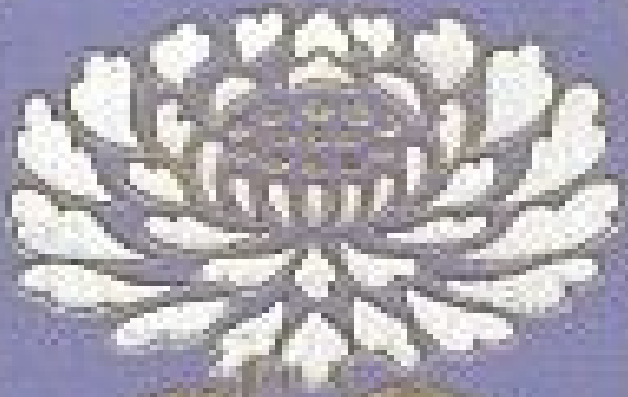
Flower of the Dusk

By

Myrtle Reed



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FLOWER OF THE DUSK

By MYRTLE REED

Emblem

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By MYRTLE REED.

FLOWER OF THE DUSK.
LOVE AFFAIRS OF LITERARY MEN.
A SPINNER IN THE SUN.
LOVE LETTERS OF A MUSICIAN.

LATER LOVE LETTERS OF A MUSICIAN.

THE SPINSTER BOOK.

LAVENDER AND OLD LACE.

THE MASTER'S VIOLIN.

AT THE SIGN OF THE JACK-O'-LANTERN.

THE SHADOW OF VICTORY.

THE BOOK OF CLEVER BEASTS.

PICKABACK SONGS.

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From a painting by Clinton Balmer

I

A Maker of Songs

Sunset

The pines, darkly purple, towered against the sunset. Behind the hills, the splendid tapestry glowed and flamed, sending far messages of light to the grey East, where lay the sea, crooning itself to sleep. Bare boughs dripped rain upon the sodden earth, where the dead leaves had so long been hidden by the snow. The thousand sounds and scents of Spring at last had waked the world.

The man who stood near the edge of the cliff, quite alone, and carefully feeling the ground before him with his cane, had chosen to face the valley and dream of the glory that, perchance, trailed down in living light from some vast loom of God's. His massive head was thrown back, as though he listened, with a secret sense, for music denied to those who see.

Joyful Memories

He took off his hat and stray gleams came through the deepening shadows to rest, like an aureole, upon his silvered hair. Remembered sunsets, from beyond the darkness of more than twenty years, came back to him with divine beauty and diviner joy. Mnemosyne, that guardian angel of the soul, brought from her treasure-house gifts of laughter and tears; the laughter sweet with singing, and the bitterness of the tears eternally lost in the Water of Forgetfulness.

Slowly, the light died. Dusk came upon the valley and crept softly to the hills. Mist drifted in from the sleeping sea, and the hush of night brooded over the river as it murmured through the plain. A single star uplifted its exquisite lamp against the afterglow, near the veiled ivory of the crescent moon.

Sighing, the man turned away. "Perhaps," he thought, whimsically, as he went cautiously down the path, searching out every step of the way, "there was no sunset at all."

The road was clear until he came to a fallen tree, over which he stepped

easily. The new softness of the soil had, for him, its own deep meaning of resurrection. He felt it in the swelling buds of the branches that sometimes swayed before him, and found it in the scent of the cedar as he crushed a bit of it in his hand.

Easily, yet carefully, he went around the base of the hill to the street, where his house was the first upon the right-hand side. The gate creaked on its hinges and he went quickly up the walk, passing the grey tangle of last Summer's garden, where the marigolds had died and the larkspur fallen asleep.

Within the house, two women awaited him, one with anxious eagerness, the other with tenderly watchful love. The older one, who had long been listening, opened the door before he knocked, but it was Barbara who spoke to him first.

"You're late, Father, dear."

"Am I, Barbara? Tell me, was there a sunset to-night?"

"Yes, a glorious one."

"I thought so, and that accounts for my being late. I saw a beautiful sunset—I saw it with my soul."

"Give me your coat, Ambrose." The older woman stood at his side, longing to do him some small service.

"Thank you, Miriam; you are always kind."

The tiny living-room was filled with relics of past luxury. Fine pictures, in tarnished frames, hung on the dingy walls, and worn rugs covered the floor. The furniture was old mahogany, beautifully cared for, but decrepit, nevertheless, and the ancient square piano, outwardly, at least, showed every year of its age.

Still, the room had "atmosphere," of the indefinable quality that some people impart to a dwelling-place. Entering, one felt refinement, daintiness, and the ability to live above mere externals. Barbara had, very strongly, the house-love which belongs to some rare women. And who shall say that inanimate things do not answer to our love of them, and diffuse, between our four walls, a certain gracious spirit of kindliness and welcome?

In the dining-room, where the table was set for supper, there were marked contrasts. A coarse cloth covered the table, but at the head of it was overlaid a remnant of heavy table-damask, the worn places carefully hidden. The china at this place was thin and fine, the silver was solid, and the cup from which Ambrose North drank was Satsuma.

On the coarse cloth were the heavy, cheap dishes and the discouraging knives and forks which were the portion of the others. The five damask napkins remaining from the original stock of linen were used only by the blind man.

A Comforting Deceit

For years the two women had carried on this comforting deceit, and the daily lie they lived, so lovingly, had become a sort of second nature. They had learned to speak, casually, of the difficulty in procuring servants, and to say how much easier it was to do their own small tasks than to watch continually over fine linen and rare china intrusted to incompetent hands. They talked of tapestries, laces, and jewels which had long ago been sold, and Barbara frequently wore a string of beads which, with a lump in her throat, she called "Mother's pearls."

Discovering that the sound of her crutches on the floor distressed him greatly, Barbara had padded the sharp ends with flannel and was careful to move about as little as possible when he was in the house. She had gone, mouse-like, to her own particular chair while Miriam was hanging up his coat and hat and placing his easy chair near the open fire. He sat down and held his slender hands close to the grateful warmth.

"It isn't cold," he said, "and yet I am glad of the fire. To-day is the first day of Spring."

"By the almanac?" laughed Barbara.

"No, according to the almanac, I believe, it has been Spring for ten days. Nature does not move according to man's laws, but she forces him to observe hers—except in almanacs."

Kindly Shadows

The firelight made kindly shadows in the room, softening the unloveliness and lending such beauty as it might. It gave to Ambrose North's fine, strong face the delicacy and dignity of an old miniature. It transfigured Barbara's yellow hair

into a crown of gold, and put a new gentleness into Miriam's lined face as she sat in the half-light, one of them in blood, yet singularly alien and apart.

"What are you doing, Barbara?" The sensitive hands strayed to her lap and lifted the sheer bit of linen upon which she was working.

"Making lingerie by hand."

"You have a great deal of it, haven't you?"

"Not as much as you think, perhaps. It takes a long time to do it well."

"It seems to me you are always sewing."

"Girls are very vain these days, Father. We need a great many pretty things."

"Your dear mother used to sew a great deal. She—" His voice broke, for even after many years his grief was keenly alive.

"Is supper ready, Aunt Miriam?" asked Barbara, quickly.

"Yes."

"Then come, let's go in."

Ambrose North took his place at the head of the table, which, purposely, was nearest the door. Barbara and Miriam sat together, at the other end.

"Where were you to-day, Father?"

At the top of the World

"On the summit of the highest hill, almost at the top of the world. I think I heard a robin, but I am not sure. I smelled Spring in the maple branches and the cedar, and felt it in the salt mist that blew up from the sea. The Winter has been so long!"

"Did you make a song?"

Always Make a Song

"Yes—two. I'll tell you about them afterward. Always make a song, Barbara, no matter what comes."

So the two talked, while the other woman watched them furtively. Her face was that of one who has lived much in a short space of time and her dark, burning eyes betrayed tragic depths of feeling. Her black hair, slightly tinged with grey, was brushed straight back from her wrinkled forehead. Her shoulders were stooped and her hands rough from hard work.

She was the older sister of Ambrose North's dead wife—the woman he had so devotedly loved. Ever since her sister's death, she had lived with them, taking care of little lame Barbara, now grown into beautiful womanhood, except for the crutches. After his blindness, Ambrose North had lost his wife, and then, by slow degrees, his fortune. Mercifully, a long illness had made him forget a great deal.

"Never mind, Barbara," said Miriam, in a low tone, as they rose from the table. "It will make your hands too rough for the sewing."

"Shan't I wipe the dishes for you, Aunty? I'd just as soon."

"No—go with him."

The fire had gone down, but the room was warm, so Barbara turned up the light and began again on her endless stitching. Her father's hands sought hers.

"More sewing?" His voice was tender and appealing.

"Just a little bit, Father, please. I'm so anxious to get this done."

"But why, dear?"

"Because girls are so vain," she answered, with a laugh.

"Is my little girl vain?"

"Awfully. Hasn't she the dearest father in the world and the prettiest"—she swallowed hard here—"the prettiest house and the loveliest clothes? Who wouldn't be vain!"

"I am so glad," said the old man, contentedly, "that I have been able to give you the things you want. I could not bear it if we were poor."

"You told me you had made two songs to-day, Father."

He drew closer to her and laid one hand upon the arm of her chair. Quietly, she moved her crutches beyond his reach. "One is about the river," he began.

"In Winter, a cruel fairy put it to sleep in an enchanted tower, far up in the mountains, and walled up the door with crystal. All the while the river was asleep, it was dreaming of the green fields and the soft, fragrant winds.

"It tossed and murmured in its sleep, and at last it woke, too soon, for the cruel fairy's spell could not have lasted much longer. When it found the door barred, it was very sad. Then it grew rebellious and hurled itself against the door, trying to escape, but the barrier only seemed more unyielding. So, making the best of things, the river began to sing about the dream.

"From its prison-house, it sang of the green fields and fragrant winds, the blue violets that starred the meadow, the strange, singing harps of the marsh grasses, and the wonder of the sea. A good fairy happened to be passing, and she stopped to hear the song. She became so interested that she wanted to see the singer, so she opened the door. The river laughed and ran out, still singing, and carrying the door along. It never stopped until it had taken every bit of the broken crystal far out to sea."

"I made one, too, Father."

"What is it?"

Song of the Flax

"Mine is about the linen. Once there was a little seed put away into the darkness and covered deep with earth. But there was a soul in the seed, and after the darkness grew warm it began to climb up and up, until one day it reached the sunshine. After that, it was so glad that it tossed out tiny, green branches and finally its soul blossomed into a blue flower. Then a princess passed, and her hair was flaxen and her eyes were the colour of the flower.

"The flower said, 'Oh, pretty Princess, I want to go with you.'

"The princess answered, 'You would die, little Flower, if you were picked,' and she went on.

"But one day the Reaper passed and the little blue flower and all its fellows were gathered. After a terrible time of darkness and pain, the flower found itself in a web of sheerest linen. There was much cutting and more pain, and thousands

of pricking stitches, then a beautiful gown was made, all embroidered with the flax in palest blue and green. And it was the wedding gown of the pretty princess, because her hair was flaxen and her eyes the colour of the flower."

Barbara

"What colour is your hair, Barbara?" He had asked the question many times.

"The colour of ripe corn, Daddy. Don't you remember my telling you?"

He leaned forward to stroke the shining braids. "And your eyes?"

"Like the larkspur that grows in the garden."

"I know—your dear mother's eyes." He touched her face gently as he spoke. "Your skin is so smooth—is it fair?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"I think you must be beautiful; I have asked Miriam so often, but she will not tell me. She only says you look well enough and something like your mother. Are you beautiful?"

"Oh, Daddy! Daddy!" laughed Barbara, in confusion. "You mustn't ask such questions! Didn't you say you had made two songs? What is the other one?"

Miriam sat in the dining-room, out of sight but within hearing. Having observed that in her presence they laughed less, she spent her evenings alone unless they urged her to join them. She had a newspaper more than a week old, but, as yet, she had not read it. She sat staring into the shadows, with the light of her one candle flickering upon her face, nervously moving her work-worn hands.

"The other song," reminded Barbara, gently.

Song of the Sunset

"This one was about a sunset," he sighed. "It was such a sunset as was never on sea or land, because two who loved each other saw it together. God and all His angels had hung a marvellous tapestry from the high walls of Heaven, and it reached almost to the mountain-tops, where some of the little clouds sleep.

"The man said, 'Shall we always look for the sunsets together?'

"The woman smiled and answered, 'Yes, always.'

"'And,' the man continued, 'when one of us goes on the last long journey?'

"'Then,' answered the woman, 'the other will not be watching alone. For, I think, there in the West is the Golden City with the jasper walls and the jewelled foundations, where the twelve gates are twelve pearls.'"

There was a long silence. "And so—" said Barbara, softly.

Ambrose North lifted his grey head from his hands and rose to his feet unsteadily. "And so," he said, with difficulty, "she leans from the sunset toward him, but he can never see her, because he is blind. Oh, Barbara," he cried, passionately, "last night I dreamed that you could walk and I could see!"

"So we can, Daddy," said Barbara, very gently. "Our souls are neither blind nor lame. Here, I am eyes for you and you are feet for me, so we belong together. And—past the sunset——"

"Past the sunset," repeated the old man, dreamily, "soul and body shall be as one. We must wait—for life is made up of waiting—and make what songs we can."

"I think, Father, that a song should be in poetry, shouldn't it?"

The Real Song

"Some of them are, but more are not. Some are music and some are words, and some, like prayers, are feeling. The real song is in the thrush's heart, not in the silvery rain of sound that comes from the green boughs in Spring. When you open the door of your heart and let all the joy rush out, laughing—then you are making a song."

"But—is there always joy?"

"Yes, though sometimes it is sadly covered up with other things. We must find it and divide it, for only in that way it grows. Good-night, my dear."

He bent to kiss her, while Miriam, with her heart full of nameless yearning, watched them from the far shadows. The sound of his footsteps died away and a distant door closed. Soon afterward Miriam took her candle and went noiselessly upstairs, but she did not say good-night to Barbara.

Midnight

Until midnight, the girl sat at her sewing, taking the finest of stitches in tuck and hem. The lamp burning low made her needle fly swiftly. In her own room was an old chest nearly full of dainty garments which she was never to wear. She had wrought miracles of embroidery upon some of them, and others were unadorned save by tucks and lace.

When the work was finished, she folded it and laid it aside, then put away her thimble and thread. "When the guests come to the hotel," she thought—"ah, when they come, and buy all the things I've made the past year, and the preserves and the candied orange peel, the rag rugs and the quilts, then——"

Dying Embers

So Barbara fell a-dreaming, and the light of the dying embers lay lovingly upon her face, already transfigured by tenderness into beauty beyond words. The lamp went out and little by little the room faded into twilight, then into night. It was quite dark when she leaned over and picked up her crutches.

"Dear, dear father," she breathed. "He must never know!"

II

Miss Mattie

Miss Mattie was getting supper, sustained by the comforting thought that her task was utterly beneath her and had been forced upon her by the mysterious workings of an untoward Fate. She was not really "Miss," since she had been married and widowed, and a grown son was waiting impatiently in the sitting-room for his evening meal, but her neighbours, nearly all of whom had known her before her marriage, still called her "Miss Mattie."

"Old Maids"

The arbitrary social distinctions, made regardless of personality, are often cruelly ironical. Many a man, incapable by nature of life-long devotion to one woman, becomes a husband in half an hour, duly sanctioned by Church and State. A woman who remains unmarried, because, with fine courage, she will have her true mate or none, is called "an old maid." She may have the heart of a wife and the soul of a mother, but she cannot escape her sinister label. The real "old maids" are of both sexes, and many are married, but alas! seldom to each other.

A Grievance

In his introspective moments, Roger Austin sometimes wondered why marriage, maternity, and bereavement should have left no trace upon his mother. The uttermost depths of life had been hers for the sounding, but Miss Mattie had refused to drop her plummet overboard and had spent the years in prolonged study of her own particular boat.

She came in, with the irritating air of a martyr, and clucked sharply with her false teeth when she saw that her son was reading.

"I don't know what I've done," she remarked, "that I should have to live all the time with people who keep their noses in books. Your pa was forever readin' and you're marked with it. I could set here and set here and set here, and he took no more notice of me than if I was a piece of furniture. When he died, the

brethren and sistern used to come to condole with me and say how I must miss him. There wasn't nothin' to miss, 'cause the books and his chair was left. I've a good mind to burn 'em all up."

"I won't read if you don't want me to, Mother," answered Roger, laying his book aside regretfully.

"I dunno but what I'd rather you would than to want to and not," she retorted, somewhat obscurely. "What I'm a-sayin' is that it's in the blood and you can't help it. If I'd known it was your pa's intention to give himself up so exclusive to readin', I'd never have married him, that's all I've got to say. There's no sense in it. Lemme see what you're at now."

She took the open book, that lay face downward upon the table, and read aloud, awkwardly:

"Leave to the diamond its ages to grow, nor expect to accelerate the births of the eternal. Friendship demands a religious treatment. We talk of choosing our friends, but friends are self-elected."

"Now," she demanded, in a shrill voice, "what does that mean?"

"I don't think I could explain it to you, Mother."

"That's just the point. Your pa couldn't never explain nothin', neither. You're readin' and readin' and readin' and you never know what you're readin' about. Diamonds growin' and births bein' hurried up, and friends bein' religious and voted for at township elections. Who's runnin' for friend this year on the Republican ticket?" she inquired, caustically.

Roger managed to force a laugh. "You have your own peculiar way of putting things, Mother. Is supper ready? I'm as hungry as a bear."

"I suppose you are. When it ain't readin', it's eatin'. Work all day to get a meal that don't last more'n fifteen minutes, and then see readin' goin' on till long past bedtime, and oil goin' up every six months. Which'll you have—fresh apple sauce, or canned raspberries?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Then I'll get the apple sauce, because the canned raspberries can lay over as long as they're kept cool."

Miss Mattie's Personal Appearance

Miss Mattie shuffled back into the kitchen. During the Winter she wore black knitted slippers attached to woollen inner soles which had no heels. She was well past the half-century mark, but her face had few lines in it and her grey eyes were sharp and penetrating. Her smooth, pale brown hair, which did not show the grey in it, was parted precisely in the middle. Every morning she brushed it violently with a stiff brush dipped into cold water, and twisted the ends into a tight knot at the back of her head. In militant moments, this knot seemed to rise and the protruding ends of the wire hairpins to bristle into formidable weapons of offence.

She habitually wore her steel-bowed spectacles half-way down her nose. They might have fallen off had not a kindly Providence placed a large wart where it would do the most good. On Sundays, when she put on shoes, corsets, her best black silk, and her gold-bowed spectacles, she took great pains to wear them properly. When she reached home, however, she always took off her fine raiment and laid her spectacles aside with a great sigh of relief. Miss Mattie's disposition improved rapidly as soon as the old steel-bowed pair were in their rightful place, resting safely upon the wart.

Second-hand Things

When they sat down to supper, she reverted to the original topic. "As I was sayin'," she began, "there ain't no sense in the books you and your pa has always set such store by. Where he ever got 'em, I dunno, but they was always a comin'. Lots of 'em was well-nigh wore out when he got 'em, and he wouldn't let me buy nothin' that had been used before, even if I knew the folks.

"I got a silver coffin plate once at an auction over to the Ridge for almost nothin' and your pa was as mad as a wet hen. There was a name on it, but it could have been scraped off, and the rest of it was perfectly good. When you need a coffin plate you need it awful bad. While your pa was rampin' around, he said he wouldn't have been surprised to see me comin' home with a second-hand coffin in the back of the buggy. Who ever heard of a second-hand coffin? I've always thought his mind was unsettled by so much readin'.

"I ain't a-sayin' but what some readin' is all right. Some folks has just moved over to the Ridge and the postmaster's wife was a-showin' me some papers they get, every week. One is *The Metropolitan Weekly*, and the other *The Housewife's Companion*. I must say, the stories in those papers is certainly beautiful.

"Once, when they come after their mail, they was as mad as anything because the papers hadn't come, but the postmaster's wife was readin' one of the stories and settin' up nights to do it, so she wa'n't to blame for not lettin' 'em go until she got through with 'em. They slip out of the covers just as easy, and nobody ever knows the difference.

