

Carryl Guy Wetmore

# The Lieutenant-Governor: A Novel



Guy Carryl

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### I

#### THE FLY ON THE WHEEL

The offices of the Governor and the Lieutenant-Governor adjoined. Each had its ante-room, in which a private secretary wrote eternally at a roll-top desk, an excessively plain-featured stenographer rattled the keys of his typewriter, and a smug-faced page yawned over a newspaper, or scanned the cards of visitors with the air of an official censor. At intervals, an electric bell whirred once, twice, or three times; and, according to the signal, one of the trio disappeared into the presence of the august personage within.

A door connected the office of the chief executive with that of his lieutenant, but this was rarely opened by either, and then only after a formal tap and permission to enter had been given. It was a matter of general knowledge that the Governor and the Lieutenant-Governor were not in sympathy; but few, even among the intimates of either, were aware how deep, and wide, and hopelessly impassable was the gulf which lay between them. This was due not alone to disparity in age, though twenty-eight years separated the white-haired Governor from his handsome subordinate, who had been nominated to this, his first public office, on his thirtieth birthday; nor was it wholly a difference between the experience of the one and the inexperience of the other. The point of view of the veteran is, naturally, not that of the novice, particularly in politics. That the enthusiasms of Lieutenant-Governor Barclay should have been the disillusionments of Governor Abbott, and his pitfalls his senior's stepping-stones, — this was to be expected. The root of their dissimilarity lay deeper. It was nothing less than mutual distrust which kept the connecting door closed day after day, and clogged the channel of coöperation with the sharp-pointed boulders of antagonism.

The convention which nominated the successful ticket of the preceding year had been a veritable chaos of contending factions. The labor delegates, encouraged by the unexpected strength of their representation, were not content with such nominal plums as had fallen to their share in former conventions. Led by Michael McGrath, an agitator whose native Irish eloquence, made keener and more persuasive by practice in bar-room forensics, brought him naturally to the fore, they threatened, at one stage of the proceedings, to carry all before them. The more conservative faction, its strength sapped by the formation, in its very ranks, of a reform party determined upon the fall of the "machine," was forced to yield ground. The reformers themselves, young men for the most part, distinguished by great ideals but small ability, were too few to impose their individual will upon their opponents, yet sufficiently numerous to make their support necessary to the success of either party. The usual smooth course of the convention, upset by this unlooked-for resistance from two quarters, staggered helplessly, and was on the point of coming to a deadlock. It was Michael McGrath's shrewd perception of the situation which solved the problem. In a brief, impassioned speech he laid the claims of his faction before the delegates, winding up with a stirring picture of the coöperation of labor and reform, now possible, which held the convention in spellbound silence for ten seconds after he had closed, and then set the hall ringing to cheers and vigorously plied hands and feet. For an instant he paused, with his arms folded, and his keen blue eyes sliding over the faces before him, and then played his trump card. At his signal, a banner, hastily prepared, was borne, slowly revolving, down the central aisle, and on this were boldly lettered the words which at the same moment McGrath was thundering from the platform: —

## **LABOR AND REFORM!**

**For Governor, ELIJAH ABBOTT**

**For Lieutenant-governor, JOHN HAMILTON BARCLAY**

McGrath had no need to look toward the labor faction for support. He knew what the name of Elijah Abbott meant in that quarter. His shifting glance was fixed upon the seats of the reform delegates, and a little smile twitched at the corners of his mouth, as he saw them rise with a cheer. Barclay was the chief spirit of their movement. They had not expected this recognition. But if, in the enthusiasm of unlooked-for victory, they did not perceive how little, in reality, was their gain, McGrath was far from being unaware how great was his own. Before the cheering of the now allied forces of labor and reform had fairly died away, he had moved that nominations were in order, and, ten minutes later, while the partisans of the "machine" were still endeavoring to collect their wits, the main business of the convention was an accomplished fact, and Abbott and Barclay were declared the regular Democratic nominees for Governor and Lieutenant-Governor of the state. In six weeks followed their election by a small plurality, and on the first of January the two men moved into their adjoining rooms, in the inexcusably unlovely state capitol, on the main hill of Kenton City, wherein they were, thenceforward, separated, one from the other, by two inches of Georgia pine and a practically infinite diversity of principle and prejudice.

From the first their relationship had been no better than an armed truce. Both were courteous men, the one because such was his policy, the other because he was to this manner born. There was no need for them to discuss their individual creeds. They tacitly accepted the fact that there was not a parallel between the two. From the moment when his election was assured by the returns, Abbott was candidly the man of the Labor – nay, more – of the Socialist party. McGrath and his associates manipulated him as readily as a marionette. The promises and pledges of the campaign were ruthlessly jettisoned. If Governor Abbott did not stand for anarchy, it was only because, for the moment, anarchy was not the demand of his party. Withal, he was dignified and self-possessed, robed in an agreeable suavity which became him at functions and ceremonials, and assured his popularity with those – and they were, as always, in the majority – who did not look below the surface.

Lieutenant-Governor Barclay had not been ten days in office before he realized the futility of resistance to the established order, as represented in his superior. He had accepted his nomination, and welcomed his election, with an almost Quixotic elation in the opportunity thus opened to him. He would accomplish – oh, there was no telling what Lieutenant-Governor Barclay would *not* accomplish!

He was standing at his office window now, staring out disconsolately over the sloping lawns of the capitol grounds, mottled with thin patches of snow, which had contrived to withstand the recent thaw, and he was telling himself, for the thousandth time, the dispiriting fact that, as a force for good or evil in the destiny of his state, he was no more significant than his stenographer's Remington or his secretary's roll-top desk. With all his ideals, with all those pledges which are infinitely more vital when made in private to one's conscience than when made in public to one's party, he found himself merely a cog in the state machinery – a cog, too, that, seemingly, might be skipped at any or every time, without in the least degree disturbing the progress of routine. On the few occasions, in the early days of their official relation, when he had ventured to set his will in opposition to that of the Governor, there had not been manifest in the latter's attitude even that spirit of resistance which spurs men to more active and resolute endeavor. Governor Abbott had smiled pleasantly upon him, and

then quietly shifted the conversation into other channels, with an air of selecting a topic more suited to his companion's comprehension. Finally, on one occasion, when Barclay had voiced his opinion with an energy which savored of rebuke, the Governor had gone further, and had asked calmly – "And what were you proposing to do about it?" After that Barclay had relinquished the unequal struggle, and resigned himself to the unavoidable conclusion of his impotency.

It is a situation which tries men's souls, this of utter helplessness in the face of plain duty. He could have no hope of making his position clear to the constituency to which he was responsible. Debarred on the one side from taking an active part in the administration of state affairs, and bitterly arraigned on the other on the grounds of inefficiency, laxity, and indifference to duty, the second month of office found John Barclay in a fair way to be ground to powder between the millstones of impuissance and hostile criticism. The men of his party who had, both in private conviction and public statement, based their hopes of political reform upon the frankly avowed platform of his principles, now passed him coldly, with a bare nod, sometimes with none whatever; the labor element jeered joyously at his attitude; the "machine" pointed to him as proof of the fallacy of the reform creed. It is easy to expect great performances from great promises, easier still to outline the duties and condemn the delinquencies of another, and not even Barclay's knowledge of his own good faith was sufficient compensation for the sneers of press and public which fell to his share. As he surveyed the dispiriting prospect from his office window, on that late February afternoon, he was near to resigning his position, and with it all further pretension to political prominence.

In the opinion of those competent to judge, the state of Alleghenia was going to the dogs. A press distinguished alike for the amplitude of its headlines and the pitiable paucity of its principles; a legislature of which practically every member had, not only a price, but such a price as the advertisements describe as being "within the reach of all;" a Governor who avowedly stood ready to sanction the most extreme pretensions of the notoriously corrupt party which had secured him his election, – here, surely, were good and sufficient reasons for the generously bestowed disapproval of Alleghenia's sister states. In all the *personnel* of her government there was but one man sincerely devoted to her advancement on the lines of integrity and non-partisanship. And that man was Lieutenant-Governor Barclay, whose influence on the trend of affairs was approximately that of the proverbial fly on the hub of the revolving wheel.

The Lieutenant-Governor had turned back to his desk, and was arranging his papers, preparatory to departing for the day, when his ears were greeted by the unusual and unwelcome sound of a rap upon the communicating door. Instinctively he braced himself for an unpleasant encounter before replying. It was his experience that the Governor's room was like to Nazareth of old, in that no good might be expected to issue therefrom. Nevertheless, as Governor Abbott entered, in response to Barclay's "Come!" it was difficult to believe that he was aught but what he appeared to be, – a courteous, conspicuously well-dressed and white-haired gentleman, of sixty or thereabouts, smooth-shaven save for chop side-whiskers of iron gray, with a habit of rubbing his hands, and an inclination from the hips forward which suggested a floor-walker. In brief, the Governor of Alleghenia seemed the type of a man who turns sideways and slips through narrow places, rather than run the risk of barking his elbows by a face-front advance. In reality he was somewhat less pliable than a steel rail.

"You are going?" he asked, seeing how Barclay was employed.

"I was thinking of it," replied the Lieutenant-Governor. "Of course, if there is anything" —

Governor Abbott seated himself on the edge of the desk, holding a lapel of his coat in each hand, and surveyed his subordinate from under his drooping eyelids, with his head cocked on one side.

"I believe you know Peter Rathbawne," he said.

"I do. I am engaged to his elder daughter."

"Ah! That is what I thought."

The Governor looked contemplatively at the ceiling, closing his right eye, and nibbling behind his pursed lips.

"Peter Rathbawne," he said, "is the second most obstinate man in Kenton City, if not in Alleghenia. I'm afraid he thinks he is the *most* obstinate. If so, he does me an injustice. His mills are the largest in the state. I am told that when they are running full strength they employ over four thousand hands."

"Something like that number, I believe," put in Barclay, as the Governor seemed to expect a reply.

"Ah! It is a pity for such an industry as that to be tied up on account of one man's obstinacy."

"I had not heard" – began Barclay; but Governor Abbott continued steadily, disregarding the interruption.

"Yesterday morning Mr. Rathbawne discharged fifteen employees on the ground of incompetency. It is hard to see exactly what Mr. Rathbawne means by 'incompetency.' These men were not newcomers. Some of them had been in the mills for as much as eighteen months. It seems as if he might have discovered the alleged incompetency long ago. It is more or less arbitrary, one might say, this discharging men by wholesale, as it were."

"I suppose," commented Barclay, "that a man may do as he will with his own."

"Ah!" said the Governor, lifting his hands from his lapels with a little gesture of deprecation, but immediately replacing them. "But *can* he? A man in Peter Rathbawne's position has a responsibility to fulfill toward the community. He cannot beggar men for a caprice – because his horse has gone lame, or his breakfast has not agreed with him. He must show reasons – give an accounting. He must be fair."

"Oh, when it comes to fairness," laughed the other, "I assure you, Governor Abbott, you won't find Mr. Rathbawne's equal this side of the Pacific. He's famous for square dealing."

"He *has* been," corrected the Governor. "In the present instance he seems to have fallen below standard. He has declined to reconsider his decision in the case of the discharged men. What's worse, he has flatly refused to see the committee appointed by the Union."

"I'm not surprised at that," said Barclay slowly, fingering a paper-cutter on the desk before him. "Mr. Rathbawne is peculiar in one respect; he supports and considers the Union in every other. But he has always insisted upon his right to discharge the hands at will, and without giving reasons. Incompetency is only a word which is used to cover more serious causes."

"Well, he's wrong," said the Governor, with a heat unusual to him. "He's dead wrong, Mr. Barclay, and he will find it out before he's a day older."

"Do you mean" —

"I mean that if the men in question are not taken back before to-morrow noon, every man, woman, and child in the employ of the Rathbawne Mills will be out on strike. The question is, what is Peter Rathbawne prepared to do?"

The silence that followed was broken only by the tap, tap, tap of the Lieutenant-Governor's paper-cutter on the silver-mounted blotter. Presently he looked up and met the Governor's eye.

"If you want *my* opinion, sir," he answered, "it is that Mr. Rathbawne would fight such a point to a standstill. He's sole owner of the mills, and he's a rich man. He has always treated his employees as if they were his own children. If they turn on him now for something which, from their experience of his character, they must know was fair and justifiable" —

"But *was* it?" interrupted the Governor.

"I don't know the facts, sir, but I know Peter Rathbawne," said Barclay, throwing back his head, "and I can say, with clear conviction, that it *must* have been. If, as you suggest, the hands go out, I think he would close down the mills for a year, and go abroad. He's a man who doesn't argue; he simply acts. I fancy there wouldn't be much opposition left by the time he wanted to reopen."

"Provided always that there were anything left to reopen," suggested the Governor softly.

"The state troops have more than once proved their ability to assure the sanctity of property," answered his subordinate, with a touch of the old pride with which he had assumed office.

"Hum!" said Governor Abbott. "But calling out the militia is a serious matter, Mr. Barclay, to say nothing of the expense entailed. Considering that the difficulty would be due entirely to the obstinacy of one man – er – one might not feel justified" —

He hesitated briefly under the Lieutenant-Governor's keen glance, and then swerved from this line of suggestion.

"What I wanted to say was this: You are a friend of Mr. Rathbawne's, – something more than a friend, indeed. No doubt he has a respect for your opinion, as you have for his. Now, if in the course of a quiet chat – it will have to be to-night – you should point out the situation that threatens him, the distress that a strike will cause, the probable destruction of his property, perhaps he might consent to reinstate the discharged men to-morrow morning."

"It would be a surrender of principle, to which he would never consent," said Barclay firmly. "Of that I am sure. Moreover, sir, I should be speaking against my convictions were I to advise him to adopt such a course."

The Governor's lip wrinkled slightly.

"The Union is prepared to do the right thing by the man who settles this question," he said.

"I hope you don't mean that!" exclaimed Barclay. "You are the first man to make such a suggestion to me. Pardon me, Governor Abbott, but I cannot but think the executive chamber of the capitol of Alleghenia a singular place for it to be mentioned."

The Governor held up his hand.

"You misunderstand me," he said. "One would suppose I had offered you a purse! I mean simply that the popularity of the man who averts this strike will be an assured fact. He would be the idol of the working people, and hardly less esteemed by the element of capital. Moreover, he would be doing a humane and merciful thing. You are the only man who is in a position to approach Rathbawne, and, if you will excuse the suggestion, I think you can hardly afford to throw away the chance. As it is, you – er – you are not what might be called popular, Mr. Barclay."

This time the silence was broken by a single sharp little click – the latch of the connecting door slipping into place. The Lieutenant-Governor sank slowly into his revolving chair, tipped back, swung round a half circle, and stared out disconsolately over the sloping lawns of the capitol grounds, mottled with thin patches of snow.

## II

# THE ODDS AGAINST YOUNG NISBET

Young Nisbet leaned forward in his chair.

"And I've been thinking," he added, "that perhaps – that perhaps" —

"That perhaps what?" asked the junior Miss Rathbawne, leaning forward in hers.

"If I don't have tea *instantly*," said her mother, with profound conviction, as she came ponderously through the portières, tugging at her gloves, "I shall expire! How de do, Mr. Nisbet. *Do* sit up straight, Dorothy, my dear."

She sank heavily into a low chair, which brought her within the radius of lamp-light at the tea-table, and was thus revealed as a lady of generous proportions, with a conspicuous absence of features, and no observable lap. In speaking, she displayed a marked partiality for undue emphasis. Sublimely unconscious of the depression induced by her advent, she continued to talk, as she pulled off her gloves, which were a size too small, and came away with reluctance, leaving imprints of the stitching on her pudgy pink hands.

Young Nisbet surveyed her with a kind of mute despair. He was a very average young American, very conventionally in love, and the trifling remnant of self-assertiveness which had triumphed over the crescent humility natural to his condition inevitably evaporated into thin air at the approach of Mrs. Rathbawne; and always, as he was doing now, he turned in his toes excessively when she was present, hitched at his right trouser-leg, where the crease passed over his knee, and looked first at her, and then at the floor, and then at her again, with the purposeless regularity of a mechanical toy.

There was a tremendous and highly significant rattling of cups, saucers, and silver spoons, as Dorothy Rathbawne prepared her mother's tea. All things considered, one found something very admirable about Dorothy at such a time as this. It was not complete submission, still less was it open revolt, but savored of both, and was incomparable as an attitude toward Mrs. Rathbawne. On some occasions it was almost as impossible to get on with Mrs. Rathbawne as it would have been, on others, to get on without her. The which, nowadays, is more or less true of all parents. And children.

"Natalie and your Aunt Helen got out at the florist's," went on the good lady, "but I came straight on, and sent the carriage back for them. I felt that I *couldn't* exist an *instant* longer without my tea. I'm sure I don't see how Natalie *stands* it. She was out all morning in the brougham, too. You had best make enough for three cups, Dorothy – and *do* sit up straight, my dear! – and order Thomas to bring in some more tartines. They are *sure* to be hungry, and they are apt to come in at *any* moment."

"That is a family failing," said Dorothy venomously, from behind the kettle.

"Well, I'm *sure*, my dear," said Mrs. Rathbawne innocently, as she straightened her rings, and picked an imaginary speck out of one of her round, flat nails, "there is no disgrace at all in a healthy appetite. I'm thankful we all have it – though as for your Aunt Helen, *hers* is about like that of a fly."

"Flies have very good appetites – judging from all I've seen, that is," said Dorothy, "so I don't think she is to be commiserated on that account."

"That was only a figure of speech, my dear," replied Mrs. Rathbawne, with engaging placidity. "Mercy! but I'm glad to get home. We've had a positively *exhausting* day with Natalie's shopping, and the *worst* of it is to think what a *lot* more there is to do. A wedding certainly *is* an undertaking, Mr. Nisbet."

"Is it?" answered young Nisbet, perceptibly startled at being thus abruptly included in the conversation.

"Decidedly!" asseverated Mrs. Rathbawne.

"Of course, in the case of an *ordinary* man" —

"Two lumps, mother?"

"*Always* two lumps, Dorothy, my dear. Surely you must know that, by this time! As I was *saying*, Mr. Nisbet, the fact that my elder daughter is to marry Mr. Barclay" —

Dorothy's eyebrows went up resignedly as she bent with affected solicitude over the alcohol lamp, than which none ever burned more blamelessly. There was no stopping Mrs. Rathbawne now!

"One has to keep his position in mind," she was saying. "It isn't like the *usual* marriage, which interests only the families and friends of the persons concerned, you know. It isn't even as if only Kenton City were looking on. *All* Alleghenia will be on the *qui vive*, Mr. Nisbet, *all* the state of Alleghenia. I shouldn't wonder if *some* notice were taken of the event, even at Washington. Marrying a statesman, you see, — a Lieutenant-Governor! Oh, it's *quite* different —*quite!* *Do* sit up straight, Dorothy, my dear!"

She continued to prattle of the momentous marriage impending, until her complacent chatter was interrupted by the entrance of her half-sister, Mrs. Wynyard, and the elder Miss Rathbawne.

The two newcomers were both beautiful, in widely dissimilar ways. Helen Wynyard, Mrs. Rathbawne's junior by nearly a score of years, retained at thirty the transparent brilliancy of complexion which, at eighteen, had made her the most admired *débutante* of her season in San Francisco. Her marriage with Ellery Wynyard had caused a great to-do among the gossips, and, later, had defrauded them pitilessly of their self-promised "I told you so's," by reason of the death of the handsome young rake, before the rose-color of the honeymoon had begun to fade. Beauty, wit, and infallible tact she inherited from her mother, shrewd business ability and a keen insight into men and things from her father, and wealth and a certain attractive audacity of speech from her husband; and five years of widowhood only served to develop and emphasize the promise of her first season. There were numerous feet which aspired to be shod with Ellery Wynyard's discarded shoes, but no one pair, said the world, so much as an inch in advance of the rest.

Mrs. Wynyard was spending the winter with her half-sister, and the Rathbawnes, whom the circumstance of widely distant residence had always kept from coming into close touch with her, were equally at a loss when they wondered how they had formerly contrived to exist without her, and in what manner they should resign themselves to giving her up. She was a woman who came amazingly near to being indispensable.

For the moment, Natalie Rathbawne, in reality the beauty which Dorothy by a fraction fell short of being, suffered by comparison with her sister. She was desperately tired — that was in her smile. But there was something else: a singular preoccupation which was nearly akin to listlessness. That was in the droop of her eyelids, in the eloquently inattentive gesture with which she touched a bowl of Gloire de Dijon roses as she passed, and in her conventionally courteous acknowledgment of young Nisbet's greeting. And, too, as she seated herself beside her sister on the divan, there was perceptible purpose in her avoidance of the lamp-light, her withdrawal into the dark, deep corner. To the conversation which followed she contributed only such brief remarks as were made necessary by those occasionally addressed to her.

The two women brought with them a delicious, indefinite atmosphere of out-of-doors: that commingled smell of cold flowers, and cold flesh, and cold fur, which is to a drawing-room in winter what a whiff of salt air is in summer to a sun-baked hillside; and this proved almost too much for the self-possession, already tottering, of young Nisbet. He had always been accustomed to have the things he desired, had young Nisbet, but these, until now, had been either creature comforts, readily obtainable when one's father is a multi-millionaire, or athletic honors, equally easy of attainment when one measures forty-two around the chest, and can do one's quarter in something under fifty. Again, the Nisbets lived on a ranch, and when one does not know people in New York one spends the Sundays in New Haven, so that neither the terms nor the vacations incidental to his four years at Yale had equipped him, in the sense in which they equipped his fellows, for dealing with society.

Now that he was in Kenton City, representing his father's interests, young Nisbet was painfully self-conscious of multitudinous shortcomings, totally unsuspected hitherto. His speech was

apparently hopelessly incrustated with slang, his legs were too long, his ears protruded abominably, his hair was desperately unruly, his freckles and his capacity for blushing were inexhaustible. He was as much at ease in such surroundings as these in which he now found himself as a trout in a sandpile. The great room, with its costly furnishings, the tea-table crowded with silver and fragile porcelain, the kettle purring contentedly above the iridescent flame of the alcohol lamp, – above all, the subtle, indefinable suggestion of femininity which unknowably pervaded his surroundings, – all these enthralled young Nisbet beyond expression, and awed him immeasurably, into the bargain. He was, as usual, very clear in his own mind as to what he wanted, and that was the younger Miss Rathbawne, but, for the first time in his experience, the means at his command did not seem to be sufficient unto the end. For the younger Miss Rathbawne was, very evidently, not the sort of triumph which is achieved by recourse to an imposingly ample bank-account, nor yet by two months' loyalty to the exigencies of the training-table. And this was February, and he had known her since July, and, altogether, it was highly discouraging. Unwittingly, young Nisbet heaved a sigh so profound and so pitiable that Mrs. Wynyard immediately proffered her sympathy.

"Poor, dear Mr. Nisbet! I never heard a more pathetic sigh. Whatever is the matter?"

"He's sleepy," put in Dorothy. "He always is, after talking with me for a whole hour."

"I was just thinking," protested young Nisbet helplessly.

"Oh!" exclaimed Dorothy, "that's it, is it? Then pray don't discourage him, Aunt Helen. He's really getting into some very good habits, of late."

"Why, *Dorothy!*" said Mrs. Rathbawne, digging her chin reproachfully into her black velvet collar, "how *can* you say such things? Mr. Nisbet will think you have had *no* bringing up at all. And *do* sit up straight, my dear!"

"And if you don't stop nagging, O most conscientious of parents," retorted Dorothy, with her nose in the air, "Mr. Nisbet will think you bring people up by throwing them down!"

"And slang! *Dorothy!*"

"I always think," said Mrs. Wynyard, "that Dorothy should have had a fairy godmother, to promise that every time she uttered a word of slang a pearl should pop out of her mouth. We should have all been wearing triple strings down to our knees within a week after she learned to talk."

"That settles it!" exclaimed Dorothy. "If you are going to side with the enemy, Aunt Helen, there is nothing left for me to do but to beat a retreat. Come on, Mr. Nisbet, there is rest for the weary in the conservatory – that is, unless you want another cup of tea?"

In the conservatory the air was heavy with the moist, sweet smell of earth and moss, and faintly vibrant with the tiny splash of water, dripping from a pile of rocks into the circular central pool, wherein fat gold-fish went idly to and fro, nuzzling floating specks upon the surface. Through the polished green of the surrounding palms and rubber-plants stared gardenias and camelias; below, between maidenhair and sword-ferns, winked the little waxen blossoms of fuchsias and begonias; at intervals poinsettia flared audaciously among its more quietly dressed neighbors; and, in the far corners the golden spheres were swelling to fairly respectable proportions on the branches of dwarf orange-trees.

Dorothy installed herself on a bench, and young Nisbet perched upon the rim of the pool, and stared at vacancy.

"It's corking, in here," he said, after a moment.

"Isn't it, though?" agreed Dorothy, with a nod of approval. "It's my favorite part of the house. You can't imagine how many hours I spend here, sewing, or reading, or fiddling with the fish and all those funny little plants under the palms."

"You bet!" said young Nisbet, with enthusiasm, if not much relevancy. "I've just got a picture of that, you know. Besides, we've spent a good many of those hours together in here, these past few months."

"Oh, not a tenth of them!" exclaimed Dorothy, "and then only the very shortest."

"Oh!" said young Nisbet gloomily. His fertile imagination was immediately peopled with the forms and faces of those who had shared the other hours, a score of eligible and attractive young men, his moral, mental, and physical superiors in every conceivable particular, faultlessly arrayed, scintillating with wit, and surpassingly skilled in the way to win a woman. The conservatory was full of them. He saw them in every imaginable posture: feeding the gold-fish, watering the begonias, looking up into Dorothy's eyes as they sat at her feet, looking down at her slender fingers, as she pinned gardenias to their lapels. And these had been granted the long hours, he only the short. Inwardly, young Nisbet groaned; aloud, as was his wont, he said the wrong thing.

"They seemed long enough to me."

"Well!" said Dorothy.

"Oh, hang it all! I didn't mean that. What an oaf I am!"

"Never mind," said Dorothy consolingly. "I know you well enough to understand you, by this time." She smoothed her skirt reflectively. "Let me see," she added, "what were we talking about when we were swamped by the family?"

"I think," answered young Nisbet, with one of his illogical blushes, "that I had just asked you what sort of a man you thought you would like to marry. I remember I was on the point of saying that I thought perhaps you had ideas like – er – like your mother's."

Dorothy raised her eyebrows.

"Like the Mater's?"

"About a man being big and prominent, and all that, you know," floundered young Nisbet. "She always makes such a point of Barclay's being Lieutenant-Governor – I thought you might be for the same kind of thing."

Dorothy looked him over, with a whimsical smile, as he was speaking. There was a deep bronze light in his close-cropped, ruddy hair, and his skin was very smooth and clean. His eyes were appealing, with that unspeakable eloquence of simple honesty which is almost pathetic. Under his blue cloth coat, the great muscles of his shoulders and chest stood out magnificently, rippling the fabric as he stirred, as if eager to throw off their trammels, and be given free play. About him there was a distinct suggestion of sane living and regular exercise. For all his freckles, and his nose that was too little, and his mouth that was too large, "the ugliest of the Nisbet boys" – he had often been called that! – was very emphatically good to look upon.

"A big man?" answered Dorothy. "Yes, I think I should like to marry a big man. I want him very clean, too — *very* clean! – morally, as well as otherwise. And honest as the day is long. And not *too* bright! I don't want to be continually trying to live up to his brain, and continually failing. It is fatal to one's self-respect, that sort of thing. Then, he must be heels over head in love with me – for keeps! And then – oh, he must be a *man*, a man through and through, who wouldn't think anything he didn't dare to say, nor say anything he didn't dare to do! That's what I want, and if I can get it, all the prominence in the world may go hang!"

"That's just about John Barclay, though," said young Nisbet, "with the prominence thrown in."

"Well, I'm not saying I wouldn't have married John Barclay, if I'd had the chance. He comes pretty close to being all I would ask for, in the way of a man. But, unfortunately, there's only one John Barclay, and, like the rest of the world, he looked directly over poor little Me's shoulders, and saw only Natalie. Good gracious! Who could blame him? She's the loveliest little thing in the world! But, at all events, she nabbed him, so all that is left for me to do is to grin and bear the disappointment as best I may. He's very much of a man, John Barclay is!"

"Yes," assented young Nisbet, somewhat mournfully. "I can see that would be the kind of a chap that the dames would stand for everlastingly."

"But, as I said before," continued Dorothy, "it's not because he's Lieutenant-Governor, whatever the Mater may think about it, that I admire him. It's just because he's so big, and earnest, and loyal, and – and" —

"White," said young Nisbet.

"Yes, *isn't* he? That's it – white!"

"I can understand a man like that getting spliced," observed young Nisbet very earnestly. "He has so much to offer a girl. But as for the rest of us" —

"Oh, as to that," broke in Dorothy airily, "John Barclay isn't the only man in the world, by any manner of means! Besides, Natalie having already bagged him, it is plain I shall have to look elsewhere."

There was a long pause, broken only by the splash of the water, which seemed, as the seconds slipped by, to grow amazingly loud. Then young Nisbet raised his eyes, and looked at her, blushing deplorably.

"I wish" – he said, "I wish" —

"Dorothy! *Do* excuse me, Mr. Nisbet, but *really*— dinner at seven, you know, and this child *must* be thinking about dressing. She takes *ages*!"

Mrs. Rathbawne folded her fat hands, and stood waiting, at the conservatory door. Young Nisbet rose.

"Of course!" he said. "I'm always so stupid about these things. Good-by, Miss Rathbawne. I'm off to New York to-morrow on some confounded business, so I probably won't see you for a week or so. Good-by."

"*Would* you mind going out by the hall, Mr. Nisbet?" suggested Mrs. Rathbawne. "Mr. Barclay is in the drawing-room with my elder daughter, and he is so *greatly* occupied with affairs of state that they have *very* little time together. I *hate* to have them interrupted. One can do *so* much harm sometimes, you know, by thoughtlessly interrupting people who are in love with each other. Thank you *so* much; good-by. *Do* try to stand a little straighter, Dorothy, my dear."

### III

## A FACE IN THE CROWD

At the sound of the Lieutenant-Governor's voice at the front door, Mrs. Rathbawne had beaten a hasty retreat, dragging her immensely edified half-sister in her wake, so that when he stepped through the curtained doorway Barclay found Natalie alone.

"I'm so glad you could come early," she said, from the corner of the divan. "Now we can have a talk before dinner. I seem to see so little of you. I suppose that's the penalty attached to being engaged to the second biggest man in the state. I'm sometimes jealous, Johnny boy, of Alleghenia's place in your affections."

"You're the only person in the world who has no need to be," laughed Barclay. "What is the news?"

"Probably," said Natalie, "the only interesting items are that you are cold and a little cross, and that you want a big chair and a cup of tea and some hot toast."

"Your summary of the situation is so exhaustive," said Barclay, "that there seems to be nothing left for me to say, except that you are the most beautiful girl in the world, and that I think I must stand still a moment and just look at you, before I accept any of the luxuries you suggest."

"I can't imagine how you know that I'm so beautiful. You can't possibly see me in this dark corner. But I see I've made one mistake! You are distinctly *not* cross."

"Why should I be?" asked the Lieutenant-Governor, standing before the table, with his long legs far apart, and rocking from his toes to his heels and back again. "When a man has been walking for half an hour through a gnawing February air, and suddenly, out of all proportion to his deserts, comes full upon a rose in bloom, is that a reason for being cross?"

She was very small, and deliciously delicate, was Natalie Rathbawne, like a little Dresden image, with an arbutus-pink complexion, brown hair, and deep-blue eyes, now clouded thoughtfully, but oftener alight with humor, or dilating and clearing under the impetus of conversation. A doll-like daintiness of tiny pleats and ruffles, fresh bows, and fine stitching pervaded everything she wore, and if her voice inspired the hackneyed comparison of running water, it was of water running under moss, the sound whereof is as different from that of an open brook as is music from discord. To John Barclay's thinking the barely believable fact that this little miracle of beauty – this pocket-Venus, as he was wont to call her – actually belonged to him remained one of the insoluble mysteries of life. He could not, in the thralldom of his present Elysium, be expected to remember, even if he had ever fully realized, that he himself was tall, broad-shouldered, clean-cut, and clean-lived, with the unmistakable stamp of the American gentleman on his linen and his simple, well-fitting clothes, and the evidences of a sane, regular existence in his steady hands and his clear eyes and his firm mouth, – a man of whom any woman might be, and of whom this particular woman was, extravagantly proud. For the first tribute which a lover lays at the feet of his lady is, in ordinary, the stamped-upon and abused summary of his personal attributes, which, in his own mind, he has taken remarkable pains to render as despicable as possible, and which, in hers, her imagination contrives not only to rehabilitate, but to imbue with a preposterously exaggerated splendor.

"I wonder," added the Lieutenant-Governor presently, "whether when gentlemen are invited to tea they are supposed to kiss the hostess on entering."

"If you are in any doubt about it," observed Natalie, with an air of superb indifference, "I advise you to write for advice to the etiquette editor of the 'Kenton City Record.' She is probably sixty-two years old, looks like an English walnut, has never had a proposal in her life, and so knows all about" —

What the lady in question was supposed to know all about was for sufficient reasons never made clear. There are occasions, despite the manuals of polite behavior, when interruption cannot with any approach to justice be regarded as rudeness.

Barclay heaved a long sigh of satisfaction as he took his tea and two thin slices of toast and settled himself in his chair.

"Do you think it possible," he asked, "for a man to be asleep for six weeks, dreaming that he is in another garden of Eden, with an Eve in a French frock, who has no partiality for apples" —

"I *adore* apples!" said the girl.

"And then wake up," he continued, disregarding the interruption, "and find that the dream was only a dream, after all, — that he's only a poor dog of a politician, that the garden is only a dingy office, and the flower-beds full of briars and pitfalls?"

"You've been eating pie for lunch again," said Natalie severely, "and it always makes you morbid. No; I don't think it possible at all. If I did, I should hang on to your coattails like fury and keep you in dreamland, whether you wanted to wake up or not."

"It's all too good to be true! How *dare* you be so beautiful?"

"John" —

"It's gospel truth!"

Barclay paused for a moment, and then went on more seriously.

"You're tired, littlest and most lovely in the world, and troubled about something."

Natalie laughed shortly, with evident effort.

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

"Why not? Don't you suppose I know? Do you think you could say a hundred words without my perceiving that? It almost seems to me that the knowledge that you were unhappy would make its way to me, no matter what distance separated us, and that I should come to you at top-speed to set things right. I've hardly seen your face, and yet I know your dear, deep eyes are troubled; I had barely heard your voice before I felt its weariness."

Natalie bent forward until her face came under the light.

"Yes, I'm tired," she said; "or, rather, I was tired when I first came in. I'm better now, since I've had my tea. But you're right, Johnny boy, — there's something more. I'm troubled, desperately troubled and heartsick. I've been trying to make myself believe that it's all imagination, that I have no reason for feeling as I do; but I'm afraid I can't manage it. John, I thought I saw Spencer Cavendish to-day."

"Spencer Cavendish? Are you sure? I had almost forgotten his existence! — Of course, it's not impossible; but I imagined he had taken root in some South Sea island long ago. That's what he was always expecting to do, you remember. How I have hated that man!"

"You were good friends once."

"Yes, and should be yet, if I had not been the most suspicious mortal that ever breathed, and he the most hot-blooded. There was a reason, you know, — a little reason, but the most important in the world! I was jealous, Natalie, insanely jealous. I could forgive him everything now."

"That hurts me, John. I'm so happy, boy dear, that I want everybody else to be happy as well. Oh, why is it that a girl must always have that one thought on her mind, which is so hard, so hard? — I mean the thought of the good men, the true, brave, loyal men, whom she has cared for, who have been her best friends perhaps, and yet whom she has been forced to hurt bitterly because they asked her for something she was not able to give. A man has so much easier a road! His happiness, when it comes to him, isn't clouded by the thought of those to whom it means the loss of their last remnant of hope. They are there, the disappointed ones, but he doesn't know, he doesn't know! He hasn't on his conscience the memory of hearts cruelly wounded, — wounded even to death. He doesn't in memory see the eagerness in a good friend's eyes die to disillusion, to hopelessness, to bitter, bitter sorrow. He doesn't have to remember how the life died suddenly out of a voice that had been tender and eloquent. He doesn't sicken with the thought that his hand has given a blow so merciless, so unmerited, and yet

so inevitable. Worst of all, for the girl, is the after-discovery that her decision has made a difference – a hideous, irreparable difference, – that the man can never be the same again, – that she has wrecked a life with a word! Oh, there ought to be some way! The man ought not to ask unless he is sure of the reply! It's too much responsibility to force upon the girl!

"So with Spencer Cavendish," she went on after a moment. "In spite of all – in spite of all, John! – I can't forget that he loved me. I think a woman never forgets that."

"Until the man marries another woman!"

"Ah," said Natalie, with a faint smile, "then least of all, John! And besides, Spencer never married. He knew I loved you, long before you did! I felt that it was due to him that he should know; he was my oldest and best friend then, and so I told him! And then he went out of my life – out of his own – into darkness. I can't forget it! I can't forget that I broke up your friendship" —

"Dearest!"

"I did, John! It wasn't my fault, perhaps, nor any one's, for that matter, but I did, just the same. Besides, it wasn't only the question of your friendship. What hurt me most was the wilful wreck of his life. And yet, how could I have known what was going to happen? What could I do when it did happen? He was beyond my reach. He didn't even answer the letter I wrote, asking him to come and see me. I thought, if he cared for me, I could save him. But it was just as he had said, – he must have everything, or he would have nothing at all. And so he went wrong – oh, so terribly, terribly wrong! – he who might have been anything, if it hadn't been for me. I can never forget it – never! I can never forget the pity of it, the tragedy of its awful publicity, the newspapers, the scandal, people's sneers, his mother dying of a broken heart —*and I did it!* Think of it! Think of a man like Spencer Cavendish in the police courts, not once, but a dozen times. Think of what Justice Meyer called him at last, and what was printed in the papers, – 'a common drunk!' Oh, John!"

"Natalie, Natalie!" broke in the Lieutenant-Governor. "Why should you think of such things, brood over them, above all, blame them on yourself? How could it possibly have been your fault? how could you possibly have helped it? He was a reckless, hot-headed chap – brilliant, of course, but a slave to his impulses and his nerves. If Lochinvars could act with impunity nowadays, he'd have ridden up to your door on a black horse, killed Thomas, and carried you off across his pommel. As it was, he let himself go, and disgraced himself. I tried to talk to him, just as you did, but he wouldn't have it – called me 'an insolent cub' and – er – worse. I had to give it up. It was all very distressing, I admit, but then, dear, it was all so long ago. He hasn't been in Kenton City for two years and more, and I've no doubt he pulled himself together long since, and is leading a straight life somewhere. He had lots in him, with all his recklessness. A chap like that, with no family hanging about his neck, and with his brains, and only his own living to make, could forge ahead almost anywhere."

"But John, I'm *sure* I saw him to-day, and suppose I should tell you that he was – begging?"

Barclay almost smiled at her earnest, troubled face, as he replaced his cup on the table.

"Begging?" he answered. "I'm afraid I couldn't bring myself to believe you, violet-eyes. Even granting that he has fallen as low as that, which I should think one of the most unlikely things in the world, it would hardly be in Kenton City, would it? – a place where his face is known to a thousand people. Tell me about it. What makes you think you saw him?"

"I was shopping this morning," said Natalie, "all alone; and as I came out of Kendrick's and was just about to get into the brougham, I saw that someone was holding the door open for me. I looked up carelessly, as one naturally would under the circumstances, and, John – I know it was he! At first I thought so, and then I didn't, because he was so changed, so thin and pale, and because he had a beard. So, before I thought what I was doing, I stepped into the brougham, and put my hand on the door to close it. Then I looked up again, and saw his face, peering in at me through the glass, and that time there couldn't be any mistake. It *was!* I was going to speak, but he was gone in a flash. I saw him disappearing in the crowd before the shop —*slinking*, John! – with that dreadfully pathetic air which all beggars have, his shoulders all hunched up, and his head bent, and his hands in his pockets. He was

cold, John, I could see that, and, no doubt, hungry! And there I was, in that dreadful little brougham, with my hateful furs, as warm as toast, and I didn't even speak to him. I could have died of shame!"

She buried her face in her hands, bending low over the tea-table. Barclay was leaning forward in his chair, his lips set.

"It's impossible," he murmured, "impossible!"

The girl looked up suddenly, a white spot in the centre of each cheek, where the pressure of her thumbs had left its mark in the tender, pink flesh.

"Improbable – yes!" she said, "but not impossible. Oh, I wish I could believe otherwise, but I'm sure, I'm sure! Oh, John! You are so big, so strong, so powerful now! Think of it – Lieutenant-Governor of Alleghenia! You can do anything. And if he *is* here in Kenton City, homeless, cold, starving, you must find and help him – for me, Johnny boy, for me!"

The Lieutenant-Governor had risen, and was pacing up and down the room, with his brows knit, and his strong, white hands chafing slowly against each other, palm to palm. It seemed impossible, indeed! Spencer Cavendish, the last of one of Alleghenia's proudest families; Spencer Cavendish, the brilliant young society pet and sportsman; Spencer Cavendish, the wit, the *viveur* – a beggar in the street? And yet —

The scandal of Cavendish's sudden and reckless plunge into sodden, open dissipation, two years before, freshly called to Barclay's mind by Natalie's words, had pointed to almost any finale, however debased, however sordid. Barclay mentally invoked the face of his former friend, as he had seen it on the occasion of their last meeting, flushed, swollen-eyed, insolent, the fine patrician mouth hideously contorted and maundering insults, filth, banality.

"And I did it!" the girl was saying. "Don't forget that, John. Unwittingly, ignorantly, helplessly, if you will, I did it, just the same. If I could have loved him, I could have saved him. As it was, I had to send him away, and he has come to – to this! Oh, don't you see? Don't you understand that something more than chance has crossed my path with his, just at this moment of my supremest happiness, and of his utter degradation? My duty is plain. It is to help him, to uplift him, to make a man of him once more – to undo what I have done! I'm responsible – and I'm helpless! What can I do? What can any girl do in such a case? I can't go out into the streets and search for him. I can only turn to you, Johnny boy, and rely upon your aid."

"But, Natalie dearest," said the Lieutenant-Governor slowly, "don't you see that it is impossible, all this? I cannot allow such an affair to come into your pure, sweet life, bringing with it the knowledge of the depths to which men may fall, and the shadow of misery and degradation. I cannot bear that, in even the remotest way, you should blame yourself for that which it was never in your power to prevent or remedy. A man – this man – has no business to cast on you the blight of his own weakness and folly, to establish a relation of cause and effect between your refusal of him and the subsequent transformation of a gentleman into a common drunkard."

"John!"

"Ah, don't think me bitter, dearest! If the man you saw was actually Cavendish, I pity him from the bottom of my heart. But it was his hands which built up the barrier between his life and ours, and it must be his that tear it down. It is intolerable that in his degradation he should come into your life again, and have, even in your imagination, the smallest claim upon you – intolerable! The paths of my love for you and my duty toward you are identical in this respect. There can be no alternative – no quibbling. At least until he has redeemed himself, if redemption is still possible, the thought of him, his presence, his misdoings, must not and shall not contaminate the atmosphere in which you live and move."

Natalie had risen suddenly, her eyes ablaze.

"Ah, John!" she said. "Am I then a toy, a sugar figure, that I must be packed in cotton, and shielded from all knowledge of the evil in the world? Is that what it means to be a woman? Ah, *no!* It is bad enough to be hemmed in by the wretched conventionalities which prevent my doing openly

what I conceive to be my duty, without adding to the restrictions that actually exist the imaginary one that I must not even think of the misery, the wretchedness, the sordid vice which abound just across the borders of the comfortable little world in which I live. And see, boy dear! – with all the force of my conviction that things should be otherwise, yet I am reasonable. I don't ask to see Spencer, or to have an active hand in his redemption. I realize that the time for that has passed, and that you are just in saying that he must come to me, not I to him – and come to me another than the man he is to-day. Anything else is impossible: that I see and accept. But the hideous fact remains. A man who loved me once, who offered me all that a man can offer a woman, is walking the streets of Kenton City, cold, hungry, homeless – a beggar! What business is it of yours or mine what his past follies and weaknesses were? His temptations may have been beyond our understanding, but his present plight is not. He is begging – begging at our very doors – a man whom we have called by the name of friend! I can't help him. All I can do, as I said before, is to turn to you, whom I love better than all the world, and ask you to save him, in my stead. Ah, boy, boy! – I've given you all I refused to him, taken at your hands all I put away at his. You can afford to be generous!"

The Lieutenant-Governor came slowly toward her, and, placing his hands upon her shoulders, looked her in the eyes.

"Dearest and Most Beautiful," he said tenderly, "you are right. I hope – I believe – that you were overwrought, fanciful, that it is not true. But if it is, if Cavendish is begging in our streets, then, so surely as I am Lieutenant-Governor of Alleghenia, I will pull him out of them, and make a man of him, if it takes a month and every police officer and detective in Kenton City to find him. And that not alone for your sake, tenderest-hearted, but for mine. I *can* afford to be generous, God bless your sweet face, I can indeed!"

And he bent over reverently, and kissed her hand.

## IV AS BETWEEN FRIENDS

There were but two guests at the Rathbawnes' dinner-table that night, the Lieutenant-Governor and Colonel Amos Broadcastle, a veteran of the Rebellion, brevetted Major for conspicuous gallantry at Lookout Mountain, and now commanding officer of the Ninth Regiment, N. G. A., the crack militia organization of Kenton City. Colonel Broadcastle had seen his sixty-five, but his broad, square shoulders, his rigid carriage, and his black hair, even now only slightly touched with gray, clipped twenty years from his appearance. His eye was one that was famous throughout the Alleghenia Guard, – an eye accustomed to control, not a single man, or two, or three, but a thousand, moving as one at his command; an eye enforcing obedience immediate, machine-like, and unquestioning.

It had been a momentous day for the Ninth when Amos Broadcastle, retiring from the staff of a former Governor, had accepted, first a majority therein, and then, three months later, its colonelcy. He found ten companies, in no one instance exceeding twenty files front. He found a field and staff vain, incompetent, and jealous; company officers deficient alike in their knowledge of tactics and in their conception of their responsibilities; sergeants, corporals, and lances chosen without any view to fitness, and ignorant and tyrannical in their positions; and finally, the rank and file lazy, untidy, and frankly contemptuous of the school of the soldier. Some one had once said of the Ninth that there was consolation to be found in the mortifying knowledge that the men composing it were there with the unique view of escaping jury duty. The consolation lay in the probability that such infernally bad soldiers would have made jurors quite as infernally bad.

But Broadcastle, a born disciplinarian and a trained tactician, was now in a position to echo, albeit in a different spirit, the arrogance of Louis: "*Nous avons changé tout cela!*" Ten years had sufficed to change the indolent and incompetent Ninth of Alleghenia into a regiment rivaling in prestige the Seventh of New York. The commissioned officers were thrust upon, rather than achieved by, their companies, but, once established in their respective positions, proceeded without exception to justify, by their energy and ability, their selection from the best element of Kenton City. Among the enlisted men the exponents of the old spirit of sloth, indifference, and laxity were weeded out as fast as their terms of service expired, and their places filled from the same sources whence the company officers were drawn. Colonel Broadcastle was a diplomat as well as a disciplinarian. By some unknowable system of suggestion and example it came, little by little, to be regarded in Kenton City as "the thing" to belong to the Ninth. Before the capital was aware of the transformation, every company roster read 103, the field and staff had been reorganized and perfected, and the Ninth Regiment, N. G. A., was what it remained thereafter: a magnificent fighting machine, ably drilled, perfectly equipped, a credit to the state, to the credit of which there stood so little else. The declaration of war with Spain brought it suddenly into prominence by the astonishing readiness with which it went into camp twenty hours after the Adjutant-General of Alleghenia published the President's call for volunteers; and although it never saw active service, it attracted at Chickamauga, and later at Tampa, the admiring attention of the regular army, and was spoken of as the most perfect body among the volunteer forces.

The citizens of Kenton City were not accustomed to discovering things in which they could take pride. The exact contrary was more apt to be the case. When, therefore, they discovered the rehabilitated Ninth, and its redeemer in the person of its commanding officer, they had a deal to say, and said it with unexampled arrogance and satisfaction. Thenceforward, Alleghenia meant much to Colonel Broadcastle, and Colonel Broadcastle considerably more than much to Alleghenia.

Something of all this went through the Lieutenant-Governor's mind during the progress of the dinner. He sat at Mrs. Rathbawne's right, than which nothing in the world could have been more

cheerless, unless it was sitting at Mrs. Rathbawne's left. But the good lady's habitual complacency was plainly in abeyance, her customary volubility replaced by a fidgety reserve. The dinner, as a social achievement, was a distinct failure, save in so far as Mrs. Wynyard and Colonel Broadcastle were concerned. Several months before, Mrs. Wynyard had frankly announced that she had designs upon the Colonel. Latterly, Barclay had begun to suspect the Colonel of having designs upon Mrs. Wynyard. Thirty and sixty-five that looked forty-five – a widow and a widower! More wonderful things had happened.

"If I were thirty years younger," Broadcastle was saying even now, as he did full justice to the celery mayonnaise, "I should say we were made for each other."

"Since two single people may be made for each other," laughed Mrs. Wynyard, "I wonder if two married people can't be unmade for each other. Perhaps that is just what has happened to us!"

"I'll think that over," replied the Colonel with mock gravity. "I don't want to commit myself on so serious a hypothesis, without due reflection."

They were the only ones who were thoroughly at ease. Barclay and Natalie, unstrung by the events of the day, ate little and talked listlessly. Dorothy, victim to an inward excitement which was half happiness and half disappointment, chattered feverishly. Rathbawne was wrapped in his own thoughts, and his wife, innocently unobservant of emotional manifestations in any and every other, but pathetically sensitive to the slightest evidence of mental perturbation in this stern, kind man, between herself and whom existed a devotion dog-like in its silence and intensity, watched his clouded face with an anxiety which she made no effort to conceal. The dinner dragged hopelessly, until she shook herself into a bewildered realization that it was over, folded her napkin scrupulously, dusted a few crumbs from the black-satin slope of her obsolete lap, and, followed by her daughters and Mrs. Wynyard, left the men to their cordials and cigars.

The latter drew their chairs nearer, as the door closed, made little clearings in the wilderness of finger-bowls, silver, and discarded napkins, for the accommodation of their coffee-cups and cordial glasses, and, lighting the long Invincibles which were Rathbawne's sole extravagance, inhaled that first matchless whiff of smoke which makes a whole day of anxiety and vexation seem to have been worth the while.

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