Spearman Frank Hamilton

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

The dancing pavilion, separated from theCasino itself by an arched passageway andaffording another pretty view of the lake in themoonlight, was filled with young people whenAlice entered.

"It will be cool here, I think," suggested DollyDe Castro, leading the way for her guest. "TheHickories is by no means a gay place," shecontinued, seating herself beside Alice where theycould see the dancers moving in and out of thelong room. "And it isn't a club. There is justthis Casino and the fields for golf and polo. It isa neighborhood affair-and really the quietestplace of the kind in the Lake country. Too badyou could not have been here three weeks ago forthe Kermess."

"So Miss Venable said. They are great fun."

"We revive one occasionally to preserve theDutch traditions of the family," continued Dolly."Mrs. Charles Kimberly-Imogene-gave it thisyear. Last year I gave it. You would have seeneverybody, especially the Sea Ridge people.Fritzie, dear?" Dolly paused to stay a slender youngwoman who was passing. "Miss Venable," sheexplained, still speaking to Alice, "is our favoritecousin and will make you acquainted with every one."

Fritzie Venable whose lively, brown eyesescaped beauty only through a certain keennessof expression, stopped with a smile and waitedon Dolly's word.

"I want Mrs. MacBirney to go over to theNelsons' after a while. This dance is really ayoung people's affair," Dolly went on, turningto Alice. "These are friends of Grace's andLarrie's and I don't know half of them. Takecare of Mrs. MacBirney a moment, Fritzie, willyou, while I find Arthur?" asked Dolly, risingand leaving the two together.

Alice looked after Dolly as she walked away.Dolly had the Kimberly height and preserved itwith a care that gave dignity to her carriage.Her dignity, indeed, showed in her words as wellas in her manner; but in both it battled with amental intensity that fought for immediateexpression. Dolly persuaded and dictated unblushingly, though it could not be said, unpleasingly.

"I know you are enjoying Mrs. De Castro andher lovely home," said Fritzie to Alice. "Ofcourse," she added as Alice assented, "The Towersis on a much grander scale. But I think BlackRock is the 'homiest' place on Second Lake. Isuppose since I saw you yesterday you have beenall around?"

"Not quite; but I've met many lovely people."

"You can't help liking Second Lake people.They are a kind-hearted, generous set-notablyso for people of means."

"Aren't such people usually generous?"

Fritzie looked doubtful: "People of large means, perhaps, yes. Indeed, the only trouble here is, there are too many of that sort. Everybody isprosperous and everybody, with, I think, twoexceptions, contented. I," laughed Fritzie, "amone of the exceptions. There being no possibilityof preëminence in the line of means, I believe Ihave in my rôle of discontent a certain distinction; and as far as I can see, as much fun as anybody.In fact, I've often thought the only place whereI should care to be rich would be among thepoor. Where every one overflows with luxurydistinctions are necessarily lost-and I likedistinctions. Isn't this pretty for dancing?"

"Everything over here is pretty," said Alice.

"The place takes its name, 'The Hickories,'from the grove back of it. You see there wasnothing about the Lake itself to serve the purposeof a country club-no golf course, no polo field.All this

stretch of the eastern shore is a part ofThe Towers estate, but Mr. Kimberly was goodenough to set it apart for the rest of us-you havemet Mr. Robert Kimberly?"

"Neither of the Mr. Kimberlys as yet."

"There is Charles now." Fritzie indicated asmooth-faced, youthful-looking man coming inthrough one of the veranda openings. "That ishe speaking to Dolly. They call him thehandsome Kimberly."

Alice smiled: "For a man that's rather asevere handicap, isn't it?"

"To be called handsome?"

"It suggests in a way that good looks areexceptional in the family, and they are not, for theirsister, Mrs. De Castro is very handsome, I think.Which brother is this?"

"The married brother; the other is Robert.They call him the homely Kimberly. He isn'treally homely, but his face in repose *is* heavy.He is the bachelor."

"Mr. MacBirney tells me he is completelywrapped up in business."

"Rather-yes; of late years."

"That, I presume, is why he has never married."

"Perhaps," assented Fritzie with a prudentpause. "Some men," she went on somewhatvaguely, "get interested, when they are young, inwomen in general. And afterward never settledown to any one woman, you know."

"I should think that kind of a man would betiresome."

Fritzie looked at young Mrs. MacBirney somewhatin surprise, but there was nothing in Alice'sfrank eyes to provoke criticism. They metFritzie's with an assurance of good-nature thatforestalled hostility. Then, too, Fritzieremembered that Mrs. MacBirney was from the Westwhere people speak freely. "Robert is deliberatebut not a bit tiresome," was all Fritzie said inanswer. "Indeed, he is not communicative."

"I didn't mean in that way," explained Alice."I should only be afraid a man like that wouldtake himself so seriously."

Fritzie laughed: "He wouldn't know what thatmeant. You had music at your dinner to-night."

"Lovely music: the Hawaiian singers."

"I was sorry I couldn't be there. They alwayscome out to sing for Robert when they are in theStates, and they are always in dreadful financialstraits when they get as far from home as this, andhe is always making up their deficits. They usedto sing at The Towers, from barges on the lake.But The Towers is hardly ever opened nowadaysfor a function. The music over the waterwith the house illuminated was simply superb.And the evening winding up with fireworks!"sighed Fritzie in pleasing retrospect.

"There is Robert now," she continued.. "Doyou see him? With Mrs. Charles Kimberly.They are devoted. Isn't she a slip? And thedaintiest little thing. Robert calls her his littleQuakeress-her people were Quakers. She seemslost among the Kimberlys-though Robert isn'tquite so tall as his brother, only more muscularand slower."

Robert Kimberly with Imogene on his armentered from the opposite side of the room andwalked across the floor to take her to her husband.His face was darker than that of Charles andheavier eyebrows rendered his expression less alert.Fritzie waved a hand at Imogene, who answeredwith her fan and greeted Alice.

"And there comes Mrs. Nelson-the palebrunette. Heroic woman, I call her. She has beenfighting her advancing weight for ten years. Isn'tshe trim? Heavens, she ought to be. She livesin Paris half the time and does nothing but dressand flirt."

"And who is it with her?"

"The stately creature with her is Dora Morgan.She is a divorcée. She likewise lives in Parisand is quite a singer. I haven't heard her latelybut she used to sing a little off the key; she dressesa little off the key yet, to say nothing of theway she acts sometimes. They are going to dance."

A small orchestra of stringed instruments witha French horn, hidden somewhere in a balcony, began the faint strains of a German waltz. Thenight was warm. Young people in white strollingthrough dim veranda openings into the softlylighted room moved at once out upon the floorto the rhythm of the music. Others, following, paused within the doorways to spin out ends ofsmall talk or persist in negligible disputes. Thedancers wore the pretty Hawaiian leis in honor ofthe Island singers.

"There were some interesting men at the dinnerto-night," said Alice.

"You mean the German refiners? Yes, theyare Charles Kimberly's guests," remarked Fritzieas the floor filled. "There they are now, in thatgroup in the archway with Mr. Nelson."

"But the smaller man was not at the dinner."

"No, that is Guyot, the French representativeof the Kimberlys. He and George Doane, the bald, good-looking man next to him, have the party incharge. You met the immense man, HerrGustav Baumann, at dinner. He is a great refinerand a Hawaiian planter. They are on their wayto Honolulu now and leave within an hour or twoin Robert Kimberly's car for San Francisco. TheBaumanns have known the Kimberlys forgenerations. Should you ever think Herr Baumanncould dance? He is as light as a cat on his feet, but he waltzes in the dreadful Europeanround-and-round way. The black-haired man with thebig nose is Lambert, a friend of his, a promoterand a particularly famous chemist whom RobertKimberly, by the way, hates-he is a Belgian. Ican't bear him, either-and, Heavens, Guyot isbringing him over here now to ask me to dance!"

Fritzie's fear proved true. However, sheaccepted graciously as Lambert was broughtforward and bowed in making his request. But shedid not fail to observe that though he bowed low,Lambert's bold eyes were glued on Alice evenwhile he was begging Fritzie for the dance.Something in Alice's slender face, the white hardlytouched enough with pink, except under animation, held Lambert's glance. Alice, alreadyprejudiced, directed her eyes as far away as possibleunder the inspection and was glad that Fritzierose at once.

Robert Kimberly joined Baumann and EdwardNelson. "You have not told me yet, Robert,"Baumann began, "how you put in your time herein the country."

"I have a good secretary and do a great deal ofmy work here, Gustav."

"But one does not always work. What else?I remember," he continued, turning to Nelson,"the stories my father used to tell about theKimberlys-your father, Robert, and especially yourUncle John." Baumann radiated interest ineverything American. "Those men were busymen. Not alone sugar-refining, but horses, steamboats, opera-houses, women-always, always someexcitement."

"Other times, other manners, Baumann,"suggested Nelson. "In those days a fine horse hada national interest; to-day, everybody's horsedoes his mile in two minutes. The railroads longago killed the steamboats; newsboys build theopera-houses now; sugar refines itself. Meremoney-making, Baumann, has become so absorbingthat a Kimberly of this generation doesn'thave time to look at a woman."

"Nelson!" protested the good-natured andperspiring German, "no time to look at a woman? That, at least, cannot be true, can it, Robert?"

"Not quite. But I imagine the interest haswaned," said Kimberly. "When a man took hislife in his hand on such a venture the excitementgave it a double zest-the reflection that you werean outlaw but prepared, if necessary, to pay theprice with your life. Nowadays, the husband hasfallen lower than the libertine. If you break uphis home-he sues you. There is nothinghair-raising in that. Will you dance, Gustav?"

"I want very much to dance. Your womendance better than ours."

"Why, your women dance beautifully. Nelsonwill find you a partner," suggested Kimberly."I must hunt up Mrs. Nelson. I have a dancewith her, myself."

Alice sat for a moment alone. Among thedancers, Robert Kimberly moved past her withLottie Nelson on his arm. Alice noticed howhandsome and well poised Lottie was on her feet;Kimberly she thought too cold to be an attractivepartner.

Within a moment Dolly came back. "I can'tfind Arthur anywhere."

"He isn't on the floor, Mrs. De Castro."

"No matter, I will let him find me. Isn't it apretty company? I do love these fresh faces,"remarked Dolly, sitting down. "The youngpeople complain of our being exclusive. That isabsurd. We have to keep quiet, otherwise whylive in the country? Besides, what would begained by opening the doors?"

Dolly had a pleasing way of appealing indifficulties, or what seemed such, even to a stranger."We don't want ambitious people," she went on;"they are killing, you know-and we certainlydon't want any more like ourselves. As Arthursays," Dolly laughed a little rippling laugh, "'wehave social liabilities enough of our own.'"

Arthur De Castro came up just in time to hearhis name: "What's that Arthur says, Dolly?"

"Oh, here you are!" exclaimed his wife. "Nomatter, dear, what it was."

"It is certain Arthur never said anything ofthe kind, Mrs. MacBirney," interposed De Castro."If any one said it, it must have been you, Dolly."

Alice laughed at the two. "No matter whosaid it," remarked Dolly, dismissing the controversy,"somebody said it. It really sounds morelike Robert than anybody else."

"You will be aware very soon, Mrs. MacBirney,"continued De Castro, "that the Kimberlyssay all manner of absurd things-and they are notalways considerate enough to father them on someone else, either."

Alice turned to her hostess with amused interest: "You, of course, are included because you are aKimberly."

"She is more Kimberly *than* the Kimberlys,"asserted her husband. "I am not a Kimberly."Arthur De Castro in apologizing bowed with soreal a deprecation that both women laughed.

"Of course, the young people rebel," persistedDolly, pursuing her topic, and her dark hairtouched with gray somehow gave an authority toher pronouncements, "young people always wanta circle enlarged, but a circle *never* should be.What is it you want, Arthur?"

"I am merely listening."

"Don't pretend that you leave the men just tolisten to me. You want Mrs. MacBirney todance."

"She is always like that," declared De Castroto Alice, whom he found pleasing because hergraciousness seemed to invite its like. "Just suchbursts of divination. At times they areoverwhelming. I remember how stunned I was whenshe cried-quite before I could get my breath:'You want to marry me!'"

"Was she right?" laughed Alice, looking fromone to the other.

"Absolutely."

"Is she right now?"

"Dolly is always right."

"Then I suppose I must dance."

"Not, of course, unless you want to."

Alice appealed to Dolly: "What did you do?"

"I said I wouldn't marry him."

"But you did," objected her companion.

"He was so persistent!"

Alice laughingly rose: "Then it would bebetter to consent at once."

Dolly rose with her. Two of the dancersstopped before them: a tall, slender girl and aruddy-faced, boyish young man.

"Grace," said Dolly to the blue-eyed girl, "Iwant you to meet Mrs. MacBirney. This is myniece, Grace De Castro."

The young girl looked with pretty expectancyinto Alice's face, and frankly held out her hand.

"Oh, what a bloom!" exclaimed Alice, lookingat the delicate features and transparent skin.Grace laughed happily. Alice kept her hand amoment: "You are like a bit of morning cometo life, Grace."

"And this is my cousin, Mrs. MacBirney-Mr. Morgan,"said Grace shyly.

Larrie Morgan, a bit self-conscious, stood foran instant aloof. Alice said nothing, but her eyesin the interval worked their spell. He suddenlysmiled.

"I'm mightily pleased to meet you, Mrs. MacBirney,"he exclaimed with heartiness. "We'veall heard about you. Is Mr. MacBirney here?"he continued, tendering the biggest complimenthe could think of.

"He is somewhere about, I think."

"We shall lose our waltz, Mrs. MacBirney,"urged Arthur De Castro.

"Oh, we mustn't do that. Let's run,"whispered Alice, taking his arm.

"Who is Mrs. MacBirney?" asked Grace ofLarrie with an appealing look as Alice movedaway.

"Why, don't you know? Her husband ownssome beet plants."

"What lovely manners she has." Grace spokeunder her breath. "And so quiet. Where aretheir refineries, Larrie?"

"In the West."

"Where in the West?"

"Somewhere out toward the Rocky Mountains,"hazarded Larrie.

"Denver?" suggested Grace doubtfully.

"I fancy that's it. Anyway," explained Larriecoldly, "we are buying them."

"Are you?" asked Grace, lifting her soft eyestimidly.

To her, Larrie was the entire Kimberly sugarinterest; and at the moment of making theMacBirney purchase he looked, to Grace, the part.

CHAPTER II

Edward Nelson, the counsel, in somemeasure the political adviser and, as to thepublic, the buffer of the Kimberly sugar interests, was fond of entertaining. Being naturally anamiable gourmet, his interests suited his tastes.Moreover, his wife, Lottie Nelson, pleasing offace, with a figure well proportioned and withdistinction in her bright, indolent eyes, loved toentertain. And she loved to entertain withoutworking hard to do so. Morningside, her countryhome at Second Lake, though both attractive andspacious, and designed with a view to entertaining, was already being replaced with a new home moreattractive and more spacious, and meant to befilled with still more guests.

Observation and experience had convincedLottie that the easiest way to keep people in hand isto feed them well. And she quite understood thata vital part of the feeding in such a philosophy isthe drinking. There were difficulties, it is true, but which of us has not difficulties?

People-provided, they were people ofconsequence-diverted Lottie. She had nochildren-children had no place in her view of life-norwas she vitally interested in her husband. Thecompanionship of those whom she called herfriends thus became a necessity; the annoyancebeing that not always would the particularfriends whom she wanted-men chiefly-gather to her.

On the evening of the De Castro dinner anddance, Lottie was in better than her usual spirits.She had brought home Charles Kimberly-who asa yachtsman bore the title of Commodore-andhis wife, Imogene. Imogene, the little Quakeress, did not like her, as Lottie was aware, but CharlesKimberly was always in sorts and alwaystractable-different in that respect from Robert.Charles and his wife took MacBirney and FritzieVenable to the Nelsons' with them and Alice wasto follow with the De Castros.

When Lottie reached home, Dora Morgan hadalready come over with George Doane, one of theKimberly stock brokers. These two assured theevening. In the dining-room only a few-of theright sort-were needed for good company.

But more was in prospect for thisevening-Robert Kimberly was expected. Nelson camedown from the library with MacBirney and lefthim with Imogene while he followed Charles toa smoking-room. Fritzie and Mrs. Nelson joinedDoane and Dora Morgan in the music-room.Cards were proposed, but no one had the energyto get at them.

A servant passed in the hall to answer the doorand Lottie Nelson at once left the room. Whenshe reached the vestibule the footman was takingRobert Kimberly's coat. She walked well up toRobert before she spoke: "At last!"

"I went back to The Towers for a moment,"said Kimberly in explanation. "Are Charles andNelson here?"

"And is that all after a month-'Are Charlesand Nelson here?'!" echoed Lottie patiently andwith a touch of intimate reproach.

"We have a conference to-night, you know,Lottie. How are you?"

She put back her abundant hair: "Why didn'tyou call up last week when you were home tofind out?"

"I was home only overnight. And I camelate and left before you were awake. You knowI have been at the new refinery for a week. Webegan melting yesterday."

"At the big one?"

"At the big one."

She took hold of the lei that he had worn overfrom the dance and in a leisurely way made apretence of braiding the stem of a loose rose backinto it. "This is the prettiest I've seen," saidLottie. "Who gave it to you?"

"Grace. What is the matter with it?" heasked looking down at her white fingers.

"You are losing your decoration," she murmuredwith leisurely good-nature. "Nobody todo anything for you."

Kimberly looked at the parting lei with someannoyance, but if he entertained doubts as to itsneeding attention he expressed none. "Thesethings are a nuisance anyway," he declared atlength, lifting the lei impatiently over his head anddepositing it without more ado on a console. "Wewill leave it there."

"Where else have you been all this time?"demanded Lottie with an indolent interest.

"All over the country-even across the Rockies."

"Across the Rockies! And a whole big car toyourself! You must love solitude. And now youare buying a lot of refineries."

"Not I-the companies are."

"Oh, it's all the same."

"Not precisely; this MacBirney purchase isnot by my advice or with my approval."

"He is in there now, Imogene is talking with him."

"The trip was extremely tedious," said Kimberly, casting his eyes slowly around for means of escape.

"How could it be anything else with no friendsalong?"

"With McCrea and two secretaries and astenographer, I hadn't time to take any friends."

"What is time for?"

"I should say in the West it is valuable forgetting home with."

"And when you do get home?"

"To build more; borrow more; control more; sell more; spend more. I'm speaking for all therest of you, not for myself. I'm just thecentrifugal to throw the money out."

"Never by any chance to live more, I suppose?"

"You mean to eat and drink more? Howcould we?"

"I *don't* mean to eat and drink more. I meanjust what I say, to live more!"

They were at the threshold of the music room.He laughed good-naturedly, but Lottie declinedto be appeased.

"Lord, but I'm sick of it all!" she exclaimedpetulantly.

Kimberly used care not to offend, yet he alwaysinterposed a screen between himself and her, and however delicate the barrier, Lottie Nelsonhad never been able to penetrate it.

"No sicker of it than I am," he returned."But I'm a part of the machine; I can't get out.I suppose you are, and you can't get out. Butyou are too young to talk like that; wait till thenew home is finished. Then you will shine."

She uttered a contemptuous exclamation, notquite loud enough for the others to hear, as shereëntered the room. The others, in fact, scarcelywould have heard. Fritzie, Doane, and DoraMorgan were laughing immoderately. Imogeneat the piano was playing softly. Kimberlystopped to speak to her.

"I forgot, by the way, to ask you when yousail, Imogene," he said.

She answered with one hand running over thekeys: "That depends on you, doesn't it, Robert? I do hope you'll get through soon."

"Anxious to get away, are you?"

"You know I always am."

"Where are you going this time?"

"To the Mediterranean, I suppose."

"You are fond of the Mediterranean."

"Every place else seems so savage after it."

"Lottie says you have been talking with MacBirney."

"Just a few minutes."

"How do you like him?" asked her brother-in-law.

Imogene laughed a little: "He is very intelligent.He confuses me a little, though; he is so brisk."

"Is he entertaining?"

Imogene shrugged her shoulders: "Yes. Only,he rather makes you feel as if he were selling yousomething, don't you know. I suppose it's hardlyfair to judge of one from the first interview. Hisviews are broad," smiled Imogene in retrospect."'I can't understand,' he said 'why our Americanmen should so unceasingly pursue money. Whatcan more than a million or two possibly be goodfor-unless to give away?'" Imogene looked witha droll smile into Kimberly's stolid face. "Whenhe said, 'a million or two,' I thought of my wretchedbrother-in-law struggling along with thirty or fortythat he hasn't yet managed to get rid of!"

"You don't think, then, he would accept a fewof them?" suggested Kimberly.

"Suppose you try him some time," smiledImogene as she walked with Kimberly to thecard-table where Fritzie and Dora Morgan sat withDoane.

"Travelling agrees with you, Robert," observed Doane.

"The country agrees with you," returnedKimberly. "Good company, I suppose, George, isthe secret."

"How is the consolidation getting along?"

"There isn't any consolidation."

"Combination, then?"

"Slowly. How is the market?"

"Our end of it is waiting on you. When shallyou have some news for us?"

"You don't need news to make a market,"returned Kimberly indifferently, as he sat down.He looked at those around the table. "What areyou doing?"

"Tell your story again, Dora," suggested Doane.

Dora Morgan looked at Kimberly defiantly."No," she said briefly.

"Pshaw, tell it," urged Doane. "It's about theVirgin Mary, Robert."

Dora was firm: "It's not a bachelor's story,"she insisted.

"Most of your stories are bachelors' stories,Dora," said Kimberly.

Dora threw away her cigarette. "Listen tothat! Didn't I tell you?" she asked appealingto Doane. "Robert is getting to be a real nice man."

In an effort to appease both sides, Doanelaughed, but somewhat carefully.

"I got into trouble only the other day in tellingthat story," continued Dora, with the sameundercurrent of defiance.

Effectively dressed, though with a tendency tocolor, and with dark, regular features, flushed alittle at night, Dora Morgan had a promise ofmanner that contrasted peculiarly with herfreedom of tongue.

"Tell us about it, Dora?" said Lottie Nelson.

"It was over at The Towers. I was telling thestory to Uncle John. His blood is red, yet," sheadded without looking at Robert Kimberly toemphasize her implication.

"Uncle John!" echoed Fritzie, at fault. "DidUncle John object?"

"Oh, no, you misunderstand. It wasn't UncleJohn." Every one but Kimberly laughed. "Iwas telling Uncle John the story, and his nurse-yourprotégé, what's his name? I never canremember-Lazarus? the queer little Italian," shesaid, appealing to Kimberly.

"Brother Francis," he answered.

"He's not so awfully little," interposed Fritzie.

"Well, he was in the room," continued Dora,"and he got perfectly furious the moment he heard it."

"Furious, Dora? Why, how funny!" exclaimedLottie Nelson, languidly.

"He turned on me like a thunder-cloud. PoorUncle John was still laughing-he laughs on oneside of his face since his stroke, and looks sofiendish, you know-when Lazarus began toglower at me. He was really insulting in hismanner. 'Oh, I didn't know you were here,' Isaid to hush him up. 'What difference shouldthat make?' he asked, and his eyes were flashing,I can tell you."

"'The Virgin Mary is no relation of yours, isshe?' I demanded frigidly. You ought to haveseen the man. You know how sallow he is; heflushed to the roots of his hair and his lips snappedlike a trap. Then he became ashamed of himself,I dare say, and his eyes fell; he put his handon his breast and bowed to me as if I had been aqueen-they certainly have the prettiest manners, these poor Italians-haven't they, Imogene?"

"But what did he say?" asked Fritzie.

"'Madame,' he exclaimed, as if I had stabbedhim to the heart, 'the Blessed Virgin is mymother.' You really would have thought I hadinsulted his own mother. They have such queerideas, these foreigners. My, but he was mad!Then, what do you think? The next day Ipassed him walking up from the lake and he cameover with such apologies! He prayed I wouldoverlook his anger-he professed to have been soshocked that he had forgotten himself-no doubthe was afraid he would lose his job."

"George, you look sleepy," Lottie Nelsoncomplained, looking at Doane. "You needsomething to wake you up. Suppose we adjourn tothe dining-room?"

Imogene returned to the piano. Kimberlywalked to the door of the dining-room with theothers. "I will go upstairs," he said to LottieNelson.

"Don't stay all night," she returned peremptorily."And come have something before you go up."

"Perhaps when I come down."

Fritzie caught his arm, and walked with himinto the hall. They talked for a moment. "Youmust meet her," declared Fritzie at length, "sheis perfectly lovely and will be over after a whilewith Dolly." Then she looked at him suddenly: "I declare, I don't believe you've heard a wordof what I've been saying."

"I'm afraid not, Fritzie, but no matter, listento what I say. Don't go in there and drink withthat bunch."

"I won't."

"Whiskey makes a fool of you."

Fritzie put up her hand: "Now don't scold."

Upstairs, Nelson and Charles Kimberly, facingeach other, were seated at a big table on which laya number of type-written sheets, beautifully clearand distinct. These they were examining.

"What are you going over?" asked Robert, taking the chair Nelson drew up for him.

"The Colorado plants."

"Our own or the MacBirney?"

"Both."

Charles Kimberly with one hand in his pocket, and supporting his head with the other as hiselbow rested on the table, turned to Robert with aquestion.

"You've seen the MacBirney figures. What doyou think of them?"

"They are high. But I expected that."

"Do you really need the MacBirney plants tocontrol the Western market?" asked CharlesKimberly. With eyes half closed behind hisglasses he studied his brother's face, quite asoccupied with his thoughts as with his words.

Robert did not answer at once. "I should hateto say so, personally," he remarked at length.

"McCrea," continued Charles, "contends thatwe do need them to forestall competition. Thatis, he thinks with the MacBirney crowd out of thefield we can have peace for ten years out there."

Nelson asked a question. "What kind offactories have they got?"

"Old-fashioned," answered Robert Kimberly.

"What kind of influence?"

"In public affairs, I don't know. In tradethey are not dangerous, though MacBirney isambitious and full of energy. The father-in-lawwas a fine old fellow. But he died just before thereorganization. I don't know how much moneythey've got now."

"They haven't much," remarked Nelson.

"We bother them a good deal from San Francisco,"continued Robert Kimberly, reflecting, "butthat is expensive. Ultimately we must own morefactories in Colorado. Of course, as far as thatgoes, I would rather build new plants thanremodel rat-hospitals."

Charles Kimberly straightened up and turnedhimself in his chair. "Ten years of peace is wortha good deal to us. And if MacBirney can insurethat, we ought to have it. All of this," heappealed to Robert, as he spoke, "is supposing thatyou are willing to assent."

"I do not assent, chiefly because I distrustMacBirney. If the rest of you are satisfied totake him in, go ahead."

"The others seem to be, Robert."

"Then there is nothing more to be said. Let'sget at the depreciation charges and the estimatesfor next year's betterments, so we can go over thenew capitalization."

While the conference went on, the muffled humof gathering motor-cars came through the openwindows.

Robert Kimberly leaving the two men, walkeddownstairs again. The rooms were filling withthe overflow from the dance. They who hadcome were chiefly of the married set, though boysand girls were among them.

After the manner of those quite at home, the dancers, still wearing their flower leis, werescattered in familiar fashion about small tableswhere refreshment was being served.

At one end of the music room a group applaudeda clever young man, who, with his coat cuffs rolledback, was entertaining with amateur sleight-of-hand.

At the other end of the room, surrounded by asecond group, Fritzie Venable played smashingrag-time. About the tables pretty, overfedmarried women, of the plump, childless type, withlittle feet, fattening hands, and rounding shoulders, carried on a running chatter with men youngerthan their husbands.

A young girl, attended at her table by marriedmen, was trying to tell a story, and to overcomeunobserved, her physical repugnance to thewhiskey she was drinking.

In the dining-room Lottie Nelson was thecentre of a lively company, and her familiar pallor, which indulgence seemed to leave untouched, contrasted with the heightened color in DoraMorgan's face.

Robert Kimberly had paused to speak to someone, when Fritzie Venable came up to ask aquestion. At that moment Arthur and DollyDe Castro, with Alice on Dolly's left, enteredfrom the other end of the room. Kimberly sawagain the attractive face of a woman he hadnoticed dancing with Arthur at the Casino. Thethree passed on and into the hall. Kimberly, listening to Fritzie's question, looked after them.

"Fritzie, who is that with Dolly?" he askedsuddenly.

"That is Mrs. MacBirney."

"Mrs. MacBirney?" he echoed. "Who isMrs. MacBirney?"

"Why, Mr. MacBirney's wife, of course. Howstupid of you! I told you all about her beforeyou went upstairs. He has brought his wife onwith him. Dolly knew her mother and has beenentertaining Alice for a week."

"Alice! Oh, yes. I've been away, you know.MacBirney's wife? Of course. I was thinking ofsomething else. Well-I suppose I ought to meether. Come, Fritzie."

CHAPTER III

They found Alice with the De Castros in thehall. Dolly looked pleased as her brothercame forward. Alice collected herself. She felta momentary trepidation at meeting this man, from whom, she was already aware, much of whatshe had seen and most of the people whom she hadmet at Second Lake in some degree derived.

She had heard for years, since girlhood, indeed,of the house of Kimberly. Her own father'sstruggle through life had been in the line of theirbusiness, and the name of the Kimberlys couldnot but be haloed wherever refiners discussedtheir affairs. Moreover, at the moment her ownhusband was seeking, and with prospects ofsuccess, an alliance with them.

Yet in a moment she found it all very easy.Kimberly's manner as he met her was simplicityitself. His words were few and did not confuseher, yet they were sufficient to relieve the necessityof any effort on her part to avoid embarrassingpauses. She only noticed that the others ratherwaited for Kimberly to speak; giving him a chanceto say without interruption whatever he pleasedto say. Beyond this, that the conversation wasnow reserved for herself and Kimberly, she wasat ease and wondered why she had been a littleafraid of him. The surprise was that he wasyounger than she had supposed. She began towonder that his name should at times commandso much of the public interest. Nor could anybut those who knew him have realized that underhis restraint Alice was experiencing his mostgracious manner.

But those who did know him saw instantly howinterested he was in her youth and inexperience.Her cheeks were already flooded with pink, as ifshe realized she must do her best to please andwas conscious that she was not wholly failing.Timidity reflected itself in her answers, yet thiswas no more than an involuntary compliment, pleasing in itself. And whenever possible, Alicetook refuge from the brother's more directquestions by appealing to his sister Dolly. Kimberlywas diverted to see her seek escape in this fashionfrom his directness.

She expressed presently her admiration for thedecorations at the Casino and the talk turnedupon the Hawaiian singers; from them to Hawaiiand Honolulu. Word at that moment came fromthe music room that the singing was beginning.Kimberly without any sign of giving up Alice, followed Dolly and her husband down the hallto where the guests were gathering.

The group paused near the foot of the stairs.Alice asked an explanation of the chant that theyhad heard at the Casino and Kimberly interpretedthe rhythm for her. "But I should have thought,"he added, "you would be familiar with it."

"Why so?"

"Because you have been at the Islands."

"Pray, how did you know that?"

"By your pronunciations."

"Ah, I see. But I was there only once, whenI was quite young, with my father."

"And yet you have no lei to-night? That ishardly loyal, is it?"

"We came late and they had all been givenout, I suppose."

"I have one in reserve. You must show yourgood-will to the musicians. Permit me." Heturned with dignity to the console where he had sounceremoniously discarded his own lei and pickedthe garland up to lay it upon Alice's shoulders.

"But Robert," Fritzie cried, "you mustn't!That is a rose lei."

"What is the difference?" asked Kimberly.

"There's a superstition, you know, about a rose lei."

"Mercy, what is it?" demanded Alice, pink and smiling.

"If a man gives you a rose lei you must marryhim or you will die."

"Fortunately," remarked Kimberly, lifting thedecoration quickly above Alice's head and placingit without hesitation on her shoulders, "neitherMrs. MacBirney nor I are superstitious. And theroses harmonize perfectly with your gown,Mrs. MacBirney. Don't you love the Islands?"

"I've always wanted to go back to them to stay.I don't think if I had my choice I should everleave them."

"Neither should I. We must get up a partyand have a yacht meet us in San Francisco forthe trip. This fall would be a good time to get away."

His decisive manner was almost startling; thetrip seemed already under way. And hismannerisms were interesting. A certain haltingconfidence asserted itself under the affected indifferenceof his utterance. Whatever he proposed seemedas easy as if done. He carried his chin somewhatlow and it gave a dogmatism to his words. Whilehe seemed to avoid using them obtrusively, hiseyes, penetrating and set under the straight heavybrows which contracted easily, were a barometerfrom which it was possible to read his intent.

"You have been frequently at the Islands?" returned Alice.

"Years ago I knew them very well."

"Father and I," Alice went on, "spent a monthat Honolulu." And again the softness of her longvowels fell agreeably on Kimberly's ear. Hervoice, he thought, certainly was pretty. "It islike a paradise. But they have their sorrows, dothey not? I remember one evening," Alice turnedtoward Fritzie to recount the incident, "just at thesunset of a rarely perfect day. We were walkingalong the street, when we heard the most piercingcries from a little weeping company of women andchildren who were coming down the esplanade.In front of them walked a man all alone-hewas a leper. They were taking him away fromhis family to be sent to Molokai. It was themost distressing thing I ever saw." She turned toKimberly. "You have never been at Molokai?"

"I have cruised more or less around it. Doyou remember the windward cliffs just above theleper settlement? They are superb from the sea.We put in once at Kalawao for a night and I calledon the priest in charge of the mission."

"It must have been very, very dreadful."

"Though like all dreadful places, disappointingat first; nothing, apparently, to inspire horror.But after we had breakfasted with the priest inthe morning, we went around with him to see hispeople." Kimberly's chin sank and his eyesclosed an instant as he moved his head. "Iremember," he added slowly, "a freezing uparound the heart before we had gone very far."Then he dismissed the recollection. "The attendantat home who takes care of my uncle-Francis-"he continued, "had a brother in the lepermissions. He died at Molokai. Francis hasalways wanted to go there."

The conversation waited a few moments on thesinging. "Miss Venable tells me," said Alice, presently, "these singers always come out to singfor you when they visit this country."

"I have met most of them at one time or anotherin Hawaii. You know they are the gentlest, mostgrateful people in the world. Sha'n't we havesome refreshment, Mrs. MacBirney?"

CHAPTER IV

"I am hoping it will all be settled satisfactorilysoon," said Dolly De Castro to Alice oneafternoon a few weeks afterward. She had invitedAlice out from town for a fortnight at Black Rockwhile MacBirney, with McCrea and the activepartners of the Kimberly interests were workingon the negotiations for the purchase of theMacBirney factories.

"And when it is settled, I can congratulate you,I think, my dear, most sincerely on any issue thatassociates your husband and his interests withthose of my brothers."

"Indeed, I realize that it would be a matter forcongratulation, Mrs. De Castro. I hope if theydo come to terms, your brothers will findMr. MacBirney's Western acquaintance andexperience of some value. I am sorry you haven'tseen more of my husband-"

"I understand perfectly how engaged he has been."

"He is an unceasing worker. I told himyesterday, when he was leaving home, thatMrs. De Castro would think I had no husband."

"Then," continued Dolly, pursuing her topic,"if you can secure the little Cedar Lodge estateon the west shore-and I think it can bearranged-you will be very comfortable."

Dolly had suggested a drive around the lake, and as she made an admirable guide Alice lookedforward with interest to the trip. If it should beobjected that Dolly was not a good conversationalist,it could be maintained that she was a fascinating talker.

It is true that people who talk well must, asa penalty, say things. They can have nocontinued mental reserves, they must unburden theirinner selves. They let you at once into the heartof affairs about them-it is the price that thebrilliant talker must pay. Such a one gives you forthe moment her plenary confidence, and beforeAlice had known Dolly a month, she felt as if shehad known her for years.

On their drive the orders were to follow theprivate roads, and as the villas around the entire lakeconnected with one another, they were obliged touse the high-roads but little. Each of the placeshad a story, and none of these lost anything inDolly's dramatic rendering.

From the lower end of the lake they drove toSunbury, the village-commonplace, but Colonial,Dolly explained-and through it. Taking theridge road back of the hills, they approachedanother group of the country places. The houses ofthese estates belonged to an older day than thoseof the lake itself. Their type indicated thedescent from the earlier simplicity of the Colonial, and afforded a melancholy reminder of thearchitectural experiments following the period of theCivil War.

"Our families have been coming out here for ahundred years," observed Dolly. "These dreadfulFrench roofs we have been passing, give youthe latest dates on this side of the ridge." As shespoke they approached a house of brown sandstoneset in an ellipse of heavy spruces.

"This was the Roger Morgan place. Mrs. Morgan,Bertha, was our half-sister, dear, theonly child of my father's first marriage-she diedseven years ago. This villa belongs to FritzieVenable. She was Roger Morgan's niece. Butshe hasn't opened it for years-she just keeps acaretaker here and makes her home withImogene. To me, spruces are depressing."

"And what is that?" asked Alice, indicatingan ivy-covered pile of stone in the midst of acluster of elms at some distance to the left of thehouse and on a hill above it. "How odd and pretty!"

"That is the Morgan chapel."

"Oh, may we see it?"

"Of course," assented Dolly, less enthusiastically."Do you really want to see it?"

It was Alice's turn to be interested: "Why, yes,if we may. How quaint-looking," she pursued, scrutinizing the façade.

"It is, in fact, a mediæval style," said Dolly.

The car was turned into the driveway leading upto the chapel. When the two women had alightedand walked up the steps to the porch, Alice foundthe building larger than it had appeared frombelow the Morgan house.

Dolly led the way within. "It really is abeautiful thing," she sighed as they entered. "Areproduction in part-this interior-of a little churchin Rome, that Mrs. Morgan was crazy about, SantaMaria in-dear me, I never can remember, SantaMaria in something or other. But I want youto look at this balustrade, and to walk up intoone of these ambones. Can't you see somedark-faced Savonarola preaching from one on the sinsof society?" Dolly ascended the steps of oneambone as she spoke, while Alice walked up intothe other.

"You look as if you might do very well thereyourself on that topic," suggested Alice.

"But I don't have to get into an ambone topreach. I do well anywhere, as long as I have anaudience," continued Dolly as she swept the modestnave with a confident glance.

They walked back toward the door: "Here's aperfect light on the chancel window," said Dollypausing. "Superb coloring, I think."

Alice, held by the soft rich flame of the glass, halted a moment, and saw in a niche removedfrom casual sight the bronze figure of a knightstanding above a pavement tomb. "Is this amemorial?"

"Poor Bertha," continued Dolly; "ordered mostof these windows herself."

"But this bronze, Mrs. De Castro, what is it?"

"A memorial of a son of Bertha's, dear."

The shield of the belted figure bore the Morganarms. An inscription set in the tomb at his feettook Alice's attention, and Dolly without joiningher waited upon her interest.

"And in whose memory do you say this is?"persisted Alice.

"In memory of one of Bertha's sons, dear."

"Is he buried here?"

"No, he lies in Kimberly Acre, the familyburial-ground on The Towers estate-where weshall all with our troubles one day lie. This poorboy committed suicide."

"How dreadful!"

"It is too sad a story to tell."

"Of course."

"And I am morbidly sensitive about suicide."

"These Morgans then were relatives of theMrs. Morgan I met last night?"

"Relatives, yes. But in this instance, thatsignifies nothing. These, as I told you, were Fritzie'speople and are *very* different."

They reëntered the car and drove rapidly downthe ridge. In the distance, to the south and east, the red gables of a cluster of buildings showed faraway among green, wooded hills.

"That is a school, is it?" asked Alice.

"No, it is a Catholic institution. It is a school,in a way, too, but not of the kind youmean-something of a charitable and training school.The Catholic church of the village stands justbeyond there. There are a number of Catholicsover toward the seashore-delightful people. Wehave none in our set."

The ridge road led them far into the countryand they drove rapidly along ribboned highwaysuntil a great hill confronted them and they beganto wind around its base toward the lake and home.Half-way up they left the main road, turned intoan open gateway, and passing a lodge entered theheavy woods of The Towers villa.

"The Towers is really our only show-place,"explained Dolly, "though Robert, I think, neglectsit. Of course, it is a place that stands hardtreatment. But think of the opportunities on thesebeautiful slopes for landscape gardening."

"It is very large."

"About two thousand acres. Robert, I fancy, cares for the trees more than anything else."

"And he lives here alone?"

"With Uncle John Kimberly. Uncle John isall alone in the world, and a paralytic."

"How unfortunate!"

"Yes. It is unfortunate in some ways; inothers not so much so. Don't be shocked. Oursis so big a family we have many kinds. UncleJohn! mercy! he led his poor Lydia a life. Andshe was a saint if ever a wife was one. I hopeshe has gone to her reward. She never sawthrough all the weary years, never knew,*outwardly*, anything of his wickedness."

Dolly looked ahead. "There is the house.See, up through the trees? We shall get a fineview in a minute. I don't know why it has to be, but each generation of our family has had a brainyKimberly and a wicked Kimberly. The legendis, that when they meet in one, the Kimberlyswill end."

CHAPTER V

To afford Alice the effect of the mainapproach to The Towers itself, Dolly ordereda roundabout drive which gave her guest an ideaof the beauties of the villa grounds.

They passed glades of unusual size, borderedby natural forests. They drove among pleasingsuccessions of hills, followed up valleys withoccasional brooks, and emerged at length on wide, open stretches of a plateau commanding the lake.

A further drive along the bluffs that rose highabove the water showed the bolder features of anAmerican landscape unspoiled by overtreatment.The car finally brought them to the lower end ofa long, formal avenue of elms that made a settingfor the ample house of gray stone, placed on anelevation that commanded the whole of SecondLake and the southern country for many miles.

Its advantage of position was obvious and thecastellated effect, from which its name derived, implied a strength of uncompromising pridecommonly associated with the Kimberlys themselves.

At Dolly's suggestion they walked aroundthrough the south garden which lay toward thelake. At the garden entrance stood a sun-dial andAlice paused to read the inscription:

Per ogni ora che passa, im ricordo.
Per ogni ora che batte, una felicità.
Per ogni ora che viene, una speranza.

"It is a duplicate of a dial that Robert fanciedin the garden of the Kimberly villa on LagoMaggiore," Dolly explained. "Come this way, I wantyou to see the lake and the terrace."

From the terrace they looked back again at thehouse. Well-placed windows and ampleverandas afforded views in every direction of thesurrounding country. Retracing their way to themain entrance, they ascended a broad flight ofstone steps and entered the house itself.

Following Dolly into the hall, Alice saw achamber almost severe in spaciousness and stillsomewhat untamed in its oak ruggedness. But glimpsesinto the apartments opening off it were delightfullysatisfying.

They peeped into the dining-room as they passed.It was an old-day room, heavily beamed in gloomyoak, with a massive round table and high chairs.The room filled the whole southern exposure ofits wing and at one end Alice saw a fireplace abovewhich hung a great Dutch mirror framed in heavyseventeenth-century style. Dolly pointed to it: "It is our sole heirloom, and Robert won't changeit from the fireplace. The Kimberly mirror, wecall it-from Holland with our first Kimberly.The oak in this room is good."

Taken as a whole, however, Dolly franklyconsidered The Towers too evidently suggestiveof the old-fashioned. This she satisfactorilyaccounted for by the fact that the house lacked themagic of a woman's presence.

Alice, walking with her, slowly and critically, found nowhere any discordant notes. The carpetsoffered the delicate restraints of Eastern fancy, andthe wall pictures, seen in passing, invited moreleisurely inspection.

There was here something in marble, somethingthere Oriental, but nowhere were effects confused, and they had been subdued until consciousness oftheir art was not aroused.

Alice, sensitive to indefinable impressions, hadnever seen anything comparable to what she nowsaw, and an interior so restful should have put herat ease.

Yet the first pleasing breath in this atmospherebrought with it something, she could not have toldwhat, of uneasiness, and it was of this that shewas vaguely conscious, as Dolly questioned theservant that met them.

"Is Mr. De Castro here yet?" she asked.

"Yes, Mrs. De Castro. He is with Mr. Kimberly.I think they are in the garden."

"Tell them we are here. We will go up andspeak to Uncle John."

They were at the foot of the stairs: "Sha'n't Iwait for you?" suggested Alice.

"By no means. Come with me. He is reallythe head of the family, you know," Dolly addedin an undertone, "and mustn't be slighted."

Alice, amused at the importance placed uponthe situation, smiled at Dolly's earnestness. Asshe ascended the stairs with her hostess, a littlewave of self-consciousness swept over her.

On the second floor was a long gallery openingat the farther end upon a western belvedere, lighted just then by the sun. The effect of theroom, confusing at first in its arrangement, was,in fact, that of a wide and irregular reception hallfor the apartments opening on the second floor.At the moment the two women reached the archway,a man walked in at the farther end from the terrace.

"There is Robert, now!" Dolly exclaimed. Hewas opening the door of a room near at handwhen he saw his sister with Alice, and cameforward to meet them. As he did so, a doormid-way down the hall opened and a man clad in ablack habit crossed between Kimberly and Alice.

"That is Francis, who takes care of UncleJohn," said Dolly. Francis, walked toward thebalcony without seeing the visitors, but his earcaught the tones of Dolly's voice and she waveda hand at him as he turned his head. He pausedto bow and continued his way through a balcony door.

As Kimberly came forward his face was sonearly without a smile that Alice for a momentwas chilled.

"I brought Mrs. MacBirney in to see Uncle Johna moment, Robert. How are you?" Dolly asked.

"Thank you, very well. And it is a pleasureto see Mrs. MacBirney, Dolly."

He looked into Alice's eyes as he spoke. Shethanked him, simply. Dolly made a remark butAlice did not catch it. In some confusion ofthought she was absurdly conscious that Kimberlywas looking at her and that his eyes were gray, that he wore a suit of gray and that she now, exchanging compliments with him, was clad inlavender. The three talked together for somemoments. Yet something formal remained inKimberly's manner and Alice was already theleast bit on the defensive.

She was, at any rate, glad to feel that her motoringrig would bear inspection, for it seemed as ifhis eyes, without offensively appearing to do so, took in the slightest detail of her appearance.His words were of a piece with his manner. Theywere agreeable, but either what he said lackedenthusiasm or preoccupation clouded his efforts tobe cordial.

"They told us," said Dolly, at length, "youwere in the garden."

"Arthur is down there somewhere," returnedKimberly. "We will go this way for Uncle John,"he added. "Francis is giving him an airing."

They walked out to the belvedere. Facing thesunset, Alice saw in an invalid chair an old manwith a wrinkled white face. Dolly, hasteningforward, greeted him in elevated tones. Kimberlyturned to Alice with a suggestion of humor as theywaited a little way from Dolly's hand. "My sister, curiously enough," said he, "always forgets thatUncle John is *not* deaf. And he doesn't like it a bit."

"Many people instinctively speak louder toinvalids," said Alice. Uncle John's eyes turnedslowly toward Alice as he heard her voice. Dolly, evidently, was referring to her, and beckoned herto come nearer. Alice saw the old man looking ather with the slow care of the paralytic-of onewho has learned to distrust his physical faculties.Alice disliked his eyes. He tried to rise, but Dollyfrowned on his attempt: it looked like a failure, anyway, and he greeted Alice from his chair.

"You are getting altogether too spry, UncleJohn," cried Dolly.

His eyes turned slowly from Alice's face toDolly's and he looked at his talkative niecequizzically: "Am I?" Then, with the mildlysuspicious smile on his face, his eyes returned to Alice.Kimberly watched his uncle.

"They say you want to ride horseback,"continued Dolly, jocularly. He looked at her again: "Do they?" Then he looked back at Alice.

Kimberly, his hands half-way in the pockets ofhis sack-coat, turned in protest: "I think youtwo go through this every time you come over,Dolly." Dolly waved her hand with a laugh.Uncle John this time did not even take the troubleto look around. He continued to smile at Aliceeven while he returned to Robert hisnon-committal: "Do we?"

Alice felt desirous of edging away from UncleJohn's kind of Kimberly eyes. "You ought toget better here very fast, Mr. Kimberly," she saidto him briskly. "This lovely prospect!" sheexclaimed, looking about her. "And in everydirection."

"It is pretty toward the lake," Robertvolunteered, knowing that Uncle John would merelylook at Alice without response.

He led the way as he spoke toward the mirroredsheet of water and, as Alice came to his side, pointed out the features of the landscape. Dollysat a moment with Uncle John and joinedKimberly and Alice as they walked on.

They encountered the attendant, BrotherFrancis, who had retreated as far as he could from thevisitors. Dolly, greeting him warmly, turned toAlice. "Mrs. MacBirney, this is Brother Franciswho takes care-and such excellent care! – of UncleJohn."

Brother Francis's features were spare. Hisslender nose emphasized the strength of his face.But if his expression at the moment was sober, and his dark eyes looked as if his thoughts mightbe away, they were kindly. His eyes, too, fellalmost at the instant Dolly spoke and he onlybowed his greeting to Alice. But with Francisa bow was everything. Whether he welcomed, tolerated, or disapproved, his bow clearly andsufficiently signified.

His greeting of Alice expressed deference andsincerity. But there was even more in it-somethingof the sensible attitude of a gentleman who,in meeting a lady in passing, and being himselfan attendant, desires to be so considered and seekswith his greeting to dismiss himself from thesituation. To this end, however, Francis's effortswere unsuccessful.

"He is the most modest man in the world,"murmured Dolly, in concluding a eulogium, delivered to Alice almost in the poor Brother's face.

"Then why not spare his feelings?" suggestedKimberly.

"Because I don't believe in hiding a light undera bushel," returned Dolly, vigorously. "Thereis so little modesty left nowadays-"

"That you want to be rid of what there is,"suggested Kimberly.

"That when I find it I think it a duty torecognize it," Dolly persisted.

Brother Francis maintained his composure aswell as he could. Indeed, self-consciousnessseemed quite lacking in him. "Surely," hesmiled, bowing again, "Madame De Castro has agood heart. That," he added to Alice, italicizinghis words with an expressive forefinger, "is thereal secret. But I see danger even if one *should*possess a gift so precious as modesty," hecontinued, raising his finger this time in mildadmonition; "when you-how do you say in English-'trotout' the modesty and set it up to lookat" – Francis's large eyes grew luminous inpantomime-"the first thing you know, pff! Where is it?You search." Brother Francis beat the skirt of hisblack gown with his hands, and shook it as if todislodge the missing virtue. Then holding hisempty palms upward and outward, and addingthe dismay of his shoulders to the fanciedsituation, he asked: "Where is it? It is gone!"

"Which means we shouldn't tempt BrotherFrancis's modesty," interposed Alice.

Francis looked at Alice inquiringly. "You area Catholic?" he said, "your husband not."

