Beauty--and Mary Blair

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A Novel

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CHAPTER I

Mother didn't speak. Of course, Father didn't really put anything up to her, but the general idea was there just the same. What he wanted to know was, whether a family like ours, consisting of one young married feminist, one eligible though unsusceptible young unfeminist, one incorrigible kid brother, and a large, sentimental colored lady, could be trusted to look after itself while the natural guardians of it took a protracted business trip into Canada. There was only one answer, of course, but Mother didn't make it. Among other things she didn't want to spend the money.

"If you were looking for a nice athletic young daughter now," I said, "I know of one that would accompany your wanderings delightedly."

"I'm not," Father said. "Not that I wouldn't like to have you, Baby, but your mother can drive, and she knows what to do for me if I get the collywobbles and —"

Bobby winked at Della, who was moving majestically around the table serving pie.

"Della ate some bread, Della ate some jelly, Della went to bed—" Bobby says everything that comes into his head without any reference to time and place, or whoever else happens to be speaking.

"I can drive almost as well as Mother, and I could give you castor oil, if I can give it to Rex."

Father smiled.

"You poured it on the puppy's head, I understand, and he licked it off to get rid of it. Peculiar as it may seem I'd rather have your mother."

But Mother hedged.

"I'd like to go," she said. "You know I would, Robert."

"We could get a couple of weeks of camp," Father suggested, "and it would set

you up.—Oh! I knew you wouldn't think of it seriously."

"No," Mother said, "I can't leave." And that ended it.

The Angel in the house tried to get us started on some general conversation, with the coffee. She's a prohibitionist, and a communist,—sometimes. At other times, I believe, she's a centrist or a left-winger!—and she won't live in the same house with her perfectly good husband, as it isn't done in those circles.

"It's only a question of a few weeks when every State in the Union ratifies," she said.

"It's news to me that they haven't," Father was momentarily interested.

"I was talking of suffrage," the Angel—her real name is Stella—condescended.

Mother turned a rather intent look on Stella. The women of our family are a great puzzle to each other. Stella, with her braids bound round that burning high-brow of hers, and her unquenchable craving for intellectual breakfast food, is a perpetual thorn in Mother's flesh, dearly as she loves to have one there. Father's, too, though Father isn't quite so much given to kissing the bee that stings him, as it were. Father and Mother are only going on forty, anyway.

"I suppose if you had a family, you would leave it to look after itself whenever it was convenient," Mother said musingly.

Stella is going to have a family, but Mother's social error didn't in the least ruffle her. She's so high-minded she doesn't care whether she has a family or not. I should have very decided ideas for or against. I understand that Mother did—against.

"You know I believe in the rights of the individual," Stella said gently. Well, so do I, if he can get them.

Father looked so worried to me, as if something a good deal more important than Mother's going or not going to Canada hung in the balance, that I tackled him about it.

"Daddy," I said, "do you want me to make Mother go with you or anything? Do you feel awfully seedy? You know she doesn't want to spend the money."

“I know it,” Father said. Then he spoke between his teeth: “I want to spend the money,” he said; “what have I made it for?”

“You couldn’t, seriously, I mean, spend it on me, Daddy? I’d love to go.”

“Too much of a row. Besides, I want your mother.” I knew from his tone that he did want her—heaps, more than heaps.

“Daddy,” I said, “do your children bore you?”

“Sometimes. Why? Not you, Baby, excepting as such.”

“Oh! I know that,” I said; “well, they bore me, too, rather. Mother doesn’t bore you?”

“Never.”

“Don’t you think that the fact that she is so terribly good-looking has something to do with that?”

“Probably,” Father said; “and let me give you a word of advice, Mary. If you really want to keep a man—keep him going, you understand, and true to you—utilize him; use him, all the best there is in him, and even a little of the worst if it comes to that. Use his time, use his money. Make the most of him. You can keep any man, you know, if you keep him busy enough—if you make the most of him.”

“Father,” I said, “let me go to Canada with you. I’d be better than nothing.”

And I think I would have been.

I am one of those people to whom life is a very great puzzle. So many people seem to get used to living, but I don’t. I can’t seem to get up any really satisfying philosophy, or find anybody or anything to help me about it. I want everything, little and big, fixed up in my mind before I can proceed.

Even as a very small child I always wanted my plans made in advance. Once when Mother had a bad sick headache, I sat on the edge of her bed, and begged her to tell me if she thought she was going to die, so if she was I could plan to go and live with my Aunt Margaret. I was an odious infant, but all the same, I really

wanted to know, and that's the way I am to this day! I want to know what the probabilities are, in order to act accordingly. I want to know about human beings, and how they got into the fix they are in, and what the possibilities are of their getting out of it. I wantrto know what life means, but nobody wants to talk about it.

I pursue knowledge in various ways. I read a good many books, more since I left school than before. I've waded through most of our green cloth edition of the Popular Science Library. It isn't very modern to read Dar win and Huxley and John Stuart Mill, but I don't know how to pick and choose better things—that is, better *sound* things. I am handicapped by having a sister who knows everything. She lightly acquired a classical education, became a conspicuous banner-bearing feminist, and married a notorious radical editor, all before she was twenty. The Angel's a wonder. I always expect Mother to peel off some little anecdote about her having prepared her own baby food according to formula, at the age of thirteen months. It's awfully hard to imagine her ever having let Mother do it. But Sister isn't much help to me because she's an idea cannibal. If she can't get her ration of raw human theory to gorge on every day, she isn't quite the same girl. If you won't be psycho analyzed, or read books about Russia, or try to get up some little private system of solving labor questions, why, Sister's interest in you ceases. I hope her unlucky infant will be born lisping the Einstein theory of Relativity. I don't know what it is, but that infant will have to be informed on it if it expects either one of its parents to take an intelligent interest in it. I can't live on Sister's diet. I'd get mental hookworm.

Mother's literary tastes are again different. Mother's inclined to Spiritualism, and things occult. She reads a lot of faintly Pollyannaish novels with a Western setting if possible, and she doesn't care at all about books that show you how the hero and the heroine connect up with life. H. G. Wells and John Galsworthy bore her stiff, for instance, and she used to cry when her mother made her read George Eliot. And I'd cry if she made me read all those books about the Romances of the Insect World, and What the Flowers Know, that she's so fond of. The things I want to know nobody but Carlyle and Stevenson and Browning have had much to say about, and they're dead, and much less companionable for that reason. Sister's cultured, and Mother isn't, I suppose that's the gist of it, and I'm stuck in between them somewhere, drowning between the high-brows and the deep-blue sea of ignorance.

Father is safely out of it all, because he doesn't read anything but the

newspapers. He's good looking enough not to need to be cultured in the least. It's too bad that Sister tried to look so much like him, and didn't succeed. She's got the big blue eyes, and the straight-cut profile, all the makings, but she hasn't got the look itself. Father is a charmer. I am dark like Mother, but not so pretty, though I am thankful to say that I look more like myself than any one. My color is good anyhow. Bobby looks like me.

If I could think what it was I wanted of life I would be a whole lot better off. I have all the opportunities there are, all the advantages of a life in New York City in a two-hundred-dollar apartment that we paid a hundred for five years ago—all the culture there is; but it isn't culture I'm after, some way. I want to get the hang of things, and I don't know how I'm going to do it at present.

I'm the only one of the family who is very much interested in people, well, as people, though we all have a weird lot of friends. The Angel fills the place with ladies in well-cut tweeds, who are economically independent of the race, and Byronic boys with records as draft-dodgers. Friend husband is the best friend she's got, but of course she won't take his name or anything. She's still Miss Blair to the born and unborn. Evangeline Tucker is her closest woman friend, I should say. They get together on the Jugo-Slavs, and exchange confidences on personal subjects like the Eastern question, and how to make a confirmed aesthete of the poor working-girl. When I sit in at one of these confabs I always feel like taking up wrestling for a life work. A wrestler uses the bony structure of his skull as a weapon. He butts the other fellow in the stomach with it.

Mother's friends consist of fat women who look eighteen years older than she does, and haven't half such good-looking families—and Ellery Howe. I don't know where Mother picked him up, but she's had him for years. He's a music hound and a picture sleuth. Mother doesn't care much for either music or pictures, but she's used to Ellery, and so are all the rest of us. At one time I thought that Stella might marry him and get him out of the way. He seemed to melt into some of the crevices of her granite nature, but I don't think Mother liked it very much. It seemed rather a waste, too; like spattering an egg against a stone wall. The wall does not absorb it, and you lose the ingredient of a perfectly good omelet. An ingredient is about what Ellery is.

Father and I are more alike about friends. We don't have them so much to exchange sentiments with as we do for general purposes of amusement. We both like fools, rather; that is, people that are silly and healthy and good-looking, and

know their way about. That's why I like the Webster girls and Tommy Nevers,and that's why Father is always having lunch with ladies with earrings and green turbans, and men like Jimmie Greer. I like Jimmie, but I defy any other member of our refined family circle to find a good word to say for him, except that he's the friend of Father's bosom.

It was Jimmie that Father thought he could get to go with him on the Canadian trip. Mother was dead against it because he drinks so much, and when it turned out that Jimmie couldn't go anyway she was as pleased as if somebody had handed her a present.

"I don't like Jimmie Greer," she said; "he's coarse-fibred. Your father wouldn't get the benefit of his trip if he were with him."

"I don't see how he's going to get the benefit of his trip anyway," I argued; "he hates to go alone so, and he's starting off so unsatisfied."

"It's too bad he has to go at all," Mother said.

"Men are very childish things, Mother. You ought to know."

"It's too bad," Mother repeated.

"Too bad they're childish things?"

"Too bad he's got to go."

"But they are," I said.—And they are. Oh! dear me.

It seems to me that if Mother wanted to know anything about Father, she'd just have to get right down to brass tacks and study Bobby.

The night that Father went away I felt rather childish myself. The dinner was perfectly punk for one thing. We had veal which Father hated, and macaroni, which he hates worse, and corn fritters, which he never eats, and rice pudding, which I don't think any man ever eats. Della is a pretty good cook, but Mother ordered this dinner, and so she produced it. Father ate a little, and then went off into the living-room and sulked. I put my arms around him, but that only seemed to add insult to injury. Mother tranquilly knitted, and the Angel spoke lovingly of the Adriatic, and Esthonia, whatever that is.

Then Ellery Howe was announced, and Father quit cold. I cornered him in the hall with his hat on.

“Whither away, Daddy?” I said.

“I’m going out to get something to eat.”

“Take me.”

“I don’t think so.”

But he would have if Tommy Nevers hadn’t put in his appearance at that instant.

“You’ll have to go away, Tommy,” I said, *’ because I’m going out with Father.”

“She isn’t, though,” Father said. “Take her off my hands, Tommy.”

“It’s Father’s last night,” I said.

Father’s reply to this was merely to go out and shut the door.

“Let’s go into the dug-out,” Tommy said, meaning the lounging-hole I’ve made out of my dressing-room.

“No, I want to go to walk,” I said; “and if you know anything that will take the taste of rice pudding out of my mouth I would be very gratified to have some of it.”

“We used to drink claret lemonade,” Tommy said regretfully.

“They used to raise live-stock right on Broadway,” I said.

We walked along the Drive for a while, and Tommy told me what he thought about women. He certainly thinks a lot about them. He likes a girl that knows where she gets off, and that makes a fellow comfortable, and that keeps herself right up to the mark. He’d prefer to have her have a permanent wave if she gets it done right, and to have her be a good sport without ever getting out beyond a certain point where the ice is too thin. I know it all by heart.

“Well, Tommy,” I said briskly, “I think I answer all those qualifications, except the permanent wave.”

“Oh! you do,” Tommy assured me earnestly.

“I strive to please,” I said. He hasn’t any sense of humor. “If you were a man,” I added hastily, “and you got the kind of a wife that wasn’t all those things, and it kept drag ging on and on and everything going wrong, or wrongish all the time, what do you think that you’d finally come to do about it?”

“I don’t know,” Tommy said uncertainly; “make the best of a bad bargain, I suppose.”

“But just practically, what would you do?” I said. “Supposing your wife would never go with you anywhere or let you spend any money on her or anything? Supposing she just got to be kind of lackadaisical about you, and sat around refusing to be a sport for no particular reason?”

“I’d find somebody that would be a sport, then.”

“But that would be rather hard on your family, wouldn’t it?”

“I wouldn’t have a family under those circumstances,” Tommy argued.

“But you can’t always pick and choose whether you will have a family or not! Supposing you had one first, and then this lackadaisical condition developed afterward, what would you do?”

“Well, this is a man’s world,” Tommy said, rather threateningly.

We wandered over to the Hotel La France a little later, and found our same little table over against the side wall. I adore having the same table, and Tommy is pretty adequate about getting it for me. Tommy is so much better than nothing that I often wonder what I should ever do without him. I don’t like suitors, but then I don’t very much like these good old chums that let you pay for your own refreshments. I don’t know why it is that a boy thinks more of you if you eat at his expense than at your own, but such indeed is the case. The Angel is economically independent on money that Grandfather earned for Grandmother, when she was parasitically bringing eight children into the world. I have no such advantages, so I can’t marry anybody but a conservative.

After we had been sitting there for a while drinking ginger ale, and waiting for the Peach Melbas we had ordered, in came Father with Jimmie Greer, and one of

those ladies in earrings that Jimmie imports every little while. I had a moment of real pang, because it would have been so much more suitable if I had been there with Daddy and all the others were *non esL*

“There’s Mary,” Jimmie Greet said, indicating me.

Father consigned me to the nether regions without an upward glance, and the lady stretched in my direction. She was wearing an imitation moleskin coat with a squirrel collar—of all things-and an iridescent hat shaped like a salad bowl, with a hearth-brush effect over the right ear, the curved kind of hearth-brush that gets into all the corners and crevices.

“There’s your father,” said Tommy.

“You’ve seen him before this evening.”

“He wants us to go over to his table.”

“He doesn’t; Jimmie Greer does.”

“Who’s the vamp?”

“She’s Jimmie’s vamp.”

Father came over to speak to me.

“I ran into Jimmie and Mrs. Van der Water, a friend of his. I’ll just have a sandwich and run home. Don’t stay out too late yourself, Kitten.”

“Who is Mrs. Van der Water?”

“A Canadian woman, a friend of Jimmie’s. I never met her before.”

When I got home Mother was sitting up and waiting for Father. Stella was receiving one of her semi-weekly visits from her husband, but they went off into her own room the moment they saw me approaching. Cosgrove had had his hair cut, which gave him a rather bereft appearance. A man who has the habit of wearing his hair long always looks so distrait without it, some way.

What do you say to your mother when you’ve just seen your father basking in

the smiles of a hand-painted siren, breaking the prohibition laws with the aid of a concealed flask and three bottles of White Rock? The ash of Ellery Howe's Panatela was still smoking in the jade ash-tray he brought her. Everybody has a right to enjoy themselves in their own way—everybody who is decent, that is. I hate to stir up anything.

"There's beer on the ice, dear," Mother said to Father, when at last he did come in.

"I've had a drink," Father said, with a suspicious look at me.

"Where?" Mother asked.

"At the La France. Greer had it in his pocket."

"He'll get arrested some of these days," Mother said.

"It's my last night, Helen," Father said slowly.

"I know it. I must get to bed so as to be up to get you off in the morning."

"I wish you were coming."

"I wish I were, Robert, but it's so much money for such a short time."

"I wish you'd come with me, and spend it."

Then they kissed, and Father went off to his room and Mother to hers. The voice of Stella and her shorn radical could be heard ever and anon echoing through the apartment. There was a gorgeous and glorious moon over the Drive. I could see it from my window, and I stood there and cried. There didn't seem to be anything about life—our life—my life—to get your teeth in.

CHAPTER II

A Few days after Father's departure Ellery Howe took me to a picture show. Mother had a headache, and he decided that I was better than going alone. Stella wouldn't go for some reason best known to Stella. I think the reason that Mother had a headache was that Father telegraphed her that morning, asking her if she wanted him to get her a full-length seal coat worth twelve hundred dollars for half-price. Of course Mother wired in a panic that she wouldn't wear it under any circumstances, but the incident upset her. Poor Mother, she grew up poor, and it about kills her to spread out. She just can't seem to believe that our income will bear our weight. She's got what the Angel calls a complex about it.

I put on my crimson feather turban which I am crazy about because it's the first mature-looking hat I've ever had. A woman of forty could wear it, and it's very smart, too. It goes very well with my suit, which is beaver color and trimmed with beaver. Ellery cast a very slight look of satisfaction on me as we started on our way. I ought to know more about art, and so I am always glad of any chance to look at pictures with anybody who knows anything about them. Ellery talks too much gibberish to be of much use, but sometimes I get a gleam.

"What are we going to see?", I asked encouragingly, as the bus conductor changed Ellery's dollar bill into dimes and nickels. I always like to put the fares into the automatic collector, myself. Once I put in eight before the conductor could stop me, but I wouldn't tell Ellery anything like that for worlds.

"We are going to see"—he fed in the two dimes—"mostly studies in abstract form. There are to be a few portraits in the new manner, but the color studies are the interesting things."

"They are not Cubistic, are they?"

"Well, not exactly. This particular exhibition is by a group who are just about halfway between the Cubists and the Vorticists."

"The which?" I said. I was watching the automatic collector nibbling dimes. I always feel as if somebody who was clumsy would get a real nip if he didn't watch out.

“The Vorticists. You know what a vortex is.”

I couldn’t think what it was at the moment.

“Is that what they do, paint vortexes?” I asked, to gain time.

“Well, no, not exactly. They see motion in terms of static form, though sometimes they convey the actual vibration by some effect with color. Don’t you remember seeing the Primitives in the art museum with halos about their heads, crudely representing scintillation?”

“The entire class went to see the Italian Primitives once. I liked them because they looked like things I could have done myself.”

“Exactly. That’s the whole modern theory, reversion to the simplest art expression we are capable of.”

“Why don’t they draw pictures of cats and dogs and houses?”

“They are trying to get away from the presentation of any literal image, any concrete idea.”

“What are they trying to do?” I said. It was hard to keep my mind on what he was saying because, speaking of vortexes, that was what Fifth Avenue was as we skimmed along it, a whirling, swirling mass of color and personality and life.

“They are trying to appeal to the imagination by achieving a balance of abstract color and form.”

“But why?” I said.

When we got inside the gallery the interesting thing was Ellery, though I admit the pictures themselves were fearful and wonderful. Seriously, that’s what they were—fearful and wonderful. After you studied them for a while you got afraid.

“They all mean something,” Ellery said.

“I can’t see what this means.” It was a canvas covered with long curved things like ladies’ stockings, some with feet in them and some just twisted once, all in the most gorgeous and brilliant colors.

“It’s just a design.”

“But what’sit for?”

“Just a study in color and form.”

“You really like it?” I said.

“Better than anything else here.”

“What do you get out of it?”

“Beauty.”

“But there isn’t any there.”

“Look again. Take a good five minutes.”

I did, and I got sort of hypnotized. There was a personality behind that picture just the same as there is behind other pictures. I suddenly got awfully homesick for Whistler’s picture of his mother.

“It’s better than I thought,” I admitted; “it might mean something to somebody, but not to me.”

“If any man is strong enough you feel him through his medium,” Ellery said.

I looked at him critically. He has big velvet-brown eyes and a sweet smile, and he wears putty-colored clothes with solid-color ties, mostly in brilliant orange.

“What do you mean by Beauty?” I asked him as we wended our way up the Avenue. It suddenly occurred to me .that he must mean something by the way he goes about things. There’s milk in every cocoanut, they say.

“What do *you* mean by it?”

“I don’t know very much about it.”

“It’s—the thing behind every art impulse.”

“But I haven’t any,” I said.

“Well, neither have I,” Ellery acknowledged; “but I think perhaps Beauty is my religion just the same.”

“I read a poem by Masefield the other day, you know the one on growing old. ‘Be with me, Beauty, for the fire is dying.’ Beauty seems pretty real to him, doesn’t it? I think when I get to be that age I’ll be more likely to write a poem that says, ‘Be with me, Amos or Bessie,’ or somebody.”

Ellery didn’t crack a smile.

“There are lots of poems about it,” I mused. “‘Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty,—that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.’ Is that what you mean by having it for a religion?”

“Something like that.”

“Do you like new poetry as well as you like new art?”

“I don’t understand it so well.”

“I understand it better,” I said; “when it’s idiotic I know it’s idiotic. I don’t get the art so straight.”

But Ellery had gone off into a sort of coma.

“Beauty,” he said, “beauty. ‘Helen, thy beauty is to me, like those Nicean barks of yore, that dumpty o’er a dumpty sea!’” I forget his exact words; what I was struck with was the fact that my mother’s name is Helen.

We walked home practically in silence, though I annoyed him somewhat by singsonging a poem I found in a collection of modern verses the other day:

“We have a one room house,

you have a two room, three room, four room.

We have a one room house

because a one room house is all we have.

We have a one room house

because we do not want

a two room, three room, four room.

If we had a two room, three room, four room,

we would want more than a one room—”

and so on *ad infinitum.*

Ellery knows a lot, and has got very high ideals about life. I don’t know why it is that whenever I drop into serious human conversation with him, I always wish that I hadn’t. I feel that same way about the Angel, except that with her I never even try it on.

Mother was sitting up in a pale-blue hostess gown when we got back to the house, looking so stricken and motherish that she almost dis armed my suspicions, but not enough so that I got out of the way.

“I hope your headache is better,” Ellery said; “we missed you, Mary and I.”

“Uncle Ellery missed you,” I said. I had never “uncled” him before, and he looked a little surprised.

“I didn’t feel equal to it,” Mother said.

“It’s been some time since you complained of a headache.” Ellery looked at her anxiously.

“I don’t always complain of them.”

“I know,” Ellery said.

“I’ve been a little troubled in some ways.”

4 Poor Helen.”

“Well, we all have our little problems.” Mother smiled bravely. A fat problem she had, as to whether or not to decline a thousand dollars’ worth of furs—besides having already declined them. I decided then and there to write Father to get me a cross-fox set if he could.

“Mother,” I said suddenly,” “what do you think about all this new art stuff? Do you think it’s going to get anybody anywhere?”

Mother smiled at Ellery.

“She’s a terrible child,” she said, indicating me; “she always asks that about everything.”

“Well, do you?” I insisted.

“It depends on where you are going,” she said, matronizing me.

“I don’t know where I’m going,” I said, “but I’m on my way. Are you?”

“I said she was a terrible child,” Mother sighed. She’s really quite cute when she kittens with Ellery.

Finally I took pity on them, and went out into the kitchen to make them some cinnamon toast and tea, it being Della’s day out. I like our kitchen, and I spend all the time I can there when it isn’t encumbered by Della. Mother has blue-and-white checked gingham sash curtains, and blue-and-white linoleum on the floor. The tubs and shelves are all done in white oilcloth, and there is an enamel-topped table, very convenient to sit on and swing your feet, and a kitchen cabinet that makes cooking an aesthetic delight. I love order and immaculateness, though I am not one of those who can reduce things to that state unaided. Once aided, however, I can keep them going. Cinnamon toast is quite an art. You don’t want it either crumbly or gooey. Mother loves it. Anybody but Mother would be fat on what she eats, but not she—not her. Age cannot wither her scrumptious figure.

Ellery came out into the kitchen to say that Mother would take lemon, instead of the habitual cream, but personally he would stick to the English manner.

“The English have milk,” I reminded him.

“Well, I’ll have milk.”

“Cream is what you usually have.”

“Oh! is it? Well, I’ll have that, then.”

Personally I can’t see why you’d call having milk “the English manner” even if you knew the difference, which you so often don’t.

“I’m really a little worried about your mother,” Ellery said. “She seems so distrait.”

“She is,” I said.

“I hate to have her begin those headaches again.”

“Well, maybe she isn’t beginning.”

“She looks well.”

“She is. She had a chance to go to Canada with Father, but she wouldn’t. Father thought that would set her up.”

Ellery looked conscientious.

“Maybe it would have been wiser for her,” he said.

“She couldn’t leave us. Stella might have got the colic or something.” The brown sugar and cinnamon were acting up. I stirred them frantically.

“Mary,” Ellery said solemnly, “your mother is a very rare human being.”

“Do you think so?” I said, waving the saucepan in midair so the stuff wouldn’t granulate.

“She’s very highly organized, and she suffers from a million petty annoyances that a less sensitive creature wouldn’t even know the existence of.”

“Well, maybe,” I said. The kettle boiled over opportunely. Ellery helpfully began spreading toast for me.

“She’s succeeded in making a very beautiful life for herself. I realize that, but in a sense it is a life that is very hard for her. She’s miscast, one might almost say. She was made for a larger scope of existence.”

“What do you mean—larger scope?”

“A freer, more facile existence. One can imagine her the mistress of a salon, or in a European country the presiding genius of a group of diplomats. She has great social gifts, you know.”

“You think she wouldn’t have headaches if she had a salon?” I said.

“She would be better poised physically if she were in perfect accord mentally and spiritually.”

“Wouldn’t we all?” I asked flippantly; but there was something in Ellery’s face that made me add quickly, the way I do to Bobby when he hasn’t been taken seriously enough, “I’m going to think it all over.”

We bore the tea-tray together back to the living-room. Mother was poised in the big carved Spanish chair, with her head drooping a little, and one little silver shoe stuck out from beneath her blue dress. She might have been anything in the world—excepting my mother.

Ellery drew in a sharp breath of admiration.

“Helen, thy beauty is to me-” I said to myself.

It’s just all I can do to think of the possibility of my mother or father ever having married any one else. It’s positively uncanny to work back to a period where your respected parents were thinking of breaking their engagement to one another. It leaves you so out in the cold. It makes my hair slowly rise any day of the week to think of the Mayor of Toledo, for instance, who once inquired of Mother if she would be his wife. But this Ellery business is something else again. I wish I knew what to think. Mother isn’t Guinevere or anything. But *does* she know where she’s going? Does Ellery—sweet soul—think he can go on forever watching over Mother’s head, and deploring the absence of a gilded salon for her—Mother who won’t take the sealskin offerings that the gods are hankering to provide for her?

Maybe some other kind of life would have brought her out more. I suppose she is a raving beauty. I for one would like to see her always in velvets with chiffon hangings and silver slippers; but if all we’ve got to hold out for is the kind of life for which we’re best fitted, why, I, as Stella so frequently remarks, don’t see the logic of it.

CHAPTER III

The Webster girls live in a house, a real house with an upstairs and a downstairs, and a back yard with a police dog chained in it. I know the girls are rather silly, but I adore going there. Their chief object in life is to get out of doing anything that is expected of them. For instance, they are supposed to get up to breakfast, but they have all kinds of devices to cheat their family, and bribe the cook into letting them stay in bed. Sometimes one of them pretends she is sick, and the other—Mertis usually—brings enough breakfast for both of them to her bedside. Or they get the waitress to fill a thermos bottle full of coffee, and then they drink it with zwieback or Lorna Doones that they have smuggled in from the grocer's. Of course, this doesn't appeal to me so much, because Bobby will bring in my breakfast any time I ask for it, and he fixes it very nicely, too. He never slops the coffee or slides the things around on the tray.

"Excuse my pajamas, Sister," he says. Bobby is awfully cute when nobody is hounding him into being a perfect gentleman.

Marion is the prettiest Webster, but I think that Mertis has the most character, if you can speak of character in connection with either of them. They look a little like the Dolly sisters, if you have ever seen them in musical comedy, which I haven't. They are not twins, but they dress alike. This winter they both had gray-squirrel capes, the long kind to the bottom of their dresses, with deep yokes to their waists, and they wore black hats with big orange pins in them. All their clothes are cute.

Of course, they haven't an idea between them. All they care about is making lingerie, and going to shows and dancing, but I like them. I spend whole days with them. Mrs. Webster likes to have me because she thinks I'm a restraining influence. I'm not. I like to see them perform, and I'm pretty likely to start them going again whenever they stop for breath.

It's curious that they are so gay and giddy, with that kind, white-haired father, and gentle, frilly mother. I guess their parents were older than mine are now when they were born. They've got a married brother that looks positively patriarchal as compared with my young daddy.