The Doctor's Darling

"She was tellin' me about one of the stories. It's named *Lovely Lulu, or the Doctor's Darling*. Lovely Lulu is a little orphant who has to do most of the housework for a family of eight, and the way they abuse that child is something awful. The young ladies are forever puttin' ruffled white skirts into her wash, and makin' her darn the lace on their blue silk mornin' dresses.

"There's a rich doctor that they're all after and one day little Lulu happens to open the front-door for him, and he gets a good look at her for the first time. As she goes upstairs, Arthur Montmorency—that's his name—holds both hands to his heart and says, 'She and she only shall be my bride.' The conclusion of this highly fascinatin' and absorbin' romance will be found in the next number of *The Housewife's Companion*."

"Mother," suggested Roger, "why don't you subscribe for the papers yourself?"

Miss Mattie dropped her knife and fork and gazed at him in open-mouthed astonishment. "Roger," she said, kindly, "I declare if sometimes you don't remind me of my people more'n your pa's. I never thought of that myself and I dunno how you come to. I'll do it the very first time I go down to the store. The postmaster's wife can get the addresses without tearin' off the covers, and after I get 'em read she can borrow mine, and not be always makin' the people at the Ridge so mad that she's runnin' the risk of losin' her job. If you ain't the beatenest!"

Basking in the unaccustomed warmth of his mother's approval, Roger finished his supper in peace. Afterward, while she was clearing up, he even dared to take up the much-criticised book and lose himself once more in his

father's beloved Emerson.

Childish Memories

All his childish memories of his father had been blurred into one by the mists of the intervening years. As though it were yesterday, he could see the library upstairs, which was still the same, and the grave, silent, kindly man who sat dreaming over his books. When the child entered, half afraid because the room was so quiet, the man had risen and caught him in his arms with such hungry passion that he had almost cried out.

"Oh, my son," came in the deep, rich voice, vibrant with tenderness; "my dear little son!"

The Priceless Legacy

That was all, save a few old photographs and the priceless legacy of the books. The library was not a large one, but it had been chosen by a man of discriminating, yet catholic, taste. The books had been used and were not, as so often happens, merely ornaments. Page after page had been interlined and there was scarcely a volume which was not rich in marginal notes, sometimes questioning in character, but indicating always understanding and appreciation.

As soon as he learned to read, Roger began to spend his leisure hours in this library. When he could not understand a book, he put it aside and took up another. Always there were pictures and sometimes many of them, for in his later years Laurence Austin had contracted the baneful habit of extra-illustration. Never maternal, save in the limited physical sense, Miss Mattie had been glad to have the child out of her way.

Day by day, the young mind grew and expanded in its own way. Year by year, Roger came to an affectionate knowledge of his father, through the medium of the marginal notes. He wondered, sometimes, that a pencil mark should so long outlive the fine, strong body of the man who made it. It seemed pitiful, in a way, and yet he knew that books and letters are the things that endure, in a world of transition and decay.

The underlined passages and the marginal comments gave evidence of an extraordinary love of beauty, in whatever shape or form. And yet—the parlour, which was opened only on Sunday—was hideous with a gaudy carpet, stuffed chairs, family portraits done in crayon and inflicted upon the house by itinerant vendors of tea and coffee, and there was a basket of wax flowers, protected by glass, on the marble-topped "centre-table."

The pride of Miss Mattie's heart was a chair, which, with incredible industry, she had made from an empty flour barrel. She had spoiled a good barrel to make a bad chair, but her thrifty soul rejoiced in her achievement. Roger never went near it, so Miss Mattie herself sat in it on Sunday afternoons, nodding, and crooning hymns to herself.

An Awful Chasm

"How did father stand it?" thought Roger, intending no disrespect. He loved his mother and appreciated her good qualities, but he saw the awful chasm between those two souls, which no ceremony of marriage could ever span.

Roger Austin

In appearance, Roger was like his father. He had the same clear, dark skin, with regular features and kind, dark eyes, the same abundant, wavy hair, strong, square chin, and incongruous, beauty-loving mouth. He had, too, the lovable boyishness, which never quite leaves some fortunate men. He was studying law in the judge's office, and hoped by another year to be ready to take his examinations. After working hard all day, he found refreshment for mind and body in an hour or so at night spent with the treasures of his father's library.

"Let us buy our entrance to this guild with a long probation," read Roger. "Why should we desecrate noble and beautiful souls by intruding upon them? Why insist upon rash personal relations with your friend? Why go to his house, and know his mother and brother and sisters? Why be visited by him at your own? Are these things material to our covenant? Leave this touching and clawing. Let him be to me——"

"I've spoke twice," complained Miss Mattie, "and you don't hear me no more'n your pa did."

"I beg your pardon, Mother. I did not hear you come in. What is it?"

"I was just a-sayin' that maybe those papers would be too expensive. Maybe I ought not to have 'em."

"I'm sure they're not, Mother. Anyhow, you get them, and we'll make it up in some other way if we have to." Dimly, in the future, Roger saw long, quiet evenings in which his disturbing influence should be rendered null and void by the charms of *Lovely Lulu, or the Doctor's Darling*.

A Morning Call

"Barbara North sent her pa over here this morning to ask for some book. I disremember now what it was, but it was after you was gone."

Roger's expressive face changed instantly. "Why didn't you tell me sooner, Mother?" He spoke with evident effort. "It's too late now for me to go over there."

"There's no call for you to go over. They can send again. Miss Miriam can come after it any time. They ain't got no business to let a blind old man like Ambrose North run around by himself the way they do."

"He takes very good care of himself. He knew this place before he was blind, and I don't think there is any danger."

"Just the same, he ought not to go around alone, and that's what I told him this morning. 'A blind old man like you,' says I, 'ain't got no business chasin' around alone. First thing you know, you'll fall down and break a leg or arm or something.'"

Roger shrank as if from a physical hurt. "Mother!" he cried. "How can you say such things!"

"Why not?" she queried, imperturbably. "He knows he's blind, I guess, and he certainly can't think he's young, so what harm does it do to speak of it? Anyway," she added, piously, "I always say just what I think."

Roger got up, put his hands in his pockets, and paced back and forth restlessly. "People who always say what they think, Mother," he answered, not unkindly, "assume that their opinions are of great importance to people who probably do not care for them at all. Unless directly asked, it is better to say only the kind things and keep the rest to ourselves."

"I was kind," objected Miss Mattie. "I was tellin' him he ought not to take the risk of hurtin' himself by runnin' around alone. I don't know what ails you, Roger. Every day you get more and more like your pa."

Dangerous Rocks

"How long had you and father known each other before you were married?" asked Roger, steering quickly away from the dangerous rocks that will loom up in the best-regulated of conversations.

"'Bout three months. Why?"

"Oh, I just wanted to know."

"I used to be a pretty girl, Roger, though you mightn't think it now." Her voice was softened, and, taking off her spectacles, she gazed far into space; seemingly to that distant girlhood when radiant youth lent to the grey old world some of its own immortal joy.

"I don't doubt it," said Roger, politely.

"Your pa and me used to go to church together. He sang in the choir and I had a white dress and a bonnet trimmed with lutestring ribbon. I can smell the clover now and hear the bees hummin' when the windows was open in Summer. A bee come in once while the minister was prayin' and lighted on Deacon Emory's bald head. Seems a'most as if 't was yesterday.

Great Notions

"Your pa had great notions," she went on, after a pause. "Just before we was married, he said he was goin' to educate me, but he never did."

III

The Tower of Cologne

Roger sat in Ambrose North's easy chair, watching Barbara while she sewed. "I am sorry," he said, "that I wasn't at home when your father came over after the book. Mother was unable to find it. I'm afraid I'm not very orderly."

"It doesn't matter," returned Barbara, threading her needle again. "I steal too much time from my work as it is."

Roger sighed and turned restlessly in his chair. "I wish I could come over every day and read to you, but you know how it is. Days, I'm in the office with the musty old law books, and in the evenings, your father wants you and my mother wants me."

"I know, but father usually goes to bed by nine, and I'm sure your mother doesn't sit up much later, for I usually see her light by that time. I always work until eleven or half past, so why shouldn't you come over then?"

A Happy Thought

"Happy thought!" exclaimed Roger. "Still, you might not always want me. How shall I know?"

"I'll put a candle in the front window," suggested Barbara, "and if you can come, all right. If not, I'll understand."

Both laughed delightedly at the idea, for they were young enough to find a certain pleasure in clandestine ways and means. Miss Mattie had so far determinedly set her face against her son's association with the young of the other sex, and even Barbara, who had been born lame and had never walked farther than her own garden, came under the ban.

Ambrose North, with the keen and unconscious selfishness of age, begrudged others even an hour of Barbara's society. He felt a third person always as an intruder, though he tried his best to appear hospitable when anyone came. Miriam might sometimes have read to Barbara, while he was out upon his long,

lonely walks, but it had never occurred to either of them.

World-wide Fellowship

Through Laurence Austin's library, as transported back and forth by Roger, one volume at a time, Barbara had come into the world-wide fellowship of those who love books. She was closely housed and constantly at work, but her mind soared free. When the poverty and ugliness of her surroundings oppressed her beauty-loving soul; when her fingers ached and the stitches blurred into mist before her eyes, some little brown book, much worn, had often given her the key to the House of Content.

"Shall you always have to sew?" asked Roger. "Is there no way out?"

Glad of Work

"Not unless some fairy prince comes prancing up on a white charger," laughed Barbara, "and takes us all away with him to his palace. Don't pity me," she went on, her lips quivering a little, "for every day I'm glad I can do it and keep father from knowing we are poor.

"Besides, I'm of use in the world, and I wouldn't want to live if I couldn't work. Aunt Miriam works, too. She does all the housework, takes care of me when I can't help myself, does the mending, many things for father, and makes the quilts, preserves, candied orange peel, and the other little things we sell. People are so kind to us. Last Summer the women at the hotel bought everything we had and left orders enough to keep me busy until long after Christmas."

"Don't call people kind because they buy what they want."

"Don't be so cynical. You wouldn't have them buy things they didn't want, would you?"

"Sometimes they do."

"Where?"

"Well, at church fairs, for instance. They spend more than they can afford for things they do not want, in order to please people whom they do not like and help heathen who are much happier than they are."

"I'm glad I'm not running a church fair," laughed Barbara. "And who told you

that heathen are happier than we are? Are you a heathen?"

"I don't know. Most of us are, I suppose, in one way or another. But how nice it would be if we could paint ourselves instead of wearing clothes, and go under a tree when it rained, and pick cocoanuts or bananas when we were hungry. It would save so much trouble and expense."

"Paint is sticky," observed Barbara, "and the rain would come around the tree when the wind was blowing from all ways at once, as it does sometimes, and I do not like either cocoanuts or bananas. I'd rather sew. What went wrong to-day?" she asked, with a whimsical smile. "Everything?"

"Almost," admitted Roger. "How did you know?"

Unfailing Barometer

"Because you want to be a heathen instead of the foremost lawyer of your time. Your ambition is an unfailing barometer."

He laughed lightly. This sort of banter was very pleasing to him after a day with the law books and an hour or more with his mother. He had known Barbara since they were children and their comradeship dated back to the mud-pie days.

"I don't know but what you're right," he said. "Whether I go to Congress or the Fiji Islands may depend, eventually, upon Judge Bascom's liver."

"Don't let it depend upon him," cautioned Barbara. "Make your own destiny. It was Napoleon, wasn't it, who prided himself upon making his own circumstances? What would you do—or be—if you could have your choice?"

Aspirations

"The best lawyer in the State," he answered, promptly. "I'd never oppose the innocent nor defend the guilty. And I'd have money enough to be comfortable and to make those I love comfortable."

"Would you marry?" she asked, thoughtfully.

"Why—I suppose so. It would seem queer, though."

"Roger," she said, abruptly, "you were born a year and more before I was, and yet you're fully ten or fifteen years younger."

"Don't take me back too far, Barbara, for I hate milk. Please don't deprive me of my solid food. What would you do, if you could choose?"

"I'd write a book."

"What kind? Dictionary?"

"No, just a little book. The sort that people who love each other would choose for a gift. Something that would be given to one who was going on a long or difficult journey. The one book a woman would take with her when she was tired and went away to rest. A book with laughter and tears in it and so much fine courage that it would be given to those who are in deep trouble. I'd soften the hard hearts, rest the weary ones, and give the despairing ones new strength to go on. Just a little book, but so brave and true and sweet and tender that it would bring the sun to every shady place."

"Would you marry?"

"Of course, if the right man came. Otherwise not."

"I wonder," mused Roger, "how a person could know the right one?"

"Foolish child," she answered, "that's it—the knowing. When you don't know, it isn't it."

"My dear Miss North," remarked Roger, "the heads of your argument are somewhat involved, but I think I grasp your meaning. When you know it is, then it is, but when you don't know that it is, then it isn't. Is that right?"

"Exactly. Wonderfully intelligent for one so young."

Barbara's blue eyes danced merrily and her red lips parted in a mocking smile. A long heavy braid of hair, "the colour of ripe corn," hung over either shoulder and into her lap. She was almost twenty-two, but she still clung to the childish fashion of dressing her hair, because the heavy braids and the hairpins made her head ache. All her gowns were white, either of wool or cotton, and were made to be washed. On Sundays, she sometimes wore blue ribbons on her braids.

To Roger, she was very fair. He never thought of her crutches because she had always been lame. She was simply Barbara, and Barbara needed crutches. It had never occurred to him that she might in any way be different, for he was not one of those restless souls who are forever making people over to fit their own patterns.

"Why doesn't your father like to have me come here?" asked Roger, irrelevantly.

"Why doesn't your mother like to have you come?" queried Barbara, quickly on the defensive.

"No, but tell me. Please!"

"Father always goes to bed early."

"But not at eight o'clock. It was a quarter of eight when I came, and by eight he was gone."

"It isn't you, Roger," she said, unwillingly; "it's anyone. I'm all he has, and if I talk much to other people he feels as if I were being taken away from him—that's all. It's natural, I suppose. You mustn't mind him."

"But I wouldn't hurt him," returned Roger, softly; "you know that."

"I know."

"I wish you could make him understand that I come to see every one of you."

Hard Work

"It's the hardest work in the world," sighed Barbara, "to make people understand things."

"Somebody said once that all the wars had been caused by one set of people trying to force their opinions upon another set, who did not desire to have their minds changed."

"Very true. I wonder, sometimes, if we have done right with father."

"I'm sure you have," said Roger, gently. "You couldn't do anything wrong if you tried."

"We haven't meant to," she answered, her sweet face growing grave. "Of course it was all begun long before I was old enough to understand. He thinks the city house, which we lost so long ago that I cannot even remember our having it, was sold for so high a price that it would have been foolish not to sell it, and that we live here because we prefer the country. Just think, Roger, before I was born, this was father's and mother's Summer home, and now it's all we have."

"It's a roof and four walls—that's all any house is, without the spirit that makes it home."

"He thinks it's beautifully furnished. Of course we have the old mahogany and some of the pictures, but we've had to sell nearly everything. I've used some of mother's real laces in the sewing and sold practically all the rest. Whatever anyone would buy has been disposed of. Even the broken furniture in the attic has gone to people who had a fancy for 'antiques.'"

"You have made him very happy, Barbara."

"I know, but is it right?"

"I'm not orthodox, my dear girl, but, speaking as a lawyer, if it harms no one and makes a blind old man happy, it can't be wrong."

"I hope you're right, but sometimes my conscience bothers me."

A Saint's Conscience

"Imagine a saint's conscience being troublesome."

"Don't laugh at me—you know I'm not a saint."

"How should I know?"

"Ask Aunt Miriam. She has no illusions about me."

"Thanks, but I don't know her well enough. We haven't been on good terms since she drove me out of the melon patch—do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember. We wanted the blossoms, didn't we, to make golden bells in the Tower of Cologne?"

"I believe so. We never got the Tower finished, did we?"

"No. I wasn't allowed to play with you for a long time, because you were such a bad boy."

"Next Summer, I think we should rebuild it. Let's renew our youth sometime by making the Tower of Cologne in your back yard."

"There are no golden bells."

"I'll get some from somewhere. We owe it to ourselves to do it."

Barbara's blue eyes were sparkling now, and her sweet lips smiled. "When it's done?" she asked.

Like Fairy Tales

"We'll move into it and be happy ever afterward, like the people in the fairy tales."

"I said a little while ago that you were fifteen years younger than I am, but, upon my word, I believe it's nearer twenty."

"That makes me an enticing infant of three or four, flourishing like the green bay tree on a diet of bread and milk with an occasional soft-boiled egg. I should have been in bed by six o'clock, and now it's—gracious, Barbara, it's after eleven. What do you mean by keeping the young up so late?"

As he spoke, he hurriedly found his hat, and, reaching into the pocket of his overcoat, drew out a book. "That's the one you wanted, isn't it?"

"Yes, thank you."

"I didn't give it to you before because I wanted to talk, but we'll read, sometimes, when we can. Don't forget to put the light in the window when it's all right for me to come. If I don't, you'll understand. And please don't work so hard."

Barbara smiled. "I have to earn a living for three healthy people," she said, "and everybody is trying, by moral suasion, to prevent me from doing it. Do you want us all piled up in the front yard in a nice little heap of bones before the Tower of Cologne is rebuilt?"

Roger took both her hands and attempted to speak, but his face suddenly crimsoned, and he floundered out into the darkness like an awkward school-boy

instead of a self-possessed young man of almost twenty-four. It had occurred to him that it might be very nice to kiss Barbara.

Back to Childhood

But Barbara, magically taken back to childhood, did not notice his confusion. The Tower of Cologne had been a fancy of hers ever since she could remember, though it had been temporarily eclipsed by the hard work which circumstances had thrust upon her. As she grew from childhood to womanhood, it had changed very little—the dream, always, was practically the same.

A Day Dream

The Tower itself was made of cologne bottles neatly piled together, and the brightly-tinted labels gave it a bizarre but beautiful effect. It was square in shape and very high, with a splendid cupola of clear glass arches—the labels probably would not show, up so high. It stood in an enchanted land with the sea behind it—nobody had ever thought of taking Barbara down to the sea, though it was so near. The sea was always blue, of course, like the sky, or the larkspur—she was never quite sure of the colour.

The air all around the Tower smelled sweet, just like cologne. There was a flight of steps, also made of cologne bottles, but they did not break when you walked on them, and the door was always ajar. Inside was a great, winding staircase which led to the cupola. You could climb and climb and climb, and when you were tired, you could stop to rest in any of the rooms that were on the different floors.

Strangely enough, in the Tower of Cologne, Barbara was never lame. She always left her crutches leaning up against the steps outside. She could walk and run like anyone else and never even think of crutches. There were many charming people in the Tower and none of them ever said, pityingly, "It's too bad you're lame."

All the dear people of the books lived in the Tower of Cologne, besides many more, whom Barbara did not know. Maggie Tulliver, Little Nell, Dora, Agnes, Mr. Pickwick, King Arthur, the Lady of Shalott, and unnumbered others dwelt happily there. They all knew Barbara and were always glad to see her.

Wonderful tapestries were hung along the stairs, there were beautiful pictures

in every room, and whatever you wanted to eat was instantly placed before you. Each room smelled of a different kind of cologne and no two rooms were furnished alike. Her friends in the Tower were of all ages and of many different stations in life, but there was one whose face she had never seen. He was always just as old as Barbara, and was closer to her than the rest.

The Boy

When she lost herself in the queer winding passages, the Boy, whose face she was unable to picture, was always at her side to show her the way out. They both wanted to get up into the cupola and ring all the golden bells at once, but there seemed to be some law against it, for when they were almost there, something always happened. Either the Tower itself vanished beyond recall, or Aunt Miriam called her, or an imperative voice summoned the Boy downstairs—and Barbara would not think of going to the cupola without him.

When she and Roger had begun to make mud pies together, she had told him about the Tower and got him interested in it, too—all but the Boy whose face she was unable to see and whose name she did not know. In the Tower, she addressed him simply as "Boy." Barbara kept him to herself for some occult reason. Roger liked the Tower very much, but thought the construction might possibly be improved. Barbara never allowed him to make any changes. He could build another Tower for himself, if he chose, and have it just as he wanted it, but this was her very own.

