BURNHAM CLARA LOUISE

INSTEAD OF THE THORN

Clara Burnham

Instead of the Thorn

Burnham C.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
AT THE SOUTH SHORE

On a June evening, Mr. and Mrs. Radcliffe were entertaining their New York friends the Lindsays at dinner at the South Shore Club. The dining-room, with its spacious semicircle of glass, is a place where Chicago may entertain New York with complacence, for the windows give upon Lake Michigan, whose billows break so close to the border of velvety grass that the effect is of dining on a yacht.

The Lindsays were enamored of the great marine view, lovely in the long June evening, and with many an admiring comment watched the white gulls hover and wheel above the sunset water.

Mrs. Radcliffe was a stout, white-haired woman, costumed with disregard of expense, and she habitually wore an expression of countenance which betokened general optimism.

Mrs. Lindsay, of about her friend's age, was spare and lined of face, offering a contrast to the hostess's plump smoothness. She again raised a jeweled lorgnette to watch the wheeling gulls.

"Oh, Chicago wouldn't be anything without the lake," remarked Mrs. Radcliffe complacently.

"And this clubhouse is such a perfect place to watch it," returned her friend.

"We have a very charming ballroom here," said Mrs. Radcliffe. "I'm sorry it isn't a formal dance night."

The orchestra was playing a Hesitation Waltz, which reminded her. For the Hesitation had not yet been driven from the field by troops who cantered, and those strains were always sufficient to people the spacious ballroom until it was alive with dancers, old and young. Indeed, as one comic paper had it that season, "He who does not hesitate is lost." Just when or why silver threads among the gold ceased to relegate advancing years to a shelf above the dancers, it would be hard to say; but certain it is that the rosy walls behind the pure white columns in the popular ballroom threw their diffused and becoming light that season upon sometimes agile but always determined middle age, as well as upon slender youth.

There is a point, however, where Terpsichore stands inexorably and says, "Thus far and no farther": a point where the wistful dancer realizes that all is Hesitation, and the Waltz balks. This is reached in the matron at the weight of two hundred pounds, and Mrs. Radcliffe had arrived there; so, like the spinster of the story, who settled down to contentment with her lot when she had "stopped strugglin'," Mrs. Radcliffe enjoyed peacefully her visits to the club, and invaded the ballroom only as a spectator.

She looked up now at her friend. "Have you and Mr. Lindsay joined the one-stepping legion?" she asked.

"No, we have not. We have children and rheumatism. You know that does make a difference." Mrs. Lindsay's bright, nervous eyes snapped, and she showed a set of artistic teeth.

Mrs. Radcliffe shrugged a comfortable shoulder. "Well, I have one child, but that wouldn't stop me. He has a child of his own. Let him attend to his own affairs. I haven't the rheumatism, but neither have I any breath to spare. You look at me and you see that."

The two ladies laughed and sipped their coffee. Their husbands, with chairs moved sidewise, were talking in low tones over their cigarettes.

"We have such a charming ballroom!" repeated the hostess. "It makes me hate my flesh to go in there; but Mr. Radcliffe says it's the terror of his life that I may lose an ounce and want to dance,

and he is always urging delicious salads on me." The plump speaker shook again, till the diamonds on her ample breast scintillated. "He's the laziest man in Chicago. I suppose I ought to be thankful that he doesn't improve his slimness and the shining hour by coming and dancing with these buds. Lots of other gray heads do, and the buds can't help themselves, poor little things. Isn't that an attractive nosegay over there?" The speaker indicated the spot where twenty-four young girls and men were gayly dining at a round table, whose roses, violets, and lilies-of-the-valley strove with the material feast.

"My daughter-in-law, Harriet, is giving that dinner for her sister, who has just graduated from our University. If you want to see a spoiled child of fortune, look at Linda Barry now. That is she, holding up the glass of grape-juice. Aren't her dimples wonderful? Look at those brown eyes sparkle. Doesn't her very hair look as if electricity were running through the locks? I tell you she's a handful! I've always been so thankful that Henry chose her sister Harriet. Such a quiet, sensible young woman, Harriet is. She wouldn't let them have any wine, you see. She says it sounds like Fourth of July all the year around at this club, and she's terribly particular about Henry. That's Harriet, sitting with her back to us: the one with the velvet around her throat. I admire my daughter-in-law, but I always feel she thinks I'm too frivolous, and spend too much time playing cards."

The speaker's husband caught a part of what she was saying.

"Yes, Lindsay," he said. "You knew one of Barry's daughters married my boy, didn't you? That's the other one facing us."

Mr. Lindsay turned his iron-gray head until he could observe the smiling girl, offering a grape-juice toast. The family of the head of the firm of Barry & Co. was of interest to him.

Some one had stuck a spray of leaves in the thick, bright waves of her hair.

"Make a corking study of a Bacchante, if some one should paint her just as she is," remarked the New York man.

"Shades of my daughter-in-law – if she should hear you! She'd say that Linda had outwitted her after all." Mr. Radcliffe smiled across at his wife. "Harriet is the modern progressive woman, – goes in for Suffrage and Eugenics and all that; but with the reserve and quiet of a Puritan. She can't understand Linda, who is athletic, a comrade of boys, the idol of her father, and a law unto herself."

Mr. Lindsay was regarding the girl, who was smiling confidently and making a speech inaudible from the distant corner. "She looks as if she had the world by the tail," he remarked.

"That about describes her state of mind," responded the other. "Life has been a triumphal progress for her, so far. She hasn't had a mother for ten years, and her father couldn't spare her to go away to school, so here she has been educated, right in our burg, though she's a millionaire's daughter. You've been in that old-fashioned stone pile of a house of Barry's up there on Michigan Avenue? I should think Barry'd be sick of keeping a boarding-house for servants, and I've told him so."

"He's sick of something," returned Mr. Lindsay quietly, "or so it seemed to my wife and me. We dined there last night."

"Oh, you did?"

"Yes. The daughter wasn't there. Her father said she was away at one of her graduation festivities. What's the matter with Barry?"

The speaker's eyes left the dimpling girl with the dancing eyes and came back to his friend as he asked the quiet question.

"Why, nothing that I know of," replied the other, surprised. "Cares of state, I suppose."

"No rumors on the street?" The slow question was put in a still lower tone.

"Haven't heard any," was the quick reply.

The other nodded. "Good," he said.

"Why, have you?"

"There's some talk in the East about the Antlers project. Probably nothing but gossip."

"Nothing else, I'm sure. All these big irrigation deals have something of a black eye just now, but Barry & Co. know what they're about. They never buy a pig in a poke."

"What are you saying about pigs, Cyrus?" asked Mrs. Radcliffe smartly. "You know it's a tabooed subject in our best families."

Mr. Radcliffe paid no attention to her in his disturbance. "You know my nephew, Bertram King? He came straight out of college into that bank, and has been there nearly ten years. Barry likes him, and he's had good luck, and I think another year'll see him in the firm. Everybody believes that Barry doesn't go into any big deal unless King approves. I see Bertram quite often. He's over there in that dinner party now: sitting on Harriet's right. You've met my daughter-in-law?"

"Oh, yes, and King, too. He dined with us last night. Seemed to be a brainy chap."

"Oh, he's sedate as they make 'em. I often think he's the one that ought to have married Harriet. See Henry sitting between those pink and blue girls, and keeping 'em in a roar? He gets his frivolity from his mother."

Mrs. Radcliffe drew down the corners of her lips. "Frivolity that captured Harriet Barry, you'll notice. There they go," she added, as the gay young people at the round table pushed back their chairs; "there they go to their dance. Happy young things!" Mrs. Radcliffe sighed. "With all their troubles before them," she added, and the perfunctoriness of the addition made Mr. Lindsay smile.

"I hope they all weather it as well as you have, Mrs. Radcliffe," he said.

The host smiled too as they rose from the table.

"So say we all of us," he remarked. "Let's go and have a game. Do you play nullos, Mrs. Lindsay?"

"I play everything I can get my hands on," she returned promptly.

CHAPTER II
HOT TEA

Linda Barry was looking in the glass. She liked her own reflection, and no wonder. She was coolly critical of her own appearance, however, and granted it her approval only when her costume and coiffure reached the standard of her own prescription. Whether any one else criticized her was a matter of profound indifference. She had been known in her class in the University as a good fellow, a good sport, carelessly generous, and confident of her own powers, physical and mental.

Emerson says, if you would have friends you must know how to do without them. Linda Barry was a born leader and took her friends for granted. She never went out of her way to make one. That sort of girl always has some enemies, impotently resenting all that she arrogates to herself and that her admirers grant to her. But such clashes as had taken place left no mark on Linda. Triumphant and careless of triumph, she emerged from college life and asked of an obliging world, "What next?"

She was looking in the glass now, this Sunday afternoon, because she had been romping with her nephew, aged five, and he had pulled her hat awry.

She had dropped in for tea at her sister's apartment by the lake. It was two days after the dinner dance, and she was still feeling high approval of Harriet for the way in which she had managed the whole affair.

Bertram King was sitting opposite her now, holding the panting small boy, whose cheeks were red with exertion, and who chuckled with joy at having won a sudden and tempestuous battle by the simple move of jerking his aunt's hat over her eyes.

"I beated Aunt Linda. I beated her," he shrieked gayly.

"Hush, hush, Harry dear," said his mother from the tea-table. "Aunt Linda lets you get too excited."

Aunt Linda, whose very presence was suggestive of intoxicating rough and tumble to her nephew, winked and nodded at him from the glass.

"I'll catch you alone some day," she said, with a significance which filled him with ecstatic terror.

He jumped up and down in the encircling arms.

"No, you won't, no, you won't!" he shouted. "Uncle Bertram won't let you." The child's active arms caught the ribbon that held his protector's eyeglasses, and jerked them from his nose.

"Now, Linda, Linda," protested the mother, looking proudly at the lusty youngster, whose rumpled hair and floating tie-ends told of the bout just finished. "Listen, Harry, there's father coming. If I let you take him his tea, will you be very careful?"

Linda, rehabilitated, turned from the mirror and seated herself near the window.

"Let him bring me *my* tea," she said, gazing at the child with eyes that set him again to effervescing with delicious apprehension.

"No, *no*, she'll grab me!" yelled the boy, on a yet higher pitch of joy.

"Linda dear, it's Sunday. Let's have a little quiet," pleaded her sister.

At this moment, the head of the house entered, and his hopeful broke his bonds and, rushing to meet him, was lifted to a safe perch from which he looked down in rosy triumph on his dearest foe.

"Hello, everybody," said Henry Radcliffe. "If there isn't the girl that knows everything – including how to dance! You're a bird, Linda. How are you, Bertram?" The men shook hands, then the host approached the tea-table and kissed his wife.

"Put Harry right down here, dear. He's going to be a little gentleman and pass the tea."

"But not to Aunt Linda," shouted the child.

"No, no," agreed his mother pacifically. "You can take her tea to Uncle Bertram, and he'll pass it."

"Look out, Uncle Bertram, she'll tickle you," advised the boy out of long experience.

Linda, leaning lazily back in her armchair, met King's gray eyes and gave a low laugh.

"Just imagine such *lèse majesté*," she said, and the provoking arch of her lips made Bertram feel, as he always did, that she was laughing at him, not with him. He was too used to it to be disconcerted. He had a serious, even-featured, smooth-shaven face, light hair which would have liked to wave had its owner been willing, and short-sighted eyes, which, nevertheless, saw far enough to understand Linda Barry and deplore her.

"She'll catch your heels, too, if you go upstairs in front of her," continued the small boy, chuckling breathlessly as he watched his lazily reclining adored one, the sparks in whose eyes gave every hope that she was as ready as ever to spring.

"That sort of thing isn't good for a child. It overexcites him," remarked Bertram, unsmiling, dangling his eyeglasses by the ribbon.

"Dear, dear," said Linda. "Excuse me! I meant, Hear, hear!"

"Now, Harry darling," said Mrs. Radcliffe, "can you be careful? Father will sit between you and Aunt Linda, and don't go the other side of him *at all*. Do you understand?" Then to her sister, "You know how I value these cups, Linda. Please be good."

Linda stifled a yawn behind her white-gloved hand and looked very good indeed.

"Henry and I," went on the hostess complacently, "think we can't begin any too soon to make Harry at home in the drawing-room. Why, already he can stand and drink his cambric tea, and manage his cup as well as any of you, can't you, dear?"

Harry, finding himself under discussion, ceased smiling and scuffed violently across the rug.

"That isn't pretty, darling. Now, this is for Uncle Bertram to take to Aunt Linda. Come here. Now, be careful."

Henry Radcliffe took a seat near his wife's table, and the little boy seized a lettuce sandwich and took a bite of it before he attempted the cup.

"Oh, oh, put that down, Harry. You can have it in a minute." The mother laughed as she placed the cup in the child's hands. "He wouldn't eat a bit of lettuce at his own supper, but because grown-ups are having it he wants it!" she remarked. "That's a good boy," as the transit of the cup was made safely. "Now, come here and get one for Uncle Bertram."

As the child obeyed, his mother continued: "I must tell you a very good joke Harry made the other day. He was playing with the cat, and she stretched herself out on the rug, and he lay down with his head on her and said, 'This is my caterpillar.' Wasn't that clever?"

Harry glanced around the assembly rather sheepishly.

"Bully for the boy!" laughed his father. "Come here, Turk."

"Now, don't romp, Henry," pleaded his wife. "Here's Father's tea, Harry dear. Take it nicely. He's learning such a number of German words these days. Fräulein says he has a real talent for languages." The mother regarded her darling fondly. The child's gayety had entirely subsided, and he took his father's cup stolidly. Mrs. Radcliffe gave a low laugh as she continued, "*Now*, whenever he uses a big word in English and isn't quite sure that it is right, he says very carelessly, 'Oh, I said that in Germany.'" The soft laugh increased in merriment, and the speaker looked at her sister and King for appreciation. Linda laughed.

The subject of her remarks, having landed his father's cup safely in the paternal hands, eased his embarrassment by stamping again up and down the rug, making guttural noises in his throat.

"Now, dear, if you're going to do that you'll have to go away," said his mother, and, the German nurse appearing at that moment in the doorway, she accosted her: "Is Harry's supper ready? Yes? All right. Go on, then, darling, we'll excuse you. Fräulein has your nice supper all ready. I'll come and see you in a little while."

When the child, too self-conscious even to exchange parting hostilities with Aunt Linda, had left the room, Bertram King looked up from stirring his tea.

"Henry," he said shortly, "have I your leave to lecture Harriet?"

"Dear me, Bertram," ejaculated Linda, "are you going to take on another? You'll soon not have time to go the rounds, and the world will go to smash!"

King didn't look at her.

Henry Radcliffe closed his hand over his wife's as it rested on the handle of the teapot.

"Certainly, if you can think of anything to lecture her about."

"Can't *you*?" As King asked it he rose and, coming to the tea-table, took a plate of sandwiches and carried them to Linda, and then back to Henry, finally setting them on the table and helping himself.

His cousin shook his head. "Rather not!" he ejaculated. "I hope I know my place. I trip after Harriet at a respectful distance." This time he picked up his wife's hand and kissed it.

"This is fulsome," murmured Linda from her armchair.

"Then you share the lecture, that's all," returned King firmly, resuming his seat. "Here's my text: 'No one should ever talk about a child before him – or her.'"

"Harriet has only one, please remember, Bertram," protested Linda kindly.

Mrs. Radcliffe set down her teacup, and color began to come up in her cheeks as she regarded King. "Bertram, I never – " she began, for he paused. "It's the rarest thing! But here where we're all Harry's own people" – a little rigidity crept into the speaker's voice – "I didn't mean to bore anybody. Don't you" – with defiance – "don't you think that was very witty for a child of his age, that about the caterpillar? I keep his sayings in a book, and he's really a remarkable baby. It isn't at all because he's ours, is it, Henry? Oh" – with sudden impatience – "it's foolish of me to talk to you about it, Bertram. What do you know about children!"

"I've been one; and I see one occasionally; and I marvel to Heaven to see how parents cut themselves out of half the fun they might have with them. You don't seem to have grasped my text. People shouldn't talk *about* children *before* them."

"Of course, I wouldn't *scold* a child before others," said Harriet, with some excitement. "Now, Bertram, you know a lot about bonds that I don't, but I know a lot about children that you don't. I'm not just an animal mother. I've looked into pedagogy and kindergarten principles. Harry can work beautifully in cardboard already; but, of course, if it bores you to hear about him – "

"Yes," interrupted King, "parents should also take into consideration that the general public doesn't care a copper to hear anything about their children; but I'm not the general public where Harry is concerned. I'll guarantee to sit between you and Henry and listen to an antiphonal recital of everything Harry has said and done since he was born, and not yawn once – with one provision."

Harriet flashed him a look. "I don't care to hear your provision. You'll not be called to the martyrdom."

"And the provision is," went on Bertram equably, "that Harry shall not be present. Now, Henry, if you will kindly place your hand over Harriet's mouth, I will proceed."

Linda stirred. There was something about Bertram King's arrogation of superiority that always exasperated her.

"How about my placing my hand kindly over *your* mouth?" she suggested.

He turned and looked directly at her. "I should enjoy that very much," he returned.

Linda was disconcerted for only a moment, then her provoking smile shone.

"Wonderful facilities for biting me, I suppose," she remarked.

"Now, if the children will all be quiet a moment," said Bertram, turning back, "I will take up the cudgels for the rising generation. One of the most charming things on earth, probably the most charming, is a child, unconscious of itself; the most graceful, the most winning; untrammeled in their little speeches as in their movements. Then some grown-up discusses them in their presence,

no matter whether flatteringly or not. Their grace changes to awkwardness, their unconsciousness to embarrassment, their freedom to reserve or to resentful, meaningless noises such as those with which Harry lately favored the company. Under moments of flattery they show some chestiness and conceit at times, but for the most part they're stolid under the infliction, and their parents and friends have lost all the joy of their charm until they can forgive by forgetting. One of the bitterest leaves of their tree of knowledge is discovering that the well-meaning giants around them are laughing at them, not with them."

"Say, there's something in that, Harriet," remarked her husband good-naturedly. "Harry grew as red as a turkey-cock when you told about his excusing himself for using wrong words. I noticed it."

Linda nodded in King's direction. "It's surely a duty Bertram owes to a benighted world to marry."

He turned to her again with the same direct, quick movement as before.

"Very well. Will you have me, Linda?"

She met his gaze, finding some difficulty in giving her own just the right proportion of light scorn.

"I should like to see myself married to you!" she exclaimed slowly.

"Would you?" he responded with lively interest, and rising, strode across to her, while she retreated to the furthest corner of her chair. "Then we're of the same mind for once." He seized her hand, while the teacup in the other rocked and tinkled in a manner to cause the liveliest apprehension in its owner. "Witness, both of you. Linda and I are engaged."

The girl's strong heart pounded violently as she found that vigorous efforts could not free her hand. Color burned her cheeks. Her father's factotum had never seemed to consider her affairs or herself as of any importance, and her habit of thought toward him was an effort to assure him of absolute reciprocation.

"Let me go," she said sharply. "Don't be silly."

"Come on," he urged. "Let's give your father a pleasant surprise. Henry, Harriet, speak up. Tell her what's for her good."

Harriet, the conventional, was anxious under the growing anger in her sister's dark eyes.

"Behave, Bertram," she said severely. "I don't like joking on those subjects. Go back to your chair and I'll give you a lecture much more sensible than yours to me."

"I'm not joking. I believe I could make something fine out of Linda." He gazed down into the girl's face as he spoke.

Henry Radcliffe laughed derisively. "You poor nut," he remarked. "Better not try the Cave-Dweller stunt on Linda. The club would be likely to change hands."

The captured fingers struggled a moment more, while the two pairs of eyes exchanged their combative gaze.

There had never been any jocose passages between the girl and her father's favorite co-worker. There had been moments when she had even felt desire for his approval. The present audacity amazed and disconcerted her, and coercion was simply hateful.

Finding effort to free herself futile, she set her tea down on the arm of her chair, and quickly taking up the cup, deliberately poured the hot, creamy liquid over as much of her captor's cuff as was visible. The cuff collapsed, the tea was hot. King abruptly dropped the girl's hand, and set himself to wiping his own with his handkerchief.

"Now, will you be good?" laughed Henry; but Harriet fixed anxious eyes on the arm of the chair, hoping that Bertram's hand and cuff had received the whole of the baptism, and groaned within herself over the talents of her young sister as a trouble-maker.

"And who calls it 'the cup that cheers'?" remarked King drily.

CHAPTER III
COLD WATER

June heat dropped down on Chicago promptly that year and caused the Barrys to plan to leave town earlier than it suited the banker to go. Indeed, no weather condition ever made Linda's father willing to leave business.

One evening, a few days before their intended departure, Bertram King came to the house to see his employer. The heavy door stood open after the hot day, and with the familiarity of an intimate he stepped inside, intending to take his way to his old friend's den, but in the hall he met Linda: Linda, blooming, dressed in white, and altogether lovely to look upon. Over her arm she carried a silk motor coat and a chiffon veil.

The young man's face looked haggard by comparison with her fresh beauty, and he smiled unconscious admiration as he greeted the exhilaration of her breezy appearance.

"Father is out," she said, "and I'm so glad!"

"Why? Did you want to see me alone?"

"I can't see you at all. I'm going out."

"But he hasn't come yet."

"Who?"

"Your motoring friend. Why are you glad your father is out?"

"Because I think he sees enough of you in the daytime. Too much. Father's very tired. Can't you see it? I'm going to run away with him on Saturday."

"So I hear. – I'm somewhat seedy myself. I think I'll accept your urgent invitation to sit down until he comes."

"He isn't coming. He'll be out all the evening."

"I'm talking about your beau." There was an empty, nerveless quality to the visitor's voice which began to impress his companion.

"Let's set a spell, as they say in Maine," he added. "I've been thinking about Maine to-day."

Linda followed his lead into a reception room, where they sat down.

"A pretty good place to think about, when Lake Michigan sizzles," she replied; "but I've chosen Colorado. We're going to Estes Park."

"Yes, so Mr. Barry told me. I should like to go there too." King's tone was wistful.

"Perish the thought!" returned Linda devoutly. "I wouldn't have you within a thousand miles of father."

"That's what the doctor says," remarked King, his pensive gaze bent on the ribbon bordering of Linda's thin frock.

She started and leaned toward him. "The doctor!" she repeated. "Has Doctor Flagg been talking to you about father? Is he – is he worried about him?"

King shook his head. "I didn't go to Doctor Flagg. I went to Doctor Young. We've been getting some golf together lately, and he's a good sort."

"What's the matter with *you*, Bertram?" Linda sat up again, and her voice and manner cooled. "What do you want of a doctor?"

King shook his head. "Never in my life before: first offense. Everything seemed to go back on me all of a sudden. Sleeping, eating, and all the rest of it." The speaker scowled. "The mischief of it is, Young says I've got to get away for a month at least. He says – Oh, you don't care what he says."

Linda regarded the downcast one. He was speaking to her as to an equal, not, as usual, with tacit rebuke for some misdemeanor. This blunt reproach, if it were reproach, merely referred casually to her indifference.

"I care a great deal," she returned, with spirit. "I'm sure it will make my father very anxious to have you away at the same time he is."

King lifted his weary eyes to hers, eager and bright.

"I'm sure Doctor Flagg could give you a tonic or something to tide you over till we return in September," she went on. "You could go then."

Her companion leaned back in his chair with a long, inaudible breath. "We have arranged all that. Mr. Barry wants me to go."

The speaker did look rather cadaverous. Linda realized it now. It was a strange thing to have in any degree a sense of compassion for him: this masterful man on whom her father leaned, the man who alone in all the world had a hundred times without a word put her in the wrong, and whom as often she had fervently wished she might never see again. She had chafed against that chain of her father's reliance which bound herself as well. There was no escaping King, and when in her busy college life she thought of him at all, it was as a presumptuous creature who was continually making good his presumption; and what could be more exasperating than that?

King was a self-made man, one with few connections in Chicago, one of whom was Linda's voice teacher, Mrs. Porter. The girl never had exactly understood this relationship, but the fact that some of Mrs. Porter's blood ran in his veins constituted Bertram's only redeeming trait in the eyes of that lady's adorer. Now as she regarded him, staring with discontented eyes at the rug, a sense came over her for the first time that King was a lonely figure. It was all very well for a man in health to live at the University Club and have his mind and life entirely wrapped up in business; but when eating and sleeping became difficult and the brain was over-weary, the evenings might seem rather long to him.

"It serves a young man right," thought Linda, "when he will bind himself on the wheel of business and act as if there was not one thing in the world worth having but money!" Hadn't she seen to what such a course had brought her father? She spoke: —

"There's a lot of nonsense in all this kow-towing to business," she said. "Why do men make such slaves of themselves?"

"So their women can have a house like this, several gowns like yours, and a motor like the one you're going out in," responded King dully.

Linda's rosy lips curled. "Fred Whitcomb's motor is last year's model."

Her companion smiled.

"There, you see!" he remarked. "There's nothing for me to do but to keep on hustling so you can always have the latest."

Color flashed over Linda's face, but she shrugged carelessly.

"Oh, of course," she retorted, "everything is Eve's fault."

"Pretty sure to be," returned King, nodding slowly. "*Cherchez la femme. Toujours cherchez la femme.*" He regarded her for a moment of silence, during which she was so uncomfortable that she raised both hands to arrange an imaginary hairpin at the back of her head.

"Where have you decided to go?" she asked at last, continually warmer under his eyes, and wondering if Fred Whitcomb had had a puncture.

"Why, I thought it would be great to spend long Colorado days in the saddle with you."

"Did you really?" Linda's little laugh had a most discouraging note.

"Yes, but Dr. Young jumped on that. He said I mustn't go within gunshot of your father."

Linda shook her head. "I should advise you not to myself. I'm a pretty good shot."

King looked up. "It would be great, though. Think of having you through with all this college foolery, and having plenty of time to talk to you."

The girl's eyes brightened. "Pray, did you consider Yale foolery?"

"A lot of it, yes," replied King, wearily; "but never mind, Linda, we're through with all that. I thought of the long days out there in Estes Park, the divine air, 'the dark pilasters of the pines,' and you, sparkling and radiant, on a good horse, and I with time enough to tell you how I love you!"

"Bertram!" Linda shot rather than rose to her feet, and her eyes launched arrows.

"Sit down. Sit down. I shall have to stand if you don't, and I'm dog-tired. Didn't you know I loved you, Linda, honest now?"

The girl sank into her chair. She was trying to think of the cruelest way to crush him. She opened her lips once or twice to speak and closed them again. King regarded her immovably, his worn look meeting her vital gaze.

"Your taste in jokes is very poor," she said at last, and her tone was icy, "and you may rest assured that no regard for you will prevent my telling my father exactly what you have said."

"You needn't. He knows it," returned King. His voice, which had brightened, relapsed into nervelessness.

"My father knows it!" The girl could not restrain the exclamation.

"Yes, of course. I believed you did, upon my honor. I've had so little time, you see, and you've been so busy."

He seemed so innocent of offense that her anger gave way to the habitual exasperation.

"Bertram King," she said, – and if there is such a thing as stormy dignity her manner expressed it, – "I believe the grind of business has dried up your brains. I could count on the fingers of one hand the occasions on which you have expressed even approval of me." Her nostrils dilated as she spoke.

Her companion's solemn visage suddenly beamed in a smile. "You remember them, then," he returned, with a pleased naïveté which nearly wrecked her severity; but she held her pose.

"You dared to speak to my dear father – I think you have him mesmerized, I really do – you dared to speak to him seriously of – of – caring for me, when you have criticized nearly every move I have made at home for four years."

"Have I? I don't remember saying anything discourteous to you."

"You didn't need to," retorted Linda. She didn't wish to snap, she wished to freeze, but old wounds ached. "Your actions, your looks, were quite enough."

"My looks?" repeated King mildly. "I'm sure you exaggerate. It must have been these glasses: the wrong shape or something." He took them off and regarded them critically.

"I hate your jokes!" retorted the girl, hotly.

"Hate what you like so long as it isn't me!"

"It is you!" The words came with emphasis.

"Then you do like me." King nodded. "It's an admission."

"You disgust me with your silliness," she returned, turning away. "I wonder what has become of Fred Whitcomb." She rose and swept to the bay window.

King followed her.

"Fred's a good fellow. I always liked Whitcomb," he said.

Linda made no response to this. She scanned the road anxiously up and down.

There was another interim of silence; then: —

"Your father would be pleased, Linda," ventured King. "He said so."

"You hypnotize him. *I* said so. My father," she added with scorn, – "my father like me to marry a man who always disapproved of me?"

"Is that why you try to hate me?" asked King thoughtfully. "I have disapproved of you a good many times, but I do think that – considering everything – you've done very well."

Linda, the all-conquering, the leader, the criterion, turned upon the speaker a gaze of amazement; then she laughed.

"How kind! You overwhelm me."

"Yes, I do really think so. Considering your beauty, your strength, your easy finances, your college crushes, your empress-like reign, you've done pretty well to consider others as much as you have."

"Others?" the echo came crisply. "What others?"

"Your father mainly."

"My father!" Linda faced him now, and sparks were flying from the brown eyes. "Bertram King, I adore my father!"

"Yes, I know, – when you have time."

"What – what is it? Would you have had me not go to college?"

"No," – King spoke in a reasonable tone, – "you did right to go to college."

"Thank you – a thousand times." The crisp waves of the speaker's hair seemed to snap as on a cold night while she bowed her thanks.

King played with his glasses; and she turned quickly back to the window in order that he should not see that sudden tears quenched the fire in her eyes. Her father's preoccupied face rose before her. Was it true that she had ever neglected him? A habit of sighing unconsciously had recently grown upon him. She had noticed that, and also that in late months new lines of harassment had come in his face. Never mind, she was going to run away with him, devote herself to him, far from this man who dared to comment, and to pick flaws in her behavior. He should never see her change.

"I did want to do some riding with you, Linda. The idea comes to me like a picture or a poem when I think of those forests: —

' – here and there in solemn lines
The dark pilasters of the pines
Bore up the high woods' somber dome;
Between their shafts, like tapestry flung,
A soft blue vapor fell and hung.'

Nice, isn't it?"

"On what bond issue did you find that?" inquired Linda, tapping the window pane with restless fingers, and watching impatiently for her laggard cavalier.

"I told Dr. Young I wanted to play with you and your father, but he said Mr. Barry and I didn't know how to play."

"He was quite right."

King regarded his companion's averted, charming head with a pale smile. "You know," he remarked after a little, "we can love people while seeing their imperfections."

"Not I! I love only perfection."

King gave a noiseless whistle, and raised his eyebrows. "I'm so glad I'm perfect," he said at last.

Linda looked around at him slowly. How pale he was! Ripples of the flood of tenderness that had bathed the thought of her father flowed grudgingly toward her companion, as he stood there in the long twilight, regarding her with lack-lustre eyes.

"There are pines outside of Colorado," she remarked.

"That's what Mrs. Porter says."

"Mrs. Porter?" Linda echoed him with interest; "but she has left town. I went to the studio yesterday, and she's gone; gone to Maine without letting me know."

"You've been pretty hard to locate, remember. She told me she was going."

Linda sighed. "If she could have gone West with Father and me, it would have been perfect."

"I'm said to resemble Maud very strongly," suggested King.

Linda regarded him with quick appraisement. "I never thought of it." She turned back to the window. "I can quote poetry, too, when I think of her. The other day I found a verse that fits her: —

'He that of such a height hath built his mind,
And reared the dwelling of his thoughts so strong,
As neither fear nor hope can shake the frame

Of his resolvéd powers; nor all the wind
Of vanity or malice pierce to wrong
His settled peace, or to disturb the same:
What a fair seat hath he, from whence he may
The boundless wastes and wilds of man survey.'

A man named Daniel wrote that. Isn't it perfect?"

"H'm," agreed King. "A Daniel come to judgment. Maud likes you very much," he added.

"She loves me, thank you," flashed Linda, against his tepid speech.

"Then it runs in the family. I've told her how I felt toward you myself."

"And told her all my faults, I suppose." The girl bit her lip.

"Oh, I knew she could see those. Maud is very penetrating." Fire and dew flashed at him again. "Linda," he added in a different tone, "Whitcomb can't be much longer. Do you know I'm asking you to marry me?"

An inarticulate sound from his companion, and continued drumming on the window pane.

"I came to your father's employ ten years ago. I climbed the ladder slowly, but just three years and eight months ago I reached the rung from which I could see you." A pause. "You've haunted me ever since."

"Unintentional, I assure you." But Linda, her cheeks burning, could not look around again. In her tumult of hurt pride and indignation there penetrated a strain of triumph.

"Certainly," returned King; "you had other things to attend to, and so had I. You've attended to them with vast credit, and your father will tell you that I'm not so bad. Now a new chapter begins. Probably no one will ever love you as comprehendingly as I do."

"I shouldn't think of marrying any one who didn't consider me perfect," announced Linda clearly.

"Remember the chromo that goes with me – Mrs. Porter. Maud would be your cousin." King dangled his eyeglasses as he made the suggestion, and regarded a short curl of hair that had dropped against his companion's white neck.

Linda was silent for a moment. "I suppose you'll poison her mind against me now," she said.

"No. You've poured hot tea and cold water on my budding hopes, but I'm strictly honorable; and besides, I'm going to remember that both douches are good for plants. Ask your father if I know how to hang on to a proposition."

Silence. Linda's strong heart beat against her ribs as the man came a step nearer to her.

"Don't you touch me!" she exclaimed.

"I wasn't thinking of touching you, Linda. I just wanted to fix your hair. Something has fallen down here; just wait, I see a hairpin."

The girl preserved her pose under the caressing hands for a second, but he fumbled the soft lock, and she suspected him.

"That will do," she said, jerking her head away.

"Oh, well, I fixed it. You might thank me, going out as you are."

"I should think Fred had fallen dead!" she exclaimed.

"Yes; Maud prescribes Maine for me. She knows the lay of the land pretty well up there. She says she has known it for thirty years. I think that's an exaggeration, don't you?"

"I don't know how old she is, and I don't care; I only know that it must have nearly killed her husband to die and leave her."

King rocked back and forth on his toes. "I've heard that it did, entirely," he responded.

Linda gave her head a quick shake. "No wonder I say idiotic things!" she exclaimed. "It's catching! – Fred! Fred!" The sudden call was a cry of relief, and the girl quickly stepped out of an

open glass door upon the piazza, and hurried down the steps. A motor had stopped beside the walk. King caught up his hat and followed her.

"I thought you'd never come!" cried Linda, to the joy of the distracted chauffeur.

"Great Scott! I thought I never would either!" he responded.

"What have you been doing? Climbing trees?" asked King. "Linda and I had nearly decided to be reckless and go to a movie."

"Nothing of the sort," averred Linda, "but I had begun to believe all four were punctured."

"One was," admitted Whitcomb, "and I've had a dozen delays." And he gnashed his teeth over a wasted hour of June as he handed his fair one into the front seat.

"Whither away?" inquired King.

"To the North Shore," responded Whitcomb, with fire in his eye which portended speeding.

"Drop me at the club, then, will you, Freddy?" And without waiting for the assent Bertram landed in the tonneau as the car started.

In front of the University Club he descended, and stepped forward beside Linda.

"I may not see you again," he said, standing between the wheels, hatless, and holding her hand. "Have a good time. If you send me a picture postal, it will be all off between us."

"What did he mean?" asked Whitcomb, as with a whirr and a jerk they were on their way again.

"Why, I'm going to Colorado with my father; or he's going with me. He's tired."

"Well, he has nothing on King," remarked Freddy. "Never saw any one run down as that chap has the last month. He'd better get some smaller collars. Don't you care, Linda! Send *me* a picture postal, and I'll frame it."

The look that accompanied this outburst was lost on the adored one. She was trying to remember if Bertram King's collar had looked too large.

The University Club was a lonely place!

CHAPTER IV
THE JUNE NIGHT

Linda enjoyed the long flight under the June stars between the waves of the freshwater sea and the star-filled lagoons of Lincoln Park, and returned late to the dark house on the avenue.

"Did you ever see anything look so inhospitable!" she exclaimed, as her escort ran with her up the steps. "I wonder why Sedley didn't light up."

"Do you want me to go in and look under all the beds for you?" asked Whitcomb gayly.

"No. Father's bound to be in one of them by this time. I'm afraid to look at my watch. You shouldn't have kept me out so late, Freddy. You know it was against my will."

He could see her dimples in the starlight. They had been dear to him in grammar school; dear to him all the years while he was bereft of them at Harvard.

"If I could keep you always!" he ejaculated, in a lower tone.

"Against my will?" she laughed. "How about your promise, Freddy?"

"Yes, I know I did," was the incoherent response, "but you're going away – and – are you sure you don't feel a bit – not the least bit different, Linda?"

She shook her head at the pleading tone, and its low vibration set some chord within her to stirring. The sudden vision of Bertram King rose before her, dangling his eyeglasses and watching to see what she would say and how she would say it. Freddy had none of Bertram's hateful way of taking things for granted. He was all that was manly and humble and appealing. She could see in the dim light his square, strong hands clenched, and she felt again King's slender fingers on her hair; insolent, presumptuous: a man who had never courted her.

She liked Whitcomb so much. She approved of him so deeply.

"I ought not to have gone with you to-night," she said, and the gentle, regretful voice was so unlike Linda Barry that it frightened her devoted suitor.

"No, no. No, no!" he exclaimed quickly, taking a fresh grip on the situation. "I assumed all the responsibility. I haven't forgotten it."

His teeth closed, and the two regarded one another. She again contrasted his athletic build and efficient effect with King, very much to the latter's disadvantage.

"Oh, Freddy!" she exclaimed appealingly, and her fingers locked together, "there are so many nice girls." She paused, but he was silent. "I should just love your wife, I know. What fun we would have together!"

"Afraid not, Linda. Three's a crowd." A sudden thought corrugated the speaker's forehead. "Were you thinking – thinking of making it a quartette?"

"What an idea!"

The corrugation remained. "I've been suspecting that that dry-as-dust King would pounce on you as soon as you left school."

"Really, Freddy, your language – "

Linda's cheeks flushed. Were not the boyish words extremely graphic!

"Well, wouldn't it occur to any one? He must have some human moments when the machine's resting, and he has eyes in his head. Each man of us wants the best of everything, and aren't you the best of everything? I don't care a hang for your father's money. I got a raise last week."

"Bless your dear heart, Freddy!"

"Don't!" The young fellow winced. "I abhor that big-sister tone of yours. King's hand in glove with your father. Everybody says Barry & Co. take on nothing that King doesn't sanction, and your father is some business man, as you may know. I only hope he won't ever regret such absolute faith. I know I bought something, and – well, I believe it's shaky to tell the truth, and I've begun to wonder

if, after all, King is such a wizard. But – all this is nothing to you. I just want to be sure that if I'm not the leading man it'll be somebody with more flesh and blood than King, somebody gaited more like myself, only a better man. If I've got to give you up, I want it to be to a better man, Linda; not to a long-legged, cadaverous, conceited prig!"

"Why, Freddy, Freddy!" Bertram was all that. Why should Linda object to hearing it in good nervous English? "I had no idea you disliked Bertram so," she said.

"Didn't you think he had his nerve to start out with us to-night? I don't understand how he was able to make me feel that way, but somehow it was just as if he said: 'Yes, you have my permission to take her driving this once. Be good children and enjoy yourselves.'"

Linda laughed. "Imaginative, too! Why, I'm learning a lot about you to-night; and here I was thinking you were an open book!"

"Not if you didn't know I was imaginative," declared Whitcomb. "If I should tell you of some pictures I draw – "

He came a step nearer, and the girl shrank.

"Good-night!" she exclaimed; "Father's pretty indulgent, but if he should wake up he might be worried. Good-night; I've had such a good time, Freddy." She gave him her firm, brief, boyish hand-shake, and glided within the door. It was still open and the house not lighted! Then her father —

"Linda, I'm in here, daughter."

The voice came from the reception room, where earlier she had talked with King.

With a swish of her motor coat the girl turned and entered the room, noting instantly and with relief that her father was leaning back in an armchair in the corner of the dark room farthest from the window. Then he had not overheard Whitcomb's talk.

"Why aren't you in bed? Were you worried, dear?" she asked repentantly. "These June nights are all like day, aren't they?" She hurried forward, and sitting on the arm of her father's chair drew his head toward her and kissed his forehead, taking one of his hands into her lap. "One hasn't sense enough to go in on such a night. We left Sheridan Road as lively as if it were noon. Really I don't know what time it is now. Is it awfully late? I'm sorry if I worried you."

"No, little one." The reply was gentle and abstracted. "I knew you were all right. I knew you were with Fred."

"Why, how did you know it?" The sprightly, fresh voice sounded gay after the tired one.

"Bertram told me."

"Bertram!" The ejaculation was accusing. "Where have you seen him?"

"At the office."

"The office! Of all places this glorious night! Father, dear," reproachfully, "I thought you went off with Mr. Radcliffe to paint the town. That's what he told me. How could Bertram get hold of you? I'd have made Freddy tie him to our machine if I had suspected such a thing."

"Mr. Radcliffe had some business to talk over, and the data were at the office."

The utter weariness of the reply made the fresh face cling again against the speaker's gray head.

"But Bertram came here to find you."

"Yes, I got him at the club."

Linda gave an inarticulate exclamation. "Oh, doesn't it just do me good to think how soon you'll be where offices and Bertrams are unknown!" she said slowly.

The man in her embrace lifted her hand to his lips in silence.

"You're the stunningest thing on horseback that was ever seen," she went on, "and the only time you'll be out of the saddle is when you're in bed."

Silence.

"Why don't you say something?" she mumbled against his hair. "Did you know I was good-looking?" she added after a pause, lifting her head and squeezing him.

"Yes, child."

"Oh, Father, don't be so meek! Say something nice and impudent, or I'll think you're *too* tired, and take you away to-morrow. I was leading up tactfully to thanking you for being the best-looking man in Chicago so your daughter could have a nice nose." She burrowed the feature into his thick hair, and kissed it again.

"You're my darling girl," he said soberly. "You've been a joy to me ever since you were born."

"Hurrah for us!" ejaculated Linda. "I've been no kind of a joy compared to what I'm going to be. Now I have all this school business off my hands, I'm going to trail you – just dog your footsteps. Now, don't say that I won't be near so much of a joy that way, because I can think of more ways to make you have a good time than you dream of now!"

"You aren't the sort of girl who stays with Father long."

"Do you mean marriage? My dear sir, don't you know that handsome girls are far less apt to marry than the nice, commonplace, cozy ones with turn-up noses? I admit coyly that I'm something of a peach, but I'm going to stay with you."

"Have you ever thought," – the question came gravely, – "have you ever thought of – Bertram?"

Color mounted richly over the face against the gray hair.

"Thought of him! I should say so! The most critical, disagreeable, *nosey* man; always interfering and – and trying to make people over into his mold. It never occurs to him that his ideas could be anything less than perfection."

"I'm surprised to hear you speak so," came the monotonous voice, "and disappointed too."

"Father, dear, don't! You make me sad! When I know you've come into this tired condition, just working for me, – that's one of the pleasant things Bertram said to me to-night."

"He was wrong. It wasn't working for you, Linda. Remember that. Money-making gets to be a disease. A millionaire should be satisfied; but the multi-millionaires are ahead of him, and the game is exciting." There was no excitement in the colorless voice. "Mere prosperity palls. He takes chances, hoping and expecting to do great things for himself and every one involved with him. There's the pinch. He should never allow others to take chances with him. That's criminal."

"Oh, well." Linda opposed a light tone to what she considered the morbidity of over-fatigue. Her heart reproached her for not having seen the symptoms long ago. She should have thrown up college and taken her dear one away long ago. Resentment against King again flared up in her. His had been daily companionship with her father. How could he have let it come to this!

"If Barry & Co.," she went on, "should ever have a setback, they would simply deal out," – she gestured as if dealing cards, – "deal out to the little people and make up their losses. That would be Barry & Co.'s way," she added proudly.

Her father's next words were irrelevant, and came after a short silence.

"I'm surprised that you give Bertram such a bad character. He is unconscious of offending you, I'm sure."

"Oh, Daddy, dear, don't bother about that. I don't hate him, you understand. It's only that he is flint and perhaps I'm steel. At any rate, there are fireworks when we mingle in society."

"Not flint at all, Linda. He loves you."

"A queer sort of love, then. It isn't so much what he says, dear," – Linda's cheeks were burning, – "it's that compelling – oh, sort of – well, compelling's the best word, – that always wants to – to guide me; and I won't be guided by anybody but you. I'll tell you what, Daddy, you haven't any son, and I'm going to be your son after this. If you're very good for two whole weeks after we get out to Colorado, and don't say one word about business, after that I'll get you to tell me all about your affairs, and I'll put my whole mind on understanding them. You know, Daddy, I have a good head for mathematics and for business generally, – truly I have. This isn't bluffing. If you'll take a little pains with me, you'll find Bertram isn't the only one you'll confide in. I think I'd like business. My heart isn't much to boast of, but my head, now, when it comes to my head – Thank Heaven, Bertram will be where he can't write to you about anything but fish. Mrs. Porter has persuaded him to go to Maine. Just think

what she did, Daddy. She went off without saying a word to me. I went down to the studio and there was no one there but a caretaker, packing up. The calendar hadn't been torn off, so I tore off a leaf and wrote her a message on the date I was there. It's a calendar of Bible promises, and this one was, 'When thy father and thy mother forsake thee, then the Lord will take thee up.' I added something about her inhumanity in forsaking me."

"Why – why," – Mr. Barry's brow wrinkled, – "I'm afraid I've been remiss. I paid the bill for your lessons, and when she sent back the receipt she wrote something about having tried to get you on the 'phone, but that you were too popular, and that she was going East to tell your aunt that you were a good girl."

"Then she has gone to the Cape!" exclaimed Linda, with interest. "I remember when Aunt Belinda was here at Christmas Mrs. Porter talked about it with her."

"Yes," responded Mr. Barry, "and I think the plan is for Bertram to join her there if – when he can go."

"Right away, won't he?" demanded Linda eagerly. "His doctor says – "

"Yes, poor Bertram," said Mr. Barry slowly, "he does need it; but, little one," – he patted Linda's hand slowly, – "we can't either of us go quite so soon as we expected."

"Now, Father!" exclaimed the girl acutely.

"Something very important, Linda," – his voice increased as he repeated it, – "very important. I think we must – " he rose; "but it's late. We must go upstairs now, little one."

His repetition of the term of affection impressed Linda. It was associated with sadness. She remembered how often he had used it during the week that her mother died.

"I shall read you to sleep, dear. Please let me," she said as they rose.

"No, no need of that. Go to bed, little girl. I'll lock up. Good-night, daughter."

He put his arms around her, and she clung to him, kissing him again and again.

CHAPTER V
THE CAPE

Maine. Mrs. Porter loved the very word. Always when the train left the North Station in Boston she sank into her chair with a sense of shaking off the cares of life; and to-day the smile she gave the porter as he placed her suit-case beside that chair was valued, even by him, more than the coin she placed in his hand.

The cares of life in her case were represented by a busy music studio, where, luckily for her, every half-hour was a busy one; but there were the pupils who didn't supply their own steam, but had to be urged laboriously up the steeps of Parnassus; there were those in whom a voice must be manufactured if it ever appeared; and those whose talent was great and whose application was fitful; those whose vanity was fatuous, and those whose self-depreciation was a ball and chain; those who had been badly taught and who must be guided through that valley of humiliation where bad habits are overthrown. Taking into account all the trials of the profession, any voice teacher in Mrs. Porter's place to-day might give a Boston and Maine porter a seraphic smile as if he were opening to her the gate leading to Elysian Fields where pianos and *vocalises* have no place.

"That woman sure do look happy," was the soliloquy of this particular red-cap as he pocketed the silver and left the car.

The traveler leaned back in her chair with a glorious sense of unlimited leisure, and prepared to recognize the landmarks grown as familiar to her as the scenes on the Illinois Central suburban railroad.

Probably none of her pupils save Linda Barry, although there were other hero-worshipers among them, would deny that Mrs. Porter's nose was too short, her mouth too wide, and her eyes too small; but the kindly lips revealed such even teeth, and the eyes such light, that no one commented on Maud Porter's looks, nor cared what shape her nose was. One saw, as she leaned back now in her chair, that her brown hair was becoming softly powdered with gray. Her eyes half closed as the express train gained speed, flying away from care, and her humorous lips curved as she considered the mild adventure on which she was embarking.

When Miss Belinda Barry had visited her brother during the holidays, she had dropped some remarks concerning her home which had roused Mrs. Porter's curiosity and interest. The idea had been growing on her all the spring that, instead of going out as usual to one of the islands in Casco Bay, she would explore this corner of the mainland from whence had sprung the Chicago financier. She had not, however, communicated since with Miss Barry. She did not wish that lady to feel any responsibility for her.

A picture of Linda's aunt rose before her mind as she reflected. Tall, thin, with a scanty coiffure and long onyx earrings. These ornaments Miss Barry had donned in her youth, and declined to renounce with the fashion; so that when they began to be worn again by the daring, they gave her the effect, as Linda had confided to her teacher, of being "the sportiest old thing in town."

The naturally severe cast of Miss Barry's features, Mrs. Porter had always observed, rather increased in severity when the good lady looked at her niece, and that holiday visit had been a strain on both sides.

It was happy history repeating itself when the traveler alighted to-day at the Union Station in Portland. The same involuntary wonder rose within her that any face could look harassed, ill, or care-worn here. It was Maine. It was the enchanted land! the land of pines, of unmeasured ocean, of supernatural beauty in sunset skies; of dreamful days and dreamless nights.

She smiled at her own childish ignoring of the seamy side of existence as evidenced in the look of many of the crowd hurrying through the busy clearing-house of the station. She beamed upon a

porter who took her to a waiting carriage – a sea-going hack, Linda would have called it – and drove to a hotel. She would not risk arriving in the evening in a locality where the only inn might be that of the Silver Moon.

Till supper time – it would be supper, she considered exultantly – she wandered up Congress Street to some of her favorite shops. Undeniably there are other streets in Portland, but to the summer visitor the dignified city is much like a magnified village with one main street where its life centers.

Maud Porter entered one shop after another, repressing with difficulty her longing to tell every clerk how happy she was to be back, and enjoying all over again the good manners and obligingness of everybody.

Next morning, as soon as breakfast was over, she made her inquiries and took her train. It was one that stopped at every station, and when, after three quarters of an hour of this sauntering, she alighted on a desolate and unpromising platform, her first thought was to inquire in the small depot for the first train back. The little house seemed to be deserted for the moment, however, and she observed an elderly man with a short white beard, who, with trousers tucked into his boots and thumbs hooked in his armholes, stood at a little distance, regarding speculatively the lady in the gray suit and floating gray veil. Near where he was standing a carryall was waiting by the platform.

In Mrs. Porter's indecision she looked again within the weather-beaten station, then across at the motionless, weather-beaten face.

"There doesn't seem to be any one in here," she said.

"I cal'late Joe's out in the shed luggin' wood," responded the man. His pleasant tone, his drawl, the sea-blue of his eyes, caused her to move toward him as the needle to the magnet. She knew the type. All the suspended Maine exhilaration rushed back upon her. How clean he was! How rough! How adorable!

"I've come," she said, gazing up into the eyes regarding her steadily, and said no more.

"Want me to haul ye?" he asked kindly, not changing his position.

"Yes."

"Where to?"

"I don't know." The sunlight of her smile evoked a grin from him.

"Come on a chance, have ye?"

"Yes, So did you, I should think. Nobody but little me getting off here."

"No, 't ain't time for 'em really to come yet."

"Who? Summer people, do you mean?"

"Yes. Folks is beginnin' to think they like it down here; but we don't take summer boarders to the Cape, ye'll have to know that."

A prodigious wink enveloped one sea-blue eye.

"Oh, I'm so sorry." Mrs. Porter's smile vanished in her earnestness. "Wouldn't – wouldn't your wife, perhaps – "

"Haven't got none."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"I ain't. Ben glad on't always. Hain't ever repented."

"Then you mean you never were married."

"That's what I mean." The speaker nodded as if to emphasize a triumph.

"But isn't there some one in your – your village – I suppose it's a village, isn't it?"

"Shouldn't wonder if 'twas."

The visitor tasted that "'t wa-a-as" with appetite, and echoed it mentally.

"Some one who would take a boarder if – if I want to stay?" The monotonous landscape was not inviting.

"Wall, for accawmodation's sake I cal'late they would; but it's only for accawmodation's sake, ye understand." The speaker winked again. "The Cape don't take boarders."

"Oh, I see," laughed the visitor. "But you must have expected somebody. You're here."

"Usually git somebody. I haul 'em for hard cash, not for accawmodation's sake, so ye see I'm on hand."

"I should hope so. What should I have done if you hadn't been here?"

"Oh, they'se a car you could git over there a little piece." The speaker unhooked one thumb and gestured.

"I'd far rather go with you, Mr. – Mr. – "

"Holt. Jerry Holt. Most folks forgit the Mister. Shall I take yer bag?"

It was standing where Mrs. Porter had descended from the train, and Jerry unhooked his thumbs and clumped across the platform in the heavy boots in which he had gone clamming that morning.

Maud Porter, her spirits high, entered the old carryall. She suddenly decided not to mention her acquaintance with Miss Barry, but to pursue her way independently.

Deliberately her companion placed her bag in the carriage, then lifted the weight which anchored his steed to duty, and took his place on the front seat, half turning with a sociable air to include his passenger. "Git ap, Molly," he remarked, and Molly somewhat stiffly consented to move.

"You have a nice horse," remarked his passenger fatuously. She knew her own folly, but reveled in it. Pegasus himself could not have pleased her at this moment so well as Jerry Holt's bay. It proved that her remark was the open sesame to her driver's heart.

"There's wuss," he admitted. "Ye see me lift that weight jest now? It's nonsense to use it, but Molly's a female, after all, and in-gines comin' and goin' might git on her nerves; but take her in the ro'd, now, that hoss, she ain't afraid o' no nameable thing!" The sea-blue eyes met his listener with a challenge.

"Not autos even?" with open admiration.

Jerry Holt snorted. "Shoot! She looks down on 'em. Miss – Miss – "

"Oh, excuse me. I forgot you didn't know me. I'm Mrs. Porter, from Chicago."

"Chicago, eh? We've got a neighbor out there. Barry his name is. A banker. Ever hear of him?"

"Oh, yes, certainly."

"Sister lives here still. We all went to school together."

They were driving on a good road between green fields, and Mrs. Porter scented the crisp sea air.

"There's a handsome new house started over there," she said, indicating a hill which was to their left. "Who's building that?"

"Wall, now," the driver responded in his slow, mellifluous tones, "I couldn't tell ye – sudden."

Mrs. Porter leaned back in the carriage with a sigh of ineffable contentment, and thought of the corner of State and Madison streets.

In a minute more the glorious blue of the ocean came in sight, and scattered cottages, which with delightful irregularity were set down at random, some of them surrounded with trees and shrubs.

Mrs. Porter leaned forward with sparkling eyes.

"Don't take me anywhere just yet," she said. "Drive about a little. Have you time?"

"Plenty," declared her companion. "Hain't got to go to the station only once more to-day. Git ap, Molly."

"Oh, let her walk if she wants to. This is beautiful!"

The Cape ran out into the sea, bearing lighthouses, and was bordered with high, jagged rocks among which the clear waves rushed and broke in gay, powerful confusion. As they neared the water the visitor observed on the side toward the ship channel a cottage whose piazza touched the rocks. The hill upon which it stood ended abruptly at the water, and daisies waved in the interstices of the natural sea-wall.

"Who is the lucky woman who lives clinging to the rocks like that?" asked Mrs. Porter, indicating the shingled house with her slender umbrella.

"That? Oh, that's Belinda Barry's cottage. Might's well live in the lighthouse and done with it, I say; but she's got a spyglass and likes to watch the shippin'. See the New York bo't out there comin' in now? There! Hear her blow? Bet Belinda's got her eye on her this minute. Seems if Belinda set on them rocks a lot when she was a girl, and had a cottage in the air, ye might say, 'bout livin' there some day; so when her brother began to have more money'n he knew what to do with, he give Belinda that place. Nobody else wanted it, I can tell ye that. When I'm ashore I'd ruther *be* ashore, myself."

A man with a bucket of clams passed their slow-moving carriage, and looked curiously at Mrs. Porter.

"Hello, Cy," said Jerry Holt, jerking his head toward the other's nod.

The visitor looked after the figure in the dilapidated coat. "That man had a fine head," she said.

"H'm," ejaculated the other. "A pity there ain't more in it."

"Oh, is the poor creature – do you mean – "

"Oh, no, not so bad as that; but ye know how there are some folks no matter what they try at, they 're allers poundin' and goin' astern. Cy's that kind."

"It's a mercy there are always clams," said Mrs. Porter, and Jerry Holt's sea-blue eyes twinkled at her.

The visitor's plans for independence suddenly weakened. That cottage clinging to the rocks was undermining it more swiftly the further the carriage advanced.

"I believe, Mr. Holt, you'd better leave me at Miss Barry's," she said suddenly.

He shook his head. "Not a bit o' use," he replied. "She won't even accawmodate ye, let alone takin' a boarder. Belinda ain't stuck up. Her worst enemy can't say it changed her a mite to have a brother that eats off gold plates. She was always jest that way."

"What way?"

"Oh, high-headed ye might call it. I dunno exactly what; but Belinda allers claimed to steer; and now she lives to Portland winters in any hotel she's a mind to, she don't act a mite different from what she allers did, though lots o' folks claim she does. 'T ain't no use, though, Mis' Porter, your goin' there. I'd – I'd kind o' hate to have Belinda refuse ye."

The speaker cast a kindly glance at his passenger, who smiled back at him appreciatively.

"Thank you, but I do know Miss Barry. I met her in Chicago, and I'll just stop for a call, and she'll advise me where to go; for I tell you I'm going to stay, Mr. Holt, even if you have to let me sleep in your carryall. Why haven't you a nice wife, now, who would take me in?"

"That's jest why. 'Cause that's the specialty o' wives, and I didn't want to be took in."

Mrs. Porter laughed, and the carryall drew up beside Miss Barry's sunlit piazza. She opened her purse. "How much, Mr. Holt?"

"Well, I'll have to charge ye twenty-five cents for this outin'," he returned with deliberate cheerfulness. "One minute, till we see if Miss Barry's to home."

He got out upon the piazza and knocked on the cottage door, opening it at the same time.

"Belinda!" he called.

"Leave it on the step," came a loud voice from the back of the house.

"Hear that?" he grinned, turning. "She's home, and I'm to leave ye on the step."

"That's all right," said Mrs. Porter, alighting. Jerry Holt's clean, rough hand assisted her, and lifted out her suit-case "I'm perfectly charmed to be left on the step," she added, handing her guide a quarter, which he pocketed with a nod. "I'll try not to envy the girl who sat on these rocks and built a cottage in the air that came to earth."

"She's welcome to it, welcome to it," observed Jerry, as he climbed back into the carriage. "When I'm to sea I want to be to sea. When I'm ashore I druther be to shore."

"Did you ever go to sea?"

"Cap'n of a schooner fifteen year or more."

"Why didn't you tell me? You're Captain Holt, of course."

"Oh," he shook his head, "hain't got nothin' to steer but Molly now." He smiled, nodded a farewell, and turned his horse around with many a cluck of encouragement.

The sound of departing wheels was lost in the swish of surf on the rocks. Maud Porter stood looking seaward. Again the New York boat in the distance, lost to sight now, boomed its signal to smaller fry as it advanced to the harbor. The rioting wind carried her thin gray veil out straight. She heard the house door open, and turned to meet the surprised gaze of Miss Barry, in a checked gingham gown, but with her scanty coiffure and long onyx earrings precisely as she had seen them last.

Mrs. Porter smiled radiantly, and captured her streaming veil.

"I'm what he left on the step," she said.

Miss Barry's surprised gaze grew uncertain. There was a familiar look about this radiant face, but where —

"Was you one of the Portland Aid – " she began.

"No, no!" Mrs. Porter stepped forward and held out both her hands. "Don't let my suit-case frighten you, dear Miss Barry. I've only come to call. Remember last Christmas in Chicago, and Linda's teacher, Mrs. Porter?"

"Mrs. Porter!" exclaimed Miss Barry, letting her hand be captured in the two outstretched ones. "Do excuse me!" Her face beamed welcome. She had liked Linda's voice teacher, and when Belinda Barry liked a person it was once and forever. "Come right into the house this minute," she said cordially. "I'm ashamed o' myself!"

CHAPTER VI
THE SHINGLED COTTAGE

Miss Barry's hard, kindly hands helped remove the visitor's hat and veil, although Mrs. Porter repeated her declaration that she had come only for a call.

"You're going to stay to dinner with me," returned the hostess. "I always do have enough for two."

Her lips, which had returned to their rather grim line, twitched a little as she spoke, and Maud Porter glanced about the living-room with its old-fashioned furniture and rag rugs. Beyond was the dining-room, divided from this only by an imaginary line, and the table stood ready set for one.

"You live here all alone?" asked the visitor.

"Not half as alone as I'd like to be. I don't mind the fish and the barnacles, but it's the folks coming to the back door. Sit right down, Mrs. Porter."

"Don't let me detain you if you were getting dinner." The caller laughed. "How about these folks that come to the *front* door; the things Captain Holt leaves on the step?"

"Oh, I'm in no hurry. I'm going to sit right down with you now. Things are stewing out there. There's nothing to hurt."

Miss Barry suited the action to the word. Mrs. Porter regarded her with curious interest as she sank into a rocker with chintz cushions. The hostess's narrow face, usually as devoid of expression as a mask, was now lighted by pleasure.

"How comes it you didn't let a body know?" she asked.

"I was going to be so wonderfully independent! I was going to come to the Cape, and find a place to live, and then some day saunter over to your cottage bareheaded, and surprise you."

"And all you accomplished was the surprise, eh?"

"That's it, and it's entirely your fault. I was driving about with Captain Holt to see the lay of the land, when suddenly the rocks and the water, and this cottage perched on them like a gull's nest, did something to me. I don't know what. I think it gave me a brain-storm. When he told me you lived here, what could I do but rush in to congratulate you?"

Miss Barry's lips twitched again. "I ain't any gull, I will maintain that, but – it is sightly, ain't it?"

"Wonderful. Nothing less than wonderful. But in a storm, Miss Barry?"

"Yes, the windows are all spray then, and the waves try to swallow me up, and I can't hear myself think, but – "

"Yes," – Mrs. Porter nodded as the other hesitated, – "I understand that 'but.'"

"How'd you leave my brother?"

"Very tired."

"That so? Wouldn't you think he'd come up here and rock in the cradle o' the deep awhile? You write him about that hammock out there."

Mrs. Porter looked out through the open window toward the end of the porch, where a hammock hung.

"The doctor says Colorado," she replied.

"Doctor? Is it as bad as that?" Miss Barry frowned questioningly. "Lambert never writes. I don't care for his stenographer's letters, and he knows it. If he can't take time to write himself, let it go." The speaker threw her head to one side, as if disposing of the matter of fraternal affection.

"Linda is blooming," remarked Mrs. Porter.

Miss Barry's lips took a thinner line. "Let her bloom," she responded dryly; and her visitor laughed again.

"Doesn't she write either?"

"I should say not."

"It will be less difficult now she's out of college," said Mrs. Porter pacifically. "Those girls are absolutely occupied, you know."

"Never play at all, I presume," returned her hostess, with a curling lip.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that."

"Better not if you care where you go to. – No," after a slight pause, "I understand my niece a good deal better than she thinks I do. It's enough that she scorns her own name. She was named for me. Belinda's been good enough for me, and she's no business to slight the name her parents gave her."

"Oh, Linda is such a free lance," said Mrs. Porter apologetically; "and 'Linda' sounds so breezy, so – so like her. 'Belinda' is quaint and demure, and – and you know, really, she isn't demure!"

"Not a great deal," agreed Miss Barry curtly. "I'm sorry my brother isn't well," she added.

"These business men let themselves be driven so. You remember my cousin Bertram King. He and Mr. Barry have been worn down in the same vortex, and both are ordered away. I told Bertram Maine was the best place in the world for him. As soon as I find an abiding-place I shall let him know."

Miss Barry rose suddenly. "I'm forgetting that you're starved. Just excuse me while I dish up the chowder," she said, and vanished.

Mrs. Porter clasped her hands and lifted her eyes.

"Chowder!" she repeated sententiously; then she too rose, went to the open window, and stood looking out.

The tide was rising, and the waves, climbing higher and higher, threw white arms toward the shingled cottage, as if claiming its boulder foundation, and striving to pass the barrier of daisies and draw the little house down to its own seething breast.

As the visitor stood there, a woman, bareheaded, stepped up from the grass upon the porch, and giving one glance from her prominent, faded eyes at the gray figure standing in the window, crossed the piazza to the front door, which was closed.

Mrs. Porter, advancing, opened it, and came face to face with a scrawny little woman, who stood with her head apologetically on the side. Her temples were decorated with those plastered curls of hair known as "beau-catchers," and across the forehead it was strained back and caught in a comb set with large Rhinestones. Her red-and-green plaid calico dress was open girlishly at the throat, around which a red ribbon was tied with the bow in the back.

"Why are they always thin here?" thought Maud Porter. "Is it eating fish? Do they never have to reduce?"

"Oh, pardon me!" exclaimed the newcomer, with such an elegant lift of her bony shoulders that it twisted her whole body. "I expected to see Belinda – that is – pardon me! – Miss Barry."

"She's in the kitchen just at present. Won't you come in?"

The newcomer accepted with alacrity, her prominent eyes openly scanning Mrs. Porter's costume.

"I wouldn't have thought of intruding had I supposed Miss Barry had a guest. I didn't notice Jerry brought anybody." Another writhe, and a rearrangement of a long necklace of imitation coral beads, which suffered against the red plaid.

"Yes, he brought happy me," returned Mrs. Porter, wondering whether, with the chowder so imminent, she should ask this guest to be seated.

The newcomer relieved her of responsibility by sinking into the nearest chair.

"Comin' for the summer?" she asked hurriedly, as though she felt that her time was short.

"I don't know. It's a place to tempt one, isn't it?"

"The views is called wonderful," returned the other modestly. "Of course, 't ain't for *us* to call 'em sumtious, but artists *hev* called 'em sumtious."

"They deserve any praise," was the reply, and Mrs. Porter gave the speaker her sweet smile.

"It's very difficult, one might almost say comple-cated, for visitin' folks to find any place to reside on the Cape. We ain't got any hotel."

Pen fails to describe the elegant action of shoulders and eyebrows which accentuated this declaration, and Mrs. Porter's smile broadened.

"I've understood so," she replied.

"My name's Benslow," said the visitor, casting an apprehensive glance toward the dining-room. "I've got one o' these copious houses with so much more room than I can use that sometimes I *hev*– I *hev* accawmodated parties. I suppose you're from the metrolopous."

"Well, we think it is one. I'm from that wild Chicago!"

"Oh, I s'posed it was Boston."

Here Miss Barry entered, bearing a steaming tureen, which perfumed the atmosphere temptingly.

"Hello, Luella," she said quietly.

At the word the visitor started from her chair with guilty celerity, and brandished an empty cup she was carrying.

"I hadn't an idea you was entertainin', Belinda, and you must excuse my walkin' right in on – on – "

Miss Barry kept her eyes fixed imperturbably on the tureen, and turned to get a plate of crackers from a side table.

"Mrs. Porter is my name," said the guest, taking pity on Miss Benslow's embarrassed writhings.

"Oh, yes, on Mis' Porter. I just wanted to see if you could spare me a small portion of bakin' soda."

"Why didn't you come to the back door as you do commonly?"

"Why – why, the mornin' was so exhilaratin', I made sure you'd be watchin' the waves, and I thought it would expediate matters for me to come around front." An ingratiating smile revealed Miss Benslow's full set.

"Just go right out and help yourself, Luella. You know where 't is, and you can let yourself out the back door. Come, Mrs. Porter, the chowder's good and hot."

It was, indeed. Miss Benslow's prominent eyes rolled toward the white-clothed table as she passed it, and inhaled the tantalizing fragrance. She would presently go home and eat bits of cold mackerel with her old father, at the oilcloth-covered table in the kitchen. Neither he nor she was a "good provider."

Miss Barry laughed quietly to herself as she and her guest sat down.

"Luella did get ahead of me," she said appreciatively. "I don't know how she slid by. Her uniform never blends with the landscape, either. Perhaps she climbed under the lee of the rocks."

"Oh, *why* does she wear those beads with that frock?" asked Mrs. Porter, accepting a dish of chowder.

"I guess if we could find that out we'd know why she does lots of things," returned the hostess.

"Simply delicious," commented Mrs. Porter, after her first mouthful. "Do show me how to do it, Miss Barry."

"Surely I will; but serve it after an early start from Portland and a ride across country with the wind off the sea. That's the sauce that gives the finishing touch."

"Why are all the people in Maine thin? Is it fish? You all have the best things to eat, yet you never get cushiony like us."

Miss Barry cast a glance across at the round contours, so different from her own angles.

"I think a bit of upholstery helps, myself," she remarked.

"Now, that Miss Benslow – why, she's really – really bony."

"Yes," responded Miss Barry, eating busily, "but she's got beauty magazines that's full of directions how to reduce, and she's delighted with her bones. Unlucky for her father, because she

might do more cooking if she believed flesh was fashionable. Luella's dreadfully slack," added Miss Barry, sighing; "but so's her father, for that matter. He goes out to his traps twice a day, but he wouldn't mind his chicken-house if he lost the whole brood; and just so he has plenty of tobacco the world suits him all right. You know folks can just about live on this air."

Mrs. Porter regarded her hostess thoughtfully. "Then," she said, "I don't believe their house would be a very good place to board."

Miss Barry looked up suddenly. "Board!" she repeated explosively. Then, after a silent pause, she added, "Is that what Luella came over for?"

"Probably not; but she mentioned – "

"Yes, I guess she did. She saw Jerry bring you – "

"No, she said she didn't see him bring me."

Miss Barry snorted. "Luella says lots o' things beside her prayers, and if she uses the same kind o' language for *them* that she does for other folks, I doubt if the Almighty can understand her half the time. I often think the futurists ought to get hold of her and her clothes and her talk."

Mrs. Porter laughed. "Perhaps she was born too soon."

"Indeed she was for her own comfort. Luella's as sentimental as they make 'em, and she still feels twenty. Board with her, indeed! You'd reduce fast enough then, I assure you. Folks have lived with her till they were ready to eat stewed barnacles; and the only way they got along was finally to get her to live somewhere else and let them have the house to themselves. They've done that sometimes, and Luella and her father camped out in the boathouse, I guess; I don't know exactly what they did do with themselves. Tried to get you! Well, I do declare! Luella's nerve is all right, whatever else she may lack."

"What *I* want to know," laughed Mrs. Porter, "is, when she says the view is 'sumtious,' whether she means 'scrumptious' or 'sumptuous.'"

Miss Barry smiled at her plate. "Luella ought to write a dictionary or a key or something," she said. – "Oh, I don't know what's the matter with women, anyway," she added with a sigh of disgust.

"Why, Miss Barry, what do you mean? They're finer every year! There are more of them every year for us to be proud of."

"A few high lights, maybe," admitted Miss Barry, "but look at the rank and file of 'em. Look at the clothes they'll consent to wear – and not wear. Just possessed with the devil o' restlessness, most of 'em, and willing to sell their souls for novelty. Isn't it enough to see 'em perspiring under velvet hats and ostrich feathers with muslin gowns in September, and carrying straw hats and roses above their furs in February? I get sick of the whole lot. Do you suppose for a minute they could wait for the season to come around, whichever it is? H'm!" Miss Barry put a world of scorn into the grunt.

Mrs. Porter, as she accepted a second helping of chowder, had a vision of Linda, capriciously regnant, and realized the status she must hold in her aunt's estimation.

"Oh, I'm an optimist," she replied, "especially when I'm eating your chowder. I don't see how you can look out of these windows and not love everybody."

She regarded her vis-à-vis as she said it. It was hard to visualize this spare and hard-featured woman as the young girl who used to sit on these rocks and build castles in the air.

"Mortals are ungrateful, I guess," was the reply. "I'm glad you like it here."

"It's a paradise to one who is tired of people and pianos," declared Mrs. Porter.

"Think you could look out of these windows and love 'em all, do you?" inquired Miss Barry dryly.

Mrs. Porter laughed. "At this distance, certainly," she answered. "Some of them I could love even if they were in the foreground," she continued. "I'm very fond of Linda, Miss Barry."

"A point in her favor," remarked the hostess, with a cool rising inflection.

"Thank you for saying so. One must make lots of allowance for a girl so pretty, so rich, and so overflowing with life."

"Let her overflow, only nowhere near me."

"Don't say that. She'll settle down under the responsibilities of life. Do you remember my cousin Bertram King?"

"Oh, yes. The long-legged, light-haired fellow that aids and abets my brother in overworking."

"That's the very one. I must tell you that he's heart and soul in love with Linda."

"H'm. I suppose so. I only wish she'd marry him and live out on Sheridan Road somewhere, then I could live with my brother and take care of him winters. He'd get some care then. Are they engaged?"

"Oh, no. She's just out of school. He hasn't asked her yet."

"What's the matter with him? Is he the kind with boiled macaroni for a backbone?"

"No, Bertram's backbone is all right. He wanted to let her get out of school. He has no relations but me. He had to confide in somebody."

"Well, he'll get all that's coming to him if he marries her." Miss Barry sniffed. "I guess if there was a prize offered for arrogance she'd get it. I speak plain because you're fond of her, and you're aware that you know her much better than I do, so I couldn't set you against her even if I wanted to; and *I* need somebody to confide in too."

Mrs. Porter smiled. "You'll change your tune some day. Linda has lots of goods that aren't in the show window."

Miss Barry nodded. "If she keeps her distance I may change in time. It all depends on that."

The visitor could picture how in little things the high-spirited, popular girl might have shown tactlessness during the holidays, and created an impression on the taciturn aunt which it would be hard to efface. Words could never do it, she realized, and wisely forbore to say more.

Dinner was over, and the visitor was just considering that during the process of social dishwashing she could broach the subject of a boarding-place, when Jerry Holt's steed again approached the shingled cottage. Both women discerned him at the same moment.

"Did you tell Jerry to come back for you? You can't go yet," said Miss Barry.

"I didn't, but it might be a good plan for him to take me the rounds."

"What rounds?"

"Of possible boarding-places."

Miss Barry did not reply, for she had to answer the knock at the door. There stood Captain Holt, holding a telegram gingerly between his thumb and finger, and his sea-blue eyes gazed straight into Belinda's.

"I want you should bear up, Belinda," he said kindly. "There ain't no other way." His voice shook a little, and Miss Barry turned pale as she took the sinister envelope.

Mrs. Porter heard his words, and hastening to her hostess stood beside her as she tore open the telegram. Captain Holt's heavy hand closed the door slowly, with exceeding care, as he shut himself out.

Mrs. Porter's arm stole around the other woman as she read the message: —

Mr. Barry died last night. Please come at once.

Henry Radcliffe.

Miss Barry's limbs shook under her, and she tottered to a chair.

Captain Holt sat on the edge of the piazza and bit a blade of grass while he waited.

In the silence a pall seemed to fall over the little house, broken only by the sharp rending apart of mounting waves against the rocks.

Mrs. Porter knelt by her friend and held her hands.

"What can I do for you?" she asked.

"Look in the desk over in that corner, and find the time-tables in the drawer."

"I know the Chicago trains, Miss Barry. Let me arrange it all for you. You wish to leave to-night?"

Miss Barry nodded without speech.

Mrs. Porter went out on the piazza and sent Jerry to telegraph, telling him to return.

"Did you know my brother was ill?" asked Belinda, when she returned, still without moving.

"No. I thought him just overtired."

The other nodded. "That's the way they do it. Rush madly after money and more money till they go to pieces all of a sudden."

The bereft sister's eyes were fixed on space, seeing who knows what pictures of the past, when a barefooted boy romped with her over these rocks that held the nest he had given her. Suddenly her far-away look came back, and focused on the pitiful eyes regarding her drawn, pale face.

"I'm glad you're here," she said simply.

"And I am so glad," responded the other, her thoughts busy with Linda and Bertram, and longing to fly to them.

"Will you stay here in my cottage till I come back? I have a little girl that comes every day to help. She cooks pretty well. She'll stay with you."

"Yes, Miss Barry." It was on the tip of the visitor's tongue to say, "You'll bring Linda back with you," but she restrained the words. This common sorrow would do its work between aunt and niece, she felt sure.

There was no further inaction. A trunk was packed, and Mrs. Porter accompanied the traveler as far as Portland, spending the night again at the hotel where she had left her belongings; and Miss Barry pursued her sad journey.

Henry Radcliffe met her at the station in Chicago; and when they were in the motor Miss Barry turned to him with dim eyes.

"What was the matter with Lambert?"

His pale face looked excited and sleepless.

"You haven't seen the papers?"

"No. My head ached and I didn't read them. What do you mean?" Her voice grew tense.

"Barry & Co. have gone to pieces."

"What do I care for that? Lambert! My brother! Tell me of him!"

"But it carried a lot of innocent ones down in the crash."

"Oh, my poor brother! What of him, Henry? Tell me. Tell me."

The young man turned his head away, and his voice grew thick. "He died down in the office."

"Heart trouble?"

"Yes. He never told us if he knew he had a weak heart. The shock was terrible."

The young man took his companion's groping hand.

"Linda is prostrated. We have had to save her in every way. Poor Harriet! She has had to be a heroine."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.