If I could get the parents of my friends together in one room sometime I'd have

the funniest collection anybody ever saw. Tommy Nevers's mother is the president of the Woman's Civic Union, and she always wears a uniform. Cosgrove's father has been in jail, and I've got a girl friend whose mother dyes her hair pink, and is married to a boy of twenty-two. She isn't half bad either, and Prunella is the lambiest lamb I almost ever knew. Good old Southern family, and all that. Stella says that it's the children that educate their parents. Well, it's a lucky thing that we don't have to have them all at school together. Corporal punishment wouldn't do for all alike, but some of them would need it badly.

The most successful affair that the Websters gave was that orchid tea in January, a real *th*  *dansant* in their own house. The whole place was banked with lavender flowers, mostly mums, but the girls themselves wore orchids and pale mauve Georgette frocks—the most ravishing things I've ever seen in my life. They had their hair dressed at Richardson's, brushed back from their forehead and pulled way out over their ears. They had a string quartette, and the fattest caterer I ever saw. Every one took him for a guest. I wore peach color with my hair banded around my head. Even Stella, whose general idea of evening dress is a Batik portiere, *sans* stockings, thought I looked satisfactory, and said so.

I love the smell of a party, flowers and chicken salad and ices and talcum powder; with a kind of general odor of dressmaking establishments brooding over everything. When I stood in the front hall I got my first whiff of it, and often when I am with Carrington Chase, whom I met there for the first time, the general scent of that party comes back to me, just as it smelled on my first entrance upon it. You don't always have as good a time as you expect at parties, but I did at that one.

Carrington Chase is a peculiar person. I like him better than almost any one I know, but a lot of people can't stand him. He hasn't the conventional type of manners. When Mertis introduced us, for instance, he just looked at me, under his winglike eyebrows.

"This is Mary," Mertis said; "I've told you all about her. Miss Blair, Mr. Chase."

"So it is," Carrington Chase said, "Mary."

"I've heard a good deal about you, too," I said.

"I didn't know your eyes were going to be gray," he said.

“They aren’t going to be; they are,” I retorted.

He has a quizzical, rather benign smile, and hair that stands straight up on end. He’s quite young, and looks very old until you come to examine him closely. What I like about him is the downright way he says what he thinks, and what he wants. 1 “Come and sit over here on this sofa,” he said, “and tell me about it.”

“About what?”

“About Mary Blair and what she thinks of the world.”

“There’s nothing much to tell.”

“There’s every thing to tell,” he said earnestly. “I’ll wager my lucky penny that I know your reaction to this party, and all par ties like it.” I never heard anybody say “wager” before. “You want to know what the whole silly show is about.”

“Why, yes,” I said, “I do. Not that I think this is a silly party.”

“Oh! yes, you do.”

“I don’t,” I maintained.

“But it’s a part of the show that you can’t accept unthinkingly.”

“Well, no, I can’t.”

“It’s all in those big gray eyes of yours. They’ve challenged life, I suppose, ever since you first opened them on it.”

“I’m not exactly intellectual,” I said. “My sister Stella, Mrs. Cosgrove Worthington, is the prominent member of our family.”

“Mrs. Cosgrove Worthington—Stella Blair—you mean. Is she your sister? My Lord!”

“Didn’t Mertis tell you that?”

“No, she didn’t. My Lord!” he said again.

“She’s my sister just the same,” I said.

“Amazing!”

“I don’t think you sound very flattering,” I said. “Stella is rather nice when you come to know her.”

“Oh! I suppose she is. But you are nicer.”

“I’m not generally supposed to be very important, and she is.”

“You’re delicious,” he said, “and she isn’t. I’ll bet you never read a book on Political Economy in your life.”

“Well, I haven’t. I got one out of the library once, but Father said if it was political it wasn’t economy. Sometimes things like that stick in my mind and spoil a subject for me.”

“I’ll wager you went to boarding-school.”

“I did with Mertis and Marion.”

“You play?”

“Yes, some. Not Beethoven. Not Scriabin.”

He laughed. When he laughs he throws his head up suddenly, and all his gleaming white teeth show. His eye-teeth are rather fangy, but not unpleasantly so.

“Are you an artist?” I asked.

“Not I. I’m in the export business.”

“You don’t look like a business man.”

“I have the dilettante temperament.” It was the first time I had ever heard any one say “dilettante.”

“You look like an artist,” I said.

“You look like a rose. Let’s dance,” he said, and we did.

It wasn’t that he danced so well as far as the mere steps were concerned, but our dancing together was just as if one person was moving, instead of two, not only moving but gliding, swaying, and standing poised like one human being.

“That was beautiful,” he said, as we found our seats again.

“Yes,” I said.

“I’m going to break into this.” Marion pounced upon us, with a desiccated blond thing in tow. “I’m going to dance with Carrington myself, and Mr. Miffen is crazy to dance with you, Maisie. Mr. Miffen, Miss Blair. Now, you know each other.”

“How do you do, Miss Blair?” Mr. Miffen was slightly crosseyed. I had all I could do to refrain from starting in by telling him that French story of the lame man and the crosseyed lady: “Comment vous portez-vous?” “Comme vous voyez.”—But fortunately he expected me to dance. It was lucky I didn’t expect him to.

When he said good-night to me Carrington asked if he could come to see me. He also asked if I would go out with him and dance at different places sometimes. That wasn’t so easy to answer because, excepting going to the Hotel La France, which is near home, with Tommy Nevers, or the crowd, my public appearance with interesting young men has been conscientiously frowned on. Mother had such a hard time with Stella’s professional indiscretions, and they began so early, that I’ve been kept more or less done up in absorbent cotton. Still I put up a front, and accepted on the spot. I’ve never regretted it. His first call on me wasn’t the most successful thing on earth. In the first place, he hates cats, and Omar Khayyam, fresh from the coal, where she always goes when Bobby takes her down to visit the janitor, made a flying leap for his shoulders when he first came in. After Omar—Mrs. Omar she ought to be—Bobby came in eating something; and Mother didn’t look as nice as usual, and was very expansive about spiritualism. I don’t think many people like to have seances described out at length. It’s all right to tip tables, and make them lurch around the place groaning and spelling out people’s dead friends, but I don’t think a mere long recital of these manifestations is very interesting. After Mother, the Angel threw him a dissatisfied look, and then settled down to do her duty by him. Cosgrove doesn’t believe in talking to any one unless you like them, and he carefully says so to any one he doesn’t like, but Stella hasn’t got Greenwich Village manners,

only ideas.

After Stella had put him through his paces, he soon went away, and the next time I saw him I met him at the La France—and we danced. Since then I've seen him a good deal at the Websters' too.

He was with us on the worst bat I ever went on in my life, and I still remember it with the cold shivers creeping up and down my spine. Of course, it was just Marion's craziness, and it came out all right in the end, but I thought at one time that we should all end up in the night court. It began more reasonably than most things do, but it went on and on like a nightmare.

We went to walk first, and we got so far down the Avenue—the girls preening and strutting along the way they do, and *not* flirting so hard that every decent-looking man they met turned around to see why not—that they insisted on going home in a taxi. Now, I'm not supposed to taxi much unless I go with a guardian. Mother's read a lot of stories about taxi bandits, and she thinks I'd be drawn and quartered at the very least if I dared to climb into a cab without a chaperon, but the girls insisted, and there were three of us, so I swallowed Mother's scruples and went along.

We'd just given the chauffeur my address when we saw Carrington loping along the Avenue, and we got him in. While we were arranging him in our midst Marion spoke softly to the driver and told him to go out towards the Drive instead of taking us home. So he did. It was a long time before any of the rest of us woke up to the fact, because we were fooling over a box of caramels Mertis had in her muff, and Carrington was holding her hand and trying to make her give them up to him, or else stroking her on the cheek and calling her a nice little kitty. It's curious that he seems to like all that kind of palavering with the girls when his attitude to me is so different. He always talks to me about my philosophy and the fineness of my sensibilities.

"You'd better put me down, somewhere," he said warningly when he found out the true state of things; "I've a dinner engagement and it's five-thirty now."

"We'll put you down at the end of the subway," Marion said daringly.

"Well, if you do it in less than half an hour."

We drove on and on. Marion got out once and gave the chauffeur some

instructions, and finally Carrington demanded to know what was happening.

“We’re going to your old subway station now,” Marion said, “but if you haven’t really got a dinner engagement you may just as well come along. We haven’t got any money to pay for the taxi, but we’re going to keep on beyond Yonkers where my uncle lives, and get it of him.”

“You little devil,” Carrington said; “I haven’t money enough to pay for it.”

He hasn’t very much money. His job is a more important than lucrative one. I think it is so nice of him spending so much on me for teas and dancing.

“But have you a dinner engagement?” Marion persisted.

“I have.”

“Could you break it?”

“If I don’t turn up, my hostess will draw the obvious conclusion, that I found something I liked better.”

“Please stay,” I said; “I’m getting frightened.”

“All right,” he said.

Well, to make a long story short, when we got to Marion’s uncle’s the house was closed up. The family had gone to Florida. By that time the chauffeur was getting quite nasty. We just told him to go back again—that was all.

In Yonkers Carrington got out and bought about a million sandwiches and ginger ale to go around. The meter went up in leaps and bounds. It was seven dollars before we turned around. Mertis was so frightened her teeth were chattering, but Marion was behaving like a sport. She always does when it’s her funeral. She made the mistake of telling the chauffeur not to go to her house address, after all, but to go on downtown to another uncle’s. She had just remembered that her father and mother were dining out, and she didn’t want to tell the servants. The chauffeur was so suspicious that this was the finishing straw, and he began threatening to have us arrested, and everything.

“It’s a good lesson for the girls,” Carrington whispered to me; “they do crazy

things like this all the time."

"You won't let it go too far, will you?" I besought.

He made a little tunnel with his hands.

"No," he breathed through it.

At the end we did go back to the Webster house, and we didn't find Mr. and Mrs. Carrington took the money out of his pocket and paid for the cab. He'd had it all the time. Of course, instead of being grateful the girls were furious.

"I'll send it to you tomorrow morning," Marion said, thinking he would decline it, but he didn't. I guess he thought they needed more of a lesson.

He walked home with me, and left me at my door. He held my hand longer than he ever held it before. I suppose he knew that I had been frightened, though, of course, it was silly to be when he was there all the time.

"Your eyes are as big as saucers," he said, examining them.

"You've got rather big eyes yourself," I said. He has; they are a little like Omar's, only much more beautiful, blue and sleepy."

"All the better to see you with, my child."

"Well, as long as you don't eat me up."

"I won't promise that," he said.

CHAPTER IV

Whenever I am inclined to think that there are too many puzzling elements in my life, all I have to do is to think how many more of them Prunella Page has. Compared with hers my life is as simple as a game of solitaire. After all, I only have to play my own hand. Prunella's mother drinks, and she's a vamp besides. I've always had the vague wish that we had some really aristocratic blood in our family. We have way back, but so far back that a lot of grocers and ship captains and things got in between us and it; but the Pages belong to such a good old family that nobody till this present generation ever worked for a living. Mrs. Page was a famous Southern beauty, and yet she's killing Prunella with the most outrageous antics.

Prunella is lovely. She has long slim legs and ankles, and regular piano-playing hands—I couldn't stretch an octave until two years ago. Her face is a little too long, but she fluffs her lovely light hair out over her temples, and looks like a daughter of the gods, divinely tall, and most divinely fair. I do like poetry.

She doesn't talk much about her mother, not about the real inwardness of her affairs, but the mere facts she enumerates are often blood-curdling. In the first place, this twenty-two-year-old husband wants to get a job and earn his living, and Mrs. Page won't let him. She hasn't got very much money, but she's afraid to let him out in the world for fear his pristine innocence will be worn off, and also that he won't have so much time to devote to her and the Pekingese, Reggie. From the time she gets up in the morning till she takes down her henna hair at night (I call her the Henna Madonna), Prunella and Guy are kept on the rapid jump with soft pillows and smelling-salts, and hot coffee and aromatic spirits of ammonia. She isn't sick at all, only the kind of delicate that women get when they've got lots of vitality and won't take any exercise to work it .off. They make the other fellow take the exercise from sheer joy in swift movement, I think. Then, when she gets too awfully bored even to have a tantrum without help from outside, she begins to drink a little until she winds up completely pickled, to put it inelegantly. She'd be a peach to look at if she hadn't roughened a naturally poor skua with rouge and stuff, and if it weren't for that hair, but Prunella and Guy evidently see past the Cubistic decoration to the work of art itself. Prunella speaks of her mother's looks with bated breath. Well, so do I.

I was having my struggles with Bobby the other day when Prunella came to see

me. I don’t suppose I am specially fitted to pry into Bobby’s development along certain lines, but there is nobody else in our family to do it. He certainly doesn’t think that babies come from cabbages, and I’ve seen a look in his eyes when Mother was speaking guardedly of Stella that made me think he ought to discuss the matter with some member of his own family. Mother certainly wasn’t much help to me, though she would have been if she had thought fit to time her discussion of the facts of life about three and a half years earlier than she did. Of course, Bobby is eleven. I have always meant to get up my nerve to tackle Father about it, but I never did. I don’t think much of the school Bobby goes to. It’s a compromise between Mother and Stella—Montessori and water—and a lot of bad little boys go to it. I will say if Bobby could look anybody in the face when they were talking to him like a Dutch uncle it would be me. I was glad to see Prunella in spite of the interruption. Bobby untied the bows on my shoes and slid out toward the door, but when he met Prunella coming in, he said:

“How do you do? I guess it’s going to rain,” very politely in passing.

“Maisie, I want to ask you something,” Prunella said, without many preliminaries. “I can’t think what is the right thing to do. I know you have ideas on what is right and wrong in certain situations.”

“Well, sometimes, I have,” I said, “but not so often as you’d think.”

“What I want to ask is whether or not you think you have a right to suppress facts from people that they might distress too much?”

“Yes,” I said, “I do.”

“What I mean is—well, you know what a highly nervous condition my mother is in. She isn’t quite—normal. She doesn’t sleep much, and what sleep she gets isn’t really restful sleep. She tosses so much in bed. I have to keep pulling the bedclothes over her all night long.” Nice job for Prunella, isn’t it?

“I know,” I said.

“Well, I saw somebody she loves doing something she wouldn’t like. Not a very harmful thing, if you come to think of it, but slightly deceptive. I don’t know what to do about it. He—well, I may as well tell you it was Guy—doesn’t know that I saw him, so that part’s all right.”

“Where did you see him?”

“At a restaurant.”

“With a squab?”

“A—a chicken,” Prunella said explosively; “would you tell?”

“No, I wouldn’t,” I said.

“Why?”

“Because you’re the strongest.”

“Stronger than who?”

“Stronger than both of them. You have to use your judgment. They haven’t got any to use.”

“I haven’t got much. If it were you, why wouldn’t you tell?”

“Well,” I said, “God doesn’t tell.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that He—if there is a He—lets things like that happen, and go right on happening to the end. He started this universe with one general idea of letting human life work itself out. He put evil and deceit and everything in to keep it going. Otherwise it would stop.”

“You’re too deep for me.”

“Well, all I mean is that if God or Something started things going the way they are going, and He has the courage to let them go on that way, why, then I have.”

“I don’t see what that has to do with telling or not telling Mother whether I saw her husband buying lunch for—a chicken.”

“Well, it has. If you tell it will only complicate matters further.”

“I know it, but is it right not to? Isn’t it sneaky?”

I had an inspiration.

“If you were a doctor,” I said, “and your mother were your patient, would you let her be told a thing like that?”

“No, I wouldn’t.”

“Well, always think of that, then. That’s a good idea to hold on to. If you don’t have an idea like that in the back of your mind you won’t be any good in emergencies.”

“Of course, you never have any such problems in your life.”

“Yes, I have,” I said, though I didn’t want to; “I don’t tell.”

Of course, you can’t really help anybody unless you are willing to give them your confidence when they’ve given you theirs, but what you want to do is to keep your own things under your hat mostly.

In addition to her other troubles Prunella seemed to be getting interested in a man. I couldn’t be sure, but she spoke about him in a way that she has never spoken about anybody else. He’s older than she is, and his name is Anthony Cowles; Tony she calls him. She has known him for a good many years.

“I wonder if Tony would think it was all right,” she mused.

“No man approves of telling tales,” I said, which seemed to satisfy her.

“I don’t think I shall ever get married,” Prunella said, apropos of the baby dress I began working on later when we were ensconced in the dug-out. I usually begin with callers in the living-room, and then work toward my own quarters when the family begins to accumulate.

“I think I shall,” I said.

“Do you ever think about eugenics? Don’t you think anybody ought to have an awfully good inheritance in order to be married?”

“Well, very few people have,” I said.

“Don’t you think people ought to be bred like cattle? Only the good specimens allowed to perpetuate the race?”

“I used to think so, but now I don’t think it would work,” I said. Stella has expounded the subject so much that I’ve had to get up some kind of a point of view on it.

“Why don’t you?”

“Because people aren’t cattle.”

“Don’t you think there ought to be a law that forbade people who weren’t physically perfect, or who had a bad inheritance, to marry?”

Then I did rather a tactless thing. I put my finger right on the spot where her trouble was; her whole face wore such a wretched expression that I couldn’t help it.

“Don’t you go thinking you’ve got a bad inheritance,” I said; “nobody’s physically perfect, and nobody’s family is above reproach. This offspring’s grandfather”—I held up my handiwork—“has been in jail for aiding an enemy alien, but what difference does it make? He or she won’t be branded by it or anything, and if it goes to jail itself for the same or other crimes, it will be on its own head. That’s the way I look at it.”

“But if its grandfather had any really bad habits like drinking or anything?” Prunella trembled.

“Yes, but if its mother and father didn’t. Look at it practically,” I said; “wouldn’t you rather have a chance to be born into almost any nice family you know than not to have it? Every family has its drawbacks, but supposing they all refused to have children, what would happen to the world then? What would have happened to us if our mothers and fathers had come to that decision?”

“Sometimes I wish that mine had,” said poor Prunella.

After she had cried a little on my shoulder she felt better.

Tommy Nevers came in and created a diversion. He knows a man who knows Tony Cowles, whom he calls “Scowls,” and thinks that he is about the finest

fellow that ever breathed, so they had a pow-wow about that, and Prunella went home happier. As a matter of fact, I don't think her mother's drinking is very serious, considered as a menace to posterity. It's just hard on Prunella.

Sometimes I think it's a greater responsibility to have a mother than to be one. Maybe Stella's oncoming offspring will find it so. Stella believes in eugenics like anything, but she doesn't believe there is any mote in the family eye. I'm not so sure. She's sort of queer herself, and Father isn't a very strong character, or very well when he isn't looked after properly. He wrote Mother a very funny kind of letter, which was brought in to her just after Prunella's departure, when I was having these reflections on the subject of perpetuity.

Mother didn't quite know what to make of it, so she passed it around. It is a good idea never to write Mother anything that you wouldn't be willing to share with the janitor and the elevator man.

"Dear Helen:" he said, "Canada is a rotten place, but I have thought seriously of never leaving it. Could you, would you by any chance think of joining me in Montreal before I go farther West? If you would, please wire me at once. We could go into camp for a week as we planned. We could have quite a cheerful tune bumming around and seeing the sights.

"I don't feel very much married, and that's the truth. I should be glad to have my wife again, and to act as a general guide around the country. I've had a poor time so far, but you could fix all that. Helen, will you come?

"I've had the collywobbles, but they're better now. You know how these attacks go. Miserable for a day; but next I don't know that I've got a stomach. Then the trouble all over again.

"There are shows and all kinds of good eating, and some drinking. We could be very happy. I wish you would send me that wire. It isn't a good idea to let a husband loose too long. You'd like it after you got started. I've got the money, and for God's sake let's spend it together. Robert.

"P. S. For God's sake—come."

"You're going, aren't you, Mother?" I asked anxiously.

"What would you children do?"

“What we always do. Stella and I can run the house.”

“You think you can?”

“We can.”

“I can’t leave,” Mother said; “Robert ought to realize.”

“Why do you think he said, Tor God’s sake—come?’ Father doesn’t say things like that very often.”

“No, he doesn’t,” Mother said; “I suppose he isn’t feeling well. I am sorry he had to go. I must send him some warmer things.”

Even Stella thought the letter sounded a little ominous. She said she thought Mother ought to go and bring him home, and have him go through a thorough examination by a diagnostician. Mother said she’d write him to come home. I could imagine how the prospect of a thorough diagnosis would cheer his waning spirits, and how likely it was that he would hasten home to have it done, but there wasn’t anything more I could say, so I didn’t say it. I got hold of Bobby again instead.

“Bobby,” I said, “we didn’t finish talking.”

“Talking about what?”

“You know about what,” I said.

“I wasn’t talking about nothing.”

“Well, I was,” I said.

We paused. If I hadn’t been holding Bobby by a button I shouldn’t be able to speak in the plural.

“What do you want me to say?” he asked finally, after I had eyed him for a while; “that I’l1-always-be-a-good-little-boy-and-never-tell-a-lie?”

“No, I don’t,” I said. “I don’t want you to say anything. I want to say something to you. It isn’t about Stella; we’ve talked about Stella.”

“Yes, we have!” he jeered.

“Well, I have; and I’m through with that subject. Don’t mutter,” I said, shaking him, “but listen to me. It’s about school.”

“What about school?”

“I—know about it,” I said, bluffing.

Bobby looked very scared.

“I just want you to remember that I know about it.”

“All right. Let me go,” Bobby said. “Ouch, you’ll get that button off, and if a big bunch of cloth comes I’ll get the dickens.”

“Bobby,” I said, “did you hear me?”

“Sure.”

“Those horridest boys will probably grow up to be criminals. They aren’t smart, they are just horrid.” I told him about horridness in general as much as I dared, and how important it was to think of such things and understand hygiene and all that.

“I don’t go round with that bunch much,” he said; “honest I don’t. I wish you’d let me go.”

“But you listen to them,” I said, hazarding a guess.

“Not much.”

“It’s just common sense not to,” I said; “you think I’m just a girl and I don’t know.”

“Sure, you are.”

“But all I want you to do is to stick around with the decent boys.”

“They are all about alike.”

“No, they aren’t.”

“Who’s going to tell the difference?”

“You are,” I said unexpectedly; “you know the difference as well as I do.”

“All right, let me go.”

“Bobby,” I said, “you do know the difference, don’t you?”

“*You* wouldn’t think there was any difference,” he muttered.

“I don’t care what I’d think,” I said, “you’ve got to think!”

“All right,” he said, squirming away for good, but some way I did feel that I had made a little impression.

CHAPTER V

It's a curious thing about getting blue. You get up in the morning and the sun is shining, and there is lots of hot milk for your coffee, and you get into a clean shirt-waist that makes you look as if you had just been bought at a department store that minute, and yet you feel a general sense of being too *discomfortable* to live. I don't think anybody ought to feel that way, and I try not to, but I don't succeed.

It distresses me to death for Mother to be blue, and it makes me equally depressed for Stella to be so composed under all circumstances. I think if we ever shared any of our moods it would be better, but there is very little class spirit in this family. I cheer the things that Sister jeers at, and Mother remains serenely distressed at her own hallucinations. I think a family ought to coordinate as one man. When the head of it moves—either parental head—the children ought to wiggle like so many fingers and toes. Well, anyway, they ought to feel some of the same things at the same time. Somebody ought to be responsive to somebody. I positively feel grateful to Bobby when he inquires, "What's eating you, Sister?" because he always selects the time when something *is.*

I read a long article in the "Athenaeum" on Hunger the other day. As far as I can find out I have all the symptoms that an animal has when it is hungry, only the great difference is that I don't know what I am hungry for. I suppose it's life, really. I am, it appears, in a *behavior cycle,* which is a state you stay in until you get your result, unless you are interrupted by death or accident, or the intervention of another *behavior cycle.* You get very restless and uncomfortable, you agitate yourself till you get what you want, and then you *get it.* That's the one encouraging thing—_you get it._ Still, it's considerably more abstract to be hungry for life than for food. You get back to the same old question—what do you mean—life? You'd think that I had life enough with all the people I know, and things I have to do, but none of it seems very feeding, somehow. I sympathize with Father whose great cry is to be *utilized.*

His letter from Canada, by the way, was followed by a silence so deep that even Mother got worried, and began wiring him. It was a week before even the telegrams got any result. I think perhaps this item added some edge to my *behavior cycle,* which was cutting into me most awfully—_chafing_ is the word.

Every night when I went to bed I cried before I could get to sleep, and then I couldn't most likely.

Carrington Chase didn't come near me for over two weeks at a stretch while this was going on. He didn't telephone me or anything. The only thing I mind about not seeing Carrington is that things get so flat when I'm not talking or dancing with him two or three times a week. He has his faults, of course, but he makes everything seem so interesting. When he did turn up we had rather a funny evening. I decided that he ought to come to the house more. Of course, there isn't any harm in my meeting him at the La France. I meet Tommy Nevers therea and the time is past when you have to be so excruciatingly conventional about your best friends of either gender, but since I hadn't been telling Mother exactly the true status of the case I began to feel rather squirmy about it. I don't lie to Mother. When she asks I always tell her, but she doesn't very often ask. There are a few general rules which she assumes I keep inside of, and of course I'm over the legal age. Eighteen plus is being an adult in these days.

Well, Mother had Ellery and I had Carrington, and we sat off in our separate corners of the living-room and talked earnestly, a part of the time.

"I haven't seen you for ages," I told him. "I suppose you've been doing a lot of interesting things."

"Quite interesting," he agreed.

"Have you been to many parties and theaters?"

"I've been to some of the openings. I've seen several very bad shows, and one good one."

"What was the good one?"

"'Sacred and Profane Love.' It develops rather disappointingly, but the first act where the girl comes to the man's apartment is superbly done. She has the subconscious incentive which the man does not understand, and she works for the one result."

"She has a behavior cycle, hasn't she?" I said.

"A what?"\

I explained, but in rather different terms from those of the “Athenaeum” author. When I read the article it didn’t sound suggestive at all, but I suppose when you come to think into it that it is—like all science.

“You’re a funny child,” Carrington remarked thoughtfully, after I had elucidated. “You have a very frank mind, and yet a very excessive sensibility.”

I always get sensibility and sensuality mixed up. One means that you are sensitive, and the other means that you are not, that you are a little coarse, in fact.

“Have I?” I said. Then I remembered which was which. “I’m not sensitive in the sense of being touchy,” I added.

“I’ve never seen so much as a flash of temper in you.”

“You may some day,” I said.

“Have you missed me all this time? It’s been a week or two, hasn’t it?”

“It’s been two weeks and three days and eleven hours to be exact,” I said. “I know be cause it was during the time when we were so worried about my father. He was rather sick in Canada, and we couldn’t seem to get any news from him.”

“Why didn’t you telephone me?”

“I don’t telephone to people much. Besides, I thought you’d telephone if you wanted to see me.”

“That doesn’t necessarily follow.”

“Have you wanted to see me?” I said.

“Yes, my dear.”

“Then—why?”

“You know what happened to Little Red Riding Hood?”

I didn’t quite know what he meant by that. He was only trying to get a rise, I suppose.

“Well, she didn’t live to tell the tale,” I said.

“Have you seen Leonard Trask’s exhibition at Kncedler’s this week?” Ellery asked, lifting his voice across the intervening spaces between the two te’te-a-te’tes.

“Yes, I saw them yesterday. Rather remarkable studies.” Carrington has a great deal of presence of mind always.

“Now that I think of it I saw you there. You were with a lady with a long red feather, weren’t you?”

“Mrs. Harten Jones,” Carrington explained. “Trask is her cousin. He spent eight months in Alaska doing the things. I think he managed to bring away some pretty rugged impressions.”

“Big ideas compressed to a simplicity of expression that’s astounding.”

“Yes, and on such small canvases, too.”

I went to see them the next day, and I thought they were simply funny. Three uneasy icebergs the way Bobby would have drawn them, and a wudge of cloud. A red man, not really drawn, but horribly smeared against a background of vermicelli stars. Give me the Vorticists!

“Wouldn’t you like to get us some ginger ale or White Rock, dear?” Mother said.

“I’ll go,” Ellery said.

“No, let Mary.”

“May I come too?” Carrington asked.

I showed him the kitchen, and he was delighted with it.

“Let’s not hurry back,” he said; “they don’t want us.”

“They want their drinks,” I said.

“They’re having a good time. Who is Mr. Howe?”

I explained.

“Your mother has known him a good many years?”

“Why, yes,” I said.

“I’ve never heard you mention Mrs. Harten Jones,” I said.