It all seemed as if it were yesterday. "And," mused Barbara, "it was almost sixteen years ago, when I was six and Roger 'seven-going-on-eight,' as he always said." The dear Tower still stood in her memory, but far off and veiled, like a mirage seen in the clouds. The Boy who helped her over the difficult places was a grown man now, tall and straight and strong, but she could not see his face.

"It's queer," thought Barbara, as she put out the light. "I wonder if I ever shall."

An Enchanted Land

That night she dreamed of the Tower of Cologne, in the old, enchanted land, where a blue sky bent down to meet a bluer sea. She and the Boy were in the cupola, making music with the golden bells. Their laughter chimed in with the sweet sound of the ringing, but still, she could not see his face.

IV

The Seventh of June

Barbara sat by the old chest which held her completed work, frowning prettily over a note-book in her lap. She was very methodical, and, in some inscrutable way, things had become mixed. She kept track of every yard of lace and linen and every spool of thread, for, it was evident, she must know the exact cost of the material and the amount of time spent on a garment before it could be accurately priced.

Finishing Touches

Aunt Miriam had carefully pressed the lingerie after it was made and laid it away in the chest with lavender to keep it from turning yellow. There remained only the last finishing touches. Aunt Miriam could have put in the ribbons as well as she could, but Barbara chose to do it herself.

Ways and Means

Three prices were put on each tag in Barbara's private cipher, understood only by Aunt Miriam. The highest was the one hoped for, the next the probable one, and the lowest one was to be taken only at the end of the season.

Already four or five early arrivals were reported at the hotel. By the end of next week, it would be proper for Aunt Miriam to go down with a few of the garments packed in a box with tissue paper, and see what she could do. Barbara had used nearly all of her material and had sent for more, but, in the meantime, she was using the scraps for handkerchiefs, pin-cushion covers, and heart-shaped corsage pads, delicately scented and trimmed with lace and ribbon.

Once, Aunt Miriam had gone to the city for material and patterns, and had priced hand-made lingerie in the shops. When she came back with an itemised report, Barbara had clapped her hands in glee, for she saw the wealth of Crœsus looming up ahead. She had soon learned, however, that she must keep far below the city prices if she would tempt the horde of Summer visitors who came, yearly, to the hotel. At times, she thought that Aunt Miriam must have been

dreadfully mistaken.

Barbara put down the highest price of every separate article in the small, neat hand that Aunt Miriam had taught her to write—for she had never been to school. If she should sell everything, why, there would be more than a year of comfort for them all, and new clothes for father, who was beginning to look shabby.

"But they won't," Barbara said to herself, sadly. "I can't expect them to buy it all when I'm asking so much."

Down in the living-room, Ambrose North was inquiring restlessly for Barbara. "Yes," he said, somewhat impatiently, "I know she's upstairs, for you've told me so twice. What I want to know is, why doesn't she come down?"

"She's busy at something, probably," returned Miriam, with forced carelessness, "but I think she'll soon be through."

"Barbara is always busy," he answered, with a sigh. "I can't understand it. Anyone might think she had to work for a living. By the way, Miriam, do you need more money?"

"We still have some," she replied, in a low voice.

"How much?" he demanded.

"Less than a hundred dollars." She did not dare to say how much less.

"That is not enough. If you will get my check-book, I will write another check."

Miriam's face was grimly set and her eyes burned strangely beneath her dark brows. She went to the mahogany desk and took an old check-book out of the drawer.

"Now," he said, as she gave him the pen and ink, "please show me the line. 'Pay to the order of'——"

She guided his hand with her own, trying to keep her cold fingers from trembling. "Miriam Leonard," he spelled out, in uneven characters, "Five—hundred—dollars. Signed—Ambrose—North. There. When you have no money,

I wish you would speak of it. I am fully able to provide for my family, and I want to do it."

"Thank you." Miriam's voice was almost inaudible as she took the check.

"The date," he said; "I forgot to date it. What day of the month is it?"

She moistened her parched lips, but did not speak. This was what she had been dreading.

"The date, Miriam," he called. "Will you please tell me what day of the month it is?"

"The seventh," she answered, with difficulty.

"The seventh? The seventh of June?"

"Yes."

There was a long pause. "Twenty-one years," he said, in a shrill whisper. "Twenty-one years ago to-day."

A Dreadful Anniversary

Miriam sat down quietly on the other side of the room. Her eyes were glittering and she was moving her hands nervously. This dreadful anniversary had, for her, its own particular significance. Upstairs, Barbara, light-hearted and hopeful, was singing to herself while she pinned on the last of the price tags and built her air-castle. The song came down lightly, yet discordantly. It was as though a waltz should be played at an open grave.

"Miriam," cried Ambrose North, passionately, "why did she kill herself? In God's name, tell me why!"

"I do not know," murmured Miriam. He had asked her more than fifty times, and she always gave the same answer.

"But you must know—someone must know! A woman does not die by her own hand without having a reason! She was well and strong, loved, taken care of and petted, she had all that the world could give her, and hosts of friends. I was blind and Barbara was lame, but she loved us none the less. If I only knew why!" he cried, miserably; "Oh, if I only knew why!"

Miriam, unable to bear more, went out of the room. She pressed her cold hands to her throbbing temples. "I shall go mad," she muttered. "How long, O Lord, how long!"

Constance North

Twenty-one years ago to-day, Constance North had, intentionally, taken an overdose of laudanum. She had left a note to her husband begging him to forgive her, and thanking him for all his kindness to her during the three years they had lived together. She had also written a note to Miriam, asking her to look after the blind man and to be a mother to Barbara. Enclosed were two other letters, sealed with wax. One was addressed "To My Daughter, Barbara. To be opened on her twenty-second birthday." Miriam had both the letters safely put away. It was not time for Barbara to have hers and she had never delivered the other to the person to whom it was addressed—so often does the arrogant power of the living deny the holiest wishes of the dead.

The whole scene came vividly back to Miriam—the late afternoon sun streaming in glory from the far hills into Constance North's dainty sitting-room, upstairs; the golden-haired woman, in the full splendour of her youth and beauty, lying upon the couch asleep, with a smile of heavenly peace upon her lips; the blind man's hands straying over her as she lay there, with his tears falling upon her face, and blue-eyed Barbara, cooing and laughing in her own little bed in the next room.

Years of Torture

Miriam had found the notes on the dressing-table, and had lied. She had said there were but two when, in reality, there were four. Two had been read and destroyed; the other two, with unbroken seals, were waiting to be read. She was keeping the one for Barbara; the other had tortured her through all of the twenty years.

The time had passed when she could have delivered it, for the man to whom it was addressed was dead. But he had survived Constance by nearly five years, and, at any time during those five years, Miriam might have given it to him, unseen and safely. She justified herself by dwelling upon her care of Barbara and the blind man, and the fact that she would give Barbara her letter upon the appointed day. Sternly she said to herself: "I will fulfil one trust. I will keep faith with Constance in this one way, bitterly though she has wronged me."

Haunting Dreams

Yet the fulfilment of one trust seemed not to be enough, for her sleep was haunted by the pleading eyes of Constance, asking mutely for some boon. Until the man died, Constance had come often, with her hands outstretched, craving that which was so little and yet so much. After his death, Constance still continued to come, but less often and reproachfully; she seemed to ask for nothing now.

Miriam had grown old, but Constance, though sad, was always young. One of Death's surpassing gifts is eternal youth to those whom he claims too soon. In her old husband's grieving heart, Constance had assumed immortal beauty as well as immortal youth. She was now no older than Barbara, who still sang heedlessly upstairs.

Every night of the twenty-one years, Miriam had closed her eyes in dread. When she dreamed it was always of Constance—Constance laughing or singing, Constance bringing "the light that never was on sea or land" to the fine, grave face of Ambrose North; Constance hugging little lame Barbara to her breast with passionate, infinitely pitying love. And, above all, Constance in her grave-clothes, dumb, reproachful, her sad eyes fixed on Miriam in pleading that was almost prayer.

"Miriam! Oh, Miriam!" The blind man in the next room was calling her. Fearfully, she went back.

"Sit down," said Ambrose North. "Sit down near me, where I can touch your hand. How cold your fingers are! I want to thank you for all you have done for us—for my little girl and for me. You have been so faithful, so watchful, so obedient to her every wish."

Miriam shrank from him, for the kindly words stung like a lash on flesh already quivering.

Miriam and Ambrose

"We have always been such good friends," he said, reminiscently. "Do you remember how much we were together all that year, until Constance came home from school?"

"I have not forgotten," said Miriam, in a choking whisper. A surge of

passionate hate swept over her even now, against the dead woman whose pretty face had swerved Ambrose North from his old allegiance.

"And I shall not forget," he answered, kindly. "I am on the westward slope, Miriam, and have been, for a long time. But a few more years—or months—or days—as God wills, and I shall join her again, past the sunset, where she waits for me.

"I have made things right for you and Barbara. Roger Austin has my will, dividing everything I have between you. I should like your share to go to Barbara, eventually, if you can see your way clear to do it."

"Don't!" cried Miriam, sharply. The strain was insupportable.

"I do not wish to pain you, Sister," answered the old man, with gentle dignity, "but sometimes it is necessary that these things be said. I shall not speak of it again. Will you give me back the check, please, and show me where to date it? I shall date it to-morrow—I cannot bear to write down this day."

When Barbara came down, her father was sitting at the old square piano, quite alone, improvising music that was both beautiful and sad. He seldom touched the instrument, but, when he did, wayfarers in the street paused to listen.

"Are you making a song, Father?" she asked, softly, when the last deep chord died away.

Too Sad for Songs

"No," he sighed; "I cannot make songs to-day."

"There is always a song, Daddy," she reminded him. "You told me so yourself."

"Yes, I know, but not to-day. Do you know what to-day is, my dear?"

"The seventh—the seventh of June."

"Twenty-one years ago to-day," he said, with an effort, "your dear mother took her own life." The last words were almost inaudible.

Barbara went to him and put her soft arms around his neck. "Daddy!" she whispered, with infinite sympathy, "Daddy!"

He patted her arm gently, unable to speak. She said no more, but the voice and the touch brought healing to his pain. Bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, the daughter of the dead Constance was thrilled unspeakably with a tenderness that the other had never given him.

"Sit down, my dear," said Ambrose North, slowly releasing her. "I want to talk to you—of her. Did I hear Aunt Miriam go out?"

"Yes, just a few minutes ago."

"You are almost twenty-two, are you not, Barbara?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"Then you are a woman grown. Your dear mother was twenty-two, when—" He choked on the words.

"When she died," whispered Barbara, her eyes luminous with tears.

A Torturing Doubt
A Change

"Yes, when she—died. I have never known why, Barbara, unless it was because I was blind and you were lame. But all these years there has been a torturing doubt in my heart. Before you were born, and after my blindness, I fancied that a change came over her. She was still tender and loving, but it was not quite in the same way. Sometimes I felt that she had ceased to love me. Do you think my blindness could—?"

"Never, Father, never." Barbara's voice rang out strong and clear. "That would only have made her love you more."

"Thank you, my dear. Someway it comforts me to have you say it. But, after you came, I felt the change even more keenly. You have read in the books, doubtless, many times, that a child unites those who bring it into the world, but I have seen, quite as often, that it divides them by a gulf that is never bridged again."

"Daddy!" cried Barbara, in pain. "Didn't you want me?"

"Want you?" he repeated, in a tone that made the words a caress. "I wanted you always, and every day I want you more. I am only trying to say that her love seemed to lessen, instead of growing, as time went on. If I could know that she died loving me, I would not ask why. If I could know that she died loving me—if I were sure she loved me still—"

"She did, Daddy—I know she did."

"If I might only be so sure! But the ways of the Everlasting are not our ways, and life is made up of waiting."

Insensibly relieved by speech, his pain gradually merged into quiet acceptance, if not resignation. "Shall you marry some day, Barbara?" he asked, at last.

"If the right man comes—otherwise not."

"Much is written of it in the books, and I know you read a great deal, but some things in the books are not true, and many things that are true are not written. They say that a man of fifty should not marry a girl of twenty and expect to be happy. Miriam was fifteen years older than Constance and at first I thought of her, but when your mother came from school, with her blue eyes and golden hair and her pretty, laughing ways, there was but one face in all the world for me.

"We were so happy, Barbara! The first year seemed less than a month, it passed so quickly. The books will tell you that the first joy dies. Perhaps it does, but I do not know, because our marriage lasted only three years. It may be that, after many years, the heart does not beat faster at the sound of the beloved's step; that the touch of the loving hand brings no answering clasp.

Gift of Marriage

"But the divinest gift of marriage is this—the daily, unconscious growing of two souls into one. Aspirations and ambitions merge, each with the other, and love grows fast to love. Unselfishness answers to unselfishness, tenderness responds to tenderness, and the highest joy of each is the well-being of the other. The words of Church and State are only the seal of a predestined compact. Day by day and year by year the bond becomes closer and dearer, until at last the two are one, and even death is no division.

If——

"A grave has lain between us for more than twenty years, but I am still her husband—there has been no change. And, if she died loving me, she is still mine. If she died loving me—if—she—died—loving me——"

His voice broke at the end, and he went out, murmuring the words to himself. Barbara watched him from the window as he opened the gate. Her face was wet with tears.

Flaming banners of sunset streamed from the hills beyond him, but his soul could see no Golden City to-night. He went up the road that led to another hillside, where, in the long, dreamy shadows, the dwellers in God's acre lay at peace. Barbara guessed where he was going and her heart ached for him—kneeling in prayer and vigil beside a sunken grave, to ask of earth a question to which the answer was lost, in heaven—or in hell.

V

Eloise

A Summer Hotel

The hotel was a long, low, rambling structure, with creaky floors and old-fashioned furniture. But the wide verandas commanded a glorious view of the sea, no canned vegetables were served at the table, and there was no orchestra. Naturally, it was crowded from June to October with people who earnestly desired quiet and were willing to go far to get it.

The inevitable row of rocking-chairs swayed back and forth on the seaward side. Most of them were empty, save, perhaps, for the ghosts of long-dead gossips who had sat and rocked and talked and rocked from one meal to the next. The paint on the veranda was worn in a long series of parallel lines, slightly curved, but nobody cared.

No phonograph broke upon the evening stillness with an ear-splitting din, no unholy piccolo sounded above the other tortured instruments, no violin wailed pitifully at its inhuman treatment, and the piano was locked.

At seasonable hours the key might be had at the office by those who could prove themselves worthy of the trust, but otherwise quiet reigned.

Eloise Wynne

Miss Eloise Wynne came downstairs, with a book under her arm. She was fresh as the morning itself and as full of exuberant vitality. She was tall and straight and strong; her copper-coloured hair shone as though it had been burnished, and her tanned cheeks had a tint of rose. When she entered the dining-room, with a cheery "good-morning" that included everybody, she produced precisely the effect of a cool breeze from the sea.

She was thirty, and cheerfully admitted it on occasion. "If I don't look it," she said, smiling, "people will be surprised, and if I do, there would be no use in denying it. Anyhow, I'm old enough to go about alone." It was her wont to settle

herself for Summer or Winter in any place she chose, with no chaperon in sight.

For a week she had been at Riverdale-by-the-Sea, and liked it on account of the lack of entertainment. People who lived there called it simply "Riverdale," but the manager of the hotel, perhaps to atone for the missing orchestra and canned vegetables, added "by-the-Sea" to the name in his modest advertisements.

Miss Wynne, fortunately, had enough money to enable her to live the much-talked-of "simple life," which is wildly impossible to the poor. As it was not necessary for her to concern herself with the sordid and material, she could occupy herself with the finer things of the soul. Just now, however, she was deeply interested in the material foundation of the finest thing in the world—a home.

A Passion for Lists

She had taken the bizarre paper slip which protected the even more striking cover of a recent popular novel, and adjusted it to a bulky volume of very different character. In her chatelaine bag she had a pencil and a note-book, for Miss Eloise was sorely afflicted with the note-book habit, and had a passion for reducing everything to lists. She had lists of things she wanted and lists of things she didn't want, which circumstances or well-meaning Santa Clauses had forced upon her; little books of addresses and telephone numbers, jewels and other personal belongings, and, finally, a catalogue of her library alphabetically arranged by author and title.

Immediately after breakfast, she went off with a long, swinging stride which filled her small audience with envy and admiration. Disjointed remarks, such as "skirt a little too short, but good tailor," and "terrible amount of energy," and "wonder where she's going," followed her. These comments were audible, had she been listening, but she had the gift of keeping solitude in a crowd.

Far along the beach she went, hatless, her blood singing with the joy of life. A June morning, the sea, youth, and the consciousness of being loved—for what more could one ask? The diamond on the third finger of her left hand sparkled wonderfully in the sunlight. It was the only ring she wore.

The Cook Book

Presently, she found a warm, soft place behind a sand dune. She reared upon the dune a dark green parasol with a white border, and patted sand around the curved handle until it was, as she thought, firmly placed. Then she settled her skirts comfortably and opened her book, for the first time.

"It looks bad," she mused. "Wonder what a carbohydrate is. And proteids—where do you buy 'em? Albuminoids—I've been from Maine to Florida and have never seen any. They must be germs.

"However," she continued, to herself, "I have a trained mind, and 'keeping everlastingly at it brings success.' It would be strange if three hours of hard study every day, on the book the man in the store said was the best ever, didn't produce some sort of definite result. But, oh, how Allan would laugh at me!"

The book fell on the sand, unheeded. The brown eyes looked out past the blue surges to some far Castle in Spain. Her thoughts refused to phrase themselves in words, but her pulses leaped with the old, immortal joy. The sun had risen high in the shining East before she returned to her book.

"This isn't work," she sighed to herself; "away with the dreams."

Before long, she got out her note-book. "A fresh fish," she wrote, "does not smell fishy and its eyes are bright and its gills red. A tender chicken or turkey has a springy breast bone. If you push it down with your finger, it springs back. A leg of lamb has to have the tough, outer parchment-like skin taken off with a sharp knife. Some of the oil of the wool is in it and makes it taste muttony and bad. A lobster should always be bought when he is alive and green and boiled at home. Then you know he is fresh. Save everything for soup."

The Air of Knowing

"I will go out into the kitchen," mused Eloise, "and I will have the air of knowing all about everything. I will say: 'Mary Ann, I have ordered a lobster for you to boil. We will have a salad for lunch. And I trust you have saved everything that was left last night for to-night's soup.' Mary Ann will be afraid of me, and Allan will be *so* proud."

"'I thought I told you,' continued Eloise, to herself, 'to save all the crumbs. Doctor Conrad does not like to have everything salt and he prefers to make the

salad dressing himself. Do not cook any cereal the mornings we have oranges or grape-fruit—the starch and acid are likely to make a disturbance inside. Four people are coming to dinner this evening. I have ordered some pink roses and we will use the pink candle-shades. Or, wait—I had forgotten that my hair is red. Use the green candle-shades and I will change the roses to white.'"

A Frolicsome Wind

A frolicsome little wind, which had long been ruffling the waves of Eloise's copper-coloured hair, took the note-book out of her lap and laid it open on the sand some little distance away. Then, after making merry with the green parasol, it lifted it bodily by its roots out of the sand dune and went gaily down the beach with it.

Eloise started in pursuit, but the wind and the parasol out-distanced her easily. Rounding the corner of another dune, she saw the parasol, with all sails set, jauntily embarked toward Europe. Turning away, disconsolate, she collided with a big blonde giant who took her into his arms, saying, "Never mind—I'll get you another."

When the first raptures had somewhat subsided, Eloise led him back to the place where the parasol had started from. "When and where from and how did you come?" she asked, hurriedly picking up her books.

"This morning, from yonder palatial hotel, on foot," he answered. "I thought you'd be out here somewhere. I didn't ask for you—I wanted to hunt you up myself."

"But I might have been upstairs," she said, reproachfully.

"On a morning like this? Not unless you've changed in the last ten days, and you haven't, except to grow lovelier."

"But why did you come?" she asked. "Nobody told you that you could."

"Sweet," said Allan, softly, possessing himself of her hand, "did you think I could stay away from you two whole weeks? Ten days is the limit—a badly strained limit at that."

