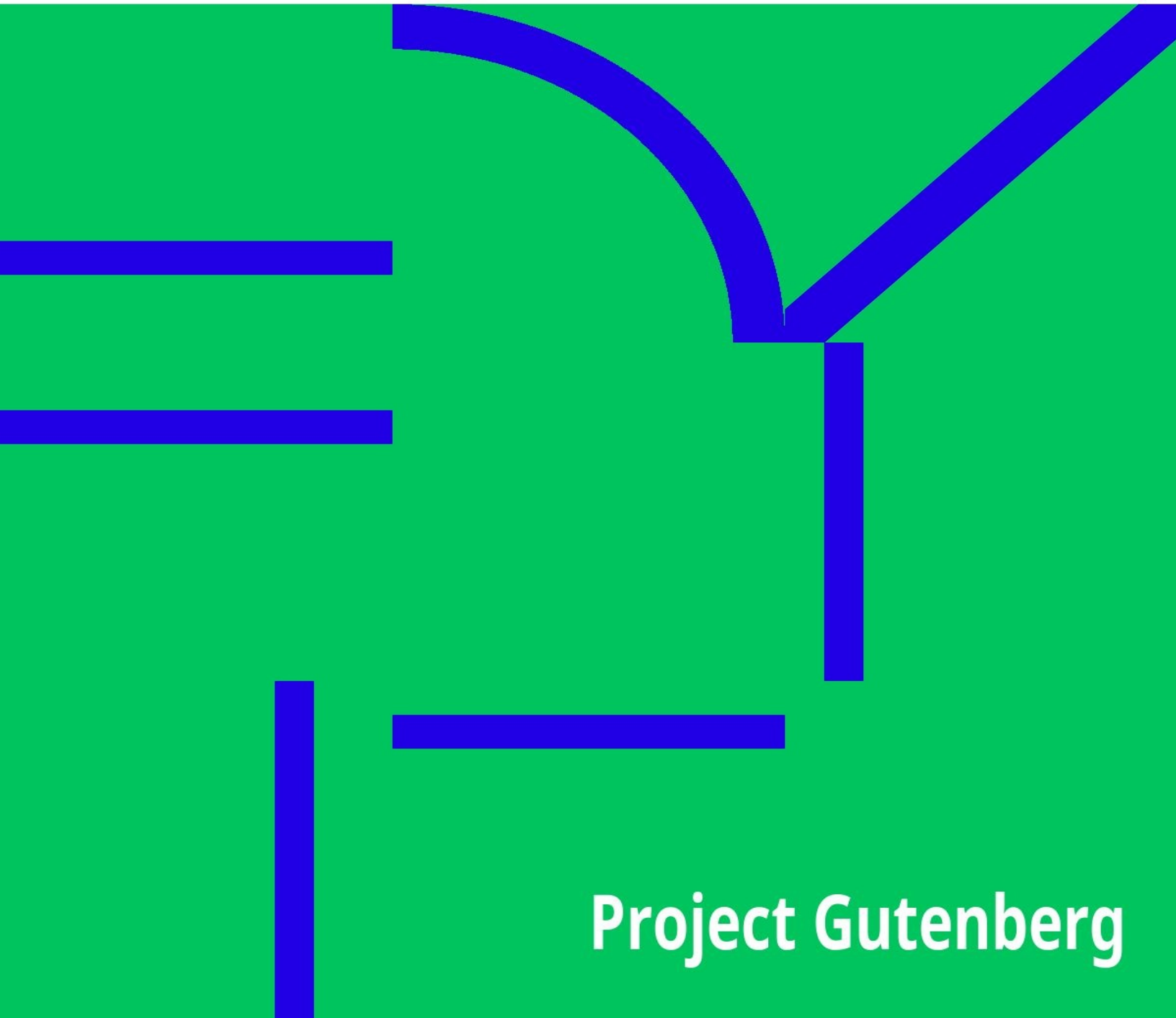
Find the Woman

Arthur Somers Roche



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FIND THE WOMAN

Clancy Dean, the heroine of "Find the Woman"—from the painting by Dean Cornwell

FIND THE WOMAN

By

ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

Author of "Uneasy Street," etc.

With four illustrations

By DEAN CORNWELL

NEW YORK

Cosmopolitan Book Corporation

MCMXXI

To ETHEL PETTIT ROCHE

Let Philip win his Clancy,
As heroes always do;
To each his own sweet fancy—
My fancy

is for you.

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The Illustrations by

DEAN CORNWELL

I

As the taxi stopped, Clancy leaned forward. Yes; she'd read the sign aright! It was Fifth Avenue that she saw before her.

Fifth Avenue! And she, Clancy Deane, of Zenith, Maine, was looking at it with her own eyes! Dreams *did* come true, after all. She, forty-eight hours ago a resident of a sleepy Maine town, was in the city whence came those gorgeous women who, in the summer-time, thrilled her as they disembarked from their yachts in Zenith Harbor, to stroll around the town, amusement in their eyes.

She looked to the left. A limousine, driven by a liveried chauffeur, beside whom sat another liveried man, was also stopped by the policeman in the center of the avenue. Furtively, Clancy eyed the slim matron who sat, leaning back, in the rear of the car. From the jaunty toque of blue cloth trimmed with gold, down the chinchilla-collared seal coat, past the edge of brown duveteen skirt to the short-

vamped shoes that, although Clancy could not know it, had just come from Paris, the woman was everything that Clancy was not.

As the policeman blew a whistle and the taxi moved forward and turned up the avenue, Clancy sat more stiffly. Oh, well, give her six months— She knew well enough that her tailor-made was not the real thing. But it was the best that Bangor, nearest city to Zenith, could provide. And it would do. So would her hat that, by the presence of the woman in the limousine, was made to seem coarse, bucolic. Even her shoes, which she had been assured were the very latest thing, were, she suddenly knew, altogether too long and narrow. But it didn't matter. In her pocketbook she held the "Open Sesame" to New York.

A few weeks, and Clancy Deane would be as well dressed as this woman to whom a moment ago she had been so close. Clothes! They were all that Clancy needed. She knew that. And it wasn't vanity that made her realize that her faintly angular figure held all the elements that, ripening, would give her shape that lissomness envied by women and admired by men. It wasn't conceit that told her that her black hair, not lusterless but with a satiny sheen, was rare in its soft luxuriousness. It wasn't egotism that assured her that her face, with its broad mouth, whose red lips could curve or pout exquisitely, its straight nose with the narrow nostrils, its wide-set gray eyes, and low, broad forehead, was beautiful.

Conceit, vanity, egotism—these were not in the Clancy Deane make-up. But she recognized her assets, and was prepared to realize from their sale the highest possible price. She could not forbear to peep into her pocketbook. Yes; it was still there—the card, oddly enough, quite simply engraved, of "Mlle. Fanchon DeLisle." And, scrawled with a muddy pen, were the mystic words: "Introducing my little friend, Florine Ladue, to Mr. Morris Beiner."

Carefully, as the taxi glided up the avenue, Clancy put the card back in the side compartment of the rather bulky pocketbook. At Forty-fifth Street, the driver turned to the left toward Times Square. She recognized the Times Building from a photograph she had seen. The taxi turned again at the north end of the square, and, a door away, stopped before what seemed to be a row of modiste's shops.

"This is the Napoli, ma'am," the driver said. "The office is up-stairs. Help you with your bag, ma'am?"

"Of course." It was with a quite careless air that she replied.

She climbed the short and narrow flight of stairs that led to the office of the Napoli with as much of an air as is possible for any human to assume mounting stairs.

A fat, jolly-seeming woman sat at a desk perched so that it commanded not merely the long, narrow dining-room but the stairs to the street. Although Clancy didn't know it, the Napoli, the best known theatrical hotel in America, had been made by throwing several old dwelling-houses together.

"A room?" suggested Clancy.

The stout woman nodded pleasantly. Whereupon Clancy paid and tipped her taxi-man. The landlady, Madame Napoli, as Clancy was soon to learn, shoved the register toward her. With a flourish Clancy signed "Florine Ladue." To append the town of Zenith as her residence was too much of an anticlimax after the "Florine Ladue." Portland was a bit more cosmopolitan, and Portland, therefore, appeared on the register.

"You have a trunk?" asked Madame Napoli.

Clancy shook her head.

"Then the terms, for a room by the week, will be fourteen dollars—in advance," said *madame*.

Clancy shrugged. Nonchalantly she opened her purse and drew forth a twenty-dollar bill. *Madame* beamed upon her.

"You may sign checks for one week, Miss"—she consulted the register—"Miss Ladue."

"'Sign checks?'" Clancy was puzzled.

Madame beamed. Also, a smaller edition of *madame*, with the same kindly smile, chuckled.

"You see," said *madame*, "my children—these are all my children." And she waved a fat hand toward the dining-room, where a few men and women were gayly chattering incomprehensible badinage to each other between mouthfuls. "But children are careless. And so—I let them sign checks for one week. If they do not pay at the end of one week——"

Clancy squared her shoulders haughtily.

"I think you need have no apprehension about me," she said stiltedly.

"Oh, I won't—not for one week," beamed *madame*. "Paul!" she called. A 'bus-boy emerged from the dining-room, wiping his hands upon a soiled apron.

"Take Miss—Ladue's bag to one hundred and eighteen," ordered *madame*. She

beamed again upon Clancy. "If you like chocolate-cake, Miss Ladue, better come down early. My children gobble it up quickly."

"Thank you," said Clancy, and followed the 'bus-boy porter up two flights of stairs. Her room, fairly large, with a basin for running water and an ample closet, and, as Paul pointed out, only two doors from the bathroom, had two wide windows, and they looked out upon Times Square.

The afternoon was waning. Dots of light embellished the awesome Times Building. Back, lower down Broadway, an automobile leaped into being, poised high in the air, its wheels spinning realistically. A huge and playful kitten chased a ball of twine. A petticoat flapped back and forth in an electrically created gale.

There was a wide seat before one window, and Clancy stretched out upon it, elbows upon the sill and her cheeks pressed into her two palms. Zenith was ten million miles away. She wondered why people had hoped that she wouldn't be lonely. As if anyone *could* be lonely in New York!

Why, the city was crowded! There were scores of things to do, scores of places to go. While, back home in Zenith, two days ago, she had finished a day just like a hundred preceding, a thousand preceding days. She had washed her hands in the women's dressing-room at Miller & Company's. She had walked home, tired out after a hard day pounding a typewriter for Mr. Frank Miller. Her aunt Hetty —she wasn't really Clancy's aunt—Clancy was an orphan—but she'd lived at Mehitabel Baker's boarding-house since her mother died, four years ago—had met her at the door and said that there was apple pie for supper and she'd saved an extra piece for her. After supper, there'd been a movie, then bed. Oh, occasionally there was a dance, and sometimes a dramatic company, fourth-rate, played at the opera-house. She thought of "Mlle. Fanchon DeLisle," whose card she carried, whose card was the "Open Sesame."

Mademoiselle DeLisle had been in the "New York Blondes." Clancy remembered how, a year ago, when the "flu" first ravaged the country, Mademoiselle DeLisle had been stricken, on the night the Blondes played Zenith. She'd almost died, too. She said herself that, if it hadn't been for Clancy, when nurses were so scarce and hard to get, that she sure would have kicked in. She'd been mighty grateful to Clancy. And when she left, a fortnight after her company, she'd given Clancy this card.

"Morris Beiner ain't the biggest guy in the world, kid," she'd said, "but he's big enough. And he can land you a job. He got me mine," she stated. Then, as she caught a glint of pity in Clancy's eyes, she went on: "Don't judge the stage by the

Blondes, and don't judge actresses by me. I'm an old-timer, kid. I never could *act*. But if the movies had been in existence twenty years ago, I'd 'a' cleaned up, kid; hear me tell it. It's a crime for a girl with your looks to be pounding the keys in a two-by-four canning factory in a jerk Maine town. Why, with your looks—a clean-up in the movies—you don't have to be an actress, you know. Just look pretty and collect the salary. And a husband with kale—that's what a girl like you *really* wants. And you can get it. Think it over, kid."

Clancy had thought it over. But it had been one of those absurdly hopeless dreams that could never be realized. And then, two months ago, had come from California an inquiry as to her possible relationship to the late Stephen Burgess. Aunt Hetty had visited the court-house, looked up marriage records, with the result that, two days ago, Clancy had received a draft for seven hundred and thirty-two dollars and forty-one cents, one-eighth of the estate of Stephen Burgess, cousin of Clancy's mother.

It wasn't a fortune, but Clancy, after a shriek, and showing the precious draft to aunt Hetty, had run up-stairs and found the card that Fanchon DeLisle had given her. She stood before the mirror. She pirouetted, turned, twisted. And made her decision. If she stayed in Zenith, she might, if lucky, marry a traveling man. One hundred dollars a week at the outside.

Better to sink in New York than float in Zenith! And Fanchon DeLisle had been so certain of Clancy's future, so roseate in her predictions, so positive that Morris Beiner would place her!

Not a regret could Clancy find in her heart for having, on the day after the receipt of the draft, left Zenith. Forever! She repeated the word to herself, gritting her teeth.

"What's the matter, kid? Did he insult you?"

Clancy looked up. In the doorway—she had left the door ajar—stood a tall young woman, a blonde. She entered without invitation and smiled cheerfully at Clancy. She whirled on one shapely foot.

"Hook me up, will you, kid? I can't fix the darned thing to save my life."

Clancy leaped to her feet and began fastening the opened dress of the woman. She worked silently, too overcome by embarrassment to speak. The blonde wriggled in her dress, making it fit more smoothly over her somewhat prominent hips. She faced Clancy.

"My name's Fay Marston. What's yours?"

"Cl—Florine Ladue," replied Clancy.

"Y-e-s, it is," grinned the other. "But it don't matter a darn, kid. It's what others call you, not what you call yourself. On the stage?"

"I expect to enter the movies," said Clancy.

"'*Enter*' them, eh? Wish I could crawl in! I'm too blamed big, they all tell me. Still, I should worry, while Mr. Ziegfeld runs the 'Follies.'"

"Are you in the 'Follies'?" asked Clancy. This was life!

Fay winked.

"Not when they're on the road, old thing. You got your job?"

"Oh, I will!" said Clancy.

Miss Marston eyed her.

"I'll say you will. With a skin like that, you'll get anywhere under God's blue canopy that you want to go. That's the secret, Flo—Florine—skin. I tell you so. Oh, well, much obliged, kid. Do as much for you sometime."

She walked to the door but hesitated on the threshold.

"Like wild parties, Florine?" she asked.

"I—I don't know," said Clancy.

"Nothing rough, you know. I never forget that I'm a lady and what's due me from gentlemen," said Fay. "But—Ike Weber 'phoned me that his little friend was laid up sick with somethin' or other, and if I could bring another girl along, he'd be obliged. Dinner and dance—at the Château de la Reine. Jazzy place, kid. You'd better come."

Clancy was thrilled. If a momentary doubt assailed her, she dismissed it at once. She could take care of herself.

"I—I'd love to. If I have anything to wear——" She hesitated.

"Well, unpack the old gripsack," grinned Fay, "and we'll soon find out."

A moment later, she was shaking out the folds of an extremely simple foulard. Another moment, and Clancy was in her knickers. Fay eyed her.

"Dance? Stage-dances, I mean. No? You oughta learn. Some pretty shape, kid. Here, lemme button this."

For a moment, Clancy hesitated. Fay patted her on the shoulder.

"Don't make any mistake about me, Florine. I'm the right kind of people for a little girl to know, all right."

"Why—why, of course you are!" said Clancy. Without further delay she permitted Fay to return her service of a while ago and hook up the pretty foulard.

II

Ike Weber was waiting for them in the foyer of the Château de la Reine. During the brief taxi-ride up Broadway to the cabaret, Clancy had time to suffer reaction from the momentary daring that had led her to acceptance of Fay's invitation. It was this very sort of thing against which young girls were warned by pulpit and press! She stole a searching glance at her companion's large-featured face and was reassured. Vulgar, Fay Marston might be—but vicious? "No," she decided.

And Weber's pleasant greeting served to allay any lingering fears. A good-natured, shrewd-eyed man, with uneven and slightly stained teeth, his expensive-seeming dinner jacket of dark-gray cloth, his dark, shining studs—Clancy could not tell of what jewels they were made—and his whole well-fed air seemed to reek of money. He waved a fat hand at Fay and immediately came toward them.

"You're late, Fay," he announced.

"But look what made me late!" laughed the blonde girl.

Weber bowed to Clancy with an exaggerated gallantry which he had picked up by much attendance at the theater.

"You're forgiven, Fay."

"Florine, meet Mr. Weber," pronounced Fay. "Miss—Miss—kid, I forget your name."

"'Florine' will do," said Weber. "It's a bear of a name. Call me 'Ike,' girlie."

He took Clancy's hand between his two fat palms and pressed it. He grinned at Fay.

"I'll let you do all my picking after this, Fay. Come on; check your things."

Up a heavily carpeted stairway he forced a path for them. Clancy would have

lingered. Pushing against her were women dressed as she had never expected to see them dressed. There were necklaces of pearls and diamonds, coats of sable and chinchilla, gowns that even her inexperience knew cost in the hundreds, perhaps the thousands.

In the dressing-room, where she surrendered her plain cloth coat of a cheap dark-blue material to the maid, she voiced something of her amazement to Fay. The blond girl laughed.

"You'll have all they got, kid, if you take your time. At that, there isn't one of them wouldn't give all her rags for that skin of yours. Did you notice Ike's eyes? Like a cat lookin' at a plate of cream. You'll do, kid. If Ike Weber likes your looks—and he does—you should worry about fur coats."

"Who is he?" demanded Clancy.

"Broker," said Fay. "With a leanin' to the stage. They say he's got money in half a dozen shows. I dunno about that, but he's a regular feller. Nothin' fresh about Ike. Don't worry, Florine."

Clancy smiled tremulously. She wasn't worried about the possible "freshness" of a hundred Webers. She was worrying about her clothes. But as they entered the dining-room and were escorted by a deferential *maitre d'hôtel* to a long, flower-laden table at one side, next the dancing-space, worry left her. Her shoulders straightened and her head poised confidently. For Clancy had an artistic eye. She knew that a single daisy in a simple vase will sometimes attract great attention in a conservatory filled with exotic blooms. She felt that she was that daisy to-night.

In somewhat of a daze, she let herself be presented to a dozen men and women, without catching a single name, and then sank into a chair beside Weber. He was busy talking at the moment to a petite brown-haired beauty, and Clancy was free to look about her. It was a gorgeous room, with a queer Japanesque effect to the ceiling, obtained by draperies that were, as Clancy phrased it to herself, "accordion-plaited." At the far end of the dancing-space was a broad flight of stairs that led to a sort of curtained balcony, or stage.

But it was the people at her own table who interested Clancy. The complete absence of formality that had marked their entrance—Weber had permitted them, after his escort to the dressing-room, to find their own way to the table—continued now. One gathered from the conversation that was bandied back and forth that these were the most intimate of friends, separated for years and now come together again.

A woman from another table, with a squeal of delight, rose, and, crossing over, spoke to the brown-haired girl. They kissed each other ecstatically, exchanged half a dozen sentences, and then the visitor retired. Clancy heard Weber ask the visitor's name.

"Hanged if I know! I seem to remember her faintly," said the brown-haired one.

Weber turned to Clancy.

"Get that?" he chuckled. "It's a great lane—Broadway. It ain't a place where you are *acquainted* with people; you love 'em."

"Or hate 'em?" suggested Clancy.

Weber beamed upon her.

"Don't tell me that you're clever as well as a bear for looks, Florine! If you do, I'll be just bowled over completely."

Clancy shrugged.

"Was that clever?"

Weber chuckled.

"If you listen to the line of talk around this table—how I knocked 'em for a goal in Philly, and how Branwyn's been after me for seven months to get me to sign a contract, and how Bruce Fairchild got a company of his own because he was jealous of the way I was stealing the film from him—after a little of that, anything sounds clever. Dance, Florine?"

Back in Zenith, Ike Weber, even if he'd been the biggest business man in town, would have hesitated to ask Clancy Deane so casually to dance with him. The Deanes were real people in Zenith, even though they'd never had much money. But great-grandfather Deane had seen service in '47 in Mexico, had been wounded at the storming of Chapultepec; and grandfather Clancy had been Phil Sheridan's aide. That sort of thing mattered a whole lot in Zenith, even to-day.

But Clancy had come to New York, to Broadway, with no snobbery. All her glorious ancestry hadn't prevented her from feeling mighty lucky when Mr. Frank Miller made her his stenographer. She'd come to New York, to Broadway, to make a success, to lift herself forever beyond the Mr. Frank Millers and their factories. So it was not disinclination to letting Ike Weber's arm encircle her that made Clancy hesitate. She laughed, as he said,

"Maybe you think, because I'm a little fat, that I can't shake a nasty toe, Florine?"

"I—I'm awfully hungry," she confessed. "And—what are these things?"

She looked down at the plate before her, on which were placed almost a dozen varieties of edibles, most of them unfamiliar.

Weber laughed.

"Florine, I *like* you!" he declared. "Why, I don't believe you know what a four-flusher is. This your first Broadway party?"

"I never saw New York until this afternoon," she confessed.

Weber eyed her closely.

"How'd you meet Fay?"

Clancy told him, told him all about the little legacy from the West, the breaking of the home ties. She mentioned that she had a card of introduction to an agent.

"Well, that'll help—maybe," said Weber. "But it don't matter. You give me a ring to-morrow afternoon, and I'll make a date with you. I know about everybody in the picture game worth knowing, and I'll start you off right."

"You're awfully good," she told him.

Weber smiled; Clancy noted, for the first time, that the merry eyes deep set in flesh, could be very hard.

"Maybe I am, and maybe I ain't. Anyway, you ring me—those are *hors d'œuvres*, Florine. Anchovy, *salami*—try 'em."

Clancy did, and enjoyed them. Also, she liked the soup, which Weber informed her was turtle, and the fish, a filet of sole. After that, she danced with her mentor.

They returned to the table and Weber promptly began singing her praises. Thereafter, in quick succession, she danced with several men, among them Zenda, a mop-haired man with large, dreamy eyes, who informed her casually that he was giving the party. It was to celebrate, he said, the releasing of his twenty-fifth film.

"You a friend of the big blond girl that you came in with?" he asked.

"Why, she invited me!" cried Clancy. "Miss Marston—don't you know her?"

Zenda grinned.

"Oh, yes; I know her. But I didn't know she was coming to-night. My press-agent told me that I ought to give a party. He invited every one he could think of. Forty

accepted, and about a dozen and a half are here. But that doesn't matter. I get the publicity just the same. Know 'em? I know every one. I ought to. I'm one of the biggest men in the films. Listen to me tell you about it," he chuckled. "Florine, you sure can dance." Like the rest, he called her by her first name.

She was blushing with pride as he took her back to the table. But, to her piqued surprise, Zenda promptly forgot all about her. However her pique didn't last long. At about the salad course, the huge curtain at the top of the wide staircase parted, and the cabaret began. For forty-five minutes it lasted, and Clancy was thrilled at its elaborateness.

At its end, the dinner had been eaten, and the party began to break up. Zenda came over to Weber.

"Feel like a game?" he asked.

"You know me," said Weber.

Ensued a whispered colloquy between five of the men. Then came many loud farewells and the making of many engagements. Clancy felt distinctly out of it. Weber, who wished her to telephone him to-morrow, seemed to forget her existence. So even did Fay, who moved toward the dressing-room. Feeling oddly neglected, Clancy followed her.

"What you doin' the rest of the evenin'?" asked Fay, as she was being helped into her coat.

"Why—I—nothing," said Clancy.

"Of course not!" Fay laughed. "I wasn't thinkin'. Want to come along with me?"

"Where are you going?" demanded Clancy cautiously. She'd heard a lot about the wickedness of New York, and to-night she had attended a dinner-party where actresses and picture-directors and backers of shows gathered. And it had been about as wicked as a church sociable in Zenith.

"Oh, Zenda and Ike and a few of the others are goin' up to Zenda's apartment. They play stud."

"'Stud?'" asked Clancy.

"Poker. They play the steepest game you ever saw, kid. Still, that'd be easy, you not havin' seen any game at all, wouldn't it? Want to come?"

"To Mr. Zenda's apartment?" Clancy was distinctly shocked.

"Well, why not?" Fay guffawed. "Why, you poor little simp, Mabel Larkin'll be there, won't she?" Clancy's expression indicated bewilderment. "Gosh! Didn't you meet her? She sat at Weber's left all evening. She's Zenda's wife."

Clancy demurred no longer. She was helped into her coat, that seemed to have grown shrinkingly forlorn, and descended to the foyer with Fay. There Weber met them, and expressed delight that Clancy was to continue with the party.

"You'll bring me luck, Florine," he declared.

He ushered them into his own limousine, and sat in the rear seat between the two girls. But he addressed no words to Clancy. In an undertone, he conversed with Fay. Clancy grew slightly nervous. But the nervousness vanished as they descended from the car before a garish apartment-house. A question to Fay brought the information that they were on Park Avenue.

They alighted from the elevator at the seventh floor. The Zendas and five other people—two of whom were girls—had arrived before them, and were already grouped about a table in a huge living-room. Zenda was in his shirt-sleeves, sorting out chips from a mahogany case. Cigar smoke made the air blue. A colored man, in livery—a most ornate livery, whose main color was lemon, lending a sickly shade to his ebony skin—was decanting liquor.

No one paid any attention to Clancy. The same casualness that had served to put her at her ease at the Château de la Reine had the same effect now. She strolled round the room. She knew nothing of art, had never seen an original masterpiece. But once, in the Zenith Public Library, she had spent a rainy afternoon poring over a huge volume that contained copies of the world's most famous paintings. One of them was on the Zenda living-room wall. Fay, lighting a cigarette, heard her exclamation of surprise. She joined her.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

Clancy pointed at the picture.

"A Landseer," she said, breathlessly. "Of course, though, it's a copy."

"Copy nothin'," said Fay indignantly. "Zenda bought it for the publicity. Paid sixty-seven thousand for it."

Clancy gasped. Fay smiled indulgently.

"Sure. He makes about six hundred thousand a year. And his wife makes three thousand a week whenever she needs a little pocket-money."

"Not really?"

"Oh, it's true, all right. Why, Penniman, there, the little gray-haired man—he was an electrician in a Broadway theater five years ago. Griffin used him for some lighting effects in one of his films. Now he does nothin' *but* plan lighting effects for his features, and he gets two thousand a week. Grannis, that man shufflin' the cards"—and she pointed to a tall, sallow-faced man—"was press-agent for another theater four years ago. He's half-owner of the Zenda films to-day. Makes a quarter of a million or so every year. Of course, Zenda gets most of it. Lallo, the man drinkin' the Scotch, was a bankrupt eighteen months ago. He got some Wall Street money behind him, and now he owns a big bit of the stock of the Lallo Exchange, a big releasing organization. Worth a couple of million, easy. Oh, yes; that Landseer is the real thing. 'Sh. Come over and watch 'em play, kid."

Weber reached out his fat hand as Clancy came near. He patted her arm.

"Stay near me, and bring me luck, Florine."

The game had begun. It was different from any game that Clancy had ever seen. She watched eagerly. Zenda dealt five cards, one to each player, face down. Then he dealt five more, face up.

"You're high," he said to Weber. Clancy noted that Weber's exposed card was a king.

"I'll bet one berry," said Weber. He tossed a white chip toward the center of the table.

"How much is that?" whispered Clancy.

Weber laughed.

"A berry, Florine, is a buck, a seed—a dollar."

"Oh!" said Clancy. Vaguely she felt admonished.

Grannis sat next to Weber. He gingerly lifted the edge of the first card dealt to him and peeked at it. Then he eyed the eight of diamonds that lay face up before him.

"We are here," he announced jovially, "for one purpose—to get the kale in the middle of the table. I see your miserable berry, Ike, and on top of it you will notice that I place four red chips, red being the color of my heart."

Penniman immediately turned over his exposed card.

"I wouldn't like to win the first pot," he said. "It's unlucky."

"How the lads do hate to admit the tingle of yellow!" Weber jeered.

Lallo studied the jack before him.

"Just to prove," he said, "that I am neither superstitious nor yellow, I'll see your two hundred, Grannis."

"I feel the way you do, Lallo," said Zenda. He put five chips, four red and one white, in the middle of the table.

Weber squeezed Florine's hand.

"Breathe luck in my ear, kid," he whispered. Then, louder, he said: "Fooled you with that little berry bet, eh? Well, suckers, we're here for one purpose." He patted the king that lay face up before him with his fat hand. "Did your royal highness think I didn't show the proper respect to your high rank? Well, I was just teasing the boys along. Make it an even five hundred," he said briskly. He pushed four red and three blue chips toward the little pile.

Clancy did some quick figuring. The blue chips must be worth one hundred dollars apiece. It was incredible, ghastly, but—fascinating. Grannis stared at Weber.

"I think you mean it, Ike," he said gently. "But—so do I—I'm with you."

Lallo turned over his exposed card. With mock reproach, he said:

"Why, I thought you fellows were playing. Now that I see you're in *earnest*——" He winked merrily at Clancy.

Zenda chuckled.

"Didn't know we were playing for keeps, eh, Lal? Well, nobody deceived me. I'm with you, Ike."

He put in his chips and dealt again. When, finally, five cards had been given each remaining player, Grannis had two eights, an ace and a king showing. Weber dropped out on the last card but Zenda called Grannis' bet of seven hundred and fifty dollars. Grannis turned over his "buried" card. He had another king, and his two pair beat Zenda's pair of aces. And Grannis drew in the chips.

Clancy had kept count of the money. Forty-five hundred dollars in red and blue chips, and four dollars in whites. It—it was criminal!

The game now became more silent. Sitting in a big armchair, dreamily

wondering what the morrow and her card to Morris Beiner would bring forth, Clancy was suddenly conscious of a harsh voice. She turned and saw pretty Mabel Larkin, Zenda's wife, staring at Weber. Her eyes were glaring.

"I tell you, Zenda," she was saying, "he cheats. I've been telling you so for weeks. Now I can prove it."

Clancy stared at Weber. His fat face seemed suddenly to have grown thin.

"Your wife had *better* prove it, Zenda," he snarled.

"She'll prove it if she says she will!" cried Zenda. "We've been laying for you, Weber. Mabel, what did he do?"

His wife answered, never taking her eyes from Weber.

"He 'made' the cards for Penniman's next deal. He put two aces so that he'd get them. Deal them, Mr. Penniman, and deal the first card face up. Weber will get the ace of diamonds on the first round and the ace of clubs on the second."

Penniman picked up the deck of cards. For a moment, he hesitated. Then Weber's fat hand shot across the table and tore the cards from Penniman's grasp. There was a momentary silence. Then Zenda's voice, sharp, icy, cut the air.

"Weber, that's confession. You're a crook! You've made over a hundred thousand in this game in the last six months. By God, you'll settle——"

Weber's fat fist crashed into Zenda's face, and the dreamy-eyed director fell to the floor. Clancy leaped to her feet. She saw Grannis swing a chair above her head, and then, incontinently, as Zenda's wife screamed, Clancy fled from the room. She found her coat and put it on. With trembling fingers she opened the door into the corridor and reached the elevator. She rang the bell.

It seemed hours before the lift arrived. She had no physical fear; it was the fear of scandal. If the folks back home in Zenith should read her name in the papers as one of the participants, or spectators, even, in a filthy brawl like this, she could never hold her head up again. For three hours she had been of Broadway; now, suddenly, she was of Zenith.

"Taxi, miss?" asked the polite door-man down-stairs.

She shook her head. At any moment they might miss her up-stairs. She had no idea what might or might not happen.

A block down the street, she discovered that not wearing a hat rendered her conspicuous. A small closed car passed her. Clancy did not yet know that two-

passenger cars are never taxis. She hailed the driver. He drew in to the curb.

"Please take me to the Napoli," she begged. "Near Times Square."

The driver stared at her. Then he touched his hat.

"Certainly," he said courteously.

Then Clancy drew back.

"Oh, I thought you were a taxi-man!"

"Well, I can at least take you home," smiled the driver.

She looked at him. They were near an arc-light, and he looked honest, clean. He was big, too.

"Will you?" she asked.

She entered the car. Not a word did either of them speak until he stopped before the Napoli. Then, hesitantly, diffidently, he said,

"I suppose you'd think me pretty fresh if—if I asked your name."

She eyed him.

"No," she said slowly. "But I wouldn't tell it to you."

He accepted the rebuke smilingly.

"All right. But I'll see you again, sometime. And so you'll know who it is—my name's Randall, David Randall. Good-night." She flushed at his smiling confidence. She forgot to thank him as she ran up the stairs into the Napoli.

Safe in her room, the door locked, she sat down on the window-seat and began to search out her plan of action. Little by little, she began to see that she had no plan of action to find. Accidentally she had been present when a scandalous charge was made. She knew nothing of it, was acquainted with none of the participants. Still, she was glad that she had run away. Heaven alone knew what had happened. Suddenly she began to weep. The conquering of Broadway, that had seemed so simple an achievement a few hours ago, now, oddly, seemed a remote, an impossible happening.

Some one knocked on her door. Startled, afraid, she made no answer. The door shook as some one tried the knob. Then Fay's voice sounded through the thin partition.

"Hey, Florine! You home?"

Clancy opened the door reluctantly. Fay burst into the room. Her blond hair had become string-seeming. Her make-up was streaked with perspiration.

"Kid, you're a wise one," she said. "You blew. Gosh, what a jam!"

She sank down in a chair and mopped her large face.

"What happened?" demanded Clancy.

"'*Happened?*' Hell broke loose."

"The police?" asked Clancy, shivering.

"Lord, no! But they beat Weber up, and he smashed Zenda's nose. I told Ike that he was a sucker to keep tryin' it forever. I knew they'd get him. Now——" She stopped abruptly. "Forget anything you hear me beef about, Florine," she advised harshly. "Say, none of them got your name, did they? Your address?"

"Why?"

"Because Zenda swears he's goin' to have Ike arrested. Fine chance, though. Ike and I are leavin' town——"

"You?"

The blond girl laughed harshly.

"Sure. We been married for six months. That's why I said you weren't in no danger comin' along with me. I'm a married woman, though nobody knows it. But for that Larkin dame, we'd been gettin' away with it for years to come. Cat! She's clever. Well, kid, I tried to get you off to a good start, but my luck went blooey at the wrong moment. Night-night, Florine! Ike and I are goin' to grab the midnight to Boston. Well, you didn't bring Ike much luck, but that don't matter. New York is through with us for a while. But we should worry. Be good, kid!"

She left the room without another word. Through the thin wall, Clancy could hear her dragging a trunk around, opening bureau drawers. This most amazing town—where scandal broke suddenly, like a tornado, uprooting lives, careers! And how cynically Fay Marston took it!

Suddenly she began to see her own position. She'd been introduced as a friend of Weber's. *She* couldn't discover a six-months-old husband and leave town casually. *She* must stay here, meet the Zendas, perhaps work for them—— On this, her first night in New York, Clancy cried herself to sleep.

And, like most of the tears that are shed in this sometimes futile-seeming world,

Clancy's were unnecessary. Only one of her vast inexperience would have fled from Zenda's apartment. A sophisticated person would have known that a simple explanation of her brief acquaintance with Fay would have cleared her. But youth lacks perspective. The tragedy of the moment looms fearsomely large. For all its rashness, youth is ostrichlike. It thinks that refusal to see danger eliminates danger. It thinks that departure has the same meaning as end. It does not know that nothing is ever finished, that each apparently isolated event is part of another apparently isolated event, and that no human action can separate the twain. But it is youth's privilege to think itself godlike. Clancy had fled. Reaction had brought tears, appreciation of her position.

III

Clancy woke with a shiver. Consciousness was not, with her, an achievement arrived at after yawning effort. She woke, always, clear-eyed and clear-brained. It was with no effort that she remembered every incident of yesterday, of last night. She trembled as, with her shabby bathrobe round her, she pattered, in her slippered feet, the few steps down the hall to the bathroom.

The cold water did little to allay her nervous trembling. Zenda, last night, had referred to having lost a hundred thousand dollars. That was too much money to be lost cheerfully. Cheerfully? She'd seen the beginning of a brawl, and from what Fay Marston had said to her, it had progressed brutally. And the mere departure of Ike Weber with his unsuspected wife would not tend to hush the matter up.

Back in her room, dressing, Clancy wondered why Weber's marriage had been kept quiet. Fay had said, last evening, that "Weber's little friend" could not go to the party. Clancy had been asked to fill in. Why had Fay Marston not merely kept her marriage secret but searched for girls to entertain her own husband? For Fay, even though she was apparently quite callously and frankly dishonest, was not immoral, Clancy judged, in the ordinary sense with which that adjective is applied to women.

The whole thing was strange, incomprehensible. Clancy was too new to Broadway to know many things. She did not guess that a girl only casually acquainted, apparently, with Ike Weber could help in a card game as his own

publicly accepted wife could not. Miss Fay Marston could glimpse a card and nothing would be thought of it. Mrs. Ike Weber could not get away with the same thing. But Clancy had all of these matters yet to learn.

Down in the dining-room, presided over by Madame Napoli and her buxom daughter, two shabby waiters stood idle. They looked surprised at Clancy's entrance. *Madame* ushered Clancy to a table.

"It's easy seen you ain't been in the business long, Miss Ladue," chuckled *madame*. "Gettin' down to breakfast is beginners' stuff, all right. At that, it would help a lot of 'em if they did it. You stick to it, Miss Ladue. The griddle-cakes is fine this morning."

Clancy had a rural appetite. The suggestion of buckwheat cakes appealed to her. She ordered them, and had them flanked with little sausages, and she prepared for their reception with some sliced oranges, and she also drank a cup of coffee.

Her nervousness had vanished by the time she finished. What had she to be concerned about? After all, she might as well look at last night's happenings in a common-sense way. She could prove that she arrived in New York only yesterday, that her acquaintance with Fay Marston—or Weber—had begun only last night. How could she be blamed? Still—and she twitched her shoulders—it was nasty and unpleasant, and she hoped that she wouldn't be dragged into it.

The waiter brought her check to her. Clancy drew a fifty-dollar bill from her pocketbook. The waiter scurried off with it, and *madame*, in a moment, came to the table with Clancy's change.

"Carryin' much money?" she asked.

"Quite a lot—for me," said Clancy.

"Better bank it," suggested *madame*.

Clancy looked blank. She hadn't thought of that. She'd never had a bank-account in her life. But seven hundred dollars or so was a lot of money. She took the name and address of a bank in the neighborhood, and thanked *madame* for her offer of herself as a reference.

It was barely nine o'clock when she entered Times Square. The crowd differed greatly from the throng that she had observed last night. Times Square was a work-place now. Fascinated, Clancy watched the workers diving into subway entrances, emerging from them, only to plunge, like busy ants, into the office-buildings, hotels, and shops that bordered the square. The shops fascinated her,

too. She was too new to the city, too unlearned in fashion's whimsicalities to know that the hats and gowns and men's clothing shown in these windows were the last thing in the bizarre.

It was quite exciting being ushered into a private office in the Thespian National Bank. But when it came to writing down the name: "Florine Ladue," she hesitated for a moment. It seemed immoral, wrong. But the hesitation was momentary. Firmly she wrote the *nom de théâtre*. It was the name that she intended to make famous, to see emblazoned in electric lights. It was the name of a person who had nothing in common with one Clancy Deane, of Zenith, Maine.

She deposited six hundred and fifty dollars, received a bank-book and a leather-bound folding check-book, and strolled out upon Broadway with a feeling of importance that had not been hers when she had had cash in her pocketbook. The fact that she possessed the right to order the great Thespian Bank to pay her bills seemed to confer upon her a financial standing. She wished that she could pay a bill right now.

She entered a drug store a block from the bank and looked in the telephone-book. Mademoiselle DeLisle had neglected to write upon the card of introduction Morris Beiner's address. For a moment, Clancy felt a sick sensation in the pit of her stomach. A doubt that, up to now, had never entered her head assailed her. Suppose that Mr. Beiner had gone into some other business in some other city! Suppose he'd died!

She sighed with relief when she found his name. There it was: "Beiner, Morris, Theatrical Agt., Heberworth B'ld'g. Bryant, 99087."

The condescending young gentleman at the soda-fountain affably told her that the Heberworth Building was just round the corner, on Forty-fifth Street. To it, Clancy made her way.

The elevator took her to the fifth floor, where, the street bulletin had informed her, Morris Beiner's office was located. There was his name, on the door of room 506. For a moment, Clancy stood still, staring at the name. It was a name, Fanchon DeLisle had assured her, with a certainty that had dispelled all doubt, owned by a man who would unlock for Clancy the doors to fame and fortune.

Yet Clancy trembled. It had been all very well, tied to a typewriting machine in Zenith, to visualize fame and fortune in far-off New York. It took no great imagination. But to be in New York, about to take the first step—that was different.

She half turned back toward the elevator. Then across her mind flashed a picture, a composite picture, of aunt Hetty, of Mr. Frank Miller, of a score of other Zenith people who had known her since infancy. And the composite face was grinning, and its brazen voice was saying, "I told you so."

She shook her head. She'd never go back to Zenith. That was the one outstanding sure thing in a world of uncertainties. She tossed her head now. What a silly little thing she was! Why, hadn't even Fay Marston last night told her that her skin alone would make her a film success? And didn't she herself *know* that she had talent to back up her good looks? This was a fine time to be nervous! She crossed the hall and knocked upon the door.

A harsh voice bade her enter. She opened the door and stepped inside. It was a small office to which she had come. It contained a roll-top desk, of an old-fashioned type, two chairs, a shabby leather couch, half hidden beneath somewhat dusty theatrical magazines, and two filing-cases, one at either end of the couch. The couch itself was placed against the further wall, before a rather wide window that opened upon a fire-escape.

A man was seated in a swivel chair before the roll-top desk. He was tilted back, and his feet were resting comfortably upon an open drawer. He was almost entirely bald, and his scalp was red and shiny. His nose was stubby and his lips, thick, gross-looking, were clamped over a moist cigar. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and Clancy noticed that the noisily striped shirt he wore, although there was an ornate monogram upon the left sleeve, was of a flimsy and cheap grade of silk.

"Welcome to our city, chicken!" was his greeting. "Sit down and take a load off your feet."

His huge chest, padded with fat, shook with merriment at his own witticism.

"Is this Mr. Beiner?" asked Clancy. From her face and voice she kept disgust.

"Not to you, dearie," said the man. "I'm 'Morris' to my friends, and that's what you and I are goin' to be, eh?"

She colored, hating herself for that too easy flow of blood to cheek and throat.

"Why—why—that's very kind of you," she stammered.

Beiner waved his cigar grandiloquently.

"Bein' kind to pretty fillies is the best thing I do. What can I do for you?"

"Mademoiselle"—Clancy painfully articulated each syllable of the French word according to the best pronunciation taught in the Zenith High School—"Fanchon DeLisle gave me a card to you."

Beiner nodded.

"Oh, yes. How is Fanchon? How'd you happen to meet her?"

"In my home town in Maine," answered Clancy. "She was ill with the 'flu,' and we got right well acquainted. She told me that you'd get me into the movies."

Beiner eyed her appraisingly.

"Well, I've done stranger things than that," he chuckled. "What's your name, dearie?"

Clancy had read quite a bit of New York, of Broadway. Also, she had had an experience in the free-and-easy familiarity of Broadway's folk last night. Although she colored again at the "dearie," she did not resent it in speech.

"Florine Ladue," she replied.

Beiner laughed.

"What's that? Spanish for Maggie Smith? It's all right, kid. Don't get mad. I'm a great joker, I am. Florine Ladue you say it is, and Florine Ladue it'll be. Well, Florine, what makes you want to go into the movies?"

Clancy looked bewildered.

"Why—why does any one want to do anything?"

"God knows!" said Beiner. "Especially if the 'any one' is a young, pretty girl. But still, people do want to do something, and I'm one guy that helps some of 'em do it. Ever been in the movies at all?" Clancy shook her head. "Done any acting?"

"I played in 'The Rivals' at the high-school graduation," she confessed.

"Well, we'll keep that a dark secret," said Beiner. "You're an amachoor, eh? And Fanchon DeLisle gave you a card to me."

"Here it is," said Clancy. She produced the card from her pocketbook and handed it to the agent. Her fingers shook.

Beiner took the card, glanced at it carelessly, and dropped it upon his desk.

"From the country, eh? Ingénue, eh?" He pronounced it "anjenoo." He tapped his stubby, broken-nailed fingers upon the edge of his desk. "Well, I shouldn't

wonder if I could place you," he said. "I know a couple companies that are hot after a real anjenoo. That's nice skin you have. Turn round."

Clancy stifled an impulse to laugh hysterically. Tears were very close. To be appraised by this gross man—— Nevertheless, she turned slowly round, feeling the man's coarse eyes roving up and down the lines of her figure.

"You got the looks, and you got the shape," said Beiner. "You ain't too big, and you ain't too small. 'Course, I can't tell how you'll photograph. Only a test will show. Still——" He picked up the desk telephone and asked for a number.

"Hildebloom there? This is Beiner talking. Say, Frank, you wanted an anjenoo, didn't you? I got a girl here in the office now that might do.... Yes; she's a peach. Fresh stuff, too. Just in from the country, with the bloom all on.... Bring her around? At six? You made a date, feller."

He hung up the receiver and turned to the furiously blushing Clancy.

"You're lucky, kid. Frank Hildebloom, studio manager for Rosebush Pictures, asked me to keep my eyes open for some new girls. He's a queer bug, Frank. He don't want professionals. He wants amateurs. Claims most of the professionals have learned so many tricks that it's impossible to unlearn them. I'll take you over to him. Come back here at five."

Somehow or other, Clancy found herself outside the office, found herself in the elevator, in the street down-stairs. She'd expected much; she had come to New York with every confidence of achieving a great success. But doubts linger unbidden in the hearts of the most hopeful, the most ambitious, the most confident. To have those recreant doubts scattered on the very first day! Of course she'd photograph well. Hadn't she always taken good pictures? Of course, moving pictures were different; still—— She wished that there were some one whom she knew intimately—to whom she could go and pour out the excitement that was welling within her. What an angel Fanchon DeLisle had been! Poor Fanchon—a soubrette in a cheap burlesque company! But she, Clancy Deane—she was forgetting. She, Florine Ladue, would "do something" for Fanchon DeLisle, who had set her feet upon the path to fortune.

She didn't know what she'd do, but she'd do something. She beheld a vision, in which Fanchon DeLisle embraced her with tears, thanked her. She endowed a school for film-acting in Zenith, Maine.

She walked through Forty-second Street to Fifth Avenue. She boarded a passing 'bus and rode up-town. She did not know the names of the hotels she passed, the

great mansions, but—famous actresses were received everywhere, had social position equal to the best. In a year or so, she would ride up the avenue in her own limousine. At Grant's Tomb, she left the 'bus. She walked along Riverside Drive, marveling at the Palisades.

Hunger attacked her, and she lunched at Claremont, thrilling with excitement, and careless of prices upon the menu. She was going into the movies! What did a couple of dollars more or less matter to her?

Still moving in a glowing haze, out of which her name in brilliant electric lights thrust itself, she returned in mid-afternoon to the Napoli. Carefully she bathed herself. As meticulously as though she were going to her wedding, she dressed herself in fresh linen, in her best pair of silk stockings. She buttoned herself into her prettiest waist, brushed the last speck of lint from her blue suit, adjusted her hat to the most fascinatingly coquettish angle, and set forth for the Heberworth Building.