“Well, she’s a friendly acquaintance with whom I sometimes dine and go about a little.”

“A widow?” I asked.

“Well, not exactly. One of these modern affairs with a husband abroad most of the time, you know.”

“I shouldn’t like that,” I said; “I don’t like modern situations. If I took the trouble to marry a husband I shouldn’t want him to go abroad.”

“I don’t think he’d be likely to. You said your father was ill in Canada—is he better now?”

“Well, he was the last time we got any news from him. He wasn’t really sick, only nervous and depressed. We’ve lost’ him again now, but the mails are so uncertain we don’t feel worried at all. Besides, it’s nearly time for him to start home again.”

“Are you very fond of your father?”

“Why, yes,” I said.

“Your mother is a very beautiful woman. Mr. Howe is a fine fellow, too, isn’t he?”

We got all the bottles and glasses together on a tray, and then we sat down on the edge of the table and swung our feet again.

Carrington slipped his arm over my shoulder, and we sat there watching the lights that opened on the court, and the different people or shadows on the shades that appeared at the windows one after another. It was very restful.

Stella and Cosgrove were in the living-room when we went back. The furniture consists mostly of new mahogany and old stuffed chairs; when Mother gets a new thing it has to be good, but personally I'd rather it would be the other way round, old mahogany that is. The Websters have lovely old highboys and secretaries and things that could stand old stuffed chairs. Still Mother does make a room look cozy with everything the right distance apart, and all that.

Stella was wearing a cross between a smock and a curtain, in bright green, and she looked lovely. .Cosgrove, on the contrary, looked like Bobby before he has washed up after baseball, only Bobby never needs a shave. Carrington had never met him before, and seemed quite pleased to have done so until somebody started something about the presidential candidate. Ellery was for Hoover and Carington for Wood, and Cosgrove, of course, for the overthrow of the Government by his dear friends the Reds. They were all of them too well used to argument to get very violent, but the general atmosphere was rather purple.

Carrington said that General Wood was a gentleman and that all his friends were gentlemen, and while that wasn't all there was to it, still it would help some. The word "gentleman" is like a red rag to Cosgrove, but he almost managed to behave like one under the coercion of Stella's earnest gaze. He does like Stella—I'll say that for him. Ellery didn't care who was president as long as it was Hoover! Then they all started on President Wilson, and got together in tearing him limb from limb. Poor old Wilson, I can't help being sorry for anybody that has as many people down on him as he has. I can't help feeling that he's a good deal like the old lady I used to buy eggs from in the country, who always said that she would have been a very different woman if she had had her health.

There was something quite humorous about me and Mother and Stella all sitting up with our eagle eyes on our own men, and quietly disapproving of everything each other's man said. Ellery is all right as far as he goes, but that isn't very far when you come to think of it. Cosgrove is all wrong, but he goes farther. Carrington—well, he's just fascinating, and what he thinks doesn't matter so much. The other two are not in the least intuitive, but Carrington knows everything that any one thinks.

It must be a queer thing to be in love the way Stella is. Mother and I are just romantic, of course. Mother has a perfectly good husband to whom she is devoted, but she likes to have the other sex admire her just the same. I like to admire the other sex. Admiration doesn't do me any good. I want to be the

admiree, if I can. But Stella, “so calm, so cool, so bright”—with apologies to whichever poet it is—is really devoted to her unkempt husband, and likes him as well as being in love with him. They aren’t exactly human, of course—Bolshevists never are, I guess—and it’s a little bit like a fish loving a crab, or two crosseyed people trying to look at one another. Some people have a warm, ruddy glow about them, like a lamp, but the Angel and her cult have an indirect lighting system concealed in their ceiling, as it were.

We sat around a table for a little while to please Mother, who wants very much to get a message from Sir Oliver Lodge’s son Raymond, and touched little fingers in the dark until we almost fell asleep—at least I did. Carrington has a very strong magnetic current that is shooting as well as stimulating. I could feel the throbbing all through me like somebody’s heart beating near you, all from a little-pressure of his hand. The table heaved and groaned a little, but it didn’t do anything else, and Cosgrove wanted so very much to tell an unpleasant story about a man that was murdered in Paris communicating the details of his death to some friends in Greenwich Village that he was finally encouraged to talk, and the seance broke up. Stella had to keep him in hand very firmly, because I think the story was even more improper than it sounded. Carrington didn’t think he ought to tell it anyway.

I had a little minute alone with him in the hall when he said good-night. We were standing just out of sight by the door, and Mother and Ellery were conversing in low tones on the seat in the bend of the hall.

“Good-night, Little Red Riding Hood,” he said, and then he did a thing I didn’t like, I don’t know why. He ran the tips of his fingers from my elbow to my wrist.

“Good-night,” I said, putting my hands behind me.

“I was very glad to meet your sister,” he said.

“She is lovely looking, if she is my sister.”

“I like those vine leaves she wears in her hair,” he said, “and your mother is very lovely, too.”

Mother’s voice rose for a moment.

“I’m not an unhappy woman,” she was saying, “only perhaps a misplaced one.”

Ellery’s answer was too low for us to hear.

“It’s a curious family for a little girl like you to be growing up in.”

“I’m not a little girl,” I said; “I am older than you think.”

“You are pretty wise,” he said; “you’d have to be.” He seemed to be weighing my wisdom. “What do you think of it all, I wonder,” he said.

“What all?”

He did not answer.

His face was very close to mine, and suddenly a funny thing happened. I thought that Mother kissed Ellery around the corner of the wall. I couldn’t possibly have seen her if she had, and I know now it was only my imagination, but I backed away from Carrington involuntarily.

“What’s the matter?” he said.

“I felt a little sick for a moment,” I answered truthfully. “I don’t know why.”

“You’re a funny child,” he said.

I am, I suppose, and sometimes I wish I were a little funnier or less funny. I wish the whole family were.

CHAPTER VI

I Saw the ambulance coming down the block, and it beat me to the door. Even when I stood aside to let the internes pass me I had no idea of the real truth. It was only when I heard the blond one asking the door man if Mrs. Blair lived in the building that I began to get an inkling of the facts. Mother wasn't in fortunately, as emergencies are rather apt to take it out of her.

Stella and Bobby and I got the room ready, and by the time they had got Father into bed with ice on his head, and hot-water bottles at his feet to draw the blood down, he began to show signs of regaining consciousness. I got Stella out of the room as quickly as I could. She was perfectly composed as usual, but she began to turn terribly pale about the eyes, and I was afraid that just physically she couldn't stand the racket. Bobby is the clumsiest boy on earth when anybody's looking at him, but very quick with his hands when he isn't observed and self-conscious. I found out what to do, and Bobby and I did it.

Then I sat on the edge of the bed very quietly until Father opened his eyes.

"Well, Baby," he said, and shut them again.

"Well, Daddy," I said, and slipped down to the floor, still holding his hand, and went to sleep almost as soon as he did. The doctor had told me he would drop off into a natural sleep after he came to himself.

"I wish I had let you go," he said drowsily once.

"I wish you had, Daddy." Then he was off again.

It was some time before I got at the facts—hours that is. Mother didn't come in. She had gone to a concert with Ellery, and then they went somewhere to dinner. She tried to get us by telephone, but the operator had told her, in her usual convincing fashion, that there was no such number as ours, and that the telephone was out of order besides, which is the usual way the telephone company adds insult to injury.

"Were you sick like this all the time?" I demanded, when my patient began to show signs of life again.

“I wasn’t sick at all. I only kept on feeling rottener and rottener. I was taken sick on the train, and pretty nearly cashed in, I guess.”

“But how did you even get home?”

“There was a doctor, and they tried to go through my clothes for identification marks. I came to enough to give them my address, and tell them to shove me in a taxi and send me to it.”

“You didn’t come home in a taxi, Daddy,” I said, and I described his entrance at length.

“Where was your mother?”

“Gone out to a concert with Ellery.”

“What time is it now?”

I looked at my wrist-watch.

“Eight o’clock.”

“She stayed out to dinner,” he said.

I told Bobby to watch out and break it to her gently.

“I don’t want to see her to-night,” he said.

“She—she never goes out like this,” I said, “she doesn’t really. This is the first time since you’ve been gone she was ever out to dinner, without one of us anyway.”

“That’s all right,” Father said; “I don’t care. Was that Bobby who put a water bottle at my feet?”

“Yes, but I thought you were unconscious.”

“It was pretty hot.” Father smiled.

“Did he burn you? Bobby would be awfully mortified.”

“We won’t tell him,” Father said; “get him in and let me look at him.”

“Do you want to see Stella, too?” I said.

“Not unless it’s absolutely necessary.”

Bobby was sitting forlornly in the hall when I called him. I had forgotten to report to him, and I guess he had been pretty scared sitting all alone there.

“Is he-worse?” he said in sepulchral tones.

“No, Son, I’m better,” Father called from the bed.

I put my arm around him, and found he was shaking with nervousness, but he pushed me away. “How are you, Father?” he said, approaching the snowy surface of counterpane, under which stretched Father’s limp contours; “did you have a pleasant trip in Canada?”

“Very pleasant, thank you,” Father smiled; “sorry to come home in such bad shape.”

“Oh! that was all right,” Bobby said. Father had never talked to him quite in that vein before.

“Thank you for looking out for me, you and Mary.”

“I didn’t mind,” said Bobby.

“I was pretty far gone for a while.”

“Didn’t you know it when you were riding in the ambulance?”

“He didn’t know he was in an ambulance,” I explained.

“Gee!” Bobby said.

I shooed him out when Father began to get tired, but outside of the door he held me up.

“What’s he got?” he asked in those same deep tones. “Apoplexy or something?”

“No; just acute indigestion.”

“Why, anybody has that!”

“Well, people can die of it just the same,” I said, not realizing that later we were going to hear of somebody we knew who did.

Mother was more upset to find that Father had come home sick without finding her on the job than she was at the mere fact of his illness. Of course, the worst of that was over when she came back. I kept her from going in to see him as long as I could, but she went just the same. He put up his hands with a little hopeless gesture, as if she had come too late, though it was a very good time for her to arrive, if she had to arrive after the first excitement at all. She stood looking at him with her little close blue toque still draped about her head.

“I am so sorry,” she said; “oh! Robert, why didn’t you telegraph?”

He made the same gesture with his hands, palms up.

“Are you sure you’re better now?”

“Yes, Helen,” he said.

She sat down beside him and put her hand on one of his. He let it stay there, but he did not move one of his little fingers.

“Are you sure there is nothing I can do for you?”

“Not now,” he said.

“Has Mary done everything the doctor ordered? Wouldn’t you like it if I slipped into some different clothes, and then came back? Wouldn’t you like to have me stay with you?”

“Not any more,” Father said heavily.

“I could just as well.”

Father turned on his pillow and shut his eyes, still with his hands open and the palms turned upward. It was hard to understand his not having anything to say to

Mother.

I would almost rather be sick myself than have any one else be. When pains are racking my slender frame I know their location, and just exactly how well I am going to be able to stand them. When anybody else is sick you suffer for two, yourself and them. I suffered for Father all that week, because his sickness, as they say, was more of the soul than of the body. Not that acute indigestion is any joke—it isn't.

He didn't have a nurse, so I was it, aided and abetted by Stella, with Mother in charge, of course. She is quite good in cases of sickness, and she did her duty faithfully by Father, but he didn't react to her, somehow. He liked to have me or Bobby in the room, or just to lie back and shut his eyes. He was wondering most of the time what was the use of getting well, and what particular excuse he had for existence in the bright roomy apartment for which he had hitherto so cheerfully paid the rent. I knew.

He sent me to his office for his mail, twice, and both times I brought him an accumulation of pale lavender letters in a feminine handwriting, which he waited to read till he was alone. There is no doubt that it's uncanny to have your father or mother philandering, however innocently. I felt as if those lavender letters were positively snaky, and I hated to bring them into the house as if they were so much poison. With my head, of course, I could only grant Father his right to a correspondence with a lady. When I get a husband, however, I hope to stand for all the elements comprised in lavender note-paper, and long red feathers, myself. The funny part of it is that Stella is the only member of our family who believes in the freedom of the sexes, and neither she nor Cosgrove cares anything in the world about philandering.

Sometimes I think Father tried to talk to me about it all, but I just automatically stopped him for some unknown reason. I can be of assistance to him in other ways, but not that way.

I was helping him sort and classify his business letters one day when I came upon a bill for a thousand dollars for a Hudson seal coat.

"I didn't know you got Mother that coat," I said.

"She wouldn't have it," Father said, not noticing what I held in my hand.

“But you got it for her just the same.”

“I did not,” said Father.

“Here’s the bill.”

“Let me have it,” he said, sitting up suddenly, and putting out his hand for it. “That was a mistake. I—I countermanded the order.”

“What a pity when you had already paid for it.” He had, for the bill was receipted. I had a vision of long, sweeping lines of rich seal sweeping about my young form. “What was it trimmed with?”

“Skunk,” Father said briefly; “no, beaver. It was changed for me.”

“I wish you had brought it home to me.”

“I wish I had,” said Father,” but it wouldn’t have done. Don’t-don’t say anything about it to your mother. She had her chance at it.”

Father adores women’s clothes. He doesn’t take such an interest in mine because he doesn’t understand flapper garments so well. Peter Pan collars and tam-o’-shanters discourage him, but let me put on sleeveless pink chiffon or anything soft and trailly with a waist-line-he insists on waist-lines to Stella’s disgust—and he’s my willing slave. I wish he liked to take me to places more, but he says he can’t talk like Tommy Nevers, and if he could he wouldn’t have the nerve. I think he is discouraged with the memory of the night I took him to the La France with the Webster girls. They treated him the way they do anything else masculine under ninety-five, and it rather palled on him. He liked the way they looked, but when he began his own little line of small talk Marion interrupted him with baby stuff all the time, and finally told him that if he was good she would dance with him after she had had another strawberry ice cream. Mertis reminded him that if he was good he would be lonesome, whereupon with the muttered remark that it would be a welcome change he abandoned us to our fate, only reappearing in time to pay our check. He wants to be amused, Daddy does, but the thing that amuses him the most is to be amusing to other people. I don’t quite fill the bill, because we’ve got such a difference of taste in jokes, but he used to be very funny and sweet to Mother and simply love talking to her. Now he doesn’t care. I think her not going on the Canadian trip was the mistake she made.

As usually happens, my cogitations led me to the subject of Carrington very often while I was doing my duty to Father. I'm not naturally secretive, only discreet, and I'd rather talk about the things I think about if I can. Besides, I thought if Father knew what a good friend I have it might vaguely cheer him up, cheer him up to know that people did have such relationships. Of course, Carrington isn't only a friend, he's an ideal. He knows about me, and what I think and feel. If Father only had somebody like that he wouldn't be so listless, so I began to dilate on Carrington's good qualities.

"Where do you see him?" Father asked; "in the bosom of the family?"

"Sometimes," I said, "but the bosom is so full most of the time that I meet him places—like the La France and at the Webster girls'."

Father gave a reminiscent shudder.

"Anywhere else?"

I named our dancing haunts, and Father considered them.

"I wouldn't go to the Rotunde," he said, "or Bealy's."

"Are the other places all right?"

"I shouldn't have said your mother would have let you go to them."

"Mother doesn't know," I said; "do you think I ought to tell her?"

"I think you ought," he said.

"She'll stop me going."

"I suppose she will. Why do you want to go?"

"I like to dance, and I like to be with Carrington."

"Are you sure he is all right?"

"The Websters have known him for years, and he goes about with all the girls I know. Ellery knows him."

“Then your mother thinks he’s all right. He probably is. Trot him in sometime, and I’ll look him over. Not that I’m much of a judge.”

“Father,” I said, “I don’t think I’ll tell Mother, if you don’t mind.”

“Oh! I don’t mind,” said Father; “I probably ought to, but I don’t. You can’t get anything to drink any more. It’s your mother’s lookout to see where tyou go. I don’t think your morals will suffer.”

“You don’t care much about my morals, do you?” I said saucily.

“I don’t care much about anybody’s morals any more,” he said.

I told Carrington about this whole conversation. I have got into the habit of telling him almost everything that is on my mind at all. I like the philosophical slant he gets on me, and the way he helps me to deal with my problems. Some people might call him rather cynical, but I like his kind of cynicism. It seems so real. The other people I know take life so much as a matter of course that it’s quite frightening—life and death.

It was Prunella Page’s stepfather who died, the little young man that her mother married before he was of age, and it was my first experience since I was a little girl of having anybody die who was connected with my own friends in any way. He died of acute indigestion, suddenly and without any warning when he was standing at the telephone trying to telephone for the doctor for Mrs. Page who thought she was getting sick. Well, I couldn’t get over it, or get any help or comfort about it till I saw Carrington. Everybody seems to take death so coolly when it isn’t their own immediate connection. You’d think that going out of the world was just one of the explained things that people could be criticized for and gossiped about.

“I understand why you wanted me,” Carrington said; “you’re frightened.”

“Yes,” I said, “I am, and I’m awfully—chilled too. It seems so strange that anybody I know could die like that.”

“That is the way it seems, isn’t it?” he said.

“Prunella isn’t a very deep girl,” I said, “she’s just sweet. I don’t mean she’s shallow, but she can’t seem to get any hold on herself.”

“How did her mother take it?” I had told him everything about her mother—but one thing.

“She isn’t—hasn’t been quite herself since,” I said.

“Does she seem to realize it?”

“I don’t think she does,” I said; “she doesn’t see any one but Prunella.”

“Poor kid.”

“Prunella is fortunate in one thing, just the way I am. She has one friend who understands the way she feels.”

“A man friend?”

“Yes, Tony Cowles,” I said.

“Do you know Tony Cowles?”

“I’ve never seen him.”

“I went to college with him.”

“Oh! isn’t that exciting?” I said; “did you like him?”

Carrington deliberated.

“He was all right,” he said; “he had a superiority complex, but he was all right.”

“I never heard of a superiority complex.”

“Neither did I,” Carrington laughed, “but he had one.”

“Prunella says that he’s awfully quiet and unassuming.”

“He may be. He’s the pedagogic type, that’s all.”

I don’t know why it worried me to have Tony Cowles called pedagogic, but I suppose it was only because I knew he was being so heavenly sweet to Prunella in her need.

“It isn’t so much having Mrs. Page’s husband die,” I said, “that has upset me. It’s—it’s people’s attitude. They don’t seem to know.”

“Know what?” said Carrington softly.

“Know anything. They just talk and talk and talk about it.”

“They do.”

“I think there is only one thing to realize when people die, if you only could, but I can’t. I feel as if I were the only person in the world that was even trying to realize this about huii.”

“Realize what, dear?”

“That when you’re dead you’re dead,” I blurted out; “and he’s *dead.*”

“Yes,” Carrington said, “he’s dead.”

“And he wasn’t fit to die,” I said; “why, *I’m* not fit to die. I haven’t worked anything out, and he—why, he was really shallow and uneducated and stupid.”

“Poor little man,” Carrington said. Then he added, “Don’t be frightened, dear, death is the greatest adventure, you know.”

“But he wasn’t an adventurer,” I said.

He put his arm around my shoulders, and we sat still meditating. It’s very warming to have any one who understands your inmost thoughts the way he does mine. I don’t think that Tony Cowles is really pedagogic.

After a while I went on to tell him about Father, and the fur coat that Mother wouldn’t let him buy her, and the way I felt when I found the receipted bill among his letters.

He gave a little exclamation at this.

“You don’t think that Father really bought the coat for me, and is keeping it for a surprise, do you?”

“No,” Carrington said; “he didn’t buy it for you.”

“It’s a pity he didn’t, isn’t it? I should have looked so well in it.”

“You look very well now,” he said; “all these philosophical agitations are good for you. To-night you are almost beautiful.”

“That’s nice,” I said. He wouldn’t say beautiful even if he meant it. He doesn’t express himself that way.

“You understand,” I said, “and nobody else does. I can’t just accept things the way they come. I’ve got to work them out somehow, or I can’t stand it. My mind or my soul or whatever it is grows more and more hungry all the time. I’ve got to know. You realize that about me, don’t you? I’ve got to find out what it’s all about.”

“You certainly have,” Carrington said. “I hope somebody will have the courage some day to teach you—beautifully.”

“I’ve got to know,” I repeated, “I’ve got to *know.”*

“You’ve got to *feel,”* Carrington said, gently.

CHAPTER VII

It occurred to me that perhaps my relation with Tommy Nevers might come under the general head of philandering, and I got so worried about it that I sent for Tommy, and put in a whole evening trying to find out. I will say that I succeeded in mystifying Tommy greatly. He's a queer boy—he cerebrates so much, and with so little result, that it's funny, when you come to think of it, that I should have chosen him for the object of my solicitations.

We settled down in the dug-out, and he made the air of that semi-private retreat foggy with his special brand of cigarettes. If any one in the vicinity was having a few surreptitious whiffs at the same time it was quite un-noticeable. Anyway I never have smoked in public places.

"I've had a rather hard day at the office," Tommy said. He's been out of college six months, and had his job six weeks.

"Have you?" I said.

"There's a great deal of red tape to be assimilated in a big office like ours."

"I suppose there is," I said, wondering how I could get the subject of our personal relations uppermost.

"My day goes like this. I get up in the morning, shave, dress, breakfast on the customary orange juice, oatmeal, and eggs."

"The citric fruits are rather out of favor just now," I said, quoting Stella.

"And coffee." Tommy didn't scorn the interruption, it just didn't penetrate. "Then I hustle to the subway. While I'm in the train I try to concentrate on the day's work. I go over in my mind the possible emergencies I will have to meet, and then I mentally attack the day's routine. By the time I'm actually at Bowling Green I've made a real beginning, by getting a lot of preliminary thinking out of the way."

"That's fine," I said.

“If you use the first fresh vigor of your mind for planning the day’s campaign you have an advantage over the man who hasn’t.”

“You are interested in business, aren’t you, Tommy?”

“Yes, I am. A young man starting out the way I am brings his opportunity to his job. It isn’t the job that’s the opportunity. The opportunity is in himself.”

“Well, I suppose it is,” I said. “Do you ever see Carrington Chase downtown? He’s in the export business, you know.”

“My interests are all in concrete, nothing else takes much of my attention.”

“I thought you might meet him out to lunch, or something.”

“I haven’t,” Tommy said; “I thought he was rather a tea hound and all that sort of thing. I always meet him whenever I go anywhere to tea.”

“He could say the same thing of you,” I said, “and you’re not a tea hound.”

“I don’t pretend to be a ladies’ man,” said Tommy.

“Neither does he.”

“I thought he did,” Tommy said; “look at the way he hangs around the Webster girls.”

“The Webster girls!” I said. Poor Tommy, he hasn’t got a very fine caliber and he doesn’t understand much about life.

“They are nice enough girls, but they don’t carry any weight. I like a woman with something in her bean. Look at you, for instance; I like to put in a lot of time with you, because you’re such a good listener, and when you do advance an idea it always agrees so well with what I think myself.”

“It seems to,” I said with deep double meaning.

“You’ve got horse sense,” Tommy said; “I like a girl that makes a fellow comfortable, but that knows where she gets off just the same; a girl that’s a good sport, but doesn’t want to get out where the ice is thin.”

“And that’s got a permanent wave if it’s done well enough,” I supplemented.

“That’s just a matter of appearance,” Tommy said.

“Why do you like to be at the beck and call of a girl?” I asked.

“I don’t know that I am,” Tommy said. I didn’t remind him that he was at my beck and call. “I like to sit around and talk about things, and tell girls what I think of them, and all that.”

“What other girls do you like to do that to?” I asked practically.

“There aren’t any others,” Tommy said, “specially.”

“Well,” I said, “if I wereyou I’d find a few.”

We finished up the evening by going to make a call on Prunella, poor lamb. Every time I see her my heart begins like a toothache. Now that she hasn’t her stepfather to bear the burden with her Mrs. Page puts in all her time vamping her, eating her up as if she was so much good nourishment. I don’t see how Prunella lives, even in a hotel.

I was a little sorry we had come when I found that we had interrupted a visit from Tony Cowles. They were sitting together on the couch in their small gimcracky sitting-room, and she had evidently been telling her troubles and having them sympathized with. The door had been set ajar for us, and we went right in without ringing the bell. Mrs. Page—of course I ought to call her by her latest married name, which is Pemberton, but I never do—doesn’t like to have the bell rung. She was not visible, but she was audible from time to time.

Tony Cowles was an entirely different person from anything I had expected. He was tall and blond and shy, with the best manners I have almost ever seen. When I put my hand in his he held it for a second, and looked at me without smiling. I knew he was examining the kind of girl Prunella had for her best friend in her hour of trouble. I smiled at him to show him that I wanted to do the best I could for her, and his answering smile was like a flash of light. Some people smile like that.

“I’m awfully glad you came,” Prunella said.

“I’m awfully glad to be here,” Tommy said in a voice as solemn as Bobby’s.

“I’ve been trying to persuade Prunella to walk around the block with me,” Tony Cowles said,” but she doesn’t seem to be persuadable.”

“There is nothing so refreshing as a little fresh air,” Tommy said.

I knew Tony Cowles knew that was funny.

“Mother doesn’t like to have me leave her.” A low moaning from the inner room seemed to bear Prunella’s testimony out.

“Tommy and I will stay,” I said; “it will only be a few minutes.”

“Oh! I don’t think I ought to,” Prunella said. She was so tired she didn’t want to start anything new with her mother.

“The doctor says she must get out every day,” Tony Cowles said; “she hasn’t been out to-day.”

“I’ll go if Mother will let me,” Prunella said, but it took her fifteen minutes closeted with that untold parent of hers to get it arranged.

Then it was decided that Tommy was to take Prunella out, and Tony and I were to keep guard outside her door. Tony being a friend of the family could rush in and restore her if she fainted, I suppose, but she didn’t. She just kept up a continuous murmur of suffering.

“I’m very worried about Prunella,” I said to Tony Cowles, as the door closed on Tommy’s sweetly solemn invitation to Prunella to come through it.

“What shall we do about her?” Tony Cowles asked.

“Well,” I said, “I don’t know.”

“If I can get Mrs. Pemberton into a sanatorium could you put Prunella up with you for a while?”

“Yes,” I said, “but we haven’t got a very restful place, I am afraid. It’s a fairly good sized apartment, but it’s got a lot of large people in it.”

“That wouldn’t do.”

“It might for a week or so.”

“No,” said Tony Cowles. I understood why they called him “Scowls” then. “She needs immediate rest. She ought to be somewhere that she can relax. If I make some plan to send her into the country, or even to turn over my apartment in town to her for a while, could you go with her?”

“Yes, I could,” I said. I was rewarded by another one of those smiles. Tony Cowles likes people who don’t shilly-shally, as well as I do.

“We’ll call that settled,” he said, and we shook hands on it. It isn’t always true that a handshake is an indication of character; at least I don’t think it is, for Carrington hasn’t the kind of a grip that makes you realize how sympathetic he is, but Tony Cowles, on the contrary, has. His personality is certainly very restful.

“Do you think you can handle Mrs. Pemberton?” I said, more straightforwardly than I had meant to speak.

“I do,” he said, with a kind of click of the jaw.

“Prunella won’t think she ought to go, but you think—?” I couldn’t finish my sentenee because I really didn’t know what I wanted to say.

“I think she ought to be—”

“Choked,” I finished for him.

He didn’t seem quite so lover-like as I had expected, but he was nicer than my wildest dreams of him. In fact, I liked him better than any man I had ever met, excepting Carrington. Carrington, of course, penetrates your soul, and Tony Cowles merely weighs you sort of judicially, and waits for you to measure up. I should hate not to, but I think I did.

Mrs. Pemberton made a noise at this juncture, as if she *had* choked, but nothing further until Prunella and Tommy came in; when Nell had one more session with her, though briefer than the last.

“There is nothing quite so refreshing as fresh air,” Tommy announced, when we were all at last seated again.

“It is very refreshing,” Prunella said; “I feel a lot better. I’m glad you made me go, Tony.”

“A brisk walk in good clear air always makes me feel fine,” Tommy said.

“It does me,” said Prunella.

Tony Cowles looked too interested to be true. Of course, he is at least twenty-five, and Tommy is just of age, but I don’t think he was ever given to repeating himself the way Tommy does.

“I think the air uptown in New York is entirely different from the business districts. It’s so much purer the higher up you get.”

“Yes, isn’t it?” Prunella agreed. She likes Tommy, though she doesn’t know him very well. Probably his line of conversation is very much like that of her dead stepfather. Anyway, she seems to know how to encourage it, without too much hard labor. I either work too much or hedge with Tommy.

“New York air is like New York water, surprisingly pure for a city of the size,” Tony Cowles said. I tremble to think of Carrington in the midst of a prolonged conversation about pure air.

“Now that the street-cleaning department is in such a disgraceful condition, I don’t see how the air can be pure,” said Prunella.

“Well, it isn’t—very,” Tony Cowles said unbrilliantly.

“Maybe a Soviet Government would do more for it,” I suggested, using Stella stuff.

“What?” said Tony Cowles.

“Well, it works in Russia,” I said.

“Look out; he knows an awful lot about Russia,” Prunella said.

“Well, I don’t,” I said.

“Nobody does,” said Tony Cowles, shutting his jaw firmly.

I know he knows a lot about everything. I can see it in him.

“Do you know Carrington Chase?” I said.

“Yes.”

“He’s a great friend of mine.”

“He was at Yale when I was.”

“He said he knew you.”

There the conversation languished. If Carrington thought that Tony Cowles was pedagogic, why, Tony Cowles must have had some kind of an opinion of Carrington. I wished that I could make him express it, but I couldn’t. Tony Cowles may be school-teachery, but I didn’t see anything of it on my first meeting with him. He isn’t a philanderer, either.

“Tommy,” I said to him on the way home, “you once said to me that this is a man’s world. Do you really think it is?”

“Well,” Tommy considered, “I think in a great many instances the woman pays, but then when you come to consider it so do men very often.”

“Prunella is paying, isn’t she?”

“I am very sorry for that little girl,” Tommy said.

“So is Tony Cowles,” I said; “how did you like him?”

“A little stiff, but agreeable.”

“I think it’s pretty well distributed, after all,” I said.

“What?” said Tommy.

“The—the world. Men pay, too,” I said, thinking of Father; “but whatever we do,

Tommy,” I said as I bade him good-night at my own door, “don’t let’s philander.”

“Philander?”

“Well, I’ve been thinking,” I said, “of the people I know that do.”

“Oh! you mean Carrington.”

“No,” I said.

“Well, who do you mean?5

“Nobody in particular,” I said, “really.” “You don’t mean me,” Tommy said; “all I want of a girl is to have her a good old pal of mine.”

“Like the song,” I said; “I know it. I really didn’t mean anything.”

“Well, good-night,” said Tommy, but he made a few general passes in my direction that might or might not have borne out my original theory.

“Good-night,” I said, ducking.

CHAPTER

Things have been slightly complicated in the family since Daddy staggered to his feet after the illness that followed his Canadian trip, and proceeded to ignore his home ties almost entirely. I don't blame him. He's got this grudge against Mother, and he doesn't get the things he likes to eat at home. He has a big comfortable room of his own, but even so the rest of the house is all littered up with manifestations of a busy life—Stella typing articles on International Solidarity at his keyhole, and all that.

I've tried to make him just as comfortable as I could, but one daughter doesn't make a family, and he looks on most of my attempts to liven him up with cold disfavor. He keeps thinking he ought to tell me that I ought not to go out with Carrington without Mother's knowledge, and that worries him, too. Well, the human soul is a very lonely thing, as Kipling or somebody says, and we've all got one.

As for Mother, she ought to be looking after me; I know that; but I was wondering the other day whether I ought not to be looking after Mother. She ought to find out where I go, and why I go there.

Fortunately my reasons and motives for what I do are perfectly sound, but supposing they weren't? I'm an adult, but quite a young adult, and sometimes I might be sincerely in need of the administrations of a mother, but Mother for some reason or other is not among those present at time of writing. She isn't attending to her business of mothering. If her philandering with Ellery is at the bottom of it, why, then, it ought to be looked into.

"Mother," I said to her one night when Father had just telephoned that he wasn't coming home to dinner—mostly he doesn't even telephone—" what do you think now about Daddy and the Canadian trip?"

"I think it was very bad for him," she said.

"He seems a good deal changed," I ventured.

"He looks badly, but then he had a good deal of work to make up at the office."

“He doesn’t spend much time with you.”

“He hasn’t much time to spend.”

“It seems too bad that two married people can’t be more comfortable together,” I said; “it’s kind of discouraging to the young to see matrimony so kind of discounted.”

“Your father and I don’t discount matrimony,” Mother said; “we’ve been married a good many years, and we understand one another.”

“But Father goes his way, and you go yours,” I said.

“Life is very complicated,” Mother admitted, “and it gets more so as you grow older.”

“It ought not to, Mother; you know it ought not to.”

“I suppose I seem old to you,” Mother said, pursuing her own train of thought, “but I don’t seem very old to myself, or—or to my friends.”

“You look very young,” I said, “even to my critical gaze. Carrington Chase says you are the youngest-looking woman of your age that he ever saw. Not that he knows it,” I added hastily.

“When my mother was my age I used to think of her as a very mature woman,” Mother said, “a long way from the romance of youth, but I suppose she wasn’t, any more than I am.”

“Did she have gentlemen friends?” I said.

Mother hardly ever hears any question that’s addressed to her, and she didn’t hear this one.

“I suppose my trouble is,” she mused, “that I am miscast in life. I am not playing the r6le for which nature intended me.”

“Ellery told—I mean, says that,” I said; “do you think he knows?”

“I think he knows me as well as any one,” Mother said, quite unaware of the

inappropriateness of telling me so.

“He thinks you need a salon for a background.”

“I know he does,” Mother said fondly.

“What do you think Father needs for his background?”

“Men are different,” Mother said; “their needs are more material. I try to attend to all of your Father’s material wants. I don’t think I fail in my duty to him. He cares less and less for my society, you must remember that, dear.”

“Mother,” I said, “why don’t you do something about it?”

She turned on me a look of such dewy innocence that I was nonplussed.

“What is there to do about it, dear?” she asked.

What, indeed?

The next thing I did was to tackle Ellery. It seems very simple to get right at the root of a matter like this, but when you come to examine it you find out that it isn’t. As Browning says, it’s an awkward thing to play with souls.

“Ellery,” I said, “I don’t think Mother is in a very good state, do you?”

“Do you mean headaches?” Ellery asked anxiously.

“No, she isn’t having many of those, but you know how lackadaisical she gets sometimes. Well, I think she’s getting more and more so.”

“Lackadaisical?” said Ellery.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea for her to follow the line of least resistance the way she does.”

“The line of least resistance?”

“Well,” I said, “I don’t suppose I can tell you very much about Mother that you don’t know, but she seems to me to be softening down considerably.”

“You don’t mean muscularly?”

“If you consider the soul to have any muscles, I do.”

“You mean that she is—spiritually—er—er- “

“Out of condition,” I said.

Ellery looked perfectly miserable.

“Did you have some special object in talking to me about it?” he asked.

“Well, I can’t talk to any one else. I thought I’d like to see what you thought, anyway. Besides, Mothef’s interested in you, and she isn’t interested in me, so you might do her some good.”

“She says you are a terrible child,” he said, with that kind of worried smile that is his nearest approach to a sense of humor. “In what way did you think I might do her some good?”

“By leaving her alone,” I said stoutly.

“I’ve thought of that,” Ellery said unexpectedly; “but she hasn’t got anybody but me.”

“She’s got us,” I said, but I knew what he meant, just the same.

“She’s so fine,” he said;” she needs so much.”

“So does Father,” I said.

Ellery wilted.

“So do I,” I said; “she ought to look out for me, and she doesn’t.”

“She’s an ideal mother,” Ellery said hotly.

“Ideal, but not real,” I said; “it isn’t only rice pudding that a young girl needs.”

“She’ll never leave you, you know,” Ellery said; “she wouldn’t even stay away from you for a single meal.”

“She did the night that Father was taken sick,” I said, “and now it doesn’t make any difference.”

“What do you think I ought to do?” said Ellery miserably.

“I don’t know,” I said; “just step out till she gets her bearings or something.”

“She won’t let me,” Ellery blurted out; “she doesn’t like it if I don’t come. I’ve been coming so many years.”

“Don’t you think that you and Mother come under the general head of philandering?” I said.

“Not that,” Ellery said briefly; “I don’t suppose you can understand my devotion to your mother.”

“I can, but I can’t understand her devotion to you.”

“Oh! “Ellery said, “oh!”

“She ought to have gone to Canada with Father.”

Ellery won’t talk about Father.

“Your mother is so rare,” Ellery said; “you can’t judge her by ordinary standards.”

“But there aren’t any others.”

“I want everything that’s beautiful and good for her,” Ellery said.

“I know,” I said; “Beauty. I want it, too, but just practically how are you going to give it to her with things mixed up the way they are?”

“I don’t know,” said Ellery.

He feels about Mother the way I do about Carrington. He wants to give her everything that I want Carrington to give me. I don’t exactly know what I mean, but Carrington’s friendship is the one thing that solves all my problems, and makes life seem like a wonderful thing to me. If this is the case with Mother, what can I say? What I want is for Mother to tell me how she connects it all up,

instead of my trying to figure her out like a little Miss Fbtit. Nothing much can be fixed, anyway, I suppose.

I knew Stella didn't have any point of view on it that would seem rational to me, but being a naturally thorough person, I didn't rest until I had sounded her out also.

"Stella," I said, "don't you think that Mother and Father are drifting apart?"

"I hadn't thought about it," Stella said.

"Well, I wish you would think about it, and tell me what you think."

"Of course, they have no common mental interests," Stella said; "they married on the old basis, ignorant of the episodic nature of love."

"Do you regard Cosgrove as an episode?" I said.

"Cosgrove and I are mated mentally as well as physically."

"Well, supposing you weren't. Supposing after you got all mated you found out that your common mental interests were waning, what then?"

"Why, then, we should dissolve our partnership."

"Get divorced, you mean?"

"Yes; we married with that understanding."

"But what about your offspring?"

"Our children will be individuals just as we are individuals, with the individual right to follow out their own development."

"It might be harden them," I said; "children need moral and mental support."

"I never did," said Stella.

"Don't you believe in families at all?"

"I believe in communities," Stella said.

“There have been a good many centuries of families,” I said; “do you really think it would be a good idea to abolish them now?”

“The family as an institution is abolishing itself.”

“Our family seems to be,” I said.

Stella’s inconsistency in staying at home with us so as not to set up an absolute institution of her own struck me afresh, but nothing would make her see it that way. Her idea is to shed your offspring the way a tree sheds its leaves, I suppose, in the middle of a community.

“Ellery and Mother have common mental interests in a way,” I said; “I wish they didn’t.”

“For Heaven’s sake,” said Stella, “y[illegible]u don’t object to that, I hope! You don’t question the right of the individual to choose his associates?”

“I don’t believe in married women being too much occupied with detached men,” I said. “I want Mother to look out for Father instead of Ellerying around all over the place all the time.”

“Don’t be morbid,” Stella said; “that kind of an attitude is pernicious. It’s a relic of the dark ages. You wouldn’t interfere with Mother’s freedom in the choice of friends, would you?”

“But it’s all wrong,” I said; “things ought not to be that way.”

I don’t know that Stella’s burst of silvery, ringing laughter helped me much, but I can’t blame her. She doesn’t know that anybody wants to be helped, ever. She’s like a goldfish swimming in a bowl.

As much as I could communicate to Carrington of all this, I did. His point of view on marriage is characteristic, but real like all the other things he thinks. It’s such a change to go from him to Stella, who is “as passionless as a bit of glass.” I quote Carrington. He believes that people should not marry until they see their way clear to setting up a decent regular establishment, and then only if the impulse to do so is irresistible. In other words, he believes in love, but he doesn’t think you ought to let it hamper you. I think that is perfectly fair, and I agree with him. He won’t be able to marry for some time yet, I suppose. Meantime, I

am the best woman friend he has.

“Still bothering about the rights and wrongs of things, aren’t you?” he said; “you can’t rearrange the universe, dear.”

“You know I don’t want to rearrange the universe,” I said. “I just want to know what to think of this particular instance.”

“Why do you have to think anything at all?” “I don’t know,” I answered, “but I do.” “You want to hold your mother and father together. To prevent a scandal?”

“There’s no question of that,” I said quickly.

“People will talk, though I don’t know what people. You haven’t a circle that you have to be afraid of, not being society people.”

Well, of course, we’re not society people.

“No,” I said.

“Why do you bother? Your mother and Mr. Howe may have a very beautiful friendship.”

“Oh! they have,” I said; “I just want to know what to do, and what to think.”

“There are certain obligations of civilized life,” he said; “the question is always just how civilized the life is. I’d just let the show go on, if I were you.”

“I suppose I’ll have to,” I said, “but do you think I ought to?”

“I don’t see how you could help yourself in any case.”

“What are you smiling at?” I said quickly.

“You,” he said.

“Why at me?”

“It’s an amusing situation, that’s all.”

“I can’t decide what things mean,” I said, “and that always makes me

miserable.”

“Don’t be miserable. Be happy. All that life is worth is the happiness you can get out of it.”

“But without injuring anybody else,” I said. The idea was not original.

We were sitting in the dug-out, so he put his arms around me and I rested my head on his shoulder as the family were mercifully out. Suddenly I felt as if the whole world were dissolving right before my eyes. I usually get so much inspiration from him, and whenever I am touching him I feel so safe. This time I began to feel farther and farther away from him, and I knew if I couldn’t feel that he was really near me, and really understanding me, that I would not be able to bear it.

“Are you happy now?” he said.

“Yes,” I said, “but tell me what to think.”

“Don’t think.”

“I must,” I said.

He only smiled, but I felt closer to him.

“It’s all right, isn’t it,” I said, “about my family? We aren’t all drifting into chaos or anything?”

He smiled again.

“Kiss me,” I said, “kiss me.”

I couldn’t bear being alone any longer.

CHAPTER IX

Stella was going to the hospital to have her neatly arranged baby according to scientific schedule, but the stork anticipated her. Cosgrove, Jr., arrived in our apartment one blizzardy evening in early February, and I know a good deal more about life now than I did even the evening previous to that event.

I sat at the telephone and telephoned impartially for doctors and nurses and taxicabs. Later I tried to get an ambulance, but I couldn't. The streets of New York have been practically impassable for weeks, the snow has been piled so high. So Cosgrove, Jr., decided not to wait until these practical difficulties were overcome, but joined the family group in our already overcrowded apartment.

My first instinct was to drive Bobby out into the night, blizzard or no blizzard, influenza or not, but I thought better of that, and took him off into his own room and stuffed cotton into his ears. The house was full of Cosgrove and Father, and three of the doctors I had telephoned for, as well as a nurse or two, and Stella. Ellery we sent away.

Mother was fine. I sometimes forget that she once had Stella and me and Bobby, but we all remembered it that night. She knew exactly what to do. Cosgrove was scared stiff, and Father walked him up and down the outside corridor and told him stories, just like any nice avuncular kind of person might have done. b_ "Do you feel sick, Bobby?" I asked him, as the evening progressed and he got whiter and whiter.

"No, I feel all right."

"It's most over," I said.

He began to cry after a while.

"Don't you worry, Bobby; Mother says it isn't as bad as it seems to us."

"I ate so much of that lemon pie," Bobby said, "I guess it wasn't good for me."

I put my arm around him.

“I guess I’m going to be sick,” he said, and he was—a little.

“Look here, Bobby,” I said, to get his mind off himself, “I’m the one that ought to mind the most. You are going to grow up to be a man, and it’s only women—”

“You’d better not get married,” Bobby said.

“Most every one does,” I said.

“Foolish, then.”

“Look here,” I said, “how did you get into this world? If people didn’t get married, you know, we shouldn’t be here.”

“Well,” Bobby said, “I’m never going to get married, I can tell you.”

“Bobby, you ought to have a course in hygiene. If I had a chart, and we were both the same sex, I could give it to you.”

“Well, you couldn’t,” Bobby said.

I closed my eyes, and listened to all the noises there were. Stella was the most penetrating.

“Put that cotton back in your ears,” I told Bobby.

“You’re sick yourself,” Bobby said; “do you feel as if you were going to be sick?”

I did, but I didn’t tell him so.

He rubbed my head and let me kiss him two or three times. I thought of everybody in the world that I knew, excepting Carrington. I postponed him because it wasn’t a matter of actual mental help I needed; it was only an endurance test.

“I hear a goose quacking,” Bobby said later.

“Ducks quack,” I said.

“Well, ducks, then. Don’t you hear them?”

“Why, yes,” I said. It was an awfully funny sound.

“Do you suppose it’s one that Cosgrove has got Stella for a present?” Bobby said.

“Come away from that door, Bobby.”

“If it’s a duck I want to see it.”

A great light broke over me.

“Well, it isn’t a duck,” I said; “it’s a member of the human species.”

“Not the baby!” Bobby said, disappointed.

“Yes, the baby.”

“Well, I don’t think much of it, then.”

Cosgrove and Father broke the glad news to us.

“It was only two hours,” Cosgrove said; “it was like Stella to have a phenomenally easy time.”

Well, if she had had a hard time I think I should have lost a really valuable little brother, to say nothing of a year’s growth and the use of a fairly adequate mentality. Knowing all about a thing, as I did after all my hygiene and the reading of Stella’s literature on the subject, isn’t the same as *knowing*. *I* am certainly an older and wiser woman. So is Bobby, so to speak.

I never cared for little squalling babies very much until Stella had this one. I used to like little puppies, or even pigs, much better. Babies always seemed to be so unnecessarily undeveloped, but Squidgins—with apologies to nobody, because that’s my name for him—is a very superior specimen. He’s been a person from the very beginning, with a wavy pompadour and large blue wicked-looking eyes. The first time he opened them on me I nearly dropped him. He seemed to know so much that put me entirely in the wrong. It’s the Romany gypsy look he has that especially appeals to me. Anyhow, I winked back and we were friends from that instant. I don’t get much chance at him, of course, but there are scientific interims when he has to be held while the nurse is sterilizing

something or somebody, that make it very pleasant for an interested aunt. By the way, I don't see why uncles have an adjective and aunts haven't.

At first, I couldn't pick him up without the most disastrous results. A small baby has to be handled like a frog with a broken back. If you don't look sharp they'll wiggle through your fingers, and if you don't hold on to their heads they are likely to fall off. Also there is a soft spot on top to be reckoned with. It hardens up in time, but it has to be scrupulously avoided while they are new. I say to him:

"Squidgins, you are very little,

And your bones are very brittle,"

and he always smiles. Of course, they tell you that those smiles are merely digestional grimaces, but it seems curious to me that they always have a digestional response ready at a given time.

When I am very restless, and the back of my neck aches from too much conjecturing about the universe, or wondering why Carrington doesn't telephone oftener-he doesn't need to see me half as often as I need him, but I suppose that's because I need him oftener and oftener—why, getting Squidgins cuddled up under my chin is quite a panacea. He seems very warm and soft—and mine. It's funny how a little fragment of a baby like that can seem to belong to you, especially when it doesn't.

Stella regards him with an interest not unmixed with surprise. After all, he isn't a little goldfish swimming in a bowl, nor a Bolshevist, nor even a reasonable human being like herself. He's something undreamed of in her philosophy—a baby, a real live kicking baby. I should think she would be wondering herself crazy about this remarkable fact.

He certainly doesn't make family life any more complicated. I brought him out the other night just after we were through dinner, and went the rounds exhibiting him. Father and Mother got together over him with quite a little do-you-remember stuff that I'd never even heard before. It seems that when Stella was born they were so young that they knew practically nothing about what to do with her, and had all kinds of experiences trying to cover up their ignorance.

"Robert disowned her once," Mother said; "we were going down to the beach for

the summer, and she cried so much on the train that he was ashamed of her, so he said in hearing of all the passengers that he hoped my husband would be there to meet me when the train got in."

"Your mother got even with me, though," Father said; "she told me that she hoped they'd let my wife out of the asylum before long."

"That created a real sensation," Mother said, and they both laughed.

"He doesn't look like Stella," Father said. "Stella was the calmest baby that ever lived."

"Except when we traveled with her," Mother put in.

"He looks more like Bobby," Father decided.

Bobby came over to see about this, but didn't feel very flattered at the comparison.

"Gee, I bet I was never as red as that," he said.

"You were the reddest baby I ever saw," Mother said; "you were a regular little Indian."

"I'd rather look like a red Indian than an old man."

"Squidgins doesn't look like an old man," I said.

"He does, too!"

"He does not!"

"Well, if I could get an old man, and have him here, you'd see."

"Luckily, you can't," I said;"wedon't want any nasty germy old men around Squidgins."

"Well, if I could get one I'd show you," said Bobby foolishly. "Look at him, he doubled up his little fist and tried to pound me. Take him away!"

"The next thing you know you'll get to like him, Bobby," I said.

“I shan’t either.”

I caught Father and Mother actually exchanging glances over this. I wish they’d be more interested in Bobby. There are ways in which he is almost too bright, and then other ways in which he seems actually stupid. Of course, boy nature is a funny thing. Boys take so much out in pretending to be rough and coarse that it’s hard to get right down to the root of them and decide how much softening influence to exert. I don’t know that growing up to be a boy is fraught with as many uncertainties as growing up to be a girl is, but it’s certainly a more cantankerous process. Boys resist everything that girls take as a matter of course. I yearn and hunger for a little demonstrativeness in hours of need, and Bobby makes a big effort trying to avoid any such thing.

Father doesn’t spend much more time at home than he did, though. I had rather a harrowing encounter with him the other night. I went to the Cafe de Boheme with Carrington quite late, when Mother thought I was spending the night at the Webster girls’. I was, of course, but not anything but the literal night itself, as we danced till nearly half-past one. I am a smooth dancer, if I do say it myself, smooth and sensitive to the inclinations of my partner. Carrington doesn’t need so much as the littlest pressure of his hand to lead me. I know what he is going to do as well as he knows it himself.

As soon as we got inside of the place I saw that Father was there with a lady, one of the earringed variety. We were a little before the theater crowd—we’d been to a movie—and the place was practically deserted. You couldn’t just bow to your own father when he was one of the only other two couples in the room, and pretend you had practically never seen him before. So Carrington and I reluctantly sailed up to him, and he reluctantly reminded me that I had met Mrs. Van der Water, and we all ordered ginger ale and club sandwiches, and talked a lot of feverish small talk to hide our embarrassment and general chagrin. I was glad to have Father and Carrington meet, but that was the only ray of light in the situation.

Mrs. Van der Water shook her gory earrings at Carrington, and smiled at me.

“So this is the little daughter,” she said, not meaning to accomplish so much unpleasantness of tone.

“I’m still growing,” I said, “though I never can make Father believe it. Do you

like to dance?”

“I enjoy looking on better.”

“When the music begins perhaps you’ll try it with me,” Carrington said.

“If Mr. Blair doesn’t mind.”

“Oh! I don’t mind,” Father said; “I was lucky enough to run into Mrs. Van der Water at the Astor after dinner to-night, and she kindly consented to—er—come across the street for a bite to eat. At a business dinner I never get enough to eat. Talking business is hungry work.”

Father was never so apologetic before.

“Isn’t it?” said Mrs. Van der Water. She does her hair like Valeska Suratt, combed straight back like painted hair, and her eyes are smudged with natural brownish shadows. She was wearing a blue charmeuse trimmed with lemon color. I always hate women that wear lemon color. She had left her wrap with the coat girl. I wondered if it was the same imitation moleskin she had on the first time I saw her that night she and Father were with Jimmie Greer at the La France.

Carrington played up to her the way he does to the Webster girls, only he treated her as if she were a stage beauty or something. He paid her every little attention there is, watching her glass to see if it was empty, lighting her cigarette for her and all that. He has beautiful manners—even when we are alone together he doesn’t forget the little courtesies that make life so very much more pleasant. When they got up to dance Father stared after them gloomily, and so did I, too, I suppose. They seemed to hit it off so awfully well.

“So that’s your young man, is it?” Father said.

“Yes; what do you think of him?”

“I don’t think very much of him.”

“Oh!” I said.

“Oh! I suppose he’s all right. Where’s that young Tommy Nevers you used to see

so much of?”

“I still see him,” I said; “he seems so much more childish than Carrington.”

“Carrington is certainly not childish,” he said.

“Mrs. Van der Water is a very striking-looking woman, isn’t she?”

“I suppose so.”-

“She is, if you admire that type, but Mother is so wonderful-looking that I’m prejudiced in favor of blondes.”

Father answered with a snort of annoyance. “We’re going after this dance,” he said, you’d better get home early yourself.”

“I’m not going home,” I said; “I’m going to the Websters’.”

“Do they know who you are out with?”

“Yes.”

Carrington sailed by with his chin over Mrs. Van der Water’s shoulder. She smells so much of Mary Garden talcum powder the effect couldn’t have been altogether gratifying.

“He’s got a fishy eye,” Father said; but Father can’t dance very well, and might have been a little jaundiced by the fact.

Carrington and I sat and watched them go out. Father was scowling as he stood by the swinging door with his hat and stick in his hand.

“He’s a fine-looking man,” Carrington said; “look at the fur wrap on the lady.”

Mrs. Van der Water was sporting a Hudson seal coat with a deep shawl collar of beaver. It was certainly a wonderful-looking garment.

“That coat,” I said—“why, it couldn’t be—”

Carrington smiled.

“You think it is,” I said.

“Oh! well,” Carrington said, “don’t be too hard on him. Your mother wouldn’t have it, you know.”

“I wish you hadn’t called my attention to it,” I said.

“I wish I hadn’t. I didn’t think. I was so impressed by it.”

“Father never lied to me before,” I said.

“He wouldn’t have lied to you this time if you hadn’t caught him red-handed. He’s very fond of you.”

“He’s fond of me, but I bore him, too.”

“Well, you don’t bore me,” Carrington said.

But when I cried on the way home in the taxicab, he made up for his seeming callousness. He kissed away my tears one by one.

“Don’t mind, little girl,” he said, “don’t mind anything. Don’t you know how dear you are becoming to me? Don’t you realize that I hate to see you grieve?”

“Yes,” I said, and I do know.

CHAPTER X

“You’D better powder up your nose, darlin’,” Della said; “there’s a perfectly new man to see you in the parlor.”

“A new man to see me?” I said; “what does he look like?”

“He’s a fine-looking man, honey, a big light-haired man, with great blue eyes.” “Did he ask for me?” “Yes, he asked for you, honey.” “Didn’t he give you his name?” “He gave me his name, but I forgot it, darlin’, I was so taken up just looking at him.” I was so curious to see who it could be that had come to see me that way, without even telephoning, and roused Della’s interest to that extent, that I followed her right into the sitting-room without a backward look at the nose she made so much a point of.

Tony Cowles uncoiled himself from the depths of the wing chair, and stood smiling at me for a second before either of us said anything.

“I canvassed this neighborhood for a tele phone booth,” he said, “until I had to choose between taking my chances at trying to find you without telephoning or using my last free half-hour to get you on the wire.”

“I’m glad you chose coming,” I said, wishing I had taken Della’s advice.

“I wanted particularly to see you to-day,” he said, “because Prunella’s affairs have come to the point where they won’t wait. I am bundling Mrs. Pemberton off to a sanatorium tomorrow, and I have come to ask you if you can join Prunella at my place tomorrow night. She’s not going out of town because Dr. Hueston wants to keep her under observation. She’s going to my place because you’ll both be more comfortable there than anywhere else I can find for you.”

“But we’ll be turning you out,” I said.

“I can go to the club. I’m used to that. I don’t mind a bit, really.”

“It will be great fun,” I said.

“You think you can arrange it, then?”

“I know I can. I talked it over with Mother when you first spoke of it—that is, of my being with Prunella while her mother was away.”

“I asked for Mrs. Blair, too.”

“She’s gone to a concert,” I said; “I’m sorry. You would have liked seeing Mother.”

“I think you’ll be perfectly comfortable. There’s a bed and a day bed in my room, and plenty of chests and bureau drawers. There’s room enough for three men to store away their outfits, so I imagine two girls would be just about able to squeeze in. Miranda will take care of you nicely. She’s a funny old soul, older than the maid who showed me in, but her general appearance is very much like her. I think you’ll get on with her.”

“Della calls me darliu’ most of the time,” I said.

“Miranda will be following her example very soon, I am sure. It’s settled, then? I will come for you at about half-past five and you will be there in time for dinner.”

“Lovely,” I said.

“I want to have a little talk with you about Prunella sometime. One of these days when she is taking her prescribed nap—the doctor is putting her on more or less of a regime, you know—we’ll take a turn about the park and settle her affairs for her.”

“You’re awfully good to her,” I said.

“She needs her friends,” Tony Cowles said soberly.

“I think girls need their friends oftener than men do. I mean I think they have more troubles.”

“More troubles?” said Tony Cowles encouragingly.

“I mean I think they have more shocks,” I said; “they don’t know what to expect of the world as well as men seem to.”

“Meaning?” said Tony Cowles.

“Well, men know what things are likely to happen in a situation,” I said; “girls just go right on thinking that things that happen to other people aren’t going to happen to them, that people they believe in can’t really do wrong, and then when they find out they get a terrible shock.”

“I suppose they do.”

“Girls know there are horrid things in the world, but they don’t believe them, and then when they have to it’s almost too hard to bear.”

“I had a little sister,” Tony Cowles said, “who was just about your age, your age and Prunella’s. She died two years ago.”

“Did she?” I said; “perhaps you know more about girls, then, for that reason.”

“We were very close. She used to say she had all her best jokes with me. That counts a good deal, you know.”

“Did she tell you her troubles, too?”

“When she had any.”

“Did she have a father?”

“Yes, he’s still living.”

“Was he a young-looking father?” I asked.

“Not so very. I was a good deal older than she. They were very good friends, though.”

I was ashamed to find my eyes were filling with tears.

“I’ve had some trouble,” I said, “and sometimes when I think of it I get a little upset.”

“I don’t mind,” said Tony Cowles, which was, of course, just exactly what I wanted him to say.

“It wasn’t anything but a shock,” I said; “I suppose every one has them.”

“I’ve got a nice big handkerchief,” said Tony Cowles, as he began to realize that I didn’t have any.

“Thank you,” I said, and began to smile and not need it so much.

“How is the young man who thinks it’s so refreshing to be out in the fresh air?” he inquired presently.

“Very well,” I said.

“He amuses Prunella, so we must have him around while she’s visiting me.”

“He’ll love to come,” I said; “he thought you had a very nice mind.”

“A nice mind!” said Tony Cowles; “well, that isn’t the way I should have described it myself.”

“Isn’t it nice?” I asked saucily.

“Probably, but’nice’ isn’t my favorite adjective, exactly.”

“It isn’t mine,” I said. “I haven’t any favorite adjective, but I have a favorite noun.”

“Have you?”

“It’s-‘ beauty,’” I said. “I don’t mean art or anything like that by it. Well, I just mean—beauty, that’s all.”

“That’s enough,” said Tony Cowles soberly.

We shook hands at parting, and I stared at the clear blondness of his hair, which he wears sleeked down to his head in a way that almost disguises its fine texture. Someway it makes his head look very dependable. It turned out that a dependable head to remember was the one thing that could have been any help to me. I thought I had suffered about Father, but my suffering about that still left me a world to live in. I haven’t had one since I went to dinner with Carrington that night. All the time I was planning to go and visit with Prunella I was

hugging the idea of that dinner to my breast. Poor old breast, it didn't know what it was in for, but it knows now. It will always know the same thing.

I never had dinner with Carrington before. I had met him after dinner and danced or gone to tea with him, but we had never met and gone through the regular schedule of four courses and a demitasse, and, of course, the idea excited me. It is a good deal more grownup to go out to dinner with your men friends than just to meet and dance with them, and a lot more exciting some way. We went to a very stunning place, too, the Butterfly Grill, which is the downstairs of the Butterfly Restaurant, and has squashed butterflies all over its walls, and little stalls to sit in, and a peacock blue velour carpet among its attractions.

We began with grapefruit with a cherry in it, and then we had sweetbreads and grilled sweet potatoes, and a course of artichokes all by themselves instead of a salad,—I do love Hollandaise sauce,—and then we had ices and coffee, strawberry ice cream, to be exact. The dinner part of it was all lovely, but after dinner we had our fatal conversation. Nobody ever told me, and I never read anything about it in any book, that you could sit looking across a table at a person you loved best in all the world, and be absolutely stabbed by a few low-spoken words from him. I didn't know it was possible at one moment to be alive, and believing one thing about a person with all your heart and soul, and the next moment to be practically dead, and not believing in anything any more. It doesn't make any difference to me now what ideas I have about the universe, I don't think there is any such thing as beauty. Oh! I'm sure there isn't.

I began talking about Father a little. I kept asking Carrington things about it just so I could get a point of view on it.

"Mrs. Van der Water is typical," Carrington said; "she's neither better nor worse than her kind. Your father is probably able to take care of himself. She'll bleed him as long as she can, and then she'll look elsewhere, that's all."

"You can't imagine how queer it makes you feel when it's your own father," I said.

"I never cared what my father did," Carrington said; "he was an old rake."

"Did you ever find out anything like this about him?" I asked.

"Oh! yes."

“Didn’t you mind?”

“I don’t remember minding.”

“Somehow I’d feel better about everything if it wasn’t for Ellery,” I said.

“A very harmless member of the human family.”

“But harmful in his effect,” I said. “If Mother would only not be so interested in him, she might do something about Father.”

“The modern daughter,” Carrington said, “intellectualizing about the sex affairs of her parents.”

“But Mother and Ellery haven’t anything to do with sex,” I said, “not really. They’re just philandering.”

“What is philandering?”

“You talk like Stella,” I said.

“You don’t,” he said; “you’ve heard everything in the world discussed. You mustn’t pretend your eyes are shut.”

“They are opening fast,” I said.

“Doesn’t it occur to you, my dear, that there is a little mote in your own eye, a little beam of sex?”

“What do you mean?” I said.

“What do you think I mean?”

“I don’t know.”

“You know I love you very dearly,” he said, “don’t you?”

“I suppose I do know.”

“You know that I’m not a marrying man.”

“I don’t want you to marry me,” I said quickly; “I’ve never thought of such a thing. I just want you to care about me the way you do.”

“I can’t care about you the way I do. I’ve either got to care about you more or less. You know that.”

“Why?” I said; “I just want you for my friend, for the person I can tell everything to and who will understand me. You can care about me as much as that, can’t you?”

“It seems simple, the way you put it,” he said, “but you know better.”

“I don’t think I do,” I said; “you’ve never talked like this before.”

“It’s time I did,” he said.

“You—you frighten me,” I said.

“I mean to. You need frightening. You’re very young, but you are after all not quite so young as you pretend to be. You know what you are doing, dear. You know what you are doing to me.”

“I don’t think I do,” I said.

“I think you do. You’ve got too good a head not to know. You know what I represent to you.”

“What do you represent?” I said.

“Emotion,” he said, “life. Sex, if you want to call it that.”

“I thought it was something else,” I said.

“Well,” he said, “what are you going to do about it? It’s your responsibility as well as mine, you know.”

“What do you want me to do about it?” I said.

“I have nothing to suggest,” he said; “I love you. You’ve led me on—”

“I didn’t know it was that,” I said.

“What did you think it was?”

“I didn’t think.”

“Think now,” he said; “what you want is life. I can give it to you. You know too much for your ignorance, dear. You ought to get your balance young.”

“I shall,” I said.

It’s embarrassing to sit in a restaurant with the tears streaming down your face, trying to talk airy nothings as if you didn’t know they were there. I had to change the subject to something more trivial.

“Have you seen the Webster girls lately?”

“I went with Mertis to ‘Look Who’s Here,’ last night,” he said; “some newspaper friend sent them tickets.”

“Did you like it?”

“Be a sport,” he said; “I’m only trying to put things straight. You’ll be glad I did.”

“I’m glad now,” I said; “did you like ‘Look Who’s Here’?”

“Fairly. The girls weren’t much, and the costumes were both shocking and ugly.”

“Like life,” I said.

“Life isn’t shocking and ugly. It’s very beautiful. I can show you how beautiful it is.”

“Not now,” I said; “I suppose you think I’m a kind of baby vamp?”

“Yes—and no,” he said.

“You said I led you on.”

“You did.”

“I loved you,” I said; “I didn’t know it, but I loved you.”

“Why the past tense?”

“Because it is the past tense.”

Then, because I couldn’t control the tears that kept coming faster all the time, Carrington called a taxicab and took me home. He held my hand in the cab as usual.

“I should think you would be ashamed to let me see what a cry-baby you are,” he said jokingly.

“I don’t care,” I said; “you might as well see me cry. You’ve seen other things.”

“I understand you better than you think,” he said; “I’ve just tried to show you my point of view.”

“You have,” I said.

He kissed me good-night.

“Will you let me hear from you, dear?” he said.

“I don’t know,” I said.

When I got into the house I saw Mother kissing Ellery in the front hall. She knew that I saw her, and called me in to talk about it after Ellery was gone.

“You mustn’t misunderstand, dear,” she said; “Ellery and I are very old friends, you know. We’ve always had a more or less affectionate relation.”

“Well, I don’t care,” I said.

“That’s not quite the way to speak to your mother, Mary.”

“I don’t care,” I said; “I think everything is rotten. You don’t have to apologize to me for how rotten things are. I know.”

And I left her standing at her dressing-table with her hairbrush in her hand, and her eyes wide open.

CHAPTER XI

The first week of my being with Prunella in Tony Cowles's apartment was like the blind visiting the halt. I could hardly see some of the time, because things got a peculiar habit of darkening before my eyes, or the room would tip itself up and then swing back again and settle in a very giddy fashion. I had a pain around my heart, which I thought was organic too for a time.

Prunella was hardly any better off. She was so used to the querulous sound of her mother's voice that she shivered every tune she felt as if she was going to hear it. I kept my own state of mind from her as well as I could because I think you have to in the case of a person being weaker than you are. Prunella was all shot to pieces; there was no doubt of that. I missed Squidgins. The top of his head, soft spot and all, would have been a good thing for my heart trouble. Of course, it was sex that was responsible for his being in the world, but you don't have to think of that with a baby because the baby itself doesn't understand anything about it. Anybody else may be acting from not unmixed motives. According to Carrington, I was.

The place turned out to be adorable—well, perhaps it was a little too bachelory to be called that, but it was perfect. It wasn't done in mission furniture, though there were big chairs and couches of carved dark wood and Spanish leather in the living-room, which was also a library, with low shelves running all the way round it stuffed with all the most heavenly books in the world. I felt almost safe there.

Prunella, in a blue cap to match her eyes, and her soft mouse-colored hair fluffed around her face, had her breakfast served in bed, and I had mine with her, sitting up in a high-backed chair by the bedside table that Tony bought especially for this function.

"Wouldn't this be fun," Prunella said, "if I weren't feeling so badly? Poor Maisie, I am sorry for you with an invalid on your hands."

"It's fun, anyway, isn't it?" I said, wanting her to believe it was.

"I don't think any thing's fun any more," Prunella said, "since Mr. Pemberton died. I keep feeling that anybody might die, and that I am probably going to.

There isn’t much to live for, I don’t think.”

“You’re just morbid,” I said.

“I don’t think this sanatorium is going to do Mother any good, and if it doesn’t I can’t stand it.”

“Do you love her so much, Prunella?” I said.

“I don’t know that it’s love,” Prunella said; “I worry about her all the time whether I’m with her or not, and she can’t bear me out of her sight.”

“She took Mr. Pemberton’s death very hard,” I said. “Prunella, do you think she would have been fond of him just the same if your father had been living?”

“What a terrible question!” Prunella cried, “how can you say such a thing, Maisie?”

“I just wondered,” I said.

“Maisie, sometimes I don’t think you seem natural. You just walk around the house like a person in a dream, and you say unnatural things.”

“Maybe I’m a kind of monster,” I said, trying to be playful. “I was accused of being a baby vamp once.”

“Who accused you?”

“Carrington,” I said.

“Well, he was just kidding you.”

“Of course,” I said, smiling. I can almost always smile now. I’ve only cried those two times, once with Tony Cowles and again that same night when Carrington took me to the Butterfly Grill.

“Nobody ever called me a baby vamp,” Prunella said; “I don’t see any boys, anyway. I’m always running around with the smelling salts. Oh dear, that’s very wicked of me! Sometimes I’m afraid when I say a thing like that I’ll be punished for it.”

“I don’t think we are punished,” I said; “if I thought we were I should be glad.”

“Why?” said Prunella.

“Well, I’d think there was Some One to punish us. Some reason for it all.”

“What do you think now?”

“I don’t think there is much reason for anything. I think most things are—” I was going to say rotten, but I remembered that it wasn’t a very good idea to share this feeling with poor Prunella.

“When I make a remark about Mother, a remark that shows tiredness or impatience, I feel sometimes as if I were driving a nail into her coffin.”

“It’s cigarettes,” I said, “that drive nails into people’s coffins. Besides I think your mother is better than you are, apart from her grief at losing so young a husband.”

“He was young,” Prunella said, “but he was awfully nice when you came to know him, and very helpful too.”

“Did you ever think, Prunella,” I said, “that he might have really hurt her feelings worse if he had lived?”

“I think I could always have shielded her,” Prunella said, “but perhaps I couldn’t.”

“Well, since he is dead, why don’t you think that?” I said; “it can’t hurt any one.”

“You mean that you think it would be all right for me to decide that it’s the best thing that could have happened?”

“Yes, I do,” I said.

“Don’t you think that’s a kind of heartless way of looking at it?”

“I think that dying would be the best thing that could happen to lots of people.”

“Something’s got into you,” Prunella said; “I know it has. You’ve always been a

kind of backbone to me, and now I feel as if it were giving way."

"Well, don't cry, Prunella," I said, comforting her; "backbones don't really give way. Maybe I've just got a curvature of the spine like Richard Third."

"Oh, don't!" said Prunella.

After that I tried not to distress her by any allusions, covert or otherwise, to the things I was thinking. However little you care to go on living, you ought to keep it to yourself, I suppose. Just because you've found out that life is fundamentally evil and disgusting is no reason why you should go around spreading the glad tidings.

"Tony Cowles is very good to you," I observed, to change the subject.

"Yes, he is," Prunella agreed.

"You have a kind of an ideal friendship with him, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have. If it wasn't for Tony I should die, I think."

My poor old eyes filled with tears, but Prunella didn't see them.

"He's certainly an ideal host," I said. "Miranda said that he ordered chicken and waffles and Henri ice cream for to-night, and he's going to take Tommy Nevers with us to the theater *if* he can get him over the telephone."

"I didn't know that," Prunella said, cheering up.

"You like Tommy, don't you, Prunella?"

"Well, you do, too. I like his ideas about things. He's so sensible, and everything," said Prunella.

"He likes fresh air," I said shyly.

"He likes sensible girls, too. Girls that are good sports and don't flirt, you know. The kind that are not always anxious to get out on thin ice."

"Yes, I know he does."

“I don’t think he really cares much for the “Webster girls. He practically described them in telling me the kind of girls he didn’t care for.”

“Well, Mertis is going to get a permanent wave,” I said.

“What do you mean by that?” “He likes permanent waves.” “Oh! I don’t think he does.” “Well, you ask him if you get a chance.” I gave her a chance that evening, when we all went to “Ruddigore” together, after gorging on fried chicken and waffles. Or I didn’t exactly give her a chance; Tony did. He planned it that I was to sit next to him, and Prunella and Tommy together. When the curtain went up his hand was lying on the chair-arm, and I kept looking at it at intervals, and wishing I could close my eyes and hold it a few minutes instead of gazing at the performance. I don’t think anybody in the world could help me, but I’d like to tell him what I had found out about life, and see what he’d have to say about it. Maybe he’d send me to a sanatorium, or send me away from Prunella so as to be sure that I wouldn’t contaminate her. Of course, I can’t be intrinsically very nice, considering the kind of things that I am mixed up in and supposed to resemble.

“Are you devoted to Gilbert and Sullivan?” Tony asked me when the lights went on. He took his hand away and opened his programme with it, and then let it fall on his overcoat which he was holding.

“If this is it, I am,” I said.

“This is it,” he said seriously.

“Of course, I’ve played ‘Pinafore,’” I said, “but I’ve never seen any of them acted before.”

“This isn’t the best of them musically,” he said, “but it’s one of the most delightful.”

“It’s got lovely tunes.”

“Shall I send you a score tomorrow?”

“Yes, please,” I said, and we both laughed.

“How do you think Prunella seems?”

“All right *now*” I said.

On the other side of me I heard Tommy giving her an outline of his daily schedule. He’d got as far as “When I’m in the subway I begin to concentrate on the possible emergencies I will have to meet—” and Prunella was listening to him eagerly.

“As a general thing do you think she is gaining?”

“Yes, I do,” I said. “Mr. Cowles, I’m not altogether sure that I’m the best influence for her. I don’t want to be visiting you under false pretenses. You know that I told you that I wasn’t very cheerful.”

“You said you had had a shock.”

“I keep having shocks,” I said, “and they make me a little bit draggy. If you don’t think I am good for Prunella, you just have to say so, and I will go away.”

“Shocks?” Tony Cowles said invitingly.

But I didn’t pursue the subject.

“I think you are the best possible influence Prunella could have,” he said; “if Miranda doesn’t make you perfectly comfortable I hope you will complain at headquarters.”

“You know she does.”

“I hoped she did.”

“The opportunity is in himself,” Tommy was concluding.

“I think you are perfectly right about that,” Prunella agreed.

“A motto with that strange device,” Tony Cowles murmured, as the curtain rose on the second act. Then he put his hand back where I could look at it again.

It was not until after that night that I began to want to see Carrington again. I had not supposed that I ever would want to. I had thought seriously of killing myself, for I agree with Stella that when an individual has ceased to be of service to a

community or to himself he has a perfect right to self-destruction. It's a matter of your own conscience, really. As long as you believe that you are put in this world for a beneficent purpose, and you follow out the laws of physical and mental development accordingly, why, then you are not a detrimental force, but when you begin to deteriorate—you are. Cosgrove says you have a perfect right to be a destructive element if you want to. But I don't want to.

I intended to wait until my visit with Prunella was over, as it wouldn't be very nice of me to leave her and Tony Cowles in the lurch—and then perhaps drown myself. I never have thought that I wanted to turn on the gas. I'd always be afraid that I would be resuscitated by mistaken friends, but drowning is good clean business, and when you are dead you are dead, and not disillusionized any longer.

It's curious how your ideas of things change. I was more frightened of death than of anything when Mr. Pemberton died, and now it is rather a welcome idea to me.

I began to write notes and letters to Carrington every day when Prunella was taking her nap. Of course I never sent any of them. For one thing I didn't write them to send, and for another I didn't want to make an appointment to see him while I was visiting Tony Cowles. If I went out to meet Carrington from there it would have seemed sneaky. I don't know where I got my ethical point of view from, but that was the way I felt.

Then one day I was all alone in the apartment while Prunella and Tony were out walking, and I just went over to the desk and wrote pages and pages without stopping. , "Dear Carrington," I said, "you may be surprised to get a letter from me, because I have only written you notes before, but I should like to tell you my point of view on our friendship, and then to stop it forever—if I can.

"You see, I thought this was an entirely different world from what it is. I was brought up in a rather peculiar way, and I had to do my thinking for myself. I didn't have brains enough to get anything'doped out' right, apparently. I probably didn't have the most helpful kind of education to improve my philosophy, and my bringing-up was eccentric in some ways. Stella and Mother and Father all have such diametrically opposed ways of looking at things. I think it would be better to have rules of conduct laid down for young girls, and not so much left to their imagination. Your parents ought to tell you what is right and

wrong or good and bad, and if they don't know, why, the State ought to have the power to do it, like in the old days of the Greeks. Some order might be brought out of chaos this way, but perhaps it doesn't matter. "I just took the universe on trust, I suppose. I took John Stuart Mill's word for it that evil was put into the world so that there would be something to keep the wheels going round. It would be a static condition if there wasn't some elimination going on. That always seemed very reasonable to me, and a great comfort, when my sister was philosophizing about the menace of modern civilization and so on. Then I have found so much about Beauty in the literature of the poets, and even in the prevailing conversation of different people, that I got to believe in it as a thing you could go on expecting to find—beauty and love. I don't know whether I am making my ideas very clear. I am just trying to tell you the things that may excuse me a little for my attitude toward you.

"When I began to find out things about my father and my mother that didn't seem quite right, I couldn't believe even then that there was any explanation of their conduct but a kind of sloppy or lackadaisical way they had of looking at things. I should not have talked to you about my fears on this subject if they had been real fears or suspicions. I know you will be inclined to scoff at my saying so, but I just didn't know that things were like that. I supposed in a dim way that your own relations had to be like Caesar's wife,' above suspicion.'

"It wasn't right for me to meet you out at different places without telling my mother, or it wouldn't have been right if I had had the kind of mother that really minded such things. Perhaps I am exaggerating the importance of mothers. I don't know. This was my first mistake. My second mistake was a much more serious one. You know what that was, as well as I do. Of course, it didn't seem wrong to me because I didn't know what things were like. I was silly enough to believe that there could be tender and beautiful friendships that could go on indefinitely, with each trusting the other and giving the other the comfort and affection that he craved.

"Of course, I knew about sex in a general way, but I didn't seem to connect what I knew with my devotion to you, or with the way it made me happy to have you near me. I suppose this is because it cloaks itself in the guise of beauty, just as Nature cloaks the animals in brilliant plumage to further her own ends. If my mind had been more logical I should have understood this before, but as it was I only knew that I loved you. I suppose you will think that I am making confused explanations when I say that I knew that I loved you, and I didn't know it at the

same time. But it seemed all right to me. I don’t know whether that is a thing you can believe or not. You said I knew what I was doing. You said I was a baby vamp.

“Well, I suppose I am a baby vamp. I understand perfectly—when you say you love me—what you mean, but I don’t like it very much. I suppose that is not very consistent of me. I loved you, and all I could expect was that you would point out to me what I was doing.

“You said I *knew* what I was doing. I must have known in a general way, but I can’t understand yet why I was not warned by my intuition that there was something else beneath it all. I did not expect that you would ask me to marry you. I didn’t want you to, because I was so happy as I was.

“Now, I don’t see how we can go on. I should like to see you again and talk things over, and perhaps I shall some day, but that is all, and—”

At this point I stopped, because I could see that to his logical mind I wouldn’t seem to be getting anywhere. He wouldn’t care so much why it was that I felt the way I do. He would only want to know whether I was going to do anything about it or not. I don’t want to do anything about it, because it would be so terrible to see him again with that one expression on his face. So I tore up the letter. I tore it in long scraggly pieces, and then I tore it in little pieces, and burned it in Tony Cowles’s grate, and when he and Prunella came back from their walk it was burning merrily.

“A bonfire?” Tony Cowles said interrogatively.

“A bonfire,” I said.

“Nothing wrong?” he said with an intent gaze into my face.

Then as I didn’t answer he put one of his nice friendly hands on my shoulder.

“I wrote a letter,” I said, “and burnt it up.”

“That is sometimes the best possible thing to do with a letter,” he answered quietly.

CHAPTER XII

I Had forgotten that my visit in Tony Cowles's apartment couldn't last forever. It could have gone on almost indefinitely, I suppose, if Mrs. Pemberton hadn't come frantically out of her sanatorium one day when she wasn't expected to. Tony thought he had her sewed in too tight for anything like that to happen, but stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage. She came right through all of them, and appeared to us one sunny morning slightly lit up, though Prunella couldn't imagine where she got it. She probably bribed somebody at the sanatorium. I shudder now when I think of the expression on her face when she held out her arms to Prunella, and cried in a high, hysterical voice:

"Darling, aren't you glad to see your mother?"

"Your hat is on crooked, Mother," Prunella said, trying to straighten it.

Mrs. Pemberton pulled some of the straggling henna locks down over her nose, and blew at them inanely.

"Don't want any hat on," she said; "take it off, dearie."

So Prunella took it off, and finally got her mother quieted and put to bed in Tony Cowles's bed that she herself always slept in, but before she went off to sleep she had extracted a sacred promise from Prunella that she would never leave her again. It was all so ghastly that I felt quite seasick. Mrs. Pemberton is a refined woman, of the very best family and antecedents, but she looks and acts a good deal like a park-bench woman. It is a strange mystery to me that a lady like Prunella's mother can be a regular pathological case that the Charity Organization societies would be after if she moved in a different social sphere. She's like a piece of beautiful decaying fruit, drenched in wine.

Tony Cowles was heartbroken at the failure of his plan for Prunella's preservation, but the best of his efforts failed to persuade her to have her mother taken away from her again. Prunella believes that she alone can stand between her mother and destruction, and even the doctor won't admit that to tear them apart is the way out of the difficulty. I think it is, myself, but men are a good deal more sentimental about family relations than women are. They don't know so much about them from the inside of the inside.

“The only thing I can do now,” Tony Cowles said, “is to have Mrs. Pemberton committed if she gets enough worse to warrant such a step.”

“She will,” I said.

“Prunella has always listened to me before, but this time she doesn’t think I know.”

“She doesn’t think there is any escape,” I said, “and she can’t stand the strain of pretending there is, and then having her mother pounce on her again.”

“Do you think that is it?” Tony Cowles asked wonderingly.

“I know it is,” I said.

“Then the thing to do is to prove to her that there is a way out once and for all.”

“Yes,” I said.

“We must think about that.”

“We will,” I said.

“I’m sorry to have my house party finishing so abruptly.”

“I’m sorry, too.”

“Are the shocks any better?”

“There are some kinds of shocks that never get any better.”

“No physician would agree with you.”

“No physician would know,” I said.

“I’m not only Prunella’s friend in need, you know,” Tony said gravely.

“I know that,” I said.

“I’m going to give you my downtown address and telephone number. You know how to reach me here, now, and if you don’t find me either here or there you

could try the club."

"I don't suppose I shall ever be in need any more," I said.

"I might be in need of you, at least," Tony Cowles said.

"You have *my* telephone number."

"So don't throw mine away. Sometimes unforeseen things happen like houses burning down, or lovely ladies meeting a ruffian, or—"

"My house did burn down," I said. "You mean your house of life," Tony Cowles said swiftly. "Yes," I said. It was temporarily settled that when Mrs.

Pemberton went back to the sanatorium Prunella was to go with her, also as a patient. It was a pretty good solution of a matter that couldn't be solved. Mrs. Pemberton wouldn't go without her, but she did consent to take her along, and at least Prunella would be being built up by having good care herself, and the nature of the treatment would keep her away from her mother for good long intervals. So I went home again to Stella and Mother and Squidgins and Bobby, and my intermittent father. I felt so many thousand years older than I did when I went away that it was hard to adjust myself to my old scale of living, or to remember all the things that I was supposed to think and feel under given circumstances. I felt like Rip Van Winkle, more than anything, awake and alive after a long sleep that had left me a thousand years old, and everybody else entirely changed. Squidgins, however, had only taken advantage of my absence to acquire a few parlor tricks, and to lose about a square inch of hair from the back of his head. I think he is going quite bald. The nurse had just gone the first day I came home, and I was allowed to take a good deal of the care of him, and finally put him to bed at night after changing him out of his ridiculous day things into his equally ridiculous night ones. I felt like making a prayer as I tucked him under his pink eiderdown.

"God, if there is a God," I said (out of some story, I can't remember what), "if Thou knowest any comfort for an entirely desolate girl, who doesn't believe in anything, send it to me. Help Thou mine unbelief. Bless this little helpless baby, and bless me."

Then I kissed his pink and wiggling toes and felt quite peaceful. I know Stella entirely disapproves of kissing, but I don't think a germ could travel from an

infant’s head to his feet without getting lost in transit, and he isn’t big enough to get his toes in his mouth yet.

Bobby was very glad to see me. He was building an airplane in his own room, and the place was entirely littered up with shavings and whalebone and chamois skin, and all the other things that he thought might be useful to him.

“I was going to build a dirigible,” he said, “but I couldn’t find out anything to make it of.”

“Why don’t you make a kite?” I said; “and then you could really fly it.”

“If I wanted to make a kite, I would,” he said.

“Have you been all right?” I said.

“Sure, I have.”

“Did you remember the things I told you about—school?”

“What things?”

“Did you remember them?”

“I don’t know what things you mean.”

“About keeping away from the worst boys.”

“I don’t know how you knew there was any worst boys,” he muttered in his teeth, whittling industriously all the time.

“I knew,” I said; and then, being reminded of other things that won’t stay buried in my mind for more than a few minutes at a time, my poor old eyes slopped over again.

Bobby looked up in consternation.

“What are you doing that for?” he said.

“I’m very tired, Bobby,” I said.

“Well, you make me tired,” he said, in a very shamefaced way. “If you knew how good I behaved, you’d know that you didn’t have any cause to worry about me. I keep away from those boys. I have, ever since you said to.”

“Oh! Bobby,” I said, “I wasn’t crying about that, but I am now,” and I made some passes at him.

“You act just like a girl,” he said.

But he put his arms around me, and hugged me, and breathed down my back a few times just to show that his roughness was mostly assumed.

At dinner every one was unexpectedly cheerful.

“It seems like a month since you went away, Mary,” Mother said, “instead of a bare two weeks.”

“Della has been quite disconsolate,” Stella said, and Della, who was serving me with hot corn bread, nearly dropped it in my lap while she nudged me with her elbow.

Cosgrove, who was our guest that evening, honored me with a penetrating glance.

“Mary is one of those people who is literally conspicuously absent,” he said, with his slow drawl.

“Well, I’m glad you missed me,” I said; “did you miss me, Daddy?”

Father came out of the trance in which he lives, moves, and has his being.

“Yes,” he said, “Cosgrove is right. Your company is better than your room, any day.”

“That’s gratifying,” I said; “there’s something to be said for homes and families, Stella, if you can react on them like that.”

“I don’t think I can,” said Stella.

“What would you do to the home, if you had your way, Stella; bust it entirely?”

Father asked.

“Not necessarily,” Stella said; “in principle all human habitations should be nationalities, that’s all.”

“It seems simple,” Father murmured.

“A man should possess as personal property the house in which he lives,” Cosgrove said earnestly, “but that right should be contingent upon his use of the place.”

“What use ought he to put it to?” I said.

“He should make only one use of it, as an abode for himself and family.”

“But I thought you didn’t believe in families,” I said.

“Personally I don’t, but the soviet system recognizes the family unit.”

“I should think you would be pro-family, then, if you were pro-soviet,” I said.

“You don’t understand our personal attitude,” Stella said patiently.

“One reactionary daughter in a family ought to be enough,” Cosgrove said, meaning it as a pleasantry; “you are pro-family for the two of you.”

“I don’t know that I believe in families any more than Stella does,” I said; “only I have a different reason for it.”

“It’s a matter of principle with me, entirely,” Stella said. “I think there is something better to look forward to.”

“What’s your reason?” Cosgrove asked me interestedly.

“I don’t believe they are founded on anything permanent,” I said evasively.

“Keeping the home together is the ideal of a great many women,” Mother said; “the ideal for which they are willing to sacrifice everything.” Father gave her a sharp look.

“A great many women who might be against a much more spectacular

background are willing and glad to give themselves up to the making of a home," she concluded.

"It's a pity," Father said briefly.

"Where's old Ellery?" Bobby put in. "I haven't seen him around for quite a while."

"He hasn't been here for a week," Mother said, sighing. "That's no way to speak of our friends, Bobby."

"He's not my friend," Father said.

"Ellery's all right," Stella contributed profoundly; "he lacks intellectual grasp/that's all."

"He has a dainty nature," Cosgrove added.

Mother colored slightly, and Stella suppressed her husband with that look of tranquil reproof that anybody else would find perfectly maddening.

"Ellery thinks of going to South America," Mother said, sighing; "he thinks that the voyage might benefit him."

"Why do you let him go?" Father asked sharply.

"I have nothing to do with Ellery's movements," Mother said.

Bobby winked at me.

"Haven't you?" said Father; "why not?"

"Why should I have?"

"You know that better than I do."

"I don't understand you," Mother said shortly; "don't you like your dessert?"

"You know I never eat cornstarch."

"There's very little cornstarch in that pudding. It's mostly thickened by the

chocolate itself."

"Why don't you have whipped cream if you must have this chocolate stuff?"

"Do you realize that cream has gone up to sixty cents a pint?"

"What do I care?"

"You would care when the bills began to come in. The only way to cope with the high cost of supplies is to eliminate the things that have become extravagant luxuries."

"There was a little boy getting his hair cut the other day," Bobby broke in, "and the barber said to him, 'The price of haircuts has gone up,' and the boy looked up at him and said, 'I don't care; my father is a lawyer, and the price of law has gone up.'"

"Exactly," said Father, getting up abruptly.

"I wish your father wouldn't get injured when I explain how I try to regulate my budget," Mother said, as she looked after his retreating figure.

"But you don't need to, Mother," I said; "you have more money than you spend all the time."

"I don't any more; he's cut down my allowance," Mother explained. "I really have to manage now."

"He's left his cigar-case," I said. "I guess I'll go and take it to him."

I knocked on his door softly, but got no answer. Then thinking he wasn't in there after all I pushed the door open, meaning to leave the case on his dressing-table. He was lying on the bed face downward, and did not hear me come in.

"Father!" I cried. "Father, what's the matter, Father?"

He turned a ghastly face toward me, but did not speak.

"What's the matter, Father?" I said again; "are you ill?"

He shook his head, and I stood still, stupidly watching him.

“Can’t I do anything for you?”

He shook his head again, then he sat up on the edge of his bed and began kneading his eyes and his forehead with the palms of his hand.

“Family life!” he burst out suddenly, “family life! Oh! my God!”

And all I could do was to go out and leave him sitting there.

CHAPTER XIII

The Webster girls, being the only people I never expected anything from, naturally couldn't disillusionize me by falling down on it. They are scatter-brained, but they keep on the even tenor of their way, never getting into any trouble that they can't get out of, never getting too much disappointed or hurt about anything, and living in a charming home atmosphere which they take as a perfect matter of course.

They occupy the top floor of their house, having two enormous bedrooms, connected with a dressing-room, and every reasonable luxury thrown in. Mertis's room is blue with blue hangings, and decorated in that new way they are doing bedrooms now, with flowered wall-paper set in panels between the woodwork. Her flowers are violets, and Marion's are forget-me-nots on a rose background. They each have eiderdown puffs folded corner-wise across the filet lace counterpanes on their beds, and ivory toilet sets with enameled violets and roses, respectively,—and oh! every thing. My bedroom is a corner room that debauches—debauches is just what it does—on a busy corridor, and the dug-out is merely the alcove of it. I've done my best to make it peaceful, but the publicity of its situation is something that is beyond my poor efforts to rectify. It's like sitting in the middle table in a restaurant, and having the waiters walk round and round and round you.

The Webster girls were both in Mertis's room one day about a week after I got back home, and I found them swimming in yards of pale-colored Georgette and lace and satin ribbon. Mertis was making herself a com–~~L~1 of orchid-colored lingerie, and Marion rose. They had Paris patterns, and garment was a dream. It looks like a trousseau," I said.

"Not yet," Mertis said.

"No wedding bells for me," Marion measured herself from her hip to her knee.

"I wouldn't waste these on a mere husband," Mertis said. "I'm thinking of going into musical comedy with them."

"I never saw such lovely things."

“There’s a peach of a lingerie show at Wanamaker’s.” Marion continued to take her dimensions serenely. I am accustomed to think slightingly of the Webster brains, but I can’t attend to these little technicalities, and keep up a rattling commentary on current topics beside. When I sew, I stick my tongue in my left cheek like Bobby at his carpentering, and knit my bushy brows.

“Their lingerie is always fascinating,” I said.

“Like all good Methodists Mr. Wanamaker runs to extremes at times,” Mertis said.

“He isn’t a Methodist,” Marion said.

“Oh! isn’t he? I thought he was.”

“‘The weather to-day will probably be pleasant,’” Mertis quoted from the well-known Wanamaker ads.

“I can’t think whether to make a camisole like the pattern, and a little pettie separately, or whether to sew the two together and call it a combination,” Marion deliberated.

“It will be a combination if you do that to it,” Mertis said. “I’m going to make mine separately, because there might be a time when you wanted to wear some kind of a Turkish effect and the pettie would be superfluous.”

“On the other hand,” Marion argued, “I hate to have garments that can divide at the waist-line. It makes the whole effect ugly.”

“Oh! you two are such a comfort,” I said, “talking about things like this as if they were the most important subjects in the world.”

“Well, they are,” Mertis said; “what have you been doing with yourself lately?”

“Taking care of Stella’s baby.”

“Mercy!”

“I like it,” I said.

“I think she does, Marion,” Mertis said; “don’t you know some girls do?”

“Well, I like babies better than you do,” Marion agreed. “I don’t mind them, if they don’t part with their milk suddenly, or anything. What usually happens to me when I get a baby in my arms is—”

“Never mind,” Mertis said; “but I don’t see how you can handle one of them, Maisie, just as a labor of love.”

“I like it,” I said. “Squidgins is a particularly nice one.”

“And yet he has that eccentric father,” Marion mused.

“Stella isn’t exactly the most normal person, is she?”

“You aren’t very polite about Maisie’s relations,” Marion reminded her.

“I don’t have to be,” Mertis said. “Maisie knows what I mean. I wouldn’t say anything derogatory to Stella.”

“There is nothing derogatory to be said of Stella,” I said. “Stella’s just Stella, that’s all.”

“And yet, this offspring is a perfect wonder. Well, wonders will never cease. Have you seen anything of Carrington lately, Maisie?”

I wasn’t expecting this.

“Well, no,” I said.

“We haven’t either. But we’ve heard of him around with Red Feather a lot.”

“Who is Red Feather?” I asked, though I didn’t have to ask. I knew.

“That’s Mrs. Hyphen Something Jones, you know.”

“She’s just a friendly acquaintance of his,” I said; “she has a husband.”

“Yes, but he spends all of his time abroad.”

“And Carrington spends most of his time with her,” Mertis contributed.

“Why do you let him get away with it, Maisie?” Marion inquired.

“I—what have I to do with it?”

“Oh! you needn’t play innocent. You know he’s crazy about you.”

“Not any more,” I said.

“What‘11 you bet?”

“He isn’t.”

“What’l1 you bet? Be a sport. Nut sundaes at Page’s?”

“I don’t want to bet on it?” I said.

“Well, you know he is, that’s why. You Ve probably started your hope chest already.”

“Oh! don’t, please,” I said.

“Let her alone, Marion. You’re bothering her.”

“Well, I’d put a quietus on Red Feather,” Marion said.

“How would you?” I said.

“By keeping him too busy myself for any such nonsense.”

“I don’t think he wants to marry any one,” I said.

“Well, bring him round to another way of thinking.”

“I—couldn’t,” I said.

“Nonsense, any girl can. No man wants to get married when you come right down to it.”

“What do they want?”

“Oh! just to fool around, and keep out of the toils.”

“You don’t take things very seriously, do you?” I said.

“Of course, we do. You don’t have to take men like Carrington seriously, though. If you want them, you get them, that’s all.”

“Do you ever think about—sex?” I said.

Mertis threw a sudden queer little look at Marion, which seemed to say that I was on the verge of a vulgar subject, so I hastily retrieved my error.

“I mean, what sex would you really rather be? If you had your way—a man or a woman?”

“Oh! I’d rather be a woman,” Marion said.

“I don’t know,” Mertis hesitated. “I think you could have a lot of fun being a man. Men can do anything they darn well please, and never have to suffer from the consequences. Think of being able to take in everything, and have no blame attached to it.”

“Women get more,” Marion said; “after all, it’s the men that have to pay the bills.”

“Well, I wouldn’t want to be a poor man,” Marion said, “but if I had money enough, why, that would be another story. Which would you rather be, Maisie? What started you on this, anyhow?”

“I don’t know,” I said, to both questions. “I’d rather be a man probably. A man can get away if he’s a square peg in a round hole. A woman has to stick.”

Suzanne, who is one of the prettiest maids I ever saw, knocked on the door at this juncture, and announced that Mertis was wanted on the telephone.

“Father says we’d never come downstairs at all if we had a connection up here,” Mertis pouted.

When she came back she had a long whispered colloquy with her sister. I think it’s rude to hold private conversations like that with a third person present, and I know Marion and Mertis were brought up to think so, but they don’t care, and some way you don’t mind it in them. Their ideas of all human relations are so

simple.

“Let’s all go downstairs,” Mertis said, after all this was over.

“You can’t take your work down there,” I said.

“We’ve worked enough for a while.”

“I thought you were going to sew all the afternoon,” I said.

“Well, let’s go downstairs for a while anyway.”

We descended slowly, three abreast, with our arms twined about each other. At the drawing-room door the girls suddenly relaxed their clasp and pushed me in ahead of them. Then instead of following they closed the door softly upon me.

Carrington was standing by the window, gazing down into the street. He turned as I came in.

“Well,” he said.

“Was that you on the telephone?” I asked.

“No; Mertis was sitting in the hall telephoning when I came in. When she told me you were here I asked her to send you down to see me alone.”

“Well, she did,” I said.

“Aren’t you glad to see me?”

Of course my heart was pounding so hard that it nearly suffocated me, and the strength was oozing out of me like so much sawdust.

“Yes,” I said.

Then he put his arms full around me, and kissed me, but not on the lips, because I would not let him.

“Don’t you love me?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Enough?” he said.

“I—don’t know.”

“Don’t you realize you’ve been torturing me by your silence?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“How could you, then?” he asked reproachfully.

“I don’t care about that,” I said.

“About what?”

“About what you want.”

“Why not?”

“Because I don’t think it’s very important.”

“What is important, then?”

“Nothing, I guess.”

“You’re quibbling, dear. I’ve been honest with you. It would have been easier not to be.”

“I should think it might have been,” I said. “Carrington, why do you think—why did you think that you—could—put anything up to me—I mean—like this?”

“In the first place, I’m not putting anything up to you, dear. You’re a free agent. I could almost ask you the same question, for it’s practically I who met you halfway, not the other way around. In the second place, you’ve had unusual opportunities to observe life through vicarious experience.”

“You mean my mother and father? Because they are like that you think I might just as well be?”

“That’s morbid, dear.”

“No, it isn’t morbid. That’s the reason.”

“You’re talking nonsense.”

“Well, I will,” I said.

Carrington stared.

“You’ll—you’ll come to me?” he said.

“Yes, I will.”

“You understand what you are doing?” he said.

“Yes,” I said.

“You see it’s like this, dear,” he said; “you’ve consciously or unconsciously brought about a state of affairs between us to which there is only one answer, if we are ever to see one another again. If I were some men I would lie to you about the possibilities of our being married, and so on. I never have lied to a woman yet.”

“Haven’t you?” I said.

“You won’t marry young, and yet your nature demands its fulfillment. I can give you of happiness, and really not hurt you, I think. You’re older at nineteen than most women of twenty-five.”

“I am old,” I said.

“Will you come to my apartment tomorrow night?”

“If you’ll get me the address,” I said.

“Oh! I’ll meet you somewhere-say, the Butterfly Grill, and we’ll dine.”

“I don’t want to have dinner with you,” I said; “if you give me the address, I’ll come.”

“Let me take you there. I’d feel better.”

“I’ve met you everywhere else,” I said; “why shouldn’t I meet you at your home?”

“Just as you wish, dear. You’re sure you want to? I’m not coercing you in any way?”

“I wish you were,” I said.

“You’re a strange little girl.”

“Weren’t the other women strange?”

“What other women?”

“The women that you never lied to?”

N

“Dear,” he said, “life is worth just one thing, the happiness we can make it yield us. The only tragedy is never having lived. It takes some courage on my part to give you life—straight.”

He looked very earnest and beautiful as he spoke. I wished that I could believe in him again, and I almost did for the moment, only I had nothing left to believe with. I knew he was right. If this was life I ought to take it, on his terms.

“I don’t see what else there is to be—but a sport,” I said.

“Did you and Carrington patch it up?” Mertis inquired, after he had gone away again.

“Yes,” I said.

“Weren’t you surprised when you found out who it was in the drawing-room?”

“Very surprised.”

“Mertis winked at me,” Marion said, “and we both gave you a push at the same moment. You thought there was something suspicious about our leaving our labors upstairs, didn’t you?”

“Now, I know what you were doing it for.”

“Guess what we are going to see tomorrow night?”

“‘The Follies’?” I said.

“No, ‘Hamlet.’ Isn’t it a scream? Did you ever see it?”

“Tony Cowles took me and Prunella one night.”

“Did you like it?”

“Yes, I did,” I said; “it seemed true to life to me, if it is Shakespeare.”

“What do you mean—true to life?”

“Well, as if it might happen anywhere, at any time.”

“We haven’t got many kings and queens and things in New York.”

“Well, we have family complications,” I said.

“What’s it about?” Marion inquired; “I’ve forgotten.”

“Well, Hamlet discovers how rotten things are in the State of Denmark, and—”

“He can’t stand the strain,” Mertis put in, “so he goes around making an awful fuss about it, and throwing down his lady love, and doing a lot of soliloquizing.”

“Yes, but how does it come out?” “Oh! he goes all to pieces,” I said; “it’s a tragedy.”

“I see where we put in a wonderful evening,” Marion groaned.

CHAPTER XIV

I put Squidgins to bed and had my dinner as usual,—it was pot roast and canned lima beans and bread pudding, and it did seem as if it was a peculiarly unpalatable combination for anybody who might be leaving home for the last time,—and then I began to make my plans for going away. My general idea was not to come back, though I wasn't sure where I meant to go if I didn't hold to my original idea of drowning myself. For once in my life I couldn't seem to make plans of any sort or description. I suppose I really didn't care what became of me.

I don't know why I said that I would go to Carrington, except that when he put his arms around me I almost forgot he had killed everything that I thought was beautiful in the world. Also, I wanted to be a sport. I hate people that won't go through with a thing that they have started, and Carrington said I had started this.

I put some things together in my overnight bag, and then I decided that I wouldn't take it. After all, I might be spending the night in the park. I didn't know. There might not be any night to spend. I tried to think of the family consternation if they woke up in the morning and did not find me there, but I wasn't able to picture it very vividly. There was no need to be heroical, and write a note the way they do in the movies. What I was going to do was an old story to my father and mother. Stella wouldn't be shocked because she would have done the same thing if she happened to want to. I felt squeamish when I thought of Squidgins, that was all. I just felt as if I were putting something over on somebody that hadn't had a chance to develop any theory of life, and that might be hurt by mine. He didn't know what things were like any more than I had known.

I had put on my robin redbreast turban and was getting into my coat when Bobby came into my room.

"Can I go out with you, Sister?" he said.

"I'm only going to walk a little way," I said; "that wouldn't be any fun for you."

"Yes, it would," he said; "I'll buy you an ice-cream soda."

“You haven’t any money,” I said.

“Yes, I have. I bet Noodle Paine that it would snow yesterday, and I won.”

“How much did you win?”

“A quarter, and I had five cents.”

“Well, I’ve got to go somewhere,” I said.

“Out to meet your beau?”

“I haven’t any beau.”

“Yes, you haven’t! Carrington Chase is your beau.”

“No.”

“Yes, he is. Ellery Howe is Mother’s beau.”

“Married women don’t have beaux.”

“Yes, they do. Mother’s got one.”

“Bobby,” I said, “you ought not to think that way about things; you’ll get mixed up about life.”

“Father’s got a girl, too; a lady vamp with earrings and a long fur coat.”

“He hasn’t.”

“Has, too; I’ve seen her.”

“Where?”

“Walking down the street with her and kind of quarreling with her.”

“Didn’t you think it was—terrible?”

“What do I care?”

“I care terribly, Bobby,” I said.

“Well, you’re a girl.”

“Would you care if—I went off with a man the way they do in the movies?”

“I’d knock his block off.”

“Why don’t you knock Ellery’s off, then?”

“Old Ellery’s different.”

“He’s Mother’s beau.”

“Well, he doesn’t hurt anything.”

“How about Father?”

“His old vamp doesn’t hurt.”

“I don’t see why you’d feel any different about Car—about my—”

“Well, you’re a girl, and my sister.”

“Bobby,” I said, “do you love me—do you, really?”

“No,” Bobby said, “nothing like that. I wouldn’t say so if I did, would I?”

“Kiss me, Bobby, will you?”

“No.”

I had to start out with him in tow, because I couldn’t shake him, but finally I induced him to turn around and let me go on alone. I watched his little figure sauntering along, and thought how differently things worked out in stories. That talk with my little brother might have saved me if I had been a heroine in a novel. In a novel I would have got that kiss, too.

The building Carrington lived in was quite old, and they had the push-button arrangement where you ring, and then they open the door from the apartment itself. I was going to ring the bell when I discovered the outside door was

standing ajar, and I went on up. Carrington lived on the fifth floor he had told me. It was a stuffy building, and at the turn of each staircase was a niche built for a statue or a saint to stand in, but empty of occupants now. It was no place for saints anyhow. The carpet was red and plushy, and very full of dust. Carrington's door had a neat little plate with his name engraved on it. I sat in the niche on his landing to get my breath. Then I rang the bell. No one answered, and I rang again, and went back to my niche thinking I would wait for him.

As I sat there I went through that door in my imagination. I saw Carrington's old young face, with his upstanding hair, and his sleepy eyes fixed on me. I felt him take me in his arms, and kiss me. I heard his voice saying things that he had never said to me before. I saw him open the door of his own room—

It was all as if it had happened. I slipped to my feet and made my way down the stairs again, not saved—I wasn't that, because I had eaten of the tree of good and evil. What there was left of my guilelessness I left up there enshrined in that niche like a devil instead of a saint. I wasn't a good woman or a bad woman. I was just one that didn't have to take the trouble to be either, that was all. I hated Carrington, and the stuffy look of his stair carpet, and the cracked enamel of his pinkish walls.

I telephoned him as soon as I could find a booth.

"I came," I said, "and I couldn't get in. I'm not coming back."

"You came?"

I explained to him.

"My doorbell doesn't ring," he said, "but the downstairs bell does. I didn't dream of your failing to ring that. Why, I was inside all the time."

"I knew you were," I said.

"You'l1 come back?"

"No, I won't," I said; "I wouldn't have *not* come, but I won't come back."

"You're a quitter."

“All right,” I said, “I’m a quitter.”

“You don’t love me?”

“No, I don’t. I know I said I did, but I don’t.”

“Are you afraid?”

“If I were I would come back,” I said, and then I hung up the receiver on his pleadings.

I used another nickel to call up Tony Cowles, but when I heard the sound of his voice I hung up on him, because I couldn’t think of one thing I had to say to him.

I went and sat in the park for a while, and then I rode in the subway almost all night. Along about six in the morning I let myself into my own door with my latch-key, and nobody knew the difference. I looked hollow-eyed at breakfast, but so did Father, and so did Stella, on account of Squidgins having had a tummy-ache all night. Mother remarked that she had thought I was staying all night with the Webster girls, and Father asked in a gruff voice what time I did come in, anyway. I lied composedly, being now so sure of my moral degeneration that I didn’t feel even one little qualm about it.

It was rather a good thing that I did come home that morning because before the day was out things had happened in our family that put even my own emotions in the shade, for the time being. It seems to be the rule about shocks that they keep on coming. In fiction just about one big thing happens to the characters at once, and the story deals with that and disposes of it. In real life events pile one on top of another without reason; one knock-out blow seems to be a signal for all the rest to come on. Sometimes I think I shall never read any more novels, because they don’t give you any idea of life at all.

After breakfast, which was harmonious,- though rather pathetic,—I did the regular stunts of practicing a little, and mending up my clothes and running fresh ribbons in things, and helping with Squidgins. I felt as if my whole body were asleep the way your foot is sometimes,[bef ore it begins to pain and prickle. When Mother suggested that we go out together and do some shopping after lunch I acquiesced, because I couldn’t think of any adequate reason for not going.

We took a bus downtown, and then went from one Fifth Avenue shop to another. I don't care much for shopping with Mother, because she shops around among the bargains so much, carefully examining price marks and quality, but this time she wasn't so bad. She was almost reckless at'moments.

"Please don't save money on the lace I put into my underwear," I begged her automatically, as we walked toward Macy's. "If you don't get a good kind it doesn't wash, or else I have to have complete sets of things just for thin dresses and parties." I like to dress very daintily all the time, instead of having a lot of best sets of things. I think it's in better taste.

"We haven't got so much money to save," Mother said cryptically.

"So you're not saving it so hard. Well, that's good news."

"I don't know whether it is or not," Mother said.

"Father isn't giving you so much?"

"No."

"Because he hasn't got it?"

"I don't know. I think if he had been making less I should know. You don't know, do you, dear? You're more in your father's confidence than I am."

"I'm not really in his confidence," I said.

"I'm not," Mother said; "I used to be, but I'm not now."

"But you don't care," I said.

"You mustn't jump at conclusions like that. Of course I care; when you are married you will understand these things better."

"I hope I shall never be married."

"When a man is the father of your children—it's a different matter."

"Well, he always was," I said, "and you—wouldn't go to Canada with him. That was the beginning."

“The beginning of what? I don’t understand you.”

“The beginning of everything.”

“I had no right to go off on a pleasure trip and leave my family.”

“And Ellery,” I supplemented.

Mother looked scared.

“You’re only a child, and you know nothing about life, and you have no right—” Mother began.

“I didn’t say I had,” I said; “only I can’t help thinking it would be better to come right out flat with things and admit what they are.”

Jimmie Greer coming toward us with his hand outstretched was a welcome interruption to the conversation. He had grown very fat, and was wearing an overcoat with a mink collar that made him look like the Secretary of State or something.

“I am glad to see you,” he said to Mother; “aren’t you looking unusually well, or do I dream it?”

“You dream,” I answered to this sotto voce, but nobody heard me.

“I didn’t know you in that luxurious coat,” Mother said.

“Where’s your luxurious coat?” he asked. “You know Robert got me this at the same time he got the seal one for you. Don’t you wear it on these shopping expeditions?”

“Alas, I didn’t get mine,” Mother said.

“Why, it was sent to you. Mine came with it.”

“Robert offered to get me a coat, but I declined it.”

“The more fo—I mean, the more unfortunate for you. But I saw the bill for it. Robert enclosed it with mine by mistake.”

“It was no doubt all a mistake,” Mother said.

“Robert described the coat to me, it was such a wonderful bargain. I would have bought it for any lady friend I’ve got.”

“Perhaps Robert did,” said Mother with no inkling of the truth.

But the perception of it in Jimmie Greer’s face was unmistakable.

“Nothing like that,” he said hastily, “of course not.”

“Maybe he did,” Mother persisted.

“Nonsense,” said Jimmie Greer, and even Mother could see that he was kicking himself mentally for the break he had made; “well, I must be running along. So glad I caught sight of you, and to see you looking so well. My love to your father, Mary. Tell him I’m sorry his daughter didn’t get her complexion from him. Though it’s evident where she did get it.” He bowed in Mother’s direction.

“Good-afternoon,” Mother said soberly. “Mary”—she turned to me suddenly—” do you know whether your father bought that coat for another woman or not?”

“How—how should I?” I stammered.

“Do you know?”

“I don’t know,” I said.

“Well, I know, now. He did. That’s the explanation.”

“The explanation of what?”

“Where his money goes.”

“He wanted to spend it on you,” I said; “he doesn’t care anything about this woman.”

“So you know there is a woman?”

“Yes,” I said, “I’ve met her.”

“Oh!” Mother said. “Oh!—why didn’t you tell me?”

“I don’t tell things,” I said.

“Did—did he buy her the fur coat? Do you know that?”

“Yes,” I said, “I’ve seen her in it.”

“Oh!” said Mother again. Then, “I can’t believe it, Mary; are you sure?”

“Yes, Mother,” I said, “I am sure. Even Bobby knows.”

“Oh!” Mother cried, “my own children.”

“Perhaps I ought to have lied, and pretended,” I said, “but I wouldn’t want any one to do that to me.”

“Get me into a bus or a cab. Take me home,” Mother said.

So I hailed a passing taxi and helped her in. She lay back with her eyes closed for some time, and I thought she was going to swoon, or something.

“I shall leave him,” she said faintly.

“Don’t you think it’s your own responsibility—some?” I said.

“You don’t know what you are talking about. How long has this been going on—do you know?”

“Ever since Canada, I think,” I said.

“You haven’t much natural feeling,” Mother said bitterly. “You can talk as calmly about your father’s infidelity to me as you can about the ribbons in your underclothes. What kind of a daughter have I brought in the world to help my hour of bitterness?”

“I told you everything was rotten,” I said.

“I shall tell your father to-night what I am going to do.”

But she didn’t, because when she did get home she found a letter that had been

brought by messenger when she was out, that told her everything she had just found out from me, including one thing that even I hadn’t dreamed of, and that was that Father himself was through, and didn’t intend to come back to us again.

CHAPTER XV

I Don’t know what I thought Tony Cowles could do about it, especially since I felt I could tell him nothing about any of my troubles, but I got obsessed with the idea of seeing him and feeling his nice warm handclasp again. My own hands were as cold as if they had died. I don’t see why mental anguish affects the extremities.

I telephoned him once at his office, but he was out, and then I didn’t have the courage to call again on account of the fatal drawback of having nothing to say. I took to walking up and down on the Drive about a block away from his house, just hoping I would meet him. I didn’t like to go any nearer, and yet I couldn’t bear not to do something that might result in my seeing him. Of course, when I actually did catch a glimpse of him, I turned and walked rapidly in another direction, and he didn’t see me at all. Finally one day I was standing on the corner of Fifth Avenue waiting for a bus, and he came up behind me.

“I was thinking of you,” he said. “I had a letter from Prunella to-day full of all kinds of messages for you. I was wondering if I was going to be able to deliver them.”

“I was thinking of you, but not in connection with Prunella,” I said. “I telephoned you the other day, but you were not in your office.”

“And then you didn’t try again?”

“It was really nothing.”

“More shocks?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Just life in general or particular?”

“Quite particular this time.”

“More particular than before?”

“Well,” I said, “the other time I kept finding out how rotten things were—one

thing after another. This time it’s something that’s happened. My father has left my mother, that’s all. I suppose every one will know it sometime, though I didn’t mean to say anything to any one, myself.”

“I see,” said Tony Cowles; “here comes an inviting-looking hansom, have you got time enough to jump in it and take a turn round the park?”

“Oh, yes,” I said.

“Do you want the doors closed?” the driver asked. He was red-nosed, but very pleasant.

“I think we do,” Tony said; “it’s cozier. Nice fresh horse you have.”

“Yes, sir, he gets the best of care, sir.”

“He looks it.”

I put my head back and closed my eyes for a minute, but the tears forced them open.

“I never cry when I’m alone,” I said.

“My little sister used to hold my hand whenever she was in any kind of trouble.”

I put my hand close to his, and then I slipped it all the way in.

“Thank you,” I said.

“You could have my apartment again, with a mother or a sister, or a friend, or anybody that needed resting up, or if you just wanted to be there by yourself we could arrange that, I think.”

“I wish I could,” I said, “I’m quite tired. But I don’t think so.”

“If there is anything you can think of that would make things easier?”

I curled my finger round his thumb.

“Can I talk to you?” I said, “a little?”

He just smiled.

“Well, the first thing that happened was that I didn’t believe in things any more.. There was some one I trusted, and then he—he—told me how rotten things were. I mean, that everything meant just one thing. You see, I didn’t know before that things weren’t—ideal, some of the time. Young girls don’t have much chance to find out what life means. I know Schopenhauer and all those people, even Emerson, indicate it all quite plainly, but somehow you don’t believe it, or you dress it up.”

“I see,” said Tony Cowles.

“I just wanted beauty. I thought that friendship was closer to it than anything. I didn’t understand that I was just acting like—well, just scientifically.”

“Oh!” he said.

“It’s awfully hard to believe that everything is just one thing, isn’t it?”

I took my hand out of Tony Cowles’s hand.

“Everything is just one thing?”

“Well, you see, there was somebody that I led on—when I didn’t understand I was doing it.

“And so he told you?”

“Well, yes; you see those things are just progressive, and I didn’t know it. It was my responsibility, too.”

Tony Cowles turned quite white.

“Oh! aren’t you feeling well?” I said.

“No, not very.” His jaw was set, and a blue vein throbbed in his temple. “Oh! I’m all right,” he smiled, seeing my anxiety.

“Of course, I wasn’t very much of a sport,” I said; “anybody would think you could brace up better. Of course, all that happened was that I had a few perfectly

simple things explained to me. I'm awfully thin-skinned, you know. Well, that was the first shock; no, not quite the first, but it was the biggest. I had lost faith in my—my father, you know, but I hadn't begun to see everything in that light until after what I've told you about happened. I think perhaps I am morally degenerate, I don't know."

"What makes you think that?"

"Lots of things," I said evasively. "I don't know that everybody isn't, except you," I said; "I don't think you are."

"Put back your hand where you took it from," said Tony Cowles, scowling.

"Well, since then it has been just one—"

"Damn shock after another?"

"Thank you," I said, squeezing his hand hard. He knew I meant for the *damn*, too.

"Is there anything practical to be done?"

"You mean to go after Father?"

"I mean that, or money, or engaging a trained nurse, any of those little things that I'm so good at."

"I don't think so," I said. "Mother isn't sick. She's just stupefied."

"Well, if there is, will you let me know?"

"Yes, I will this time."

"Well, every Tuesday and Friday I'm going to telephone to you, and make an engagement with you. We can go driving or walking or teaing, and talk things over. In the intervals if you have need of a friend will you call me?"

"Yes, I will."

"You'l1 promise?"

“I’ll promise,” I said.

“About these shocks; I’m a pretty good shock absorber, you know. You can just attach me any time if you happen to feel one coming.”

“The trouble is you never feel them coming.”

“Well, if you should, or if you ever feel yourself in the mood to go out and meet one halfway, come to me instead.”

“I don’t see how you knew that,” I said; “of course, it’s only when I’m perfectly desperate. Most of the time I want to run the other way.”

“I know.”

“I guess you do,” I said.

“Prunella’s coming home in about ten days,” he said presently, not really changing the subject, but only putting it quietly aside.

“She hasn’t got much of a home to come to,” I said.

“I’ve found them a place that I think they’ll like. A nice sunny apartment looking down on the park, with a capable French woman in charge. It will be more like a home than anything Prunella has had for some time.”

“But she’ll still have her mother eating her up,” I said.

“I’ve an idea that may work out. Mrs. Pemberton has a sister, who is devoted to her. She’s plain, rather a coarser-grained woman, that always idolized her beautiful sister, and yet knew how to handle her better than any one. Mrs. Pemberton has not wanted her with her since her marriage, and before that there was a delicate mother to look out

“Would Mrs. Pemberton want her now?”

“She would if Prunella was not devoting all her time to her. I have a sort of a plan about Prunella that isn’t developed enough yet to talk about. What you said about the situation started me thinking. She won’t believe there is any escape until we prove to her that there is one.”

“But how can we?” I said.

“Well, we’ll see,” said Tony Cowles.

He landed me at my own door just in time to meet Ellery going in, and I introduced them. I couldn’t help being sorry for poor Ellery. He had deep hollows underneath his eyes, and he looked as if he hadn’t slept for weeks—much less eaten. He hadn’t been in the house but once before, since Father left it.

“Mary,” he said, without preliminary, after the elevator had deposited us on our landing, “what do you think I had better do?”

“I haven’t thought much,” I said.

“Your father—your mother—will she get a divorce?”

“She’s talking about it,” I said; “whether she’ll do it or not is another story.”

“It is, isn’t it?”

“Do you—love her yourself, Ellery?”

“What else, why else,” he said miserably, “would I have—?”

“I suppose that does explain your actions. Does it explain hers?”

“I—I don’t know.”

“It seems to be Father she’s concentrated on now,” I said.

“I know it,” said Ellery; “what would you do?”

“I’d go to South America,” I said.

“And leave her?”

“Or take her,” I said.

“That would be terrible—for her,” he said.

“I don’t think she wants to go,” I said, “but I’d give her a chance.”

“Why?”

“Well, because she might come out of her dream then, if she just had to say’yes’ or ‘no.’”

“I suppose that’s true,” said Ellery.

“I wouldn’t let her back and fill,” I said.

“This is a strange way to talk with a daughter about her own mother—the woman I—I—”

“I know you do, Ellery,” I said; “I’m awfully glad you do. It makes it better some way.”

“I’ve messed up her whole life.”

“*She’s* messed up her whole life. You could have been friends,” I said, “if she would have.”

“I never meant to let her know,” said Ellery.

“She wouldn’t stand that,” I said; “well, I guess few women would. We can’t stand here talking in the hall all night,” I reminded him, applying the latch-key.

While Mother and Ellery were having it out in the living-room, Stella and I went into the matter ourselves at some length. Her bedroom looks like a Greenwich theater stage set, being all in dust-color and orange, with Squidgins sleeping in a cross between a chicken coop and a workbox in the corner.

“What do you think about it, Stella?” I said; “do you think Mother ought to divorce him?”

“The divorce laws are archaic,” Stella said; “think of a State that has only one statutory reason for setting aside the marriage contract.”

“Mother’s got that reason,” I said.

“It’s the principle that affects me,” said Stella.

“But how do you apply it in this case? Here’s Mother with a good reason for

divorcing Father. Here's Father with a good reason for leaving Mother. What good would looser or tighter divorce laws do?"

"There'd be no question of their freedom then."

"But they don't want to be free," I said; "not any more free than they are, that's their trouble. They want to eat their cake and have it too," I said. "Mother wants Father to have a nice fresh loaf of it waiting when she's through nibbling what Ellery provides."

"What do you think Father wants?"

"Father wants—well, Father's more reasonable. He—wants things the way he's made them impossible to be, or he wants to quit cold."

"I don't think that's more reasonable," Stella said seriously.

"Well, it isn't, but men are fundamentally more reasonable than women."

"I think I'm more reasonable than Cosgrove."

"Does Cosgrove think so?"

"I don't know," said Stella.

"How would he feel if you had an Ellery around all the time?"

"Perfectly calm, I think."

"How would you feel if Cosgrove had a—a lady?"

"Perfectly calm," said Stella.

"That isn't human," I said. "I suppose the only reason you feel so is that it couldn't happen."

"When you live on an intellectual basis, you live on a different plane."

"What do you think Mother and Father ought to do?" I said.

"Whatever they like," said Stella; "we can't arrange their life for them."

“Well, just practically. Keep this apartment, and patch things up, and all stay together?”

“I’ve been thinking that I would talk to you about that,” Stella said; “you know I’m thinking of leaving.”

“Of leaving?”

“Cosgrove needs me in his work. It isn’t convenient for him to work here in the evenings with the baby. Neither of us believes in a mutual establishment, it’s against our principles, but temporarily we think we’ll have to have one. Nothing else seems to work in our present circumstances.”

“So you’re just going to set up like anybody else—housekeeping?” I said.

“Well, that’s what it amounts to,” Stella said, “temporarily. There are better ways of arranging for the family unit, but none of these ideals have been perfected yet.”

“I shall lose Squidgins,” I said.

When I went to bed that night, the events of the day passed in more or less rapid review before me. I didn’t know what had happened between Mother and Ellery; probably nothing, or I should have known. Mother just let him out of the door, sobbing faintly as she closed it on him, and ten to one wondering all the tune where Father was. None of us had been able to get him at the office since he announced he was leaving us, though both Stella and I had called him there to ask about perfectly practical matters like where to send the laundry, or to readdress the rapidly accumulating bills, for which there seemed to be no logical provision made. We all knew that Father wouldn’t leave us in the lurch financially, but we wanted the technical arrangements disposed of. I couldn’t help thinking of Stella and wondering if deep down in her soul the idea of hanging on to her own man wasn’t beginning to percolate, and if that wasn’t why she was reconciled to the idea of abandoning her principles. Eating Father’s cake, and having Cosgrove’s too, never disturbed her. When she was a working unit she gave her money impartially to both of them in the form of board and general contributions, but when Squidgins was coming along she just decided she was contributing him to the community and that was enough for the time being. But this standing for the perfect freedom and complete homelessness of the otherwise married was an ideal very dear to her heart. If Cosgrove hadn’t

been doing part of his work with a crosseyed girl in a blue-and-green smock, would she have been quite so ready to set up a habitat with him? Was Stella some of these things that she never suspected any one of being, or was it only my vicious mind running around and around its circle?

The last thought that I had before I went to sleep was this, and it came so suddenly that it jerked me straight up hi bed in the dark. When Tony Cowles said that he had an idea about Prunella's future, did he mean that he was thinking of *marrying* her?

CHAPTER XVI

Father opened communication with me finally. He had been gone two weeks and three days before he made any manifestation at all, and Mother was nearly frantic. I think she had even gone so far as to write him a letter, which is an unheard-of demonstration on Mother's part under any circumstances whatever. Her procedure is always to get me to do it.

The office got me on the telephone, and Father's secretary said that Mr. Blair would like to have me meet him at the Man ton Hotel at twelve-thirty that noon. Mother couldn't bear to have me go or not to go, and we had rather a dreadful scene about it. She was so worn out with the whole situation that she had to take it out of somebody, I suppose. She never did anything like it before—I'll say that for her. Her idea was that I made myself a tacit champion of Father's by paying any attention to his sudden demand for me.

By dint of all the persuasiveness I could summon I managed to make it possible to get out of the house at the given time, without her actually forbidding me to come back. I suppose the worst of our quarrel could have been avoided if I could have been a little more sympathetic with her point of view, but I couldn't exactly see what it was. I could have, of course, if it hadn't been for Ellery, but certainly the goose got her sauce first, and the gander only followed suit. Ganders always go a good deal farther when they get started. She ought to know that by this time, certainly. . Besides I had as many rice puddings against her as Father had. She was suffering, and I wished that I could have gone to her and put my arms around her. Perhaps I could have if I hadn't suffered so much myself so recently, and got so hardened by it.

It turned out that Father was living at the Manton House, and had left word at the desk that I was to be sent up to his room at once.

He was dictating to his office stenographer when I went in, but he sent her away.

"I've had a touch of my old complaint," he said as the door closed on her; "well, Baby, are you going to kiss your father?"

"I wasn't," I said, "but I am."

“I suppose you’re on your mother’s side in this?”

“I’m not on anybody’s side,” I said.

“You’re the only one of the family with any sense of my position. You had eyes enough to see what was going on.”

“I have two eyes,” I said.

“My home was not only undermined,” Father said bitterly, “it was comfortless.”

“You left us in it,” I said.

“I deserted *you*—that’s the only unfairness I can see.”

“How about Bobby?”

“He’s a child.”

“He knew just the same.”

“Knew what?”

“About Mrs., Mrs.—that woman.”

“How do you know he knew?”

“He said you had a girl, a lady vamp with earrings.”

Father winced.

“It sounds rather raw when you put it like that,” he said.

“It *is* rather raw, isn’t it, Daddy?”

“Oh! I’m no saint,” he said.

“I guess nobody is,” I said.

He looked at me closely.

“What do you mean, Mary?” he said.

“Well, I’m not much of a saint,” I said; “I’m different from what I was.”

“What do you mean?” he said again.

“Nothing much. I know what to expect from life, that’s all.”

“Do you mean that Carrington fellow—that Chase?”

“Yes, Father,” I said; “he told me a few things, and now I know them.”

“Explain yourself,” said Father roughly.

“Well,” I said, “I got disillusioned, that’s all, the way everybody does. When Mother wouldn’t go with you to Canada, and all that, and I found out about the fur coat being bought for Mrs. Van der Water, and—and the way Mother was going on with Ellery, I got disillusioned. I just sort of depended on Carrington. I thought he was my best friend and, well, you know, a kind of God. I really didn’t think of him in any way but that, only I let him kiss me, and I kissed him sometimes, just affectionately, you know, and he just told me what I was doing.”

“What were you doing?” said Father.

“Leading him on. So he asked me to—measure up, and I was going to. Only when I got to his rooms I didn’t go in.”

“Oh, my God!” said Father.

“I didn’t go in,” I said.

“Why not?”

“I rang the bell, and it—didn’t ring. Then I got sort of sick of it. It wasn’t a moral impulse on my part. I just got sort of sick.”

“What’s the matter with you, Mary?” Father said. “Don’t you realize what you’re saying? Do you mean that just at the first suggestion of a man like that you were actually—going to him—like any—”

“I went,” I said.

“But, my God! why—why?”

“*You* did,” I said. “Mother—”

“But you’re a young, innocent girl,” Father said; “you’re not twenty yet. Your natural instinct ought to warn you.”

“It didn’t,” I said. “I don’t see that it makes any difference how young you are. You’ve just got to take life as it is.”

“This is your mother’s fault,” he said.

“I’m your daughter, too, Daddy,” I said.

“That’s right,” he said. “I knew about that young swine, and your mother didn’t.”

“Well, I hate him now,” I said.

“This is a shock to me, Mary. I counted on you, somehow.”

“I counted on you, Daddy, “I said, “not that I want to blame you. I don’t blame anybody, excepting Mother about the rice puddings. Ellery’s a pretty good sort, you know. He’s just weak, like everybody. You’re weak, Father, and I’m weak.”

“Well, we ought to brace up, then.”

“What’s the use?” I said. “Father, are you going to marry Mrs. Van der Water?”

“Heaven forbid!”

“Do you want Mother to divorce you?”

“It’s her privilege. That’s what I sent for you for. I want to know what your mother wishes in the matter.”

“I don’t think she has any,” I said; “she’s just shocked and she doesn’t know how she does feel.”

“She doesn’t *care?”* Father said incredulously.

“Well, she’s putting up a pretty good bluff at it,” I said.

Father put his head down in his hands.

“Life is too much for me,” he said.

“There’s something rotten in the State of Denmark, isn’t there?” I said.

“I guess there is,” Father agreed; “you are not twenty yet, are you, Mary?”

“Not in years,” I said.

“You are telling me everything that happened, aren’t you?”

“Yes, Daddy,” I said.

“Mary, I think I’ll go and talk to your mother.”

“I think that would be the best thing to do,” I said; “there are a good many practical things to be settled, anyway. We’ve got that big apartment on our hands, and Stella is going to leave.”

“Stella is going to leave?”

“She’s going to live with Cosgrove.”

“The deuce she is!”

“She’s not a very natural person, but I think she’s getting naturaler all the time.”

“She’s such an abnormal creature,” Father said. “I don’t think your mother ever quite understood why a daughter of that type was—wished on her.”

“It is hard to understand,” I said. “Stella’s all right. She isn’t very intelligent, that’s all.”

“She’s only educated,” Father said. “I suppose that’s one of the reasons why you’ve been neglected as you have been. There was nothing to be done for Stella. She knew it all.”

“There’s something to be done for Bobby, Father,” I said, and I told him all about my problem with Bobby, and how I had handled it.

“I suppose a parent has moral responsibilities.”

“Didn’t you ever think of that before?” I asked.

“I suppose I haven’t cared much about being a parent. It isn’t very interesting, Mary, unless you happen to like it.”

“You liked Mother, didn’t you?”

“I wanted a home,” Father said; “I’ve always wanted a home. I suppose if I could have got that fixed the rest would have been simpler.”

“Mother makes a place homelike.”

“Yes, but as I’ve always told you, Mary, a man likes to be the central feature of a home. If he isn’t, things go wrong. A home ought to be adjusted to the comfort and convenience of the man who is paying the bills. Otherwise, he feels he’s being cheated-and if he’s a weak character, he begins to cheat, in his turn.”

“It doesn’t seem fair to take everything and give nothing,” I said.

“A human partnership has got to be like any other partnership, basically sound, or it doesn’t hold.”

“If there was something to believe in,” I said, “I suppose we’d all believe in it. Do you hate to get up in the morning, Daddy, and face your morning cup of coffee and realize there’s another day to be got through—somehow? I do.”

“That’s a wrong way for you to look at things, Mary.”

“It’s just logical,” I said. “I’m so tired, Daddy.”

Father put his arms around me. Then he led me over to the gilt couch by the window, and took me in his lap.

“My little girl,” he said gently.

“We’re awfully disorganized, aren’t we, Daddy?” I said with my head on his shoulder. “It’s all so rotten, and it might have been so nice—New York, and the sunshine, and people you love, and everything. I don’t see the use in being born

when things get spoiled so soon for you."

"I'm going to talk to your mother," Father said.

"If it hadn't been for that horrid fur coat. Oh! dear, why did you buy it for her, Father?"

"Because I was a damned fool," Father explained succinctly.

I couldn't report much of this conversation to Mother, and what I could report didn't assuage her much. I didn't want to commit myself on anything that Father was going to say to her, because in the first place I didn't know, and in the second I wanted him to make his own statements without my having anticipated them. She was thinking of him as a man who had committed an enormous crime against her, and he was thinking of her as a woman who hadn't delivered the goods. Neither of them could possibly fathom the other's point of view, that I could see.

Tony Cowles came to see me the next afternoon, and we took a long walk in the park. There are some wonderful paths that I have never explored before.

"Wouldn't you like to live in the country?" he asked me, as we sniffed the air for scents of coming spring, faintly discernible through other more urban odors.

"Yes, and no," I said. "I don't see what there would be to do in the country, after you had taken all the exercise in sight. I like people, and excitement, don't you?"

"Yes, and no," said Tony Cowles, smiling. "You never have had much country life, have you?"

"Only boarding in summer places," I said.

"A home of your own would be different."

"I suppose it would," I said; "the only really likable place in the country that I know about belongs to a girl I went to school with. It's all flowers and fireplaces and babies; all the married daughters live at home, and have a back yard full of children." "How is Squidgins?" Tony inquired. I've told him a good deal about Squidgins from time to time.

“Oh! Squidgins is all right. Stella is going to move away, though, and I shan’t have any baby to play with.”

“You’ll mind?”

“I shall mind awfully,” I said.

“Would you like to have a back yard full of children?”

“I used to think I should, but I feel differently about it now.”

“Differently?”

“I don’t believe in having children. That is, I don’t think it’s fair. They probably would resent it, anyway.”

“Do you resent living?”

“I hate it,” I said.

“I’m sorry about that.”

“Do you like it?” I said.

“I have a pretty good time. I can see, though, that things are pretty mixed up for you.”

“They are for Prunella, too. Prunella doesn’t think it right to have children unless you have a good heredity. I didn’t use to think that mattered. I thought it was all right for them to take a sporting chance—but now I don’t think there is any sport.”

“Prunella doesn’t hate living.”

“Well, Prunella has you,” I said.

“You have me, too, haven’t you?”

“Not the way Prunella has. Besides, I didn’t have you till—afterwards!”

“You can have me just the way Prunella has, if you want me.”

But I knew I couldn’t, because Prunella has him the way I had Carrington, and he is being kind to me because I am her friend, and he *is* kind. I don’t want to get to depend on him at all.

“Well, anyway, I don’t want to kill myself any more,” I said; “if you hadn’t taken an interest in me I might not have given that up.”

“So you thought of that?” said Tony Cowles.

“I’ve thought of everything,” I said. “I can’t live without ideals. The world is too scientific for me, that’s all.”

“Perhaps it isn’t as scientific as you think,” said Tony Cowles.

“Well, it’s quite hopeless,” I said. “I don’t want any more shocks, and I can’t have any if I don’t get to believing in anything again.”

“I’ll race you to that farthest tree,” said Tony Cowles.

“That big one with the moss on it?”

“No, the maple just beyond.”

“All right,” I said, and I got there only a second later than he did.

CHAPTER XVH

About a week after Prunella came back to town Tommy Nevers made a portentous call upon me. Although he came at half-past seven, and hadn't been dining anywhere but at the Automat, as he afterwards confessed, he wore his Tuxedo, with the conventional black tie and patent-leather pumps, which were rather marred by a pair of far from immaculate tan spats.

We discussed the weather, and the freshening effects of pure air for quite a while, and then he switched to the peace treaty.

"I am very glad that I didn't take up the law," Tommy said. "I should feel even more of a participant in my country's disgrace if I were a legal representative of it at this time."

"We have hemmed and hawed over it a good deal," I said. "Tony Cowles says it's because there are so many people in America they haven't got a composite mind to make up."

"Do you know that fellow?" Tommy asked.

"Why, you know I do," I said. "I took you to call on Prunella when he was there one evening."

"Do you think he's a good influence on Prunella?"

"Why, yes."

"Well, I am not sure that I think so. He's always around there whenever I go."

"Prunella's only been back a week,"I said.

"Yes, but he's always around there."

"He's her oldest friend."

"Well, what's the matter with her getting some new ones, then?"

"Nothing seems to be," I admitted.

“He’s a good deal too old to be an intimate friend, I should say.”

“He’s twenty-eight,” I said.

“Well, that’s old.”

“It’s a nice age, I think.”

“Well, I don’t like that fellow.”

“Now, Tommy,” I said.

“Well, you know yourself that twenty-eight is too old for Prunella. She has her mother around all the time, anyway. I should think he would be a depressing influence.”

“He cheers me up a good deal.”

“Does he come to see you?”

“Yes, quite often.”

“Well, maybe he’s just got that habit of hanging around young girls.”

“He’s a dear,” I said.

“Is it so about your father and mother separating?” Tommy asked, changing the subject. “I’m mighty sorry to hear it.”

“Yes, it’s so,” I said.

“Are you explaining the details to people, or are you not?”

“I are not,” I said; “besides there aren’t any details, just facts.”

“It’s a very sad situation,” Tommy said, “when a man and woman of comparative middle age have lived together for twenty years, and then cleave their lives apart. I heard there was another woman—on your father’s part.”

“Well, you can hear most anything,” I said.

“You and Prunella both seem to have rather bitter burdens to bear. I said to Prunella only the other night that I thought it was a strange coincidence that you should both have had troubles concerning the same things—that is, parents. I think it’s com paratively rare that children have troubles about their parents. It’s so often the other way.”

“Well, we have you to cheer us up,” I said.

“That’s one of the things I came to talk to you about; I want everything I do to be perfectly fair and aboveboard, and also I want your advice. You know, I’ve always told you that the reason I liked to be with you was that you were such a good sport, and understood just how one meant things, and all that. I know you never suspected me of any ulterior motives no matter how often I called upon you.”

“No, I didn’t,” I said.

“Of course, I think you are an awfully attractive girl, and there was a time when I thought that—perhaps—well, you know you *are* awfully attractive, and until I —”

“Met Prunella,” I said, “go on.”

“Well, yes, until I met Prunella—I—I—”

“I know all that, anyway,” I said; “go on with Prunella.”

“Well, to put it briefly, I’m awfully sorry for Prunella, and a man feels, when he’s as sorry for a girl as I am for Prunella, that he’d like to do something for her —take care of her, you know, for the rest of her life. I’d like to lift Prunella right out of those painful surroundings into a life of her own, in which she could expand. That’s the way you get to feel when you get to be as sorry for a girl as I am for her.”

“I wonder how Prunella feels,” I said.

“That’s one of the things I wanted to ask your advice about. How do you think she feels, Maisie? You’re such a keen judge of human nature that I thought you might know.”

“Well, she likes you a lot,” I said.

“I can do no more than put it to the test, I suppose.”

“Angels could do no more,” I said.

“I’m far from an angel,” he said, meaning to be humorous, “but that little girl deserves one after all she has been through.”

“You’ve taken me a little by surprise,” I said; “it’s odd to think of your old friends wanting to get married. How did it ever occur to you in the first place?”

“I don’t know. You know what they say pity is akin to. Well, when I began to realize that little girl’s situation in the world I began to wish that I could help her out of it in some way, and the wish grew, until now I—I—”

“You’re in love with her,” I said. “Have you ever—well—have you ever tried to —well, say good-night or anything?”

“I don’t think she’s that kind of a girl,” said Tommy.

“You thought I was.”

“You’re different,” Tommy said.

“Different?”

“You make anybody think of it quicker. Prunella is more *spirituelle* than you are, in a way.”

“I guess you are right, Tommy,” I said; “there’s something wrong about me, somewhere.”

“I don’t think there is. You’re an awfully attractive girl, you know, and you kind of—someway—attract people, but you’re not like Prunella.”

“Nobody thinks I am,” I said.

“Well, Prunella is *spirituelle.”*

“I used to think I was, too.”

“Oh, no!” said Tommy. “You are not what I call *spirituelle.”*

“I suppose that means I’m not *nice* like Prunella.”

“Oh! I didn’t mean *that.”*

“I don’t mind. I’d really rather think there was something wrong with me than with everything else.”

“Oh! I wouldn’t,” said Tommy; “that would take away all my confidence in myself.”

“How do you feel when you are in love?” I said.

“Pretty good, only you are torn between hope and fear. Do you think that Tony Cowles is hanging around for any special reason?”

“I don’t know,” I said; “that’s for you to find out, isn’t it?”

“I’ll find out. I’m in a position to support a wife in a modest way, you know. I have some income outside of my position.”

“Men don’t always want to marry girls just because the girls are in trouble about things. A man might feel quite interested in a girl’s state of mind and yet not want to marry her.”

“He might,” said Tommy, “but unless there was something wrong with the girl I think his impulse would be to lift her out of her misery.”

“He might want to lift her out of her misery and not marry her,” I said.

“That’s only morbid,” said Tommy; “you get those ideas from your sister, and that Greenwich Village bunch. Don’t think along those lines, Maisie.”

“I wish I knew what lines to think along,” I said; “Stella is not Greenwich Villagey,” I said, “not essentially.”

“I know she isn’t. She’s quite celebrated, but she has that trend of thought. I don’t care for that trend of thought. I don’t believe in psychoanalysis and Freud and all those things, because of the morbid tendency they have.”

“You’ve got to analyze the motives of human life some way.”

“No, I don’t agree with you. The less you analyze things the better off you are.”

“But you Ve got to know what life means?”

“No,” said Tommy; “you’ve just got to live it according to the best of your ability. Then you’ll find it’s all smooth sailing.”

“It seems easy the way you put it,” I said; “well, maybe, it is like that. The State of Denmark wasn’t any more mixed up than Hamlet was, was it?”

I couldn’t sleep all that night for thinking of different things. It seemed rather wonderful that Tommy should want to marry Prunella on what is really quite a slight acquaintance, and just want to marry her because she’s in so much trouble. Carrington and I were very, very intimate friends, and I gave him all my most sacred and inmost confidence, and trusted him more than I have ever trusted any one, and all that happened was that he didn’t want to marry me, and blamed me for caring for him so much. Then Tony Cowles cares about Prunella too. He is willing to give up all his own pleasure and comfort to make things easier for her, and I suppose what he means to do is to marry her, and take her away from the terrible problem of her mother. I’ve thought and thought about what else he could mean by his hint to me of an idea that might work out for her salvation, and I am pretty sure he can’t mean anything else.

Of course, Prunella can’t marry both of them, but looking at it from her point of view it’s perfectly wonderful to have things happen like that. They both cherish her, and think about the way things could be arranged to make life easier for her. The pathetic thing is that it takes so little to please her. I love her very much, and she is the most intimate friend I have, of course, and I am not belittling her at all when I say that either one of them could make her equally happy. I wouldn’t dream of marrying Tommy Nevers. I didn’t even dream of marrying Carrington —only of a beautiful friendship with him, though I suppose I dimly hoped for more to come; but Tony Cowles is like a shining knight out of an Edwin Abbey painting, and it’s a pity that Prunella hasn’t the intelligence to know the difference.

Also, it is painful to think of the complication of Prunella choosing between them. I wish Tony Cowles hadn’t felt that he had to be so fatherly about me and my affairs, because it’s going to be a wrench when I have to give him up

entirely. I know he'll always be just as kind and helpful to me, but a man doesn't realize that a girl can't get much comfort and consolation out of a sympathy that's merely left over from something he gives somebody else. In other words—charity.

It will be Tony, of course, and yet it will be an awful experience for Tommy, not to get something that he wants. It's never happened to him so far. Tony won't mind knowing about Tommy, I suppose, and yet to think of Prunella considering Tommy the way I know she will consider him, quite seriously, without any sense of values, makes my blood boil.

The effect of Tommy's revelation, though, of course, it was a sacred confidence, sent me to see Prunella the next afternoon. I had a feeling that I should like to have a good look at her to see if all these experiences that she was the focus of had had any visible effect on her; but they hadn't. I asked her about Tony, and she compared his usefulness to that of Mr. Pemberton, and I spoke of Tommy, and she said that he had introduced her to a new kind of chocolate nougat that wasn't too neutral tasting, and yet had that lovely chewy quality like a caramel. Her mother, who seemed quite a lot improved, brought her knitting (which Prunella says is a part of the prescribed treatment at the sanatorium) and sat with us until Tommy arrived promptly at five-thirty, with his brief-case under his arm containing all the business papers that go everywhere with him.

To my surprise he seemed to get on famously with Mrs. Pemberton. I suppose she treats any young man of the late Mr. Pemberton's age in a kind of reminiscent way, and it's easy for them to respond to it because it seems so habitual.

"Don't go, Maisie," Prunella said, in a perfectly sincere way, that made me get my hat and coat at once. She really didn't want me to go, only at the same time she thought it was rather too bad I was there.

"I've got to," I said, and Tommy cast me a grateful look.

"This is the hour for my treatment," Mrs. Pemberton said; "you should come earlier, Tommy."

"He can't leave the office any earlier, Mother dear. It's nice of him to come in every day as soon as he can get away."

“I always like to be of service,” Tommy murmured.

As I stepped into the street I met Carrington there face to face.

“Well?” he said.

“Well,” I said.

“Couldn’t we have a cup of tea somewhere?”

“I’d rather walk,” I said.

We turned toward Broadway.

“Maisie,” he said, “don’t you think I was rather badly treated?”

“No,” I said; “I think in a way I was.”

“Do you blame me?”

“I have only myself to blame-Iknowthat.”

“Not that,” Carrington said; “it’s the whole artificial civilization. You are only the product of your generation seeking—seeking the solvent of life, and then with not courage enough to take it when you find it.”

“What do you think the solvent of life is?”

“Beauty—the beauty that comes through the courage to experience.”

“It might take some courage not to experience,” I said.

“Do you mean that?”

“Not for you,” I said.

“I loved you, but I left you free.”

“What do you mean by love?” I said.

“You know what I meant—and what I do mean.”

“Just one thing,” I said. “And yet they say it is men who put things bluntly.”

“Do you know what I think?” I said. “I think that men like you ought to leave girls like me alone.”

“Well—”

“Nice girls do have nice men that want to marry them, and protect them.”

“I’ve never claimed the contrary.”

“Even if I am not naturally as nice as other girls, I have nice instincts.”

“You’re nicer than other girls.”

“I’m too demonstrative,” I said.

“Just about right,” Carrington said.

I shivered.

“The trouble with you is,” Carrington went on thoughtfully, “that you’ve got too good a mind for your limitations. Your brain is not immature, but your reactions are just as archaic as if you lacked a thinking organ.”

“Thank you,” I said sarcastically.

“Don’t be nasty.”

“You were,” I said; “you ought to have let me alone,” I continued with my first train of thought, “even if I did meet you halfway. My halfway wasn’t the same thing as your halfway.”

“How was I to know that?”

“Well, you’d had experience,” I said, “and I hadn’t.”

“You were after experience.”

His eyes widened and popped. His short arms and little hands swung out at his side as he walked.

“You’re just terrible,” I said, without premeditation—” terrible!”

I ran wildly after a passing taxi and hailed it. I jumped in it, pushing him off as I did so, and slammed the door in his face.

“Go away, go away!” I said; “you make me sick!”

And although he gave my address composedly enough to the driver my last glimpse of him was standing stock-still on the sidewalk with a strange, disconcerted look on his face, and his hat pulled down over his eyes. He looked more like a trick dog than anything.

CHAPTER XVIII

Mother was nearly dead waiting for Father to come and have his promised talk with her, and the day he came we had all we could do to keep her from going out. Even Stella argued with her quite hotly. All she would say was that it had been so long now that she didn't feel able to go through with it. You couldn't very well blame her, for he had taken a long time about it.

They were closeted together over an hour, and then they sent for me. Mother was sitting on the couch looking very unmotherish in a silk shirt-waist and skirt, her hair parted on the side, and done low, and her little feet in low-heeled pumps like a boy's. I'd noticed without really taking it in that she had changed a good deal since Father left—she'd got younger and littler some way—but it wasn't fully borne in upon me until I saw her sitting there, waiting for me.

Father was standing and looking down at her. Neither of them spoke for a minute. Then Father said:

"Well, Kitten."

And Mother said:

"Sit down, Maisie."

"All right," I said, making for a neutral seat in the wing chair. But Father motioned me to a place beside Mother.

"Your mother is very tired," he said.

"Your father has been telling me some simple truths," she said; "at least they sound simple, and they are truths."

"I've nearly killed her," Father said remorsefully.

"What have you done to her?" I said, and I put my arm around her.

"I've just told her what she has done to us, me, you—all of us."

"It's you, Father," I said, "that have done it to us."

“I’ve told her that, too,” said Father; “only it’s her failure more than mine because she’s so much better than I am.”

“I’m not very much good,” said Mother, “but I haven’t been disloyal to you Robert—not literally.”

“Well, I have—to you,” said Father. “The question is now—what are we going to do about it?”

“Yes, that is the question, isn’t it? I’ve been asking myself that question a good deal lately. Do you want to patch it up and go on, Robert?—if I could, that is?”

“No, I don’t want to patch it up,” said Father savagely, “I want a new deal.”

“The old hand didn’t play very well.” It was strange to hear Mother talking in metaphors with a queer little one-sided smile on her face. “I haven’t much to say in my own defense, except that I wasn’t much interested in my life. I wasn’t very close to you, Robert, or my children. I don’t know whose fault that was. It just happens to be a fact. So I neglected you to all intents and purposes, and played around with Ellery. He made me feel like a—beautiful woman. That’s all.”

“You are,” said Father, “you are.”

“If you only would have said so to me sometimes. I didn’t want to run around with Jimmie Greer, and those terrible people he knows. I’ve got some Scotch blood in me, and I don’t like to squander money on those things.”

“Do you want to spend it for anything?” Father said.

“I’d like to save a certain amount first. I always thought when we had done that we’d squander it together on trips, and things.”

“But you wouldn’t go to Canada with me?”

“It was too late then. I wasn’t interested.”

“What would have kept you interested?” Father asked.

“What does keep a woman interested?”

“I don’t—know,” said Father uncomfortably; “you know you’re the only woman there ever could be for me?”

“Am I?” said Mother; “if I could have known that before—I mean, really have known it. Now, of course, it doesn’t mean anything.”

“It means everything,” said Father quietly.

“Mary,” Mother said, turning to me, “will you answer me a few questions? Your father accuses me of having neglected you. Do you think I have?”

“Yes, Mother,” I said.

“When you began to go out with this Carrington Chase, why couldn’t you come and tell me about it—at least?”

“You would have stopped it.”

“The only reason that I didn’t interfere with your freedom, Mary, was that I trusted you utterly.”

“I know it,” I said.

“You were not worthy of my trust.”

“It wasn’t a question of that, Mother,” I said. “I needed somebody to talk to, so I talked to Carrington the way you talked to Ellery. It was all I had, and I wasn’t going to have it stopped.”

“You had me,” Father said.

“No,” I said.

“Your mother was the natural one—”

“You weren’t being the natural one,” I said; “you can’t tell people the things that are in your soul unless they realize you have a soul.”

“Mary’s hit it,” said Father.

“There is a difference between right and wrong,” Mother insisted.

“Yes, but nobody in this house seemed to know it,” I said; “I didn’t. I don’t yet.”

“I’ve always said she was a terrible child,” said Mother.

“Look at Stella,” Father said ruefully; “it was Stella that discouraged us. We couldn’t be expected to bring up a perfectly normal daughter after that experience.”

“Stella is extraordinary,” Mother agreed; “she’s such a queer old person.”

“But she’s steadily getting younger,” I said.

“Mary,” Mother said, “have you told us all the truth about your relation with Carrington Chase?”

“All that counts,” I said.

“You went to his rooms, and you didn’t stay?”

I cringed.

“Yes,” I said.

“Robert, you are right, it was my fault. Mary isn’t a child I can understand, but I see where I’ve been wrong just the same.”

“You ought to have held me to account,” I said.

“Mary’s hit it again,” Father said; “you ought to have held me to account. Somebody’s got to keep the books.”

“I thought I kept them only too well,” Mother said with her new crooked smile; “we haven’t reached any conclusion except that we’ve all decided we were wrong.”

“Wrong as hell,” Father said cheerfully.

“Will you give me a week, Robert, to decide what I want to do?”

“As long as you decide my way.”

“Where is—Mrs.—Mrs. Van der Water?”

“Gone to Canada.”

“To stay?”

“With Jimmie Greer,” said Father.

“Call in Bobby,” I said, after a pause, “and talk to him.”

“What does Bobby know?” Mother said.

“Almost everything,” I said.

Bobby looked as white as a sheet of paper when he was summoned. Nobody realizes what that child goes through in his head about all the family difficulties.

“It’s going to be all right, Bobby,” I said, as he appeared.

“It’s getting fixed,” Father said.

“Come here, Bobby.” Mother smoothed his hair back from his forehead, and he put his head silently down on her shoulder.

“He needs a mother, too,” I said, “don’t you, Bobby?”

He jerked his head twice, without lifting it.

“He’s my baby,” Mother said.

“Well, I guess he is, if he’ll let you do that to him,” I said. “Come on, Bobby, let’s have a few minutes’ conversation among ourselves outside,” I added as Mother released him and looked helplessly about. I knew she’d have to say something to Father about that fur coat before they could part amicably.

“Are they going to come together again?” Bobby asked me hoarsely after I had borne him off to the dug-out.

“I think so,” I said.

“What has become of the corespondent?”

“Where did you pick up such a word, Bobby?” I asked him severely.

“That’s what they call them, isn’t it?”

“We don’t have to call this one anything,” I said; “she’s gone off to Canada.”

“I thought she looked kind of like Theda Bara, didn’t you?”

“No, I didn’t,” I said; “Theda Bara is fat.”

“Well, this one looked like her in the face,” Bobby insisted. “I don’t see what a man wants to make a fool of himself over a vamp for. I can imagine falling in love with a nice clean girl like Mary Pickford.”

“Well, don’t you let me catch you falling in love with anybody,” I said.

“Is Mother’s beau going to South America?”

“Bobby, that isn’t very respectful.”

“Well, is he?”

“He isn’t coming around here very much, anyway.”

“He was all right,” Bobby said, “only he hung around too much, I guess.”

Mother expressed some interest in Tony Cowles after this, because his keeping on my trail so persistently suggested another intrigue to her. I explained to her that she needn’t bark up Tony Cowles’s tree because his interest was in Prunella, and I was only an offshoot of that interest. It was a little bit humiliating to keep on explaining that to everybody, even myself all the time, but I kept bravely to it. She finally decided that Tony was a perfectly harmless friend for me to have, and subsided.

Of course, it was wonderful for me to have anybody like that. We took long walks together and drives in the park, and talked along the lines that my hungry mind demanded. His point of view on everything almost exactly coincides with mine, and when it doesn’t all I have to do is to educate mine up to it. He is so soothingly impersonal about everything. I used to think that the personal note was the only one it was really interesting to sound, but Tony has taught me how

to run the whole scale, as it were. With Carrington the only thing I liked to talk about was how things affected me, and he liked to go on analyzing the motivation of life—and me—with the tacit idea in mind of something to come of it that I took at its face value.

“I think we ought to hear some music together,” Tony suggested one day when we were sitting in the dug-out with the window open and the strains of “Trovatore” oozing through the crack from a hand-organ down below; “your mother wouldn’t mind an occasional opera, would she? Even if they are late.”

“I’ve done worse things than operas,” I said; “once I stayed out all night riding up and down the subway.”

“That’s better than the Grand Central Station. I stayed all night in the Grand Central Station once when I couldn’t get a hotel.”

“This wasn’t because I couldn’t get a hotel,” I said.

“Shocks?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said, “the worst one. The one I went to meet halfway.”

“And didn’t quite make?”

“I just as bad as made it,” I said; “it was only” an accident that I came away. The bell didn’t ring.”

“Didn’t it?” said Tony encouragingly.

“It’s just the same as if it had rung,” I said, “as far as my intentions went. There isn’t any reason why you or anybody should think of me as an especially nice girl.”

“I think we’ll begin with the ‘Coq d’ Or,’” Tony said frowningly, as if he hadn’t been listening to my dissertation on myself.

“I’ve heard ‘Boris’ and ‘Parsifal’ and ‘Faust,’” I said, “and that’s all.”

Tony laughed.

“Did you like them all equally?”

“Just about. The ‘Meistersingers’ is my great ambition, though. I don’t know why, but I’ve always dreamed about it.”

“We’ll hear it the first time it’s given in New York. Did you like’Parsifal’?”

“It was hard to hear and hard to see, but I acquired a taste for it,” I said. “I went with the Webster girls in their cousin’s box, and it drove them wild.”

“I should think it might have,” Tony smiled.

He has met them once, and he feels about them the way Father does, only amused besides. They both made him button up their white spats, which are about as long as my best evening gloves.

“I love all operatic music,” I said, “but the only kind I really like is Wagner.”

“You remind me of what .George Mac-Donald said of God,” Tony said; “you are easy to please and hard to satisfy.”

“Well, I guess that’s about it,” I said, “and you’re like that yourself.”

“Ami?”

“Yes, you are,” I said; “especially so—more than anybody.”

“*You* satisfy me,” Tony said.

For my sake I thought we had better get back to the subject of Prunella.

“Prunella isn’t hard to satisfy,” I said.

“She’s delightfully easy to please. I took her three pounds of caramels yesterday tied up with a bow of blue ribbon, of this thin cloudy stuff, you know, and she tied it in the front of her blouse and has been wearing it ever since.”

“She likes those things,” I said; “caramels and attentions.”

“Your young friend Tommy Nevers spends all his spare time with her; did you know it?” Tony asked.

“Well, he told me that he did.”

“Did he tell you anything else?”

“He told me how much he liked Prunella.”

“How much does he?”

“A lot.”

“Do you think his attentions are serious?”

“On his part, yes.”

“I think they are serious—on her part,” said Tony, laughing at my grammatical construction.

“Do you think she *likes* him?” I said.

“I think she does.”

“Not really?”

“I think she’s falling in love with him as fast as she can.”

“Well,” I said.

“I always regarded young Nevers as rather your property.”

“I always regarded Prunella—” I said, and stopped.

“Oh!” he said thoughtfully.

“Tommy told me that he would like to lift her out of her misery,” I began rapidly; “he said he thought that when a man felt as sorry for a girl as he did for Prunella that was what he always wanted to do.”

“Well, maybe. He’s right about the freshening effects of fresh air, isn’t he?”

“He’s very sweet about Prunella,” I said; “differently so, from any way I’ve ever seen him before.”

“He’s a thoroughly reliable boy. He’s afflicted by an acute case of youth, that’s all, and that mends itself.”

“I’m afflicted by youth, too,” I said.

“It’s becoming to *you*”

“I think my mother and my father are going to make friends again,” I said, changing the subject once more.

“I’m glad to hear that.”

“I don’t know that they are going to be happy ever after,” I said, “but they won’t be happy any other way.”

“Love is a curious business,” said Tony Cowles.

I couldn’t help wondering how he knew.

The hand-organ switched to “That dear old pal of mine.”

“You believe that you can smash a thing to bits, and then remould it nearer to the heart’s desire, don’t you?” I said.

“I believe there is a destiny,” he said, smiling, “‘that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will.’ Also, I believe ‘that the world is so full of a number of things’ that it’s our solemn duty to be as happy as the—”

“Well-known kings,” I finished for him.

“Yes, don’t you—don’t you really?”

“I’ve been awfully miserable,” I said.

“I know.”

“Do you believe in God?” I said, after a silence.

“Yes, dear,” said Tony Cowles gently.

CHAPTER XIX

I Was so popular for a few days after this that I had hardly time to air out the dug-out between visitations. Prunella came and stitched lingerie ruffles in a smiling state of abstraction, talking a great deal about Tommy as if he were a matter of course, but not allowing me anything but generalizations on the subject. The Webster girls came and announced Mertis's engagement to Hanson Hollowell, whom I don't think she has any intention of marrying; she is so afraid it will get into the papers.

"When I come to think it all over I don't think anything will induce me to leave Marion," she admitted, "but I want Marion to get an entanglement of her own for the time being, and then we can see how it works out."

"Hanson is rather nice, isn't he?" I said.

"He has a beastly temper," Mertis said; "otherwise I might take him more seriously."

"You couldn't take him more seriously on the face of it," I said.

"Well, you know how those things are. You sort of drift into them, and then you have to say something to appease the poor man. If it's no, you don't get any more parties and the confectionery supply abruptly ceases."

"I will say he isn't a tight wad," Marion said; "you know that's one thing I always had against your acquisition, Maisie. He was awfully careful with his money. He actually let me pay for that taxicab that time, do you remember?"

"You insisted," I said.

"Well, why did I insist? To be resisted, of course. I didn't want to fork out my money."

"Neither did he," said Marion.

"Well, you let him slip, didn't you, Maisie?"

"Yes," I said, "I really did."

“You could have held on to him if you’d wanted to.”

“I know it,” I said.

“I hear now that the hyphen lady’s husband is divorcing her, and she’s going to marry Carrington.”

“What hyphen lady?”

“You know, Red Feathers.”

“Do you think it’s so?” I asked.

“Well, it’s all over town; but you never can tell, can you, Mertis?”

“You never can,” Mertis answered coolly.

“Well,” Marion said, “if you think of a likely candidate for me, trot him along, and I’ll look him over. Meantime, I’ll do as much for you.”

“Maisie has a gentleman friend,” Mertis said slyly, “Anthony Cowles. Maisie knows which side her bread is buttered on now.”

“He’s awfully good people,” Marion said; “as good as Hollo well, but isn’t he frightfully heavyweight?”

“No,” I said, “he isn’t. He’s just about right.”

“Hollowell never had an idea in his life,” Mertis said; “that’s why I like him. If you took off the top of his head nothing but feathers would fly out.”

“I’m glad you think that’s a recommendation,” I said.

“It’s the only one,” Mertis said seriously, “if you get a man who thinks he wants to do your thinking for you.”

It might be necessary in Mertis’s case, but there was no good telling her so.

They hadn’t been out of the house five minutes before Tommy arrived, bursting with revelations. I steered him past my absent-minded mother who had done her politest to my butterfly friends, and had settled down to comparative quiet again,

writing a letter, to Father I strongly suspected, as she'd had a long one from him.

"Ought I to stop and speak to her?" Tommy asked. "I'd rather not, if it can be avoided. I'm so moved, in a great many ways."

"Mercy, no," I said; "she has troubles of her own."

"May I smoke?" Tommy said, as we settled.

He lit up ostentatiously to show me how his hand was trembling. It really was, for that matter.

"She's going to," he said finally.

"Marry you?"

"Think of it," Tommy said; "she wants a week to think it over."

"Tell me about it," I demanded.

"Well, it's too sacred a matter to speak of very much, but this is what happened. I went around there this afternoon, and that Cowles fellow was there, but he saw that there was something serious on and he went away. I like that fellow."

"So do I," I said.

"He's been mighty white to Prunella. She told me about him. Well, he went away, and we sat down on the sofa together, and, well, you know I told you how a fellow feels about a girl that's in the state of trouble Prunella is in. You have an irresistible impulse to soothe them. I don't mean that you think of them in any—any desecrating way—"

"I know what you mean, Tommy," I said; "go on."

"Well, I took her hand in mine, and then I told her—"

"What?" I said.

"What I've told you about wanting to lift her out of her misery. She—she is willing, it seems, or will be when she has thought it over for about a week. You know, I feel as if I could get down on my knees and kiss the hem of that little

girl’s garment.”

“Why didn’t you?” I inquired.

“I did,” said Tommy reverently.

“What about her mother?” I said.

“We didn’t discuss her; but she knows that I would do the right thing by her mother.”

“She drinks, you know, Tommy.”

“Well, I don’t,” Tommy said; “where does she get it?”

“I don’t know.”

“All those things will settle themselves,” Tommy said; “the legislature of my country has taken such a disgraceful turn that it makes my blood boil when I think of it. I suppose Mrs. Pemberton is forced to the same shameful expedients that all other anti-prohibitionists are.”

“Well, you aren’t, Tommy, if you don’t drink.”

“It’s the principle of the thing,” Tommy said. “Weren’t you surprised that Prunella gave way so quickly?”

“Well, no,” I said. “Tony Cowles told me the other day that he thought Nella was getting deeply interested in you.”

“I like that fellow,” said Tommy. “What do I hear about your other friend Carrington Chase? He’s named as corespondent in a divorce case.”

“I didn’t know that,” I said.

“That Mrs. Jones’s husband is divorcing her on Carrington’s account. How’s your father, Maisie?”

“Mother isn’t divorcing him,” I said, “if that’s what you mean.”

“I’m mighty glad to hear that.”

“I’m mighty glad to hear about you and Prunella,” I said.

“You look a little white,” Tommy said; “are you tired or something? Had I better go?”

“If you don’t mind, Tommy,” I said.

“Oh! I was going, anyway, in five minutes—excuse my looking at my watch. I only came away long enough for Prunella to have a consultation with the doctor about her mother. She expects me back at half-past five. I’m the happiest man in the world,” he said, rising. “I shall never forget the help you’ve been to me, little girl—never.”

“I’m glad of that,” I said.

When the door closed on him, it left me alone with quite a number of things. The look on Mother’s face, for instance, as she folded and smoothed out her letter to my father, the forgiveness look, I suppose it might be called, because that was what it was, anyway.

Then there was the thought of Tommy and Prunella’s happiness and Mertis’s fake engagement, and—the news about Carrington.

I shut myself into the telephone booth in the hall, and called Tony Cowles’s home number.

“I want to see you,” I said.

“All right, I’ll be there.”

“I don’t want you to come here,” I said; “I want to come there.”

“You get in a taxicab and come over here,” Tony said; “only don’t get out and come up. I’ll be looking for you, and I’ll come down.”

“I don’t care about its being proper,” I said, “or not.”

“I’ll come down.”

“All right,” I said.

“The house stifled me,” I said; “I couldn’t stay in it.”

“Drive through the park,” Tony told the driver; “keep on driving till I tell you to stop.”

“Carrington Chase is going to be the corespondent in a divorce case.”

“Is he?” said Tony Cowles cheerfully.

“I never told you his name before,” I said.

“It’s alliterative, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” I said; “he was perfectly horrid really. I told him so one night, standing on a street-corner. He’d never understand why I thought so. But you do, don’t you?”

“I do.”

“A corespondent always means somebody that is—that isn’t—”

“Yes, it does,” said Tony Cowles quickly; “of course, the case may not be proved.”

“This case will be,” I said.

“Does it matter?” Tony asked gently.

“Oh! doesn’t it?” I said.

“The lights are nice in this mist, aren’t they?”

“Yes,” I said; “my father and mother nearly got dragged into the divorce courts. Oh! I can’t see how such things are allowed to happen.”

“They do, but I don’t think we need to think about them to-night. We can drive around for a while, and then I’ll telephone your mother and ask her if she is willing for you to go to dinner with me.”

“I don’t see why you are so careful about me,” I said, “when I’ve told you everything. He didn’t care what I did, or whether Mother knew it or not.”

“She might be anxious.”

“Yes, she might be, now,” I agreed; “the lights *are* nice in the mist.”

After a while I put my hand over his, and then I put my arms around his neck, but I jerked them away again, and covered my face with them.

“Oh!” I said. “Oh! that’s the way I am. You see it isn’t right. I’m too—”

“Mary,” Tony Cowles said, in a voice I had never heard him use before, “do what you started to do.”

“I—can’t,” I said.

“Put your arms around my neck, and kiss me.”

“It isn’t right,” I said; “there’s something about me—I’m all wrong,” I said.

“What makes you think so?”

“It’s either that or—that everything is—sex,” I said. “I don’t want to believe that. You aren’t like that.”

“Mary,” he said, “everybody is.”

“What do you mean?” I said.

“There’s just one big ideal in this world—and that’s love,” he said, “the fusion of two beings into one. It’s the truth that underlies everything.”

“People get awfully messed up,” I said.

“Yes, but that doesn’t alter the fact that it’s love they are looking for.”

“Like Parsifal,” I said.

“Exactly.”

“But it seemed to me so—disgusting that I should be looking for it,” I said. “At first I didn’t know what it was I wanted, and then Carrington, he—told me—”

“Yes, I know.”

“I just thought it was beauty.”

“It is,” he said, “it is. Put your arms around my neck, dear. Kiss me.”

“Oh! is that all right?” I cried.

“Is it?” asked Tony Cowles.

I’m going to marry him as soon as Stella gets out of the house and Father and Mother get together again. I was willing to wait until Prunella’s aunt came out of the South and relieved her of the worst of her troubles, but Tony thinks that won’t be necessary. He’s—he’s beautiful.