The colour surged into her face. She was radiant, as though with some inner light. The atmosphere around her was fairly electric with life and youth and joy.

Dr. Conrad

Doctor Allan Conrad was very good to look at. He had tawny hair and kind brown eyes, a straight nose, and a good firm chin. He wore eye-glasses, and his face might have seemed severe had it not been discredited by his mouth. He was smooth-shaven, and knew enough to wear brown clothes instead of grey.

Eloise looked at him approvingly. Every detail of his attire satisfied her fastidious sense. If he had worn a diamond ring or a conspicuous tie, he might not have occupied his present proud position. His unfailing good taste was a great comfort to her.

"How long can you stay?" she inquired.

"Nice question," he laughed, "to ask an eager lover who has just come. Sounds a good deal like 'Here's-your-hat-what's-your-hurry?' Before I knew you, I used to go to see a girl sometimes who always said, at ten o'clock: 'I'm so glad you came. When can you come again?' The first time she did it I told her I couldn't come again until I had gone away this time."

"And afterward?"

Forgetting the Clock

"I kept going away earlier and earlier, and finally it was so much earlier that I went before I had come. If I can't make a girl forget the clock, I have no call to waste my valuable time on her, have I?"

Assuming a frown with difficulty, Miss Wynne consulted her watch. "Why, it's only half-past eleven," she exclaimed; "I thought it was much later."

"You darling," said the man, irrelevantly. "What are you reading?" Before she could stop him, he had picked up the book and nearly choked in a burst of unseemly merriment.

"Upon my word," he said, when he could speak. "A cook book! A classmate of mine used to indulge himself in floral catalogues when he wanted to rest his mind with light literature, but I never heard of a cook book as among the 'books for Summer reading' that the booksellers advertise."

"Why not?" retorted Eloise, quickly.

"No real reason. Lots of worse things are printed and sold by thousands, but, someway, I can't seem to reconcile you—and your glorious voice—with a cook-book."

"Allan Conrad," said Miss Wynne, with affected sternness, "if you hadn't studied medicine, would you be practising it now?"

"No," admitted Allan; "not with the laws as they are in this State."

"If I had no voice and had never studied music, would I be singing at concerts?"

"Not twice."

"If a girl had never seen a typewriter and didn't know the first thing about shorthand, would she apply for a position as a stenographer?"

"They do," said Allan, gloomily.

Preparation

"Don't dissemble, please. My point is simply this: If every other occupation in the world demands some previous preparation, why shouldn't a girl know something about housekeeping and homemaking before she undertakes it?"

"But, my dear, you're not going to cook."

"I am if I want to," announced Eloise, with authority. "And, anyhow, I'm going to know. Do you think I'm going to let some peripatetic, untrained immigrant manage my house for me? I guess not."

"But cooking isn't theory," he ventured, picking up the note-book; "it's practice. What good is all this going to do you when you have no stove?"

"Don't you remember the famous painter who told inquiring visitors that he mixed his paints with brains? I am now cooking with my mind. After my mind learns to cook, my hands will find it simple enough. And some time, when you come in at midnight and have had no dinner, and the immigrant has long since gone to sleep, you may be glad to be presented with panned oysters, piping hot, instead of a can of salmon and a can-opener."

"Bless your heart," answered Allan, fondly. "It's dear of you, and I hope it'll work. I'm starving this minute—kiss me."

"'Longing is divine compared with satiety,'" she reminded him, as she yielded. "How could you get away? Was nobody ill?"

"Nobody would have the heart to be ill on a Saturday in June, when a doctor's best girl was only fifty miles away. Monday, I'll go back and put some cholera or typhoid germs in the water supply, and get nice and busy. Who's up yonder?" indicating the hotel.

"Nobody we know, but very few of the guests have come, so far."

"Guests"

"In all our varied speech," commented Allan, "I know of nothing so exquisitely ironical as alluding to the people who stop at a hotel as 'guests.' In Mexico, they call them 'passengers,' which is more in keeping with the facts. Fancy the feelings of a real guest upon receiving a bill of the usual proportions. I should consider it a violation of hospitality if a man at my house had to pay three prices for his dinner and a tip besides."

"You always had queer notions," remarked Eloise, with a sidelong glance which set his heart to pounding. "We'll call them inmates if you like it better. As yet, there are only eight inmates besides ourselves, though more are coming next week. Two old couples, one widow, one *divorcée*, and two spinsters with life-works."

"No galloping cherubs?"

"School isn't out yet."

Life-Works

"I see. It wouldn't be the real thing unless there were little ones to gallop through the corridors at six in the morning and weep at the dinner table. What are the life-works?"

"One is writing a book, I understand, on *The Equality of the Sexes*. The other —oh, Allan, it's too funny."

"Spring it," he demanded.

"She's trying to have cornet-playing introduced into the public schools. She says that tuberculosis and pneumonia are caused by insufficient lung

development, and that cornet-playing will develop the lungs of the rising generation. Fancy going by a school during the cornet hour."

"I don't know why they shouldn't put cornet-playing into the schools," he observed, after a moment of profound thought. "Everything else is there now. Why shouldn't they teach crime, and even make a fine art of it?"

"If you let her know you're a doctor," cautioned Eloise, "she'll corner you, and I shall never see you again. She says that she 'hopes, incidentally, to enlist the sympathies of the medical profession.'"

"She's beginning at the wrong end. Cornet manufacturers and the people who keep sanitariums and private asylums are the co-workers she wants. I couldn't live through the coming Winter were it not for pneumonia. It means coal, and repairs for the automobile, and furs for my wife—when I get one."

"Come," said Eloise, springing to her feet; "let's go up and get ready for luncheon."

"Have you told me all?" asked Allan, "or is there some gay young troubadour who serenades you in the evening and whose existence you conceal from me for reasons of your own?"

A Pathetic Little Woman

"Nary a troubadour," she replied. "I haven't seen another soul except a pathetic little woman who came up to the hotel yesterday afternoon to sell the most exquisite things you ever saw. Think of offering hand-made lingerie, of sheer, embroidered lawn and batiste and linen, to *that* crowd! The old ladies weren't interested, the spinsters sniffed, the widow wept, and only the *divorcée* took any notice of it. The prices were so ridiculous that I wouldn't let her unpack the box. I'd be ashamed to pay her the price she asked. It's made by a little lame girl up the main road. I'm to go up there sometime next week."

"Fairy godmother?" asked Allan, good-naturedly. He had known Eloise for many years.

"Perhaps," she answered, somewhat shamefaced. "What's the use of having money if you don't spend it?"

A Human Interest

They went into the hotel together, utterly oblivious of the eight pairs of curious eyes that were fastened upon them in a frank, open stare. The rocking-chairs scraped on the veranda as they instinctively drew closer together. A strong human interest, imperatively demanding immediate discussion, had come to Riverdale-by-the-Sea.

VI

A Letter

Discouraging Prospects

Miriam had come home disappointed and secretly afraid to hope for any tangible results from Miss Wynne's promised visit. Nevertheless, she told Barbara.

"Wouldn't any of them even look at it, Aunty?"

"One of them would have looked at it and rumpled it so that I'd have had to iron it again, but she wouldn't have bought anything. This young lady said she was busy just then, and she wanted to come up and look over all the things at her leisure. She won't pay much, though, even if she buys anything. She said the price was 'ridiculous.'"

"Perhaps she meant it was too low," suggested Barbara.

"Possibly," answered Miriam. Her tone indicated that it was equally possible for canary birds to play the piano, or for ducks to sing.

"How does she look?" queried Barbara.

"Well enough." Enthusiasm was not one of Miriam's attractions.

"What did she have on?"

"White. Linen, I think."

"Then she knows good material. Was her gown tailor-made?"

"Might have been. Why?"

"Because if her white linen gowns are tailored she has money and is used to spending it for clothes. I'm sure she meant the price was too low. Did she say when she was coming?"

"Next week. She didn't say what day."

Waiting

"Then," sighed Barbara, "all we can do is to wait."

"We'll wait until she comes, or has had time to. In the meantime, I'm going to show my quilts to those old ladies and take down a jar or two of preserves. I wish you'd write to the people who left orders last year, and ask if they want preserves or jam or jelly, or pickles, or quilts, or anything. It would be nice to get some orders in before we buy the fruit."

Barbara put down her book, asked for the pen and ink, and went cheerfully to work, with the aid of Aunt Miriam's small memorandum book which contained a list of addresses.

"What colour is her hair, Aunty?" she asked, as she blotted and turned her first neat page.

"A good deal the colour of that old copper tea-kettle that a woman paid six dollars for once, do you remember? I've always thought she was crazy, for she wouldn't even let me clean it."

"And her eyes?"

"Brown and big, with long lashes. She looks well enough, and her voice is pleasant, and I must say she has nice ways. She didn't make me feel like a peddler, as so many of them do. P'raps she'll come," admitted Miriam, grudgingly.

"Oh, I hope so. I'd love to see her and her pretty clothes, even if she didn't buy anything." Barbara threw back a golden braid impatiently, wishing it were copper-coloured and had smooth, shiny waves in it, instead of fluffing out like an undeserved halo.

While Barbara was writing, her father came in and sat down near her. "More sewing, dear?" he asked, wistfully.

Writing Letters

"No, Daddy, not this time. I'm just writing letters."

"I didn't know you ever got any letters—do you?"

"Oh, yes—sometimes. The people at the hotel come up to call once in a while, you know, and after they go away, Aunt Miriam and I occasionally exchange letters with them. It's nice to get letters."

The old man's face changed. "Are you lonely, dear?"

"Lonely?" repeated Barbara, laughing; "why I don't even know what the word means. I have you and my books and my sewing and these letters to write, and I can sit in the window and nod to people who go by—how could I be lonely, Daddy?"

"I want you to be happy, dear."

"So I am," returned the girl, trying hard to make her voice even. "With you, and everything a girl could want, why shouldn't I be happy?"

Miriam went out, closing the door quietly, and the blind man drew his chair very near to Barbara.

Dreaming

"I dream," he said, "and I keep on dreaming that you can walk and I can see. What do you suppose it means? I never dreamed it before."

"We all have dreams, Daddy. I've had the same one very often ever since I was a little child. It's about a tower made of cologne bottles, with a cupola of lovely glass arches, built on the white sand by the blue sea. Inside is a winding stairway hung with tapestries, leading to the cupola where the golden bells are. There are lovely rooms on every floor, and you can stop wherever you please."

"It sounds like a song," he mused.

"Perhaps it is. Can't you make one of it?"

"No—we each have to make our own. I made one this morning."

"Tell me, please."

Love Never Lost

"It is about love. When God made the world, He put love in, and none of it has ever been lost. It is simply transferred from one person to another. Sometimes it takes a different form, and becomes a deed, which, at first, may not

look as if it were made of love, but, in reality, is.

"Love blossoms in flowers, sings in moving waters, fills the forest with birds, and makes all the wonderful music of Spring. It puts the colour upon the robin's breast, scents the orchard with far-reaching drifts of bloom, and scatters the pink and white petals over the grass beneath. Through love the flower changes to fruit, and the birds sing lullabies at twilight instead of mating songs.

"It is at the root of everything good in all the world, and where things are wrong, it is only because sometime, somewhere, there has not been enough love. The balance has been uneven and some have had too much while others were starving for it. As the lack of food stunts the body, so the denial of love warps the soul.

"But God has made it so that love given must unfailingly come back an hundred-fold; the more we give, the richer we are. And Heaven is only a place where the things that have gone wrong here will at last come right. Is it not so, Barbara?"

"Surely, Daddy."

"Then," he continued, anxiously, "all my loving must come back to me sometime, somewhere. I think it will be right, for God Himself is Love."

The blind man's sensitive fingers lovingly sought Barbara's face. His touch was a caress. "I am sure you are like your dear mother," he said, softly. "If I could know that she died loving me, and if I could see her face again, just for an instant, why, all the years of loving, with no answer, would be fully repaid."

"She loved you, Daddy—I know she did."

The Old Doubt

"I know, too, but not always. Sometimes the old, tormenting doubt comes back to me."

"It shouldn't—mother would never have meant you to doubt her."

"Barbara," cried the old man, with sudden passion, "if you ever love a man, never let him doubt you—always let him be sure. There is so much in a man's world that a woman knows nothing of. When he comes home at night, tired beyond words, and sick to death of the world and its ways, make him sure. When

he thinks himself defeated, make him sure. When you see him tempted to swerve even the least from the straight path, make him sure. When the last parting comes, if he is leaving you, give him the certainty to take with him into his narrow house, and make his last sleep sweet. And if you are the one to go first, and leave him, old and desolate and stricken, oh, Barbara, make him sure then—make him very sure."

A String of Pearls

The girl's hand closed tightly upon his. He leaned over to pat her cheek and stroke the heavy braids of silken hair. Then he felt the strand of beads around her neck.

"You have on your mother's pearls," he said. His fine old face illumined as he touched the tawdry trinket.

Barbara swallowed the hard lump in her throat. "Yes, Daddy." They had lived for years upon that single strand of large, perfectly matched pearls which Ambrose North had clasped around his young wife's neck upon their wedding day.

"Would you like more pearls, dear? A bracelet, or a ring?"

"No—these are all I want."

"I want to give you a diamond ring some day, Barbara. Your mother's was buried with her. It was her engagement ring."

"Perhaps somebody will give me an engagement ring," she suggested.

"I shouldn't wonder. I don't want to be selfish, dear. You are all I have, but, if you loved a man, I wouldn't try to keep you away from him."

"Prince Charming hasn't come yet, Daddy, so cheer up. I'll tell you when he does."

Thus she turned the talk into a happier vein. They were laughing together like two children when Miriam came in to say that supper was ready.

Alone

Afterward, he sat at the piano, improvising low, sweet chords that echoed

back plaintively from the dingy walls. The music was full of questioning, of pleading, of longing so deep that it was almost prayer. Barbara finished her letters by the light of the lamp, while Miriam sat in the dining-room alone, asking herself the old, torturing questions, facing her temptation, and bearing the old, terrible hunger of the heart that hurt her like physical pain.

A little before nine o'clock, the blind man came to kiss Barbara good-night. Then he went upstairs. Miriam came in and talked a few minutes of quilts, pickles, and lingerie, then she, too, went up to begin her usual restless night.

Left alone, Barbara discovered that she did not care to read. It was too late to begin work upon the new stock of linen, lawn, and batiste which had come the day before, and she lacked the impulse, in the face of such discouraging prospects as Aunt Miriam had encountered at the hotel. Barbara steadily refused to admit, even to herself, that she was discouraged, but she found no pleasure in the thought of her work.

A Light in the Window

She unfastened the front door, lighted a candle, and set it upon the sill of the front window. Within twenty minutes Roger had come, entering the house so quietly that Barbara did not hear his step and was frightened when she saw him.

"Don't scream," he said, as he closed the door leading into the hall. "I'm not a burglar—only a struggling young law student with no prospects and even less hope."

"I infer," said Barbara, "that the Bascom liver is out of repair."

"Correct. It seems absurd, doesn't it, to be affected by another man's liver while you are supremely unconscious of your own?"

"There are more things in other people's digestions than our philosophy can account for," she replied, with a wicked perversion of classic phrase. "What was the primary cause of the explosion?"

"It was all his own fault," explained Roger. "I like dogs almost as well as I do people, but it doesn't follow that dogs should mix so constantly with people as they usually are allowed to. I was never in favour of Judge Bascom's bull pup keeping regular office hours with us, but he has, ever since the day he waddled in behind the Judge with a small chain as the connecting link. I got so

accustomed to his howling in the corner of the office where he was chained up that I couldn't do my work properly when he was asleep. So all went well until the Judge decided to remove the chain and give the pup more room to develop himself in.

"I tried to dissuade him, but it was no use. I told him he would run away, and he said, with great dignity, that he did not desire for a pet anything which had to be tied up in order to be retained. He observed that the restraining influence worked against the pethood so strongly as practically to obscure it."

"New word?" laughed Barbara.

"I don't know why it isn't a good word," returned Roger, in defence. "If 'manhood' and 'womanhood' and 'brotherhood' and all the other 'hoods' are good English, I see no reason why 'pethood' shouldn't be used in the same sense. The English language needs a lot of words added to it before it can be called complete."

"One wouldn't think so, judging by the size of the dictionary. However, we'll let it pass. Go on with the story."

"Things have been lively for a week or more. The pup has romped around a good deal and has playfully bitten a client or two, but the Judge has been highly edified until to-day. Fido got an important legal document which the Judge had just drafted, and literally chewed it to pulp. Then he swallowed it, apparently with great relish. I was told to make another, and my not knowing about it, and taking the liberty of asking a few necessary questions, produced the fireworks. It wasn't Fido's fault, but mine."

"How is Fido?" queried Barbara, with affected anxiety.

"He was well at last accounts, but the document was long enough and complicated enough to make him very ill. I hope he'll die of it to-morrow."

"Perhaps he's going to study law, too," remarked Barbara, "and believes, with Macaulay, that 'a page digested is better than a book hurriedly read.'"

"I think that will do, Miss North. I'll read to you now, if you don't mind. I would fain improve myself instead of listening to such childish chatter."

"Perhaps, if you read to me enough, I'll improve so that even you will enjoy talking to me," she returned, with a mischievous smile. "What did you bring over?"

A New Book

"A new book—that is, one that we've never seen before. There is a large box of father's books behind some trunks in the attic, and I never found them until Sunday, when I was rummaging around up there. I haven't read them—I thought I'd make a list of them first, and you can choose those you'd like to have me read to you. I brought this little one because I was sure you'd like it, after reading *Endymion* and *The Eve of St. Agnes*."

"What is it?"

"Keats's letters to Fanny Brawne."

The little brown book was old and its corners were dog-eared, but the yellowed pages, with their record of a deathless passion, were still warmly human and alive. Roger had a deep, pleasant voice, and he read well. Quite apart from the beauty of the letters, it gave Barbara pleasure to sit in the firelight and watch his face.

A Folded Paper

He read steadily, pausing now and then for comment, until he was half-way through the volume; then, as he turned a page, a folded paper fell out. He picked it up curiously.

"Why, Barbara," he said, in astonishment. "It's my father's writing."

"What is it—notes?"

"No, he seems to have been trying to write a letter like those in the book. It is all in pencil, with changes and erasures here and there. Listen:

The Letter

"'You are right, as you always are, and we must never see each other again. We must live near each other for the rest of our lives, with that consciousness between us. We must pass each other on the street and not speak unless others

are with us; then we must bow, pleasantly, for the sake of appearances.

"'I hope you do not blame me because I went mad. I ask your pardon, and yet I cannot say I am sorry. That one hour of confession is worth a lifetime of waiting—it is worth all the husks that we are to have henceforward while we starve for more.

"'Through all the years to come, we shall be separated by less than a mile, yet the world lies between us and divides us as by a glittering sword. You will not be unfaithful to your pledge, nor I to mine. Nothing is changed there. It is only that two people chose to live in the starlight and bound themselves to it eternally, then had one blinding glimpse of God's great sun.

"'But, Constance, the stars are the same as always, and we must try to forget that we have seen the sun. The little lights of the temple must be the more faithfully tended if the Great Light goes out. When the white splendour fades, we must be content with the misty gold of night, and not mind the shadows nor the great desolate spaces where not even starlight comes. Your star and mine met for an instant, then were sundered as widely as the poles, but the light of each must be kept steadfast and clear, because of the other.

"'I do not know that I shall have the courage to send this letter. Everything was said when I told you that I love you, for that one word holds it all and there is nothing more. As you can take your heart in the hollow of your hand and hold it, it is so small a thing; so the one word 'love' holds everything that can be said, or given, or hungered for, or prayed for and denied.

"'And if, sometimes, in the starlight, we dream of the sun, we must remember that both sun and stars are God's. Past the unutterable leagues that divide us now, one day we shall meet again, purged, mayhap, of earthly longing for earthly love.

"'But Heaven, for me, would be the hour I held you close again. I should ask nothing more than to tell you once more, face to face and heart to heart, the words I write now: I love you—I love you—I love you.'"

A Discovery

Roger put down the book and stared fixedly at the fire. Barbara's face was very pale and the light had gone from her eyes.

