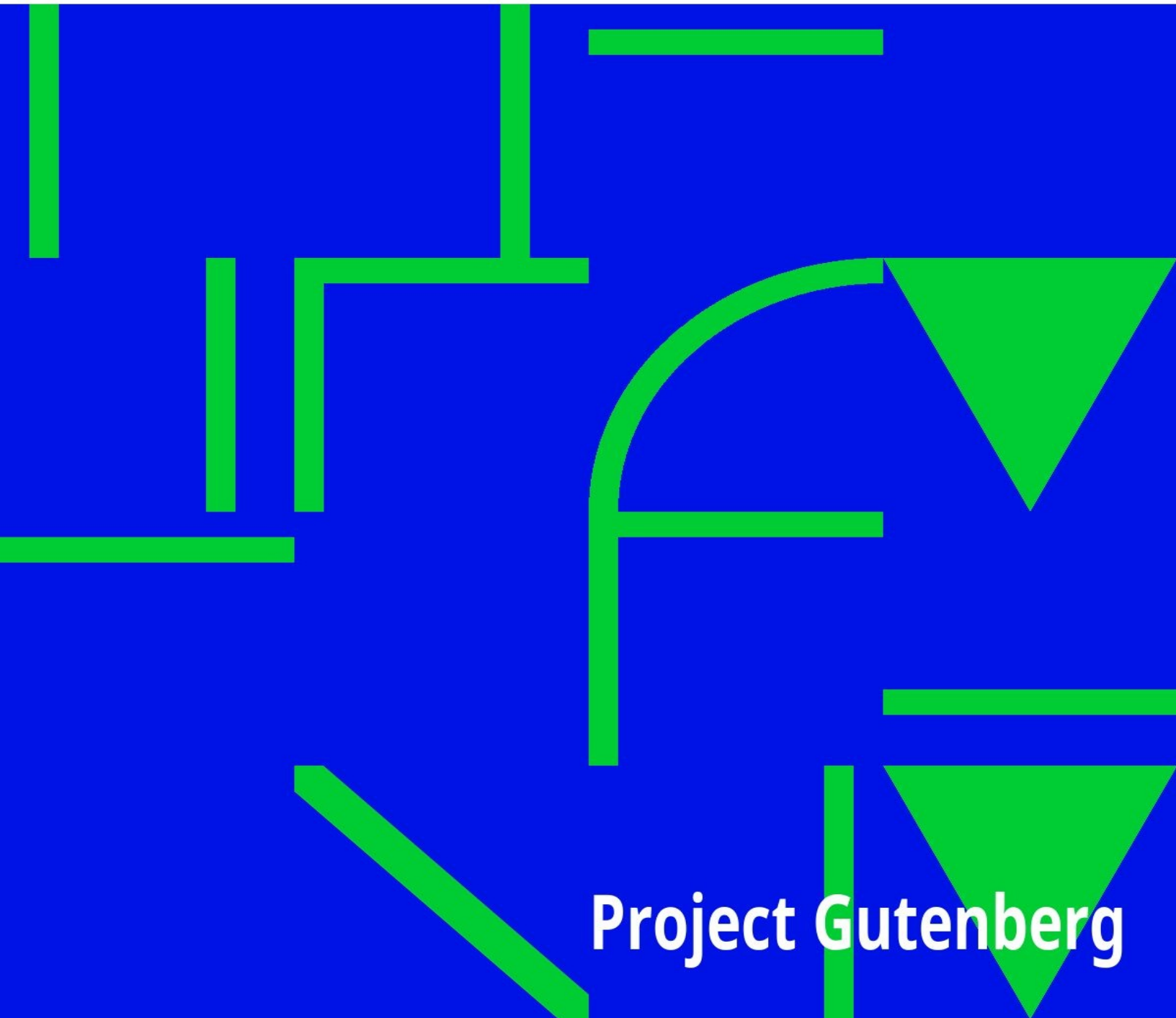
The House of Mystery

An Episode in the Career of Rosalie Le Grange, Clairvoyant

Will Irwin



Title: The House of Mystery
       An Episode in the Career of Rosalie Le Grange, Clairvoyant An Episode
              in the Career of Rosalie Le Grange, Clairvoyant

Author: William Henry Irwin

Release Date: June 22, 2004 [EBook #12678]

Language: English

ROSALIE LE GRANGE

THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY

AN EPISODE IN THE CAREER OF ROSALIE LE GRANGE, CLAIRVOYANT

By

WILL IRWIN

Illustrated by Frederick C. Yohn

New York
The Century Co.

1910

CONTENTS

I. The Unknown Girl
II. Mr. Norcross Wastes Time
III. The Light
IV. His First Call
V. The Light Wavers
VI. Enter Rosalie Le Grange
VII. Rosalie's First Report
VIII. The Fish Nibbles
IX. Rosalie's Second Report
X. The Streams Converge
XI. Through the Wall-Paper
XII. Annette Lies
XIII. Annette Tells the Truth
XIV. Mainly from the Papers

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Rosalie le Grange

Annette

"It wasn't the money; it was the game—"

He had taken an impression of mental power as startling as a sudden blow in the face

"Then it's as good as done"

Norcross's breath came a little faster

"I was looking straight down on the back parlors"

"Stay where you are," he commanded

THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY

I

THE UNKNOWN GIRL

In a Boston and Albany parlor-car, east bound through the Berkshires, sat a young man respectfully, but intently studying a young woman. Now and then, from the newspapers heaped in mannish confusion about his chair, he selected another sheet. Always, he took advantage of this opportunity to face the chair across the aisle and to sweep a glance over a piquant little profile, intent on a sober-looking book. Again, he would gaze out of the window; and he gazed oftenest when a freight train hid the beauties of outside nature. The dun sides of freight cars make out of a window a passable mirror. Twice, in those dim and confused glimpses, he caught just a flicker of her eye across her book, as though, she, on her part, were studying him.

It was her back hair which had first entangled Dr. Blake's thoughts; it was the graceful nape of her neck which had served to hold them fast. When the hair and the neck below dawned on him, he identified her as that blonde girl whom he had noted at the train gate, waving farewell to some receding friend—and noted with approval. As a traveler on many seas and much land, he knew the lonely

longing to address the woman in the next seat. He knew also, as all seasoned travelers in America know, that such desire is sometimes gratified, and without any surrender of decency, in the frank and easy West—but never east of Chicago. This girl, however, exercised somehow, a special pull upon his attention and his imagination. And he found himself playing a game by which he had mitigated many a journey of old. He divided his personality into two parts—man and physician—and tried, by each separate power, to find as much as he could from surface indications about this travel-mate of his.

Mr. Walter Huntington Blake perceived, besides the hair like dripping honey, deep blue eyes—the blue not of a turquoise but of a sapphire—and an oval face a little too narrow in the jaw, so that the chin pointed a delicate Gothic arch. He noted a good forehead, which inclined him to the belief that she "did" something—some subtle addition which he could not formulate confirmed that observation. He saw that her hands were long and tipped with nails no larger than a grain of maize, that when they rested for a moment on her face, in the shifting attitudes of her reading, they fell as gently as flower-stalks swaying together in a breeze. He saw that her shoulders had a slight slope, which combined with hands and eyes to express a being all feminine—the kind made for a lodestone to a man who has known the hard spots of the world, like Mr. Walter Huntington Blake.

"A pippin!" pronounced Mr. Blake, the man.

Dr. Blake, the physician, on the other hand, caught a certain languor in her movements, a physical tenuity which, in a patient, he would have considered diagnostic. So transparent was her skin that when her profile dipped forward across a bar of sunshine the light shone through the bridge of her nose—a little observation charming to Blake, the man, but a guide to Blake, the physician. She had the look, Dr. Blake told himself, which old-fashioned country nurses of the herb-doctor school refer to as "called." He knew that, in about one case out of three, that look does in fact amount to a real "call"—the outward expression of an obscure disease.

Annette

"Her heart?" queried Blake, the physician. The transparent, porcelain quality of her skin would indicate that. But he found, as he watched, no nervous twitching, no look as of an incipient sack under her eyes; nor did the transparent

quality seem waxy. There was, too, a certain pinkness in the porcelain which showed that her blood ran red and pure.

Then Mr. Blake and Dr. Blake re-fused into one psychology and decided that her appearance of delicacy was subtly psychological. It haunted him with an irritating effect of familiarity—as of a symptom which he ought to recognize. In all ways was it intertwined with the expression of her mouth. She had never smiled enough; therein lay all the trouble. She presented a very pretty problem to his imagination. Here she was, still so very young that little was written on her face, yet the little, something unusual, baffling. The mouth, too tightly set, too drooping—that expressed it all. To educate such a one in the ways of innocent frivolity!

When the porter's "last call for luncheon" brought that flutter of satisfaction by which a bored parlor-car welcomes even such a trivial diversion as food, Dr. Blake waited a fair interval for her toilet preparations, and followed toward the dining-car. He smiled a little at himself as he realized that he was craftily scheming to find a seat, if not opposite her, at least within seeing distance. On a long and lonely day-journey, he told himself, travelers are like invalids—the smallest incident rolls up into a mountain of adventure. Here he was, playing for sight of an interesting girl, as another traveler timed the train-speed by the mile-posts, or counted the telegraph poles along the way.

So he came out suddenly into the Pullman car ahead—and almost stumbled over the nucleus of his meditations. She was half-kneeling beside a seat, clasping in her arms the figure of a little, old woman. He hesitated, stock still. The blonde girl shifted her position as though to take better hold of her burden, and glanced backward with a look of appeal. The doctor came forward on that; and his sight caught the face of the old woman. Her eyes were closed, her head had dropped to one side and lay supine upon the girl's shoulder. It appeared to be a plain case of faint.

"I am a physician," he said simply, "Get the porter, will you?" Without an instant's question or hesitation, the girl permitted him to relieve her, and turned to the front of the car. Other women and one fussy, noisy man were coming up now. Dr. Blake waved them aside. "We need air most of all—open that window, will you?" The girl was back with the porter. "Is the compartment occupied? Then open it. We must put her on her back." The porter fumbled for his keys. Dr. Blake gathered up the little old woman in his arms, and spoke over his shoulder

to the blonde girl:

"You will come with us?" She nodded. Somehow, he felt that he would have picked her from the whole car to assist in this emergency. She was like one of those born trained nurses who ask no questions, need no special directions, and are as reliable as one's instruments.

The old woman was stirring by the time he laid her out on the sofa of the compartment. He wet a towel in the pitcher at the washstand, wrung it out, pressed it on her forehead. It needed no more than that to bring her round.

"Only a faint," said Dr. Blake; "the day's hot and she's not accustomed to train travel, I suppose. Is she—does she belong to your party?"

The girl spoke for the first time in his hearing. Even before he seized the meaning of her speech, he noted with a thrill the manner of it. Such a physique as this should go with the high, silvery tone of a flute; so one always imagines it. This girl spoke in the voice of a violin—soft, deep, deliciously resonant. In his mind flashed a picture for which he was a long time accounting—last winter's ballet of the New York Hippodrome. Afterward, he found the key to that train of thought. It, had been a ballet of light, shimmering colors, until suddenly a troop of birds in royal purple had slashed their way down the center of the stage. They brought the same glorified thrill of contrast as this soft but strong contralto voice proceeding from that delicate blondness.

"Oh, no!" she said, "I never saw her before. She was swaying as I came down the aisle, and I caught her. She's—she's awake." The old woman had stirred again.

"Get my bag from seat 12, parlor-car," said Dr. Blake to the porter. "Tell them outside that it is a simple fainting-spell and we shall need no assistance." Now his charity patient had recovered voice; she was moaning and whimpering. The girl, obeying again Dr. Blake's unspoken thought, took a quick step toward the door. He understood without further word from her.

"All right," he said; "she may want to discuss symptoms. You're on the way to the dining-car aren't you? I'll be along in five minutes, and I'll let you know how she is. Tell them outside that it is nothing serious and have the porter stand by—please." That last word of politeness came out on an afterthought—he had been addressing her in the capacity of a trained nurse. He recognized this with

confusion, and he apologized by a smile which illuminated his rather heavy, dark face. She answered with the ghost of a smile—it moved her eyes rather than her mouth—and the door closed.

After five minutes of perfunctory examination and courteous attention to symptoms, he tore himself away from his patient upon the pretext that she needed quiet. He wasted three more golden minutes in assuring his fellow passengers that it was nothing. He escaped to the dining car, to find that the delay had favored him. Her honey-colored back hair gleamed from one of the narrow tables to left of the aisle. The unconsidered man opposite her had just laid a bill on the waiter's check, and dipped his hands in the fingerbowl. Dr. Blake invented a short colloquy with the conductor and slipped up just as the waiter returned with the change. He bent over the girl.

"I have to report," said he, "that the patient is doing nicely; doctor and nurse are both discharged!"

She returned a grave smile and answered conventionally, "I am very glad."

At that precise moment, the man across the table, as though recognizing friendship or familiarity between these two, pocketed his change and rose. Feeling that he was doing the thing awkwardly, that he would give a year for a light word to cover up his boldness, Dr. Blake took the seat. He looked slowly up as he settled himself, and he could feel the heat of a blush on his temples. He perceived—and for a moment it did not reassure him—that she on her part neither blushed nor bristled. Her skin kept its transparent whiteness, and her eyes looked into his with intent gravity. Indeed, he felt through her whole attitude the perfect frankness of good breeding—a frankness which discouraged familiarity while accepting with human simplicity an accidental contact of the highway. She was the better gentleman of the two. His renewed confusion set him to talking fast.

"If it weren't that you failed to come in with any superfluous advice, I should say that you had been a nurse—you seem to have the instinct. You take hold, somehow, and make no fuss."

"Why should I?" she asked, "with a doctor at hand? I was thinking all the time how you lean on a doctor. I should never have known what to do. How is she? What was the matter?"

"She's resting. It isn't every elderly lady who can get a compartment from the Pullman Company for the price of a seat. She was put on at Albany by one set of grandchildren and she's to be taken off at Boston by another set. And she's old and her heart's a little sluggish—self-sacrifice goes downward not upward, through the generations, I observe—though I'm a young physician at that!"

Her next words, simply spoken as they were, threw him again into confusion.

"I don't know your name, I think—mine is Annette Markham."

Dr. Blake drew out a card.

"Dr. W.H. Blake, sometime contract surgeon to the Philippine Army of Occupation," he supplemented, "now looking for a practice in these United States!"

"The Philippines—oh, you've been in the East? When we were in the Orient, I used to hear of them ever so dimly—I didn't think we'd all be talking of them so soon—"

"Oh, you've been in the Orient—do you know the China Coast—and Nikko and—"

"No, only India."

"I've never been there—and I've heard it's the kernel of the East," he said with his lips. But his mind was puzzling something out and finding a solution. The accent of that deep, resonant voice was neither Eastern nor Western, Yankee nor Southern—nor yet quite British. It was rather cosmopolitan—he had dimly placed her as a Californienne. Perhaps this fragment explained it. She must be a daughter of the English official class, reared in America. The theory would explain her complexion and her simple, natural balance between frankness and reserve. He formed that conclusion, but, "How do you like America after India?" was all he said.

"How do you like it after the Philippines?" she responded.

"That is a Yankee trick—answering one question with another," he said, still following his line of conjecture; "it was invented by the original Yankee philosopher, a person named Socrates. I like it after everything—I'm an

American. I'm one of those rare birds in the Eastern United States, a native of New York City."

"Well, then,"—her manner had, for the first time, the brightness which goes with youth, plus the romantic adventure—"I like it not only after anything but before anything—I'm an American, too."

A sense of irritation rose in him. He had let conjecture grow to conclusion in the most reckless fashion. And why should he care so much that he had risked offending a mere passing acquaintance of the road?

"Somehow, I had taken it for granted—your reference to India I suppose—that you were English."

"Oh, no! Though an English governess made me fond of the English. I'm another of the rare birds. I was hardly out of New York in my life until five years ago, when my aunt took me for a stay of two years in the Orient—in India at least. I've been very happy to be back."

The current of talk drifted then from the coast of confidences to the open sea of general conversation. He pulled himself up once or twice by the reflection that he was talking too much about himself. Once—and he remembered it with blushes afterward—he went so far as to say, "I didn't really need to be a doctor, any more than I needed to go to the Philippines—the family income takes care of that. But a man should do something." Nevertheless, she seemed disposed to encourage him in this course, seemed most to encourage him when he told his stories about the Philippine Army of Occupation.

"Oh, tell me another!" she would cry. And once she said, "If there were a piano here, I venture you'd sing Mandelay." "That would I," he answered with a half sigh. And at last, when he was running down, she said, "Oh, please don't stop! It makes me crazy for the Orient!" "And me!" he confessed. Before luncheon was over, he had dragged out the two or three best stories in his wanderer's pack, and especially that one, which he saved for late firesides and the high moments of anecdotal exchange, about the charge at Caloocon. She drank down these tales of hike and jungle and firing-line like a seminary girl listening to her first grownup caller. For his part, youth and the need of male youth to spread its bright feathers before the female of its species, drove him on to more tales. He contrived his luncheon so that they finished and paid

simultaneously—and in the middle of his story about Sergeant Jones, the dynamite and the pack mule. So, when they returned to the parlor-car, nothing was more simple, natural and necessary than that he should drop into the vacant chair beside her, and continue where he left off. He felt, when he had finished, the polite necessity of leading the talk back to her; besides, he had not finished his Study of the Unknown Girl. He returned, then, to the last thread which she had left hanging.

"So you too are glad to be at home!" he said. "I'm so glad that I don't want to lose sight either of a skyscraper or of apple trees for years and years. I can't remember when I've ever wanted to stay in one place before."

She laughed—the first full laugh he had heard from her. It was low and deep and bubbling, like water flowing from a long-necked bottle.

"Just a moment ago, we were confessing that we were crazy for the Orient."

"I'm glad to be caught in an inconsistency!" he answered. "I've been afraid, though, that this desire to roost in one place was a sign of incipient old age."

She looked at him directly, and for a moment her fearless glance played over him, as in alarm.

"Oh, I shouldn't be afraid of *that*," she said. "I don't know your age, of course, but if it will reassure you any, I'd put it at twenty-eight. And that, according to Peter Ibbertson, is quite the nicest age." Her face, with its unyouthful capacity for sudden seriousness, grew grave. Her deep blue eyes gazed past him out of the window.

"I'm only twenty-four, but I know what it is to think that middle age is near—to dread it—especially when I half suspect I haven't spent the interest on my youth." She stopped.

Dr. Blake held his very breath. His instincts warned him that she faltered at one of those instincts when confidence lies close to the lips. But she did not give it. Instead, she caught herself up with a perfunctory, "I suppose everyone feels that way at times."

Although he wanted that confidence, he was clever enough not to reach for it at this point. Instead, he took a wide detour, and returned slowly, backing and

filling to the point. But every time that he approached a closer intimacy, she veered away with an adroitness which was consummate art or consummate innocence. His first impression grew—that she "did" something. She had mentioned "Peter Ibbertson." He spoke, then, of books. She had read much, especially fiction; but she treated books as one who does not write. He talked art. Though she spoke with originality and understanding in response to his second-hand studio chatter, he could see that she neither painted nor associated much with those who did. Besides, her hands had none of the craftswoman's muscle. Of music—beyond ragtime—she knew as little as he. He invaded business—her ignorance was abysmal. The stage—she could count on her fingers the late plays which she had seen.

When the trail had grown almost cold, there happened a little incident which put him on the scent again. He had thought suddenly of his patient in the compartment and made a visit, only to find her asleep. Upon his return he said:

"You behaved like a soldier and a nurse toward her—a girl with such a distinct *flair* for the game must have had longings to take up nursing—or perhaps you never read 'Sister Dora'?"

"I did read 'Sister Dora,'" she answered, "and I was crazy about it."

"Most girls are—hence the high death rate in hospitals," he interrupted.

"But I gave that up—and a lot of other desires which all girls have—for something else. I had to." Her sapphirine eyes searched the Berkshire hills again, "Something bigger and nobler—something which meant the entire sacrifice of self."

And here the brakeman called "Next station is Berkeley Center." Dr. Blake came to the sudden realization that they had reached his destination. She started, too.

"Why, I get off here!" she exclaimed.

"And so do I!" He almost laughed it out.

"That's a coincidence."

Dr. Blake refrained from calling her attention to the general flutter of the

parlor-car and the industry of two porters. This being the high-tide time of the summer migration, and Berkeley Center being the popular resort on that line, nearly everyone was getting off. However as he delivered himself over to the porter, he nodded:

"The climax of a series!"

As they waited, bags in hand, "I am on my way to substitute for a month at the Hill Sanatorium," he said. "The assistant physician is going on a vacation—I suppose the ambulance will be waiting."

"And I am going to the Mountain House—it's a little place and more the house of friends than an inn. If your work permits—"

He interrupted with a boyish laugh.

"Oh, it will!" But he said good-bye at the vestibule with a vague idea that she might have trouble explaining him to any very particular friends. He saw her mount an old-fashioned carry-all, saw her turn to wave a farewell. The carry-all disappeared. He started toward the Hill ambulance, but he was still thinking, "Now what is the thing which a girl like *that* would consider more self-sacrificing than nursing?"

II

MR. NORCROSS WASTES TIME

Robert H. Norcross looked up from a sheet of figures, and turned his vision upon the serrated spire of old Trinity Church, far below. Since his eyes began to fail, he had cultivated the salutary habit of resting them every half-hour or so. The action was merely mechanical; his mind still lingered on the gross earnings of the reorganized L.D. and M. railroad. It was a sultry afternoon in early fall. The roar of lower New York came up to him muffled by the haze. The traffic seemed to move more slowly than usual, as though that haze clogged its wheels and congealed its oils. The very tugs and barges, on the river beyond, partook of the season's languor. They crept over the oily waves at a sluggard pace, their smoke-streamers dropping wearily toward the water.

The eyes of Robert H. Norcross swept this vista for the allotted two minutes of rest. Presently—and with the very slightest change of expression—they fixed themselves on a point so far below that he needs must lean forward and rest his arms on the window sill in order to look. He wasted thus a minute; and such a wasting, in the case of Robert H. Norcross, was a considerable matter. The Sunday newspapers—when in doubt—always played the income of Robert H. Norcross by periods of months, weeks, days, hours and minutes. Every minute of his time, their reliable statisticians computed, was worth a trifle less than forty-seven dollars. Regardless of the waste of time, he continued to gaze until the watch on his desk had ticked off five minutes, or two hundred and thirty-five dollars.

The thing which had caught and held his attention was a point in the churchyard of old Trinity near to the south door.

The Street had been remarking, for a year, that Norcross was growing old. The change did not show in his operations. His grip on the market was as firm as ever, his judgment as sure, his imagination as daring, his habit of keeping his own counsel as settled. Within that year, he had consummated the series of operations by which the L.D. and M., final independent road needed by his system, had "come in"; within that year, he had closed the last finger of his grip on a whole principality of our domain. Every laborer in that area would thenceforth do a part of his day's delving, every merchant a part of his day's bargaining, for Robert H. Norcross. Thenceforth—until some other robber baron should wrest it from his hands—Norcross would make laws and unmake legislatures, dictate judgments and overrule appointments—give the high justice while courts and assemblies trifled with the middle and the low. Certainly the history of that year in American finance indicated no flagging in the powers of Robert H. Norcross.

The change which the Street had marked lay in his face—it had taken on the subtle imprint of a first frosty day. He had never looked the power that he was. Short and slight of build, his head was rather small even for his size, and his features were insignificant—all except the mouth, whose wide firmness he covered by a drooping mustache, and the eyes, which betrayed always an inner fire. The trained observer of faces noticed this, however; every curve of his facial muscles, every plane of the inner bone-structure, was set by nature definitely and properly in its place to make a powerful and perfectly coördinated whole. In this facial manifestation of mental powers, he was like one of those

little athletes who, carrying nothing superfluous, show the power, force and endurance which is in them by no masses of overlying muscles, but only by a masterful symmetry.

Now, in a year, the change had come over his face—the jump as abrupt as that by which a young girl grows up—the transition from middle age to old age. It was not so much that his full, iron-gray hair and mustache had bleached and silvered. It was more that the cheeks were falling from middle-aged masses to old-age creases, more that the skin was drawing up, most that the inner energy which had vitalized his walk and gestures was his no longer.

In the mind, too—though no one perceived that, he least of all—had come a change. Here and there, a cell had disintegrated and collapsed. They were not the cells which vitalized his business sense. They lay deeper down; it was as though their very disuse for thirty years had weakened them. In such a cell his consciousness dwelt while he gazed on Trinity Churchyard, and especially upon that modest shaft of granite, three graves from the south entrance. And the watch on his desk clicked off the valuable seconds, and the electric clock on the wall jumped to mark the passing minutes. "Click-click" from the desk—seventy-eight cents—"Click-click"—one dollar and fifty-seven cents—"Clack" from the wall—forty-seven dollars.

Presently, when watch and clock had chronicled four hundred and seventy dollars of wasted time, he leaned back, looked for a moment on the brazen September heavens above, and sighed. He might then have turned back to his desk and the table of gross earnings, but for his secretary.

"Mr. Bulger outside, sir," said the secretary.

"All right!" responded Mr. Norcross. In him, those two words spoke enthusiasm; usually, a gesture or a nod was enough to bar or admit a visitor to the royal presence. Hard behind the secretary, entered with a bound and a breeze, Mr. Arthur Bulger. He was a tall man about forty-five if you studied him carefully, no more than thirty-five if you studied him casually. Not only his strong shoulders, his firm set on his feet, his well-conditioned skin, showed the ex-athlete who has kept up his athletics into middle age, but also that very breeze and bound of a man whose blood runs quick and orderly through its channels. His face, a little pudgy, took illumination from a pair of lively eyes. He was the jester in the court of King Norcross; one of the half-dozen men whom the

bachelor lord of railroads admitted to intimacy. A measured intimacy it was; and it never trenched on business. Bulger, like all the rest, owed half of his position to the fact that he never asked by so much as a hint for tips, never seemed curious about the operations of Norcross. There was the time on Wall Street when Norcross, by a lift of his finger, a deflection of his eye, might have put his cousin and only known relative on the right side of the market. He withheld the sign, and his cousin lost. The survivors in Norcross's circle of friends understood this perfectly; it was why they survived. If they got any financial advantage from the friendship, it was through the advertising it gave. For example, Bulger, a broker of only moderate importance, owed something to the general understanding that he was "thick with the Old Man."

Norcross looked up; his mustache lifted a little, and his eyes lit.

"Drink?" he said. His allowance was two drinks a day; one just before he left the office, the other before dinner.

"Much obliged," responded Bulger, "but you know where I was last night. If I took a drink now, I would emit a pale, blue flame."

Norcross laughed a purring laugh, and touched a bell. The secretary stood in the door; Norcross indicated, by an out-turned hand, the top of his desk. The secretary had hardly disappeared before the office-boy entered with a tray and glasses. Simultaneously a clerk, entering from another door as though by accident, swept up the balance sheets of the L.D. and M. and bore them away. Bulger's glance followed the papers hungrily for a second; then turned back on Norcross, carefully mixing a Scotch highball.

As Norcross finished with the siphon, his eyes wandered downward again.

"Ever been about much down there?" he asked suddenly. Bulger crossed the room and looked down over his shoulder.

"Where?" he asked, "The Street or—"

"Trinity Churchyard."

"Once I sang my little love lays there in the noon hour," answered Bulger. "I was a gallant clerk and hers the fairest fingers that ever caressed a typewriter—" The intent attitude of Norcross, the fact that he neither turned nor smiled,

checked Bulger. With the instinct of the courtier, he perceived that the wind lay in another tack. He racked the unused half of his mind for appropriate sentiments.

"Bully old graveyard," he brought out; "lot's of good people buried there."

"Know any of the graves?"

"Only Alexander Hamilton's. Everyone knows that."

"That one—see—that marble shaft—not one of the old ones."

"If you're curious to know," answered Bulger easily, "I'll find out on my way down to-morrow. I suppose if you were to go and look, and the reporters were to see you meditating among the tombs, we'd have a scare head to-morrow and a drop of ten points in the market." Bulger's shift to a slight levity was premeditated; he was taking guard against overplaying his part.

"No, never mind," said Norcross, "it just recalls something." He paused the fraction of a second, and his eye grew dull. "Wonder if they're—anywhere—those people down under the tombstones?"

"I suppose we all believe in immortality."

"Seeing and hearing is believing. I believe what I see. Born that way." Norcross was speaking with a slight, agitated jerk in his voice. He rose now, and paced the floor, throwing out his feet in quick thrusts. "I'm getting along, Bulger, and I'd like to know." More pacing. Coming to the end of his route, he peered shrewdly into the face of the younger man. "Have you read the Psychical Society's report on Mrs. Fife?"

Bulger's mind said, "Good God no!" His lips said, "Only some newspaper stuff about them. Seemed rather remarkable if true. Something in that stuff, I suppose."

"I've read them," resumed Norcross. "Got the full set. We ought to inform ourselves on such things, Bulger. Especially when we get older. That gravestone now. There's one like it—that I know about." Norcross, with another jerky motion, which seemed to propel him against his will, crossed to his desk and touched a bell, bringing his secretary instantly.

"Left hand side of the vault, box marked 'Private 3,'" he said. Then he resumed:

"If they could come back they would come, Bulger. Especially those we loved. Not to let us see them, you understand, but to assure us it is all right—that we'll live again. That's what I want—proof—I can't take it on faith." His voice lowered. "Thirty years!" he whispered. "What's thirty years?"

The secretary knocked, entered, set a small, steel box on the glass top of the desk. Norcross dismissed him with a gesture, drew out his keys, opened the box. It distilled a faint scent of old roses and old papers. Norcross looked within for a moment, as though turning the scent into memories, before he took out a locket. He opened it, hesitated, and then extended it to Bulger. It enclosed an exquisite miniature—a young woman, blonde, pretty in a blue-eyed, innocent way, but characterless, too—a face upon which life had left nothing, so that even the great painter who made the miniature from a photograph had illuminated it only with technical skill.

"Don't tell me what you think of her," Norcross said quietly; "I prefer to keep my own ideas. It was when I was a young freight clerk. She taught school up there. We were—well, the ring's in the box, too. They took it off her finger when they buried her. That's why—" to put the brake on his rapidly running sentiment, he ventured one of his rare pleasantries at this point—"that's why I'm still a stock newspaper feature as one of the great matches for ambitious society girls."

Bulger, listening, was observing also. Within the front cover of the case were two sets of initials in old English letters—"R.H.N." and "H.W." His mind, a little confused by its wanderings in strange fields, tried idly to match "H.W." with names. Suddenly he felt the necessity of expressing sympathy.

"Poor—" he began, but Norcross, by a swift outward gesture of the hand, stopped and saved him.

IT WASN'T THE MONEY; IT WAS THE GAME

"Well, I got in after that," Norcross went on, "and I drove 'em! It wasn't the money; it was the game. She'd have had the spending of *that*. And it isn't just to see her—it's to know if she is still waiting—and if we'll make up for thirty years —out there."

As Bulger handed back the locket, the secretary knocked again. Norcross started; something seemed to snap into place; he was again the silent, guarded baron of the railroads. He dropped the locket into the box, closed it. "The automobile," said his secretary. Norcross nodded, and indicated the box. The secretary bore it away.

"Come up to dinner Tuesday," said Norcross in his normal tone. But his voice quavered a little for a moment as he added:

"You're good at forgetting?"

"Possessor of the best forgettery you ever saw," responded Bulger. Forthwith, they turned to speech of the railroad rate bill.

When, after a mufti dinner at the club, Bulger reached his bachelor apartments, he found a telegram. The envelope bore his office address; by that sign he knew, even before he unfolded the yellow paper, that it was the important telegram from his partner, the crucial telegram, for which he had been waiting these two days. It must have come to the office after he left. He got out the code book from his desk, laid it open beside the sheet, and began to decipher, his face whitening as he went on:

> BUTTE, MONT.
>
> Reports of expert phony. Think Oppendike salted it on him. They will finish this vein in a month. Then the show will bust. Federated Copper Company will not bite and too late now to unload on public. Something must be done. Can't you use your drag with Norcross somehow?
>
> WATSON.

Bulger, twisting the piece of yellow paper, stared out into the street. His "drag with Norcross!" What had that ever brought, what could it ever bring, except advertising and vague standing? Yet Norcross by a word, a wink, could give him information which, rightly used, would cancel all the losses of this unfortunate plunge in the Mongolia Mine. But Norcross would never give that word, that wink; and to fish for it were folly. Norcross never broke the rules of the lone

game which he played.

As Bulger stood there, immovable except for the nervous hands which still twisted and worried the telegram, he saw a sign on the building opposite. The first line, bearing the name, doubtless, was illegible; the second, fully legible, lingered for a long time merely in his perceptions before it reached and touched his consciousness.

"CLAIRVOYANT," it read.

He started, leaned on a table as though from weakness, and continued to stare at the sign.

"Who is the cleverest fakir in that business?" he said at length to himself.

And then, after a few intent minutes:

"When he was a freight clerk—thirty years ago—that was at Farnham Mills —'H.W.'—granite shaft—sure it can be done!"

III

THE LIGHT

As Dr. Blake tucked his racket under his arm and came down to the net, the breeze caught a corner of her veil and let the sunlight run clear across her face. He realized, in that moment, how the burning interest as a man, which he had developed in these three weeks for Annette Markham, had quite submerged his interest as a physician. For health, this was a different creature from the one whom he had studied in the parlor-car. Her color ran high; the greatest alarmist in the profession would have wasted no thought on her heart valves; the look as of one "called" had passed. Though she still appeared a little grave, it was a healthy, attractive gravity; and take it all in all she had smiled much during three weeks of daily walks and rides and tennis. Indeed, now that he remembered it, her tennis measured the gradual change. She would never be good at tennis; she had no inner strength and no "game sense." But at first she had played in a kind of stupor; again and again she would stand at the backline in a brown study until the passage of the ball woke her with an apologetic start. Now, she frolicked

through the game with all vigor, zest and attention, going after every shot, smiling and sparkling over her good plays, prettily put out at her bad ones.

While he helped her on with her sweater—lingering too long over that little service of courtesy—he expressed this.

"Do you know that for physical condition you're no more the same girl whom I first met than—than I am!"

She laughed a little at the comparison. "And you are no more the same man whom I first met—than I am!"

He laughed too at this tribute to his summer coating of bronze over red. "I feel pretty fit," he admitted.

"My summer always has that effect," she went on. "Do you know that for all I've been so much out of the active world"—a shadow fell on her eyes,—"I long for country and farms? How I wish I could live always out-of-doors! The day might come—" the shadow lifted a little—"when I'd retire to a farm for good."

"You've one of those constitutions which require air and light and sunshine," he answered.

"You're quite right. I actually bleach in the shadow—like lettuce. That's why Aunt Paula always sends me away for a month every now and then to the quietest place proper for a well-brought-up young person."

His eyes shadowed as though they had caught that blasting shade in hers. From gossip about the Mountain House, later from her own admission, he knew who "Aunt Paula" was—"a spirit medium, or something," said the gossip; "a great teacher of a new philosophy," said Annette Markham.

Dr. Blake, partly because adventure had kept him over-young, held still his basic, youthful ideas about the proper environment for woman. Whenever the name "Aunt Paula," softened with the accents of affection, proceeded from that low, contralto voice, it hurt the new thing, greater than any conventional idea, which was growing up in him. He even suspected, at such times, what might be the "something nobler than nursing."

A big apple tree shaded the sidelines of the Mountain House tennis court. A

bench fringed its trunk. Annette threw herself down, back against the bark. It was late afternoon. The other house-guests droned over bridge on the piazzas or walked in the far woods; they were alone out-of-doors. And Annette, always, until now, so chary of confidences, developed the true patient's weakness and began to talk symptoms.

"It is curious the state I'm in before Aunt Paula sends me away," she said; "I was a nervous child, and though I've outgrown it, I still have attacks of nerve fag or something like it. I can feel them coming on and so can she. You know we've been together so much that it's like—like two bees in adjoining cells. The cell-wall has worn thin; we can almost touch. She knows it often before I do. She makes me go to bed early; often she puts me to sleep holding my hand, as she used to do when I was a little girl. But even sleep doesn't much help. I come out of it with a kind of fright and heaviness. I have little memories of curious dreams and a queer sense, too, that I mustn't remember what I've dreamed. I grow tired and heavy—I can always see it in my face. Then Aunt Paula sends me away, and I become all right again—as I am now."

Blake did not express the impatient thought of his mind. He only said:

"A little sluggishness of the blood and a little congestion of the brain. I had such sleep once after I'd done too much work and fought too much heat in the Cavite Hospital. Only with me it took the form of nightmare—mostly, I was in process of being boloed."

"Yes, perhaps it was that"—her eyes deepened to their most faraway blue —"and perhaps it is something else. I think it may be. Aunt Paula thinks so, too, though she never says it."

What was the something? Did she stand again on the edge of revelation? Events had gone past the time when he could wait patiently for her confidence, could approach it through tact. It was the moment not for snipping but for bold charging. And his blood ran hot.

"This something—won't you tell me what it is? Why are you always so mysterious with me? Why—when I want to know everything about you?" After he had said this, he knew that there was no going backward. Doubts, fears, terrors of conventionalities, awe of his conservative, blood-proud mother in Paris —all flew to the winds.

Perhaps she caught something of this in his face, for she drew away a trifle and said:

"I might have told you long ago, but I wasn't sure of your sympathy."

"I want you to be sure of my sympathy in all things."

"Ah, but your mind is between!" That phrase brought a shock to Dr. Blake. At the only spiritualistic seance he had ever attended, a greasy affair in a hall bedroom, he had heard that very phrase. A picture of this woman, so clean and windblown of mind and soul, caught like a trapped fly in the web of the unclean and corrupt—it was that which quite whirled him off his feet.

"Between our hearts then, between our hearts!" he cried. "Oh, Annette, I love you!" His voice came out of him low and distinct, but all the power in the world vibrated behind it. "I have loved you always. You've been with me everywhere I went, because I was looking for you. I've seen a part of you in the best of every woman"—he pulled himself up, for neither by look nor gesture did she respond —"I've no right to be saying this—"

"If you have not," she answered, and a delicate blush ran over her skin, "no other man has!" She said it simply, but with a curious kind of pride.

He would have taken her hand on this, but the grave, direct gaze of her sapphirine eyes restrained him. It was not the look of a woman who gives herself, but rather that of a woman who grieves for the ungivable.

"Ah," she said, "if anyone's to blame, it is I. I've brought it on myself! I've been weak—weak!"

"No," he said, "I brought it on—God brought it on—but what does that matter?

"It's *here*. I can no more fight it than I can fight the sea."

Now her head dropped forward and her hands, with that gracefully uncertain motion which was like flower-stalks swayed by a breeze, had covered her face.

"I can't speak if I look at you," she said, "and I must before you go further—I must tell you all about myself so that you will understand."

The confidence, long sought, was coming, he thought; and he thought also how little he cared for it now that he was pursuing a greater thing.

"You know so little about me that I must begin far back—you don't even know about my aunt—"

"I know something—what you've said, what Mrs. Cole at the Mountain House told me. She's Mrs. Paula Markham—" his mind went on, "the great fakir of the spook doctors," but his lips stifled the phrase and said after a pause, "the great medium."

"I don't like to hear her called that," said Annette. "In spite of what I'm going to tell you, I never saw but once the thing they call a medium. That was years ago—but the horrible sacrilege of it has never left me. She had a part of truth, and she was desecrating it by guesses and catch words—selling it for money! Aunt Paula is broader than I. 'It's part of the truth,' she said, 'that woman is desecrating the work, but she's serving in her way.' I suppose so—but since then I've never liked to hear Aunt Paula called a medium."

She paused a second on this.

"If I were only sure of your sympathy!" A note of pleading fluttered in her voice.

"No thought of yours, however I regard it, but is sure of my sympathy—because it's yours," he answered.

As though she had not heard, she went on.

"I was an orphan. I never knew my father and mother. The first things I remember are of the country—perhaps that is why I love the out-of-doors—the sky through my window, filled with huge, puffy, ice-cream clouds, a little new-born pig that somebody put in my bed one morning—daisy-fields like snow—and the darling peep-peep-peep of little bunches of yellow down that I was always trying to catch and never succeeding. I couldn't say *chicken*. I always said *shicken*" She paused. With that tenderness which every woman entertains for her own little girlhood, she smiled.

"I've told you of the five white birches. I was looking at them and naming them on my fingers the day that Aunt Paula came. My childhood ended there. I

seemed to grow up all at once."

Blake muttered something inarticulate. But at her look of inquiry, he merely said. "Go on!"

"She isn't really my aunt by blood,—Aunt Paula isn't. You understand—my father and her husband were brothers. They all died—everybody died but just Aunt Paula and me. So she took me away with her. And after that it was always the dreadful noise and confusion of New York, with only my one doll—black Dinah—a rag-baby. I thought," she interrupted herself wistfully, "I'd send Dinah to you when I got back to New York. Would you like her?"

"Like her—like her! My—my—" But he swallowed his words. "Go on!" He commanded again.

"Afterwards came London and then India. Such education as I had, I got from governesses. I didn't have very much as girls go in my—in my class. I didn't understand that then, any more than I understand why I wasn't allowed to go to school or to play with other girls. There was a time when I rebelled frightfully at that. I can tell definitely just when it began. We were passing a convent in the Bronx, and it was recess time. The sisters in their starched caps were sewing over by the fence, and the girls were playing—a ring game, 'Go in and out the window'—I can hear it now. I crowded my little face against the pickets to watch, and two little girls who weren't in the game passed close to me. The nearest one—I 'm sure I'd know her now if I saw her grown up. She was of about my own age, very dark, with the silkiest black hair and the longest black eyelashes that I ever saw. She had a dimple at one corner of her mouth. She wore on her arm a little bracelet with a gold heart dangling from it. I wasn't allowed any jewelry; and it came into my mind that I'd like a gold bracelet like that, before it came that I'd like such a friend for my very ownest and dearest. The other girl, a red-haired minx who walked with her arm about *my* girl's waist—how jealous I was of her! I watched until Aunt Paula dragged me away. As I went, I shouted over my shoulder, 'Hello, little girl!' The little dark girl saw me, and shouted back, 'Hello!' Dear little thing. I hope she's grown up safe and very happy! She'll never know what she meant to me!"

Her lips quivered again. Looking up into her face, Blake wondered for an instant at the sudden softness of her eyes. Then he realized that they were slowly filling with tears. He reached again to seize her hands.

"Oh, no, no—wait!" she said, weakly. After a pause, she resumed:

"That got up rebellion in me. All children have such periods, I've heard. I'm docile enough now. But before I was through with this one, Aunt Paula had to make my destiny clear to me—long before she meant to do so. And I grew to be resigned, and then glad, because it was a greater thing."

Here a rapid, inexplicable change crossed her face. From its firmness of health and strength, it fell toward the look of one "called"—

"I must go back again. Between Aunt Paula and me there was always a great sympathy. It's hard to describe. Often we do not have to speak even of the most important things. When I come to know more about other people, I wondered at first why they needed to do so much talking. Things have happened—things that I would not expect you to believe—"

She had kindled now, and she looked into his eyes like some sybil, divinely unconscious, preaching the unbelievable.

"I knew dimly, as a child knows, and accepts, that Aunt Paula had some wonderful mission and that it had to do with the other world—all you're taught when they teach you to say your prayers. Little by little she made me understand. I grew up before I understood fully. The Guides—Aunt Paula's—I have none as yet—had told her that I was a Light."

He caught at this word, for his lover's impatience was burning and beating within him.

"Light!" he said; "my Light!"

She regarded him gravely, and then, as though his fervor had frightened her, she looked beyond at the apple leaves.

"Don't—you'll know soon why you mustn't. Oh, help me, for I am unhappy!" She controlled a little upward ripple of her throat. "She, the Guides say, is a great Light, but I am to be a greater. They sent her to find me, and they directed her to keep me as she has—away from the world. When she first told me that, I was terrified. She had to sit beside me and hold my hand until I went to sleep. It's wonderful how quickly I do sleep when Aunt Paula's with me—she's the most soothing person in the world. If it weren't for her, I don't know what I'd do when

I get into my tired times."

"You're never going to have any more tired times, Light," he said.

She went on inflexibly, but he knew that she had heard:

"There was one thing which I did not understand, and neither perhaps did Aunt Paula. The Guides sometimes seem foolish, but in the end they're always wise; I suppose they waited until the time should come. Though I tried to help it along, though I cried with impatience, I couldn't begin to get voices. I've sat in dark rooms for hours, as Aunt Paula wished me to do. I've felt many true things, but I could never say honestly that I heard anything. But the Guides told Aunt Paula 'wait.' And at last she learned what was the matter.

"I don't know quite how to tell you this next. It came on the way back from India. She had gone there—but perhaps you won't be interested to know why she went. Though I was more than twenty, I'd never had what you might call a flirtation. I'd been kept by the Guides away from men—as I'd once been kept from other children. There was a young Englishman on the steamer. And I liked him."

Blake gave a sudden start, and rose automatically. So this confidence led to another man—that was the obstacle! She seemed to catch his thought.

"Oh, not that!" she cried; "he was only an incident—won't you hear me?" Blake dropped at her feet again.

"But I liked him, though never any more—he was a friend and girls need to play. But he wanted to be more than a friend. Aunt Paula passed us on the deck one evening. After I had gone to bed, she came into my stateroom. When the power is in her, I know it—and I never saw it so strong as that night. It shone out of her. But that wasn't the strange thing. Only twice before, had I heard the voices speak from her mouth—mostly, she used to tell me what they said to her. But it was not Aunt Paula talking then—it was Martha, her first and best control. Shall I tell you all she said?"

Out of the confused impulses running through Dr. Blake, his sense of humor spurted a moment to the fore. He found himself struggling to keep back a smile at the picture of some fat old woman in a dressing gown simulating hysteria that she might ruin a love affair. He was hard put to make his voice sound sincere, as

he answered:

"Yes, all."

"She said: 'Child, you are more influenced by this man than you know. It is not the great love, but it is dangerous. You are to be the great Light only after you have put aside a great earthly love. This vessel from which I am speaking'—she meant Aunt Paula of course—'yielded to an earthly love. That is why she is less than you will be. Would you imperil truth?' It was something like that, only more. Ah, do you see now?"

"I see," said his sense of humor, "that your Aunt Paula is a most unlimited fakir."

"I see," said his voice, "but do you *believe* it?"

"I've so much cause to believe that I can never tell you all. After Aunt Paula came out of it, I told her what Martha had said. She was dear and sympathetic. She put me to sleep; and when I woke, I was resigned. I did not see him alone again. Now I understand more clearly. When I have had that earthly love and put it aside, when I have *proved* myself to my Guides—then the voices will come to me. Martha has repeated it to Aunt Paula whenever I have gone away from home. She repeated it before I came up here—"

"They had cause to repeat it," he took her up fiercely; "cause to repeat it!"

"I—I'm afraid so. But how should I know? I looked at you—and it seemed right, everlastingly right, that I should know you. And then I did—so suddenly and easily that it made me shudder afterwards for fear the test had come—the agony which I have been afraid to face. Ah, it's bold saying this!" She drooped forward, and her porcelain skin turned to rose.

Blake sat breathless, dumb. Never had she seemed so far away from him as then; never had she seemed so desirable. He struggled with his voice, but no word came; and it was she who spoke first.

"Now I know—it is the agony!"

At this admission, all the love and all the irritation in him came up together into a force which drove him on. They were alone; none other looked; but had all

the world been looking, he might have done what he did. He rose to his feet, he dropped both his hands on her shoulders, he devoured her sapphirine eyes with his eyes, and his voice was steel as he spoke:

"You love me. You have always loved me. In spite of everything, you will marry me! You will say it before you are done with me!"

He stopped suddenly, for her eyelids were drooping. Had he not been a physician, he would have said that she was going to faint. But her color did not change. And suddenly she was speaking in a low tone which mocked his, but with no expression nor intonations:

"I love you. I have always loved you. In spite of everything, I shall marry you."

He dropped his hands from her shoulders with a bewildered impulse to seize her in his arms; then the publicity of the place came to him, and he drew his hands back. On that motion, her eyes opened and she flashed a little away from him.

"What did I say?" she exclaimed; "and why—oh, don't touch me—don't come near—can't you see it makes it harder for me to renounce?"

"But you said—"

"I said before you touched me—ah, don't touch me again—that I *should* make it hard—the harder I make it, the more I shall grow—but I can't bear so much!" She had risen, was moving away.

"Let's walk," he said shortly; and then, "Even if you put me aside, won't you keep me in your life?"

"The Guides will tell me," she answered simply.

"But I may see you—call on you in the city?"

"Unless the Guides forbid."

They were walking side by side now; they had turned from the sunken arena, which surrounded the tennis court, toward the house. Blake saw that the driver

of the Mountain House stage was approaching. He waved a yellow envelope as he came on:

"Been looking for you, Miss Markham. Telegram. Charges paid."

Dr. Blake stepped away as Annette, in the preliminary flutter of fear with which a woman always receives a telegram, tore open the envelope and read the enclosure. Without a word, she handed it over to him. It read:

ANNETTE MARKHAM:

Take next train home. Advice of Martha. Wire arrival.

PAULA MARKHAM.

"Perhaps the Guides know," she said, smiling but quivering, too. "Perhaps they're going to make it easier for me."

IV

HIS FIRST CALL

Dear Mr. Blake (read the letter): It was nice to get your note and to know that you are back in town so soon. Of course you must come to see me. I want Aunt Paula to know that all the complimentary things I have said about you are true. We are never at home in the conventional sense—but I hope Wednesday evening will do.

Cordially,

ANNETTE MARKHAM.

He had greeted this little note with all the private follies of lovers. Now for the hundredth time, he studied it for significances, signs, pretty intimacies; and he found positively nothing about it which he did not like. True, he failed to extract any important information from the name of the stationer, which he found under the flap of the envelope; but on the other hand the paper itself distinctly pleased him. It was note-size and of a thick, unfeminine quality. He approved of the

writing—small, fine, legible, without trace of seminary affectation. And his spirits actually rose when he observed that it bore no coat-of-arms—not even a monogram.

At last, with more flourishes of folly, he put the note away in his desk and inspected himself in the glass. To the credit of his modesty, he was thinking not of his white tie—fifth that he had ruined in the process of dressing—nor yet of the set of his coat. He was thinking of Mrs. Paula Markham and the impression which these gauds and graces might make upon her.

"What do you suppose she's like?" he asked inaudibly of the correct vision in the glass.

He had exhausted all the possibilities—a fat, pretentious medium whom Annette's mind transformed by the alchemy of old affection into a presentable personage; a masculine and severe old woman with the "spook" look in her eyes; a fluttering, affected *precieuse*, concealing her quackery by chatter. Gradually as he thought on her, the second of these hypotheses came to govern—he saw her as the severe and masculine type. This being so, what tack should she take?

The correct vision in the glass vouchsafed no answer to this. His mood persisted as his taxicab whirled him into the region which borders the western edge of Central Park. The thing assumed the proportions of a great adventure. No old preparation for battle, no old packings to break into the unknown dark, had ever given him quite such a sense of the high, free airs where romance blows. He was going on a mere conventional call; but he was going also to high and thrilling possibilities.

The house was like a thousand other houses of the prosperous middle class, distinguishable only by minor differences of doors and steps and area rails, from twenty others on the same block. He found himself making mystery even of this. Separate houses in New York require incomes.

"Evidently it pays to deal in spooks," he said to himself.

His first glimpse of the interior, his subsequent study of the drawing-room while the maid carried in his name, made more vivid this impression. The taste of the whole thing was evident; but the apartment had besides a special flavor. He searched for the elements which gave that impression. It was not the old walnut furniture, ample, huge, upholstered in a wine-colored velours which had

faded just enough to take off the curse; it was not the three or four passable old paintings. The real cause came first to him upon the contemplation of a wonderful Buddhist priest-robe which adorned the wall just where the drawing-room met the curtains of the little rear alcove-library. The difference lay in the ornaments—Oriental, mostly East Indian and, all his experience told him, got by intimate association with the Orientals. That robe, that hanging lantern, those chased swords, that gem of a carved Buddha—they came not from the seaports nor from the shops for tourists. Whoever collected them knew the East and its peoples by intimate living. They appeared like presents, not purchases—unless they were loot.

And now—his thumping heart flashed the signal—the delicate feminine flutter that meant Annette, was sounding in the hall. And now at the entrance stood Annette in a white dress, her neck showing a faint rim of tan above her girlish decolletage; Annette smiling rather formally as though this conventional passage after their unconventional meeting and acquaintance sat in embarrassment on her spirits; Annette saying in that vibrant boyish contralto which came always as a surprise out of her exquisite whiteness:

"How do you do, Dr. Blake—you are back in the city rather earlier than you expected, aren't you?"

He was conscious of shock, emotional and professional—emotional that they had not taken up their relation exactly where they left it off—professional because of her appearance. Not only was she pale and just a little drawn of facial line, but that indefinable look of one "called" was on her again.

All this he gathered as he made voluble explanation—the attendance at the sanitorium had fallen off with the approach of autumn—they really needed no assistant to the resident physician—he thought it best to hurry his search for an opening in New York before the winter should set in. Then, put at his ease by his own volubility, and remembering that it is a lover's policy to hold the advantage gained at the last battle, he added:

"And of course you may guess another reason."

This she parried with a woman-of-the-world air, quite different from her old childlike frankness.

"The theatrical season, I suppose. It opens earlier every year."

He pursued that line no further. She took up the reins of the conversation and drove it along smooth but barren paths. "It's nice that you could come to-night. Looking for a practice must make so many calls on your time. I shouldn't have been surprised not to see you at all this winter. No one seems able to spare much time for acquaintances in New York."

"Not at all," he said, ruffling a little within, "I shall find plenty of time for my *friends* this winter." Deliberately he emphasized the word. "I hope nothing has happened to change our—friendship. Or does Berkeley Center seem primitive and far away?"

For the first time that quality which he was calling in his mind her "society shell" seemed to melt away from her. She had kept her eyelids half closed; now they opened full.

"I am living on the memory of it," she said.

Here was his opening. A thousand incoherences rushed to his lips—and stopped there. For another change came over her. Those lids, like curtains drawn by stealth over what must not be revealed, sank half-way over her eyes. An impalpable stiffening ran over her figure. She became as a flower done in glass.

Simultaneously, an uneasiness as definite as a shadow, fell across his spirit. He became conscious of a presence behind him. Involuntarily he turned.

A woman was standing in the doorway leading to the hall.

An instant she looked at Blake and an instant he looked at her. What she gained from her scrutiny showed in no change of expression. What he gained showed only in a quick flutter of the eyelids. He had, in fact, taken an impression of mental power as startling as a sudden blow in the face. She had a magnificent physique, preserved splendidly into the very heart of middle age; yet her foot had made no sound in her approach. Her black velvet draperies trailed heavy on the floor, yet they produced not the ghost of a rustle. Jet-black hair coiled in ropes, yet wisped white above the temples; light gray eyes, full and soft, yet with a steady look of power—all this came in the process of rising, of stepping forward to clasp a warm hand which lingered just long enough, in hearing Annette say in tones suddenly dead of their boyish energy:

"Aunt Paula, let me introduce Dr. Blake." With one ample motion, Mrs.

Markham seated herself. She turned her light eyes upon him. He had a subconscious impression of standing before two searchlights.

HE HAD TAKEN AN IMPRESSION OF MENTAL POWER AS STARTLING AS A SUDDEN BLOW IN THE FACE

"My niece has told me much about Dr. Blake," she said in a voice which, like Annette's, showed every intonation of culture; "I can't thank you enough for being kind to my little girl. So good in you to bother about her when"—Aunt Paula gave the effect of faltering, but her smile was peculiarly gracious—"when there were no other men nearer her own age."

Curiously, there floated into Blake's mind the remark which Annette made that first day on the train—"I should think you were about twenty-eight—and that, according to 'Peter Ibbertson,' is about the nicest age." Well, Annette at least regarded him as a contemporary! He found himself laughing with perfect composure—"Yes, that's the trouble with these quiet country towns. There never *are* any interesting young men."

"True," Mrs. Markham agreed, "although it makes slight difference in Annette's case. She is so little interested in men. It really worries me at times. But it's quite true, is it not so, dear?"

Mrs. Markham had kept her remarkable eyes on Dr. Blake. And Annette, as though the conversation failed to interest her, had fallen into a position of extreme lassitude, her elbow on the table, her cheek resting on her hand.

At her aunt's question, she seemed to rouse herself a little. "What is it that's quite true, Auntie?" she asked.

Mrs. Markham transferred her light-gray gaze to her niece's face. "I was saying," she repeated, speaking distinctly as one does for a child, "that you are very little interested in men."

"It is perfectly true," Annette answered.

Mrs. Markham laughed a purring laugh, strangely at variance with her size and type. "You'll find this an Adam-less Eden, Dr. Blake. I'll have to confess that I too am not especially interested in men."

This thrust did not catch Dr. Blake unawares. He laughed a laugh which rang as true as Mrs. Markham's. He even ventured on a humorous monologue in which he accused his sex of every possible failing, ending with a triumphant

eulogy of the other half of creation. But Mrs. Markham, though she listened with outward civility, appeared to take all his jibes seriously—miscomprehended him purposely, he thought.

Whereupon, he turned to the lady's own affairs.

"Miss Markham told me something about your stay in India. I've never been there yet. But of course no seasoned orientalist has any idea of dying without seeing India. I gathered from Miss Markham that you had some unusual experiences."

"It's the dear child's enthusiasm," Mrs. Markham said. And it came to Blake at once that she was a little irritated. "I assure you we did not stir out of the conventional tourist route." Then came a few minutes about the beauties of the Taj by moonlight.

Blake listened politely. "Your loot is all so interesting," he said, when she had finished. "Do tell me how you got it? Have you ever noticed what bully travelers' tales you get out of adventures in bargaining? Or better—looting? Those Johnnies who came out of Pekin—I mean the allied armies—tell some stories that are wonders."

"That is true generally," Mrs. Markham agreed. "But I must confess that I did nothing more wonderful than to walk up to one of the bazaars and buy everything that I wanted."

"That," Dr. Blake said mentally, "is a lie."

Almost as if Annette had heard his thought—were answering it—she spoke for the first time with something of the old resiliency in her tone. "Auntie, do tell Dr. Blake about some of your adventures with those wonderful Yogis, and that fascinating rajah who was so kind to us."

"The Yogis!" commented Dr. Blake to himself; "Ha, ha, and ho, ho! I bet you learned a bag of tricks there, madam."

"Why, Annette, dear." Mrs. Markham laughed her purring laugh—that laugh could grow, Dr. Blake discovered, until it achieved a singularly unpleasant quality. "Your romantic ideas are running away with you. Whenever we arrived anywhere, of course, like anybody else, I called at Government House and the

authorities there always put me in the way of seeing whatever sights the neighborhood afforded. I met one rajah in passing and visited one Yogi monastery. Do tell me about the Philippines!" Annette settled back into her appearance of weariness.

Dr. Blake complied.

He had intended to stay an hour at this first formal call. He had hoped to be led on, by gentle feminine wiles, to add another hour. He had even dreamed that Aunt Paula might be so impressed by him as to hold him until midnight. As a matter of fact, he left the house just thirty-five minutes after he entered. Just why he retreated so early in the engagement, he had only the vaguest idea. Even fresh from it as he was, he could not enumerate the small stings, the myriad minor goads, by which it became established in his mind that his call was not a success, that he was boring the two ladies whom he was trying so hard to entertain. At the end, it was a labored dialogue between him and Mrs. Markham. Again and again, he tried to drag Annette into the conversation. She was tongue-tied. The best she did was to give him the impression that, deep down in her tired psychology, she was trying to listen. As for Aunt Paula—if his gaze wandered from her to Annette and then back, he caught her stifling a yawn. Her final shot was to interrupt his best story a hair's breadth ahead of the point. When he said good-night, his manner—he flattered himself—betrayed nothing of his sense of defeat. But no fellow pedestrian, observing the savage vigor of his swift walk homeward, could have held any doubt as to his state of mind.

V

THE LIGHT WAVERS

As Blake drove the runabout north through the fine autumn morning, he perceived suddenly that his subconscious mind was playing him a trick. He had started out to get light, air, easement of his soul among woods and fields. And now, instead of turning into Central Park at Columbus Circle, he was following Upper Broadway, where, in order to reach the great out-of-doors, he must dodge trucks and cabs between miles of hotels and apartment houses. In fact, he had been manoeuvering, half-unconsciously, so that he might turn into the park at the Eighty-Sixth Street entrance and so pass that most important of all dwellings in

Manhattan, the house where Annette Markham lived. Any irritation which he had felt against her, after the unpleasant evening before, was lost in his greater irritation with her aunt. Annette appeared to him, now, as the prize, the reward, of a battle in which Mrs. Paula Markham was his antagonist.

As he turned the corner into her street, ten years rolled away from him; he dreamed the childish, impossible dreams of a very youth. She might be coming down the steps as he passed. Fate might even send a drunkard or an obstreperous cabman for him to thrash in her service. But when he reached the house, nothing happened. The front door remained firmly shut; no open window gave a delicious glimpse of Annette. After his machine had gone ahead to such position that he could no longer scan the house without impolite craning of his neck, he found that his breath was coming fast. Awakened from his dream, a little ashamed of it, he opened the control and shot his machine ahead to the violation of all speed laws. He was crossing Central Park West, and the smooth opening of the park driveway was before him, when he looked up and saw—Annette.

Her honey-colored hair, glistening dull in the autumn sunshine, identified her even before he caught her characteristic walk—graceful and fast enough, but a little languid, too. She was dressed in a plain tailor suit, a turban, low, heavy shoes.

He slowed down the automobile to a crawl, that he might enter the park after her. A boyish embarrassment smote him; if he drove up and spoke to her, it would look premeditated. So he hesitated between two courses, knowing well which he would pursue in the end. As he entered the park, still a dozen yards behind her, he saw that the footpath which she was following branched out from the automobile drive. Within a few paces, she would disappear behind a hydrangea bush. On that perception, he gave all speed to his machine, shot alongside and stopped.

Even before he reached her, she had turned and faced him. He fancied that the smile of recognition on her face had started even before she began to turn; she did not appear surprised, only pleased. Beating around in his mind for a graceful word of introduction, he accomplished an abrupt and ungraceful one.

"Will you ride?" he asked.

"With pleasure," she responded simply, and in one light motion she was in the

seat beside him. He turned at low speed north, and as his hands moved over wheels and levers, she was asking:

"How did you happen to be here?"

He put a bold front on it.

"I drove past your home, by instinct, because I was coming north. And I saw you. Which of your spirits"—he was bold enough for the moment to make light of her sacred places—"sent you out-of-doors just before I passed?"

"The spirit of the night before," she answered, passing from smiles to gravity. "That long sleep without rest has been troubling me again. I remembered how exercise set me up in the country, and I started out for a little air. Aunt Paula is out this morning—something about the plumbing. Dear Auntie, how I'd love to take those cares off her shoulders. She'll never let me, though. And next week our housekeeper, whom we've held for two years, is leaving; she must advertise and receive applicants—and likely get the wrong one. So that's another worry for her. I was alone in the house when I awoke, and I could not waste such autumn weather as this!"

He looked at her with anxiety—the physician again.

"I saw trouble in your face last night. It isn't normal that you should be tired out so soon after the perfect condition you achieved at Berkeley Center."

"No, it isn't. I know that perfectly, and I'm resigned to it."

"I won't ask you to let *me* treat you—but why don't you go to some physician about it? You know how much this case means to me."

For a time she did not reply. She only kept her eyes on the autumn tints of the park, streaking past them like a gaudy Roman scarf.

"No," she said at length, "no physician like you can heal me. Greater physicians, higher ones, for me. And they will not—will not—" She was silent again.

"Are you coming back again to that queer business of which you told me—that day on the tennis court?"

"To just that."

"What can such a thing have to do with your physical condition?"

"You will not laugh?"

"At you and yours and anything which touches you—no. You know I could not laugh now. Little as I respect that obstacle, it is the most serious fact I know."

His eyes were on the steering of the automobile. He could not see that her lips pursed up as though to form certain low and tender words, and that her sapphirine eyes swept him before she controlled herself to go on.

"Aunt Paula says it is part of the struggle. Some people, when the power is coming into them, are violent. Men, she says, have smashed furniture and torn their bodies. I am not strong to do such things, but only weak to endure. And so it takes me as it does.

"Don't you see?" she added, "that if I'm to give up so many powers of my mind, so many needs of my soul, to this thing, I can afford to give up a few powers of my body? Am I to become a Light without sacrificing all? So I keep away from physicians. It is Aunt Paula's wish, and she has always known what is best for me."

The automobile was running at an even fifteen miles an hour down a broad, unobstructed parkway. He could turn his eyes from his business and let his hands guide. So he looked full at her, as he said:

"She may have a hard time keeping you away from this physician!"

That, it seemed, amused her. The strain in her face gave way to a smile.

"For yourself, she likes you, I think," said Annette.

"She has a most apt and happy way of showing it," he responded, his slights rising up in him.

"You mustn't judge her by last night," replied Annette. "Aunt Paula has many manners. I think she assumes that one when she is studying people. Then think of the double reason she has for receiving you coldly—my whole future, as she

plans it, hangs on it—and she spoke nicely of you. She likes your eyes and your wit and your manners. But—"

"But I am an undesirable acquaintance for her niece just the same!"

"Have I not said that you are—the obstacle? Haven't her controls told her that? If not, why did she telegraph to me when she did?" Then, as they turned from the park corner and made towards Riverside Drive, something in her changed.

"Must we talk this out whenever we meet? You said once that you would teach me to play. Ah, teach me now! I need it!"

And though he turned and twisted back toward the subject, she was pure girl for the next hour. The river breezes blew sparkle into her eyes; the morning intoxicated her tongue. She chattered of the trees, the water, the children on the benches, the gossiping old women. She made him stop to buy chestnuts of an Italian vendor, she led him toward his tales of the Philippines. He plunged into the Islands like a white Othello, charming a super-white Desdemona. It was his story of the burning of Manila which brought him back to the vexation in his mind.

"That yarn seemed to make a very small hit last night," he said, turning suddenly upon her.

"I didn't like it so much last night," she answered frankly.

"What was the matter?" he asked. "Why were you so far away? Were you afraid of Mrs. Markham? I felt like the young man of a summer flirtation calling in the winter. What was it?"

"I don't know," she answered.

"No—tell me."

"There wasn't any reason. I liked you last night as I always like you. But we were far away. Shall I tell you how it seemed to me? I was like an actress on the stage, and you like a man in the audience. I was speaking to you—a part. In no way could you answer me. In no way could I answer you directly. We moved near to each other, but in different worlds. It was something like that."

"I suppose"—bitterly—"your Aunt Paula had nothing to do with that?"

"You must like Aunt Paula if you are to like me," she warned. "Yet that may have something to do with it. I am wonderfully influenced by what she thinks—as is right."

"Then it's coming to a fight between me and your Aunt Paula? For I'll do even that."

"Must we go all over it again? Oh like me, like me, and give me a rest from it! I think of nothing but this all day—why do you make it harder? I do not know if I can renounce and still have you in my life. Won't you wait until I know? It will be time enough then!"

"'Renounce,'" he quoted. "Then you know that there is something to renounce—and that means you love me!" So giddy had he become with the surge of his passion that his hands trembled on the steering-wheel. Afraid of losing all muscular control, he brought the automobile to a full stop at the roadside. Her sapphirine eyes were shining, her hands lay inert in her lap, her lips quivered softly.

"Have I ever denied it—can I ever deny it to you?"

The pure accident of location gave him opportunity for what he did next. For they were in one of those country lanes of Upper Manhattan which, though enclosed by the greatest city, seem still a part of remote country. Heavy branches of autumn foliage guarded the road to right and left; from end to end of the passage was neither vehicle nor foot-passenger. One faculty, standing unmoved in the storm of emotions which had overwhelmed him, perceived this.

He reached for the trembling hands which gave themselves to his touch. She swayed against him. Her hands had snatched themselves away now—only to clasp his neck. And now her lips had touched his again and again and somehow between kiss and kiss, she was murmuring, "Oh, I love you—I love you—I love you. I love you so much that life without you is a perfect misery. I love you so much that my work now seems stale and dreary. I love you so much that I don't want ever to go away from you. I want to stay here forever and feel your arms about me, for that is the only way that I shall ever know happiness—or peace. I wake in the morning with your name on my lips. I wander through the day with you. If I try to read, you come between me and the page. If I try to play you

come between me and the notes. You are my books. You are my music—my—my—everything. I go to bed early at night often so that I can lie in the dusk and think of you. And oh, the only nights that rest me are those filled with dreams of the poem we would make out of life—if—if—"

Her voice faltered and he felt the exquisite caress of her lips trembling against his cheek. As though she were utterly spent, she ended where she had begun, "I love you—I love—I love you."

He was aware now that another car whirred behind them. He managed—it took all the force in his soul—to put her from him. He turned to see if they had been observed; the passengers in the other car, intent on their own chatter, did not look; only the chauffeur regarded their chassis with a professional eye, as though wondering if they were stalled. When Blake drew a long breath and looked back at Annette, her face was buried in her hands. And now, when he touched her, she drew slowly away.

"Oh, drive on—drive on!" she said.

"Oh, Annette—dearest."

"Don't speak. I beg you—drive on or I shall die!"

And though the car wavered dangerously under his unsteady touch, he obeyed, managed to gain the highroad without a spill, and to turn north.

She wept silently. When at last she took her hands away and turned her face on him, his lover's observation saw how beautifully she wept. Her eyes were not red, her face was calm. He took heart from her glance, began to babble foolish love words. But she stopped him.

"You are driving away from home," she said. "Drive back, and don't speak yet."

After he had turned, her tears ceased. She dried her eyes. Now she smiled a little, and her voice grew natural.

"I must never be weak again," she said. "But it was sweet. Dear, might I touch your arm? No, you must not stop again. Just my hand on your arm."

"Dearest, why do you ask?" She drew off her glove, and all the way a light, steady pressure made uncertain his wheel-hand. They drove a mile so—two miles—and neither spoke until they came out into inhabited Upper Broadway. At the appearance of crowds, trucks and the perils of the highway, that silver thread of silence broke. She drew her hand away, and took up the last word of ten minutes ago.

"It was sweet—but no more. How long it is since I kissed you! I am glad. I shall pay for it heavily—but I am glad!"

He smiled on her as on a child who speaks foolishness.

"You cannot renounce now!" he said.

"I shall renounce. I have stolen this morning—would you rob me in turn?"

"It will be the first kiss of a million," he said.

"It will be the last forever," she answered. "But remember, if you do not kiss me, no man ever shall."

He busied himself with guiding the automobile; it was no time to hurl out the intense things which he had to say. But when they had entered the smooth park driveway, he came out with it:

"Do you think that I respect that obstacle? Can you think that I believe such moonshine even if you do? And do you suppose that I am going to let Aunt Paula keep you now?"

She touched his arm again; let her hand rest there as before.

"Dear," she said, "I have never thought that you believed. I have felt this always in the bottom of your heart. I only ask you not to spoil this day for me. I have stolen it. Let me enjoy it. I shall not put you out of my life—at least not yet. Later, when we are both calm, we will talk that out. But let it rest now, for I am tired—and happy."

So they drove along, her light hand making warm his arm, and said no word until they came near the Eighty-Sixth Street entrance. He looked at her with a question in his eyes.

"Leave me where you found me," she answered; "I shall go in alone."

"But will you tell your Aunt Paula that you met me?"

"I shall tell her—yes. Not all, perhaps, but that I rode with you. What is the use of concealment? She will know—"

"Her spirits?"

"Dear, do not mock me. They tell her everything she wants to know about me." They had drawn up at the park entrance now; before he could assist, she had jumped down.

"Good-by—I must go quickly—you must come soon—I will write."

He stood beside his car, watching her back. Once she turned and waved to him; when she went on, she walked with a spring, an exultation, as though from new life. He watched until she was only a blue atom among the foot-passengers, until a park policeman thumped him on the shoulder and informed him that this was not an automobile stand.

When Dr. Blake woke next morning, it was with a sense of delicious expectancy. He formulated this as his eyes opened. She had promised to write; the mail, due for distribution in the Club at a quarter past eight, might bring a note from her. He timed his dressing carefully, that he might arrive downstairs neither before nor after the moment of fulfilment or disappointment. He saw, as he crossed the corridor to his mail-box, that the clerk was just dropping a square, white envelope. He peered through the glass before he felt for his keys. It was Annette's hand.

So, glowing, he tore it open, and read:

> DEAR MR. BLAKE:
>
> I think it best never to see you again. Aunt Paula approves of this; but it is done entirely of my own accord. My decision will not change. Please do not call at my house, for I shall not see you. Please do not write, for I shall send your letters back unopened.

> Please do not try to see me outside, for I shall not recognize you. I thank you for your interest in me; and believe me, I remain,
>
> Your sincere friend,
>
> ANNETTE MARKHAM.

After a dreadful day, he came back to the Club and found a package, addressed in her hand. Out fell a little bundle of rags, topped by a comical black face, and a note. The letter of the morning was in a firm, correct hand. This was a trembling scrawl, blotted with tears. And it read:

> Dear, I have something terrible to write you. I must give you up. I cannot go into all the reasons now, and after all that would not help any, for it all comes to this—we must never see each other again. Please do not send me a letter, for though I should cover it with my kisses, in the end I would have to send it back unopened. I send you Black Dinah as I promised. It's all that's left of me now, and I want you to have it. Dearest, dearest, good-by.

VI

ENTER ROSALIE LE GRANGE

"Cut, dearie," said Rosalie Le Grange, trance and test clairvoyant, to Hattie, the landlady's daughter. "Now keep your wish in your mind, remember. That's right; a deep cut for luck. U-um. The nine of hearts is your wish—and right beside it is the ace of hearts. That means your home, dearie—the spirits don't lie, even when they're manifestin' themselves just through cards. They guide your hand when you shuffle and cut. Your wish is about the affections, ain't it, dearie?"

The pretty slattern across the table nodded. She had put down her dust-pan and leaned her broom across her knees when she sat down to receive the only tip which Rosalie Le Grange, in the existing state of her finances, could give.

"I got your wish now, dearie," announced Rosalie Le Grange. "The spirits sometimes help the cards somethin' wonderful. Here it comes. I thought so. The

three of hearts for gladness an' rejoicin' right next to the ace, which is your home. Now that might mean a little home of your own, but the influence I git with it is so weak I don't think it means anythin' as strong an' big as that. Wait a minute—now it comes straight an' definite—he'll call—rejoicin' at your home because he'll call. Do you understand that, dearie?"

"Sure!" Hattie's eyes were big with awe.

"Hat-tie!" came a raucous voice from outside.

"Yes-m!" answered Hattie.

"Are you going to be all day redding up them rooms?" pursued the voice.

"Nearly through!" responded Hattie. Rosalie Le Grange made pantomime of sweeping; and—

"I'll help you red up, my dear," she whispered. Forthwith, they fell to sweeping, dusting, shaking sheets.

As she moved about the squeezed little furnished rooms and alcove, which formed her residence and professional offices in these reduced days, Rosalie Le Grange appeared the one thing within its walls which was not common and dingy. A pink wrapper, morning costume of her craft, enclosed a figure grown thick with forty-five, but marvelously well-shaped and controlled. Her wrapper was as neat as her figure; even the lace at the throat was clean. Her long, fair hands, on which the first approach of age appeared as dimples, not as wrinkles or corrugations of the flesh, ran to nails whose polish proved daily care. Her hair, chestnut in the beginning, foamed with white threads. Below was a face which hardly needed, as yet, the morning dab of powder, so craftily had middle age faded the skin without deadening it. Except for a pair of large, gray, long-lashed eyes—too crafty in their corner glances, too far looking in their direct vision—that skin bounded and enclosed nothing which was not attractive and engaging. Her chin was piquantly pointed. Beside a tender, humorous, mobile mouth played two dimples, which appeared and disappeared as she moved about the room delivering monologue to Hattie.

"I see a dark gentleman that ain't in your life yet. He's behind a counter now, I think. He ain't the one that the ace of hearts shows is goin' to call. I see you all whirled about between 'em, but I sense nothin' about how it's goin' to turn out—

land sakes, child, don't you ever dust behind the pictures? You'll have to be neater if you expect to make a good wife to the dark gentleman—"

"Will it be him?" asked Hattie, stopping with a sheet in her hands.

"Now the spirits slipped that right out of me, didn't they?" pursued Rosalie. "Land sakes, you can't keep 'em back when they want to talk. Now you just hold that and think over it, dearie. No more for you to-day." Rosalie busied herself with pinning the faded, dusty pink ribbon to a gilded rolling pin, and turned her monologue upon herself:

"I ain't sayin' nothin' against this house for the price, dearie, but my, this is a comedown. The last time I done straight clairvoyant work, it was in a family hotel with three rooms and a bath and breakfast in bed. Well, there's ups an' downs in this business. I've been down before and up again—"

Hattie, her mouth relieved of a pillowcase, spoke boldly the question in her mind.

"What put you down?"

Rosalie, her head on one side, considered the arrangement of the pink ribbon, before she answered:

"Jealousy, dearie; perfessional jealousy. The Vango trumpet seances were doin' too well to suit that lyin', fakin', Spirit Truth outfit in Brooklyn—wasn't that the bell?"

It was. Hattie patted the pillow into place, and sped for the door.

"If it's for me," whispered Rosalie, "don't say I'm in—say you'll see." Rosalie bustled about, putting the last touches on the room, pulling shut the bead portières which curtained alcove and bed.

Hattie poked her head in the door.

"It's a gentleman," she said.

"Well, come inside and shut the door—no use tellin' *him* all about himself," said Rosalie. "I'm—I'm kind of expectin' a gentleman visitor I don't want to see

yet. It's a matter of the heart, dearie," she added. "What sort of a looking gentleman?"

Hattie stood a moment trying to make articulate her observations.

"He's got nice eyes," she said. "And he's dressed quiet but swell. Sort of tall and distinguished."

"Did you look at his feet?" For the moment, Rosalie had taken it for granted that all women knew, as she so well knew, the appearance of police feet.

"No 'm, not specially," said Hattie.

"Well, you'd 'a' noticed," said Rosalie, covering up quickly. "The gentleman I don't want to see has a club foot—show him up, dearie."

As Madame Le Grange sat down by the wicker center table and composed her features to professional calm, she was thinking:

"If he's a new sitter, I'll have to stall. There's nothing as hard to bite into as a young man dope."

The expected knock came. Entered the new sitter—him whom we know as Dr. Walter Huntington Blake, but a stranger to Rosalie. During the formal preliminaries—in which Dr. Blake stated simply that he wanted a sitting and expressed himself as willing to pay two dollars for full trance control—Rosalie studied him and mapped her plan of action. There was, indeed, "nothing to bite into." His shapely clothes bore neither fraternity pin nor society button; his face was comparatively inexpressive; to her attempts at making him chatter, he returned but polite nothings. Only one thing did she "get" before she assumed control. When she made him hold hands to "unite magnetisms," his finger rested for a moment on the base of her palm. She put that little detail aside for further reference, and slid gently into "trance," making the most, as she assumed the slumber pose, of her profile, her plump, well-formed arms, her slender hands. This sitter was "refined"; not for him the groans and contortions of approaching control which so impressed factory girls and shopkeepers.

Peeping through her long eyelashes, she noted that his face, while turned upon her in close attention, was without visible emotion.

"I must fish," she thought as she began the preliminary gurgles which heralded the coming of Laughing Eyes, her famous Indian child control—"I wonder if I've got to tell him that the influence won't work to-day and I can't get anything? Maybe I'd better."

A long silence, broken here and there by guttural gurglings; then Laughing Eyes babbled tentatively:

"John—Will—Will—" she choked here, as though trying to add a syllable which she could not clearly catch. And at this point, Rosalie took another look through her eyelashes. She had touched something! He was leaning forward; his mouth had opened. Before she could follow up her advantage, he had thrown himself wide open.

"Wilfred—is it Wilfred?" he asked.

Laughing Eyes was far too clever a spirit to take immediately an opening so obvious.

"You wait a minny!" she said. "Laughing Eyes don't see just right now. Will—Will—he come, he go. Oh—oh—I see a ring—maybe it's on a finger, maybe it ain't—Laughing Eyes kind of a fool this morning—Laughing Eyes has got lots to do for a 'itty girl—" Rosalie had essayed another glance as she spoke of the ring. It brought no visible change of expression; and from the success of her shot with Wilfred she knew that this, in spite of first impressions, was a sitter whose expression betrayed him. "Then it's business troubles," she thought, "unless he's a psychic researcher. And if he was, he wouldn't be so easy with his face."

So Laughing Eyes burbled again, and then burst out:

"I see a atmosphere of trouble!" The young man's countenance dropped, whereupon Laughing Eyes fell to chattering foolishly before she went on: "Piles of bright 'itty buttons—money—" And then something which had been gently titillating Rosalie's sense of smell made a sudden connection with her memory, Iodoform—the faintest suggestion. She linked this perception with his appearance of having been freshly tubbed, his immaculate finger nails, shining as though fresh from the manicure, his perfectly kept teeth and—yes—the pressure of a finger on her pulse. Upon this perception, Laughing Eyes spoke sharply:

"Wilfred says your sick folks don't always pay like they ought. He says when they're in danger they can't do too much for the doctor, but when they're well, he's—he—he—Wilfred is funny—a old sawbones!"

"Ask fa—ask him about the patient," faltered Rosalie's sitter.

"Wilfred says, 'My son, it's comin' out all right if you follow your own impulses,'" responded Laughing Eyes. "You do the way the influences guide you. They 're guiding *you*, not them other doctors that you're askin' advice from." Laughing Eyes shifted to babbling of the bright spirit plane beyond, and all that the patient was missing by delay in translation, while Rosalie took another glance of observation, and thought rapidly. Was this patient a medical or surgical case? Two chances out of three, surgical; it would take remorse and apprehension over a mistake with the scalpel to drive a medical man medium-hunting. Her glance at his hands confirmed her determination to venture. They were large and heavy, yet fine, the hands of a craftsman, a forger, a surgeon, anyone who does small and exact work. Rosalie had been in a hospital in her day, and she had studied doctors, as she studied the rest of humanity, with an eye always to future uses. Having a pair of hands like that, a doctor must inevitably choose surgery.

"Trust your papa!" babbled the Control. "Laughing Eyes trusted her papa—ugh!—he big Chief. He here now! Your papa knows my papa! Your papa says you didn't cut too deep!"

The young man let out an agitated "didn't I?"

"You was guided," pursued Laughing Eyes. "What you might'a' thought was a mistake was all for the best. Those in the spirit controlled your hands. Wilfred says 'three'—oh—oh I know what Wilfred means—ugh—get out bad spirit—Wilfred means three days—you wait three days—you wait three days and it will be right."

"And now," thought Rosalie Le Grange, "he's got his money's worth, and I'll take no more risks for any two dollars!" Forthwith, she let the voice of Laughing Eyes chuckle lower and lower. "Good-by!" whispered the control at length, "I'm goin' away from my medie!" Then, with a few refined convulsions, Rosalie awoke, rubbed her eyes, and said in her tinkling natural voice:

"Was I out long? I hope the sitting was satisfactory."

No change came over the young man's face as he said:

"From my standpoint—very!"

"Thank you," murmured Rosalie. "I was afraid, when you come in, that the influences wasn't going to be strong. A medium can sense them."

"Very satisfactory—with modifications," responded the sitter. "For instance, it is absolutely true that I had a father. His name wasn't Wilfred, it was James. And he died before I was born. But don't let that discourage you. I can prove his existence. The other true thing was the corker. I've been to fifty-seven varieties of mediums in the course of this experiment, and you're the first to jump at the widest opening I gave. I am a physician. I've put iodoform on my handkerchief every morning to prove it. I've been listed six times as a commercial traveler, twice as a con man, eight times as a clerk, three times as a policeman, with scattering votes for a reporter, a clergyman, an actor and an undertaker. But you're the first to roll the little ball into the little hole. I am a physician, or was. Better than that, you got it that I specialized on surgery—and I didn't plant *that*. You draw the capital prize."

"Young man," asked Rosalie with an air of shocked and injured innocence, "are you accusing me of *fakery*?" But despite her stern lips, in Rosalie's cheeks played the ghost of a pair of dimples. They were reflected, so to speak, by twin twinkles in the eyes of her sitter. And he went straight on:

"In addition, you're the prettiest of them all, and a cross-eyed man with congenital astigmatism could see that you're a good fellow. Do! *My* controls tell *me* that you're about to be offered a good job."

"My controls tell *me*," responded Rosalie Le Grange, "that if you don't quit insultin' a lady in her own house and disgracin' her crown of mediumship, out you go. There's those here that will defend me, I'll have you know!"

The young man's face sobered. "I beg your pardon, Mme. Le Grange," he said, "I have been sudden. Would you mind my coming to the point at once? I'm here to offer you a job."

Rosalie looked him sternly over a moment, but in the end her dimples triumphed. She lifted her right hand as though to arrange her hair, two fingers extended—the sign in the Brotherhood of Professional Mediums to recognize a

fellow craftsman. The young man made no response; Rosalie's eyes flashed back on guard.

"How much is this business worth to you?" pursued the young man.

"Mediums ain't measuring their rewards by earthly gains," responded Rosalie; and now she made no secret of her dimples. "If we wanted to water our mediumship, couldn't we get rich out of the tips we give people on their business?"

"But getting down to the earth plane," the young man continued—and perhaps the twinkles in his eyes were never more obstreperous—"how much would you ask to take a nice, easy job of using your eyes for me?"

"Well," said Rosalie, "if there was nothin' unprofessional about it, I should say fifty dollars a week." She smiled on him now openly. "You're a doctor. I don't have to say, as one professional person to another, that there's such a thing as ethics."

The young man smiled back. "Oh, certainly!" he said. "I understand that!" Quite suddenly he leaned forward and clapped Rosalie's shoulder with a motion that had nothing offensive about it—only good fellowship and human understanding—"I want you to help me expose Mrs. Paula Markham."

The announcement stiffened Rosalie. She sat bolt upright. "There ain't nothin' to expose!" she said.

"Now let's get on a business basis," said the young man.

"Well, you let me tell you one thing first. If you're pumpin' me for evidence, it don't go, because you've got no witnesses."

"I'm not pumping you for anything. I'm willing to admit that the spirits, not you, smelled the iodoform—"

"An' noticed that you was scrubbed clean as a whistle and that when we held hands to unite our magnetism, you was pawing for my pulse," pursued Rosalie, dropping her defences all at once. Thereupon, Roman haruspex looked into the eyes of Roman haruspex, and they both laughed. But Rosalie was serious enough a moment later.

"Now when you come to talk about exposing Mrs. Markham, you've got to show me first why you want her exposed, and you've got to let me tell you that you're wastin' your money. There's enough that's fake about this profession, but I know two mediums I'd stake my life on; barring of course myself"—here Rosalie smiled a smile which might have meant a confession or a boast, so balanced was it between irony and sweetness—"Mrs. Markham and Mrs. Anna Fife. They're *real*."

She peered into the face of her investigator. His expression showed skeptical amusement. She knew that her passion for talking too much was her greatest professional flaw; though had she thought it over maturely, she would have realized that she had never got into trouble through her tongue. Her trained instinct for human values led her inevitably to those who would appreciate her confidences and keep them. So the sudden retreat within her defences, which followed, proved irritation rather than suspicion.

"See here," she pursued, "are you a psychic researcher?"

"Cross my heart," answered the young man, "I never associated with spooks in my life until this week. I did it then because I wanted a first-class professional medium to take a good job."

"Investigating Mrs. Markham? What for? Has she got a cinch on a relative of yours?"

"Well, I'd like her for a relative," started the young man. Then he hesitated and for the first time faltered. A light blush began at the roots of his hair and overspread his face.

"I got that you were a physician," said Rosalie, "but there's one place I got you plumb wrong. I thought it was business troubles. So the trouble's your heart and affections! It's that big-eyed blonde niece of Markham's, of course. Well, you ain't the first. The best way to bring the young men like a flock of blackbirds is to shut a girl away from 'em."

Now the young man showed real surprise.

"How did you know?" he enquired.

"My controls an' guides, of course," responded Rosalie. "They couldn't find

anybody else to fall in love with around the Markham house—ain't as smart as you thought you was, are you?"

"Beside you," he responded, "I'm Beppo the Missing Link."

Rosalie acknowledged the compliment, and turned to business.

"I ain't asking you how I'm going about it," she said; "probably you've planted that. I *am* asking you if you're willing to risk fifty a week on a pig in a poke? I know about her; we all do. She's just like Mrs. Fife. The Psychic Researchers have written up Mrs. Fife, but they ain't got half of her. They miss the big things, just like they get fooled on the little things. *We* know. And we know about Mrs. Markham, too, though she's had sense enough to keep shut up from the professors.

"You're a skeptic," pursued Rosalie, "and I'm blowin' my breath to cool a house afire when I talk to you. I guess I just talk to hear myself talk. We start real. I did; we all do. With some of us it's a big streak an' with some it's a little. I was pretty big—pretty big. Things happen; voices and faces. Things that are true right out of the air, and things that ain't true—all mixed up with what you're thinking yourself. It comes just when it wants to, not when you want it. And the longer you go on, and the more horse sense you get, the less it comes."

Rosalie stopped a moment, and veiled her eyes with her lashes, as though speaking out of trance.

"Everyone of us says to herself, 'It won't leave me!' An' we start to practice. What are we goin' to do then? You git a sitter. She pays her two dollars. And *they* don't come perhaps. Not for that sitter, or the next sitter, or the next. But you have to give the value for the two dollars or go out of business. So some day, you guess. That's the funny thing about this business, anyway. Lots of times you ain't quite sure whether guessing did it, or spirits. I've glimpsed the ring on a girl's left hand, and right then my voices have said, 'Engaged!' Now was it me makin' that voice, or the spirit? I don't know. But when you begin to guess, you find how easy people are—how they swallow fakes and cry for more. As sitters go, fakin' gets 'em a lot harder than the real stuff. An' before long—it's easy—you're slipping the slates or bringing spooks from cabinets—let me tell you no medium ever did that genuine. But it's funny how long the real thing stays. Now you—I called your father Wilfred. Maybe I'll wake up to-morrow night, seein'

your face, and a voice will come right out of the air and say a name—and it'll be yours. It's happened; it will happen again; but generally when I can't make any use of it.

"I'm goin' a long way round to get home. There's some so big that they don't have to fake. Sometimes, of course, the controls won't come to them, but they can afford to tell a sitter they can't sense nothin', because the next sitter will get the real stuff—the stuff you can't fake. Mrs. Fife is that way. I've seen her work and I know. I know just as well about Mrs. Markham, though I haven't seen her. She keeps tight shut up away from the rest of us. She never mixes. But some of us have seen her, they've passed it on.

"Mediums," added Rosalie Le Grange, after a pause, "is a set of pipe dreamers as a class, but there's one place where you can take their word like it was sworn to on the Bible. It's when they say somebody has the real thing. Because mediums is knockers, and when they pass out a bouquet, you can bet they mean it. No, young man, Mrs. Markham, if she *does* play a lone hand, is the real thing. But I may help you waste your money."

The young man had lost his air of cynical levity, he was regarding Rosalie Le Grange somewhat as a collector regards a new and unclassified species.

"Why?" he asked.

"Who's the greatest doctor in the world?" asked Mme. Le Grange.

"Watkins, I suppose," responded the young man.

"What'd you give for a chance to stay in his office a month and see him work? See?"

He nodded his head.

"Of course."

"I was a darned little fool when I was young," pursued Rosalie Le Grange, "an' now that I'm gettin' on in years I'm just as darned an old one. I like to take chances. See?"

"Mme. Le Grange," said her sitter, again clapping her rounded shoulder,

"you're a fellow after my heart."

"Just a second before we come to the bouquets," responded Rosalie Le Grange, "there's another reason. Can you guess it?"

"I've already given up guessing on you."

On the table beside Mme. Le Grange lay an embroidery frame, the needle set in a puffy red peony. Mme. Le Grange picked it up and took a stitch or two. Her head bent over her work, so that the playful light made gold of the white in her chestnut hair, she pursued:

"Maybe you specialize on mendin' people's bones and maybe your specialty is their insides. I've got a specialty, too. You see, in this business it's easy to go all to the bad unless you do somethin' for other people. You have to have a kind of religion to tie to. Mine is unitin' and reunitin' lovin' hearts. Of course you're saying that this is a lot of foolishness. Never mind." She paused a moment, and plied the needle. "What's the trouble between you and that slim little niece of Mrs. Markham's that you want her aunt exposed? An' can't I fix it some other way?"

"What do you know about Miss Markham?" asked the sitter.

"I've opened myself up to you like a school-girl in a cosey corner chat," said Rosalie Le Grange; "ain't it time *you* was doin' some confidin'?"

"Did you ever hear that Miss Markham had been brought up to be a medium? That she mustn't marry because it would destroy her powers? That she's been taught to believe that she will never develop fully until she's put aside an earthly love?"

"O-ho!" quoth Rosalie; "so that's the way the wind sets! My! I must say that's the fakiest thing I ever heard about Mrs. Markham. We all know that a medium's born. This dark room developin' seance work is bosh to stall the dopes along. Still, Mrs. Markham has always played a lone hand. She's never mixed with other mediums, which is why I'll be safe in goin' into her house—she won't recognize me. Probably she's kept some fool notions that the rest of us lost long ago. But the poor little puss!"—her voice sank to a ripple—"the poor little puss!" Her eyes grew tender, and tenderly they met the softened eyes of the young man. "Just robbin' her of her girlhood! I wonder"—her voice grew harder as she

turned to practical consideration of the subject—"if Mrs. Markham got the idea from them Yogis and adepts and things that she mixed with in India. Just like 'em. They've got the real thing, but they're little, crawling Dagoes with no more blood in 'em than a swarm of horseflies."

"It is terrible to think of," said the sitter.

THEN IT'S AS GOOD AS DONE

"You poor dear, I should say so!" responded Rosalie. "Of course, I see what you want done. If I can prove that Mrs. Markham is a fake, then I prove to the girl that it's all bosh about her not marrying. I can't give you no encouragement as far as exposin' goes, seem' 's I know Mrs. Markham is real, but if I'm on the ground, maybe I can fix it some other way. How are you goin' to git me into the house?"

"This week," responded her co-conspirator, "Mrs. Markham will advertise for a housekeeper. I suppose you can play housekeeper well enough to keep the place a month, can't you?"

"If there's anythin' I can do," responded Rosalie, "it's keep house. Is it a big house?"

"Three stories—three or four servants, I suppose."

"That's good; I'll enjoy it; I never had a chance at *that!*"

"Remember you must get the place from the other applicants."

"If my mediumship hasn't taught me enough to git me a plain job, it hasn't taught me nothin'," responded Rosalie.

"Then it's as good as done," answered the young man. "Shall I pay you now or later? Mrs. Markham's salary will be your tip."

"It's a good paymaster that pays when the job's got," answered Rosalie. Her sitter rose, as though to go.

"Confidences is like love," said Rosalie, "first sight or not for ten years. Here I've opened my whole bag of tricks, and yours is locked tight. Don't you think

you might tell me your name?"

The young man reached for a card.

"Dr. Blake," he said as he fumbled.

"Walter Huntington Blake, Curfew Club," corrected Rosalie.

His hands dropped, and he stared.

"How—how—"

"Spirits—my kind." Rosalie extended her hand. In it rested his little card case. "Excuse me. I done it just to show you I wasn't *quite* a darn fool, if I do tell everything I know to a stranger. Now don't get silly an' think from this marvelous demonstration that I've been givin' you a con talk. It's just a lesson not to take your card case along when you visit a medium. It's a proof that I can expose Mrs. Markham if there 's anything to expose. Good-by Dr. Blake, and good luck."

The following Wednesday, at eight o'clock in the morning, a messenger boy woke Mme. Le Grange by prolonged knocking. He passed in this note:

> Answer early the third advertisement, third column, sixth page, in the *Herald* Help Wanted column. From the address, I know it is Mrs. M.'s.
>
> W.H. BLAKE.

VII

ROSALIE'S FIRST REPORT

Rosalie Le Grange, upon assuming her position as housekeeper in the Markham establishment, had written Dr. Blake that Tuesday was her afternoon out, and suggesting that he meet her every Tuesday afternoon at three in the ladies' parlor of the old Hotel Greenwich, which lay far from main lines of traffic and observation. So they sat on the faded velvets of the Greenwich that fall

afternoon, heads together in close conference.

"You're wastin' your money," began Rosalie.

"Tell me about Miss Markham first," he interrupted; "is she well?"

"As well as she ever is—that girl's far from strong. The more I think of this job"—she reverted to her subject—"the more meechin' I feel about it, spyin' on a good woman an' a great medium like her. Git the girl away from *her*! Let me tell you, Dr. Blake, your girl's the luckiest girl in the world, and I don't care if I have to say it right into your face. If *I'd* had a chance to develop my mediumship straight from a great vessel of the spirit like that, I wouldn't be fakin' test books, and robbin' card cases, and givin' demonstrations to store girls at a dollar a trance. To learn from Mrs. Markham! She ought to thank God for the chance."

Then, perceiving that she had left his feelings out of consideration—noticing by the droop of his eyes how much she had depressed him—she patted his knee and let a tender smile flutter over her dimples.

"Of course, Boy," she said, with the sweet patronage of woman, "I don't take no stock in the notion that the girl has got to put aside earthly love, and that kind of talk. We've all got our notions and our places—where we don't follow the spirit guides. Perhaps that's just Mrs. Markham's weak spot. Maybe her own love affairs was ashes in her mouth. Come to think of it, I never did know who Mr. Markham was. What I'm tryin' to tell you is that you've got your pig by the wrong ear, for you can't expose what's genuine. And I'm ashamed of what I'm doin', and if I hadn't promised to stay a month, I'd leave this very day." Her companion made an involuntary motion of alarm.

"Don't be afraid—I'm not goin' to yet. Gettin' the place was easy. You want a housekeeper stupid and respectable; I was all that. I was bothered, before I got started, to get the letters of recommendation, but I got 'em—never mind how. And they were good, too. I'm Mrs. Granger, as I told you, and I'm a widow. So I took the place away from a Swede, an Irishwoman, and a French ginny. Right at the start, I found a line on Mrs. Markham. When she was alone with me, after we come to terms, she was just as kind and good as any lady in the land. I don't suppose that means anythin' to you, but it did to me. Big fakirs and crooks just live their lives in terror, afraid of their own shadows. They've got to be sweet and kind on the outside, and so they take out their crossness and irritation on the

help. I'd rather be keeper in an asylum than cook to a burglar. But Mrs. Markham was *fine*—and no airs and no softness. If the spirit ever hallowed a face, it's hers. I know you don't like her, and you can't be blamed—her keeping your little girl from you! But you must have noticed her voice, how pretty it is if she *does* talk English fashion. Now that was my first sight into her. Whatever she's done, she's never done materializin', which is just where pure, proved fakin' begins. It's as soft as a girl's. It wouldn't be if she'd worked up her voices for men controls. I've been complimented on my voice myself, but you must have noticed the way it slides down and gits deep every little while. That's left to show I did materializin' in St. Paul; and I'm ashamed of it, too. My, how I wander around in Robin Hood's barn! But I'm full of it."

"Tell me everything," he said, "and in your own way."

"'You know my profession?' says Mrs. Markham.

"'No, Ma'am,' says I.

"'I'm a religious teacher, in a way,' says she. 'A medium if you care to call it that. I prefer another name.'

"'A medium!' says I. 'My! I was to a medium last week!'

"Perhaps you don't see why I done that. 'T was to give her an opening. First move, when you're fakin' on a big scale, is to make dopes out of your servants. Git 'em to swallow the whole thing; then find the yellow spot, work it, and pull 'em into your fakin'. But she never followed the lead, even so much as to seem interested. 'Indeed?' says she. 'Well, I see only a few callers, and usually in the evening. I'm a little particular about bein' disturbed at such times, and I must ask you not to come below the top floor on such evenings. Ellen, the parlor maid, always sits by the front door to answer the bell.' That was a relief. I was afraid I'd have to answer bells, which would have been risky. Dopes that follow big mediums go to little ones sometimes; there was a chance that I'd let in one of my own sitters and be recognized. And the arrangement didn't look faky to me as it may to you; for a fact, you're just a bundle of nerves when you're coming in and out of real control.

"'And I hope you'll be comfortable,' says she, 'I'm coming up this evening to see if your room is all right and if there's anything you want. You'll like my servants, I think.'

"Right there I began to be ashamed of our game, and it hasn't got any less, I'll tell *you*.

"It was hard work getting the job to runnin', and I didn't have much time for pokin' into things. When I did git room to turn around, I went through that whole house pretendin' to take inventories. I didn't find a thing that looked out of place, or faky. Not a scrap of notes on sitters, not a trap, not a slate, not a thread of silk mull, not a spark of phosphorus. I wasn't fool enough to break the rule about coming downstairs when she had sitters. Let her catch me spyin', and the bird's gone. But last Sunday night I had a fair chance. I knew it would come if I waited. There's three servants under me—Mary the cook, who's a hussy; and Martin the furnace man, who's a drunk; and Ellen, who's a fool. I'd listened to 'em talking and I'd pumped 'em gradual, but I couldn't git a definite thing—and what the help don't know about the crooked places in their bosses ain't generally worth knowin'. Ellen, the maid, ought to 'a' been my best card—her sittin' every night at the door catchin' what comes out of the parlors. She couldn't tell a thing. All she knew was that she heard a lot of talk in low tones, and it was something about spirits and the devil, and then she crossed herself. As help goes, they like Mrs. Markham, which is a good sign.

"Last Sunday, at supper, Ellen begins to complain of a pain in her head. It seemed to me that I'd better take, just once, the chance of being recognized by a sitter, an' 'tend door for the seance. So I begun with Ellen.

"'You're sick, child,' says I, havin' her alone at the time. 'It looks to me like neuralgia.'

"Well, you're a doctor—I don't have to tell you how easy it is to make a person *think* they're sick. And that's my specialty—makin' people think things. In half an hour, I had that girl whoop-in' an' Martin telephonin' for a doctor. Then I broke the news over the house telephone to Mrs. Markham. She waited ten minutes, and called me down. It come out just as I figured. She wanted me to 'tend door. I'd been playin' the genteel stupid, you know, so she trusted me. And I must say I'd rather she hated me, the way I'm out to do her. She told me that I was to sit by the door and bring in the names of callers, and if anyone come after eight o'clock, I was to step into the outside hall and get rid of 'em as quick as I could. Now let me tell you, that killed another suspicion. One way, the best way of fakin' in a big house, is to have the maid rob the pockets of people's wraps for letters an' calling cards an' such. I'd thought maybe Ellen played that game, she

acted so stupid; but here I was lettin' in the visitors, me only, a week in the house. I took the coats off her callers myself and I watched them wraps all the time. Nobody ever approached 'em while I looked. She had only four sitters, two men and two women—an old married couple an' a brother an' sister, I took it from their looks an' the way they acted toward each other. The old couple were rich and tony. They didn't flash any jewelry, but her shoes and gloves were made to order and her coat had a Paris mark inside. The brother and sister must be way up, too; he was dressed quiet but rich, and he had a Bankers' Association pin in his buttonhole. Yes, they wasn't paupers, and that's the only fake sign I've seen about Mrs. Markham. But that's nothin'. Stands to reason the best people go to the best mediums, just like they go to the best doctors and preachers.

"That sittin', you hear me, was real. I got by the double doors where I could listen. You just hear me—it was real. You ain't a sensitive. You've followed knowledge and not influences, and it's going to be hard for me to git this into you. So I'll tell you first how it would have looked to you, and then how it looked to me. I'm not sayin' what she gave wasn't something she got out of test books and memorandums, because I don't know her people or yet how much she'd had to do with them. It was the way it come out that impressed me. First place, she didn't go into trance. That's a fake to impress dopes, nine times out of ten. If you ever git anything real from me, you'll git it out of half trance. Then she didn't feel around an' fish, an' neither did she hit the bull's eye every time. She'd get the truth all tangled up. John would say a true thing, that only *he* knew, and she'd think she got it from James. Her sitters were fine acknowledgers, especially the old maid, and I could tell. That's how I would 'a' looked to you, and now let me tell you how it struck me. You don't have to believe it.

"I was sittin' there just takin' it all in, when I began to get influences. Now laugh; but you won't stop me. It never struck me so strong in my life as it did right there. And it all come from Mrs. Markham. It was like a sweet smell radiatin' from that room, and just makin' me drunk. It was like—maybe you've heard John B. Gough speak. Remember how he had you while you listened? Remember how you believed like he did and felt everything was right and you could do anything? Now that is as near like it as I can tell you and yet that *ain't* it by half. You ain't a sensitive. You can't git just what I mean.

"An' then *I* begun to see. I can't tell you all; I was half out; but just this for a sample: I had a sitter last week, an old lady; an' the sittin' was a failure. Yes, I was fishin' and pumpin', but she was close-mouthed an' suspicious. I got it out of

her that she was worried about her boy. I tried a bad love affair for a lead, an' there was nothing doing. I tried bad habits and it was just as far away; and I give it up and was thankful I got fifty cents out of her. Well, while I sat there listenin' to Mrs. Markham, right into my mind came a picture—the old lady leanin' over a young man—her pale and shaky and him surprised an' mad,—and he held a pen in his hand, an' I got the word 'forgery!' That's one of the things I saw while that influence come from Mrs. Markham; and if you only knew how seldom I git anything real nowadays, you'd be as crazy as me about her. I just had to use all the force I've got to look stupid when the sitters went out."

Rosalie had talked on, oblivious to Dr. Blake's anxieties and feelings. He sat there, the embodiment of disappointment.

"As perfect a case of auto-suggestion as I ever knew," his professional mind was thinking. But he expressed in words his deeper thought:

"Then that line fails."

"I'm sorry, boy," responded Rosalie, "but I'm doin' my job straight, and you wouldn't want it done any other way. And I feel you'll git her somehow; if not this way, some other. And the longer the wait the stronger the love, *I* say. She don't seem any too happy, even if Mrs. Markham does treat her well."

"Doesn't she?" he asked, his face lighting with a melancholy relief.

"Good symptom for you, ain't it? And I can't think of nothing else that can be on her mind. But how that girl passes her days, I don't know. It must be dull for her, poor little bird. She and Mrs. Markham ain't much apart. She looks at Mrs. Markham like a dog looks at his master, she's that fond of her. Seems to read a lot, and twice they've been out in the evening—theater, or so the chauffeur said. We don't have no private car. We hire one by the month from a garage. An' if I ever liked a girl and wanted to see her happy, that's the one!"

Rosalie rose. "Must do some shoppin'. Can't say I hope for better news next week, not the kind of good news you're looking for. But I'm hopin' for good news in the end."

Dr. Blake remained sitting, his head dropped in depression on his breast. Rosalie stooped to pat it with a motherly gesture.

"Just remember this," she said, "you love her and she loves you or I miss my guess, an' there ain't no beatin' that combination. If I was fakin' with you I wouldn't need no more than that to make me see your two names in a ring. And remember this, too, boy! There never was anything that turned out just the way you expected. You figure on it twenty ways. It always beats you; and yet when you look back, you say, 'Of course; what a fool I was.' Good-by, boy—here next Tuesday at three unless I tell you different by letter." Rosalie was gone.

Dr. Blake walked in the park that night until dawn broke over the city roofs. And he drew out a dull and anxious existence,—shot and broken with whims, fancies, all the irregularities of a lover,—during the week in which he awaited Rosalie's next report.

VIII

THE FISH NIBBLES

Quietly, naturally, giving a preliminary word of direction to the maid as she lifted the portières, Mrs. Markham entered the drawing room. Pricking with a sense of impatience, tinctured by nervousness over his own folly, Robert H. Norcross awaited her there. She stood a moment regarding him; in that moment, the quick perception, veiled away by an expression of thought, to which the railroad baron owed so much, took her all in. Superficially, he saw a tall woman, approaching fifty, but still vigorous and free from over-burdening flesh.

"Good evening; I am glad to see you," she said quietly. She had a low voice and pleasing. He remembered then that he had failed to rise, so intent had he been on her face; and he got to his feet in some embarrassment. As she approached him, his mind, going from detail to detail, noticed her powerful head, her Grecian nose, rising without indentation from a straight forehead, her firm but pleasant mouth, her large, light gray eyes which looked a little past him. Here was a person on his own level of daring mental flight. He remembered only one other woman who had struck him with the force of this one. That other was an actress, supreme in her generation not so much for temperament as for mind. As he looked over a reception crowd at her, intellect had spoken to intellect; they had known each other. So Paula Markham struck him on first sight.

He was about to speak, but she put in her word first.

"Do you come personally or professionally? I had an engagement for an unknown visitor on professional business. Are you he? For if you are, it would be better for you not to tell me your name—I am Mrs. Markham."

"I came professionally," he said. He paused. The manner of Norcross, on all first meetings, was timid and hesitating. It was one of his unconscious tricks. Because of that timidity, new-comers, in trying to put him at his ease revealed themselves to his shrewd observation. But there was a real embarrassment at this meeting. He was approaching the subject which had lain close to his imagination ever since three days ago, when Bulger said carelessly that a woman had given him the address of the best spook medium in the business.

"I want to know," he said, "all about—myself."

She laughed lightly as she seated herself in an old-fashioned straight-back chair.

"If I should tell you that," she said, "I would give you the sum and substance of human wisdom. That seems to me the greatest mystery of the unknowable. No human being ever thoroughly understood any other human being, I suppose,—and yet no human being knows himself. If you search yourself, you find mystery. If you ask others, you find double mystery. Perhaps that is the knowledge which is reserved for the Divine."

"That is true," responded Norcross. "That is true. But your spirits—"

"Not mine," she interrupted. "And perhaps not spirits, either. Though they speak to me, I cannot say that they are real, any more than I can tell that this table, these clothes"—her long, expressive, ringless hand swept across the area of her skirt—"than you yourself, are real. All reality and unreality may dwell in the mind. Though personally," she added, "I prefer to believe that this chair, these clothes, you, I, are real. And if they are real, so are the Voices. At least, so I believe."

This philosophy was past any power of Norcross for repartee; the faculties which deal with such things had wasted in him during thirty years in Wall Street. But the effect of her voice, her ladyhood, and her command of this philosophy—those moved him.

"Will your voices tell me anything?" he asked, irrelevantly, yet coming straight to the point.

"Impatience," she answered, "will not help you. The power bloweth where it listeth. That impatience is one of the roads to trickery employed by the frauds of —my profession."

A smile lifted the mustache of Norcross.

"You admit that there *are* frauds in your profession, then?"

"Oh, dear, yes!" she smiled back at him. "It lends itself so easily to fraud that the temptation among the little people must be overwhelming—the more because trickery is often more accurate than real revelation. I will confess to you that this is the rock upon which my powers and my mission seem sometimes most likely to split. But I console myself by thinking that all of us, great as well as small, must be on the verge of it sometimes. Let me draw you a parallel. Perhaps you know something of the old alchemists. They had laid hold on the edge of chemistry. But because that truth came confused, because they all had things by the wrong handle, a thousand of them confused truth with error until, in the end, they did not know right from wrong. This force in which you and I are interested is a little like chemistry—it may be called mental and spiritual chemistry. But because it deals with the unseen, not with the seen, it is a thousand times more uncertain and baffling. We have ears, eyes, touch—a great equipment—to perceive gold, silver, stones, trees, water. But we have only this mind, a mystery even to ourselves, to perceive an idea, a concept. I wish that I could express it better"—she broke off suddenly—"and very likely I'm boring you—but when your whole soul is full of a thing it *will* overflow." She smiled upon Norcross, as though for sympathy. If he gave it, his face did not betray him.

"Then you say," returned Norcross with one of his characteristic shifts to childlike abruptness, "that you never faked?"

Mrs. Markham, as though daring him to provoke her by his forthrightness, leaned forward and regarded him with amusement on her lips. "Men are only boys," she said. "My dear sir—I could almost say 'my dear boy'—if I had, would I admit it? You must take me as I am and form your own conclusions. I shall not help you with that, even though I admit to you that I don't care very much what your conclusions are.

"To be serious," she added, "it is not a pleasant suspicion to hear of one's self. Now take yourself—you are a man of large practical affairs—"

Norcross leaned forward a trifle, as though expecting revelation to begin. She caught the motion.

"Don't think I'm telling you *that* from any supernormal source," she said. "That's my own intelligence—my woman's intuition if you like to call it so. Your air, your ineptness to understand philosophy, show that you are not in one of the learned professions, and it is easy to see, if I may make so bold"—here she smiled a trifle—"that you are no ordinary person. You have the air of great things about you. Well, if I should raise suspicion against your business integrity and your methods, it would hurt for a moment, even if there were truth in it. In fairness, that is so, is it not?"

"I have to beg your pardon, of course," said Norcross, grown easier in his manner. "But you must remember that your profession has to prove itself—that they're all accused of fraud."

"Now that you have apologized," said she, "I will prove that I have accepted the apology by answering you direct. I am not a fraud. I have been able to afford not to be. Still, I have a little sympathy with those who are. Did you ever consider," she went on, "that no fraud invents anything; that he is only imitating something genuine? Perhaps it may shake whatever faith you have in me if I tell you whatever these people profess to do has been done genuinely and without possibility of fraud."

"Even bringing spirits from a cabinet?" he asked. Just as he spoke that question, an electric bell rang somewhere to the rear of the drawing-room. Mrs.

Markham sat unmoving for an instant, as though considering either the sound or his question. The bell tinkled no more. After a moment, she smiled again.

"You must know more of all these things before I can answer your question. Haven't we talked enough? Wouldn't it be better, in your present condition of suspicion, if I try to see what we can do without seeming any further to inspect you? For you must know that long preliminary conversation is a stock method with frauds and fakirs."

Norcross's breath came a little faster, and a curious change passed for a second over his face—a falling of all the masses and lines. Mrs. Markham rose, sat by the table, under the reading-lamp, and shaded her eyes with her hand. She spoke now in a different tone, softer and less inflected.

NORCROSS'S BREATH CAME A LITTLE FASTER

"I shall probably not go into trance," she said. "That is rare with me, rare with anyone, though often assumed for effect. Of you, I ask only that you remain quiet and passive. I'd like less light."

Norcross shot a glance of quick suspicion at her as he rose, reached for the old-fashioned gas chandelier, and turned the jets down to tiny points.

"Oh, dear no!" spoke Mrs. Markham, "not so low as that—this is no dark seance. I merely meant that the lights are too strong for a pair of sensitive eyes. I feel everything when I am in this condition. Would you mind sitting a little further away? Thank you. I think that's right. Please do not speak to me until I speak, and do not be disappointed if I tell you nothing."

For five minutes, no sound broke the silence in Mrs. Markham's drawing-room, except the hiss of a light, quick breath and the intake and outgo of a heavier, slower one. And so suddenly, with such smothered intensity, that Norcross started in his seat, Mrs. Markham's voice emitted the first quaver of a musical note. She held it for a moment, before she began to hum over and over three bars of an old tune—"Wild roamed an Indian maid, bright Alfaretta." Thrice she hummed it, still sitting with her hand over her eyes.—"Wild roamed an Indian maid—" Then silence. But now, the breath of Norcross was coming more heavily, and the masses of his face had still further fallen. After an interval, Mrs. Markham spoke, in a low, even tone:

"It is Lallie."

Another period of heavy silence.

"I cannot see her nor hear her speak. Martha, my control, is speaking for her. But Martha shows me the picture of a child—a little girl in an old-fashioned dress. And I think she is saying that name—Lallie."

The silence again, so that when Norcross moistened his dry lips with his tongue the slight smack seemed like the crackle of a fire.

"I see it more clearly now and I understand. The child gave her that name, but someone else used it for a love name. It was just between those two." The rest came in scattered sentences, with long pauses between—"I hear that song again —it was her favorite—I understand now why it comes—she was singing it when —Yes, you are the man—when you told her—She calls you Bobbert—and now I cannot see."

A bead of perspiration had appeared so suddenly on the forehead of Norcross that it had the effect of bursting from a pore. He was on his feet, was pacing the floor in his jerky little walk. When, after one course of the drawing-room, he turned back, Mrs. Markham had taken her hand from her eyes, and was facing him.

"Oh, why did you do that?" she asked. "It has its effect on me—you do not know how much!" Her manner spoke a smothered irritation. "I shall not see Lallie to-night. And she was very near."

As though something had clicked and fallen into place within him, Norcross straightened and stiffened, controlled the relaxed muscles of his face, flashed his eyes on Mrs. Markham.

"Might I ask some questions?" he said.

"You must sit quietly," she answered, "and though I can never see so well after the first contact breaks, Martha may speak for you. Sit as you did, and wait for me." Norcross walked at his nervous, hurried little pace back to his seat on the sofa. His face was quite controlled now, and his sharp eyes held all their native cunning. That grip on himself grew, as he waited for the inert seeress to speak again.

"Martha says, 'I will try,'" she gave out finally. "Quick—with your question—with your lips, not your mind—I am not strong enough now."

"What was Lallie's real name?"

"Helen."

"Her other name?"

A pause, then:

"Martha is silent. You are testing me. Tell something you want to know—even advice."

"Was there ever anyone else?"

A pause again, then:

"Never. She loved you wholly. She was angry over a little thing, just jealousy, during that last quarrel. She had already forgiven. It was only a girl's whim. Do you want advice?"

Norcross thrusted obliquely from the corner of his eye at Mrs. Markham and looked down at the floor.

"Ask her if I shall sell," he said.

The answer came so suddenly that it overlapped the last words of his sentence.

"Martha says that she is going away." No more for two silent minutes; no more until Mrs. Markham dropped her hand from her eyes, turned to Norcross, and said in a normal, sprightly tone:

"It is all over for this evening. I suppose the trouble lay in your last question. I am sorry—if you came here looking for business advice—that you got only the things of the affections. To your old love affairs, I had an unusually quick response to-night." She leaned heavily back in her chair. "Excuse me if I seem tired. There is a kind of inner strain about this which you cannot know—a strain at the core. It does not affect the surface, but it makes you languid." Yet her manner, as she threw herself back, invited him to linger.

"I shall not ask you," she went on, "whether the things I told you to-night are true. We all have our human vanities in our work; we like to hear it praised. That is one reason why I do not ask. Then I know without your confirmation that what I told you was true. When the control comes as clearly and strongly as it did for a few minutes tonight,—before you interrupted by rising—the revelations are always accurate and true. The details I gave you are trivial. That is generally a feature of a first sitting. The scholars have found an explanation of that phenomenon, and I am inclined to agree with them. If I were talking to you over a telephone and you were not sure of my voice, how should I identify myself? By some trivial incident of our common experience. For example, suppose I were to call you up to-morrow. How should I identify myself? Somewhat like this, probably: 'You tried to turn the gas out completely, when I wanted it only lowered in order to save my eyes.' Wouldn't that identify me to you?" she paused as for an answer.

"As nearly as you could over a telephone wire," he answered. "You're a marvelously clever woman, to think of that," he added. Mrs. Markham answered, on the wings of a light laugh:

"If I appear at all clever by contrast with what you expected to find, it is because I have not let my mind dwell in a half-world, as have so many others of my profession. That is the tendency. I have seen no reason why I should not combat it. I believe, too, that I am the stronger for it in my work. What was I saying? Oh, yes—about the first contact. Probably the last thought of the disembodied, upon assuming the trance state—for I believe that the sender of these messages, like the receivers, have to enter an abnormal condition—is to prove their identity. That is only natural, is it not? Would not you do the same? Think. And what do they have to offer? One of those intimate memories of years past which linger so long in the mind. Take me for example. What should I offer to—well, to that one among the disembodied who means most to me? An adventure in stealing cream from a dairy house!" As though she were carried away by this memory, her face grew soft and serious. With an outward sweep of her hands and a quick "but then!" she resumed:

"The best judges of character—and you must be such a one—make their mistakes. Why did you ask that question?"

Norcross, glib and effective as his tongue could be when he directed or traded, found now no better answer than:

"Because I wanted to know, I suppose."

"Were this Helen in the flesh—young and inexperienced as she was—would you expect her to give you advice in any large affair of business—would she be basically interested in it? Interested because it is yours and she loves you, perhaps—but basically? We have no proof that natures change out there. I suppose that isn't all, either. Is she, keeping her soul for you in a life which I hope is better—is she interested in whether or no you make a little more money and position? I can conceive only one condition in which she would mention your business. If you were at a crossroads—if great danger or great deliverance hung on your decision—she might sense that. I think they must get it, by some process to which we are blind, from other disembodied spirits."

"Suppose, then, that—Martha I think you call her—had brought some old business associate. Would he have answered me?"

"Perhaps. But that does not really explain what is in your mind. If this business matter which perplexes you were so vital, don't you suppose that some one of those very associates would have rushed to speak, instead of a dead love? In that way, I think I can construct an answer—provided you ask that question in good faith. It is, probably, not very important whether you sell or no."

Mrs. Markham rose on this. Norcross caught the hint in her manner, and rose with her. A little "oh!" escaped her, and her face lighted.

"I know who you are, now!" she said. "You are Robert H. Norcross of the Norcross lines!"

Norcross started.

"Please do not think I got *that* by any supernormal means!" she added quickly. "I mention it only to be frank with you. From the moment I saw you, I was perplexed by a memory and a resemblance. Then, too, I caught the air of big things about you. That attitude which you have just taken solved it all. It is the counterpart of your photograph in last Sunday's *Times*—the full-page snap shot. I must be frank with you or you will not believe me."

The mustache of Norcross raised just a trifle, and his eyes glittered.

"Passing over what I may think of your revelations," he said, "you're a

remarkable woman."

"If you're coming again," said Mrs. Markham, "perhaps you'd better not delve into my personality. It interferes. Understand, I'm really flattered to have a man like you take notice of this work. That's why I ask that your notice shan't be personal. At least not yet."

"Since this is a—a—professional relation, may I ask how much I owe you?"

"My price is twenty-five dollars a sitting—for those who can afford it."

Norcross drew out his wallet, handed Mrs. Markham three bills. Without looking at them, she dropped them on the table beside her. "You see," she went on as though her mind were still following their discussion, "I don't like to talk much with my—patients. I never can know when I may unconsciously steal from what they tell me."

At the entrance, Norcross hesitated, as though hoping for something more than a good-night. No more than that did she give him, however. He himself was obliged to introduce the subject in his mind. "If I should come again, would Helen tell me more?"

"Perhaps. From the excellent result to-night I should call it likely."

"Then may I come again?" His voice broke once, as with eagerness.

"Certainly. Will you make an appointment?"

"Tuesday night?"

"I had an engagement for Tuesday. Could you come as well on Friday?"

And though it meant postponing a directors' meeting, he answered promptly:

"Very well. Say Friday at eight."

And now he was in his automobile. He settled himself against the cushions and held the attitude, without motion. For five minutes he sat so, until the chauffeur, who had been throwing nervous backward glances through the limousine windows, asked:

"I beg your pardon, sir, did you say 'home'?"

"Yes, home," responded Norcross. And even on those words, his voice broke again.

Mrs. Markham stood beside the table, hardly moving, until she knew by whir and horn that the Norcross automobile was gone. Then she sent Ellen to bed, and herself moved quickly to a secretary in the little alcove library back of the drawing-room. Taking a key from her bosom, she unlocked a drawer and took out a packet of yellow legal cap paper. Holding this document concealed in a fold of her waist, she passed rapidly to an apartment upstairs. She opened the door softly, and listened. Nothing sounded within but the light, even breathing of a sleeper. After a moment, she crossed the room, finding her way expertly in the darkness. Well within, she knelt and began some operation on the floor.

And her hand made a slip. A crash echoed through the house. Following the startled, half-articulate cry of a sudden awakening, Mrs. Markham, still finding her way with marvelous precision in the darkness, passed through a set of portières and crossed to the bed.

"Hush, dear," she said, "I only came upstairs to borrow a handkerchief. Go to sleep. I'm sure it won't bother your rest. Don't think of it again."

IX

ROSALIE'S SECOND REPORT

As though to prove her maxim, "Nothing turns out the way you expect it," Rosalie, on her second Tuesday off, failed to meet her anxious young employer in the ladies' parlor of the Hotel Greenwich. Instead came a page, calling "Dr. Blake!" It was a note—"Stuyvesant Fish Park as soon as you get this. R. Le G.," it read. Dr. Blake leaped into a taxicab and hurried to the rendezvous. He spied her on a park bench, watching with interest the maneuvers of the little Russian girls, as they swarmed over the rocker swings. Even before he came within speaking distance of her, he perceived that something must have happened—read it in her attitude, her manner of one who lulls a suppressed excitement. When she turned to answer his quick "Mme. Le Grange!" her cheeks carried a

faint color, and her gray eyes were shining. But her face was serious, too; her dimples, barometer of her gayer emotions, never once rippled. Before he was fairly seated, she tumbled out the news in a rush:

"Well! I never was more fooled in my life!"

"She's a fraud!" He jumped joyously to conclusions. "You can prove it!"

Rosalie put a slender finger to her lips.

"Not so loud. Yids have ears. I ain't dead sure of anything now. I ain't even sure she don't have me followed when I leave the house. That's why I sent for you to change meeting places. There's nothing as safe as outdoors, because you can watch the approaches."

"But is she a fake? Can you prove it?" persisted Dr. Blake.

"I'm a woman," responded Rosalie Le Grange, "not a newspaper reporter. I can't tell my story in a headline before I git to it. I've got to go my own gait or I can't go at all. Now you listen and don't interrupt, or I'll explode. It goes back, anyhow, into our last talk.

"I was comin' downstairs in the afternoon a week ago Thursday, and I saw Ellen let in a man. Good-looking man. Good dresser. Seemed about thirty-five till you looked over his hands and the creases around his eyes, when you saw he was risin' forty-five if a day. Stranger, I guess, for Ellen kept him waiting in the hall. He read the papers while he waited, and he didn't look at nothing but the financial columns. I took it from that, he was in Wall Street, though you can't never tell in New York, where they all play the market or the ponies. I didn't wait to size him up real careful; that wouldn't do. I just passed on down to the pantry and then passed back again. He was still there. This time he had put up his newspapers, and he was looking over some pencil notes on that yellow legal cap paper. He didn't hear me until I was close on him, the rugs in the hall are that big and soft. But when I did get close, he jumped like I had caught him in something crooked and made like he was goin' to hide the sheets. Of course, I didn't look at him, but just kept right on upstairs. When I turned into the second floor, I heard Ellen say, 'Mrs. Markham will receive you.' I didn't pay no attention to that at the time. It was only one of twenty little things I remembered. Stayed in the back of my head, waitin' to tie up with something else.

"Come Tuesday—week ago to-day and my afternoon off. I was comin' home early, about nine o'clock. I've got front door privileges, but I generally use the servants' entrance just the same. Right ahead of me, a green automobile with one of those limousine bodies drove up to the front door. It's dark down in the area by the servants' entrance. I stopped like I was huntin' through my skirt for my key, and looked. Out of the automobile come a man. He turned around to speak to the chauffeur and I got the light on his face. *Who* do you suppose it was? Robert H. Norcross!"

"The railroad king?"

Rosalie pursed her lips and nodded wisely.

"How did you know? You've never seen him before."

"Ain't it my business to know the faces of everybody? What do I read the personals in the magazines for? You'd know Theodore Roosevelt if you saw him first time, wouldn't you? But I made surer than that. Next day I matched the number of his automobile with the automobile register. That number belongs to Robert H. Norcross."

Dr. Blake whistled.

"Playing for big game!" he said.

"That was what struck me," said Rosalie, "and while it wasn't impossible that this Mr. Norcross might have a straight interest in the spirit world—well, when you see big medium and big money together, it looks like big *fake*. And there was the man with the notes who read the financial pages—he jumped back into my mind.

"The servants' entrance comes out through the kitchen onto the second floor. When I come into the hall, Ellen was waiting for me. She was tiptoeing and whispering.

"'Mrs. Markham,' she says, 'wanted that I should tell you she has sitters unexpected. There's some of her devil doin's going on downstairs to-night. She wanted me to catch you when you came in and ask you to go very quiet to your room.'

"While I went upstairs, I listened hard. Just before I came out on the landing of the servants' hall, I heard a bell ring, away down below. Just a little ring—b-r-r. Now, you know if there's one thing more 'n another that I've got, it's ears—and ears that remember, too. I hadn't been a day in that house when I knew every bell in it and who was ringin' besides. This wasn't any of 'em. But that wasn't the funny thing. *It lasted just about as long as my foot rested on a step of the stairs*. I didn't make the break of going back and ringin' again; but I remembered that step—third from the top.

"'T ain't easy to admit you've been fooled, and 't ain't easy to give up somebody you've believed in. I couldn't have slept that night even if I'd wanted. I opened the registers in my room, because open registers help you to hear things, and sat in the darkness. I could catch that the sitting was over, because the front door slammed. Then Ellen came upstairs, and the bell rang b-r-r again. I could hear someone come upstairs to the second floor, where Mrs. Markham and the girl have their rooms. I listened for that bell when she struck the stairs. I couldn't hear nothing. The current has been switched off, thinks I. Maybe it was ten minutes later when I got a faint kind of thud, like somebody had let down a folding bed, though there ain't a one of those man-killers in our house. Sort of stirred up a recollection, that sound. I lay puzzling, and the answer came like a flash. Worst fake outfit I ever had anything to do with was Vango's Spirit Thought Institute in St. Paul. I've told you before how ashamed I am of that. I left because there's some kinds of work I won't stand for. Well, he used a ceiling trap for his materializin'; though the wainscot is a sight better and more up-to-date in my experience. When he let it drop careless, in practicing before the seance, it used to make a noise like that. I fell asleep by-and-bye; and out of my dreams, which was troubled and didn't bring nothing definite, I got the general impression that Mrs. Markham wasn't all right and that I'd been fooled.

"Mrs. Markham and the little girl went to the matinee next afternoon. Now I'm comin' to her. You let me tell this story *my* way. The cook was bakin' in the kitchen, Ellen the parlor maid, who had to stay home to answer bells, was gossipin' with her. Martin was cleanin' out the furnace. I had the run of the house. First thing I looked at was the third step from the top of the stairs. I worked out two tacks in the carpet—wasn't much trouble; they come out like they was used to it. I pulled the carpet sideways. Sure enough, there was a wide crack just below the step, and when I peeked in, I could see the electric connections. Question was, where was the bell? But I had something to think of first. Where would Mrs. Markham have a cabinet if she ever done materializin'?

I had thought that all out—a little alcove library in the rear of the back parlor. Give you plenty of room, when the folding doors were open, for lights and effects. If there *was* a ceiling trap, it must be in the rooms above. I went into—into the rooms"—here Rosalie paused an infinitesimal second as though making a mental shift—"into the room above. Just over the alcove library is a small sittin'-room. The—a bedroom opens off it—but has nothing to do with the case. It's one of those new-fangled bare floor rooms. Right over the cabinet space was a big rug. I pulled it aside and pried around with a hair pin until I found a loose nail."

"I WAS LOOKING STRAIGHT DOWN ON THE BACK PARLORS"

Rosalie paused for breath before she resumed:

"I went over the house again to be sure I was alone, before I pulled out the nail. Well, sir, what happened like to knocked me over. The minute that nail come out, a trap rose right up—on springs. I just caught it in time to stop it from making a racket. I was looking straight down on the back parlors. It's one of those flossy, ornamented ceilings down there, and a panel of those ceiling ornaments came up with the bottom of the trap. But that wasn't the funny thing about that trap, nice piece of work as it was. It's a regular cupboard. Double, you understand. Space in between—and all the fixings for a materializin' seance, the straight fixings that the dope sees and the crooked ones that only the medium and the spook sees, tucked inside. A shutter lamp, blue glass—a set of gauze robes, phosphorescent stars and crescents, a little rope ladder all curled up—and whole books of notes. Right on top was"—she paused impressively to get suspense for her climax—"was them notes on yellow foolscap that I seen in the hands of the visitor last week. And"—another impressive pause—"they're the dope for Robert H. Norcross!"

"The what?"

"The full information on him—dead sweetheart, passed out thirty years ago up-state. Fine job with good little details—whoever got 'em must 'a' talked with somebody that was right close to her—an old aunt, I'm thinking. But no medium made them notes. Looks like a private detective's work. Not a bit of professional talk. The notes on Robert H. Norcross. See!"

Dr. Blake, whose face had lightened more and more as he listened, jumped up

and grasped Rosalie's hand.

"Didn't I tell you!" he cried. "Didn't I tell you!"

But she failed to respond to his enthusiasm. She turned on him a grave face; and her eyes shone.

"What I'm wondering," she said, "is who plays her spook? 'Cause if she has a trap, she uses confederates, and it can't be none of the servants, unless I'm worse fooled on that little Ellen than ever I was on Mrs. Markham. That's the next thing to consider."

"Does look curious," replied Dr. Blake, "but of course you can be trusted to discover that! But about Annette?"

"Something's a little wrong there," responded Rosalie. "Quiet, and dopey, and strange. That,"—her voice fell to soft contemplation,—"is another thing to find out."

"We must get her out of there!" he exploded; "away from that vampire!"

"Well, that's what I'm takin' your money for, ain't it?" responded Rosalie.

After they parted Rosalie Le Grange stood on a corner, among the push-cart peddlers and the bargaining wives, and watched Dr. Blake's taxicab disappear down Stanton Street.

"Ain't it funny?" she said half aloud, "that a smart young man like him never thought to ask whose room it was I found the trap in?"

X

THE STREAMS CONVERGE

Bulger, trailing whiffs of out-door air, had dropped into the Norcross offices to join the late afternoon drink. He sat now sipping his highball, tilted back with an affectation of ease. Norcross, in his regular place at the glass-covered desk, laid his glass down; and his gaze wandered again to the spire of Old Trinity and then,

following down, to the churchyard at its foot. Had he faced about suddenly at that moment, he would have surprised Bulger in a strained attitude of attention. But he did not turn; he spoke with averted glance.

"You never asked me, Bulger, how I was making it with that medium woman."

Bulger took a deep swallow of whiskey and water that he might control his voice. When, finally, he spoke, he showed a fine assumption of indifference.

"Well, no. Can't say I'm heavily interested. When I found for you the best medium that money could buy, I decided that my job was done. Of course," he added, "I was complimented to have you tell me—what I've forgotten. If you want to consult a medium, it's really none of my business. How the Lusitania does loom up at her dock out there!"

Norcross let his eyes wander in search of the Lusitania, but his mind refused to stray from the vital subject.

"You've no business to be indifferent, Bulger. When you come to my age, you won't be. Martha says it's the most important thing. And she's right—she's right. What's the ten or twenty years I've got to live in this world, compared with all that's waiting us out there? Of course," he added, "I don't know much about your private life; I don't know if you have another part of you waiting."

"Who's Martha?" enquired Bulger.

"No one in *this* world," responded Norcross. "She's a control now—Mrs. Markham's best control." Norcross jumped up, and began to pace the floor in his hurried little walk. Bulger did not fail to notice that, within a minute or two, a heavy, beady perspiration came out on his face and forehead. The room was cool; the railroad king was old and spare. Nothing save some struggle of the inner consciousness could produce that effect of mighty labor.

"Bulger," said Norcross, speaking in quick, staccato jerks, "if I told you what I'd seen and heard in the last fortnight, I couldn't make you believe it. Proofs! Proofs! I've wasted thirty years. I might have had her—the best part of her—all this time. You think I'm crazy—" he stopped and peered into Bulger's face. "If anyone had talked this way to me six months ago, I'd have thought so myself. Do you or don't you?" he exploded.

"About as crazy as you ever were," responded Bulger. "Not to sugar coat the pill, people have always said you were crazy—just before you let off your fireworks. You've got there because you dared do things that only a candidate for Bloomingdale would attempt. But you always landed, and we've another name for it now."

"That's it!" exclaimed Norcross. "That's exactly it. I dare to say now that the dead do return! People have believed in ghosts as long as they've believed in a Divine Providence—just as many centuries and ages—every race, every nation. We hear in this generation that certain people have proved it—found! the way—set up the wires—and we laugh, and call it all fraud. I don't laugh! Why, we're on the verge of things which make the railroad and the steamboat and the telegraph seem like toys—if we only dared. I dare—I dare!" He went on pacing the floor; and now the beads had assembled into rivers, so that a tiny stream trickled down and fogged his reading-glasses. He jerked them off, wiped them, wiped his face and forehead. The action calmed him, brought him back to his reasonable grip on himself. At the end of his route across the room, he sat down abruptly.

Bulger did not miss this shift of the new Norcross back toward the old, iron, inscrutable Norcross whom the world knew. The next remark he directed against that aspect of his man.

"It's all right," said Bulger, "if you want to follow that line." During the short pause which ensued, he thought and felt intensely. Working under the direction of a mind infinitely his superior for intrigue and subtlety, he had instruction to play gently upon the Norcross contrariety, the Norcross habit of rejecting advice. This, if ever, seemed the time. With a bold hand, he laid his counter upon the board. "Just one thing to be careful about—of course, it's a mouse trying to steer a lion for me to advise you—but watch those people, when they get on the subject of business. Sometimes they work people, you know."

Norcross's face, fixed on the third monument from the south door of Old Trinity, permitted itself the luxury of a slight smile.

"I'm safe there," he responded. "Don't think I haven't tried her out—put tests of my own. I know what you're thinking about—Marsh and Diss Debar. I tried at my very first seance to make her talk business and I've tried it twice since. I couldn't get a single rise out of *that*. This medium receives from me her regular rate, and no more. I established that in the beginning. Though I suppose the

guides could advise on business as well as on anything else. But they think about other things on the other side than this"—his hand swept over Lower Manhattan —"this money grubbing."

Bulger leaned his elbows on his knees.

"It sounds wonderful," he said.

"Not more wonderful than wireless telegraphy," answered Norcross. "And the ancients, she says, dreamed of talking with spirits long before they dreamed of talking to each other across an ocean. We only need an exceptional force to do it. And Mrs. Markham is that force. You know the locket I showed you?"

"I promised to forget it."

"Well, remember for a minute. I"—his voice exploded—"I may see her, Bulger—before the month is over, I may see her!"

Bulger threw himself back in his chair.

"What!" he exclaimed, jumping with an affectation of surprise.

It was as though the sudden motion, the exclamation had touched a spring in the mind of Norcross, had projected his spirit from that disintegrating, anaemic cell in his brain to the sound, full-blooded cells by which he did his daily business. His form, which had seemed relaxed and old, stiffened visibly. He turned his eyes on Bulger.

"Forget that, too," he said. "Some day, when I'm strong enough, you'll go with me and you'll believe too." And now the secretary had signalled the chauffeur, and Norcross had risen to go.

The streams of destiny were converging that afternoon; the lines were drawing close together. Among the towers of Lower Manhattan, Norcross sat baring his soul; on a bench in Stuyvesant Square, Rosalie Le Grange had reported the consummation of her investigations to Dr. Walter Huntington Blake; in a back parlor of the Upper West Side, Paula Markham, with many a sidelong glance at the approaches, sat memorizing the last syllable of a set of notes on yellow legal

cap paper. But the master current was flowing elsewhere. In the offices of the *Evening Sun*, the stereotypers had just shot the front page of the Wall Street edition down to the clanking basement. It carried a "beat"; and that item of news had as much to do with this story as with the ultimate destinies of the L.D. and M. railroad. On October 19, two weeks hence, the directors of the road were to meet and decide whether to pay or pass the dividend. "The directors"—that, as the *Sun* insinuated, meant none other than Norcross. Holding a majority of the L.D. and M. stock, holding the will of those directors, his creatures, he alone would decide whether to declare the dividend or to pass it. The stock wavered at about fifty, waiting the decision. If Norcross put it on a dividend-paying basis, it was good for eighty. To know which way he would decide, to extract any information from that inscrutable mind—that were to open a steel vault with a pen-knife. "All trading," the *Sun* assured its readers, "will be speculative; it is considered a pure gamble."

As Bulger parted with Norcross on the street and turned south, a newsboy thrust the Wall Street *Sun* into his face. The announcement of the L.D. and M. situation jumped out at him from a headline. The inside information, held for two weeks by the group of speculators in which Bulger moved, was out; the public was admitted to the transaction; now was the time, if ever, to strike. He found a sound-proof telephone, and did a few minutes of rapid talking. Then he proceeded to his office.

The force was gone. Alone at his desk, he went over the papers in a complicated calculation which he had made twenty times before. By all devices, Watson could hold back the collapse of the Mongolia Mine until after October 19. By straining his credit to the utmost—liquidating everything—he himself could raise a trifle more than seventy thousand dollars. He hesitated no longer. Methodically, he apportioned out the seventy thousand dollars among a dozen brokers, who to-morrow should buy for him, on a ten point margin, L.D. and M. stock at fifty to fifty-three.

This done, Bulger locked up the papers again, telephoned for a cab, and proceeded to his club, where he dined with his customary hilarity and good humor.

XI

THROUGH THE WALL-PAPER

"You've got to do it!" said Rosalie Le Grange; "no half-way business. I could show better reasons than I'm tellin'."

Blake paused in his slow walk beside her.

"What reasons?" he asked.

"Now listen to the man!" exclaimed Rosalie. "And ain't it man for you! Right off, first meeting, I told you enough to put me in jail and now you won't trust me!"

Blake seemed to see the logic of what she said.

"I have cause to trust you," he said, "and I hope you don't think that I am afraid of the personal danger. It's just that you're asking me to do something which—will, which people like me don't do."

"So anxious to be a gentleman that you forgit to be a man!" remarked Rosalie with asperity. "Now you listen to me. I've told you that she's held two materializing seances for Robert H. Norcross, haven't I? I've told you it is crooked materialization—even if there was such a thing as real cabinet spooks, which there ain't—because I found the ceiling trap an' the apparatus long ago. And if Mrs. Markham is playin' fake materializing with old Norcross as a dope, what does it come to? Obtainin' money, an' big money, under false pretenses! That's enough to put her behind the bars. So what risk do you take even if you *are* caught? She'll be more anxious than you to keep it away from the papers and the police. And Norcross! He'll break his collar-bone to shut it up!"

Half persuaded, he clutched at his sense of honor.

"But it's a sneaking trick—Annette would call it that."

"Yes, an' ain't it a sneakin' trick to hire a housekeeper to be a spy?" Rosalie hurled back. "Seems to me you draw a fine line between doin' your own dirty work an' havin' it done!"

At this plain statement of the case, Blake smiled for the first time that morning.

"I suppose you're right," he said. "A good officer never sends a man where he wouldn't go himself. I'm rather sorry I started now."

The dominant thought in all the complex machinery of Rosalie's mind was: "And you'll be sorrier before this night's over, boy." But her voice said:

"I knew you'd see it that way. Now listen and git this carefully: You're to wear a big ulster and old hat and soft-soled shoes—don't forget that. You're to come to the back door at a quarter to nine—exactly. Us servants receive our callers at the back door. Norcross will be in the parlor at half past, Annette will be in her room, the other help will be out, Ellen and all. Mrs. Markham takes no chances—not even with that fool girl—when she's got Norcross. She's given Ellen theater tickets. That's how careful she is about little things. You can see how clear the coast will be. I'm goin' to bring you straight to my room like a visitor. You walk soft!"

"But how about that electric bell?" he asked.

"I disconnected it this morning at the trap with my manicure scissors an' a hairpin," replied Rosalie, triumphantly.

So, at sixteen minutes to nine, Dr. Blake, feeling a cross between a detective and a burglar, stole through the alley which backed the Markham residence, crossed the area, knocked softly at the kitchen door. It opened cautiously and then suddenly to show the kitchen, lighted with one dim lamp, and the ample form of Rosalie. With a finger on her lips, she closed the door behind him. His heart beat fast, less with a sense of impending adventure than with the thought, which struck him as he mounted the servants' staircase, that he was divided but by thin walls from the object of all these strivings and diplomacies—that for the second time in his life he was under her home roof with Annette. It was a firm, old house. Their footsteps made not the slightest creak on the thick-carpeted stairs. At the door of her room, Rosalie stopped and put her mouth to his ear.

"Step careful inside," she said, "my floor is bare." He stood now in the neat, low-ceiled housekeeper's parlor. Rosalie turned up the gas, and indicated by a gesture that he was to stand still. Elaborately, she closed the registers, plugged the keyhole with her key, and set two chairs beside him.

"Now sit down," she whispered. "They can't hear us talkin', though we'd better whisper for safety, but two sets of footsteps might sound suspicious. The halls

are carpeted like a padded cell, which ought to have put me wise in the beginning."

"Are you sure Annette's abed?" he asked anxiously.

Rosalie threw him a swift glance, as of suspicion.

"Sure," she said—"saw her go. Now before I let you out, I want to git one promise from you. Whatever happens, you leave this house quiet,—as quiet as you can. You've got *me* to guard in this as well as yourself—you can't leave me alone with trouble."

"I'll promise that," he said. "Won't you tell me what I'm going to see?"

Rosalie, under pretense of consulting her watch, looked away.

"You'll know in ten minutes," she said. "Now don't bother me with any questions. I've got directions for you. You're coming with me to the floor below. I'll let you into a hall closet. It was built into a—into a room, and the back of it is only wood. There's an old gas connection, which they papered over, through that wood. Yesterday I punched through the paper and hung a picture over the hole. This afternoon, I took that picture down. To-morrow morning, the picture goes back. But now, there's a peephole into the room."

Dr. Blake bristled.

"Peep through a hole!" he said.

"Now ain't that just like a fashionable bringin-up," said Rosalie, almost raising her voice. "Things a gentleman can do an' things he can't do! You're tryin' to bust a crook, an' you remember what your French nurse told you about the etiquette of keyholes!"

"You're my master at argument, Mme. Le Grange," responded Blake. "Go ahead."

"And you promise to leave quiet?"

"I promise."

"There's one place I can trust your bringin'-up, I guess. When you're inside, feel about till you find a hassock. Stand on it; 't will bring your eyes up to the hole. Stay there until I knock for you to come out—let's be goin'."

"But what am I to do—why am I here if I am to do nothing?"

"You're to look an' see an' remember what you see—that's all for to-night."

At the door, she looked him full in the eyes again:

"Remember, you've promised."

"I remember."

The dim light of a low gas jet illuminated the upper hall. From below came the faintest murmur of voices. Rosalie led to the hall of the second floor, turned toward the back of the house, opened a door and motioned. He stepped inside; the door closed without noise. He was in black darkness.

His foot found the hassock; he mounted it and adjusted his eye. He was looking into some kind of a living-room or boudoir. On the extreme left of his range of vision he could see a set of dark portières; directly before him was a foolish little white desk, over which burned a gas jet, turned low. That, apparently, was the only illumination in the room. For the rest, he could only see a wall decorated with the tiny frivolities of a boudoir, two chairs, a sewing table. He watched until—his eyes, grown accustomed to the dim light—he discerned every detail. From far below, he heard the subdued hum of a conversation, and made out at length, in the rise and fall of voices, that a man and a woman were speaking. Then even that sound ceased; over the house lay a stillness so heavy that he feared his own breathing.

Gradually, he was aware that someone was playing a piano. It began so gently that he doubted, at first, whether it was not a far echo from one of the houses to right or left. But it increased in volume until he located it definitely in the rooms below. The air, unrecognized at first, called up a memory of old-fashioned parlors and of his grandmother. He found himself struggling for words to fit the tune; and suddenly they sprang into his mind—"Wild roamed an Indian maid, bright Alfaretta." Thrice over the unseen musician played the air, and let it die with a last, lingering chord.

Suddenly his heart gave a great leap. For the first time, something was happening in the room before him. It came first as a slight, padded thump, like bare feet striking the floor. He saw that the portières to left of his range of vision were undulating. They parted—and a pillar of white stood for a moment before them. The thing resolved itself into a human figure, swathed, draped in white, the face concealed by a white veil which fell straight from the head. Now the white figure, with a noiseless, gliding motion, was crossing the room toward the white desk. It stopped, lifted a hand which crept toward the gaslight. With this motion, the veil fell away from the face. The gaslight shone upon it; he could see it in full profile.

It was Annette.

In the space of his long gasp, her hand touched the gas jet. It went out; the room faded into absolute darkness.

And the vision which stood out from the black background made him sway and clutch at the garments in the closet. For her robes radiated dull light, like a coal seen behind ashes. It was as though she were about to burst into flame. On her head gleamed a dull star; from it, the radiance of her robe fell away toward her feet in lesser light, like the tail-streamer of a comet. All emotion of despair, disillusion, rage, were expressed for a moment within him by an emotion of supernatural awe which sent the tremors running from his face to his spine, and his spine to his feet. She stood a perfect phantom of the night, like Annette called back from the dead.

The pillar of dull light was moving now. She had stooped; he heard a faint creak, he imagined that he felt new air. Suddenly, too, a voice which had been droning far away became audible. And now the pillar of light was sinking, sinking through the floor. The feet were gone, the torso; the star of light was level with the floor, was gone. He was looking into darkness.

Mrs. Markham's controlled, vibrant voice rose clearly from below—he caught every word:

"Come, Helen; be strong. He loves you. His love calls you!"

Silence for a quarter of a minute; then a swish as of garments agitated by some swift motion; then Annette's well-remembered contralto voice of a boy—Annette's voice, which had spoken such things to him—

"*Robert, dearest, I have come again. Robert, I keep for you out here the little ring. Robert, we will be happy!*"

And the voice of a man, sobbing and breaking between the exclamatives:

"*My little Lallie—Dear Helen—how long I've waited—sweetheart—how many years!*"

And the voice of Annette.

"*Only a few more years to wait, dearest—and now that you have faith, I can come to you sometimes—but, oh, dearest, I foresee a danger—a great danger!*"

Ten minutes later, Rosalie tiptoed from the library from which she had observed the seance to the last detail of method, and made her way to the closet wherein she had shut Dr. Blake. She opened the door with all precaution, fumbled, found nothing, whispered. No one answered. At last she stepped within, plugged the keyhole with her key, and lit a match.

The closet was empty.

Rosalie crept upstairs to her own room. When she lit the gas, she was crying softly and—as of old habit under emotional stress—talking to herself under her breath.

"I had to do it," she whispered. "He'd believe nothin' but his eyes!"

She sat down then, and surveyed her belongings. "The job's over. What whelps it makes people—just to touch this business!"

XII

ANNETTE LIES

Blake rose from a night of protracted, dull suffering; of quick rages; of hideous, unrelieved despairs. When the day came and the city roared about him again, the habits of life reasserted themselves. He rose, dressed, sent for coffee, gained the pathetic victory of swallowing it. His face, seared by all the inner

fires of that night, settled now to a look of steel resolution. He rose from his coffee, opened his desk and wrote this note:

> MY DEAR MME. LE GRANGE:
>
> I understand perfectly your motive in asking me to invade a private house and peep through a keyhole. It was the only thing which would have disillusioned me. Had you told me this, I would not have believed you. Though it was harsh treatment, I thank you. I enclose a check for a hundred dollars, payment two weeks in advance for your services, which I shall need no longer. You did your job well. You will understand, I think, that I do not reflect on you when I ask you never to see me again. You would recall something which I shall try for the rest of my life to forget.
>
> WALTER H. BLAKE.
>
> P.S. Do as you please about this—but I should prefer you to give Mrs. Markham the customary notice.

As he sealed the letter and put on his hat that he might go to post it with his own hands, he had the look of a man who has settled everything and for life. But the clanging lid of the letter box had no sooner closed than the look of resolution began to leave his face. For two hours, he paced the streets of Manhattan. He found himself at length apostrophizing a brick wall, "Who could believe it?" And again, to a lamp-post, "I can't believe it!" And again, "She made her!" He wheeled on this, turned into a drug store, shut himself into the telephone booth, and called up the Markham house.

After an eternal minute, he was answered in Annette's own deep, thrilling contralto:

"Hello!"

He paused, controlled his voice, and plunged in:

"Miss Markham, this is Dr. Blake. Please don't go away from the telephone. You owe it to me to listen—"

"I shall listen—"

"Very well. You will remember that I have respected your wishes about keeping away from you. I do not want to make you any trouble. But something has happened in which you are concerned, and which makes it imperative that I should speak to you face to face for five minutes—"

"Something important?" he heard her voice tremble. He remembered then that cheated and humiliated lovers had been known to shoot women; he had raised his voice; perhaps, what with her bad conscience, she was thinking of that.

"Understand me," he added, speaking lower. "I shall be kind. I shall do nothing violent nor disagreeable. I want five minutes, at your house, in the Park —anywhere. Though I would prefer to see you alone, I would consent to the presence of your aunt. But you must see me!"

"I must see you," she repeated—musingly he thought—"Aunt Paula is away."

"Could you come at once to that Eighty-sixth Street entrance of the Park?"

A pause, and—

"I will come," she said.

"Good-by—at once," he answered, and hung up the receiver, without further word. Outside, he hurled himself into a taxicab. Spurred on by an offer of an extra dollar for speed, the chauffeur raced north.

Annette was sitting on a bench by the Park gate. Not until he had paid and dismissed the chauffeur did she look up. She wore a smile, which faded as she caught his expression. With its fading came the old, worn look; he had never, even at that first meeting on the train, seen it more pronounced. A flood of perverse tenderness came over him; he found himself obliged to steel his heart. And so, it was Annette who spoke first:

"What is the matter—oh, what has happened?"

He stood towering over her.

"Miss Markham, I came to ask a simple question. Do not be afraid to tell me the truth. What did you do last night?"

"What did I do last night?" she repeated. "Why do you ask?"

"Answer, please. Where were you last night—what did you do?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"It will be better, I assure you," he replied, "if you do not act with me."

"You have never seemed harsh before—"

"Will you answer me?"

A blush ran over her exquisite whiteness.

"I have to remember," she said, "that perhaps I once gave you the right to ask such things of me. Last night I went to bed just after dinner."

"Exactly when?"

"A little after eight. I have been tired lately. Aunt Paula saw that I went to sleep."

"Is that all?" sharply.

"Why, yes. I slept heavily. The old sleep. The one which leaves me tired."

"You did not get up?"

"I am beginning to question your right to—"

"But answer me—*Did you wake?*"

"No. I slept until seven this morning. Walter, Walter—" she had never used his Christian name before, and at the moment it struck him only as one of her Circe arts—"you are cruel! What do you mean by this? Why do you trouble me so?"

Now that she had lied in his face, he felt the blood surging scarlet behind his eyes. It came to him that, if he remained a moment longer, he should lose all control. Without another word, without a backward look, he turned and walked away.

"Walter!" she called after him, and again, "Walter! Don't go!"

But he was running top speed down the footpath.

When he stopped, from growing weariness of soul as much as from physical exhaustion, he was on a cross street leading into Sixth Avenue. The tinsel front of a saloon rose before him. He tore through the swinging doors, ordered a drink of whiskey and then another. It might have been so much water, for all it either fed or quenched the fire within him. With some instinct to go back to his own private hole of misery, he took a street car. But he found it impossible to sit still. He got down after three blocks, found another saloon, took another drink. This, too, evaporated in the feverish heat engendered by his sleepless night. But it did afford an idea, a plan. He would get drunk—for the first time in his life, get blind, staggering drunk. When he recovered from that, time would have dimmed the misery a little; he would be able to endure. Just now, he must get drunk or die.

Alone and in broad daylight, he tried it. From, the corner saloons of the Upper West Side to the dives of the Bowery, he poured in whiskey and yet more whiskey. Nothing happened; positively nothing. The fire within burned as fiercely as ever, the misery beat as keenly against his temples. He tried his voice; he was speaking clearly. Once he ran down the open asphalt of a water-front street; all his muscular control remained. The most that liquor did was to spread a slight fog over his senses, so that he seemed to be seeing through a veil, hearing through a partition.

On the approach of night, the effect struck him all at once. It came in a wave of drowsiness, a delicious sense that his trouble, still there, weighed lightly upon him—did not matter. He was sitting in Madison Square when he realized this effect. He could sleep now. Thank God for that! He turned toward the club, walking on the rosy airs of reaction.

As he approached the club door, he was aware that a woman had disengaged herself from the crowd across the street, was hurrying toward him. At that moment, a hall-boy dived from the entrance, and grabbed his arm urgently but respectfully.

"That woman's been asking for you since four—when we chased her away she laid for you—if you want to get inside—"

"Young man," said the voice of Rosalie Le Grange across his shoulder, "young man, Dr. Blake wants to see me as much as I want to see him an' more. Now you jest leave go of him, and you Dr. Blake, come right along with me, or I'll make a scene and scandal right here in front of the club."

The hall-boy, with the exaggerated desire to avoid scandal which marks the perfect club servant, fell away. As for Dr. Blake, this seemed the line of least resistance. Life and death, misery and happiness—all looked equally dim and rosy.

Mme. Le Grange said nothing until they were three doors away. Under the marquee of a restaurant, she stopped, whirled Blake, whom she still held by an arm, within the entrance.

"You've been drinkin'," she said. "Now don't talk back. The question in my mind is whether you're clear enough in your head to understand what I've got to say, because it's something you want to hear straight and quick. See that table over in the corner? Let's see you walk to it and take off your hat and pull out a chair for me an' tell the waiter we won't eat till the rest of our party comes. If you can do that, you can listen to me."

Blake, feeling that someone else was going through these motions, obeyed.

"Legs are straight," commented Rosalie Le Grange as she settled herself and picked at her glove buttons. "How's your head? Are you takin' in what I tell you?"

"Yes. I hear you. Why won't you leave me alone?"

"Tongue's pretty straight, too. Can't have much in you, though you do look like the last whisper of a misspent life. Well, men can't cry just when they want to, though a woman knows they cry oftener than any *man* ever sees. You have to take it out in booze."

Blake heard his own voice, far away, saying:

"What did you come for?"

"You'll know soon enough. If I didn't have the patience of an angel I'd never have waited. Gee, those gentlemen's clubs is exclusive! Now I want you to

remember you're drunk and keep quiet and not hurry me. I've got things to tell you. Miss Markham came in from a walk this morning—"

Dr. Blake saw his own hand lift in a gesture of repulsion, heard his own voice say:

"I don't want to hear about her."

"Will you kindly remember," said Rosalie Le Grange, "that you're supposed to be drunk? She came in from a walk this morning about half past ten, in a worse state than I ever saw her. I didn't much care, way I felt about her then—you know—now let me go my own way. Mrs. Markham was shut in her room all the morning. I was busy packing—I was getting ready to send in my notice but didn't, thank our stars—an' I didn't run onto her but once or twice. She was movin' about the house, and her face was like death.

"Just before lunch, I came down to the library, lookin' for a sewin' basket. Mrs. Markham was at the table, writin' a note. In meanders Annette Markham an' begins to pull out the books in the library, listless. She'd open one, flip the pages, put it back and open another. She kept that up quite some time. I wasn't noticing special until she took out three or four together, reached into the space they left and pulled out a sizable gray book that had fallen down behind the stock—or been put there!

"Mrs. Markham had just looked up, and I saw her git stiff. She spoke quick —'Annette!'—jest like that—sharp, you know. Annette looked at her. Mrs. Markham reached over and took the book away. The girl, never looked down at it again, I can swear to that—she was starin' straight at her aunt. Mrs. Markham dropped the book on the table, but she put her elbows on it, and said: 'I'd been hunting everywhere for that—I'm glad you found it.' Annette never said a word, never tried to get the book back; she jest went on rummaging.

"Well, one thing was clear. Mrs. Markham didn't want her to git as much as a sight of that book. Why? It was about the funniest little thing I'd seen in that house. Better believe I found business in the front parlor where I could keep my eyes on 'em. After a minute or two, Annette walked out, listless as ever. Soon as her back was turned, Mrs. Markham went to the desk an' locked the book in the top drawer.

"It was an hour before the coast was clear for me to git into the parlor and

open that lock with a skeleton key an' a hairpin. An' when I seen the title of that book—well it got as clear—"

Blake saw, through the veil above his sight, that Rosalie's face had broken out dimples and sparkles as a yacht breaks out flags. It irritated him remotely.

"What has that to do with the case?" he asked; and then, weakly, "I don't want to hear about it."

"If I was to tell you," persisted Rosalie rolling the sweets of revelation under her tongue, "that jest the name of the book in the secretary showed your girl was all right and you and I was fools, what would you say?"

The veil lifted from Blake. It was he himself who had risen from his chair, was leaning over the table, was asking:

"What do you mean? Tell me—what do you mean?"

Rosalie herself rose, leaned over to meet him, and whispered four words in his ear.

"See!" she added aloud. "See!"

Blake fell back into his chair with a thump.

"I, a doctor and a man of science and I never thought once of that! What a damned fool I was!"

"*We* was," amended Rosalie Le Grange.

XIII

ANNETTE TELLS THE TRUTH

It seemed to Blake, waiting in Rosalie's sitting-room for a quarter of nine, that this silent house of mystery vibrated suppressed excitement. He sat with his hands clenched, his body leaning forward, in the attitude of one waiting the signal to strike. Rosalie, sitting opposite him, sent over a smile of reassurance

now and then, but neither spoke.

There was no need of words. They had talked out the smallest detail of Rosalie's plot, even to mapping the location of the furniture. Inch by inch, objection after objection, she had conquered his cautions and scruples; had persuaded him that the dramatic method was the best method. When Blake entered the house, nothing was left to chance except the question whether Norcross would miss his engagement to "sit" with Mrs. Markham. Rosalie settled that. From the front windows, she had observed the green limousine automobile waiting by the curbing outside; through her open registers she had caught the murmur of conversation.

So even Rosalie, whose tongue ran by custom in greased grooves, found nothing to say until the little mantel clock tapped three times to announce a quarter to the hour. It brought Blake to his feet with such a jerk that Rosalie shook both her hands at him by way of caution. At the door she stopped a second, put her lips to his ear.

"I don't have to tell you to be brave, boy," she said. "But keep your head and don't git independent. You do what I say!"

She touched his side pocket, which bulged. "An' not too brash with that!" she added. "Revolvers is good for bluffs but bad for real business!"

Blake nodded. And for the second time they crept down the silent, padded halls to those apartments above Mrs. Markham's alcove library. They approached, then, not the closet door, but the door leading to that boudoir which he had seen once before through Rosalie's hole in the wall paper. Rosalie applied a key, turned it with infinite caution, opened the door, motioned him in. The room appeared as before. The light burned low over the white desk; the portières hung close. Rosalie pointed to the rounded, further end of the room—the space where he had seen the ghostly thing which was Annette disappear through the floor. That floor space was bare; a rug, rolled up, rested against the further wainscot. Blake took it in, and smiled at Rosalie as though to say, "everything is ready I see!" Then for a minute they stood immobile, listening. A murmur of conversation came up from below, and in the room behind the portières someone was breathing, lightly, regularly. Rosalie touched his arm and beckoned. Moving without sound, they lifted the portières, stepped within.

No light inside that room, except the low radiance from a prone figure by the outer wall. It seemed at first that this ghost of Annette lay suspended between heaven and earth. Blake's mind put down the awe which was stealing over his senses. His eyes sharpened until he could make out a few details.

At the right, dimly suggested, was a disordered bed. Annette lay on a couch. The robes swathed her from head to foot, but the veil over her face was parted as though to give her air. Her eyes were closed; her arms, with something strained and stretched in their attitude, lay along her sides.

And now Rosalie had her lips at his ear.

"Quick!" she said.

Blake crept to Annette's side and spoke in a low tone.

"Annette, this is I—Walter, your lover. You belong to me. I revoke no other commands, but you are to listen to me also and do as I tell you. Answer me first. You have been commanded to rise when you hear music?"

As by the miracle of one speaking in normal tones out of sleep, Annette answered:

"Yes."

"Speak low. You have been commanded to enter the other room then, turn out the light, lift a trap, let down a rope ladder, descend it, and say certain things?"

"Yes." The tone was less than a whisper.

"Have you been given anything special to say to-night—has anything been impressed upon you?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"After the rest, I am to say: 'Robert, they tell me that the great danger is near. They give me a message which I do not understand—"Declare that dividend tomorrow." You do not know the awful things which will come if you do not.'"

Blake could hear Rosalie catch her breath at this. It came to him, also, that he had intervened at the very climax of Mrs. Markham's operation on Robert H. Norcross. But he went on firmly:

"Obey that. Do as you were told. But do something else. So that you will remember, I am going to whisper it in your ear."

Blake leaned over for a minute, and whispered. Presently he raised himself a little, so that he bent over her face, and said in a low speaking voice:

"Do all that. I command you. I am Walter, and you must obey me. And remember especially—when you have done it all, then wake—wake and do not be alarmed. Do you hear?"

"Yes."

"Will you obey?"

"Yes."

"You will not be frightened?"

"No."

Rosalie touched his arm. Blake, with one last look back, stepped outside and dropped the portières. Rosalie drew him into the hall, softly locked the door, beckoned him to follow to the head of the stairs. And hard upon this movement, the piano downstairs began:

Wild roamed an Indian maid, bright Alfaretta.

"Make no noise—and hurry!" whispered Rosalie. Down the stairs they went, and stationed themselves by the hall door of the drawing-room. There, it was pitch dark. Without risk of being seen, they could look along the dim reaches of Mrs. Markham's parlors. From a point above their heads, a little, shaded cabinet-lamp gave a fan of low light which shone full on the dark curtains of the alcove library. They could make out, by his white hair and collar, the back of a man, and a shadowy figure at the piano. "Wild roamed an Indian maid" was falling away to its dying chord. Silence settled again; the back of the old man swayed. Mrs. Markham spoke from the piano stool:

"I feel your influence, Helen. You are stronger every time, dear, because his love grows stronger. Come, dear—come."

A pillar of light glowed against the cabinet curtains. Norcross rose; Blake could catch a suggestion of his face and collar against the dark draperies. There came the same exchange of love words, of pats, of caressing speeches, which he had heard from the closet; even now, better understood as this thing was, the sound of them drew his finger nails up into his palms.

Rosalie's touch brought him back to his sense of observation. Here, now, came the climax; here the moment upon which everything depended. The low, sweet contralto voice was saying:

"They tell me that the great danger is near. They give me a message which I do not quite understand. They say, 'Declare that dividend to-morrow!' You cannot know what awful things will follow if you do not."

Rosalie's clutch tightened on Blake's arm. For the voice had ceased altogether. A silent moment; then they saw the pillar of light become a crumpled blotch on the floor, heard a sudden shuffle of feet, heard Annette's voice, loud, clear, distinct, crying:

"This is a lie! I am not Helen Whitton! I am Annette Markham. I am not a spirit! I am alive! You are being fooled—fooled!"

There followed a jangle of piano keys, as though something had dropped upon the keyboard.

In that instant, Rosalie Le Grange jerked the string of the cabinet light, throwing the shutter wide open. The details of that group by the curtain blazed into Blake's sight as he jumped forward—Annette, all in black, her white gauze robes a crumpled heap at her feet, swaying in the center of the floor; Norcross a huddle against the wall; Mrs. Markham, stiff as though frozen to stone, leaning against the piano. More light blazed on them; Blake knew that Rosalie, according to program, had lit the gas. He reached the curtains an instant before Mrs. Markham, roused to sudden, cat-like action, threw herself toward Annette. Blake came between; out of his pocket he whipped the revolver.

"I'm talking to you all!" he said. "You, old fool over there, and you, you devil! I'll kill the first that moves!"

Now Rosalie had slipped up beside Mrs. Markham, laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Don't make any fuss, my dear. I'm a medium myself an' I've been exposed four times. Take it from me, *your* play is to be a lady—and a sport."

Suddenly, Mrs. Markham lifted herself from the piano keys and spoke:

"Annette, my dear, control yourself. Come to me, dear—my poor, insane niece. Mr. Norcross, I will explain these intruders later. Come to me, dear!" She had stepped toward Blake, who stood with his left arm about Annette. Blake felt

Annette shrink away from him, felt her sway toward her aunt. He raised the revolver.

"Stay where you are!" he commanded. "Annette, listen to me. I control you now—I! Until I say otherwise, keep your face on my shoulder. Do not look up. Keep your mind on what I am saying."

Annette's first movement away from him ceased. She gave a little inarticulate murmur of obedience. Simply as a child, she settled her face into the hollow of his shoulder.

He turned to Norcross.

"You old fool—" then he caught the face of him who had been king of the American railroads. Norcross had settled into a chair; more, he had shriveled into it. His mouth had fallen open as from senile weakness; his eyes, suddenly grown old, glazed and peering, seemed to struggle with tears. His hands moved uncertainly, feebly.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Norcross," he said, "I came here to-night to take away this girl, whom I intend to marry, and I'm excited. Now listen—Annette, I want you to listen also. Keep your mind upon me alone, dear, and remember I told you not to be frightened. This girl is ward of that she-devil there. Since her childhood, Mrs. Markham has been hypnotizing her—for her own purposes. So good a subject has she become that Mrs. Markham uses her to play ghost for these seances—without her own knowledge—"

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Markham.

"Now, my dear," protested Rosalie, "I've been in the house four weeks jest watchin' you work. Your play is to shut up until you see what we've got in our hand. If you don't, you'll put your foot in it!"

As though aware of her presence for the first time, Mrs. Markham turned and looked Rosalie straight in the face. And as though realizing the common sense in this counsel, she seated herself. Only a gnawing at her under lip indicated her mental disturbance.

Now Annette, as though beginning to realize the situation, was sobbing softly. Blake patted her shoulder; and the passion went out of his voice. But he still held

the revolver alert in his free hand.

"STAY WHERE YOU ARE," HE COMMANDED

"Her method is fairly established. In a few minutes, I will permit you to see the trap between the ceiling of that cabinet room there and the floor of the room above. The trap is hollow; in it, for safety, she keeps those phosphorescent robes"—he nodded toward the white heap on the floor—"all her cabinet paraphernalia, and the notes on such as you. Full information on your love affair with Helen Whitton has been in that trap for weeks." Then, seeing how raw was the nerve which he had touched in the old man, he added:

"I beg your pardon again, sir; but I must speak of this. Mme. Le Grange there—my agent in this house—is an expert on such matters. She informs me that those notes are the work of a private detective—that the information comes from an old aunt of Helen Whitton who must have been her confidante. Do you see now what happened? Every night of a seance, Mrs. Markham has prepared for you by sending this girl to bed early—by sitting beside her and putting her to sleep. That is what Miss Markham, in her innocence, calls it. It *is* sleep—the hypnotic sleep. Miss Markham is in bad condition. Her nerves are those of the overworked hypnotic horse. Mrs. Markham has used that as a pretext for putting her to bed early. Shall I particularize? Do I need to go on?"

"Oh, pray do! You are very interesting!" spoke Mrs. Markham from the piano stool.

"I will—since you wish it," returned Blake with an equal sarcastic courtesy. "When sleep was established, Mrs. Markham made her rise and dress herself in those phosphorescent robes"—he pointed to the gauzy heap on the floor—"put her back on the couch, and gave her directions. She was to rise at a signal—you know it—'Wild roamed an Indian maid.' Must I tell you any more?" he burst out. "Do you know that three nights ago I looked into her sitting-room above that trap and saw her—saw her go down to you—heard what she said to you!"

Annette was gasping and moaning.

"Oh, did I do that?" she said.

"No, sweet, *she* did it," he said. He turned to Rosalie. "Take this revolver and keep order for me. Annette ought not to stand any longer." Still keeping her head

on his shoulder, he seated her beside him on a couch. "She has never heard this before, Mr. Norcross, and you must know what a shock she is suffering. This is a desperate case, and it required a desperate remedy. That accounts for this drama to-night. Mme. Le Grange there is housekeeper of this place, and my agent. Putting her in this house was part of the remedy. Fifteen minutes ago, she and I entered the room where Miss Markham lay in hypnotic trance, waiting to go down to you. I supplemented Mrs. Markham's suggestion by a command of my own—you know what it was. I took a risk. One never knows whether a hypnotic subject—even such a perfect one as this—will obey a supplementary suggestion. Had it failed, had she started back toward the ladder, I should have turned on the lights and seized the spook in the vulgar manner, and Mrs. Markham would have had the thousand excuses which a professional medium can give in such circumstances. But Annette obeyed—she even woke on my command before she had fulfilled the whole of Mrs. Markham's suggestion—because we love each other. That made the difference." He drew Annette's head closer on his shoulder. "I'm going to take her away to-night. She's done with all this." He turned to Mrs. Markham. Her hand still rested on the keyboard. Her face was pale, but her lips wore a sneering smile. "It is your turn, Madame," he said.

"I lose gracefully," answered Mrs. Markham, "yet if Mr. Norcross will think very carefully, he may realize that I am not all a loser."

Rosalie crossed the room to Dr. Blake. "Here, you take this thing," she said, extending the revolver, "it makes me nervous, an' I told you at the start there wasn't no use of it."

And now, something had clicked in Norcross again. His mouth had closed like a vise, light had come back to his eyes; he was again the Norcross of the street.

"You're a devil," he said, "but you're a marvelously clever woman—"

"So clever," responded Mrs. Markham in dulcet tones, "that I intend never to worry about finances again—by your leave, Mr. Norcross."

"That means blackmail, I suppose," said Norcross.

"Now, Mr. Norcross, I beg of you," protested Mrs. Markham, "I have *never* used harsh names for unpleasant truths with you! Do me the same courtesy. You will agree, I think, that the Norcross interests would suffer if people knew that Robert H. Norcross was running to spirit mediums—my business is little

appreciated. The newspapers, Mr. Norcross—"

"Would any newspaper believe you?" asked Norcross.

"An admirable method," responded Mrs. Markham, "an admirable method of getting these people before the public as witnesses"—her gesture indicated Dr. Blake and Rosalie—"would be to sue for custody of my niece, whom this young man intends, I believe, to take away tonight. Certain unusual features of this case would charm the newspapers."

Rosalie shook Blake's shoulder.

"Doctor!" she cried, "can't you see what she's aiming at? She's trying to drag us into her blackmailing. She's tryin' to make this look like a plant." She whirled on Norcross.

"Listen, Mr. Norcross. I'll tell you what this was done for! Do you know a youngish lookin' man, smooth-shaven, neat dresser, gray eyes, about forty-five, got something to do with Wall Street, wears one of them little twisted-up red and white society buttons in his buttonhole, has a trick of holding his chin between his fingers—so—when he's thinkin'? Because *he* started it. He's the nigger in your woodpile. He came here a week before you ever saw Mrs. Markham, bringin' the notes about Helen Whitton—the dope that she's been feedin' you. If you'll put that together with what the spirit—she—Miss Markham, told you tonight about declarin' dividends—"

"Mrs. Granger," interrupted Mrs. Markham, "you are a shrewd woman, but you carry your deductions a little far—"

"Deductions, your grandmother!" retorted Rosalie Le Grange, "To think how close you come to foolin' even *me* that's played this game, girl and woman, for twenty-five years! If I hadn't caught you so anxious to stop that little girl from seein' that you kept Practical Methods of Hypnotism' hid behind the bookcase, I'd have gone away from here believin' that she was deep in the mud as you was in the mire. You certainly sprung a new one on me!"

The eyes of Norcross lighted, as though with a new idea, and he broke abruptly into this feminine exchange:

"I do not believe that this is a plant. Mrs. Markham, shall we bargain?"

"I like the life in London," said Mrs. Markham. "I have been waiting to retire."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars?"

"Oh dear, no! Fifty."

Norcross drew a check book, flipped it on his knee. Mrs. Markham raised a protesting hand.

"Yes, you will—you'll take it in a check or not at all," he said. "I want this transaction recorded. I'll tell you why. It is worth just that to keep this story out of the papers. I was caught, and I pay. It is worth no more. I will give you this check to-night. You will cash it in the morning. I shall have the cancelled check as a voucher. If ever you ask me for a dollar more, you go to State's Prison for extortion—on the testimony of these three witnesses. My legal department is the best in the country. In short, it is worth fifty thousand dollars to me. It is not worth fifty thousand and one. Also, you sail to London within a week. Does that go?"

Mrs. Markham drummed a minute with her fingers, and her face went a shade paler.

"It does," she said in a low voice.

Blake bent over Annette.

"Do you hear that?" he asked. "Do you know what it means? It is called blackmail!"

"Oh, Aunt Paula, Aunt Paula!" whispered Annette. Her face settled closer on Blake's shoulder, and she burst into a torrent of weeping.

Rosalie tiptoed to the desk, bringing pen and ink, which she laid on the table beside Norcross. It was quite evident that one of their number was by this time enjoying the situation.

"Keep everybody here for three minutes—I'll be back," she said to Blake, and floated out of the door.

As Norcross handed over the check, Dr. Blake spoke:

"I am taking Miss Markham away. She is not to see this woman again—taking her to my aunt's house. I, too, want a witness. If I have done anything for you to-night, will you return it by setting us down in your automobile?"

"Certainly," responded Norcross. "I suppose I ought to thank you—but I've got to think this thing out." He scrutinized Blake closely. "How about you and the papers—I hadn't thought of you—"

Blake, still dropping soft love pats on Annette's hair and shoulders, looked into the eyes of the railroad king.

"I have earned that opinion, I suppose," he said. "I can't say that I feel myself greatly superior to—to anyone here—tonight. But I've done what I started to do. My name is Blake, Mr. Norcross—Dr. Walter H. Blake—lately army surgeon in the Philippines, if you take my profession as a voucher. My father was Rear-Admiral Blake, if family will help establish me. Or, better, I intend to marry this girl as soon as the license clerk will let me—and it isn't likely that I'll make public anything that involves my wife and her people. Does that satisfy you?"

Norcross ran his eye across them. It rested a moment upon Annette; and a ghost of that late emotion, of which she had been the instrument, flashed across his face.

"I guess I'm satisfied," he said.

Now Rosalie, in hat and wraps, stood at the door carrying her suit case.

"Sorry to leave without notice, Mrs. Markham," she said, "but you remember I haven't drawn no pay as housekeeper for doin' you up. I guess we'd all better be goin'. Here's your hat, Dr. Blake, and a fur coat and boots for Miss Markham."

Paula Markham, twirling the fifty thousand dollar check idly in her fingers, rose from the piano stool.

"I wish you to listen, Dr. Blake," she said, "although you may not believe it, I am really fond of Annette. The temptation to use her became too strong. Believe me, I have intended for some time to stop it. I had stopped it in fact, when this big fish came to my net. You have seen, no more keenly than I, how hard it was

on her nerves. Take her away and give her a good time—she needs it. Indeed, had you come into her life a little later, I should have welcomed you—for after I found that she had no clairvoyance in her, I wanted her to be happy."

"You had an admirable way of showing it," responded Dr. Blake. "What about putting aside earthly love for strength?"

"It kept off the undesirables," said Mrs. Markham, "and just then—with this large order in hand—you were an undesirable. I shall not ask you to let me see her for the present—indeed, I am going away—but years from now, when you and she have softened—"

"When her will is built up—perhaps."

"May I kiss her?" For the first time in his experience of her, Blake traced a note of feminine softness in Mrs. Markham's tones.

Blake took the back of the little head firmly in his hand, pressed the face tightly on his shoulder.

"Her cheek—yes. You must not look into her eyes."

As Mrs. Markham lifted her face from Annette's cheek, the tears showed under her lids.

"But, oh, Annette," she whispered, "I ask you to believe that I am real—that once I was all real—but I fell like the rest."

For the first time Annette spoke coherently.

"Oh, Aunt Paula—it breaks my heart—but I will try to remember only how kind you were."

And now Rosalie had wrapped her for the street; and now the door closed between Mrs. Markham and her biggest operation.

Rosalie was first to quit the automobile—she had asked Norcross to drive her to a woman's hotel.

"Good-night, people," she said cheerily at the curb, "I hope it ain't good-by to any of you. Doctor, I'd like to be invited to the weddin', however private—that's my tip. When I git settled again, I'll send you my card an' address. Good-night, Mr. Norcross, I'm real pleased to have met you. I had a cousin who was a conductor on one of your roads an' he always spoke nicely of the way he was treated. An', oh, yes! Don't you worry about *me* givin' any of this away. I'm a medium, all right, but I ain't in that kind of work. I ain't recommendin' myself, of course, Mr. Norcross, but if you git over this—they generally do—an' want some good, straight clairvoyant work done, write Mme. Rosalie Le Grange, care the *Spirit Truth Bulletin*, an' I'll recommend you to them that are strangers to graft. Good-night."

After they drove on, Blake, brazenly patting and caressing Annette toward calm and a right mind, furtively noticed Norcross as the bands of city light flashed his figure into view. He was huddled in a corner of the cushioned seat; he looked again the pitiful, broken, disappointed old man. But when he parted from the lovers at the curb of an old house in Lexington Avenue, his voice came out of him with certainty and ring.

"If I can do anything more for you in this matter, I am at your service," Blake had said.

"I will attend to the rest myself, thank you!" answered Norcross.

"It has occurred to me," continued Blake, "that Mrs. Markham will communicate at once with whatever confederates she had in this business. I hope you don't mind my mentioning it."

"Probably," responded Norcross, "she's at the telephone now. That's my part of it. Good-night."

XIV

MAINLY FROM THE PAPERS

(From the Wall Street *Sun*, Oct. 21, 190—)

Whatever motive impelled Robert H. Norcross to his mysterious

operations in L.D. and M. during the past two days, it looks rather like stock manipulation than the larger financing which has hitherto marked his career. When, on Wednesday, the directors of the L.D. and M. adjourned without declaring a dividend, that stock, which had advanced somewhat owing to the speculative trading of the past three weeks, fell from 56 to 50, and closed weak at 49¼. Directly after the close of the exchange, Norcross, as though by program, reconvened the directors, who declared a dividend of one and one-half per cent. The news was about by the time the market opened yesterday, and L.D. and M. made the record jump of the year, going to 76 and closing strong at 75½. It scarcely went below that point to-day, and at two o'clock touched its highest notch—76¾. Considerable criticism of Norcross was heard on the street to-day.

(From the Wall Street *Sun*, Oct. 24, 190—)

BROKERAGE FIRM ASSIGNS

The firm of Bulger and Watson, promoters and Stock Exchange operators, made an assignment this morning. Liabilities $276,125; assets $81,300. This failure followed the collapse of the Mongolia Copper Mine in Montana, news of which reached New York last Saturday. Bulger and Watson were heavily interested in that property. An unusual feature of this failure, according to those on the inside, was the action of Arthur Bulger, senior member of the firm, in the L.D. and M. flurry of last Wednesday and Thursday. Bulger, it is said by those who know his affairs best, had speculated heavily in L.D. and M., playing for a rise. On the eve of the fluky directors' meeting of last Wednesday—which, it will be remembered, adjourned without action only to reconvene after market hours and declare a dividend—Bulger began through his brokers to unload. It is believed that he was acting upon some advance inside information of the directors' action. He was sold clean out of this stock when the market closed Wednesday afternoon. Had he held on, the firm would doubtless have been able to survive the Mongolia crash, for L.D. and M., following the unexpected action of the directors in declaring a dividend, jumped on Thursday from 50 to the neighborhood of 75. The failure will involve no other firms, it is thought.

As the curve of Sandy Hook blotted from sight the last, low glimpse of the skyscrapers which point Manhattan, Blake touched Annette's arm. She turned from her reveries; the distance faded from her eyes.

"It's the end of a life for you—that," he said. "We don't see New York again for two years. We're going back over the girlhood you never had—you're going to dance and motor and walk—yes and coquette, too—or as much as you care to with me as a husband. For two years, you're just going to play!"

Then, noticing the expression of the dog who beholds his master with which her sapphirine eyes regarded him, he dropped his hand on hers.

"But most of all, dearest," he added, "you're going to do what you want to do! Not what I or any one else commands, but just as your own sweet will dictates—Light of me!"

THE END

redistribution.

*** START: FULL LICENSE ***

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg-tm License (available with this file or online at http://gutenberg.net/license).

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is in the public domain in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg-tm works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg-tm name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg-tm License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg-tm work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH F3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTIBILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need, is critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at http://www.pglaf.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification

number is 64-6221541. Its 501(c)(3) letter is posted at http://pglaf.org/fundraising. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at http://pglaf.org

For additional contact information:
Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit http://pglaf.org

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: http://pglaf.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed