Clyde was away she often kissed her Cousin Elizabeth.

Yet despite her uttermost efforts the days continued to slip by, and the autumn came to Middleborough.

CHAPTER XXVII

IT was well into October before Clyde returned from her summer trip; and then she arrived at dusk when no one expected her and the sound of her babble and merriment filled the house, just as the fresh fall air had filled the hall at her entrance. Her very presence stirred the staid, decorous stillness of the place, and introduced an atmosphere of youth that was invigorating even if, at times, it proved a trifle exhausting. She was followed by Ned and Jock McFarland, and the one carried a satchel, the other a hat-box.

"Met me," Clyde explained succinctly as she kissed her parents. "I wanted to surprise everybody." She made a second round of kisses, not forgetting Paulina.

"But the hat-box," Mrs. Taliaferro said.

"Mine," Clyde answered firmly. "A sport hat. I couldn't wait to have it expressed. Open it, Jock."

She started to untie the knot, and then impatiently bade Jock cut the string; and, with a look of elation, produced the hat. It was a soft green velour with a green and black wing, shot with orange, on one side. Clyde threw the straw sailor that she had been wearing contemptuously on the sofa; and placed her treasure upon her head. She wheeled about for inspection, and it was not hard to guess why she had not been willing to wait for the express. If she had searched for months she could have found nothing more becoming than the sport hat. The soft, thick, green brim rested upon her hair and made a suitable nimbus for her eyes. She was as pronouncedly vivid as a poppy without its glaring colouring. The chorus of admiration that broke forth drowned Mrs. Taliaferro's inquiry, "Isn't that rather

loud, Clydie?" Clyde was too radiant to hear so faint a criticism.

"You look like Maid Marian," Ned McFarland stated.

The chorus swelled again and, under its cover, Jock said to her in a low aside, "You may look like Maid Marian; but both you and I know you to be a water-witch; and when you are pleasant your eyes are moss-covered pebbles; and when you are disagreeable they are bits of stone you stole from some idol's head. Clothes don't change you, Clyde."

"Clothes don't change you either, Jock," Clyde retorted, a straightforward answer that, nevertheless, admitted of a hint of reproof.

"Did you buy anything else?" Mrs. Taliaferro asked anxiously.

"Yes," a happy, reminiscent smile spread over Clyde's face, "I spent every penny that I had; and I was too poor to ride home in a Pullman. I took a day coach. I'm bankrupt, Father."

Mr. Taliaferro shoved his hand into his pocket.

"Stop," Mrs. Taliaferro ordered, "you must not give Clyde money all the time. She had plenty and she has evidently been most extravagant. It won't hurt her to do without for a week or two."

"That's so humiliating, Mother, and you are just pretending to be stern," Clyde said.

She patted her mother's cheek. Over her mother's shoulder, she beamed at Mr. Taliaferro. In return, he flashed forth a series of highly illuminating winks. It was as good a telephonic communication as could be desired. Clyde could see that his fingers itched to produce the contents of his pockets. She felt as secure as if she had already received a signed check.

"If the Lord loves a cheerful giver," she said to herself irreverently, "he must simply dote on father."

She hoped, with warm affection, that Mr. Taliaferro did like her hat. She was sure he did. He always liked her clothes. He always liked her.

"I think," Mrs. Taliaferro said at last, "that I should take off the hat now, Clyde."

"Has Minnie been here to-day?" Clyde asked irrelevantly. "Yes."

"I'm sorry for that," Clyde was plainly annoyed, "because I wanted him to see this hat."

"There's plenty of time for that." Mrs. Taliaferro smiled.

"I want him to see it now," Clyde said positively. "I shall telephone him to come here to-night."

Mrs. Taliaferro looked at her daughter aghast. There were times when she was almost appalled at her child's naïve egotism. Clyde felt no respect for age, no respect for Mr. Fellows' sacred calling. At this moment Mrs. Taliaferro could not think of a single person or thing that Clyde did respect.

"You must not do that," she said decidedly. "Sometimes, Clyde, I know you forget that Mr. Fellows is not your age. You cannot telephone him to-night."

"I won't if you don't want me to do it," Clyde answered nicely, "but I am certain he'd wish to see me. Now I wrote and said for either Jock or Ned to meet me, and both of them appeared. When you've been away as long as I have you can't see your friends too quickly."

"Not to-night, dear," Mrs. Taliaferro shook her head.

During this conversation Paulina had sat down on the sofa and had picked up the old straw hat. Mechanically she straightened the wreath around the crown. She smoothed the leaves here and there, and she bent some loose bits of wire out of sight. Since the flowers were hopelessly faded there was nothing else she could do. The hat would have to be discarded; it could not be carried over into another summer. It had outlived its usefulness.

The faded flowers reminded her of herself. Both had had their day. A blight had fallen upon her. Clyde had returned more glowing, more unconsciously omnivorous than ever. She was gathering together her old possessions, and it was plain that she did not intend to part with the minis-

ter. It never occurred to Paulina to contest this point with Clyde. Who, indeed, would be eager to battle with a foe empanoplied in the strong armour of youth? No stronger accoutrement could have been made; and when you added to that attraction, for there was no denying Clyde's charm, the battle was decided before it was fought. So Paulina knew. She found herself unable to enter into combat with Clyde, who was, after all, beautifully unconscious that there was any other aspirant for her very choice position. Paulina stared at the wreath and it seemed to her that she could not see very clearly. Her summer in Middleborough had meant a great deal to her. By her summer she referred largely to Mr. Fellows.

"It's the first time I have ever known, in an intimate way, a gentleman," she told herself sadly. This was a plain statement of facts. It explained the blight. It explained why she could not see the wreath of faded flowers.

Unlike Mrs. Taliaferro, to her there was nothing unnatural in Clyde's egotism. There had been no one to dispute her queenship with her. While Little Ranny was every one's petted darling he was only a baby, and did not interfere with Clyde. Not Mr. and Mrs. Taliaferro alone, but the whole machinery of the Taliaferro household revolved around her.

Paulina tried to pretend that she was Clyde, tried to imagine how it would feel to be the centre of a home where the entire family united in petting, praising, and loving her. She put her mother in the place of her Cousin Elizabeth, and Mrs. Sprague rose to the standard set for her and, by her noble unselfishness, overtopped her former friend and schoolmate. She substituted the Reverend Lemuel for Mr. Taliaferro, and here she recoiled. Never, never could she have smiled at her father as she had just seen Clyde, across her mother's shoulder, smile at Mr. Taliaferro. She might have managed a frown, but she far preferred to look in the other direction. She was oppressed by the shadowy image of the Reverend Lemuel's long, narrow face, oppressed



his money. It was impossible for her to get a peach without a worm at the core; and yet there were plenty of good, sound peaches. Not for her. Of course not. The mere idea that she should expect a perfect peach was pure presumption. She had no divorce, no alimony, no fruits of her long struggle; and last but not least in her own estimation, the tiny straw that broke the camel's back, Clyde was going to destroy her pleasant intimacy with Mr. Fellows. She might accompany Clyde, it is true; but her very soul rebelled at that. It seemed to her that wherever she turned she ran into a blind alley. Her whole life had been a succession of wasted efforts. A great dreariness swept over her and engulfed her; a great loneliness threw up its walls about her. The fact that the room was full of laughing, light-hearted people made her feel all the more forlorn and isolated. No one noticed her. How could they? Clyde talked, talked, talked. There was a quantity to tell. The whole summer had to be roughly sketched in. After the McFarlands left, they had supper; but Clyde was far too excited to eat; was far too excited to sit still any length of time.

"But, my darling," Mrs. Taliaferro said, "you've eaten nothing."

"I'm so glad to get home; I'm not hungry, Mother," Clyde replied. She pushed aside her plate and suggested that they go back to the living-room.

In the living-room Paulina sat down in a big chair and Little Ranny crawled into her lap. Because of Clyde's arrival he had been allowed to sit up later; but he was already sleepy and, as he liked Paulina, he put his head comfortably upon her shoulder. He watched Clyde with tired, admiring eyes. Clyde was still talking. She was so glad to get home was the burden of her song, and every one looked so well. Why, Little Ranny was quite a grown man. She had some lovely things for him in her trunk.

"May I have them before breakfast?" Ranny asked.

"Yes," Clyde said graciously, "you may. If you wish you may get in bed with me to-morrow morning, Ranny." This

was a great concession for Clyde, and was duly appreciated by Little Ranny.

It transpired that she had presents for every one; just little gifts for the servants, but something really lovely for her mother.

"You've spent all your money on us, darling," Mrs. Taliaferro cried.

"I wanted to spend it," Clyde said. "I only skimmed on father because I couldn't think of a thing he would like, and so I brought him a new book some one gave me. I said to myself all the time, 'if father has me he won't want anything else.'"

"That's true," Mr. Taliaferro said, and he clinked his loose change together so noisily that Mrs. Taliaferro heard him and thought, with a guilty start, that she ought to have let him give Clyde the money; for surely the child was generous, too generous. She would have to cast about in her mind for some way to make up to Clyde for her unwise expenditures. The child must not suffer on their account.

"I was almost afraid to buy Paulina anything," Clyde confessed shyly. "She has beautiful taste."

It was a pretty little compliment, gracefully said, and had not Paulina felt so heavy of heart and dull of head, she would have done more than smile at Clyde. The smile was all she could muster; but, for once, Clyde was not disposed to be critical. She was even absent-minded.

"I hear somebody coming up the steps," she announced. "It's either my trunk or Minnie. I shall make it a subject of prayer."

Paulina's heart sank still lower. Of course, since everything came her way, Clyde's prayer would be answered. Paulina was positive that Mr. Fellows would appear. It was no surprise to see him enter the living-room. Above Little Ranny's face, from her corner, she nodded her head in grave salutation.

Clyde had vanished into the hall to meet the minister, or the trunk as the case might have been, and now she

rushed back into the room and produced the sport hat. She placed it upon her head. She demanded Mr. Fellows' entire attention; she demanded his enthusiasm. As he praised two red spots came into her cheeks.

"Oh, Minnie," she said rapturously.

Mr. Fellows laughed pleasantly.

"We've missed you, Clyde," he announced. He included Paulina in his editorial "we."

"I'm awfully glad to get back," Clyde cried. "I've been homesick; though I didn't know it until I got here."

Every one laughed at this. It was so like Clyde to be homesick after she had returned to Middleborough. Clyde was the centre of attention again. She had pulled a chair into the middle of the room and sat, with her back to Paulina, talking to Mr. Fellows. Paulina was conscious that, unobtrusively, over Clyde's red head, the minister looked at her. It was a look that embraced the sleeping child. Her memory had a disagreeable trick of reproducing ancient pictures. It reproduced one now. She saw the log fire in the room where she had welcomed Rosie. She saw Rosie, flat and dejected, in the armchair. She saw herself with Rose Baby in her arms; and she saw George Bull watching her, devouring her with his sombre eyes. She had used Rose Baby as a shield that night, though to George Bull the child had been as a torch.

She was using Little Ranny as a shield now, hiding her sad face behind his bobbed yellow hair. It was not possible that the minister could know that. She wondered if he divined the loneliness, and if his intent gaze was significant of sympathy and friendship. She wondered what he thought of George Bull, or if he thought at all about her wedded life. He was the only person in Middleborough who knew her secret, and he had never by word or deed alluded to her unhappy marriage. For a minister he seemed to be singularly unaware that it was his sacred duty to poke and pry into all the veiled corners of her soul. He made very little use of his ministerial perquisites. In fact, he was most surpris-

ingly reticent on the subject of souls, and appeared indifferent to Paulina's lack of religious convictions. He had exactly the opposite view-point of the Reverend Lemuel, who always inferred that you were guilty of wrongdoing, until you afforded him good and ample proof to the contrary. Mr. Fellows' attitude of mind was far more flattering. Tacitly, without a word, he assured Paulina that she took a deep interest in the Sunday school; in the poorer members of the congregation; in the hundred and one little vexing details that cropped up in the life of the church. At first she had been scornfully amused; then mildly tolerant; and lately she had been surprised to find that she was interested in these simple matters. She had an uneasy feeling that she might be getting soft like the unfortunate Rosie; but her good common sense pointed out to her that there was no resemblance between herself and her silly little sister-in-law.

She was truthful enough to admit that her great interest in the minister had led to her faint interest in the church work; that, in the beginning, she had put up with the latter for the sake of the former. Now she owned to herself that there was something in it; and that religion might be a beautiful and comforting state if you could once see the vision of the whole as Mr. Fellows saw it. In spite of his peculiar silences she was sure he had seen the vision. It pleased her that he did not nag her to death—the expression was her own—with his expositions of the better life; yet, at the same time, he often showed he had the courage of his convictions and he stated his opinions with a singleness of mind and a solemnity of tone that, by its very earnestness, was impressive. It was this mixture of tolerance and hardness that attracted her; that made her insensibly long for the minister to like her as she really was; and not as she sometimes, for the edification of Middleborough, had to pretend to be. At times she had a wild desire to go over her whole life for the benefit of Mr. Fellows that he might know the worst and the best of her; but confidences of this sort

were nothing short of mild insanity and, recognising it as such, Paulina suppressed her feelings with a stern hand. To-night one of these wild impulses swept over her as she hid behind Little Ranny and avoided Mr. Fellows' eyes that, when they were not looking at her, were directed beyond and above her, apparently at the ceiling. Even Clyde noticed this.

"You've had your eyes glued on that spot so long that I thought there must be a leaky mark on the wall," she said frankly, "but there isn't; so I am beginning to think you expect some heavenly visitor; do you, Minnie?"

Then, when the minister modestly disclaimed any such expectations, she had taken up the conversation again; and she had talked; talked; talked.

Had Paulina not been so unhappy she would have enjoyed Clyde's chatter, since the girl was not only bright, but had a clever knack of seeing the comical side of a situation. Unfortunately Paulina longed to cry, not to laugh. It was impossible for her to rouse herself. She recalled one of Clyde's morbid speeches that greatly vexed Mrs. Taliaferro.

"Living is all very well," the girl had declared, "while you are young; but, as the years get on, you must feel that you are being blown through a putty blower with but one prospect before you, and that the dead certainty of being, eventually, shot into space."

It was a simile suggested by Little Ranny, who was always blowing paper balls through a tin tube. As she spoke Clyde had laughed; but Paulina could tell by her half-frightened expression that she had no fancy for the picture she had brought before her. Now the certainty of being shot through a narrow tube into space caught Paulina in its grip; and, through the remainder of the evening, she sat as one in a trance. After what seemed to her a long period of waiting the minister said good-bye. Paulina was conscious of shaking hands with him; was conscious of heavily mounting the steps; was conscious of quietly closing her bedroom door after she had heard herself tell each Taliaferro good

night. For a space she sat down on the edge of the bed. Clyde was still talking. She had taken her mother to her room and her voice sounded high and clear.

While she was away some one had given her a funny party, and she had won three prizes. She had two mandarin figures that, at a touch, nodded their heads; and a precious tin cat which, if properly wound up, ran madly about the floor, catching a tiny mouse.

"Is that for Ranny?" Mrs. Taliaferro asked.

"Why, no," Clyde answered indignantly. "I want it myself, Mother."

Then the voices ceased. Either Mrs. Taliaferro had shut Clyde's door or she had gone to bed. Paulina had a shrewd suspicion that the tin cat catching the mouse had been too much for her. It seemed ridiculous for Clyde to keep it as a plaything. At nineteen years of age one ought not to want toys. She thought again of the putty blower. She undressed and went to bed.

As it happened, Paulina was wrong in her surmises. Mrs. Taliaferro had not objected to the story of the tin cat; but regarded it as a touching sample of Clyde's extreme youth. Clyde had such elderly streaks that her mother was glad to see her drop back into childhood now and then. She thought wistfully that her son and daughter would spend a very happy morning winding up the tin cat, nodding the mandarins' heads, not to mention the joys of the presents that were purchased for Ranny's special delectation.

She was pleased to see Clyde so well and cheerful, and it struck her, with renewed force, what good reasons she had to offer thanks. Mr. Taliaferro was the best and kindest of husbands; and, in her own eyes, her children were charming; were original; were all that could be desired. She had done nothing whatever to deserve the benefits showered upon her, she acknowledged humbly, yet blessed she had been, inordinately blessed. Suddenly and unexpectedly she remembered Pauline Selden who, as far as she could gather, had not been blessed; and here her thoughts turned upon

Paulina. This was a child to be pitied, a poor, motherless child. She had stayed all the summer in the heat and she had been more than contented, if one could put faith in words. Mrs. Taliaferro considered that the summer was dull for a young person, and yet Paulina had said that she liked Middleborough. Paulina had liked Mr. Fellows also and, since she had been obliged to see him nearly every day, that was most fortunate. It was to be hoped she had confided in him, and that he had thrown some spiritual consolation upon her most unhappy marriage. Mrs. Taliaferro felt a delicacy about inquiring into this, but she prayed that confirmation might be the outcome of the intimacy. She hated to think that Pauline Selden's child had no religion. Lately Paulina had had a trying time of it. Mrs. Taliaferro was a little hazy as to exact details, but Paulina must need something to which she could cling. Poor Paulina!

Of course, if the girl went to Miss Jessie's she would have a very comfortable, very quiet life; while if she stayed on with the Taliaferros the chances were in favour of her enjoying the coming winter. It was near the season for the young people to entertain, and Paulina had lightened her mourning. Insensibly Mrs. Taliaferro winced as she thought of the mourning. Clyde brought girls and boys to the house and Paulina wasn't a Methuselah. If only Clyde were willing, her mother thought, she could keep Paulina with her until after Christmas. At this juncture Mrs. Taliaferro rose and shut the door.

"Clyde," she said, "do you think Paulina looks badly?"

"She looks well enough," Clyde answered thoughtfully, "but she seems low in her mind. Has she got her back up about anything?"

"Certainly not," Mrs. Taliaferro said. She spoke with great emphasis because she could not bear Clyde's occasional descent into common slang.

"I don't know what I should have done without her," she continued with dignity. "She has been so sweet around the house. She was quiet to-night, but I had an idea that was

because she saw you coming home to your father and mother, and it made her feel lonely to remember that she had no parents. If I were dead you would miss me, wouldn't you, Clyde?"

"What horrible ideas you have!" Clyde gazed at her mother in blank consternation. "Why, what in the world should I do without you and father?"

"I think Paulina felt that way."

"Well, there's nothing we can do about it," Clyde said consolingly.

"It's been such a dull summer," Mrs. Taliaferro said.

She explained Paulina's plans. As long as they had touched on this topic, she determined to appeal to Clyde.

"You see how it is, don't you, darling?" she inquired at the conclusion of her little speech. "With us she is obliged to have a much gayer time. If you have not invited any one to visit you I shall make her stay here, at any rate until after Christmas."

"Let her stay," Clyde said. "If any girl comes to see me she may come in the room with me."

"That's my sweet little daughter," Mrs. Taliaferro said gratefully.

After her mother had left, Clyde unlocked her trunk and searched until she had found the tin cat. Winding it up, she placed it on the floor. The mouse was fastened to a thin piece of wire that drew together like a corkscrew. When this happened the cat almost caught the mouse; and then, just at the critical moment, the wire very slowly straightened out again. Clyde was thrilled with the whole performance. She could have played with this toy indefinitely. She wound up the cat three times, and then she thought of her mother. Her face went blank. Suppose she had no mother, no home of her own? That was Paulina's trouble.

"What horrible ideas mother has!" she said aloud.

Very carefully she put the tin cat back into her trunk. If Little Ranny saw it he was sure to want it.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MRS. TALIAFERRO took Clyde at her word, and lost no time in urging Paulina to stay on with her. She was relieved to find that her guest had not yet completed her arrangements with Miss Jessie; but was free to do as she thought best. While it did not surprise her to have Paulina refuse the invitation, it did worry her to think just how she could force Pauline Selden's child to accept what, so evidently, would be an advantage to her.

"But I have been here for months," Paulina said gravely.

"So you have," Clyde answered briskly for her mother. "That's no reason why you shouldn't remain months longer. Nobody's using the room."

"I thought you expected some of your friends?"

"Most of the girls like to come in with me," Clyde said, basking in the approval that shone from her mother's eye.

Paulina thought about this. Her very eagerness not to leave the Taliaferros made her hesitate to accept too quickly. Perhaps they might not object to having her, and they might even want her; though that seemed unlikely. Why should they want her? Paulina could think of no valid reason, and yet she was sure that Mrs. Taliaferro was absolutely sincere. She had meant to decline the tempting offer; but Clyde had altered that, just as she had altered Paulina's decision when the summer invitation had been issued. Paulina was convinced that had Clyde wished she could have put a stop to Mrs. Taliaferro's hospitable intentions. Clyde had not taken advantage of her opportunities. That was equivalent to saying that she did not care. Paulina decided to accept. She knew that the older Taliaferros and Little Ranny really liked her; but she did not include Clyde under the head of

the older Taliaferros. Clyde was an uncertain quantity, an assured, contained little person who preferred to look after herself. It cheered Paulina to think how very far Clyde had gone when she seconded her mother's invitation.

Clyde did not feel as cheerful as Paulina did. It was not that she had gone farther than she intended; for she had been really touched by her mother's account of Paulina's loneliness. She felt guilty that she had not credited Paulina with such deep feelings; and whenever she glanced at either of her entirely satisfactory parents, and thought of what her life would be without them, she was seized with a desire to make amends to her guest. In view of her mother's opinion, in view of the fact that the minister was evidently smitten with Pauline Selden's child, Clyde felt that it was possible that she was lacking in perspicacity, and nothing hurt her pride more than a reflection on her astuteness.

It seemed to her that her mother had invested Paulina with a certain amount of new interest. A woman bereaved of her parents, left absolutely alone in the world, was to Clyde an appealing spectacle; and a woman in the process of a spiritual awakening was an object of the deepest curiosity. Paulina was both of these women rolled into one, that was, if you could believe Mrs. Taliaferro. Clyde was willing to believe her mother's statements.

"You see, dearest," Mrs. Taliaferro had said, "if Mr. Fellows can exercise a good influence over her, he may succeed in weaning her from her idea of getting a divorce. She need not live with Mr. Bull; but once married, always married, I maintain. I am confident Pauline Selden would have agreed with me about this, no matter how bad a man Paulina's husband may have been."

"Was her husband a bad man?" Clyde inquired idly.

"He must have been," Mrs. Taliaferro replied. There were times when she found her daughter's questions decidedly exasperating.

Whenever Clyde thought of the process of awakening

that was supposed to be going on within Paulina, she felt both speculative and inquisitive. Awakenings always aroused a doubt within her mind, and yet she would have given a good deal to know the substance of the conversations that took place between Paulina and Mr. Fellows.

"Minnie's so smitten," she said to herself again, "that she must have told him all her soul's secrets."

She thought this last expression very fine. Just as a child sticks its finger into the crust of a pie, so Clyde, fired by her mother's words, longed to stick her intrusive little self into Paulina's soul's secrets. She wondered how the subject of the longed for divorce had been divulged to Mr. Fellows. Had Paulina been apologetic or proudly melancholy? Since her husband was a thief, Clyde rather thought the latter was the better rôle. She agreed with her mother that it was desirable to throw their guest with the minister, not because she had much faith in Paulina's ultimate conversion, but because she wished to observe Paulina's approaches, as it were. Perhaps affairs had gone beyond the need of an approach; perhaps they had already adjusted the delicate matter of the divorce, and were now able to talk on less depressing subjects. Clyde determined to let Paulina have free play. There were two reasons for doing this. First that her mother had suggested it to her; and last, but not least, that, since this was Middleborough's gayest season, Clyde needs must crowd a day and a half's amusement into a short and unstretchable twenty-four hours.

Clyde's effacement of herself caused Paulina the utmost amazement that was, all too quickly, followed by resentment. If Clyde chose to ignore the minister, if the minister insisted on remaining in a state of placid unconcern, assuredly it was none of her business; yet, none the less, Clyde's ability to pick up and cast off her friends was infuriating, just as it was incomprehensible that the minister was too poor spirited to resent the slight put upon him. Apparently he noticed nothing and welcomed even the briefest glimpses

of Clyde who was as autocratic and as domineering as any young queen.

"You haven't preached my sermon yet, Minnie," she said accusingly.

"No," Mr. Fellows answered meekly.

"When are you going to do it?"

"How about the first week in December? Just now I am in the midst of a series; and I have asked two friends of mine to preach on the last two Sundays in November. I am sorry I have had to put it off so long." He spoke apologetically as though Clyde had the right to order a sermon at a moment's notice.

"We'll have to make that do," Clyde said graciously.

"Exactly as if she owned him," Paulina said to herself angrily.

Clyde's superb confidence was as unconscious as it was irritating. Unless some one pointed it out to her, she was rarely aware that she often committed sins of omission. She was so intensely busy thinking about herself that she had no idle minutes to give to the unspoken thoughts of others.

After an interval Paulina saw that Clyde's defection was to her advantage; and, as this grew upon her, she buried her resentment and made the most of Mr. Fellows' society. While it was not the close companionship of the summer months, with the daily walks and talks in the quaint, sweet-smelling old garden, it was a friendship that not only could be trusted, but one that carried with it a sense of good-fellowship, a camaraderie that, though Paulina did not know it, was fast becoming a very vital spot in her life. She stopped thinking about the future; about Miss Jessie's; about her all too evident loneliness. As Mrs. Taliaferro had hoped, Paulina was caught up in the fringe of the vortex of the younger set's gayety; and had she not, ostensibly, been in mourning, she could have had nearly as many engagements as Clyde. Her empty days filled, and she forgot to notice that the autumn was passing away, and

that winter weather threatened Middleborough. It came to her with a shock the Sunday she went to hear Clyde's sermon that it was now the first week in December; and that, after Christmas, she would say good-bye to the Taliaferros. Of course Miss Jessie did not live a great distance away; but it would not be at all the same as being a member of the Taliaferros' household. This reflection saddened the service for her, and it was with a heavy heart that she saw Mr. Fellows mount the steps of the pulpit. She must, she told herself, make an effort to forget her own troubles and try to listen to Clyde's sermon. Before her eyes she saw the Sunday school room and Mr. Fellows' face as he declared the Lord still spoke to his people. It might be worth her while to bend every energy to listen.

For his part Mr. Fellows was distinctly glad that the choir had one more hymn to sing before he could begin to preach. While he had never been a nervous speaker, to-day he felt a certain amount of trepidation, an uneasy fear that he might not give Clyde exactly what she wanted; not wanted either, needed was the word he wished to use. He was absolutely sure of himself; but he was not positive that he could reach through to the idealistic Clyde that he was convinced was concealed beneath her practical, seemingly cold, charmingly flippant exterior.

From his point of vantage he looked down upon his congregation, and wished sincerely that his text had been shorter. A pithy text, he had learned from his ministerial career, was more apt to catch the ear of the distraught listener. The Taliaferros sat in the centre of the church, and Little Ranny was the only absent member of the family. Clyde was in her usual corner of her pew, and he saw she was determined to pay the strictest attention to everything that he said. He prayed that he might reach Clyde, the soul of Clyde; for he was very fond of her; and it seemed to him that, for a brief instant, her eyes met his in a glance of understanding. Paulina sat between Clyde and Mrs. Taliaferro, and her face, too, was uplifted to the pulpit.

He decided to speak directly to Clyde. The hymn stopped and he read his text slowly, twice over, that every one might gather the purport of its meaning.

"The thirteenth chapter of Matthew, the thirteenth and fifteenth verses," he said distinctly.

"Therefore speak I to them in parables; because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand.

"For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and should be converted and I should heal them."

When he had finished he waited a minute for the full context of the words to sink into the minds of his congregation. With the reading of the verses his nervousness slipped from him, and his voice stopped sounding in his ears.

These words had followed the parable of the sower, he reminded his listeners; and it had been in the autumn of the year in the country around Capernaum. That he might visualise the scene before them, he described the land, its rock-strewn surface, its small but fertile pockets of earth. But for these pockets it would have been a most unprofitable soil.

Clyde settled herself more comfortably in the corner of her pew, and breathed a sigh of content. She preferred what she called a descriptive sermon and now she had a good idea of the shore of the Lake of Galilee. All this happened thousands of years ago. It was wonderful that you could see it so plainly in your mind's eye. She wanted to punch Paulina and express her entire approval of Minnie; but Paulina, Clyde considered, had sunk into a trance, and therefore could not be disturbed. She listened again.

Mr. Fellows was talking now of the multitude that gathered to hear the Saviour, and Clyde felt an honest glow of indignation at their unworthiness. He spoke of Christ's

discouragement and Clyde did not wonder; for it was most evident that these people had refused to be converted. Their ignorance had been a deliberate, intentional thing. How wicked of them to close their eyes and their ears that they might neither see nor hear, so her thoughts flowed, a running commentary that followed the minister as he spoke. Here a noise in the gallery made her look around, and so she never knew just how Mr. Fellows bridged the distance between all those thousands of years ago and the present time; nor how he could take the words that were uttered to the ungrateful Galileans, and prove that they were intended for his own congregation, not his own congregation exactly either; but the vast number of men and women who comprised the world of to-day. The astonishing part of it was that he seemed to think that it was six of one and a half a dozen of the other. She felt her indignation rise.

"Well, really," she said to herself helplessly, "really—"

She frowned at Paulina's absorption. She wished she had Little Sally next to her. She could not understand Minnie; and as for people not being converted, why, she could hardly think of a girl who had not joined the church. Of course there were some children, but all they needed was time. She had not meant anything like this when she had said she wished the day of miracles was still here, and that the Lord would sometimes speak to his people. She had in mind something like an unmistakable answer to an imperative prayer; or a clear, direct pointing out of the way in the event of some great and puzzling emergency; whereas the minister was picking out the smaller details of life, little trifles that Clyde thought of no importance whatever, and was asserting that, after all, these details made up the sum and substance of existence. The big matters could be left to look after themselves, since it needs must follow that a decision about them would inevitably be the outcome of numerous small decisions on seemingly unimportant affairs. Clyde was perplexed at such a line of reasoning. What was this he was saying now?

"We are a people sunk in apathy," the minister said solemnly, "an apathy as thick, and far more dangerous, than the fog that surrounds and, at last, blots out the vessels on the sea; for, unlike those vessels, we carry no fog horns to warn others of our approach, no searchlights to help us pierce through the gloom, but are content to drift hither and thither, until we strike some hidden reef and the dark waters sweep over our heads."

Clyde drew a little quivering breath. Was all this quite true, as the minister had said, that the world was sunk in apathy? If so, it was possible that the people of to-day were even worse than those Galileans who, by their very ignorance, had some excuse for their unbelief. She felt hurt and moved, and a hundred small, convincing proofs of the minister's words rose up before her. She had often shut her own eyes and ears and, up to now, she had not thought it really mattered. "Little things ought not to matter," she said to herself feebly.

She took furtive peeps at her various acquaintances to see how they were affected; and, as she surveyed their unmoved faces, pleasant as they were, a horrified suspicion crossed her mind that if they were not apathetic they were indifferent, and therefore would not be apt to hear the Lord if he did speak to them.

"What we need is a new heart and a better understanding that it may become clear to us that our views are distorted, that we are out of proportion, as it were."

Minnie said the most wonderful things, Clyde thought, and his voice went across you, up and down you, and filled every nook and cranny of your being. It was a kind voice, a trustworthy voice.

"If I got into a scrape," she said to herself, "I'd confide right off in Minnie. He'd be sure to help me."

She liked every bit of her sermon. If it made her feel uncomfortable, it made her think, and it undoubtedly held her attention. It had held Paulina's attention. Why, Paulina hadn't moved once, and she had never taken her

eyes off Mr. Fellows. Paulina looked odd, in fact almost ill. Perhaps she had a blinding headache. She looked stricken. Clyde had often felt as Paulina now looked. Stricken was the exact term. Blinding headaches always made you feel as if some one had hit you on the head with an axe. She made up her mind to be much nicer to Paulina. Maybe that very night she would go in and talk to her before they went to bed, and on Monday they could pay some calls together. She couldn't do a thing for Paulina this afternoon, because she had to go to Mammy Kinney's, that was, if it didn't pour in torrents. It was a damp, disagreeable morning, and Uncle Abie had said it was going to snow. She didn't agree with him there. With an effort she turned her mind to the sermon again. Mr. Fellows was in what she called his winding up attitude. She gazed at him with honest affection. Since she had made those resolutions about Paulina, she felt better able to meet his eye.

After the service was over, Clyde waited; but Paulina, as Clyde had surmised, had a headache and went off with Mrs. Taliaferro who, since Ned McFarland was coming to dinner, had to perform some mystic rites concerning the seasoning of the soup. Clyde stood aside until the crowd had dispersed, and then she went to thank Mr. Fellows for her sermon.

"Did you like it?" the minister asked eagerly.

"Yes," said Clyde, "I loved it, though it wasn't what I expected," she added honestly.

"What did you expect?"

Clyde explained her idea about an immediate answer to an imperative prayer.

"Didn't you feel disappointed?" Mr. Fellows inquired.

"Not at all," Clyde declared. "While you were talking, Minnie, I felt exactly as if that something within me you call a soul was sailing, like a little balloon, straight to heaven. While you were talking, I felt like that."

"Isn't the little balloon still sailing?"

"Certainly not!" Clyde exclaimed. "You know about

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balloons, Minnie. Either they burst in mid air, or they have a string attached to them that pulls them back to earth again."

"Clyde," the minister asked, "are you ever going to let go that string?"

His voice was grave. His eyes smiled into hers.

CHAPTER XXIX

WHEN she said she was ¹¹¹ Paulina was not shamming. She had felt nervous and unhappy all the morning; and the heat of the church, the tenseness with which she had listened to the sermon had given her the blinding headache of which Clyde had spoken. She was glad that she did not have to resort to pretences; but could openly admit that she was not well, and thereby satisfactorily account for the pallor of her cheeks, the circles beneath her eyes. She fell in eagerly with Mrs. Taliaferro's suggestion that, when dinner was over, she should take a short nap and, a little later, go for a brisk walk.

"While there's nothing like fresh air for a headache," Mrs. Taliaferro said wisely, "you look tired, Paulina, and so I should rest first. A dose of ammonia will help you."

Paulina assented to all these propositions that dovetailed in so neatly with her plans. She had wondered how she could slip away unnoticed, and now it was all arranged for her. She must go for a walk and, since Clyde was due at Mammy Kinney's, she must go alone. How simple it all was! She was quite clear as to her intentions. She meant to go to see Mr. Fellows; she meant to tell him every bit of her past life; she meant to have some one in Middleborough know her as she really was. It was an idea that had been seething in her brain for some time. Clyde's sermon had made that idea crystallise; and, once the plunge was taken, Paulina prayed that it might ease her tired mind.

Lately she had become possessed with the notion that she ought to go back to her old home; that she had no right to so coolly fling from her her husband, Rose Baby, her sister-in-law. It was her duty to help Rosie. She saw

that now plainly. Since she came to Middleborough her own standards had changed; and, occasionally, she had an uncomfortable feeling that her attitude in the past had not been an altogether generous one. She found it exceedingly hard to readjust that attitude. When she came to think of it, her very position in Middleborough was false and untenable. Sometimes she wished she had not pretended to be a widow, though, as Mr. Fellows had not objected to the plan, there could be no harm in that. It did seem hard that Rosie who wanted a husband should not have one; and she . . . She stopped here. She had come dangerously near wishing herself a widow. If only she were a widow! Ah! . . . She checked herself again.

She felt that if she contemplated living in Middleborough she should more definitely close, as it were, her former life. Now she had the air of having run away from a very disagreeable situation. It did not help matters that this was exactly what she had done. She had several things in mind. More than ever she wanted to get her divorce; and, in addition to that, she wanted to undeceive Middleborough. Above all, she desired the minister to recognise these as laudable, even praiseworthy, wants and advise with her concerning them. Naturally she must go slowly. She could see that, heretofore, she had been too precipitate, and even perhaps a little unkind. She must help Rosie. It had been wrong of her to drop all communication with her sister-in-law. She thought of how she had striven to make Rosie a "handle" for her divorce; and, for a single instant, she cried out at herself, "What manner of woman art thou?" At that moment she could have struck Clyde to the earth for having suggested the text of a sermon that had the power to bring to life the ugly hidden forces of her soul. She was ashamed of this thought, and tried to calm her whirling head. Besides she had some other plans in view. It was for that very reason that she had made up her mind to see Mr. Fellows.

If she went back, she argued, and saw how matters stood;

and if she agreed to do her share, her monetary share she meant, surely that would help to square her with the world. Since she came South she had saved a nice little sum.

"Why?" her conscience asked accusingly.

"Because you utilised the Taliaferros," it replied for her.

"No," Paulina cried in refutation of this statement, "no, not always."

At first she had utilised her mother's dear friend Elizabeth, she thought in an agony of spirit; but now she honestly loved Mrs. Taliaferro. Perhaps some day she might find a way to repay her kindness. She would take this money she had saved and give it all to Rosie; and if Rosie chose to give it all to George Bull that was her sister-in-law's affair. It was not unlikely that her talk with Mr. Fellows might lose her this precious sense of a keen and intimate friendship—she winced at the thought—yet something within her, stronger than herself, drove her to confide in the minister.

"I've got to tell some one," she told herself desperately. "I've got to talk it all over. If possible, I want to straighten out everything. He can help me if anybody can."

She was so unused to self-reproach that she did not recognise her craving for a clear conscience. It was indicative of the change within herself that she was willing, even eager, to yield up a portion of her beloved money to satisfy what she considered an uncomfortable feeling.

She had a number of uncomfortable feelings nowadays, and Clyde's sermon had touched her to the quick. She was moved not so much by the minister's words as by his voice. It was like the tolling of a bell in her ears. "Ding, dong; ding, dong," it said to her; and then more softly, but more penetratingly, "Ding . . . dong; ding . . . dong." When it stopped, its reverberations echoed through her. They used such solemn, clear-toned, deep-mouthed bells to warn sailors away from dangerous rocks. That was the note Mr. Fellows sounded, a note of warning. Though she was not cold, Paulina shivered.

When Clyde returned home she showed such marked solicitude for Paulina's welfare that the latter grew suspicious, and wondered if, in some uncanny way, the girl had divined her intentions. She would have been more responsive had she known that Clyde also was desirous of squaring herself with the world, and regarded Pauline Selden's child as the nearest duty at hand. Having no inkling of this, Paulina breathed a sigh of relief when, at last, from her window, she saw the girl start off for Mammy Kinney's. Ned McFarland was with her, and a Sabbath quietness fell upon the Taliaferro mansion.

A little later Paulina, too, left the house; but she was alone and went in an opposite direction from Clyde. First she would walk past the spot where her mother's home had been; and then she would go to the rectory. If she waited until twilight she would feel more secure from interruptions. All that morning she had longed for her mother. Her poor mother! How she must have loved Middleborough! How Middleborough had loved her!

It had been bleak and grey all day, and now, though the weather had moderated, there was an unpleasant dampness in the air. Paulina inclined to Uncle Abie's opinion that they were apt to have snow before to-morrow. It would be the first snow of the season, and it promised to be disgustingly wet and sloppy.

"A wet snow," Clyde had said oracularly, "is the limit, the very limit."

When Paulina remembered these words she half turned to retrace her steps to the house. She wished she had thought to bring her umbrella though, to be sure, Clyde had gone without one; and she had worn the sport hat she so dearly loved. Apparently she was willing to take the risk. Paulina decided to go straight ahead. She walked briskly, yet the dampness closed in on her. It crept through her coat and waist to her very body itself. It chilled her, and drove her to hurry her steps. She gave up the idea of walking past her mother's home and started for the

rectory. Since her head felt tremendously better it had been proven that she was nervous, not neuralgic as Mrs. Taliaferro had predicted. It was no wonder that she was overwrought. She dreaded this interview with Mr. Fellows.

She walked slowly up the pathway to the rectory; climbed the steps of the porch; and rang the minister's door-bell. An interminable wait followed. She rang again. Again she waited. Evidently the minister was out. She gazed forlornly at the shut door. To have come so far on this undertaking and then to have to retrace her steps with nothing accomplished, with the old dissatisfied, unhappy thoughts stirring and bubbling within her, would be a calamity, an overwhelming calamity. In her despair she rang again, and again, and again; and she waited while the wet air soaked to her very bones. At last her energy was rewarded. The old coloured cook opened the door, and she beamed upon Paulina.

"He ain't here," she answered in response to Paulina's inquiry for Mr. Fellows, "but you come in and wait. He ain't goin' to be long."

"How do you know?" Paulina asked, faintly cheered by the smiling, black face, the pleasant, soft voice.

"He say so hisself, honey."

Paulina stepped in. If he said so that settled everything. His cook trusted him. So did she.

There was an open fire in the minister's sitting-room, and Paulina stood beside it as she watched the old woman pull down the shades and light the student's lamp on the desk in the centre of the room.

"Want mo' light?" the woman asked when she had finished adjusting the lamp.

"No," said Paulina, "no more light."

A glaringly bright room was bad for confidences such as hers. The fire shed forth a warm glow; the lamp, a steady beam of light; and, under the combined influence of the two, she felt the chill slipping from her. Even the old cook's chatter was reassuring. Mr. Fellows had said "he sho'

would come home in half an hour." If Paulina wanted anything she could call her. Christy was her name. As she closed the door behind her she beamed again upon Paulina who, because she was grateful for her rising spirits, smiled back.

Mr. Fellows had an attractive sitting-room, she decided. She liked the heavy mahogany wainscoting that went half-way up the walls; and the soft, dull red cartridge paper that melted into the cream ceiling. It was a cheerful room at night, and there were plenty of windows to make it cheerful in the daytime. Two of them overlooked the church, and two of them, at the back of the house, went down to the floor, and opened on the back porch. Mr. Fellows kept his most treasured possession, his piano, in the front room; but Paulina thought that the furniture about her was charming.

The flat table-desk, upon which the lamp stood, occupied a great deal of space; and it was made of polished black oak with a heavy carved border that hid some seven inches of the base of the desk. This was an old English piece, Clyde had said, and so were the twin chairs of the same wood, whose carved backs rose up tall and straight, in the shape of a Gothic window, and bore upon each of their three distinct pinnacles a carven flame. Penitential chairs, Clyde asserted, and they were placed on either side of the desk. Between the two, in convenient proximity to the lamp, was a big, comfortable, leather rocker that was undoubtedly Mr. Fellows' standby; for, in front of it reposed a pair of brilliant carpet slippers; an indubitable sign of the minister's prompt return.

Paulina smiled at the old-fashioned slippers, so evidently the gift of a parishioner; and then, half guiltily, she stooped over them; picked them up and placed them on the rug before the fire. It was so cold and damp, she told herself apologetically, and she had an idea that the coloured woman had hastily removed them from the fender just as she, Paulina, entered the room. Paulina did not object to carpet

slippers. Her father had always worn them. Only in this small detail did Mr. Fellows resemble the Reverend Lemuel. It was practically the one item about her father that did not arouse within her memory a feeling of absolute distaste.

It occurred to her that it might be advisable not to trust to the inspiration of the moment; but to plan ahead what she should say to Mr. Fellows. It was going to be difficult to express herself. There was something so final and definite about a spoken utterance. She sat in the penitential chair and leaned against the carved back. Above her head, topping the centre pinnacle, rose the carved flame. She looked into the fire and tried to marshal her facts; and she found it increasingly difficult, even in retrospect, to face those ugly truths. The carpet slippers between her and the glittering fender held her eye. Her view-point had shifted once more to the old question. What would Mr. Fellows think of her? It was impossible for her to imagine. No matter how he might hide his feelings, and a minister naturally kept his surface emotions under control, she knew she would be able to ascertain exactly how she stood or, rather, exactly how she had fallen in his estimation. She was on the lookout for the fall. She would feel even the disapproval of his secret thoughts. Beginning at the carpet slippers, bit by bit, she constructed the man until, from the hearth-rug, Mr. Fellows smiled upon her with all the sweetness of his kindly, half-quizzical smile. Paulina caught her breath. When he knew all about her would he stop smiling? She prayed not, and it was an earnest prayer.

Because she could not bear this forced inaction, she arose and again picked up the slippers. They were warm to her hand, deliciously warm. She replaced them before the fire; and she was so absorbed in her self-appointed task, in her disquieting thoughts, that she did not hear the door of the living-room open, nor see Mr. Fellows enter the room.

"Who is it?" he asked, holding his hand before his eyes

as if he had been blinded by his sudden entrance from darkness into light.

"It is I, Paulina Bull," she said. For the moment she was at a loss for words.

The minister walked swiftly around the table-desk. Apparently he did not see the hand that Paulina mechanically stretched towards him. He drew so near to her that her dress almost touched his coat. From his greater height he looked down upon her. He smiled his tender, half-quizzical smile.

"Were you waiting for me, my love?" he asked gently.

Something leaped up within Paulina; something strange, new, and exhilarating; something that could not be reasoned with or controlled, had she been in the humour to reason or control; something that meant not to be gainsaid until it had gone its way; and, as the flower bends before the storm, so Paulina bent before the hurricane of emotion that swept over her. She was as bewildered as a beggar might be were he suddenly to behold the contents of a goldmine poured at his feet. Her starved self caught and held the glittering ball that fortune had tossed toward her. For the nonce she forgot she was George Bull's wife. Life was wonderful! The world was wonderful! Middleborough was twice, even thrice, wonderful!

She felt the minister's arm about her; she felt his face against her face; his lips against her lips. Now she was weakened by a tremulous sweetness. Every current of her being flowed toward this man she knew she had always loved. Now she was swept by a torrent of exultation. Friendship! What a namby-pamby thing it was, what a diluted mixture for a man and woman to drink together! It was worth while to have waited for this, to have slipped this treasure from beneath Clyde's small white hand. Thus thought Paulina in the grasp of the hurricane. Alas, that the hurricane was not the sum and substance of the storm.

She was so submerged in the swirl of her feelings that, though she had clung to the minister, she had been, to a

certain extent, deaf to what he had actually said. He loved her, that was the gist of it, and it was enough for her. He loved her. Not Clyde. Not Clyde. Paulina felt that she had gained a victory over Clyde who, to her mind, was symbolical of youth.

Now that the first delicious moments were passed, she listened to find out how this marvellous thing had come to be. As she listened a mighty hand caught her heart; squeezed it; released it, as it were, to get a better grip upon it; and squeezed it again until she could have cried out in pain. The minister was not talking of love, he was talking of marriage, a subject that should have been awkward to broach considering he knew she had not yet applied for a divorce. He seemed to forget she had one husband securely locked behind prison bars. "The earlier, the better," was his cry. "We have delayed long enough, dearest," he said. How was it possible for her to marry at once, she asked herself? What could he mean? She thought of her mock widowhood. If it had been any one except Mr. Fellows, but Mrs. Taliaferro had told him. She was sure of that. But was she sure? Had not the mighty grip seized her heart at the birth of doubt within her mind? The something that had leaped within her cowered and moaned within her tortured self. The mighty hand never relaxed its grasp. No heart could stand such treatment. It had all been a fatal mistake. Doubtless Mrs. Taliaferro had tried to do her best; doubtless Mr. Fellows had intended to listen; yet, between the two, a misunderstanding had arisen with the result that Paulina and the minister stood at cross-roads.

Barely a few minutes had elapsed before she comprehended the situation, and already she saw how monstrous, how incredible it had been of her to suspect, even for a second, that Mr. Fellows knew of the existence of George Bull. She trembled to think that his arm was still about her, that his face was still against her face. If some one should unexpectedly enter the room, what would become

of his reputation? She forgot, with him, this was not a case of stolen sweets. She forgot that she was a widow not only in the sight of Mr. Fellows, but in the eyes of Middleborough. She planned quickly. She dared not linger. She dared not look into his kind eyes for fear the small remnant of her courage might leave her. Through her no harm should come to this man that she loved. She would withdraw from the shelter of his encircling arm. She endeavoured to disengage herself.

"You must stop," she cried sharply because of her anguished heart, "I . . . I am a married woman."

Mr. Fellows released her instantly.

"Yes, I knew you were a widow." He was puzzled but not dismayed.

"Perhaps I was too abrupt," he said shyly, a little painfully. "I'm afraid I am given to jumping at surmises. I had an idea that you had not been happily married, and I longed to have you trust yourself to me. I felt I could make up to you for those empty years. It was my longing that made me overhasty. You do love me, Paulina?" It was more of a statement than a question.

"Yes," Paulina whispered, "I love you."

"Then, that's enough, isn't it?" Mr. Fellows asked.

"Enough for me?" Paulina cried. "Yes, more than enough; but I—I have a living husband."

She stopped. Mr. Fellows was regarding her fixedly, uneasily. Plainly he thought her ill. Paulina felt that she was trembling, that she had at last reached a crisis beyond her adjustment. To wipe the look of concern from the minister's face; to shatter, at one blow, their joint happiness was the task that had been set before her. Though she flinched, she was forced to go forward.

"I tell you I'm not a widow," she repeated it twice since, God help her, she must speak. "My husband is in the penitentiary. I loathe him. Mrs. Taliaferro said you knew."

She brought out her disjointed sentences in gasps, and

hesitated. They appeared so bald, so totally inadequate. They were not enough. She must go on.

"I felt I could stand no more publicity. I suggested to Mrs. Taliaferro that I should call myself a widow. It seemed to me that it was all right to deceive Middleborough. I was sure you knew." She added the last because she desired to cover all the ground, because she wished to make plain to him that it was the last thought of her heart to trick him. She had tried to speak quietly and distinctly, but the effort was beyond her strength; and she heard her voice crack, break, and end in a long-drawn wail.

Mr. Fellows caught hold of the back of one of the "penitential" chairs. When he removed his hand he held a carven flame between his fingers. Mechanically he placed it upon the table-desk.

"I must apologise to you for my behaviour," he said at length. "I believed you to be a widow."

"Yes," Paulina looked at him out of sick eyes.

"I forgot myself when I saw you here," he said steadily.

"I came to tell you about my life, to get you to help me secure a divorce. I needed your advice."

"I cannot advise you about that. I do not feel well this afternoon, Mrs. Bull. I am not myself," Mr. Fellows replied in a low voice.

Paulina stared at his white face, at the carven flame upon the table. Once she saw him beat his hand against his knee, and she was reminded of George Bull when he came to tell her that he was a ruined man. Did this action signify that Mr. Fellows was as unhappy as George Bull had been? She felt something hot and wet splash upon her hand, and she found that she was crying. It made no difference about herself; but for Mr. Fellows to suffer. . . . It was too much, too much.

"To think that I should have done this to you," she sobbed, "I, who love you so dearly."

A great silence fell upon the minister's living-room. The minister's lips moved though no sound came forth. Then

he spoke slowly and clearly. Ding, dong, tolled the bell in Paulina's ear. Ding . . . dong. Such bells were tolled when a soul was mounting heavenward, when a body was laid to rest.

"There can be no question of love between us, Mrs. Bull," he said. "In the sight of God the man is your husband till death you do part. This afternoon must be as if it had never been. Would to God it never had been."

Paulina stumbled to her feet. She could not see for her blinding tears. "Would to God it never had been," he had said. Let the hand squeeze on now. It was immaterial what became of her heart. All she wanted was a dark corner where she might hide her wounded self, where she might die.

"I must go." She made a futile effort to dry her face, to return to the commonplace. "It is late, and on Sunday the Taliaferros have an early supper."

She walked unsteadily to the door. The minister followed her. He did not offer to shake her hand.

"I shall see you home," he said.

"It is not necessary," Paulina cried brokenly.

"I wish to see you home," he insisted.

Paulina bowed her head. She was bent; she was broken; she had nothing more to say. The minister spoke once more.

"I dare not wipe away your tears," he said.

CHAPTER XXX

CLYDE and Ned McFarland were so busily engaged in discussing the minister's sermon that they were half-way to Mammy Kinney's before they found an opportunity to observe the weather.

"I hope it is not going to snow," Clyde said after a critical inspection of the leaden sky.

"It looks very threatening," Ned agreed. "If it does, borrow an umbrella from Mammy Kinney. I don't want to see that sport hat spoiled."

"Do you like my sport hat?" Clyde asked ingenuously.

"Tremendously," Ned McFarland replied deliberately, "and I don't want it spoiled, because I should like you to wear it whenever you go with me. It's very becoming to you, Clyde."

Clyde laughed aloud with pleasure.

"I'm glad you like it, Ned," she exclaimed. "It makes me very happy when people do honestly admire my clothes."

"I honestly admire you in the sport hat," Ned declared solemnly. "Will you do me a favour?"

"Perhaps," Clyde was cautious.

"I can't come back for you this afternoon, because I have a business engagement with a man that I can catch only on Sunday; and so I want you to promise me to come home early. It's a dark day, and this is not a good part of the town. Will you promise me, Clyde?"

If there was one thing Clyde hated to do, it was to tie herself down by a promise. All at once you became so circumscribed, so curtailed, so irretrievably a slave to that promise. Besides, since Ned had mentioned it, she was seized with an irresistible inclination to stay very late at

Mammy Kinney's. She recognised this as a contrary attitude on her part.

"I really am not afraid," she said, "but I am going to promise just to please you, Ned," she said.

"Thanks," Ned McFarland replied curtly, and smiled at her.

Clyde smiled back. "At times he's very economical with words," she said to herself thoughtfully. She had enjoyed her walk immensely, and she was sorry he could not come to take her home. She quite regretted their arrival at Mammy Kinney's. He reminded her again of her promise, and she promised anew. Later on she deplored her hastiness. It seemed to her that she had hardly settled herself at Mammy Kinney's when, if she lived up to her word, it was time to leave. It was not late; but it was growing darker; and when she agreed to do a thing she always did it. She consulted Mammy Kinney and found to her astonishment that she was on Ned's side.

"Go long, Honey, go long," she urged persuasively. "There's a lot of no-count trash around this town. You go home like Mr. Ned says."

"But, Mammy, it's not a bit late," Clyde objected.

"Where's Mr. Jock?" Mammy asked irrelevantly.

"I haven't seen him for an age," Clyde replied carelessly.

She was so emphatic and so devoid of hurt feelings that the old woman smiled and suggested to her that she should hurry.

Clyde had hurried; yet, in spite of all her efforts, she just did manage to cross the town and get on the main street by nightfall. There wasn't a suspicion of a twilight. From having been fairly light, it suddenly became black, not a pleasant black, but a black so damp, so thick, so dingy that she involuntarily quickened her steps, and gave as wide a berth as the street allowed to the few doubtful looking persons she chanced to meet. Though she was not afraid, she wished she had left Mammy Kinney's a little

earlier, and she made up her mind to thank Ned for exacting the promise from her.

She had walked along so briskly that she was in front of the Watsons' house almost before she knew it; and it was then that she caught sight of the minister and Paulina. They were nearly a block away, but, in the light of the gas lamp, Clyde recognised Paulina's hat, Mr. Fellows' tall, slightly stoop-shouldered figure. As it was dark she had intended to run swiftly and overtake them, when Tom Aylett rushed up behind her and seized her arm.

"Phew," he said, "I had a hard time catching you. Must have thought you were running a race."

Clyde slackened her pace. She gave up all thought of joining Mr. Fellows and Paulina. She might meet Minnie on his trip back. Tom was a nice boy and good company. She crooked her elbow hospitably.

"Take a wing," she said.

Tom took a wing, and they moved sociably homeward.

There was no object in hurrying now, Clyde decided. With so many interests in common there was no lack of conversation. She went in the Ayletts' gate with Tom and slipped through the hedge into her own yard.

"Good night, Tom," she said, "I'm glad I met you."

"Good night, Clyde," Tom answered. "Want me to wait until you get into the house?"

"No," Clyde said, "I'm not in the least afraid, Tom."

Tom nodded his head and lunged off. It seemed odd to Clyde that he should always go in the back way. Because it was so ridiculous, and so exactly like a boy, she laughed softly to herself as she moved beside the high box that separated the garden from the street. She took off her gloves and shoved them into her pocket; and, as she stretched her cramped, chilled fingers, she hummed what Jock called a tuneless tune. All at once something light and wet fell upon her face and hands. Clyde uttered an exclamation of surprise. Here were a few stray snowflakes, perhaps the harbingers of Uncle Abie's first snow of the

season. She was thankful she was so near home; for, though the sport hat was bought for bad weather, if it did get wet it would probably be ruined. Since Ned had spoken of it in such a noble fashion, she must redouble her efforts to preserve it.

She had forgotten all about Mr. Fellows and Paulina, and should never have thought of them again, if she had not stopped in front of the lamp-post, opposite the centre of the garden, to watch the snowflakes fall. They were few and far between, nevertheless, it was a real snow. The winter was here in earnest now.

She was turning to take one of the short cuts to the house when she saw Mr. Fellows coming up the street. In another minute he was beside the lamp-post. Clyde's cry of welcome died in her throat and, instinctively, she ducked her head below the hedge. This was and was not the minister. To be sure it was the minister's body, the minister's clothes, even the minister's hair and hands; yet it was not the minister's face but the face of a haunted man, so solitary, so desolate, so grief stricken was its expression. Clyde shivered, and was afraid. What could have happened to Minnie? Only a short time ago she had seen him walking home with Paulina, indeed he must have just parted with her. What could have happened to him? Paulina! Paulina! Clyde's old antagonism revived at the name. She tried to conquer this by focussing her thoughts upon the sermon.

"Pshaw," she said to herself with an effort, "there's nothing Paulina could do to make Minnie look like that."

While these thoughts had run swiftly through her head, her feet had run still more swiftly. Acting on the impulse of the moment, and stooping low enough for the hedge to hide her, she raced back toward the Ayletts' house, slipped into their yard, and hurried down their pathway. She stopped a minute to get her breath, and then she went to meet the minister. She trusted it to appear that she was on her way home.

Though it was darker here, she saw that his face was still the same. Again she shivered, and was afraid, yet, surely, if Mr. Fellows was as ill as he looked he needed some one with him. She stood directly in front of him, and he lowered his head and strove to brush by her. Clyde moved aside and slipped her hand in his. He gazed at her blankly, unknowingly, then his fingers closed about her hand in a tight, fierce grip. Side by side they started off. Apparently they were going to the rectory. The snow was falling a little faster, and Clyde thought regretfully of her hat. If she spoiled all the hats she possessed, however, she had to do for Minnie. Suppose she had not promised Ned to come home early? Suppose she had not met Mr. Fellows? The two suppositions were too much for her. It made her wretched to think of what might have happened. It made her wretched to think at all.

The walk was fraught with a tragic silence; and by the time they had reached the rectory gate, Clyde's hat, suit and face were damp to the touch. The only thing about her that was warm and dry was the hand enclosed in that of the minister's. While she was conscious of feeling chilly, she had forgotten her clothes, forgotten everything in her intense desire to unravel this mystery. What was the matter? Had not her sympathy made her dumb, it would still have been intrusive for her to question; for she could see that there was something vitally wrong here. What on earth could it be? What could it be?

Up the pathway they went; up the steps of the rectory porch; and now the minister released Clyde's hand and, unlocking his door, followed Clyde into the hall; then down the hall; and into his living-room where the brass lamp shed forth its steady beam, and the fire burned warm and bright. On the table, close to the lamp, lay the carven flame, and Clyde could have wept for the pity of the sight.

"Who has broken your beautiful chair?" trembled on the tip of her tongue; but something held her back. Perhaps

it was the snapped off edge of the flame, perhaps it was the handkerchief she saw on the floor beside the table.

"Paulina," she said to herself again, "Paulina."

She could make no mistake about this; for who else in Middleborough had as dainty an embroidered square with the letter P in one corner. The conviction grew upon her that Paulina, in some fashion, was responsible for Mr. Fellows' distress; yet that seemed impossible and, more than that, it seemed unkind. Mr. Fellows also had noticed the handkerchief. He stooped; picked it up; and handed it to Clyde.

"I think this belongs to Mrs. Bull," he said evenly.

Clyde accepted the handkerchief in silence. Obviously Paulina had been at the rectory. Why? There was no answer to that why. She went to the minister and laid her hand upon his coat sleeve.

"Minnie," she said, "you look so ill. Won't you let me send for a doctor?"

"No doctor could help me, Clyde."

A dimness came over Clyde's eyes.

"I can't bear to see you unhappy," she cried, "and not be able to do something for you."

"You've done a great deal for me," Mr. Fellows replied. "You have walked home with me. I couldn't get on without you."

Clyde looked at him pityingly. It suddenly struck her that Mr. Fellows was not young but old, nearly as old as her father. She saw the crow's-feet at the corners of his eyes, the tired droop of his shoulders, and the protective, maternal side of her awoke. She was seized with a fierce desire to punish the person who had injured Minnie. She twisted the handkerchief in her hand. Paulina, that was it, Paulina.

"You must go now," the minister said. "Christy will walk home with you; for I don't feel well, Clyde. I'm afraid you have missed your supper."

"That's all right," Clyde answered stoutly, "only I am not willing to leave you entirely alone."

"I must be alone." His muted voice went to her heart.

"That means he'll eat no supper," she thought anxiously; yet there was nothing she could do about it. She had already stayed too long. However she put it, her mother would be angry. When she left the room, she heard him lock the door behind her.

As the snowflakes were still falling in the same fitful fashion, she had taken one of Mr. Fellows' umbrellas. She held it over the old woman, and she liked her comfortable presence. Mr. Fellows' face had upset her. Other faces might jump out of the darkness and stare at her. When she did reach home at last she really enjoyed her mother's scolding, and she promised at once to change her wet clothes.

In spite of the wet nothing appeared to be hurt. To be sure, the black and orange wing smelled gluey, but that could dry at its leisure. She knew Ned would be pleased that the hat had safely weathered the storm, and it was a comfort to know that it was all right. Everything else was so totally wrong.

She put on a house-dress and went downstairs. Paulina was not in the living-room with her mother and father. She was not in the dining-room, where Clyde ate a supper cold and congealed enough to satisfy the most indignant parent. When she finished her meal she sought Mrs. Taliaferro.

"Where is Paulina?"

"She has a sick headache," her mother replied. "Do you know I am worried about that child. Try not to make much noise when you come up to-night, Clyde."

Paulina had a sick headache. Clyde thought about this. And Minnie, what did he have? She shook her head and frowned. A sick heartache perhaps. She would have sunk into a genuine gloom if callers had not arrived. Coming as they did, in a happy little group—Sally was among the number—they brightened her, and she became almost merry.

Ned McFarland was the last to appear, but he patiently and silently outsat Sally and her friends.

"What's the matter?" he said to Clyde when they were alone. "What's worried you, Clydie?"

"I can't tell you," she answered sadly, "it wouldn't be right; but I am worried, Ned."

"You were not like this before you went to Mammy Kinney's?"

"It hadn't happened then," she sighed.

She wished she could have poured her story into Ned's ears. As this was not possible she wished he would go home. To sit up late would spoil her plans and, besides, he had the same kind note in his voice that Mr. Fellows had, the same half-quizzical smile. While, of course, one was young and the other old, as old as her father, she thought again they were not unlike; and it distressed her to be reminded of the minister.

"Ned," she said, "I'm getting a headache. You come another night. I'm so worried I believe I had better go to bed."

Ned left at once, and Mrs. Taliaferro tried the doors and windows, and cautioned Clyde to remember about Paulina.

"Did you get enough supper, dearest?" she asked. "When you stay out so late everything is cold. It upsets me for you to do that way."

Clyde smiled at her mother. It was exactly like Mrs. Taliaferro to be sorry about the horrid supper, even though she knew Clyde had been in fault.

"I got plenty," she said. "I wasn't hungry."

Then she hugged her mother and told her good night.

There was a light in Paulina's room, Paulina who had the sick headache, and who ought to be asleep. Clyde kept her own door ajar, and watched that light. She undressed; slipped her feet into her slippers; and threw her wrapper over her arm. She lowered her gas to the merest pinpoint, and she went into the hall and listened. There was not a

sound to be heard. She moved cautiously across the hall to Paulina's room. Turning the knob softly, she found that the door was not locked. She pushed it open and saw Paulina lying upon the box sofa. At Clyde's entrance she sat upright, but the light was too dim to see her face. Clyde closed the door behind her, and advanced toward the sofa. In her white gown, with her red hair, she looked like a flame-tipped candle.

"Now, Paulina," she demanded sternly, "what have you done to Minnie?"

CHAPTER XXXI

AS Clyde had divined Mr. Fellows had not intended to eat any supper, and had shut himself within his room to signify that he did not wish to be disturbed. Luckily Christy was not the sort of person to take a hint, but knocked loudly and persistently until Mr. Fellows, in sheer desperation, appeared and bade her depart. The coloured woman beamed upon him just as she had smiled upon the depressed Paulina, the anxious Clyde; and, brushing past him, deposited a well filled tray upon the table-desk.

"I don't care for any supper," Mr. Fellows said.

"The muffins is made for you," the old woman replied equably, "and you got to eat 'em, Mr. Fellows."

She cast an approving glance at the muffins, and left the minister to his own devices. Once again he locked the door and sat down in the leather chair. Because the food had been thrust upon him and he was thirsty, he drank a cup of strong tea, and made a pretence of eating one of the muffins. Then he put the tray on the floor of the hall, outside the door, and took his seat before the fire.

Ordinarily he held services every Sunday night, but there was something wrong with the heating apparatus of the church, a difficult piece of repair work had to be done, and it had been found necessary to send to a near-by city for a more expert man. The expert was to arrive on Monday and had requested a cold furnace; and so it had seemed expedient to let the fire die out after the morning service. Though, at the time, the minister had deplored this, he now saw that it was the finger of providence. In his present state of mind he could not have conducted the service,

could not have preached a sermon to his congregation. It would have been torture, slow torture.

He had been so unprepared for Paulina's disclosure, so stunned by the crushing to earth of his hopes, that his chaotic mind had refused to meet the situation, but kept repeating that not only did he love Paulina, but that, obviously, Paulina returned that love. He had been strong enough to openly disavow and oppose the thought of a compact between them; and weak enough to still hold the image of Paulina in his heart. That was his sin. He acknowledged it with a bowed head, a throb of bitter pain. He was neither narrow nor bigoted; and therefore he did not believe that he had done wrong to fall in love with Paulina; yet should he not cast her utterly from his affections, he did believe he would be a discredit to his robes, and become as the leper who cried as he walked through the street, "Unclean, unclean!" He wanted Paulina; more than anything else in the world he wanted Paulina. He had to strangle that desire. Here, alone in his living-room, he must kill his new-found joy.

Picking up the carven flame, he held it in his hand. That he should have broken his beautiful chair showed his lack of self-control, that he should regard it as a matter of little moment convinced him that he had, indeed, swept far from his moorings. To what? To where? That was exactly what he had to face, that what, that where.

His two chairs and his desk had come from England, and they represented his share of the furniture of his old home. Now one of his heirlooms was mutilated; and, when it was repaired, a line would forever mark where the flame had been replaced. The pity of it was that dearly as he loved these chairs he could not care about this defacement. He was beside himself. With what? He steadied himself. He would call things by their true names. Passion, that was it, passion. The evil that he had rebuked from his pulpit had come to dwell within him; and it was his duty, it was his fervent wish to dislodge it; only he

desired Paulina, more than anything else in the world he desired Paulina. He was wrong again there. Had he desired her more than anything else in the world, he would have helped her get her divorce; he would have taken her; in spite of his church, in spite of everything. He recoiled at the thought. He drew comfort from the certainty that his faith shone always before him, and the difficulty was that Paulina stood between. He had to go around her, or over her, or through her. No matter what happened he had to reach his faith.

He thought of the wife he had married and buried so many years ago. She had been a distant cousin of his and he had been honestly devoted to her; but it did not resemble the feeling he had for Paulina. The former was the steady flow of a river; the latter, the rising of a surging, swollen flood. The remarkable part of it was that the river and the flood were one and the same man. He wondered dully how that could be.

Until now no inkling of the truth had dawned upon him. The summer had passed so swiftly, he had been so absorbed in his midsummer night's dream that it had never occurred to him to question Paulina about her past life. To him she was what she appeared to be, a widow, and a most unhappy woman. A dozen times, in the garden, he had started to tell her of his love when a glance at her black dress had sobered him, and he had warned himself to go slowly. A fool's paradise. There was no other word for it.

Christy was shuffling about the hall. She had come for her tray, and after that she would go to her own quarters in the yard, and he would be alone in the house. If any one rang the bell he meant not to answer. He couldn't answer. He must stay in this room until he had conquered the rank growth within himself, a growth that threatened his spiritual mountains, his beloved spiritual mountains. He clasped his hands together.

He tried to remember exactly what had transpired the

day he had first heard of the Taliaferros' guest. It had been practice day, he recalled distinctly, and he was improvising a new tune to "Lead, Kindly Light." When he was in the midst of this Mrs. Taliaferro had interrupted him; and she had told him a lengthy tale, and somebody was a widow. He remembered how he had striven to listen patiently, and how one hand would stray over the keys in search of the note he had been pursuing. It was not until he found he had definitely lost that note that he had really heard what Mrs. Taliaferro was saying. He thought he had extracted the gist of the matter. Though Mrs. Taliaferro had been vague, he could not say it was her fault. If he had listened, as he should have done, nothing would have happened. He was glad he was the person who had been hurt.

How about Paulina, he asked himself? Paulina had been hurt, too, but it was wrong of him to think of that. The thought of her love made his heart quicken its beats; the thought of her suffering made his soul weep. He was so powerless. Never before in his life had he felt so constrained, so restricted. Ah, that was his sin! He had set the image of a woman within his heart; and that woman was the wife of another man. He groaned aloud at the persistent way his mind thrust that fact upon him.

The fire dropped in the grate, and the hall clock struck the hour. It wheezed before every stroke as if each effort might be its last. Automatically he counted; one, two, three, four, and onward up to ten. Everything was silent again.

If it had not been for the leak in the furnace, about this time he would have returned from church; and perhaps, it was more than likely, some members of his vestry would have been with him. Outwardly the room would have appeared as it did now. Of course the carven flame would not have been on the desk, but on the back of the chair where it belonged, and where it had remained until he had set the image of a woman within his heart. He desired Paulina; more than anything else in the world he desired Paulina.

Rising violently to his feet, he walked up and down the room; and as he passed, he kicked the carpet slippers to one side. Paulina had been warming those slippers, Paulina who could never belong to him, because she was another man's wife. How happy the sight of her had made him; and, until he had heard her voice, he had been afraid that it was a hallucination of his brain.

"Who is it?" he had cried.

"It is I, Paulina Bull," she had answered.

He wanted Paulina; more than anything else in the world he wanted Paulina. He picked up the carven flame. Because the temptation to fling it from him was so strong within him, he opened the drawer of his desk, and dropped the ornament among his papers and manuscripts. There it was out of sight. He stared down at the brass lamp. His chest rose and fell; and a long, slow shudder convulsed his frame. He knew his sin. He had set the image of a woman within his heart, and that woman was the wife of another man.

"God," he whispered humbly, "God."

He stretched his arms above him.

"O set me upon a rock that is higher than I," he cried, "for thou hast been my hope and a strong tower for me against the enemy."

His face was uplifted. His hands quivered. Since apparently there was none to hear, he cried out again in a loud, harsh voice, "O set me upon a rock that is higher than I, for thou hast been my hope and a strong tower for me against the enemy."

He waited expectant. The clock in the hall struck the hour; one, two, three, four, and onward up to twelve. It was midnight, and all was silent.

The minister's arms crumpled and dropped to his chest; and then, by their own leaden weight, fell to his sides. His limbs shook beneath him. Out of eyes that did not see, he stared ahead of him; for, obscured by the cloud of his worldly desires, the face of his Lord was hidden

from him. Kneeling upon the floor, he raised his piteous glance to heaven. He had been standing near his desk, but where was it now? Where was it? His hand reached out; beat the air; and gripped the carved border of his table-desk. He drew himself to it, and laid his arms upon its flat, smooth surface. How firm and strong it was! His erect head drooped lower and lower until it rested upon his hands. The steady beam of the brass lamp shone upon him. He prayed.

Though the fire fell again in the grate, and the clock struck twice more, Mr. Fellows heard neither the one nor the other. At length he rose from his knees, and sought the roomy depths of the rocker. His face was white and drawn; but his eyes were steady, as steady as the beam of light from the brass lamp. He was spent and exhausted as one would be when one has fought for one's life; and has won. He was like a man who, in the quiet of the evening, is suddenly struck and smitten to the pavement by a ruthless and mighty foe; and who, while he has beaten off the attacks of his enemy, limps bruised and bleeding home. Mr. Fellows had won, but the scars of his fight would remain with him. Though victorious, he was touchingly humble. It was enough for him that his prayer had been heard, that he had been drawn upon the rock that was higher than he; and that, while he was sore beset, the Lord was still his hope and his strong tower against the enemy. After his night of vigil he could say to himself, from the depths of his being, exactly as he had said to Paulina, "This day must be blotted out of my memory, out of my very existence. It must be as if it had never been." He closed his weary eyes. He had fought, and he had won.

The clock struck again, and the minister listened. One, two, three, it sounded. That was all. It was not far from morning now. There were a few red ashes left of the afternoon's cheery blaze, and the room was getting cold. He was cramped and tired; and, when he stood upon his feet, he was chilly. Crossing the room, he pulled up the shade,

and looked out of the window. In spite of the black night he dimly discerned the shadow of the old church. Secure in its strength, there it rested; the church militant, the church triumphant, the church absolute. All that it had meant in centuries past, all that it could mean in centuries to come swept over him; and the soul within him leaped up in exultation. What a glorious future lay before it, and what wonderful opportunities it unfolded to its people.

"The church militant, the church triumphant, the church absolute," he said softly.

It seemed to him that his voice echoed and re-echoed through the quiet room.

It was time to go to bed. He turned from the window, and stumbled over the carpet slippers. Gathering them in his hands, he fingered them tentatively. His skin reddened. As distinctly as possible he saw Paulina warming them before the fire.

A few red ashes yet remained, and there was a morning's paper on the desk. Tearing this into shreds, he dropped it in the fireplace. The fire flared high and bright. In the midst of the flame he placed the carpet slippers; and, after a minute's hesitation, the blaze enveloped them. He turned down and blew out the flame of the brass lamp. By the light of his slippers he left the room.

CHAPTER XXXII

LASSITUDE and a headache had prevented Paulina from putting out her light and getting to bed. When she returned from the rectory she hurried straight to her room; and, tossing her coat and hat on the nearest chair, flung herself upon the box sofa. There she stayed, an inert, huddled together figure whose greatest effort was the lifting of the head to tell Mammy Ellen, when she came in to arrange the room for the night, that she did not desire any supper. That message brought Mrs. Taliaferro full of concern and sweet sympathy, and imbued with a strong determination to make Paulina eat something, even if it were nothing more than hot toast and tea.

"A little food often makes you feel better," she coaxed.

"No," Paulina replied, "my head aches so badly that I am positively sick."

"I can see that from your face," said Mrs. Taliaferro.

It was then that she manipulated the light in a manner that shaded Paulina's eyes; tucked a soft, knitted robe over her feet; and because it was so exceedingly damp, placed a lump of coal on the glowing fire. These things done she sat down by Paulina's side on the edge of the sofa.

"You have no idea how much pleasure you have given me by staying with me, my dear," she said. "The more I see of you, the more you remind me of your mother."

"You are far too kind to me," Paulina stammered.

"No," Mrs. Taliaferro smilingly shook her head, "I couldn't be too kind to you. I loved your mother dearly. It would please her to see you with my children. Ranny's very fond of you, Paulina."

Paulina did not reply. She was being stifled with tender-

ness, with praise that hurt. It was not possible to begin all over again, she thought miserably; but it was possible to try to make amends, though it was difficult to think of anything she could do to repay the Taliaferros. She was not aware that, in her own peculiar fashion, she approached the frame of mind of her husband when he sat by the table in her mother's room, and held the ribbons of Rosie's work-bag between his fingers. Paulina's stay in Middleborough had humbled her, had upset her ideas of the values of life and had bred in her a wish to create other values of the type and quality of those she saw about her. In this she differed from George Bull who desired simply to return and to cling to his old standards.

Interpreting her silence to mean that she did not feel equal to a prolonged conversation, Mrs. Taliaferro kissed Paulina good night, and hurried down to caution Clyde to be quiet. She found that her daughter had not come in and, between annoyance and anxiety, she forgot about her guest until Clyde's inquiry brought her again to mind.

When Mrs. Taliaferro and Clyde came up the steps whispering together, their hushed voices suggested to Paulina that it must be very late, that her waist and skirt were not being improved by the treatment to which they were being subjected, and that it would be a wise act on her part to arise and go to bed. Unhappy as she was, it surprised her that she should consider her clothes and then she remembered that she had to travel, and this was the only thick suit she possessed. In the North you needed good, thick clothes. In the North! She turned cold at the thought, and then she trembled and wiped her poor red eyes once more. She had to go. There was nothing else for her to do.

Now she was too upset to go to bed. The vision of the future swept over her, a future devoid of the minister, devoid of Middleborough. She waved Middleborough aside. For her, Mr. Fellows was Middleborough, and Middleborough was Mr. Fellows. If only she, and not Rosie, had been the widow. If George Bull had died. . . . She pulled herself to-

gether again. It came to her suddenly that she was suffering just as her husband had suffered. He had loved her, that she had always known, but she had not thought that it mattered. Now she saw that she must have hurt him cruelly. It seemed odd to think that George Bull had longed for her exactly as she, at this very moment, longed for the minister. She had one comfort her husband never had. The minister loved her. She had hated George Bull.

"Oh, the poor creature," she said, and it was the first pitying thought she had ever given her husband.

She closed her eyes to try to ease the pain of their smarting edges, and, as she neither saw nor heard the turn of her door-knob, she was startled and frightened when Clyde bore down upon her.

"What have you done to Minnie?" Clyde had demanded and then she had waited.

Paulina flushed angrily. What right had this girl to come into her room and question her? She would send her about her business. To give her speech more force she sat up and then, looking at Clyde, she hesitated; for, on closer inspection, the intruder's keen, bright little face was careworn and unhappy. That was because she loved Mr. Fellows. That was her excuse. It was the one thing she had in common with Paulina who began to see that Clyde was due some sort of explanation, and that her claim was based upon an unbroken friendship, upon an honest affection that had lasted for years. And the minister was not in love with Clyde. How often she, Paulina, had been made miserable by that last thought which was the product of her jealous brain.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked at length.

Clyde put on her wrapper and took possession of a small rocker. She did not lean against the back of the chair; but sat as erectly as possible, and looked as uncompromising as she felt.

"Why do you think I did anything to the minister?" Paulina inquired.

Clyde hated subterfuges and recognised this as one. Somewhat scornfully she gave a succinct account of her afternoon after she had left Mammy Kinney's, not omitting the description of her walk home with Mr. Fellows, and stating exactly why she had connected Paulina with the trouble. She concluded by tossing Paulina's handkerchief on the sofa.

"I found this on the floor of Minnie's study," she said.

Paulina picked up the handkerchief and pressed it gently and continuously between the palms of her two hands. Clyde had established another claim to justify her intrusion, a claim greater than that of friendship or affection. Clyde possessed knowledge and, if she were thwarted or thrust aside, it might prove a dangerous weapon for her to own. Since Paulina had left the rectory, Clyde had stood in its living-room, perhaps upon the very spot where she, Paulina, had reached the zenith of her happiness and had sunk to the depths of her despair. Clyde had striven to comfort the minister. She had the right to demand.

Before she did speak, Paulina opened her mouth once or twice as if she were gasping for air; but, at last, the words came with a rush, though her voice was so low that Clyde had to bend forward to catch what she said. Taking pattern by Clyde, she narrated her afternoon as briefly as possible. As she told of Mr. Fellows' proposal of marriage she went hot and cold; and she stopped patting the handkerchief, and said dully, "He took me for a widow." She did not once glance at the girl in the rocker.

It all seemed so incomprehensible that, at first, Clyde had stared at Paulina with hard, unbelieving eyes. Gradually, as the low voice continued, it had been forced upon her that this was the truth, that, incredible as it appeared, the minister was in love with Pauline Selden's child. Just as she had survived that shock, and had seen looming before her the horrible fact that Mr. Fellows had deliberately fallen in love with another man's wife, Paulina had brought out her simple announcement, "He took me for a widow." Clyde rallied all her senses to correct this statement.

"Mother told him," she cried and stopped; for, instantly, her memory went back to that pleasant spring day when she had walked with her mother to the rectory.

It had been practice day. She could hear the piano playing now. What was it? Ah, she had it. She knew the tune. It was, "Lead, Kindly Light." That was it. She remembered every detail distinctly. Her mother had gone in alone; and, doubtless, had been vague enough about Paulina, the daughter of her beloved friend; and Mr. Fellows was entirely absorbed in his music. Clyde recalled that she had speculated about that and then she had decided to let things drift. She exonerated her mother and Mr. Fellows. They couldn't help being as they were. She was really the chief one at fault.

"Paulina," she whispered, her face twitching, "I know exactly what happened. It was practice day, and Minnie never listens when he's been playing. Mother was excited and I ought not to have let her go in to talk to Mr. Fellows. Then this would not have happened. He would never have fallen in love with you."

"I'm glad you didn't stop her," Paulina cried. "It's all I've got left; it's the one thing I cherish, the minister's love."

"But just to have that one thing, is it worth while to be as unhappy as you are now?" Clyde asked.

"Yes," Paulina answered slowly. "Yes, a thousand times, yes."

"But if you can't get married—and you can't, Paulina—it will be awkward for Mr. Fellows to have to meet you all the time."

"I must go away," Paulina said in a half-suffocated voice. "I can't ruin his life. You see that?"

"Yes," Clyde answered gently, "yes, I see."

"I've wanted a divorce for a long time," Paulina spoke drearily; "but I must not get it just yet. Gossiping people might look upon that as a reflection on the minister."

"Was your husband a very wicked man?" Clyde asked.

Paulina hesitated at this question. Just what did this girl call wicked? George Bull had stolen, and that was wicked enough; but there was nothing else wrong with him unless lack of attraction was a sin. It would have suited her to keep silent. She saw by Clyde's face that she expected an answer.

"No, except for stealing, no," she answered shortly.

Clyde's eyes opened wide. So, though the husband had not ill-treated Paulina, she had wanted a divorce for a long time. Why? It was not the stealing. He had only done that at the last. A shadow of doubt crossed her countenance.

Paulina saw the doubt and realised that, once again, Clyde was judging her by her extremely correct and youthful ideals. When she had asked about the wicked husband, she had spoken like a naïve and curious child. This answer had turned her into a virtuous child; and it occurred to Paulina, that, if she were willing, she could further develop her into an enlightened child. The temptation was too great to resist. The desire to unburden herself, thwarted by the minister's disclosure, overwhelmed her.

"Clyde," she asked, "shall I tell you of my early life, of how I happened to get married and the rest of it?"

Clyde nodded her head. She felt it wiser not to interrupt. As a confidante she did not want to fail Paulina; yet she had been so overwrought all the afternoon that she was hardly equal to these midnight revelations. She had come to demand an explanation; she was receiving a confession. Moreover it was difficult for her to keep her thoughts off the unhappy Minnie; and, in a measure, Paulina had succeeded in awakening her sympathy. Paulina was beginning to look odd and eager, and it frightened Clyde. Except for the discourtesy of it, she would have liked to tell her guest to stop. Her thoughts went back to that spring day when her mother had called upon the minister. While Mammy always said there was no use crying over spilt milk, there was some milk that was worth a hard deluge of tears.

Paulina was talking steadily, and evidently there was a

great deal to tell. As Clyde listened she felt Paulina was fully justified in being nasty. With such a life and such a father it was no wonder that she was horrid at times. Clyde reproached herself for not liking her better; and followed most attentively the story of her married life; and sat in silence when Paulina had finished.

"Well," Paulina questioned restlessly, "what are you thinking about, Clyde?"

"I was thinking about George Bull," Clyde said hesitatingly.

"What about him?"

"I was wondering what he got out of it all, out of his life, I mean, out of all the money you say he spent on the house and you?"

"I married him," said Paulina.

"No," Clyde answered quickly and firmly, "not really, Paulina. You told me yourself that you could never bear him in your sight, didn't you?"

She felt the hot blood rush to her face. She held up her hand to shield her eyes from Paulina. These were matters beyond her ken; yet, in spite of her natural shyness, she wanted to be just to George Bull.

Paulina did not reply. What was the use? Out of her own mouth she had been condemned. She fell back upon the sofa and buried her face in the pillows. Without an unkind word she had been condemned. She was struck by the truth of Clyde's statement. George Bull had got nothing out of his life, nothing.

She lay silent so long that, at length, Clyde leaned forward, stroked her head with an awkward hand, and asked softly, "What's the matter, Paulina?"

"Everything's the matter." Paulina made no effort to restrain her tears. They fell, big, scalding drops, upon her face and dampened her pillow.

"*Do you despise me, Clyde?*" she cried, and *clung to the hand that had stroked her head.*

"Despise you?" said Clyde. "Why, from the bottom of my heart I pity you, Paulina."

She put her arms around her mother's guest and kissed her. At that moment she really liked Pauline Selden's child. She had been honest in her confidences, and Clyde loved honesty.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A VERY tired Clyde crept to bed that Sunday night, a Clyde too brain-fagged and weary to drop to sleep as soon as her head touched the pillow, her usual custom; but who instead, tossed restlessly from side to side striving to thresh out the problems presented to her.

And she had always maintained that nothing ever happened in Middleborough, nothing. To confute this rash speech, and arising out of the simplest possible mistake, the worst that could happen had happened. But was it the worst? She recalled that Mammy Kinney always said that trouble came in threes. Who would be the next; for, according to Mammy, they couldn't hope to escape? Poor Minnie, poor Paulina, and she must not forget Paulina's husband. Who, indeed, was as poor as he?

At last she dropped to sleep and, not hearing the rising bell, had to be roused by Sam who tapped on her door to tell her that breakfast was on the table. Clyde sprang out of bed at once, and commenced a hasty toilet, not forgetting to glance out of the window to get an idea of the weather.

It hadn't been much of a snow, barely enough to cover the ground and sprinkle the trees and the hedge; and, as it was blowing hard, the chances were that the little that was there would be whirled away by the middle of the day. Clyde sobered instantly when she gazed upon its glistening whiteness. It made her remember Minnie and that, in turn, brought up Paulina who was so closely linked with George Bull. Taking it all in all she was sure she was sorriest for him.

She dressed as rapidly as possible, and found that she was not particularly late for breakfast. Paulina was still in

bed with her headache; Mrs. Taliaferro had also overslept; and the morning meal had been delayed half an hour. Clyde had very little appetite which, considering all things, was not unnatural; but it struck her as strange that both of her parents appeared singularly indifferent to food. They wouldn't talk either, and now and then Clyde caught them exchanging glances.

"Is anything up?" she inquired in what she tried to make a cheery, unaffected voice.

"Nothing is up, but I see that you are down," Mr. Taliaferro said.

As he made this little joke he essayed a feeble wink and failed in his attempt. Clyde was bewildered, and it did not help matters for her mother to rise from the breakfast table, and stop to kiss her before she followed Mr. Taliaferro out of the room. It was not the correct thing to do to a person whose mouth was, supposedly, full of food; but then it was not an ordinary sort of a kiss. For a minute Clyde was at a loss, but only for a minute. All at once she knew it to be a kiss of condolence, though why she should be condoled with she couldn't conceive? While she was wondering over this Mrs. Taliaferro returned to the dining-room.

"Clyde, dearest," she said, "I've heard some bad news this morning."

"Oh, Mother!"

Clyde was aghast. Though nothing had been said it was tacitly understood that she must respect the confidences of yesterday. Now there was no need to be secretive. If her father and mother knew, some one must have told them. It wasn't Minnie. It would make him positively sick to have his private affairs become public property. That left Paulina; but, no, it wasn't Paulina. How could anyone else have known?

"Ned 'phoned your father," Mrs. Taliaferro said, "but there was nothing he could do. I was always so fond of the boy."

"What boy?"

"Jock, dearest. I thought you understood. It seems he's been drinking lately; and yesterday, under the influence of liquor, he married a woman nearly old enough to be his mother. He's gone to North Carolina to live. It will hurt Ned financially; for Jock wants to take all of his money out of the business."

Jock married and gone to North Carolina to live. Clyde could hardly take it in. The third blow had fallen, and she was thankful that it was no one nearer and dearer than Jock. Why, it might have been her father or mother, or Little Ranny, she thought, with a quick intake of her breath. This news had not hurt her as the minister's face had done. She was sorry because she had been so fond of the boy, as her mother called him, and there was Ned who must be fairly wild with distress. What possessed Jock to marry a woman old enough to be his mother? Her cheeks reddened to the edge of her very red hair. That was why she had received a kiss of condolence; why her parents had exchanged glances. They thought her interested in Jock, and she admitted to herself that he did have a hold over her; yet she had never been in love with him. Never, she repeated vehemently. Something within her had always rebelled at Jock's love-making. Some quality he possessed made her feel squeamish. She grew antagonistic at the thought. Poor Jock! Why had he married a woman so much older than himself?

"Mrs. Spigg," she ejaculated suddenly and violently.

"What did you say?" Mrs. Taliaferro inquired.

"Nothing," Clyde said hastily. "Who did he marry, Mother?"

A shade passed over Mrs. Taliaferro's face, and she assumed the air of reserve that showed her daughter she had been guilty of treading on forbidden ground.

"She's not the sort of person you talk about, Clyde," she stated decidedly, "and there was no reason for Jock to marry her. He's ruined his life. No wonder he has left town."

"Was she a big, dark woman?"

Mrs. Taliaferro looked at her child with strong disapproval. Finally she said shortly, "I believe so, and now we will let the subject drop."

As Clyde had obtained the information she desired the last suggestion was agreeable to her, though she reflected there were certainly a great many subjects that her mother and herself had to let drop. To a large extent it curtailed their conversation and their expansiveness. She saw that it would never do to talk to her mother about Mrs. Spigg; and yet it was evidently she that Jock had married. What a pity! Even Joe disliked her, and had labelled her a stout pig. She was big and strong and there was no doubt about her age. She had kidnapped Jock.

She wondered if Sally knew of this, and then the door-bell rang, and there was Sally come to call. She seemed so flurried and red of face that Clyde bore her out of sight and sound of Mrs. Taliaferro. The two girls sat down side by side, in one corner of the big sofa in the parlour, and to Clyde's surprise Sally looked and behaved exactly as if Jock had died.

"Why, Sally, I had no idea you cared so much?" Clyde said.

"I can't help caring," Sally confessed with wet eyes, "and yet he didn't care for me. Do you know, Clyde, I always thought he was in love with you."

"Well, he wasn't," Clyde returned stoutly.

She saw that this fact comforted Little Sally, and she added to the comfort by putting her arms around the neck of her friend and hugging her. Sally invited petting and needed it and, after a little, she cheered up, dried her eyes, and they talked of Jock's wife. How odd it was for Jock to have a wife! How hard it was on Ned!

Sally stayed all the morning, then dinner was served and Paulina appeared, haggard of eyes and chary of speech. At Mrs. Taliaferro's suggestion she swallowed a small, white

pellet produced by her hostess, and guaranteed to be a sure cure for a neuralgic headache.

"It won't do you any harm, and it might do you a great deal of good," Mrs. Taliaferro said.

To Clyde there was a fine irony about the whole situation. That her mother should give Paulina a cure for neuralgia; that Paulina, to keep up appearances, should accept the same; and that she, Clyde, should sit by and not enlighten her mother, were all details that had in themselves a ghastly humour, a humour that made her wince. She was relieved that she had to dress for a card-party and couldn't wait for her dessert; and she breathed a sigh of relief when she shut the front door behind her.

The party, with its endless talk of Ned and Jock's misfortunes, broke up early. Clyde walked home with Little Sally, and had just left the Watsons' house when Uncle Abie drove by with the empty victoria.

"Where you goin'?" he asked with a chuckle.

Clyde stepped into the victoria and drew the robes over her.

"You take me to Mr. McFarland's," she directed suddenly.

Uncle Abie's jaw dropped.

"I got to go home," he said appealingly. "Your Ma sent me straight home. This nigh horse," he pointed with his whip at one of the fat horses, "is mighty wheezy, and your Ma says it's too cold fer him to stay out."

"Nonsense," Clyde replied. "You drive me to Mr. McFarland's, you hear me, Uncle Abie?"

Uncle Abie groaned and gathered up the whip. "Lil Mistis" was determined to have her own way, he saw. He turned the horses around, and he wished the nigh one would wheeze loud enough for Clyde to hear him. But he wouldn't wheeze. "Damn his ol' hide," he thought. "He won't wheeze." Her Ma was going to be angry with "Lil Mistis"; but, "She gwine to have her own way, all the same," he said to himself. He couldn't help being proud of this trait of

the "Lil Mistis" and he laughed softly when he thought of the ways Clyde had had in the past, that was, after all, not so very long ago.

If the nigh horse had wheezed ever so loudly Clyde would never have heard him. It had been the impulse of the moment, her direction to Uncle Abie, and she was wondering now what she was going to say to Ned McFarland. She felt so sorry for him, so very sorry for him. The girls had almost driven her mad with their chatter about him.

The McFarlands lived in the new, growing part of Middleborough, where the neighbours were few and far between. It was not built up on either side of Ned's little house, which he thought lucky, and Clyde considered lonesome. Now that he was by himself it must be doubly forlorn for him. Perhaps another year he would give up his house and take a flat. It was dreary for a man to live by himself. Because the street was dug up in front of Ned's, Uncle Abie stopped lower on the block and prepared to descend from his perch.

"You needn't get down," Clyde said.

"Ain't you goin' to give a message?" Uncle Abie inquired.

"I shall give it myself." Clyde suited her actions to her words and, tossing aside the rug, stepped nimbly to the pavement.

Uncle Abie was dazed by her swiftiness.

"You let Uncle Abie give it, honey," he urged. "Miss Lizbeth ain't goin' to like it."

"You are an old idiot," Clyde said pleasantly.

"You lemme go, Miss Clyde," Uncle Abie pleaded. "It's cold to wait, and that nigh horse wheezes just as easy."

"Pooh, Uncle Abie, I don't care," Clyde answered merrily and, to avoid further expostulations, walked off.

"She goin' to have her own way," Uncle Abie muttered again. "She ain't thanking nobody to mind her bizness."

He shook his head dubiously. Proud as he was of Clyde's firmness, he couldn't help worrying when he thought of Mrs. Taliaferro. Often Clyde's determination became a

fault in the eyes of her mother. He ran his hand through his woolly hair. There was nothing he could do about it. He protected himself as far as possible from the cold, and resigned himself to wait. That was all he could do.

Clyde rang Ned's door-bell timidly, and was distinctly pleased when the coloured man opened the door.

"Can I see Mr. McFarland?" she asked.

The man bowed low. He knew Clyde and liked her.

"Walk right in," he said. He forbore to mention that Mr. Ned had stated he was not to be disturbed by any one. He did not consider Clyde any one.

Clyde pushed open the door of the sitting-room and entered unannounced. Ned McFarland had been sitting in a chair near the window; but he rose to greet his visitor.

"Well, Clyde," he asked in some surprise, "how did you get here?"

"Uncle Abie brought me," Clyde answered.

She was at a loss how to proceed, though she knew from close observation of her mother that it was not tactful to sympathise too abruptly. She wished she had Mrs. Taliaferro's ready flow of words. It was wrong of her to stand hesitating while Ned, with his grave eyes fixed upon her face, waited for her to speak. She ventured to look directly at him; and, as usual, he responded to her unuttered appeal.

"You've heard about Jock?" he asked.

Clyde nodded her head.

"I was sitting here missing him," Ned McFarland confessed sadly, and again Clyde had the feeling that Jock had died, not married. "I'm going to be very lonely without him. Poor, foolish boy! I think you loved him a little, didn't you, Clyde?"

"No," said Clyde distinctly, "I never loved Jock one bit. I liked him tremendously and sometimes I thought I might love him; but that was all."

"I think he loved you?"

"No," Clyde's voice was absolutely dispassionate, "no, he

didn't really love me. He liked me exactly as much as I liked him."

"But you knew about his marriage yesterday?"

Clyde was honestly astonished.

"Why, how could I?" she exclaimed. "I haven't seen Jock for two weeks."

"Last night you asked me to go home and you said something had just happened to make you unhappy; and this morning when I found that Jock had been married yesterday afternoon, I thought that was what had upset you, and you were not able to tell me about it."

"Why, no, Ned," Clyde shook her head gently, "mother told me about Jock this morning."

Ned's sober face brightened.

"I'm glad you came here this afternoon," he said slowly. "What has grieved me most is the thought that Jock might have hurt you."

"No," the colour rose to Clyde's cheeks, "no, he didn't hurt me in the way you mean, Ned."

"And you came to tell me—?" He waited for her answer.

"Just that I was sorry for you."

"How sweet of you, Clyde!" Ned caught her two hands in his. His intent glance swept over her; caught; and analysed her changing expression. It was as if he were in search of something, and yet dreaded what he might find.

"Are you sure you were not in love with Jock, not even for a minute?" he asked.

"For a minute, yes," Clyde was getting indignant, "but not for more than that."

Ned McFarland laughed low and joyously.

"Clyde," he said simply, "you know I'm ready and waiting, don't you? I've stood aside because I thought that Jock ought to have his show; yet, if you didn't love him, perhaps you could learn to love me a little. Could you, Clyde?"

Clyde's green eyes opened wide in frightened surprise. Why, she had almost thought Ned disliked her. Since that

fatal night in the garden he had been so friendly—that was it exactly, nothing more—in his manner. Of course there was nobody in the world half so good and kind. He was like Minnie, only a great deal younger, and you could trust him to the end of time. What if Ned and not Jock had gone off with Mrs. Spigg? Then, like Little Sally, she might have been red of face and wet of eye. She always expected him to help her over the rough places, and he had never failed her. When she began to think of it she saw that she could not get on without Ned. An illuminating idea came to her. It could not have been more illuminating had she been gazing at a dark lantern that had suddenly swung around and dazzled her with its broad, white light. That was what love was, not to be able to get on without a person. If you felt like that about a man, if you could trust him as she trusted Ned, infinite possibilities leaped up before you, possibilities so far reaching that you were but faintly aware of their promise. The echo of these possibilities enveloped Clyde. She lifted her wet eyes to Ned.

“You teach me, Ned,” she said falteringly. “I—I want to learn.”

Disengaging her hand, she took off her hat and, though it was her very best, she dropped it lightly upon the floor. The brim was in the way; no, more than that, it was a perfect nuisance.

Uncle Abie sat on the box of the victoria as long as he was able to stand the cold. Then he came down, and stamped his feet upon the pavement. It grew darker and the lamps were lit on the streets. A dozen times he started to ring Ned McFarland's bell, and each time he was stopped by the smiling face of Clyde, by the lilt of her gay young voice that declared as she swung up the street, “Pooh, Uncle Abie, I don't care.”

CHAPTER XXXIV

IN the days that followed Clyde was too busy to give much time to her own affairs. Paulina turned to her for everything and Clyde, though capable, was inexperienced, and very decidedly under her mother's supervision. It was a nice question how the news of Paulina's departure should be broken to Mrs. Taliaferro, who would be surprised at this sudden change of plans.

"How shall I tell her?" Paulina asked.

Clyde did not answer at once.

"You must tell her," she said finally, "that your husband is sick and needs you, and that you feel you ought to go. Mother's sense of duty is so highly developed that even if she wants to protest she won't feel able to do so."

"I am not willing to tell her a story."

"Did you ever think of telling her the truth," Clyde suggested.

"I can't do that." Paulina shrank back as if she had been struck.

"Well, what is your idea?" Clyde asked patiently.

"I might leave and not give any explanation."

Clyde considered this. She had a vision of Mrs. Taliaferro's hurt face at the strange behaviour of Pauline Selden's child. It would be the sort of thing she would remember all her life, and every one would be placed in a false position. Paulina would appear ungrateful, whereas she was really heartbroken, and she could never reinstate herself in Mrs. Taliaferro's eyes. Some day she might return to Middleborough. Who could tell? She explained all this to Paulina.

"You arrange it," Paulina said helplessly.

"Very well," Clyde agreed, and bided her time.

Mrs. Taliaferro was the first to broach the subject. She had a worried little pucker between her eyes, and Clyde could see that she was discouraged.

"Clyde," she said, "Mammy Ellen tells me that Paulina is going away. I can't understand that. Why is she leaving Middleborough?"

"I think she means to tell you herself, Mother. I believe her husband is sick." Clyde preferred not to look directly at her mother.

"So I imagined, though Mammy Ellen knew nothing whatever about that," Mrs. Taliaferro was plainly dissatisfied. "If he's sick I suppose she has to go; still it is a shock to me. I thought we had planned a nice winter for her, and I wanted to keep in touch with Pauline Selden's child."

Clyde put her soft arms around her mother's neck and kissed her gently.

"Mother, you are awfully sweet," she said.

Mrs. Taliaferro was pleased and surprised at her daughter's sudden demonstration of affection. It diverted her from dwelling on Paulina, though, in the back of her brain, she could not help making a note of the fact that all young people were queer, and didn't know their own minds for two minutes in succession. However, she expected Pauline Selden's child to do her duty; for, otherwise, she could not have been her mother's daughter.

"Do you think she enjoyed her stay with us?" she voiced the doubt within herself.

"I should say so," Clyde said emphatically.

"I must ask her again then," said Mrs. Taliaferro, and proceeded about her housekeeping, in which undertaking she was assisted by Little Ranny who dearly loved "to help mother give out the things."

When he wasn't playing with the ridiculous Polly and Margery he was always tagging after Mrs. Taliaferro; but her mother really liked that. Clyde could see that she did. Apparently she joyed in the presence of the child. "I believe they," and by "they" Clyde referred to her parents,

"prefer us to be dependent upon them," Clyde said to herself. "They want to do for us."

If she ever married—she stopped and corrected this—when she married was what she intended to say, it would fall to her lot to arrange and provide for the comfort of a home. Before long she would cease to be a child, she would become a woman. It was an uncomfortable thought and made her see that, in the past, she had been unappreciative. "Ears that hear not and eyes that see not." Hitherto that had been her attitude to her home life. She had loved the devotion that had been lavished upon her; but it had always seemed her natural due. Was that because she had neither heard nor seen? It was as astonishing as it was aggravating how a text could be made to fit the little personal details of every day. It always put you in the wrong in the most skilful fashion.

Clyde had seen the minister once since the day of the snowstorm, and Paulina had not seen him at all. He had called upon the Taliaferros in the afternoon and it happened that Paulina was out, a circumstance that Clyde thought fortunate rather than otherwise. He was quieter than his wont, she noticed, and he did not stay long. That was because he was so unusually busy, he said, but she was under the impression that it was an ordeal to him to resume his normal intercourse with their house; and she marvelled at the strength of mind he showed in behaving and appearing as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. It must have been an effort to him to have come so promptly to see them. She felt she could only realise the import of that tremendous effort.

She had put on her hat and coat and walked with him as far as Little Sally's. When they were about to separate she said somewhat abruptly, "Paulina is leaving us next week, Minnie. Won't you come to tell her good-bye?"

"Yes," Clyde saw the endeavour Mr. Fellows made to speak composedly, "I am going out of town on business for

a few days; but if I don't return in time to call on her I shall take her to the station if I may?"

"Of course." Clyde nodded her head.

Poor Minnie! Poor Minnie! He wanted to take Paulina to the station, and if he did she determined her mother and father should stay away. She could act as chaperon and not hang around more than was necessary. Poor Minnie!

That night when she was alone with Paulina she told her what the minister had said; and Paulina had smiled piteously and had asked, "Do you think he'll remember to come?"

"I am sure he will." Knowing Mr. Fellows as she did, she was able to answer with absolute certainty.

"Will he call, or will he come to the train?"

"He will come to the train, I believe," Clyde said astutely.

Though she had no real opinion about the matter, she spoke decisively because she feared Paulina might be disappointed if the call did not take place; and, as the days passed by, she was struck by the wisdom of her judgment, just as she was struck by the mistake she had made in divulging to Paulina Mr. Fellows' intentions. Paulina, she saw, builded on the hope of that visit. In the daytime her strained glance, her inattentive expression showed that her thoughts were elsewhere; and, at night, so keyed up was she, that her entire body assumed an attitude of listening, waiting, and watching for a footstep that never came, for a voice that, as far as she was concerned, was silenced forever.

To Clyde there was something infinitely pathetic about this unconscious exhibition on the part of their guest. She saw the muscles around Paulina's mouth quiver at each ring of the door-bell, at every tread upon the porch; and when the inevitable disappointment followed she watched the muscles tighten again until the face settled back into its old listening, expectant expression. It seemed strange to Clyde that her mother was not aware of this byplay; but went on her cheery, pleasant way, dosing Paulina with milk punches, and cautioning her to put on plenty of warm

flannels, that was, of course, when she did reach the North. The climate was so different. It was comforting to have one perfectly normal, contented person in the house; and Mrs. Taliaferro, unknowingly, brightened the atmosphere for her daughter, if not for her guest, who lost, rather than gained, under the strengthening punches.

"She's demented about the minister. What in the world will she do when she leaves Middleborough for good?" Clyde speculated, and then she resolutely turned her back to Paulina for fear her telltale face might betray her thoughts.

And after the day had dragged itself out and bedtime came at last, when they were alone together Paulina would say, "He didn't come, Clyde. He didn't come."

Clyde had learned to brace herself for this remark, and learned to reply, with the air of a prophetess, "I always told you he was going to take you to the station."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure." She sometimes repeated this twice to revive her courage which was at a very low ebb. It made her wretched to think about or to look at Paulina; and had she been able to find a single thing George Bull had got out of his marriage, she might have grown very fond of her guest. As it was, she pitied; but she did not love. George Bull had got nothing out of it, nothing whatever. This damaging fact was fearfully distinct in her mind.

She was relieved when the day of departure at length arrived; and was profoundly grateful that the minister telephoned early and asked to be allowed to take Paulina to the station. Without a second's hesitation Clyde accepted the offer, and set to work to eliminate her parents. This proved exceedingly easy, as Mr. Taliaferro did not finish his office work until six o'clock. Paulina's train left at five; and Mrs. Taliaferro was scheduled for an important meeting that, as treasurer of the association, she felt obliged to attend.

While it would have been discourteous to have no one but Clyde see Paulina off, Mr. Fellows' message enabled

Mrs. Taliaferro to go about her business with a clear conscience. Before she left the house she kissed Paulina and urged her to come to visit them whenever she chose. At this Paulina had cried a little and so touched her hostess that, taking Clyde aside, she warned her not to neglect to repeat the invitation, a precaution so typical of her mother that Clyde had been obliged to laugh.

Then Mrs. Taliaferro had hurried away, and Minnie came. To be sure Uncle Abie had brought around the victoria; but that only carried Paulina's umbrella and bag; for Mr. Fellows suggested that it would be pleasant to walk, and so they started forth, a sad trio. From the window Little Ranny, watching them, beat frantically upon the pane, and kissed his hand to them until they passed out of sight. By common consent, as it were, Clyde walked between the two; and, in her position of a connecting link, did her best to bridge the long silences that threatened to ensue. Minnie's trip hadn't improved him a bit and Paulina looked ill, and as if she had not slept for a week, which was more than likely.

"Just lies awake and thinks about him," Clyde commented to herself. "If she keeps on this way she'll go crazy, I believe."

It must hurt Minnie, she thought, to see Paulina's altered appearance. It was a pity he had come home to put her on the train. Now he would be left with a most unhappy impression in his mind's eye. Things were run in a topsyturvy fashion up above, she decided. They should have known better than to have hurt Minnie.

At the station they collected Paulina's belongings, and Clyde dismissed Uncle Abie. She would walk home with the minister and tell him of her engagement. It might interest him, and her secret was safe in his keeping. It required skill to separate herself from her companions; but she slipped away and, from a convenient window, brooded over them as they paced up and down the platform. Clyde wondered what they could find to say to each other without

further complicating the situation. Even her fertile brain failed to ferret out a single happy outcome of this muddle. Nevertheless, they must have their chance, she decided; and so she stayed where she was until the train was called, and she saw the minister was wondering what had become of her.

She joined them and instantly found herself between the pair of them again, and the three walked sedately to Paulina's coach. In the light of a fading day Clyde kissed Pauline Selden's child good-bye and saw her step upon the train followed by Mr. Fellows who carried her umbrella, her bag, her heavy coat. When he had settled Paulina in the car he came back to Clyde. They had a wait of five minutes before Paulina started for the North.

"Why is she going there? Oh, Lord, why?" said Clyde, the irreverent, to herself, and she was not conscious of being familiar in her manner of addressing the Almighty. The exclamation was wrung from her at the sight of Paulina's face at the window of the car. Of course they had to stand there until the train left; but she couldn't keep looking at Paulina. Perhaps Minnie could.

Clyde drew her breath quickly, and lifted her eyes to the heavens. In the western sky she saw the setting sun, a red ball of fire flanked on either side by a thick and fleecy grey cloud.

"Like the soft wings of a gigantic dove," Clyde said to herself, "a dove with red, red breast, if such a thing were possible."

There was something so beautiful to her in those spreading wings that she forgot Paulina; and the minister had to touch her arm to show her that the train was moving, slowly to be sure, but still moving. Clyde waved her hand frantically. Why, Paulina was going to the North. She had started on her journey. For the space of a second her tragic eyes stared at them. Another second and she was gone. It was foolish to wave longer, just as it was foolish to hang around the station. They started homeward; but Clyde turned once more to see the western sky.

She uttered a stifled exclamation. Oh, the pity of it! The pity of it! The big grey wings were in their place; but the red heart of the dove had spread. Big globs of colour had dropped from it into the cold wintry sky.

"The dove has been wounded and from its poor, torn breast the blood has dripped," she whispered.

That poor breast! It might have been torn asunder by a rude and careless hand. She started to show this to the minister; but was stopped by his evident absorption, by the pallor of his face. It struck her that perhaps Minnie might be as badly wounded as the grey dove of her fancy. She fixed her eyes upon the sunset.

"O God, help dear Minnie," she prayed from the depths of her fervent heart. "O God, help dear Minnie."

PART III

CHAPTER XXXV

FROM the car window Paulina watched the sunset just as Clyde had done; but to her the ball of fire, the heavy clouds on either side, were menacing rather than beautiful. Flame and smoke spelt destruction. That was her first thought. Then, when from the power of its own immensity, the ball burst, and the whole sky turned into a crimson lake, she likened the spectacle to a gigantic funeral pyre upon which, judging from her feelings, might have been tossed her desires, her happiness, her very life itself. Lastly as the daylight waned and the gay colours faded from the heavens, upon the land a greyness settled, and that she knew to be the mound of ashes left from the fire. Ashes, nothing but ashes. The hot flame had consumed all else. A great many things, if roughly touched, crumble into dust as fine, as elusive, as whity grey as the ashes of her imagination. And treading closely upon the heels of the grey dusk came the dark night, or so it seemed to Pauline as she stared at the fast vanishing twilight.

"Black without and within," she whispered to herself, "and there is no blackness as stifling as the blackness of despair."

She twisted uneasily in her seat and lifted her hand. It fell heavily upon her knee. She moved it hastily and placed it upon the plush cover by her side. Just so had George Bull's hand fallen. Just so had the minister beat his knee. She was but following in the footsteps of others.

"Black without and within," she said to herself *ever so* softly through her dry lips. "Black, ink black."

She closed her eyes. Nature, in its sunset, had to her mind typified her career. Her hopes had been destroyed; her ambitions had dwindled into a grey nothingness; and now her inner self was swathed in darkness.

Until she parted with the minister at the station she had not realised how complete would be her separation from Middleborough. In the glory of her abasement and renunciation, in the satisfaction she had felt in confessing all to Clyde, in the bustle and hurry incident to her departure, she had had few opportunities to think about the future; and as such thoughts had proved hampering to her in the great struggle she was making, she had laid the future aside. Her first care had been to stand erect with steadfast mien and brave eyes to face to-day. To accomplish this purpose it was necessary to stiffen every muscle. With the help of Clyde she had passed through the ordeal, but she could no longer put aside to-morrow. It had become to-day and she had no one near at hand to ease her strain. It was Clyde who had arranged the last interview with Mr. Fellows. But for her intervention it was possible, even probable, that she, Paulina, would have started on her long journey without a farewell word with the minister; and as unsatisfactory as the parting had been, it was infinitely better than nothing. She made no attempts to conceal from herself that it had been unsatisfactory, that parting, and it told her far more plainly than words could have done that she had burned her bridges behind her.

Paulina did not know exactly what she had expected to happen; but she now saw that she had trusted some miracle would deter her from leaving Middleborough; or, failing that, that she could still keep up her intercourse with Mr. Fellows. Though letters gave pleasure they were innocent things, and no one need know of the quiet correspondence. Such was the trend of her thoughts, and if once she conveyed this idea to the minister all would be well. Unfortunately it required two persons to put this plan into execution, and Mr. Fellows himself blocked the way. It

was the sort of proposition that ought to emanate from him, and he had persisted in ignoring the opening she made for him. She had grown desperate.

"We must keep in touch with each other," she had begged. "How shall we manage to do that?"

"Through Clyde," Mr. Fellows replied promptly, so promptly that it put a stop to further suggestions on her part. "She's a good friend," he had added.

So there were to be no letters, no intercourse of any sort unless Clyde might be gracious enough to write now and then. There was to be no miracle either. She had to go. Since it was unaccountably hard for her to see the platform, she stumbled, and Mr. Fellows had helped her to her feet again. She had wanted to clutch the arm that caught her and pray him to write to her; but so steady and compelling was his gaze that insensibly she straightened.

"I thank you," she had said stilly, and they had walked once more.

If the minister would again assure her of his love, she had thought, she was confident she could go her way with the same bravery a martyr might show as he mounted the steps to the scaffold. It was not that she doubted the sincerity of his former declaration, it was only that she required some further mental stimulus to help her over the last lap of the road. She hungered for his approval, for his appreciation of the fact that for his sake alone she was taking this step. Surely something was due her. It could be a matter of words or a matter of letters. Either would sweeten her trip to the North.

It appeared that she was to have neither the one nor the other. Repeatedly, in numberless small ways, she had appealed to Mr. Fellows, and had listened in heart-stricken silence to his replies to her remarks. She remembered what he had said in the living-room of the rectory.

"This afternoon must be blotted out of your memory, wiped out of existence. It must be as if it had never been. Would to God it never had been."

He meant to live up to these words, in fact, at this very moment, he was living up to them.

"But he is obliged to remember," she comforted herself, and saw at once that was not enough to satisfy her. He must show, he must say he remembered. That was what she wanted, and what, evidently, she was not likely to get.

She was forced to consider the minister from another view-point. Inasmuch as he had clung to his faith, inasmuch as he had set the ideal above the material, he had risen, as it were, out of her plane, he had reached a height to which she dared not, could not climb. Inadvertently she had been guilty of clutching at the hem of his garments in a vain effort to drag him down to her own level. Since, knowingly, she could not do that, she desisted in her efforts to coax him to write to her. Then, and not until then, did it dawn upon her how entirely Middleborough would disappear from her horizon. From having been a reality, it would become a memory. She saw, too, exactly how the town would regard her visit to the Taliaferros. For Pauline Selden's child to return to her mother's home was a pleasant episode, for Pauline Selden's child to desire, after this visit, to go back North was a surprising episode. Middleborough would not worry its head over the whys and wherefores of the matter. It had its own life to live. Paulina had come and gone. She was an episode, nothing but an episode.

The remainder of her days the picture of the little station, that she had smiled upon so contemptuously when she had descended upon Middleborough, would be photographed upon her brain. The long, low, yellow sheds, for that was what they amounted to, the covered platform with the inevitable weighing machines, the swarm of lounging negroes, the antiquated, shabby hacks with their twice antiquated, shabby drivers, all stood out plainly before her. Clearer than anything else she saw the minister as he stood by Clyde's side. Just as the train pulled out she had pressed her face against the pane that she might not lose his slightest expression, his smallest smile. Surely now eye might

answer eye. What was there to hinder? Not Clyde. She was watching the sunset. Not the lounging negroes, nor the antiquated drivers, nor the other passengers in the car; for they were occupied with their divers business and were not paying the least attention to Paulina. There was nothing to hinder, and yet Mr. Fellows continued to ignore her glances. He meant to stick to his resolve. He meant to blot her out of his existence.

With a violent whistle and an equally violent jerk the train started, then glided smoothly and slowly enough past Mr. Fellows and Clyde, past the swarming negroes, past the weighing-machines, past the yellow sheds. Shortly nothing remained of Middleborough but the sunset, and she had no use for that, though she continued to stare at the moving landscape until the shifting scenery made her eyeballs ache.

It was night now. The lights were lit in the car and the porter was arranging the berths for the somewhat impatient travellers. There were not a great many of them and they had come from much farther South and were tired and dirty. Opposite her, on the other side of the aisle, was a young woman with a baby in her arms. Paulina watched her curiously. Just so might her mother have looked as she travelled with the child Paulina. What hopes, what fears had been her companions on that trip? Above all, she had had the Reverend Lemuel to add to her bliss. Paulina stopped. It was wrong of her to so despise a man who had been her father, and who was dead and beyond all power of vexing her further. It was not safe for her to let her thoughts drift backward. It was better far to watch the deft porter.

Before many minutes had passed her bed was ready and waiting, and still she sat thinking. If her mother had not travelled, if she had continued to live in Middleborough, she, Paulina, might have married Mr. Fellows instead of George Bull; she might have been the minister's wife. Once again her hand fell heavily upon her knee. Once again she

placed it on the plush arm of her seat. The colour crept into her cheeks. To have been the minister's wife! She let her fancy dwell on that. To have been the minister's wife.

It was a glorious vision that she had roused, and she took it with her to the narrow little dressing-room and back again to her section. It left her when she crept into her berth, and laid her head upon a pillow that, in spite of its cleanly appearance, smelt so strongly of cinders. She laughed, a short, scornful laugh, at her own foolishness. Never had she been so utterly alone as she was at this moment. No matter what might befall her it was impossible for her to be more wretchedly miserable.

Through the screened window the night air poured in upon her, sharp gusts that made her draw her blankets closer about her. Since they were moving steadily northward it would continue to grow colder. It was a winding road and the coach swayed as it rounded each curve; yet, because of the iron tracks, it was compelled to go ahead. Now and then the whistle blew, a hoarse, shrieking sound, and once the smoke and cinders of a tunnel poured directly in her face.

It seemed to her that she was not unlike this train that forged along through the night. She, too, must follow the track that stretched before her; and, just as the train would ultimately reach its destination, so must she hope in the course of time to come to some spot where she could rest. It was natural, she told herself, that she should feel exhausted, that she should feel, in a certain sense, let down after the excitement of her great decision; for to her it had been great in the biggest meaning of the word. Though at the start it had hurt her to have the minister not comprehend her sacrifice, looking at it from his standpoint, she saw he had followed the only course open to a man of his spiritual beliefs.

"If he were not so far above me," she had whispered to herself. "If I could climb . . ."

"Why not?" demanded the soul within her. "Why not?"

Paulina lay absolutely motionless. Why not, indeed? There were many answers to that question, and it was never easy to climb. Was there no other way to come close to the minister? Apparently not. If she had been the minister's wife she would have climbed. No matter how many times she might have fallen, she would have kept on climbing. She turned restlessly upon her hard pillow and steadied her body against the rock of the coach. She decided, in the future, to live as a minister's wife would have done. She did not call that climbing.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IF Pauline had hoped to compose her thoughts for the night she soon discovered that her efforts were unavailing. All too quickly it became evident to her that sleep had deserted her, a condition she had learned to dread since her unhappy talk with Mr. Fellows.

Though it was dark and quiet enough in her coach she grew to hate her narrow berth, its box-like dimensions, its ceiling, overhanging her and shutting her in. The shrieking, importunate whistle rasped on her nerves, and the long stops at the big towns, where the hurrying porters swung lighted lanterns to and fro before her window, almost drove her frantic. She prayed that the train might travel more swiftly, and then she invariably shuddered at the jolt and jostle of the engine as it started again on its weary task of moving northward. Sometimes it seemed to her that the very reverberations of the wheels repeated the refrain. To the North, they creaked and turned. To the North, they turned and creaked.

She imagined, but was not sure, that she snatched a couple of short naps; and, at last, towards morning, she fell into a sound sleep. When she awakened it was broad daylight, and she could tell from the admixture of noises beyond her curtains that the greater number of passengers were up and had breakfasted. She looked at her watch. It had run down because she had been too unhappy to think of winding it up. She rang for the porter.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"'Bout nine," the porter answered.

"How about breakfast?"

"Going on now, ma'am."

Paulina nodded her head in curt dismissal of the man and, closing the curtains of her berth, lifted her window shade. For a minute the whiteness of the landscape almost blinded her; but, as she grew accustomed to the light, she saw that it was a sparkingly clear day and that the snow was packed hard and firm upon the hillsides. They were in the North now and here, during the winter, the ground was always covered with snow. You walked between snowy walls upon a hard, beaten path, and this condition lasted until the February thaw when the walls and paths melted into a dirty stream of slush. Last year had proved an exception to this rule. Last year. . . . With a shudder she recalled her wandering thoughts, gathered together her belongings and departed for the dressing-room. Here the white glare was absolutely unpleasant, and so she half lowered the shade and set to work to do away with the dust of the train. No one came to disturb her and outside the hard snow, as solid as facts, assured her she was in the North. When she returned to her section she found the porter dusting its plush cushions.

Mechanically Paulina sat down, relaxed her body against the back of the seat and folded her hands in her lap. In all too short a space of time she would leave this train. She would be home again, though in her case the word home was a mockery, a slap in the face as it were. When she stepped from the train into the station, where was she to go, she asked herself? She passed her hand across her eyes. First she must find Rosie, and here the Christian Association might be able to help her. Yet granting she found her sister-in-law, what difference could it make; she demanded of her innermost thoughts?

She had her answer ready. Rosie would take her to George Bull, and she would give the pair of them the little money she had laid aside. Perhaps every year she could spare something. The minister's wife would have spared a great deal, but then she would never have been caught in such a predicament, Paulina thought mockingly, and, even

as she mocked, she planned to model herself on this imaginary woman. While it was not likely she would succeed, she wanted to try. If she stopped and asked herself this question, "What would the minister's wife do under these circumstances?" it might help her in her decisions. She was sure that it would; in fact, the one thing that worried her was the fear that she might not be able to follow in the wake of this wonderful woman. At times she knew her courage would fail her; yet because it was so difficult, because the position was so desirable, it was all the more worth the trying. It was not much she had left now; but it helped her, this gracious image of the minister's wife.

Also, after she had offered her money, she desired to apologise, if she were able, to George Bull for the unhappiness she had caused him. Clyde had showed her that she owed this to her husband, that, indeed, it was the only reparation she could make for those neglectful years of her married life. How would he accept her apology? She could not imagine. No matter how he took it, she was forced to go ahead, just as she had been forced to confess the sordid details of her matrimonial experience to Clyde. Perhaps she desired to shrive herself. Perhaps, through her love for Mr. Fellows, she had gained some inkling of the wrong she had committed in marrying a man who, to her, was, at the start, distasteful if not absolutely repulsive. She could never have forced herself to love him. She admitted she had not tried. Paulina did not attempt to analyse her motives in desiring to apologise. In her youthful, trenchant way Clyde had made the situation perfectly clear to her. "George Bull got nothing out of it," she had said. So convincing had she been that Paulina at length confessed that, "He got nothing out of it, nothing." Here Clyde had hit hard, and Paulina was still smarting under the force of the blow.

When she finally arrived at her journey's end she did not hurry at once to the waiting-room, but loitered around until the train had started off again. In a certain sense it

was connected in her mind with Middleborough. Even if it had borne her away, it had deposited her there. That had been a kind act on its part. In spite of all she had suffered, was still suffering, she had never regretted, not for the space of a second, her expedition to Middleborough. She felt now that the last link had been severed. The train was moving northward. She, too, must move. Her destination was the Information Bureau. She went to seek it.

It did not prove at all difficult to find the Young Women's Christian Association; but Rosie was no longer there; to be exact, had not been a resident of that domicile for some months.

"Have you any idea where she has gone?" Paulina inquired.

The matron knew where Rosie had gone when she first left the association.

"I have not seen her for some time and she may have moved," she said, "but it's worth trying, I think."

"Yes," Paulina agreed, "it's worth trying."

"Her embroidery is marvellous."

"Yes," Paulina agreed again. The matron thought her a patron of Rosie's. There was no use undeceiving her. Perhaps had she known she was talking to the wife of a thief, she might not have been as interested nor as courteous. It was human nature to want to accommodate the well-to-do. Money counted everywhere. She smiled faintly. No, it didn't count everywhere. It didn't count in Middleborough; it occupied a very lowly position there. As Clyde had explained to her, it was a sort of deplorable necessity; and if you were a lady, though you might be uncomfortable, you could manage to get on without it. Paulina did not agree with Clyde about this. You needed money everywhere, she thought. If Middleborough was an exception to this rule, it was a modern miracle.

The matron disappeared, and returned with the address neatly typed on a sheet of paper that set forth the advantages of the association.

"They don't lose a chance to advertise," Paulina said to herself with a spark of her old malice and put the paper safely in her pocketbook.

"Is it far?" she asked.

"It will take an hour to get there on the car. You have to transfer. Perhaps I had better explain."

"That is kind," Paulina said, and wrote down the directions as they were given her.

When she reached the street she studied her written directions. It seemed foolish of her not to be able to get along without these instructions; yet, thinking it over, she remembered that her home had always been outside of the city itself. She was, and she was not, familiar with the town. Once again she read her directions. First she must walk a block to the car line. That was easily done. She started out briskly. She was on her way to Rosie's.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A LITTLE over an hour was consumed getting to Rosie's boarding-house, and then Paulina was clever enough to avoid all useless delays. After the ride was over she still had three cross blocks to walk and there was an excellent possibility of not finding Rosie, who might easily have moved to another part of the city. It was getting on in the afternoon; as yet she had made no arrangement for the night, and her trunk was still at the station. If this turned out to be a footless expedition she felt she would be utterly discouraged.

It was not a part of the town to promote cheerfulness, and it was a locality unknown to Paulina. Though she was well acquainted with the suburbs, with the shopping district, with miles and miles of the country that stretched out and beyond George Bull's house, not being of a philanthropic turn of mind, she had never penetrated into the congested portion of the town and she found it a disagreeable reminder of her more youthful days.

She glanced at the row of tall, narrow houses that rose like a wall by her side, at the small patch of sky above her head, and she saw again the irregular streets of Middleborough, the trees that shaded the pavements, the gardens gay with summer flowers. It was useless to argue that in winter there were no flowers, that now the trees were stripped of their foliage; for Paulina knew the blooms would reappear in the spring and the leaves overhead would be as thick and as green as ever. A phase of nature was not to be dreaded. It was right and natural. It had to be. Here it was different. Spring would not alter the aspect of this street. It was beyond all powers of revivification. It was overwhelmingly

respectable and overwhelmingly disheartening. She rang the bell of one of the tall houses, and the door was opened by a woman hard of face and harder still of voice and manner.

"Does Mrs. Bull live here?" Paulina asked.

"Yes," answered the woman.

She said nothing more, but her eyes wandered over Paulina, appraising her, making a mental inventory of her. She disapproved of what she saw. Too well-dressed to be a friend, and if she meant to give an order she'd have come in her own machine, she argued shrewdly. Yet this was a good-looking woman at her door, though she had curious circles beneath eyes that were a mite too close together. It was not for her to make the first move. She stood expectant.

"Is she in?" Paulina was not aware that she had been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

"She's out," the woman returned calmly.

Paulina reddened at the discovery that this woman did not intend to make herself pleasant.

"I have come to see Mrs. Bull on important business," she said levelly. "I am her sister-in-law. Where shall I wait?"

The woman moved aside, and Paulina walked into the little sitting-room and sat down on the springless sofa. She felt the boarding-house keeper was watching her. About this she was correct.

"Her sister-in-law," the woman had said to herself incredulously. "Her sister-in-law." She lingered in the hall to see how Rosie might receive her guest. Mrs. Bull had already been out longer than she had intended to stay. She might return any minute now.

Unluckily for her she was called to the kitchen, and therefore did not see the meeting between the two Mrs. Bulls. It would have interested her that they neither kissed nor shook hands; but stood staring at each other with white faces and almost fearful eyes. There was an element of

uncertainty in their attitude, and for a minute neither spoke. But for Rose Baby, who was with her mother, the meeting might have proved exceedingly awkward. Rosie was the first to recover herself.

"Go, kiss Aunt Paulina, Rose Baby," she said hoarsely.

"Muvver's friend?" the child asked interrogatively.

Both women coloured. Each remembered that Rose Baby had said precisely the same words, in precisely the same voice, the day George Bull had brought her in his arms to Paulina. The child was taller now, and shyer. She hesitated and waited for her mother's answer. Rosie gave her a gentle push.

"Yes," she said, "she's mother's friend." Her words, not her voice, were reassuring.

Rose Baby walked to her aunt and held up her face to be kissed, nor did she demur, though her eyes turned anxiously to her mother, when Paulina took her in her lap and smoothed the little ringlets that clung so closely to her face. She had the same air of delicate aloofness that had first attracted Paulina, and the same trick of remaining charmingly silent without appearing the least stupid.

"She's a 'darling,'" Paulina said impulsively.

"Yes," Rosie's tone was guarded, even lifeless. She was watching her sister-in-law and she was wondering what brought her here. Why had Paulina come back, she wanted to know. There was something behind this visit.

She, Rosie, had left the house to deliver an order, and she had taken her child with her for company. It had been a happy expedition, and it was a shock to her to come home and find this surprise awaiting her. She had always been afraid of George Bull's wife; for there was something in her manner, in her intonation, that hurt, or, at least, it had always hurt Rosie, who was not used to slights of speech and gesture. As she sat facing Paulina who, for the nonce, appeared to have laid aside that manner, the old dislike came over her, only this time it was coupled with a certain amount of pity. Paulina, she thought, must have been through a

severe illness. She had lost weight, her colour was gone; and while she was still handsome she was a wreck of her former self.

"She looks as if she were driven," said the now city-wise Rosie to herself, "but she's not the sort of person to let anybody or anything drive her. What's the matter with her?"

Poor Rosie! This time last year she had not known a great deal about driven people. She had grown years older, years wiser, years sadder since then, and she had learned to provide for herself and Rose Baby. Feeling as she did about George Bull, with her unanswered letter in her mind, she considered Paulina's altered appearance a just punishment from heaven for her inhuman behaviour to her husband.

"She shouldn't come off scot free," she argued, "and she hasn't."

She felt a hasty but entirely natural twinge of satisfaction at the thought; yet, at the same time, she wanted to be just to her sister-in-law, who had the one redeeming trait of having always been sweet to Rose Baby. It was this last attribute that made Rosie sit quietly by while Paulina fondled her child.

Since her husband's death Rosie herself had undergone a great change. During her stay with George Bull, she had developed to some extent; and his misdemeanours and imprisonment had the effect of forcing her growth with almost alarming rapidity. The very fact that she had disregarded his orders had strengthened her somewhat childish character, and her love for him had given her courage to go ahead. Not for a minute had she hesitated; not for a second had she wavered in her determination to turn a deaf ear to his entreaties. Her place was by his side, or as close to him as she could get; and she stuck to her purpose with the stubbornness of the weak that, in the course of time, crystallised into the endurance of the strong. Had she taken the trouble to think about it, she would have seen that there was scarcely a scrap of the old Rosie left, and

that what had evolved out of George Bull's great misfortune was a womanly creature who was neither afraid nor ashamed to fight for her own. She counted her own Rose Baby and George Bull, and she had offered to share with Paulina. This was the context of the letter Paulina had not answered. Now Rosie was not willing to share and she resented the appearance of her sister-in-law, partly because she could not understand this visit, and partly because Paulina had scorned George Bull, an unforgivable sin in Rosie's eyes.

While her inward self waxed strong her outward self had not remained at a standstill. Her independence showed itself in her very walk, her very gesture, her very assumption of ease that had been born of a great determination. Her eyes were clearer, steadier, more purposeful, and she had lost the knack of crying. She had no minutes, no hours, to weep for the dead. She needed her whole day to fight, to work for the living. Thanks to Paulina she had learned to dress properly and with due regard to her somewhat uncertain waist line. The very suit she was wearing had been selected by her sister-in-law and was both becoming and a good fit.

Paulina, with Rose Baby on her knee, observed the suit. Her first sensation was one of pride that she had so uplifted Jim's wife. So neat and trim was she that a casual passer-by would never have known that she was country born and bred.

"She's positively pretty," Paulina thought, "and quite stylish."

When her examination of Rosie's clothes was over her eyes travelled to Rosie's face, and she noticed those quiet eyes that were regarding her so unwinkingly.

"You look very well, Rosie," she said.

"I feel well," Rosie returned.

"As you see, I have just come," Paulina was a little at a loss how to proceed, "and I want a room. Can I get one?"

"Here?" Rosie asked. "Here?"

"Yes, here."

"For how long?" To ask this Rosie had to moisten her lips.

"I think you get them by the week, don't you?" Paulina evaded the question. "I shall pay in advance. Are any of the rooms empty?"

"Yes," Rosie said unwillingly, "there's a little one next to mine." She lifted the child from Paulina's lap. "Get Mrs. Harding for mother, darling," she said.

It was a relief to walk to the door and back to her chair. She had to do something. Was the world turning upside down? She rather thought it was. Rack her brain as she might she could not explain this strange behaviour on the part of her sister-in-law, and to be obliged to have her in the house with her for a week, or it might be longer, was almost unendurable. What did she want? Paulina interrupted these disagreeable reflections.

"Does this woman, Mrs. Harding, know about George Bull?" she asked.

"No," Rosie replied brusquely, "but you had better tell her just who you are. The Association people told me she was most respectable."

"Why tell her anything?"

"Why," said Rosie. "Why? Because well-dressed women don't usually stay at a cheap place of this sort. She might refuse to take you in."

"Oh," said Pauline in a small voice.

She began to understand the strange manner of the boarding-house keeper. Nothing further was said until Mrs. Harding appeared without the child who, it seemed, wanted to stay with the cook.

Rosie was grateful for Rose Baby's absence. There was a great deal to explain and it was hard to pick and choose words that a child could not understand. She introduced Mrs. Harding to Paulina, who bowed and said, "You manage it," and it was a few minutes before Rosie realised that

she had been gently but firmly forced into urging Mrs. Harding to find a room for George Bull's wife. When the knowledge dawned upon her she was about to stop negotiations, but a glance at Paulina's face, white and drawn with fatigue, moved her to pity; and she finished her request by adding that she thought there was a vacancy next to her.

"Yes," the woman replied, "the room is empty."

"May I have it?" Paulina asked.

Mrs. Harding hesitated. It might give an unpleasant notoriety to a house to board the wife of a thief. As well as she could she intimated this difficulty, and spoke of the gentility of her house.

"Why mention it to any one?" Rosie asked. "We hate the publicity, but we thought it right to tell you."

"So it was," the woman agreed, "and we'll call it settled. No one need know and if it leaks out, it won't be my fault."

She smiled, her hard smile, upon Paulina; for it was a satisfaction to her, a tribute to her house, as it were, to lodge the wife of a man who, if he were now a convict, had once been reckoned rich in this world's goods. This feeling impelled her to accompany Paulina to the room; and forced her to suggest that, for a modest recompense, her son would take Paulina's check and get her trunk from the station to the house, a proposition that the latter thankfully accepted. The room was on the top floor and exceedingly small.

"It's better higher up," Rosie said listlessly. "You get more air and a good view."

Paulina sat down on the edge of the narrow bed. The flights of steps had taken her breath away.

"Well?" asked the landlady.

For answer Paulina opened her bag and paid for a week's board.

"There's just one thing," Mrs. Harding observed as she took the money. "If a regular boarder, wanting to stay all the winter, applies you'll have to go."

"Very well," Paulina replied.

"Perhaps no one will apply," Mrs. Harding said consolingly.

It was hard to have been the wife of a rich man and to have become the wife of a convict. In consideration of this she decided to alter the furniture a bit, and to give Paulina an extra chair, a rocker perhaps. She mentioned this to Rosie, who only half turned her head and who appeared unenthusiastic solely because, at that moment, she was praying that a regular boarder might apply, some one who would want to stay all the winter. Rosie was wholly human, and wholly devoted to George Bull.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AS soon as her landlady and her sister-in-law had closed the door behind them, Paulina put her coat and hat in the small cupboard that was dignified by the name of a closet; and when she had smoothed her hair she sat by the one window that the room possessed. As Rosie had said, it was better higher up. They were farther from the people on the street and nearer the scrap of sky. In summer this room must be hot—it was too close to the roof to be comfortable—and in winter it must be cold since the heat had so far to climb. It was cold now, only Paulina did not mind the cold. Yet thousands of men and women lived in rooms similar to this all the year around. Rosie had no better accommodation. Rosie was next to her. The thinnest of plaster partitions separated them. Had this been knocked down, their beds would have stood revealed side by side. If her sister-in-law coughed or turned in her sleep, she would be aware of either the cough or the turn. Rose Baby slept with Rosie and while theirs was not a single bed, it was scarcely big enough for two. Rose Baby was always with her mother. Paulina could hear the child talking now and Rosie's low responses that reached her in half unintelligible whispers. Occasionally Rose Baby laughed and once, in an excess of glee, she jumped upon the bed and sang a funny little Christmas carol. The burden of her thoughts was all too plain. Christmas was coming. Christmas was coming.

“Will I get everything I want, Muvver?” she asked.

“You will get something,” Rosie promised, and fell to whispering again. It must have been a satisfactory whis-

per, for it was then that Rose Baby jumped upon the bed and sang.

"What do the children do who don't get anything, Muvver?"

"They do without," Rosie said soberly.

"Oh," said Rose Baby, and from the ensuing sounds Paulina knew that her sister-in-law had taken her child within her arms, was kissing her, was adoring her exactly as Mrs. Taliaferro adored Little Ranny. Rosie was afraid she had worried her child.

If Rosie had saddened Rose Baby, Rose Baby in turn had saddened Paulina. Little Ranny also talked of Christmas, though lately his mother had coaxed him from the subject. Paulina knew that was on her account. Because she was unhappy, they would not make merry. Paulina had heard the programme too often not to be familiar with their Christmas plans. Ranny was to have a tree and a party on Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day the Taliaferros kept open house and served cake and egg-nog made by a recipe belonging to Mrs. Taliaferro's mother. The minister always ate his Christmas dinner with the Taliaferros, and sometimes he came to Ranny's party and helped to give the children their toys.

Paulina was not to take up her abode with Miss Jessie until the first of January, and she had been looking forward to this Christmas with the Taliaferros. The Spragues had never had any money to waste on Christmas merry-making, though her mother, by careful economy, had always managed to buy her a simple gift. The Reverend Lemuel's donation appeared in the form of "The Spirit of Missions," or some other religious pamphlet that he desired to possess and read. Paulina never touched these periodicals. They belonged to the Reverend Lemuel. Let him open them as he pleased.

The first year of her married life George Bull had proposed some Christmas festivities, but she had not encouraged his proposition. As was his wont, he said nothing

more and, except that he gave her a big cheque to spend as she wished, the day had passed quietly enough.

If her previous experience of the holiday season had proved dull and uneventful, by force of contrast this coming Christmas had promised to be fairly riotous. Now all that was past, and she would eat her Christmas dinner in this stupid but highly respectable boarding-house in the company of Rosie and her child; and when the meal was finished, she would return to her room to sit alone unless Rosie consented to sit with her. Rosie was not likely to do this. She had stiffened, just as jelly stiffens if packed in a mould and placed upon the ice. Perhaps when she heard about the money she might soften. Paulina wondered if she would. Rosie was changed; was, indeed, so greatly altered that she hardly knew how to deal with her. There was an assurance about Rosie that, when you considered her former pliability, was fairly alarming.

The dinner-bell interrupted her thoughts. Rosie came for her and they went down together. Clinging tightly to the banisters, Rose Baby followed them. When they were seated at the table, and Paulina looked again at Rosie's set face, she wondered once more if she would soften. She hoped she would. Paulina wanted to make amends. "I am willing to give what I can," she thought.

"No, you are not willing to give yourself," her inner self reminded her.

Paulina did not contradict this. She was not willing to give herself, and yet that was what Rosie was doing. At this juncture she became conscious that Rose Baby was regarding her gravely.

"I wonder if you know what's coming?" she said to the child to break the lengthy stillness.

"Puddin' is coming," Rose Baby replied to Paulina's question. "I saw it, Muvver, in the stove."

"I didn't mean pudding," said Paulina. "I meant that time of the year when you hope to see Santa Claus."

"Christmas," cried the child jubilantly and beat upon the table with her spoon.

"You mustn't do that," Rosie said gently. "You might hurt the table."

"O Muvver," the child cried, "I want it to come quick. O Muvver!"

For the first time since her absence from Middleborough Paulina laughed.

"Do you like Christmas?" she said.

"Yes," said Rose Baby. "Don't you?"

"No," Paulina answered; "no, I don't like Christmas."

"Muvver, she don't like Christmas," the child said.

"I like Christmas," Rosie replied.

She caught Rose Baby's little hand and squeezed it. Her face paled. It had just dawned on her, suggested by the Christmas conversation, that Paulina could hear what she said, could hear what she did; in fact knew, or rather would know, every detail of her daily existence. In the future she could have no privacy. She knew the thickness of those plastered laths. She had not thought of all this when she spoke of the empty room next to hers; and even had she thought, it is doubtful if she could have kept silent when Paulina looked so ill, and so utterly unable to go further.

Rosie felt sorry for Paulina and scorned herself for the feeling. It was weak of her not to utterly repudiate this woman; yet she could not make up her mind to push her aside. That she had once occupied the position of George Bull's wife gave her a hold not upon Rosie, but upon Jim's wife, upon George Bull's sister-in-law. She could but wonder what the motive was that had prompted this step on the part of Paulina. She travelled backwards and forwards many times over the same ground before she found a clue, or thought she had found one which to her mind amounted to the same thing. There was a single possible explanation. Paulina missed her husband. Atrociously as she had behaved, she desired to reclaim George Bull.

They were still seated at the table when this idea took possession of Rosie, who was human enough to cast a glance of real fury at the unconscious Paulina. It was an idea that deprived her of her appetite, that forced her to acknowledge to herself that she was no longer willing to share George Bull with his wife. Since she had stood by him, since she had left her country home to be with him, since she had worked for him, surely he belonged to her, not to Paulina. He was Jim's brother and, though he was legally married to Paulina, no one in the world could say he was Paulina's husband in the true and right sense of the word.

She was not ashamed of his prison stripes, and she had unlimited faith in him and was convinced that, ultimately, he would return every penny he had stolen. Perhaps if she had not lived in the same house with him, and had not seen his physical as well as his mental condition, she might not have taken so lenient a view of her brother-in-law. His theft had saddened her; yet she had been able to look behind and beyond it to the finer, bigger side of George Bull's nature; and she trusted and believed in the man, all of which helped George Bull to trust and believe in himself.

That night after Rosie went to bed she went over the case as it must appear to the ordinary observer. As she thought she was careful not to twist and turn, because she had a shrewd suspicion that, on the other side of the laths, Paulina, too, was awake and thinking. She, Rosie, did not intend to give the impression of a sleepless night. There were some things that you owed to yourself to conceal. As a working basis she took the fact that Paulina loved George Bull; and while this supposition hurt her, she had the courage to probe more deeply. If this were true, if Paulina now wished to take back the husband she had cast from her, how would that husband, in the light of her previous conduct, receive her? Pride could go with prison stripes. Since the trial George Bull had never mentioned Paulina's

name to Rosie, and an unfortunate allusion on her part had brought back the ugly, black look to his face. She dreaded that look. As far as he was concerned his wife might have been dead and buried, or better still, might never have existed. Yet he had loved Paulina. How would he receive her? How?

Rosie came to no real conclusion on the matter. She was woman enough to hope that Paulina's overtures would not be accepted; and fond enough of George Bull to wish him to be happy even if that happiness lay in the direction of Paulina. When he no longer needed her, she would return to the country once more. City life and city ways had no fascination for her. When she thought of her existence minus Jim or George Bull, her fortitude deserted her; and but for Rose Baby she would have cried herself to sleep.

On the other side of the partition Paulina, as Rosie had guessed, lay awake, not intentionally listening, yet, none the less, keenly alive to any noise that disturbed the stillness of her room. She, too, was thinking of how George Bull would receive her, of how he would accept her decidedly tardy apology. She remembered Clyde's words.

"He got nothing out of it," the girl had said, "nothing."

Clyde had been quite right. He had got nothing out of it, nothing.

"He is not getting much now," Paulina said to herself; "but I mean to tell him how sorry I am for him, and I shall try to put aside some money. When he gets out, he'll need it."

She closed her eyes. She could not picture this interview with George Bull. She could not see what the future had in store for her. After she had made her small, for small it must be, reparation, what should she do? Where should she go? Middleborough was closed to her, closed as tightly as if it had been put under lock and key. She uttered a smothered exclamation and, just as a drowning

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man flings out his arm before he goes down for the last time, so Paulina flung out her bare arm into the darkness.

"And I can never marry the minister," was her unspoken thought.

CHAPTER XXXIX

IN spite of the strange bed, in spite of the mean little room, Paulina slept heavily that night, and would have slept far into the day had not a commotion on the other side of the plastered laths half-way awakened her. Some one was sweeping Rosie's room in a rough-and-ready fashion and, since the broom hit the furniture at frequent intervals, some one was both careless and in a hurry. Paulina was aware of this, but managed to drowse through the sweeping. Then Rosie's bed was attacked and the wall was bumped until it shook. These last sounds, so close to Paulina's head, roused her entirely and made her wonder at Rosie's strange behaviour, but when she glanced at her watch and found that it was ten o'clock, she understood at last that the room next to her was being cleaned for the day, and that the morning meal had been over some time ago. Rosie had not taken the trouble to call her. Very quietly and swiftly she had dressed herself and Rose Baby, and then she had slipped away. Rosie wanted none of her. She did not blame Rosie.

Since she had missed her breakfast it seemed foolish not to lie in bed until lunch was ready; yet when the servant came to clean she would be forced to vacate her room. She could not stand around in the hall until the sweeping was over and she was too proud to seek shelter in Rosie's bedroom. There was nothing to do but dress. The bustle about her urged her to hurry. As her trunk had not arrived she put on her clothes of yesterday. This done, she opened her door and almost fell over Mrs. Harding, who stood on the edge of the threshold.

"I overslept myself," Paulina said.

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"Yes," Mrs. Harding replied, "yes, I know. Mrs. Bull and I talked the matter over and decided not to wake you. When you came out I was just about to knock at your door. Mrs. Bull thought you needed sleep."

"I did need sleep."

Mrs. Harding nodded with infinite satisfaction and folded her hands, palms upward, upon the front of her apron.

"So we thought, so we thought," she declared. "There's some coffee in the kitchen and I will give you a roll."

"I don't expect any breakfast," Paulina said.

"You must eat it," Mrs. Harding replied graciously. "It is not usual to give anything after hours, but a journey is fatiguing and I could see you were tired out. Mrs. Bull told me to tell you she would be back by half past twelve."

"Thank you," said Paulina humbly.

So Rosie had not slipped off, and had not tried in any disagreeable fashion to evade her. On the contrary, she had endeavoured to be kind and considerate, and she meant to return at half past twelve, the woman said. Between now and then she must while away the time as best she could.

There was no one in the dining-room and the tables had been cleared of all save their cloths. Mrs. Harding herself brought the coffee and rolls; and, as Paulina thanked her, she winced under an eye that was most expressive of the deepest sympathy felt for the wife of a thief. When she had finished eating she went into the sitting-room to wait until her room was cleaned. After a short interval her trunk arrived and was conveyed to the third floor. She went with her trunk. Until Rosie returned she might as well unpack.

Unpacking proved a real pleasure to Paulina, who was excessively particular, and enjoyed bringing order out of chaos. Finding three flat, sweet-scented pads among her gowns, she placed them in her bureau drawers; and when Rosie arrived she was in the act of planning what was

best to leave in her trunk. She gave Rosie the rocker Mrs. Harding had donated; and then she waited, hoping, praying that Rosie would make the first move.

Unfortunately for her Rosie had lost the garrulity that had been so noticeable when she first came to live with George Bull. With her hands folded in her lap, with her quiet eyes gazing at the scrap of sky that showed above Paulina's head, she, too, waited and perhaps she, too, prayed; though there may have been a difference in the quality of her prayer. Rosie had changed; she felt the change within herself, and she was no longer as optimistic as she once had been. From this move of Paulina's she expected the worst, and she had steadied herself to bear any blow. Nothing that Paulina could say would surprise her, nothing; and she had not the least intention of opening the conversation.

"Were you expecting to see me?" Paulina asked at last.

"No," said Rosie.

"I have been South," Paulina said hurriedly, "visiting some friends of my mother's, the Taliaferros. Do you remember the name?"

"I remember."

"I intended to pay them just a short visit and then I stayed on and on. I was very happy with those people."

Rosie did not answer. What concern was it of hers whether Paulina was happy or unhappy? It was a matter outside of her interest, just as Paulina was outside of her interest. There had been a time when she had hated Paulina for her scorn of George Bull; and there had been a time when she had prayed that she might never again see the face of her sister-in-law. As the long summer months slipped by she considered this prayer had been answered; yet hardly had she stopped her petition when Paulina appeared. She had spoken truthfully about the Taliaferros. She remembered them with startling distinctness. It was a letter from them that had brought forth from Paulina the taunting remark, "Any one would think

you were his wife." To which she had replied, "No one would think that you were." Paulina had forgotten this. Rosie had not. Indeed, there were very few details about her life with George Bull and Paulina that Rosie had forgotten. It was the beginning of her disillusionment. How far ago those days seemed.

"Not having to pay any board," Paulina continued, "I have managed to put by some money. I don't want to spend all of it, because if I were sick I might need it. When you are alone you have to consider the cost of a sickness. Even so, however, I have about three hundred dollars more than I need."

Rosie's eyes left the scrap of sky and looked directly at Paulina. Her attention was arrested by this last item of news. Three hundred dollars was a great deal to have put by, a great deal. Rosie had nothing whatever laid aside and she was often haunted by the fear of being invalidated by some disagreeable form of illness. As far as her health was concerned, she ran no risks and took no chances. She had Rose Baby to provide for and she knew scarcely any one in this big city. Now in the country she was intimately acquainted with everybody, and living was cheap. To know people made all the difference in the world. Three hundred was a great deal to have saved; but then Paulina had visited and she hadn't Rose Baby to feed and clothe. Rosie worked hard for what she earned and to her mind this amount of money represented thousands and thousands of tiny stitches. Undoubtedly it was a great deal.

"I am going to give it to you," Paulina said.

Rosie's face flushed, but, though she never removed her eyes from Paulina, she did not speak. Paulina wondered at her long silence and felt uncomfortable beneath her steady gaze.

"You may use it as you please, Rosie," she said, with an honest desire to show that there was no string attached to the gift. "You may spend it on yourself or on your—"

your Brother George—or, if you prefer, you may put it in the bank. I don't care what you do with it."

"Why have you offered me this money?" Rosie asked slowly.

It was Paulina's turn to flush. Rosie's tone was not altogether pleasant; neither was Rosie's expression at all grateful. It was going to be hard to make amends.

"Mrs. Taliaferro didn't think about things as I do," she said haltingly, "not that she knew anything about us, our private affairs, I mean. She thought more as you do, Rosie. After I had been living with the Taliaferros for a while, I saw I had not been kind to you and George Bull. I am sorry for that, and so I brought you the money."

"I don't intend to take it," Rosie said, and she spoke with the greatest composure. The flush left her face and she leaned back in her chair. This was a new and remarkable Paulina she had before her, a Paulina whose idea was not to insult but to give, yes, to give. Of course she was mad, entirely mad, to believe for a minute that she, Rosie, would accept a single penny from her. Paulina ought to have better sense. Heretofore, lack of sense had not been her failing.

"You must take it," Paulina begged. "Surely you won't refuse me, Rosie, when I have come so far to give it to you."

"Was that your only reason for coming?"

"No," Paulina said and stopped. Was it necessary to tell Rosie about the minister? She thought not. Perhaps she should tell George Bull, but not Rosie. The very remembrance of Mr. Fellows made her tremble.

"No," she repeated again, "that's not my only reason. I want to have a talk with George Bull." She was careful not to say, "my husband."

Rosie caught hold of the arms of her rocking chair. So it was all exactly as she had feared. Paulina meant to

claim George Bull and it was her duty to stand by and see her do it.

"But she's not worthy of him," Rosie said to herself, "she's not worthy of him. Yet if he wants her . . ." She stopped here. If George Bull's happiness required Paulina he must have her. That was the long and the short of it. To her, her brother-in-law's happiness was paramount. It was for him to choose between his wife and Rosie.

"You will take the money?" Paulina entreated.

"No," said Rosie sternly, "I will not take the money."

"Then I must give it to Rose Baby. She needs things all the time."

"She shall not take it," Rosie replied. She spoke sharply because Rose Baby did need things, and three hundred dollars was a great deal to have laid aside. Rose Baby had less than usual. Unknowingly she contributed towards the modest sum that was expended on a few small comforts for George Bull.

Paulina looked at Rosie angrily. Her old, ungovernable temper flared up within her.

"What right have you to refuse the money I offer Rose Baby?" she demanded stormily.

"What right have you to offer it?" Rosie asked. Her eyes flashed. She held her head high.

Paulina wheeled about and stared out of the window. What right, indeed, had she to offer money to Rosie and her child? She knew what Rosie meant. Had she said so in so many words her meaning could not have been plainer. Rosie did not look upon her as her sister-in-law, as the wife of George Bull. Rosie considered her a stranger, and to accept money from a stranger was to become an object of charity. Rosie could work; she was not dependent upon charity. It was useless to discuss the matter. There was nothing for Paulina to say.

"When do you think I could see George Bull?" she asked at last. "I want to have a long talk with him. I want to see him alone."

"The penitentiary has visiting days when the relatives are allowed to speak to the prisoners. You have to have a permit, but you would have no trouble getting that," Rosie said. "Next week is Christmas, and they never work Christmas Day. Then you could talk to him alone, as long as you wished."

Once more she glanced past and above Paulina towards the little scrap of sky. She had been looking forward to that Christmas Day to be spent with George Bull, and now Paulina had taken it from her. Poor Rosie! She wanted that Christmas Day.

"Very well," said Paulina, "I shall see him Christmas Day." She was quite unconscious of the sacrifice Rosie had made, but she did perceive Rosie wore a softer, less frozen expression.

"Rosie," she cried on the impulse of the moment, "if you have spending money you can be much more comfortable in prison. Do you think George Bull would accept that three hundred dollars?"

"You must ask him that yourself," Rosie said.

CHAPTER XL

DURING the week that followed, the better part of Paulina's day was spent with Rose Baby. There were three reasons for this. Rosie had a quantity of Christmas work to be finished; the child's kindergarten had closed for the holiday season; and Rose Baby had taken a fancy to Paulina, much as Little Ranny had done, and constantly demanded the society of George Bull's wife.

While Rosie embroidered, her child played about the room; but it was Paulina who took her to walk, and rode her in the car to get off at the shops that fairly glittered with Christmas toys. With a heart swelling with envy Rosie watched them depart on these pleasant expeditions. Dearly as she would have enjoyed going through the big stores with the impressionable and enthusiastic Rose Baby, now she could not afford to stop working for even the portion of a morning. In some way she had managed to get behindhand in her orders, and she had been politely told that she must hurry. Since she had not visited any one and thereby saved her board, and since she had not three hundred dollars in the bank to give away, she could not make up her mind to disregard this imperative message.

The child had a new topic of conversation and that topic went by the name of "Paulina." Through the laths Paulina heard her and smiled; face to face Rosie heard her and sighed. At times she did more than sigh. She wept, she who had thought never to weep again, and then she chid herself for her folly; for crying hurt the eyes, and if her eyes hurt she could no longer embroider and earn money. It was foolish to cry. It was more than foolish. It was wrong.

"Which do you love the best," she said in a fierce whisper to Rose Baby, "mother or Paulina?"

"Muvver," said the child.

Rosie hugged Rose Baby frantically.

"If mother wasn't so busy," she lamented, "she could take you to see the pretty things."

"Paulina takes me," the child replied.

Rosie did not answer this remark.

"Will she take me to-morrow, Muvver?" Rose Baby asked.

"I suppose so," said the tortured Rosie.

"Will Paulina take me all the time, Muvver? I love Paulina." And on and on the babble went until, in desperation, Rosie carried the child to Paulina's room and left her there; while, with fingers that trembled, she strove to finish her orders for the happy holiday season.

Wretched as she was, Rosie never for a minute thought of trying to prevent the meeting between George Bull and Paulina. Had she told her brother-in-law of Paulina's proposed visit she felt sure he would have refused to see his wife, a mode of procedure that would not have been fair to Paulina. Rosie's plan was different. Let her come upon him unawares, she reasoned, and let him choose between the two of them. Would Paulina succeed in winning back her husband's affections? After Christmas Rosie would know. After Christmas. . . .

Sometimes Rosie wondered if Paulina had some fatal illness. How else could she stay so thin and pale, and besides her manner was so gentle and deprecating. Only at intervals did she see traces of the old, bad-tempered, fiery Paulina. The new Paulina was pathetically pleasant, and she put herself out to be sweet to Rose Baby. Rosie wished she wouldn't behave in this fashion. She could have derived a large amount of pleasure from an honest hatred of Paulina; but pity and hate never went together. Against her desire, against her better judgment, Rosie was obliged to

pity her sister-in-law who had, as it were, thrown herself upon Rosie's mercy.

When Paulina was not with the child or Rosie, she either sat alone, or tramped the snowy streets until her limbs ached from pure fatigue. At night she slept, a heavy, troubled sleep that oppressed rather than invigorated her. In her room she was more or less sunk in apathy, while in the street, with the holiday throng pressing against her, hustling her here and there on the pavement, she fought her battle over and over again, with all the old anguish, all the old craving as alive as if she had never stifled them with her sacrifice, with her trip to the North. Only in the society of Rose Baby did she forget herself, and that was mainly because the child required her attention and repeated her questions until they were answered. Since she had left Middleborough both Mrs. Taliaferro and Clyde had written to her, and Clyde had added a postscript stating that they were packing her a Christmas box, and that Mr. Fellows sent his regards. There was no other news of him. Clyde was not liberal with her information, or it might be that Clyde had no information to write.

The box arrived Christmas Eve and Ranny's present was on top. It was a portfolio filled with paper and envelopes, and in the stamp partition there was a new book of stamps. Some one had held Ranny's hand and, in a large, uncertain scrawl, written on a Christmas card, "You write to me, Paulina." As she read Paulina felt the uncomfortable tightening of the throat that had become so habitual to her. Little Ranny was not a demonstrative child. It was a great compliment to Paulina that he wanted her to write to him.

Each Taliaferro had sent something, and besides these gifts Paulina was the richer by a five pound box of candy and a large fruit-cake that Mrs. Taliaferro had made for her. "With Cousin Elizabeth's love and a Merry Christmas," the card said. Below this greeting she had written in her own small, firm handwriting a sweet little mes-

sage, "Christmas Day every one in the house will miss you, dear Paulina, but I most of all; for I can never forget that you are Pauline Selden's child."

"Pauline Selden's child!" Paulina said to herself. "Pauline Selden's child!" That was what she was to Middleborough. That was what she was to the Taliaferros. All the gifts were for Pauline Selden's child. So was the box of candy. So was the fruit-cake. Nothing was for Paulina herself. All was for Pauline Selden's child.

In spite of her sound common sense Paulina had counted on one gift for herself, only one. It had never come. Now there was a chance, a good chance, that it might be in this box, that she had overlooked it in her desire to open her packages. Placing a towel on the floor, she lifted into it, bit by bit, ever so carefully, the shaved paper packing. She felt each paper ball, she searched through the empty box and then in silence she sank upon her knees. She had found nothing. Without departing from his high resolve, Mr. Fellows might have sent her a small remembrance, it seemed to her. He might still send her a remembrance. This was only Christmas Eve. Something within her contradicted this hope. She had already received his regards. Now Christmas would come and go without a word of cheer, without the smallest of gifts to be treasured in the days to come. There was nothing in the box save presents for Pauline Selden's child. She wanted something for Paulina who was so unhappy and so alone. Perhaps on Christmas Day. . . . Who could tell? Who, indeed?

"If he had intended to give me something he'd have put it in this box," she said to herself. "Perhaps he will write." She shook her head at the futility of the thought. No, he would not write. All too plainly he had shown her he meant not to write. She must stop expecting the impossible.

That night she helped Rosie fill Rose Baby's stocking; and when they had finished, they had good reason to be proud of their work. Tied to the front of the stocking,

the best gift of all, was an infant doll given by Paulina, a doll that said, "Mama, Papa," and had curls of real hair. Paulina had not seen Rosie's sad face, her blinking eyes as she fastened the doll in place, and for further safety slipped its sash over a convenient nail to avoid an unfortunate mishap in case the foot and leg should fall. Rosie, who adored Rose Baby, had so little to offer. Paulina had given a most desirable and a most expensive toy.

Neither Paulina nor Rosie slept well that Christmas Eve night. Both heard the creaking of the bed on the reverse side of the plastered laths, and each wondered why the other stayed awake. By morning both of them were exhausted and fell into a heavy slumber, and both were startled into consciousness by Rose Baby who, as soon as she opened her eyes, had caught sight of the infant doll.

"Oh, Muvver!" she cried. "Oh, Muvver!"

It was all as clear to Paulina as if she had been in the room with the child. She knew exactly when Rosie untied the stocking and handed the doll to Rose Baby. She knew that the stocking was proffered and, because of the attractions of the infant doll, was ignored, indeed, almost pushed aside. That Rosie was hurt by this natural behaviour on the part of her child, she did not know, just as she did not know that she had altogether spoiled Rosie's Christmas. She could hear Rose Baby chuckling, gurgling, and talking to herself.

"Make it talk, Muvver," she cried.

"Mama, Papa," said the doll. "Mama, Papa."

"Now Rose Baby make it talk."

"Mama, Papa. Mama, Papa. Mama, Papa," the doll repeated in a hasty, jerky fashion. With the rapidity of its utterance it would be wonderful if the infant doll had any powers of articulation left by breakfast time. Paulina was glad to get downstairs; and she even laughed when Rose Baby appeared with the doll and, as a great treat,

permitted her to pull the string and make "Paulina's doll talk."

Though she had not said anything to Rosie, Paulina had decided to see George Bull in the morning. That would leave Rosie the whole afternoon. As she made this plan she had no suspicion of her sister-in-law's jealousy, but was moved by a wish to please her husband, who must have counted on a visit from his most faithful adherent.

As soon as she had finished her breakfast, Paulina slipped unnoticed from the dining-room. A little later Rosie and Rose Baby came upstairs. Apparently Rosie was still sewing.

"Mother's so busy she hasn't had time to play with you, darling," she was saying. "As soon as I finish my mending we will dress and go out car riding."

"Where's Paulina?" inquired Rose Baby absent-mindedly but in a reminiscent fashion. To her way of thinking car riding was inseparably connected with Paulina. The thought of one necessarily suggested the thought of the other. Here Paulina opened her door and lost Rosie's answer.

As she was about to go downstairs an idea struck her. Why not take George Bull the fruit-cake? Surely he would like that. Another thought came over her. What if he should refuse to accept it? She hesitated and then decided to risk the refusal. Returning to her room, she wrapped the cake in tissue paper, tied a ribbon about it, and now, at last, she had started. In the lower hall she stopped again. Mrs. Harding was sorting the mail. Paulina waited until she had finished.

"Anything for me, Mrs. Harding?" she asked.

"Nothing at all," Mrs. Harding replied with her hard, sympathetic smile.

Paulina moved away and closed the front door softly behind her. So Christmas had come and would soon be gone, and Mr. Fellows had not sent so much as a post-card. He had resolved not to write, and he had lived up to his resolve. Surely a word of Christmas cheer would

have been no sin. Once again she struggled, and fought, and rebelled against her fate; yet there was nothing she could do to help herself. She was impotent, that was the word, impotent.

It was a cold, clear, radiant day, but Paulina was oblivious of the weather. Once she looked to see what she grasped so tightly. It was George Bull's fruit-cake. She must be careful of that.

It was a long trip to the penitentiary, the sort of trip Rose Baby would have enjoyed. When Paulina finally did reach her destination she found herself one of a small group of silent men and women, plainly relatives of those within the prison walls. Instinctively she dropped to the rear of this crowd. She felt she preferred not to pioneer the way. Within the main hall the silent men and women seemed to know where to go, but the warden showed Paulina George Bull's cell, the door of which was open in honour of Christmas Day. As soon as services were over she could see her husband.

Paulina could tell when the service ended. After a ten minutes' wait, somewhere, in the distance, a door opened, and the subdued murmur of voices reached her. Paulina was almost at the end of the long hall, and she listened fearfully to the heavy tread of feet as the men came down the corridor. She had crossed her hands loosely upon her lap; but now, in her nervousness, she clasped and unclasped them. What should she say to George Bull, the man who "got nothing out of it"? What might not George Bull say to her? Even as she thought a step, heavier than the rest, sounded at the door. In another instant George Bull stood upon the threshold of his cell.

While prison confinement had thinned him off and whitened his face, it had really, in a measure, added to his appearance. It had toned him down and taken away a certain full-blooded coarseness that was the result of birth rather than breeding. In the course of time, as the years rolled by, this toning down process might lead to a pre-

mature old age. For the present it was an improvement and it struck Paulina at once how greatly her husband had changed for the better. When he spoke his voice was curiously detached, even remote.

"I heard you were here," he said.

"How?"

"The warden told me," George Bull replied.

He forbore to add that he had wished to refuse to see her; but that would have involved an explanation to the warden, whom he liked and who liked him. A visit from Paulina was preferable to an explanation. Now he sat opposite her on the edge of his stool. His whitened, toil-marked hands rested upon his knee. Like Rosie he waited for Paulina to speak. She glanced at him, he saw, uncertainly.

"I thought," she said nervously, "that you might fancy this fruit-cake?"

George Bull shook his head. Like Rosie he was puzzled by Paulina's manner. Like Rosie he wondered what she wanted, what was behind this visit? Shifting his position that he might not blot out the light, he looked thoughtfully at Paulina, at her nervous hands, at the sensitive muscles of her face that had quivered at his refusal. Paulina had changed, and by that he was not referring to her health. Any one could see that she was on the verge of an illness. It was her manner that had aroused his interest. Ah, now he had it. She was beginning to resemble her mother. For a minute he had caught upon Paulina's face Mrs. Sprague's very expression. Mrs. Sprague had been a good friend of his. She would wish him to take Paulina's cake. If he watched Paulina carefully he might catch that expression again.

"I am going to change my mind about that cake." He offered no apology for his refusal. "I think I should like to have it."

Reaching out his hand, he lifted the cake to his lap. There was an awkward silence.

"Why did you come here, Paulina?" he asked at length. "I have been so unhappy," she replied in a half-strangled voice. "You must hate me. I have ruined your life."

"When did you begin to think of that?" George Bull inquired deliberately.

Paulina looked at him with burning eyes. Now she must shrive herself. Now she must commence at the very first and tell him everything about Middleborough, about the minister, about what Clyde had said. She must try to be honest with him. She must try to omit nothing. Somehow she stumbled through the recital.

"Clyde said you got nothing out of it," she said.

On the edge of his stool George Bull sat silent for a long time. He was reading the very soul of his wife, and this was a new page she was showing him, a page with an unfamiliar line of thought. He could not quite understand how it managed to be bound up in the book of Paulina. At last the change in her appearance, in her manner had been made clear to him. Paulina had learned to love. Now she knew how love could hurt, how love could tear your very heart to bits, how it could warp your judgment and your sound common sense. It was this knowledge that had given her that touch of sweetness, that shadowy resemblance to her mother. He had only to close his eyes to see Mrs. Sprague as she clasped his hand upon her breast. Though Paulina did not know it, her mother stood between them still. She was pleading as no other intermediary could plead, that he would not repulse Paulina's most extraordinary, most belated apology.

"See here, Paulina," he spoke softly because he felt the grip of that dying hand, "when you get by yourself, alone in a place like this, you have plenty of time to think. Since I've been here I see I should never have married you. That was my big mistake. It was impossible for us to have been happy. I wanted a wife and you didn't want a husband, or rather you didn't want me. I wanted children. You didn't. . . ." His voice trailed away. He recollected him-

self and started again. "I don't hold that up against you now," he said. "I did, but I don't now."

"Will you, will you take the money then?" Paulina asked. She hung upon his answer. She forgot he knew nothing whatever about the money, about Rosie's scorn of her proposal.

Here was another matter to explain. George Bull sat silent again, and listened, in growing amazement, to Paulina's words. He noticed, with real pity, the sharp curve of her cheek, the unhappy droop of her mouth. He could see that Rosie's refusal of the money loomed high on her horizon, that it had, as it were, become an obsession with her. Apparently she could dwell on nothing else. He knew what that meant. Once he had been obsessed by the craze of making money. If Paulina kept on like this she would lose her reason. How could she expect him to take it? Undoubtedly, it was an obsession with her.

"She's her mother's daughter," he said to himself. "I must never forget that, never."

"I am not going to let you give me the money," he said at last. As he spoke her face fell. "But if you are willing, I am going to get you to lend it to me, without any hope of repayment you understand, and then I shall have Rosie buy me a little stock that I think is going to be a bully investment before long." A light came into his eyes. The thought of this dip into business pleased him.

"I want to give it to you," Paulina insisted.

"Maybe you will have to give it to me," George Bull said, half to humour her and half because the little investment wasn't a sure thing. "You have done me a real favour. I thank you, Paulina."

"I should like to do something for you."

"Don't worry about me," George Bull advised. "When I get out, as God is my judge, I intend to repay every penny that I stole."

He forgot about Paulina. The solemnity of his purpose enveloped him. He intended to repay. Mrs. Sprague

knew that. She had been a good friend of his. He must not forget that Paulina was her mother's daughter. He bent his gaze upon her.

"It will be a long time before I am out. Why don't you get a divorce from me now, Paulina?" he inquired simply. "Then you can marry the man that you love."

He saw Paulina tremble all over.

"He's an Episcopal minister," she whispered. "He can't marry a divorced woman."

"Why not?"

"With his faith, his church, it would be wrong."

"Does he love you?"

"Yes," said Paulina. The colour rose to her thin cheeks. Her face was flooded by the tremulous sweetness that reminded him of Mrs. Sprague. He had not conceived it possible that Paulina could love as she now gave every evidence of loving.

"If I were an Episcopal minister and loved you," George Bull spoke in a measured tone, "I'd get out of my church and take you. No power on earth could prevent my doing it. He's a man, isn't he, Paulina?"

"It's because he's a man he doesn't dream of doing that," Paulina replied proudly. "I should think less of him if he did."

Her eyes filled with tears. She rose to her feet and walked to the door.

"Then," said George Bull, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing," Paulina answered.

She heard a heavy step behind her and George Bull stood by her side. From his greater height he looked down upon her. Kindly, pityingly, impersonally, he placed his whitened hand upon her shoulder.

"Poor thing," he said. "Poor thing."

Once again Paulina was acutely aware of the personality of her husband, only this time his near presence brought with it a sense of comfort, of relief. She had been so

stirred by the rush of her feelings that the import of his words reached her at best vaguely; but his kindly touch was something tangible, something she could understand. It soothed her trembling nerves, eased her tired spirits, made worth while her trip to the North. Yet it was characteristic of the change within herself that she should immediately perceive the spiritual values that had prompted this action on the part of George Bull. It was the generosity of a big man, big in the larger, higher sense of the word. For the first time in her life she saw her husband's possibilities, and if he lived, she believed he would repay.

She looked at the whitened hand upon her shoulder, then raised her tired eyes to his face.

"You forgive," she said humbly. It was more of a statement than a question.

For the fraction of a second George Bull hesitated. He could not forget the woman who had scorned him, who had helped to wreck his life, who had deserted him in his hour of need. But was this the same Paulina? He thought not. He obeyed the impulse that swelled within him.

"I forgive," he said quietly.

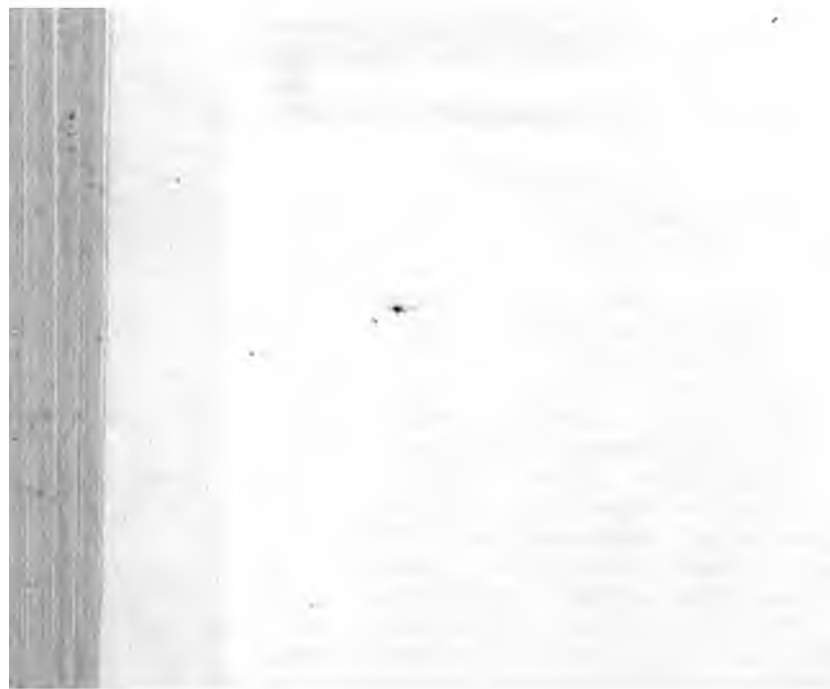
"Why?" asked Paulina.

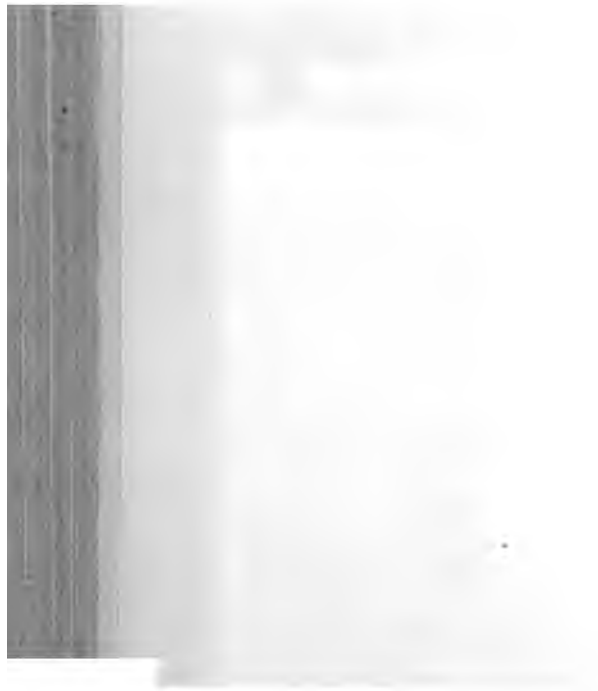
"You look like your mother." As he spoke he removed his hand from her shoulder and drew away from her until a little space separated them.

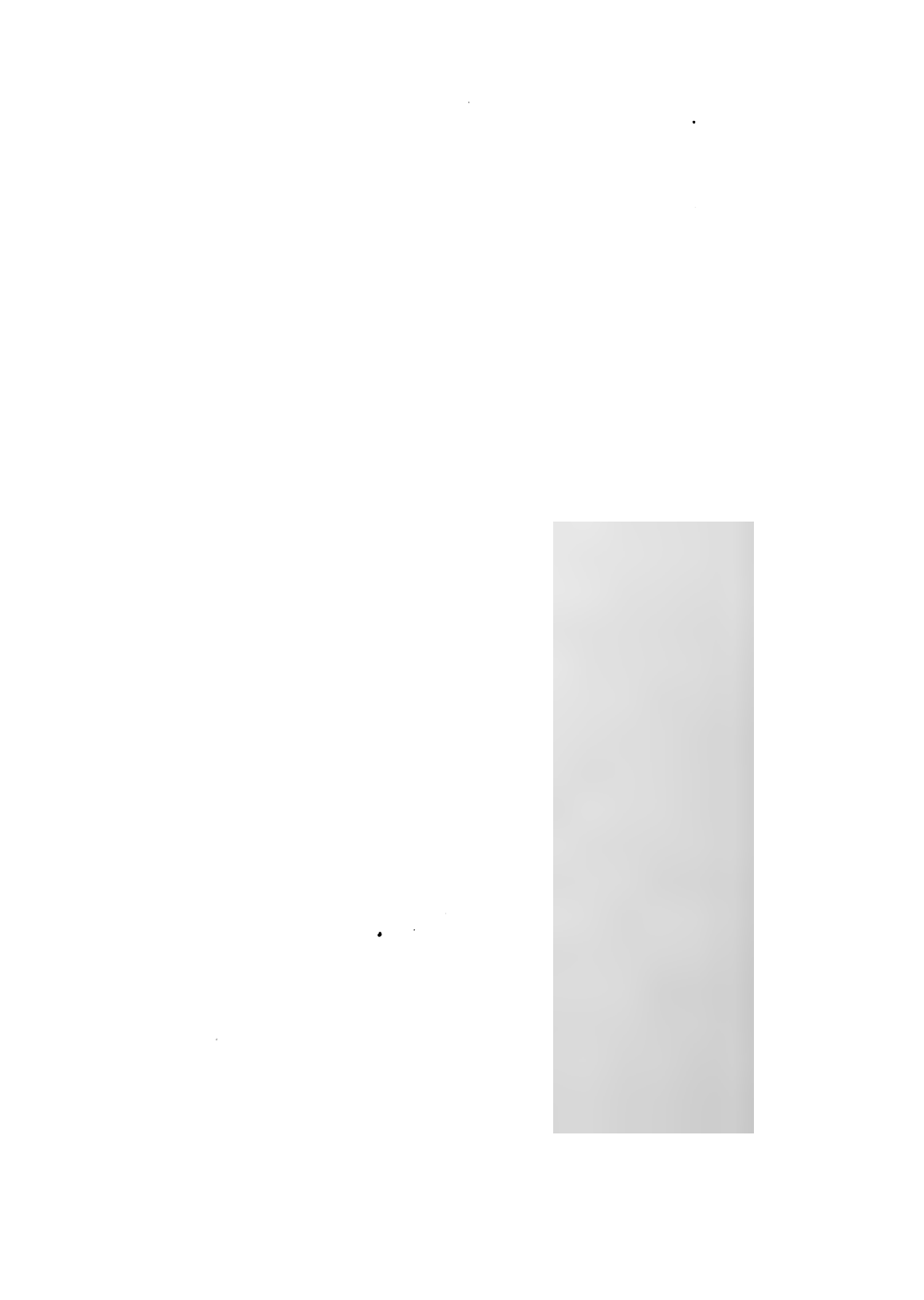
"I loved your mother, Paulina," he said.

THE END

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