"Roger," she said, in a strange tone, "Constance was my mother's name. Do you think——"

He was startled, for his thought had not gone so far as her intuition. "I—do—not—know," he said.

"They knew each other," Barbara went on, swiftly, "for the two families have always lived here, in these same two houses where you and I were born. It was only a step across the road, and they——"

A Barrier

She choked back a sob. Something new and terrible seemed to have sprung up suddenly between her and Roger.

The blood beat hard in his ears and his own words sounded dull and far away. "It is dated June third," he said.

"My mother died on the seventh," said Barbara, slowly, "by—her—own—hand."

They sat in silence for a long time. Then, speaking of indifferent things, they tried to get back upon the old friendly footing again, but failed miserably. There was a consciousness as of guilt, on either side.

Roger tried not to think of it. Later, when he was alone, he would go over it all and try to reason it out—try to discover if it were true. Barbara did not need to do this, for, with a woman's quick insight, she knew.

Secretly, too, both were ashamed, having come unawares upon knowledge that was not meant for them. Presently, Roger went home, and was glad to be alone in the free outer air; but, long after he was gone, Barbara sat in the dark, her heart aching with the burden of her father's doubt and her dead mother's secret.

VII

An Afternoon Call

The rap at the Norths' front door was of the sort which would impel the dead to rise and answer it. Before the echo of the imperative summons had died away, Miriam had opened it and admitted Miss Mattie.

Bein' Neighbourly

"I was sewin' over to my house," announced the visitor, settling herself comfortably, "and I surmised as how you might be sewin' over here, so I thought we might as well set together for a spell. I believe in bein' neighbourly."

Barbara smiled a welcome and Miriam brought in a quilt which she was binding by hand. As she worked, she studied Miss Mattie furtively, and with an air of detachment.

"I come over on the trail Roger has wore in the grass," continued Miss Mattie, biting off her thread with a snap. "He's organised himself into sort of a travellin' library, I take it, what with transportin' books at all hours back and forth. After I go to bed, Roger lets himself out and sneaks over here, carryin' readin' matter both ways. But land's sake," she chuckled, "I ain't carin' what he does after I get sleepy. I was never one to stay up after nine o'clock for the sake of entertainment. If there's sickness, or anythin' like that, of course it's a different matter.

"Roger's pa was always a great one for readin', and we've both inherited it from him. Roger sits with his books and I sit with my paper, and we both read, never sayin' a word to each other, till almost nine o'clock. We're what you might call a literary family.

"Jewel of a Girl"

"I'm just readin' a perfectly beautiful story called *Margaret Merriman, or the Maiden's Mad Marriage*. Margaret must have been worth lookin' at, for she had golden hair and eyes like sapphires and ruby lips and pearly teeth. I was readin'

the description of her to Roger, and he said she seemed to be what some people would call 'a jewel of a girl.'

"Margaret Merriman's mother died when she was an infant in arms, just like your ma, Barbara, and left her to her pa. Her pa didn't marry again, though several was settin' their caps for him on account of him bein' young and handsome and havin' a lot of money. I suppose bein' a widower had somethin' to do with it, too. It does beat all how women will run after a widower. I suppose they want a man who's already been trained, but, speakin' for myself, I've always felt as if I'd rather have somethin' fresh and do my own trainin'—women's notions differ so about husbands.

"Just think what it would be to marry a man, thinkin' he was all trained, and to find out that it had been done wrong. You'd have to begin all over again, and it'd be harder than startin' in with absolute ignorance. The man would get restless, too. When he thought he was graduated and was about ready to begin on a post-graduate course, he'd find himself in the kindergarten, studyin' with beads and singin' about little raindrops.

"Gettin' an idea into a man's head is like furnishin' a room. If you can once get a piece of furniture where you want it, it can stay there until it's worn out or busted, except for occasional dustin' and repairin'. You can add from time to time as you have to, but if you attempt to refurnish a room that's all furnished, and do it all at once, you're bound to make more disturbance than housecleanin'.

"It has to be done slow and careful, unless you have a likin' for rows, and if you're one of those kind of women that's forever changin' their minds about furniture and their husband's ideas, you're bound to have a terrible restless marriage.

"Roger's pa was fresh when I took him, but, unbeknownst to me, he'd done his own furnishin', and the pieces was dreadful set and hard to move. Some of 'em I slid out gently and others took some manouverin', but steady work tells on anythin'. He was thinkin' as I wanted him to about most things, though, when he died, and that's sayin' a good deal, for he didn't die until after we'd been married seven years and three months and eighteen days. If he wasn't really thinkin' right, he was pretendin' to, and that's enough to satisfy any reasonable woman.

The Will

"Margaret Merriman's pa died when she was at the tender age of ten, and he left all his money to a distant relation in trust for Margaret, the relative bein' supposed to spend the income on her. If Margaret died before she was of age, the relative was to keep it, and if she should marry before she was of age, the relative was to keep it, too. But, livin' to eighteen' and marryin' afterwards, it was all to be Margaret's, and the relative wasn't to have as much as a two-cent stamp with the mucilage licked off.

"This relative was a sweet-faced lady with a large mole on her right cheek. Margaret used to call her 'Moley,' when she was mad at her, which was right frequent. Her name was Magdalene Mather and she'd been married three times. She was dreadful careless with her husbands and had mislaid 'em all. Not bein' able to find 'em again, she just reckoned on their bein' dead and was thinkin' of marryin' some more.

Keeping Margaret Young

"Seems to me it's a mistake for anybody to marry more'n once. In one of Roger's books it says somethin' about a second marriage bein' the triumph of hope over experience. Magdalene Mather was dreadful hopeful and kept thinkin' that maybe she could get somebody who would stay with her without bein' chained up. Meanwhile it was to her interest to keep little Margaret as young as possible.

"Margaret thought she was ten when she went to live with Magdalene, but she soon learned that it was a mistake and she got to be only seven in less'n half an hour. Magdalene put shorter dresses on her and kept her in white and gave her shoes without any heels, and these little short socks that show a foot or so of bare leg and which is indecent, if fashionable.

"Margaret's birthdays kept gettin' farther and farther apart, and as soon as the neighbours begun to notice that Margaret wasn't agin' like everybody else, why, Magdalene would just pack up and go to a new place.

"She didn't go to school, but had private teachers, because it was in the will that she was to be educated like a real lady. Any teacher who thought Margaret was too far advanced for her age got fired the minute it was spoke of, and pretty soon Margaret got onto it herself. She used to tell teachers she liked to say that

she was very backward in her studies, and tell those she didn't like that Aunty Magdalene would be dreadful pleased to hear that she was improvin' in her readin' and 'rithmetic and grammar.

"Meanwhile Nature was workin' in Margaret's interest and she was growin' taller and taller every day. The short socks had to be took off because people laughed so, and Magdalene had to let her braid her hair instead of havin' it cut Dutch and tied with a ribbon. When she was eighteen, she thought she was thirteen, and she was wearin' dresses that come to her shoe tops, and her hair in one braid down her back, and dreadful young hats and no jewels, though her pa had left her a small trunk full of rubies and diamonds and pearls. Magdalene was wearin' the jewels herself. They were movin' around pretty rapid about this time, and goin' from city to city in order to find better teachers for 'the dear child' as Magdalene used to call her.

The Conductor

"One day, soon after they'd gone to a new city, Margaret was goin' down town to take her music lesson. She went alone because Magdalene was laid up with a headache and wanted the house quiet. When the conductor come along for the fare, Margaret was lookin' out of the window, and, absent-minded like, she give him a penny instead of a nickel.

"The conductor give it back to her, and asked her if she was so young she could go for half fare, and Margaret says, right sharp, when she give him the nickel, 'It's not so long since I was travellin' on half-fare.'

"The conductor says: 'I'd hate to have been hangin' up by the thumbs since you was,' says he. Of course this made Margaret good and mad, and she says to the conductor, 'How old do you think I am?'

"The conductor says: 'I ain't paid to think durin' union hours, but I imagine that you ain't old enough to lie about your age.'

Ronald Macdonald

"Just then an old woman with a green parrot in a big cage fell off the car while she was gettin' off backwards as usual, and Margaret didn't have no more chance to fight with the conductor. She saw, however, that he was terrible good lookin'—like the dummy in the tailor's window. It says in the story that 'Ronald

Macdonald'—that was his name—was as handsome as a young Greek god and, though lowly in station, he would have adorned a title had it been his.'

"Margaret got to doin' some thinkin' about herself, and wonderin' why it was she didn't seem to age none. And whenever she happened to get onto Ronald Macdonald's car, she noticed that he was awful polite and chivalrous to women. He waited patiently when any two of 'em was decidin' who was to pay the fare and findin' their purses, and sayin', 'You must let me pay next time,' and he would tickle a cryin' baby under the chin and make it bill and coo like a bird.

"Did you ever see a baby bill? I never did neither, but that's what it said in the paper. I suppose it has some reference to the expense of their comin' and their keep through the whoopin' cough stage and the measles, and so on. There don't neither of you know nothin' about it 'cause you ain't married, but when Roger come, his pa was obliged to mortgage the house, and the mortgage didn't get took off until Roger was out of dresses and goin' to school and beginnin' to write with ink.

Fine Manners

"Let me see—what was I talkin' about? Oh, yes—Ronald Macdonald's fine manners. When a woman give him five pennies instead of a nickel, he was always just as polite to her as he was to anybody, and would help her off the car and carry her bundles to the corner for her, and everything like that. Of course Margaret couldn't help noticin' this and likin' him for it though she was still mad at him for what he said about her age.

"One morning Margaret give him a quarter so's he'd have to make change, and while he was doin' it, she says to him, 'How nice it must be to ride all day without payin' for it.'

"'I'm under age,' says Ronald Macdonald, with a smile that showed all his beautiful teeth and his ruby lips under his black waxed mustache.

"'Get out,' says Margaret, surprised.

"'I am, though,' says Ronald, confidentially. 'I'm just nineteen. How old are you?'

"'Thirteen,' says Margaret, softly.

"'Don't renig,' says Ronald. 'I think we're pretty near of an age.'

"When Margaret got home, she looked up 'renig' in the dictionary, but it wasn't there. She was too smart to ask Magdalene, but she kept on thinkin'.

Chance Acquaintances

"One day, while she was goin' down in the car, two men came in and sat by her. They was chance acquaintances, it seemed, havin' just met at the hotel. 'Your face is terrible familiar to me,' one of the men said. 'I've seen you before, or your picture, or something, somewhere. Upon my soul, I believe your picture is hung up in my last wife's boudoir.'

"'Good God,' says the other man, turnin' as pale as death, 'did you marry Magdalene Mather, too?'

"'I did,' says the first man.

"'Then, brother,' says the second man, 'let us get off at the next corner and go

and drown our mutual sorrow in drink.'

"After they got off, Margaret went out to Ronald, and she says to him: 'There goes two of my aunt's husbands. She's had three, and there's two of 'em, right there.'

"'Well,' says Ronald, 'if Aunty ain't got a death certificate and two or three divorces put away somewhere, she stands right in line to get canned for a few years for bigamy. You don't look like you had an aunt that was a trigamist,' says he.

"Margaret didn't understand much of this, but she still kept thinkin'. One day while Magdalene was at an afternoon reception, wearin' all of Margaret's jewels, Margaret looked all through her private belongings to see if she could find any divorces, and she come on a family Bible with the date of her birth in it, and her father's will.

Facts of the Case

"Soon, she understands the whole game, and by doin' a small sum in subtraction, she sees that she is goin' on nineteen now. She's afraid to leave the proofs in the house over night, so she wraps 'em up in a newspaper, and flies with 'em to her only friend Ronald Macdonald, and asks him to keep 'em for her until she comes after 'em. He says he will guard them with his life.

"When Margaret goes back after them, havin' decided to face her aunt and demand her inheritance, Ronald has already read 'em, but of course he don't let on that he has. He convinces her that she ought to get married before she faces her aunt, so that a husband's strong arm will be at hand to defend her through the terrible ordeal.

"Margaret thinks she sees a way out, for she has been studyin' up on law in the meantime, and she remembers how Ronald has told her he is under age, and she knows the marriage won't be legal, but will serve to deceive her aunt.

The Climax

"So she flies with him and they are married, and then when they confront Magdalene with the will, and the family Bible and their marriage certificate, and tell her she is a trigamist, and they will make trouble for her if she don't do right by 'em, Magdalene sobs out, 'Oh, Heaven, I am lost!' and falls in a dead faint

from which she don't come out for six weeks.

"In the meantime, Margaret has thanked Ronald Macdonald for his great kindness, and says he can go now, as the marriage ain't legal, he bein' under age and not havin' his parents' consent. Ronald gives a long, loud laugh and then he digs up his family Bible and shows Margaret how he is almost twenty-five and old enough to be married, and that women have no patent on lyin' about their ages, and that he is not going away.

"Margaret swoons, and when she comes to, she finds that Ronald has resigned his job as a street-car conductor, and has bought some fine clothes on her credit, and is prepared to live happy ever afterward. He bids eternal farewell to work in a long and impassioned speech that's so full of fine language that it would do credit to a minister, and there Margaret is, in a trap of her own makin', with a husband to take care of her money instead of an aunt. Next week, I'll know more about how it turns out, but that's as far as I've got now. Ain't it a perfectly beautiful story?"

Miriam muttered some sort of answer, but Barbara smiled. "It is very interesting," she said, kindly. "I've never read anything like it."

Going the Rounds

"It's a lot better'n the books you and Roger waste your time over," returned the guest, much gratified; "but I can't lend you the papers, cause there's five waitin' after the postmaster's wife, and goodness knows how many of them has promised others. I don't mind runnin' over once in a while, though, and tellin' you about 'em while I sew.

"It keeps 'em fresh in my memory," she added, happily, "and Roger is so busy with his law books he don't have time to listen to 'em except at supper. He reads law every evening now, and he didn't used to. Guess he ain't wasting so much time as he was. Been down to the hotel yet?" she asked, inclining her head toward Miriam.

"Once," answered Miriam, reluctantly.

Gossip

"There ain't many come yet," the postmaster's wife tells me. "There's a young lady at the hotel named Miss Eloise Wynne, and every day but Saturday she gets

a letter from the city, addressed in a man's writin'. And every afternoon, when the boy brings the hotel mail down to go out on the night train, there's a big white square envelope in a woman's writin' addressed to Doctor Allan Conrad, some place in the city. The envelope smells sweet, but the writin' is dreadful big and sploshy-lookin'. Know anything about her?" Miss Mattie gazed sharply at Miriam over her spectacles.

"No," returned Miriam, decisively.

"Thought maybe you would. Anyhow, you don't need to be so sharp about it, cause there's no harm in askin' a civil question. My mother always taught me that a civil question called for a civil answer. I should think, from the letters and all, that he was her steady company, shouldn't you?"

"It's possible," assented Barbara, seeing that Miriam did not intend to reply.

"There's some talk at the sewin' circle of gettin' you one of them hand sewin' machines," continued Miss Mattie, "so's you could sew more and better."

Barbara flushed painfully. "Thank you," she answered, "but I couldn't use it. I much prefer to do all my work by hand."

"All right," assented Miss Mattie, good-humouredly. "It ain't our idea to force a sewin' machine onto anybody that don't want it. We can use some of the money in gettin' a door-mat for the front door of the church. And, if I was you, I wouldn't let my pa run around so much by himself. If he wants to borrow a dog to go with him, Roger would be willin' to lend him Judge Bascom's Fido. If the Judge wasn't willin', Roger would try to persuade him. Lendin' Fido would make law easier for Roger and be a great help to your pa.

"I must go, now, and get supper. Good-bye. I've enjoyed my visit ever so much. Come over sometime, Miriam—you ain't very sociable. Good-bye."

The two women watched Miss Mattie scudding blithely over the trail which, as she said, Roger had worn in the grass. Miriam looked after her gloomily, but Barbara was laughing.

"Don't look so cross, Aunty," chided Barbara. "No one ever came here who was so easy to entertain."

"Humph," grunted Miriam, and went out.

Relief

But even Barbara sighed in relief when she was left alone. She understood some of Roger's difficulties of which he never spoke, and realised that the much-maligned "Bascom liver" could not be held responsible for all his discontent.

She wondered what Roger's father had been like, and did not wonder that he was unhappy, if his nature was in any way akin to his son's. But her mother? How could she have failed to appreciate the beautiful old father whom Barbara loved with all the passion and strength of her young heart!

The Secret

"He mustn't know," said Barbara to herself, for the hundredth time. "Father must never know."

VIII

A Fairy Godmother

The Postponed Visit

As cool and fresh as the June morning of which she seemed a veritable part, Miss Eloise Wynne, immaculately clad in white linen, opened the little grey gate. It was a week later than she had promised to come, but she had not been idle, and considered herself justified for the delay.

Miriam opened the door for her and introduced Barbara. Eloise smiled radiantly as she offered a smooth, well-kept hand. "I know I'm late," she said, "but I think you'll forgive me for it a little later on. I want to see all the lingerie —every piece you have to sell."

"Would you mind coming upstairs?" asked Barbara.

"No, indeed."

The two went up, Barbara slowly leading the way. Miriam remained downstairs to make sure that the blind man did not come in unexpectedly and overhear things which he would be much happier not to know.

"What a lot of it," Eloise was saying. "And what a wonderful old chest."

Dainty Wares

Trembling with excitement, Barbara spread forth her dainty wares. Eloise was watching her narrowly, and, with womanly intuition, saw the dire need and the courageous spirit struggling against it.

"Just a minute, please," said Barbara; "I'd better tell you now. My father is blind and he does not know we are poor, nor that I make these things to sell. He thinks that they are for myself and that I am very vain. So, if he should come home while you are here, please do not spoil our little deceit."

Barbara lifted her luminous blue eyes to Eloise and smiled. It was a brave

little smile without a hint of self-pity, and it went straight to the older woman's heart.

"I'll be careful," said Eloise. "I think it's dear of you."

"Now," said Barbara, stooping to peer into the corners of the deep chest, "I think that's all." She began, hurriedly, to price everything as she passed it to Eloise, giving the highest price each time. When she had finished, she was amazed at Miss Wynne's face—it was so full of resentment.

"Do you mean to tell me," asked Eloise, in a queer voice, "that you are asking *that* for *these?*"

The blue eyes threatened to overflow, but Barbara straightened herself proudly. "It is all hand work," she said, with quiet dignity, "and the material is the very best. I could not possibly afford to sell it for less."

"You goose," laughed Eloise, "you have misunderstood me. There is not a thing here that is not worth at least a third more than you are asking for it. Give me a pencil and paper and some pins."

Higher Prices

Barbara obeyed, wondering what this beautiful visitor would do next. Eloise took up every garment and examined it critically. Then she made a new price tag and pinned it over the old one. She advanced even the plainest garments at least a third, the more elaborate ones were doubled, and some of the embroidered things were even tripled in price. When she came to the shirtwaist patterns, exquisitely embroidered upon sheerest handkerchief linen, she shamelessly multiplied the price by four and pinned the new tag on.

"Oh," gasped Barbara; "nobody will ever pay that much for things to wear."

"Somebody is going to right now," announced Eloise, with decision. "I'll take this, and this, and this," she went on, rapidly choosing, "and these, and these, and this. I'll take those four for a friend of mine who is going to be married next week—this solves the eternal problem of wedding-presents—and all of these for next Santa Claus time.

"I can use all the handkerchiefs, and every pin-cushion cover and corsage-pad you've made. Please don't sell anything else until I've heard from some more of my friends to whom I have already written. And you're not to offer one of these

exquisite things to those unappreciative people at the hotel, for I have a letter from a friend who is on the Board of Directors of the Woman's Exchange, and got a chance for you to sell there. How long have you been doing this?"

In a Whirl of Confusion

"Seven or eight years," murmured Barbara. Her senses were so confused that the room seemed to be whirling and her face was almost as white as the lingerie.

"And those women at the hotel would really buy these things at such ridiculous prices?"

"Not often," answered Barbara, trying to smile. "They would not pay so much. Sometimes we had to sell for very little more than the cost of the material. One woman said we ought not to expect so much for things that were not made with a sewing-machine, but of course, Aunt Miriam had been to the city and she knew that hand work was worth more."

"I wish I'd been there," remarked Eloise. There was a look around her mouth which would have boded no good to anybody if she had. "When I see what brutes women can be, sometimes I am ashamed because I am a woman."

"And," returned Barbara, softly, "when I see what good angels women can be, it makes me proud to be a woman."

"Where do you get your material?" asked Eloise, quickly.

Barbara named the large department store where Aunt Miriam bought linen, lawn, batiste, lace, patterns, and incidentally managed to absorb ideas.

"I see I'm needed in Riverdale-by-the-Sea," observed Miss Wynne. "I can arrange for you to buy all you want at the lowest wholesale price."

"Would it save anything?" asked Barbara, doubtfully.

Practical Help

"Would it?" repeated Eloise, smiling. "Just wait and see. After I've written about that and had some samples sent to you, we'll talk over half a dozen or more complete sets of lingerie for me, and some more shirtwaists. Is there a pen downstairs? I want to write a check for you."

When they went into the living-room, Barbara's cheeks were burning with excitement and her eyes shone like stars. When she took the check, which Eloise wrote with an accustomed air, she could scarcely speak, but managed to stammer out, "Thank you."

"You needn't," said Eloise, coolly, "for I'm only buying what I want at a price I consider very reasonable and fair. If you'll get some samples of your work ready, I'll send up for them, and hurry them on to my friend who is to put them into the Woman's Exchange. And please don't sell anything more just now. I've just thought of a friend whose daughter is going to be married soon, and she may want me to select some things for her."

"You're a fairy godmother," said Barbara. "This morning we were poor and discouraged. You came in and waved your wand, and now we are rich. I have heart for anything now."

Always Rich

"You are always rich while you have courage, and without it Crœsus himself would be poor. It's not the circumstance, remember—it's the way you meet it."

"I know," said Barbara, but her eyes filled with tears of gratitude, nevertheless.

Ambrose North came in from the street, and immediately felt the presence of a stranger in the room. "Who is here?" he asked.

"This is Miss Wynne, Father. She is stopping at the hotel and came up to call."

The old man bowed in courtly fashion over the young woman's hand. "We are glad to see you," he said, gently. "I am blind, but I can see with my soul."

"That is the true sight," returned Eloise. Her big brown eyes were soft with pity.

"Have many of the guests come?" he inquired.

"I have a friend," laughed Eloise, "who says it is wrong to call people 'guests' when they are stopping at a hotel. He insists that 'inmates' is a much better word."

"He is not far from right," said the old man, smiling. "Is he there now?"

"No, he comes down Saturday mornings and stays until Monday morning. That is all the vacation he allows himself. You are fortunate to live here," she added, kindly. "I do not know of a more beautiful place."

"Nor I. To us—to me, especially—it is hallowed by memories. We—you will stay to luncheon, will you not, Miss Wynne?"

Eloise glanced quickly at Barbara. "If you only would," she said.

"If you really want me," said Eloise, "I'd love to." She took off her hat—a white one trimmed with lilacs—and smoothed the waves in her copper-coloured hair. Barbara took her crutches and went out, very quietly, to help Aunt Miriam prepare for the guest.

When the kitchen door was safely closed, Barbara's joy bubbled into speech. "Oh, Aunt Miriam," she cried; "she's bought nearly every thing I had and paid almost double price for it. She's already arranged for me to sell at the Woman's Exchange in the city, and she is going to write to some of her friends about the things I have left. She's going to arrange for me to get all my material at the lowest wholesale price, and she's ordered six complete sets of lingerie for herself. She wants some more shirtwaists, too. Oh, Aunt Miriam, do you think the world is coming to an end?"

"Has she paid you?" queried Miriam, gravely.

"Indeed she has."

"Then it probably is."

Miriam was not a woman easily to be affected by joy, but the hard lines of her face softened perceptibly. "Show her the quilts," she suggested.

"Oh, Aunt Miriam, I'd be ashamed to, to-day, when she's bought so much. She'll be coming up again before long—she said so. And father's asked her to luncheon."

"Just like him," commented Miriam, with a sigh. "He always suffered from hospitality. I'll have to go to the store."

The Best We Have

"No, you won't, Aunty—she's not that sort. We'll give her the best we have, with a welcome thrown in."

If Eloise thought it strange for one end of the table to be set with solid silver, heavy damask, and fine china, while the other end, where she and the two women of the house sat, was painfully different, she gave no sign of it in look or speech. The humble fare might have been the finest banquet so far as she was concerned. She fitted herself to their ways without apparent effort; there was no awkwardness nor feeling of strangeness. She might have been a life-long friend of the family, instead of a passing acquaintance who had come to buy lingerie.

Friendly Conversation

As she ate, she talked. It was not aimless chatter, but the rare gift of conversation. She drew them all out and made them talk, too. Even Miriam relaxed and said something more than "yes" and "no."

"What delicious preserves," said Eloise. "May I have some more, please? Where do you get them?"

"I make them," answered Miriam, the dull red rising in her cheeks. She had not been entirely disinterested when she climbed up on a chair and took down some of her choicest fruit from the highest shelf of the store-room.

"Do you—" A look from Barbara stopped the unlucky speech. "Do you find it difficult?" asked Eloise, instantly mistress of the situation. "I should so love to make some for myself."

"Miriam will be glad to teach you," put in Ambrose North. "She likes to do it because she can do it so well."

The red grew deeper in Miriam's lined face, for every word of praise from him was food to her hungry soul. She would gladly have laid down her life for him, even though she hated herself for feeling as she did.

An Hour of Song

Afterward, while Miriam was clearing off the table, Eloise went to the piano without being asked, and sang to them for more than an hour. She chose folk-

songs and tender melodies—little songs made of tears and laughter, and the simple ballads that never grow old. She had a deep, vibrant contralto voice of splendid range and volume; she sang with rare sympathy, and every word could be clearly understood.

"Don't stop," pleaded Barbara, when she paused and ran her fingers lightly over the keys.

"I don't want to impose upon your good-nature," she returned, "but I love to sing."

"And we love to have you," said North. "I think, Barbara, we must get a new piano."

"I wouldn't," answered Eloise, before Barbara could speak. "The years improve wine and violins and friendship, so why not a piano?" Without waiting for his reply, she began to sing, with exquisite tenderness:

"Sometimes between long shadows on the grass
The little truant waves of sunlight pass;
Mine eyes grow dim with tenderness the while,
Thinking I see thee, thinking I see thee smile.

"And sometimes in the twilight gloom apart
The tall trees whisper, whisper heart to heart;
From my fond lips the eager answers fall,
Thinking I hear thee, thinking I hear thee call."

"Yes," said Ambrose North, unsteadily, as the last chord died away, "I know. You can call and call, but nothing ever comes back to you." The tears streamed over his blind face as he rose and went out of the room.

"What have I done?" asked Eloise. "Oh, what have I done?"

"Nothing," sighed Barbara. "My mother has been dead for twenty-one years, but my father never forgets. She was only a girl when she died—like me."

"I'm so sorry. Why didn't you tell me before, so I could have chosen jolly, happy things?"

"That wouldn't keep him from grieving—nothing can, so don't be troubled

about it."

Eloise turned back to the piano and sang two or three rollicking, laughing melodies that set Barbara's one foot to tapping on the floor, but the old man did not come back.

"I never meant to stay so long," said Eloise, rising and putting on her hat.

"It isn't long," returned Barbara, with evident sincerity. "I wish you wouldn't go."

"But I must, my dear. If I don't go, I can never come again. I have lots of letters to write, and mail will be waiting for me, and I have some studying to do, so I must go."

Adieus

Barbara went to the door with her. "Good-bye, Fairy Godmother," she said, wistfully.

"Good-bye, Fairy Godchild," answered Eloise, carelessly. Then something in the girl's face impelled her to put a strong arm around Barbara, and kiss her, very tenderly. The blue eyes filled with tears.

"Thank you for that," breathed Barbara, "more than for anything else."

Eloise went away humming to herself, but she stopped as soon as she was out of sight of the house. "The little thing," she thought; "the dear, brave little thing! A face like an angel, and that cross old woman, and that beautiful old man who sees with his soul. And all that exquisite work and the prices those brutal women paid her for it. Blind and lame, and nothing to be done."

Then another thought made her brown eyes very bright. "But I'm not so sure of that—we'll see."

A Request

She wrote many letters that afternoon, and all were for Barbara. The last and longest was to Doctor Conrad, begging him to come at the first possible moment

and go with her to see a poor broken child who might be made well and strong and beautiful.

"And," the letter went on, "perhaps you could give her father back his eyesight. She calls me her Fairy Godmother, and I rely upon you to keep my proud position for me. Any way, Allan, dear, please come, won't you?"

Awaiting Results

She closed it with a few words which would have made him start for the Klondike that night, had there been a train, and she asked it of him; posted it, and hopefully awaited results.

IX

Taking the Chance

Dr. Conrad Comes

"Well, I'm here," remarked Doctor Conrad, as he sat on the beach with Eloise. "I have left all my patients in the care of an inferior, though reputable physician, who has such winning ways that he may have annexed my entire practice by the time I get back.

"If you'll tell me just where these protégées of yours are, I'll go up there right away. I'll ring the bell, and when they open the door I'll say: 'I've come from Miss Wynne, and I'm to amputate this morning and remove a couple of cataracts this afternoon. Kindly have the patients get ready at once.'"

"Don't joke, Allan," pleaded Eloise. Her brown eyes were misty and her mood of exalted tenderness made her in love with all the world. "If you could see that brave little thing, with her beautiful face and her divine unselfishness, hobbling around on crutches and sewing for a living, meanwhile keeping her blind old father from knowing they are poor, you'd feel just as I do."

Discussing the Case

"It is very improbable," returned Allan, seriously, "that anything can be done. If they were well-to-do, they undoubtedly made every effort and saw everybody worth seeing."

"But in twenty years," suggested Eloise, hopefully. "Think of all the progress that has been made in twenty years."

"I know," said Allan, doubtfully. "All we can do is to see. And if anything can be done for them, why, of course we'll do it."

"Then we'll go for a little drive," she said, "and on our way back, we can stop there and get the things I bought the other day. They have no one to send with them, and it's too much for one person to carry, anyway."

"I suppose she has sold everything she had," mused Allan impersonally.

"Not quite," answered Eloise, flushing. "I left her some samples for the Woman's Exchange."

"Very kind," he observed, with the same air of detachment. "I can see my finish. My wife will have so much charity work for me to do that there will be no time for anything else, and, in a little while, she will have given away all the money we both have. Then when we're sitting together in the sun on the front steps of the poorhouse, we can fittingly lament the end of our usefulness."

Policy of Segregation

"They won't let us sit together," she retorted. "Don't you know that even in the old people's homes they keep the men and women apart—husbands and wives included?"

"For the love of Mike, what for?" he asked, in surprise.

"Because it makes the place too gay and frivolous. Old ladies of eighty were courted by awkward swains of ninety and more, and there was so much checker-playing in the evening and so many lights burning, and so many requests for new clothes, that the management couldn't stand it. There were heart-burnings and jealousies, too, so they had to adopt a policy of segregation."

"'Hope springs eternal in the human breast,'" quoted Allan.

"And love," she said. "I've thought sometimes I'd like to play fairy godmother to some of those poor, desolate old people who love each other, and give them a pretty wedding. Wouldn't it be dear to see two old people married and settled in a little home of their own?"

"Or, more likely, with us," he returned. "I've been thinking about a nice little house with a guest room or two, but I've changed my mind. My vote is for a very small apartment. You're not the sort to be trusted with a guest room."

Starting Off

Eloise laughed and sprang to her feet. "On to the errand of mercy," she said. "We're wasting valuable time. Get a horse and buggy and I'll see if I can borrow an extra suit-case or two for my purchases."

When she came down, Allan was waiting for her in the buggy. A bell-boy, in her wake, brought three suit-cases and piled them under the seat. Half a dozen rocking-chairs, on the veranda, held highly interested observers. The paraphernalia suggested an elopement.

"Tell those women on the veranda," said Eloise, to the boy, "that I'm not taking any trunks and will soon be back."

"What for?" queried Allan, as they drove away.

"Reasons of my own," she answered, crisply. "Men are as blind as bats."

"I'm wearing glasses," he returned, with due humility. "If you think I'm fit to hear why you left that cryptic message, I'd be pleased to."

"You're far from fit. Here, turn into this road."

Spread like a tawny ribbon upon the green of the hills, the road wound lazily through open sunny spaces and shaded aisles sweet with that cool fragrance found only in the woods. The horse did not hurry, but wandered comfortably from side to side of the road, browsing where he chose. He seemed to know that lovers were driving him.

Horses versus Autos

"He's a one-armed horse, isn't he?" laughed Eloise. "I like him lots better than an automobile, don't you?"

"Out here, I do. But an automobile has certain advantages."

"What are they?" she demanded. "I'd rather feed a horse than to buy a tire, any day."

"So would I—unless he tired of his feed. But if you want to get anywhere very quickly and the thing happens not to break, the machine is better."

"But it never happens. I believe the average automobile is possessed of an intuition little short of devilish. A horse seems more friendly. If you were thinking of getting me a little electric runabout for my birthday, please change it to a horse."

"All right," returned Allan, serenely. "We can keep him in the living-room of our six-room apartment and have his dinner sent in from the nearest *table d'oat*.

For breakfast, he can come out into the *salle à manger* and eat cereals with us."

"You're absolutely incorrigible," she sighed. "This is the river road. Follow it until I tell you where to turn."

Within half an hour, the horse came to a full stop of his own accord in front of the grey, weather-worn house where Barbara lived. He was cropping at a particularly enticing clump of grass when Eloise alighted.

"Going to push?" queried Allan, lazily.

"No, this is the place. Come on. You bring two of the suit-cases and I'll take the other."

Observations

The blind man was not there at the moment, but came in while Miriam was upstairs packing Miss Wynne's recent additions to her wardrobe. Doctor Conrad had been observing Barbara keenly as they talked of indifferent things. Outwardly, he was calm and professional, but within, a warmly human impulse answered her evident need.

He was young and had not yet been at his work long enough to determine his ultimate nature. Later on, his profession would do to him one of two things. It would transform him into a mere machine, brutalised and calloused, with only one or two emotions aside from selfishness left to thrive in his dwarfed soul, or it would humanise him to godlike unselfishness, attune him to a divine sympathy, and mellow his heart in tenderness beyond words. In one instance he would be feared; in the other, only loved, by those who came to him.

As Barbara went across the room to another chair, his eyes followed her with intense interest. Eloise shrank from him a little—she had never seen him like this before. Yet she knew, from the expression of his face, that he had found hope, and was glad.

"Barbara?" It was Miriam, calling from upstairs.

"In just a minute, Aunty. Excuse me, please—I'll come right back."

She was scarcely out of the room before Eloise leaned over to Allan, her face alight with eager questioning. "You think—?"

Willing to Try

"I don't know," he returned, in a low tone. "It depends on the hardness of the muscles and several other local conditions. Of course it's impossible to tell definitely without a thorough examination, but I've done it successfully in two adult cases, and have seen it done more than a dozen times. I'd be very willing to try."

"Oh, Allan," whispered Eloise. "I'm so glad."

Barbara's padded crutches sounded softly on the stairs as she came down. Eloise went to the window and studied the horse attentively, though he was not of the restless sort that needs to be tied.

While she was watching, Ambrose North came around the base of the hill, crossed the road, and opened the gate. He had been to his old solitude at the top of the hill, where, as nowhere else, he found peace. While he was talking with the visitors, Miriam went out, taking the neatly-packed suit-cases, one at a time, and put them into the buggy.

"Mr. North," said Doctor Conrad, "while these girls are chattering, will you go for a little drive with me?"

The blind man's fine old face illumined with pleasure. "I should like it very much," he said. "It is a long time since I had have a drive."

"It's more like a walk," laughed Allan, as they went out, "with this horse."

"We sold our horses many years ago," the old man explained, as he climbed in. "Miriam is afraid of horses and Barbara said she did not care to go. I thought the open air and the slight exercise would be good for her, but she insisted upon my selling them."

About Barbara

"It is about Barbara that I wished to speak," said Allan. "With your consent, I should like to make a thorough examination and see whether an operation would not do away with her crutches entirely."

"It is no use," sighed North, wearily. "We went everywhere and did everything, long ago. There is nothing that can be done."

"But there may be," insisted Allan. "We have learned much, in my profession, in the last twenty years. May I try?"

"You're asking me if you can hurt my baby?"

"Not to hurt her more than is necessary to heal. Understand me, I do not know but what you are right, but I hope, and believe, that there may be a chance."

"I have dreamed sometimes," said the old man, very slowly, "that my baby could walk and I could see."

If Possible

"The dream shall come true, if it is possible. Let me see your eyes." He stopped the horse on the brow of the hill, where the sun shone clear and strong, stood up, and turned the blind face to the light. Then, sitting down once more, he asked innumerable questions. When he finally was silent, Ambrose North turned to him, indifferently.

"Well?" The tone was simply polite inquiry. The matter seemed to be one which concerned nobody.

"Again I do not know," returned Allan. "This is altogether out of my line, but, if you'll go to the city with me, I'll take you to a friend of mine who is a great specialist. If anything can be done, he is the man who can do it. Will you come?"

There was a long pause. "If Barbara is willing," he answered simply. "Ask her."

The Plunge

Meanwhile, Eloise was talking to Barbara. First, she told her of the letters she had written in her behalf and to which the answers might come any day now. Then she asked if she might order preserves from Aunt Miriam, and discussed patterns and material for the lingerie she had previously spoken of. Finding, at length, that the best way to approach a difficult subject was the straightest one, she took the plunge.

"Have you always been lame?" she asked. She did not look at Barbara, but tried to speak carelessly, as she gazed out of the window.

"Yes," came the answer, so low that she could scarcely hear it.

"Wouldn't you like to walk like the rest of us?" continued Eloise.

Barbara writhed under the torturing question. "My mind can walk," she said, with difficulty; "my soul isn't lame."

The tone made Eloise turn quickly—and hate herself bitterly for her awkwardness. She saw that an apology would only make a bad matter worse, so she went straight on.

"Doctor Conrad is very skilful," she continued. "In the city, he is one of the few really great surgeons. He told me that he would like to make an examination and see if an operation would not do away with the crutches. He thinks there may be a good chance. If there is, will you take it?"

"Thank you," said Barbara, almost inaudibly. Her voice had sunk to a whisper and she was very pale. "I do not mean to seem ungrateful, but it is impossible."

"Impossible!" repeated Eloise. "Why?"

"Because of father," explained Barbara. Her colour was coming back slowly now. "I am all he has, my work supplies his needs, and I dare not take the risk."

"Is that the only reason?"

Barbara nodded.

"You're not afraid?"

Barbara's blue eyes opened wide with astonishment. "Why should I be afraid?" she asked. "Do you take me for a coward?"

Eloise knelt beside Barbara's low chair and put her strong arms around the slender, white-clad figure. "Listen, dear," she said. Her face was shining as though with some great inner light.

"My own dear father died when I was a child. My mother died when I was born. I have never had anything but money. I have never had anyone to take care of, no one to make sacrifices for, no one to make me strong because I was needed. If the worst should happen, would you trust your father to me? Could

you trust me?"

"Yes," said Barbara slowly; "I could."

A Compact

"Then I promise you solemnly that your father shall never want for anything while he lives. And now, if there is a chance, will you take it—for me?"

Barbara looked long into the sweet face, glorified by the inner light. Then she leaned forward and put her soft arms around the older woman, hiding her face in the masses of copper-coloured hair.

"For you? A thousand times, yes," she sobbed. "Oh, anything for you!"

Late in the afternoon, when Ambrose North and Barbara were alone again, he came over to her chair and stroked her shining hair with a loving hand.

"Did they tell you, dear?" he asked.

"Yes," whispered Barbara.

"I have dreamed so often that my baby could walk and I could see. He said that the dream should come true if he could make it so."

"Did he say anything about your eyes?" asked Barbara, in astonishment.

"Yes. He thinks there may be a chance there, too. If you are willing, I am to go to the city with him sometime and see a friend of his who is a great specialist."

"Oh, Daddy," cried Barbara. "I'm afraid—for you."

He drew a chair up near hers and sat down. The old hand, in which the pulses moved so slowly, clasped the younger one, warm with life.

"Barbara," he said; "I have never seen my baby."

"I know, Daddy."

"I want to see you, dear."

"And I want you to."

"Then, will you let me go?"

"Perhaps, but it must be—afterward, you know."

"Why?"

"Because, when you see me, I want to be strong and well. I want to be able to walk. You mustn't see the crutches, Daddy—they are ugly things."

"Nothing could be ugly that belongs to you. I made a little song this afternoon, while you and Miriam were talking and I was out alone."

"Tell me."

"Once there was a man who had a garden. When he was a child he had played in it, in his youth and early manhood he had worked in it and found pleasure in seeing things grow, but he did not really know what a beautiful garden it was until another walked in it with him and found it fair.

"Together they watched it from Springtime to harvest, finding new beauty in it every day. One night at twilight she whispered to him that some day a perfect flower of their very own was to bloom in the garden. They watched and waited

and prayed for it together, but, before it blossomed, the man went blind.

"In the darkness, he could not see the garden, but she was still there, bringing divine consolation with her touch, and whispering to him always of the perfect flower so soon to be their own.

"When it blossomed, the man could not see it, but the one who walked beside him told him that it was as pure and fair as they had prayed it might be. They enjoyed it together for a year, and he saw it through her eyes.

"Then she went to God's Garden, and he was left desolate and alone. He cared for nothing and for a time even forgot the flower that she had left. Weeds grew among the flowers, nettles and thistles took possession of the walks, and strange vines choked with their tendrils everything that dared to bloom.

A Perfect Flower

"One day, he went out into the intolerable loneliness and desolation, and, groping blindly, he found among the nettles and thistles and weeds the one perfect white blossom. It was cool and soft to his hot hand, it was exquisitely fragrant, and, more than all, it was part of her. Gradually, it eased his pain. He took out the weeds and thistles as best he could, but there was little he could do, for he had left it too long.

"The years went by, but the flower did not fade. Seeking, he always found it; weary, it always refreshed him; starving, it fed his soul. Blind, it gave him sight; weak, it gave him courage; hurt, it brought him balm. At last he lived only because of it, for, in some mysterious way, it seemed to need him, too, and sometimes it even seemed divinely to restore the lost.

"Flower of the Dusk," he said, leaning to Barbara; "what should I have been without you? How could I have borne it all?"

Strength for the Burden

"God suits the burden to the bearer, I think," she answered, softly. "If you have much to bear, it is because you are strong enough to do it nobly and well. Only the weak are allowed to shirk, and shift their load to the shoulders of the strong."

"I know, but, Barbara—suppose——"

"There is nothing to suppose, Daddy. Whatever happened would be the best that could happen. I'm not afraid."

Her voice rang clear and strong. Insensibly, he caught some of her own fine courage and his soul rallied greatly to meet hers. From her height she had summoned him as with a bugle-call, and he had answered.

"The ways of the Everlasting are not our ways," he said, "but I will not be afraid. No, I will not let myself be afraid."

X

In the Garden

A Summer Evening

The subtle, far-reaching fragrance of a Summer night came through the open window. A cool wind from the hills had set the maple branches to murmuring and hushed the incoming tide as it swept up to the waiting shore. Out in the illimitable darkness of the East, grey surges throbbed like the beating of a troubled heart, but the shore knew only the drowsy croon of a sea that has gone to sleep.

Golden lilies swung their censers softly, and the exquisite incense perfumed the dusk. Fairy lamp-bearers starred the night with glimmering radiance, faintly seen afar. A cricket chirped just outside the window and a ghostly white moth circled around the evening lamp.

Roger sat by the table, with Keats's letters to his beloved Fanny open before him. The letter to Constance, so strangely brought back after all the intervening years, lay beside the book. The ink was faded and the paper was yellow, but his father's love, for a woman not his mother, stared the son full in the face and was not to be denied.

Was this all, or—? His thought refused to go further. Constance North had died, by her own hand, four days after the letter was written. What might not have happened in four days? In one day, Columbus found a world. In another, electricity was discovered. In one day, one hour, even, some immeasurable force moving according to unseen law might sway the sun and set all the stars to reeling madly through the unutterable midnights of the universe. And in four days? Ah, what had happened in those four days?

A Recurring Question

The question had haunted him since the night he read the letter, when he was reading to Barbara and had unwittingly come upon it. Constance was dead and Laurence Austin was dead, but their love lived on. The grave was closed against

it, and in neither heaven nor hell could it find an abiding-place. Ghostly and forbidding, it had sent Constance to haunt Miriam's troubled sleep, it had filled Ambrose North's soul with cruel doubt and foreboding, and had now come back to Roger and Barbara, to ask eternal questions of the one, and stir the heart of the other to new depths of pain.

He had not seen Barbara since that night and she had sent no message. No beacon light in the window across the way said "come." The sword that had lain, keen-edged and cruel, between Constance and her lover, had, by a single swift stroke, changed everything between her daughter and his son.

Not that Barbara herself was less beautiful or less dear. Roger had missed her more than he realised. When her lovely, changing face had come between his eyes and the musty pages of his law books, while the disturbing Bascom pup cavorted merrily around the office, unheard and unheeded, Roger had ascribed it to the letter that had forced them apart.

The woollen slippers muffled Miss Mattie's step so that Roger did not hear her enter the room. Preoccupied and absorbed, he was staring vacantly out of the window, when a strong, capable hand swooped down beside him, gathering up the book and the letter.

Tremendous Power

"I don't know what it is about your readin', Roger," complained his mother, "that makes you blind and deaf and dumb and practically paralysed. Your pa was the same way. Reckon I'll read a piece myself and see what it is that's so affectin'. It ain't a very big book, but it seems to have tremendous power."

She sat down and began to read aloud, in a curiously unsympathetic voice which grated abominably upon her unwilling listener:

"'Ask yourself, my Love, whether you are not very cruel to have so entrammelled me, so destroyed my freedom. Will you confess this in the letter you must write immediately and do all you can to console me in it—make it rich as a draught of poppies to intoxicate me—write the softest words and kiss them, that I may at least touch my lips where yours have been. For myself, I know not how to express my devotion to so fair a form; I want a brighter word than bright,

a fairer word than fair. I almost wish we were butterflies and lived but three summer days—three such days with you I could fill with more delight than fifty common years could ever contain.'

"Ain't that wonderful, Roger? Wants to get drunk on poppies and kiss the writin' and thinks after that he'll be made into a butterfly. Your pa couldn't have been far from bein' a butterfly when he bought this book. There ain't no sense in it. And this—why, it's your pa's writin', Roger! I ain't seen it for years."

Miss Mattie leaned forward in her chair and brought the letter to Constance close to the light. She read it through, calmly, without haste or excitement. Roger's hands gripped the arms of his chair and his face turned ashen. His whole body was tense.

A Moment's Pain

Then, as swiftly as it had come, the moment passed. Miss Mattie took off her spectacles and leaned back in her chair with great weariness evident in every line of her figure.

Crazy as a Loon

"Roger," she said, sadly, "there's no use in tryin' to conceal it from you any longer. Your pa was crazy—as crazy as a loon. What with buyin' books so steady and readin' of 'em so continual, his mind got unhinged. I've always suspected it, and now I know.

"Your pa gets this book, and reads all this stuff that's been written about 'Fanny,' and he don't see no reason why he shouldn't duplicate it and maybe get it printed. I knew he set great store by books, but it comes to me as a shock that he was allowin' to write 'em. Some of the time he sees he's crazy himself. Didn't you see, there where he says, 'I hope you do not blame me because I went mad'? 'Mad' is the refined word for crazy.

"Then he goes on about eatin' husks and bein' starved. That's what I told him when he insisted on havin' oatmeal cooked for his breakfast every mornin'. I told him humans couldn't expect to live on horse-feed, but, la sakes! He never paid no attention to me. I could set and talk by the hour just as I'm talkin' to you and he wasn't listenin' any more'n you be."

"I am listening, Mother," he assured her, in a forced voice. He could not say

with what joyful relief.

"Maybe," she went on, "I'd 'a' been more gentle with your pa if I'd realised just what condition his mind was in. There's a book in the attic full of just such writin' as this. I found it once when I was cleaning, but I never paid no more attention to it. I surmised it was somethin' he was copyin' out of another book that he'd borrowed from the minister, but I see now. The Lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. If I'd 'a' knowed what it was then, maybe I couldn't have bore it as I can now."

Seizing his opportunity, Roger put the book and the letter aside. Miss Mattie slipped out of its wrapper the paper which Roger had brought to her from the post-office that same night, and began to read. Roger sat back in his chair with his eyes closed, meditating upon the theory of Chance, and wondering if, after all, there was a single controlling purpose behind the extraordinary things that happened.

Inner Turmoil

Miss Mattie wiped her spectacles twice and changed her position three times. Then she got another chair and moved the lamp closer. At last she clucked sharply with her false teeth—always the outward evidence of inner turmoil or displeasure.

"What's the matter, Mother?"

"I can't see with these glasses," she said, fretfully. "I can see a lot better without 'em than I can with 'em."

"Have you wiped them?"

"Yes, I've wiped 'em till it's a wonder the polish ain't all wore off the glass."

"Put them up close to your eyes instead of wearing them so far down on your nose."

"I've tried that, but the closer they get to my eyes, the more I can't see. The further away they are, the better 't is. When I have 'em off, I can see pretty good."

"Then why don't you take them off?"

"That sounds just like your pa. Do you suppose, after payin' seven dollars and ninety cents for these glasses, and more'n twice as much for my gold-bowed ones, that I ain't goin' to use 'em and get the benefit of 'em? Your pa never had no notion of economy. They're just as good as they ever was, and I reckon I'll wear 'em out, if I live."

"But, Mother, your eyes may have changed. They probably have."

Miss Mattie's Eyes

Miss Mattie went to the kitchen and brought back a small, cracked mirror. She studied the offending orbs by the light, very carefully, both with and without her spectacles.

"No, they ain't," she announced, finally. "They're the same size and shape and colour that they've always been, and the specs are the same. Your pa bought 'em for me soon after you commenced readin' out of a reader, and they're just as good as they ever was. It must be the oil. I've noticed that it gets poorer every time the price goes up." She pushed the paper aside with a sigh. "I was readin' such a nice story, too."

"Shan't I read it to you, Mother?"

"Why, I don't know. Do you want to?"

"Surely, if you want me to."

"Then you'd better begin a new story, because I'm more'n half-way through this one."

"I'll begin right where you left off, Mother. It doesn't make a particle of difference to me."

"But you won't get the sense of it. I'd like for you to enjoy it while you're readin'."

"Don't worry about my enjoying it—you know I've always been fond of books. If there's anything I don't understand, I can ask you."

"All right. Begin right here in *True Gold, or Pretty Crystal's Love*. This is the place: 'With a terrible scream, Crystal sprang toward the fire escape, carrying her mother and her little sister in her arms.'"

Two Sighs

For nearly two hours, Roger read, in a deep, mellow voice, of the adventures of poor, persecuted Crystal, who was only sixteen, and engaged to a floor-walker in 'one of the great city's finest emporiums of trade.' He and his mother both sighed when he came to the end of the installment, but for vastly different reasons.

"Ain't it lovely, Roger?"

"It's what you might call 'different,'" he temporised, with a smile.

"Just think of that poor little thing havin' her house set afire by a rival suitor just after she had paid off the mortgage by savin' out of her week's wages! Do you suppose he will ever win her?"

"I shouldn't think it likely."

"No, you wouldn't, but the endin' of those stories is always what you wouldn't expect. It's what makes 'em so interestin' and, as you say, 'different.'"

Roger did not answer. He merely yawned and tapped impatiently on the table with his fingers.

Nine o'Clock

"What time is it?" she asked, adjusting her spectacles carefully upon the ever-useful and unfailing wart.

"A little after nine."

"Sakes alive! It's time I was abed. I've got to get up early in the mornin' and set my bread. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mother."

"Don't set up long. Oil is terrible high."

"All right, Mother."

Miss Mattie went upstairs and closed her door with a resounding bang. Roger heard her strike a match on a bit of sandpaper tacked on the wall near the match-safe, and close the green blinds that served the purpose of the more modern

window-shades. Soon, a deep, regular sound suggestive of comfortable slumber echoed and re-echoed overhead. Then, and then only, he dared to go out.

A Light in the Window

He sat on the narrow front porch for a few minutes, deeply breathing the cool air and enjoying the beauty of the night. Across the way, the little grey house seemed lonely and forlorn. The upper windows were dark, but downstairs Barbara's lamp still shone.

"Sewing, probably," mused Roger. "Poor little thing."

As he watched, the lamp was put out. Then a white shadow moved painfully toward the window, bent, and struck a match. Star-like, Barbara's signal-light flamed out into the gloom, with its eager message.

"She wants me," he said to himself. The joy was inextricably mingled with pain. "She wants me," he thought, "and I must not go."

"Why?" asked his heart, and his conscience replied, miserably, "Because."

For ten or fifteen minutes he argued with himself, vainly. Every objection that came forward was reasoned down by a trained mind, versed in the intricacies of the law. The deprivations of the fathers need not always descend unto the children. At last he went over, wondering whether his father had not more than once, and at the same hour, taken the same path.

Two Hours of Life

Barbara was out in the garden, dreaming. For the first time in years, when she had work to do, she had laid it aside before eleven o'clock. But, in two hours, she could have made little progress with her embroidery, and she chose to take for herself two hours of life, out of what might prove to be the last night she had to live.

When Roger opened the gate, Barbara took her crutches and rose out of her low chair.

"Don't," he said. "I'm coming to you."

She had brought out another chair, with great difficulty, in anticipation of his coming. Her own was near the moonflower that climbed over the tiny veranda

and was now in full bloom. The white, half-open trumpets, delicately fragrant, had more than once reminded him of Barbara herself.

"What a brute I'd be," thought Roger, with a pang, "if I had disappointed her."

"I'm so glad," said Barbara, giving him a cool, soft little hand. "I began to be afraid you couldn't come."

"I couldn't, just at first, but afterward it was all right. How are you?"

"I'm well, thank you, but I'm going to be made better to-morrow. That's why I wanted to see you to-night—it may be for the last time."

Her words struck him with chill foreboding. "What do you mean?"

"To-morrow, some doctors are coming down from the city, with two nurses and a few other things. They're going to see if I can't do without these." She indicated the crutches with an inclination of her golden head.

"Barbara," he gasped. "You mustn't. It's impossible."

"Nothing is impossible any more," she returned, serenely.

"That isn't what I meant. You mustn't be hurt."

"I'm not going to be hurt—much. It's all to be done while I'm asleep. Miss Wynne, a lady from the hotel, brought Doctor Conrad to see me. Afterward, he came again by himself, and he says he is very sure that it will come out all right. And when I'm straight and strong and can walk, he's going to try to have father made to see. A fairy godmother came in and waved her wand," went on Barbara, lightly, "and the poor became rich at once. Now the lame are to walk and the blind to see. Is it not a wonderful world?"

"Barbara!" cried Roger; "I can't bear it. I don't want you changed—I want you just as you are."

"Such impediments as are placed in the path of progress!" she returned. Her eyes were laughing, but her voice had in it a little note of tenderness. "Will you do something for me?"

"Anything—everything."

"It's only this," said Barbara, gently. "If it should turn out the other way, will you keep father from being lonely? Miss Wynne has promised that he shall never want for anything, and, at the most, it couldn't be long until he was with me again, but, in the meantime, would you, Roger? Would you try to take my place?"

"Nobody in the world could ever take your place, but I'd try—God knows I'd try. Barbara, I couldn't bear it, if——"

"Hush. There isn't any 'if.' It's all coming right to-morrow."

The full moon had swung slowly up out of the sea, and the misty, silvery light touched Barbara lovingly. Her slender hands, crossed in her lap, seemed like those of a little child. Her deep blue eyes were lovelier than ever in the enchanted light—they had the calmness of deep waters at dawn, untroubled by wind or tide. Around her face her golden hair shimmered and shone like a halo. She had the unearthly beauty of a saint.

"Afterward?" he asked, with a little choke in his voice.

"I'll be in plaster for a long time, and, after that, I'll have to learn to walk."

"And then?"

"Work," she said, joyously. "Think of having all the rest of your life to work in, with no crutches! And if Daddy can see me—" she stopped, but he caught the wistfulness in her tone. "The first thing," she continued, "I'm going down to the sea. I have a fancy to go alone."

"Have you never been?"

"I've never been outside this house and garden but once or twice. Have you forgotten?"

All the things he might have done came to Roger, remorsefully, and too late. He might have taken Barbara out for a drive almost any time during the last eight years. She could have been lifted into a low carriage easily enough and she had never even been to the sea. A swift, pitying tenderness made his heart ache.

"Nobody ever thought of it," said Barbara, soothingly, as though she had read

his thought, "and, besides, I've been too busy, except Sundays. But sometimes, when I've heard the shore singing as the tide came in, and seen the gulls fly past my window, and smelled the salt mist—oh, I've wanted it so."

"I'd have taken you, if I hadn't been such a brute as to forget."

More than the Sea

"You've brought me more than the sea, Roger. Think of all the books you've carried back and forth so patiently all these years. You've done more for me than anybody in the world, in some ways. You've given me the magic carpet of the *Arabian Nights*, only it was a book, instead of a rug. Through your kindness, I've travelled over most of the world, I've met many of the really great people face to face, I've lived in all ages and all countries, and I've learned to know the world as it is now. What more could one person do for another than you have done for me?"

"Barbara?" It was Miriam's voice, calling softly from an upper window. "You mustn't stay up late. Remember to-morrow."

"All right, Aunty." Her answer carried with it no hint of impatience. "I forgot that we weren't in the house," she added, to Roger, in a low tone.

"Must I go?" To-night, for some reason, he could not bear even the thought of leaving her.

"Not just yet. I've been thinking," she continued, in a swift whisper, "about my mother and—your father. Of course we can't understand—we only know that they cared. And, in a way, it makes you and me something like brother and sister, doesn't it?"

"Perhaps it does. I hadn't thought of that."

The Barrier Broken

All at once, the barrier that seemed to have been between them crashed down and was forgotten. Mysteriously, Roger was very sure that those four days had held no wrong—no betrayal of another's trust. His father would not have done anything which was not absolutely right. The thought made him straighten himself proudly. And the mother of the girl who leaned toward him, with her beautiful soul shining in her deep eyes, could have been nothing less than an

angel.

"To-morrow"—began Roger.

"To-morrow is Mine"

"To-morrow was made for me. God is giving me a day to be made straight in. To-morrow is mine, but—will you come and stay with father? Keep him away from the house and with you, until—afterward?"

"I will, gladly."

Barbara rose and Roger picked up her crutches. "You'll never have to do that for me again," she said, as she took them, "but there'll be lots of other things. Will you take in the chairs, please?"

A lump was in his throat and he could not speak. When he came out, after having made a brief but valiant effort to recover his self-control, Barbara was standing at the foot of the steps, leaning on her crutches, with the moon shining full upon her face.

Roger went to her. "Barbara," he said, huskily, "my father loved your mother. For the sake of that, and for to-morrow, will you kiss me to-night?"

Smiling, Barbara lifted her face and gave him her lips as simply and sweetly as a child. "Good-night," she said, softly, but he could not answer, for, at the touch, the white fire burned in his blood and the white magic of life's Maytime went, singing, through his soul.

XI

Barbara's "To-morrow"

The shimmering white silence of noon lay upon the land. Bees hummed in the clover, gorgeous butterflies floated drowsily over the meadows, and far in the blue distance a meadow-lark scattered his golden notes like rain upon the fields.

A Cold Shadow

The world teemed with life, and yet a cold shadow, as of approaching death, darkened the souls of two who walked together in the dusty road that led from the hills to the sea. The old man leaned heavily upon the arm of the younger, and his footsteps faltered. The young man's face was white and he saw dimly, as through a mist, but he tried to keep his voice even.

From the open windows of the little grey house came the deadly sweet smell of anæsthetics, heavy with prescience and pain. It dominated, instantly, all the blended Summer fragrances and brought terror to them both.

"I cannot bear it," said Ambrose North, miserably. "I cannot bear to have my baby hurt."

"She isn't being hurt now," answered Roger, with dry lips. "She's asleep."

"It may be the sleep that knows no waking. If you loved Barbara, you would understand."

The boy's senses, exquisitely alive and quivering, merged suddenly into one unspeakable hurt. If he loved Barbara! Ah, did he not love her? What of last night, when he walked up and down in that selfsame road until dawn, alone with the wonder and fear and joy of it, and unutterably dreading the to-morrow that had so swiftly become to-day.

"I was a fool," muttered Ambrose North. "I was a fool to give my consent."

"It was her choice," the boy reminded him, "and when she walks——"

"When she walks, it may be in the City Not Made With Hands. If I had said

'no,' we should not be out here now, while she—" The tears streamed over his wrinkled cheeks and his bowed shoulders shook.

All for the Best

"Don't," pleaded Roger. "It's all for the best—it must be all for the best."

Neither of them saw Eloise approaching as she came up the road from the hotel. She was in white, as usual, bareheaded, and she carried a white linen parasol. She went to them, calling out brightly, "Good morning!"

"Who is it?" asked the old man.

"It must be Miss Wynne, I think."

"What is it?" inquired Eloise, when she joined them. "What is the matter?"

The blind man could not speak, but he pointed toward the house with a shaking hand.

"It's Barbara, you know," said Roger. "They're in there—cutting her." The last words were almost a whisper.

Allan is There

"But you mustn't worry," cried Eloise. "Nothing can go wrong. Why, Allan is there."

Insensibly her confidence in Allan and the clear ring of her voice relieved the unbearable tension. Surely, Barbara could not die if Allan were there.

"It's hard, I know," Eloise went on, in her cool, even tones, "but there is no doubt about the ending. Allan is one of the few really great surgeons—he has done wonderful things. He has done things that everyone else said were impossible. Barbara will walk and be as straight and strong as any of us. Think what it will mean to her after twenty years of helplessness. How fine it will be to see her without the crutches."

"I have never minded the crutches," said Roger. "I do not want her changed."

"I cannot see her," sighed Ambrose North. "I have never seen my baby."

"But you're going to," Eloise assured him, "for Allan says so, and whatever

Allan says is true."

At length, she managed to lead them farther away, though not out of sight of the house, and they all sat down on the grass. She talked continually and cheerfully, but the atmosphere was tense with waiting. Ambrose North bowed his grey head in his hands, and Roger, still pale, did not once take his eyes from the door of the little grey house.

After what seemed an eternity, someone came out. It was one of Allan's assistants. A nurse followed, and put a black bag into the buggy which was waiting outside. Roger was on his feet instantly, watching.

"Sit down," commanded Eloise, coolly. "Allan can see us from here, and he will come and tell us."

Ambrose North lifted his grey head. "Have they—finished—with her?"

"I don't know," returned Eloise. "Be patient just a little longer, please do."

All Right

Outwardly she was calm, but, none the less, a great sob of relief almost choked her when Doctor Conrad came across the road to them, swinging his black bag, and called out, in a voice high with hope, "All right!"

The sky was a wonderful blue, but the colour of the sea was deeper still. The vast reaches of sand were as white as the blown snow, and the Tower of Cologne had never been so fair as it was to-day. The sun shone brightly on the clear glass arches that made the cupola, and the golden bells swayed back and forth silently.

The Changed Tower

Barbara was trying to climb up to the cupola, but her feet were weary and she paused often to rest. The rooms that opened off from the various landings of the winding stairway were lovelier than ever. The furnishings had been changed since she was last there, and each room was made to represent a different flower.

There was a rose room, all in pink and green, a pond-lily room in green and white, a violet room in green and lavender, and a gorgeous suite of rooms which

someway seemed like a great bouquet of nasturtiums. But, strangely, there was no fragrance of cologne in the Tower. The bottles were all on the mantels, as usual, but Barbara could not open any of them. Instead, there was a heavy, sweet, sickening smell from which she could not escape, though she went continually from room to room. It followed her like some evil thing that threatened to overpower her.

The Boy who had always been beside her, and whose face she could not see, was still in the Tower, but he was far away, with his back toward her. He seemed to be suffering and Barbara tried to get to him to comfort him, but some unforeseen obstacle inevitably loomed up in her path.

People in the Tower

There were many people in the Tower, and most of them were old friends, but there were some new faces. Her father was there, of course, and all the brave knights and lovely ladies of whom she had read in her books. Miss Wynne was there and she had never been in the Tower before, but Barbara smiled at her and was glad, though she wished they might have had cologne instead of the sickening smell which grew more deadly every minute.

A grave, silent young man whose demeanour was oddly at variance with his red hair was there also. He had just come and it seemed that he was a doctor. Barbara had heard his name but could not remember it. There were also two young women in blue and white striped uniforms which were very neat and becoming. They wore white caps and smiled at Barbara. She had heard their names, too, but she had forgotten.

None of them seemed to mind the heavy odour which oppressed her so. She opened the windows in the Tower and the cool air came in from the blue sea, but it changed nothing.

"Come, Boy," she called across the intervening mist. "Let's go up to the cupola and ring all the golden bells."

He did not seem to hear, so she called again, and again, but there was no response. It was the first time he had failed to answer her, and it made her angry.

"Then," cried Barbara, shrilly, "if you don't want to come, you needn't, so there. But I'm going. Do you hear? I'm going. I'm going up to ring those bells if I have to go alone."

Still, the Boy did not answer, and Barbara, her heart warm with resentment, began to climb the winding stairs. She did not hurry, for pictures of castles, towers, and beautiful ladies were woven in the tapestry that lined the walls.

She came, at last, to the highest landing. There was only one short flight between her and the cupola. The clear glass arches were dazzling in the sun and the golden bells swayed temptingly. But a blinding, overwhelming fog drifted in from the sea, and she was afraid to move by so much as a step. She turned to go back, and fell, down—down—down—into what seemed eternity.

The Clouds Lift

Before long, the cloud began to lift. She could see a vague suggestion of blue and white through it now. The man with the red hair was talking, loudly and unconcernedly, to a tall man beside him whose face was obscured by the mist. The voices beat upon Barbara's ears with physical pain. She tried to speak, to ask them to stop, but the words would not come. Then she raised her hand, weakly, and silence came upon the room.

Out of the fog rose Doctor Allan Conrad. He was tired and there was a strained look about his eyes, but he smiled encouragingly. He leaned over her and she smiled, very faintly, back at him.

"Brave little girl," he said. "It's all right now. All we ever hoped for is coming very soon." Then he went out, and she closed her eyes. When she was again conscious of her surroundings, it was the next day, but she thought she had been asleep only a few minutes.

At first there was numbness of mind and body. Then, with every heart-beat and throb by throb, came unbearable agony. A trembling old hand strayed across her face and her father's voice, deep with love and longing, whispered: "Barbara, my darling! Does it hurt you now?"

"Just a little, Daddy, but it won't last long. I'll be better very soon."

One of the blue and white nurses came to her and said, gently, "Is it very bad, Miss North?"

Intense Pain

"Pretty bad," she gasped. Then she tried to smile, but her white lips quivered

piteously. The woman with the kind, calm face came back with a shining bit of silver in her hand. There was a sharp stab in Barbara's arm, and then, with incredible quickness, peace.

"What was it?" she asked, wondering.

"Poppies," answered the nurse. "They bring forgetfulness."

"Barbara," said the old man, sadly, "I wish I could help you bear it——"

"So you can, Daddy."

"But how?"

"Don't be afraid for me—it's coming out all right. And make me a little song."

"I couldn't—to-day."

"There is always a song," she reminded him. "Think how many times you have said to me, 'Always make a song, Barbara, no matter what comes.'"

The old man stirred uneasily in his chair. "What about, dear?"

"About the sea."

"The sea is so vast that it reaches around the world," he began, hesitatingly. "It sings upon the shore of every land, from the regions of perpetual ice and snow to the far tropic islands, where the sun forever shines. As it lies under the palms, all blue and silver, crooning so softly that you can scarcely hear it, you would not think it was the same sea that yesterday was raging upon an ice-bound shore.

"If you listen to its ever-changing music you can hear almost anything you please, for the sea goes everywhere. Ask, and the sea shall sing to you of the frozen north where half the year is darkness and the impassable waste of waters sweeps across the pole. Ask, and you shall hear of the distant islands, where there has never been snow, and the tide may even bring to you a bough of olive or a leaf of palm.

"Ask, and the sea will give you red and white coral, queer shells, mystically filled with its own weird music, and treasures of fairy-like lace-work and bloom. It will sing to you of cool, green caves where the waves creep sleepily up to the rocks and drift out drowsily with the ebb of the tide.

"It will sing of grey waves changing to foam in the path of the wind, and bring you the cry of the white gulls that speed ahead of the storm. It will sing to you of mermen and mermaids, chanting their own melodies to the accompaniment of harps with golden strings. Listen, and you shall hear the songs of many lands, merged into one by the sea that unites them all.

"It bears upon its breast the great white ships that carry messages from one land to another. Silks and spices and pearls are taken from place to place along the vast highways of the sea. And if, sometimes, in a blinding tumult of terror and despair, the men and ships go down, the sea, remorsefully, brings back the broken spars, and, at last, gives up the dead.

The Dominant Chord

"Yet it is always beautiful, whether you see it grey or blue; whether it is mad with rage or moaning with pain, or only crooning a lullaby as the world goes to sleep. And in all the wonderful music there is one dominant chord, for the song of the sea, as of the world, is Love.

"Long ago, Barbara—so long ago that it is written in only the very oldest books, Love was born in the foam of the sea and came to dwell upon the shore. And so the sea, singing forever of Love, creeps around the world upon an unending quest. When the tide sweeps in with the cold grey waves, foam-crested, or in shining sapphire surges that break into pearls, it is only the sea searching eagerly for the lost. So the loneliness and the beauty, the longing and the pain, belong to Love as to the sea."

"Oh, Daddy," breathed Barbara, "I want it so."

"What, dear? The sea?"

"Yes. The music and the colour and the vastness of it. I can hardly wait until I can go."

There was a long silence. "Why didn't you tell me?" asked the old man. "There would have been some way, if I had only known."

"I don't know, Daddy. I think I've been waiting for this way, for it's the best way, after all. When I can walk and you can see, we'll go down together, shall we?"

"Yes, dear, surely."

"You must help me be patient, Daddy. It will be so hard for me to lie here, doing nothing."

"I wish I could read to you."

"You can talk to me, and that's better. Roger will come over some day and read to me, when he has time."

"He was with me yesterday, while——"

"I know," she answered, softly. "I asked him. I thought it would make it easier for you."

Father and Daughter

"My baby! You thought of your old father even then?"

"I'm always thinking of you, Daddy, because you and I are all each other has got. That sounds queer, but you know what I mean."

The calm, strong young woman in blue and white came back into the room. "She mustn't talk," she said, to the blind man. "To-morrow, perhaps. Come away now."

"Don't take him away from me," pleaded Barbara. "We'll be very good and not say a single word, won't we?"

"Not a word," he answered, "if it isn't best."

Peaceful Sleep

The afternoon wore away to sunset, the shadows grew long, and Barbara lay quietly, with her little hand in his. Long lines of light came over the hills and brought into the room some subtle suggestion of colour. Gradually, the pain came back, so keenly that it was not to be borne, and the kind woman with the bit of silver in her hand leaned over the bed once more. Quickly, the poppies brought their divine gift of peace again. And so, Barbara slept.

Then Ambrose North gently loosened the still fingers that were interlaced with his, bent over, and, so gently as not to waken her, took her boy-lover's kiss from her lips.

XII

Miriam

Miriam moved about the house, silently, as always. She had assumed the extra burden of Barbara's helplessness as she assumed everything—without comment, and with outward calm.

Joy and Duty

Only her dark eyes, that burned and glittered so strangely, gave hint of the restlessness within. She served Ambrose North with steadfast and unfailing devotion; she waited upon Barbara mechanically, but readily. An observer could not have detected any real difference in her bearing toward the two, yet the service of one was a joy, the other a duty.

After the first week the nurse who had remained with Barbara had gone back to the city. In this short time, Miriam had learned much from her. She knew how to change a sheet without disturbing the patient very much; she could give Barbara both food and drink as she lay flat upon her back, and ease her aching body a little in spite of the plaster cast.

Ambrose North restlessly haunted the house and refused to leave Barbara's bedside unless she was asleep. Often she feigned slumber to give him opportunity to go outdoors for the exercise he was accustomed to taking. And so the life of the household moved along in its usual channels.

A Living Image

As she lay helpless, with her pretty colour gone and the great braids of golden hair hanging down on either side, Barbara looked more like her dead mother than ever. Suffering had brought maturity to her face and sometimes even Miriam was startled by the resemblance. One day Barbara had asked, thoughtfully, "Aunty, do I look like my mother?" And Miriam had answered, harshly, "You're the living image of her, if you want to know."

Miriam repeatedly told herself that Constance had wronged her—that

Ambrose North had belonged to her until the younger girl came from school with her pretty, laughing ways. He had never had eyes for Miriam after he had once seen Constance, and, in an incredibly short time, they had been married.

Miriam had been forced to stand by and see it; she had made dainty garments for Constance's trousseau, and had even been obliged to serve as maid of honour at the wedding. She had seen, day by day, the man's love increase and the girl's fancy wane, and, after his blindness came upon him, Constance would often have been cruelly thoughtless had not Miriam sternly held her to her own ideal of wifely duty.

Now, when she had taken a mother's place to Barbara, and worked for the blind man as his wife would never have dreamed of doing, she saw the faithless one worshipped almost as a household god. The power to disillusionise North lay in her hands—of that she was very sure. What if she should come to him some day with the letter Constance had left for another man and which she had never delivered? What if she should open it, at his bidding, and read him the burning sentences Constance had written to another during her last hour on earth? Knowing, beyond doubt, that Constance was faithless, would he at last turn to the woman he had deserted for the sake of a pretty face? The question racked Miriam by night and by day.

And, as always, the dead Constance, mute, accusing, bitterly reproachful, haunted her dreams. Her fear of it became an obsession. As Barbara grew daily more to resemble her mother, Miriam's position became increasingly difficult and complex.

Sometimes she waited outside the door until she could summon courage to go in to Barbara, who lay, helpless, in the very room where her mother had died. Miriam never entered without seeing upon the dressing table those two envelopes, one addressed to Ambrose North and one to herself. Her own envelope was bulky, since it contained two letters beside the short note which might have been read to anybody. These two, with seals unbroken, were safely put away in Miriam's room.

One was addressed to Laurence Austin. Miriam continually told herself that it was impossible for her to deliver it—that the person to whom it was addressed was dead. She tried persistently to forget the five years that had intervened

between Constance's death and his. For five years, he had lived almost directly across the street and Miriam saw him daily. Yet she had not given him the letter, though the vision of Constance, dumbly pleading for some boon, had distressed her almost every night until Laurence Austin died.

After that, there had been peace—but only for a little while. Constance still came, though intermittently, and reproached Miriam for betraying her trust.

The One Betrayal

As Barbara's twenty-second birthday approached, Miriam sometimes wondered whether Constance would not cease to haunt her after the other letter was delivered. She had been faithful in all things but one—surely she might be forgiven the one betrayal. The envelope was addressed, in a clear, unfaltering hand: "To My Daughter Barbara. To be opened upon her twenty-second birthday." In her brief note to Miriam, Constance had asked her to destroy it unopened if Barbara should not live until the appointed day.

She had said nothing, however, about the other letter—had not even alluded to its existence. Yet there it was, apparently written upon a single sheet of paper and enclosed in an envelope firmly sealed with wax. The monogram, made of the interlaced initials "C.N.," still lingered upon the seal. For twenty years and more the letter had waited, unread, and the hands that once would eagerly have torn it open were long since made one with the all-hiding, all-absolving dust.

At Supper

At supper, Ambrose North still had his fine linen and his Satsuma cup. Miriam sat at the other end, where the coarse cloth and the heavy dishes were. She used the fine china for Barbara, also, washing it carefully six times every day.

The blind man ate little, for he was lonely without the consciousness that Barbara sat, smiling, across the table from him.

"Is she asleep?" he asked, of Miriam.

"Yes."

"She hasn't had her supper yet, has she?"

"No."

"When she wakes, will you let me take it up to her?"

"Yes, if you want to."

"Miriam, tell me—does Barbara look like her mother?" His voice was full of love and longing.

"There may be a slight resemblance," Miriam admitted.

"But how much?"

The Same Old Question

A curious, tigerish impulse possessed Miriam. He had asked her this same question many times and she had always eluded him with a vague generalisation.

"How much does she resemble her mother?" he insisted. "You told me once that they were 'something alike.'"

"That was a long time ago," answered Miriam. She was breathing hard and her eyes glittered. "Barbara has changed lately."

"Don't hide the truth for fear of hurting me," he pleaded. "Once for all I ask you—does Barbara resemble her mother?"

For a moment Miriam paused, then all her hatred of the dead woman rose up within her. "No," she said, coldly. "Their hair and eyes are nearly the same colour, but they are not in the least alike. Why? What difference does it make?"

"None," sighed the blind man. "But I am glad to have the truth at last, and I thank you. Sometimes I have fancied, when Barbara spoke, that it was Constance talking to me. It would have been a great satisfaction to me to have had my baby the living image of her mother, since I am to see again, but it is all right as it is."

Since he was to see! Miriam had not counted upon that possibility, and she clenched her hands in swift remorse. If he should discover that she had lied to him, he would never forgive her, and she would lose what little regard he had for her. He had a Puritan insistence upon the literal truth.

"How beautiful Constance was," he sighed. An inarticulate murmur escaped from Miriam, which he took for full assent.

"Did you ever see anyone half so beautiful, Miriam?"

Her throat was parched, but Miriam forced herself to whisper, "No." This much was truth.

A Beautiful Bride

"How sweet she was and what pretty ways she had," he went on. "Do you remember how lovely she was in her wedding gown?"

Again Miriam forced herself to answer, "Yes."

"Do you remember how people said we were mismated—that a man of fifty could never hope to keep the love of a girl of twenty, who knew nothing of the world?"

"I remember," muttered Miriam.

"And it was false, wasn't it?" he asked, hungering for assurance. "Constance loved me—do you remember how dearly she loved me?"

Beloved Constance

A thousand words struggled for utterance, but Miriam could not speak just then. She longed, as never before, to tear open the envelope addressed to Laurence Austin and read to North the words his beloved Constance had written to another man before she took her own life. She longed to tell him how, for months previous, she had followed Constance when she left the house, and discovered that she had a trysting-place down on the shore. He wanted the truth, did he? Very well, he should have it—the truth without mercy.

"Constance," she began, huskily, "Constance loved——"

"I know," interrupted Ambrose North. "I know how dearly she loved me up to the very last. Even Barbara, baby that she was, felt it. She remembers it still."

Barbara's bell tinkled upstairs while he said the last words. "She wants us," he said, his face illumined with love. "If you will prepare her supper, Miriam, I will take it up."

The room swayed before Miriam's eyes and her senses were confused. She had drawn her dagger to strike and it had been forced back into its sheath by some unseen hand. "But I will," she repeated to herself again and again as her trembling hands prepared Barbara's tray. "He shall know the truth—and from me."

"Barbara," said the old man, as he entered the room, "your Daddy has brought up your supper."

"I'm glad," she responded, brightly. "I'm very hungry."

"We have been talking downstairs of your mother," he went on, as he set down the tray. "Miriam has been telling me how beautiful she was, what winning ways she had, and how dearly she loved us. She says you do not look at all like her, Barbara, and we both have been thinking that you did."

Disappointed

Barbara was startled. Only a few days ago, Aunt Miriam had assured her that she was the living image of her mother. She was perplexed and disappointed. Then she reflected that when she had asked the question she had been very ill and Aunt Miriam was trying to answer in a way that pleased her. She generously forgave the deceit for the sake of the kindly motive behind it.

"Dear Aunt Miriam," said Barbara, softly. "How good she has been to us, Daddy."

"Yes," he replied; "I do not know what we should have done without her. I want to do something for her, dear. