

Chambers Robert William

The Moonlit Way: A Novel



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The Moonlit Way: A Novel

PROLOGUE CLAIRE-DE-LUNE

There was a big moon over the Bosphorus; the limpid waters off Seraglio Point glimmered; the Golden Horn was like a sheet of beaten silver inset with topaz and ruby where lanterns on rusting Turkish warships dyed the tarnished argent of the flood. Except for these, and the fixed lights on the foreign guard-ships and on a big American steam yacht, only a pale and nebulous shoreward glow betrayed the monster city.

Over Pera the full moon's lustre fell, silvering palace, villa, sea and coast; its rays glimmered on bridge and wharf, bastion, tower arsenal, and minarette, transforming those big, sprawling, ramshackle blotches of architecture called Constantinople into that shadowy, magnificent enchantment of the East, which all believe in, but which exists only in a poet's heart and mind.

Night veiled the squalour of Balat, and its filth, its meanness, its flimsy sham. Moonlight made of Galata a marvel, ennobling every bastard dome, every starved façade, every unlovely and attenuated minarette, and invested with added charm each really lovely ruin, each tower, palace, mosque, garden wall and balcony, and every crenelated battlement, where the bronze bulk of 2 ancient cannon slanted, outlined in silver under the Prophet's moon.

Tiny moving lights twinkled on the Galata Bridge; pale points of radiance dotted Scutari; but the group of amazing cities called Constantinople lay almost blotted out under the moon.

Darker at night than any capital in the world, its huge, solid and ancient shapes bulking gigantic in the night, its noble ruins cloaked, its cheap filth hidden, its flimsy Coney Island aspect transfigured and the stylographic-pen architecture of a hundred minaretttes softened into slender elegance, Constantinople lay dreaming its immemorial dreams under the black shadow of the Prussian eagle.

The German Embassy was lighted up like a Pera café; the drawing-rooms crowded with a brilliant throng where sashes, orders, epaulettes and sabre-tache glittered, and jewels blazed and aigrettes waved under the crystal chandeliers, accenting and isolating sombre civilian evening dress, which seemed mournful, rusty, and out of the picture, even when plastered over with jewelled stars.

Few Turkish officials and officers were present, but the disquieting sight of German officers in Turkish uniforms was not uncommon. And the Count d'Eblis, Senator of France, noted this phenomenon with lively curiosity, and mentioned it to his companion, Ferez Bey.

Ferez Bey, lounging in a corner with Adolf Gerhardt, for whom he had procured an invitation, and flanked by the Count d'Eblis, likewise a guest aboard the rich German-American banker's yacht, was very much in his element as friend and mentor.

For Ferez Bey knew everybody in the Orient – knew 3 when to cringe, when to be patronising, when to fawn, when to assert himself, when to be servile, when impudent.

He was as impudent to Adolf Gerhardt as he dared be, the banker not knowing the subtler shades and differences; he was on an equality with the French senator, Monsieur le Comte d'Eblis because he knew that d'Eblis dared not resent his familiarity.

Otherwise, in that brilliant company, Ferez Bey was a jackal – and he knew it perfectly – but a valuable jackal; and he also knew that.

So when the German Ambassador spoke pleasantly to him, his attitude was just sufficiently servile, but not overdone; and when Von-der-Hohe Pasha, in the uniform of a Turkish General of

Division, graciously exchanged a polite word with him during a moment's easy gossip with the Count d'Eblis, Ferez Bey writhed moderately under the honour, but did not exactly squirm.

To Conrad von Heimholz he ventured to present his German-American patron, Adolf Gerhardt, and the thin young military attaché condescended in his Prussian way to notice the introduction.

"Saw your yacht in the harbour," he admitted stiffly. "It is astonishing how you Americans permit no bounds to your somewhat noticeable magnificence."

"She's a good boat, the *Mirage*," rumbled Gerhardt, in his bushy red beard, "but there are plenty in America finer than mine."

"Not many, Adolf," insisted Ferez, in his flat, Eurasian voice – "not ver' many anyw'ere so fine like your *Mirage*."

"I saw none finer at Kiel," said the attaché, staring at Gerhardt through his monocle, with the habitual insolence and disapproval of the Prussian junker. "To 4 me it exhibits bad taste" – he turned to the Count d'Eblis – "particularly when the *Meteor* is there."

"Where?" asked the Count.

"At Kiel. I speak of Kiel and the ostentation of certain foreign yacht owners at the recent regatta."

Gerhardt, redder than ever, was still German enough to swallow the meaningless insolence. He was not getting on very well at the Embassy of his fellow countrymen. Americans, properly presented, they endured without too open resentment; for German-Americans, even when millionaires, their contempt and bad manners were often undisguised.

"I'm going to get out of this," growled Gerhardt, who held a good position socially in New York and in the fashionable colony at Northbrook. "I've seen enough puffed up Germans and over-embroidered Turks to last me. Come on, d'Eblis – "

Ferez detained them both:

"Surely," he protested, "you would not miss Nihla!"

"Nihla?" repeated d'Eblis, who had passed his arm through Gerhardt's. "Is that the girl who set St. Petersburg by the ears?"

"Nihla Quellen," rumbled Gerhardt. "I've heard of her. She's a dancer, isn't she?"

Ferez, of course, knew all about her, and he drew the two men into the embrasure of a long window.

It was not happening just exactly as he and the German Ambassador had planned it together; they had intended to let Nihla burst like a flaming jewel on the vision of d'Eblis and blind him then and there.

Perhaps, after all, it was better drama to prepare her entrance. And who but Ferez was qualified to prepare that entrée, or to speak with authority concerning the history of this strange and beautiful young girl who had suddenly appeared like a burning star 5 in the East, had passed like a meteor through St. Petersburg, leaving several susceptible young men – notably the Grand Duke Cyril – mentally unhinged and hopelessly dissatisfied with fate.

"It is ver' fonny, d'Eblis – une histoire chic, vous savez! Figurez vous – "

"Talk English," growled Gerhardt, eyeing the serene progress of a pretty Highness, Austrian, of course, surrounded by gorgeous uniforms and empressement.

"Who's that?" he added.

Ferez turned; the gorgeous lady snubbed him, but bowed to d'Eblis.

"The Archduchess Zilka," he said, not a whit abashed. "She is a ver' great frien' of mine."

"Can't you present me?" enquired Gerhardt, restlessly; " – or you, d'Eblis – can't you ask permission?"

The Count d'Eblis nodded inattentively, then turned his heavy and rather vulgar face to Ferez, plainly interested in the "histoire" of the girl, Nihla.

"What were you going to say about that dancer?" he demanded.

Ferez pretended to forget, then, apparently recollecting:

“Ah! Apropos of Nihla? It is a ver’ piquant storee – the storee of Nihla Quellen. Zat is not ’er name. No! Her name is Dunois – Thessalie Dunois.”

“French,” nodded d’Eblis.

“Alsatian,” replied Ferez slyly. “Her fathaire was captain – Achille Dunois? – you know – ?”

“What!” exclaimed d’Eblis. “Do you mean that notorious fellow, the Grand Duke Cyril’s hunting cheetah?”

“The same, dear frien’. Dunois is dead – his bullet head was crack open, doubtless by som’ ladee’s angree 6 husban’. There are a few thousan’ roubles – not more – to stan’ between some kind gentleman and the prettee Nihla. You see?” he added to Gerhardt, who was listening without interest, “– Dunois, if he was the Gran’ Duke’s cheetah, kept all such merry gentlemen from his charming daughtaire.”

Gerhardt, whose aspirations lay higher, socially, than a dancing girl, merely grunted. But d’Eblis, whose aspirations were always below even his own level, listened with visibly increasing curiosity. And this was according to the programme of Ferez Bey and Excellenz. As the Hun has it, “according to plan.”

“Well,” enquired d’Eblis heavily, “did Cyril get her?”

“All St. Petersburg is still laughing at heem,” replied the voluble Eurasian. “Cyril indeed launched her. And that was sufficient – yet, that first night she storm St. Petersburg. And Cyril’s reward? Listen, d’Eblis, they say she slapped his sillee face. For me, I don’t know. That is the storee. And he was ver’ angree, Cyril. You know? And, by God, it was what Gerhardt calls a ‘raw deal.’ Yess? Figurez vous! – this girl, déjà lancée – and her fathaire the Grand Duke’s hunting cheetah, and her mothaire, what? Yes, mon ami, a ’andsome Géorgianne, caught quite wild, they say, by Prince Haledine! For me, I believe it. Why not?... And then the beautiful Géorgianne, she fell to Dunois – on a bet? – a service rendered? – gratitude of Cyril? – Who knows? Only that Dunois must marry her. And Nihla is their daughtaire. Voilà!”

“Then why,” demanded d’Eblis, “does she make such a fuss about being grateful? I hate ingratitude, Ferez. And how can she last, anyway? To dance for the German Ambassador in Constantinople is all very 7 well, but unless somebody launches her properly – in Paris – she’ll end in a Pera café.”

Ferez held his peace and listened with all his might.

“I could do that,” added d’Eblis.

“Please?” inquired Ferez suavely.

“Launch her in Paris.”

The programme of Excellenz and Ferez Bey was certainly proceeding as planned.

But Gerhardt was becoming restless and dully irritated as he began to realise more and more what caste meant to Prussians and how insignificant to these people was a German-American multimillionaire. And Ferez realised that he must do something.

There was a Bavarian Baroness there, uglier than the usual run of Bavarian baronesses; and to her Ferez nailed Gerhardt, and wriggled free himself, making his way amid the gorgeous throngs to the Count d’Eblis once more.

“I left Gerhardt planted,” he remarked with satisfaction; “by God, she is uglee like camels – the Baroness von Schaunitz! Nev’ mind. It is nobility; it is the same to Adolf Gerhardt.”

“A homely woman makes me sick!” remarked d’Eblis. “Eh, mon Dieu! – one has merely to look at these ladies to guess their nationality! Only in Germany can one gather together such a collection of horrors. The only pretty ones are Austrian.”

Perhaps even the cynicism of Excellenz had not realised the perfection of this setting, but Ferez, the nimble witted, had foreseen it.

Already the glittering crowds in the drawing rooms were drawing aside like jewelled curtains; already the stringed orchestra had become mute aloft in its gilded gallery.

The gay tumult softened; laughter, voices, the rustle of silks and fans, the metallic murmur of drawing-room equipment died away. Through the increasing stillness, from the gilded gallery a Thessalonian reed began skirling like a thrush in the underbrush.

Suddenly a sand-coloured curtain at the end of the east room twitched open, and a great desert ostrich trotted in. And, astride of the big, excited, bridled bird, sat a young girl, controlling her restless mount with disdainful indifference.

“Nihla!” whispered Ferez, in the large, fat ear of the Count d’Eblis. The latter’s pallid jowl reddened and his pendulous lips tightened to a deep-bitten crease across his face.

To the weird skirling of the Thessalonian pipe the girl, Nihla, put her feathered steed through its absurd paces, aping the haute-école.

There is little humour in your Teuton; they were too amazed to laugh; too fascinated, possibly by the girl herself, to follow the panicky gambols of the reptile-headed bird.

The girl wore absolutely nothing except a Yashmak and a zone of blue jewels across her breasts and hips.

Her childish throat, her limbs, her slim, snowy body, her little naked feet were lovely beyond words. Her thick dark hair flew loose, now framing, now veiling an oval face from which, above the gauzy Yashmak’s edge, two dark eyes coolly swept her breathless audience.

But under the frail wisp of cobweb, her cheeks glowed pink, and two full red lips parted deliciously in the half-checked laughter of confident, reckless youth.

Over hurdle after hurdle she lifted her powerful, half-terrified mount; she backed it, pirouetted, made it squat, leap, pace, trot, run with wings half spread and neck stretched level.

She rode sideways, then kneeling, standing, then poised on one foot; she threw somersaults, faced to the rear, mounted and dismounted at full speed. And through the frail, transparent Yashmak her parted red lips revealed the glimmer of teeth and her childishly engaging laughter rang delightfully.

Then, abruptly, she had enough of her bird; she wheeled, sprang to the polished parquet, and sent her feathered steed scampering away through the sand-coloured curtains, which switched into place again immediately.

Breathless, laughing that frank, youthful, irresistible laugh which was to become so celebrated in Europe, Nihla Quellen strolled leisurely around the circle of her applauding audience, carelessly blowing a kiss or two from her slim finger-tips, evidently quite unspoiled by her success and equally delighted to please and to be pleased.

Then, in the gilded gallery the strings began; and quite naturally, without any trace of preparation or self-consciousness, Nihla began to sing, dancing when the fascinating, irresponsible measure called for it, singing again as the sequence occurred. And the enchantment of it all lay in its accidental and detached allure – as though it all were quite spontaneous – the song a passing whim, the dance a capricious after-thought, and the whole thing done entirely to please herself and give vent to the sheer delight of a young girl, in her own overwhelming energy and youthful spirits.

Even the Teuton comprehended that, and the applause grew to a roar with that odd undertone of animal menace always to be detected when the German herd is gratified and expresses pleasure en masse.

But she wouldn’t stay, wouldn’t return. Like one of those beautiful Persian cats, she had lingered long enough to arouse delight. Then she went, deaf to recall, to persuasion, to caress – indifferent to praise, to blandishment, to entreaty. Cat and dancer were similar; Nihla, like the Persian puss, knew when she had had enough. That was sufficient for her: nothing could stop her, nothing lure her to return.

Beads of sweat were glistening upon the heavy features of the Count d'Eblis. Von-der-Goltz Pasha, strolling near, did him the honour to remember him, but d'Eblis seemed dazed and unresponsive; and the old Pasha understood, perhaps, when he caught the beady and expressive eyes of Ferez fixed on him in exultation.

"Whose is she?" demanded d'Eblis abruptly. His voice was hoarse and evidently out of control, for he spoke too loudly to please Ferez, who took him by the arm and led him out to the moonlit terrace.

"Mon pauvre ami," he said soothingly, "she is actually the proprietee of nobodee at present. Cyril, they say, is following her – quite ready for anything – marriage – "

"What!"

Ferez shrugged:

"That is the gosseep. No doubt som' man of wealth, more acceptable to her – "

"I wish to meet her!" said d'Eblis.

"Ah! That is, of course, not easee – "

"Why?"

Ferez laughed:

"Ask yo'self the question again! Excellenz and his guests have gone quite mad ovaire Nihla – "

"I care nothing for them," retorted d'Eblis thickly; "I wish to know her... I wish to know her!..

Do you understand?"

After a silence, Ferez turned in the moonlight and looked at the Count d'Eblis.

"And your newspapaire — *Le Mot d'Ordre*?"

"Yes... If you get her for me."

"You sell to me for two million francs the control stock in *Le Mot d'Ordre*?"

"Yes."

"An' the two million, eh?"

"I shall use my influence with Gerhardt. That is all I can do. If your Emperor chooses to decorate him – something – the Red Eagle, third class, perhaps – "

"I attend to those," smiled Ferez. "Hit's ver' fonny, d'Eblis, how I am thinking about those Red Eagles all time since I know Gerhardt. I spik to Von-der-Goltz de votre part, si vous le voulez? Oui? Alors – "

"Ask her to supper aboard the yacht."

"God knows – "

The Count d'Eblis said through closed teeth:

"There is the first woman I ever really wanted in all my life!.. I am standing here now waiting for her – waiting to be presented to her now."

"I spik to Von-der-Goltz Pasha," said Ferez; and he slipped through the palms and orange trees and vanished.

For half an hour the Count d'Eblis stood there, motionless in the moonlight.

She came about that time, on the arm of Ferez Bey, her father's friend of many years.

And Ferez left her there in the creamy Turkish moonlight on the flowering terrace, alone with the Count d'Eblis.

When Ferez came again, long after midnight, with Excellenz on one arm and the proud and happy Adolf Gerhardt on the other, the whole cycle of a little drama had been played to a conclusion between those two shadowy figures under the flowering almonds on the terrace – between this slender, dark-eyed girl and this big, bulky, heavy-visaged man of the world.