At its doorway, she stepped aside just in time to avoid being knocked down by a man leaving the building in great haste. The man turned to apologize. He wore a bandage across one eye, and his hat was pulled down over his face. Nevertheless, that mop of dark hair rendered him recognizable anywhere. It was Zenda!

For a moment, she feared recognition. But the movie director was thinking of other things than pretty girls. Her hat shielded her face, too. With a muttered, "Beg pardon," Zenda moved on.

He had not seen her—this time. But another time? For years to come, she was to be in a business where, necessarily, she must come into contact with a person so eminent in that business as Zenda. Then, once again, common sense reasserted itself. She had done nothing wrong. She could prove her lack of knowledge of the character of Fay Marston and her husband. Her pretty face was defiant as she entered the Heberworth Building.

IV

It was an excited Beiner that threw open the door when she knocked at his office a moment later. The cigar stuck between his thick lips was unlighted; his silk shirt, although it was cold outside, with a hint of snow in the tangy atmosphere, and there was none too much heat in the Heberworth Building, clung to his chest, and perspiration stained it.

"Come in," he said hoarsely. He stood aside, holding the handle of the door. He closed it as Clancy entered, and she heard the click of the latch.

She wheeled like a flash.

"Unlock it!" she commanded.

Beiner waved a fat hand carelessly.

"We got to talk business, kid. We don't want any interruption. You ain't afraid of me, are you?"

Clancy's heaving breast slowed down. She was not afraid of Beiner; she had never seen any one, man or woman, in her brief life, of whom she was afraid. Further, to allay her alarm, Beiner sat down in his swivel chair. She sat down herself, in a chair nearer the locked door.

"Quite a kidder, ain't you, Florine?" asked Beiner.

"I don't understand you," she replied.

He grinned, a touch of nervousness in the parting of the thick lips. Then he closed them, rolling his wet cigar about in his mouth.

"Well, you will pretty soon," he said. "Anjenoo, eh? I gotta hand it to you, Florine. You had *me* fooled. Amachoor, eh? Played in 'The Rivals' once?" He took the cigar from his mouth and shook it at her. "Naughty, naughty, Florine, not to play fair with old papa Beiner!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said.

"Oh, no; of course not. Little Florine, fresh from Maine, doesn't know a soul on Broadway. Of course not! She gets a letter from Fanny DeLisle to old papa Beiner, and wants a job in the movies, bless her dear, sweet heart! Only"—and his voice lost its mocking tones and became reproachful—"was that the square way to treat her friend Morris?"

"I came here," said Clancy coldly, "to keep a business engagement, not to answer puzzles. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Now, be nice; be nice," said the agent. "I ain't mad, Florine. Didn't Fanny DeLisle tell you I was a good old scout?"

"She said that you were a very competent agent," said Clancy.

"Oh, did she, now?" Beiner sneered. "Well, wasn't that sweet of old Fanny? She didn't happen to say that anybody that tried to trim old Morris was liable to get their hair cut, did she?"

All fear had left Clancy now. She was exasperated.

"Why don't you talk plain English?" she demanded.

"Oh, you'd like it better that way, would you?" Beiner threw his cigar upon the floor and ground his heel upon it. "'Plain English,' eh? All right; you'll get it. Why did Ike Weber send you here?"

Clancy's breath sucked in audibly. Her face, that had been colored with nervous indignation, whitened.

"'Ike Weber?'" she murmured.

Beiner laughed harshly.

"Now, nix on the rube stuff, Florine. I got your number, kid. Paul Zenda just left my office. He wants to know where Weber is. He told me about the jam last night. And he mentioned that there was a little girl at his house that answered to the name of Florine. I got him to describe that little girl."

"Did you tell him," gasped Clancy, "that I was coming here this afternoon?"

"You understand me better, don't you?" sneered Beiner. "Oh, you and me'll get along together fine, Florine, if you got the good sense you look like you have. Did I tell Zenda that I knew you? Well, look me over, Florine. Do I look like a guy that was just cuttin' his first teeth? Of course I didn't tell him anything. I let him tell me. It's a grand rule, Florine—let the other guy spill what's on *his* chest. 'Course, there's exceptions to that rule, like just now. I'm spillin' what I know to you, and willin' to wait for you to tell me what I want to know. Suppose I put my cards right down where you can see 'em, Florine?"

She could only stare at him dumbly. Zenda was a big man in the picture industry. He'd been robbed and beaten. Last night, he'd seemed to her the sort of man who, for all his dreaminess, would not easily forget a friend or a foe. He was

important enough to ruin Clancy's picture career before it began.

Beiner took her silence for acquiescence.

"Zenda gets trimmed last night in a stud game. He's been gettin' trimmed for a long time, but he ain't really wise to the scheme. But last night his wife watches close. She gets hep to what Ike Weber is doin'. There's a grand row, and Zenda gets slugged, and Weber takes a lickin', too. But they ain't got any real evidence on Weber. Not enough to have him pinched, anyway, even if Zenda decides to go that far. But Zenda wants his money back." Beiner chuckled. "I don't blame him. A hundred thousand is a wad of kale, even in these days. So he comes to me.

"Some time ago I had a little run-in with Ike Weber. I happen to know a lot about Ike. For instance, that his brokerage business is a stall. He ain't got any business that he couldn't close out in ten minutes. Well, Ike and I have a little row. It don't matter what it's all about. But I drop a hint to Paul Zenda that it wouldn't do any harm for him to be careful who he plays stud with. Paul is mighty curious; but I don't tell him any more than that. Why should I? There was nothing in it for me. But Paul remembers last night what I'd told him—he'd been suspicious for quite a while of Weber—and to-day he hot-foots it to me. So now, you see, Florine, how you and me can do a little business."

"How?" asked Clancy.

"Oh, drop it!" snapped Beiner. "Quit the milk-maid stuff! You're a wise little girl, or you wouldn't be trailin' round with Ike Weber. Now—where's Ike? And why did Ike send you to me?"

Clancy shook her head vehemently.

"I don't know him. I never met him until last night. I don't know anything at all about him."

Beiner stared at her. For many years, he had dealt with actresses. He knew feigned indignation when he heard it. He believed Clancy. Still, even though he believed, he wanted proof.

"How'd you meet him?" he asked.

Clancy told him about her arrival in New York, her meeting with Fay Marston, and what had followed, even to Fay's late visit and her statement that she was married to Weber and was leaving town.

"And that's every single thing I know about them," she said. Her voice shook. The tears stood in her eyes. "I ran away because I was frightened, and I'm going

right to Mr. Zenda and explain to him."

For a moment, Beiner did not speak. He took a cigar from the open case on his desk and lighted it. He rolled it round in his mouth until one-half its stubby length was wet. Then, from the corner of his mouth, he spoke.

"Why do that, kid? Why tell Zenda that Fay Marston practically confessed to you?"

"So that Mr. Zenda won't think that—that I'm dishonest!" cried Clancy.

"Aw, fudge! Everybody's dishonest, more or less. And every one else suspects them, even though they don't know anything against them. What do you care what Zenda thinks?"

"What do I care?" Clancy was amazed.

"Sure. What do you care? Zenda can't do anything to you."

"He can keep me out of pictures, can't he?" cried Clancy.

Beiner shrugged.

"Oh, maybe for a week or two, a few people would be down on you, but—what did you come to New York for, Florine, to make friends or money?"

"What has that to do with it?" she asked.

Beiner leaned over toward her.

"A whole lot, Florine. I could 'a' told Zenda a whole lot about Ike Weber to-day. I could 'a' told him a couple things that would 'a' put Ike behind the bars. 'Smatter of fact, I could 'a' told him of a trick that Ike done in Joliet. But what's the good? The good to me, I mean. Ike knows that I put the flea in Zenda's ear that led to his wife spottin' Ike's little game. If he's got sense, he knows it, for I saw that my hint to Zenda reached Ike. Well, Ike will be reachin' round to get hold of me. Why, I thought, when Zenda described you and mentioned your first name, that Ike had sent you to me. Because Ike knows what I could tell Zenda would be enough to give Zenda a hold on Ike that'd get back that hundred thousand. But why be nasty? That's what I ask myself." His face took on an expression of shrewd good humor, of benevolence, almost. "You're just a chicken, Florine, a flapper from the mud roads and the middle-of-the-day dinner. And a hick chicken don't have it any too soft in New York at the best of it. I don't suppose that your bank-roll would make a mosquito strain its larynx, eh? Well, Florine, take a tip from old papa Beiner, that's been watchin' them come and watchin'

them go for twenty-five years along Broadway.

"Why, Florine, I've seen them come to this town all hopped up with ambition and talent and everything, and where do they land? Look the list over, kid. Where are your stars of twenty years ago, of ten years ago, of five, when you come right down to it? Darned few of them here to-day, eh? You know why? Well, I'll tell you. Because they weren't wise, Florine.

"Lord, don't I know 'em! First or last, old papa Morris has got 'em jobs. And I've heard their little tales. I know what pulled 'em back to where they started from. It was because they didn't realize that friends grow cold and enemies die, and that the only friend or enemy that amounts to a darn is yourself.

"I've seen girls worry because somebody loved 'em; and I've seen 'em worry because somebody didn't love 'em. And those girls, most of them, are mindin' the baby to-day, with a husband clerkin' it down-town, too poor to afford a nurse-girl. But the girls that look out for the kale, that never asked, 'What?' but always, 'How much?'—those are the girls that amount to something.

"Here's you—crazy to run right off to Paul Zenda and tell him that you're a good little girl and don't know a darned thing about Ike Weber. Well, suppose you do that. What happens? Zenda hears your little story, decides you're tellin' the truth, and forgets all about you. Your bein' a nice, honest little fool don't buy you no silk stockings, kid, and I'm here to tell you so.

"Now, suppose you don't run to Zenda. Sooner or later, he runs into you. He bawls you out. Because you've kept away from him, he suspects that you stood in with Ike. Maybe he tries to get you blacklisted at a few studios. *All* right. Let's suppose he does. Six months from now, Zenda's makin' a picture out on the Coast, or in Europe, maybe. A director wants a girl of your type. I send him you. He remembers that Zenda's got it in for you, but—Zenda's away. And he hires you. Take it from me, Florine, he'll hire you. Get me?"

Her brows knitted, she had heard him through.

"I've heard you, but I don't understand. You talk about being sensible, but—why *shouldn't* I go to Mr. Zenda?"

"Because there's no money in it. And there's a bunch in not going to him," said Beiner.

"Who's going to give it to me?" demanded Clancy.

"Weber."

"He's left town."

Beiner guffawed.

"Maybe that fat blonde of his thought so last night. She had a scare in her all right. But Ike ain't a rube. He knows Zenda's got no proof. He'll lie low for a few days, but—that's all. He'll pay you well—to keep quiet."

"Pay me?" gasped Clancy.

"Surest thing! Same as he'll be round to see me in a day or so, to shut my mouth. I know too much. Listen: By this time, Ike has pumped Fay Marston. He knows that she, all excited, blew the game to you. My God, what a sucker a man is to get married! And if he *must* do it, why does he marry a Broadway doll that can't keep her face closed? Oh, well, it don't matter to us, does it, Florine? What matters is that Ike will be slippin' you a nice big roll of money, and you should worry whether you go to work to-day or to-morrow or next month. I'll be gettin' mine, all right, too. So now you see, don't you?"

Clancy rose slowly to her feet.

"Yes," she said deliberately; "I see. I see that you—why, you're no better than a *thief*! Unlock that door and let me out!"

Beiner stared at her. His fat face reddened, and the veins stood out on his forehead.

"So *that's* the way you take it, eh? Now then, you little simp, you listen to me!"

He put his cigar down upon the edge of his desk, an edge scarred by countless cigars and cigarettes of the past. Heavily he rose. Clancy backed toward the door.

"If you touch me," she cried, "I'll——"

She had not dreamed that one so fat could move so quickly. Beiner's arms were round her before the scream that she was about to give could leave her lips. A fat palm, oily, greasy with perspiration, was clapped across her mouth.

"Now, don't be a little fool," he whispered harshly. "Why, Florine, I'm givin' you wise advice. I've done nothin' to you. You don't want to go to Zenda and tell him that Fay Marston admitted Ike was a crook, do you? Because then the game will be blown, and Ike won't see his way to slip me my share. You wouldn't be mean to old papa Beiner that wants to see all little girls get along, would you? How about it, Florine?"

He drew her closer to him as he spoke. Clancy, staring into his eyes, saw something new spring into being there. It was something that, mercifully, she had been spared seeing ever before. Fear overwhelmed her, made her limp in Beiner's clasp. The agent chuckled hoarsely.

"What a sweet kiddie you are, Florine! Say, I think you and me are goin' to be swell little pals, Florine. How about giving old papa Beiner a little kiss, just to show you didn't mean what you just said?"

Her limpness deceived him. His grasp loosened as he bent his thick neck to bring his gross mouth nearer hers. Clancy's strength came back to her. Her body tautened. Every ounce of strength that she possessed she put into a desperate effort for freedom. She broke clear, and whisked across the room.

"If you come near me, I'll scream," she said.

Beiner glared at her.

"All right," he said thickly. "Scream, you little devil! I'll give you something to scream about!"

He leaped for her, but she knew now how fast he could move. Swiftly she stepped to one side, and, as she did so, she seized a chair, the one on which she had been sitting, and thrust it toward the man. The chair-leg jammed between his knees and unbalanced him. His own momentum carried him forward and to one side. He grasped at the edge of the desk for support. But his hand slipped. Twisting, trying desperately to right himself, he pitched forward. His head struck upon the iron radiator beside his desk. He lay quite still.

For a moment, her mouth open, prepared to scream, Clancy stared down at the man. As the seconds passed and Beiner failed to move, she became alarmed. Then his huge chest lifted in a sigh. He was not killed, then. She came near to him, and saw that a bruise, already swollen, marked the top of his bald skull. She knew little of such injuries, but even her amateur knowledge was sufficient to convince her that the man was not seriously hurt. In a moment, he would revive. She knelt beside him. She knew that he had put the door-key in his trousers pocket. She had noticed the key-ring and chain. But her strength had deserted her. She was trembling, almost physically ill. She could not turn the gross body over.

She heard footsteps outside, heard some one knock on the door. Bent over, trying not to breathe, lest she be heard outside, she stared at the door. The person outside shook the knob, pounded on the door. Then she heard a muttered

exclamation, and footsteps sounded, retreating, down the hall.

Beiner groaned; he moved. She straightened up, frightened. There had been something in his eyes that appalled her. He would not be more merciful when he recovered. She crossed the tiny office to the couch. Outside the wide window was the fire-escape. It was her only way of escape, and she took it.

She opened the window and stepped upon the couch. A sort of court, hemmed in by office-buildings, faced her. She stepped through the window upon the iron grating-like landing of the fire-escape. The sheer drop beneath her feet alarmed her. She hesitated. Why hadn't she called to whoever had knocked upon the door and got him to break it down? Why had she been afraid of the possible scandal? Last night, she had fled from Zenda's through fear of scandal, and her fear had brought her into unpleasant complications. Now she had done the same thing, practically, again.

But it was too late to worry. Beiner would revive any moment. She descended the fire-escape. Luck was with her. On the next landing was a window that opened, not into an office but into a hallway. And the latch was unfastened. In a moment, Clancy had climbed through the window and was ringing the elevator-bell. No one was in the hall. Her entrance through the window was not challenged.

V

Clancy woke clear-brained. She knew exactly what she was to do. Last night, after eating dinner in her room, she had tried to get Zenda on the telephone. Not finding his number in the book, she had endeavored to obtain it from "Information," only to learn that "it is a private wire, and we can't tell it to you." So, disappointed, she went to bed.

Her resolution had not changed over-night. She'd made a little idiot of herself in running away from the Zenda apartment night before last. But now that she found herself involved in a mass of nasty intrigue, she would do the sensible thing, tell the truth, and let the consequences be what they might.

Consequences? She mustn't be absurd. Innocently she had become entangled in something, but a few words would straighten the matter out. Of course, she would incur the enmity of Ike Weber, but what difference did that make? And

Morris Beiner—she hoped, with a pardonable viciousness, that his head would ache for a week. The nasty beast!

In the tub, she scrubbed herself harshly, as though to remove from herself any possible lingering taint of contact with Beiner. A little later, she descended to the Napoli dining-room and ordered breakfast. It was as substantial as yesterday's. Exciting though yesterday had been, Clancy had not yet reached the age where we pay for yesterday's deviation from the normal with to-day's lack of appetite.

As at her previous breakfast, she had the dining-room to herself. Madame Napoli waddled beamingly over to her and offered her a morning paper. Clancy thanked her and put it aside until she should have finished her omelet. But, finally, the keen edge of her appetite blunted, she picked up the paper. It was a sheet devoted to matters theatrical, so that the article which struck her eye was accorded greater space in this newspaper than in any other in the city.

For a moment, Clancy's eyes were blurred as the import of the words of a head-line sunk into her understanding. It was impossible for her to hold the paper steadily enough to read. She gulped her second cup of coffee, put a bill on the table, and, without waiting for her change, left the room. Madame Napoli uttered some pleasant word, and Clancy managed to stammer something in reply.

Up in her room, she locked the door and lay down upon the bed. Five minutes, staring wide-eyed at the ceiling, she stayed there. Then she sat up and looked at the paper. She read:

THEATRICAL MAN FOUND SLAIN

MORRIS BEINER STABBED TO DEATH IN OWN OFFICE

> Morris Beiner, an old-time manager, more recently a theatrical agent, was killed in his office some time yesterday afternoon under mysterious circumstances. He was stabbed with a paper-knife, one that has been identified as belonging to the dead man.
>
> The discovery was made by Lemuel Burkan, the watchman of the Heberworth Building, in which Beiner had his office. According to Burkan's statement, he has been in the habit of answering telephone calls for many of the tenants during their temporary absences. Last evening, at six-thirty, while making his first night-round of the building, Burkan heard the telephone ringing in Beiner's office. Although the light was on, the

telephone was unanswered. Burkan unlocked the door to answer the call and take the message. He found Beiner lying upon the floor, the paper-knife driven into his chest.

Burkan did not lose his head, but answered the call. Frank Hildebloom, of the Rosebush Film Company, was on the wire. On being informed of the tragedy by the watchman, Hildebloom immediately came over to the dead man's office. To the police, who were immediately summoned by Burkan, Hildebloom stated that Beiner had telephoned him in the morning, stating that he wished to make an engagement for a young actress to make a film-test. Hildebloom was telephoning because the engagement was overdue and he could wait no longer. An old friend of the murdered man, he was overcome by the tragedy.

The police, investigating the murder, learned from the janitor of the adjoining building, the Bellwood, that he had seen a young woman emerge from a window on the fifth floor of the Heberworth Building at shortly before six o'clock yesterday. She had descended by the fire-escape to the fourth floor and climbed through a window there. The janitor, who is named Fred Garbey, said that, while the incident was unusual, he'd thought little of it. He gave a description of the young woman to the police, who express confidence in their ability to find her, and believe that she must be the same woman for whom Beiner had made the engagement with Hildebloom.

None of the dead man's friends who could be reached last night could advance any reason for the killing. Beiner was apparently rather popular in the profession, having a wide acquaintance.

There followed a brief *résumé* of the dead man's career, but Clancy did not read it. She dropped the paper and again stared at the ceiling.

She was the woman who had fled by the fire-escape from Beiner's office, for whom the engagement had been made with Hildebloom! And the police were looking for her!

Beiner had been murdered! She had not killed him, but—who had? And would the police believe her story? She'd heard of third degrees. Would they believe her? Her whole story—if she admitted having been in Beiner's office, she must admit her method of egress. That descent by the fire-escape would have to be explained. She would have to tell the police that Beiner had seized her, had held her. Having admitted that much to the police, would they believe the rest of her story?

She shook her head. Of course they wouldn't! Beiner had been killed with his own paper-knife. The police would believe that she had picked it up and used it in self-defense.

She became unnaturally calm. Of course, she was a girl; her story might win her acquittal, even though a jury were convinced that she was a murderess. She knew of dozens of cases that had filled the newspapers wherein women had been set free by sentimental juries.

But the disgrace! The waiting in jail! Some one else had entered Beiner's office, had, perhaps, found him still unconscious, and killed him. But would that some one come forward and admit his or her guilt to free Clancy Deane?

She laughed harshly at the mere thought. Everything pointed to her, Clancy Deane, as the murderess. Why, even at this very moment, the police might be down-stairs, making inquiries of Madame Napoli about her!

She leaped from the bed. She stared out the window at the tall buildings in Times Square. How harsh and forbidding they were! Yesterday they had been different, had suggested romance, because in them were people who, like herself, had come to New York to conquer it.

But to-day these stone walls suggested the stone walls of jails. Jails! She turned from the window, overwhelmed by the desire for instant flight. She must get away! In a veritable frenzy of fear, she began to pack her valise.

Midway in the packing, she paused. The physical labor of opening drawers, of taking dresses from the closet, had helped to clear her brain. And it was a straight-thinking brain, most of the time. It became keener now. She sat down on the floor and began to marshal the facts.

Only one person in the world knew that Florine Ladue and Clancy Deane were the same girl. That person was Fanchon DeLisle, and probably by this time Fanchon DeLisle had forgotten the card of introduction.

Morris Beiner had not mentioned to Hildebloom the name of Florine Ladue. Hildebloom could not tell the police to search for the bearer of that name. Fay Marston knew who Florine Ladue was, but Fay Marston didn't know that Florine had been intending to call on Morris Beiner. Nor did Madame Napoli or her daughter. Zenda and the members of his party had never heard Florine's last name, and while the discovery of that card of introduction in Morris Beiner's office *might* lead the police to suspect that Florine Ladue had been the woman who descended the fire-escape, it couldn't be proved.

Then she shook her head. If the police found that card of introduction—and, of course, they would—they'd look up Florine Ladue. The elevator-boy in the Heberworth Building would probably identify her as a woman who had ridden in his car yesterday afternoon at five.

The first name would attract the attention of Zenda and his friends. Her acquaintance with Fay Marston and her card-sharp husband would come out. *She wasn't thinking clearly.* The affair at Zenda's was unimportant now. The only important thing in the world was the murder of Morris Beiner.

She got back to her first fact—only Fanchon DeLisle could know that Florine Ladue and Clancy Deane were the same person. If, then, Fanchon had forgotten that high-sounding name, had forgotten that she had given a card of introduction to Clancy— What difference would it make if Fanchon had forgotten the incident of the card? The police would remind her of it, wouldn't they?

She put her palms to her eyes and rocked back and forth. She couldn't *think*! For five minutes she sat thus, pressing against her eyes, slowly, out of the reek of fearsome thoughts that crowded upon her brain, she resolved the salient one. Until Fanchon DeLisle told the police that Florine Ladue and Clancy Deane were one and the same persons, she was safe.

It would take time to locate Fanchon. Meanwhile, Clancy was safe. That is, unless the police began to look up the hotels to find Florine Ladue right away, without waiting to communicate with Fanchon. She leaped to her feet. She'd decided, several minutes ago, that that was exactly what the police would do. Therefore, she must get out of the Napoli.

Now, with definite action decided upon, Clancy could think straightly. She tilted her hat forward, so that it shielded her features, and descended from her room to the street. Yesterday afternoon she had noticed a telegraph office on Forty-second Street. To it she went now.

She wrote out a telegram: "Florine Ladue, Hotel Napoli, Forty-seventh Street, New York. Come home at once. Mother is ill." She signed it, "Mary."

The receiving clerk stared at her.

"You could walk up there in five minutes and save money," he said.

Clancy stared at him. The clerk lowered his eyes, and she walked out, feeling a bit triumphant, not at her poor victory over the clerk but because she had demonstrated to herself that she was mistress of herself.

Back in the Napoli, she packed her valise. She had almost finished when Paul, the 'bus-boy porter, knocked at her door. He gave her the telegram which she had written a little while ago.

Clancy, holding the door partly shut, so that he could not see her preparations for departure, read the wire. She gasped.

"Bad news, miss?" asked Paul.

"Oh, terrible!" she cried. "My mother is ill—I must go home—get me a taxi—tell Madame Napoli to make up my bill——"

The boy murmured something meant to be sympathetic, and disappeared down the hall. Five minutes later, Madame Napoli came wheezing up the stairs. She refused to permit Clancy to pack. Clancy was a good girl to worry so about her mother. She must sit still and drink the coffee that Paul was fetching. Madame Napoli would pack her bag. And *madame* had sent for a taxi.

It was all very easy. Without arousing the slightest suspicion, Clancy left the Napoli.

She told the driver to take her to the Grand Central Station. There she checked her valise. For she was not running back to Zenith. No, indeed! She'd come to New York to succeed, and she *would* succeed. Truth must prevail, and, sooner or later, the murderer of Morris Beiner would be apprehended. Then—Clancy would be free to go about the making of her career. But now, safety was her only thought. But safety in Zenith was not what she sought.

In the waiting-room she purchased a newspaper. She found a list of lodging-houses advertised there. Inquiry at the information-desk helped her to orientate herself. She wished to be settled some distance from Times Square. She learned that Washington Square was a couple of miles from the Napoli. Two miles seemed a long distance to Clancy.

She reacquired her valise, got another taxi, and shortly had engaged a room in the lodging-house of Mrs. Simon Gerand, on Washington Square South. Mrs. Gerand was not at all like Madame Napoli, save in one respect—she demanded her rent in advance. Clancy paid her. She noted that she had only seven dollars left in her purse. So, in her room, she took out her check-book and wrote her first check, payable to "self," for twenty-five dollars. She'd take a 'bus, one of those that she could see from her tiny room on the square below, ride to Forty-second Street, cross to the Thespian Bank. No, she wouldn't; she might be seen. She'd ask Mrs. Gerand to cash her check.

She sat suddenly down upon a shabby chair. She couldn't cash her check, for Florine Ladue could be traced through her bank-account as well as through any other way!

She rose and walked to the window. It was a different view from that which she had had at the Napoli. She might be in another country. Across the park stood solid-looking mansions that even the untutored eyes of Clancy knew were inhabited by a different class of people than lived at Mrs. Gerand's. The well-keptness of the houses reminded her of a well-dressed woman drawing aside her skirts as the wheel of a carriage, spattering mud, approached too closely. She did not know that an old-time aristocracy still held its ground on the north side of Washington Square, against the encroachments of a colony of immigrants from Italy, against the wave of a bohemia that, in recent years, had become fashionable.

Despite the chill of the winter day, scores of children of all ages played in the park. Some were shabby, tattered, children of the slums that lurked, though she did not yet know it, south of the square. Others were carefully dressed, guarded by uniformed nurses. These came from the mansions opposite, from the fashionable apartments on lower Fifth Avenue.

Girls in tams, accompanied by youths, carelessly though not too inexpensively dressed, sauntered across the park. They were bound for little coffee-houses, for strange little restaurants. They were of that literary and artistic and musical set which had found the neighborhood congenial for work and play.

But, to Clancy, they were all just people. And people made laws, which created policemen, who hunted girls who hadn't done anything.

She had come to New York to achieve success. Here, within forty-eight hours after her arrival, she had not only roused the suspicions of one of the biggest men in the profession which she had hoped to adopt but was wanted by the police on the charge of murder, and had only seven dollars in the world. She stared at the greasy wall-paper of her ill-kept room. Without friends, or money—in danger of arrest! And still she did not think of going to the police, of confessing to circumstances that really were innocent. She had not learned overnight. She was still young. She still believed in the efficacy of flight. Queerly, she thought of the young man who had taken her home from the Zendas' apartment in the runabout. She remembered not merely his blue, kindly eyes, and the cleft in his chin, and his bigness, but things about him that she had not known, at the time, that she had noticed—his firm mouth, his thick brown hair.

And he'd had the kindest-seeming face she'd ever seen. The only really kind face she'd seen in New York. All the rest—— Clancy wept.

VI

Youth suffers more than age. No blow that comes to age can be more severe than the happening to a child which, to its elders, seems most trivial. Each passing year adds toughness to the human's spiritual skin. But with toughness comes loss of resiliency.

Clancy was neither seven nor seventy; she was twenty. She had not yet acquired spiritual toughness, nor had she lost childhood's resiliency. The blows that she had received in the forty-eight hours since she had arrived in New York—the loss, as she believed, of her hoped-for career, the fear of arrest on the hideous charge of murder, and, last, though by no means least, the inability to draw upon the funds that she had so proudly deposited in the Thespian Bank—all these were enough to bend her. But not to break!

Her tears finally ceased. She had thrown herself upon the bed with an abandon that would have made an observer of the throwing think her one entirely surrendered to despair. Yet, before this apparently desperate, hysterical hurling of her slim body upon a not too soft couch, Clancy had carefully removed her jacket and skirt. She was not unique in this regard for her apparel; she was simply a woman.

So, when, in the natural course of the passing hours, hunger attacked Clancy, and she rose from the narrow bed that Mrs. Gerand provided for the tenant of her "third-floor front" room, she had only to remove the traces of tears, "fix" her hair, and don her waist and skirt to be prepared to meet the public eye.

She had been lying down for hours, alternating between impulses toward panic and toward brazen defiance. She compromised, of course, as people always compromise upon impulses, by a happy medium. She would neither flee as far from New York as seven dollars would take her nor surrender to the searching police. She would do as she had intended to do when she came down, earlier in the day, to Washington Square. She would look for a job to-morrow, and as soon as she found one, she'd go to work at anything that would keep her alive until the police captured the murderer of Morris Beiner and rendered her free to resume

her career. And just now she would eat.

It was already dark. Somehow, although she was positive that she could not have been traced to Washington Square, she had been timid about venturing out in the daylight. But that very darkness which brings disquiet to the normal person brought calmness and a sense of security to Clancy. For she was now a different person from the girl who had arrived in New York from Zenith two days before. She was now that social abnormality—a person sought by the officers of justice. Her innocence of any wrong-doing in no way restored her to normality.

So, instead of a frank-eyed girl, fresh from the damp breezes of Zenith, it was an almost furtive-eyed girl that entered the Trevor, shortly after six o'clock, and, carrying an evening paper that she had acquired at the news-stand, sat down at a table in the almost vacant dining-room. Her step was faltering and her glance wary. It is fear that changes character, not sin.

She had entered the down-stairs dining-room of the Trevor, that hotel which once catered to the French residents of New York, but that now is the most prominent resort of the Greenwich Village bohemian or near-bohemian. It held few guests now. It was the hour between tea and dinner.

Clancy looked hastily over the menu that the smiling, courteous captain of waiters handed her. With dismay, she saw that the Trevor charged prices that were staggering to a person with only seven dollars in the world. Nevertheless, the streak of stubbornness in Clancy made her fight down the impulse to leave the place. She would not confess, by implication, to any waiter that she had not money enough to eat in his restaurant.

So she ordered the cheapest things on the menu. A veal cutlet, breaded, cost ninety-five cents; a glass of milk, twenty; a baked potato, twenty-five; bread and butter, ten. One dollar and a half for a meal that could have been bought in Bangor for half the money.

The evening paper had a column, surmounted by a scare-head half a page wide, about the Beiner murder. Clancy shivered apprehensively. But there was nothing in the feverish, highly adjectived account to indicate that Florine Ladue had been identified as the woman for whom Beiner had made the engagement with Hildebloom, of the Rosebush studios. Clancy threw care from her shoulders. She would be cautious, yes; but fearful—no! This, after she had eaten a few mouthfuls of the veal cutlet and drunk half of her glass of milk. A full stomach brings courage.

She turned the pages of the newspaper and found the "Help Wanted" page. It was

encouraging to note that scores of business firms needed stenographers. She folded the paper carefully for later study and resumed her dinner. Finished, finally, she reached for the paper. And, for the first time, she became conscious that a couple across the room was observing her closely.

Courage fled from her. A glimmering of what her position would continue to be until her relation to the Beiner murder was definitely and for all time settled flashed through her brain. She would be always afraid.

She had not paid her check. Otherwise, she would have fled the room. Then she stiffened, while, mechanically, she returned David Randall's bow.

What ill fate had sent her to this place? Then, as Randall, having flashed her a smile that showed a row of extremely white although rather large teeth, turned to the woman with whom he was dining, Clancy's courage raced back to her.

What on earth was there to be nervous about? Why should this young man, whose knowledge of her was confined to the fact that, two nights ago, he had conveyed her in his runabout from somewhere on Park Avenue to the Napoli, cause her alarm? She forced herself to glance again in Randall's direction.

But the woman interested Clancy more than the young man who had introduced himself two nights ago as David Randall. A blonde, with reddish brown hair, most carefully combed, with a slightly tilted nose and a mouth that turned up at the corners, she was, Clancy conceded, far above the average in good looks. She was dressed for the evening. Two days ago, Clancy would have thought that only a woman of loose morals would expose so much back. But an evening spent at the Château de la Reine had taught her that New York women exposed their backs, if the exposure were worth while. This one was. And the severe lines of her black gown set off the milky whiteness of her back.

Her eyes were envious as the woman, with a word to Randall, rose. She lowered them as the woman approached her table. Then she started and paled. For the woman had stopped before her.

"This is Sophie Carey," she said.

Clancy looked up at her blankly. Behind her blank expression, fear rioted. The other woman smiled down upon her.

"I have been dining," she said, "with a most impetuous young man. He has told me of a somewhat unconventional meeting with you, and he wishes me to expurgate from that meeting everything that is socially sinful. In other words, he pays me the doubtful compliment of thinking me aged enough to throw a halo of

respectability about any action of his—or mine—or yours. Will you let me present him to you?"

Back in Zenith, no one had ever spoken to Clancy like this. She was suddenly a little girl. New York was big and menacing. This woman seemed friendly, gracious, charming. She had about her something that Clancy could not define, and which was cosmopolitanism, worldliness.

"Why—why—it's awfully kind of you——"

The woman turned. One hand rested on the table—her left hand. A wedding-ring was on it, and Clancy somehow felt relieved. With her right hand, Mrs. Carey beckoned Randall. He was on his feet and at Clancy's table in a moment.

"This," said Mrs. Carey, "is David Randall. He is twenty-nine years old; his father was for three terms congressman from Ohio. David is a broker; he was worth, the last time he looked at the ticker, four hundred and ninety thousand dollars. He plays a good game of golf and a poor game of tennis. He claims that he is a good shot, but he can't ride a horse. He *can* run a motor-car, but he doesn't know anything about a catboat."

"I could teach him that," laughed Clancy. Mrs. Carey's nonsense put her at her ease. And all fear of Randall had vanished before he had reached the table. How *could* he know anything of her and her connection with either Zenda or Beiner?

Randall held out a very large hand.

"You sail a boat, Miss—" He paused confusedly.

"Deane," said Clancy. She had thought, when she left Zenith, to have left forever behind her the name of Deane. Ladue was the name under which she had intended to climb the heights. "Yes, indeed, I can sail a boat."

"You'll teach me?" asked Randall.

Mrs. Carey laughed.

"Lovely weather for boating, David. Where do you do your sailing, Miss Deane?"

"Zenith Harbor. It's in Maine," said Clancy.

"But you don't live in Maine!" cried Randall.

Mrs. Carey laughed again.

"Don't be misled by his frank eyes and his general expression of innate nobility

and manliness, Miss Deane. That agony in his voice, which has lured so many young girls to heartbreak, means nothing at all except that he probably had an Irish grandmother. He really isn't worried about your living in Maine. He feels that, no matter where you live, he can persuade you to move to New York. And I hope he can."

Her last five words were uttered with a cordiality that won Clancy's heart. And then she colored for having, even for the minutest fraction of a second, taken Mrs. Carey's words seriously. Was she, Clancy Deane, lacking in a sense of humor?

"Thank you," she said. Then, "I have an Irish grandfather myself," she added slyly.

Mrs. Carey's face assumed an expression of sorrow.

"Oh, David, David! When you picked up a lone and lorn young lady in your motor-car, mayhap you picked up revenge for a score of sad damsels who were happy till they met you." She smiled down at Clancy. "If the high gods of convention are wrathful at me, perhaps some other gods will forgive me. Anyway, I'm sure that David will. And perhaps, after you've had a cup of tea with me, you'll forgive me, too. For if you don't like David, you're sure to like me."

"I know that," said Clancy.

Indeed, she already liked Mrs. Carey. Perhaps the sight of the wedding-ring on Mrs. Carey's left hand made for part of the liking. Still, that was ridiculous. She hardly knew this Randall person.

"I leave you in better company, David," said Mrs. Carey. "No, my dear boy; I wouldn't be so cruel as to make you take me to the door. The car is outside. You stay here and improve upon the introduction that I, without a jealous bone in my body—well, without jealousy I have acquainted myself with Miss Deane, and then passed on the acquaintance to you." She lifted her slim hand. "No; I insist that you remain here." She smiled once more at Clancy. "Did you notice that I used the word 'insist'?" She leaned over and whispered. "To save my pride, my harsh and bitter pride, Miss Deane, don't forget to come to tea."

And then Clancy was left alone with Randall.

VII

For a moment, embarrassed silence fell upon them. At least, Clancy knew that she was embarrassed, and she felt, from the slowly rising color on Randall's face, that he was also what the girls in Zenith—and other places—term "fussed." And when he spoke, it was haltingly.

"I hope—of course, Miss Deane—Mrs. Carey was joking. She didn't mean that I —" He paused helplessly.

"She didn't mean that you were so—fatally attractive?" asked Clancy, with wicked innocence. After all, she was beautiful, twenty, and talking to a young man whom she had met under circumstances that to a Zenither filled many of the requirements of romance. She forgot, with the adaptable memory of youth, her troubles. Flirtation was not a habit with Clancy Deane. It was an art.

"Oh, now, Miss Deane!" protested Randall.

"Then you haven't beguiled as many girls as Mrs. Carey says?" persisted Clancy.

"Why, I don't know any girls!" blurted Randall.

"Not any? Impossible!" said Clancy. "Is there anything the matter with you?"

"Matter with me?" Randall stared at her.

"I mean, your eyesight is perfectly good?"

"I saw *you*," he said bluntly. It was Clancy's turn to color, and she did so magnificently. Randall saw his advantage. "The very minute I saw you," he said, "I knew—" He stopped. Clancy's chin had lifted a trifle.

"Yes," she said gently. "You knew?"

"That we'd meet again," he said bravely.

"I didn't know that brokers were romantic," she said.

"I'm not," he retorted.

She eyed him carefully.

"No; I don't think you are. Still, not to know any girls—and it isn't because you haven't seen any, either. Well, there must be something else wrong with you. What is it?"

Randall fumbled in his pocket and produced a leather cigarette-case. He opened

it, looking at Clancy.

"Will you have one?" he asked.

She shook her head. He lighted the cigarette; the smoke seemed to restore his self-possession.

"I've been too busy to meet girls," he declared.

Clancy shrugged.

"You weren't busy night before last."

She was enjoying herself hugely. The night before last, when she had met men at Zenda's party at the Château de la Reine, and, later, at Zenda's home, she had been too awed by New York, too overcome by the reputations of the people that she had met to think of any of the men as men. But now she was talking to a young man whose eyes, almost from the moment that she had accosted him on Park Avenue, had shown a definite interest in her. Not the interest of any normal man in a pretty girl, but a personal interest, and interest in *her*, Clancy Deane, not merely in the face or figure of Clancy Deane.

Randall was the sort of man, Clancy felt (still without knowing that she felt it), in whom one could repose confidences without fear of betrayal or, what is worse, misunderstanding. All of which unconscious, or subconscious, analysis on Clancy's part accounted for her own feeling of superiority toward him. For she had that feeling. A friendly enough feeling, but one that inclined her toward poking fun at him.

"No," admitted Randall; "I was kind of lonesome, and—I saw you, and——"

Clancy took the wheel and steered the bark of conversation deftly away from herself.

"Mrs. Carey must know many girls," she said. "And she seemed *quite* an intimate friend of yours." Clancy had in her make-up the due proportion of cattishness.

"She is," answered Randall promptly. "That is, she's been extremely kind to me. But I haven't known her long. She returned from Europe last month and was interested in French securities. She bought them through my office, because an uncle of mine, who'd been on the boat with her, had mentioned my name. That's all."

The mention of Europe wakened some memory in Clancy.

"She's not *the* Mrs. Carey, is she? Not the artist who was decorated for bravery ——"

Randall nodded.

"I guess she is, but you'd never think it from her talk. She never mentions it, or refers to her work——"

"Have you seen it?" asked Clancy.

"Her paintings? Oh, yes; I've been in her studio. The fact is"—and he colored—"I happened to be the right size, or shape, or something, for a male figure she wanted, and—well," he finished sheepishly, "I posed for her."

Clancy grinned.

"You've never been in the chorus of a musical comedy, have you?"

"No." Randall laughed. "And I won't unless you're in it."

It was a perfectly innocent remark, as vapid as the remarks made by young people in the process of getting acquainted always are. Yet, for a second, Clancy felt a cold chill round her heart. A glance at Randall assured her that there'd been no hidden meaning in the statement. Her own remark had inspired his response. But the mere casual connection of herself with any matter theatrical brought back the events of the past two days.

She beckoned to her waiter and asked for her check. Randall made an involuntary movement toward his pocket, then thought better of it. Clancy liked him for the perfectly natural movement, but liked him better because he halted it.

"You—I don't suppose—you'd care to go to the theater—or anything?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"I must go home," she declared.

"Well, I can, at least, take you up-town," he said,

"I don't live up-town. I live——"

"You've moved?"

"Yes," she answered. All the fears that for ten minutes had been shoved into the background now came back to her. To-morrow's papers might contain the statement that the supposed murderess of Morris Beiner had been traced to the Napoli, whence she had vanished. It wouldn't take a very keen brain to draw a connection between that vanished girl and the girl now talking with Randall.

"Well, I can take you to wherever you've moved," he announced cheerfully.

"I—I'd rather you wouldn't," said Clancy.

Randall's face reddened. He colored, Clancy thought, more easily and frequently than any man she'd known.

The waiter brought her change. She gave him fifteen cents, an exact ten per cent. of her bill, and rose. Then she bent over to pick up her evening paper. Randall forestalled her. He handed it to her, and his eyes lighted on the "want ad" columns.

"You aren't looking for work, are you?" he asked. "I mean—I don't want to be rude, but——"

"Well?" said Clancy coldly.

"I—if you happened to know stenography—do you?"

"Well?" she said again.

"I need a—stenographer," he blurted.

She eyed him.

"You move rapidly, don't you?"

"I'm fresh, you think? Well, I suppose it seems that way, but—I don't mean to be, Miss Deane. Only—well, my name and address are in the telephone-book. If you ever happened—to want to see me again—you could reach me easily."

"Thank you," said Clancy. "Good-night." For a moment, her fingers rested in his huge hand; then, with a little nod, she left the restaurant.

She did not look behind her as she walked down Fifth Avenue and across Washington Square. Randall was not the sort to spy upon her, no matter how anxious he was to know where she lived. And he was anxious—Clancy felt sure of that. She didn't know whether to be pleased or alarmed over that surety.

She felt annoyed with herself that she was even interested in Randall's attitude toward her. She had come to New York with a very definite purpose, and that purpose contemplated no man in its foreground. Entering Mrs. Gerand's lodging-house, she passed the telephone fastened against the wall in the front hall. It was the idlest curiosity, still—it wouldn't do any harm to know Randall's address. She looked it up in the telephone directory. He had offices in the Guaranty Building and lived in the Monarch apartment-house on Park Avenue.

She was more exhausted than she realized. Not even fear could keep her awake to-night, and fear did its utmost. For, alone in her room, she felt her helplessness. She had avoided the police for a day—but how much longer could she hope to do so?

In the morning, courage came to her again. She asked Mrs. Gerand for permission to look at the morning paper before she left the house. The Beiner mystery was given less space this morning than yesterday afternoon. The paper reported no new discoveries.

And there were no suspicious police-looking persons loitering outside Mrs. Gerand's house. Three rods from the front door and Clancy's confidence in her own ability to thwart the whole New York detective force had returned.

Mrs. Gerand had recommended that she breakfast in a restaurant on Sixth Avenue, praising the coffee and boiled eggs highly. Clancy found it without difficulty. It was a sort of bakery, lunch-room, and pastry shop.

Blown by a brisk wind, Clancy stopped before a mirror to readjust her hat and hair. In the mirror, she saw a friendly face smiling at her. She turned. At a marble-topped table sat Mrs. Carey. She beckoned for Clancy. Short of actual rudeness, there was nothing for Clancy to do but to accept the invitation.

"You look," Mrs. Carey greeted her, "as though you'd been out in your catboat already. Sit down with me. Jennie!" she called to a waitress. "Take Miss Deane's order."

Clancy let Mrs. Carey order for her. She envied the older woman's air of authority, her easiness of manner.

"New York hasn't corrupted you as yet, Miss Deane, has it? You keep Maine hours. Fancy meeting any one breakfasting at seven-thirty."

"But I've met you, and you're a New Yorker," said Clancy.

Mrs. Carey laughed.

"I have to work."

"So do I," said Clancy.

"Whereabouts? At what?" asked Mrs. Carey.

"I don't know," Clancy confessed. "I've made a list of firms that advertise for stenographers."

"'Stenographer?' With that skin? And those eyes? And your hair? Bless your heart, Miss Deane, you ought to go on the stage—or into the movies."

Clancy lowered her eyes to the grapefruit which the waitress had brought.

"I—don't think I'd care for either of those," she answered.

"Hm. Wouldn't care to do a little posing? Oh, of course not. No future in that—" Mrs. Carey's brows wrinkled. She broke a roll and buttered it. "Nothing," she said, "happens without good reason. I was alarmed about my cook this morning. Laid up in bed. I think it's—'flu,' though I hope not. Anyway, the doctor says it's not serious; she'll be well in a day or so. But I hated to go out for my breakfast instead of eating in bed. And I can't cook a thing!"

"No?" said Clancy. Into her tones crept frigidity. Mrs. Carey laughed suddenly.

"Bless your sweet heart, did you think I was offering you a place as cook? No; in my roundabout, verbose way, Miss Deane, I was explaining that my cook's illness was a matter for congratulation. It sent me outdoors, enabled me to meet you, and—after breakfast come over to my studio. Sally Henderson needs an assistant, and spoke to me the other day. You'll do."

"What sort of work is it?" asked Clancy timidly.

"Interior decorating—and renting apartments."

"But I—don't know anything about that sort of thing."

Mrs. Carey laughed.

"Neither does Sally. Her father died five years ago. He was a doctor. Lots of money, but spent it all. Sally had to do *something*. So she became an interior decorator. Don't argue with me, my dear. I intend to play Destiny for you. How are the buckwheat cakes?"

"Fine!" Clancy murmured from a full mouth.

VIII

Clancy's ideas of studios had been gained from the perusal of fiction. So the workmanlike appearance of the room on the top floor of Sophie Carey's house on Waverly Place was somewhat of a surprise to her.

Its roof was of glass, but curtains, cunningly manipulated by not too sightly cords, barred or invited the overhead light as the artist desired. The front was a series of huge windows, which were also protected by curtains. It faced the north.

About the room, faces to wall, were easels. Mrs. Carey turned one round until the light fell upon it.

It was a large canvas, which Clancy supposed was allegorical. Three figures stood out against a background of rolling smoke above a scene of desolation—a man, a woman, and a child, their garments torn and stained, but their faces smiling.

"Like it?" asked Mrs. Carey.

"Why—it's wonderful!" cried Clancy.

"I call it 'Hope,'" said Mrs. Carey.

Clancy stared at it. She got the painter's idea. The man and his wife and their child, looking smilingly forward into a future that— She turned to Mrs. Carey. She pointed to the foreground.

"Isn't there more—smoke—trouble—there?"

"There is—but they refuse to look at it. That, after all, is hope, isn't it, Miss Deane? Hope founded on sheer blindness never has seemed to me a particularly admirable quality. But hope founded on courage is worth while. You really like it?"

Clancy turned again to the picture. Suddenly she pointed to the figure of the man.

"Why, that's Mr. Randall!" she exclaimed.

"Yes. Of course, it isn't really a likeness. I didn't want that. I merely wanted the magnificence of his body. It is magnificent, isn't it? Such a splendid waist-line above such slender but strong thighs. Remarkable, in these days, when, outside of professional athletes, the man with a strong upper body usually has huge, ungraceful hips."

Mrs. Carey picked up a telephone as she spoke, and so did not observe the blush that stole over Clancy's face. Of course, artists, even women artists, spoke unconventionally, but to discuss in such detail the body of a man, known to both of them was not mere unconventionality—it was shocking. That is, it was

shocking according to the standards of Zenith.

Clancy listened while her hostess spoke to some one whom she called "Sally," and who must be Miss Henderson.

"You said you wanted some one, Sally. Well, I have the some one. Prettiest thing you ever looked at.... The business? As much as you do, probably. What difference does it make? She's pretty. She's lovely. No man could refuse to rent an apartment or have his place done over if she asked him.... Right away. Miss Deane, her name is.... Not at all, old thing."

She hung up and turned beamingly to Clancy.

"Simple, isn't it? You are now, Miss Deane, an interior decorator. At least, within an hour you will be." She wrote rapidly upon the pad by the telephone. "Here's the address. You don't need a letter of introduction."

Dazed, Clancy took the slip of paper. She noted that the address written down was a number on East Forty-seventh Street. Little as she yet knew of the town's geography, she knew that Fifth Avenue was the great dividing-line. Therefore, any place east of it must be quite a distance from Times Square, which was two long blocks west of Fifth Avenue. She would be safe from recognition at Miss Sally Henderson's—probably. But she refused to think of probabilities.

"I don't know how to thank you, Mrs. Carey," she said.

Sophie Carey laughed carelessly.

"Don't try, my dear. Don't ever learn. The really successful person—and you're going to be a great success—never expresses gratitude. He—or she—accepts whatever comes along."

She crossed her knees and lighted a cigarette.

"I couldn't follow that philosophy," said Clancy. "I wouldn't want to."

"Why not?" demanded Sophie Carey.

"It doesn't seem—right," said Clancy. "Besides," she added hastily, "I'm not sure that I'll be a success."

Mrs. Carey stared at her.

"Why not?" she asked sharply. "God gives us brains; we use them. God gives us strength; we use it. God gives us good looks; why shouldn't we use them? As long as this is a man-ruled world, feminine good looks will assay higher than

feminine brains. If you don't believe it, compare the incomes received by the greatest women novelists, artists, doctors, lawyers, with the incomes received by women who have no brains at all, but whose beauty makes them attractive in moving pictures or upon the stage. Beauty is an asset that mustn't be ignored, my dear Miss Deane. And you have it. Have it? Indeed you have! Didn't our hitherto immune David become infected with the virus of love the moment he saw you?"

Clancy looked prim.

"I'm sure," she said, almost rebukingly, "that Mr. Randall couldn't have done anything like that—so soon."

Mrs. Carey laughed.

"I'll forgive you because of your last two words, my dear. They prove that you're not the little prig that you sound. Why, you *know* that David is extremely interested. And you are interested yourself. Otherwise, you would not be jealous of me."

"Jealous?" Clancy was indignant.

Mrs. Carey smiled.

"That's what I said. When you recognized him in the painting— My dear, I'm too old for David. I'm thirty-one. Besides, I have a husband living. You need not worry."

She rose, and before Clancy could frame any reply, threw an arm about the girl's shoulders and led her from the studio. Descending the two flights of stairs to the street door, Clancy caught a glimpse of a lovely boudoir, and a drawing-room whose huge grand piano and subdued coloring of decoration lived up to her ideals of what society knew as correct. The studio on the top floor might be a workroom, but the rest of the house was a place that, merely to own, thought Clancy, was to be assured of happiness.

Indeed, after having left Mrs. Carey and boarding a cross-town car at Eighth Street, Clancy wondered that Mrs. Carey did not give the impression of complete happiness. She was famous, rich, sought-after, yet she seemed, to Clancy, dissatisfied. Probably, thought Clancy, some trouble with her husband. Surely it must be the fault of Mr. Carey, for no woman so sweet and generous as Sophie Carey could possibly be at fault.

For a moment, she had been indignant at Mrs. Carey's charge of jealousy. But the one salient characteristic of Clancy Deane was honesty. It was a characteristic

that would bring to her unhappiness and happiness both. Just now, that honesty hurt her pride. For she had felt a certain restlessness, uneasiness, that had been indefinable until Mrs. Carey had named it. It had been jealousy. She had resented that this rich, beautiful, and famous woman should assume a slightly proprietary air toward David Randall. Clairvoyantly, Clancy knew that she would never *really* love Sophie Carey. Still, she would try to.

At Astor Place, she took the subway, riding, according to instructions that Mrs. Carey had given her, to the Grand Central Station. Here she alighted and, a block west, turned up Madison Avenue.

If it had not occurred to her before that one found one's way about most easily in New York, she would have learned it now. With its avenues running north and south, and its cross-streets running east and west, and with practically all of both, save in the far-down-town district, numbered, it was almost impossible for any one who could read Arabic numerals to become lost in this, the greatest city of the Western hemisphere.

She found the establishment of "Sally Henderson, Interior Decorator—Apartments," a few doors east of Madison Avenue.

A young gentleman, soft-voiced, cow-eyed, moved gracefully forward to greet her. The cut of his sleeves, as narrow as a woman's, and fitting at the shoulder with the same pucker, the appearance of the waist-line as snug as her own, made Clancy realize that the art of dressing men has reappeared in the world as pronouncedly as in the days when they wore gorgeous laces and silken breeches, and bejeweled-buckled shoes.

The young gentleman—Clancy later learned that he was named Guernsey, and pronounced it "Garnsey"—ushered her into an inner office. This room was furnished less primly than the outer office. The first room she had entered seemed, with its filing-cases and busy stenographer pounding away at a typewriter and its adding machine and maps upon the wall, a place of business. But this inner room seemed like a boudoir. Clancy discovered that the outer room was where persons who desired to rent apartments were taken care of; this inner room was the spot where those desirous of the services of an interior decorator were received.

Miss Sally Henderson sat at a table upon which were samples of wall-paper. She was tall, Clancy could tell, had what in Zenith would be termed a "skinny" figure, and her hair, of a stringy mud-color, was almost plastered, man-fashion, upon a narrow, high forehead. Upon her nose were perched a pair of glasses. Her

lips, surprisingly, were well-formed, full, and red. It was the mouth of a sensuous, beauty-loving, passionate woman, and the rest of her was the masculinity of an old maid.

She smiled as Clancy approached.

"So Sophie sent you to my matrimonial bureau, eh?" she said. Clancy stared. "Oh, yes," Miss Henderson went on; "three girls have been married from this business in the last eight months. I think there's a curse on the place. Tell me—are you engaged, in love, or anything?" Clancy shook her head. "That's too bad," sighed Miss Henderson.

"Why?" asked Clancy.

"Oh, if you were already engaged, you'd not be husband-hunting the men who come apartment-hunting."

"I assure you that I'm not husband-hunting," said Clancy indignantly.

Miss Henderson shrugged.

"Of course you are, my dear. All of us are. Even myself. Though I've given it up lately. My peculiar style of beauty doesn't lure the men, I'm beginning to understand. Well, you can't help it if you're beautiful, can you? And I can't help it if one of my clients runs away with you. Just stay three months, and I'll give you, to start with, fifty dollars a week."

Clancy stared at her.

"You'll give me fifty a week—right now?"

"My dear, any musical-comedy manager would give you forty to stand in the front row. You could earn a trifle more than that by not being particular. I take it that you are particular. Should a particular girl earn less than the other kind? Is it common justice? It is not. Therefore, I will pay you fifty dollars a week. You ought to rent a hundred per cent. of the apartments you show. Also, every third client you deal with ought to be wheedled into having some interior decorating done. I can afford to pay you that."

Clancy gasped. Fifty dollars a week was not, of course, a tithe of what she'd expect to earn in the moving pictures, but it was a big salary to one who possessed about five dollars in the world.

"But you'll have to buy yourself some decent clothes," continued Miss Henderson. "That suit, if you'll pardon me, my dear, looks like the very devil. I have a dressmaker, unique thing— Oh, don't stare at the clothes I have on; I have to dress this way during office-hours. It makes me look business-like. But outside of business—it's different. You may trust my dressmaker. Cheaper—

much cheaper, too. What do you know about interior decorating?" she asked suddenly.

"Nothing," Clancy confessed frankly.

"Excellent!" said Miss Henderson. "Interior decorators can design theatrically beautiful rooms, but not homes. How can they? Home is the expression of its owner. So the less you know the better."

Clancy drew in a long breath. Feebly, she comprehended that she was in the presence of a "character," a person unique in her experience. She was glad that she did not have to talk, that her new employer's verbosity covered up her own silence. She was grateful when, as Miss Henderson paused, the young man, Guernsey, entered.

"Mr. Grannis to see you, Miss Henderson," he said.

Miss Henderson shrugged petulantly. She looked at Clancy.

"Your first commission, Miss Deane," she said. "He wants to rent an apartment. He has oodles of money. Here is a list of places. Mr. Guernsey will order a car for you. You'll find the rental-rates on this card. God be with you, my child!"

She grinned, and Clancy started for the door. Her footsteps were faltering and her face white. Grannis was an unusual name. And Grannis had been one of the players in the Zenda poker game three nights ago!

IX

New as she was to New York, limited of observation and of ability to digest her observations and draw from them sane conclusions, Clancy realized that each business in the city was confined to certain restricted districts. For instance, Times Square was the center of the theatrical and night life of the city. A cursory glance at the women on Fifth Avenue near Forty-second Street was enough to make her pretty certain that this was the heart of the shopping-district. And, of course, all the reading world knew that the financial district was down-town.

This knowledge had contributed to her feeling of security. She was a single atom in a most enormous city. Even though the police, by reason of the card bearing Fanchon DeLisle's introduction of Clancy to Morris Beiner, might be

investigating her, it seemed hardly probable to Clancy that any chance meeting would betray her. She thought that one could live years, decades in New York without meeting a single acquaintance. Until the police should get in touch with Fanchon DeLisle and discover that Florine Ladue and Clancy Deane were the same person, Clancy believed that she was comparatively safe.

But now, as she hesitated on the threshold of the outer office, it came to her with a shock that New York was a small place. Later on, she would learn that the whole world is a tiny hiding-place for a fugitive, but just now it seemed to her that fate was treating her most unkindly in bringing her into contact with Grannis to-day. But at the moment she could only blame fate, not realizing that, from the very nature of its geography, having so much north and south and so comparatively little east and west, all New York, practically, must, at some time during its working-day, be in the neighborhood of Times Square or the Grand Central Station, and that shrewd men, realizing this fact, have centered certain businesses, such as the retail-clothing trade, the jewelry and other luxury-merchandising, the hotels and theaters in these neighborhoods. The money may be made in other parts of the town, but it is spent here.

So, had Clancy but realized it, it was not at all unusual that, within the first hour of her employment by Sally Henderson, Grannis should enter the offices. He needed an apartment; Sally Henderson, catering to the class of persons who could afford expensive rentals, was naturally located in a district contiguous to other places where cost was not counted by the customer.

It was only by a tremendous effort of will that Clancy forced herself across the threshold.

But Grannis's sallow face did not change its expression as she entered. It so happened that he had a lot on his mind, of which the renting of an apartment was but a minor detail. And young Guernsey and the stenographer were not particularly observant; they merely saw that Miss Henderson's new employee seemed a bit timid.

"Miss Deane, this is Mr. Grannis," said Guernsey. "Miss Deane will show you several apartments," he added.

Grannis nodded absent-mindedly. He glanced at Clancy for a moment; then his eyes dropped. Clancy drew a long breath. Something seemed about to burst within her bosom. Relief is quite as violent in its physical effects as fear, though not so permanent. Then her pulse slowed down. But her eyes were filmily unseeing until they had entered the motor, a closed car, that Guernsey ordered.

Then they cleared. Unflattering as it might be to her vanity, it was nevertheless a fact that Grannis had no recollection of having met her before. It was natural enough, Clancy assured herself. She had simply been an extra person at a dance, at a poker-party. Further, in her coat suit and wearing a hat, she was not the same person that had accompanied Fay Marston three nights ago to the Château de la Reine.

Why, it was quite probable that even Zenda would not remember her if he saw her again. Then her throat seemed to thicken up a trifle. That was not so, because Morris Beiner had told her that not only had Zenda remembered her first name but had been able to describe her so accurately that Beiner had recognized her from the description.

But, at the moment, she had nothing to fear. She looked at the card Miss Henderson had given her. There were half a dozen addresses written on it. The rentals placed opposite them ranged from five to twelve hundred.

"How much did you wish to pay, Mr. Grannis?" she asked.

Grannis started as she spoke. He stared at her; his brows furrowed. Clancy felt herself growing pale. Then Grannis smiled.

"I meet so many people—oh, thousands, Miss Deane—that I'm always imagining that I've met my newest acquaintance before. I haven't met you, have I?"

The direct lie was something that Clancy abhorred, hardly ever in her life had she uttered one.

She compromised between the instinct for self-preservation and a rigid upbringing by shaking her head. He accepted the quasi-denial with a smile, then answered her question.

"Oh, six or eight hundred a month—something like that," he said carelessly.

Clancy smothered a gasp. Miss Henderson had told her nothing of the details of the business. That had been careless to an extreme of Miss Henderson. Yet Clancy supposed that Miss Henderson felt that, if an employee didn't have common sense, she wouldn't retain her. Still, not to have told Clancy that these rentals marked on this card were by the *month*, instead, as Clancy had assumed, by the year, was to have relied not merely on Clancy's possession of common sense but on her experience of New York. But Miss Henderson didn't know that Clancy had just come from the country. Probably sending Clancy out offhand in this fashion had been a test of Clancy's adaptability for the business. Well—and

her chin stuck forward a bit—she'd show that she had that adaptability. If Grannis were willing to pay six or eight hundred dollars a month for an apartment, she'd rent him one.

She handed the card to Grannis.

"You're a busy man," she said. "Which address looks best to you?"

Grannis stared at her.

"I congratulate you, Miss Deane. Most women would have taken me to the least desirable first, tried to foist it upon me, then dragged me to another. This one."

He put his finger on the third apartment listed. The rental was eight hundred and fifty dollars a month, and opposite it were the words: "six months." Clancy interpreted this to mean that the tenant must sign a six months' lease. She said as much to Grannis, who merely nodded acquiescently.

Clancy had never been in a limousine in her life before. But she picked up the speaking-tube, which told its own purpose to her quick wit, and spoke to the chauffeur. The car moved toward Park Avenue, turned north, and stopped a dozen blocks above Forty-seventh Street.

One hour and a half later, Grannis left Miss Sally Henderson's offices. Behind him, Miss Henderson fingered a lease, signed by Grannis, and a check for eight hundred and fifty dollars, also signed by the moving-picture man.

"My dear," she said, "you're wonderful! You have passed the test."

"'Test?'" echoed Clancy innocently.

"I have only one," said Miss Henderson. "Results. You got them. How did you do it?"

Clancy shrugged carelessly.

"I don't know. I showed him the apartment. He liked it. That's all."

"You're engaged!" cried Miss Henderson.

"'Engaged?'"

"Yes—to work for me."

"But you engaged me before I went out with Mr. Grannis," said Clancy.

Miss Henderson smiled. Clancy discovered that those full lips could be as acidulous as they were sensuous.

"But not permanently, my dear. Oh, I may have talked about salaries and employing you and all that sort of thing, but—that was to give you confidence. If you'd failed in letting an apartment to Mr. Grannis—but you didn't, my dear." She turned to Guernsey. "If you had the pep of Miss Deane, Frank, you'd be running this business instead of working for me. Why don't you show some jazz?"

Guernsey shrugged.

"I'm not a pretty girl," he replied.

He left the office, and Miss Henderson looked Clancy over critically.

"Better call it a day, my dear, and run over to Forty-fifth Street and see my dressmaker. I'll 'phone her while you're on the way. Put yourself entirely in her hands, and I'll attend to the bill. Only—you promise to stay three months?"

"I promise," said Clancy.

Sally Henderson laughed.

"Then run along. Miss Conover. Jennie Conover. Number Sixty-three A West Forty-fifth. Take whatever she chooses for you. Good-by."

Clancy was crossing Fifth Avenue a moment later. She was as dazed as she'd been when Morris Beiner had made the engagement with Hildebloom, of the Rosebush studios. This amazing town, where some starved and others walked into fortune! This wondrous city that, when it smiled, smiled most wondrously, and, when it frowned, frowned most horrendously! But yesterday it had pursued her, threatened her with starvation, perhaps. The day before, it had promised her fame and fortune. To-day, it promised her, if neither fame nor fortune, at least more immediate money than she had ever earned in her life, and a chance for success that, while not dazzling, yet might be more permanent than anything that the stage could offer her.

She felt more safe, too, now that she had met one of the players in Zenda's poker game. Doubtless she could meet any of the rest of them, except Zenda himself, and escape recognition. The town no longer seemed small to her; it seemed vast again. It was quite improbable that she would ever again run across any of those few Broadwayites who knew her. At any rate, sufficient time would have elapsed

for the real murderer of Morris Beiner to have been apprehended. Up to now, oddly enough, she had not devoted much thought to the possible identity of the murderer. She had been too greatly concerned with her own peril, with the new interests that despite the peril, were so engrossing. Her meeting with Randall, her acquaintance with Sophie Carey, her new position—these had occupied most of her thoughts of the last twenty-four hours. Before that, for eight hours or so, she had been concerned with her danger. That danger had revived momentarily this afternoon; it had died away almost immediately. But the only way to remove the cause of the danger was to discover the identity of the person who had killed Morris Beiner.

She drew a deep breath. She couldn't do any investigating, even if she knew how, without subjecting herself to great risk. Still— She refused to think about the matter. Which is exactly what youth always does; it will not face the disagreeable, the threatening. And who shall say that it is not more sensible in this than age, which, knowing life's inevitability of act and consequence, is without hope?

She entered the establishment of Jennie Conover with that thrill which comes to every woman at her modiste's or furrier's or jeweler's. Clothes may not make the man, but they may mar the woman. Clancy knew that her clothes marred her. Miss Sally Henderson, whose own garb was nothing wonderful, but who apparently knew the things that were deemed fashionable, had said for Clancy to trust entirely to the judgment of Miss Conover. Clancy would do so.

Care, that had hovered about her, now resting on her slim shoulders, now apparently flying far off, suddenly seemed to have left her for good and all. It was discarded even as she discarded her coat suit, petticoat, and waist before the appraising eyes of Miss Conover, the plump, good-humored dressmaker to whom Miss Henderson had sent her.

But she donned these undistinguished garments an hour later. Also, she donned Care, the lying jade who had seemed to leave her. For, walking measuredly up and down, as though prepared to wait forever for her reappearance, was Grannis, the man whom she had been so certain had not recognized her earlier to-day.

She hesitated a moment upon the stoop of the building that had once been a private residence, then a boarding-house, and was now remodeled into intimate shops and tiny apartments. But Grannis had seen her; flight would merely postpone the inevitable. Bravely she descended the short flight of steps, and, as Grannis approached, she forced a smile to her white lips.

He stopped a yard away from her, studying her carefully with eyes that she suddenly sensed were near-sighted. His sallow, lean countenance was wrinkled with puzzlement.

"Miss Deane," he said slowly, "you told me this afternoon that we had not met before."

Clancy had not said anything of the sort. She had simply evaded a question with a nod of the head. But now she merely shrugged her shoulders. It was an almost despairing little shrug, pathetic, yet with defiance in it, too. It expressed her mental attitude. She was despairing; also she was defiant.

Grannis studied her a moment longer. Then, abruptly, he said:

"I haven't the best memory in the world, Miss Deane, but—from the moment I heard your voice to-day, I've been sure that we've met before. I know where, now. In fact, I'd hardly left you when I remembered. And I waited outside Miss Henderson's office and followed you. Isn't there some place where we can go and talk?"

"You seem to be talking quite clearly here," said Clancy. She knew that her cheeks were white and that her voice trembled, but her eyes never left the eyes of Grannis.

The tall, thin moving-picture magnate shrugged his narrow shoulders. But his shrug was not like Clancy's. It was neither despairing, nor pathetic, nor defiant. It was careless.

"Just as you say, of course, Miss Deane. Only—there are pleasanter places than a police station. Don't you think so?"

Clancy gasped. She seemed to grow cold all over, then hot. Then she felt as if about to faint. She gripped herself with an effort that would have done credit to a woman ten years older.

"All right," she said. "Where shall we go?"

X

Grannis turned abruptly to the east. It would have been quite easy, Clancy thought, to slip away and lose herself in the crowd that swarmed upon Fifth

Avenue. But she had common sense. She knew that ahead of every flight waits the moment of pause, and that when she paused, Grannis or Zenda or the police would catch up with her; And—she had no money. Unless she chose to starve, she must return to-morrow, or the next day to Miss Sally Henderson's office. There, Grannis would be waiting for her. Besides, he had already threatened, "Pleasanter places than a police station!"

A police station!

What courage she had mustered to meet Grannis' first words had evaporated as she followed him meekly up three steps and through the revolving door of a restaurant.

Within was a narrow hall, the further side of which was framed by glass windows that ran to the ceiling, and through which was visible a dining-room whose most conspicuous decorations were tubs of plants. At one end of the hall was a grill, and at the other end was another restaurant.

Grannis turned to a check-boy and surrendered his hat and coat. He threw a question at Clancy.

"Powder your nose?" He took it for granted that she would, and said: "I'll be up-stairs. Tea-room."

He sauntered toward an elevator without a glance at her. A maid showed Clancy to a dressing-room. She learned what she had not happened to discover at the Château de la Reine three nights ago—that every well-appointed New York restaurant has a complete supply of powder and puffs and rouge and whatever other cosmetics may be required.

She looked at herself in the mirror. She had never rouged in her life, considering it one of those acts the commission of which definitely establishes a woman as not being "good." So, even though her usually brilliant skin was pale with apprehension, she refused the maid's offer of artificial coloring. But she did use the powder.

Up-stairs she hesitated timidly on the threshold of the tea-room. An orchestra was playing, and a score of couples were dancing. This was Fifth Avenue, and a word overheard in the dressing-room had informed her that this restaurant was Ferroni's, one of the most famous, she believed, in the world. In her unsophistication—for Clancy was sophisticated only within certain definite limits; she could take care of herself in any conflict with a man, but would be, just now, helpless in the hands of a worldly woman—she supposed that Ferroni's

patronage was drawn from the most exclusive of New York's society. Yet the people here seemed to be of about the same class as those who had been at the Château de la Reine on Monday night. They were just as noisy, just as quiet. The women were just as much painted, just as daring in the display of their limbs. They smoked when they weren't dancing.

Clancy would soon learn that the difference between Broadway and Fifth Avenue is something that puzzles students of New York, and that most students arrive at the conclusion that the only difference is that the Avenue has more money and has had it longer. Arriving at that truth, it is simple of comprehension that money makes society. There is a pleasant fiction, to which Clancy in her Maine rearing had given credence, that it takes generations to make that queer thing known as a "society" man or woman. She did not realize that all the breeding in the world will not make a cad anything but a cad, or a loose woman anything but a loose woman.

She had expected that persons who danced on Fifth Avenue would have round them some visible, easily discernible aura of gentility. For, of course, she thought that a "society man" must necessarily be a gentleman. But, so far as she could see, the only difference between this gathering and the gathering at Zenda's Broadway party was that the latter contained more beautiful women, and that the men had been better dancers.

The music suddenly stopped, and at that instant she saw Grannis sitting at a table across the room. Timidly she advanced toward him, but her timidity was in no wise due to her association with him. It was a shyness born of lack of confidence. She was certain that her shoes clattered upon the waxed floor and that every woman who noticed her smiled with amused contempt at her frock. These things, because Clancy was young, were of more importance than the impending interview with Grannis.

"That rouge becomes you," said Grannis brusquely, as she sat down in the chair beside him.

Clancy stared at him. She did not know that embarrassment had restored color to her cheeks.

"I never rouge," she replied curtly.

"Oh, well, don't get mad about it. I don't care a rap whether you do or don't," he said. "Only, you're looking prettier than a while ago." He eyed her closely. His near-sighted eyes took on an expression of personal interest. Heretofore, his expression had been impersonal. But now she felt that Grannis was conscious

that she was a young girl, not bad to look upon. She resented it. Perhaps Grannis caught that resentment. He picked up a menu.

"Eat?" he asked.

He was a monosyllabic sort of person, Clancy decided, frugal of words. Something inside her bade her be cautious. Those who are frugal of speech force others to be wasteful, and Clancy, in so far as, in her chaotic mental state, she had arrived at any decision, had decided to commit herself as little as possible. If she was to be accused of the murder of Morris Beiner, the less she said the better.

But the one-word questions demanded an answer. She suddenly realized that excitement had temporarily made her forget hunger. But hunger forgotten is not hunger overcome. She hadn't eaten since breakfast. Yet, because of the social timidity that had made her walk mincingly across the room, she said she preferred that Grannis should order. Clancy was only four days away from Maine, where it is still not considered too well bred to declare that one is famished.

Fortunately, however, Grannis was hungry. He ordered sandwiches—several varieties—and a pot of tea. Then he looked at Clancy. She was experiencing various emotions to-day, many of them survivals of age-old instinct. Now she felt suddenly conscious that Grannis was dishonest.

"Dance?" Grannis asked. She shook her head. "Been in the city long?"

"Not very," she replied.

"Not living at the Napoli any more, eh?" She shook her head again. "Seen Fay to-day? Fay Marston?" Once more she shook her head. "Don't feel like talking, eh?" She shrugged. "Oh, well, there's no hurry. I can wait——"

She did not learn what Grannis would wait for, because the arrival of the waiter stopped Grannis's speech. She hoped that her face did not show her anxiety, not about his questioning, but about the food. The instinct that told her that Grannis was dishonest also told her that one need not fear greatly a dishonest person. She began, as the waiter arranged the service, to analyze Grannis's actions. If he knew of her visits to Beiner, why did he bring her here? Why didn't he denounce her to the police? The question answered itself. He knew nothing of those visits.

Her hands were steady as she reached for the tea-pot. She poured it with a grace that caught Grannis's attention.

"Wish to God that was something you could teach a woman who never had any

real bringing-up. Trouble with pictures is the same trouble that's the matter with everything else in this world—the people in them. How can you teach a girl that ain't a lady to act like one? You could get money just for that way you handle that tea. Never thought of trying pictures, did you?"

"Not—seriously," said Clancy.

"Pretty good graft you got at Miss Henderson's, I suppose. Ike Weber steer you against it?"

Clancy bit into a sardine sandwich in a leisurely manner. She swallowed, then drank some tea. Then, in a careless tone, she replied:

"Mr. Weber never steered me against anything. I never met him until the night of Mr. Zenda's party. And I haven't seen him since."

"You'd stick to that—in a court-room?"

Clancy laughed. "I'll never have to, will I?"

Into Grannis's dull eyes crept admiration.

"Kid, I'm for you," he said. Clancy shrugged again. Although no one had ever commented on it, she knew that her shrug was a prettily provocative thing. "Don't care whether I'm for you or not, eh?"

Clancy stared at him. "You know," he said, "if I tipped off this Miss Henderson that Weber planted you with her so's you could steer suckers—wealthy folks that don't mind a little game—his way, how long do you think your graft would last?"

"You'd have to prove what you said, you know," Clancy reminded him.

"Kid, why haven't you been round to see Zenda?" he asked.

"Why should I go round to see him?"

Grannis's eyes took on a cunning look.

"Now you're talking business. We're getting down to cases. Listen, kid: You were scared of me a while ago. You've forgotten that. Why?" Clancy reached for another sandwich. She made no answer. "You're certainly there, kid!" exclaimed her companion. "No one is running a blazer on you, are they?"

"No one is fooling me, if that's what you mean," said Clancy.

"You've said it! Well, I won't try to bluff you, kid. I've found you. It's a lucky chance, and I don't deserve any credit for it, but—I found you—before Zenda did. Before Ike did, if it comes to that. And Ike's the guy that wants you. I been

feeling you out, to find out where you stood. I know that Ike didn't plant you with Miss Henderson. I dunno how you got in there. All Fay knows of you is that you were living at the Napoli, and were going in the movies, she thought. But Fay's a blab-mouth, and Ike and I know what she told you—about her and Ike working together to gyp people in poker games. Well, Ike figures that, as long as you disappear, he should worry, but when I run into you to-day, I begin to wonder. Now I see that you're no boob. Well then, take a look at that!"

"That" was a bill. The denomination was the largest Clancy had ever seen on a piece of money. One thousand dollars! And Grannis placed it on the table by her plate.

"Slip it into your kick, kid. There's more where it came from. Put it away before the waiter sees it. Understand?" Clancy didn't understand, and her face showed it. "Weber is coming back to town," said Grannis. "He can't come back if there's real evidence against him. The only *real* evidence is what Fay Marston told you. Can you keep your mouth shut?"

Clancy stared at him. Grannis grinned. He entirely misunderstood her bewilderment. He rose suddenly, placing a five-dollar bill on the table.

"I'm in a hurry. That's for the tea. So long, kid." He walked away, leaving Clancy staring at the thousand-dollar bill.

XI

It was more difficult to leave Ferroni's than it had been to enter it. It was Clancy's first experience in a restaurant that, she assumed—and correctly enough—was a fashionable one. And it was not merely the paying of the obsequious waiter that flustered Clancy. She felt like a wallflower at a college dance. Conscious that her clothing was not modish, she had slipped timidly across the room to join Grannis. Now, having tipped the waiter, she must walk lonesomely across the room to the door, certain that everyone present was sneering inwardly at the girl whose cavalier had deserted her.

For Clancy was like most other girls—a mixture of timidity and conceit. She knew that she was beautiful; likewise, she knew that she was ugly. With a man along, admiration springing from his eyes—Clancy felt assured. Alone, running the gantlet of observation—she felt hobbledehoyish, deserted.

As a matter of fact, people *were* looking at her. Neither the cheap hat nor her demoded coiffure could hide the satiny luster of her black hair. Embarrassment lent added brilliance to her wonderful skin, and the awkwardness that self-consciousness always brings in its train could not rob her walk of its lissom grace. She almost ran the last few steps of her journey across the room, and seeing a flight of stairs directly before her, hastened down them, not waiting for the elevator.

She walked rapidly the few steps from the entrance to Ferroni's to Fifth Avenue, then turned south. The winter twilight, which is practically no twilight at all, had ended. The darkness brought security to Clancy. Also the chill air brought coolness to a forehead that had been flushed by youth's petty alarms.

It did more than that; it gave her perspective. She laughed, a somewhat cynical note in her mirth, which Zenith had never heard from the pretty lips of Clancy Deane. With a charge of murder in prospect, she had let herself be concerned over such matters as the fit of a skirt, the thickness of the soles of her shoes, the casual opinions of staring persons whom she probably would never see again, much less know.

She had placed Grannis's thousand-dollar bill in her pocketbook. She clasped the receptacle tightly as she crossed Forty-second Street, battling, upon the sidewalks and curbs, with the throng of commuters headed for the Grand Central Station. For a moment she was occupied in making her way through it, but another block down the avenue brought her to a backwater in the six-o'clock throng. She sauntered more slowly now, after the fashion of people who are engaged in thought.

Her instinct had been correct—Grannis was dishonest. His gift of a thousand dollars proved that. But why the gift? He knew, of course, that she was aware of his partnership with Zenda. His statement that he didn't want Zenda to know that he had seen her had been proof of his assumption of her knowledge of the partnership that existed between himself and the famous director. Then why did he dare do something that indicated disloyalty to his associate?

Why hadn't she made him take the money back? He had every right to assume that she was as dishonest as she seemed. She had permitted him to leave without protest. Further, with the five-dollar bill that he had put upon the table, she had paid the check. She made a mental note of the amount of the bill. Three dollars; and she had given the waiter fifty cents. One dollar and seventy-five cents, then —an exact half of the bill she owed to Grannis. She wouldn't let such a man buy

her tea. Also, the change from the five-dollar bill, one dollar and a half. Three dollars and a quarter in all. Plus, of course, the thousand.

She felt tears, vexatious tears, in her eyes. She was in a mood when it would have been easy for her to slap a man's face. She had never done such a thing in her life—at least, not since a little child, and then it had been the face of a boy, not a man. But now, once again, minor things assumed the ascendency in her thoughts.

For even Grannis's attempt to bribe her—that was what it was—was a minor matter compared to the Beiner murder. She wondered what the evening papers would have to say further about that mystery.

A newsboy crying an extra at Thirty-fourth Street sold her a paper. She wanted to open it at once, but, somehow, she feared that reading a newspaper on a cold wintry evening would be most conspicuous on Fifth Avenue.

Even when she had secured a seat on a down-town 'bus, she was half afraid to open the paper. But, considering that practically everyone else in the vehicle was reading, she might safely open hers.

She found what she was looking for without difficulty. Her eyes were keen and the name "Beiner" leaped at her from an inside page. But the reporters had discovered nothing new to add to the morning account. A theory, half-heartedly advanced by the police, that possibly Beiner had killed himself was contradicted by the findings of the coroner, but if the police had any inkling as to the identity of the murderer, they had not confided in the reporters.

That was all. She began to feel justified in her course. To have gone to the police would have meant, even though the police had believed her story, scandal of the most hideous sort. She would have been compelled to tell that Beiner had embraced her, had tried to kiss, had— She remembered the look in the murdered man's eyes, and blushed hotly at the recollection. She would never have been able to hold her head up again. For she knew that the uncharitable world always says, when a man has insulted a woman, "Well, she must have done *something herself* to make him act that way."

But now she supposed, optimistically, that there must have been, in Beiner's desk, scores of letters and cards of introduction. Why on earth should she have worried herself by thinking that Fanchon DeLisle's card of introduction would have assumed any importance to the police? No matter what investigation the police set on foot, it would hardly be based on the fact that they had found Fanchon's card.

So then, as she had avoided discovery by the mere fact of not having gone to the police, and had thus avoided scandal, and as there was no prospect of discovery, she could congratulate herself on having shown good sense. That she had lost a matter of six hundred and fifty dollars, deposited in the Thespian Bank, was nothing. A good name is worth considerably more than that. Further, she might reasonably dare to withdraw that money—what of it she needed, at any rate—from the bank now. If the police had not by this time discovered the connection between Fanchon's card of introduction and the woman who had been observed upon the fire-escape of the Heberworth Building, they surely never would discover it.

The pocketbook in her hand no longer burned her. There was now no question about her returning Grannis's bribe. In fact, there never had been any question of this. But Clancy was one of those singularly honest persons who are given to self-analysis. Few of us are willing to do that, and still fewer are capable of doing it.

She wondered if it would not be best to do now what she should have done last Tuesday morning. If she went to Zenda and told him what Fay Marston had said to her, she would be doing Zenda a great favor. She was human. She could not keep from her thoughts the possibility of Zenda's returning that favor. And the only return of that favor for which she would ask, the only one that she'd accept, would be an opportunity in the films. The career which she had come to New York to adopt, and which rude chance had torn away from her, was capable of restoration now.

She had fled from Zenda's apartment because scandal had frightened her. The presence of a graver scandal had almost obliterated her fear of the first. She'd go to Zenda, tell him that his partner was deceiving him, plotting against him.

She could hardly wait to take off her coat when she reached her room in Mrs. Gerund's lodging-house. Using some of the note-paper that sold in Zenith as the last word in quiet luxury, she wrote to Zenda:

> MY DEAR MR. ZENDA: I was frightened Monday night at your apartment, and so I ran away. But to-day Mr. Grannis saw me and talked to me and gave me a thousand dollars. He said that Mr. Weber could not return to New York while there was any real evidence against him, and that, as I had been told by Miss Marston that she was really Mr. Weber's wife and that she helped him in his card-cheating, I must keep my mouth shut. He said that he didn't want you to know that he had met me. I think you ought to know that

Mr. Grannis is on Mr. Weber's side, and if you wish me to, I will call and tell you all that I know.

truly,

DEANE.

In the telephone book down-stairs, under "Zenda Films," she found the address of his office on West Forty-fifth Street, and addressed the letter there.

Then she wrote to Grannis. She enclosed the thousand-dollar bill that he had given her. Her letter was a model of simplicity.

MY DEAR MR. GRANNIS:

I think you made a mistake.

Yours truly, CLANCY DEANE.

She addressed the letter to Grannis in care of the Zenda Films and then sealed them both. As she applied the stamps to the envelopes, she wondered whether or not she should have signed her name in the Zenda letter, "Florine Ladue."

She had thoroughly convinced herself that she had nothing to fear from the use of that name. The frights of yesterday and to-day were vanished.

Still, she had dropped the name of "Florine Ladue" as suddenly as she had assumed it. Zenda would write or telephone for her. If she signed herself as "Florine Ladue," she'd have to tell Mrs. Gerand about her *nom de théâtre*. And Clancy was the kind that keeps its business closely to itself. She was, despite her Irish strain, distinctly a New England product in this respect—as canny as a Scotchman.

So it was as "Clancy Deane" that she sent the letters. She walked to the corner of Thompson Street, found a letter-box, and then returned to the lodging-house. Up-stairs again, she heard the clang of the telephone-bell below. Her door was open, and she heard Mrs. Gerand answering.

She heard her name called aloud. She leaped from the chair; her hand went to her bosom. Then she laughed. She'd given Miss Sally Henderson her address and Mrs. Gerand's 'phone-number to-day. She managed to still the tumultuous beating of her heart before she reached the telephone. Then she smiled at her

alarms. It was Mrs. Carey.

"Do be a dear thing, Miss Deane," she said. "I'm giving an impromptu dance at the studio, and I want you to come over."

Clancy was delighted.

"What time?" she asked.

"Oh, come along over now and dine with me. My guests won't arrive until ten, but there's lots of fixing to be done, and you look just the sort of girl that would be good at that. Sally Henderson's been telling me what a wonder you are. Right away?"

"As soon as I can dress," said Clancy. Her step was as light as her heart as she ran up-stairs.

XII

On Monday night, Clancy had had her introduction to metropolitan night life. She didn't know, of course, what sort of party Sophie Carey would give. It probably would differ somewhat from Zenda's affair at the Château de la Reine. Probably—because Mrs. Carey was a painter of great distinction—there would be more of what Clancy chose to denominate as "society" present. Wherefore she knew that her gray foulard was distinctly not *au fait*.

Having hastily donned the gown, she scrutinized herself distastefully in the mirror, and was unhappy.

For a moment, she thought of telephoning Mrs. Carey and offering some hastily conceived excuse. Then she reflected. David Randall would perhaps be at the party. Clancy had had a unique experience as regards New York men thus far. They had proved inimical to her—all except Randall. He had shown, in the unsubtle masculine ways which are so legible to women, that he had conceived for her one of those sudden attachments that are flattering to feminine vanity. She wanted to see him. And she was honest enough to admit to herself that one of her reasons for wishing to see him had nothing to do with herself. She wanted to observe him with Sophie Carey, to watch his attitude toward her. For, vaguely, she had sensed that Sophie Carey was interested in young Randall. But she tried to put this idea, born of a strange jealousy that she hated to admit, away from

her. Mrs. Carey had been an angel to her.

She shrugged. If they didn't like her, they could leave her. About her neck she fastened a thin gold chain, and carefully adjusted the little gold locket that contained a lock of her mother's hair, upon her bosom. She gave a last look at herself, picked up her cheap little blue coat, turned off the electric light, and ran lightly down-stairs.

Mrs. Gerand was in the front hall. Her sharp features softened as she viewed Clancy.

"Party?" she asked.

"Dinner—and dance," said Clancy.

Mrs. Gerand had come from the kitchen to answer the door-bell. She wore an apron, on which she now wiped her hands.

"It's snowing. You oughta have a taxi," she said.

Clancy's jaw dropped in dismay. Even including the change from the five-dollar bill that Grannis had left upon the table—she suddenly realized that she hadn't sent Grannis this money—she had only about seven dollars. Then her face brightened. She had convinced herself that on the morrow it would be perfectly safe to withdraw some of the funds that stood in the Thespian Bank to the credit of Florine Ladue.

And, anyway, it would have been poor economy to ruin the only pair of slippers fit for evening wear that she owned to save a taxi-fare. The snow was swirling through the street as Clancy ran down the steps to the waiting taxi-cab. It was, though she didn't know it, the beginning of a blizzard that was to give the winter of Nineteen-twenty a special prominence. In the cab Clancy wondered if the snow that had fallen upon her hair would melt and disarrange her coiffure. And when Mrs. Carey opened the door herself on Clancy's arrival at the studio-house in Waverly Place, she noticed the girl's hands patting the black mass and laughed.

"Don't bother about it, my dear," she advised. "I want to fix it for you myself after dinner."

She took Clancy's coat from her and hung it in a closet.

"Usually," she said, "I have a maid to attend to these things, but this is Thursday, and she's off for the day."

Clancy suddenly remembered Mrs. Carey's talk of the morning.

"But your cook——"

Mrs. Carey shrugged. They were shoulders well worth shrugging. And the blue gown that her hostess wore this evening revealed even more than the black gown of the Trevor last night.

"Still sick," laughed Mrs. Carey. "That's why I'm giving a party. I like to prove that I'm not dependent on my servants. And I'm not. Of course"—and she chuckled—"I'm dependent upon caterers and that sort of thing, but still—I deceive myself into thinking I'm independent. Self-deception is God's kindest gift to humanity."

She was even more beautiful than last night, Clancy thought. Then she felt a sudden sinking of the heart. If Sophie Carey, with her genius, her fame, her *savoir-faire*, her beauty, *wanted* David Randall— She shook her head in angry self-rebuke as she followed Mrs. Carey to the tiny dining-room.

Clancy had never seen such china or silver. And the dinner was, from grapefruit to coffee, quite the most delicious meal that Clancy had ever eaten. Her hostess hardly spoke throughout the dinner, and Clancy was ill at ease, thinking that Mrs. Carey's silence was due to her own inability to talk. The older woman read her thoughts.

"I'm frequently this way, Miss Deane," she laughed, as she poured coffee from a silver pot that was as exquisite in its simplicity of design as some ancient vase. "You mustn't blame yourself. Work went wrong to-day—it often does. I can't talk. I felt blue; so I telephoned half New York and invited it to dance with me to-night. And then I wanted company for dinner, and I picked on you, because my intimate friends won't permit me to be rude to them. And I knew you would. And I won't be any more. Have a cigarette?"

Clancy shook her head.

"I never smoke," she admitted.

"It's lost a lot of its fascination since it became proper," said Mrs. Carey. "However, I like it. It does me good. Drink? I didn't offer you a cocktail, because I ain't got none. I didn't believe it possible that prohibition would really come, and I was fooled. But I have some liqueurs?" Clancy shook her head. Mrs. Carey clapped her hands. "Don will adore you!" she cried. "He loves simplicity, primeval innocence—I hope you break his heart, Miss Deane."

"I hope so, too, if it will please you," smiled Clancy. "Who is Don?"

"My husband," said Mrs. Carey. "If I can't find some one new, fresh, for him to fall in love with, he'll be insisting on returning to me, and I can't have him around. I'm too busy."

Clancy gasped.

"You're joking, of course?"

Mrs. Carey's eyebrows lifted.

"Deed and deedy I'm *not* joking," she said. "I haven't seen Don for seven months. Last time, he promised me faithfully that he'd go to Reno and charge me with desertion or something like that. I thought he'd done it. I might have known better. He's been paying attentive court to a young lady on Broadway. He telephoned me this afternoon, demanding my sympathy because the young woman had eloped with her press-agent. He insisted on coming down here and letting me hold his hand and place cold cloths on his fevered brow." She laughed and rose from the table. "I'm going to saw him off on you, Miss Deane."

Clancy was like a peony. Mrs. Carey came round the table and threw an arm about her.

"Don't take me too seriously, Miss Deane. I talk and I talk, and when one talks too much, one talks too wildly. Sometimes, when I think upon the foolishness of youth— Don't you marry too soon, Miss Deane."

"I won't!" exclaimed Clancy.

Mrs. Carey laughed.

"Oh, but you will! But we won't argue about it." She stepped away a pace from Clancy. Her eyes narrowed as she stared. "I wonder," she said, "if you're a very —touchy—person."

Clancy hoped that she wasn't, and said so.

"Because," said Sophie Carey, "I've taken an—does it sound too patronizing? Well, no matter. I'm interested in you, Miss Deane. I want you to be a success. Will you let me dress you? Just for to-night? I have a yellow gown up-stairs. Let me see your feet."

Clancy surrendered to the mood of her hostess. She held out her gray-clad foot. Mrs. Carey nodded.

"The slipper will fit. Let's go up."

"Let's!" said Clancy excitedly.

Mrs. Carey's bedroom was furnished in a style that Clancy had never dreamed of. But the impression of the furnishings, the curtains and rugs and lacy pillows —this vanished before the display that the closet afforded. Gown after gown, filmy, almost intangible in their exquisite delicacy— She offered no objection as Sophie Carey unhooked her gray foulard. She slipped into the yellow-silk dress with her heart beating in wild excitement.

In the mirror, after yellow stockings and slippers to match, with bright rhinestone buckles, had been put on, she looked at herself. She blushed until her bosom, her back even, were stained. What *would* they think in Zenith? She turned, and, by the aid of a hand-mirror, saw her back. A V ran down almost to the waist-line.

"Satisfied?" asked Mrs. Carey.

Clancy ran to her hostess. She threw her arms round Sophie Carey's neck and kissed her. Mrs. Carey laughed.

"That kiss, my dear, is for yourself. But I thank you just the same."

Down-stairs, the door-bell tinkled.

"You'll have to answer it," said Mrs. Carey.

XIII

The opened door admitted more than David Randall. It let in a snowy gust that beat upon Clancy's bosom, rendering her more conscious than even a masculine presence could that the dress she wore was new to her experience. Randall was almost blown through the doorway. He turned and forced the door closed. Turning again, he recognized Clancy, who had retreated, a pink picture of embarrassment, to the foot of the staircase.

"Do I frighten you?" he asked dryly.

Clancy recovered the self-possession that never deserted her for long.

"No one does that," she retorted.

"I believe you," said Randall. His good-humored face wore a slightly pathetic

expression. If no man is a hero to his valet, still less is he to the woman for whom he has conceived a sudden devotion which is as yet unreturned.

Clancy dropped him a courtesy.

"Thank you," she said, "for believing me."

He moved toward her, holding out his big hands. Clancy permitted them to envelop one of hers. Randall bowed over it. His face, when he lifted it, was red.

Blushes are as contagious as measles. Clancy was grateful for the cry from above.

"Miss Deane," called Sophie Carey, "who is it?"

"Mr. Randall," Clancy called back.

"Send him into the dining-room. Tell him that there are no cocktails, but Scotch and soda are on the sideboard. Come up, won't you? And tell David to answer the door-bell."

Clancy turned to Randall. His mouth sagged open the least bit. He looked disappointed.

"Don't mind," she whispered. "We'll have it by and by."

"Have what?" he asked blankly.

"The *tête-à-tête* you want." She laughed. Then she wheeled and ran up the stairs, leaving him staring after her, wondering if she were the sweetly simple country maiden that she had appeared last night, or a wise coquette.

Mrs. Carey, still in the bedroom, where she was, by twisting her lithe, luscious figure, managing to hook up her dress in the back, smiled at Clancy's entrance.

"Is he overwhelmed?" she asked.

Clancy grinned entrancingly. Then she became suddenly demure.

"He—liked me," she admitted.

"He would; they all would," said Mrs. Carey.

She managed the last hook as Clancy offered her aid. She glanced at herself in the mirror, wriggled until the blue frock set more evenly over the waist-line, then turned to Clancy.

"Your hair—I said I'd fix it. Come here," she commanded.

Meekly, Clancy obeyed.

Deftly, Mrs. Carey unfastened Clancy's hair. It was of a soft texture, hung softly to her hips, and seemed, despite its softness, to have an electric, flashing quality. Mrs. Carey's eyes lighted. She was, primarily, an artist. Which means that people were rarely individuals to her. They were subjects. Clancy was a subject now. And a satisfying subject, Mrs. Carey thought, for if the girl had been transformed by the low-cut evening gown, so, by the severe coiffure that her hostess rearranged, was she even more transformed. Mrs. Carey looked at her and shook her head.

"The baby stare went out of fashion on the day that the baby vampire came in," she said. "But you've achieved a combination, Miss Deane."

"Vampires" were not popular in Zenith. Clancy did not know whether to be shocked or pleased. She decided to be pleased.

The door-bell had rung several times during the process of fixing Clancy's hair, and from the down-stairs part of the house came occasional gleeful shouts. Now Mrs. Carey and Clancy descended. They entered the dining-room. A stout, bald gentleman, who, Clancy would learn later, was a Supreme Court judge, lifted a glass and toasted Mrs. Carey.

"Our lovely hostess. May her eyes always be dry, but her cellar never!"

Mrs. Carey laughed.

"You are committing a crime, Judge," she said.

"But not vandalism, Mrs. Carey," he retorted. "Some day, the seekers of evil where there is none are coming to this house. They are going to raid you, Mrs. Carey. And what liquor they find here they will pour into the gutters."

He beamed upon Clancy, set down his glass, and advanced to her.

"Little stranger," he said, "there are many wicked, wicked men in this room to-night. I don't know where Mrs. Carey finds them or why she associates with them. Let us go into a corner while I explain to you why you should know no one in this vile city but myself."

A portly, good-humored-looking woman, who seemed to be bursting from her corsage, tapped the judge on the shoulder.

"Tom, you behave," she said.

The judge sighed. He took Clancy's unresisting hand and lifted it to his lips. His

wife, the portly woman, snatched Clancy's hand away.

"Don't pay any attention to him," she said. "He's really an old, old man approaching senility. I know, because I'm married to him. I myself, when a deluded young girl, decided to be a rich old man's darling instead of a poor young man's slave. It was a mistake," she whispered hoarsely. "Youth should never be tied to age."

The judge inflated his huge chest.

"Miss—Miss——"

"Miss Deane," said Sophie Carey; "Judge and Mrs. Walbrough."

Clancy, a bit fussed by the judge's heavy good humor, managed to bow.

"Ah—Miss Deane!" said the judge. "Well, Miss Deane, if you are as sensible as, despite your beauty, you seem to be, you will pay no attention to the maunderings of the woman who calls herself my wife. As a matter of fact, though she does not suspect it, I married her out of pity. She was much older than myself, and possessed a large fortune, which she did not know how to administer. And so I——"

Mrs. Walbrough took Clancy's hand. She pushed her husband away. And Clancy noticed that the hand that pushed lingered to caress. She suddenly adored the judge and loved his wife.

From up-stairs sounded now the barbaric strains of "Vamp."

Randall, who had been hovering near, rushed to her.

"The first dance? Please, Miss Deane!"

Mrs. Walbrough smiled.

"Don't forget to give one to Tom by and by," she said.

"Indeed I won't," promised Clancy.

She and Randall were the first couple to reach the studio. The easels had been removed, and chairs were lined against the walls. At the far end of the room, behind some hastily imported tubs of plants, was a negro orchestra of four men. Into the steps of the fox-trot Randall swung her.

He was not an extremely good dancer. That is, he knew few steps. But he had a sense of rhythm, the dancer's most valuable asset, and he was tall enough, so that their figures blended well. Clancy enjoyed the dance.

Before they had finished, the room was thronged. Mrs. Carey, Clancy decided, must be extremely popular. For Randall knew many of the guests, and their names were familiar, from newspaper reading, even to Clancy Deane, from far-off Zenith. She was extremely interested in seeing people who had been mere names to her. It was interesting to know that a man who drew what Clancy thought were the most beautiful girls in the world was an undistinguished-appearing bald man. It was thrilling to look at a multimillionaire, even though he wore a rather stupid grin on a rather stupid face; to see a great editor, a famous author, a woman whose name was known on two continents for her gorgeous entertainments, an ex-mayor of the city. A score of celebrities danced, laughed, and made merry. And Sophie Carey had managed to summon this crowd upon almost a moment's notice. She must be more than popular; she must be a power. And this popular power had chosen to befriend Clancy Deane, the undistinguished Clancy Deane, a nobody from Zenith, Maine!

Randall surrendered her, after the first dance, to Judge Walbrough. Like most fat men who can dance at all, he danced extremely well. And Clancy found his flowery compliments amusing.

Then Sophie Carey brought forward a young man of whose interested regard Clancy had been conscious for several minutes. He was good-looking, with a mouth whose firmness verged on stubbornness. His dinner jacket sat snugly upon broad shoulders. He wore glasses that did not entirely disguise the fact that his eyes were gray and keen. A most presentable young man, it was not his youth or good looks that compared favorably with Randall's similar qualities, that thrilled Clancy; it was the name that he bore—Vandervent.

"Our famous district attorney," Sophie Carey said, as she presented him. All America had read of the appointment of Philip Vandervent to an assistant district attorneyship. Scion of a family notable in financial and social annals, the fact that he had chosen to adopt the legal profession, instead of becoming the figurehead president of half a dozen trust companies, had been a newspaper sensation five years ago. And three months ago not a paper in the United States had failed to carry the news that he had been appointed an assistant to the district attorney of New York County.

Almost any girl would have been thrilled at meeting Philip Vandervent. And for Clancy Deane, from a little fishing-village in Maine, dancing with him was a distinction that she had never dreamed of achieving.

They slid easily into a one-step, and for one circuit of the room Vandervent said

nothing. Then, suddenly, he remarked that she danced well, adding thereto his opinion that most girls didn't.

He spoke nervously; an upward glance confirmed Clancy in an amazing impression, an impression that, when she had observed him staring at her as she danced, she had put down to her own vanity. But now she decided that a Vandervent was as easily conquerable as a Randall. And the thought was extremely agreeable.

"I suppose," she said, "that the district attorney's office is an interesting place."

It was a banal remark, but his own nervousness confused her, and she must say *something*. So she said this desperately. Usually she was at home when flirtation began. But the Vandervent name awed her.

"Not very," he said. "Not unless one *makes* it interesting. That's what I've decided to do. I started something to-day that ought to be interesting. Very."

"What is it?" asked Clancy. "Or shouldn't I ask?"

Vandervent caught her eyes as he reversed. He looked swiftly away again.

"Oh, I wouldn't mind telling *you*," he said.

Clancy knew that Vandervent intended flirtation—in the way of all men, using exactly the same words, the same emphasis on the objective personal pronoun.

"I'd love to hear it," she said. And she cast him an upward glance that might have meant anything, but that really meant that Clancy Deane enjoyed flirtation.

"Difficulty in our office," said Vandervent jerkily, "is lack of cooperation with us by the police. Different political parties. Police lie down often. Doing it now on the Beiner murder."

"On what?" Clancy almost shrieked the question. Luckily, the negro musicians were blaring loudly. Vandervent didn't notice her excitement.

"The Beiner mystery," he repeated. "They don't usually lie down on a murder. Fact is, I don't really mean that now. But there's inefficiency. We're going to show them up."

"How?" asked Clancy. Her throat was dry; her lips seemed as though they were cracked.

"By catching the murderess," said Vandervent.

"'Murderess?'" All the fears that had departed from Clancy returned to her,

magnified.

Vandervent enjoyed the effect of his speech.

"Yes; a woman did it. And we know her name."

"You do?" Once again the young man thought her excitement due to admiration.

"Yes. I'm taking personal charge of the case. Discovered a card of introduction to Beiner. Only one we could find in his desk. Right out on top, too, as though he'd just placed it there. Of course, we may be all wrong, but—we'll know better to-morrow."

"So soon?" asked Clancy. Her feet were leaden.

"I hope so. We've found out the company that the woman who gave the card of introduction is playing in. We've sent a wire to her asking her to tell us where we can find the woman, Florine Ladue."

"Are—are you sure?" asked Clancy.

"Sure of what? That the Ladue woman committed the murder? Well, no. But a woman escaped through the window of Beiner's office—you've read the case? Well, she ran down the fire-escape and then entered the Heberworth Building by another window. Why did she do it? We want to ask her that. Of course, this Ladue woman may not be the one, but if she isn't, she can easily prove it." The music ceased. "I say, I shouldn't talk so much. You understand that——"

"Oh, I sha'n't repeat it," said Clancy. She marveled at the calm, the lightness with which she spoke.

Repeat it? If Vandervent could only know the grimness of the humor in which she uttered the promise! If this young multimillionaire whom she had been captivating by her grace and beauty only knew that the woman whom he had sought had been in his arms these past ten minutes! In cynicism, she forgot alarm. But only for a moment. It came racing back to her.

And she'd written to Zenda! He'd look her up to-morrow. What a fool she'd been! Her face was haggard, almost old, as she surrendered herself to the arms of Randall.

XIV

Not nearly enough admiration has been granted by the male human to the most remarkable quality possessed by the human female—her ability to recuperate. Man worships the heroic virtues in man. But in woman he worships the intangible thing called charm, the fleeting thing called beauty. Man hates to concede that woman is his superior in anything, wherefore even that well-known ability of hers to endure suffering he brushes aside as inconsequential, giving credit to Mother Nature. Possibly Mother Nature does deserve the credit. Still, man has no quality that he has bestowed upon himself. Yet that does not prevent him from being proud of the physique that he inherited from his grandfather, the brain that he inherited from his father, or the wit that descended to him from some other ancestor.

So may women justly be proud of their recuperative powers. For these powers are more than physical. Thousands of years of child-bearing, of undergoing an agony that in each successive generation, because of corsets, because of silly notions of living, of too much work or too little work, has become more poignant, have had their effect upon the female character.

If the baby dies, father is prostrated. It is mother who attends to all the needful details, although her own sense of loss, of unbearable grief, is greater, perhaps, than her husband's. If father loses his job, he mopes in despair; it is mother who encourages him, who wears a smiling face, even though the problem of existence seems more unsolvable to her than to him.

It does not do to attribute this quality to women's histrionic ability. For the histrionism is due to the quality, not the obverse. It was not acting that made Clancy smile coquettishly up into Randall's lowering visage as he swept her away from Vandervent. It was courage—the sheerest sort of courage.

In the moment that Randall had come to claim her, her feet had suddenly become leaden, her eyes had been shifting, frightened. Yet they had not taken half a dozen steps before she was again the laughing heroine of the party. For that she had been! Even a novice such as Clancy Deane knew that more than courtesy to a hostess' *protégée* was behind the attentions of Judge Walbrough. And she was versed enough in masculine admiration to realize that Vandervent's interest had been genuinely roused. Flattery, success had made her eyes brilliant, her lips and cheeks redder, her step lighter. Danger threatened her, but cringing would not make the danger any less real. Therefore, why cringe? This, though she did not

express it, even to herself, inspired her gayety.

The fact that Randall's brows were gathered together in a frown made her excitement—her pleasurable excitement—greater. Knowing that he had conceived a quick jealousy for Vandervent, she could not forbear asking, after the immemorial fashion of women who know what is the matter,

"What's the matter?"

And Randall, like a million or so youths before him, who have known that the questioner was well aware of the answer, said,

"You know well enough."

"No, I don't," said Clancy.

"Yes, you do, too," asserted Randall.

"Why"—and Clancy was wide-eyed—"how could I?"

Randall stared down at her. He had made a great discovery.

"You're a flirt," he declared bitterly.

He could feel Clancy stiffen in his arms. Her face, quickly averted, seemed to radiate chill, as an iceberg, though invisible, casts its cold atmosphere ahead. He had offended beyond hope of forgiveness. Wherefore, like the criminal who might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb, he plunged into newer and greater offenses.

"Well, of course I'm not a multimillionaire, and I don't keep a press-agent to tell the world what a great man I am, like Vandervent, but still—" He paused, as though confronted by thoughts too terrible for utterance. Clancy sniffed.

"Running other men down doesn't run you up, Mr. Randall."

She felt, as soon as she had uttered the words, that they were unworthy of her. And because she felt that she had spoken in a common fashion, she became angry at Randall, who had led her to this—well, indiscretion.

"I didn't mean to do that, Miss Deane," he said hastily; "only, I—I'm sorry I spoke that way. Vandervent doesn't hire a press-agent—so far as I know. And he's a good citizen and an able man. I'm sorry, Miss Deane. I'm jealous!" he blurted.

Clancy grinned. She twisted her head until she met Randall's eyes again. For the moment, she had completely forgotten the deadly though unconscious threat

behind Vandervent's words of a few moments ago.

"You mustn't be absurd, Mr. Randall," she said, with great severity.

"I don't mean to be," he answered, "but I can't help it. You promised me a *tête-à-tête*," he said plaintively.

"Did I?" She laughed. Randall reversed as she spoke, and she faced the door. Vandervent was eyeing her. Although his eyes were friendly, eager, she saw him, not as a partner in flirtation but as an officer of the law. Half a minute ago, engrossed in teasing Randall, she'd almost forgotten him. Back and forth, up and down—thus the Clancy spirits. She was, in certain emotional respects, far more Irish than American. She pressed Randall's left hand.

"Let's go down-stairs," she suggested.

She caught the look of disappointment in Vandervent's eyes as she passed him. For a moment, she hesitated. How simple it would be to exchange *tête-à-tête* partners, take Vandervent down-stairs, and, from the very beginning, tell him the amazing history of her half-week in New York! He *liked* her. Possibly his feeling toward her might grow into something warmer. Certainly, even though it remained merely liking, that was an emotion strong enough to justify her in throwing herself upon his mercy. And, of course, he'd *believe* her.

She wondered. She realized, as she had realized many times before in the past few days, and would realize again in the days to come, that the longer one delays in the frank course, the more difficult frankness becomes. Even if Vandervent did believe her, think of the position in which she would find herself! It came home to her that she liked the affair that she was attending to-night. It was more fun than any kind of work, she imagined—playing round with successful, fashionable, wealthy people. Scandal, if she emerged from it with her innocence proved, might not hurt her upon the stage or in the moving pictures, or even in Sally Henderson's esteem. But it would ruin her socially.

"A husband with the kale." That was what Fanchon DeLisle had said. No such husband could be won by a girl who had been the central figure of a murder trial. Clancy was the born gambler. It had taken the temperament of a gambler to leave Zenith; it had taken the temperament of a gambler to escape from the room that contained Beiner's dead body; it had taken the temperament of a gambler to decide, with less than seven dollars in the world, to brave the pursuit of the police, the wrath of Zenda, the loneliness of New York, rather than surrender to the police, conscious of her innocence.

A gambler! A chance-taker! Thus she had been created, and thus, in the fulfilment of her destiny, she would always be. The impulse to surrender, to throw herself upon Vandervent's mercy, passed as instantly as it had come. Yet, once out of the studio, she leaned heavily upon Randall's arm.

In the drawing-room, on the ground floor, Randall paused. Clancy withdrew her hand from his arm. They faced each other a bit awkwardly. Clancy always had courage when there were others present, but, when alone with a man, a certain shyness became visible. Also, although there had been boys in Zenith who had fancied themselves in love with her, she had always held herself high. She had not encouraged their attentions.

Randall was different. He was a grown man. And, after his confession of jealousy, it was silly for her not to take him seriously. He was not the flirtatious kind. He frightened her.

"You're worried," he stated surprisingly.

"'Worried?'" She tried to laugh, but something inside her seemed to warn her to beware.

"Yes—worried," repeated Randall. He came close to her. "Has Vandervent annoyed you? You were happy—you seemed to be—until you danced with him. Then——"

"Mr. Randall, you talk like a little boy," she said. "First, you want *tête-à-têtes*; then you are jealous; then you are sure that some one is annoying me——"

"You *are* worried," he charged.

He did not make the iteration stubbornly. He made it as one who was certain of what he said. Also, there was a patience in his tone, as though he were prepared for denial, and had discounted it in advance and had no intention of changing his belief.

For a moment, Clancy wavered. He was big and strong and competent-seeming. He looked the sort of man who would understand. There are some men who one knows will always be faithful to any trust imposed in them, who can be counted upon always. Randall had the fortunate gift of rousing this impression. He was, perhaps, not overbrilliant—not, at least, in the social way; but he was the sort that always inspires, from men and women both, not merely confidence but confidences. Had he not been making love to her, Clancy would perhaps have confided in him. But a lover is different from a friend. One hides from a lover the things that one entrusts to a friend. It is not until people have been married

long enough to inspire faith that confidences result. Whoever heard of a bride telling important secrets to her husband?

Clancy's wavering stopped. Possible husbands could not be entrusted with knowledge prejudicial to her chances as a possible wife.

"If you're going to continue absurd, we'll go up-stairs again," she announced.

Her chin came slightly forward. Randall looked at her doubtfully, but he was too full of himself, as all lovers are, to press the subject of Clancy's worriment. He was tactful enough, after all. And he told her of his boyhood in Ohio, of his decision to come to New York, of the accident that had caused him to leave the bank which, on the strength of his father's Congressional career, had offered him an opening. It had to do with the discontinuance of the account of an apparently valuable customer. Randall, acting temporarily as cashier, had, on his own responsibility, refused further credit to the customer. He had done so because a study of the man's market operations had convinced him that a corner, which would send the customer into involuntary bankruptcy, had been effected. There had ensued a week of disgrace; his job had hung in the balance. Then the customer's firm suspended; the receiver stepped in, and Randall had been offered a raise in salary because of the money—from the refusal of worthless paper offered as security by the bankrupt—that the bank had been saved.

He had refused the increase in salary and left the bank, convinced—and having convinced certain financiers—that his judgment of the stock-market was worth something. His success had been achieved only in the past two years, but he was worth some hundreds of thousands of dollars, with every prospect, Clancy gathered, of entering the millionaire class before he was much over thirty.

He went farther back. Despite his apparently glowing health, he'd suffered a bad knee at football. The army had rejected him in 1917. Later on, when the need for men had forced the examiners to be less stringent, he had been accepted, and had been detailed to a training-camp. But he had won no glory, achieving a sergeancy shortly before the armistice. He had not gone abroad. He was a graduate of the University of Illinois, knew enough about farming to maintain a sort of "ranch" in Connecticut, and was enthusiastic about motor-cars.

This was about as far as he got when he insisted that Clancy supplement his slight knowledge of her. She told him of the Zenith normal school, which she had attended for two years, of the summer residents of Zenith, of the fishing-weirs, of the stage that brought the mail from Bucksport, of the baseball games played within the fort of Revolutionary times on the top of the hill on which the

town of Zenith was built. And this was as far as she had reached when Vandervent found them.

He was extremely polite, but extremely insistent in a way that admitted of no refusal.

"I say, Randall, you mustn't monopolize Miss Deane. It's not generous, you know. You've been lucky enough. This is my dance."

Clancy didn't remember the fact, but while she and Randall had rambled on, she had been doing some close thinking. She couldn't confess to Vandervent that she was Florine Ladue, but she could utilize the heaven-sent opportunity to fascinate the man who might, within twenty-four hours, hold her life in his hand—although it couldn't be as serious as that, she insisted to herself. But, in the next breath, she decided that it could easily be as serious as that, and even more serious. Yet, with all her worry, she could repress a smile at Randall's stiff courtesy to his rival. Clancy was young, and life was thrilling.

But she had no chance to "vamp" Vandervent. A Paul Jones was in full swing as they reached the studio, and Judge Walbrough took her from Vandervent after a half-dozen bars had been played. From him she went to Mortimer, the illustrator, and from him to Darnleigh, the poet, and from him to Cavanagh, the millionaire oil-man, the richest bachelor in the world, Judge Walbrough informed her, in a hoarse whisper meant to reach the ears of Cavanagh.

And then Mrs. Carey announced that the storm was increasing so savagely that she feared to detain her guests any longer lest they be unable to reach their homes. There was much excitement, and several offers to take Clancy home. But Mrs. Carey came to her.

"I want you to stay with me, Miss Deane. Please!" she added, in a whisper. Clancy thought there was appeal in her voice. She said that she would. Whereas Randall looked savage, and Vandervent downcast. Which looks made Clancy's heart sing. In this laughing crowd, under these lights, with the jazz band only a moment stilled, it was absurd to suppose that she was really in danger from Vandervent or any one else. Wasn't she innocent of any wrong-doing?

Up and down, down and up! The Clancys of this world are always so. Which is why they are the best beloved and the happiest, all things considered.

She was properly remote and cool to both her suitors, as she called them to herself. Modesty was not her failing.

XV

The room into which Sophie Carey showed Clancy was smaller than her hostess' bedroom, but, in its way, just as exquisite. It made Clancy think—with its marvelous dressing-table, divided into two parts, the mirror between them, its soft rugs, its lacy covers on the bed—of pictures in magazines devoted to the home. It brought, somehow, to a focus, certain uneasy thoughts of the past day. So that her face was troubled when, having donned a wonderful nightgown that Mrs. Carey had lent her, and having put over this a fleecy dressing-gown, she turned to receive her hostess, who was similarly attired. Mrs. Carey pulled up a chair and sank into it.

"You're nervous," she announced.

Clancy shrugged faintly. If Sophie Carey knew just what Clancy had to be nervous about!

"No; I've been wondering," she replied.

"Wondering what?" asked Mrs. Carey.

Clancy's forehead puckered.

"About all this," she replied.

She waved a hand vaguely about the little room. Sophie Carey laughed.

"Like it?" she asked languidly. "Care to live here?"

Clancy stared at her.

"'Live here?'" she demanded incredulously.

"Why not?"

"Why should I?" countered Clancy.

"I like you," Mrs. Carey said. "I think we'd get on well together."

Clancy frowned.

"Why, I couldn't begin to pay——"

"No one said anything about paying," interrupted Mrs. Carey.

"But I couldn't—I never accepted——" Clancy was prim.

Mrs. Carey laughed.

"You'll get over that, I fear. Now, as for the expense—if you feel that way, we'll arrange what's fair."

"You really want me?" said Clancy.

"I told you earlier this evening that I liked success. Well, I like to protégé success. You'll be a success. You're practically one already. With Phil Vandervent interested and the Walbroughs enthusiastically enlisted on your side—It was rather hard on David to-night, wasn't it?"

Clancy blushed.

"'Hard?'"

Mrs. Carey smiled.

"He had an open face, poor David! It tells what is in his heart quite plainly. Oh, well, David is a remarkable youth in lots of ways, but Phil Vandervent—he's a Vandervent."

"You don't really think, can't imagine—" Clancy paused, dazed at the possibilities.

"Why not? Three Vandervents have married chorus-girls. You're a lady, my dear. Phil could do a lot worse. And you could hardly hope to do better."

Clancy shook her head.

"That isn't the career I came to New York to find."

Mrs. Carey chuckled.

"None of us find the career we were looking for. Half the bankers in the world planned to be authors. Half the authors planned to be bankers. And there you are! You'll live here?"

The offer opened up opportunities undreamed of by Clancy. To be chaperoned, guided, protégé'd by a woman like Sophie Carey! She had come to New York intent on making financial and, secondarily, of course—Clancy was young—artistic success. To have a vista of social achievement placed before her enraptured eyes——

"It would be pretty hard," she said naïvely, "to give up a thing like this, wouldn't it? I mean—pretty clothes, a place to live in that was beautiful. I stayed to-night because you wanted me to. But I was wondering. I can see why girls—slide

down. And I don't think it's because they want what they haven't got; it's more because they can't give up what they have. Isn't it?"

"It sounds convincing," admitted Mrs. Carey. She sighed. "Well, we're going to be friends, anyway, my dear. It was good of you to spend the night here. I—Donald didn't drop in as he'd threatened, and I'm lonesome, and—blue." She rose suddenly. "I'm keeping you up. It isn't fair." She walked toward the door and turned. "Do you know why I really asked you to stay? Because I saw that something was on your mind, my dear. And I didn't want you to do anything foolish."

"'Foolish?'" Clancy stared at her.

"David Randall would have insisted on taking you home. And—if he'd proposed sudden marriage, what would you have done?"

"'Marriage?'"

"That's what I said," said Mrs. Carey. "You're nervous, a stranger, and—I like you, little girl. I want you to have a fair chance to make up your mind."

"But I wouldn't have—why, it's absurd!" said Clancy.

Her hostess shrugged.

"My third night in New York, I went to a dance. I was terribly depressed. And a boy had conceived the same sudden sort of attachment for me that David has conceived for you. Only one thing saved me from making a little idiot of myself—not a minister would marry us without a license. I'm confessing a lot, my dear. Good-night," she ended abruptly.

Alone, Clancy slipped out of the pretty dressing-gown and got into bed. She could not doubt Sophie Carey's sincerity. Yet how absurd the woman was in thinking that she and David— She wondered. Suppose that Randall *had* proposed—in one of her reactions from bravado to fear. To have a man to help her fight her battle, to extricate her from the predicament into which her own frightened folly had hurried her! Sleepily, she decided that Sophie Carey was a wonderful friend. Also, she decided that Clancy Deane wasn't much of an actress. If *every one* guessed that she was worried——

Once, during the night, she half wakened. She thought that she'd heard the door-bell ringing. But she slipped into unconsciousness again almost at once. But in the morning she knew that she had not been mistaken. For Sophie Carey woke her up, and Clancy saw a face that was like a blush-rose.

"Miss Deane, you must wake up and meet him before he goes."

"Before who goes?" demanded Clancy.

Sophie Carey's face was like fire.

"Don. He came last night after all—late, and he isn't going to get a divorce, because I won't let him." There was fiery pride and touchingly soft self-abasement in her voice. "We've made it up. It was all my fault, anyway."

Clancy, as she bathed and dressed, shook her head wonderingly. Mrs. Carey's life was almost as kaleidoscopic as her own.

She put on the gray foulard and descended, shortly, to the dining-room. There she met Donald Carey. Weak-mouthed, its selfishness was partly hidden by a short mustache, blond. If Clancy hadn't heard something of him, she'd not have known, at first, the essential meanness of his nature. Undoubtedly he had helped himself from one of the decanters on the sideboard, for his nerves were well under control, and Clancy gathered, from his own somewhat boastful remarks, that he'd been intoxicated for the better—or worse—part of the week.

Last night, Sophie Carey had been so attracted by Clancy that not only did she wish to protégé her but wished to support her. Her offer, last night, had meant practically that. But events had transpired, Mrs. Carey was no longer, in effect, a widow. She was a married woman again—pridefully so. Her air of dependence half sickened Clancy. A woman of prestige, ability, and charm, she was a plaything of the momentary whim of the man whose name she bore. Last night independent, mistress of her own destiny, this morning she was an appanage. And how could Sophie Carey respect this weak sot?

But she had more to think about than the affairs of Sophie Carey, no matter how those affairs might affect herself. Few persons, no matter how temperamentally constituted, are nervous on first waking in the morning. They may be cranky and irritable, but not nervous. So Clancy, who had no irritation in her system, was calm until after breakfast. Then she began to fret. This was the day! Assistant District Attorney Philip Vandervent would receive an answer to his telegram to Fanchon DeLisle. He would learn that the real name of the woman who had borne Fanchon's card of introduction to the office of Morris Beiner was Clancy Deane. Her arrest was a matter of—hours, at the outside.

She felt like one condemned, with the electric chair round a turn in the corridor. Of course, she assured herself, the police must believe her story. But even if they did, gone was her opportunity for success. She would be the distasteful figure in

a great scandal. Her breakfast was an unsubstantial meal. But her hostess did not notice. She was too intent on seeing that her husband's coy appetite was tempted.

Suddenly, Clancy felt a distaste for herself—a distaste for being protégé'd, for having a patroness. Sophie Carey had taken a liking to her. Sophie Carey had wished to do this and that and the other thing for her. Now Sophie Carey was by the way of forgetting her existence. She accepted the offer of her hostess' car to take her home, but gave vague replies to Sophie's almost equally vague remarks about when they must see each other again. It had been kind of Mrs. Carey to invite her to spend the evening, but it had been a little too much like playing Destiny. Suppose that Randall had proposed and that Clancy had, in a moment of fright, accepted him. It would have been her own business, wouldn't it?

She was almost sullen when she reached Washington Square. Up-stairs in her dingy room, she fought against tears. She had voiced a great truth, without being aware of it, last night, when she had said that what made girls slide down-hill was the having to give up what they had, not the desire for possession of those things which they'd never had.

She almost wished that Sophie Carey had not weakly surrendered to her husband's first advances. Clancy might have been installed in the studio home on Waverly Place, half-mistress of its comforts, its charms—a parasite! That's what she had been by way of becoming within a week of her arrival in the city where she had hoped, by the hardest sort of work, to make a place for herself. Well, that was ended. Why the fact that Sophie Carey had taken back her errant husband should have affected Clancy's attitude toward life and the part she must play in it is one of the incomprehensible things of that strange thing which we call "character."

Yet it had done so. Perhaps, after all, because it had shown Clancy how little dependence must be placed on other people. Not that she felt that Sophie Carey would not be friendly to her, but that Sophie Carey's interest would now be, for a while, at any rate, in the husband to whom she surrendered so easily. And by the time that Sophie had rid herself again of Donald Carey, Clancy would have been forgotten.

Forgotten! As, clad in the storm-overshoes that were necessities in Zenith, she braved the drifts of Washington Square on her way to the 'bus, she laughed wryly. Forgotten! Possibly, but not until her name had been blazoned in the press as a murderess——

Sally Henderson was not at the office when Clancy arrived there. She telephoned

later on that the storm was too much for her, and that she would remain at home all day. She told young Guernsey to instruct Clancy in the routine matters of the office.

By one o'clock, Clancy had begun to understand the office machinery. Also, she was hungry, and when Guernsey announced that he was going out to luncheon, Clancy welcomed the cessation of their activities. She had been too apathetic to wonder why she had not heard from Zenda, and was amazed when, just as she had buttoned her coat, the girl clerk summoned her to the telephone.

"Miss Deane? This is Zenda talking. I got your letter. Can I see you right away?"

Clancy vaguely wondered where Zenda had procured her working-address. She had mentioned it this morning, after changing her dress, to Mrs. Gerand, but Mrs. Gerand had been a bit frigid. Mrs. Gerand did not approve of young lodgers of the female sex who spent the nights out. Clancy didn't believe that Mrs. Gerand had heard her. However, inasmuch as Zenda telephoned, the landlady must have heard her lodger's business address.

"Yes," she answered.

It was the beginning of the end. Zenda would believe probably about her connection with Fay Marston and Weber, but he'd perhaps know that Florine Ladue had been in Beiner's office. She shook her head savagely. As on Wednesday, when she'd read of Beiner's murder, she'd been unable to think clearly, her brain now wandered off into absurdities.

For it didn't matter about Zenda. Philip Vandervent had wired Fanchon DeLisle. What did Zenda matter? What did anything matter?

"Can you come over to my office, Miss Deane?"

"Yes," she replied.

"I'll be waiting for you," said Zenda.

She hung up the receiver. She shrugged her shoulders, and, telling the telephone clerk that she was going out to luncheon, left the office.

XVI

Zenda Films, Incorporated, occupied the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth floors of the newly named—though Clancy didn't know it—Zenda Building. In the lobby was a list of the building's tenants, and it stated that the executive offices of Zenda Films were on the tenth floor.

An office-boy heard her name, asked if she had an appointment, and reluctantly, upon her stating that she had, turned toward an inner room, casting over his shoulder the statement that he didn't think Mr. Zenda was in.

But from the room toward which he was making his sullen way—that sullen way peculiar to office-boys—emerged a tall young man, garbed in the height of Broadway fashion. He advanced beamingly to Clancy.

"Miss Deane? Please come right in."

Clancy followed him through the door, across an inner room, and into a further chamber beyond. And the instant she was inside that second room, Clancy knew that she had been a gullible fool, for instead of Zenda, she beheld Grannis.

But what was somehow more terrifying still, she saw beside Grannis, his thick features not good-humored to-day, the face of Weber. She didn't scream—Clancy was not the sort who would use valued and needed energy in vocalities—she turned. But the tall youth had deftly locked the door behind her. He faced her with a triumphant grin, then stepped quickly to one side; the key which he had been holding in his hand he transferred to the hand of Grannis, who put it, with an air of grim finality, into his trousers pocket.

Clancy knew when she was beaten, knew, at least, when the first round had gone against her. She did the one thing that rendered uncertain the mental attitudes of her captors. She walked coolly to a chair and sat.

Grannis, expecting to see a girl reduced by fright to hysteria, eyed her bewilderedly. He had intended to be calm, intending, by calm, to convince Clancy that her danger was the greater. Now he lapsed, at the start, into nervous irritation, the most certain sign of indecision.

"Pretty cool about it, Miss Deane, aren't you?"

Clancy knew, somehow, that her cool desperation had given her, in some inexplicable fashion, an equally inexplicable advantage.

"Why not?" she asked.

Grannis' sallow face reddened.

"Will you feel that way when you see a policeman?" he demanded.

"You talked about policemen yesterday," said Clancy. "Don't talk about them today. I want to see Mr. Zenda," she added.

Weber interjected himself into the scene.

"I suppose you do. But you see, Florine, my little dear, we're seeing you first. And you're seeing us first."

"Pretty clever of you, writing to Zenda," said Grannis. "Never occurred to you that, getting a letter from you, I might run through Zenda's mail, looking for a note in the same handwriting, eh?"

"No-o, it didn't," said Clancy slowly. "Yet, I suppose I should have known that one kind of crook is another kind, too."

Grannis nodded his head. His underlip came forward a trifle.

"I'll give you credit; you're game enough. If being a fool can be called gameness. And any one that parts with a thousand dollars in this town is certainly a fool. But *that's* all right. You probably don't need money. 'Little Miss Millions' is your name, I suppose."

Clancy yawned.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, Mr. Grannis, but if you're being funny, I somehow can't get it."

"You will!" snapped Grannis. "Look here, Miss Deane! You're breaking into matters that don't concern you."

"I suppose I am," said Clancy.

She turned to Weber.

"I understood that New York's climate was bad for you," she said.

"Not half as unhealthy as it's going to be for you, Florine," he retorted. "You can make up your mind this minute. Either out of town for yours or the Tombs. Take your pick."

He had advanced threateningly until he stood over Clancy. Grannis pushed him aside.

"Let me handle her," he said. "Now, let's get down to cases, Miss Deane. Ike never done anything to you, did he?" Clancy shrugged. "'Course he didn't," said Grannis. "Then why not be a regular feller and keep out of things that don't

concern you? Zenda never paid the rent for you, did he? No. We're willing to pay the rent and the eats, too, for a long while to come. That thousand is only a part. Listen: Ike got me on the long-distance last night. I told him it's O. K. to come back to town, that Zenda, with you keeping your face closed, couldn't do a thing to him. And then I get your letter this morning, and grab your note to Zenda. I find out that you're giving me the double cross. Well, we won't quarrel about it. Maybe you think Zenda is a heavier payer than I'd be. But you'd have to gamble on that, wouldn't you? You don't have to gamble on me. You take ten thousand dollars and leave town for just six months. That's all I ask. How about it?"

"I thought that you were Zenda's partner," said Clancy. Her pretty lips curled in the faintest contemptuous sneer.

"Never mind about that," snapped Grannis. "You're not talking to any one's partner, now. You're just talking to me."

"And me," put in Weber.

"And both of you want me to help you in swindling Mr. Zenda?" said Clancy.

Weber took a step toward her, his big fist clenched. Once again, Grannis intervened.

"Never mind the rough stuff, Ike!" he cried. "Let me handle her. Now, Miss Deane, are you going to listen to sense? Ike is back in town. He don't feel like skipping out every time you get a change of heart. And listen to this: Ike is a good-hearted guy, at that. All you can tell Zenda won't *prove* anything. It'll just cause a lot of trouble—that's all. It'll make a bunch of scandal, you claiming that Fay Marston told you that Ike was gyping Zenda, but it won't *prove* much."

"I don't suppose that your offering me money to leave town will prove anything, either," said Clancy.

"I'll just say you lie," said Grannis.

"I wonder which one of us Mr. Zenda will believe," retorted Clancy.

"I've never been in jail. I've got no criminal record," said Grannis.

"Neither have I!" cried Clancy.

Grannis smiled. It was a nasty smile, a smile that chilled Clancy. The advantage that she had felt was somehow hers seemed to have left her. She became suddenly just what she always was, a young girl, unwise in the ways of the metropolis. Courage, desperation made her forget this, but when courage ebbed,

though ever so slightly, she became fearful, conscious of a mighty aloneness. She felt this way now.

For Grannis turned and walked to a farther door, opposite the one which the tall youth had locked. He opened it and cried out dramatically,

"Come in, Mrs. Weber!"

Clancy's fingers stopped drumming on the table. She eyed, wonderingly and fearfully, the tall figure of Fay Marston, who was cloaked in a short squirrel-skin jacket. Below that appeared the skirt of a dark-blue dress. Her shoes, despite the inclement weather, were merely slippers. Her blond hair was almost entirely hidden by a jaunty hat, also of a squirrel-skin. Altogether, she was an amazingly prosperous-seeming individual. And she was the sort of person to whom prosperity would always bring insolence of manner. Her expression now was languidly insulting as she looked at Clancy.

"This the woman?" asked Grannis.

Fay nodded.

"She's the one."

"No question about it, is there?" demanded Weber.

"Why, you know there isn't," said Fay, in apparent surprise. "I took her to Zenda's party at the Château de la Reine, and, later, up to his apartment. You was with us all the time."

"Yes," said Weber; "but two identifications are better than one, you know." He turned to Grannis. "You might as well call him in," he said.

Grannis had been standing by the door. He swung it wide, and called,

"Come in, officer."

Clancy's fingers clenched. It seemed to her like a scene in a play or a moving picture—Fay's identification of her, Grannis' dramatic manner at the door, and now the entrance of a policeman.

Grannis pointed to Clancy.

"Arrest her, officer!" he cried.

The uniformed man moved toward Clancy. She shrunk away from him.

"What for?" she cried.

"You'll find out soon enough," said the policeman, with a grin.

Fay Marston laughed shrilly.

"Ain't that like a thief, though? Trust her kind to have nerve!"

"'Thief!'" Clancy stared at her.

"Thief's what I said, and it's what I mean, too."

It was too absurd! Had the charge been that of murder, Clancy would not have laughed. That charge would soon be made against her. But, until it was——

"What am I supposed to have stolen?" Clancy asked.

"You ain't *supposed* to have stolen anything," said Weber. "You're *known* to have stolen a pearl necklace from my wife."

"A pearl necklace," said Fay glibly. "She came into my room at the Napoli. I was packin', officer, gettin' ready to take a little trip with my husband. I asked her to pack the necklace and some other things for me. She said she'd put them in a bag. The necklace was missin' when I opened the bag next day."

Clancy laughed. It was ridiculous.

"You can't arrest me on a story like that!" she cried.

"Not if we produce the pawnbroker where you pawned the pearls?" sneered Weber.

"You can't," said Clancy.

Yet, as she looked from his sneering face to the threatening eyes of Grannis, she wondered whether or not they could. She had read of "frame-ups." Was it possible that she was to be the victim of one?

"Like to talk it over a bit?" asked Grannis. She made no verbal answer, but her expression was reply enough. "Wait in the next room, officer," said Grannis.

The policeman looked undecided.

"It ain't regular," he muttered.

"I know it isn't," said Grannis, "but—under the circumstances——"

"All right," said the officer.

He walked through the door, which Grannis closed after him. Then Zenda's sallow-faced partner came close to Clancy.

"I'm going to talk turkey," he declared. "You've butted in on a game that's a whole lot bigger than you are, little girl. We don't want to ride you, but we ain't going to let you ride us, neither. It's up to you. Fay will swear that you took her necklace. We've got a pawnbroker all lined up. He'll not only identify you but he'll produce his books and the necklace that you stole. We're in earnest. Now—will you take ten thousand and—get?"

Clancy was beaten; she knew it; at least, she had lost the second round. That it was the final round she could not believe. And yet, if she refused their money, they'd not believe her. They would take her to jail. By this time, Vandervent's men were doubtless searching for her. With the ten thousand dollars she might flee. She wouldn't use a penny of it. But she'd take it, merely in order that they'd believe her. She let Grannis press the money into her hand.

Head down, she heard Grannis call in the policeman and state that she had promised to make restitution. The policeman, with some grumbling, left. Clancy supposed that it was an ordinary sort of thing; the officer was venal, would be unfaithful to his duty for the sake of a few dollars.

She listened apathetically to Grannis' threats. They didn't interest her. New York had whipped her.

Yet, when she left the building, she stopped before a hotel across the street. There she tried to engage a taxi-cab to take her up to Park Avenue. But the taximen were emulating their millionaire brethren. They were profiteering. Inasmuch as the travel was difficult because of the snow, the man wanted triple fare. Clancy couldn't afford it.

She tramped across Forty-second Street to Fifth Avenue, fought her way, buffeted by the wind, up to Forty-eighth, and then crossed over to Park avenue. She didn't know exactly where Zenda lived, but she did know that it was a corner apartment-building on the east side of the avenue. Her fourth inquiry was rewarded with the information that Zenda lived there. But when her name was telephoned up-stairs, word came back that Mr. Zenda had been taken ill last night with influenza, and was unconscious at the moment.

She turned away. The Fates were against Clancy and with her enemies.

Still—she had ten thousand dollars in her pocketbook. One could do a great deal with ten thousand dollars. But she dismissed the temptation as quickly as it had come to her. She'd go home and wait the certain arrival of Vandervent's men.

She shrugged, her lips curling in a self-amused smile. She'd been frightened at

arrest on a trumped-up charge, while imminent arrest on a charge that would be supported by strong circumstantial evidence was just round the corner. She was a funny person, this Clancy. Little things scared her; big things— But big things scared her, too. For when Mrs. Gerand met her at the door of the lodging-house, after Clancy had survived the perilous journey down Fifth Avenue on the 'bus, the landlady's first words were that a gentleman awaited her. Not until Randall had held her hand a full minute could Clancy realize that it wasn't a detective from the district attorney's office.

XVII

Clancy had, on the other occasions on which she had met David Randall, been cool, aloof, mildly flirtatious, fun-making. Even when fear had swayed her and he had guessed at some worry eating at her heart, she had managed to preserve a verbal self-command.

But it was a Clancy whom he had never met before who faced him now. It was an incoherent Clancy, who said brokenly, while his big hand still held hers:

"What a surprise! I expected—I'm *glad*— What a terrible storm—so much snow —in a few hours— Wasn't it fun—last night?"

Then the incoherence that, from a person who had heretofore been always in complete possession of herself, was all the more charming, vanished. She looked down at her hand, then demurely up at him. With Vandervent's detectives ready to knock upon the front door—it is a peculiar thing that one always thinks of detectives as knocking, never ringing—with ten thousand dollars of venal money in her purse; with flight from the city as her only escape—and that, her common sense told her, a temporary one—from her amazing difficulties; with her career, not merely the moving-picture ambitions but the new one of achieving success with Miss Henderson, vanishing as the snow upon the streets would vanish before the rain and sun; with more trouble than she could cope with, Clancy became demure. She was thoroughly feminine. And a woman regards a man as something to be swayed by her. So Clancy forgot her own troubles for the moment in the pleasing task of making Randall's face redder than it was.

"You like it?" she asked. He didn't understand her. "My hand," she explained.

Randall dropped it at once. Her own incoherence communicated itself to him.

"I didn't mean— I didn't realize——"

"Oh, it's perfectly all right," said Clancy soothingly. "If I were you, I'd probably like to hold my hand, too."

She laughed. Randall discovered from the laugh that he had not offended irreparably. Emboldened, he snatched at the hand again. But they were in the hall, and Mrs. Gerand, disapproving of eye as she looked at this young couple violating the austerity of her house by open and bold flirtation, was only twenty feet away.

"Let's go in the parlor," said Clancy.

There was a sort of sofa near the old-fashioned marble mantel in the parlor, and in the exact center of this Clancy sat. Randall was forced to deposit himself upon a chair, a rickety affair which he drew as near to Clancy as he dared. He coughed nervously. Then he smiled—a broad smile, the smile, he thought, of large friendliness, of kindly impersonality. Clancy was not deceived by it.

"How'd you find me here?" she demanded. "Didn't I refuse to tell you my address?"

"Mrs. Carey told me this morning."

"Oh, she did! Why did she do that?"

"It wasn't a crime, was it?" asked Randall aggrievedly. "I guess that she thought she owed it to me—after last night."

"What do you mean?"

Randall's eyes lowered. He fidgeted uneasily in his chair. Then he lifted his eyes until they met hers.

"Well, she wouldn't give me a chance last night."

"'A chance?' What do you mean?" Clancy sat bolt upright on the sofa.

"She was afraid that you might listen to me." The explanation didn't quite explain.

"I'm listening to you now," she said.

"Yes; yes"—and Randall smiled rather wanly—"Mrs. Carey is a mind-reader, I think. She knew that I intended—she knew what I intended to say," he corrected his phrasing, "and she didn't want me to say it."

Into Clancy's eyes came glints of merriment.

"Oh, yes; she was afraid that you would propose to me."

Somehow or other, without Clancy putting it into words, her manner indicated an amused scorn. Randall was in love—in love in that terrific and overwhelmingly passionate fashion that only love at first sight can attain. But he was a grown man, who had proved, by his business success, his right to walk among men. He was good-natured, would always be good-natured. But he had self-respect. And now he hit back.

"Oh, no," he said; "she was afraid that you would accept me."

Not afraid to hit back, nevertheless, for a moment, he feared that he had struck too hard. He misread, at first, the light in Clancy's eyes. He thought it was anger.

But, to his relieved amazement, she began to laugh.

"Some one has a flattering conception of you, Mr. Randall," she told him.

He grinned cheerfully.

"Not flattering, Miss Deane—correct."

"Hm." Clancy pursed her lips. "You think well of Mr. David Randall, don't you?"

"I couldn't offer you goods of whose value I had any doubt, Miss Deane," he retorted.

Clancy's respect for him reached an amazing altitude. He could, after all, then, be quick of speech. And Clancy liked a man who could find ready verbal expression for his thoughts.

"I take it, then, that you are definitely offering me your hand and fifty per cent of all your worldly goods, Mr. Randall."

"Do you accept them?" he asked.

Clancy shook her head, smiling.

"Not to-day, thank you."

Randall frowned.

"Mrs. Carey is altogether too ambitious," he said. "She couldn't play Fate."

Clancy made a *moue*.

"Oh, then, last night—you think it might have been different?"

"I have no thoughts, Miss Deane—merely hopes. But Mrs. Carey said that you

were worried— I could see that, too—and she thought that it wasn't fair——"

Clancy felt a sudden resentment at Sophie Carey. After all, even though Mrs. Carey had been ever so kind, it had all been voluntary. Clancy hadn't dreamed of asking anything of her. And even involuntary kindness, grudging kindness, doesn't bestow upon the donor the right to direct the affairs of the donee. Once again, she was rather certain that she and Sophie Carey would never be real friends. She would always owe the older woman gratitude, but——

"Not fair, eh? You didn't mind that, though."

The humor left Randall's eyes. He was deadly serious as he answered,

"Miss Deane, any way that I could get you would be fair enough for me."

"But why hurry matters?" smiled Clancy.

"'Hurry?'" His smile was a little bit uneasy. "You—you're destined to a great success, Miss Deane, and pretty soon I'm afraid that you'll be way beyond my reach."

"I suppose that I should courtesy," said Clancy. "But I won't. I'll simply tell you that——"

"Don't tell me anything unless it's something I want to hear," he interposed.

"You'll like this, I'm sure," she said naïvely. "Because I was going to tell you that I like you immensely, and—well, I like you."

"And you won't marry me?"

"Well, not now, at any rate," she replied.

He rose abruptly.

"I'm sorry—awfully sorry. You see—last night—it's altogether ridiculous, I suppose, my expecting, daring to hope, even, that a girl like you would fall in love with me so soon. But—you're so lovely! Vandervent—last night—please don't be offended—and I'm leaving town to-day."

"'Leaving town?'" Clancy was shocked.

"That's why. I'll be gone a month. And I've never met a girl like you. Never will again; I know that. I—didn't want to tell you last night. It wasn't absolutely decided. If I'd taken you home—well, I'd have told you. Because I'd have proposed then. But not at Mrs. Carey's. I hoped to—sort of surprise you in the taxi. But that chance went. You spent the night at her house. And I'm leaving to-

day."

"Where for?" she asked. She didn't know how dull her voice had suddenly become. She wasn't in love with Randall. Clancy Deane was not the kind to surrender her heart at the first request. Her head would not rule her heart, yet it would guide it. Under normal conditions, even had she fallen in love with Randall, she would not have married him offhand, as he suggested. She would demand time in which to think the matter over.

But these were abnormal conditions. She was in danger. In the rare moments, when she could force her mind to analyze the situation, she believed that her danger was not great, that the police *must* believe her story. But she was a young and somewhat headstrong girl; fear triumphed over reason most of the time.

If she loved Randall, she might have accepted him. Of course, she would have told him her predicament. She was enough of a character-reader to know that Randall would believe her and marry her. But she didn't love him.

"California," he said. "A moving-picture combination. They've asked me to handle the flotation of stock and the placing of the bonds. It's a big thing, and I want to look the proposition over." He leaned suddenly near to her. "Oh, don't you think that you can come with me? If you knew how much I cared!"

She shook her head.

"I don't love you," she said.

He managed a smile. The nicest thing about him, Clancy decided, was his sportsmanship.

"Well, I *have* rushed matters, Miss Deane. But—don't forget me, please."

"I won't," she promised. "And I hope you have a fine trip and make a great success."

"Thank you," he said. "Good-by."

They touched hands for a moment, and then he was gone. Thus banal, almost always, are the moments that follow upon the ones that have reached for the height of emotion.

Clancy was left alone almost before she realized it. Up-stairs, in her shabby bedroom, she wondered if any other girl had ever crowded so much of differing experience into a few days. Truth was stranger than fiction—save in this: in fiction, all difficulties were finally surmounted, all problems solved.

But her own case— One who flees always prejudices his case. Fanchon DeLisle's reply to Vandervent's telegram would arrive by the morrow, anyway. The only reason that Clancy had not been called upon by Vandervent's men that she could conceive was that the storm had delayed the transmission of telegrams. A thin reed on which to lean! She suddenly wished with all her heart that she loved Randall. If she did love him, she could demand his protection. That protection suddenly loomed large before her frightened eyes.

Well, there was only one thing to do. Accepting defeat bravely is better than running away from it eternally. Also, in her mind lived the idea that Vandervent might possibly— Absurd! He'd only met her last night. And he was an officer of the law, sworn to do his duty.

She had no preconceived idea of what she'd do. She felt dull, bewildered, dazed.

Surrender! It was the only thing to do. Better by far that than being rudely taken to the Tombs. She'd read of the Tombs prison. What a horrible name! How it suggested the gruesome things! Lesser characters than Clancy for much less reason have had recourse to poison, to other things— It never even entered her head.

Mrs. Gerand, amazed at the question, told her where to find the district attorney's office. Clancy fought her way to the Astor Place subway station. She got off at Brooklyn Bridge. From there, a policeman directed her to the Criminal Courts Building. In the lobby, an attendant told her that Mr. Vandervent's office was on the third floor. She took an elevator, and, after entering two offices, was correctly directed. To a clerk who asked her business, she merely replied:

"Tell Mr. Vandervent that Florine Ladue wishes to see him."

The clerk showed no surprise. That was natural. Vandervent's underlings, of course, knew nothing of the clue which Vandervent possessed to the identity of the Beiner murderer. He departed toward an inner office.

Clancy sank down upon a wooden bench. Well, this was the end. She supposed that she'd be handcuffed, locked in a cell. She picked up a newspaper, a paper largely devoted to theatrical doings. Idly she read the dramatic gossip. She turned a page, and glanced a second time at a portrait displayed there.

It was a picture of Fanchon DeLisle. Her bosom rose; in her excitement she did not breathe. For beneath the picture was a head-line reading:

FAMOUS SOUBRETTE DIES OF INFLUENZA

She read the brief paragraph that followed. Fanchon DeLisle, leading woman of the New York Blondes Company, had died of the "flu" in Belknap, Ohio, on Wednesday afternoon. It was her second attack of the disease. Clancy's eyes blurred. She read no more. She looked about her. She must escape. Fanchon DeLisle was the only person who could tell Vandervent that Florine Ladue was Clancy Deane. Of course, Fay Marston knew, but Fay Marston's knowledge was not known to the police. Only Fanchon DeLisle could, just now, at any rate, tell that Clancy— She had sent in the name, Florine Ladue!

She must escape before Vandervent— But even as she rose tremblingly to her feet, Vandervent entered the outer reception-room. He stopped short at sight of Clancy. His mouth opened. But Clancy didn't hear what he said, because she fainted.

XVIII

Clancy came out of her faint mentally alert, although physically weak. It took her but the smallest fraction of time after she recovered consciousness to remember all that had led up to her collapse. And she kept her eyes closed long enough to marshal to her aid all those defensive instincts inherent in the human species. So, when she did open her eyes, that consummate courage which is mistaken for histrionism made her wreathe her lips in a smile. She was lying on a leather-covered couch in what she learned, in a moment, was Vandervent's private office. Her eyes rested on the tenant of that office. His broad shoulders were slightly stooped as he bent toward her. In his hand, he held a glass of water. She noted immediately that his hand shook, that water slopped over the edge of the glass.

"You—feel better?" he asked breathlessly.

Clancy sat upright, her hand straying to her hair. She looked beyond Vandervent to where stood a man in a badly cut blue suit. His black mustache was gray at the roots, and the vanity that this use of dye indicated was proved by the outthrust of his lower lip. A shrewder observer than Clancy—one versed in the study of physiognomy—would have known that the jutting lip had been trained to come forward, that the aggressiveness it denoted was the aggressiveness of the bully, not of a man of character. His round chin was belligerent enough, as were his

little round blue eyes, but there was that lack of coordination in his features that is found in all weak souls.

But, to Clancy, he was terrifying. His small eyes were filled with suspicion, filled with more than that—with a menace that was personal.

Clancy reached for the glass of water; she drank it thirstily, yet in a leisurely manner. She watched the blue-suited man closely. She put back the glass into Vandervent's outstretched hand.

"Thank you—so much," she said. "It's a wonder that you didn't let me lie where I fell, after my playing such a silly joke."

She saw Vandervent cast a glance over his shoulder at the blue-suited man. His head nodded slightly. Had he phrased it in words, he could not more clearly have said, "I told you so."

And if the blue-suited man had replied verbally, he could not have said more clearly than he did by the expression of his eyes, "She's lying."

Vandervent's shoulders shrugged slightly; his keen gray eyes gleamed. Once again it was as though he spoke and said, "I'll show you that she isn't."

It was a swift byplay, but need sharpens one's wits. Not that Clancy's ever were dull, for, indeed, a lesser character, even in such danger as hers, might have been too concerned with her physical well-being, her appearance, to notice anything else. But she caught the byplay, and it brought a silent sigh of relief up from her chest. She was on her own ground now, the ground of sex. Had Vandervent been a woman, such a woman as Sophie Carey or Sally Henderson, Clancy would have surrendered immediately, would have known that she had not a chance in the world of persuading any woman that she had played a joke when she announced herself as Florine Ladue. But with a man—with Philip Vandervent, whose hand shook as he held a glass of water for her, whose eyes expressed a flattering anxiety—Clancy's smile would have been scornful had not scorn been a bit out of place at the moment. Instead, it was shyly confident.

"A—er—a joke, of course, Miss Deane," said Vandervent.

"Not so very funny, though, after all," said Clancy, with just enough timidity in her manner to flatter Vandervent.

The blue-coated man snorted.

"'Joke!' 'Funny!' Excuse me, lady; but where do you get your humor?"

Vandervent wheeled and glared at the man.

"That'll be about all, Spofford!" he snapped.

Spofford shrugged.

"You're the boss," he said. "Only—how does she happen to know the name Florine Ladue? Answer me that, will you?"

"I told her," said Vandervent shortly.

Spofford caressed his mustache.

"Oh, I getcha. Oh-h!" His grin was complimentary neither to Clancy nor Vandervent. Then it died away; his eyes became shrewd, although his voice was drawling. "And the faintin'—that was part of the joke, eh, lady?"

Clancy felt a little chill of nervous apprehension run between her shoulder-blades. Confidence left her. This man Spofford, she seemed to foresee, might be dangerous. She was not out of the woods yet. But Vandervent's words reassured her.

"Miss Deane doesn't need to explain anything to you, Spofford."

There was a touch of petulance in the assistant district attorney's voice. Spofford recognized it.

"Sure not, Mr. Vandervent. Certainly she don't. Only—" He paused; he turned, and started for the door.

Vandervent recalled him sharply.

"What do you mean by 'only,' Spofford?"

"Well, she come in here and said she was Florine Ladue—and then she faints when you come out to see her. I meant that, if there was any of the newspaper boys hangin' around——"

"There weren't," said Vandervent. "And if the papers should mention Miss Deane's joke—" The threat was quite patent.

"They won't," said Spofford.

He cast a glance at Clancy. It was a peculiar glance, a glance that told her that in his eyes she was a suspicious character—no better than she should be, to put it mildly.

And Vandervent's expression, as he turned toward her, drove away what fears

Spofford's expression had aroused. For, despite his effort to seem casual, the young man was excited. And not excited because of the name that she had sent in, or because she had fainted, but excited simply because Clancy Deane was alone in the room with him. He moved toward her. Quite calmly she assumed control of the situation, and did it by so simple a method as extending her hand for the glass which he still held and uttering the single word: "Please."

She held the glass to her lips for a full minute, sipping slowly. Falsehood was repugnant to her. Yet she must think of how best to deceive Vandervent.

"I suppose I've made you very angry," she said, putting the glass down upon the couch beside her.

"'Angry?' How could you make me angry—by coming to see me?"

Vandervent, with an acquaintance that comprised the flower of American and European society, was no different from any other young and normal male. His attitude now was that of the young man from Zenith or any other town in America. He was embarrassed and flattered. And he was so because a pretty girl was showing a certain interest in him.

"But to—fool you! I—you'll forgive me?" She was conscious that she was pleading prettily.

"Forgive you? Why—" Vandervent had difficulty in finding words. He was not a particularly impressionable young man. Had he been so, he could not, with his name and fortune, have remained a bachelor until his thirtieth birthday.

Clancy took up the not easily rolling ball of conversation.

"Because it was a terrible impertinence. I—you see——"

She paused in her turn.

"Jolly good joke!" said Vandervent, finally finding, apparently to oblige his guest, humor in the situation. "You can't imagine my excitement. Just had a wire from the chief of police in Belknap, Ohio, that Fanchon DeLisle was dead. Didn't see how we could locate this Ladue woman, when in comes a clerk saying that she's outside. I tell you, I never was so excited. Then I saw you, and you—tell me: why did you faint?" He put the question suddenly.

"Why did I faint?" She tried to laugh, and succeeded admirably. "I'm used to cold weather and blizzards. In Zenith, sometimes, it is thirty below, and the snow is piled ten feet high in the big drifts. But one dresses for it, or doesn't go outdoors. And, to-day, I wanted to see New York so much. I've only been here

since Monday. The cars aren't running very regularly, so I walked down-town. And I guess I grew cold and tired. I feel ever so much better now," she ended chirpily.

"I'm glad of that," he smiled.

"And some one told me that this was the Criminal Courts Building, and I thought —I thought of—" She paused at exactly the right moment.

"Of me?" asked Vandervent. He colored faintly.

"I'm here," said Clancy. "And I thought that perhaps you wouldn't remember my name; so I—thought I'd play a joke. You *will* forgive me, won't you?"

He laughed.

"I'm afraid that Spofford won't, but I will."

"'Spofford?' The man who was here?" asked Clancy.

"One of the detectives attached to the staff. Hasn't much sense of humor, I'm afraid. But it doesn't matter."

He sat down, pulling up a chair opposite her.

"I think it's mighty nice of you to call down here, Miss Deane."

"You don't think it's bold of me?" she asked.

"Hardly. Would you like to go over the Tombs?"

Clancy shuddered.

"Indeed I wouldn't!"

"No morbid curiosity? I'm glad of that."

"'Glad?' Why?"

"Oh, well, just because," he blurted.

Clancy looked demurely downward, fixing a button on her glove. For a moment, there was silence. Then Clancy rose to her feet. She held out her hand to Vandervent.

"You've been so kind," she said. "If you'd arrested me for my silly joke, you'd have done to me what I deserved to have happen."

"Not at all," he said. "I feel that—that maybe I scared you when I came in——"

"Not a bit. I was—tired."

"You must let me take you home," he said.

She shook her head.

"I've troubled you enough. *Please!*"—as he seemed about to insist. "I'm *really* all right."

He eyed her doubtfully.

"You're sure?"

"Positive."

"All right, then; but—I'd *like* to."

She became mockingly stern.

"I've interrupted the course of justice enough for one day. Some other time, perhaps."

"There'll be another time?" he asked eagerly.

"Well"—she was doubtful—"I can't promise."

"But we might have luncheon together. Or tea? Or dinner?" He was flatteringly eager.

"I'll see," said Clancy.

Down-stairs, in the great lobby of the building, she marveled that she had escaped so easily. To have announced herself as Florine Ladue, the woman wanted for Beiner's murder, to have fainted when Vandervent came out, and still to have avoided, by a puerile explanation, all penalties was a piece of good luck that was incredible. She blessed the person unknown who had left the newspaper on the bench. The luckiest of chances had saved her from betrayal. Had she not read of Fanchon's death— She shuddered.

Then her eyes clouded. She had been fighting, with all the wit she owned, for liberty. She had not yet had opportunity to pay to Fanchon's death the tribute of sorrow that it demanded. She had known Fanchon but slightly; the woman was of a class to which Clancy could never belong—a coarse but good-hearted vulgarian. And she had tried to help Clancy in return for little kindnesses that Clancy had shown her when she lay ill with the "flu" in Zenith.

And now this same disease had finally killed the kindly soubrette. Her death had saved Clancy from disgrace—from worse, perhaps, if there is anything worse than disgrace— She suddenly realized how lucky she had been.

She stopped outside to adjust her veil. And she noticed that Spofford, the dyed-mustached gentleman of Vandervent's office, also emerged from the building.

She shuddered. If her wit had not been quick, if she had not remembered, on, coming out of her faint, that the item in the paper had removed all danger, his hand might now be clasped about her wrist. Instead of walking toward the subway, she might now be on her way to the Tombs.

Spofford turned south toward the Brooklyn Bridge. She would never, thank God, see him again. For nothing would ever tempt her to the Criminal Courts Building another time. Its shadow would hang over her soul as long as she lived. She had had the narrowest escape that was possible, and she would not tempt fate again.

She would never learn. As her mind ceased to dwell upon the problem of her connection with Beiner's mysterious fate and moved on to consider what she should do with Grannis's ten thousand dollars, it was as though the Beiner incident were forever closed. Clancy had too much Irish in her for trouble to bear down upon her very long. She would never learn that issues are never avoided but must always be met. She was in a congratulatory mood toward herself because Vandervent had not suspected the grim truth behind what she called a jest. She had conquered this difficulty by the aid of fate; fate would help her again to handle the Grannis-Zenda-Weber matter. So she reasoned. It would straighten itself out, she assured herself.

XIX

There was a lunch-room on Broadway, just below Eighth Street. Clancy, walking westward from Astor Place, the station at which she emerged from the subway, saw its window-display of not too appetizing appeal, and paused. To-day was Friday; it was quite possible that Sally Henderson would to-morrow give her new employee an advance upon salary. But Clancy had learned something. That something was that New York is not a place in which to reveal one's pecuniary embarrassment. It was not that New York was hard-hearted, Clancy decided. It was that it was a busy place, and had no time to listen to whines. To ask an advance on salary was, in a way, to whine. Clancy was not going to begin her relationship with Sally Henderson on anything but a basis of independence.

So her pause before the lunch-room was only momentary. She entered it immediately. The Trevor was only two hundred yards away, but Clancy had only a pitiful amount of money in her pocket. That is, money that belonged to her.

Grannis's ten thousand was not hers. To whom she would give it, she did not yet know, but she did know that she would starve before she used any of it. It might be that Sally Henderson would pay her a half-week's salary to-morrow. She must hope for that. But she must not rely on it. Hence she must live leanly.

This was only her fifth day in New York. It had been her fortune to eat at restaurants of the better class, at a private home. Now, for the first time since her arrival from Zenith, she had opportunity to find out what might have been, what might still be, her lot. Not that the food in the lunch-room was particularly bad. Of its kind, it was rather good. But there was the stain of egg upon the table-cloth; the waiter who served her was unshaven. The dishes in which the food was served were of the heaviest of china. And Clancy was of the sort that prefers indifferent food well served to good food execrably presented.

She paid her check—considering that she had had only corned-beef hash and tea and bread, she thought that sixty cents was an exorbitant charge—tipped the waiter a dime, and trudged out into the storm again.

The snow had ceased falling, but only one so weather-wise as the Maine-bred Clancy would have known that. For the flurries blown by the gale had all the appearance of a continuing blizzard. Bending forward, she made her way to Fifth Avenue, and thence south across Washington Square. Twice, feeling very much alone in the gloom, she made detours to avoid coming too near men whom she observed moving her way. She was yet to learn that, considering its enormous heterogeneous population, New York holds few dangers for the unescorted girl. And so she ran the last few yards, and breathed with relief when the latch-key that Mrs. Gerand had given her admitted her to the lodging-house on the south side of the square.

In her room, her outer clothing removed, she pulled a shabby rocking-chair to the window and looked out upon the dimly descried trees, ghostly in their snowy habiliments. Chin on elbow, she pondered.

The wraith of Florine Ladue was laid. So she believed. And she could find no reason to fear a resurrection. Beiner, who knew her, could recognize her as Florine Ladue, was dead. So was Fanchon DeLisle. Zenda, Grannis, Weber, and the others of the poker-party at Zenda's knew that she called herself "Florine." But it was quite a distance from knowing that a young woman had named herself Florine to proof that the same young woman's last name was Ladue, and that she had visited Morris Beiner's office. Of course—and Clancy's brows knitted at the thought—if there were any legal trouble over the Weber-Zenda-Grannis matter

and she testified in court, and Vandervent or Spofford or some other of the district attorney's office heard or saw testimony which involved the fact that she'd used the name "Florine," that person would do some thinking, would wonder how much jesting had been behind her announcement of herself under the name of the woman wanted for the Beiner murder. In that case——

What about that case? Oddly enough—yet not so oddly, after all, when one considers that Clancy was only twenty years of age—up to now she had given a great deal of thought to her predicament and practically none to the real way out of it. She marveled at herself.

Why in that case, she'd be in desperate danger, as great danger as she had been in just before she picked up the paper in Vandervent's anteroom, and the only way out of that danger, without lasting disgrace at the least, would be the production of the real murderer of Morris Beiner.

The real murderer! She drew in her breath with a whistle.

Beiner had been killed; she was suspected. These were facts, and the only facts that she had reckoned with. But the greater fact, though up to now ignored by her, was that *somebody* had killed Beiner. Some one had entered the man's office and slain him, probably as he lay unconscious on the floor. That *somebody* was foot-loose now, perhaps in New York, free from suspicion.

She straightened up, alert, nervous. Suddenly, horror—a horror which fear had managed to keep from her till now—assailed her. *A murderer!* And free! Free to commit other murders! She started as a knock sounded upon the door. And, queerly, she didn't think of the police; she thought of the murderer of Beiner. It was with difficulty that she mastered herself sufficiently to answer the knock.

It was Mrs. Gerand. Miss Deane was wanted on the telephone. It was not a moment when Clancy wished to talk to any one. She wished to be alone, to study upon this new problem—the problem that should have been in her mind these past three days but that had only popped into it now. But the telephone issued commands that just now she dared not disobey. It might be Grannis or Vandervent. She ran down-stairs ahead of Mrs. Gerand. A booming voice, recognition of which came to her at once, greeted her.

"Hello!"

"Miss Deane? This is Judge Walbrough speaking."

"Oh, how do you do?" said Clancy. In her relief, she was extremely enthusiastic.

The deep voice at the other end of the wire chuckled.

"You know the meaning of the word 'palaver,' don't you, young woman? The happy way you speak, any one'd think I was a gay young blade like David Randall or Vandervent instead of an old fogy."

"'Old fogy!' Why, Judge Walbrough!"

Clancy's tone was rebuking, politely incredulous, amused—everything, in short, that a young girl's voice should be when a man just passing middle age terms himself "old." Walbrough chuckled again.

"Oh, it's a great gift. Miss Deane; never lose it. The young men don't matter. Any girl can catch one of them. But to catch the oldsters like myself—oldsters who know that they can't catch you—that takes genius, Miss Deane."

Clancy laughed.

"Please don't flatter me, Judge. Because, you know, I *believe* you, and——"

"Sh," said Walbrough. As he uttered the warning, his voice became almost a roar. "The jealous woman might overhear us; she is listening in the next room now——"

There was the sound of a scuffle; then came to Clancy's ears the softer voice of Mrs. Walbrough.

"Miss Deane, the senile person who just spoke to you is absurd enough to think that if an old couple—I mean an old man and his young wife—asked you, you'd probably break an engagement with some dashing bachelor and sit with us at the opera."

"I don't know the senile person to whom you refer," retorted Clancy, "but if you and the judge would like me to go, I'd love to, even though I have no engagement to break."

"We won't insist on the breaking, then. Will you run over and dine with us?"

Clancy was astonished. Then she remembered that she had dined rather early at the Broadway lunch-room. It really wasn't more than six-thirty now. People like the Walbroughs, of course, didn't dine until after seven, possibly until eight.

"I won't do that," she answered. "I'd intended to go to bed—it's such a terrible night. And I ate before I came home—but I'd love to come and sit with you," she finished impulsively.

There was something warm, motherly in the older woman's reply.

"And we'd love to have you, Miss Deane. I'll send the car around right away."

Clancy shrugged as she surveyed again her meager wardrobe. But the Walbroughs must know that she lived in a lodging-house—she supposed that they'd obtained her telephone-number and address from Sophie Carey—and the fact that she didn't possess a gorgeous evening gown wouldn't mean much to them, she hoped. And believed, too. For they were most human persons, even if they did, according to Sophie Carey, matter a lot in New York.

Mrs. Gerand was quite breathless when she announced to Clancy, half an hour after the telephone-call, that a big limousine was calling for the newest Gerand lodger. Clancy was already dressed in the pretty foulard that was her only evening frock. Mrs. Gerand solicitously helped her on with her shabby blue coat. Her voice was lowered in awe as she asked:

"It ain't *the* Walbroughs, is it? The chauffeur said, 'Judge Walbrough's car;' but not *the* judge, is it?"

"Are there two of them?" laughed Clancy.

Mrs. Gerand shook her head.

"Not that I ever heard of, Miss Deane. But—gee, you got swell friends, ain't you?"

Clancy laughed again.

"Have I?"

"I'll say you have," said Mrs. Gerand.

The Walbrough home was on Murray Hill, though Clancy didn't know at the time that the section of the city directly south of the Grand Central Station was so named. It was not a new house, and it looked as though it was lived in—something that cannot always be said of New York homes, whether in apartment-buildings or in single houses. It was homey in the sense that the houses in Zenith were homey. And, even though a colored man in evening clothes opened the front door, and though a colored maid relieved Clancy of her coat, Clancy felt, from the moment that she passed the threshold, that she was in a *home*.

Her host met her at the top of a flight of stairs. His great hands enveloped hers. They drew her toward him. Before she knew it, he had kissed her. And Clancy did the thing that made two admiring acquaintances adoring friends for life. She kissed the judge warmly in return. For Mrs. Walbrough was standing a trifle behind the judge, although Clancy hadn't seen her. She came forward now, wringing her hands with a would-be pathetic expression on her face.

"I can't trust the man a moment, Miss Deane. And, to make it worse, I find that I can't trust you." She drew Clancy close to her. She, too, kissed the girl, and found the kiss returned.

"Why shouldn't I kiss him?" demanded Clancy. "He brags so much, I wanted to find out if he knew how."

"Does he?" asked Mrs. Walbrough.

Clancy's eyes twinkled.

"Well, you see," she answered, "I'm not really a judge myself."

The judge exploded in a huge guffaw.

"With eyes like hers, Irish gray eyes, why shouldn't she have wit? Tell me, Miss Deane: You have Irish blood in you?"

"My first name is Clancy," replied the girl.

"Enough," said the judge. He heaved a great mock sigh. "Now, if only Martha would catch a convenient cold or headache——"

Mrs. Walbrough tapped him with an ostrich-plume fan.

"Tom, Miss Deane is our guest. Please stop annoying her. The suggestion that she should spend an hour alone with you must be horrifying to any young lady. Come."

The judge gave an arm to each of the ladies, and they walked, with much stateliness on the part of the judge, to a dining-room that opened off the landing at the head of the stairs.

Clancy felt happier than she had deemed it possible for her to be. Perhaps the judge's humor was a little crude; perhaps it was even stupid. But to be with two people who so evidently liked her, and who so patently adored each other, was to partake of their happiness, no matter how desperate her own fears.

Dinner passed quickly enough, and Clancy found out that she had an appetite,

after all. The judge and his wife showed no undue interest in her. Clancy would have sworn that they knew nothing about her when dinner ended and they started for the opera. She did not know that, before he went upon the bench, Judge Walbrough had been the cleverest cross-examiner at the bar, and that all through dinner he had been verifying his first estimate of her character. For the Walbroughs, as she was later to learn, did not "pick up" every lovely young female whom they chanced to meet and admire. A happy couple, they still were lonely at times—lonely for the sound of younger voices.

And the significant glance that the judge cast at his wife at the end of the dinner went unnoticed by Clancy. She did not know that they had passed upon her and found her worth while.

And with this friendly couple she heard her first opera. It was "Manon," and Farrar sang. From the beginning to the tragic dénouement, Clancy was held enthralled. She was different from the average country girl who attends the opera. She was not at all interested in the persons, though they were personages, who were in the boxes. She was interested in the singers, and in them only. She had never heard great music before, save from a phonograph. She made a mental vow that she would hear more again—soon.

XX

The judge and his wife were true music-lovers and didn't attend the opera for social reasons. Nevertheless, they knew, seemingly, every one of importance in the artistic, financial, professional, and social world. During the entr'actes, the judge pointed out to Clancy persons with whom he was acquainted. Ordinarily, Clancy would have been thrilled at the mere sight of the demi-gods and goddesses. To-night, they left her cold. Yet, out of courtesy, she professed interest.

"And there's my little friend Darcy," she heard the judge say.

She roused herself from abstraction, an abstraction in which she was mentally reviewing the acting and singing of the superb Farrar.

"Who is he?" she asked.

The judge smiled.

"Munitions. Used to live in Pennsylvania. Now he dwelleth in the Land of Easy Come."

For a second, her thoughts far away, Clancy did not get the implication. Then she replied.

"But I thought that the munitions millionaires made so much that they found it hard to get rid of it."

"This is a wonderful town, Miss Deane. It affords opportunity for everyone and everything. No man ever made money so fast that New York couldn't take it away from him. If the ordinary methods are not sufficient, some brilliant New Yorker will invent something new. And they're inventing them for Darcy—and ten thousand other Darcys, too."

Clancy stared at the squat little millionaire a few seats away.

"He doesn't look very brilliant," she announced.

"He isn't," said the judge.

"But he's worth millions," protested Clancy.

"That doesn't prove brilliance. It proves knack and tenacity, that's all," said her host. "Some of the most brilliant men I know are paupers; some of the most stupid are millionaires."

"And vice versa?" suggested Clancy.

The judge shrugged.

"The brilliant millionaires are wealthy despite their brilliance. My child, money was never so easy to make—or so easy to spend. And those who make it are spending it."

"But isn't every one spending, not only the millionaires?" demanded Clancy.

"It's the fashion," said the judge. "But fashions change. I'm not worried about America."

The curtain rose, cutting short Walbrough's disquisition. But, for a moment, Clancy pondered on what he had said. "The Land of Easy Come." The people that she had met, the moving-picture millionaires—theirs had come easily—Would it go as easily? Even David Randall, worth approximately half a million before his thirtieth birthday—she'd read enough to know that brokers went bankrupt over-night. The hotels that she knew were crowded almost beyond

capacity with people who were willing to pay any price for any sort of accommodation. The outrageous prices charged—and paid—in the restaurants. The gorgeous motor-cars. The marvelous costly clothing that the women wore. Some one must produce these luxuries. Who were paying for them? Surely not persons who had toiled and sweated to amass a few dollars. Easy come! Her own little nest-egg, bequeathed to her by a distant relative—it had come easily; it had gone as easily. Of course, she hadn't spent it, but—it was gone. But she was too young to philosophize; she forgot herself in the performance.

She was throbbing with gratitude to the Walbroughs as, the opera over, they slowly made their way through the chattering thousands toward the lobby. They had given her the most wonderful evening of her life.

She was about to say something to this effect when some one accosted the judge. For the moment, he was separated from the two women, and verbal expression of Clancy's feelings was postponed. For when the judge joined them, he was accompanied by a man whose mop of hair would have rendered him noticeable without the fading bruise upon his face. It was Zenda!

His recognition was as quick as Clancy's. His dreamy brown eyes—one of them still discolored—lighted keenly. But he had been an actor before he had become one of the most famous directors in Screendom. He held out his hand quite casually.

"Hello, Florine!" he said.

Walbrough stared from one to the other.

"You know each other? 'Florine?'"

"A name," said Clancy quickly, "that I called myself when—when I hoped to get work upon the screen."

She breathed deeply. Of course, Judge Walbrough and Zenda didn't know that a woman named Florine Ladue was wanted for Beiner's murder; but still——

"'On the screen?' That's funny," said the judge. "Sophie Carey told us that you were thinking of stenography until she put you in touch with Sally Henderson. Huh! No fool like an old fool! I was thinking I would put a new idea in your head, and you have it already. Darcy stopped me and introduced his friend Mr. Zenda, and I immediately thought that a girl like you with your beauty—" He interrupted himself a moment while he presented Zenda to his wife. Then he turned to Clancy. "Couldn't you get work?" he asked, abruptly.

They were on the sidewalk now, and the starter was signaling, by electrically lighted numbers, for the judge's car. It was a clear, crisp, wonderful night, and the stars vied with the lights of Broadway.

Clancy looked up and down the street. She had no intention of running away. She'd tried to reach Zenda to-day, and had been told that he was too ill to receive visitors. Nevertheless, the impulse to flee was roused in her again. Then, listening to reason, she conquered it.

She answered the judge.

"'Get work?' I didn't try very long."

"And she didn't come to me," said Zenda. He put into his words a meaning that the Walbroughs could not suspect. Clancy got it.

"Oh, but I did!" she said. "I've tried to get you on the telephone. Central wouldn't give me your number. I wrote you a letter in care of Zenda Films. Your partner, Mr. Grannis, opened it. And to-day I called at your apartment and was told that you were ill."

Zenda's face, which had been stern, softened.

"Is that so?" he asked.

The judge, a trifle mystified, broke into the conversation.

"Well, she seems to have proved that she didn't neglect you, Mr. Zenda. Don't see why she should go to such pains, unless"—and he laughed—"Miss Deane wants to prove that she played fair;—didn't give any one else a prior opportunity to make a million dollars out of her pretty face."

"Miss Deane can easily prove that she is playing fair," said Zenda.

"I want to," said Clancy quickly.

Walbrough was a clever man. It was pardonable in him not to have suspected earlier that there was some byplay of talk to whose meaning he was not privy. But now he knew that there was some meaning not understood by him in this talk.

"Here's the car," he said. "Suppose you ride home with us, Zenda?"

"I have some friends. If you'll wait a moment—" And Zenda was off.

In silence, Clancy entered the judge's limousine. Then Mrs. Walbrough, settling herself comfortably, suddenly patted the girl upon the hand. She was a keen

woman, was Mrs. Walbrough; she sensed that something was troubling Clancy. And the judge cleared his throat portentously.

"Miss Deane," he said, "I don't know your relation to Mr. Zenda. But, if you'd care to consider yourself my client——"

"Thank you," said Clancy.

Then Zenda reappeared. He crowded himself into the car.

"I just telephoned my apartment, Miss Deane. The door-man went on at noon and stays until midnight. He says that a young lady answering your description called on me to-day."

"Did you need verification, Zenda?" asked the judge angrily.

Zenda shrugged.

"In a matter involving a hundred thousand and more, corroboration does no harm, and my obtaining it should not be offensive to Miss Deane."

"Oh, it isn't, it isn't!" said Clancy tremulously.

The judge's eyes narrowed.

"I must inform you, Zenda, that Miss Deane is my client," he said.

Zenda bowed.

"I couldn't wish a better adviser for Miss Deane. Farrar was in excellent voice to-night, didn't you think?"

No one challenged the change of subject, and until they were settled in the Walbrough library, the opera was the only subject of discussion. But, once there, Zenda came to business with celerity.

"Judge Walbrough, I have been swindled in a poker game, in a series of poker games, out of thousands of dollars. Last Monday night, we caught the man who did the cheating. There was trouble. Miss Deane was present at the game, in my apartment. She came as the guest of one Ike Weber. She disappeared during the quarrel. It has been my assumption that she was present as the aide of Weber. At the Star Club, on Tuesday, I stated, to associates of Weber, that the man was a swindler. Yesterday, I was told that he intended bringing suit against me. So I have denied myself to all possible process-servers on the plea of illness."

"Why? If the man is a swindler——"

But Zenda cut the judge short.

"I can't prove it. I don't want scandal. Suit would precipitate it. If I could get proof against Weber, I'd confront him with it, and the suit would be dropped. Also, I would recover my money. Not that that matters much. Miss Deane, why did you come to see me?"

Clancy drew a long breath; then she began to talk. Carefully avoiding all reference to Morris Beiner, she told everything else that had to do with Zenda, Weber, and Grannis. The judge spoke first after she ceased.

"I don't get Grannis's connection."

"I do!" snapped Zenda. "He's been trying to get control of the company— I'm not nearly so rich as people think I am. The company has a contract with me for a term of years at no very huge salary. I expected to make my money out of the profits. But now we've quarreled over business methods. If he could get me entirely out, use my name—the company has the right to—increase the capitalization, and sell stock to the public on the strength of my reputation, Grannis would become rich more quickly that way than by making pictures. And the quicker Grannis broke me, so that I'd have to sell my stock—every little bit helps. If Weber won a million from me——"

"'A million!'" gasped Walbrough.

Zenda's voice was self-contemptuous.

"Easy come, Judge," he said. "I'm an easy mark. Weber had a good start toward the million, would have had a better if it hadn't been for Mrs. Zenda."

"It's an incredible story!" cried the judge.

"What's incredible? That I should gamble, and that some one should swindle me? What's strange about that in this town, Judge? In any town, for that matter?"

Clancy, eyes half closed, hardly heard what they were saying. How easy it would be to confess! For, what had she to confess? Nothing whatever of wrong-doing. Then why had it not been easy to call on Zenda the first thing on Tuesday morning and tell him of Fay Marston's involuntary confession? Because she had been afraid of scandal? Her lips curled in contempt for herself. To avoid doing right because of possible scandal? She was overly harsh with herself. Yet, to balance too much harshness, she became too lenient in her self-judgment when it occurred to her that only fear of scandal kept her from confessing to Vandervent that she *was* Florine Ladue. That was a *different* sort of scandal; also, there was danger in it. No; she could not blame herself because she kept that matter quiet.

"And you'd advise me to keep it out of the courts, Judge?" she heard Zenda asking.

"If possible," replied the judge. "It will do you no good. The mere threat of it will be enough. Offer Grannis a fair price for his stock, deducting, of course, from that price whatever have been your poker losses to Weber. For the two are partners, unquestionably. Tell Grannis that, if he doesn't accept your offer, you will prosecute both Weber and himself for swindling. That's much the better way."

"I agree," said Zenda. "But I haven't the cash to swing Grannis's stock."

"Plenty of people have," said the judge. "In fact, I have a client who will take that stock."

"It's a bet," said Zenda. He rose briskly. "Can't thank you enough, Miss Deane. Will you be at the offices of Zenda Films to-morrow morning with Judge Walbrough?"

He turned to the judge and arranged the hour, then turned back to Clancy.

"And as soon as *that's* settled, we'll make a test of you, Miss Deane."

He was gone in another moment. The judge stared at Clancy.

"Little girl," he said, "if it weren't so late, I'd give you a long, long lecture."

"You'll lecture her no lectures, Tom Walbrough," said his wife firmly. "Hasn't she put you in the way of an investment for a client? You'll thank her, instead of scolding her."

The judge laughed.

"Right enough! But I *will* give her advice."

"And I'll follow it," said Clancy earnestly.

And she did. But not to the extent of doing as age, or proven experience, or ability advised her. She would always act upon the impulse, would follow her own way—a way which, because she was the lovely Clancy Deane, might honestly be termed her own sweet way.

XXI

When she and Judge Walbrough—the Walbroughs sent their car for her at nine-thirty—arrived in the offices of Zenda Films, they were ushered into an inner office by the same overdressed youth who had shown Clancy in there yesterday.

The meeting that loomed ahead of her was fraught, she believed, with tremendous dramatic possibilities. Of course, none of the people who would take part in it knew that she had visited the office of Morris Beiner, yet she might be called again by the name "Florine" in the presence of some one who knew.

Zenda was already there, seated at the large table. At the far end of it were Weber and Grannis. There were no introductions. Zenda greeted the new arrivals, and merely stated:

"Judge Walbrough will act as my attorney. If you want a lawyer, Grannis, you, of course, are entitled to one."

Grannis grunted unintelligibly. Zenda drummed a moment on the table with his slender fingers. Then he spoke.

"I won't go over everything again, Grannis. I've the goods on you. I've plenty on Weber, too. Judge Walbrough is prepared to offer you, on behalf of a client, seventy-five for your stock."

Here the judge nodded acquiescently. He opened an important-seeming wallet and withdrew a check.

"I went to the bank first thing this morning, Zenda," he said. "It's certified. Three hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars for half the stock—five thousand shares."

"That's correct," said Zenda. "It doesn't take account of my poker losses, but"—he leaned toward Weber—"I'm not going to slug you, Ike. I'm not going to sue you. I'm not going to do anything. Not now. But, so surely as you stay in this town, so surely as you mix into the film business *anywhere*, I'm going to land you in jail." He turned to his erstwhile partner. "I haven't much to say to you, Grannis. The judge is offering you a price that's fair, considering that he's deducted about what you and Ike trimmed me of from his offer. That's O.K. I'm willing to let his client in, sort of at my expense, in order to get rid of you. Now, do you accept?"

Clancy held her breath. But Zenda and Grannis must have held some earlier conversation this morning or last night. For Grannis produced a sheaf of engraved documents. He put them on the table. Zenda reached for them and handed them to the judge. The latter examined them carefully, then nodded in

acceptance.

"The certificates are properly endorsed in blank, Zenda. It's all right." He pushed across the table his certified check. Grannis took it. He rose and looked uncertainly at Zenda.

The film-director met his glance fairly.

"You're a pretty wise bird, Grannis," he said slowly. "But it isn't *really* wise to double-cross your friend and partner."

That was all that was said. Grannis and Weber had left the room when Clancy suddenly remembered something.

"The ten thousand dollars they gave me!" she cried. "Have you returned it?"

She had given it, for safe-keeping, into Walbrough's hands last night.

Zenda laughed.

"My dear Miss Deane," he said, "I've lost scores of thousands at stud to Grannis and Weber. That ten thousand dollars is my money. That is, it *was* my money."

Clancy stared at him. The judge chuckled.

"Considering that your evidence saved Zenda from a nasty lawsuit, that it ridded him of a crooked partner, that it gave him a chance to continue his business with a partner who will not interfere with him, both he and myself agree that you are entitled to that ten thousand dollars."

Clancy had been pale as wax. But now the color surged into her cheeks.

"For simply doing what I ought to do? No, indeed!" she cried.

Nor could their united protests move her. Zenda finally ceased. An idea struck him. He beamed upon her.

"You said, last night, that you had film ambitions. Well, Miss Deane, here's my chance to repay you."

Her eyes lighted.

"Oh, I don't want you to feel that——"

Zenda scribbled upon a card.

"Take this to the studio. Johansen will make a test of you. He'll do it right away. On Monday, you telephone——"

"And then begins the big career!" cried the judge. "Well, well, Miss Deane; I shall expect to see Zenda Films advertising the newest star all over the city. Eh, Zenda?"

Zenda smiled.

"I can always use a pretty girl with intelligence," he said. "Miss Deane is certainly pretty and just as certainly intelligent. If she screens as well as I hope ——"

His unuttered promise seemed to open the gates of Fortune to Clancy. She hardly knew afterward what she said by way of thanks. She only knew that Judge Walbrough insisted that she use his limousine—stating that he himself was going to take the subway down-town—and that Zenda wrung her hand warmly, and that, a moment later, she had descended in the elevator and was in the big motor, on her way to the East-Side studio of Zenda Films, Incorporated.

In the car, she managed to collect herself. Once again she saw herself the peer of the famous women of the screen; she saw herself famous, rich. Oddly enough, she thought of David Randall. She wondered how he would feel if he knew that she was on the threshold of international fame. For she never doubted it. She knew that all she needed was opportunity.

Johansen, a thin, bald, worried-seeming Swede, eyed her keenly with deep-set blue eyes. He was in his shirt-sleeves, superintending the erection of a "set." But he ceased that work and summoned a camera-man. The Zenda command caused all to put themselves at her service. Johansen even superintended her making-up process, of which she was abysmally ignorant. Also, he rearranged her hair. Then he conducted her to the "set" which he was erecting.

There was a table in the middle of the scene. Johansen instructed her. He put a letter on the table.

"Now, Miss Deane, you enter from the left there, you're kinda blue, downhearted —see? Then you spy this letter. You pick it up. It's for you, and you recognize the handwriting. It's from your sweetie—get me? You smile. You open the letter. Then your smile fades away and you weep. Get me? Try it. Now, mind, it don't really matter if you can act or not. Zenda wouldn't care about that. He could teach a wooden image to act. It's just your registering—that's all. Ready? Camera!"

In Zenith, when she had played in the high-school shows, Clancy had been self-conscious, she knew. And here, with only a bored assistant director and an

equally bored camera-man to observe her, she was even more self-conscious. So she was agreeably surprised when Johansen complimented her after the scene had been taken.

"You done fine!" he said. "Now let's try another. This time, you come in from the right, happy-like. You see the letter and get blue. You read it and get happy. Got it? Shoot!"

She went through the little scene, this time with less self-consciousness. Johansen smiled kindly upon her.

"I think you got something," he told her. "Can't tell, of course, yet. The screen is funny. Prettiest girl in the world may be a lemon on the screen. Same goes both ways. But we'll hope."

But he couldn't dash her sense of success. She rode on air to Sally Henderson's office. Her employer was not there, Clancy had telephoned before meeting Walbrough, asking permission to be late, and also apologizing for not having returned to the office the afternoon before.

"Miss Henderson's gone out of town for the week-end," young Guernsey, the too foppishly-dressed office-manager, told her. "She left this for you."

"This" was an envelope which Clancy quickly opened. It contained, not her discharge, which she had vaguely expected—why should her employer write to her otherwise?—but twenty-five dollars, half a week's salary. And Clancy was down to her last dollar!

"We close at one on Saturdays," Guernsey informed her. He himself was beating the closing-time by three-quarters of an hour, but Clancy waited until one o'clock. Then she left. She called upon Miss Conover, but the plump, merry little dressmaker had nothing ready to try on her newest customer.

It didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Zenda had caused a test to be made of her—and Clancy Deane would be upon the screen.

She wondered just what sort of parts Zenda would give her. Of course, she'd have to begin with little "bits," as Fanchon had called them. But soon—oh, very soon!—she'd work up to great rôles. She wanted emotional parts; she felt that she could bring to the screen something new in the way of interpretation. All the Clancys of the world, whether it is acting or writing or singing that they wish to do, feel the same.

She took in a matinée in the afternoon. She supped, in lonely splendor, at the

Trevor. And, equipped with a novel, she went to bed early. But she could not concentrate. Her mind wandered; and it didn't wander to the mystery of Morris Beiner's death, or to the possibility that some one in Vandervent's office would definitely decide that she *was* Florine Ladue, nearly so often as it wandered to the Zenda studios.

She had fooled Philip Vandervent yesterday. Grannis and Weber had passed, so she believed, out of her life. Why should she worry? She had done no wrong. Resolutely, she refused to fret. Instead, she went off to sleep, prepared for roseate dreams. She had them, but the awakening was not so roseate.

Mrs. Gerand, who, by request, roused all her lodgers on week-days, permitted them to slumber as late as they chose on Sundays. The lodging-house, usually from seven o'clock until nine a noisy place, filled with the bustle of departing men and women, was silent as the tomb on Sunday morning. And Clancy slept until eleven o'clock, to be awakened by the landlady.

"I hate to do it, Miss Deane," she apologized, "but when letters come by special messenger, they're important as telegrams, I think. So I brought this up."

Clancy, sitting up in bed, took the note from Mrs. Gerand's hand. After the landlady had gone, she opened it. And then she put her head upon the pillow and wept. For Zenda had written:

> DEAR MISS DEANE:
>
> I am at the studio, where I had them run off your test of yesterday morning. You see, I didn't waste any time. And I'm sorry to tell you that you won't do for the screen. One cannot explain it. Your skin, your features, your hair—everything about you is beautiful. And you have brains. But the camera is a tricky and unreasonable thing. All of that beauty and charm which is yours fails to register upon the screen. I cannot tell you how sorry I am, and I shall be only too glad to let you see the test yourself, so that you will not possibly doubt my good faith. If, in any other way, I can be of service to you, please command.
>
> faithfully,

All her illusions were shattered. She didn't wish to see the test. She believed Zenda.

Slowly her sobs ceased. She had no lack of courage. Also, she was young, and youth turns from defeat to future victory in a moment's time.

Carefully, as she bathed, she removed the traces of tears. Dressed, she breakfasted at the Trevor. Then, feeling more lonely than she had ever felt in her life, she went out upon Fifth Avenue. Groups of people were entering a church a block away. She was not a particularly devout young person, but she had been a regular churchgoer at Zenith. She walked up the avenue and into the church. She expected no consolation there; a girl or boy of twenty who can acquire consolation from religion is not exactly normal. Age turns to religion; youth away from it. But she did manage to forget herself in the solemn service, the mellow music.

Emerging, she envied the groups that paused to chat with each other. In Zenith, she knew everybody, would have also stopped to exchange comment and gossip. But here—she had failed in her great ambition. The rest was makeshift, a stop-gap until—until what? She didn't know. Vaguely she wondered where Randall was. Probably hundreds of miles beyond Chicago now.

And then, as she crossed the square, her heart leaped. For she saw him reluctantly descending the steps of her lodging house. She quickened her pace. He saw her. His reluctant tread also quickened. Unmindful of the drifts, Randall plowed across the street and joined her. She wondered why he had not started on his Western trip.

And then Clancy's heart, which had been beating joyously with a gladness that she did not quite understand, seemed to drop to some region inches below where it belonged. For, coming round the corner of Thompson Street—no, not coming, but stopping as he perceived her—was Spofford, the dyed-mustached detective of Vandervent's office. And with him was a shorter slighter person. Fear aided recognition. He was the elevator-man of the Heberworth Building, who had taken her up to Beiner's office last Tuesday afternoon.

XXII

Randall released Clancy's hand. He laughed embarrassedly.

"You *looked* glad," he said.

Clancy's hand fell limply to her side. A moment ago, her hand-clasp would have been firm, vital, a thing to thrill the young man. But now, although that protection he might give was most desirable, she could not respond to its presence.

For she was caught. Spofford, across the street, staring menacingly over at her, had been too swift for her. Yet, trapped though she was, she managed to look away from the attaché of the district attorney's office. She met Randall's eyes.

"I *am* glad," she said. As though to prove her words, she raised her hand and offered it again to Randall.

He took it. Holding it, he turned and stared over his shoulder. Spofford was still standing across the street; his companion was nodding his head. It seemed as though, sensing some threat in Randall's stare, they stood a little closer together. Something of that surly defiance that is the city detective's most outstanding trait seeped across the street. Clancy felt it. She wondered whether or not Randall did.

But he said nothing. With an air of proprietorship that was comforting, he drew her hand through his bended arm and started guiding her through the drifts.

Dully, Clancy permitted herself to be led. She wondered, almost apathetically, if Spofford would halt them. Well, what difference would it make? For a moment, she was vaguely interested in Randall's possible attitude. Would he knock the man down?

Then, as they reached the two men, Randall stopped. His big right arm moved backward; Clancy almost swung with it, back out of a possible fracas.

"I thought summer-time was your hunting-season," said Randall.

Spofford eyed him sullenly.

"Who you talkin' to?" he demanded.

"Why, to you," said Randall. "I thought that all you old gentlemen with dyed whiskers and toupées did your work in the pleasant months." He half-wheeled and pointed west. "Know what's over that way? I'll tell you—Jefferson Market. And the least that they give a masher is ten days on the Island. That is, after he gets out of the hospital." He paused, stared at Spofford a moment, then added "It's your move."

Spofford's red face bore a deeper color. But he met Randall's stare calmly. Slowly he turned back the lapel of his jacket, affording a glimpse of a nickel badge.

"Take a slant at that, friend," he advised. "I ain't mashin'; I'm 'tendin' to my business. Suppose," he finished truculently, "you 'tend to yours."

Clancy, hanging on Randall's arm, felt his biceps tighten. But her precarious position would not be improved by an attack upon Spofford. She made her gripping fingers dig deeper. She felt the biceps soften.

Then, as she waited for Spofford to announce that she was under arrest, the blue-coated man with the outthrust lower lip moved aside. She gave Randall no time for digestion of the queer situation. Her fingers now impelled him forward, and in a moment they were in the hall of Mrs. Gerand's lodging-house.

She left him there while she went up-stairs. Clancy would have stopped the procession to the death-house to powder her nose. And why not? Men light a cigarette; women arrange their hair. Either act, calling for a certain concentration, settles the nerves.

But Clancy's nerves were not to be settled this morning. Even though Spofford had not arrested her, his presence with the elevator-man from the Heberworth Building meant only one thing. He had not believed her explanation of her visit to Philip Vandervent's office, and, acting upon that disbelief, had produced, for purposes of identification, a man who had seen Beiner's mysterious woman visitor last Tuesday afternoon. Arrest was a mere matter of time, Clancy supposed.

Panicky, she peeped through the window, flattening her nose against the pane. Outside, across the street now, was Spofford. She was quite certain that his roving eyes sought her out, found her, and that his mean mouth opened in an exultant laugh.

She shrugged—the hopeless shrug of the condemned. She could only wait. Flight was useless. If Spofford suspected flight, he would not hesitate, she felt, to arrest her. She could visualize what had happened since she had entered the house. Spofford had told his witness to telephone for instructions. She knew vaguely that warrants were necessary, that certain informations and beliefs must be sworn to. How soon before a uniformed man— She almost ran down-stairs to Randall.

He was not in the hall, but she found him in the parlor. He was sitting down, his wide shoulders hunched together, his forehead frowning. She knew that he was thinking of the man outside, the man with the truculent lower lip, who wore a detective's shield pinned inside his coat lapel. Somehow, although, he had been willing to strike a blow for her a few minutes ago, it seemed to her that he had

lost his combativeness, that the eyes which he lifted to her were uneasy.

Yet the smile that came to his lips was cheering. He moved over slightly on the old-fashioned sofa on which he was sitting. Clancy took the hint; she sat down beside him.

"Suppose you were surprised to see me so soon again?" he asked. The banal question told Clancy that he intended to ignore the incident of Spofford. She was surprised—and vaguely indignant. Yet the indignation was not noticeable as she returned his smile.

"'Surprised?' I was thinking of you when I met you," she told him. "Of course I was surprised, but——"

"You were thinking of me?" He seemed to forget Spofford.

"Why not? Does one forget in twenty-four hours a man who has proposed?"

"There are degrees of forgetfulness," he said.

Clancy held her right hand before her. She spread its fingers wide. With the index-finger of her left hand, she began counting off, beginning with the right thumb.

"Absolute zero of forgetfulness. M-m-m—no; not that." She touched her right forefinger. "Freezing-point—no; not that." She completely forgot, in the always delightful tactics of flirtation, the man lurking outside. She paused.

"Please continue," pleaded Randall.

"Oh, I wouldn't want to," she told him. "You see, one finally reaches the boiling-point, which isn't forgetfulness at all, and—why are you in New York?" she suddenly demanded.

"Train reached Albany hours late—account of the snow. I had time to think it over, and—what's business when a lady beckons."

"Did I beckon?" she asked demurely. "I thought that I pointed."

"You did," he agreed. "But pointing is vulgar, and I knew that you couldn't be that."

She grinned—the irrepressible Clancy grin that told of the merry heart within her.

"Did you return to New York to apologize for thinking me vulgar," she inquired. Randall had never been so near to winning her admiration. She liked him, of

course, thought him trustworthy, dependable, and safe, the possessor of all those qualities which women respect in sons, fathers, brothers, and husbands, but not in suitors. But, for the first time since she had met him—not so long ago, as age reckons, but long enough as youth knows time—he was showing a lightness of touch. He wasn't witty, but, to Clancy, he seemed so, and the soul of wit is not so much its brevity as it is its audience. He seemed witty, for the moment, to Clancy. And so, admirable.

But the lightness left him as quickly as it had come. He shook his head gravely.

"I had time to think it over," he said again. "And—Miss Deane, if I could fall in love with you in a week, so could other men."

"Are you proposing again?" she demanded.

His shoulders were broad; they could carry for two. He was kindly; she forgot that, a moment ago, he hadn't seemed combative. She liked him better than she had. And then, even as she was admiring and liking him, she became conscious that he was restless, uneasy. Instinctively, she knew that it was not because of his love for her; it was because of the man outside.

That she could let Randall leave this house without some sort of explanation of Spofford's queer manner had never been in her thoughts. She knew that Randall would demand an explanation. She knew that he had been conscious of her fright at sight of Spofford.

"'Proposing again,'" echoed Randall. "Why—you know——"

She cut into his speech. She wasted no time.

"That man outside! Do you know why he's watching me?"

"*Is* he watching you?" Randall's surprise was palpably assumed. It annoyed Clancy.

"You know that he is!" she cried. "Aren't you curious?"

Randall breathed heavily. He sat bolt upright.

"I want you to know, Miss Deane, that it doesn't matter a bit to me. Whatever you may have done, I am sure that you can explain."

At any other time, Clancy would have flamed fire at his tone. Into his speech had entered a certain stiltedness, a priggishness, almost, that would have roused all the rage of which she was capable. And as she would be able to love greatly, so would she be able—temporarily—to hate. But now she was intent on self; she

had no thought to spare for Randall—save in so far as he might aid her.

"'Explain?'" Her voice almost broke. "It's—it's pretty hard to explain murder, isn't it?"

Randall's lower jaw hung down.

"'Murder!' You—you're joking, Miss Deane!" Yet, somehow, Clancy knew that he knew that she was not joking.

"I'm not joking. He—he thinks that I killed Morris Beiner."

"Murder! Morris Beiner!" he gasped.

"You've read about it. I'm the woman! The one that ran down the fire-escape, that the police want!"

Slowly Randall digested it. Once again he gasped the word:

"Murder!"

"Goodness me!" Clancy became New England in her expression. "What else did you think it was?"

"Why—I supposed—something—I didn't know—murder! That's absurd!"

"You seem relieved," she said. He puzzled her.

"Well, of course," he said.

"I don't see why."

"Well, you *couldn't* have committed murder," he replied, with an air of having uttered explanation of his relief.

"I wish the police could think so!" she cried.

"'Think so?' I'll make them think so. I'll tell that chap out there——"

"But it won't do any good!" cried Clancy. Her cry was almost a wail. Once before she had practically confessed, then withdrawn her confession. Now she could not withdraw. Words rushed from her as from a broken water-main. But, because she was Clancy Deane, they were not words of exculpation, or of apology. They were the facts. Silently Randall heard them through. Then he spoke slowly.

"Any jury in the world would believe you," he said.

"But I don't want to tell it to any jury!" screamed Clancy. "Why—why—the

disgrace—I—I——"

Confession is always dramatic, and the dramatic is emotional. The tears welled in her eyes. Through the blur of tears, Randall seemed bigger, sturdier than ever. She reached out her arms toward him.

"You asked me to marry you!" she cried. "I—I—would you want to marry me now?"

Randall smiled.

"You know it," he said. "Just as soon as this affair is fixed up, we'll be married, and——" He rose and took her hands in his. Quite unaccountably, Clancy released her hands.

"Fix it up? It *can't* be fixed up," she said.

"Well, we can try," said Randall. "I'll call in this man outside——" He hesitated. "Judge Walbrough has been mighty nice to you, hasn't he? Suppose I get him on the telephone?"

He didn't wait for Clancy to reply. He walked briskly from the room and she heard him at the telephone. She didn't listen to what he said. She walked to the window. Spofford was still outside. What right had he to act upon his own responsibility? Why hadn't the word of Philip Vandervent been enough for him?

She turned as Randall entered the room.

"The telephone is out of order," he said. "I think I'd better run up to the Walbroughs' house and get him."

"And leave me here!" cried Clancy.

Randall shrugged.

"I'm afraid that man wouldn't let you go with me."

"He may come in here and arrest me," she said.

He shook his head.

"I don't think so. And, if he does, Walbrough and I'll be right down after you. You'd better let me go."

She made no further protest. Suddenly, unaccountably, she wanted him to go.

XXIII

Up in her room, alternating between moments of almost hysterical defiance when she would stare through the window-panes at Spofford, and moments when she would hurl herself upon the narrow bed, she waited for Randall's return.

Somewhere she had read, or heard, that murder was not a bailable offense. That meant that she would be detained in prison, awaiting trial. With a curious detachment, she studied herself. As though she were some formless spirit, remote, yet infinitely near, she looked at Clancy Deane. How silly it all was—how futile! Billions of humans had conspired together, had laid down for themselves millions of queer rules, transgression of which was so simple a matter that she wondered that any one avoided it.

For a moment she had that odd clairvoyance that comes to persons who, by some quirk of fate, are compelled to think for themselves. She might escape from the present net, but what nets would the demon set for her in the years to come? Would she avoid them all? A horror of the future, a future in which she saw herself eternally attempting extrication from the inextricable, loomed before her.

And then that queer, blurry clairvoyance left her. She came back to the present. Mrs. Gerand, knocking at her door, announced that two gentlemen wished to see her. She ran to the window. Spofford was still there.

Down-stairs she ran. Mrs. Gerand had not told her that three persons were calling. And it was the third to whom Clancy ran, upon whose capacious bosom she let loose a flood of tears.

Mrs. Walbrough patted her head, drew her close to her, kissed her; with her own handkerchief wiped Clancy's eyes, from her own little vanity case offered Clancy those replenishments of the toilet without which the modern woman is more helpless than a man lost in the jungle without food or arms.

The judge noisily cleared his throat. Though he ever afterward disputed Mrs. Walbrough's testimony, it is nevertheless the fact that he used his own handkerchief upon his eyes. As for Randall, Clancy, lifting her head from Mrs. Walbrough's breast, was subtly aware that his reddened face bore an expression that was not merely embarrassment. He appeared once again uneasy. It almost seemed to her that he avoided her eyes.

Judge Walbrough cleared his throat a second time.

"Mr. Randall has told us a lot, Miss Deane. Suppose you tell us the whole story."

It was easy to talk to Walbrough. He possessed the art of asking the question that illuminated the speaker's mind, made him, or her, see clearly things that had seemed of little relevance. Not until she had finished did Clancy wonder if she had dropped in the Walbrough regard, if she had lost a patronage, a friendship that, in so brief a time, had come to mean so much.

"What must you think of me?" she cried, as Walbrough tapped his cheek with his fingers.

The judge smiled.

"I think that you've been a sensible young woman."

Clancy gasped. Her eyes widened with amazement.

"Why, I was sure that you'd blame me——"

"What for?" demanded the judge.

"For running away—hiding—everything," said Clancy.

The judge's voice was grim.

"If you'd voluntarily surrendered yourself to the indignities of arrest, I'd have thought you an idiot."

"But won't the fact that she remained in hiding go against her, Judge Walbrough?" asked Randall.

Walbrough surveyed the younger man frowningly.

"'Go against her?' Where? You certainly don't imagine that any jury would *convict* Miss Deane?"

"Of course not," stammered Randall.

"And public opinion will certainly not condemn an innocent girl for trying to avoid scandal, will it?" insisted the judge.

"No," admitted Randall.

"Then Miss Deane did the proper thing. Of course, the police will try to make it seem that flight was the admission of guilt, but we won't worry about them."

Clancy seized his hand.

"Do you mean that I won't be arrested?" she cried.

"Exactly what I mean," said the judge. Yet, had Clancy been in a calmer frame of mind, she would have observed that the judge's kindly smile was of the lips, not of the eyes. She was not old enough in the world's experiences to realize that a good lawyer is like a good doctor—he cheers up his client. But, for that matter, it took not merely an older person to know always what lay behind Judge Walbrough's smile; it took an extremely keen analyst of human nature. Even his wife, who knew him quite as well as any wife knows a husband, was deceived by his confidence. Her hug was more reassuring to Clancy than even the judge's words.

"Bring that man in," the judge said to Randall, who went out to the street to tell Spofford that Judge Walbrough wished to see him.

The judge walked up and down the room while Randall was gone. Clancy, watching him, was content to ask no questions, to beg for no more reassurances. She felt as might a little child toward a parent. Nor did her faith in him lessen as Randall, accompanied by Spofford, returned. The judge ceased his pacing up and down the floor. He held the detective with an eye from which all kindliness had vanished.

"You know who I am?" he demanded.

Spofford jerked a thumb at Randall.

"This man told me that Judge Walbrough wanted to see me."

"I'm Walbrough," said the judge. "I want to know why you're annoying this young lady?"

"Me?" Spofford's mean eyes widened. His surprise was overdone. "Annoyin' her?"

"We want to know why you are watching her."

Spofford's eyes were cunning.

"Ask her," he said.

Judge Walbrough drew closer to the man.

"Spofford, you know, of course, that I am no longer on the bench. You also, I presume, know how long you will remain on the force if I want you put off."

Spofford thrust out his lower lip.

"And I guess you know, too, that there's somethin' comin' to the man who

interferes with an officer in the performance of his duty. I don't care who you are. Threaten me, and see what you get."

The judge laughed.

"A fine spirit, Spofford! Thoroughly admirable! Only, my man, I'll not stop at putting you off the force. I'll run you out of town." His voice suddenly rose. "Answer me, or I'll knock you down."

The truculence of Spofford was always assumed. He knew, as did every New Yorker, that, ex-judge though he might be, the power of Walbrough was no inconsiderable thing.

"Aw, there's no need gettin' huffy about it. I'll tell you, if the young lady won't. She murdered Morris Beiner."

The judge's laugh was exquisitely rendered. He didn't guffaw; he merely chuckled. It was a marvelous bit of acting. Clancy, her heart beating and throat choky with fear, was nevertheless sufficient mistress of herself to be able to appreciate it. For the chuckle held mirth; it also held appreciation of the seriousness of the charge. Before it, the assumption of truculence on Spofford's features faded. He looked abashed, frightened. To have offended Judge Walbrough without any evidence was to have invited trouble. Spofford was not the sort that issues such invitations. He suddenly grew desperate.

"That's all right with me. Laugh if you want to. But I tell you we been lookin' for a dame that was in Beiner's office just before he was killed. And the elevator-boy at the Heberworth Building just took a slant at this dame and identified her as a woman he let off on the fourth floor round five o'clock on last Tuesday afternoon. And this woman was in Mr. Vandervent's office yesterday, and she sent in the name of Florine Ladue—the woman we been lookin' for, and——"

"Miss Deane has explained that. Wasn't Mr. Vandervent satisfied with her explanation?" demanded the judge.

"He was; but he ain't me!" cried Spofford. "I don't fall for them easy explanations. And, say—how did Miss Deane happen to guess what I was hangin' around for? If you know that she *explained* things to Mr. Vandervent, why'd you ask me why I was watchin'?"

Judge Walbrough chuckled again.

"Stupid people always think in grooves, don't they, Spofford? Don't you suppose that Miss Deane might have told me an amusing practical joke that she had played upon Mr. Vandervent?"

"Yes; she might have," sneered Spofford. "It was funny, at that. So funny that she fainted when she played it. Perhaps that was part of the joke, though."

Judge Walbrough now became the alert lawyer.

"Spofford, does Mr. Vandervent know of this—er—independent investigation of yours?" he asked.

The detective shook his head.

"He'll know in the mornin', though. And if he won't listen, there's others that will."

"Certainly," said the judge. "If you have something to say. But, before you say it, you'd like to be quite certain of your facts, wouldn't you?"

Spofford nodded; his forehead wrinkled. Himself cunning, he was the sort that always is trying to figure out what lies behind another's statement. And that sort always thinks that it will do something cunning. He wasn't so far wrong in this particular instance.

"And, as I understand it, you make the charge of murder against Miss Deane because she played a joke upon Mr. Vandervent, and because an elevator-man claims to recognize her. His recognition doesn't justify an accusation of murder, you know."

"No; but it'll entitle her to a chance to do some more explainin'."

"Perhaps," said the judge. "Where is this elevator-man now?"

"He's where I can get hold of him," said Spofford.

"Excellent!" said the judge. "Because the police will want him to-morrow. And

not for the reason that you imagine, Spofford. They'll want him for criminal slander and, possibly, if he sticks to the absurd story that he told, you, for perjury, also. At the time when this elevator-man claims to have seen Miss Deane in the Heberworth Building, she was having tea with me and my wife at our home."

It was a magnificent lie. But even as it was uttered, Clancy wondered at the judge. Why? He surely wouldn't, for a mere acquaintance, commit perjury. And if he would, surely his wife could not be expected to join him in the crime.

But its effect upon Spofford was remarkable. His lower lip lost its artificially pugnacious expression. It sunk in as though his lower teeth had been suddenly removed. It never occurred to him—not then, at any rate—to doubt the judge's statement. And if it had, his doubts would have been dissipated by Mrs. Walbrough's immediate corroboration.

"Tuesday afternoon, yes. I think, Tom, that Miss Deane didn't leave until a quarter after six."

Clancy's eyes dropped to the floor. Terrific had been the accusation, menacing had been the threat; and now both seemed to vanish, as though they had never been. For Spofford tried a grin. It was feeble, but it had the correct intention behind it.

"'Scuse me, lady—Miss Deane. I been locked out, and all the time thinkin' I had the key in my pocket. Well, I guess I'll be moseyin' along, ladies and gents. No hard feelin's, I hope. A guy sees his dooty, and he likes to do it, y' know. I'll sure wear out a knuckle or two on this elevator-man." He waited a moment. He had made grave charges. Walbrough was a power; he wanted to read his fate if he could. He felt assured, for Walbrough smiled and inclined his head. Sheepishly he shuffled from the room.

There was silence until the outer door had crashed behind him. Then the judge leaped into activity.

"The Heberworth Building. Part of the Vandervent estate, isn't it, Randall?"

Randall shook his head. He was a clever business man, doubtless, thought Clancy, but his mind seemed not nearly so quick as the judge's.

"I don't know," he answered.

"Well, I do," said the judge. "It's a shame; it's tough on Phil to make him suborn perjury, but I don't see any other way out of it. Where's the telephone, Miss

Deane?"

"It's out of order," Clancy gasped.

The judge frowned.

"Well, it doesn't matter. Half an hour from now will do as well as earlier, I guess. Run up-stairs and pack your things." He turned to his wife. "Better help her," he suggested.

"'Pack?'" gasped Clancy.

"Of course. You're coming home with us. That chap Spofford is not an *absolute* fool, even if he is a plain-clothes man. By the time he's thought over two or three little things, he'll be back again. And he might get somebody to swear out a warrant. Might even take a chance and arrest without it. But if you're in my house, there'll be lots of hesitation about warrants and things like that until there's been more evidence brought forward. And there won't be. Hurry along, young lady."

Clancy stared at him.

"Do you know," she said slowly, "I want to cry."

"Certainly you do. Perfectly correct. Cry away, my dear!"

Clancy suddenly grinned.

"I want to laugh even more," she said. "Judge Walbrough, you're the dearest, kindest— I can't let you do it."

"Do what?" demanded the judge.

"Why, tell lies for me. They'll jail you, and——"

Judge Walbrough winked broadly at Randall.

"I guess that wouldn't bother you, would it, Mr. Randall? Jail for a girl like Miss Deane? Then I think an old-timer like myself has a right to do something that a young man would be wild to do—even if he has a jealous wife who hates every woman who looks at him."

It was heavy, as most of Walbrough's humor was apt to be, Clancy couldn't be sure that it was even in good taste. But it cleared the atmosphere of tears. Her laugh that followed the threat of weeping had been a bit hysterical. Now, as she went up-stairs with Mrs. Walbrough, it was normal. She could climb up as quickly as she could descend.

XXIV

Vandervent entered the Walbrough living-room with a jerky stride that testified to his excitement. A dozen questions were crowded against his teeth. But, though the swift motor-ride down-town had not been too brief for him to marshal them in the order of their importance, he forgot them as he met Clancy's eyes.

They should have been penitent eyes; and they were not. They should have been frightened eyes; and they were not. They should have been pleading eyes; and they were not. Instead, they were mischievous, mocking, almost. Also, they were deep, fathomless. Looking into them, the reproach died out in Vandervent's own. The pleading that should have been in Clancy's appeared in Vandervent's, although he undoubtedly was unconscious of the fact.

On the way there, he had been aware of himself as a trained lawyer confronted with a desperate, a possibly tragic situation. Now he was aware of himself only as a man confronting a woman.

He acknowledged the presence of the Walbroughs and of Randall with a carelessness that seemed quite natural to the older people but which made Randall eye the newcomer curiously. In love himself, Randall was quick to suspect its existence in the heart of another man.

"So," said Vandervent, "you weren't joking with me Friday, eh, Miss Deane?"

She shook her head slowly. There was something in her manner that seemed to say to him that she had transferred her difficulties to him, and that, if he were half the man she believed him to be, he'd accept them ungrudgingly.

"Suppose I hear the whole story," suggested Vandervent.

Intently, he listened as, prompted by the judge when she slid over matters that seemed unimportant to her, she retold the tale of the past week. The judge took up the burden of speech as soon as she relinquished it.

"So you see, Vandervent, your job is to get hold of this elevator-man and persuade him that his identification is all wrong."

Vandervent pursed his lips; he whistled softly.

"I haven't as good a memory as I ought to have, Judge. I can't recall the exact penalty for interference with the course of justice."

Clancy's eyes blazed.

"Judge, please don't ask Mr. Vandervent to do anything wrong. I wouldn't have him take any risk. I——"

Vandervent colored.

"Please, Miss Deane! You should know that I intend—that I will do anything—I was intending to be a little humorous."

"No time for humor," grunted the judge.

Vandervent looked at Mrs. Walbrough. Her glance was uncompromisingly hostile. Only in Randall's eyes did he read anything approximating sympathy. And he resented finding it there.

"The—er—difficulties——" he began.

"Not much difficulty in shutting an elevator-boy's mouth, is there?" demanded the judge. "It isn't as though we were asking you really to interfere with the course of justice, Vandervent. You realize that Miss Deane is innocent, don't you?"

"Certainly," said Vandervent. "But—I'm an officer of the law, Judge."

"Does that mean that you won't help Miss Deane? Good God! You aren't going to let a young woman's name be dragged through a filthy mess like this, are you?"

"Not if I can help it," said Vandervent.

"That's better," grunted the judge. "But how do you expect to help it, though?"

"By finding the real murderer."

"When?" roared Walbrough. "To-day?"

Vandervent colored again.

"As soon as possible. I don't know when. But to shut up the boy—think it over, Judge. He works for the Vandervent estate, it's true. But I don't own his soul, you know. Think of the opportunities for blackmail we give him. It's impossible, Judge—and unnecessary. If Spofford goes to him again, it's the elevator-boy's word against yours. Worthless!"

"And you, of course, knowing that I lied, would feel compelled, as an officer of the law——"

"I'd feel compelled to do nothing!" snapped Vandervent. "Your word would be taken unreservedly by the district attorney's office. The matter ends right there."

"Unless," said the judge softly, "the boy goes to a newspaper. In which case, his charge and my alibi would be printed. And five directors of the Metals and Textiles Bank would immediately recollect that I had been present at a meeting on Tuesday afternoon between the hours of one and six. Likewise, thirty-odd ladies, all present at Mrs. Rayburn's bridge, would remember that my wife had been at Mrs. Rayburn's house all of Tuesday afternoon." He groaned. "I had to think of something, Vandervent. I told the first lie that popped into my head. Our alibi for Miss Deane will go crashing into bits once it's examined, once there's the least publicity. Publicity! That's all that Miss Deane fears, all that we fear for her. Scandal! We've got to stop that."

"Exactly; we *will* stop it," said Vandervent. "There's a way." Oddly, he blushed vividly as he spoke. "I know of one way—but we won't dwell on that just now. I—I have a right—to suppress information that—that I don't think is essential to the enforcing of justice. I—I—if the suppressing of the elevator-man would work good for Miss Deane, I would see to his suppression. Because I know her to be innocent."

"Well, what are you going to do?" demanded the judge.

Vandervent shrugged.

"It's not an offhand matter, Judge. We must think."

They thought. But Clancy's thoughts traveled far afield from the tremendous issue that confronted her. Mentally, she was comparing Randall and Vandervent, trying to find out what it was in Randall that, during the past few hours, had depressed her, aroused her resentment.

"You see," said Vandervent finally, "the relations between the Police Department and the district attorney's office are rather strained at the moment. If the police should happen to learn, in any way, that we've been conducting an independent investigation into the Beiner murder and that we'd dropped it——"

"Where would they learn it?" asked the judge. His brusqueness had left him. With a little thrill that might have been amazement, Clancy noted that the few minutes' silence had somehow caused Judge Walbrough to drop into a secondary place; Vandervent now seemed to have taken command of the situation.

"Spofford," answered Vandervent.

"Would he dare?" asked the judge.

Vandervent laughed.

"Even the lowly plain-clothes man plays politics. There'll be glory of a sort for the man who solves the Beiner mystery. If Spofford finally decides that he is by way of being close to the solution, I don't believe that he can be stopped from telling it to the police or the newspapers."

"And you don't see any way of stopping Spofford?" asked the judge.

"He may have been convinced by your story," Vandervent suggested.

The judge shook his head.

"His conviction won't last."

Vandervent shrugged.

"In that case— Well, we can wait."

Clancy interjected herself into the conversation.

"You won't really just simply wait? You'll be trying to find out who really killed Mr. Beiner?"

"You may be sure of that," said Vandervent. "You see"—and he shrugged again—"we become one-idea'd a bit too easily in the district attorney's office. It's a police habit, too. We know that a young woman had been in Beiner's office, that Beiner had had an engagement to take a young woman over to a film-studio. We discovered a card introducing a Miss Ladue to Beiner. From its position on Beiner's desk, we dared assume that the young woman of the studio appointment was this Miss Ladue. Our assumptions were correct, it seems. But we didn't stop at that assumption; we assumed that she was the murderess. We were wrong there."

Clancy's bosom lifted at his matter-of-fact statement. With so much evidence against her, and with this evidence apparently corroborated by her flight, it was wonderful to realize that not a single person to whom she had told her story doubted it.

"And, because we believed that we had hit upon the correct theory, we dropped all other ends of the case," continued Vandervent. "Now, with the case almost a week old—oh, we'll get him—or her—all right," he added hastily. "Only—the notoriety that may occur first——" He broke off abruptly.

Clancy's bosom fell; her hopes also. The palms of her hands became moist. In the presence of Vandervent, she realized more fully than ever what notoriety might mean. Vandervent sensed her horror.

"But I assure you, Miss Deane, that we'll avoid that notoriety. I know a way ——"

"What?" demanded the judge.

"Well, we'll wait a bit," said Vandervent. "Meanwhile, I'm going to the office."

"On Sunday?" asked Mrs. Walbrough. Vandervent smiled faintly.

"I think I'll be forgiven—considering the cause for which I labor," he finished. He was rewarded by a smile from Clancy that brought the color to his cheeks.

And then, the blush still lingering, he left them. Walbrough escorted him to the door. He returned, a puzzled look upon his face.

"Well, I wonder what he means by saying that he knows a way to keep the thing out of the papers."

"You're an idiot!" snapped his wife "Why—any one ought to know what he means."

The judge ran his fingers across the top of his head.

"'Any one ought to know,' eh? Well, I'm one person that doesn't."

"You'll find out soon enough," retorted Mrs. Walbrough. She turned to Clancy. "Come along, dear; you must lie down."

Randall, whose silence during the past half-hour had been conspicuous, opened his mouth.

"Why—er——," he began.

But Mrs. Walbrough cut him off.

"You'll forgive Miss Deane, won't you?" she pleaded. "She's exhausted, poor thing, though she doesn't know it."

Indeed, Clancy didn't know it, hadn't even suspected it. But she could offer no protest. Mrs. Walbrough was dominating the situation as Vandervent had been doing a few moments ago. She found herself shaking hands with Randall, thanking him, telling him that her plans necessarily were uncertain, but adding, with the irrepressible Clancy grin, that, if she weren't here, she'd certainly be in jail where any one could find her, and bidding him good-by. All this without

knowing exactly why. Randall deserved better treatment. Yet, queerly enough, she didn't want to accord it to him.

A little later, she was uncorseted and lying down in a Walbrough guest bedroom, a charming room in soft grays that soothed her and made her yearn for night and sleep. Just now she wasn't the least bit sleepy, but she yielded to Mrs. Walbrough's insistence that she should rest.

Mrs. Walbrough, leaving her guest, found her husband in his study; he was gravely mixing himself a cocktail. She surveyed him with contempt. Mildly he looked at her.

"What have I done now?" he demanded.

"Almost rushed that poor girl into a marriage," she replied.

"'Marriage?' God bless me—what do you mean?"

"Asking again and again what Phil Vandervent meant when he said that he knew a way to avoid publicity. And then you didn't have sense enough to edge young Randall out of the house. You let me be almost rude to him."

"Well, why should I have been the one to be rude? Why be rude, anyway? He's been darned nice to the girl."

"That's just it! Do you want her to keep thinking how nice he is?"

"Well, in the name of heaven, why not?" demanded her exasperated husband.

"Because he's not good enough for her."

"Why isn't he?"

"Because she can do better."

The judge drained his cocktail.

"Mrs. Walbrough, do you know I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about?"

"Of course you haven't! You'd have let her stay here and listen, maybe, to a proposal from that young man, and perhaps accept it, and possibly——"

"Peace!" thundered the judge. "No more supposes,' please. I'll not be henpecked in my own house."

She came close to him and put her arm about him.

"Where shall I henpeck you then, Tommy boy?" she asked.

"'Tommy boy! Tommy boy?' O my good Lord, what talk!" sputtered the judge. But he kissed her as she lifted her mouth to his.

XXV

Familiarity breeds endurance as well as contempt. Clancy ate as hearty a breakfast on Monday morning as any criminal that ever lived, and, according to what one reads, condemned criminals on the morning of execution have most rapacious appetites. Which is not so odd as people think; how can they know when they're going to eat again?

She had been in New York one week, lacking a few hours, and in that week she had run the scale of sensation. She did not believe that she could ever be excited again. No matter what came, she believed that she would have fortitude to endure it.

The judge and his wife seemed to have banished alarm. Indeed, they had seemed to do that last night, for when Mrs. Walbrough had permitted Clancy to rise for dinner, she had conducted her to a meal at which no talk of Clancy's plight had been permitted to take place. Later, the three had played draw-pitch, a card game at which Clancy had shown what the judge was pleased to term a "genuine talent."

Then had come bed. And now, having disposed of a breakfast that would have met the approval of any resident of Zenith, she announced that she was going out.

"Better stay indoors," said the judge. "Just as well, you know, if people don't see you too much."

Clancy laughed.

"I've been outdoors right along," she said. "It's rather a late date to hide indoors. Besides, I mustn't lose my job."

"Job!" The judge snorted disgustedly.

"Why, you mustn't think of work until this matter is all settled!" cried Mrs. Walbrough.

Clancy smiled.

"I must live, you know."

"'Live! Live!'" The judge lifted an empty coffee-cup to his mouth, then set it down with a crash that should have broken it. "Don't be absurd, my dear girl. Mrs. Walbrough and I——"

"Please!" begged Clancy. She fought against tears of gratitude—of affection. "You've been so dear, so—so—'angelic' is the only word that fits it. Both of you. I'll adore you—always. But you mustn't—I didn't come to New York to let other people, no matter how sweet and generous they might be, do for me."

The judge cleared his throat.

"Quite right, my dear; quite right."

"Of course she is," said Mrs. Walbrough.

Clancy hid her mirth. It is a wonderful thing to realize that in the eyes of certain people we may do no wrong, that, whatever we do, even though these certain people have advised against it, becomes suddenly the only correct, the only possible course. And to think that she had known the Walbroughs only a few days!

Fate had been brutal to her these past seven days; but Fate had also been kindly.

"But you'll continue to make this your home—for the present, at least," said the judge. "Until this affair is closed."

To have refused would have been an unkindness. They wanted her. Clancy was one of those persons who would always be wanted.

The judge, as she was leaving, wrote on a card his private-office telephone-number.

"If you got the listed one, you might have difficulty in speaking with me. But this wire ends on my desk. I answer it myself."

Clancy thanked him. Mrs. Walbrough kissed her, and the judge assumed a forlorn, abused expression. So Clancy kissed him also.

A servant stopped her in the hall.

"Just arrived, Miss Deane," she said, putting in Clancy's hand a long box, from one end of which protruded flower-stems. Clancy had never been presented with "store" flowers before. In Zenith, people patronize a florist only on sorrowful occasions.

And now, gazing at the glorious red roses that filled the box, Clancy knew that she would never go back to Zenith. She had known it several times during the past week, but to-day she knew it definitely, finally. With scandal hovering in a black cloud over her, she still knew it. These roses were emblematic of the things for which she had come to New York. They stood for the little luxuries, the refinements of living that one couldn't have in a country town. Had the greatest sage in the world come to Clancy now and told her of what little worth these things were in comparison with the simpler, truer things of the country, Clancy would have laughed at him. How could a man be expected to understand? Further, she wouldn't have believed him. She had seen meannesses in Zenith that its gorgeous sunsets and its tonic air could not eradicate from memory.

She turned back, and up-stairs found Mrs. Walbrough.

"I'll fix them for you," said the judge's wife.

But Clancy hugged the opened box to her bosom.

"These are the first flowers *from a florist's* that I ever received," she said.

"Bless your heart!" said Mrs. Walbrough. "I'll even let you fill the vases." Mrs. Walbrough could remember the first flowers sent her by her first beau. "But you haven't read the card!" she cried.

Clancy colored. She hadn't thought of that. She picked up the envelope.

"Oh!" she gasped, when she had torn the envelope open and read the sender's name. And there were scribbled words below the engraved script: "To a brave young lady."

Mutely she handed the card to her hostess. Mrs. Walbrough smiled.

"He isn't as brave as you, my dear. Or else," she explained, "he'd have written, 'To a beautiful young lady.' Why," she cried, "that's what he started to write! Look! There's a blot, and it's scratched——"

Clancy's color was fiery.

"He wouldn't have!" she protested.

"Well, he didn't; but he wanted to," retorted Mrs. Walbrough.

Clancy gathered the roses in her arms. She could say nothing. Of course, it was absurd. Mrs. Walbrough had acquired a sudden and great fondness for her, and therefore was colored in her views. Still, there was the evidence. There is no letter "t" in brave, and undeniably there had been a "t" in the word that had

preceded "young." She saw visions; she saw herself—she dismissed them. Mr. Philip Vandervent was a kindly, chivalrous young man and had done a thoughtful thing. That's all there was to it. She would be an idiot to read more into the incident. And yet, there had been a "t" in "brave" until he had scratched it out!

Her heart was singing as she left the Walbrough house. A score of Spoffords might have been lurking near and she would never have seen them.

Suddenly she thought of Randall. Why hadn't he thought of sending her roses? He had come back from Albany, cut short his trip to California to see her, to plead once more his cause. Her eyes hardened. He hadn't pleaded it very strongly. Suddenly she knew why she had been resentful yesterday—because she had sensed his refusal of her. Refusal! She offered to marry him, and—he'd said, "Wait."

But she could not keep her mind on him long enough to realize that she was unjust. The glamour of Vandervent overwhelmed her.

She walked slowly, and it was after nine when she arrived at Sally Henderson's office.

Her employer greeted her cordially.

"Easy job—though tiresome—for you to-day, Miss Deane," she said. "Sophie Carey has made another lightning change. Wants to rent her house furnished as quick as we can get a client. You've got to check her inventory. Hurry along, will you? Here!" She thrust into Clancy's hands printed slips of paper and almost pushed her employee toward the door.

Clancy caught a 'bus and rode as far as Eighth Street. On the way, she glanced at the printed slips. They were lists of about everything, she imagined, that could possibly be crowded into a house. The task had frightened her at first, but now it seemed simple.

Mrs. Carey's maid had evidently recovered from the indisposition of the other day, or else she had engaged a new one. Anyway, a young woman in apron and cap opened the door.

Yes; Mrs. Carey was in. In a moment, Clancy had verbal evidence of the fact, for she heard Sophie's voice calling to her. She entered the dining-room. Mrs. Carey was at breakfast. Her husband was with her, but that his breakfast was the ordinary sort Clancy was inclined to doubt. For by his apparently untouched plate stood a tall glass.

He rose, not too easily, as Clancy entered.

"Welcome to our city, little stranger!" he cried.

Clancy shot a glance at Sophie Carey. She was sorry for her. Mrs. Carey's face was white; she looked old.

"Going to find me a tenant?" she asked. Her attempt at joviality was rather pathetic.

"Take the house herself. Why not?" demanded Carey. "Nice person to leave it with. Take good care ev'rything. Make it pleasant for me when I run into town for a day or so. Nice, friendly li'l brunette to talk to. 'Scuse me," he suddenly added. "Sorry! Did I say anything I shouldn't, Sophie darling? I ask you, Miss Deane, did I say a single thing shouldn't've said. Tell me."

"No, indeed," said Clancy.

Her heart ached for Sophie Carey. A brilliant, charming, beautiful woman tied to a thing like this! Not that she judged Don Carey because of his intoxication. She was not too rigorous in her judgment of other people's weaknesses. She knew that men can become intoxicated and still be men of genius and strength. But Carey's weak mouth, too small for virility, his mean eyes, disgusted her. What a woman Mrs. Carey would make if the right man—— And yet she was drawn to her husband in some way or another. Possibly, Clancy decided, sheer loneliness made her endure him on those occasions when he returned from his wanderings.

Mrs. Carey rose.

"You'll excuse us, Don? Miss Deane must go over the house, you know."

"Surest thing! Go right 'long. 'F I can help, don't hes'tate t' call on me. Love help li'l brunette."

How they got out of the room, Clancy didn't know. She thought that Sophie Carey would faint, but she didn't. As for herself, the feeling that Don Carey's drunken eyes were appraising her figure nauseated her. She was so pitifully inclined toward Sophie that her eyes were blurry.

Up-stairs in her bedroom, Mrs. Carey met Clancy's eyes. She had been calm, self-controlled up to now. But the sympathy that she read in Clancy weakened her resolution. She sat heavily down upon the edge of the bed and hid her face in her hands.

"O my God, what shall I do?" she moaned.

Awkwardly, Clancy advanced to her. She put an arm about the older woman's shoulders.

"Please," she said, "you mustn't!"

Mrs. Carey's hands dropped to her side. Her eyes seemed to grow dry, as though she were controlling her tears by an effort of her will.

"I won't. The beast!" she cried. She rose, flinging off, though not rudely, Clancy's sympathetic embrace. "Miss Deane, don't you ever marry. Beasts—all of them!"

Clancy, with the memory of Vandervent's roses in her mind, shook her head.

"He—he just isn't himself, Mrs. Carey."

The other woman shrugged.

"'Not himself?' He *is* himself. When he's sober, he's worse, because then one can make no excuses for him. To insult a guest in my house——"

"I don't mind," stammered Clancy. "I—I make allowances——"

"So have I. So have all my friends. But now—I'm through with him. I——" Suddenly she sat down again, before a dressing-table. "That isn't true. I've promised him his chance, Miss Deane. He shall have it. We're going to the country. He has a little place up in the Dutchess County. We're going there to-day. The good Lord only knows how we'll reach it over the roads, but—it's his only chance. It's his last. And I'm a fool to give it to him. He'll be sober, but—worse then. And still— Hear him," she sneered.

Clancy listened. At first, she thought that it was mere maudlin speech, but as Don Carey's voice died away, she heard another voice—a mean, snarling voice.

"You think so, hey? Lemme tell you different. All I gotta do is to 'phone a cop, and——"

"Go ahead—'phone 'em," she heard Carey's voice interrupt.

The other's changed to a whine.

"Aw, be sensible, Carey! You're soused now, or you wouldn't be such a fool. Why not slip me a li'l jack and let it go at that? You don't want the bulls comin' in on this."

Clancy stared at Sophie. The wife walked to the door.

"Don!" she called. "Who's down-stairs?"

"You 'tend to your own affairs," came her husband's answer. "Shut your door, and your mouth, too."

Mrs. Carey seemed to stagger under the retort. She sat down again. She turned to Clancy, licking her lips with her tongue.

"Please—please——" she gasped, "see—who it is—with Don."

Down-stairs Clancy tiptoed. Voices were raised again in altercation.

"Why the deuce *should* I give you money?" demanded Carey. "Suppose I did run a fake agency for the pictures? Suppose I did promise a few girls jobs that they never got? What about it? You can't dig any of those girls up. Run tell the police."

"Yes; that's all right," said the other voice. "But suppose that I tell 'em that you had a key to Morris Beiner's office, hey? Suppose I tell 'em that, hey?"

Something seemed to rise from Clancy's chest right up through her throat and into her mouth. Once again on tiptoe, wanting to scream, yet determined to keep silent, she edged her way to the dining-room door. Don Carey had made no answer to this last speech of his visitor. Peering through the door, Clancy knew why. He was lying back in a chair, his mouth wide open, his eyes equally wide with fright. And the man at whom he stared was the man who had been with Spofford yesterday, the elevator-man from the Heberworth Building!

XXVI

Hand pressed against her bosom, Clancy stared into the dining-room. She could not breathe as she waited for Carey's reply to his visitor's charge. So Don Carey had possessed a key to the office of Morris Beiner! The theatrical man had been locked in his office when Clancy had made her escape from the room by way of the window. The door had not been forced. And Don Carey had possessed a key!

For a moment, she thought, with pity, of the woman up-stairs, the woman who had befriended her, whose life had been shadowed by her husband. But only for a moment. She herself was wanted for this murder; her eyes were hard as she stared into the room.

Carey's fingers reached out aimlessly. They fastened finally upon a half-drained

glass.

"Who's going to believe that kind of yarn?" Carey demanded

"Who's going to believe that kind of yarn?" he demanded.

"I can prove it all right," said the other.

"Well, even if you can prove it, what then?"

His visitor shrugged.

"You seemed worried about it a minute ago," he said. "Oh, there ain't no use tryin' to kid me, I know what I know. It all depends on you who I tell it to. I ain't a mean guy." His voice became whining. "I ain't a trouble-maker. I can keep my trap closed as well as any one. When," he added significantly, "there's enough in it for me."

"And you think you can blackmail me?" demanded Carey. His attempt at righteous indignation sounded rather flat. The elevator-man lost his whine; his voice became sulkily hard.

"Sticks and stones won't break no bones," he said. "Call it what you please. I don't care—so long as I get mine."

Carey dropped his pretense of indignation.

"Well, there's no need of you shouting," he said. He rose to his feet, assisting himself with a hand on the edge of the table.

"My wife's up-stairs," he said. "No need of screaming so she'll be butting in again. Shut that door."

Clancy leaped back. She gained the stairs in a bound. She crouched down upon them, hoping that the banisters would shield her. But no prying eyes sought her out. One of the two men in the room closed the dining-room door.

For a minute after it was shut, Clancy remained crouching. She had to *think*. A dozen impulses raced through her mind. To telephone Vandervent, the judge? To run out upon the street and call for a policeman? As swiftly as they came to her, she discarded them. She had begun to glean in recent days something of what was meant by the word "evidence." And she had none against Carey. Not yet!

But she could get it! She *must* get it! Sitting on the stairs, trembling—with excitement now, not fear—Clancy fought for clarity of thought. What to do? There must be some one correct thing, some action demanded by the situation

that later on would cause her to marvel because it had been overlooked. But what was it?

She could not think of the correct thing to do. The elevator-man knew something. He was the same man who had identified her to Spofford, the plain-clothes man. The man assuredly knew the motive that lay behind the request for identification. And now, having told a detective things that made Clancy Deane an object of grave suspicion, the man was blandly—he was mentally bland, if not orally so—blackmailing Don Carey.

Yet Clancy did not disbelieve her ears merely because what she heard sounded incredible. Nor did she, because she believed that the elevator-man had proof of another's guilt, delude herself with the idea that her own innocence was thereby indisputably shown. Her first impulse—to telephone Vandervent—returned to her now. But she dismissed it at once, this time finally.

For a man who brazenly pointed out one person to the police while endeavoring to blackmail another was not the sort of person tamely to blurt out confession when accused of his double-dealing. She had nothing on which to base her accusation of Carey save an overheard threat. The man who had uttered it had only to deny the utterance. Up-stairs was Sophie Carey, torn with anguish, beaten by life and its injustices. The hardness left her eyes again. If she could only be sure that she herself would escape, she would be willing, for Sophie's sake, to forget what she had overheard.

She heard Sophie's voice whispering hoarsely to her from the landing above.

"Miss Deane, Miss Deane!" Then she saw Clancy. Her voice rose, in alarm, above a whisper. "Has he—did he—dare——"

Clancy rose; she ran up the stairs.

"No, no; of course not!" she answered. "I—I twisted my ankle." It was a kindly lie.

It was, Clancy thought, characteristic of Sophie Carey that she forgot her own unhappiness in sympathy for Clancy. The older woman threw an arm about the girl.

"Oh, my dear! You poor thing——"

"It's all right," said Clancy. She withdrew, almost hastily, from the embrace. Postpone it though she might, she was going to bring disgrace upon the name of Carey. She *had* to—to save herself. She could not endure the other's caress now.

"Who was it?" asked Mrs. Carey.

Clancy averted her eyes.

"I don't know," she said. "I—— The door was closed."

"It doesn't matter," said the older woman. "I—I—I'm nervous. Don is so——" Her speech trailed away into a long sigh. The deep respiration seemed to give her strength. She straightened up. "I'm getting old, I'm afraid. I can't bear my troubles as easily as I used to. I want to force some one to share them with me. You are very kind, Miss Deane. Now——"

She had preceded Clancy into her bedroom. From a desk, she took a slip of paper and a ring from which dangled several keys.

"We're all ready to go," she said. "It only remains to check up my inventory. But I'm quite sure that we can trust you and Sally Henderson"—her smile was apparently quite unforced—"not to cheat us. If there are any errors in my list, Sally can notify me."

She handed Clancy the paper and key-ring. As she did so, the door-bell rang.

Almost simultaneously the door to the dining-room could be heard opening. A moment later, Carey called.

"Ragan's here," he shouted. His voice was surly, like that of a petulant child forced to do something undesirable. Clancy thought that there was more than that in it, that there was the quaver that indicates panic. But Mrs. Carey, who should have been sensitive to any vocal discords in her husband's voice, showed no signs of such sensitiveness.

"Ready in a moment. Send him up," she called.

Ragan was a burly, good-natured Irishman. He grinned at Mrs. Carey's greeting. Here was a servant who adored his mistress, Clancy felt.

"Ready to go to the country, Ragan?" asked Mrs. Carey.

The big man's grin was sufficient answer.

"Ragan," said Mrs. Carey to Clancy, "is the most remarkable man in the world. He can drive a car along Riverside Drive at forty-five miles an hour without being arrested, and he can wait on table like no one else in the world. How's Maria?" she asked him.

"Sure, she's fine," said Ragan. "She's at the station now."

"Where we'll be in ten minutes," said his mistress. She indicated several bags, already packed. Ragan shouldered them. He started down-stairs. Mrs. Carey turned to Clancy. "Hope an empty house doesn't make you nervous," she smiled.

Clancy shook her head. "I'll not be here long, anyway. And isn't your maid here?"

"I think she's gone by now," said Mrs. Carey. "But she'll sleep each night here—until you've found me a tenant. For that matter, she'll be back early this afternoon—to wash dishes and such matters." She was not a person to linger over departures. Her husband had sulkily donned hat and coat and was standing in the hall down-stairs, waiting for her.

So Mrs. Carey held out her hand to Clancy.

"Wish I could ask you to week-end with us sometime, but I don't suppose that the country, in winter-time, means anything in your young life." She seemed to put the statement as a question, almost pleadingly. Impulsively, Clancy answered her.

"Ask me sometime, and find out if it does."

"I'll do that," said Mrs. Carey. "Coming, Don," she called. Her hand clasped Clancy's a moment, and then she trotted down the stairs. The door banged behind them.

A thought came to Clancy. She raised her voice and called. But the door was thick. The Careys could not hear. Frightened, she raced down-stairs. As she passed the dining-room door, she glanced through the opening. Then fear died from her. She had been afraid that the elevator-man from the Heberworth Building still remained in the house. But, when she had seen him talking to Don Carey, his hat and coat were lying on a chair. They were gone now.

Still—— Sudden anger swept over her. This lying, blackmailing thing to frighten Clancy Deane? Anger made her brave to rashness. From the fireplace in the dining-room she picked up a short heavy poker. If he were lurking anywhere in this house, if Don Carey, fearful lest his wife note the sort of person who paid him morning visits, had hidden the man away, she, Clancy Deane, would rout him out. She'd make him tell the *truth*!

Through the dining-room, into the butler's pantry beyond, through the kitchen, to the head of the cellar stairs she marched, holding the poker before her. Her fingers found a switch: the cellar was flooded with light. Without the least timidity, Clancy descended.

But the elevator-man was not there. And as in this tiny house there was but one flight of stairs leading to the upper stories, Clancy knew that the man was not in the house. She suffered reaction. What might have been her fate had she found the man hiding here?

Like all women, Clancy feared the past more than the future. She feared it more than the present. She sank down upon the stairs outside the dining-room. Why, the man might have *shot* her! What good would her poker have been, pitted against a revolver? And, with the Careys up in the country somewhere, she might have lain here, weltering in her gore—she'd read that somewhere, and grinned as she mentally said it.

Well, she might as well begin the inventory of Mrs. Carey's household effects. But she was not to begin it yet. Some one rang the door-bell.

No weakness assailed Clancy's knees now. Indeed, it never occurred to her that the caller might be any other than the post-man. And so she opened the front door and met the lowering gaze of Spofford, Vandervent's plain-clothes man.

XXVII

Clancy felt no impulse to slam the door in Spofford's face. Instead, she opened it wider.

"Come in," she said.

He stepped across the threshold. Just beyond, he paused uncertainly. And now his lips, which had been sullen, Clancy thought, shaped themselves into a smile that was deprecatory, apologetic.

"I hope I ain't disturbin' you, Miss Deane," he said.

Clancy stared at him. She had never felt so completely in command of a situation.

"That depends," she said curtly. "If you are to annoy me further——"

Spofford's grin was extremely conciliating.

"Aw, don't hit a man when he's down, Miss Deane. Every one has to be a sucker once in a while. It ain't every guy that's willin' to admit it, apologize, and ask for

a new deal. Now, if I go that far, don't you think you ought to come a little way and meet me?"

Clancy's eyes widened.

"Suppose," she said, "we sit down."

"Thank you, Miss Deane." Spofford's tone was as properly humble as Clancy could possibly have wished. "A nice little friendly talk, me tryin' to show you I'm a regular guy, and you, maybe, bein, a little helpful. That's it—helpful."

He followed her as she led the way into the drawing-room and he seated himself carefully upon the edge of a chair whose slim legs justified his caution.

Clancy sat down opposite him. She leaned the poker against the wall. Spofford laughed.

"I'll just bet you'd 'a' beaned me one with that as soon as not, eh, Miss Deane?"

Clancy suddenly grew cautious. Perhaps this was an attempt to make her admit that she would not shrink from violence. Detectives were uncanny creatures.

"I should hate to do anything like that," she said.

Spofford guffawed heartily.

"I'd sure hate to have you, Miss Deane. But you don't need to be afraid of me."

"I'm not," said Clancy.

Spofford's nod was the acme of appreciation of a remark that held no particular humor, so far as Clancy could see. He slipped a trifle further back in the chair. He crossed his legs, assisting one fat knee with his hands. He leaned back. From his upper waistcoat pocket he took a cigar.

"You wouldn't mind, would you, Miss Deane? I can talk easier."

The downward and inward jerk of Clancy's chin gave him consent. From his lower waistcoat pocket, attached to the same heavy chain that Clancy assumed secured his watch, Spofford produced a cigar-clipper. Deliberately he clipped the end from the cigar, lighted it, tilted it upward from one corner of his mouth, and leaned toward Clancy.

"Miss Deane, you gotta right to point the door to me; I know it. But—you'd like to know who killed this Beiner guy, wouldn't you? Bein' sort of mixed up in it—bein' involved, so to speak——" His voice died away questioningly.

Despite herself, Clancy sighed with relief. Spofford was really the only man she

had to fear. And if he believed in her innocence——

"How do you know I didn't do it?" she demanded.

"Well, it's this way, Miss Deane: When you come into Mr. Vandervent's office and fainted away after announcin' yourself as Florine Ladue, I couldn't quite swallow what you said about playin' a joke. You don't look like the sort of lady that would play that kind of a joke. Anyway, I have a hunch, and I play it. I get this elevator-man from the Heberworth Building to come down to your living-place——"

"How did you know where I lived?" demanded Clancy.

Spofford grinned.

"Same way I found out that you were down here to-day, Miss Deane. I had a guy follow you. You can't blame me, now, can you?" he asked apologetically.

Clancy hid a grin at her own magnanimous wave of her hand.

"Well, this elevator-man tells me that he took you up to the fourth floor of the Heberworth Building on Tuesday afternoon. I think I have something. But, then, Judge Walbrough butts in. Well, I begin to figure that I'm *goin'* a trifle fast. Judge Walbrough ain't the sort of man to monkey with the law. And nobody ain't goin' to fool him, either. So, if Walbrough strings along with you, maybe I'm a sucker to think you got anything to do with this Beiner affair.

"And when the guy I have watching the house tells me that you've gone up to Walbrough's, and when I learn that Mr. Vandervent is down at Walbrough's house—well, I do some more figurin'. There's lots of influence in this town; but a pull that will make a man like Walbrough and a man like Vandervent hide a murderess—there ain't that pull here. 'Course, I figure that Walbrough is sendin' for Vandervent to help you out, not to pinch you.

"Anyway, what I'm guessin' is that maybe I'd better examine my take-off before I do too much leapin'. And my take-off is that the elevator-man says he saw you in the Heberworth Building. That ain't a hangin' matter, exactly, I tells myself. Suppose I get a little more.

"What sort of a lady is this Florine Ladue, I asks myself. An actress, or somebody that wants to be an actress; well, where would she be livin'? Somewhere in the Tenderloin, most likely. So, last evenin', I get busy. And I find at the Napoli that Miss Florine Ladue registered there last Monday and beat it away after breakfast Wednesday mornin'. And that's proof to me that Florine

Ladue didn't do the killing.

"Now, I'm pretty sure that you're Florine Ladue all right. Madame Napoli described you pretty thoroughly. Even told me that you was readin' a paper, at breakfast, what paper it was, how you got a telegram supposed to be from your mother that called you away. Now, I figure it out to myself: If Miss Ladue's mother wired her, and the wire made Miss Ladue pack her stuff and beat it, why didn't she go home? Because the wire's a fake, most likely. Then why, the next question is, did Miss Ladue put over that fake? The answer's easy. Because she'd just read in the mornin' paper about Beiner's murder. She's read about a young woman climbin' down the fire-escape, thinks she'll be pinched as that young woman, and—beats it. Pretty good?"

Clancy nodded. She looked at the man with narrowed eyes.

"Still," she said, "I don't understand why you're sure that Miss Ladue didn't kill him."

Spofford's smile was complacent.

"I'll tell you why, Miss Deane. This Ladue lady is no fool. The way she beat it from the Napoli proves that she was clever. But a clever woman, if she'd murdered Beiner, would have beat it Tuesday afternoon! Miss Deane, if you'd left the Napoli on Tuesday, I'd stake my life that you killed Beiner. No woman, leastwise a young girl like you, would have had the nerve to sit tight like you did on Tuesday night. I may be all wrong, but you gotta show me if I am," he went on emphatically. "Suppose you had killed Beiner, but didn't know that any one had seen you on the fire-escape! Even then, you'd have moved away from the Napoli. I tell you I been twenty-seven years on the force. I know what regular criminals do, and amachures, too. And even if you'd killed Beiner, I'd put you in the amachure class, Miss Deane."

"Let's go a little farther," suggested Clancy. "Why did I announce myself to Mr. Vandervent as Florine Ladue and then deny it?"

"You was scared," said Spofford. "Then, after you'd sent in that name, you read a paper sayin' Fanchon DeLisle was dead. You knew no one could identify you as Florine. You see, I picked up the paper on the bench where you'd been sittin'."

"Mr. Spofford," said Clancy slowly, "I think that you are a very able detective."

"'Able?'" Spofford grinned ingenuously. "I'm a *great* detective, Miss Deane. I got ideas, I have. Now, listen: I've put my cards on the table, I'm goin' to tell the chief that I've been barkin' up the wrong tree. Now, you be helpful."

"Just how?" Clancy inquired.

"Tell me all that happened that afternoon in Beiner's office," said Spofford. "You see, I *got* to land the guy that killed Beiner. It'll make me. Miss Deane, I want an agency of my own. I want some jack. If I land this guy, I can get clients enough to make my fortune in ten years. Will you come through?"

Clancy "came through." Calmly, conscious of the flattering attention of Spofford, she told of her adventures in Beiner's office; and when he put it in a pertinent question, she hesitated only momentarily before telling him of the part that Ike Weber and Fay Marston had played in her brief career in New York.

Spofford stared at her a full minute after she had finished. She brought her story down to her presence in the Carey house and the reason thereof. Then he puffed at his cigar.

"Be helpful, Miss Deane, be helpful y' know; somebody else is liable to tumble onto what I tumbled to; he's liable to have his own suspicions. 'S long as you live, you'll have a queer feelin' every time you spot a bull unless the *guy that killed Beiner is caught*. Finish your spiel, eh?" He raised his pudgy hand quickly. "Now, wait a minute. I wouldn't for the world have you say anything that you'd have to take back a minute later. What's the use of stallin'? Tell me, what did Garland say to you?"

"'Garland?'" Clancy echoed the name.

"Sure, the elevator-man from Beiner's building. Listen, Miss Deane: I get the tip from one of the boys that you've left this Miss Henderson's place and come down here. I beat it down to have a little talk with you, same as we been havin'. And whiles I'm hangin' around, out comes Garland. Why'd you send for him?"

"I didn't," said Clancy.

Spofford shot a glance at her.

"You didn't?" His lips pursed over the end of his cigar. "Then who did send for him? Say, isn't this the Carey house? Mrs. Sophie Carey, the artist? Wife of Don Carey? Wasn't it them that just left the house?"

"Yes," said Clancy.

"Well, I'm a boob. Don Carey, eh? And him bein' the gossip of Times Square because of the agency he run. Hm; that *might* be it."

"What might be it?" asked Clancy.

"A li'l bit of jack to Garland for keepin' his face closed about what went on in Carey's fake office," explained Spofford. "Still—— I dunno. Say, look here, Miss Deane: Loosen up, won'tcha? I been a square guy with you. I come right down and put my cards on the table. I admit I got my reasons; I don't want a bad stand-in with Mr. Vandervent. But still I could 'a' been nasty, and I ain't tried to. Are you tellin' me all you know? Y' know, coppin' off the murderer would put—put a lot of pennies in my pocket."

For a moment, Clancy hesitated. Then she seemed to see Sophie Carey's pleading face. Her smile was apparently genuinely bewildered as she replied,

"Why, I'd like to help you, Mr. Spofford, but I really don't know any more than I've told you."

It was another falsehood. It was the sort of falsehood that might interfere with the execution of justice, and so be frowned upon by good citizens. But it is hard to believe that the recording angel frowned.

XXVIII

Clancy was prepared to hear Spofford plead, argue, even threaten. Such action would have been quite consistent with his character as she understood it. But to her relief he accepted the situation. He rose stiffly from the chair.

"Well, I'll be moseyin' along. I'm gonna look into a coupla leads that may not mean anything. But y' never can tell in this business. Much obliged to you, Miss Deane. No hard feelings?"

"None at all," said Clancy. "I think—why I think it's *wonderful* of you, Mr. Spofford, to be so—so friendly!"

Spofford blushed. It was probably the first time that a woman had brought the color to his cheeks—in anything save anger—for many years.

"Aw, now—why, Miss Deane—you know I—glad to meetcha," stammered Spofford. He made a stumbling, confused, and extremely light-hearted departure from the house. Somehow, he felt deeply obligated to Clancy Deane.

The door closed behind him, and Clancy sat down once again upon the stairs. She felt safe at last. Now that the danger was past, she did not know whether to

laugh or cry. Was it past? Before yielding to either emotional impulse, why not analyze the situation? What had Spofford said? That until the murderer was captured, she would always be apprehensive. Until the murderer was caught——

She tapped her foot upon the lower stair. There was no questioning Spofford's sincerity. He did not believe her guilty. But—— The telephone-bell rang. It was Sally Henderson.

"Miss Deane?... Oh, is this you? This is Miss Henderson. Man named Randall telephoned a few minutes ago. Very urgent, he said. I don't like giving out telephone-numbers. Thought I'd call you. Want to talk with him?"

Like a flash Clancy replied,

"No."

No pique inspired her reply. Randall had not measured up. That the standard of measurement she applied was tremendously high made no difference to Clancy, abated no whit her judgment.

A week ago, she had met Randall. She had thought him kind. She had liked him. She had even debated within herself the advisability, the possibility of yielding to his evident regard. More than that, she had practically offered to marry him. And he had been cautious, had not leaped at the opportunity that, for one golden moment, had been his. Clancy did not phrase it exactly this way, but her failure to do so was not due to modesty. For never a woman walked to the altar but believed, in her heart of hearts, that she was giving infinitely more than she received.

"Probably," said Clancy, half aloud, "he's found out that the Walbroughs are still with me, and that Philip Vandervent isn't afraid of me——"

She thought of Vandervent's flowers, and the card that had accompanied them.

"What did you say?" demanded Sally Henderson. Clancy blushed furiously. She realized that she'd been holding on to the receiver. "I thought that you said something about Judge Walbrough."

"Lines must have been crossed," suggested Clancy.

"Rotten telephone service," said Miss Henderson. "Oh, and another man!"

Clancy felt pleasurably excited. Philip Vandervent——

"I didn't see him. Guernsey told him where you were. Guernsey is an ass! As if you'd have a brother almost fifty."

"What? I haven't any brother," cried Clancy.

"Lucky girl. When they weren't borrowing your money, they'd be getting you to help them out of scrapes or mind your sister-in-law's babies. Sorry. If you're frightened——"

"'Frightened?' Why?" demanded Clancy.

"Well, Guernsey told him where you were, and the man left here apparently headed for you."

Clancy's forehead wrinkled.

"What did he look like?" she asked.

"Oh, Guernsey couldn't describe him very well. Said he wore a mustache that looked dyed, and was short and stocky. That's all."

"Some mistake," said Clancy.

"Perhaps," said Miss Henderson dryly. "Anyway, you needn't let him in. Might be somebody from Zenith who wanted to borrow money."

"Probably," said Clancy.

"Getting ahead with the work?"

"Checking up the inventory now," said Clancy.

"All right; take your time."

And Miss Henderson hung up.

Once again, Clancy sat upon the stairs. Spofford had distinctly said that one of his men had followed Clancy down to this house. The description that Guernsey had given fitted Spofford exactly.

Spofford, then, not one of his men, had trailed Clancy down here. Why did he lie? Also, he must have known quite clearly who were the occupants of this house. Why had he expressed a certain surprise when Clancy had told him? He had said that, while he had been waiting outside, Garland had come out. But why had Spofford been waiting outside? Why hadn't he come right up and rung the door-bell? Could this delay have been because he knew that Garland was inside the house, and because he did not wish to encounter him? But how could he have known that Garland was inside with Carey? Well, that was easily answered. He might have arrived just as Garland was entering the house.

But there were other puzzling matters. Why had Spofford been so long in

recollecting that Don Carey had roused the suspicions of the police because of the office he had maintained in the Heberworth Building? Apparently, it had only occurred to him at the end of his rather long conversation with Clancy.

Hadn't Spofford been a little too ingenuous? Could it be that he had some slight suspicion of Don Carey? As a matter of fact, looking at the matter as dispassionately as she could, hadn't Spofford dropped a strong circumstantial case against Clancy Deane on rather slight cause? Against the evidence of her presence in Beiner's office and her flight from the Napoli, Spofford had pitted his own alleged knowledge of human nature. Because Clancy had delayed flight until Wednesday, Spofford had decided that she was innocent. She didn't believe it.

It had all been convincing when Spofford had said it. But now, in view of the fact that she had detected in his apparent sincerity one untruth, she wondered how many others there might be.

Would fear of the Vandervent and Walbrough influence cause him to drop the trail of a woman whom he believed to be a murderess? No, she decided; it would not. Then why had he dropped the belief in her guilt that had animated his actions yesterday?

The answer came clearly to her. Because he felt that he had evidence against some one else. Against Carey? She wondered. If against Carey, why had he gone in search of Clancy at Sally Henderson's office?

But she could answer that. He wanted to hear her story. Finding that she was at the very moment in Don Carey's house had been chance, coincidence. He had known that Garland had not come here to see her; he had known that Garland had come to see Carey. How much did he know? What *was* there to know?

Her brain became dizzy. Spofford had certainly not ceased to question the Heberworth Building elevator-man when the man had identified Clancy. Spofford had cunning, at the very lowest estimate of his mental ability. He would have cross-examined Garland. The man might have dropped some hint tying up Carey to the murder. She began to feel that Spofford was not entirely through with her.

There was a way, an almost certain way, now, though, to end her connection with the affair. If she told Philip Vandervent or Judge Walbrough the threat that she had heard Garland utter, the elevator-man would be under examination within a few hours.

Did she want that? Certainly not, just yet. She knew what scandal meant. She doubted if even Sophie Carey, with her apparently unchallenged artistic and social position, could live down the scandal of being the wife of a man accused of murder. She must be fair to Sophie. Indeed, if she were to live up to her own code—it was a code that demanded much but gave more—she must be more than fair to her. Sophie had gotten her work, had dressed her up. She did not like being under obligation to Mrs. Carey. But, having accepted so much, repayment must be made. It would be a shoddy requital of Sophie's generosity for Clancy Deane to run to the police and repeat the threats of a blackmailer.

How did she know that those threats were founded upon any truth? She had heard Garland say that Carey had possessed a key to Beiner's office; she had seen the expression of fright upon Carey's face as Garland made the charge. But fear didn't necessarily imply guilt. Clancy Deane had been a pretty scared young lady several times during the past week, and she was innocent. Don Carey might be just as guiltless.

Of course, Judge Walbrough and his wife had been unbelievably friendly, Vandervent had shown a chivalry that—Clancy sighed slightly—might mask something more personal. *Noblesse oblige.* But her first obligation was to Sophie Carey. Until her debts were settled to Sophie she need not consider the payment of others. Especially if the payment of those others meant betrayal of Sophie. And an accusation against her husband was, according to Clancy's lights, no less than that.

And so she couldn't make it. There was nothing to prevent her, though, from endeavoring to discover whether or not Don Carey were guilty. If he were—Clancy would pass that bridge when she came to it.

Meantime, she was supposed to be earning a salary of fifty dollars a week. A few minutes ago, she had told Sally Henderson that she had begun checking up the Carey household effects. She had not meant to deceive her employer. She'd work very hard to make up for the delay that her own affairs had caused.

The Careys' house was not "cluttered up," despite the artistic nature of its mistress. Clancy, who knew what good housekeeping meant—in Zenith, a dusty room means a soiled soul—pursed her lips with admiration as she passed from room to room. Two hours she spent, checking Sophie Carey's list. Then she let herself out of the house, locked the front door carefully behind her, and walked over to Sixth Avenue, into the restaurant where she had met Sophie Carey last Thursday morning.

Only that long ago! It was incredible. Whimsically ordering chicken salad, rolls, tea, and pastry, Clancy considered the past few days. It was the first time that she had been able to dwell upon them with any feeling of humor. Now, her analysis of Spofford's words, more than the words themselves, having given her confidence, she looked backward.

She wondered, had always wondered, exactly what was meant by the statement that certain people had "lived." She knew that many summer visitors from the great cities looked down upon the natives of Zenith and were not chary of their opinions to the effect that people merely existed in Zenith.

Yet she wondered if any of these supercilious ones had "lived" as much as had Clancy Deane in the last week. She doubted it. Life, in the *argot* of the cosmopolitan, meant more than breathing, eating, drinking, and sleeping. It meant experiencing sensation. Well, she had experienced a-plenty, as a Zenither would have said.

From what had meant wealth to her she had dropped to real poverty, to a bewilderment as to the source of to-morrow's dinner. From the quiet of a country town she had been tossed into a moving maze of metropolitan mystery. She, who had envied boys who dared to raid orchards, jealous of their fearlessness of pursuing farmers, had defied a police force, the press——

And she'd *liked* it! This was the amazing thing that she discovered about herself. Not once could she remember having regretted her ambitions that had brought

her to New York; not a single time had she wished herself back in Zenith. With scandal, jail, even worse, perhaps, waiting her, she'd not weakened.

Once only had she been tempted to flee the city, and then she'd not even thought of going back to Zenith. And she knew perfectly well that had Spofford failed to visit her this morning, and had some super-person guaranteed her against all molestation if she would but return to her Maine home, she would have refused scornfully.

Perhaps, she argued with herself, it was too much to say that she'd enjoyed these experiences, but—she was glad she'd had them. Life hereafter might become a monotonous round of renting furnished apartments and houses; she'd have this week of thrills to look back upon.

She ate her salad hungrily. Paying her check, she walked to Eighth Street and took the street car to Sally Henderson's office. She learned that Judge Walbrough had telephoned once during the forenoon and left a message—which must have been cryptic to Sally Henderson—to the effect that he had met the enemy and they were his.

Clancy assumed that Philip Vandervent had seen Spofford and that the man had told of his visit to Clancy. She wished that Vandervent hadn't told the judge; she'd have liked to surprise him with the news that Spofford, the one person of all the police whom she dreaded, had called off the chase. Oddly, she assumed that the judge and his wife would be as thrilled over anything happening to her as if it had happened to themselves. This very assumption that people were interested in her, loved her, might have been one of the reasons that they were and did. But it is futile to attempt analysis of charm.

She spent the afternoon with Miss Conover, the dressmaker. Business was temporarily slack with Sally Henderson. Until the effects of the blizzard had worn off, not so many persons would go house-hunting. And the kindly interior decorator insisted that Clancy yield herself to Miss Conover's ministrations.

Clancy had an eye for clothes. Although nothing had been completed, of course, she could tell, even in their unfinished state, that she was going to be dressed as she had never, in Zenith, dreamed. Heaven alone knew what it would all cost, but what woman cares what clothing cost? Clancy would have starved to obtain these garments. It is fashionable to jibe at the girl who lunches on a chocolate soda in order that she may dine in a silk dress. "She puts everything on her back," her plain sisters say. But understanding persons respect the girl. While marriage, for the mass, remains a market-place, she does well who best displays

the thing she has for sale.

It was a delightful afternoon, even though Miss Conover lost her good nature as her back began to ache from so much bending and kneeling. Clancy went down Fifth Avenue toward the Walbroughs' home walking, not on snow, but on air.

Philip Vandervent had been attracted to her when he saw her in a borrowed frock. When he beheld her in one that fitted her perfectly, without the adventitious aid of pins—— Her smile was most adorable as she looked up at the judge, waiting for her at the head of the stairs. Quite naturally she held up her mouth to be kissed. Clancy unconsciously knew how to win and retain love. It is not done by kisses alone, but kisses play their delightful part. She had never granted them to young men; she had rarely withheld them from dear old men.

XXIX

Behind the judge stood his wife. Clancy immediately sensed a tenseness in the atmosphere. As she gently released herself from the judge's embrace and slipped into the arms of Mrs. Walbrough, what she sensed became absolute knowledge. For the lips that touched her cheek trembled, and in the eyes of Mrs. Walbrough stood tears.

Clancy drew away from her hostess. She looked at the judge, then back again at Mrs. Walbrough, and then once again at the judge.

"Well?" she demanded.

"It isn't well," said the judge.

"But I thought you knew," said Clancy. "Miss Henderson gave me your message. And that Spofford man saw me to-day, and told me that he didn't believe I had anything to do——" She paused, eyeing the judge keenly. She refused to be frightened. She wasn't going to be frightened again.

"Of course he doesn't! Spofford went to Vandervent this forenoon. But—the newspapers," said the judge.

Clancy's lips rounded with an unuttered "Oh." She sank down upon a chair; her hands dropped limply in her lap.

"What do they know?" she demanded.

The judge's reply was bitter.

"'Know?' Nothing! But a newspaper doesn't have to *know* anything to make trouble! If it merely suspects, that's enough. Look!"

He unfolded an evening newspaper and handed it to Clancy. There, black as ink could make it, spreading the full length of the page, stood the damnable statement,

WOMAN SOUGHT IN BEINER MYSTERY

Her eyes closed. She leaned back in her chair. The full meaning of the head-line, its terrific import, seeped slowly into her consciousness. She knew that any scandal involving a woman is, from a newspaper standpoint, worth treble one without her. One needs to be no analyst to discover this—the fact presents itself too patently in every page of every newspaper. She knew, too, that newspapers relinquish spicy stories regretfully.

Her eyes opened slowly. It was with a physical effort that she lifted the paper in order that she might read. The story was brief. It merely stated that the *Courier* had learned, through authentic sources, that the district attorney's office suspected that a woman had killed Beiner, and that it was running down the clues that had aroused its suspicions.

But it was a bold-face paragraph, set to the left of the main article, that drove the color from her cheeks. It was an editorial, transplanted, for greater effect, to the first page. Clancy read it through.

FIND THE WOMAN

> Another murder engages the attention of police, the press, and the public. The *Courier*, as set forth in another column, has learned that the authorities possess evidence justifying the arrest of a woman as the Beiner murderess. How long must the people of the greatest city in the world feel that their Police Department is incompetent? It has been New York's proudest boast that its police are the most efficient in the world. That boast is flat and stale now. Too many crimes of violence have been unsolved during the past six months. Too many criminals wander at large. How long must this continue?

It was, quite obviously, a partisan political appeal to the prejudices of the

Courier's readers. But Clancy did not care about that. The fact of publication, not its reason, interested her. She looked dully up at the judge.

"How did they find out?" she asked.

The judge shrugged.

"That's what Vandervent is trying to find out now. He's quizzing his staff this minute. He meant to be up here this evening. He was to dine with us. He just telephoned. Some one will be 'broken' for giving the paper the tip. But—that doesn't help us, does it?"

Clancy's lips tightened. Her eyes grew thoughtful.

"Still, if that's all the paper knows——"

"We can't be sure of that," interrupted Walbrough. "Suppose that whoever told the *Courier* reporter what he's printed had happened to tell him a little more. The *Courier* may want a 'beat.' It might withhold the fact that it knew the name of the woman in order that other newspapers might not find her first."

Slowly the color flowed back into Clancy's cheeks. She would not be frightened.

"But Spofford could never have found me if I hadn't gone to Mr. Vandervent's office," she said.

"Spofford may be the man who gave the paper the tip," said the judge.

Clancy sat bolt upright.

"Would he dare?"

The judge shrugged.

"He might. We don't know. The elevator-man might have told a reporter—papers pay well for tips like that, you know. It's not safe here."

The bottom fell out of the earth for Clancy. It was years since she'd had a home. One couldn't term aunt Hetty's boarding-house in Zenith a *home*, kindly and affectionate as aunt Hetty had been. She'd only been one night in the Walbroughs' house, had only known them four days. Yet, somehow, she had begun to feel a part of their *ménage*, had known in her heart, though of course nothing had been said about the matter, that the Walbroughs would argue against almost any reason she might advance for leaving them save one—marriage.

Security had enfolded her. And now she was to be torn from this security. Her mouth opened for argument. It closed without speech. For, after all, scandal

didn't threaten her alone; it threatened the Walbroughs. If she were found here by a reporter, the gossip of tongue and print would smirch her benefactors.

"You're right. I'll go," she said. "I'll find a place——"

"'*Find* a place!'" There was amazement in Mrs. Walbrough's voice; there was more, a hint of indignation. "Why, you're going to our place up in Hinsdale. And *I'm* going with you."

Youth is rarely ashamed of its judgments. Youth is conceited, and conceit and shame are rarely companions. But Clancy reddened now with shame. She had thought the Walbroughs capable of deserting her, or letting her shift for herself, when common decency should have made her await explanation. They would never know her momentary doubt of them, but she could never live long enough, to make up for it.

Yet she protested.

"I—I can't. You—you'll be involved."

The judge chuckled.

"Seems to me, young lady, that it's rather late for the Walbroughs to worry about being involved. We're in, my dear, up to our slim, proud throats. And if we were certain of open scandal, surely you don't think that would matter?" he asked, suddenly reproachful.

Clancy dissembled.

"I think that you both are the most wonderful, dearest—— You make me want to cry," she finished.

The judge squared his shoulders. A twinkle stood in his eye.

"It's a way I have. The women always weep over me."

His wife sniffed. She spoke to Clancy.

"The man never can remember his waist-measurement."

The judge fought hard against a grin.

"My wife marvels so at her good luck in catching me that she tries to make it appear that she didn't catch much, after all."

Mrs. Walbrough sniffed again.

"'Luck?' In catching you!"

The judge became urbane, bland, deprecatory.

"I beg pardon, my dear. Not luck—skill."

Mrs. Walbrough's assumption of scorn left her. Her laugh joined Clancy's. Clancy didn't realize just then how deftly the judge had steered her away from possible tears, and how superbly Mrs. Walbrough had played up to her husband's acting.

She put one hand in the big palm of the judge and let her other arm encircle Mrs. Walbrough's waist.

"If I should say, 'Thank you,'" she said, "it would sound so pitifully little——"

"So you'll just say nothing, young woman," thundered the judge. "You'll eat some dinner, pack a bag, and you and Maria'll catch the eight-twenty to Hinsdale. You won't be buried there. Lots of people winter there. Maria and I used to spend lots of time there before she grew too old to enjoy tobogganing. But I'm not too old. I'll be up to-morrow or the next day, to bring you home. For the real murderer *will* be found. He *must* be!"

Not merely then, but half a dozen times through the meal that followed, Clancy resisted the almost overpowering temptation to tell what she had overheard being said in the Carey dining-room. It wasn't fair to the Walbroughs to withhold information. On the other hand, she must be more than fair to Sophie. Before she spoke, she must know more.

But how, immured in some country home, was she to learn more? Yet she could not refuse flight without an explanation. And the only explanation would involve Don Carey, the husband of the woman who had been first in New York to befriend her.

She couldn't tell—yet. She must have time to think, to plan. And so she kept silence. Had she been able to read the future, perhaps she would have broken the seal of silence; perhaps not. One is inclined to believe that she would have been sensible enough to realize that even knowledge of the future cannot change it.

For millions of us can in a measure read the future, yet it is unchanged. We know that certain consequences inevitably follow certain actions. Yet we commit the actions. We know that result follows cause, yet we do not eliminate the cause. If we could be more specific in our reading than this, would our lives be much different? One is permitted doubts.

The train, due to the traffic disturbances caused by the blizzard, left the Grand

Central several minutes behind its scheduled time. It lost more time *en route,* and the hour was close to midnight when Clancy and Mrs. Walbrough emerged from the Hinsdale station and entered a sleigh, driven by a sleepy countryman who, it transpired, was the Walbrough caretaker. It was after midnight, and after a bumpy ride, that the two women descended from the sleigh and tumbled up the stairs that led to a wide veranda. The house was ablaze in honor of their coming. It was warm, too, not merely from a furnace, but from huge open fires that burned down-stairs and in the bedroom to which Clancy was assigned.

The motherly wife of the caretaker had warm food and hot drink waiting them, but Clancy hardly tasted them. She was sleepy, and soon she left Mrs. Walbrough to gossip with her housekeeper while she tumbled into bed.

Sleep came instantly. Hardly, it seemed, had her eyes closed before they opened. Through the raised window streamed sunlight. But Clancy was more conscious of the cold air that accompanied it. It was as cold here as it was in Maine. At least, it seemed so this morning. She was quite normal. She was not the sort of person who leaps gayly from bed and performs calisthenics before an opened window in zero weather. Instead, she snuggled down under the bedclothes until her eyes and the tip of her nose were all that showed. One glimpse of her breath, smoky in the frosty air, had made a coward of her.

But sometimes hopes are realized. Just as she had made up her mind to brave the ordeal and arise and close the window, she heard a knock upon the door.

"Come in. Oh, *pul-lease* come in!" she cried.

Mrs. Walbrough entered, followed by the housekeeper, who, Clancy had learned last night, was named Mrs. Hebron. Mrs. Walbrough closed the window, chaffing Clancy because a Maine girl should mind the cold, and Mrs. Hebron piled wood in the fireplace. By the time that Clancy emerged from the bathroom —she hated to leave it; the hot water in the tub made the whole room pleasantly steamy—her bedroom was warm. And Mrs. Walbrough had found somewhere a huge bath robe of the judge's which swamped Clancy in its woolen folds.

There were orange juice and toast and soft-boiled eggs and coffee made as only country people can make it. It had been made, Clancy could tell from the taste, by putting *plenty* of coffee in the bottom of a pot, by filling the pot with cold water, by letting it come to a boil, removing it after it had bubbled one minute, and serving it about ten seconds after that. All this was set upon a table drawn close to the fire.

"Why," said Clancy aloud, "did I ever imagine that I didn't care for the country

in the winter?"

Mrs. Walbrough laughed.

"You're a little animal, Clancy Deane," she accused.

"I'll tell the world I am," said Clancy. She laughed at Mrs. Walbrough's expression of mock horror. "Oh, we can be slangy in Zenith," she said.

"What else can you be in Zenith?" asked Mrs. Walbrough.

Clancy drained her cup of coffee. She refused a second cup and pushed her chair away from the table. She put her feet, ridiculous in a huge pair of slippers that also belonged to the judge, upon the dogs in the fireplace. Luxuriously she inhaled the warmth of the room.

"What else can we be?" she said.

She had talked only, it seemed, about her troubles these past few days. Now, under the stimulus of an interested listener, she poured forth her history, her hopes, her ambitions. And, in return, Mrs. Walbrough told of her own life, of her husband's failure to inherit the vast fortune that he had expected, how, learning that speculation had taken it all from his father, he had buckled down to the law; how he had achieved tremendous standing; how he had served upon the bench; how he had resigned to accept a nomination for the Senate; how, having been defeated—it was not his party's year—he had resumed the practise of law, piling up a fortune that, though not vast to the sophisticated, loomed large to Clancy. They were still talking at luncheon, and through it. After the meal Hebron announced that there would be good tobogganing outside after the course had been worn down a little. To Clancy's delighted surprise, Mrs. Walbrough declared that she had been looking forward to it. Together, wrapped in sweaters and with their feet encased in high moccasins—they were much too large for Clancy—they tried out the slide.

The Walbrough house was perched upon the top of a wind-swept hill. The view was gorgeous. On all sides hills that could not be termed mountains but that, nevertheless, were some hundreds of feet high, surrounded the Walbrough hill. A hundred yards from the front veranda, at the foot of a steep slope, was a good-sized pond. Across this the toboggan course ended. And because the wind had prevented the snow from piling too deeply, the toboggan, after a few trials, slid smoothly, and at a great pace, clear across the pond.

It was dusk before they were too tired to continue. Breathlessly, Mrs. Walbrough announced that she would give a house-party as soon as—— She paused. It was

the first reference to the cause of their being there that had passed the lips of either to-day. Both had tacitly agreed not to talk about it.

"Let's hope it won't be long," said Clancy. "To drag you away from the city——"

"Tush, tush, my child," said Mrs. Walbrough.

Clancy tushed.

It was at their early dinner that the telephone-bell rang. Clancy answered it. It was Vandervent. He was brisk to the point of terseness.

"Got to see you. Want to ask a few questions. I'll take the eight-twenty. Ask Mrs. Walbrough if she can put me up?"

Mrs. Walbrough, smiling, agreed that she could. Clancy told Vandervent so. He thanked her. His voice lost its briskness.

"Are you—eh—enjoying yourself?"

Clancy demurely replied that she was. "I wish you had time for some tobogganing," she ventured.

"Do you really?" Vandervent was eager. "I'll make time—I—I'll see you to-night, Miss Deane."

Clancy smiled with happy confidence at the things that Vandervent had not said. She played double solitaire with her hostess until eleven o'clock. Then Mrs. Hebron entered with the information that her husband had developed a sudden chest-cold, accompanied by fever, and that she really dreaded letting him meet the train.

Clancy leaped to the occasion. She pooh-poohed Mrs. Walbrough's protests. As if, even in these motorful days, a Zenith girl couldn't hitch an old nag to a sleigh and drive a few rods. And she wouldn't permit Mrs. Walbrough to accompany her, either. Alone, save for a brilliant moon, a most benignant moon, she drove down the hill and over the snow-piled road to the Hinsdale station.

It was a dreamy ride; she was going to meet a man whose voice trembled as he spoke to her, a man who was doing all in his power to save her from dangers, a man who was a Vandervent, one of the great *partis* of America. Yet it was as a man, rather than as a Vandervent, that she thought of him.

So, engrossed with thoughts of him, thoughts that submerged the memory of yesterday's paper, that made her forget that she had seen no paper to-day, she gave the old horse his head, and let him choose his own path. Had she been alert,

she would have seen the men step out from the roadside, would have been able to whip up her horse and escape their clutch. As it was, one of them seized the bridle. The other advanced to her side.

"So you've followed me up here," he said. "Spying on me, eh?"

The moonlight fell upon the face of the man who held the horse's head. It was Garland. The man who spoke to her was Donald Carey. She had not known before that Hinsdale was in Dutchess County.

XXX

Clancy was afraid—like every one else—of the forces of law and order. She was afraid of that menacing thing which we call "society." To feel that society has turned against one, and is hunting one down—that is the most terrible fear of all. Clancy had undergone that fear during the past week. Panic had time and again assailed her.

But the panic that gripped her now was different. It was the fear of bodily injury. And, because Clancy had real courage, the color came back into her cheeks as swiftly as it had departed. More swiftly, because, with returning courage, came anger.

Clancy was not a snob; she would never be one. Yet there is a feeling, born of legitimate pride, that makes one consciously superior to others. Clancy held herself highly. A moment ago, she had been dreaming, triumphantly, of a man immeasurably superior in all ways to these two men who detained her. That this man should anticipate seeing her—and she knew that he did—raised her in her own self-esteem. That these two men here dared stop her progress, for any reason whatsoever, lowered her.

She was decent. These two men were not. Yet one of them held her horse's head, and the other hand was stretched out toward her. They dared, by deed and verbal implication, to threaten her. Her pride, just and well founded, though based on no record of material achievement, would have made her brave, even though she had lacked real courage. Although, as a matter of fact, it is hard to conceive of real courage in a character that has no pride.

Carey's left hand was closing over her right forearm. With the edge of her right

hand, Clancy struck the contaminating touch away. She was a healthy girl. Hours of tobogganing to-day had not exhausted her. The blow had vigor behind it. Carey's hand dropped away from her. With her left hand, Clancy jerked the reins taut. A blow of the whip would have made Garland relinquish his grasp of the animal. But Clancy did not deliver it then.

No man, save Beiner, had ever really frightened her. And it had not been fear of hurt that had animated her sudden resistance toward the theatrical agent; it had been dread of contamination. She had been born and bred in the country. In Zenith, the kerosene street-lamps were not lighted on nights when the moon was full. Sometimes it rained, and then the town was dark. Yet Clancy had never been afraid to walk home from a neighbor's house.

So now, indignant, and growing more indignant with each passing second, she made no move toward flight. Instead, she asked the immemorial question of the woman whose pride is outraged.

"How dare you?" she demanded.

Carey stared at her. He rubbed his forearm where the hard edge of her palm had descended upon it. His forehead, Clancy could vaguely discern, in the light that the snow reflected from a pale moon, was wrinkled, as though with worry.

"Some wallop you have!" he said. "No need of getting mad, is there?"

Had Clancy been standing, she would have stamped her foot.

"'Mad?' What do you mean by stopping me?" she cried.

"'Mean?'" Behind his blond mustache the weakness of Carey's mouth was patent. "'Mean?' Why—" He drew himself up with sudden dignity. "Any reason," he asked, "why I shouldn't stop and speak to a friend of my wife's?"

Suddenly Clancy wished that she had lashed Garland with the whip, struck the horse with it, and fled away. She realized that Carey was drunk. He was worse than drunk; he was poisoned by alcohol. The eyes that finally met hers were not the eyes of a drunkard temporarily debauched; they were the eyes of a maniac.

Her impulse to indignation died away. She knew that she must temporize, must outwit the man who stood so close to where she sat. For she realized that she was in as great danger as probably she would ever be again.

Danger dulls the mind of the coward. It quickens the wit of the brave. The most consummate actress would have envied Clancy the laugh that rang as merrily true as though Carey, in a ballroom, had reminded her of their acquaintance and

had begged a dance.

"Why, it's *you*, Mr. Carey! How silly of me!"

Carey stepped back a trifle. His hat swung down in his right hand, and he bowed, exaggeratedly.

"'Course it is. Didn't you know me?"

Clancy laughed again.

"Why should I? I never expected to find you walking along a road like this."

"Why shouldn't you?" Carey's voice was suddenly suspicious. "Y' knew I was coming up here, didn't you?"

"Why, no," Clancy assured him. "You see Dutchess County doesn't mean anything to me. Mrs. Carey said that you were going to Dutchess County, but that might as well have been Idaho for all it meant to me. Where is Mrs. Carey?" he asked.

"Oh, she's all right. Nev' min' about her." He swayed a trifle, and seized the edge of the sleigh for support. "Point is"—and he brought his face nearer to hers, staring at her with inflamed eyes—"what are you doin' up here if you didn't know I was here?"

"Visiting the Walbroughs," said Clancy. She pretended to ignore his tone.

"Huh! Tell me somethin' I don't know," said Carey. "Don't you suppose I know *that*? Ain't Sam and I been watchin' you tobogganing with that fat old Walbrough dame all afternoon?"

"Why didn't you join us?" asked Clancy.

"Join you? Join you?" Carey's eyes attempted cunning; they succeeded in crossing. "Thass just *it*! Didn't want to join you. Didn't want you to sus—suspect —" His hand shook the sleigh. "You come right now and tell me what you doin' here?"

"Why, I've told you!" said Clancy.

"Yes; you've *told* me," said Carey scornfully. "But that doesn't mean that I believe you. Where you going now?"

"To the railroad station," Clancy answered.

"What for?" demanded Carey.

Clancy's muscles tightened; she sat bolt upright. No *grande dame*'s tones could have been icier.

"You are impertinent, Mr. Carey."

"'Impertinent!'" cried Carey. "I asked you a question; answer it!"

"To meet Mr. Vandervent," Clancy told him. She could have bitten her tongue for the error of her judgment.

Carey's hand let go of the side of the seat. He stepped uncertainly back a pace.

"What's he doing up here? What you meeting him for? D'ye hear that, Garland?" he cried.

The elevator-man of the Heberworth Building still stood at the horse's head. He was smoking a cigarette now, and Clancy could see his crafty eyes as he sucked his breath inward and the tip of the cigarette glowed.

"Ain't that what I been tellin' you?" he retorted. "Didn't Spofford go into your house yesterday and stay there with her an hour or so? Wasn't I watchin' outside? And ain't he laid off her? Didn't he tell me to keep my trap closed about seein' her go to Beiner's office? Ain't he workin' hand in glove with her?"

Carey wheeled toward Clancy.

"You hear that?" he demanded shrilly. "And still you try to fool me. You think I killed Beiner, and—" His voice ceased. He licked his lips a moment. When he spoke again, there was infinite cunning in his tone.

"You don't think anything foolish like that, now, do you?" He came a little closer to the sleigh. His left hand groped, almost blindly, it seemed to Clancy, for the edge of the seat again. "Why, even if Morris and I did have a little row, any one that knows me knows I'm a gentleman and wouldn't kill him for a little thing like his saying he——"

"Lay off what he said and you said," came the snarling voice of Garland. "Stick to what you intended saying."

"Don't use that tone, Garland," snapped Carey. "Don't you forget, either, that I'm a—I'm a—gentleman. I don't want any gutter-scum dicta—dictating to me." He spoke again to Clancy. "You're a friend of my wife," he said. "Just wanted to tell you, in friendly way, that friend of my wife don't mean a single thing to me. I want to be friendly with every one, but any one tries to put anything over on me going to get theirs. 'Member that!"

"Aw, get down to cases!" snarled Garland. There was something strange in the voice of the man at the horse's head. There was a snarling quaver in it that was not like the drunken menace of Carey.

Suddenly Clancy knew; she had never met a drug fiend in her life—and yet she knew. Also, she knew that what Don Carey, even maniacally drunk, might not think of doing, the undersized elevator-man from the Heberworth Building would not hesitate to attempt.

Common sense told her that these two men had stopped her only for a purpose. They had watched her to-day. They knew that she was on her way to meet Philip Vandervent. They were reading into that meeting verification of their suspicions.

And they were suspicious, because—she knew why. Carey had killed Beiner. Garland knew of the crime. Garland had blackmailed Carey; Garland feared that exposure of Carey would also expose himself as cognizant of the crime. So they were crazed, one from drink, the other from some more evil cause. No thought of risk would deter them. It was incredible that they would attack her, and yet ——

"Now, listen, lady," came the voice of Garland: "We don't mean no harm to you. Get me?"

Incredibly, crazed though the man's voice was, Clancy believed him.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"We just want a little time, Carey and me. We want you to promise to keep your mouth shut for a week or so; that's all. Your word'll be good with us."

Again Clancy believed him. But now she was able to reason. She believed Garland, because he meant what he said. But—would he mean what he said five minutes from now? And, then, it didn't matter to her whether or not the man would mean it five years from now. He was attempting to dictate to her, Clancy Deane, who was on her way to meet Philip Vandervent, she who had received flowers from Philip Vandervent only yesterday.

Vandervent was a gentleman. Would he temporize? Would he give a promise that in honor he should not give?

Where there had been only suspicion, there was now certainty. She *knew* that Don Carey had killed Morris Beiner. On some remote day, she would ponder on the queer ways of fate, on the strange coincidences that make for what we call "inevitability." With, so far as she knew, no evidence against him, Don Carey

had convicted himself.

He was a murderer. By all possible implication, Carey had confessed, and Garland had corroborated the confession. And they asked her to become party to a murder!

She would never again be as angry as she was now. It seemed to her inflamed senses that they were insulting not merely herself but Vandervent also. They were suggesting that she was venal, capable of putting bodily safety above honesty. And, in belittling her, they belittled the man who had, of all the women in the world, selected her. For now, in the stress of the moment, it was as though Vandervent's flowers had been a proposal. She fought not merely for herself, but, by some queer quirk of reasoning, for the man that she loved.

Her left hand held whip and reins. She dropped the reins, she rose to her feet and lashed savagely at Garland's head. She heard him scream as the knotted leather cut across his face. She saw him stagger back, relinquishing his hold of the bridle. She turned. Carey's two hands sought for her; his face was but a yard away, and into it she drove the butt of the whip. He, too, reeled back.

Her hand went above her head and the lash descended, swishingly, upon the side of the horse. There was a jerk forward that sat her heavily down upon the seat. A sidewise twist, as the animal leaped ahead, almost threw her out of the sleigh. She gripped at the dashboard and managed to right herself. And then the sleigh went round a bend in the road.

The snow was piled on the left-hand side. The horse, urged into the first display of spirits that, probably, he had shown in years, bore to the left. The left runner shot into the air. Clancy picked herself out of a snow-drift on the right-hand side as the horse and sleigh careened round another turn.

For a moment, she was too bewildered to move. Then she heard behind her the curses of the two men. She heard them plunging along the heavy roadway, calling to each other to make haste.

She was not panicky. Before her was a narrow roadway, branching away from the main highway. Up it she ran, as swiftly as her heavily-shod feet—she wore overshoes that Mrs. Hebron had pressed upon her—could carry her over the rough track.

Round a corner she glimpsed lights. A house stood before her. She raced toward it, her pace slackening as a backward glance assured her that Garland and Carey must be pursuing the empty sleigh, for they certainly were not following her.

But the horse might stop at any moment. He was an aged animal, probably tired of his freedom already. Then the two men would turn, would find her tracks leading up this road. She refused to consider what might happen then. One thing only she knew—that she had justified herself by refusing to treat with them. It was an amazingly triumphant heart that she held within her bosom. She felt strangely proud of herself.

Across a wide veranda she made her way. She rang a door-bell, visible under the veranda-light. She heard footsteps. Now she breathed easily. She was safe. Carey and Garland, even though they discovered her tracks, would hardly follow her into this house.

Then the door opened and she stood face to face with Sophie Carey.

For a moment, neither of them spoke. Then Mrs. Carey held out her hand.

"Why, Miss Deane!" she gasped.

Perfunctorily Clancy took the extended fingers. She stepped inside.

"Lock the door!" she ordered.

Sophie Carey stared at her. Mechanically she obeyed. She stared at her guest.

"Why—why—what's wrong?" she demanded. Her voice shook, and her eyes were frightened.

Clancy's eyes clouded. She wanted to weep. Not because of any danger that had menaced her—that might still menace her—not because of any physical reaction. But Sophie Carey had befriended her, and Sophie Carey was in the shadow of disgrace. And she, Clancy Deane, *must* tell the authorities.

"Your husband——" she began.

Mrs. Carey's face hardened. Into her eyes came a flame.

"He—he's dared to——"

There was a step on the veranda outside. Before Clancy could interfere, Sophie had strode by her and thrown open the door. Through the entrance came Carey, his bloodshot eyes roving. In his hand he held a revolver.

XXXI

Until she died, Clancy would hold vividly, in memory, the recollection of this scene. Just beyond the threshold Carey stopped. His wife, wild-eyed, leaned against the door which she had closed, her hand still on the knob.

For a full minute, there was silence. Clancy forgot her own danger. She was looking upon the most dramatic thing in life, the casting-off by a woman of a man whom she had loved, because she has found him unworthy.

Not that Sophie Carey, just now—or later on, for that matter—stooped to any melodramatic utterance. But her eyes were as expressive as spoken sentences. Into them first crept fear—a fear that was different from the alarm that she had shown when Clancy had mentioned her husband. But the fear vanished, was banished by the fulness of her contempt. Her eyes, that had been wide, now narrowed, hardened, seemed to emit sparks of ice.

Contemptuous anger heightened her beauty. Rather, it restored it. For, when Clancy had staggered into the house, the beauty of Sophie Carey, always a matter of coloring and spirits rather than of feature, had been a memory. She had been haggard, wan, sunken of cheek, so pale that her rouge had made her ghastly by contrast.

But now a normal color crept into her face. Not really normal, but, induced by the emotions that swayed her, it was the color that should always have been hers. It took years from her age. Her figure had seemed heavy, matronly, a moment ago. But now, as her muscles stiffened, it took on again that litheness which, despite her plumpness, made her seem more youthful than she was.

But it was the face of her husband that fascinated Clancy. Below his left eye, a bruise stood out, crimson. Clancy knew that it was from the blow that she had struck with the butt of the whip. She felt a certain vindictive pleasure at the sight of it. Carey's mouth twitched. His blond mustache looked more like straw than anything else. Ordinarily, it was carefully combed, but now the hairs that should have been trained to the right stuck over toward the left, rendering him almost grotesque. Below it, his mouth was twisted in a sort of sneer that made its weakness more apparent than ever.

His hat was missing; snow was on his shoulders, as though, in his pursuit, he had stumbled headlong into the drifts. And his tie was undone, his collar opened, as though he had found difficulty in breathing. The hand that held the revolver shook.

Before the gaze of the two women, his air of menace vanished. The intoxication that, combined with fear, had made him almost insane, left him.

"Why—why—musta scared you," he stammered.

Sophie Carey stepped close to him. Her fingers touched the revolver in his hand. Her husband jerked it away. Its muzzle, for a wavering moment, pointed at Clancy. She did not move. She was not frightened; she was fascinated. She marveled at Sophie's cool courage. For Mrs. Carey reached again for the weapon. This time, Carey did not resist; he surrendered it to her. Then Clancy understood how tremendous had been the strain, not merely for her but for Sophie. The older woman would have fallen but for the wall against which her shoulders struck. But her voice was steady when she spoke.

"I suppose that there's some explanation, Don?"

Clancy wondered if she would ever achieve Sophie's perfect poise. She wondered if it could be acquired, or if people were born with it. It was not pretense in Sophie Carey's case, at any rate. The casualness of her tone was not assumed. Somehow, she made Clancy think of those *grandes dames* of the French Revolution who played cards as the summons to the tumbrils came, and who left the game as jauntily as though they went to the play.

For Clancy knew that Sophie Carey had forgiven her husband the other day for the last time; that hope, so far as he was concerned, was now ashes in her bosom forever. To a woman of Mrs. Carey's type, this present humiliation must make her suffer as nothing else in the world could do. Yet, because she was herself, her voice held no trace of pain.

"'Explanation?'" Carey was mastered by her self-control. "Why—course there is! Why——" He took the refuge of the weak. He burst into temper. "'Course there is!" he cried again. "Dirty little spy! Trying to get me in bad. Stopped her—wanted to scare her——"

"Don!" His wife's voice stopped his shrill utterance.

She straightened up, no longer leaning against the wall for support. "You stopped her? Why?" She raised her hand, quelling his reply. "No lies, Don; I want the truth."

Carey's mouth opened; it shut again. He looked hastily about him, as though seeking some road for flight. He glanced toward the revolver that his wife held. For a moment Clancy thought that he would spring for it. But if he held such thought, he let it go, conquered by his wife's spirit.

"'The truth?'" He tried to laugh. "Why—why, Miss Deane's got some fool idea that I killed Morris Beiner, and I wanted to—I wanted to——"

"'Beiner?' 'Morris Beiner?'" Sophie was bewildered.

"Theatrical man. You read about it in the papers." Again Carey tried to laugh, to seem nonchalantly amused. "Because I had an office in the same building, she got the idea that I killed him. I just wanted her to quit telling people about me. Just a friendly little talk—that's all I wanted with her."

"'Friendly?' With this?" Mrs. Carey glanced down at the weapon in her hand.

"Well, I just thought maybe that she'd scare easy, and——"

"Don!" The name burst explosively from his wife's lips. Her breath sucked in audibly through her parted lips.

Carey stepped back, away from her.

"Why—why——"

"A murderer," cried Mrs. Carey.

"It's a lie!" said Carey. "We had a li'l fight, but——"

Mrs. Carey glanced at Clancy.

"How did you know?" she whispered.

Clancy shook her head. She made no reply. Sophie Carey didn't want one. She spoke only as one who has seen the universe shattered might utter some question.

"Why?" demanded Mrs. Carey.

"He butted in on some business of——"

"I don't mean that," she interrupted. "I mean—isn't there anything of a man left in you, Donald? I don't care why you killed this man Beiner. But why, having done something for which a price must be paid, you attack a woman——"

She slumped against the wall again. The hand holding the revolver dangled limply at her side. So it was that it was easily snatched from her hand.

Clancy had been too absorbed in the scene to remember Garland. Sophie Carey, apparently, knew nothing of the man. The snow had been swept from the veranda only in front of the door. It muffled the elevator-man's approach to one of the French windows in the living-room, off the hall, in which the three stood. Garland crept to the door, sized up the situation, and, with a bound, was at Sophie's side. He leaped away from her, flourishing the weapon.

"'S all right, Carey! We got 'em!" he shouted.

Clancy had become used to the unexpected. Yet Carey's action surprised her. In a moment when danger menaced as never before, danger passed away. Carey had been born a gentleman. He had spent his life trying to forget the fact. But instinct is stronger than our will. He could lie, could murder even, could kill a woman. But a gutter-rat like Garland could not lay a hand on his wife.

The elevator-man, never having known the spark of breeding, could not have anticipated Carey's move. The revolver was wrested from him, and he was on hands and knees, hurled there by Carey's punch, without quite knowing what had happened, or why.

Carey handed the revolver to his wife. She accepted it silently. The husband turned to Garland.

"Get out," he said.

His voice was quiet. All the hysteria, all the madness had disappeared from it. It had the ring of command that might always have been there had the man run true to his creed. He was a weakling, but weakness might have been conquered.

Garland scrambled to his feet. Sidewise, fearful lest Carey strike him again, his opened mouth expressing more bewilderment than anger, he sidled past Carey to the door, which the latter opened. He bounded swiftly through, and Carey closed the door. The patter of the man's feet was heard for a moment on the veranda. Then he was gone.

"Thank you, Don," said Sophie quietly.

It was, Clancy felt, like a scene from some play. It was unreal, unbelievable, only —it was also dreadfully real.

"Don't suppose the details interest you, Sophie?" said Carey.

She shook her head.

"I'm sorry, Don."

He shrugged. "That's more than I have any right to expect from you, Sophie."

His enunciation was no longer thick; it was extremely clear. His wife's lower lip trembled slightly.

"There—there isn't any way——"

He shook his head.

"I've been drinking like a fish, and thought there was. I—I'm not a murderer, Sophie. I almost was—a few minutes ago. But Beiner—just a rat who interfered with me. I—I—you deserved something decent, Sophie. You got me. I deserved something rotten, and—I got you. And didn't appreciate— Oh, well, you aren't interested. And it's too late, anyway."

He smiled debonairly. His lips, Clancy noticed, did not tremble in the least. Though she only vaguely comprehended what was going on, less she realized that, in some incomprehensible fashion, Don Carey was coming into his own, that whatever indecencies, wickednesses, had been in the man, they were leaving him now. Later on, when she analyzed the scene, she would understand that Carey had spiritually groveled before his wife, and that, though she could not love him, could not respect him, despite all the shame he had inflicted upon her, she had forgiven him. But of this there was no verbal hint. Carey turned to her.

"Insanity covers many things, Miss Deane. It would be kind of you, if you are able, to think of me as insane."

He stepped toward his wife. She shrank away from him.

"I'm not going to be banal, Sophie," he told her. "Just let me have this." From her unresisting fingers he took the revolver. He put it in his coat pocket. He shrugged his shoulders. "I've had lucid moments, even in the past week," he said, "and in one of them I knew what lay ahead. It's all written down—in the steel box upstairs, Sophie. It—it will save any one else—from being suspected." He turned and his hand was on the door-knob.

"Don!" Sophie's voice rose in a scream. The aplomb that had been hers deserted her. Strangely, Carey seemed the dominating figure of the two, and this despite the fact that he was beaten—beaten by his wife's own sheer stark courage.

He turned back. The smile that he gave to his wife was reminiscent of charm. Clancy could understand how, some years ago, the brilliant and charming Sophie Carey had succumbed to that smile. Slowly he shook his head.

"Sophie, you've been the bravest thing in the world. You aren't going to be a coward now."

He was through the door, and it slammed behind him before his wife moved. Then she started for the door. She made only one stride, and then she slumped, to lie, a huddled heap, upon the hallway floor.

How long Clancy stood there she couldn't have told. Probably not more than a few seconds, yet, in her numbed state, it seemed hours before she moved toward

the unconscious woman. For she thought that Sophie Carey was dead. It was a ridiculous thought, nevertheless it was with dread that she finally bent over the prostrate figure. Then, seeing the bosom move she screamed.

From up-stairs Ragan, the chauffeur, Jack-of-all-trades whom she had seen at the Carey house in New York the other day, came running. His wife followed. Together they lifted Mrs. Carey and bore her to a couch in the living-room. But no restoratives were needed. Her eyes opened almost immediately. They cleared swiftly and she sat up.

"Ragan!"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Mr. Don!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"He—he—has a revolver. He's—outside—somewhere——"

"I'll find him, ma'am."

There seemed to be no need for explanation. Ragan's white face showed that he understood. And now Clancy, amazed that she had not comprehended before, also understood. Her hands went swiftly up over her eyes as though to shut out some horrible sight. The fact that Don Carey had pursued her half an hour ago with murderous intent was of no importance now.

She heard Ragan's heavy feet racing across the room and out of the house. She heard the piteous wail from Mrs. Ragan's mouth. Then, amazed, as she removed her hands from her eyes, she saw Sophie Carey, mistress of herself again, leap from the couch and race to a window, throwing it open.

"Ragan," she called. "Ragan!"

"Ma'am?" faintly, from the darkness, Ragan answered.

"Come here." Firm, commanding, Sophie Carey's voice brooked no refusal.

"Coming, ma'am," called Ragan.

A moment later he was in the living-room again.

"Ragan, go up-stairs," commanded his mistress.

The man looked his surprise.

"But, ma'am, Mr. Donald——"

"Must be given his chance, Ragan," she interrupted.

"'His chance,' ma'am? Him carryin' a revolver?"

"There are worse things than revolvers, Ragan," said his mistress.

"Oh, my darlin' Miss Sophie," cried his wife.

She turned on them both.

"They'll capture him. They'll put him in jail. They'll sentence him— It's his way out. It mustn't—it *mustn't* be taken from him!" Her voice rose to a scream. She held out her arms to Clancy. "Don't let them—don't let them—" She could not finish; once again she tumbled to the floor.

Uncertainly, the servants looked at Clancy. It was the first time in her life that Clancy had come face to face with a great problem. Her own problem of the past week seemed a minor thing compared with this.

She knew that what Don Carey purposed doing was wrong, hideously wrong. It was the act of a coward. Yet, in this particular case, was there not something of heroism in it? To save his wife from the long-drawn-out humiliation of a trial—Sophie Carey had appealed to her. Yet Sophie Carey had not appealed because of cowardice, because she feared humiliation; Sophie appealed to her because she wished to spare her husband a felon's fate.

Exquisitely she suffered during the few seconds that she faced the servants. Right or wrong? Yet what was right and what was wrong? Are there times when the end justifies the means? Does right sometimes masquerade in the guise of wrong? Does wrong sometimes impersonate right? Nice problems in ethics are not solved when one is at high emotional pitch. It takes the philosopher, secluded in his study, to classify those abstractions which are solved, in real life, on impulse.

And then decision was taken from her. In later life, when faced with problems difficult of solution, she would remember this moment, not merely because of its tragic associations, but because she had not been forced to decide a question involving right and wrong. Life would not always be so easy for her.

But now— Somewhere out in the darkness sounded a revolver shot. Whether or not it was right to take one's life to save another added shame no longer mattered. Whether or not it was right to stand by and permit the taking of that life no longer mattered. The problem had been solved, for right or wrong, by Carey himself.

For the second time in a week, for the second time in her life, Clancy Deane fainted.

XXXII

She was still in the living-room when she came to her senses. Sophie Carey was gone; the Ragans were also gone. Clancy guessed that they were attending to their mistress. As for herself, she felt the need of no attention. For her first conscious thought was that the cloud that had hung over her so steadily for the past week, which had descended so low that its foggy breath had chilled her heart, was forever lifted.

She was not selfish—merely human. Not to have drawn in her breath in a great sigh of relief would have indicated that Clancy Deane was too angelic for this world. And she was not; she was better than an angel because she was warmly human.

And so her first thought was of herself. But her second was of the woman up-stairs—the woman who had shown her, in so brief a time, so many kindnesses, and who now lay stricken. What a dreadful culmination to a life of humiliation! She closed her eyes a moment, as though to shut out the horror of it all.

When she opened them, it was to look gravely at the two men in the room. Randall she looked at first; her eyes swept him coolly, but she was not cool. She was fighting against something that she did not wish to show upon her countenance. When she thought that it was under control, she transferred her grave glance to Vandervent.

As on that day last week when she had fainted in his office he held a glass of water in his hand. Also, his hand shook, and the water slopped over the rim of the tumbler.

She was sitting in a chair. She wondered which one of these two men had carried her there. She wanted to know at once. And so, because she was a woman, she set herself to find out.

"Mrs. Carey—she's—all right?"

She addressed the question to both. And it was Randall who replied.

"I think so—I hope so. I helped Mrs. Ragan carry her up-stairs, while Ragan waited—outside."

Clancy shuddered. She knew why Ragan waited outside, and over what he kept watch. Nevertheless, if Randall had carried Sophie up-stairs, Vandervent must have deposited herself, Clancy Deane, in this chair. An unimportant matter, perhaps, but—it had been Vandervent who picked her up. She looked at Vandervent.

"I—couldn't meet you at the train," she said.

Vandervent colored.

"I—so I see," he said. That his remark was banal meant nothing to Clancy. She was versed enough in the ways of a man with a maid to be glad that Vandervent was not too glib of speech with her.

Vandervent set down the glass. He looked at her.

"If you don't care to talk, Miss Deane——"

"I do," said Clancy.

Vandervent glanced toward the window.

"Then——"

"He killed Morris Beiner," said Clancy. Vandervent started. "He confessed," said Clancy, "and then——"

There was no need to finish. Vandervent nodded. Carey had done the only possible thing.

"But you—how does it happen you're here?"

Swiftly Clancy told them. Silently they listened, although she could tell, by his expression, that, time and again, Vandervent wanted to burst into speech, that only the fact that Carey lay dead in the snow outside prevented him from characterizing the actions of the man who had killed Morris Beiner.

"And Garland?" he asked finally.

Clancy shrugged.

"I don't know. He left, as I've told you."

Vandervent's jaws set tightly. Then they parted as he spoke.

"He'll explain it all. He'll be caught," he said.

"Mr.—Mr. Carey said that it was all written down. It's up-stairs," said Clancy.

Vandervent nodded.

"That simplifies it." He rose and walked uncertainly across the room. "If we could catch Garland right away and—shut his mouth——"

Clancy knew what he meant. He was thinking of how to protect her from possible scandal.

"How did you happen to know that I was here?" asked Clancy. After all, murder was murder and death was death. But love was life, and Clancy was in love. The most insignificant actions of a loved one are of more importance, in the first flush of love's discovery, than the fall of empires.

"We came upon the horse, down by the station. I—I guessed that it must be yours." Vandervent colored. So did Clancy. He could not have more clearly confessed that he feared for her; and people frequently love those for whom they are fearful.

"So Randall and I— We met in the train——

"Mrs. Carey 'phoned me this afternoon. She—said that she was frightened," said Randall.

"I see," said Clancy. Despite herself, she could not keep her tone from being dry. How quickly, and how easily, Randall had returned to Sophie Carey! Safety first! It was his motto, undoubtedly. And now, of course, that Mrs. Carey was a widow — Months from now, Clancy would find that her attitude toward Randall was slightly acidulous. She'd always be friendly, but with reservations. And as for Sophie Carey, she'd come to the final conclusion that she didn't really want Sophie as her dearest and closest friend. But just now she put from her, ashamed, the slight feeling of contempt that she had for Randall. After all, there are degrees in love. Some men will pay a woman's bills but refuse to die for her. Others would cheerfully die for her rather than pay her bills. Randall would never feel any ecstasy of devotion. He would love with his head more than with his heart. He was well out of her scheme of things.

"So," continued Vandervent, "inasmuch as there was no one around, we took the horse and sleigh. I turned in at this drive, intending to leave Randall. We saw a man run across the snow, stop—we heard the shot. We ran to him. We couldn't help him. It—it was too late. We came into the house and sent Ragan out to watch the—to watch him. You and Mrs. Carey had fainted. I ought to telephone the coroner," he said abruptly. Yet he made no move toward the telephone. "You

see," he went on, "what you've told me about Garland—if we could find him ——"

He stopped short; there were steps upon the veranda outside; and then the bell rang. Vandervent moved swiftly from the room. Clancy heard him exclaim in amazement. A moment later, she understood, for Spofford entered the room, and by the wrist he dragged after him Garland.

"Got one of 'em," he announced triumphantly. "Now—the other guy. Where's Carey?" he demanded.

"Dead," said Vandervent crisply.

Spofford's mouth opened. He dropped into a chair, loosing his grasp on Garland.

"Beat me to it!" he said bitterly. "Had him dead to rights—came up here all alone." He looked up surlily. "Listen here, Mr. Vandervent; I ran this case down all by myself. You're here, and I suppose you'll grab all the glory; but I wanta tell you that I'm entitled to my share." His gaze was truculent now.

"You may have it," said Vandervent quietly.

"Eh? I don't get you," said Spofford. "Where's the string tied to it?"

"Perhaps not any—perhaps just one," was Vandervent's reply.

"Huh!" Spofford grunted noncommittally. "Where is Carey?"

Vandervent pointed out the window.

"Sent for the coroner?" demanded the plain-clothesman.

"Not—yet," admitted Vandervent.

"Why not?"

Vandervent stared at Garland.

"What's this man to do with it?" he asked.

"Material witness," said Spofford.

"But, if Carey left a written confession, you wouldn't need a witness," said Vandervent.

"H'm—no," conceded Spofford. "Only—an accessory after the fact—that's what this guy is——"

Vandervent turned to Randall.

"Take this man outside—and watch him," he ordered.

Garland's mouth opened in a whine.

"I didn't have a thing to do with it," he said. "It's a frame-up."

"Take him out, Randall," ordered Vandervent. Randall obeyed. Of course, Vandervent was an assistant district-attorney of New York and his position, though outside his jurisdiction now, was an important one. Nevertheless, Clancy knew that it was the man whom Randall obeyed, not the official. It gave her added proof that her judgment of the two men had been correct. Clancy loved with her head, too, though not so much as with her heart.

"Spofford," said Vandervent. "I've promised you all the glory—on one condition. Now tell me how you discovered that Carey was the murderer."

Spofford hesitated for a moment.

"Well, first I got the idea that Miss Deane was the one. When I found that you and Judge Walbrough was interested in protectin' her, I began to wonder. I rounded up all the tenants in the Heberworth Building. And one of them said he had a vague recollection of having seen a man enter Beiner's office sometime after five o'clock, last Tuesday. He described the man pretty well. I looked over the tenants. I found that Carey looked like the man. I got the other tenant to look at Carey. He couldn't swear to him, but thought he was the one.

"Now Carey'd been skirting the edges of the law for some time. There was a pretty little scandal brewing about the fake theatrical agency Carey was running. One or two of the girls that had been in that office had been talking. Find the woman! That's my motto when a man's been killed. I looked up those girls! One of them told me of another girl. I went to see her. She was an old sweetie of Beiner's. Carey had taken her away. It looked like something, eh? She admitted Carey had quarreled with Beiner over her. Name of Henty. Promised to keep her out of it if I could." He drew a long breath.

"That didn't make the man a murderer, but it might tie him up with Beiner. Somehow, I ain't entirely satisfied with the way that Garland talks. He's pretty ready to identify Miss Deane, but still— I keep my eye on Garland. I watch him pretty closely. Monday, I think I'll have another talk with Miss Deane. I find out from the place she works that she's down at Carey's house." He glanced at Clancy. "You'll excuse me, Miss Deane, if I didn't tip all my mitt to you the other day." He resumed his story. "I go down to Carey's. Just as I get there, Garland comes out. He don't see me, but I see him all right. A few minutes later out

comes Carey and a lady that I take to be his wife. Well, I don't worry about them then. They're too well known to get very far away.

"But Garland was in the house with them. Naturally, I began to do a whole lot of thinkin'. I ring the bell, on the chance that Miss Deane is inside. I have a talk with her, and tell her that I'm convinced she don't have anything to do with the murder. I am, all right. I have a hunch that maybe she can tell me something if she wants, but I figure I can wait.

"I leave her and go up to the Heberworth Building. Garland ain't reported for work. I go up-stairs. I do some quick thinkin'. If I let any one else in on this, I lose my chance." He glared defiantly at Vandervent. "It's a big chance," he exclaimed. "I'm gettin' on. I'll never be a day younger than I am to-day. I don't look forward to existin' on a measly pension. I want some jack. And the only way I can get it is by startin' a detective agency. And before I can do that, with any chance of makin' a clean-up, I got to pull somethin' spectacular.

"Well, you never win a bet without riskin' some money. I'm standin' in the hall outside Carey's office. Nobody's lookin'. I ain't been pinchin' guys all my life without pickin' up a trick or two. It takes me ten seconds to open that door and close it behind me.

"It may put me in the pen, burglarizin' Carey's office, but—it may put him in the chair. So I don't delay. He sure was flooey in the dome—this guy Carey. Booze has certainly wrecked his common sense. For I find papers around that show that him and Beiner been tied up in several little deals. I even find letters from Beiner threatenin' Carey unless he comes through with some coin. Motive, eh? I'll say so." He chuckled complacently. "But I find more than that. I find a bunch of keys. And one of them unlocks the door to Beiner's office. I've got opportunity now—motive and opportunity. Also a witness who *thinks* he saw Carey at the door of Beiner's office.

"It ain't everything, but—I got to Garland's house. I learn from his landlady that Garland's packed a bag, paid his rent and skipped. That was yesterday. To-day I did a bit of scoutin' around and find out that the Careys own a country place up here. Of course, that don't prove they've gone there in the middle of a winter like this, but I telephone their house. A servant answers. I ask for Mr. Carey. The servant says that he's out. I hang up the 'phone. I knew that Carey's up there. And I just decide to come up and get him. In the road outside I meet Garland—and grab him."

"Have you a warrant?" asked Vandervent.

"I'll say I have," grinned Spofford. "But it ain't no use. He beat me to it." He looked ghoulishly regretful that he didn't have a live prisoner instead of a dead

man. And not regretful that death had occurred, but that it had interfered with his plans. "And now—that little condition?" he asked.

"Carey has confessed," said Vandervent. "A written confession. Suppose that I hand you that confession?"

"Well?" Spofford didn't understand.

"Garland, I take it, has committed blackmail."

"*And* been accessory after the fact, Mr. Vandervent," said Spofford.

Vandervent nodded.

"Of course. Only, if Garland testifies, he may mention Miss Deane. In which case I shall feel compelled to maintain that it was I who traced the murderer, who won from him his confession."

"You can't prove it," blustered Spofford.

"Think not?" Vandervent smiled.

Spofford's forehead wrinkled in thought. "The idea, of course, is that you want Miss Deane's name left completely out of this affair," he said.

"You grasp it completely," smiled Vandervent.

"Well, worse guys than Garland are takin' the air when they feel like it," said Spofford.

"He's a scoundrel," said Vandervent, "but if punishing him means smirching Miss Deane's name, he'd better go free."

Spofford rose to his feet.

"You'd better 'phone the coroner," he said.

Vandervent shook his head.

"You're the genius who discovered the murderer. You do the telephoning, Spofford."

Spofford grinned.

"Much obliged, Mr. Vandervent. There won't be a yip outa me." He bowed toward Clancy. "It ain't hard for me to agree to something that saves a lady like you from bein' annoyed, Miss Deane. I may have sounded nasty, but it means something to me—this advertisin' I'll get."

He left the room before Clancy could answer. But she spoke to Vandervent.

"Have you the right to let a man like Garland go free?" she asked.

"Certainly not," he replied. "But there are occasions when one considers the greater good."

It was no time for Clancy to be hypersensitive about Vandervent's honor. He'd have been something less than a man if he had not made his bargain with Spofford. Yet, to Clancy, it seemed that he had done the most wonderful thing in the world.

There are women who would place a meticulous point of honor above love, but Clancy Deane had never been one of those bloodless persons intended for the cloister. Perhaps her eyes showed her gratitude. For Vandervent stepped nearer.

But the speech that Clancy believed trembled on the tip of his tongue was not uttered then. For Spofford reëntered the room.

"I've got the coroner, Mr. Vandervent. He'll be over in five minutes."

"What about Garland?" demanded Vandervent.

"There's a train for New York at midnight. I took the cuffs off him, and he'll be on that train. He'll keep his mouth shut. Leastwise, if he does talk, no one'll believe him. He's a hop-head, that guy. But not so far gone but that he may not come back. The fear of God is in him to-night, sir. Maybe he'll straighten up." He shuffled his feet. "Please, sir, I think Miss Deane ought to be gettin' out of sight. The coroner'll ask questions, and the fewer lies need be told him——"

"Mrs. Carey? May she talk?" asked Vandervent.

Spofford shook his head.

"We'll keep him away from her until to-morrow. By that time, I'll have her coached—Miss Deane won't be in it, sir."

"Fair enough," said Vandervent.

Spofford moved toward the door. But, suddenly, Clancy didn't wish to be alone with Vandervent. She wanted time, as a woman always does. And so, because Vandervent must remain and see the coroner, Clancy drove home to the anxious Mrs. Walbrough alone. Physically alone, but in spirit accompanied by the roseate dreams of youth.

XXXIII

Mrs. Walbrough was one of those women who are happiest when trouble impends or is at hand. She had fallen in love with Clancy almost at sight; but her affection had been rendered durable and lasting as soon as she had discovered that Clancy was in danger. Wives who are not mothers but who have always craved children furnish the majority of this kind of woman.

And now, when Clancy's story had been told to her, and she had exclaimed, and colored in rage and grown white with apprehension, and after she had tucked Clancy securely in bed, so that there was no more to be done for her protégée, the thoughts of the motherly woman turned to Sophie Carey.

"Would you be afraid," she asked, "if I went over to the Carey place? Poor thing! I never forgave her for marrying Don Carey; I don't think I've been kind enough to her."

The remark caused Clancy to remember that not, during the entire day, had Mrs. Walbrough mentioned the fact that the Careys were such near neighbors. Of course, that might be accounted for by the fact that Mrs. Walbrough had no idea that Sophie and her husband were at their country place. But she realized that Mrs. Walbrough imagined that her attitude toward Sophie had not been as generous as she now wished. So, even if she had feared being left alone in the house, she would have denied it. Mrs. Walbrough, Clancy readily understood, was like all whose natural affections have not sufficient outlet. They wonder if "So-and-So" will misinterpret their remarks, if "Such-and-Such" has been offended.

"I don't believe," she said, "that you've ever been anything but sweet and good to every one. But, of course, I don't mind your going. 'Afraid?'" She laughed heartily at the idea.

And so, with many motherly injunctions about the hot-water bottle at her feet and the heavy woolen blankets drawn up about her shoulders, Mrs. Walbrough departed.

Clancy reached for the electric button at the head of her bed. She turned off the lights. She was not sleepy, yet she felt that she could think better in the dark. But it was a long time before her mental processes were coherent. She was more tired than she knew. To-day's exertions upon the snow-covered hill would ordinarily have been no tax at all upon her youthful strength. But excitement saps vitality. And when one combines too much exercise with too much mental

strain, one becomes bewildered.

So, as she lay there, her thoughts were chaotic, nightmarish. Like one in an audience, she seemed to detach herself, not merely from her body but from her brain. She found amusement in her own mental wanderings. For from some incident of childhood her mind leaped to the studio-dance at Mrs. Carey's city house. From there it went to her motion-picture ambitions, thence to Vandervent's flowers with their somewhat illegible card. She thought of Randall's conveyance of her to the Napoli on that night, so shortly ago, when she had mistaken him for a taxi-man. She thought of her entrance into Vandervent's office, with confession trembling on her lips.

Always, her mind came back to Vandervent. And finally, her mental gyrations ceased. Steadily she thought of him. She wondered at the thing we call "attraction." For she was sure that neither his great name nor his wealth had anything to do with this irresistible something that drew her to him.

Not that she would ever delude herself with the idea that wealth and position meant nothing to her. They did. They meant a great deal, as is right and proper. But had Philip Vandervent been poor, had his prospects been inconsiderable, she would still have been ready, aye, anxious to yield herself to him.

She wondered why. Of course, she knew that he was decent, kindly, possessor of all those virtues which are considered ordinary, but are really uncommon. But it is none of these things, unhappily, that make for love. Combined with love, they make for happiness, but alone they never won the fickle heart of woman.

He was intelligent; she knew that. He was, perhaps, brilliant. She had no proof of that. Their conversations could hardly afford evidence either way, they had been interchanges of almost monosyllabic utterances. So, at any rate, reviewing them, it seemed to Clancy.

What was it, then, that drew her to him? Not his looks; she had known many handsomer men. She smiled whimsically. Highly as she appraised her own beauty, she supposed that somewhere was a more lovely woman. And Vandervent might have seen her. Why did he reserve his love for Clancy?

Then, for the first time, doubt came to her. She sat bolt-upright in bed. Suppose that she'd been deluding herself? She smiled, shaking her head. She knew. She didn't know why she knew, but—she knew. Women almost always do. And slowly she took less interest in the problem. Sleep descended lightly upon her. So lightly that whisperings outside her door woke her.

"Who is it?" she called.

"Sophie Carey. May I come in?"

Clancy switched on the light.

"Of course," she said.

Sophie entered. She sat immediately down upon the edge of the bed. Her face was deathly pale and wore no rouge. Her cheeks were sunken. She looked forty. Rather, she would have looked forty but for her eyes. For they were softened, somehow; yet through their softness shone a brilliance that spoke of youth. It was as though some heavy burden had been lifted from her. Clancy could not censure her. Sophie would have been less than human if she had not responded, in some expression, to the hidden relief that must have come to her, even though through tragedy and scandal.

She put her arms quickly round Clancy.

"I think," she said, "that you are the sweetest, bravest person I have ever met."

"Why—why—" stammered Clancy.

"You had every reason to suspect that Don had—done what he did. Mr. Vandervent has told me all that you told him. And yet—you didn't say anything."

"I would have," said Clancy, honestly, "had I been sure."

Sophie nodded gravely.

"But most persons, on the faintest of suspicions, to clear themselves— Oh, I can't talk about it." Suddenly she kissed Clancy. "Miss Deane, I hope—I know—that you are going to be very happy."

She was gone at once. Clancy didn't ponder long over her last remark. She went to sleep, this time in earnest.

It was bright day when she awoke. Mrs. Walbrough entered a moment after Clancy had thrown the coverlets from her and was on her way to the windows, to shut them.

"I wondered if you could still be sleeping," said her hostess. "Do you know the time, young lady?"

Clancy shivered and yawned. "Eight o'clock?"

"Eleven-thirty," said Mrs. Walbrough. "And in the country we have luncheon early, as you know. Would you like your coffee here, or will you wait?"

"I want to eat with you," said Clancy.

"And with Tom and Philip Vandervent, too, I suppose."

"Are they here?"

Mrs. Walbrough nodded gravely.

"I got Tom on the 'phone after you went to bed last night. He came on the first train this morning. He wanted, of course, to do anything for Mrs. Carey that he could. But Mr. Randall is attending to everything. He and Mrs. Carey left on an early train for New York."

"And Mr. Vandervent?" Timidly, Clancy asked the question.

Mrs. Walbrough smiled.

"There were certain matters that had to be gone over with the Dutchess County authorities. He stayed. That's why he *said* he stayed."

Clancy's expression was innocence personified.

"What other reason could there be?"

Mrs. Walbrough hugged her.

"Don't you dare attempt to deceive me, young lady." She slapped her gently.

In something less than half an hour Clancy was down-stairs, in the dining-room, attacking healthily a meal that Mrs. Walbrough described, because it was really neither breakfast nor lunch, as "brunch."

During the meal, in response to Walbrough's questions, Vandervent told the gist of the written confession that Don Carey had left behind him. It was a sordid tale. Carey, in that pursuit of pleasure which kills, had started an alleged office where young women applied for theatrical positions. Beiner, more legitimately engaged in the same business, had become acquainted with Carey. Spofford's discoveries were verified in Carey's own handwriting. Beiner had introduced Carey to a young woman. Carey, retaining some decency, did not mention the girl's name. He said, however, that Beiner had become jealous of his attentions to the young woman, and friendship between the two men had ceased. Learning what Carey was doing, Beiner had attempted blackmail. Carey, intending to have it out with Beiner, had knocked on Beiner's door. During the intimacy that had existed previous to Beiner's blackmailing attempts, Beiner had given Carey a key to his office.

Carey had heard a groan coming from behind the locked door. He had entered, with Beiner's key, and found the man lying, half-conscious, upon the floor. The scene, to Carey's drink-inflamed mind, spelled opportunity. He had snatched the paper-knife from Beiner's desk and stabbed the man to death. Then he had quietly left the office, locking it after him.

And that was all. Although the newspapers, naturally enough, "played it up" to the extent of columns, it was a crime in what is known as "high life," and they do not come too often for the public. Judge Walbrough had brought the early editions of the afternoon papers with him and permitted Clancy to look at them.

Spofford had not missed his chance. He was hailed as the greatest detective genius of the day.

"Poor Mrs. Carey!" said Clancy.

The others nodded gravely. "Not another woman in New York could live it down," said the judge.

"Why not?" demanded Clancy. "She did nothing wrong."

The judge shrugged.

"Scandal has touched her intimately. That is enough—for any other woman, but not for Sophie Carey. She has too many friends, is too great an artist—let's hope she finds happiness now."

The judge pushed back his chair and left the room, ostensibly in search of a pipe. The others drifted into the living-room. Clancy, staring out at the snow, was suddenly conscious that Vandervent stood at her elbow. She turned, to find that Mrs. Walbrough was no longer with them.

"Nice—nice view—" stammered Vandervent.

Clancy colored. She felt her heart beating.

"Isn't it?" she agreed.

Vandervent's trembling nervousness communicated itself to her. She half turned toward him, ready to yield herself. But his eyes, that, a moment ago, she had known were fixed upon the back of her head now stared out the window, over her shoulder. She turned again.

Up the Walbrough drive was coming a sleigh, an open affair. Besides the driver there was only one man. She looked up at Vandervent; His brows were knitted; behind his glasses his eyes gleamed angrily. Involuntarily she drew near to him.

"I—I'll have to see him," he exclaimed. "Reporter from the *Era*. Thought that I was all through with him. I wonder——"

The man descended from the sleigh. They saw him advance up the veranda steps, and then they heard his ring. A moment later, Mrs. Hebron entered the room.

"A gentleman to see Miss Deane," she announced.

And now Clancy understood why Vandervent had withheld the speech that she knew he wanted to utter, why he had seemed alarmed. She gasped. Then she grew reassured as she felt Vandervent's fingers on her own.

"Show him in here," said Vandervent.

Mrs. Hebron left the room.

"Just—say nothing," whispered Vandervent. "Leave him to me."

Clancy knew. The scandal that she had thought forever averted was about to break again. Her fingers were limp in Vandervent's clasp. She released them as Mrs. Hebron returned, followed by the young man who had descended from the sleigh.

"Miss Deane? Ah, how do, Mr. Vandervent?" he said.

"How do, Penwell? Miss Deane, let me present my good friend Roscoe Penwell, the *Era*'s greatest reporter."

Penwell laughed.

"Why limit yourself when you're paying compliments? Why not the *world's* greatest reporter?" he asked.

"I amend my statement," smiled Vandervent.

Clancy held out her hand. Penwell bowed over it. He was a good-looking youngster, not so very many years older than herself, Clancy judged.

"Penwell," said Vandervent, "will publish his memoirs some day. Be nice to him, Miss Deane, and you'll receive a gift-copy."

Penwell colored.

"Quit it!" he grumbled. The mirth went out of his voice. "Miss Deane, the *Era* wants a statement from you."

Before she could reply, Vandervent spoke. "Then we *weren't* mistaken. The maid

said you asked for Miss Deane, but——"

Penwell shook his head.

"Naughty, naughty, Mr. Vandervent! You can't fool me."

"Then I won't try," said Vandervent crisply. "What is it that you want?" His tone was business-like.

Penwell's reply was equally so.

"The *Era* has learned, from an authoritative source, that Miss Deane was in the office of Morris Beiner shortly before he was murdered; that, in short, she was sought by the police on suspicion of having committed the crime."

"Carey's dead, and left a confession," said Vandervent.

Penwell shrugged. "Even so."

"Authoritative source, you said?" questioned Vandervent. "I suppose that means a drug fiend named Garland."

Penwell nodded.

"You should have locked that bird up, Mr. Vandervent, until he lost his love for talk."

"And money," amended Vandervent.

"Not much. Fifty dollars."

"Cheap at the price. Still," said Vandervent, "rather expensive when you can't use what he told you."

"No?" Penwell was politely interested. For all his youth, one would have judged him a good poker player.

"Miss Deane was unfortunate; a victim of circumstances. The *Era* wouldn't drag her into a nasty scandal, would it?" demanded Vandervent.

"News is news," stated Penwell.

"Listen to a trade?" asked Vandervent.

"Always willing to," smiled Penwell.

Vandervent blushed.

"Unfortunately, sometimes, a Vandervent is always a Vandervent."

"Thou speakest truth, O Sage!" laughed the young man.

"And what a Vandervent eats for breakfast makes snappy reading, I think you'd call it, for *hoi polloi*, eh?"

"Continue. You interest me strangely," said Penwell.

"My engagement—its announcement rather—would be a 'beat' of some value?"

Penwell bowed to Clancy.

"Miss Deane, gaze upon a man so sinful that he takes a bribe." He turned to Vandervent. "The *Era* won't print a word about Miss Deane. Who's the lady?"

"Miss Deane," said Vandervent.

For a moment Penwell stared at the young girl. Then, slowly, he spoke.

"Miss Deane, I didn't want this assignment. But a reporter does what he's told. I can't tell you how glad I am that I can turn in something bigger for the paper. Why, Mr. Vandervent, the paper wouldn't dare take a chance on printing something that Garland said about your *fiancée*!"

"It might prove rather expensive for the *Era*," said Vandervent.

But Penwell didn't hear him. He was staring at Clancy. And smiling.

"Miss Deane, I don't know anything about you. I hope you'll tell me something for the paper. But whoever you may be, you've done well in your engagement. You're going to marry one of the whitest—tell me, when was the engagement contracted?"

Clancy colored to the roots of her hair. Vandervent gently pushed the reporter toward the door.

"Come back," he said, "in five minutes and we'll answer that question."

Penwell looked from one to the other. Then he grinned. Then he backed out of the room. For a moment, there was silence between the girl and the man. Vandervent spoke first.

"Was I—impertinent? Do I—assume too much?"

Slowly Clancy turned until she faced him. The heart of her stood in her eyes. Yet, because she was a woman, she must ask.

"Did you—is it because you want to save me—or do you really——"

He didn't answer. He crushed her in his arms. She had not known that he was so

strong. And within his arms she found the answer to her question. She owned the "Open, Sesame"—youth. Her challenging gray eyes might some day grow dim; the satiny luster of her black hair might give way to silver, but the heart of her would ever be young, and so the world would be hers. For it is only the young in spirit who win life's battles; youth cannot comprehend defeat, and so it knows only victory.

And she had come to New York, which jibes at age, but bends a supple knee to youth. And because she was young, would always be young, Clancy Deane would be bound by no rules, no mental timetables would fetter her. For the old, on learning that the train has gone, surrender to despair. The young take another train. Neither road nor the destination matters to youth, and so—it always arrives.

She had come to work, to win a career. She would, instead, be a wife. For the present, happily, willingly, she surrendered ambition. But it would come back to her. Whether it would speak to her in terms of her husband's career, or of her own—that was on the knees of the gods.

For the moment, she was beaten—beaten by love. But the Clancy Deanes are never beaten by circumstances. If they bow to love, it is because from love they build a greater triumph than from ambition. Youth always is triumphant when it surrenders to youth.

She found the answer in his arms. And nestled there, she vowed that she would keep the answer there. And because age would never touch her, she could fulfil her vow if she chose. Clairvoyantly, she looked ahead; suddenly she knew that she would always choose. Her lips went up to his.

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