Alice laughed: "How did you know?"

Francis waved his hand toward his informant: "Mr. Kimberly."

The answer surprised Alice. She looked atKimberly.

There was an instant of embarrassment. "Francisfeels our pagan atmosphere so keenly," Kimberlysaid slowly, "that I gave him the news aboutyou as a bracer-just to let him know we had afriend at court even if we were shut out ourselves."

"He told me," continued Francis, with humor,"that a Catholic lady was coming this afternoon, and to put on my new habit."

"Which, of course, you did not do," interposedKimberly, regaining the situation.

Brother Francis looked deprecatingly at hisshiny serge.

Dolly and Alice laughed. "Mr. Kimberlydidn't understand that you kept on your old oneout of humility," said Alice. "But how did youknow anything about my religion?" she asked, turning to Kimberly.

Francis took this chance to slip away to his charge.

"Arthur De Castro is the culprit," answeredKimberly. "He told me some time ago."

"You have a good memory."

"For some things. Won't you pour tea forMrs. MacBirney, Dolly? Let us go downstairs, anyway."

He walked with Alice into the house, talking asthey went.

Dolly bent over Uncle John's chair. "Isn'tshe nice?" she whispered, nodding toward Aliceas Alice disappeared with Kimberly. "Youknow Madame De Castro went to school in Pariswith her mother, who was a De Gallon, and herfather-Alice's grandfather-was the last man inLouisville to wear a queue."

Uncle John seemed not greatly moved at thisinformation, but did look reminiscent. "Whatwas her father's name?"

"Alice's father was named Marshall. He andher mother both are dead. She has no nearrelatives."

"I remember Marshall-he was a refiner."

"Precisely; he met with reverses a few years ago."

Uncle John looked after Alice with his feeble, questioning grin. "Fine looking," he muttered, still looking after her much as the toothless giantlooked after Christian as he passed his cave. "Finelooking."

Dolly was annoyed: "Oh, you're always thinkingabout fine looks! She is nice."

Uncle John smiled undismayed. "Is she?"

CHAPTER VI

Alice had been married five years-it seemeda long time. The first five years of marriedlife are likely to be long enough to chart prettyaccurately the currents of the future, howeverinsufficient to predict just where those currents willcarry one.

Much disillusioning comes in the first fiveyears; when they have passed we know less ofourselves and more of our consort. Undoubtedlythe complement of this is true, and our consortknows more of us; but this thought, not alwaysreassuring, comes only when we reflect concerningourselves, which fortunately, perhaps, is notoften. Married people, if we may judge fromwhat they say, tend to reflect more concerningtheir mates.

Alice, it is certain, knew less of herself. Muchof the confidence of five years earlier she hadparted with, some of it cruelly. Yet comingat twenty-five into the Kimberly circle, and withthe probability of remaining in it, of its being toher a new picture of life, Alice gradually renewedher youth. Some current flowing from this joyof living seemed to revive in her the illusions ofgirlhood. All that she now questioned waswhether it really was for her.

Her husband enjoyed her promise of success intheir new surroundings without realizing in theleast how clearly those about them discriminatedbetween his wife and himself. She brought onequality that was priceless among those withwhom she now mingled-freshness.

Among such people her wares of mentalaptness, intelligence, amiability, not to discuss acharm of person that gave her a place amongwomen, were rated higher than they could havebeen elsewhere. She breathed in her newatmosphere with a renewed confidence, for nothingis more gratifying than to be judged by what webelieve to be the best in us; and nothing morereassuring after being neglected by stupid peoplethan to find ourselves approved by the best.

Walter MacBirney, her husband, representinghimself and his Western associates, and nowlooked on by them as a man who had forcedrecognition from the Kimberly interests, made on hisside, too, a favorable impression among the menwith whom his affairs brought him for the firsttime in contact.

If there was an exception to such an impressionit was with Robert Kimberly, but even with himMacBirney maintained easily the reputationaccorded to Western men for general capacity anda certain driving ability for putting things through.

He was described as self-made; and examinedwith the quiet curiosity of those less fortunateEastern men who were unwilling or unable toascribe their authorship to themselves, he madea satisfactory showing.

In the Kimberly coterie of men, which consistedin truth more of the staff associates in theKimberly activities than of the Kimberlysthemselves, the appearance of MacBirney on the sceneat Second Lake was a matter of interest to everyone of the fledgling magnates, who, under thelarger wing of the Kimberlys, directed thecommercial end of their interests.

McCrea, known as Robert Kimberly'sright-hand man; Cready Hamilton, one of theKimberly bankers, and brother of Doctor Hamilton,Robert's closest friend; Nelson, the Kimberlycounsel-all took a hand in going over MacBirney,so to say, and grading him up. They foundfor one thing that he could talk without sayinganything; which in conducting negotiations wasan excellent trait. And if not always a successfulstory-teller, he was a shrewd listener. In everythinghis native energy gave him a show of interestwhich, even when factitious, told in his favor.

Soon after the call on Uncle John, Dollyarranged a dinner for the MacBirneys, at whichCharles Kimberly and his wife and RobertKimberly were to be the guests. It followed a secondevening spent at the Nelsons', whence RobertKimberly had come home with the De Castrosand MacBirneys. Alice had sung for them. Afteraccepting for the De Castro dinner, Robert at thelast moment sent excuses.

Dolly masked herfeelings. Imogene and Charles complained a little, but Arthur De Castro was so good a host that healone would have made a dinner go.

MacBirney, after he and Alice had gone to theirrooms for the night, spoke of Robert's absence."I don't quite understand that man," he mused."What do you make of him, Alice?"

Alice was braiding her hair. She turned fromher table. "I've met him very little, youknow-when we called at his house, and twice at theNelsons'. And I saw very little of him last night.He was with that drinking set most of the evening."

MacBirney started. "Don't say 'that drinkingset.'"

"Really, that describes them, Walter. I don'tsee that they excel in anything else. I hatedrinking women."

"When you're in Rome, do as the Romans do,"suggested MacBirney, curtly.

Alice's tone hardened a trifle. "Or at leastlet the Romans do as they please, without comment."

"Exactly," snapped her husband. "I don'tknow just what to make of Kimberly," he went on.

"Charles, or the brother?"

"Robert, Robert. He's the one they all playto here." MacBirney, sitting in a lounging-chair, emphasized the last words, as he could do whenimpatient, and shut his teeth and lips as he didwhen perplexed. "I wonder why he didn't cometo-night?"

Alice had no explanation to offer. "Charles,"she suggested, tying her hair-ribbon, "is very nice."

"Why, yes-you and Charles are chummyalready. I wish we could get better acquaintedwith Robert," he continued, knitting his brows."I thought you were a little short with him lastnight, Alice."

"Short? Oh, Walter! We didn't exchange adozen words."

"That's just the way it struck me."

"But we had no chance to. I am sure I didn'tmean to be short. I sang, didn't I? And moreon his account, from what Dolly had said to me, than anybody else's. He didn't like my singing, but I couldn't help that. He didn't say a single word."

"Why, he did say something!"

"Just some stiff remark when he thanked me."

Alice, rising, left her table. MacBirney laughed.

"Oh, I see. That's what's the matter. Well, you're quite mistaken, my dear." Catching Alicein his arms as she passed, in a way he did when hewished to seem affectionate, MacBirney drew hiswife to him. "He *did* like it. He remarked tome just as he said good-night, that you had a finevoice."

"That does not sound like him-possibly hewas ironical."

"And when I thanked him," continuedMacBirney, "he took the trouble to repeat: 'Thatsong was beautifully sung.' Those were his exactwords."

In spite of painful experiences it rarelyoccurred to Alice that her husband might bedeceiving her, nor did she learn till long afterwardthat he had lied to her that night. With herfeelings in some degree appeased she only made anincredulous little exclamation: "He didn't askme to sing again," she added quietly.

MacBirney shrugged his shoulders. "He is peculiar."

"I try, Walter," she went on, lifting her eyes tohis with an effort, "to be as pleasant as I can toall of these people, for your sake."

"I know it, Alice." He kissed her. "I knowit. Let us see now what we can do to cultivateRobert Kimberly. He is the third rail in thiscombination, and he is the only one on the boardof directors who voted finally against taking us in."

"Is that true?"

"So Doane told Lambert, in confidence, andLambert told me."

"Oh, Lambert! That detestable fellow. Iwouldn't believe anything he said anyway."

MacBirney bared his teeth pleasantly. "Pshaw!You hate him because he makes fun of yourChurch."

"No. I despise him, because he is a Catholicand ridicules his own."

Her husband knew controversy was not the wayto get a favor. "I guess you're right about that,Allie. Anyway, try being pleasant to Kimberly.The way you know how to be, Allie-the way youcaught me, eh?" He drew her to him with breezyenthusiasm. Alice showed some distress.

"Don't say such things, please."

"That was only a joke."

"I hate such jokes."

"Very well, I mean, just be natural," persistedMacBirney amiably, "you are fascinating enoughany old way."

Alice manifested little spirit. "Does it makeso much difference to you, Walter, whether wepay attention to *him*?"

MacBirney raised his eyebrows with a laughingstart. "What an innocent you are," he cried ina subdued tone. And his ways of speech, if everattractive, were now too familiar. "Difference!"he exclaimed cheerily. "When they buy he willname the figure."

"But I thought they had decided to buy."

"The executive committee has authorized thepurchase. But he, as president, has been giventhe power to fix the price. Don't you see? Wecan afford to smile a little, eh?"

"It would kill me to smile if I had to do it formoney."

"Oh, you are a baby in arms, Allie," exclaimedher husband impatiently, "just like your father! You'd starve to death if it weren't for me."

"No doubt."

MacBirney was still laughing at the idea whenhe left his wife's room, and entering his own, closed the door.

Alice, in her room, lay in the darkness for along time with open eyes.

CHAPTER VII

The test of Alice's willingness to smile camewithin a brief fortnight, when with the DeCastros, she was the guest of Imogene Kimberlyat The Cliffs, Imogene's home.

"This is all most informal," said Imogene, asshe went downstairs arm-in-arm with Alice; "asyou see, only one-half the house is open."

"The open half is so lovely," returned Alice,"that I'm glad to take the other half on faith."

"It was my only chance-this week, and asDolly says, I 'jumped at it'! I am sorry yourhusband has disappointed us."

"He was called to town quite unexpectedly."

"But Providence has provided a substitute.Robert Kimberly is coming." Alice almost caughther breath. "He is another of those men,"continued Imogene, "whom you never can get whenyou want them. Fortunately he telephoned amoment ago saying he *must* see Charles. I answeredthat the only possible way to see him was to comeover now, for he is going fishing and leaves atmidnight. The guides wired this morning thatthe ice is out. And when the ice goes out,"Imogene raised her hands, "neither fire norearthquake can stop Charles. Here is Robertnow. Oh, and he has Doctor Hamilton withhim. All the better. If we can get both we shallhave no lack of men."

Robert Kimberly and Doctor Hamilton werecoming down the hall. "How delightful!" criedImogene, advancing, "and I am so glad *you*'vecome, doctor."

Kimberly paused. He saw Alice lingering behindher hostess and the De Castros with FritzieVenable coming downstairs.

"You have a dinner on," he said to Imogene.

"Only a small one."

"But you didn't tell me-"

"Just to give you a chance to show yourindifference to surprises, Robert."

She introduced Doctor Hamilton to Alice."These two are always together," she explainedto Alice, lifting her fan toward the doctor and herbrother-in-law. "But any hostess is fortunate tocapture them like this, just the right moment."

Hamilton, greeting Alice, turned to Imogene: "What is this about your husband's going toLabrador to-morrow?"

"He is going to-night. The salmon are doingsomething or other."

"Deserted Gaspé, has he?"

"Temporarily," said Imogene, pausing to givean order to a butler. Robert waited a momentfor her attention. "I brought the doctor," heexplained, "because I couldn't leave him to dinealone. And now-"

"And now," echoed Imogene, "you see howbeautifully it turns out. The Nelsons declined,Mr. MacBirney disappoints me, Charles goesfishing, and can't get home to-night in time to dine.But there are still seven of us-what could bebetter? Mrs. De Castro will claim the doctor.Arthur won't desert me, and, Robert, you may givean arm to Fritzie and one to Mrs. MacBirney."

There was now no escape from a smile, andAlice resolved to be loyal to her hostess. Theparty moved into the drawing-room.

Fritzie Venable tried to engage Kimberly inanswering her questions about a saddle-horse thatone of his grooms had recommended. Kimberlyprofessed to know nothing about it. When itbecame apparent that he really did know nothingof the horse, Fritzie insisted on explaining.

Her spirited talk, whether concerning her owntroubles or those of other people, was notuninteresting. Soon she talked more especially toAlice. Kimberly listened not inattentively butsomewhat perfunctorily, and the manner, noticeableat their second meeting, again impressed Alice.

Whether it was a constraint or an unpleasingreserve was not clear; and it might have been theabstraction of a busied man, one of that typefamiliar in American life who are inherentlyinteresting, but whose business affairs never wholllyrelease their thought.

Whatever the cause, Fritzie was sufficientlyinterested in her own stories to ignore it and in adegree to overcome the effect of it. She was sureof her ground because she knew her distinguishedconnection had a considerate spot in his heart forher. She finally attacked him directly, and atfirst he did not go to the trouble of a defence.When she at length accused him, rather sharply,of letting business swallow him up, Kimberly, with Alice listening, showed a trace of impatience.

"The old sugar business!" Fritzie exclaimedreproachfully, "it is taking the spiritualitycompletely out of the Kimberly family."

Robert looked at her in genuine surprise andburst into a laugh. "What's that?" he demanded, bending incredulously forward.

Fritzie tossed her head. "I don't care!"

"Spirituality?" echoed Kimberly, with a quietmalice. His laugh annoyed Fritzie, but she stuckto her guns: "Spirits, then; or gayety, or life!"she cried. "I don't care what you call it.Anything besides everlastingly piling up money. Oh, these almighty dollars!"

"You tire of them so quickly, is it, Fritzie? Oris it that they don't feel on familiar terms enoughto stay long with you?" he asked, while Alicewas smiling at the encounter.

Fritzie summoned her dignity and pointed everyword with a nod. "I simply don't want to see*all* of my friends-ossify! Should you?" shedemanded, turning to Alice for approval.

"Certainly not," responded Alice.

"Bone black is very useful in our business,"observed Kimberly.

Fritzie's eyes snapped. "Then buy it! Don'tattempt to supply the demand out of your ownbones!"

It would have been churlish to refuse her herlaugh. Kimberly and Alice for the first timelaughed together and found it pleasant.

Fritzie, following up her advantage, askedDoctor Hamilton whether he had heard DoraMorgan's latest joke. "She had a dispute,"continued Fritzie, "with George Doane last nightabout Unitarians and Universalists-"

"Heavens, have those two got to talkingreligion?" demanded Kimberly, wearily.

"George happened to say to Cready Hamiltonthat Unitarians and Universalists believed justabout the same doctrine. When Dora insisted itwas not so, George told her she couldn't name adifference. 'Why, nonsense, George,' said Dora,'Unitarians deny the divinity of Christ, butUniversalists don't believe in a damned thing.' Andthe funny part of it was, George got furious ather," concluded Fritzie with merriment.

"I suppose you, too, fish," ventured Alice toKimberly as the party started for the dining-room.

"My fishing is something of a bluff," heconfessed. "That is, I fish, but I don't get anything.My brother really does get the fish," he said ashe seated her. "He campaigns for them-onehas to nowadays, even for fish. I can't scrape upinterest enough in it for that. I whip one poolafter another and drag myself wearily overportages and chase about in boats, and my guidesfable wisely but I get next to nothing."

Alice laughed. Even though he assumedincompetence it seemed assumed. And in sayingthat he got no fish one felt that he did get them.

Arthur was talking of Uncle John's nurse-whomthe circle had nicknamed "Lazarus." Hereferred to the sacrifices made sometimes by men.

"It won't do to say," De Castro maintained,"that these men are mere clods, that they haveno nerves, no sensitiveness. The first one youmeet may be such a one; the next, educated orof gentle blood."

"'Lazarus,'" he continued, "is by no means acommon man. He is a gentleman, the product ofcenturies of culture-this is evident from fiveminutes' talk with him. Yet he has

abandonedeverything-family, surroundings, luxuries-fora work that none of us would dream of undertaking."

"And what about women, my dear?"demanded Dolly. "I don't say, take a class ofwomen-take any woman. A woman's life isnothing but sacrifice. The trouble is that womenbear their burdens uncomplainingly. That iswhere all women make a mistake. My life hasbeen a whole series of sacrifices, and I proposepeople shall know it."

"No matter, Dolly," suggested Imogene, "yourwrongs shall be righted in the next world."

"I should just like the chance to tell my storyup there," continued Dolly, fervently.

Kimberly turned to Alice: "All that Dollyfears," said he, in an aside, "is that heaven willprove a disappointment. But to change thesubject from heaven abruptly-you are from theWest, Mrs. MacBirney."

"Do you find the change so abrupt? and mustI confess again to the West?"

"Not if you feel it incriminates you."

"But I don't," protested Alice with spirit.

"Has your home always been there?"

"Yes, in St. Louis; and it is a very dear oldplace. Some of my early married life was spentmuch farther West."

"How much farther?"

"So much that I can hardly make anybodycomprehend it-Colorado."

"How so?"

"They ask me such wild questions about buffalosand Indians. I have found one woman sincecoming here who has been as far West as Chicago, once."

"In what part of Colorado were you?"

"South of Denver."

"You had beautiful surroundings."

"Oh, do you know that country?"

"Not nearly as well as I should like to. It isbeautiful."

Alice laughed repentantly as she answered: "More beautiful to me now, I'm afraid, than itwas then."

"Any town is quiet for a city girl, of course.Was it a small town?"

"Quite small. And odd in many ways."

"I see; where the people have 'best clothes'-"

"Don't make fun."

"And wear them on Sunday. And there isusually one three-story building in the town-Iwas marooned over Sunday once in a littleWestern town, with an uncle. I saw a sign on a bigbuilding: 'Odd Fellows' Hall.' Who are theOdd Fellows, uncle?' I asked. He was a crustyold fellow: 'Optimists, my son, optimists,' hegrowled, 'They build three-story buildings intwo-story towns.' What was your town, by the way?"

"Piedmont."

"Piedmont?" Kimberly paused a moment."I ought to know something of that town."

Alice looked surprised. "You?"

"The uncle I spoke of built a railroad throughthere to the Gulf. Isn't there a town belowPiedmont named Kimberly?"

"To be sure there is. How stupid! I neverthought it was named after your uncle."

"No, that uncle was a Morgan,", interposedImogene, listening, "the town was named afteryour next neighbor."

"How interesting! And how could you makesuch fun of me-having me tell you of a countryyou knew all about! And a whole town namedafter you!"

"That is a modest distinction," remarkedKimberly. "As a boy I was out there with anengineering party and hunted a little. My uncle gaveme the town as a Christmas present."

"A town for a Christmas present!"

"I suspected after I began paying taxes on mypresent that my uncle had got tired of it. Theyused to sit up nights out there to figure out newtaxes. In the matter of devising taxes it is themost industrious, progressive, tireless communityI have ever known. And their pleas were soingenious; they made you feel that if you opposedthem you were an enemy to mankind."

"Then they beguiled Robert every once in awhile," interposed Fritzie, "into a town hall orpublic library or a park or electric lighting plant.Once they asked him for a drinking fountain." Fritzielaughed immoderately at the recollection."He put in the fountain and afterward learnedthere was no water within fifteen miles; theythen urged him to put in a water-works system toget water to it."

"I suggested a brewery to supply the fountain,"said Arthur, looking over, "and that he mightwork out even by selling the surplus beer. Therewere difficulties, of course; if he supplied thefountain with beer, nobody would buy it in bottles.Then it was proposed to sell the surplus beer to theneighboring towns. But with the fountainplaying in Kimberly, these would pretty certainly bedepopulated. Per contra, it was figured that thismight operate to raise the price of his Kimberlylots. But while we were working the thing outfor him, what do you think happened?"

"I haven't an idea," laughed Alice.

"The town voted for prohibition."

"Fancy," murmured Imogene, "and named Kimberly!"

"And what became of the fountain?"

"Oh, it is running; he put in the water-works."

"Generous man!"

"Generous!" echoed Hamilton. "Don't bedeceived, Mrs. MacBirney. You should see whathe charges them for water. I should think itwould be on his conscience, if he has one. He isJupiter with the frogs. Whatever they ask, hegives them. But when they get it-how they doget it!"

"Don't believe Doctor Hamilton, Mrs. MacBirney,"said Robert Kimberly. "I stand betterwith my Western friends than I do with thesecynical Easterners. And if my town will onlydrink up the maintenance charges, I am satisfied."

"The percentage of lime in the water he suppliesis something fierce," persisted the doctor."It is enough to kill off the population every tenyears. I suggested a hospital."

"But didn't Mr. MacBirney tell me they havea sugar factory there?" asked Alice.

"They have," said De Castro. "One of Robert'schemists was out there once trying to analyzethe taxes. Incidentally, he brought back someof the soil, thinking there might be something init to account for the tax mania. And behold, hefound it to be fine for sugar beets! Irrigationditches and a factory were put in. You shouldsee how swell they are out there now."

"Robert has had all kinds of resolutions fromthe town," said Fritzie.

Kimberly turned to Alice to supplement theremark. "Quite true, I *have* had all kinds-theyare strong on resolutions. But lately these havebeen less sulphurous."

"Well, isn't it odd? My father's ranch onceextended nearly all the way from Piedmont tothe very town you are speaking of!" exclaimedAlice.

Kimberly looked at her with interest. "Wasthat really yours-the big ranch north of Kimberly?"

"I spent almost every summer there until I wasfifteen."

"That must have been until very lately."

Alice returned his look with the utmostsimplicity. "No, indeed, it is ten years ago."

Kimberly threw back his head and it fellforward a little on his chest. "How curious," hesaid reflectively; "I knew the ranch very well."

When they were saying good-night, Imogenewhispered to Alice: "I congratulate you."

Alice, flushed with the pleasure of the evening, stood in her wraps. She raised her brows inpleased surprise. "Pray what for?"

"Your success. The evening, you know, wasin your honor; and you were decidedly the featureof it."

"I really didn't suspect it."

"And you made a perfect success with yourunexpected neighbor."

"But I didn't do anything at all!"

"It isn't every woman that succeeds withouttrying. We have been working for a long timeto pull Robert out of the dumps." Imogenelaughed softly. "I noticed to-night while youwere talking to him that he tossed back his headonce or twice. When he does that, he is wakingup! Here is your car, Dolly," she added, as theDe Castros came into the vestibule.

"Arthur is going to take Doctor Hamiltonand Fritzie in our car, Imogene," explained Dolly."Robert has asked Mrs. MacBirney and me todrive home around the south shore with him."

CHAPTER VIII

Charles Kimberly was at The Towersthe morning after the return from his fishingtrip, to confer with Uncle John and his brotherupon the negotiations for the MacBirney properties.In the consideration of any question each ofthe three Kimberlys began with a view-point quitedistinct from those of the others.

John Kimberly, even in old age and strickenphysically to an appalling degree, swerved not ahair's-breadth from his constant philosophy oflife. He believed first and last in force, and thatfeeble remnant of vitality which disease, or whatDolly would have termed, "God's vengeance," hadleft him, was set on the use of force.

To the extent that fraud is an element of force,he employed fraud; but it was only because fraudis a part of force, and whoever sets store by theone will not always shrink from the other. Anydisposition of a question that lacked somethingof this complexion seemed to Uncle John a dangerous one.

Charles had so long seen bludgeoning succeedthat it had become an accepted part of hisbusiness philosophy. But in the day he now faced, new forces had arisen. Public sentiment hadbecome a factor in industrial problems; John wasblind to its dangerous power; Charles was quitealive to it.

New views of the problem of competition hadbeen advanced, and in advocating them, one of theKimberlys, Robert, was known to be a leader.This school sought to draw the sting of competitiveloss through understandings, coöperation, andpeace, instead of suspicion, random effort, and war.

Charles saw this tendency with satisfaction;Uncle John saw it sceptically. But Charles, influenced by the mastery of his uncle, becameunsettled in his conclusions and stood liable to veer inhis judgment to one side or the other of thequestion, as he might be swayed by apprehensionsconcerning the new conditions or rested in confidencein the policies of the old.

Between these two Kimberly make-ups, theone great in attack, the other in compromise, stoodRobert. "Say what you please," Nelson oftenrepeated to McCrea, "John may be all right, but his day is past. Charlie forgets every daymore than the opposition know, all told. But Icall Robert the devil of the family. How doeshe know when to be bold? Can you tell? Howdoes he know when to be prudent? I know men,if I do anything, McCrea-but I never canmeasure that fellow."

Whatever Robert liked at least enlisted all of hisactivities and his temperament turned these intosteam cylinders. John Kimberly influencedRobert in no way at all and after some years ofprofanity and rage perceived that he never should.This discovery was so astounding that after acertain great family crisis he silently and secretlyhanded the sceptre of family infallibility over tohis nephew.

Left thus to himself, Robert continued to thinkfor himself. The same faculties that had servedJohn a generation earlier now served Robert.John had forgotten that when a young man he hadnever let anybody think for him, and the energythat had once made John, also made his younger nephew.

The shrewdness that had once overcomecompetition by war now united with competitors toovercome the public by peace. The real objectof industrial endeavor being to make money, awhite-winged and benevolent peace, as Nelsontermed it, should be the policy of all interestsconcerned. And after many hard words, peace witheighty per cent. of the business was usually achievedby the united Kimberlys.

It had cost something to reach this situation; and now that the West had come into the sugarworld it became a Kimberly problem to determinehow the new interests should be taken care of.

On the morning that Charles called he foundUncle John in his chair. They sent for Robert, and pending his appearance opened the conference.At the end of a quarter of an hour Robert hadnot appeared. Charles looked impatiently at hiswatch and despatched a second servant to summonhis brother. After twenty-five minutes a third callwas sent.

During this time, in the sunniest corner of thesouth garden, sheltered by a high stone wallcrested with English ivy and overgrown withclimbing roses, sat Robert Kimberly indolentlywatching Brother Francis and a diminutive Skyeterrier named Sugar.

Sugar was one of Kimberly's dogs, but Francishad nursed Sugar through an attack after thekennel keepers had given him up. And the littledog although very sick and frowsy had finallypulled through. The intimacy thus establishedbetween Sugar and Francis was never afterwardbroken but by death.

In this sunny corner, Kimberly, in a loose, brownsuit of tweed, his eyes shaded by a straw hat, satin a hickory chair near a table. It was thecorner of the garden in which Francis when off dutycould oftenest be found. A sheltered walk ledto the pergola along which he paced for exercise.Near the corner of the wall stood an oak. And abench, some chairs and a table made the spotattractive. Sugar loved the bench, and, curled upon it, usually kept watch while Francis walked.On cold days the dog lay with one hair-curtainedeye on the coming and going black habit. Onwarm days, cocking one ear for the measured step,he dozed.

Francis, when Sugar had got quite well, expressed himself as scandalized that the poor doghad never been taught anything. He possessed, his new master declared, neither manners noraccomplishments, and Francis amid other dutieshad undertaken, in his own words, to make aman of the little fellow.

Robert, sitting lazily by, instead of attendingthe conference call, and apparently thinking ofnothing-though no one could divine just whatmight be going on under his black-bandedhat-was watching Francis put Sugar through some ofthe hard paces he had laid out for him.

"That dog is naturally stupid, Francis-all mydogs are. They continually cheat me on dogs,"said Kimberly presently. "You don't think so?Very well, I will bet you this bank-note," he tookone from his waistcoat as he spoke, "that youcannot stop him this time on 'two'."

"I have no money to bet you, Robert."

"I will give you odds."

"You well know I do not bet-is it not so?"

"You are always wanting money; now I willbet you the bank-note against one dollar, Francis, that you cannot stop him on 'two'."

Francis threw an eye at the money in Kimberly'shand. "How much is the bank-note, Robert?"

"One hundred dollars."

Francis put the temptation behind him. "Youwould lose your money. Sugar knows how tostop. In any case, I have no dollar."

"I will bet the money against ten cents."

"I have not even ten cents."

"I am sorry, Francis, to see a man receiving aslarge a salary as you do, waste it in dissipationand luxury. However, if you have no money, Iwill bet against your habit."

"If I should lose my habit, what would I do?"

"You could wear a shawl," argued Kimberly.

"All would laugh at me. In any case, to betthe clothes off my back would be a sin."

"I am so sure I am right, I will bet the moneyagainst your snuff-box, Francis," persisted Kimberly.

"My snuff-box I cannot bet, since CardinalSantopaolo gave it to me."

"Francis, think of what you could do for yourgood-for-nothing boys with one hundred dollars."

Francis lifted his dark eyes and shook his head.

"I will bet this," continued the tempter, "againstthe snuff in your box, that you can't stop him thistime on 'two'."

"Sugar will stop on 'two'," declared Francis, now wrought up.

"Dare you bet?"

"Enough! I bet! It is the snuff against themoney. May my poor boys win!"

The sunny corner became active. Kimberlystraightened up, and Francis began to talk toSugar.

"Now tell me again," said Kimberly, "what thisverse is."

"I say to him," explained Francis, "that thegood soldier goes to war-"

"I understand; then you say, 'One, two, three!'"

"Exactly."

"When you say 'three,' he gets the lump?"

"Yes."

"But the first time you say the verse you stopat 'two.' Then you repeat the verse. If the dogtakes the lump before you reach the end thesecond time and say 'three'-"

"You get the snuff!" Francis laid the box onthe table beside Kimberly's bank-note.

"Sugar! Guarda!" The Skye terrier sat uprighton his haunches and lifted his paws. Francisgave him a preliminary admonition, took from amysterious pocket a lump of sugar, laid it on thetip of the dog's nose, and holding up his finger, began in a slow and clearly measured tone:

"Buon soldato
Va alia guerra,
Mangia male,
Dorme in terra.
Uno, due-
Buon soldato
Va-"

But here Sugar, to Francis's horror, snappedthe lump into his mouth and swallowed it.

"You lose," announced Kimberly.

Francis threw up his hands. "My poor boys!"

"This is the time, Francis, your poor boys don'tget my money. I get your snuff."

"Ah, Sugar, Sugar! You ruin us." The littleSkye sitting fast, looked innocently and affectionatelyup at his distressed master. "Why," demandedthe crestfallen Francis, "could you notwait for the lump one little instant?"

"Sugar is like me," suggested Kimberly lazily,"he wants what he wants when he wants it."

Alice, this morning, had been deeply in histhoughts. From the moment he woke he had beentoying indolently with her image-setting it upbefore his imagination as a picture, then puttingit away, then tempting his lethargy again with thepleasure of recalling it.

He drew a cigar-case from his pocket and carefullyemptied the snuff out of the box into it."When do you get more snuff, Francis?"

"On Saturday."

"This is Tuesday. The box is nearly full. Itlooks like good stuff." He paused between eachsentence. "But you would bet."

Francis without looking busied himself withhis little pupil.

"I have emptied the box," announced Kimberly.There was no answer. "Do you want anyof it back?"

Francis waved the offer aside.

"A few pinches, Francis?"

"Nothing."

"That dog," continued Kimberly, rapping thebox to get every grain out and perceiving theimpossibility of harrying Francis in any other way,"is good for nothing anyway. He wasn't worthsaving."

"That dog," returned Francis earnestly, "isa marvel of intelligence and patience. He has sosweet a temper, and he is so quick, Robert, tocomprehend."

"I fail to see it."

"You will see it. The fault is in me."

"I don't see that either."

Francis looked at Kimberly appealingly andpointed benevolently at Sugar. "I ask too muchof that little dog. He will learn. 'Patience,Francis,' he says to me, 'patience; I will learn.'"

Summoning his philosophy to bridge over thedisappointment, Francis, as he stood up, absent-mindedly felt in his deep pocket for his snuff-box.It was in difficulties such as this that recourse toa frugal pinch steadied him. He recollectedinstantly that the snuff was gone, and with somehaste and stepping about, he drew out hishandkerchief instead-glancing toward Kimberly as herubbed his nose vigorously to see if his slip hadbeen detected.

Needless to say it had been-less than thatwould not have escaped Kimberly, and he wasalready enjoying the momentary discomfiture.Sugar at that moment saw a squirrel runningdown the walk and tore after him.

Francis with simple dignity took the emptysnuff-box from the table and put it back in hispocket. His composure was restored and theincident to him was closed.

Kimberly understood him so well that it was nothard to turn the talk to a congenial subject. "Idrove past the college the other day. I see yourpeople are doing some building."

Francis shrugged his shoulders. "A laundry, Robert."

"Not a big building, is it?"

"We must go slow."

"It is over toward where you said the academyought to go."

"My poor academy! They do not think itwill ever come."

"You have more buildings now than you havestudents. What do you want with more buildings?"

"No, no. We have three hundred students-threehundred now." Francis looked at hisquestioner with eyes fiercely eager. "That isthe college, Robert. The academy is somethingelse-for what I told you."

"What did you tell me?" Kimberly lighteda cigar and Francis began again to explain.

"This is it: Our Sisters in the city take nowsixteen hundred boys from seven to eight yearsold. These boys they pick up from the orphancourts, from the streets, from the poor parents.When these boys are twelve the Sisters cannotkeep them longer, they must let them go and takein others.

"Here we have our college and these boys areready for it when they are sixteen. But, betweenare four fatal years-from twelve to sixteen. Ifwe had a school for *such* boys, think what wecould do. They would be always in hand; now, they drift away. They must go to work in thecity filth and wickedness. Ah, they need theprotection we could give them in those terriblefour years, Robert. They need the training inthose years to make of them mechanics andartisans-to give them a chance, to help them to domore than drift without compass or rudder-doyou not see?

"Those boys that are bright, that we find readyto go further, they are ready at sixteen for ourcollege; we keep and educate them. But theothers-the greater part-at sixteen would leaveus, but trained to earn. And strengthenedduring those four critical years against evil. Ah!"

Francis paused. He spoke fast and with anintensity that absorbed him.

Kimberly, leaning comfortably back, sat withone foot resting on his knee. He knocked theash of his cigar upon the heel of his shoe ashe listened-sometimes hearing Francis's words, sometimes not. He had heard all of them beforeat one time or another; the plea was not new tohim, but he liked the fervor of it.

"Ah! It is not for myself that I beg." BrotherFrancis's hands fell resignedly on his knees. "Itis for those poor boys, to keep them, Robert, fromgoing to hell-from hell in this world and in thenext. To think of it makes me always sorrowful-itmakes a beggar of me-a willing beggar."

Kimberly moved his cigar between his lips.

"But where shall I get so much money?"exclaimed Francis, helplessly. "It will take amillion dollars to do what we ought to do. You area great man, Robert; tell me, how shall I find it?"

"I can't tell you how to find it; I can tell youhow to make it."

"How?"

"Go into the sugar business."

"Then I must leave God's business."

"Francis, if you will pardon me, I think for aclever man you are in some respects a great fool.I am not joking. What I have often said aboutyour going into the sugar business, I repeat. Youwould be worth ten thousand dollars a year to me, and I will pay you that much any day."

Francis looked at Kimberly as if he were amadman, but contented himself with moving his headslowly from side to side in protest. "I cannotleave God's business, Robert. I must work forhim and pray to him for the money. Sometimeit will come."

"Then tell Uncle John to raise your wages,"suggested Kimberly, relapsing into indifference.

"Robert, will you not sometime give me a letterto introduce me to the great banker who comeshere, Hamilton?"

"He will not give you anything."

"He has so much money; how can he possiblyneed it all?"

"You forget, Francis, that nobody needs moneyso much as those that have it."

"Ah!"

"Hamilton may have no more money than Ihave, and you don't ask me for a million dollars."

"It is not necessary to ask you. You know Ineed it. If you could give it to me, you would."

"If I gave you a million dollars how should Iever get it back?"

Francis spoke with all seriousness. "God willpay you back."

"Yes, but when? That is a good deal of moneyto lend to God."

"It is a good deal."

"When do I get it back, and how?"

"He will surely pay you, Robert; God pays over there."

"That won't do-over there. It isn't honest."

Francis started. "Not honest?"

"You are offering deferred dividends, Francis.What would my stockholders say if I tried thatkind of business? Gad, they would drag me intocourt."

"Ah, yes! But, Robert; you pay for to-day: he pays for eternity."

Kimberly smoked a moment. "In a propositionof that kind, Francis, it seems to me the questionof guarantees is exceedingly important. You goodmen are safe enough; but where would the badmen come in on your eternal dividends?"

"You are not with the bad men, Robert. Yourheart is not bad. You are, perhaps, cruel-"

"*What?*"

"But generous. Sometime God will give youa chance."

"You mean, sometime I will give God a chance."

"No, Robert, what I say I mean-sometime,God will give you a chance."

Charles Kimberly's impatient voice was heardfrom the pergola.

"Robert! We've been waiting thirty minutes,"he stormed.

"I am just coming."

CHAPTER IX

That afternoon MacBirney played golf withCharles Kimberly. Toward five o'clock,Alice in one of the De Castro cars drove around toThe Hickories after him. When he came in, shewas sitting on the porch with a group of women, among them Fritzie Venable and Lottie Nelson.

"I must be very displeasing to Mrs. Nelson,"Alice said to her husband as they drove away."It upsets me completely to meet that woman."

"Why, what's the matter with *her*?" askedMacBirney, in a tone which professing friendlysurprise really implied that the grievance mightafter all be one of imagination.

"I haven't an idea," declared Alice a littleresentfully. "I am not conscious of having done athing to offend her."

"You are oversensitive."

"But, Walter, I can tell when people mean to be rude."

"What did Mrs. Nelson do that was rude?"asked her husband in his customary vein ofscepticism.

"She never does anything beyond ignoringme," returned Alice. "It must be, I think, thatshe and I instinctively detest each other. Theywere talking about a dinner and musicaleThursday night that Mr. Robert Kimberly is giving atThe Towers. Miss Venable said she supposedwe were going, and I had to say I really didn'tknow. We haven't been asked, have we?"

"Not that I know of."

"Mrs. Nelson looked at me when Fritzie spoke;I think it is the first time that she ever has lookedat me, except when she had to say 'good-morning'or 'good-evening.' I was confused a littlewhen I answered, I suppose; at any rate, sheenjoyed it. Mr. Kimberly would not leave us out, would he?"

"I don't think so. He was playing golf thisafternoon with Cready Hamilton, and he stoppedto offer me his yacht for the week of the cup races."

"Why, how delightful! How came he ever todo that?"

"And I think he has made up his mind what heis going to do about placing me on the board,"continued MacBirney, resuming his hard, thinmanner and his eager tone of business. "I wishI knew just what is coming."

Alice had scarcely reached her room when shefound the dinner invitation. She felt a little thrillof triumph as she read it. Her maid explainedthat the note had been laid in the morning withMrs. De Castro's letters.

Late in the evening Kimberly came over withhis sister-in-law, Imogene. The De Castros wereat the seashore overnight and the visitors' cardswere sent up to the MacBirneys. It was warmand the party sat on the south veranda.Kimberly talked with Alice and she told him theyhoped to be present at his dinner.

"You are sure to be, aren't you?" he asked."The evening is given for you."

"For us?"

"No, not for 'us,' but for you," he saiddistinctly. "Mr. MacBirney has said he is fondof the water-you like music; and I am tryingsomething for each of you. I should have askedyou about your engagements before the cardswent out. If there is any conflict the date caneasily be recalled."

"Oh, no. That would be a pity."

"Not at all. I change my arrangements whennecessary every ten minutes."

"But there isn't any conflict, and I shall bedelighted to come. Pray, how do you know I likemusic?"

"I heard you say so once to Arthur De Castro.Tell me what you are amused about?"

"Have I betrayed any amusement?"

"For just about the hundredth part of a second,in your eyes."

They were looking at each other and his gazethough within restraint was undeniably alive.Alice knew not whether she could quite ignore itor whether her eyes would drop in an annoyingadmission of self-consciousness. She avoided thelatter by confessing. "I am sure I don't know atall what you are talking about-"

"I am sure you do, but you are privileged notto tell if you don't want to."

"Then-our dinner card was mislaid and untilto-night we didn't know whether-"

"There was going to be any dinner."

"Oh, I knew that. I was at the Casino thisafternoon-"

"I saw you."

"And when I was asked whether I was goingto the dinner at The Towers I couldn't, of course, say."

"Who asked you, Mrs. Nelson?"

"No, indeed. What made you think it was she?"

"Because she asked me if you were to be there.When I said you were, she laughed in such a wayI grew suspicious. I thought, perhaps, for somereason you could not come, and now *I* amconfessing-I ran over to-night expressly to find out."

"How ridiculous!"

"Rather ridiculous of me not to know before-hand."

"I don't mean that-just queer little complications."

"A mislaid dinner-card might be answerablefor more than that."

"It was Miss Venable who asked, quite innocently.And had I known all I know now, I couldhave taken a chance, perhaps, and said yes."

"You would have been taking no chance wheremy hospitality is concerned."

"Thank you, Mr. Kimberly, for my husbandand myself."

"And you might have added in this instancethat if you did not go there would be no dinner."

Alice concealed an embarrassment under a littlelaugh. "My husband told me of your kindness inplacing your yacht at our disposal for the races."

"At his disposal."

"Oh, wasn't I included in that?"

"Certainly, if you would like to be. But tastesdiffer, and you and Mr. MacBirney being two-"

"Oh, no, Mr. Kimberly; my husband and I are one."

" – and possibly of different tastes," continuedKimberly, "I thought only of him. I hope itwasn't ungracious, but some women, you know, hate the water. And I had no means of knowingwhether you liked it. If you do-"

"And you are not going to the races, yourself?"

"If you do, I shall know better the next timehow to arrange."

"And you are not going to the races?"

"Probably not. Do you like the water?"

"To be quite frank, I don't know."

"How so?"

"I like the ocean immensely, but I don't knowhow good a sailor I should be on a yacht."

Imogene was ready to go home. Kimberlyrose. "I understand," he said, in the frank andreassuring manner that was convincing becausequite natural. "We will try you some time, upthe coast," he suggested, extending his hand."Good-night, Mrs. MacBirney."

"I believe Kimberly is coming to our side,"declared MacBirney after he had gone upstairswith Alice.

Annie had been dismissed and Alice was braidingher hair. "I hope so; I begin to feel like aconspirator."

MacBirney was in high spirits. "You don'tlook like one. You look just now likeMarguerite." He put his hands around her shoulders, and bending over her chair, kissed her. Thecaress left her cold.

"Poor Marguerite," she said softly.

"When is the dinner to be?"

"A week from Thursday. Mr. Kimberly saysthe yacht is for you, but the dinner is for me,"continued Alice as she lifted her eyes toward herhusband.

"Good for you."

"He is the oddest combination," she musedwith a smile, and lingering for an instant onthe adjective. "Blunt, and seemingly kind-hearted-"

"Not kind-hearted," MacBirney echoed, incredulously. "Why, even Nelson, and he'ssupposed to think the world and all of him, calls himas cold as the grave when he *wants* anything."

Alice stuck to her verdict. "I can't help whatNelson says; and I don't pretend to know howMr. Kimberly would act when he wants anything.A kind-hearted man is kind to those he likes, anda cold-blooded man is just the same to those helikes and those he doesn't like. There is alwayssomething that stands between a cold-bloodedman and real consideration for those he likes-andthat something is himself."

Alice was quite willing her husband should applyher words as he pleased. She thought he hadgiven her ample reason for her reflection on thesubject.

But MacBirney was too self-satisfied to perceivewhat her words meant and too pleased with thesituation to argue. "Whatever he is," heresponded, "he is the wheel-horse in thiscombination-everybody agrees on that-and the friendshipof these people is an asset the world over. Ifwe can get it and keep it, we are the gainers."

"Whatever we do," returned Alice, "don't letus trade on it. I shrink from the very thought ofbeing a gainer by his or any other friendship. Ifwe are to be friends, do let us be so through mutuallikes and interests. Mr. Kimberly would knowinstantly if we designed it in any other way, I amsure. I never saw such penetrating eyes. Really,he takes thoughts right out of my head."

MacBirney laughed in a hard way. "He mighttake them out of a woman's head. I don't thinkhe would take many out of a man's."

"He wouldn't need to, dear. A man's thought's, you know, are clearly written on the end of hisnose. I wish I knew what to wear to Mr. Kimberly's dinner."

CHAPTER X

One morning shortly after the MacBirneyshad been entertained at The Towers JohnKimberly was wheeled into his library whereCharles and Robert were waiting for him. Charlesleaned against the mantel and his brother stood ata window looking across the lake toward CedarPoint. As Francis left the room Uncle John'seyes followed him. Presently they wandered backwith cheerful suspicion toward his nephews, andhe laid his good arm on the table as they tookchairs near him.

"Well?" he said lifting his eyebrows andlooking blandly from one to the other.

"Well?" echoed Charles good-naturedly, lookingfrom Uncle John to Robert.

"Well?" repeated Robert with mildly assumedidiocy, looking from Charles back again to UncleJohn.

But Uncle John was not to be committed byany resort to his own tactics, and he came back atCharles on the flank. "Get any fish?" he asked,as if assured that Charles would make an effort todeceive him in answering.

"We sat around for a while without doing athing, Uncle John. Then they began to strikeand I had eight days of the best sport I ever sawon the river,"

Uncle John buried his disappointment under asmile. "Good fishing, eh?"

"Excellent."

There was evidently no opening on this subject, and Uncle John tried another tender spot. "Yachtgo any better?"

"McAdams has done wonders with it, UncleJohn. She never steamed so well since she waslaunched."

"Cost a pretty penny, eh, Charlie?"

"That is what pretty pennies are for, isn't it?"

Unable to disturb his nephew's peace of mind,Uncle John launched straight into business."What are you going to do with those fellows?"

"You mean the MacBirney syndicate? Roberttells me he has concluded to be liberal with them."

"He is giving too much, Charlie."

"He knows better what the stuff is worth thanwe do."

Uncle John smiled sceptically. "He will givethem more than they are worth, I am afraid."

Robert said nothing.

"Perhaps there is a reason for that," suggestedCharles.

They waited for Robert to speak. He shiftedin his chair presently and spoke with somedecision. His intonation might have beenunpleasant but that the depth and fulness of hisvoice redeemed it. The best note in his utterancewas its open frankness.

"Uncle John understands this matter just aswell as I do," he began, somewhat in protest.

"We have been over the ground often. Thesepeople have been an annoyance to us; this isundeniable. McCrea has complained of them fortwo years. Through a shift in the cards-thismoney squeeze-we have them to-day in ourhands-"

Uncle John's eyes shone and he clasped thefingers of one hand tightly in the other. "That iswhat I say; trim them!" he whispered eagerly.

Robert went on, unmoved: "Let us look atthat, too. He wants me to trim them. I havesteadily opposed buying them at all. But the restof you have overruled me. Very good. Theyknow now that they are in our power. They are, one and all, bushwhackers and guerillas. Tomy mind there isn't a trustworthy man in thecrowd-not even MacBirney.

"They have made selling agreements withMcCrea again and again and left him to hold thesack. We can't do business in that way. Whenwe give our word it must be good. They givetheir word to break it. Whenever we make aselling agreement with such people we get beaten, invariably. They

have cut into us on theMissouri River, at St. Paul, even at Chicago-fromtheir Kansas plants. They make poor sugar, butit sells, and even when it won't sell, it demoralizesthe trade. Now they are on their knees. Theywant us to buy to save what they've got invested.At a receiver's sale they would get nothing. Buton the other hand Lambert might get the plants.If we tried to bid them in there would be a howlfrom the Legislature, perhaps."

Uncle John was growing moody, for the preywas slipping through his fingers. "It might bebetter to stand pat," he muttered.

Robert paid no attention. "What I propose, and God knows I have explained it before, is this: These people can be trimmed, or they can besatisfied. I say give them eleven millions-six millionscash-three millions preferred and two millions inour common for fifty per cent of their stockinstead of sixteen millions for all of their stock."

Uncle John looked horror stricken. "It isnothing to us," exclaimed Robert, impatiently. "Ican make the whole capital back in twelve monthswith McCrea to help MacBirney reorganize andrun the plants. It is a fortune for them, and wekeep MacBirney and the rest of them, for tenyears at least, from scheming to start new plants.Nelson says there are legal difficulties aboutbuying more than half their stock. But the votingcontrol of all of it can be safely trusteed."

Uncle John could barely articulate: "Toomuch, it is too much."

"Bosh. This is a case where generosity is'plainly indicated,' as Hamilton says."

"Too much."

"Robert is right," asserted Charles curtly.

Uncle John threw his hand up as if to say: "Ifyou are resolved to ruin us, go on!"

"You will be surprised at the success of it,"concluded Robert. "MacBirney wants to comehere to live, though Chicago would be the betterplace for him. Let him be responsible for theWestern territory. With such an arrangementwe ought to have peace out there for ten years.If we can, it means just one hundred millionsmore in our pockets than we can make in theface of this continual price cutting."

Charles rose. "Then it is settled."

Uncle John ventured a last appeal. "Makethe cash five and a half millions."

"Very good," assented Robert, who to meetprecisely this objection had raised the figure wellabove what he intended to pay. "As you like,Uncle John," he said graciously. "Charles, makethe cash five and a half millions."

And Uncle John went back to his loneliness, treasuring in his heart the half million he hadsaved, and encouraged by his frail triumph inthe conference over his never-quite-wholly-understoodnephew.

At a luncheon next day, the decision was laidby Charles and Robert before the Kimberlypartners, by whom it was discussed and approved.

In the evening Charles, with Robert listening, laid the proposal before MacBirney, who hadbeen sent for and whose astonishment at theunexpected liberality overwhelmed him.

He was promptly whirled away from TheTowers in a De Castro car. And from a simpleafter-dinner conference, in which he had sat downat ten o'clock a promoter, he had risen atmidnight with his brain reeling, a millionaire.

Alice excused herself when her husbandappeared at Black Rock, and followed him upstairs.She saw how he was wrought up. In their room, with eyes burning with the fires of success, he toldher of the stupendous change in their fortunes.With an affection that surprised and moved Alice, who had long believed that never again couldanything from him move her, he caught herclosely in his arms.

Tears filled her eyes. He wiped them awayand forced a laugh. "Too good to be true, dearie, isn't it?"

She faltered an instant. "If it will only bring ushappiness, Walter."

"Alice, I'm afraid I have been harsh, at times." Hermemory swept over bitter months and wastedyears, but her heart was touched. "It is allbecause I worry too much over business. Therewill be

no more worries now-they are past andgone. And I want you to forget everything,Allie." He embraced her fervently. "I havehad a good deal of anxiety first and last. It isover now. Great God! This is so easy here.Everything is so easy for these people."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.