And the man had been beaten and the girl had laid down every term. And the compact was this: that she was to be launched in Paris; she was merely to borrow any sum needed, with privilege to acquit the debt within the year; that, if she ever came to care for this man sufficiently, she was to become only one species of masculine property – a legal wife.

And to every condition – and finally even to the last, the man had bowed his heavy, burning head.

“D’Eblis!” began Gerhardt, almost stammering in his joy and pride. “His highness tells me that I am to have an order – an Imperial d-decoration – ”

D’Eblis stared at him out of unseeing eyes; Nihla laughed outright, alas, too early wise and not even troubling her lovely head to wonder why a decoration had been asked for this burly, bushy-bearded man from nowhere.

But within his sinuous, twisted soul Ferez writhed exultingly, and patted Gerhardt on the arm, and patted d’Eblis, too – dared even to squirm visibly closer to Excellenz, like a fawning dog that fears too much to venture contact in his wriggling demonstrations.

“You take with you our pretty wonder-child to Paris to be launched, I hear,” remarked Excellenz, most affably, to d’Eblis. And to Nihla: “And upon a yacht fit for an emperor, I understand. Ach! Such a going forth is only heard of in the Arabian Nights. Eh 13 bien, ma petite, go West, conquer, and reign! It is a prophecy!”

And Nihla threw back her head and laughed her full-throated laughter under the Turkish moon. Later, Ferez, walking with the Ambassador, replied humbly to the curt question:

“Yes, I have become his jackal. But always at the orders of Excellenz.”

Later still, aboard the *Mirage*, Ferez stood alone by the after-rail, staring with ratty eyes at the blackness beyond the New Bridge.

“Oh, God, be merciful!” he whispered. He had often said it on the eve of crime. Even an Eurasian rat has emotions. And Ferez had been in love with Nihla many years, and was selling her now at a price – selling her and Adolf Gerhardt and the Count d’Eblis and France – all he had to barter – for he had sold his soul too long ago to remember even what he got for it.

The silence seemed more intense for the sounds that made it audible. From, the unlighted cities on the seven hills came an unbroken howling of dogs; transparent waves of the limpid Bosphorus slapped the vessel’s sides, making a mellow and ceaseless clatter. Far away beyond Galata Quay, in the inner reek of unseen Stamboul, the notes of a Turkish flute stole out across the darkness, where some Tzigane – some unseen wretch in rags – was playing the melancholy song of Mourad. And, mournfully responsive to the reedy complaint of a homeless wanderer from a nation without a home, the homeless dogs of Islam wailed their miserere under the Prophet’s moon.

The tragic wolf-song wavered from hill to hill; from the Fields of the Dead to the Seven Towers, from 14 Kassim to Tophane, seeming to swell into one dreadful, endless plaint:

“My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”

“And me!” muttered Ferez, shivering in the windy vapours from the Black Sea, which already dampened his face with their creeping summer chill.

“Ferez!”

He turned slowly. Swathed in a white wool bernous, Nihla stood there in the foggy moonlight.

“Why?” she enquired, without preliminaries and with the unfeigned curiosity of a child.

He did not pretend to misunderstand her in French:

“Thou knowest, Nihla. I have never touched thy heart. I could do nothing for thee – ”

“Except to sell me,” she smiled, interrupting him in English, without the slightest trace of accent.

But Ferez preferred the refuge of French:

“Except to launch thee and make possible thy career,” he corrected her very gently.

“I thought you were in love with me?”

“I have loved thee, Nihla, since thy childhood.”

“Is there anything on earth or in paradise, Ferez, that you would not sell for a price?”

“I tell thee – ”

“Zut! I know thee, Ferez!” she mocked him, slipping easily into French. “What was my price? Who pays thee, Colonel Ferez? This big, shambling, world-wearied Count, who is, nevertheless, afraid of me? Did he pay thee? Or was it this rich American, Gerhardt? Or was it Von-der-Goltz? Or Excellenz?”

“Nihla! Thou knowest me – ”

Her clear, untroubled laughter checked him:

“I know you, Ferez. That is why I ask. That is why I shall have no reply from you. Only my wits can ever answer me any questions.”

She stood laughing at him, swathed in her white wool, looming like some mocking spectre in the misty moonlight of the after-deck.

“Oh, Ferez,” she said in her sweet, malicious voice, “there was a curse on Midas, too! You play at high finance; you sell what you never had to sell, and you are paid for it. All your life you have been busy selling, re-selling, bargaining, betraying, seeking always gain where only loss is possible – loss of all that justifies a man in daring to stand alive before the God that made him!.. And yet – that which you call love – that shadowy emotion which you have also sold to-night – I think you really feel for me... Yes, I believe it... But it, too, has its price... *What* was that price, Ferez?”

“Believe me, Nihla – ”

“Oh, Ferez, you ask too much! No! Let *me* tell *you*, then. The price was paid by that American, who is not one but a German.”

“That is absurd!”

“Why the Red Eagle, then? And the friendship of Excellenz? What is he then, this Gerhardt, but a millionaire? Why is nobility so gracious then? What does Gerhardt give for his Red Eagle? – for the politeness of Excellenz? – for the crooked smile of a Bavarian Baroness and the lifted lorgnette of Austria? What does he give for *me*? Who buys me after all? Enver? Talaat? Hilmi? Who sells me? Excellenz? Von-der-Goltz? You? And who pays for me? Gerhardt, who takes his profit in Red Eagles and offers me to d’Eblis for something in exchange to please Excellenz – and you? And what, at the end of the bargaining, does d’Eblis pay for me – pay through Gerhardt to you, and through you to Excellenz, and through Excellenz to the Kaiser Wilhelm II – ”

Ferez, showing his teeth, came close to her and spoke very softly:

“See how white is the moonlight off Seraglio Point, my Nihla!.. It is no whiter than those loveliest ones who lie fathoms deep below these little silver waves... Each with her bowstring snug about her snowy neck... As fair and young, as warm and fresh and sweet as thou, my Nihla.”

He smiled at her; and if the smile stiffened an instant on her lips, the next instant her light, dauntless laughter mocked him.

“For a price,” she said, “you would sell even Life to that old miser, Death! Then listen what you have done, little smiling, whining jackal of his Excellency! I go to Paris and to my career, certain of my happy destiny, sure of myself! For my opportunity I pay if I choose – pay *what* I choose – when and where it suits me to pay! – ”

She slipped into French with a little laugh:

“Now go and lick thy fingers of whatever crumbs have stuck there. The Count d’Eblis is doubtless licking his. Good appetite, my Ferez! Lick away lustily, for God does not temper the jackal’s appetite to his opportunities!”

Ferez let his level gaze rest on her in silence.

“Well, trafficker in Eagles, dealer in love, vendor of youth, merchant of souls, what strikes you silent?”

But he was thinking of something sharper than her tongue and less subtle, which one day might strike her silent if she laughed too much at Fate.

And, thinking, he showed his teeth again in that noiseless snicker which was his smile and laughter too.

The girl regarded him for a moment, then deliberately mimicked his smile:

“The dogs of Stamboul laugh that way, too,” she 17 said, baring her pretty teeth. “What amuses you? Did the silly old Von-der-Goltz Pasha promise you, also, a dish of Eagle? – old Von-der-Goltz with his spectacles an inch thick and nothing living within what he carries about on his two doddering old legs! There’s a German! – who died twenty years ago and still walks like a damned man – jingling his iron crosses and mumbling his gums! Is it a resurrection from 1870 come to foretell another war? And why are these Prussian vultures gathering here in Stamboul? Can you tell me, Ferez? – these Prussians in Turkish uniforms! Is there anything dying or dead here, that these buzzards appear from the sky and alight? Why do they crowd and huddle in a circle around Constantinople? Is there something dead in Persia? Is the Bagdad railroad dying? Is Enver Bey at his last gasp? Is Talaat? Or perhaps the savoury odour comes from the Yildiz – ”

“Nihla! Is there nothing sacred – nothing thou fearest on earth?”

“Only old age – and thy smile, my Ferez. Neither agrees with me.” She stretched her arms lazily.

“Allons,” she said, stifling a pleasant yawn with one slim hand, “ – my maid will wake below and miss me; and then the dogs of Stamboul yonder will hear a solo such as they never heard before... Tell me, Ferez, do you know when we are to weigh anchor?”

“At sunrise.”

“It is the same to me,” – she yawned again – “my maid is aboard and all my luggage. And my Ferez, also... Mon dieu! And what will Cyril have to say when he arrives to find me vanished! It is, perhaps, well for us that we shall be at sea!”

Her quick laughter pealed; she turned with a careless 18 gesture of salute, friendly and contemptuous; and her white bernous faded away in the moonlit fog.

And Ferez Bey stood staring after her out of his near-set, beady eyes, loving her, desiring her, fearing her, unrepentant that he had sold her, wondering whether the day might dawn when he would find it best to kill her for the prosperity and peace of mind of the only living being in whose service he never tired – himself.

I A SHADOW DANCE

Three years later Destiny still wore a rosy face for Nihla Quellen. And, for a young American of whom Nihla had never even heard, Destiny still remained the laughing jade he had always known, beckoning him ever nearer, with the coquettish promise of her curved forefinger, to fame and wealth immeasurable.

Seated now on a moonlit lawn, before his sketching easel, this optimistic young man, whose name was Barres, continued to observe the movements of a dim white figure which had emerged from the villa opposite, and was now stealing toward him across the dew-drenched grass.

When the white figure was quite near it halted, holding up filmy skirts and peering intently at him.

"May one look?" she inquired, in that now celebrated voice of hers, through which ever seemed to sound a hint of hidden laughter.

"Certainly," he replied, rising from his folding camp stool.

She tiptoed over the wet grass, came up beside him, gazed down at the canvas on his easel.

"Can you really see to paint? Is the moon bright enough?" she asked.

"Yes. But one has to be familiar with one's palette."

"Oh. You seem to know yours quite perfectly, monsieur."

"Enough to mix colours properly."

"I didn't realise that painters ever actually painted pictures by moonlight."

"It's a sort of hit or miss business, but the notes made are interesting," he explained.

"What do you do with these moonlight studies?"

"Use them as notes in the studio when a moonlight picture is to be painted."

"Are you then a realist, monsieur?"

"As much of a realist as anybody with imagination can be," he replied, smiling at her charming, moonlit face.

"I understand. Realism is merely honesty plus the imagination of the individual."

"A delightful *mot*, madam –"

"Mademoiselle," she corrected him demurely. "Are you English?"

"American."

"Oh. Then may I venture to converse with you in English?" She said it in exquisite English, entirely without accent.

"You *are* English!" he exclaimed under his breath.

"No ... I don't know what I am... Isn't it charming out here? What particular view are you painting?"

"The Seine, yonder."

She bent daintily over his sketch, holding up the skirts of her ball-gown.

"Your sketch isn't very far advanced, is it?" she inquired seriously.

"Not very," he smiled.

They stood there together in silence for a while, 21 looking out over the moonlit river to the misty, tree-covered heights.

Through lighted rows of open windows in the elaborate little villa across the lawn came lively music and the distant noise of animated voices.

"Do you know," he ventured smilingly, "that your skirts and slippers are soaking wet?"

"I don't care. Isn't this June night heavenly?"

She glanced across at the lighted house. "It's so hot and noisy in there; one dances only with discomfort. A distaste for it all sent me out on the terrace. Then I walked on the lawn. Then I beheld you!... Am I interrupting your work, monsieur? I suppose I am." She looked up at him naïvely.

He said something polite. An odd sense of having seen her somewhere possessed him now. From the distant house came the noisy American music of a two-step. With charming grace, still inspecting him out of her dark eyes, the girl began to move her pretty feet in rhythm with the music.

"Shall we?" she inquired mischievously... "Unless you are too busy – "

The next moment they were dancing together there on the wet lawn, under the high lustre of the moon, her fresh young face and fragrant figure close to his.

During their second dance she said serenely:

"They'll raise the dickens if I stay here any longer. Do you know the Comte d'Eblis?"

"The Senator? The numismatist?"

"Yes."

"No, I don't know him. I am only a Latin Quarter student."

"Well, he is giving that party. He is giving it for me – in my honour. That is his villa. And I" – she 22 laughed – "am going to marry him —*perhaps!* Isn't this a delightful escapade of mine?"

"Isn't it rather an indiscreet one?" he asked smilingly.

"Frightfully. But I like it. How did you happen to pitch your easel on his lawn?"

"The river and the hills – their composition appealed to me from here. It is the best view of the Seine."

"Are you glad you came?"

They both laughed at the mischievous question.

During their third dance she became a little apprehensive and kept looking over her shoulder toward the house.

"There's a man expected there," she whispered, "Ferez Bey. He's as soft-footed as a cat and he always prowls in my vicinity. At times it almost seems to me as though he were slyly watching me – as though he were employed to keep an eye on me."

"A Turk?"

"Eurasian... I wonder what they think of my absence? Alexandre – the Comte d'Eblis – won't like it."

"Had you better go?"

"Yes; I ought to, but I won't... Wait a moment!" She disengaged herself from his arms. "Hide your easel and colour-box in the shrubbery, in case anybody comes to look for me."

She helped him strap up and fasten the telescope-easel; they placed the paraphernalia behind the blossoming screen of syringa. Then, coming together, she gave herself to him again, nestling between his arms with a little laugh; and they fell into step once more with the distant dance-music. Over the grass their united shadows glided, swaying, gracefully interlocked – moon-born 23 phantoms which dogged their light young feet...

A man came out on the stone terrace under the Chinese lanterns. When they saw him they hastily backed into the obscurity of the shrubbery.

"Nihla!" he called, and his heavy voice was vibrant with irritation and impatience.

He was a big man. He walked with a bulky, awkward gait – a few paces only, out across the terrace.

"Nihla!" he bawled hoarsely.

Then two other men and a woman appeared on the terrace where the lanterns were strung. The woman called aloud in the darkness:

"Nihla! Nihla! Where are you, little devil?" Then she and the two men with her went indoors, laughing and skylarking, leaving the bulky man there alone.

The young fellow in the shrubbery felt the girl's hand tighten on his coat sleeve, felt her slender body quiver with stifled laughter. The desire to laugh seized him, too; and they clung there together, choking back their mirth while the big man who had first appeared waddled out across the lawn toward the shrubbery, shouting:

"Nihla! Where are you then?" He came quite close to where they stood, then turned, shouted once or twice and presently disappeared across the lawn toward a walled garden. Later, several other people came out on the terrace, calling, "Nihla, Nihla," and then went indoors, laughing boisterously.

The young fellow and the girl beside him were now quite weak and trembling with suppressed mirth.

They had not dared venture out on the lawn, although dance music had begun again.

"Is it your name they called?" he asked, his eyes very intent upon her face.

"Yes, Nihla."

"I recognise you now," he said, with a little thrill of wonder.

"I suppose so," she replied with amiable indifference. "Everybody knows me."

She did not ask his name; he did not offer to enlighten her. What difference, after all, could the name of an American student make to the idol of Europe, Nihla Quellen?

"I'm in a mess," she remarked presently. "He will be quite furious with me. It is going to be most disagreeable for me to go back into that house. He has really an atrocious temper when made ridiculous."

"I'm awfully sorry," he said, sobered by her seriousness.

She laughed:

"Oh, pouf! I really don't care. But perhaps you had better leave me now. I've spoiled your moonlight picture, haven't I?"

"But think what you have given me to make amends!" he replied.

She turned and caught his hands in hers with adorable impulsiveness:

"You're a sweet boy – do you know it! We've had a heavenly time, haven't we? Do you really think you ought to go – so soon?"

"Don't you think so, Nihla?"

"I don't want you to go. Anyway, there's a train every two hours – "

"I've a canoe down by the landing. I shall paddle back as I came – "

"A canoe!" she exclaimed, enchanted. "Will you take me with you?"

"To Paris?"

"Of course! Will you?"

"In your ball-gown?"

"I'd adore it! Will you?"

"That is an absolutely crazy suggestion," he said.

"I know it. The world is only a big asylum. There's a path to the river behind these bushes. Quick – pick up your painting traps – "

"But, Nihla, dear – "

"Oh, please! I'm dying to run away with you!"

"To Paris?" he demanded, still incredulous that the girl really meant it.

"Of course! You can get a taxi at the Pont-au-Change and take me home. Will you?"

"It would be wonderful, of course – "

"It will be paradise!" she exclaimed, slipping her hand into his. "Now, let us run like the dickens!"

In the uncertain moonlight, filtering through the shrubbery, they found a hidden path to the river; and they took it together, lightly, swiftly, speeding down the slope, all breathless with laughter, along the moonlit way.

In the suburban villa of the Comte d'Eblis a wine-flushed and very noisy company danced on, supped at midnight, continued the revel into the starlit morning hours. The place was a jungle of confetti.

Their host, restless, mortified, angry, perplexed by turns, was becoming obsessed at length with dull premonitions and vaguer alarms.

He waddled out to the lawn several times, still wearing his fancy gilt and tissue cap, and called: "Nihla! Damnation! Answer me, you little fool!"

He went down to the river, where the gaily painted row-boats and punts lay, and scanned the silvered 26 flood, tortured by indefinite apprehensions. About dawn he started toward the weed-grown, slippery river-stairs for the last time, still crowned with his tinsel cap; and there in the darkness he found his aged boat-man, fishing for gudgeon with a four-cornered net suspended to the end of a bamboo pole.

"Have you see anything of Mademoiselle Nihla?" he demanded, in a heavy, unsteady voice, tremulous with indefinable fears.

"Monsieur le Comte, Mademoiselle Quellen went out in a canoe with a young gentleman."

"W-what is that you tell me!" faltered the Comte d'Eblis, turning grey in the face.

"Last night, about ten o'clock, M'sieu le Comte. I was out in the moonlight fishing for eels. She came down to the shore – took a canoe yonder by the willows. The young man had a double-bladed paddle. They were singing."

"They – they have not returned?"

"No, M'sieu le Comte – "

"Who was the – man?"

"I could not see – "

"Very well." He turned and looked down the dusky river out of light-coloured, murderous eyes. Then, always awkward in his gait, he retraced his steps to the house. There a servant accosted him on the terrace:

"The telephone, if Monsieur le Comte pleases – "

"Who is calling?" he demanded with a flare of fury.

"Paris, if it pleases Monsieur le Comte."

The Count d'Eblis went to his own quarters, seated himself, and picked up the receiver:

"Who is it?" he asked thickly.

"Max Freund."

"What has h-happened?" he stammered in sudden terror.

Over the wire came the distant reply, perfectly clear and distinct:

"Ferez Bey was arrested in his own house at dinner last evening, and was immediately conducted to the frontier, escorted by Government detectives... Is Nihla with you?"

The Count's teeth were chattering now. He managed to say:

"No, I don't know where she is. She was dancing. Then, all at once, she was gone. Of what was Colonel Ferez suspected?"

"I don't know. But perhaps we might guess."

"Are *you* followed?"

"Yes."

"By – by whom?"

"By Souchez... Good-bye, if I don't see you. I join Ferez. And look out for Nihla. She'll trick you yet!"

The Count d'Eblis called:

"Wait, for God's sake, Max!" – listened; called again in vain. "The one-eyed rabbit!" he panted, breathing hard and irregularly. His large hand shook as he replaced the instrument. He sat there as

though paralysed, for a moment or two. Mechanically he removed his tinsel cap and thrust it into the pocket of his evening coat. Suddenly the dull hue of anger dyed neck, ears and temple:

“By God!” he gasped. “What is that she-devil trying to do to me? What has she *done!*”

After another moment of staring fixedly at nothing, he opened the table drawer, picked up a pistol and poked it into his breast pocket.

Then he rose, heavily, and stood looking out of the window at the paling east, his pendulous under lip aquiver.

II

SUNRISE

The first sunbeams had already gilded her bedroom windows, barring the drawn curtains with light, when the man arrived. He was still wearing his disordered evening dress under a light overcoat; his soiled shirt front was still crossed by the red ribbon of watered silk; third class orders striped his breast, where also the brand new Turkish sunburst glimmered.

A sleepy maid in night attire answered his furious ringing; the man pushed her aside with an oath and strode into the semi-darkness of the corridor. He was nearly six feet tall, bulky; but his legs were either too short or something else was the matter with them, for when he walked he waddled, breathing noisily from the ascent of the stairs.

“Is your mistress here?” he demanded, hoarse with his effort.

“Y – yes, monsieur – ”

“When did she come in?” And, as the scared and bewildered maid hesitated: “Damn you, answer me! When did Mademoiselle Quellen come in? I’ll wring your neck if you lie to me!”

The maid began to whimper:

“Monsieur le Comte – I do not wish to lie to you... Mademoiselle Nihla came back with the dawn – ”

“Alone?”

The maid wrung her hands:

“Does Monsieur le Comte m-mean to harm her?”

“Will you answer me, you snivelling cat!” he panted between his big, discoloured teeth. He had fished out a pistol from his breast pocket, dragging with it a silk handkerchief, a fancy cap of tissue and gilt, and some streamers of confetti which fell to the carpet around his feet.

“Now,” he breathed in a half-strangled voice, “answer my questions. Was she alone when she came in?”

“N-no.”

“Who was with her?”

“A – a – ”

“A man?”

The maid trembled violently and nodded.

“What man?”

“M-Monsieur le Comte, I have never before beheld him – ”

“You lie!”

“I do not lie! I have never before seen him, Monsieur le – ”

“Did you learn his name?”

“No – ”

“Did you hear what they said?”

“They spoke in English – ”

“What!” The man’s puffy face went flabby white, and his big, badly made frame seemed to sag for a moment. He laid a large fat hand flat against the wall, as though to support and steady himself, and gazed dully at the terrified maid.

And she, shivering in her night-robe and naked feet, stared back into the pallid face, with its coarse, greyish moustache and little short side-whiskers which vulgarized it completely – gazed in unfeigned terror at the sagging, dead, lead-coloured eyes.

“Is the man there – in there now – with her?” demanded the Comte d’Eblis heavily.

“No, monsieur.”

“Gone?”

“Oh, Monsieur le Comte, the young man stayed but a moment – ”

“Where were they? In her bedroom?”

“In the salon. I – I served a pâté – a glass of wine – and the young gentleman was gone the next minute – ”

A dull red discoloured the neck and features of the Count.

“That’s enough,” he said; and waddled past her along the corridor to the furthest door; and wrenched it open with one powerful jerk.

In the still, golden gloom of the drawn curtains, now striped with sunlight, a young girl suddenly sat up in bed.

“Alexandre!” she exclaimed in angry astonishment.

“You slut!” he said, already enraged again at the mere sight of her. “Where did you go last night!”

“What are you doing in my bedroom?” she demanded, confused but flushed with anger. “Leave it! Do you hear! – ” She caught sight of the pistol in his hand and stiffened.

He stepped nearer; her dark, dilated gaze remained fixed on the pistol.

“Answer me,” he said, the menacing roar rising in his voice. “Where did you go last night when you left the house?”

“I – I went out – on the lawn.”

“And then?”

“I had had enough of your party: I came back to Paris.”

“And *then*?”

“I came here, of course.”

“Who was with you?”

Then, for the first time, she began to comprehend. She swallowed desperately.

“Who was your companion?” he repeated.

“A – man.”

“You brought him here?”

“He – came in – for a moment.”

“Who was he?”

“I – never before saw him.”

“You picked up a man in the street and brought him here with you?”

“N-not on the street – ”

“Where?”

“On the lawn – while your guests were dancing – ”

“And you came to Paris with him?”

“Y-yes.”

“Who was he?”

“I don’t know – ”

“If you don’t name him, I’ll kill you!” he yelled, losing the last vestige of self-control. “What kind of story are you trying to tell me, you lying drab! You’ve got a lover! Confess it!”

“I have not!”

“Liar! So this is how you’ve laughed at me, mocked me, betrayed me, made a fool of me! You! – with your fierce little snappish ways of a virgin! You with your dangerous airs of a tiger-cat if a man so much as laid a finger on your vicious body! So Mademoiselle-Don’t-touch-me had a lover all the while. Max Freund warned me to keep an eye on you!” He lost control of himself again; his voice became a hoarse shout: “Max Freund begged me not to trust you! You filthy little beast! Good God! Was I crazy to believe in you – to talk without reserve in your presence! What kind of imbecile was I to offer you marriage because I was crazy enough to believe that there was no other way to

possess you! You – a Levantine dancing girl – a common painted thing of the public footlights – a creature of brasserie and cabaret! And you posed as Mademoiselle Nitouche! A novice! A devotee of chastity! And, by God, your devilish ingenuity at last persuaded me that you actually were what you said you were. And all Paris knew you were fooling me – all Paris was laughing in its dirty sleeve – mocking me – spitting on me – ”

“All Paris,” she said, in an unsteady voice, “gave you credit for being my lover. And I endured it. And you knew it was not true. Yet you never denied it... But as for me, I never had a lover. When I told you that I told you the truth. And it is true to-day as it was yesterday. Nobody believes it of a dancing girl. Now, *you* no longer believe it. Very well, there is no occasion for melodrama. I tried to fall in love with you: I couldn’t. I did not desire to marry you. You insisted. Very well; you can go.”

“Not before I learn the name of your lover of last night!” he retorted, now almost beside himself with fury, and once more menacing her with his pistol. “I’ll get that much change out of all the money I’ve lavished on you!” he yelled. “Tell me his name or I’ll kill you!”

She reached under her pillow, clutched a jewelled watch and purse, and hurled them at him. She twisted from her arm a gemmed bracelet, tore every flashing ring from her fingers, and flung them in a handful straight at his head.

“There’s some more change for you!” she panted. “Now, leave my bedroom!”

“I’ll have that man’s name first!”

The girl laughed in his distorted face. He was within an ace of shooting her – of firing point-blank into the lovely, flushed features, merely to shatter them, destroy, annihilate. He had the desire to do it. But her breathless, contemptuous laugh broke that impulse – relaxed it, leaving it flaccid. And after an interval something else intervened to stay his hand at the trigger – something that crept into his mind; something he had begun to suspect that she knew. Suddenly he became convinced that she *did* know it – that she believed that he dared not kill her and stand the investigation of a public trial before a *juge d’instruction*– that he could not afford to have his own personal affairs scrutinised too closely.

He still wanted to kill her – shoot her there where she sat in bed, watching him out of scornful young eyes. So intense was his need to slay – to disfigure, brutalise this girl who had mocked him, that the raging desire hurt him physically. He leaned back, resting against the silken wall, momentarily weakened by the violence of passion. But his pistol still threatened her.

No; he dared not. There was a better, surer way to utterly destroy her, – a way he had long ago prepared, – not expecting any such contingency as this, but merely as a matter of self-insurance.

His levelled weapon wavered, dropped, held loosely now. He still glared at her out of pallid and blood-shot eyes in silence. After a while:

“You hell-cat,” he said slowly and distinctly. “Who is your English lover? Tell me his name or I’ll beat your face to a pulp!”

“I have no English lover.”

“Do you think,” he went on heavily, disregarding her reply, “that I don’t know why you chose an Englishman? 34 You thought you could blackmail me, didn’t you?”

“How?” she demanded wearily.

Again he ignored her reply:

“Is he one of the Embassy?” he demanded. “Is he some emissary of Grey’s? Does he come from their intelligence department? Or is he only a police jackal? Or some lesser rat?”

She shrugged; her night-robe slipped and she drew it over her shoulder with a quick movement. And the man saw the deep blush spreading over face and throat.

“By God!” he said, “you *are* an actress! I admit it. But now you are going to learn something about real life. You think you’ve got me, don’t you? – you and your Englishman? Because I have been fool enough to trust you – hide nothing from you – act frankly and openly in your presence. You thought you’d get a hold on me, so that if I ever caught you at your treacherous game you could

defy me and extort from me the last penny! You thought all that out – very thriftily and cleverly – you and your Englishman between you – didn't you?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you? Then why did you ask me the other day whether it was not German money which was paying for the newspaper which I bought?"

"The *Mot d'Ordre*?"

"Certainly."

"I asked you that because Ferez Bey is notoriously in Germany's pay. And Ferez Bey financed the affair. You said so. Besides, you and he discussed it before me in my own salon."

"And you suspected that I bought the *Mot d'Ordre* with German money for the purpose of carrying out German propaganda in a Paris daily paper?"

"I don't know why Ferez Bey gave you the money to buy it."

"He did not give me the money."

"You said so. Who did?"

"*You!*" he fairly yelled.

"W-what!" stammered the girl, confounded.

"Listen to me, you rat!" he said fiercely. "I was not such a fool as you believed me to be. I lavished money on you; you made a fortune for yourself out of your popularity, too. Do you remember endorsing a cheque drawn to your order by Ferez Bey?"

"Yes. You had borrowed every penny I possessed. You said that Ferez Bey owed you as much. So I accepted his cheque – "

"That cheque paid for the *Mot d'Ordre*. It is drawn to your order; it bears your endorsement; the *Mot d'Ordre* was purchased in your name. And it was Max Freund who insisted that I take that precaution. Now, try to blackmail me! – you and your English spy!" he cried triumphantly, his voice breaking into a squeak.

Not yet understanding, merely conscious of some vague and monstrous danger, the girl sat motionless, regarding him intently out of beautiful, intelligent eyes.

He burst into laughter, made falsetto by the hysteria of sheer hatred:

"That's where you are now!" he said, leering down at her. "Every paper I ever made you sign incriminates you; your cancelled cheque is in the same packet; your *dossier* is damning and complete. You didn't know that Ferez Bey was sent across the frontier yesterday, did you? Your English spy didn't inform you last night, did he?"

"N-no."

"You lie! You *did* know it! That was why you stole away last night and met your jackal – to sell him something besides yourself, this time! You knew they had arrested Ferez! I don't know how you knew it, but you did. And you told your lover. And both of you thought you had me at last, didn't you?"

"I – what are you trying to say to me – do to me?" she stammered, losing colour for the first time.

"Put you where you belong – you dirty spy!" he said with grinning ferocity. "If there is to be trouble, I've prepared for it. When they try you for espionage, they'll try you as a foreigner – a dancing girl in the pay of Germany – as my mistress whom Max Freund and I discover in treachery to France, and whom I instantly denounce to the proper authorities!"

He shoved his pistol into his breast pocket and put on his marred silk hat.

"Which do you think they will believe – you or the Count d'Eblis?" he demanded, the nervous leer twitching at his heavy lips. "Which do you think they will believe – your denials and counter-accusations against me, or Max Freund's corroboration, and the evidence of the packet I shall now deliver to the authorities – the packet containing every cursed document necessary to convict you! – you filthy little – "

The girl bounded from her bed to the floor, her dark eyes blazing:

“Damn you!” she said. “Get out of my bedroom!”

Taken aback, he retreated a pace or two, and, at the furious menace of the little clenched fist, stepped another pace out into the corridor. The door crashed in his face; the bolt shot home.

In twenty minutes Nihla Quellen, the celebrated and adored of European capitals, crept out of the street 37 door. She wore the dress of a Finistère peasant; her hair was grey, her step infirm.

The *commissaire*, two *agents de police*, and a Government detective, one Souchez, already on their way to identify and arrest her, never even glanced at the shabby, infirm figure which hobbled past them on the sidewalk and feebly mounted an omnibus marked Gare du Nord.

For a long time Paris was carefully combed for the dancer, Nihla Quellen, until more serious affairs occupied the authorities, and presently the world at large. For, in a few weeks, war burst like a clap of thunder over Europe, leaving the whole world stunned and reeling. The dossier of Nihla Quellen, the dancing girl, was tossed into secret archives, together with the dossier of one Ferez Bey, an Eurasian, now far beyond French jurisdiction, and already very industrious in the United States about God knows what, in company with one Max Freund.

As for Monsieur the Count d'Eblis, he remained a senator, an owner of many third-rate decorations, and of the *Mot d'Ordre*.

And he remained on excellent terms with everybody at the Swedish, Greek, and Bulgarian legations, and the Turkish Embassy, too. And continued in cipher communication with Max Freund and Ferez Bey in America.

Otherwise, he was still president of the Numismatic Society of Spain, and he continued to add to his wonderful collection of coins, and to keep up his voluminous numismatic correspondence.

He was growing stouter, too, which increased his spinal waddle when he walked; and he became very 38 prosperous financially, through fortunate “operations,” as he explained, with one Bolo Pasha.

He had only one regret to interfere with his sleep and his digestion; he was sorry he had not fired his pistol into the youthful face of Nihla Quellen. He should have avenged himself, taken his chances, and above everything else he should have destroyed her beauty. His timidity and caution still caused him deep and bitter chagrin.

For nearly a year he heard absolutely nothing concerning her. Then one day a letter arrived from Ferez Bey through Max Freund, both being in New York. And when, using his key to the cipher, he extracted the message it contained, he had learned, among other things, that Nihla Quellen was in New York, employed as a teacher in a school for dancing.

The gist of his reply to Ferez Bey was that Nihla Quellen had already outlived her usefulness on earth, and that Max Freund should attend to the matter at the first favourable opportunity.

III

SUNSET

On the edge of evening she came out of the Palace of Mirrors and crossed the wet asphalt, which already reflected primrose lights from a clearing western sky.

A few moments before, he had been thinking of her, never dreaming that she was in America. But he knew her instantly, there amid the rush and clatter of the street, recognised her even in the twilight of the passing storm – perhaps not alone from the half-caught glimpse of her shadowy, averted face, nor even from that young, lissome figure so celebrated in Europe. There is a sixth sense – the sense of nearness to what is familiar. When it awakes we call it premonition.

The shock of seeing her, the moment's exciting incredulity, passed before he became aware that he was already following her through swarming metropolitan throngs released from the toil of a long, wet day in early spring.

Through every twilit avenue poured the crowds; through every cross-street a rosy glory from the west was streaming; and in its magic he saw her immortally transfigured, where the pink light suffused the crossings, only to put on again her lovely mortality in the shadowy avenue.

At Times Square she turned west, straight into the dazzling fire of sunset, and he at her slender heels, not knowing why, not even asking it of himself, not thinking, not caring.

A third figure followed them both.

The bronze giants south of them stirred, swung their great hammers against the iron bell; strokes of the hour rang out above the din of Herald Square, inaudible in the traffic roar another square away, lost, drowned out long before the pleasant bell-notes penetrated to Forty-second Street, into which they both had turned.

Yet, as though occultly conscious that some hour had struck on earth, significant to her, she stopped, turned, and looked back – looked quite through him, seeing neither him nor the one-eyed man who followed them both – as though her line of vision were the East itself, where, across the grey sea's peril, a thousand miles of cannon were sounding the hour from the North Sea to the Alps.

He passed her at her very elbow – aware of her nearness, as though suddenly close to a young orchard in April. The girl, too, resumed her way, unconscious of him, of his youthful face set hard with controlled emotion.

The one-eyed man followed them both.

A few steps further and she turned into the entrance to one of those sprawling, pretentious restaurants, the sham magnificence of which becomes grimy overnight. He halted, swung around, retraced his steps and followed her. And at his heels two shapes followed them very silently – her shadow and his own – so close together now, against the stucco wall that they seemed like Destiny and Fate linked arm in arm.

The one-eyed man halted at the door for a few moments. Then he, too, went in, dogged by his sinister shadow.

The red sunset's rays penetrated to the rotunda and were quenched there in a flood of artificial light; and 41 there their sun-born shadows vanished, and three strange new shadows, twisted and grotesque, took their places.

She continued on into the almost empty restaurant, looming dimly beyond. He followed; the one-eyed man followed both.

The place into which they stepped was circular, centred by a waterfall splashing over concrete rocks. In the ruffled pool goldfish glimmered, nearly motionless, and mandarin ducks floated, preening exotic plumage.

A wilderness of tables surrounded the pool, set for the expected patronage of the coming evening. The girl seated herself at one of these.

At the next table he found a place for himself, entirely unnoticed by her. The one-eyed man took the table behind them. A waiter presented himself to take her order; another waiter came up leisurely to attend to him. A third served the one-eyed man. There were only a few inches between the three tables. Yet the girl, deeply preoccupied, paid no attention to either man, although both kept their eyes on her.

But already, under the younger man's spellbound eyes, an odd and unforeseen thing was occurring: he gradually became aware that, almost imperceptibly, the girl and the table where she sat, and the sleepy waiter who was taking her orders, were slowly moving nearer to him on a floor which was moving, too.

He had never before been in that particular restaurant, and it took him a moment or two to realise that the floor was one of those trick floors, the central part of which slowly revolves.

Her table stood on the revolving part of the floor, his upon fixed terrain; and he now beheld her moving toward him, as the circle of tables rotated on its axis, 42 which was the waterfall and pool in the middle of the restaurant.

A few people began to arrive – theatrical people, who are obliged to dine early. Some took seats at tables placed upon the revolving section of the floor, others preferred the outer circles, where he sat in a fixed position.

Her table was already abreast of his, with only the circular crack in the floor between them; he could easily have touched her.

As the distance began to widen between them, the girl, her gloved hands clasped in her lap, and studying the table-cloth with unseeing gaze, lifted her dark eyes – looked at him without seeing, and once more gazed through him at something invisible upon which her thoughts remained fixed – something absorbing, vital, perhaps tragic – for her face had become as colourless, now, as one of those translucent marbles, vaguely warmed by some buried vein of rose beneath the snowy surface.

Slowly she was being swept away from him – his gaze following – hers lost in concentrated abstraction.

He saw her slipping away, disappearing behind the noisy waterfall. Around him the restaurant continued to fill, slowly at first, then more rapidly after the orchestra had entered its marble gallery.

The music began with something Russian, plaintive at first, then beguiling, then noisy, savage in its brutal precision – something sinister – a trampling melody that was turning into thunder with the throb of doom all through it. And out of the vicious, Asiatic clangour, from behind the dash of too obvious waterfalls, glided the girl he had followed, now on her way toward him again, still seated at her table, still gazing at nothing out of dark, unseeing eyes.

It seemed to him an hour before her table approached his own again. Already she had been served by a waiter – was eating.

He became aware, then, that somebody had also served him. But he could not even pretend to eat, so preoccupied was he by her approach.

Scarcely seeming to move at all, the revolving floor was steadily drawing her table closer and closer to his. She was not looking at the strawberries which she was leisurely eating – did not lift her eyes as her table swept smoothly abreast of his.

Scarcely aware that he spoke aloud, he said:

“Nihla – Nihla Quellen!..”

Like a flash the girl wheeled in her chair to face him. She had lost all her colour. Her fork had dropped and a blood-red berry rolled over the table-cloth toward him.

“I’m sorry,” he said, flushing. “I did not mean to startle you – ”

The girl did not utter a word, nor did she move; but in her dark eyes he seemed to see her every sense concentrated upon him to identify his features, made shadowy by the lighted candles behind his head.

By degrees, smoothly, silently, her table swept nearer, nearer, bringing with it her chair, her slender person, her dark, intelligent eyes, so unsmilingly and steadily intent on him.

He began to stammer:

“ – Two years ago – at – the Villa Tresse d’Or – on the Seine... And we promised to see each other – in the morning – ”

She said coolly:

“My name is Thessalie Dunois. You mistake me for another.”

“No,” he said, in a low voice, “I am not mistaken.”

Her brown eyes seemed to plunge their clear regard into the depths of his very soul – not in recognition, but in watchful, dangerous defiance.

He began again, still stammering a trifle:

“ – In the morning, we were to – to meet – at eleven – near the fountain of Marie de Médicis – unless you do not care to remember – ”

At that her gaze altered swiftly, melted into the exquisite relief of recognition. Suspended breath, released, parted her blanched lips; her little guardian heart, relieved of fear, beat more freely.

“Are you Garry?”

“Yes.”

“I know you now,” she murmured. “You are Garret Barres, of the rue d’Eryx... You *are* Garry!” A smile already haunted her dark young eyes; colour was returning to lip and cheek. She drew a deep, noiseless breath.

The table where she sat continued to slip past him; the distance between them was widening. She had to turn her head a little to face him.

“You do remember me then, Nihla?”

The girl inclined her head a trifle. A smile curved her lips – lips now vivid but still a little tremulous from the shock of the encounter.

“May I join you at your table?”

She smiled, drew a deeper breath, looked down at the strawberry on the cloth, looked over her shoulder at him.

“You owe me an explanation,” he insisted, leaning forward to span the increasing distance between them.

“Do I?”

“Ask yourself.”

After a moment, still studying him, she nodded as though the nod answered some silent question of her own:

“Yes, I owe you one.”

“Then may I join you?”

“My table is more prudent than I. It is running away from an explanation.” She fixed her eyes on her tightly clasped hands, as though to concentrate thought. He could see only the back of her head, white neck and lovely dark hair.

Her table was quite a distance away when she turned, leisurely, and looked back at him.

“May I come?” he asked.

She lifted her delicate brows in demure surprise.

“I’ve been waiting for you,” she said, amiably.

The one-eyed man had never taken his eyes off them.

IV DUSK

She had offered him her hand; he had bent over it, seated himself, and they smilingly exchanged the formal banalities of a pleasantly renewed acquaintance.

A waiter laid a cover for him. She continued to concern herself, leisurely, with her strawberries.

"When did you leave Paris?" she enquired.

"Nearly two years ago."

"Before war was declared?"

"Yes, in June of that year."

She looked up at him very seriously; but they both smiled as she said:

"It was a momentous month for you then – the month of June, 1914?"

"Very. A charming young girl broke my heart in 1914; and so I came home, a wreck – to recuperate."

At that she laughed outright, glancing at his youthful, sunburnt face and lean, vigorous figure.

"When did *you* come over?" he asked curiously.

"I have been here longer than you have. In fact, I left France the day I last saw you."

"The same day?"

"I started that very same day – shortly after sunrise. I crossed the Belgian frontier that night, and I sailed for New York the morning after. I landed here a week later, and I've been here ever since. That, monsieur, is my history."

"You've been here in New York for two years!" he repeated in astonishment. "Have you really left the stage then? I supposed you had just arrived to fill an engagement here."

"They gave me a try-out this afternoon."

"*You?* A try-out!" he exclaimed, amazed.

She carelessly transfixed a berry with her fork:

"If I secure an engagement I shall be very glad to fill it ... and my stomach, also. If I don't secure one – well – charity or starvation confronts me."

He smiled at her with easy incredulity.

"I had not heard that you were here!" he repeated. "I've read nothing at all about you in the papers –"

"No ... I am here incognito... I have taken my sister's name. After all, your American public does not know me."

"But –"

"Wait! I don't wish it to know me!"

"But if you –"

The girl's slight gesture checked him, although her smile became humorous and friendly:

"Please! We need not discuss my future. Only the past!" She laughed: "How it all comes back to me now, as you speak – that crazy evening of ours together! What children we were – two years ago!"

Smilingly she clasped her hands together on the table's edge, regarding him with that winning directness which was a celebrated part of her celebrated personality; and happened to be natural to her.

"Why did I not recognise you immediately?" she demanded of herself, frowning in self-reproof. "I *am* stupid! Also I have, now and then, thought about you –" She shrugged her shoulders, and again her face faltered subtly:

“Much has happened to distract my memories,” she 48 added carelessly, impaling a strawberry, “– since you and I took the key to the fields and the road to the moon – like the pair of irresponsibles we were that night in June.”

“Have you really had trouble?”

Her slim figure straightened as at a challenge, then became adorably supple again; and she rested her elbows on the table’s edge and took her cheeks between her hands.

“Trouble?” she repeated, studying his face. “I don’t know that word, trouble. I don’t admit such a word to the honour of my happy vocabulary.”

They both laughed a little.

She said, still looking at him, and at first speaking as though to herself:

“Of course, you are that same, delightful Garry! My youthful American accomplice!.. Quite unspoiled, still, but very, very irresponsible ... like all painters – like all students. And the mischief which is in me recognised the mischief in you, I suppose... I *did* surprise you that night, didn’t I?.. And what a night! What a moon! And how we danced there on the wet lawn until my skirts and slippers and stockings were drenched with dew!.. And how we laughed! Oh, that full-hearted, full-throated laughter of ours! How wonderful that we have lived to laugh like that! It is something to remember after death. Just think of it! – you and I, absolute strangers, dancing every dance there in the drenched grass to the music that came through the open windows... And do you remember how we hid in the flowering bushes when my sister and the others came out to look for me? How they called, ‘Nihla! Nihla! Little devil, where are you?’ Oh, it was funny – funny! And to see *him* come out on the lawn – do you remember? He looked so fat and 49 stupid and anxious and bad-tempered! And you and I expiring with stifled laughter! And he, with his sash, his decorations and his academic palms! He’d have shot us both, you know...”

They were laughing unrestrainedly now at the memory of that impossible night a year ago; and the girl seemed suddenly transformed into an irresponsible gamin of eighteen. Her eyes grew brighter with mischief and laughter – laughter, the greatest magician and doctor emeritus of them all! The immortal restorer of youth and beauty.

Bluish shadows had gone from under her lower lashes; her eyes were starry as a child’s.

“Oh, Garry,” she gasped, laying one slim hand across his on the table-cloth, “it was one of those encounters – one of those heavenly accidents that reconcile one to living... I think the moon had made me a perfect lunatic... Because you don’t yet know what I risked... Garry!.. It ruined me – ruined me utterly – our night together under the June moon!”

“What!” he exclaimed, incredulously.

But she only laughed her gay, undaunted little laugh:

“It was worth it! Such moments are worth anything we pay for them! I laughed; I pay. What of it?”

“But if I am partly responsible I wish to know – ”

“You shall know nothing about it! As for me, I care nothing about it. I’d do it again to-night! That is living – to go forward, laugh, and accept what comes – to have heart enough, gaiety enough, brains enough to seize the few rare dispensations that the niggardly gods fling across this calvary which we call life! *Tenez*, that alone is living; the rest is making the endless stations on bleeding knees.”

“Yet, if I thought – ” he began, perplexed and troubled, “– if I thought that through my folly – ”

“Folly! *Non pas!* Wisdom! Oh, my blessed accomplice! And do you remember the canoe? Were we indeed quite mad to embark for Paris on the moonlit Seine, you and I? – I in evening gown, soaked with dew to the knees! – you with your sketching block and easel! *Quelle démenagement en famille!* Oh, Garry, my friend of gayer days, was that really folly! No, no, no, it was infinite wisdom; and its memory is helping me to live through this very moment!”

She leaned there on her elbows and laughed across the cloth at him. The mockery began to dance again and glimmer in her eyes:

"After all I've told you," she added, "you are no wiser, are you? You don't know why I never went to the Fountain of Marie de Médicis – whether I forgot to go – whether I remembered but decided that I had had quite enough of you. You don't know, do you?"

He shook his head, smiling. The girl's face grew gradually serious:

"And you never heard anything more about me?" she demanded.

"No. Your name simply disappeared from the billboards, kiosques, and newspapers."

"And you heard no malicious gossip? None about my sister, either?"

"None."

She nodded:

"Europe is a senile creature which forgets overnight. *Tant mieux*... You know, I shall sing and dance under my sister's name here. I told you that, didn't I?"

"Oh! That would be a great mistake – "

"Listen! Nihla Quellen disappeared – married some fat bourgeois, died, perhaps," – she shrugged, – "anything 51 you wish, my friend. Who cares to listen to what is said about a dancing girl in all this din of war? Who is interested?"

It was scarcely a question, yet her eyes seemed to make it so.

"Who cares?" she repeated impatiently. "Who remembers?"

"I have remembered you," he said, meeting her intently questioning gaze.

"You? Oh, you are not like those others over there. Your country is not at war. You still have leisure to remember. But they forget. They haven't time to remember anything – anybody – over there. Don't you think so?" She turned in her chair unconsciously, and gazed eastward. " – They have forgotten me over there – " And her lips tightened, contracted, bitten into silence.

The strange beauty of the girl left him dumb. He was recalling, now, all that he had ever heard concerning her. The gossip of Europe had informed him that, though Nihla Quellen was passionately and devotedly French in soul and heart, her mother had been one of those unmoral and lovely Georgians, and her father an Alsatian, named Dunois – a French officer who entered the Russian service ultimately, and became a hunting cheetah for the Grand Duke Cyril, until himself hunted into another world by that old bag of bones on the pale and shaky nag. His daughter took the name of Nihla Quellen and what money was left, and made her début in Constantinople.

As the young fellow sat there watching her, all the petty gossip of Europe came back to him – anecdotes, panegyrics, eulogies, scandals, stage chatter, Quarter "divers," paid réclames – all that he had ever read and heard about this notorious young girl, now seated there 52 across the table, with her pretty head framed by slender, unjewelled fingers. He remembered the gems she had worn that June night, a year ago, and their magnificence.

"Well," she said, "life is a pleasantry, a jest, a bon-mot flung over his shoulder by some god too drunk with nectar to invent a better joke. Life is an Olympian epigram made between immortal yawns. What do you think of *my* epigram, Garry?"

"I think you are just as clever and amusing as I remember you, Nihla."

"Amusing to *you*, perhaps. But I don't entertain myself very successfully. I don't think poverty is a very funny joke. Do you?"

"Poverty!" he repeated, smiling his unbelief.

She smiled too, displayed her pretty, ringless hands humorously, for his inspection, then framed her oval face between them again and made a deliberate grimace.

"All gone," she said. "I am, as you say, here on my uppers."

"I can't understand, Nihla – "

"Don't try to. It doesn't concern you. Also, please forget me as Nihla Quellen. I told you that I've taken my sister's name, Thessalie Dunois."

"But all Europe knows you as Nihla Quellen – "

"Listen!" she interrupted sharply. "I have troubles enough. Don't add to them, or I shall be sorry I met you again. I tell you my name is Thessa. Please remember it."

"Very well," he said, reddening under the rebuke.

She noted the painful colour in his face, then looked elsewhere, indifferently. Her features remained expressionless for a while. After a few moments she looked around at him again, and her smile began to glimmer:

"It's only this," she said; "the girl you met once in 53 your life – the dancing singing-girl they knew over there – is already an episode to be forgotten. End her career any way you wish, Garry, – natural death, suicide – or she can repent and take the veil, if you like – or perish at sea – only end her... Please?" she added, with the sweet, trailing inflection characteristic of her.

He nodded. The girl smiled mischievously.

"Don't nod your head so owlishly and pretend to understand. You don't understand. Only two or three people do. And I hope they'll believe me dead, even if you are not polite enough to agree with them."

"How can you expect to maintain your incognito?" he insisted. "There will be plenty of people in your very first audience – "

"I had a sister, did I not?"

"*Was* she your sister? – the one who danced with you – the one called Thessa?"

"No. But the play-bills said she was. Now, I've told you something that nobody knows except two or three unpleasant devils – " She dropped her arms on the table and leaned a trifle forward:

"Oh, pouf!" she said. "Don't let's be mysterious and dramatic, you and I. I'll tell you: I gave that woman the last of my jewels and she promised to disappear and leave her name to me to use. It was my own name, anyway, Thessalie Dunois. Now, you know. Be as discreet and nice as I once found you. Will you?"

"Of course."

"Of course," she repeated, smiling, and with a little twitch of her shoulders, as though letting fall a burdensome cloak. "Allons! With a free heart, then! I am Thessalie Dunois; I am here; I am poor – don't be frightened! I shall not borrow – "

"That's rotten, Thessa!" he said, turning very red.

"Oh, go lightly, please, my friend Garry. I have no claim on you. Besides, I know men – "

"You don't appear to!"

"Tiens! Our first quarrel!" she exclaimed, laughingly. "This is indeed serious – "

"If you need aid – "

"No, I don't! Please, why do you scowl at me? Do you then wish I needed aid? Yours? Allez, Monsieur Garry, if I did I'd venture, perhaps, to say so to you. Does that make amends?" she added sweetly.

She clasped her white hands on the cloth and looked at him with that engaging, humorous little air which had so easily captivated her audiences in Europe – that, and her voice with the hint of recklessness ever echoing through its sweetness and youthful gaiety.

"What are you doing in New York?" she asked. "Painting?"

"I have a studio, but – "

"But no clients? Is that it? Pouf! Everybody begins that way. I sang in a café at Dijon for five francs and my soup! At Rennes I nearly starved. Oh, yes, Garry, in spite of a number of obliging gentlemen who, like you, offered – first aid – "

"That is absolutely rotten of you, Thessa. Did I ever – "

"No! For goodness' sake let me jest with you without flying into tempers!"

"But – "

"Oh, pouf! I shall not quarrel with you! Whatever you and I were going to say during the next ten minutes shall remain unsaid!... Now, the ten minutes are over; now, we're reconciled and you are

in good humour again. And now, tell me about yourself, your 55 painting – in other words, tell me the things about yourself that would interest a friend.”

“Are you?”

“Your friend? Yes, I am – if you wish.”

“I do wish it.”

“Then I am your friend. I once had a wonderful evening with you... I’m having a very good time now. You were *nice* to me, Garry. I really was sorry not to see you again.”

“At the fountain of Marie de Médicis,” he said reproachfully.

“Yes. Flatter yourself, monsieur, because I did *not* forget our rendezvous. I might have forgotten it easily enough – there was sufficient excuse, God knows – a girl awakened by the crash of ruin – springing out of bed to face the end of the world without a moment’s warning – yes, the end of all things – death, too! Tenez, it was permissible to forget our rendezvous under such circumstances, was it not? But – I did *not* forget. I thought about it in a dumb, calm way all the while – even while *he* stood there denouncing me, threatening me, noisy, furious – with the button of the Legion in his lapel – and an ugly pistol which he waved in the air – ” She laughed:

“Oh, it was not at all gay, I assure you... And even when I took to my heels after he had gone – for it was a matter of life or death, and I hadn’t a minute to lose – oh, very dramatic, of course, for I ran away in disguise and I had a frightful time of it leaving France! Well, even then, at top speed and scared to death, I remembered the fountain of Marie de Médicis, and you. Don’t be too deeply flattered. I remembered these items principally because they had caused my downfall.”

“I? I caused – ”

“No. *I* caused it! It was I who went out on the lawn. It was I who came across to see who was painting by moonlight. That began it – seeing you there – in moonlight bright enough to read by – bright enough to paint by. Oh, Garry – and you were *so* good-looking! It was the moon – and the way you smiled at me. And they all were dancing inside, and *he* was so big and fat and complacent, dancing away in there!.. And so I fell a prey to folly.”

“Was it really our escapade that – that ruined you?”

“Well – it was partly that. Pouf! It is over. And I am here. So are you. It’s been nice to see you... Please call our waiter.” She glanced at her cheap, leather wrist watch.

As they rose and left the dining-room, he asked her if they were not to see each other again. A one-eyed man, close behind them, listened for her reply.

She continued to walk on slowly beside him without answering, until they reached the rotunda.

“Do you wish to see me again?” she enquired abruptly.

“Don’t you also wish it?”

“I don’t know, Garry... I’ve been annoyed in New York – bothered – seriously... I can’t explain, but somehow – I don’t seem to wish to begin a friendship with anybody...”

“Ours began two years ago.”

“Did it?”

“Did it not, Thessa?”

“Perhaps... I don’t know. After all – it doesn’t matter. I think – I think we had better say good-bye – until some happy hazard – like to-day’s encounter – ” She hesitated, looked up at him, laughed:

“Where is your studio?” she asked mischievously.

The one-eyed man at their heels was listening.

V IN DRAGON COURT

There was a young moon in the southwest – a slender tracery in the April twilight – curved high over his right shoulder as he walked northward and homeward through the flare of Broadway.

His thoughts were still occupied with the pleasant excitement of his encounter with Thessalie Dunois; his mind and heart still responded to the delightful stimulation. Out of an already half-forgotten realm of romance, where, often now, he found it increasingly difficult to realise that he had lived for five happy years, a young girl had suddenly emerged as bodily witness, to corroborate, revive, and refresh his fading faith in the reality of what once had been.

Five years in France! – France with its clear sun and lovely moon; its silver-grey cities, its lilac haze, its sweet, deep greenness, its atmosphere of living light! – France, the dwelling-place of God in all His myriad aspects – in all His protean forms! France, the sanctuary of Truth and all her ancient and her future liberties; France, blossoming domain of Love in Love's million exquisite transfigurations, wherein only the eye of faith can recognise the winged god amid his camouflage!

Wine-strong winds of the Western World, and a pitiless Western sun which etches every contour with terrible precision, leaving nothing to imagination – no delicate mystery to rest and shelter souls – had swept away and partly erased from his mind the actuality of those five past years.

Already that past, of which he had been a part, was becoming disturbingly unreal to him. Phantoms haunted its ever-paling sunlight; its scenes were fading; its voices grew vague and distant; its hushed laughter dwindled to a whisper, dying like a sigh.

Then, suddenly, against that misty tapestry of tinted spectres, appeared Thessalie Dunois in the flesh! – straight out of the phantom-haunted void had stepped this glowing thing of life! Into the raw reek and familiar dissonance of Broadway she had vanished. Small wonder that he had followed her to keep in touch with the vanishing past, as a sleeper, waking against his will, strives still to grasp the fragile fabric of a happy dream.

Yet, in spite of Thessalie, in spite of dreams, in spite of his own home-coming, and the touch of familiar pavements under his own feet, the past, to Barres, was utterly dead, the present strange and unreal, the future obscure and all aflame behind a world afire with war.

For two years, now, no human mind in America had been able to adjust itself to the new heaven and the new earth which had sprung into lurid being at the thunderclap of war.

All things familiar had changed in the twinkling of an eye; all former things had passed away, leaving the stunned brain of humanity dulled under the shock.

Slowly, by degrees, the world was beginning to realise that the civilisation of Christ was being menaced once again by a resurgence from that ancient land of legend where the wild Hun dented; – that again the endless hordes of barbarians were rushing in on Europe out of their Eastern fastnesses – hordes which filled the shrinking skies with their clamour, vaunting the might of Baal, cheering their antichrist, drenching the knees of their own red gods with the blood of little children.

It seemed impossible for Americans to understand that these things could be – were really true – that the horrors the papers printed were actualities happening to civilised people like themselves and their neighbours.

Out of their own mouths the German tribes thundered their own disgrace and condemnation, yet America sat dazed, incredulous, motionless. Emperor and general, professor and junker, shouted at the top of their lungs the new creed, horrible as the Black Mass, reversing every precept taught by Christ.

Millions of Teuton mouths cheered fiercely for the new religion – Frightfulness; worshipped with frantic yells the new trinity – Wotan, Kaiser and Brute Strength.

Stunned, blinded, deafened, the Western World, still half-paralysed, stirred stiffly from its inertia. Slowly, mechanically, its arteries resumed their functions; the reflex, operating automatically, started trade again in its old channels; old habits were timidly resumed; minds groped backward, searching for severed threads which connected yesterday with to-day – groped, hunted, found nothing, and, perplexed, turned slowly toward the smoke-choked future for some reason for it all – some outlook.

There was no explanation, no outlook – nothing save dust and flame and the din of Teutonic hordes trampling to death the Son of Man.

So America moved about her worn, deep-trodden and familiar ways, her mind slowly clearing from the cataclysmic concussion, her power of vision gradually returning, adjusting itself, little by little, to this new heaven and new earth and this hell entirely new.

The *Lusitania* went down; the Great Republic merely quivered. Other ships followed; only a low murmur of pain came from the Western Colossus.

But now, after the second year, through the thickening nightmare the Great Republic groaned aloud; and a new note of menace sounded in her drugged and dreary voice.

And the thick ears of the Hun twitched and he paused, squatting belly-deep in blood, to listen.

Barres walked homeward. Somewhere along in the 40's he turned eastward into one of those cross-streets originally built up of brownstone dwelling houses, and now in process of transformation into that architectural and commercial miscellany which marks the transition stage of the metropolis anywhere from Westchester to the sea.

Altered for business purposes, basements displayed signs and merchandise of bootmakers, dealers in oriental porcelains, rare prints, silverware; parlour windows modified into bay windows, sheeted with plate-glass, exposed, perhaps, feminine headgear, or an expensive model gown or two, or the sign of a real-estate man, or of an upholsterer.

Above the parlour floors lived people of one sort or another; furnished and unfurnished rooms and suites prevailed; and the brownstone monotony was already indented along the building line by brand-new constructions of Indiana limestone, behind the glittering plate-glass of which were to be seen reticent displays of artistic furniture, modern and antique oil paintings, here and there the lace-curtained den of some superior ladies' hair-dresser, where beautifying also was accomplished at a price, alas!

Halfway between Sixth Avenue and Fifth, on the 61 north side of the street, an enterprising architect had purchased half a dozen squatty, three-storied houses, set back from the sidewalk behind grass-plots. These had been lavishly stuccoed and transformed into abodes for those irregulars in the army of life known as "artists."

In the rear the back fences had been levelled; six corresponding houses on the next street had been purchased; a sort of inner court established, with a common grass-plot planted with trees and embellished by a number of concrete works of art, battered statues, sundials, and well-curbs.

Always the army of civilisation trudges along screened, flanked, and tagged after by life's irregulars, who cannot or will not conform to routine. And these are always roaming around seeking their own cantonments, where, for a while, they seem content to dwell at the end of one more aimless *étape* through the world – not in regulation barracks, but in regions too unconventional, too inconvenient to attract others.

Of this sort was the collection of squatty houses, forming a "community," where, in the neighbourhood of other irregulars, Garret Barres dwelt; and into the lighted entrance of which he now turned, still exhilarated by his meeting with Thessalie Dunois.

The architectural agglomeration was known as Dragon Court – a faïence Fu-dog above the electric light over the green entrance door furnishing that priceless idea – a Fu-dog now veiled by mesh-wire to provide against the indiscretions of sparrows lured thither by housekeeping possibilities lurking among the dense screens of Japanese ivy covering the façade.

Larry Soane, the irresponsible superintendent, always turned gardener with April's advent in Dragon Court, contributions from its denizens enabling him to 62 pepper a few flower-beds with hyacinths and tulips, and later with geraniums. These former bulbs had now gratefully appeared in promising thickets, and Barres saw the dark form of the handsome, reckless-looking Irishman fussing over them in the lantern-lit dusk, while his little daughter, Dulcie, kneeling on the dim grass, caressed the first blue hyacinth blossom with thin, childish fingers.

Barres glanced into his letter-box behind the desk, above which a drop-light threw more shadows than illumination. Little Dulcie Soane was supposed to sit under it and emit information, deliver and receive letters, pay charges on packages, and generally supervise things when she was not attending school.

There were no letters for the young man. He examined a package, found it contained his collars from the laundry, tucked them under his left arm, and walked to the door looking out upon the dusky interior court.

"Soane," he said, "your garden begins to look very fine." He nodded pleasantly to Dulcie, and the child responded to his friendly greeting with the tired but dauntless smile of the young who are missing those golden years to which all childhood has a claim.

Dulcie's three cats came strolling out of the dusk across the lamplit grass – a coal black one with sea-green eyes, known as "The Prophet," and his platonic mate, white as snow, and with magnificent azure-blue eyes which, in white cats, usually betokens total deafness. She was known as "The Houri" to the irregulars of Dragon Court. The third cat, unanimously but misleadingly christened "Strindberg" by the dwellers in Dragon Court, has already crooked her tortoise-shell tail and was tearing around in eccentric circles or darting halfway up trees in a manner characteristic, and, 63 possibly accounting for the name, if not for the sex.

"Thim cats of the kid's," observed Soane, "do be scratchin' up the plants all night long – bad cess to thim! Barrin' thim three omadhauns yonder, I'd show ye a purty bed o' poisies, Misther Barres. But Sthrin'berg, God help her, is f'r diggin' through to China."

Dulcie impulsively caressed the Prophet, who turned his solemn, incandescent eyes on Barres. The Houri also looked at him, then, intoxicated by the soft spring evening, rolled lithely upon the new grass and lay there twitching her snowy tail and challenging the stars out of eyes that matched their brilliance.

Dulcie got up and walked slowly across the grass to where Barres stood:

"May I come to see you this evening?" she asked, diffidently, and with a swift, sidelong glance toward her father.

"Ah, then, don't be worritin' him!" grumbled Soane. "Hasn't Misther Barres enough to do, what with all thim idees he has slitherin' in his head, an' all the books an' learnin' an' picters he has to think of – whithout the likes of you at his heels every blessed minute, day an' night! –"

"But he always lets me –" she remonstrated.

"G'wan, now, and lave the poor gentleman be! Quit your futtherin' an' muttherin'. G'wan in the house, ye little scut, an' see what there is f'r ye to do! –"

"What's the matter with you, Soane?" interrupted Barres good-humouredly. "Of course she can come up if she wants to. Do you feel like paying me a visit, Dulcie, before you go to bed?"

"Yes," she nodded diffidently.

"Well, come ahead then, Sweetness! And whenever you want to come you say so. Your father knows well enough I like to have you."

He smiled at Dulcie; the child's shy preference for his society always had amused him. Besides, she was always docile and obedient; and she was very sensitive, too, never outwearing her welcome in his studio, and always leaving without a murmur when, looking up from book or drawing he would exclaim cheerfully: "Now, Sweetness! Time's up! Bed for yours, little lady!"

It had been a very gradual acquaintance between them – more than two years in developing. From his first pleasant nod to her when he first came to live in Dragon Court, it had progressed for a few months, conservatively on her part, and on his with a detached but kindly interest born of easy sympathy for youth and loneliness.

But he had no idea of the passionate response he was stirring in the motherless, neglected child – of what hunger he was carelessly stimulating, what latent qualities and dormant characteristics he was arousing.

Her appearance, one evening, in her night-dress at his studio doorway, accompanied by her three cats, began to enlighten him in regard to her mental starvation. Tremulous, almost at the point of tears, she had asked for a book and permission to remain for a few moments in the studio. He had rung for Selinda, ordered fruit, cake, and a glass of milk, and had installed Dulcie upon the sofa with a lapful of books. That was the beginning.

But Barres still did not entirely understand what particular magnet drew the child to his studio. The place was full of beautiful things, books, rugs, pictures, fine old furniture, cabinets glimmering with porcelains, ivories, jades, Chinese crystals. These all, in minutest detail, seemed to fascinate the girl. Yet, after giving her permission to enter whenever she desired, often 65 while reading or absorbed in other affairs, he became conscious of being watched; and, glancing up, would frequently surprise her sitting there very silently, with an open book on her knees, and her strange grey eyes intently fixed on him.

Then he would always smile and say something friendly; and usually forget her the next moment in his absorption of whatever work he had under way.

Only one other man inhabiting Dragon Court ever took the trouble to notice or speak to the child – James Westmore, the sculptor. And he was very friendly in his vigorous, jolly, rather boisterous way, catching her up and tossing her about as gaily and irresponsibly as though she were a rag doll; and always telling her he was her adopted godfather and would have to chastise her if she ever deserved it. Also, he was always urging her to hurry and grow up, because he had a wedding present for her. And though Dulcie's smile was friendly, and Westmore's nonsense pleased the shy child, she merely submitted, never made any advance.

Barres's ménage was accomplished by two specimens of mankind, totally opposite in sex and colour; Selinda, a blonde, slant-eyed, and very trim Finn, doing duty as maid; and Aristocrates W. Johnson, lately employed in the capacity of waiter on a dining-car by the New York Central Railroad – tall, dignified, graceful, and Ethiopian – who cooked as daintily as a débutante trifling with culinary duty, and served at table with the languid condescension of a dilettante and wealthy amateur of domestic arts.

Barres ascended the two low, easy flights of stairs and unlocked his door. Aristocrates, setting the table 66 in the dining-room, approached gracefully and relieved his master of hat, coat, and stick.

Half an hour later, a bath and fresh linen keyed up his already lively spirits; he whistled while he tied his tie, took a critical look at himself, and, dropping both hands into the pockets of his dinner jacket, walked out into the big studio, which also was his living-room.

There was a piano there; he sat down and rattled off a rollicking air from the most recent spring production, beginning to realise that he was keyed up for something livelier than a solitary dinner at home.

His hands fell from the keys and he swung around on the piano stool and looked into the dining-room rather doubtfully.

"Aristocrates!" he called.

The tall pullman butler sauntered gracefully in.

Barres gave him a telephone number to call. Aristocrates returned presently with the information that the lady was not at home.

"All right. Try Amsterdam 6703. Ask for Miss Souval."

But Miss Souval, also, was out.

Barres possessed a red-leather covered note-book; he went to his desk and got it; and under his direction Aristocrates called up several numbers, reporting adversely in every case.

It was a fine evening; ladies were abroad or preparing to fulfil engagements wisely made on such a day as this had been. And the more numbers he called up the lonelier the young man began to feel.

Thessalie had not given him either her address or telephone number. It would have been charming to have her dine with him. He was now thoroughly inclined for company. He glanced at the empty dining-room with aversion.

"All right; never mind," he said, dismissing Aristocrates, who receded as lithely as though leading a cake-walk.

"The devil," muttered the young fellow. "I'm not going to dine here alone. I've had too happy a day of it."

He got up restlessly and began to pace the studio. He knew he could get some man, but he didn't want one. However, it began to look like that or a solitary dinner.

So after a few more moments' scowling cogitation he went out and down the stairs, with the vague idea of inviting some brother painter – any one of the regular irregulars who inhabited Dragon Court.

Dulcie sat behind the little desk near the door, head bowed, her thin hands clasped over the closed ledger, and in her pallid face the expressionless dullness of a child forgotten.

"Hello, Sweetness!" he said cheerfully.

She looked up; a slight colour tinted her cheeks, and she smiled.

"What's the matter, Dulcie?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? That's a very dreary malady – nothing. You look lonely. Are you?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know whether you are lonely or not?" he demanded.

"I suppose I am," she ventured, with a shy smile.

"Where is your father?"

"He went out."

"Any letters for me – or messages?"

"A man – he had one eye – came. He asked who you are."

"What?"

"I think he was German. He had only one eye. He asked your name."

"What did you say?"

"I told him. Then he went away."

Barres shrugged:

"Somebody who wants to sell artists' materials," he concluded. Then he looked at the girl: "So you're lonely, are you? Where are your three cats? Aren't they company for you?"

"Yes..."

"Well, then," he said gaily, "why not give a party for them? That ought to amuse you, Dulcie."

The child still smiled; Barres walked on past her a pace or two, halted, turned irresolutely, arrived at some swift decision, and came back, suddenly understanding that he need seek no further – that he had discovered his guest of the evening at his very elbow.

"Did you and your father have your supper, Dulcie?"

"My father went out to eat at Grogan's."

"How about you?"

"I can find something."

"Why not dine with me?" he suggested.

The child stared, bewildered, then went a little pale.

“Shall we have a dinner party for two – you and I, Dulcie? What do you say?”

She said nothing, but her big grey eyes were fixed on him in a passion of inquiry.

“A real party,” he repeated. “Let the people get their own mail and packages until your father returns. Nobody’s going to sneak in, anyway. Or, if that won’t do, I’ll call up Grogan’s and tell your father to come back because you are going to dine in my studio with me. Do you know the telephone number? Very well; get Grogan’s for me. I’ll speak to your father.”

Dulcie’s hand trembled on the receiver as she called up Grogan’s; Barres bent over the transmitter:

“Soane, Dulcie is going to take dinner in my studio with me. You’ll have to come back on duty, when you’ve eaten.” He hung up, looked at Dulcie and laughed.

“I wanted company as much as you did,” he confessed. “Now, go and put on your prettiest frock, and we’ll be very grand and magnificent. And afterward we’ll talk and look at books and pretty things – and maybe we’ll turn on the Victrola and I’ll teach you to dance – ” He had already begun to ascend the stairs:

“In half an hour, Dulcie!” he called back; “– and you may bring the Prophet if you like... Shall I ask Mr. Westmore to join us?”

“I’d rather be all alone with you,” she said shyly.

He laughed and ran on up the stairs.

In half an hour the electric bell rang very timidly. Aristocrates, having been instructed and rehearsed, and, loftily condescending to his rôle in a kindly comedy to be played seriously, announced: “Miss Soane!” in his most courtly manner.

Barres threw aside the evening paper and came forward, taking both hands of the white and slightly frightened child.

“Aristocrates ought to have announced the Prophet, too,” he said gaily, breaking the ice and swinging Dulcie around to face the open door again.

The Prophet entered, perfectly at ease, his eyes of living jade shining, his tail urbanely hoisted.

Dulcie ventured to smile; Barres laughed outright; Aristocrates surveyed the Prophet with toleration mingled with a certain respect. For a black cat is never without occult significance to a gentleman of colour.

With Dulcie’s hand still in his, Barres led her into the living-room, where, presently, Aristocrates brought a silver tray upon which was a glass of iced orange juice for Dulcie, and a “Bronnix,” as Aristocrates called it, for the master.

“To your health and good fortune in life, Dulcie,” he said politely.

The child gazed mutely at him over her glass, then, blushing, ventured to taste her orange juice.

When she finished, Barres drew her frail arm through his and took her out, seating her. Ceremonies began in silence, and the master of the place was not quite sure whether the flush on Dulcie’s face indicated unhappy embarrassment or pleasure.

He need not have worried: the child adored it all. The Prophet came in and gravely seated himself on a neighbouring chair, whence he could survey the table and seriously inspect each course.

“Dulcie,” he said, “how grown-up you look with your bobbed hair put up, and your fluffy gown.”

She lifted her enchanted eyes to him:

“It is my first communion dress... I’ve had to make it longer for a graduation dress.”

“Oh, that’s so; you’re graduating this summer!”

“Yes.”

“And what then?”

“Nothing.” She sighed unconsciously and sat very still with folded hands, while Aristocrates refilled her glass of water.

She no longer felt embarrassed; her gravity matched Aristocrates's; she seriously accepted whatever was offered or set before her, but Barres noticed that she ate it all, merely leaving on her plate, with inculcated and mathematical precision, a small portion as concession to good manners.

They had, toward the banquet's end, water ices, bon-bons, French pastry, and ice cream. And presently a slight and blissful sigh of repletion escaped the child's red lips. The symptoms were satisfactory but unmistakable; Dulcie was perfectly feminine; her capacity had proven it.

The Prophet's stately self-control in the fragrant vicinity of nourishment was now to be rewarded: Barres conducted Dulcie to the studio and installed her among cushions upon a huge sofa. Then, lighting a cigarette, he dropped down beside her and crossed one knee over the other.

"Dulcie," he said in his lazy, humorous way, "it's a funny old world any way you view it."

"Do you think it is always funny?" inquired the child, her deep, grey eyes on his face.

He smiled:

"Yes, I do; but sometimes the joke is on one's self. And then, although it is still a funny world, from the world's point of view, you, of course, fail to see the humour of it... I don't suppose you understand."

"I do," nodded the child, with the ghost of a smile.

"Really? Well, I was afraid I'd been talking nonsense, but if you understand, it's all right."

They both laughed.

"Do you want to look at some books?" he suggested.

"I'd rather listen to you."

He smiled:

"All right. I'll begin at this corner of the room and tell you about the things in it." And for a while he rambled lazily on about old French chairs and Spanish chests, and the panels of Mille Fleur tapestry which hung behind them; the two lovely pre-Raphael panels in their exquisite ancient frames; the old Venetian velvet covering triple choir-stalls in the corner; the ivory-toned 72 marble figure on its wood and compos pedestal, where tendrils and delicate foliations of water gilt had become slightly iridescent, harmonising with the patine on the ancient Chinese garniture flanking a mantel clock of dullest gold.

About these things, their workmanship, the histories of their times, he told her in his easy, unaccented voice, glancing sideways at her from time to time to note how she stood it.

But she listened, fascinated, her gaze moving from the object discussed to the man who discussed it; her slim limbs curled under her, her hands clasped around a silken cushion made from the robe of some Chinese princess.

Lounging there beside her, amused, humorously flattered by her attention, and perhaps a little touched, he held forth a little longer.

"Is it a nice party, so far, Dulcie?" he concluded with a smile.

She flushed, found no words, nodded, and sat with lowered head as though pondering.

"What would you rather do if you could do what you want to in the world, Dulcie?"

"I don't know."

"Think a minute."

She thought for a while.

"Live with you," she said seriously.

"Oh, Dulcie! That is no sort of ambition for a growing girl!" he laughed; and she laughed, too, watching his every expression out of grey eyes that were her chiefest beauty.

"You're a little too young to know what you want yet," he concluded, still smiling. "By the time that bobbed mop of red hair grows to a proper length, you'll know more about yourself."

"Do you like it up?" she enquired naïvely.

"It makes you look older."

"I want it to."

"I suppose so," he nodded, noticing the snowy neck which the new coiffure revealed. It was becoming evident to him that Dulcie had her own vanities – little pathetic vanities which touched him as he glanced at the reconstructed first communion dress and the drooping hyacinth pinned at the waist, and the cheap white slippers on a foot as slenderly constructed as her long and narrow hands.

"Did your mother die long ago, Dulcie?"

"Yes."

"In America?"

"In Ireland."

"You look like her, I fancy – " thinking of Soane.

"I don't know."

Barres had heard Soane hold forth in his cups on one or two occasions – nothing more than the vague garrulousness of a Celt made more loquacious by the whiskey of one Grogan – something about his having been a gamekeeper in his youth, and that his wife – "God rest her!" – might have held up her head with "anny wan o' thim in th' Big House."

Recollecting this, he idly wondered what the story might have been – a young girl's perverse infatuation for her father's gamekeeper, perhaps – a handsome, common, ignorant youth, reckless and irresponsible enough to take advantage of her – probably some such story – resembling similar histories of chauffeurs, riding-masters, grooms, and coachmen at home.

The Prophet came noiselessly into the studio, stopped at sight of his little mistress, twitched his tail reflectively, then leaped onto a carved table and calmly began his ablutions.

Barres got up and wound up the Victrola. Then he kicked aside a rug or two.

"This is to be a real party, you know," he remarked. "You don't dance, do you?"

"Yes," she said diffidently, "a little."

"Oh! That's fine!" he exclaimed.

Dulcie got off the sofa, shook out her reconstructed gown. When he came over to where she stood, she laid her hand in his almost solemnly, so overpowering had become the heavenly sequence of events. For the rite of his hospitality had indeed become a rite to her. Never before had she stood in awe, enthralled before such an altar as this man's hearthstone. Never had she dreamed that he who so wondrously served it could look at such an offering as hers – herself.

But the miracle had happened; altar and priest were accepting her; she laid her hand, which trembled, in his; gave herself to his guidance and to the celestial music, scarcely seeing, scarcely hearing his voice.

"You dance delightfully," he was saying; "you're a born dancer, Dulcie. I do it fairly well myself, and I ought to know."

He was really very much surprised. He was enjoying it immensely. When the Victrola gave up the ghost he wound it again and came back to resume. Under his suggestions and tutelage, they tried more intricate steps, devious and ambitious, and Dulcie, unterrified by terpsichorean complications, surmounted every one with his whispered coaching and expert aid.

Now it came to a point where time was not for him. He was too interested, enjoying it too genuinely.

Sometimes, when they paused to enable him to resurrect the defunct music in the Victrola, they laughed at the Prophet, who sat upon the ancient carved table, gravely surveying them. Sometimes they rested because he thought she ought to – himself a trifle pumped – only to find, to his amazement, that he need not be solicitous concerning her.

A tall and ancient clock ringing midnight from clear, uncompromising bells, brought Barres to himself.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, "this won't do! Dear child, I'm having a wonderful time, but I've got to deliver you to your father!"

He drew her arm through his, laughingly pretending horror and haste; she fled lightly along beside him as he whisked her through the hall and down the stairs.

A candle burned on the desk. Soane sat there, asleep, and odorous of alcohol, his flushed face buried in his arms.

But Soane was what is known as a “sob-souse”; never ugly in his cups, merely inclined to weep over the immemorial wrongs of Ireland.

He woke up when Barres touched his shoulder, rubbed his swollen eyes and black, curly head, gazed tragically at his daughter:

“G’wan to bed, ye little scut!” he said, getting to his feet with a terrific yawn.

Barres took her hand:

“We’ve had a wonderful party, haven’t we, Sweetness?”

“Yes,” whispered the child.

The next instant she was gone like a ghost, through the dusky, whitewashed corridor where distorted shadows trembled in the candlelight.

“Soane,” said Barres, “this won’t do, you know. They’ll sack you if you keep on drinking.”

The man, not yet forty, a battered, middle-aged by-product of hale and reckless vigour, passed his hands 76 over his temples with the dignity of a Hibernian Hamlet:

“The harp that wanst through Tara’s halls – ” he began; but memory failed; and two tears – by-products, also, of Grogan’s whiskey – sparkled in his reproachful eyes.

“I’m merely telling you,” remarked Barres. “We all like you, Soane, but the landlord won’t stand for it.”

“May God forgive him,” muttered Soane. “Was there ever a landlord but he was a tyrant, too?”

Barres blew out the candle; a faint light above the Fu-dog outside, over the street door, illuminated the stone hall.

“You ought to keep sober for your little daughter’s sake,” insisted Barres in a low voice. “You love her, don’t you?”

“I do that!” said Soane – “God bless her and her poor mother, who could hould up her pretty head with anny wan till she tuk up with th’ like o’ me!”

His brogue always increased in his cups; devotion to Ireland and a lofty scorn of landlords grew with both.

“You’d better keep away from Grogan’s,” remarked Barres.

“I had a bite an’ a sup at Grogan’s. Is there anny harrm in that, sorr?”

“Cut out the ‘sup,’ Larry. Cut out that gang of bums at Grogan’s, too. There are too many Germans hanging out around Grogan’s these days. You Sinn Feiners or Clan-na-Gael, or whatever you are, had better manage your own affairs, anyway. The old-time Feinans stood on their own sturdy legs, not on German beer-skids.”

“Wisha then, sorr, d’ye mind th’ ould song they sang in thim days:

“Then up steps Bonyparty
An’ takes me by the hand,
And how is ould Ireland,
And how does she shtand?
It’s a poor, disthressed country
As ever yet was seen,
And they’re hangin’ men and women
For the wearing of the green!

Oh, the wearing of the— ”

“That’ll do,” said Barres drily. “Do you want to wake the house? Don’t go to Grogan’s and talk about Ireland to any Germans. I’ll tell you why: we’ll probably be at war with Germany ourselves within a year, and that’s a pretty good reason for you Irish to keep clear of all Germans. Go to bed!”

VI DULCIE

One warm afternoon late in spring, Dulcie Soane, returning from school to Dragon Court, found her father behind the desk, as usual, awaiting his daughter's advent, to release him from duty.

A tall, bony man with hectic and sunken cheeks and only a single eye was standing by the desk, earnestly engaged in whispered conversation with her father.

He drew aside instantly as Dulcie came up and laid her school books on the desk. Soane, already redolent of Grogan's whiskey, pushed back his chair and got to his feet.

"G'wan in f'r a bite an' a sup," he said to his daughter, "while I talk to the gintleman."

So Dulcie went slowly into the superintendent's dingy quarters for her mid-day meal, which was dinner; and between her and a sloppy scrub-woman who cooked for them, she managed to warm up and eat what Soane had left for her from his own meal.

When she returned to the desk in the hall, the one-eyed man had gone. Soane sat on the chair behind the desk, his face over-red and shiny, his heels drumming the devil's tattoo on the tessellated pavement.

"I'll be at Grogan's," he said, as Dulcie seated herself in the ancient leather chair behind the desk telephone, and began to sort the pile of mail which the postman evidently had just delivered.

"Very well," she murmured absently, turning around 79 and beginning to distribute the letters and parcels in the various numbered compartments behind her. Soane slid off his chair to his feet and straightened up, stretching and yawning.

"Av anny wan tilliphones to Misther Barres," he said, "listen in."

"What!"

"Listen in, I'm tellin' you. And if it's a lady, ask her name first, and then listen in. And if she says her name is Quellen or Dunois, mind what she says to Misther Barres."

"Why?" enquired Dulcie, astonished.

"Becuz I'm tellin' ye!"

"I shall not do that," said the girl, flushing up.

"Ah, bother! Sure, there's no harm in it, Dulcie! Would I be askin' ye to do wrong, asthore? Me who is your own blood and kin? Listen then: 'Tis a woman what do be botherin' the poor young gentleman, an' I'll not have him f'r to be put upon. Listen, m'acushla, and if airy a lady tilliphones, or if she comes futtherin' an' muttherin' around here, call me at Grogan's and I'll be soon dishposen' av the likes av her."

"Has she ever been here – this lady?" asked the girl, uncertain and painfully perplexed.

"Sure has she! Manny's the time I've chased her out," replied Soane glibly.

"Oh. What does she look like?"

"God knows – annything ye don't wish f'r to look like yourself! Sure, I disremember what make of woman she might be – her name's enough for you. Call me up if she comes or rings. She may be a dangerous woman, at that," he added, "so speak fair to her and listen in to what she says."

Dulcie slowly nodded, looking at him hard.

Soane put on his faded brown hat at an angle, fished 80 a cigar with a red and gold band from his fancy but soiled waistcoat, scratched a match on the seat of his greasy pants, and sauntered out through the big, whitewashed hallway into the street, with a touch of the swagger which always characterised him.

Dulcie, both hands buried in her ruddy hair and both thin elbows on the desk, sat poring over her school books.

Graduation day was approaching; there was much for her to absorb, much to memorise before then.

As she studied she hummed to herself the air of the quaint song which she was to sing at her graduation exercises. That did not interfere with her concentration; but as she finished one lesson, cast aside the book, and opened another to prepare the next lesson, vaguely happy memories of her evening party with Barres came into her mind to disturb her thoughts, tempting her to reverie and the delicious idleness she knew only when alone and absorbed in thoughts of him.

But she resolutely put him out of her mind and opened her book.

The hall clock ticked loudly through the silence; slanting sun rays fell through the street grille, across the tessellated floor where flies crawled and buzzed.

The Prophet sat full in a bar of sunlight and gravely followed the movements of the flies as though specialising on the study of those amazing insects.

Tenants of Dragon Court passed out or entered at intervals, pausing to glance at their letter-boxes or requesting their keys.

Westmore came down the eastern staircase, like an avalanche, with a cheery:

"Hello, Dulcie! Any letters? All right, old dear! If you see Mr. Mandel, tell him I'll be at the club!"

Corot Mandel came in presently, and she gave him Westmore's message.

"Thanks," he said, not even glancing at the thin figure in the shabby dress too small for her. And, after peering into his letter-box, he went away with the indolent swing of a large and powerful plantigrade, gazing fixedly ahead of him out of heavy, oriental eyes, and twisting up his jet black, waxed moustache.

A tall, handsome girl called and enquired for Mr. Trenor. Dulcie returned her amiable smile, unhooked the receiver, and telephoned up. But nobody answered from Esmé Trenor's apartment, and the girl, whose name was Damaris Souval, and whose profession varied between the stage and desultory sitting for artists, smiled once more on Dulcie and sauntered out in her very charming summer gown.

The shabby child looked after her through the sunny hallway, the smile still curving her lips – a sensitive, winning smile, untainted by envy. Then she resumed her book, serenely clearing her youthful mind of vanity and desire for earthly things.

Half an hour later Esmé Trenor sauntered in. His was a sensitive nature and fastidious, too. Dinginess, obscurity – everything that was shabby, tarnished, humble in life, he consistently ignored. He had ignored Dulcie Soane for three years: he ignored her now.

He glanced indifferently into his letter-box as he passed the desk. Dulcie said, with the effort it always required for her to speak to him:

"Miss Souval called, but left no message."

Trenor's supercilious glance rested on her for the fraction of a second, then, with a bored nod, he continued on his way and up the stairs. And Dulcie returned to her book.

The desk telephone rang: a Mrs. Helmund desired 82 to speak to Mr. Trenor. Dulcie switched her on, rested her chin on her hand, and continued her reading.

Some time afterward the telephone rang again.

"Dragon Court," said Dulcie, mechanically.

"I wish to speak to Mr. Barres, please."

"Mr. Barres has not come in from luncheon."

"Are you sure?" said the pretty, feminine voice.

"Quite sure," replied Dulcie. "Wait a minute –"

She called Barres's apartment; Aristocrates answered and confirmed his master's absence with courtly effusion.

"No, he is not in," repeated Dulcie. "Who shall I say called him?"

“Say that Miss Dunois called him up. If he comes in, say that Miss Thessalie Dunois will come at five to take tea with him. Thank you. Good-bye.”

Startled to hear the very name against which her father had warned her, Dulcie found it difficult to reconcile the sweet voice that came to her over the wire with the voice of any such person her father had described.

Still a trifle startled, she laid aside the receiver with a disturbed glance toward the wrought-iron door at the further end of the hall.

She had no desire at all to call up her father at Grogan’s and inform him of what had occurred. The mere thought of surreptitious listening in, of eavesdropping, of informing, reddened her face. Also, she had long since lost confidence in the somewhat battered but jaunty man who had always neglected her, although never otherwise unkind, even when intoxicated.

No, she would neither listen in nor inform on anybody at the behest of a father for whom, alas, she had no respect, merely those shreds of conventional feeling⁸³ which might once have been filial affection, but had become merely an habitual solicitude.

No, her character, her nature refused such obedience. If there was trouble between the owner of the unusually sweet voice and Mr. Barres, it was their affair, not hers, not her father’s.

This settled in her mind, she opened another book and turned the pages slowly until she came to the lesson to be learned.

It was hard to concentrate; her thoughts were straying, now, to Barres.

And, as she leaned there, musing above her dingy school book, through the grilled door at the further end of the hall stepped a young girl in a light summer gown – a beautiful girl, lithe, graceful, exquisitely groomed – who came swiftly up to the desk, a trifle pale and breathless:

“Mr. Barres? He lives here?”

“Yes.”

“Please announce Miss Dunois.”

Dulcie flushed deeply under the shock:

“Mr. – Mr. Barres is still out – ”

“Oh. Was it you I talked to over the telephone?” asked Thessalie Dunois.

“Yes.”

“Mr. Barres has not returned?”

“No.”

Thessalie bit her lip, hesitated, turned to go. And at the same instant Dulcie saw the one-eyed man at the street door, peering through the iron grille.

Thessalie saw him, too, stiffened to marble, stood staring straight at him.

He turned and went away up the street. But Dulcie, to whom the incident signified nothing in particular except the impudence of a one-eyed man, was not prepared⁸⁴ for the face which Thessalie Dunois turned toward her. Not a vestige of colour remained in it, and her dark eyes seemed feverish and too large.

“You need not give Mr. Barres any message from me,” she said in an altered voice, which sounded strained and unsteady. “Please do not even say that I came or mention my name... May I ask it of you?”

Dulcie, very silent in her surprise, made no reply.

“Please may I ask it of you?” whispered Thessalie. “Do you mind not telling anybody that I was here?”

“If – you wish it.”

“I do. May I trust you?”

“Y-yes.”

“Thank you – ” A bank bill was in her gloved fingers; intuition warned her; she took another swift look at Dulcie. The child’s face was flaming scarlet.

“Forgive me,” whispered Thessalie... “And thank you, dear – ” She bent over quickly, took Dulcie’s hand, pressed it, looking her in the eyes.

“It’s all right,” she whispered. “I am not asking you to do anything you shouldn’t. Mr. Barres will understand it all when I write to him... Did you see that man at the street door, looking through the grating?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know who he is?” whispered Thessalie.

“No.”

“Have you never before seen him?”

“Yes. He was here at two o’clock talking to my father.”

“Your father?”

“My father’s name is Lawrence Soane. He is superintendent of Dragon Court.”

“What is your name?”

“Dulcie Soane.”

Thessalie still held her hand tightly. Then with a quick but forced smile, she pressed it, thanking the girl for her consideration, turned and walked swiftly through the hall out into the street.

Dulcie, dreaming over her closed books in the fading light, vaguely uneasy lest her silence might embrace the faintest shadow of disloyalty to Barres, looked up quickly at the sound of his familiar footsteps on the pavement.

“Hello, little comrade,” he called to her on his way to the stairs. “Didn’t we have a jolly party the other evening? I’m going out to another party this evening, but I bet it won’t be as jolly as ours!”

The girl smiled happily.

“Any letters, Sweetness?”

“None, Mr. Barres.”

“All the better. I have too many letters, too many visitors. It leaves me no time to have another party with you. But we shall have another, Dulcie – never fear. That is,” he added, pretending to doubt her receptiveness of his invitation, “if you would care to have another with me.”

She merely looked at him, smiling deliciously.

“Be a good child and we’ll have another!” he called back to her, running on up the western staircase.

Around seven o’clock her father came in, steady enough of foot but shiny-red in the face and maudlin drunk.

“That woman was here,” he whined, “an’ ye never called me up! I am b-bethrayed be me childer – wurra the day – ”

“Please, father! If any one sees you – ”

“An’ phwy not! Am I ashamed o’ the tears I shed? 86 No, I am not. No Irishman need take shame along av the tears he sheds for Ireland – God bless her where she shtands! – wid the hob-nails av the crool tyrant foreninst her bleeding neck an’ – ”

“Father, please – ”

“That woman I warned ye of! She was here! ’Twas the wan-eyed lad who seen her – ”

Dulcie rose and took him by his arm. He made no resistance; but he wept while she conducted him bedward, as the immemorial wrongs of Ireland tore his soul.

VII OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

The tremendous tragedy in Europe, now nearing the end of the second act, had been slowly shaking the drowsy Western World out of its snug slumber of complacency. Young America was already sitting up in bed, awake, alert, listening. Older America, more difficult to convince, rolled solemn and interrogative eyes toward Washington, where the wooden gods still sat nodding in a row, smiling vacuously at destiny out of carved and painted features. Eyes had they but they saw not, ears but they heard not; neither spake they through their mouths.

Yet, they that made them were no longer like unto them, for many an anxious idolater no longer trusted in them. For their old God's voice was sounding in their ears.

The voice of a great ex-president, too, had been thundering from the wilderness; lesser prophets, endowed, however, with intellect and vision, had been warning the young West that the second advent of Attila was at hand; an officer of the army, inspired of God, had preached preparedness from the market places and had established for its few disciples an habitation; and a great Admiral had died of a broken heart because his lips had been officially sealed – the wisest lips that ever told of those who go down to the sea in ships.

Plainer and plainer in American ears sounded the 88 mounting surf of that blood-red sea thundering against the frontiers of Democracy; clearer and clearer came the discordant clamour of the barbaric hordes; louder and more menacing the half-crazed blasphemies of their chief, who had given the very name of the Scourge of God to one among the degenerate litter he had sired.

Garret Barres had been educated like any American of modern New York type. Harvard, then five years abroad, and a return to his native city revealed him as an ambitious, receptive, intelligent young man, deeply interested in himself and his own affairs, theoretically patriotic, a good citizen by intention, an affectionate son and brother, and already a pretty good painter of the saner species.

A modest income of his own enabled him to bide his time and decline pot-boilers. A comparatively young father and an even more youthful mother, both of sporting proclivities, together with a sister of the same tastes, were his preferred companions when he had time to go home to the family rooftop in northern New York. His lines, indeed, were cast in pleasant places. Beside still waters in green pastures, he could always restore his city-tarnished soul when he desired to retire for a while from the battleground of endeavour.

The city, after all, offered him a world-wide battlefield; for Garret Barres was by choice a painter of thoroughbred women, of cosmopolitan men – a younger warrior of the brush imbued with the old traditions of those great English captains of portraiture, who recorded for us the more brilliant human truths of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

From their stately canvases aglow, the eyes of the lovely dead look out at us; the eyes of ambition, of 89 pride, of fatuous complacency; the haunted eyes of sorrow; the clear eyes of faith. Out of the past they gaze – those who once lived – deathlessly recorded by Van Dyck, Lely, Kneller; by Gainsborough, Reynolds, Hoppner, Lawrence, Raeburn; or consigned to a dignified destiny by Stuart, Sully, Inman, and Vanderlyn.

When Barres returned to New York after many years, he found that the aspect of the city had not altered very greatly. The usual dirt, disorder, and municipal confusion still reigned; subways were being dug, but since the memory of man runneth, the streets of the metropolis have been dug up, and its market places and byways have been an abomination.

The only visible excitement, however, was in the war columns of the newspapers, and, sometimes, around bulletin boards where wrangling groups were no uncommon sight, citizens and

aliens often coming into verbal collision – sometimes physical – promptly suppressed by bored policemen.

There was a “preparedness” parade; thousands of worthy citizens marched in it, nervously aware, now, that the Great Republic’s only mobile military division was on the Mexican border, where also certain Guard regiments were likely to be directed to reinforce the regulars – pet regiments from the city, among whose corps of officers and enlisted men everybody had some friend or relative.

But these regiments had not yet entrained. There were few soldiers to be seen on the streets. Khaki began to be noticeable in New York only when the Plattsburg camps opened. After that there was an interim of the usual dull, unaccented civilian monotony, mitigated at rare intervals by this dun-coloured ebb and flow from Plattsburg.

Like the first vague premonitions of a nightmare the first ominous symptoms of depression were slowly possessing hearts already uneasy under two years’ burden of rumours unprintable, horrors incredible to those aloof and pursuing the peaceful tenor of their ways.

A growing restlessness, unbelief, the incapacity to understand – selfishness, rapacity, self-righteousness, complacency, cowardice, even stupidity itself were being jolted and shocked into something resembling a glimmer of comprehension as the hunnish U-boats, made ravenous by the taste of blood, steered into western shipping lanes like a vast shoal of sharks.

And always thicker and thicker came the damning tales of rape and murder, of cowardly savagery, brutal vileness, degenerate bestiality – clearer, nearer, distinctly audible, the sigh of a ravaged and expiring civilisation trampled to obliteration by the slaving, ferocious swine of the north.

Fires among shipping, fires amid great stores of cotton and grain destined for France or England, explosions of munitions of war ordered by nations of the Entente, the clumsy propaganda or impudent sneers of German and pro-German newspapers; reports of German meddling in Mexico, in South America, in Japan; more sinister news concerning the insolent activities of certain embassies – all these were beginning to have their logical effect among a fat and prosperous people which simply could not bear to be aroused from pleasant dreams of brotherhood to face the raw and hellish truth.

“For fifty years,” remarked Barres to his neighbour, Esmé Trenor, also a painter of somewhat eccentric portraits, “our national characteristic has been 91 a capacity for absorbing bunk and a fixed determination to kid ourselves. There really is a war, Trenor, old top, and we’re going to get into it before very long.”

Trenor, a tall, tired, exquisitely groomed young man, who once had painted a superficially attractive portrait of a popular débutante, and had been overwhelmed with fashionable orders ever since, was the adored of women. He dropped one attenuated knee over the other and lighted an attenuated cigarette.

“Fancy anybody bothering enough about anything to fight over it!” he said languidly.

“We’re going to *war*, Trenor,” repeated Barres, jamming his brushes into a bowl of black soap. “That’s my positive conviction.”

“Yours is so disturbingly positive a nature,” remonstrated the other. “Why ever raise a row? Nothing positive is of any real importance – not even opinions.”

Barres, vigorously cleaning his brushes in turpentine and black soap, glanced around at Trenor, and in his quick smile there glimmered a hint of good-natured malice. For Esmé Trenor was notoriously anything except positive in his painting, always enveloping a lack of technical knowledge with a veil of camouflage. Behind this pretty veil hid many defects, perhaps even deformities – protected by vague, indefinite shadows and the effrontery of an adroit exploiter of the restless sex.

But Esmé Trenor was both clever and alert. He had not even missed that slight and momentary glimmer of good-humoured malice in the pleasant glance of Barres. But, like his more intelligent prototype, Whistler, it was impossible to know whether or not discovery ever made any particular

difference to him. He tucked a lilac-bordered handkerchief a little deeper into his cuff, glanced at his jewelled wrist-watch, shook the long ash from his cigarette.

"To be positive in anything," he drawled, "is an effort; effort entails exertion; exertion is merely a degree of violence; violence engenders toxins; toxins dull the intellect. Quod erat, dear friend. You see?"

"Oh, yes, I see," nodded Barres, always frankly amused at Trenor and his ways.

"Well, then, if you see – " Trenor waved a long, bony, over-manicured hand, expelled a ring or two of smoke, meditatively; then, in his characteristically languid voice: "To be positive closes the door to further observation and pulls down the window shades. Nothing remains except to go to bed. Is there anything more uninteresting than to go to bed? Is there anything more depressing than to know all about something?"

"You do converse like an ass sometimes," remarked Barres.

"Yes – sometimes. Not now, Barres. I don't desire to know all about anybody or anything. Fancy my knowing all about art, for example!"

"Yes, fancy!" repeated Barres, laughing.

"Or about anything specific – a woman, for example!" He shrugged wearily.

"If you meet a woman and like her, don't you want to know all there is to know about her?" inquired Barres.

"I should say not!" returned the other with languid contempt. "I don't wish to know anything at all about her."

"Well, we differ about that, old top."

"Religiously. A woman can be only an incidental amusement in one's career. You don't go to a musical comedy twice, do you? And any woman will reveal herself sufficiently in one evening."

"Nice, kindly domestic instincts you have, Trenor."

"I'm merely fastidious," returned the other, dropping his cigarette out of the open window. He rose, yawned, took his hat, stick and gloves.

"Bye," he said languidly. "I'm painting Elsenä Helmund this morning."

Barres said, with good-humoured envy:

"I've neither commission nor sitter. If I had, you bet I'd not stand there yawning at my luck."

"It is you who have the luck, not I," drawled Trenor. "I give a portion of my spiritual and material self with every brush stroke, while you remain at liberty to flourish and grow fat in idleness. I perish as I create; my life exhausts itself to feed my art. What you call my good luck is my martyrdom. You see, dear friend, how fortunate you are?"

"I see," grinned Barres. "But will your spiritual nature stand such a cruel drain? Aren't you afraid your morality may totter?"

"Morality," mused Esmé, going; "that is one of those early Gothic terms now obsolete, I believe – "

He sauntered out with his hat and gloves and stick, still murmuring:

"Morality? Gothic – very Gothic – "

Barres, still amused, sorted his wet brushes, dried them carefully one by one on a handful of cotton waste, and laid them in a neat row across the soapstone top of his palette-table.

"Hang it!" he muttered cheerfully. "I could paint like a streak this morning if I had the chance – "

He threw himself back in his chair and sat there smoking for a while, his narrowing eyes fixed on a great window which opened above the court. Soft spring breezes stirred the curtains; sparrows were noisy out there; a strip of cobalt sky smiled at him over the opposite chimneys; an April cloud floated across it.

He rose, walked over to the window and glanced down into the court. Several more hyacinths were now in blossom. The Prophet dozed majestically, curled up on an Italian garden seat. Beside

him sprawled the snow white Houri, stretched out full length in the sun, her wonderful blue eyes following the irrational gambols of the tortoise-shell cat, Strindberg, who had gone loco, as usual, and was tearing up and down trees, prancing sideways with flattened ears and crooked tail, in terror at things invisible, or digging furiously toward China amid the hyacinths.

Dulcie Soane came out into the court presently and expostulated with Strindberg, who suffered herself to be removed from the hyacinth bed, only to make a hysterical charge on her mistress's ankles.

"Stop it, you crazy thing!" insisted Dulcie, administering a gentle slap which sent the cat bucketing and corvetting across the lawn, where the eccentric course of a dead leaf, blown by the April wind, instantly occupied its entire intellectual vacuum.

Barres, leaning on the window-sill, said, without raising his voice:

"Hello, Dulcie! How are you, after our party?"

The child looked up, smiled shyly her response through the pale glory of the April sunshine.

"What are you doing to-day?" he inquired, with casual but friendly interest.

"Nothing."

"Isn't there any school?"

"It's Saturday."

"That's so. Well, if you're doing nothing you're 95 just as busy as I am," he remarked, smiling down at her where she stood below his window.

"Why don't you paint pictures?" ventured the girl diffidently.

"Because I haven't any orders. Isn't that sad?"

"Yes... But you could paint a picture just to please yourself, couldn't you?"

"I haven't anybody to paint from," he explained with amiable indifference, lazily watching the effect of alternate shadow and sunlight on her upturned face.

"Couldn't you find – somebody?" Her heart had suddenly begun to beat very fast.

Barres laughed:

"Would you like to have your portrait painted?"

She could scarcely find voice to reply:

"Will you – let me?"

The slim young figure down there in the April sunshine had now arrested his professional attention. With detached interest he inspected her for a few moments; then:

"You'd make an interesting study, Dulcie. What do you say?"

"Do – do you mean that you *want* me?"

"Why – yes! Would you like to pose for me? It's pin-money, anyway. Would you like to try it?"

"Y-yes."

"Are you quite sure? It's hard work."

"Quite – sure – " she stammered. The little flushed face was lifted very earnestly to his now, almost beseechingly. "I am quite sure," she repeated breathlessly.

"So you'd really like to pose for me?" he insisted in smiling surprise at the girl's visible excitement. Then he added abruptly: "I've half a mind to give you a job as my private model!"

Through the rosy confusion of her face her grey eyes were fixed on him with a wistful intensity, almost painful. For into her empty heart and starved mind had suddenly flashed a dazzling revelation. Opportunity was knocking at her door. Her chance had come! Perhaps it had been inherited from her mother – God knows! – this deep, deep hunger for things beautiful – this passionate longing for light and knowledge.

Mere contact with such a man as Barres had already made endurable a solitary servitude which had been subtly destroying her child's spirit, and slowly dulling the hunger in her famished mind. And now to aid him – to feel that he was using her – was to arise from her rags of ignorance and emerge upright into the light which filled that wonder-house wherein he dwelt, and on the dark threshold of which her lonely little soul had crouched so long in silence.

She looked up almost blindly at the man who, in careless friendliness, had already opened his door to her, had permitted her to read his wonder-books, had allowed her to sit unreprieved and silent from sheer happiness, and gaze unsatiated upon the wondrous things within the magic mansion where he dwelt.

And now to serve this man; to aid him, to creep into the light in which he stood and strive to learn and see! – the thought already had produced a delicate intoxication in the child, and she gazed up at Barres from the sunny garden with her naked soul in her eyes. Which confused, perplexed, and embarrassed him.

“Come on up,” he said briefly. “I’ll tell your father over the ’phone.”

She entered without a sound, closed the door which 97 he had left open for her, advanced across the thick-meshed rug. She still wore her blue gingham apron; her bobbed hair, full of ruddy lights, intensified the whiteness of her throat. In her arms she cradled the Prophet, who stared solemnly at Barres out of depthless green eyes.

“Upon my word,” thought Barres to himself, “I believe I have found a model and an uncommon one!”

Dulcie, watching his expression, smiled slightly and stroked the Prophet.

“I’ll paint you that way! Don’t stir,” said the young fellow pleasantly. “Just stand where you are, Dulcie. You’re quite all right as you are – ” He lifted a half-length canvas, placed it on his heavy easel and clamped it.

“I feel exactly like painting,” he continued, busy with his brushes and colours. “I’m full of it to-day. It’s in me. It’s got to come out... And you certainly are an interesting subject – with your big grey eyes and bobbed red hair – oh, quite interesting constructively, too – as well as from the colour point.”

He finished setting his palette, gathered up a handful of brushes:

“I won’t bother to draw you except with a brush – ”

He looked across at her, remained looking, the pleasantly detached expression of his features gradually changing to curiosity, to the severity of increasing interest, to concentrated and silent absorption.

“Dulcie,” he presently concluded, “you are so unusually interesting and paintable that you make me think very seriously... And I’m hanged if I’m going to waste you by slapping a technically adequate sketch of you onto this nice new canvas ... which might give me pleasure while I’m doing it ... and 98 might even tickle my vanity for a week ... and then be laid away to gather dust ... and be covered over next year and used for another sketch... No... *No!*.. You’re worth more than that!”

He began to pace the place to and fro, thinking very hard, glancing around at her from moment to moment, where she stood, obediently immovable on the blue meshed rug, clasping the Prophet to her breast.

“Do you want to become my private model?” he demanded abruptly. “I mean seriously. Do you?”

“Yes.”

“I mean a real model, from whom I can ask anything?”

“Oh, yes, please,” pleaded the girl, trembling a little.

“Do you understand what it means?”

“Yes.”

“Sometimes you’ll be required to wear few clothes. Sometimes none. Did you know that?”

“Yes. Mr. Westmore asked me once.”

“You didn’t care to?”

“Not for him.”

“You don’t mind doing it for me?”

“I’ll do anything you ask me,” she said, trying to smile and shivering with excitement.

“All right. It’s a bargain. You’re my model, Dulcie. When do you graduate from school?”

“In June.”

“Two months! Well – all right. Until then it will be a half day through the week, and all day Saturdays and Sundays, if I require you. You’ll have a weekly salary – ” He smiled and mentioned the figure, and the girl blushed vividly. She had, it appeared, expected nothing.

“Why, Dulcie!” he exclaimed, immensely amused. 99 “You didn’t intend to come here and give me all your time for nothing, did you?”

“Yes.”

“But why on earth should you do such a thing for me?”

She found no words to explain why.

“Nonsense,” he continued; “you’re a business woman now. Your father will have to find somebody to cook for him and take the desk when he’s out at Grogan’s. Don’t worry; I’ll fix it with him... By the way, Dulcie, supposing you sit down.”

She found a chair and took the Prophet onto her lap.

“Now, this will be very convenient for me,” he went on, inspecting her with increasing satisfaction. “If I ever have any orders – any sitters – you can have a vacation, of course. Otherwise, I’ll always have an interesting model at hand – I’ve got chests full of wonderful costumes – genuine ones – ” He fell silent, his eyes studying her. Already he was planning half a dozen pictures, for he was just beginning to perceive how adaptable the girl might be. And there was about her that indefinable something which, when a painter discovers it, interests him and arouses his intense artistic curiosity.

“You know,” he said musingly, “you are something more than pretty, Dulcie... I could put you in eighteenth century clothes and you’d look logical. Yes, and in seventeenth century clothes, too... I could do some amusing things with you in oriental garments... A young Herodiade ... Calypso ... Theodora... She was a child, too, you know. There’s a portrait with bobbed hair – a young girl by Van Dyck... You know you are quite stimulating to me, Dulcie. You excite a painter’s imagination. 100 It’s rather odd,” he added naïvely, “that I never discovered you before; and I’ve known you over two years.”

He had seated himself on the sofa while discoursing. Now he got up, touched a bell twice. The Finnish maid, Selinda, with her high cheek-bones, frosty blue eyes and colourless hair, appeared in cap and apron.

“Selinda,” he said, “take Miss Dulcie into my room. In a long, leather Turkish box on the third shelf of my clothes closet is a silk and gold costume and a lot of jade jewelry. Please put her into it.”

So Dulcie Soane went away with her cat in her arms, beside the neat and frosty-eyed Selinda; and Barres opened a portfolio of engravings, where were gathered the lovely aristocrats of Van Dyck and Rubens and Gainsborough and his contemporaries – a charmingly mixed company, separated by centuries and frontiers, yet all characterised by a common *something*– some inexplicable similarity which Barres recognised without defining.

“It’s rather amusing,” he murmured, “but that kid, Dulcie, seems to remind me of these people – somehow or other... One scarcely looks for qualities in the child of an Irish janitor... I wonder who her mother was...”

When he looked up again Dulcie was standing there on the thick rug. On her naked feet were jade bracelets, jade-set rings on her little toes; a cascade of jade and gold falling over her breasts to the straight, narrow breadth of peacock hue which fell to her ankles. And on her childish head, clasping the ruddy bobbed hair, glittered the jade-incrusted diadem of a fairy princess of Cathay.

The Prophet, gathered close to her breast, stared 101 back at Barres with eyes that dimmed the splendid jade about him.

“That settles it,” he said, the tint of excitement rising in his cheeks. “I *have* discovered a model and a wonder! And right here is where I paint my winter Academy – right here and right now!.. And I call it ‘The Prophets.’ Climb up on that model stand and squat there cross-legged, and stare at me

– straight at me – the way your cat stares!.. There you are. That’s right! Don’t move. Stay put or I’ll come over and bow-string you! – you little miracle!”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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