EVANS AUGUSTA JANE

A SPECKLED BIRD

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Evans A.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

"Grandma, who named me Eglah?"

"My cousin, Bishop Vivian, when he baptized you."

"Do you think he had any right to put such a label on me?"

"Certainly, because your father selected your name, and the bishop had no choice."

"It is so ugly, I never can like it, and a little baby that can't speak her mind ought not to be tied to something she must drag all her life and hate for ever and ever."

"Eat your breakfast, and try to be a good, quiet child, then your name will not trouble you so much."

"I never shall like it, any more than you do, and you know, grandma, when you call me your mouth twists like you had toothache."

"I was not consulted about your name. It belonged to your New England Grandmother Kent, and as it appears you belong only to your father, you were called after his mother. I heard him tell you it was the name of a queen – one of David's wives."

"Yes, but I found out she was not the head queen – just a sort of step-wife queen. Now if I could only be the pet queen, Sheba, I should not fret at all."

"The Queen of Sheba was not David's wife."

"You are all wrong about your Bible, grandma, because you are only a Methodist. David's Sheba was nicknamed Bath Sheba, for the reason that he saw her going to her bath-house, and she looked so pretty. I saw her picture in father's 'Piscopal Bible."

"There, there! Be quiet. Drink your milk."

Mrs. Maurice leaned back in her chair and sighed as she looked down at the fragile child beside her. The tall, silver coffee urn showed in repoussé on one side the flight of Europa, on the other Dirce dragged to death. Eglah could never understand how the strands of the victim's hair supported the weight of her form, and wondered why they did not give way and set the prisoner free. To-day she eyed it askance, then surveyed her own fair image reflected in the polished, smooth surface below the band of figures.

"Grandma, don't you think horses are much nicer for ladies to ride than oxen?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Then why did you buy ox riders?" one small finger pointed to the heirloom fetich.

"I did not buy the urn. It has belonged to your Grandfather Maurice's family for one hundred and fifty years, and was brought from Old England. Eliza, take her away. If she cannot be silent, she must go back and have her meals with you. It seems impossible to teach her that in the presence of grown people children are expected to listen."

Mrs. Mitchell came forward from a side table, lifted the little girl from her chair, and untied the ruffled bib that protected her white dimity dress.

"Now tell grandmother you are sorry you annoyed her, and if she will let you sit at her table you will be as quiet as she wishes."

"Ma-Lila, don't make me tell stories; she doesn't believe them, and I am so tired saying things I don't mean. I want to go back to the side table, where you are not always scolding me. Grandma, it will be peacefuller if I stay with Ma-Lila – "

"Hush! Come here."

Mrs. Maurice lifted the little one's dimpled chin and studied the fair face that had bloomed seven years in her lonely home: a winsome face cut like a gem, velvety-brown eyes, long-lashed, and the pure, pale oval set in a shining bronze frame of curling hair, all chestnut in shade, braided with gold when sunshine hid among the ripples.

"Kent! Kent – even her ears small as any other rogue's. She is her father's child."

"Is that a sin, grandma?"

Mrs. Maurice swiftly laid her hand over the uplifted, upbraiding eyes, to veil something in their depths that often disquieted her, and sought refuge in her habitual command:

"Take her away, Eliza."

Ringing the small bell close to the breakfast tray, the mistress took a spray of starry jasmine from the vase in the centre of the table, and as she turned away said to the grey-haired butler:

"Aaron, you will put a plate and chair for Miss Eglah at the side table until further orders. Tell Oliver I shall not want the carriage until four o'clock."

Unusually tall and very handsome was this stately widow of a Confederate general who had been slain during one of the fierce conflicts around beleaguered Richmond. No white hairs marred the glossy blackness of the thick coil half hidden under a snowy crêpe cap, and the brilliant blue eyes were undimmed by tearful years of widowhood – a widowhood involving for her the full, sad significance of the sacred and melancholy term, an inability to forget, a despair of any earthly consolation, and a jealous reticence that denied all discussion of her sorrow, as she would have defended her dead from an alien's rude touch. To her, time had brought neither oblivion nor alleviation, only a sharpened sense of irreparable bereavement; and as one standing in an unending and hopeless eclipse, she accepted the gloom with a stern and silent rejection of all other lights when the sun of her life went down.

Anniversaries are electric batteries that thrill the domain of emotions, and one day out of every three hundred and sixty-five the strings of memory are keyed to their utmost tension, vibrating with an intolerable intensity that reddens the lips of old wounds and quickens dull aches to stinging torture.

This memorial morning Mrs. Maurice crossed the wide, vaulted hall, and passing through the long, pillared drawing-room, opened a locked door and shut herself in a darkened chamber to keep tryst with the sacred souvenirs that represented all she held dear. Raising the window, she turned the blinds to allow sunlight entrance into this silent reliquary filled with mementoes jealously guarded "in solemn salvatory": a heavy, square bedstead with twisted columns that upheld a red-lined tester whence embroidered draperies fell; a gilded swinging wicker crib, with baby blankets, rose bordered; a velvet easy chair, where a gentleman's quilted silk dressing-gown hung over the carved back, and his slippers lay beneath; a table heaped with a child's toys, books, and daguerreotypes of various sizes. On a leathern couch lay a folded Confederate uniform, and a man's straw hat, cane, spurs, and riding whip had been placed beside the faded grey coat. Over the old-fashioned, high marble mantel hung a portrait of General Egbert Maurice, clad in uniform, wearing three stars and a wreath on his collar, and holding his plumed hat in his right hand. At one corner of the mantel a furled Confederate flag leaned until it touched the frame of the picture, and from the marble shelf, where lay the general's sash and sword, hung the stained and torn guidon of his favorite regiment. On the wall opposite the fireplace the portrait of a lovely girl with an apron full of roses seemed to fill the room with radiance and color.

With a slow, caressing movement, Mrs. Maurice's slim white hand passed over the front of the smoking-gown, and fastened in a button hole the spray of fragrant, satin-starred jasmine; then, lifting the faded grey coat, she held it to her heart in a tight, straining clasp, as she seated herself on the couch, and her fingers lingered on tarnished gilt buttons and braid. Inside the uniform was pinned a parcel wrapped in tissue paper, from which she shook out a mass of yellowed lace, and as the filmy folds of an infant's christening robe swept across her lap, a subtle perfume of withered flowers like the breath of a rose jar stole over the room.

With dry eyes she looked long at one portrait, then at the other: the husband of her youth and the only child that had come as crowning blessing to a happy married life where no dissensions muttered, no discordant clash jarred the perfect harmony. As the dead years babbled, she listened now to echoes of manly tones, and now to a baby's prattling lisp, still dividing as of yore her heart's homage. When war robbed her of the husband who had never ceased to be tender lover, her only hold on life centred in their beautiful daughter Marcia, and the struggle to guard her and defend from confiscation and ruin the fine landed estate and large fortune left by General Maurice had served, in some degree, to lessen the tendency to morbid brooding.

To the truly typical Southern woman who survived the loss of family idols and of her country's freedom, for which she had surrendered them, "reconstruction," political and social, was no more possible than the physical resurrection and return of slain thousands lying in Confederate graves all over the trampled and ruined South.

No mourning Southern matron indulged more intensely an inexorable, passionate hatred of Northern invaders than did Mrs. Maurice, who refused to accept the inevitable, and shut her doors against agents of "union and reconstruction" as promptly as she would have barred out leprosy or smallpox.

Proud of the social prestige with which her Brahmin birth and stainless family record had dowered her, she wielded her influence in uncompromising hostility to all who advocated a tacit acceptance of the new conditions called "peace." The loss of negroes that abandoned several plantations would have materially impaired the Maurice fortune, had not the prevision of the general's commission merchant in a distant seaport induced the precautionary course of sending a portion of his crop of cotton to Liverpool early in the first year of the war, thus securing a large amount of treasure under the British flag, where (as the cotton factor wrote Mrs. Maurice a few years later) "'Union' thieves could not steal, nor 'reconstruction' moths and rust feed upon it." Out of the wreckage that succeeded the final catastrophe at Appomattox the family fortune of General Maurice emerged triumphant in proportions, and the minority of Marcia was a bulwark that defied successfully the numerous assaults of "loyal confiscators."

Sooner or later the *diabolus ex machina* confronts us all, and pierces at the one spot least guarded because deemed invulnerable. Mrs. Maurice's maternal pride was built on the shifting sands of girlish impulse and flattered vanity, and the crash showed her that somewhere at the cross roads she had failed to offer a black lamb in propitiating evil divinities – had left no morsel of meat for the sleuth-hounds of baleful destiny that suddenly bayed destruction to the last earthly hope life held for her. Reared in the semi-cloistral seclusion of a Southern girl's education in ante-bellum days, trained at home by governesses, and barred from society until she should have made the European tour for which her mother had fixed an early date, predestined Marcia went to her doom when at the house of a friend she met accidentally the recently appointed Federal judge, Allison Kent – handsome, courtly, debonair, and wily.

Clandestine courtships rarely lag; hence this lover of forty years, dreading discovery and the prompt removal of an infatuated girl only seventeen on her last birthday, kept the mother in complete ignorance of impending calamity until the night before her departure for Europe, when Marcia fled with him to an adjoining State, where a justice of the peace made them man and wife.

In accordance with life-long custom, Mrs. Maurice went to her child's bedroom to kiss her good night, and on the pillow found a farewell note, praying for forgiveness, and promising to meet her at a town on the line of her journey. How the mother bore this shock only God knew; no eye but His watched during that long night, when her soul went down into a Gehenna of torture – when, alone in her crucifixion, she accepted defeat, and girded herself for grim endurance. As day dawned she unlocked her door, and summoning her servants, said:

"Miss Marcia has left me to marry a man who cannot enter my house. Take this note to Mr. Whitfield's residence at once; not to his office, to his house. Minerva, you will finish packing Miss

Marcia's trunk, which must be sent to her. I shall make no change in my plans, except to take the noon train instead of the one at midnight. Ask me no questions. Send Mitchell and Eliza to me."

When her attorney, Mr. Whitfield, appalled by the stony white face that showed no hint of tears, no more trace of grief than the marble figure that supported the mantel at her side, essayed a few words of sympathy, she put out her hands with an imperious gesture.

"There is no comfort possible, and I need your help only in writing a new will. I start to New York at noon, so you have little time."

A few hours later, having seen only her pastor and her lawyer, she left her rifled home by a route that enabled her to avoid the town designated as a place of meeting. Across the girl's farewell letter, which was returned to "Marcia Maurice," she had written: "My only hope is that God will take me out of this world before I see again the face of the child who has disgraced the memory of her father and the name of her mother."

Eighteen months had been spent in Europe, whence she was most reluctantly recalled by the death of Robert Mitchell, the overseer and business manager of one of her plantations, who was killed by the explosion of a mill engine. His young widow, Eliza, had been sheltered and guarded in Mrs. Maurice's home when orphaned by the death of her father, a Methodist chaplain attached to General Maurice's command, and the intimacy of years was marked by unfailing kindness and confidence on the part of the benefactress, by profound affection and ardent gratitude on that of the destitute girl. The peculiarly harrowing circumstances attending her husband's loss had so severely shocked Eliza that Mrs. Maurice promptly removed her from the "overseer's cottage" to her own house, where she was nursed tenderly and skilfully in the room that before her marriage she had so long called her home. Loving Marcia very warmly, she had attempted to intercede with the indignant mother, and one of her letters had enclosed an appeal from the erring daughter. It was returned unopened, and accompanied by a very positive assurance that any future repetition would not be forgiven. Old friends gathered to greet the returned traveller, yet all intuitively avoided allusion to the domestic cancer that, despite her proud, silent composure, was eating the heart barred against sympathy. She learned from the newspapers that under the new Federal régime Judge Kent was temporarily Senator, and that after a season in Washington he and Marcia were living at a hotel in her own neighboring city; but as the latter had followed her husband into the Episcopal Church, no meeting occurred between parent and child. So complete was the estrangement, and so unapproachable the stern, silent attitude of the mother, that when Dr. Eggleston, the family physician, and Bishop Vivian, the favorite cousin, called early one morning on an urgent errand, both realized that they championed a forlorn and desperate cause in battling with this old lioness robbed of her young.

Instinctively she divined their mission as her eyes fell upon a letter lying on the bishop's knee, and her lips narrowed and tightened. Standing on the hearth with her arms folded, she listened quietly to her cousin's impassioned pleading for forgiveness and to the doctor's distressing presentation of Marcia's alarming condition, which he felt constrained to pronounce hopeless.

"Madam, if you deny her dying prayer, remorse will drive you to despair."

"She has been dead to me since the hour she deliberately deceived and forsook me. Kent's wife ceased to be my child when she insulted, disgraced, her father's name."

"Oh, Patricia, how can you hope or claim God's mercy for yourself if you refuse pardon to your repentant and unhappy daughter?"

A spark leaped into the cold clear eyes.

"For mercy I think I shall never need to plead, and when my God grants me justice I will try to be satisfied."

"Will you not at least read the few lines the poor child wrote while we held her hand and guided the pen? Oh, cousin, if you could see her now!" The bishop held out the letter.

"Because you are the bearer I cannot refuse you that courtesy."

She walked to the window and, holding the curtain aside, read the brief petition:

"My Own Mother:

"Let me come home to die. It will not be so hard if I can look into your face once more, and know that your dear hand will close my eyes as I go down into my grave. I shall see father soon, and if he could come now to my help, you know he would take me in his arms and lay me in my mother's lap. Be merciful to your poor, dying

"Marcia."

Leaning eagerly forward, the two grey-haired men watched and listened for some relenting token; but after a few moments she turned toward a desk, and with no change in the frozen calm of her handsome face, she merely traced a word at the bottom of the page, handed it to the bishop, and left the room. "Come."

That night a cold waxen image of a boy whose soul refused to enter its clay tabernacle was laid for a moment in Eliza Mitchell's arms, to be kissed as only young mothers can kiss their dead first-born. The following day the hospital ambulance brought back on a stretcher the wan form of the erring daughter, who fainted from exhaustion as the bearers carried her into the home of her fathers. Three days later she died in her mother's arms, whispering with icy lips: "If my baby lives, keep her for my sake – for my sake."

So little Eglah Kent was given, when three hours old, to the care of the young foster-mother Eliza, and slept upon the heart that mourned for the lost baby boy. Since then seven years had passed, and to-day, as Mrs. Maurice caressed Marcia's lace christening robe, she put aside all that pertained to the girl's disobedience and elopement, and memory dwelt only upon the sunny time when her husband and daughter made home a heaven. Into the quiet room crept the whine of a dog scratching at the door. As she opened it, a feeble brown creature crossed the floor, crouched before the hearth, and, raising soft, tender eyes to the portrait of the general, barked once and beat the carpet with his tail, as if in salute; her husband's favorite pointer Hector, failing fast, but loyal and true as the heart of his widow.

CHAPTER II

Sharing in some degree that infallible instinct whereby lower animals interpret the character of their owners, young children are often as wise and wary as dogs and cats, and before Eglah could walk without clinging to Eliza's finger, she knew intuitively that her silent, watchful grandmother eyed her suspiciously, and that warm caresses could be expected only from her father and her young foster-mother. Profound and regretful compassion rather than tenderness filled Mrs. Maurice's heart, and she faithfully ministered to the infant's needs, as she would have pityingly warmed and fed some bleating lamb bereft of its dam by March snows. Since the little girl showed, except in form, no faintest trace of Maurice blood, her grandmother regarded her most sorrowfully – not as Marcia's baby, but as the living monument of a cruel and unpardonable injury inflicted by Judge Kent. Even in the cradle Eglah defied an authority supreme in the household.

"You must not say Lila, but Mama-Eliza."

"I won't! It hurths my tongue to say Elitha. I will say Ma-Lila."

The child's inherent antagonism made her a vexing embodiment of protest, an obstinate interrogation point punctuating the commands of this old-fashioned lady whose domestic canons belonged to an era when boys and girls were not considered "servile" because trained to answer their elders "No, sir," or "Yes, ma'am," and when after a meal in the sunset glow young human broods followed feathered folk to an early rest before stars spangled the sky. If among General Maurice's choice collection of thoroughbred game fowls, with yellow legs and bronze breasts, had appeared an uncouth mongrel pullet, dust-colored and blue of skin, his exacting widow would not have rejected it more summarily than did her proud soul repudiate the Kent scion whom she housed luxuriously because of Marcia's last prayer, but felt no more desire to caress than to fondle the bullet that slew her husband.

Judge Kent's official duties called him often from the city, and during his visits to his child Mrs. Maurice, if compelled to see him, maintained the reticent, frigid courtesy with which she had received him when he first crossed her threshold bearing his unconscious wife. He had never touched the slender white fingers that pointed to the staircase that day, and while she allowed herself no verbal expression of animosity, he was humiliated by the consciousness of her intense detestation. As Southern hostess in a typical Southern home, she fully realized *noblesse oblige*, and her punctilious observance of the etiquette of hospitality accentuated the position she assigned him – that of stranger within her gates. He had hoped the baby might bridge the chasm, but when he ventured to dwell upon his unwillingness to deprive Mrs. Maurice of this "sweet source of solace," she promptly dispelled his illusion.

"Make no mistake, Judge Kent. You leave the poor child here, and I retain her simply because her mother so requested."

Desiring to minimize sources of future contention, she had directed Mr. Whitfield to acquaint him with her will, whereby the entire estate would pass at her death into the hands of certain trustees, who, after providing a liberal annuity for Eglah and Eliza, should control absolutely all interests until Eglah was twenty-one years old, when a legacy of five thousand dollars would be paid to Eliza. Should the little girl be removed from the care of her foster-mother, the annuity of the former ceased, and half of the value of the estate should be deducted from her inheritance; and if Eglah died before marriage, the homestead was bequeathed to childless Confederate widows of that State, as an Egbert Maurice memorial. Since General Maurice's last testament had left his fortune unconditionally to his wife, there was no appeal from her decision, and Judge Kent bore the keen disappointment with such semblance of acquiescence as he could summon, striving to veil his hatred of the woman whose contempt lay beneath her studied courtesy like an iron wall under a sheet of ice. An adroit and

tireless schemer, he usually steered safely in the troubled political sea, and only once, in an unguarded moment, dared the current of Mrs. Maurice's convictions.

"If the people of the South could only reason from the analogy of history – "

He was silenced by the hand thrown up, palm outward.

"We have only the privilege of suffering and remembering. The grim analogy of Sicily under Verres suggests a rather painful parallel. For us there remains solely the grace of silence; and it were well if you, sir, could set me an example, when numbered among guests under my roof."

The voice was low, clear, steady, but the narrow lip arched, and the light in her blue eyes reminded him of the violet flame one sees flash up over a bed of hot anthracite.

Eglah was five years old when her father was called to Washington, and thence sent to Europe on a government mission, which he so successfully accomplished that on his return the governor of his native State appointed him senator to fill an unexpired term. Having proved a useful servant of the Administration, official influence secured his election and return to the United States' Senate two years later, and Mrs. Maurice welcomed any change that removed him from her neighborhood. His rare visits were festivals to his little daughter, and she revelled in the wealth of caresses, the endearing words, the prodigality of gifts that always characterized his brief sojourns. Thus were laid the foundations of an intense and absorbing devotion to her father that gradually became the dominant factor in her life.

"Nutwood" – the three-storied red brick house crowning an eminence shaded by walnut and chestnut trees – had been built in 1825 by General Maurice's father, and its pillared piazza running along three sides overlooked the city of Y – , two miles distant, where spires and factory chimneys lifted their lines against mellow western skies. On the first and second floors of the old mansion wide halls crossed at right angles, admitting breezes from every point of the compass, and so unusually thick were the walls that the nearly square windows framed in cedar furnished comfortable lounging seats. For many years this place had been famous throughout the State for its race-horses, game chickens, pointers, fox-hounds, and fine library, and the hospitality dispensed was peculiar to an era characterized by conditions that the Civil War annihilated. No invading army had reached the city of Y – , but raiding cavalry squads once completely sacked the Maurice plantations many miles distant in the river valley, and burned not only the empty gin house, but the commodious family residence often occupied in autumn. Prior to her departure for Europe Mrs. Maurice had rebuilt gin and warehouses, and erected a pretty four-room cottage comfortably furnished, which, with fifty acres of adjoining land, she gave as dower to Eliza when she married the faithful overseer and manager of the "Bend Plantations."

One sultry spring morning in Eglah's ninth year, she sat with Eliza in the "out-door schoolroom" where lessons were studied in warm weather. It was a cool retreat – a circular, latticed summer-house – overrun by yellow woodbine, honeysuckle, and a pink multiflora rose, all in full bloom, busy distilling perfume their satin lips offered in libation to the lazily wandering wind that caressed them. The pointed roof was rain proof, the floor tiled, and between the arched openings seats were fastened to the lattice wall. From the round table in the centre lovely views of shrubbery, lily-starred lawn, far-off grain fields, green pasture lands where cattle browsed, seemed set in frames of leafage and tendril that ran riot around the archways. A walk bordered with lilacs and azaleas led to the door of the conservatory, which flanked the long drawing-room; stretching beyond, one could see the wide front of the house, where no balustrade broke the line of white columns rising to the crenellated flat roof. Eglah sat with a geography lying open before her on the table, and her head supported by arms resting on the map, but once she turned a leaf, and the wind fluttered a letter many weeks old from her father.

"Are you ready to answer the map questions?"

"No, Ma-Lila. Why must I always answer other people's questions, when nobody answers mine? I will say my lesson when you tell me what 'scallawag' and 'carpet-bagger' mean."

"They are ugly slang words, and if I were you I should try to forget I ever heard them. Little girls have nothing to do with politics, and you have not told me of whom the Graham children were speaking at the party."

"Never mind about names. I looked in the dictionary, but could not find 'scallawag.' I know it means something horrid and vulgar and hateful, and I never will go to another party."

Eliza's reply was drowned by the scream of "King Herod" – a lordly peacock that had earned the title from his slaughter of young turkeys and chickens in the poultry yard. Now he trailed his feathers across the walk, came up to the summer-house, and uttered his piercing cry in quick succession.

"Something is going to happen. Uncle Aaron says it is a bad sign when Herod squalls at a door."

"Something happened a while ago, when a man rode up the avenue and tied his horse. Now he is leaving the steps, and Herod knows he is a stranger. You must not listen to superstitious foolishness from negroes," said Eliza, with a fine scorn of all but her own peculiar pet superstition, kept closely guarded in her heart.

Eglah shut the geography, propped her chin on her palms as her elbows rested on the table, and watched the beautiful bird preen his feathers.

"Ma-Lila, how old must I be before you will be ready to tell me why grandmother hates my father so?"

"Dearie, she does not 'hate' him, and you ought to try not to – "

"Don't tell stories, Ma-Lila, because I want always to believe everything you say – and – there! Listen to grandma's bell. Three rings; that is for you."

Eliza laid in her work basket the embroidered cambric ruffle she was hemming and, throwing her white apron over her head, went swiftly to the house.

Mrs. Maurice sat in the drawing-room, with two newspapers unfolded on her lap, but whether their contents annoyed or gratified her, the cold, quiet face gave no indication.

"Is Eglah ready to come and recite her lessons?"

"Not yet, madam."

"Put away her books; she will be excused from lessons to-day. Judge Kent has married again in Washington, and these papers furnish detailed accounts of the brilliant wedding reception. He has swallowed the gold bait of a widow he met in Europe. She is reputed rich, of course – a Mrs. Nina Herriott – and the bridal pair will go to England for the summer."

"Our poor baby! This news will break her heart," replied the foster-mother, whose eyes had filled with tears at thought of the child's suffering.

"Yes, she will grieve sorely, but better now than later in life. I have been pondering the best way to break the news to her."

"Let me tell her. I think I understand her disposition more thoroughly than anyone else."

"You fancy I do not comprehend my own granddaughter?"

"I beg your pardon, dear Mrs. Maurice. I mean only that I have watched all her little ways, and she feels less restraint with me than with you; but of course you must choose your own way in this matter."

"For us, this marriage is fortunate, and I rejoice at every circumstance that heightens the barrier between Judge Kent and me. He will never dare to disturb the child while I live, and brides are not importunate for the custody of step-children. Eliza, I never felt until to-day that Eglah is really Marcia's baby. She is a thousand times dearer to me now than ever before."

"Dear madam, I thank God for anything that will make you open your heart and take the precious child in. In many ways she needs tenderness from you, and especially since the children's parties she has attended recently, where rude things were said about her father. She has not told me all, but you know the damaging rumors about some of his decisions while Federal Judge in our State, and the Graham children, whose interests suffered through him, speak very bitterly of his career.

Eglah has asked me many questions lately, which I always evaded, but she broods over this matter and is resentful."

"Poor little thing! Her father has lived on sour grapes so long, her teeth must inevitably be on edge. Henceforth she belongs to me."

"She is absolutely devoted to him, and it is distressing to know how her very heartstrings are tied around him. It amounts to idolatry."

"Yes, I realize that, and it will be a sad day for her when the glamour fades and she sees the ugly, deformed clay feet of her idol."

"It would break her heart."

"No. We both know sorrow does not destroy, and death is deaf to calls from crushed hearts. She will simply find herself chained to a galling sense of shame. These papers were brought this morning by a young man who impressed me as a thoroughbred gentleman – Mr. Noel Herriott, son of Mrs. Kent's first husband. He spoke kindly of his stepmother, and explained that, as he was passing through Y – on his way west, Judge Kent had given him a card of introduction to me, and requested him to see Eglah, for whom he brought the package yonder on the window sill. I knew the poor child would be distressed at the news, and thought it best she should have time to recover from the shock before seeing him. He continues his journey by the midnight train, and I have invited him to return and take tea here, when Eglah can be introduced to him. Eliza, perhaps you are right; certainly you are more nearly her mother than any living being, and you will tenderly break the news to her. Carry the papers and the parcel and make her understand. After a while I wish to come out and join you."

In shaking and furling his rainbow train King Herod had shed a long feather. Eglah picked it up, and finding a knife in the work basket proceeded to sharpen the end into a pen, with which she purposed writing to her father. As Eliza entered and placed the papers on the table, the little girl looked up.

"Oh, Ma-Lila, you are crying! What is it? Not bad news from father?"

"My baby, your father is well and has sent you a present. Come to me, darling; I want to talk to you." She drew her to her lap and held her close.

"We know, of course, your father dearly loves his daughter, but he is often very lonely, and as he cannot have you with him, what would you think if you heard he had married a lady who would be kind and good to him? Don't you – "

"I know that would be a lie – a wicked lie! Why do you say such horrible things and hurt me so?" She threw off the clasping arm and sprang to the floor, stamping the tiles with her right foot.

"My precious baby, I would not hurt you for a million of dollars! You know your Lila loves you better than everything else in the world. I would rather hold my hand in the fire than tell you a painful thing if it could be helped. But somebody must speak the truth to you."

She knelt down by the indignant child and kissed her hot cheek twice.

"My darling, it is true – positively true – that your father was married some days ago. Now, you must not struggle to get away from me. Listen, and let me explain it all."

"Don't! I won't listen. I can't – wait – wait – " She went to the seat along the wall and threw herself face downward, crossing her arms over her head. She lay so still that a quarter of an hour later Eliza sat down beside her, and while her hand softly stroked the brown curls, she read slowly the description of church wedding and subsequent reception.

"My darling, you love your father so well you want him to be happy, and – "

"No, not with another wife, and away from me. I would rather he was dead – for then nobody else could claim him. Two wives! It is like having two Gods."

Taking the papers, she read the marked paragraphs, and though neither sob nor tear betrayed the intensity of her sorrow, one little hand caught at her throat, where a stricture seemed to stifle her.

"You must try to bear this trouble patiently."

"I can't. I would not bear it at all, if I could help myself. Now I am an orphan! An orphan!"

"Not while I live to love you. Look at this parcel, your father's present."

Eliza unwrapped the paper and took out an oblong gilded box, to which was fastened a card: "For our dear little daughter Eglah, with love of her father and mother." The child glanced at the handwriting and her eyes seemed almost to take fire. She snatched the box and threw it to the floor.

"It is not mine; I have no father and no mother. I have only Ma-Lila left!"

She buried her face in Eliza's lap, and hoping a burst of tears would relieve the strain, the nurse silently caressed her, waiting for the storm to break; but save the trembling of the figure no sign was given. After a while, Eliza whispered,

"Grandmother is coming down the walk."

Eglah started up as if electrified, and lifted the box from the floor, holding it against her breast. Leaning on her cane, Mrs. Maurice came to the table, sat down, and opened her arms.

"My dear child, come here."

Not an inch stirred Eglah, and Eliza gently forced her forward within reach of the extended arms. Mrs. Maurice leaned down to kiss her, but she turned her head away.

"My poor little girl, don't you know I love you?"

"Oh, no, grandma; you never did love me, and you never will."

"But I do, dear child. Kiss me."

"I don't want to kiss you any more than you want to kiss me. I understand exactly how you feel. You are sorry for me because you think father has treated me badly in getting married. But, grandmother, you need not pity me now, for I must make you understand that *my father always is right*. No matter what he may do, he has good reasons, and if I am satisfied nobody else can complain. I shall always know father is right."

The dry, white face was lifted proudly, and the challenging eyes met her grandmother's steadily, but the childish lips trembled and the hand clutched spasmodically at her throat.

A gush of genuine tenderness warmed the old lady's heart as she took the quivering fingers, spread them on her own palm, and touched the girl's forehead with her lips.

"'Loyal and true' – that is the Maurice motto. 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!' To-day we will have no lessons, and this evening Eliza shall dress you especially to meet the gentleman, Mr. Herriott, whom your father wishes you to know. Eliza, see that she has a warm bath, and put some orange flower water in her glass of lemonade."

In after years Noel Herriott often recalled that afternoon spent at Nutwood. The inimitable courtesy of the handsome stately hostess, the sweet countenance of the widowed foster-mother – whose anxious, tender gaze rarely left the white-clad child – the grave negro butler, wearing linen apron that matched his grey head, and the spacious old cedar-wainscotted dining-room where, on bare, polished mahogany table, the light of wax candles was reflected in silver dishes and candelabra, and glittered from heavy, antique-shaped, cut-glass bowls, while golden honeycomb and ripe strawberries mixed their fragrance with the breath of crimson carnations heaped in a Sèvres china centrepiece that once graced banquets at Trianon. Most vivid of all impressions, he retained the imperishable image of a beautiful girl, with singularly white cheeks and lustrous, shy eyes, glowing unnaturally from her fierce struggle for composure – a proud, sensitive face whose exquisite lines suggested rare old cameos behind cabinet glass.

Though the guest was a very young man, his quiet manner and perfect ease indicated thorough acquaintance with the most refined society, and despite her sectional prejudice Mrs. Maurice yielded to the charm of an unusually handsome personality and a conversation marred by no trace of egotism. The crocus light of after-glow still tinged the west, where the sickle of a new moon swung, when the visitor rose to depart.

"Miss Eglah, when I come back from New Mexico and Arizona, shall I bring you a Zuñi pickaninny or a Moqui pony?"

She shook her head.

"Since your father has stolen my stepmother, do you not think you might persuade yourself to accept me as a sort of half cousin or hemi-demi-semi-stepbrother, or any kind of a relative you may choose? I am quite alone in the world, and you are just the sister I should like to claim as my hermanita. May I?"

"Thank you, sir, I would rather not. I want only my father."

He bowed, and lifting her dainty little hand brushed it with his mustache.

"Mrs. Maurice, in saying good-bye, I must thank you cordially for the privilege of spending several hours in your lovely home, which illustrates all I have read of charming Southern life, and realizes completely my ideal picture of what your sunny land must have been in former years."

"Good-bye, Mr. Herriott. I wish you a pleasant journey. Nutwood is a mere shadow of old and happier days. Ichabod is printed all over the ruined South, and we live only to guard our graves."

CHAPTER III

The quiet, systematic routine of life at Nutwood was by no means cloistral in its seclusion, and though the term "house-party" had not yet taken root south of the Potomac, guests from various parts of the State frequently spent a week with Mrs. Maurice, and were entertained at dinners, luncheons, and teas with the lavish hospitality traditional in the family. Accustomed early to meeting strangers, Eglah was neither bashful nor awkward, but she understood fully that her father was unpopular in the social world around her, and she deeply resented an antipathy which, though never discussed in her presence, she felt it impossible to forgive or remove. The explanatory assistance of Minerva, daughter of the cook, had enabled her to comprehend all the unpleasant significance of "scallawag" and "carpet-bagger," and with the fervor of indignant loyalty she promptly espoused whatever cause her father was reputed to represent. Alert and *en garde*, she expected attacks, felt eager to retaliate, and consequently was often stung by the young people of her circle with whom she was no favorite. For many months after Judge Kent's second marriage, Mrs. Maurice yielded to a new and yearning tenderness toward her grandchild, whom she heartily pitied, but the overtures came too late; the plastic season had passed, the angles had stiffened, the childish heart had hardened hopelessly, and caresses that formerly might have won her love were received in cold, irresponsive passiveness.

Once she had gone under Eliza's care to spend Christmas in Washington, and though the pretty, gay, good-natured stepmother laid siege to the girl's heart and fondled and pampered her, Mrs. Kent knew from the defiant gleam in her watchful, jealous eyes that the daughter would never tolerate a usurper who sat on her own mother's throne and divided her father's affections.

During the following year, Mrs. Maurice was prostrated by an attack of pneumonia that resulted in heart weakness, from which she never fully rallied. The reins of household government slipped easily into Eliza's hands, and that reticent, faithful young woman proved worthy of the confidence so long reposed in her by her benefactress.

The last link in the chain of daily duties to which the invalid clung was her habit of listening to Eglah's recitations from text-books, but the hour came when she reluctantly laid down the self-imposed task.

"My dear, in future say your lessons to Eliza. I find I am not strong enough to be patient, and without perfect patience no one should attempt to teach. Go now and practise your piano exercises; it will not disturb me in the least."

She took into her own cold, beautifully shaped hand Eglah's slender, warm fingers, looked at them critically, and smiled as she drew them tenderly across her cheek.

"Kiss me, little one. Try always to obey Eliza, for she will never fail you when you need comfort, and in all this world nobody loves you as she does. Send her to me."

When the nurse came in and seated herself, darning gourd in hand, Mrs. Maurice was glancing over a blank book used for memoranda.

"Eliza, here are some instructions you must follow faithfully when I am gone. I have written them carefully, so that you cannot misunderstand. I leave nothing to your discretion, not because your judgment is defective, but simply for the reason that I desire my wishes executed exactly. It is an absolute condition of my will that you should have the personal care of Eglah until she marries. If she should be sent to a new-fangled college (one of her father's Yankee fads), you will board in sight of her; when she travels, you go with her. Nothing but her death, or marriage, shall separate you, and with this provision I can safely leave her. Egbert and Marcia will understand I have done what was possible for the poor baby. Proud little thing! she will be tortured indeed if ever the time comes when she feels ashamed of her father – and wily though he is, her eyes are keen. She is all Kent in appearance, except her hands and feet; they are dainty, beautiful, patrician, genuinely Maurice like my Marcia's."

She laid the book on Eliza's lap, motioned her away, and, turning her head aside, closed her eyes.

With the ebbing of summer tide her pulse waned slowly but steadily, like a star going down to the gates of the west. Leaning heavily on her husband's cane, followed by the aged pointer, the tall, wasted figure went to and fro through the old house, as one having packed and waiting for departure looks to see if aught has been forgotten; and over the pallid face with its cloud of black hair an exultant smile sometimes shone, as she realized how soon she should reclaim her treasures in the beckoning Beyond. It was an August night when the pilot's signal came, and swiftly and gladly she "crossed the bar." Eliza was aroused from a sound sleep by Eglah, who shook her.

"Ma-Lila, I am so frightened! I heard grandma call out 'Egbert!' 'Marcia!' Something had already waked me suddenly."

"Oh, dearie, you were only dreaming."

She sprang up and lighted a candle, but the girl clung to her.

"No, it was not a dream. I heard it clear and loud like a quick cry. I was so scared I waited a while, and then I went to her room – but she is not there! I could see the bed was empty, because Dinah had left the night lamp burning in the passage. What can it mean?"

"Grandmother is often restless, and goes out on the colonnade, where the fresh air relieves her oppressed breathing. No doubt she is there now. Baby, do not tremble so."

Clutching Eliza's nightgown, Eglah followed her to the sick room, which was unoccupied, and waking Dinah, who slept on a cot in the hall, they searched the entire length of the piazza, the foster-mother shielding the light with her hand. Turning to re-enter the house, they were startled by the howl of a dog, answered instantly by a scream from Herod, roosting on one of the arched chimney tops. Eglah was so terrified she threw her arms around Eliza, thereby dashing the candle from her trembling hand.

"She must be in the general's room, and old Hector is there also."

Swiftly they crossed the halls, and found a light shining through the partly open door of the memorial chamber. A candle burned low under the portrait over the mantel, and Hector, with his head thrown back against his mistress's knee, howled feebly. She sat in her husband's easy chair, her head pillowed on his dressing gown, where a fresh Cape jasmine gleamed, and over her lap flowed the yellowed lace of Marcia's christening robe, half hiding the baby shoes of white kid. She had laid one hand on the Confederate uniform folded on the couch beside her chair, and about the long, white fingers of the other were wrapped strands of vivid red seed-coral – the necklace and bracelets of her only child. Stern lines and shadows of sorrow had faded forever from the frozen face, where eternal peace set its blessed seal, and in the wide eyes fixed on her husband's portrait was the rapt expression that comes only with the lifting of the veil as the soul drifts through its windows of flesh. The icy shiver that runs across the world when day dawns grew into a windy gust from the west, extinguishing the fluttering candle flame and blowing the lace curtains out eastward like white sails bearing away the happy spirit to crystal seas. At the edge of the sky, where the morning star burned, a thread of orange glowed in the soft pearl grey of the new day, and only the crowing of the game cocks from their cedar thicket broke the silence that death consecrates.

CHAPTER IV

Were it possible to probe the recesses of cerebration by some psychological process as searching as the Roentgen ray, many strange beliefs would be dragged from secret chambers sedulously guarded, where mental fetiches are worshipped. Those who knew Eliza Mitchell well considered her a very pretty, dignified, reticent young widow, who won respect by her adherence to mourning garments – never laid aside after her husband's death; but her rigid observance of the strictest phase of Methodist discipline presented a certain austerity of character that appeared to rebuke quietly even the members of her own denomination who indulged in "the putting on of gold and costly apparel, and taking such diversions" as aforetime were considered appanages of the "flesh and the devil."

Keenly observant and silently contemplative, she had grown shrewd as a judge of character, and laid the tribute of her confidence at the feet of few; yet this little woman, eminently practical and rigidly orthodox in the faith of her father, had surrendered to one belief that dominated heart, soul, and mind – that ruled her absolutely, and that she jealously guarded from all but her God. Her most intense and precious conviction was that the soul created and intended for her baby boy, who never breathed, had been assigned to the body of Marcia's infant girl born a little later. She was assured that her child had never known life on earth, and had been in his coffin but a few hours when Eglah first opened her eyes. Souls never die. What of the soulless still-born? Would God deny any Christian mother reunion with her innocent baby in the world of spirits? From the hour that Marcia's wailing child was laid on Eliza's bosom she accepted it as an incarnation of the soul of little Elliot, adrift in space but housed at last in the form committed to her fostering care. Whether this phantasmal belief sprang from feverish conditions under which she first felt the baby's warm lips at her breast, Eliza never questioned; and as the years passed the conviction strengthened, until she easily explained all Eglah's waywardness by the hypothesis that a boy's soul fretted under the limitations of a girl's body. Ignorant of the complex elements that fed her devotion to the child, even Mrs. Maurice could not fully understand her idolatrous fondness, her perfect and marvellous patience that condoned all errors, and only Eglah could have told how often she was fondled as "my Elliot" when cradle songs were crooned in the sanctuary of the nursery. Notwithstanding Mrs. Mitchell was zealous in missionary work, and when she read her reports as treasurer of the "Hindustan" fund, she dwelt feelingly on the benighted superstition that worshipped idols and believed in transmigration of soul.

After Mrs. Maurice's death, Mr. Whitfield as administrator closed Nutwood, leaving Aaron and his daughter Celia custodians, and Eglah and Eliza went to Washington, where two small rooms were selected for their occupancy in the fashionable "apartments" leased by Senator Kent. His daughter now enjoyed every educational advantage that a governess for modern languages and a tutor for Greek and mathematics could supply, while teachers in the entire range of feminine accomplishments were eager to encourage cultivation of any special talent. In dancing and riding she was found surprisingly proficient, and as Senator Kent was desirous she should enter as early as possible a "woman's college" in his native State where one of his sisters was professor, the child was industriously coached to achieve this purpose.

Standing as it were on the rim of a new world, strewn with the flotsam and jetsam of shattered political, ethical, and domestic systems, where all nations and social conditions found representation, Eglah and Eliza confronted novel customs, strange beliefs, and cosmopolitan diction that clashed sharply on the conservative standards of old Southern usage. Tethered to the pivot of her Methodist discipline, Mrs. Mitchell swung around the narrow circle of conscientious orthodoxy; but Eglah made alarming excursions into ecclesiastical provinces, and their first serious altercation arose from the announcement that the girl had decided to join the class for confirmation in the Episcopal church where Judge Kent worshipped.

"Confirmation? Oh, no; you are too young to take such an important step."

"Now, Ma-Lila, would you say that if I asked to join the Methodist Church?"

"That would be different, because you know more about the Church in which you have been raised."

"I know the Episcopal catechism from cover to cover, and I like the service, and the choristers, and the candles used in some Episcopal churches, and – "

"Dearie, you merely want to follow your father, and, moreover – "

"Did not you follow your father? You are what you are just because your father was a Methodist preacher, and a chaplain who was killed bringing my grandfather off the battle-field. What are fathers for, if not to set us examples?"

"Do you forget your dear grandmother, and her love for the church you were christened in, and could you who owe her so much defy her wishes?"

"Grandmother is so glad to get away and be in heaven that she never will worry over me any more; and if I am only good enough to go where she is when I die, what difference will it make to her how I got there? Seems to me, Ma-Lila, all this strife over different faiths is as foolish as denying people their choice of routes when they go travelling in summer. If we have perfect right to trust our bodies to our favorite railroad, we ought to feel as free to take tickets for our souls on any line that leads to God."

Eliza took the girl's hands and pressed the soft palms to her own cheeks, as she said, in a voice that faltered despite her will:

"My darling, let us wait. Promise me one thing; do nothing for another year at least. For my sake, baby, I beg of you."

Eglah saw unshed tears in the black eyes that had always shone tenderly on her, and rising she stole one arm around the nurse's neck and kissed her unsteady lips.

"Please don't fret about it. You shall have your wish. Of course I will wait a year if you think it best; but you must help me, because somehow it is harder for me to be good here than it was down at home."

"It is a sacred promise you make me now."

"I told you I would wait. Did I ever deceive you? You ought to know me better than Mrs. Kent, and even she told father yesterday she had been trying to find out whether I had most talent for the piano or the mandolin, and she concluded I really had no talent for anything – showed only genius for telling the truth."

Thenceforth Mrs. Mitchell redoubled her efforts to control the spiritual aspirations of the girl to whom she had devoted her life, and the bargain she made with her conscience was that Judge Kent had the right to train and develop and decorate the body of his daughter, even along lines she deemed Philistine, but the immortal spark – the soul intended for her little Elliot – was immutably hers, to be saved eternally in the faith to which her own hopes were anchored. That night, when she had brushed and braided Eglah's golden-brown hair that no one else ever arranged, she suddenly caught the slim form in a straining embrace.

"God bless my Elliot – my own precious baby!"

"It has been a long time since you called me Elliot, and it sounds queer to give me the name of your boy. Why should you?"

"You are my boy, and my Eglah also; two in one, and my only joy in all the world. Don't argue, dearie; go to sleep."

She lifted her into bed and tucked the silk quilt carefully about her, as though crib days had not ended.

"Ma-Lila, if we should all meet in heaven – and I do hope that somehow I shall get there – I am afraid I shall feel puzzled to know who really is my mother, because it seems to me I belong more to you than to anybody else except father; but then grandmother will certainly be there, and she will carry me straight to that special spot – the heavenly 'west-end' – where all the Maurices dwell, and

hand me over to her Marcia: the beautiful one I never saw, my own mother, who would not wait in this world long enough to look at me."

"Hush, my lamb! Good night."

In the adjoining room she sat down at a table where books were piled, and opening one read a marked passage:

"The story was told by the owner of a shop where was sold the amber-tinted syrup of malt given to young children when milk could not be obtained. A pale woman in white came very late for many nights to buy a cup of this syrup —*midzu ame*– but never spoke.

"One night, when she beckoned him to follow, he went with her to the cemetery, where she suddenly vanished in a tomb, and he heard a young child crying under ground. On opening the tomb there was found the corpse of the woman, and by her side a young infant smiling, who had been fed from a cup of *midzu ame* in the hand of the corpse. The woman had by mistake been prematurely buried. The child was born in the grave, and love – stronger than death – compelled the ghost to provide nourishment for her baby."

Eliza closed the volume and tossed it across the table.

"As if we needed old heathen Japan to teach us the length and breadth and depth and deathlessness of maternal devotion, when we know from the Bible that though God in heaven forsook His Son, the earthly mother clung to Jesus!"

It was an intensely cold, windless, brilliant moonlight night in January, two years after she came to live in Washington, and when the clock struck eleven she heard a quick but cautious step in the corridor and a slight tap at her door. Mr. Herriott stood at the threshold and beckoned her to the head of the steps.

"Is Eglah asleep?"

"I think she is."

"Come downstairs quietly."

In the lower hall, where the lights burned brightly, she saw that he looked pale and troubled.

"Mrs. Mitchell, a terrible blow has fallen upon us. Mrs. Kent went sleighing with some friends, and the horses became uncontrollable. The sleigh was overturned, and poor Nina, thrown against a stone wall, was killed instantly. Will you do what is best when she is brought home? Don't rouse little Eglah. I am going to find Senator Kent, who is in committee meeting, and break the news as gently as possible. Poor, dear Nina! So merry, so kind hearted! Laughing and chaffing me for my awkwardness when I tucked the lap robe about her feet."

Once more death levelled a wall that in some degree barred Eglah from her father, and from that wintry night she dated the beginning of her happy reign over his undivided affection – a monopoly she had long coveted as the supreme privilege and crown of life.

CHAPTER V

"Has the success of the experiment justified the labor and enthusiasm you spent upon it?"

"Yes, Noel, the result far surpasses my hopes, and I am impatient for you to visit us, not only to understand fully the complete success of the work, but to receive the grateful acknowledgments of every member of the Order."

"Then you bar your doors against me, because any expression of thanks is annoying, and the great pleasure I gave myself in deeding the property to you would be marred. Remember, Vernon, I am not a well-rounded character, measured by your ecclesiastical tape-line, and one of my ugly angles is aversion to thanks. If you have drained the marshland and reclaimed the house from mildew and mice you have made your neighbors debtors."

"The same Noel Herriott of college days!"

"Only more so, if you please. Nothing human is immutable, and if a man does not improve he grows worse. By the way, is your reverence still 'Brother' Temple, or have you climbed the ladder of spiritual promotion?"

"I am always Vernon to you, but the world knows me as 'Father' Temple. When will you come to us at 'Calvary House' and inspect the rich harvest from the seed you sowed? I long for the one thing you have withheld – your deep, hearty sympathy in my grand and holy work."

"Meaning that nothing less than the three vows will assure you of my safety?"

"That is beyond all that I ever dared to hope, but your cordial approbation would cheer me more than the indorsement of any other man. Generous though you are in financial assistance, your mental attitude toward our Order is that of the smiling tolerance with which one watches a child building a house of cards."

"However tentative my opinion relative to the scope and permanence of your religious movement, you cannot doubt that I earnestly desire the success to which the sanctity of your motive entitles you. Partial as I am to gymnastic methods, I allow no athletic feats in my mental processes; I neither run nor leap to conclusions, and you must give me time. You and I always approach vital questions by different paths: you lean generally to collectiveness; I usually prefer the slower leverage of individualism. You are burning the candle of life at both ends, and trying to realize your noble ideals; I plod far behind, with only a feeble taper and indulge no higher hope than to idealize my realities."

"When will you come to the lovely home you have given us? There is one room we have called 'Founder's,' and set apart for you; and, Noel, no sun sets that has not brought us to our knees in prayer for you who made it possible for us to own a chapel. When shall we welcome you?"

"Not now. I must go home, where matters need attention. Strange, is it not, that the magic of a name should outlive all it represents? That lonely old stone house staring at its shadow on the lake has no vital element of home except my horses and dogs, and one Maltese cat that sleeps in my arm-chair. When Nina married Senator Kent the last thread that tied me to anything like domesticity snapped, and I followed my bent and prowled from land to land."

"Why do you not marry some sweet, gentle woman and settle yourself?"

"Scarcely the advice one might expect from the priestly Father of an Anglican celibate order. Has your creed narrowed to such alternatives? Either a cell at Calvary or the snare and disillusions of marriage? Unfortunately for me, women have exerted only a traditional influence on my life. My own young mother died before I could remember her, and I was consigned to tutors when I should have been trundling hoops. I went early to college, and after father's second marriage was rarely at home; hence my acquaintance with women in the home circle is nebulous and legendary. As a boy I disdained sweethearts; as a man they disdain me. The only woman I ever really cared for would no more marry me than a stone slab in a cemetery; so, with many thanks, I cannot utilize your counsel,

and it only remains for you to keep a cell for me at Calvary. Some day at eventide I may creep in, and you will kindly shrive and bless me."

Mr. Herriott had been leaning back in his chair, with his hands clasped behind his head, and when he rose he towered six feet two inches, smiling gravely at the upturned face of Father Temple, whose sombre clerical habit contrasted vividly with the white yachting flannels worn by his friend.

"Ah, Noel, what a Viking you look! Save prize fighting, is there anything in the realm of athletics you have not accomplished?"

"I fear you would not compliment me with even that civilized exception if you had seen a skirmish, minus weapons, that I had with a hairy, tattooed Dyak in a Borneo jungle where I hunted orchids. Vernon, if you trained your muscles more, and let up a little on your soul, allowed it a breathing spell, you would not look so flaccid and anæmic. Don't prefer monkish Latin to Juvenal: *mens sana in corpore sano*! You observe, respect for your Reverence prevents my offering you the Rabelais parody. Come, dine with me to-night."

"No, thank you. I am to give a brief 'retreat.' Tell me about my cousin Eglah; you crossed the ocean in the same steamer."

"You have not seen her?"

"For a few moments only. She is a beautiful girl."

"What remains to be said – since you accord her the mantle of beauty, whose folds, broader even than charity's, hide all defects? Where shall I begin? Being her cousin, you must know what I have merely heard: that she swept through college like a southern tornado – or should I have said like a meteor? – carrying off the honors, and was the youngest graduate who had ever turned the heads of the spectacled lecturers. Yet it appears she values her trophy merely because her laurels pleased her father, at whose feet she sits in adoration. In her physique, gymnastic training leaves nothing to be improved; she won badges, and can hold her own at basket-ball, tennis, rowing, and swimming. Is not the catalogue complete? So much for mental attainments and physical perfection, but in the domain of womanly emotions she is simply an unknown quantity – a latter-day sphinx, fresh and fair before drifting desert sands deface her. If a lover should ever win her heart he will certainly be entitled to it, by the supreme right of discovery. Her affection for Judge Kent absolutely rules her, and in one respect she is unique, she is as utterly incapable of flirtations as an unfledged owl."

"On account of the family connection you have been thrown so intimately into her society that I hoped you could tell me something of her religious tendencies."

"I am such a confirmed tramp that my visits to the family have been brief and interrupted by long absences. Eglah always appealed peculiarly to my sympathy because of the pathetic antagonism of her environment. Your cousin, Judge Kent, was very much disliked at the South, where sectional political rancor was, is, and will be rife, and his child suffered keenly on that account. When she came north to live, her social surroundings were even worse, because she furiously resented every reflection upon the people of the South, where the Maurices were conspicuous in war records. Her efforts at loyalty all around the circle have not made smooth sailing for her, and her motives were doubtless complex. You are curious about her 'religious tendencies'? If you are wise you will not stir any Calvary leaven into the pure sweet flour of her soul, unless you covet war *á outrance* with that nondescript personage Mrs. Mitchell – an anomalous blend, alert as a lynx, wary as a fox, stealthy as a cougar – who serves Eglah in divers and sundry capacities: an amalgamated foster-mother, housekeeper, maid, companion, chaperon, and confidante. She is a Simon-pure puritan, prim as Priscilla, and her processes of reasoning are quite as broad as the edge of a razor. That she viciously opposes all forms of 'ritualism' I happen to know from listening to a discussion between her and Eglah, in which the whole bundle of dogmas was thrashed out, from 'historic episcopate' and 'confession' to incense, candles, and 'reservation of the sacrament.' What a pile of chaff they built! Eglah's appreciation of sensuous beauty and classical music inclines her to gorgeous vestments, jewelled windows, and the rhythmic chanting of choristers that lift their chins like Raphael's cherubs, but Mrs. Mitchell finds in

the severe simplicity of her own tabernacle an added sanctity, and your Calvary House will be to her that of Rimmon. In Rome Judge Kent had a touch of fever which frightened Eglah into telegraphing for me at Basle, where I was attending a scientific congress, so we came home together."

"If Eglah's enthusiasm could be aroused in our mission work, she would wield an incalculable power for good."

"Vernon – pardon the lapse into argot – 'don't!' Let the child pick her own way to peace. She is not addicted to enthusiasms: one attack long ago destroyed her susceptibility to subsequent seizures; she can be enthusiastic over only one teraph – her father. Must you go? Wait a moment. Friendship is frank, and I am sorry to see you losing the vigor that in college days distinguished you. Fast less, and sleep more. Come home with me and hunt and fish and row, and let other people's souls enjoy a vacation."

As they shook hands Father Temple asked:

"And what have scientific congresses done for your soul, Noel?"

"Drawn me closer, I hope, to the Creator whose subtle and inexorable laws are best revealed to the faithful student that fearlessly analyzes His universal work. The sole aim of scientists is 'to admit nothing false, and to omit nothing true.' Vernon, have faith in me as of old, and keep a cell whitewashed for me at Calvary House. Truly —

"So many paths lead up to God,
'Twere strange if any soul should miss them all."

With his hand on the stair rail the minister paused and looked back.

"One thing I wish to ask is whether Eglah had any special admirers abroad? American heiresses are attractive."

"She had as many beaux as she chose to permit. Two attachés of American legations were particularly attentive, and a handsome English naval officer whose father is a duke will doubtless cross the ocean to renew his acquaintance. Possess your soul in patience. Her heart is as sound asleep as when she dreamed in her crib, and the man who wakes and wins it will travel no macadamized road. Before Lent she will be in New York for a week, and when Congress adjourns the family will come to me on the Lake for a visit."

Given a man of thirty-three, unusually good-looking, possessing by inheritance a large fortune, dowered with infinite leisure upon which no professional duties laid intrusive claim, handicapped by no church obligations, and the world assumes that he has inevitably run the gamut of those iniquities set by Satan as snares for the idle rich. Intensely virile as was Noel Herriott, his polished placidity of manner and courteous conservatism masked in some degree the strength and tenacious obstinacy of a character that presented enigmatical phases to those who knew him best. Heredity and education had combined in kneading him physically, mentally, and morally along rather peculiar curves during the plastic period of boyhood, and the finishing touches that determined the mould came from his parting interview with his Presbyterian father, when Fergus Herriott sent him away to college.

"My son, God gave you a remarkably fine body. Neither neglect nor abuse it, but be sure you master it from the start, else you will be the slave of your own flesh. Bad habits are the leeches that would suck a Hercules to effeminacy. Steer as clear of the sins labelled "Thou shalt not" as you would of that leper island down in the Pacific. The ten commandments are equal links in the moral chain, and it is no man's privilege to pick and choose which he will break or which he will keep; because if he violates one, it is merely a question of temptation, necessity, and opportunity when he will transgress all. If he bears false witness and lies, he will steal money as he filched character; if he covets his neighbor's wife, the time comes when he murders her husband. *Falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus.* You are going where you will hear much fine talk about 'lofty, broadening, philosophic ideals' and 'progressive, altruistic standards of humanitarianism and honor.' Now mark you, God's laws are not

'progressive,' they are absolutely fixed, and when you are as old as I am you will have learned that 'man's honor,' unless based on them, is merely a sliding scale set up on a quicksand. My boy, try to lead such a clean life that when the mirror of records is held up to you in the final judgment you will not squirm and want to look the other way; and now, my last word is, you had the great misfortune to lose your dear, sweet mother in this world – be sure you deserve to find her in the next."

During the journey to college he found in his well-filled pocket-book a folded sheet containing additional memoranda in his father's cramped, old-fashioned writing.

"Be honest first, then generous – never wasteful. Pose on no pedestals and you will escape falls. Avoid priggishness, which is detestable mental dry-rot; and flee from cant, the convenient domino of hypocrisy. Cultivate genuine sympathy for all suffering humanity, and remember that a man's safest companion is his own conscientious, incorruptible self-respect."

Doubtless in the years that followed Noel realized that indeed but that he succeeded fairly well might have been inferred from a certain scar on his throat, received while chastising two of his classmates who had caricatured him in doggerel under the title of "Sir Dandy Galahad." Misled by the quiet reserve of his manner, and an inborn courtesy that made him as good a listener as talker, strangers never suspected the existence of a temper fierce and, when fully aroused, well-nigh implacable. In his third collegiate year the death of his father left him untrammelled in the selection of a profession, and soon after he entered into possession of a fortune so large that its golden key would have opened the door of almost any career he might have chosen. His mental trend was toward scientific studies, and his dominant scheme of investigation embraced the elusive problems of anthropology. His individual and favorite hypothesis involved the genesis of aboriginal American man, and to secure all prehistoric and especially pre-glacial data he had attended post-collegiate lectures at several European universities, supplemented by sojourns in Central America, Pacific Islands, and British North America.

"Souls were dangerous things to carry straight
Through all the spilt saltpetre of the world;"

Since the death of his stepmother, Mr. Herriott had established temporary headquarters in New York in "apartments" not far from the old Herriott house, which by provision of his wife's will was now the property of Judge Kent. While the family of the senator usually remained in Washington, Eglah and Mrs. Mitchell frequently spent a week in New York, and on such occasions, if Noel chanced to be in the city, they relied upon him to serve as escort when needed. That he had successfully run the gauntlet of Eliza's years of cautious, suspicious observation, and finally commanded her admiring confidence, contributed in some degree to the easy *camaraderie* maintained between Eglah and himself: on her part a genuinely trusting friendship, pure and simple; on his that cool, watchful quietude that holds in leash the one deep passionate love of a strong nature and a lonely life. From the day he first saw the little quivering white-clad girl standing in the sunset glow that flooded the fragrant, flower-filled dining-room at Nutwood, he had opened the empty temple of his heart, and where no image dwelt – save the memory of his father – he lifted this child to a pure altar, and offered silent homage.

CHAPTER VI

"Of course, Mr. Herriott, you are vastly amused by my ambitious pretension."

"Why Mr. Herriott? And why assume amusement which I certainly have not expressed?"

"Not verbally; but I quite understand that look in your eyes, when by sheer force of will you hold your lips from smiling. Only courtesy keeps in check your contempt for our 'higher education.'"

"Eglah, be a little more just in your generalizations. If the education be really 'higher' and thorough, no reasonable man could afford to disparage it. You have spent the morning over volumes of tedious statistics, extracting figures on *ad valorem* and 'specific' schedules that only a custom-house clerk or a tariff expert could utilize by eliminating nonessentials and compiling valuable tables. Why waste this perfect day over metric puzzles – dekameter, hectoliter, myriagram?"

"Father wished the exact figures, and to work for him is my greatest pleasure."

"Do not confound motive and accomplishment. Your father's secretary would have collected the statistics in half the time and in a more satisfactory form, simply because he has been trained for such search, as dogs are taught to hunt truffles."

"Mr. Metcalf was needed in Washington, and as father has tried me sufficiently to trust the accuracy of my work, he asked me to make this investigation while I was in New York. Mr. Noel, to help him even in trifles is my very life; he is my world, my all."

Mr. Herriott lifted his hat and bowed.

"Your devotion is beautiful and sacred, and Judge Kent should feel proud of the list of rivals he so successfully defies. Perhaps it has not yet occurred to him that in chaining yourself to his library desk you are restricted to sawdust diet."

"Varied now and then, you must admit, by banquets of opera, germans, receptions, teas, theatre parties, and the embassies. When I was working so hard at college I looked forward eagerly to 'coming out,' as to a magical door that would swing suddenly open into a wonderful world, where, because of new conditions, I should become a different person, and shed my girlish ideas as serpents slip their skins; but since the 'open sesame,' and I have 'arrived,' I seem to have lost nothing of the past, and my old, tiresome self is tyrannous as ever."

"Is social life in Washington disappointing?"

"That is scarcely the right term. Life is certainly very brilliant, and gay and panoramic, and I enjoy music and dancing, and some dinner parties; above all, I find keen pleasure in following a spirited debate in the House, or listening to speeches in the Senate, but sometimes I catch myself wondering if this is indeed all – the veritable kernel of society, politics, diplomacy, or merely the shell partly cracked. Life here and in Washington does not seem so absolutely real as it was at home, at Nutwood."

They were driving in Central Park, and Eglah shared the front seat of the trap where Mr. Herriott held the reins of his spirited horses, and brought them down to a steady, rapid trot. It was a cold but sunny day in February, and as he laced his way in and out of the stream of vehicles, he and his companion were the theme of much comment from the passing throng. Fastidious in the matter of clothes, he was always remarkably well dressed – a fact accentuated by his unusual height and erect carriage – and at the two fashionable clubs to which he belonged he was generally regarded "as all around, the best looking member." The dark steel-blue grey eyes – with no hint of yellow – which his Scotch father gave him, lost something of their penetrating brilliance under the long jet lashes that, with black brows and thick clustering hair, his mother had contributed, and his naturally clear olive skin had been weather-tanned in various climates to a browner tint. In profile his face resembled a bronze medallion, and when he smiled his well-cut lips, that in repose seemed ominously thin, showed curves of rare beauty around a faultless set of teeth. The sun of prosperity had ripened and mellowed his manhood, and, as yet, no acid of cynicism had invaded his nature.

Gowned in a fur-trimmed cloth of hunter's green, Eglah wore a velvet toque of same hue, that failed to conceal the mass of golden-brown hair burnished by sunshine into the similitude of a white-oak leaf dyed in autumn. Under delicate, level brows, her large dark eyes —*chataigne* in some lights, almost black at times – were set rather far apart in an oval face whose exquisitely clear, pure pallor was stained only by the healthy rich red of slender lips, that had a treacherous trick of quivering when any strong emotion stirred the deeps of her heart. By the accepted canons of art and cultured taste her form and features had been adjudged "beautiful," and some great-grandmother of the far South had dowered her with a peculiar grace of movement – not languid, nor sinuous, nor Delsartian – a natural idiosyncrasy that made the manner of her steps, the lifting of head and motion of hands, unlike other women's. Only one gift – most potent of all – had been withheld from her birthright: she was absolutely devoid of personal magnetism, and her habitual cold indifference approached haughtiness, that the world resented. A certain aloofness of manner hedged her around even in the midst of the social whirl, and though in conversation the lovely eyes appeared to meet frankly those confronting hers, people were vaguely conscious that some veil was rarely lifted from their soft, shining depths.

Sudden congestion in the line of equipages, stretching far ahead, had caused a temporary halt, and when the knot dissolved, and the impatient horses sprang forward once more, Eglah said:

"I thought you loved good music too well to lose last night's opera treat, and until the final act I expected you."

"Shall I flatter myself that even in the midst of the select party occupying my box you really missed me?"

"Certainly I missed you – all the more because some of them chattered, and you would have hushed the tattle."

"Am I so successful in the rôle of ogre as to over-awe my guests in an opera box?"

"Your quiet way of setting an example of good breeding is sometimes contagious among thoughtless people."

"My lucky star is surely ascending: you have paid me two compliments, and I am puzzled to know whether I shall be expected to balance my account at *ad valorem* rates on the basis of your assessment or mine?"

"Oh, you and I established free trade long ago, and I can always tell you the truth without pausing to weigh words as do legation attachés, and as father does when wily lobbyists intercept him on his way from committee rooms. Mr. Noel, had you any special reason for absenting yourself? The lovely lilac orchids were, of course, far more ornamental in your empty chair, and you must not think me lacking in appreciation because I am so tardy in thanking you for them."

"An unexpected change in the date of a lecture given by one of my friends kept me away, when I had hoped to join you. As I had promised to attend, there was no alternative when a belated note informed me that last night had been selected for its delivery."

"Tell me about it."

"If I should so afflict you, most certainly you would vote me a bore, or fall asleep in self-defence."

"When you say that, you know curiosity always covets the forbidden."

"At your peril then! It was a monograph on the autochthonic origin of American races, and by way of ornamentation bristled with such graceful trifles as cephalic index, *brachycephalic*, and *dolichocephalic*, and was sprinkled with the curry of *Votanic* legends, and choice tid-bits from the Quiché *Popol Vuh* and from *Codex Chimalpopoco*! Sounds spicy, doesn't it? Piques your appetite for a larger slice?"

"No, thank you. Yet you preferred that tiresome jargon to listening to a superb tenor solo?"

"In a way – yes. We all ride hobby-horses from the nursery to the cemetery, and it is merely a question of individual taste what blood strain or pedigree we choose. My racing stable is

not so generously supplied as yours, which embraces colts of various breeds: reports of fisheries commissions, bounties, American tonnage from 18 – to 18 – , and a vast – "

"Sarcasm does not fit you becomingly, Mr. Noel; it hangs askew, like a clown's cap on a cowl. What have you registered your own special toy, that you canter so vigorously around the world? Is it called ethnology, or totemism, or anthropology?"

"When I have finished trying all its gaits, and find the sum total satisfactory, I shall label it, and fit a comfortable side saddle and introduce you formally. Now, Miss Kent, come to confession. Did you see the list of passengers who arrived on yesterday's steamer from Liverpool?"

"I did not."

"Can you recollect a certain prophecy I made at Cowes, anent a handsome naval officer who entertained us at luncheon on his father's yacht?"

"Cassandra was a woman, and men should not trespass on the one feminine right of 'I told you so,' that has descended to us intact from Hecuba's daughter. But, Mr. Noel, if you mean – "

She turned and looked up into his eyes.

"Yes, I met him this morning at the club, where Ogden introduced him, and I saved him a useless journey to Washington by telling him you were here for a few days."

"I can only say I am sorry to hear it."

"While he is in New York I must, in part, return the hospitality shown us, and your father will pay the remainder of the debt in Washington. I have arranged a dinner for this evening, and later we shall see 'Hamlet,' then a supper afterward at Delmonico's. Will you join us at the theatre, if I call for you, bringing Mrs. St. Clair as chaperon?"

"Thank you, I much prefer not to be one of the party; besides, I have a previous engagement. I am going with my cousin, Vernon Temple, to a meeting of shop girls, a sort of night school established by some of his lady friends."

"What class does he teach?"

"I believe he 'talks' now and then on 'feminine arts,' and to-night there will be a lecture on lace making and tapestry guilds, illustrated of course by a sketch of the inevitable Matilda and the indestructible 'Bayeux.' I am trying to classify this new cousin, who seems to me a queer blend of mediæval monk, pre-Raphaelite reformer, and socialist. He is altogether unlike any one I ever knew, but his beautiful, sad face reminds me of a picture I saw in Munich – a young priest administering the viaticum to his dying sweetheart, whom he forsook for holy orders."

Lowering his eyelids, Mr. Herriott glanced keenly at her.

"You find Temple wonderfully magnetic at times?"

"Scarcely that. 'Magnetic' implies so much and really explains so little. When I see his ceaseless struggle to keep the heel of his spirit on the neck of his flesh, it suggests a fanatical rebellion against that equipoise God saw fit to establish. Like Joubert, 'he seems to be a soul that by accident met with a body, and tries to make the best of it.' My cousin Temple is fond of you."

"Despite much difference of opinion on many questions, our friendship has survived the 'storm and stress' period, and I honor a man whose battle cry for humanity is:

"'Make trade a Christian possibility,
And individual right no general wrong.'

Have you noticed the expression of Mrs. Mitchell's face when they happen to meet?"

"Haven't I! It is too funny to see her narrow her eyes and look at him as if he were some unclassified beast whose method of pouncing on his prey had not yet been warningly advertised. She is convinced he is an ecclesiastical infernal machine trying to wreck our family orthodoxy. I asked him – "

She stopped suddenly at sight of two gentlemen approaching on horseback, and Mr. Herriott smiled, as he whispered:

"Lo! the second son of a duke!"

CHAPTER VII

In a quiet and unfrequented cross street – equally remote from the thronged thoroughfares of trade and from fashionable avenues lined with palaces – stood the low and unpretentious Chapel of St. Hyacinth, marked by neither spire nor belfry. The old stone front receded sufficiently from the pavement to permit a short flight of shallow steps that led to an arched door in a pillared portico with a cross on its pointed roof, which hung over the entrance like a sullen, frowning brow. A northeast wind came fitfully in hissing blasts, dashed with fine sleet; but when Eglah passed through the swinging inner door a warm atmosphere spiced with resinous incense infolded her as in a fragrant mist, through which glimmered brass lattice screens, rows of tall candles, the gilded carving of the white altar, laden with lilies, and the marble statue of the Virgin, at whose snowy feet a red light burned in a silver lamp. On each side of the wall below the brass lattice that barred the chancel was a "confessional" of dark wood surmounted by a cross, and the clustered lights in the centre of the concave ceiling formed a crown.

On the right and left of the altar the white surpliced choristers filled several seats, and the quivering thunder of the organ ceased suddenly, as if to listen to the marvellous voice of the boy soloist, that swelled and rose as if the singer felt himself "hard by the gates of heaven." A slender child of ten years, grasping his music with waxen hands almost infantile in size, while his head, covered thickly with shining ripples of golden hair, was thrown back, and his blue eyes almost purplish, like a periwinkle, were raised in contemplation of the crown glowing above him. The colorless face was delicate and beautiful as if wrought out of ivory, and a certain pathetic sadness of expression inherent in fragile childhood was for the moment dominated by the radiant exultation of his wonderful eyes, that seemed made to dwell between the wings of a seraph.

Father Temple left the altar before which he had knelt in prayer, and advancing to the steps of the chancel, stood with one hand on the brass railing and briefly explained his unexpected presence. A telegram had summoned the rector of St. Hyacinth's to the deathbed of his father, and the request to officiate in his absence had been received too late to permit the preparation of a regular sermon; hence the patient indulgence of the congregation was invoked for some desultory remarks which might not prove entirely fruitless. After a few exordial sentences, he repeated slowly the opening ten verses from St. John xv., and waited a moment.

"For text let us consider: 'I am the true vine,' said our Lord, 'and ye, my brethren, are the branches.'"

Then followed a recitative of various selected passages from the "Sermon in the Hospital," in tones so musical and liquid, and with a repose of manner so profound, yet full of subtle magnetism, that his audience gazed in sympathetic wonder at the slight figure clad in the sombre habit of his order – at the thin, pallid spiritual face where large, deep-set black eyes burned with the preternatural light of consecrated but consuming zeal. The folded arms attempted no gestures – what need, while that rhythmic wave of sound flowed on? – until the end, when the clasped hands were lifted in final appeal:

"… the Cross of Christ
Is more to us than all His miracles.
Thou wilt not see the face nor feel the hand,
Only the cruel crushing of the feet
When through the bitter night the Lord comes down
To tread the winepress. Not by sight, but faith,
Endure, endure – be faithful to the end."

Unconscious of his movement, and irresistibly drawn, the young soloist sitting in the front row of choristers had risen, and leaning far forward, looked up into the face of the priest, like one mesmerized, his parted lips trembling in a passion of ecstasy. Then the organ boomed, and the boy fell from paradise and joined the choristers chanting as they marched away behind the uplifted cross.

A lady stepped into the aisle and touched Eglah's arm.

"So glad to see you here, Miss Kent. Shall always welcome you to my pew. What a delightful elocutionary *tour de force* Father Temple gave us! He would make a fortune on the stage of secular drama."

"Yes. Fra Ugo himself could scarcely have been more impressive when he talked to the sick and dying on hospital cots. To my cousin Vernon this world is only a hospital of sick souls. Mrs. St. Clair, I should like to meet that little boy who sang so beautifully. Can you help me?"

"Very easily. Come back with me now to the vestry and we may find him. Did you notice how that lovely boy seemed almost hypnotized?"

Only two of the larger choristers lingered, chatting with the choirmaster, and as they turned toward the rear stairway leading to the street, Mrs. St. Clair exclaimed:

"Mr. De Graffenried, stop the boys. We want to see the soloist. Call him back."

"Madam, I think he is still in the chancel."

Lifting the velvet curtain that concealed the altar from their view, she beckoned Eglah to her side.

Father Temple had been detained by one of the church-wardens, and as he turned to hasten away the boy, standing near, caught the black skirt of the priest.

"Please, sir, may I speak to you?"

"Certainly. I am glad to be able to thank you for the music to-day. Your solo gave me great pleasure."

"I could have done better, but my throat is sore; it bled just now. I told nobody, because I am the only one who can reach that high C, and so I tried not to fail. I want to ask you how I can learn all the words you spoke? Oh, if I could, I would set them to a chant; they would lift my heart out of me if I could sing them."

"You shall have them. What is your name?"

"Leighton Dane."

Father Temple took his tablets from an inside pocket and made an entry.

"Where do you live?"

"Oh, a long way off. Far down in East – Street; but, please sir, if you would leave the poetry here, I could get it at next rehearsal."

"My little man, how do you know it is poetry? The words do not rhyme."

"Rhyme? I do not understand that word – but I feel poetry. I always know it by the way my blood beats, and the little shiver that runs down my back, and the joy that makes me cry sometimes."

"I will send you a printed copy, in care of the rector. Dear child, God has given you a wonderfully sweet voice, and I am glad you use it in His service."

He laid his thin hand on the boy's golden head, and smiled down into the wistful blue eyes, where tears glistened.

The childish fingers, holding two snowy spikes of Roman hyacinth, were lifted and placed on the priest's hand, pressing it timidly against his curls.

"Thank you, sir. Please take these. They smell like the heavenly gardens, and I have nothing else to give."

"Were they not on the altar?"

"Yes, I slipped out two from the cluster there."

"Then they belong to God. By what right do you touch sacred gifts brought to Him?"

"They were mine. I bought them last night and laid them yonder when I came to-day – and God can spare just two, when I have nothing else to pay you with. Did you – oh! did you think I – stole – them?" A sob shook him, and tears followed.

Father Temple stooped and drew the little white-robed form to him, pressing the head against his breast.

"Forgive me, I did not quite understand; and I am sure the dear Father knows what is in your grateful heart. God bless you and keep you. I shall put the hyacinths between the leaves of my Bible."

Eglah stretched an arm across Mrs. St. Clair's shoulder and dropped the curtain.

"Come away. Some other time I may talk to him, not now."

The following day Eglah returned to Washington, and two hours before the departure of the train she drove to Twenty-third Street, where she and Mrs. Mitchell usually made their purchases of damask, ribbon, and lace. While the latter bent over boxes of wools and crochet cottons, Eglah seated herself at the handkerchief counter. When she had selected the desired number, the saleswoman filled out her index sheet and rapped sharply with her pencil.

"Cash! Here, cash!"

Several minutes elapsed.

"These cash boys are so tiresome. Cash, cash! I had to report one last week. Cash – here he comes at last. Now, do hurry up; you are a regular snail."

In the boy who hastened away Eglah recognized the soloist of St. Hyacinth's, and noticed a bandage around his throat. When he came back with the parcel and counted the change into the palm of the saleswoman, Eglah touched his arm.

"I heard you sing yesterday, and want to tell you how much I liked your voice."

"Thank you, ma'am, I – "

A spell of coughing interrupted, and she noticed how wan and weary he looked, and how heavy were the greyish shadows under his lovely eyes.

"I am afraid you are not well to-day. Are you an orphan?"

"Oh, no. Mother is living, and she says a mother is worth forty fathers."

"Will you tell me her name, and where she lives?"

"Mrs. Nona Dane, and she has the glove counter at – , Fourteenth Street."

At this instant the floor-walker strode forward, and a frightened expression crossed the boy's white face as he turned quickly, but Eglah laid a detaining hand on his head as, rising, she confronted the floor-walker.

"If he loitered it is not his fault; I kept him. If he missed a call I am to blame. Good-bye, Leighton; shake hands. When I come back to New York I hope to hear you sing again at St. Hyacinth's; and if I miss you here, I shall buy elsewhere."

His hot fingers quivered in her clasp, and, pressing a folded bill into his hand, she joined her foster-mother and left the store.

"What a frail, beautiful boy, and what genuine golden hair! Looks as if it had been dipped in a pot of gilt. Dearie, don't you think it a shame these young children are chained up in stores when they ought to be romping and playing ball?"

As their carriage turned from Twenty-third Street toward Broadway, that always crowded angle was even more than usually thronged, and during the brief pause Mr. Herriott came out of Maillard's with a box of bon-bons.

"I am just going to the ferry to wait for you. Are you not too early, or has my watch gone astray?"

"Come with us, Mr. Noel, we have ample room. Yes, it is early; but of course at the last minute I must needs shop on the way."

As he seated himself in the carriage he handed a package to Eglah.

"The latest Paris 'Revue,' and your favorite *marron glacé* and chocolate."

"Thank you heartily, for both. I wonder if I ever shall cease to be a spoiled child – in your eyes?"

"Whatever you may be in my eyes, you certainly will always remain."

"How discouraging, that you should feel quite hopeless of any improvement in me. Driver, I wish to stop in West Fourteenth Street, at – . Gloves, Mr. Noel, always gloves."

"Will you bet a pair of best driving gauntlets that I cannot tell you exactly why you go there to-day?"

"Certainly; silk-lined, fur-tipped gauntlets. I told you my errand was gloves; pray what other reason?"

"You are going to get a glimpse of 'Juno.'"

"Juno? Nearly everything comes to New York sooner or later, but really I never imagined she could step out from the books of mythology. I hunt no goddess. When you pay your wager, be sure to select delicate fawn color, that will match my spring jacket."

"The debt is yours. Confess, Eglah – honor bright – you are curious about the woman who sells gloves in Fourteenth Street."

"I will present to you a witch's skirt, cap, and broomstick. But why 'Juno'?"

"The matter was thrashed out at the club last week, where Vandiver told us some artist had compared her to a print of the Ludovisi Juno hanging in Goupil's window. Hence her elevation to Olympus."

"Then you know all about her?"

"On the contrary, I never saw her; but she seems to be the magnet drawing people to – just now."

The carriage stopped, and Eglah walked into the department store.

"Come in, Mr. Noel, and pick out your gauntlets."

"Not to-day. Juno indulged in tricks that made even Jupiter keep one eye on her wiles, and I shall merely admire at a safe distance."

In front of the glove counter half a dozen women clustered, and on the outside of the group three men lounged – one evidently a foreigner, with bushy beard, coarse, hairy hands, and furtive eyes, small even behind very large spectacles. Among several busy saleswomen it was easy to discover the centre of attraction – a finely developed form, tall and graceful in every movement, and a face of surpassing beauty, lighted by dark violet eyes, flushed with the glow of perfect health, and crowned by a braided mass of glittering yellow hair heaped high on a shapely head, that held it as an empress wears her tiara. In its vivid coloring the face suggested a tropical flower, but, looking closer, one thought of a frozen tulip under a sheet of ice, so hard was the cold gleam of the defiant eyes and the proud compression of red lips that had forgotten how to smile, that seemed never to have known curves of tenderness. While Eglah waited, the foreigner leaned across the counter.

"Some black silk gloves. Number eight and a half."

"In the next room. Men's department."

"You got the papers for the league?"

"Yes, that is all arranged. Meeting will be at ten o'clock to-night. You can't talk here."

He touched the rim of his hat and walked away, and she looked toward Eglah.

"Grey kid gloves, stitched with white silk."

"What size?"

"Five and a quarter."

The voice had a sharp metallic ring, with an impatient inflection, and as she turned, lifting her arms to a box on an upper shelf, all the lovely outlines of her figure were shown most advantageously, and Eglah glanced over her shoulder at Mr. Herriott. He was watching the woman behind the counter with an intensely curious expression, as though disagreeably perplexed. She found the desired number.

"Shall I stretch them?"

"No, it is not necessary."

"Do you wish them fitted on your hands?"

"I will not give you that trouble. What is the price?"

"It is part of my business to fit them. Two dollars and a quarter. Here, cash!"

Eglah's desire to mention the chorister of St. Hyacinth's was quickly extinguished by the pronouncedly repellent bearing that plainly proclaimed all intercourse must be restricted to the business of the counter, and as she returned to the carriage, Mr. Herriott said:

"Well, you college girls are nothing if not severely classical, so I presume you will offer a ewe lamb, all garlanded with willow and dittany, and prinked out in pomegranate blossoms, on the Junonian altar."

"I am glad Jove tied her hands and hung her up above the earth and below the heavens, with anvils on her ankles, where she could do no more mischief. That goddess of yours has the most cruelly cold, hard face I ever looked at, and yet – in a way – so beautiful. Evidently she has not even the shadow of a soul – must have given it all to that angelic boy? What is her history? Of course she has one."

"It has been said happy women have none, and in this case adversity must have curdled very early the stream of her youthful joys. Vandiver investigated her – from a distance he says, as she froze him when he attempted acquaintanceship. He has a protégé in the constabulary who learned through police channels all that she will allow to be known of her life. Some years ago she drifted here from the far West – part of the human flotsam annually stranded in this city, and she found work in a cloak manufactory. Later she incited a strike among the cloak cutters, which resulted disastrously for the workers, and when all the strikers submitted, she alone was refused re-employment, and doors were closed against her. She secured a position in a large bric-à-brac establishment, but when a valuable antique vase disappeared, she was suspected and arrested. While in prison a day and night awaiting trial, the vase was found in a pawnbroker's shop, and the colored porter of the bric-à-brac dealer acknowledged the theft. The firm very honorably made ample public retraction of the unjust charge, and endeavored to compensate and appease the injured woman, but she shook the dust of the house from her feet and betook herself to Brooklyn. Recently she accepted her present place."

"Do you mean to imply that she is – is – Bohemian?"

"That depends upon your interpretation of a very flexible term. I am told she conducts herself with strict propriety, reports Mr. Dane dead, and receives attentions from no one; but she is avowedly a socialist of the extreme type: belongs to labor organizations, attends their meetings, makes impassioned addresses, and, in fine, is a female Ishmael whose hands are much too pretty for such savage work. Did you notice an odd-looking, shambling man with preposterous spectacles who spoke to her? He is an agent of a band of Russian Nihilists seeking aid from sympathizers here. She is reported as possessing some education, advocates 'single-tax' and all the communistic vagaries that appeal to the great mass of toiling poor, the discontented and morose, as colored balloons captivate the fancy of children at a circus door. She frequents a hall down on the East Side, where at night the clans of the disgruntled assemble, and long-haired men and short-haired women – who absolutely believe that the only real 'devil is private property' – denounce wealth and preach their gospel of covetousness. Here we are at the ferry, and just in time to meet the boat."

CHAPTER VIII

Distinctly a *poseur*, Senator Kent had studied his physical good points with sufficient attention to establish the habit of exhibiting them advantageously, and to-night, as he leaned back in his easy chair, persons who knew him well understood that the fine leonine head was always turned adroitly to the right because a defect in one drooping eyelid found semiconcealment in the shadow of nose and brow. Political and financial prosperity had prevented or erased the lines that usually mark countenances of men of his age, and his smooth, handsome smiling face seemed to defy and rebut the testimony offered by grey hair and white mustache.

Suave and conciliatory, tactful yet tenacious of purpose, a carefully cultivated air of frankness ambushed subtle craftiness that rarely failed to accomplish schemes which the unwary never suspected. Unhampered by scruples, he had scaled the heights of success, climbing the ladder of cautious expediency, and claiming allegiance only to principles and policies that beckoned from the rung just above his head. Proverbial good nature, voiced by a musical, hearty laugh, won him social popularity, and even in congressional debate he never laid aside the polished armor of imperturbable courtesy. Despite the keen scrutiny of Eliza Mitchell during many years of intimate association, his character had remained a baffling enigma, and her suspicious distrust was allayed, in some degree, by his genial equanimity and amiable abdication of control in domestic details. That he wore a mask she had always believed, yet it fitted so perfectly she could not penetrate the steel mesh, and in no unguarded moment had its springs loosened.

The luxuriously furnished library was bright and warm with fire glow and gas light, and sweet with the breath of white azaleas heaped in a pale-pink bowl on the low mantel shelf. Only the click of the typewriter disturbed the stillness until Eglah rose from the instrument, covered it, and numbered the written pages, arranging them in a sheaf.

"All ready now, father, and Mr. Metcalf can incorporate these tables in the report you will need to-morrow. Do you wish to verify the figures?"

"Not necessary, my dear. You are usually accurate."

"Thanks for the sugar plum. You know exactly how sweet is your praise."

Coming forward, she sat down on the carpeted foot-board attached to his reclining chair, leaned her head against his knee, and stretched her fingers toward the fire. He laid one large dimpled hand on her shoulder, and she turned her cheek to touch it. After the lapse of some minutes the clock struck, and Eglah sprang up.

"Barely time to dress for the Secretary's dinner! Has the carriage been ordered?"

"Yes. I can doze a while longer, as I have to change only my coat, vest, and tie."

"Eglah, do you need my help in dressing, or will Octavia suit you best?" asked Mrs. Mitchell, who sat at a small table near the hearth, matching silk squares for an afghan.

"You can revise me finally, and punctuate me with additional pins when I come down. Don't let father oversleep himself."

Senator Kent straightened the folds of his padded dressing-gown, and through half-closed eyes watched the small hands hovering over silken scraps, and wondered, as he had often done before, what manner of man could have been the "overseer" husband for whom this grave, pretty, reticent, demure widow still mourned in black garments, relieved only by narrow white ruches at her throat and wrists.

The clock ticked softly, and the senator seemed asleep, when the ringing of the door bell roused him. Some moments passed before the library door opened and a servant entered.

"A note, sir. It was laid on top of the bell knob, and the messenger did not wait, for I looked up and down the street."

"Evidently of no importance, else the delivery would not have been so careless."

He lazily took an envelope from the silver salver and held it up.

"Senator Allison Kent,
Washington, D. C.
"*Strictly Personal.*"

Both the address and contents were type-written.

Intent on her patchwork, Eliza was bending over a mass of scarlet satin ribbon, when a strange sound startled her: not a cry, nor yet a groan – an anomalous smothered utterance of pain, as from a strong animal sorely stricken.

He had struggled to his feet, and the large, heavy body swayed twice, then righted itself, and he stood staring blankly at the red lily dado on the opposite wall, as though their crimson petals spelled some such message as foreshadowed doom to Babylon. One hand crushed the letter into an inside pocket of the dressing-gown, the other clutched his mustache, twisting it into knots.

The swift, inexplicable change of countenance could be compared only with the startled alertness of a drowsing fox when his dim, snug covert echoes the first far-off blast of the coming hunter's horn. In every life some alluring vision of Arden beckons and beguiles, and to this successful man, basking in the golden glamor of a satisfying attainment of his aim, came suddenly an ominous baying of the bloodhounds of retributive destiny.

"You have bad news, Judge Kent?"

He made no answer, and she seized his arm.

"What is the dreadful news that distresses you?"

As he turned his eyes upon her, all their light and color seemed faded to a dull glassiness, and his voice shook like a hysterical woman's.

"News – did you say? No – I have received no news. None whatever."

"Then what ails you? I shall call Eglah."

She turned, but he clutched her skirt.

"For God's sake, don't ever tell her! Why grieve the child? The truth is – " He caught his breath, and a sickly smile showed how his mouth trembled, as he swept his hand across his brow.

"You are sick?"

"Oh, yes – sick; that is it exactly. Sick – sick indeed. Some oysters I ate, and cheese; later I very foolishly drank ale."

"Then, sir, you must go to bed, and Eglah will send an explanation of your unavoidable absence from the dinner."

Upstairs a door was opened, and a sweet, girlish voice trilled two bars of a Venetian barcarolle.

Judge Kent threw out his arms appealingly.

"I must go to-night. For God's sake, don't let her know anything! Say nothing. I shall tell her I was a little faint from indigestion. Vile compound – oysters, ale, Roquefort! Promise me to hold your tongue; not for my sake, but hers. I am obliged to attend this dinner, and it would spoil her evening if she knew how deadly sick – I – really was a moment ago. Promise me."

"Very well. I suppose you know best what concerns you most. I promise."

"You are the only woman I ever knew upon whom I could rely to hold her tongue. Now, quick as you can, bring the decanter of brandy to my room. Amuse the child with her frills and finery while I dress. I must have a little time."

When she carried the brandy to his door, the hand that grasped it was icy, and the other tugged ineffectually at his white tie.

Humming her boat-song, Eglah trailed silken draperies down the winding stairs and into the library, where she courtesied low to Eliza and swept her train – like a peacock's plumes – up to the grate, putting one slippered foot on the brass fender.

She was gowned in green crêpe of an uncommon tint, that held multitudinous silvery lights in its crinkled texture, and when she moved they glistened and played hide and seek in the clinging folds. Around her fair, full throat a rope of emeralds coiled twice.

"Am I all right – ready for publication and criticism? The damp weather makes my hair so curly I can scarcely keep it in line. Ma-Lila, the clasp of my necklace feels a little rickety, so I must ask you to move it around in front, and cover it securely with this."

She held out a diamond butterfly, and Eliza fastened it in the gold-wire links of the emerald chain. As she settled the jewels in place, she stooped and kissed one lovely white shoulder.

"Solemn little mother! I know exactly what you are thinking. That I am as frivolous a creature as grandmother's heirloom butterfly? You should not lose sight of the psychic symbolism of this much slandered and despised insect. Little white butterflies whose wings are all powdered with shining star-dust are the souls of babies – "

"Pagan nonsense that I won't listen to. Moreover, you ought to be ashamed to jest about your immortal soul as if it were yours exclusively – to play with as you would a ball."

"You darling Puritan! If you do not unlace yours it surely will smother. Really, I thought it was orthodox to believe that in the very last analysis and final adjustment of personal property one's own soul was one's solitary chattel that defied and survived the confiscation of death. Motherkin, don't scold! Kiss me good night, and help me with my cloak, so that I shall not muss all this lace jabot. Is not father ready?"

Eliza laid her long, white velvet cloak around her and tied the ribbons under her chin.

"What keeps father so long? I heard the front door bell ring; is there a visitor?"

"No visitor. Only some document left for the Judge. He is dressing."

Eglah went to the door of an adjoining room and rapped.

"Father, we shall be late. Unpardonable, you know, at a formal dinner."

"Almost ready. Old men need more time for repairs than young beauties."

When he came in, walking briskly, with his overcoat on his arm, Eliza saw that he had rallied surprisingly. Brandy reinforced his nerves, and the cautious, defensive tactics of a lifetime availed now to readjust and restore his equipoise of manner. A flush showed on the full cheeks, and his eyes shone like those of a cat in some dim corner.

"Inexcusably late, father! What can we say?"

"Come, my dear; leave that to me. I shall simply apologize by telling the truth – a spell of indigestion delayed me, but I felt sure one of the Secretary's famous cocktails would rejuvenate me."

Women, secure in their heritage of personal charms, resent as the most unpardonable of affronts to their mental acumen explanations that do not explain, and Mrs. Mitchell was thoroughly exasperated by the flimsiness of the deception which she was expected to accept with unquestioning credulity. Silence under strenuous conditions she could have condoned, because it left her the resource of conjecture; an honest confession of vitally grave business complications she would have regarded as confidential, and loyally held inviolate, but "oysters, ale, and Roquefort" was a stinging challenge to her feminine intuitions. Judge Kent's arrested assertion: "The truth is – " recalled Mrs. Maurice's estimate of his veracity when she had applied to him the sarcasm: "He holds truth too precious to be wasted on everybody." That he cowered under some unexpected blow she was quite sure, but her solicitude included him only as his interests involved Eglah's welfare, and any intimation of coming disaster fluttered this foster-mother, as the faint, grey shadow of a hawk high in the heavens startles a hen into signalling her brood. Ignorant of the quarter whence trouble might approach, how could she shield Eglah, whose safety had been committed to her guardianship? Had she the right to discover the contents of a note that "contained no news"? Did his falsehood entitle her to pry into his correspondence? All the smothered distrust of years was acutely intensified, and she rose and walked to his room. A bright light shone through the transom, but when she turned the bolt she found the door locked. During her residence in the house this precaution had never before been taken, hence

she knew the note had not been destroyed. Returning to the library, she rang the bell, and the butler responded promptly.

"Have you locked up the silver? Bring me the key. Close the house for the night. Judge Kent will be out late. Tell Octavia to have good fires upstairs, and then she need not wait for Miss Eglah, as I shall sit up till she comes; and, Watson, you can go home. Should the front door bell ring, I shall be here."

More than once she had suspected that the senator was interested in financial speculations, and, though Eglah's fortune had been carefully tied up beyond his reach, she began to fear he might by some devious process jeopard it. "Hypothecating securities" was a bristling phrase she had never quite comprehended, but it symbolized an ogre she must outwit.

In one corner of the library stood a tall, brass-mounted chiffonier filled with papers, and above it hung an engraving. Behind, and entirely concealed, was a door opening into a small bathroom that formed an alcove in the senator's apartment. After an hour had passed, Mrs. Mitchell placed her shoulder against the chiffonier, that rolled easily on its castors, and she slipped behind it. There was no key in the lock, but a slender steel bolt slid horizontally under her hand, and the door opened a few inches only, barred by a table, which she succeeded in pushing aside. Lifting the portière inside, she entered the sleeping-room, and found the *robe de chambre* hanging over the back of a chair. The pockets were empty, the drawers of the bureau locked, but under the pillow on the bed she thrust one hand and drew out the object of her search. It contained neither date nor signature, and was type-written in purple ink on thin paper bearing no water-mark.

> "A friend to you and to yours believes it a genuine kindness to inform you that the identity of 'Ely Twiggs' has been discovered, and hopes an early knowledge of this fact may be useful to you."

She replaced the note beneath the pillow, returned to the library, and rolled back the chiffonier. After all, she had ended her quest in a cul-de-sac. Turning the gas jets low, she sat watching the blue flicker that danced like witch-lights in the grate, and once she smiled at her own discomfiture, realizing that her attempt was futile as would be the trial of a Yale key to open a "combination" vault lock, the arrangement of which was unknown. Keenly alert, she heard the rattle of the night-latch, the closing of the front door, and, after a moment, Judge Kent came slowly into the room. At first he did not notice her presence, and in this brief unguarded interval she saw the countenance without its habitual mask – a face gloomy, perturbed, unnaturally flushed, with restless eyes gleaming like those of a jaded, hunted forest animal.

"Ah – Mrs. Mitchell! Sitting up for Eglah? Didn't she tell you she was going from the dinner to the cotillon? Herriott will see her home. It is a shame to have kept you up, but girls are so thoughtless."

"Eglah is never that, and I knew she would be late at the cotillon. I waited downstairs solely to see you."

"Very kind, I am sure; but I feel much better, thank you. Indeed, I may say I have fully recovered from that sudden, intolerable spell of nausea. You are very good to worry over that little attack, but pray think no more about it. I shall abjure Welsh rarebit and oysters in future. At my time of life, pneumogastric nerves get their innings."

Brightening the light in the gas globe over the mantel, she approached and confronted him.

"Judge Kent, I am not 'worrying' over the condition of your digestive organs, but I do feel deeply interested in the nature of the trouble that has come upon you so unexpectedly, and I cannot sleep until I tell you what I have done to-night. Whatever injures you wounds Eglah, and solely on her account I felt justified in taking a step that no weaker motive could have sanctioned. I sat up to tell you that when I found you would not trust me with the truth, I hunted it by reading the note that fell this evening like a bombshell. I have no hesitation in confessing the fact. I am here for that purpose."

She set her small, white teeth grimly and clasped her hands behind her.

He looked down at her, as a mastiff at a barking pug, and, throwing back his head, laughed heartily, clapping his hands softly.

"Bravo, Methodist burglar! You seem an expert, and find locked doors no barrier. What would Eglah think of your breaking into my room, and into my correspondence?"

"Shall we ask her? Only my promise not to mention this matter to her prevents me from telling her as quickly and frankly as I have told you. May I speak to her?"

"Madam, you possess an arsenal of mental reservations, and I doubt whether you can keep a promise."

"I can be silent against my will, and even in defiance of my judgment. Try me."

"Then consider yourself on probation. Where is my hoax of a note?"

"Under your pillow, where you left it."

His eyes twinkled, and his voice shook as with suppressed laughter.

"A woman's curiosity cost us Eden. My dear little lady, what did you discover in my anonymous letter?"

"That 'Ely Twiggs' is a terrible menace to your peace of mind."

"Would you like a translation of that ugly occult phrase? It is merely a telegraphic cipher. You have conjured up a malignant chimera; rest assured it is only a dingy red-paper balloon, with a flickering taper inside. Good night. Pray allow no compunctious qualms to disturb the peace of your Methodist conscience."

"No church is responsible for errors of its members, and I wish I could believe it possible that your Episcopal conscience will allow you a night of refreshing sleep. For my dear child's sake, I hoped you would confide in me, and I regret that you withhold the truth. Good night, sir."

"Little foster-mother, remember your promise."

He held out his hand, but she declined the overture and walked away.

"My Methodist promise will bear any weight laid on it."

Without premonition, a sudden storm had swept over the city that night, and at two o'clock, when Eglah and Mr. Herriott went down the steps to enter their carriage, the stone pavement held tiny pools and rills of water.

"Wait, Eglah, your slippers will be soaked."

"I can run across on tiptoe."

"You shall not! Permit me."

He stooped, lifted her from the lower step, and placed her on the cushioned seat.

"How strong you are!" she said, laughing, as he entered the carriage and sat down opposite, not beside her.

"Physically – yes. If my force of will equalled my nerves and muscles, I should be a much happier man."

"Infirmity of will? You, – the most obstinate man I ever met! How little you know yourself!"

"You are so sure you read me aright, perhaps you understand why all the strength of my manhood has not saved me from staking my earthly hopes on a venture that may be fatal. Can you explain?"

"Is it some scientific scheme? Some theory that may prove a delusion?"

"It is simply the possibility that the woman I love will not give me her heart. Eglah, I have been patient. I wished you to see and know other men – to form your own ideal, to compare me with some more brilliant and attractive – before I asked for your love. Since the day I first saw you – a grieved child – at Nutwood, my heart has been entirely yours, and all my future is gilded with the hope of a home in which you will reign as my wife. I bring you the one unshared love of my life. May I have the blessed assurance that you will accept it?"

For some seconds Eglah neither moved nor spoke; then she slipped down on her knees and laid her head on his hands, that were folded together.

"Mr. Noel – dear Mr. Noel – I will never marry. Only one man in all the world is necessary to my happiness, and he is my father. What you tell me now is a surprise – a painful surprise to me – because I never thought of you as of some who flattered and even some who have asked my hand. You were always my best friend, my wise, sympathetic companion, and I never could think of you as desiring or needing any woman's affection. You have seemed unlike other men I meet in society, and I believed you cared most for books and scientific experiments, though I thought you always felt a very kind, friendly, brotherly interest in me. Oh, I am so sorry you have uttered such words to-night! You must know I am not like other women in our circle, and I have no intention of marrying. If I should select any man to love it might be you, because I respect and trust you so profoundly; but that could never happen to me. What have I inadvertently done to make you misjudge my feelings? You must forgive me. I never suspected."

As she pressed her face against his hands he felt her lips trembling, and his struggle for self-control was short and fierce. After a moment, he raised and replaced her on the seat and sat beside her.

"I can reproach only myself for a delusion that costs me more than you will ever know. In my loneliness the dream was so beautiful. I could not resist its fascination. Dear little girl, you are the only one I ever wished or asked to be my wife, and because you are so precious to me I will not surrender my hope, unless you force me. Remember the long years I have waited for you. In time, perhaps, you might learn to care for me. May I entreat you to try?"

"Mr. Noel, I trust you, I admire you – in a way I feel attached to you – but I must tell you the truth. I shall marry no one, not even you."

"Then I shall never repeat my folly. Be sure I will vex you no more; but there is something you can do to lessen my pain. If trouble or disaster or sorrow overtake you, will you promise to confide in me, to allow me to share it, as if I were indeed that elder brother you have tried to believe me?"

"Yes, Mr. Noel. After father I will always turn next to you, and you must not condemn me because, unintentionally, I have been so unfortunate as to hurt you."

"For several reasons I wish your father to know at once all that has been said to-night. He is aware of my intentions, and kind enough to approve them. One final request I trust you will not refuse me. The visit to my house on the Lake has been definitely arranged, and I particularly desire that no change of plan should be made. Henceforth no word of mine will ever recall this interview, and during your stay under my roof I assure you no allusion to my dead hopes shall annoy you. Trust me, and come."

The carriage stopped at Senator Kent's door. As Mr. Herriott led her up the steps, she noticed he barely touched her arm, and when he rang the bell she caught his hand between both of hers.

"Dear Mr. Noel – you do forgive me?"

A neighboring lamp shone full on his handsome face, pale and set, and a sudden consciousness of the unusual charm of his noble personality thrilled her. Withdrawing his hand, he held it behind him, and, as he looked down at her, his lips twitched.

"You have done me no wrong by simply following the true, womanly dictates of your pure heart. Marriage without genuine love is a degradation to which you could never stoop. I will love you always, always; but I find it hard to forgive myself for making utter shipwreck of a man's dearest aim in life. Good night."

As Mrs. Mitchell opened the door, he turned away and went swiftly into the street.

"Eglah! What is the matter? You are crying."

"How can I help it when I have hurt the noblest man in all the world – except father? My one true friend, who never failed to be good to me!"

"You have refused to marry Mr. Herriott? My baby, you will never find his equal. Your father can scarcely forgive this defeat of his pet scheme, dating from the time you were ten years old."

CHAPTER IX

"Herriott, I owe you an apology for coming so late, but feel quite sure you will pardon a delay that was unavoidable. I have kept your dinner waiting half an hour."

"No matter, provided you bring an appetite that can defy overdone fish. I am glad it is only delay, and not total failure. Vernon, you look so spent, may I venture to offer your reverence a tonic – club-labelled 'cocktail'? It is the best antidote I dare suggest for the slow method of suicide you have adopted."

"Thank you – no."

"Then come in to dinner."

"I wasted the whole afternoon trying to find a boy down on the East Side, but when at last I reached the house I was told he had moved from that neighborhood. He is a soloist at St. Hyacinth's, and I had promised him a booklet."

"Leighton Dane?"

"Yes. What do you know of him?"

"That he will sing no more at St. Hyacinth's. Henceforth his solos belong to choirs beyond the stars. The boy is slowly dying of consumption."

"When did you see him?"

"A few days ago. He is at No. 980 – Street, Brooklyn. Your cousin Eglah asked me to keep an eye on him. Poor little lad! His battle with pain and loneliness is pathetic, and I rather think the end is not far off."

"Loneliness? Who takes care of him?"

"His mother is away all day at her work, but an old German and his wife living on the same floor of the tenement look after him as best they can."

"Could you deliver the book to him?"

"If you wish it; but why not make another effort to see him?"

"My hands are so full. In two days I must run down to Washington, and then back home, where I am needed. How luxurious your quarters are! Less like a bachelor's den than one would expect."

"Next week I give up these rooms, and when I chance to be in the city shall live at the club."

"Is not this decision rather sudden?"

"No. For some time I have contemplated another expedition to Arizona and Montana, in quest of prehistoric records needed for an anthropological paper that Professor De Wette asked me to contribute to the next volume of Reports."

"What date have you fixed?"

"About the middle of July, immediately after the visit to 'Greyledge,' which Senator Kent and Eglah have promised as soon as Congress adjourns. I am sorry you could not arrange to join the small 'house party,' and rest yourself by fishing in the Lake, instead of the turbid pools of humanity."

"What about Calvary House? We expect you there."

"That pleasure must be deferred; but I have thought a good deal about your need of more ground there, and believe I have found just what you want. Come into the library, it is cooler, and I have some papers for you. You know the Ravenal lands – some twenty acres – lie across "Tangled Brook," west of your lines. The property was sold recently by the trustees and my agent bought it. Now you can easily bridge the stream, using the foundation of the old paper-mill dam, and by extending your fences cover the whole. I know the old farmhouse was burned years ago, but those pasture lands are fine, and that hill sloping south will make a good vineyard. Here are all the papers, and my deed to the Brotherhood. Stop! No thanks, not a word, or I cancel the transfer. Some day, when I visit you, I may not be welcome, because I promise you now, if your stewardship does not suit me and things seem mismanaged, I will most certainly turn you all out."

Father Temple laid the bundle of papers on the table and grasped Mr. Herriott's hand, pressing it warmly, but something in the bright, steady grey eyes warned him to attempt no verbal expression of gratitude.

His host lighted a cigar, and drew from a stand near his elbow a portfolio tied with purple tape.

"Does your reverence ever waste time now in sketches and water-color?"

"Life is far too strenuous for such trifling."

"How do you know that some day you will not be required to dig up that buried talent and answer the charge of neglecting to bring in the expected interest? Nature intended you for one of her artistic interpreters, and if you had been loyal to her commission you might rank to-day as R.A. Last summer I was searching an old trunk for a college text-book, when I happened to find some of your drawings, that were packed by mistake with my luggage in the bustle of leaving the university."

From the pile of loose sheets he held up one, and, after a moment's survey, in which he turned it at various angles, he handed it to his guest.

Father Temple was leaning back in a cushioned arm-chair, and against the violet velvet background his pale, placid, scholarly face was sharply silhouetted. Listlessly raising the sketch sidewise, so that a gas jet on his left shone upon it, he looked at it. The profound repose that habitually rested on his countenance broke up swiftly, as a sleeping pool shivers when a stone is hurled into its motionless depths. His lips whitened, and he laid the paper as a screen over his eyes. Mr. Herriott crossed the floor to the door of the dining-room, and, loitering deliberately, ordered coffee. When he came back, followed by a servant bearing coffee and liqueurs, the priest was standing at an open window, and in the clenched fingers of the hands clasped behind him the sketch quivered as though shaken by the wind.

"Close the door, Hawkins, and when I want you I will ring. Come, Vernon; I remember your fondness for coffee, and this is good and piping hot."

The thin figure in the girded cassock shook his head and leaned out of the window, staring up at the golden stars throbbing above the roar and din of the crowded street.

After some minutes, during which the host rattled cups and glasses, Father Temple walked up and down the room, then came back to the table. The despairing sorrow in his deep, soft eyes made Mr. Herriott rise instantly.

"Vernon, have I wounded you by my reminiscent babble of college days?"

Without a word, the arms of the priest were lifted to the man towering over him, and he laid his head on the shoulder of one who had never failed him.

"Temple, forgive me, dear old fellow, if I have broken rudely into some sacred, sealed chamber."

"You have done me a priceless kindness in restoring my picture, but with it comes the hour of humiliation I always knew must sooner or later overtake me. Noel, your good opinion is so precious to me I shrink from losing it. I have dreaded your condemnation next to that of my God. You always trusted and respected me, even in what you deemed foolish monkish extremes, and yet – and yet – "

"Sit down, and pull yourself together. You have fasted and prayed your starved nerves into a fit of womanish hysteria. I am no father confessor for you, and if you are not the true, loyal man I have believed you all these years, then, while you are under my roof, I prefer not to find out that you are a hypocrite."

He pushed his friend back into the easy chair, and handed him a glass of chartreuse, but it was put aside.

"Noel, you must hear me. After the first bitterness I shall feel relieved that you know literally all I can tell, and then you will understand many things in my life. To-day I am what I am, simply and solely in the hope of expiating the sin of my youth. Noel, the sin of my youth found me out early, and this life I lead is an attempted atonement. Do you begin to understand?"

Mr. Herriott held up the sketch, and, as he struck it sharply with his fingers, his face darkened.

"Whose portrait is this?"

"The woman – the young girl – whose life I blighted."

"Good God! Blighted? Is your villainy so black?"

"I am Father Temple, vowed to celibacy, and somewhere in the wide, cruel world a wife and child of mine may have gone down to perdition because I was a coward – a vile coward, too base for a brave man to recognize. I knew you would despise me, and I kept silent as long as I could. Do you wonder?"

Mr. Herriott stood over him like an avenging Viking.

"You betrayed a woman? Wife, or victim of – "

"Both. I married and I deserted her."

"The marriage was legal – no swindling sham?"

"Legal in form, though I was a minor and she a mere child."

"And you ensnared her deliberately, intending to – "

The priest sprang to his feet and his eyes flashed.

"I loved her, and married her secretly, and intended no wrong; but before I could publicly claim her – before I was of age and dared to face my father with the fact of my marriage – I lost her. She disappeared as completely as if the ocean rolled over her."

"Is this the unvarnished truth? There is nothing worse, nothing more heinous than what you have told me?" Mr. Herriott breathed quickly, as his keen, cold eyes searched severely the wan face before him.

"I have told you the whole, bitter truth."

"Then I have not entirely lost my friend. Now sit down; begin at the beginning of this black business, and let me try to share your load of trouble. Don't hurry – be explicit. Keep back nothing. If you intended no wrong, there must and shall be found some way to right it."

"Too late! If you take a white flower and inhale its perfume, and then carelessly drop it where hurrying crowds are sure to trample it into the dust, what hope that, search as you may, you will ever find it, or, finding it, be able to restore the torn, soiled, ruined petals? Wherever she is, no matter what she has become, what sin and shame stain and defile her, she is my wife. I swore before God I would take her for my wife, 'for better, for worse,' and though it is my fault – and mine only – that I did not publish the marriage, I have kept my vows, and am dedicated to life-long celibacy. My boyish cowardice – what awful shipwreck it has made of two lives! You want the details? It is a shameful story, but not long. In the early summer of my nineteenth year I spent vacation in the far Northwest, at an advanced army station, Post – , where father was in command of his regiment. Hunting was fine but dangerous, as Indians on the frontier were ugly just then, and several tribes were painting for the war path. One hot afternoon, tramping back to camp with my rifle on my shoulder, I went down a steep, wooded hill to drink at a spring, and as I parted the thick growth I saw a cow chewing her cud, while a bare-footed girl stooped and milked into a cedar pail. She sprang up, much alarmed, and stood against a glowing background of scarlet rhododendrons. Her calico bonnet had fallen off, her sleeves rolled up showed her white, dimpled arms, and all over her head and shoulders the gold-colored hair was twisted into little curls and waves and tendrils that glittered like gilt wire. As she stared at me with large purplish-blue eyes, her bright red lips trembled, and – " He paused, and involuntarily wrung his thin white hands.

"I had seen handsome women, and many lovely girls, but never so exquisite a creature as this, and from that moment I lost reason, prudence, everything but conscience, and my heritage of honorable instincts. Nona Moorland was the daughter of a teamster attached to father's command; a brutal, rough man, whose second wife – a selfish, jealous virago – made the step-daughter's life a cruel burden. They occupied a log cabin just outside the Post parade grounds, and the girl was never allowed in sight of drill lines except when under convoy of the stepmother she assisted in carrying to headquarters the freshly laundered clothes of the officers. Having been forbidden, under threat of corporeal punishment, to speak to or be seen with any soldier, save in her father's cabin, she was

terrified at the danger of a discovery of our acquaintance; hence our interviews were secret, and adroitly arranged to elude suspicion. Her extraordinary personal beauty and gentleness of deportment more than compensated for illiteracy and humble origin, and after a few days I planned a clandestine marriage, to which she readily assented. The Post chaplain had made a pet of me, because I aided him in some botanical and geological tramps close to the frontier, and finally he consented to help us, provided his agency was never betrayed. We both swore we would not divulge his name or knowledge of our scheme, and so one starry night he and Hill, a private soldier who went as witness, stole out, and met Nona and me in a dense grove of trees near Moorland's cabin. There we were married according to the ritual of the Episcopal Church. I was not quite nineteen, she a slender girl just past her fifteenth birthday. Under the quiet stars that shone as our altar lights, we took solemn, life-long vows as husband and wife, and there, when a written certificate had been given to Nona, we all joined hands and pledged ourselves in the sight of God to keep the secret until I was of age, or thought it prudent to publish the marriage. To her I meant no more wrong than to myself, and kept to the form of law, knowing we were minors, and that no license legalized the ceremony which I believed and argued the Church sanctified. You knew my father sufficiently well to remember how terribly stern he was, how morose he often seemed, and I dared not defy him. For three weeks life was a brief vision of heaven to Nona and me. She was so lovely, so tender, so humbly conscious of her social inferiority and lack of education, so fired with an ambitious zeal for culture and improvement to fit herself for the circle where Colonel Temple's son was born to move. Then the bolt fell. A courier from the nearest telegraph station brought news that father had been promoted, was ordered to Washington, and would soon go abroad on some military commission. I begged to spend the remaining days of my vacation at Post – , but was sharply refused, and all things were ordered in readiness for our departure next day at sunrise."

Some overwhelming memory arrested the narrative, and Father Temple held the portrait sketch toward the light. Then he crossed his arms on the table and bowed his face upon them. The room was very still, and there seemed suddenly a startling insistence in the harsh sound of an organ that began to grind out "O promise me," on the pavement below. Mr. Herriott threw down a coin, closed the window, and resumed his seat.

"Noel, you must think me weak and unmanly. You are so strong yourself, you can scarcely – "

"Strong? I think if I had to carry your burden I should go out and hang myself."

"That last interview is a perpetual nightmare no noon sunshine ever dispels. Nona was frantic at the unexpectedly sudden separation, and she clung to me like a drowning child; but by degrees she accepted the inevitable, and her trust in me was supreme. She would be patient, and study books the chaplain would provide, and rely on him to forward her letters, and receive and find means to deliver mine. A full moon showed me her tearful face when we stood up to say good-bye. Oh, beautiful, tender, devoted, and pure as any lily God ever set to bloom in a wicked world! As I took her in my arms, she kissed me repeatedly, and I felt her lips tremble on mine as she sobbed:

"'No matter what happens, you must trust me as perfectly as I trust you. If we keep true to each other, all the world can't part us long.'

"That farewell vision abides with me – sleeping, it walks as a living presence through my dreams; waking, it thrusts itself between me and my God; and when I kneel before the marble image of the Mother of my Lord, her holy face is hidden by that of my fair, sweet young wife. It has become an obsession from which I cannot escape. After I went east, two letters reached me; then, in the late autumn when father had sailed, I was stricken with typhoid fever, that kept me prisoner for three months, and the inflammatory rheumatism that followed it so completely wrecked me, I was carried to the country home of an aunt in Massachusetts, in whose care father left me when he went to Europe. In my convalescence I wrote repeatedly under cover to the chaplain, signing only my middle name, Pembroke, but heard nothing until the next June. While still on crutches, I went for a day's visit to college to collect and pack my belongings, and there I found one dusty, mislaid letter from Nona,

full of sad forebodings. The chaplain had wandered too far away to a mountain range, accompanied only by an orderly, who reported on his return that his companion had been scalped by Indians while he was examining some rock ledges, and that he had barely escaped by desperate riding. A cavalry troop, sent out to recover the body and avenge the death, was ambushed in a wooded defile and four troopers were killed, among the number Hill. The letter had been written in January – five months before. Both witnesses of our marriage in the grave! Anxiety and distress brought on renewal of rheumatic fever, and I was crippled in hands and feet for six terrible weeks. One day, as I was trying my ability to walk about the room, a delayed letter was forwarded from college – the last I ever received from Nona. Her father had died very suddenly from congestion of the lungs, and his wife returned immediately to her family in Arkansas; but because of my poor Nona's condition, which had subjected her to severe abuse and horrible accusations, the stepmother had cast her off, refused her recognition, and abandoned her. Because she refused to divulge the name of her husband, her declaration that she was a wife only increased the torrent of insults that swept her beyond the pale of respectability. She wrote that one friend – the only person who believed her assertion that she had been lawfully married – was just then leaving the Post for his old home, his time of service having expired, and he had kindly carried her in a covered wagon to a small village some days' travel east of the Post, where he found shelter for her until after the birth of her child. She begged I would send money to pay her board and also to enable her to travel east and live near me, because she was so terror-stricken among strangers. The same day my father summoned me to Europe, having decided I should attend lectures in Germany and at Oxford. By express, I forwarded the money to Nona, in accordance with her directions – "Care of Delia Brown, Thompsonville, – Territory" – and I wrote her, explaining all the circumstances, assuring her I would join her as soon as I could travel, and that henceforth we should never be separated. A few hours later I was laid up with a severe relapse, and when, finally, I started west in September, I was still so lame any movement was torture. At last the stage coach put me down at the cluster of log houses called Thompsonville, and by the aid of crutches I found my way to a low, dark cabin of two rooms, where Delia Brown made a scanty living by washing and ironing for men attached to a party of prospecting miners. She was a gaunt, sinister looking woman from Maine, with small, deep-set, faded yellow eyes that bored like a gimlet, and as she took a pipe from her ugly bluish lips and greeted me my heart sank. Where was Nona? Gone – with the man who brought her there, and who 'paid well for her keep.' When? Several weeks ago. Did she receive my letter, and had the money reached her? Yes, the money had been delivered to her – Delia Brown – and she had given it to the woman Nona, in the presence of one Josh' Smith. My letter had seemed to terrify the woman, and as soon as she knew I was coming she went away suddenly, saying she was going to New Orleans, and she and the man could take care of the baby. What was the man's name? He called himself Lay' Walker, but she doubted 'if he was not somebody else, and folks had their suspicions about the whole affair.' The baby boy was four months old when the man and woman took it away, but it was 'such a poor, puny, ailing child it had little chance to live.' What I suffered then only God will ever know, but faith in Nona sustained me while I went from cabin to cabin, receiving on all sides confirmation of Delia Brown's statements from women who had met her, and also from the mail and express agent – Josh' Smith – who assured me he had delivered the letter and package of money addressed to Nona Moorland, care of Delia Brown, to the latter, and exhibited her receipt. Lay' Walker was described as a very 'handsome Spanish-looking young fellow,' and he and the woman seemed fond of each other. He spent his money freely on her, and talked about Florida and banana growing, and said they wanted to get to New Orleans, where his friends had a schooner running in the West India fruit trade. After an exhaustive search, I made my way to New Orleans and engaged police assistance, but no clue could be found. Then I arranged advertisements to run six months, and went on to Pensacola and to Tampa. I advertised in two Florida newspapers, asking Nona Moorland to write to me, care of my father's lawyer in Boston. No response, no word, no hint ever reached me. When December arrived and I had no tidings, I deposited money in a Boston bank to the

credit of Nona Moorland, and leaving instructions that all mail matter should be forwarded promptly to me, I sailed for Europe, shattered in body, almost hopeless, and the tortured prey of remorseful regret at the awful consequence of my midsummer madness."

A nervous shiver seized him, and he lifted the chartreuse to his colorless lips.

Mr. Herriott's sinewy brown hand closed over the cold white fingers half hidden in the folds of the black cassock.

"And the woman, Delia Brown? What became of her?"

"How should I know?"

"There lies the crux of this dreadful entanglement. She duped you."

"Possibly. When I left Thompsonville she was preparing to remove to Maine, where she had relatives. I doubted her as long as I could; but nearly eleven years of cruel silence have slowly destroyed every vestige of hope, or of faith in Nona's loyalty. Understand, I do not accuse her – I dare not – I accept the blame. The fault was mine; she was an innocent, ignorant child, and what she considered my heartless, wicked desertion has thrown her into the jaws of destruction. If her soul is lost, God will require me to answer for the ruin – and that is the bitterness of my intolerable life. The immortal soul of my wife, of the mother of my child – a homeless, nameless, fatherless waif! I hold marriage indissoluble by human enactment, and while Nona lives I regard her as my wife, no matter what she has become, no matter into what shameful career she may have been driven by my cowardly course of action. When she believed I had abandoned her, the poor girl doubtless grew desperate. What I have told you is known only to my confessor, to the Superior of our Order in England, where I took my vows, and to my father, to whom I promptly confided everything when I joined him in Germany just before his death. That he refused to forgive me you will readily believe. This sketch you have restored to me was enlarged from one I made at Post – , and its loss greatly grieved me. Oh, Noel, stinging memory is more merciless than sharp-set hair shirts that fret the flesh. When I see happy mothers and children, their laughter smites my heart like an iron hand; and while I minister to the suffering outcast little ones in pauper homes, my bruised soul seems to hear the accusing, piteous cry of my own forsaken, lost lamb – thrown out to hungry wolves."

CHAPTER X

Sabbath quietude had laid a finger on thousands of metal lips that screamed the song of labor on other days, and the great city seemed almost asleep as Mr. Herriott entered his carriage at ten o'clock and gave the order, "Brooklyn – Fulton Ferry." After a restless night, spent in searching an old diary for dates and notes, he had gradually untied some knotted memories – vague and conflicting – and straightened a slender thread that might possibly guide to the identification of an elusive personality. On the seat in front of him a basket of purple grapes added their fruity fragrance to the perfume of a bunch of white carnations, and during the long drive the expression of perplexity which had knitted his brows relaxed into the alert placidity that characterized his strong face.

Summer heat, blown in by a humid south wind, touched the sky with an intense blue, against which one long, thin curl of cloud shone like a silver feather, and Brooklyn parks and lawns shook their green banners of grass blades and young, silken foliage. In the middle of a block of old brick tenement houses, Mr. Herriott entered an open door, where two children fought over a wailing black kitten, and went up the inner stairway to a narrow hall, on which opened several doors bearing cards inscribed with the name of occupants of the rooms. At one, labelled "Mrs. Dane," he rapped. It was opened partly, and held ajar.

"Well, who knocked?"

"One of Leighton's friends. Can I see him?"

"Not to-day. He is not well enough for visitors."

"May I come in and see you?"

"Why should you? What do you want?"

Before he could reply, a weak voice pleaded:

"Please, mother! It is Mr. Herriott: let him in. He has been so good to me – please – please!"

"If I do, you are not to talk and bring back that spell of coughing."

The door was swung fully open, and Mr. Herriott confronted "Juno."

"You are Mr. Herriott, as I supposed. Walk in, and excuse the confusion of the rooms. I was up all night, and have not put things in order."

She wore a dark skirt and white muslin sacque, loose at the throat, ungirded, and the sleeves were rolled up, exposing the symmetry of her dimpled white arms. A rich, lovely red stained her lips and cheeks – perhaps from embarrassment, probably from the heat of the oil-stove, on which, evidently, breakfast had been recently prepared. She pointed to an adjoining room, where Leighton lay on a cot close to the open window.

"Oh, sir, are they really for me?" as Mr. Herriott laid the basket and flowers beside him.

"Look, mother! Grapes, grapes! And the smell of the carnations! Was there ever anything so sweet? I don't know how to thank you, sir. I wish I could say something, but when my heart is full I just can't tell it."

His little hot hand caught Mr. Herriott's, and the thin fingers twined caressingly about it.

"You are not to thank me, and you must not talk. Remember, that was the condition upon which I was allowed to see you. Eat your grapes while your mother tells me about you."

"You will spoil him. I can't give him such luxuries as hothouse fruit and flowers, though now and then he has his bunch of violets."

"When was the doctor here?"

"Friday. He changed the medicine, but I can see no benefit as yet."

"If you think it would not tire him too much, I should like to take him out for a drive."

"Thank you, but I could not consent to that."

"Why not? The fresh air is balmy to-day, and would do him good. I have a carriage at the door, and if you are unwilling to trust the boy with me, I should be glad to take you also. May I?"

Her blue eyes glittered and her lips straightened their curves.

"Most certainly not."

"Pardon me, madam; my interest in your child – "

"Does not justify a man of your position in taking a 'department store saleswoman' to drive on Sunday through public places."

"Perhaps you are right. Then I shall efface myself promptly, and you and Leighton can keep the carriage as long as you like."

"Such favors I accept from no man."

"Not even to help your sick boy?"

She put her hand on the child's shining curls, and a world of tenderness glorified her velvet eyes.

"Not even for my very own baby could I incur such an obligation."

"Smell them, mother – like spice! Don't they make you think of the carnation garden in San Francisco, where Uncle Dane used to carry us?"

"How long ago was that, Leighton?" asked Mr. Herriott, watching the woman's face.

"Oh, it was when I was a little chap and wore frocks."

"Were you born in San Francisco?"

"No. He was born in – Territory."

"Mrs. Dane, can you tell me what became of the artist Belmont?"

"Why do you ask me that question?"

"In order to get an answer. He painted your face for his 'Aurora,' and the picture was photographed."

"Yes; I needed money, and Mr. Dane permitted him to come to our house for the sittings. That was my first and last experience as a model."

"I have met you before."

She straightened herself, and answered defiantly:

"Probably I have sold you gloves, or socks, or handkerchiefs – certainly not the right to meddle with my personal affairs."

"I went with a San Francisco friend to see a night school for women, which his mother had established. You were there."

"Yes, I was there two winters. Now, sir, have you a police badge hidden inside your coat? Are you playing reporter – disguised as a benevolent gentleman – hunting up the details of last night's meeting and riot at Newark? You know, of course, that I made a speech there?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.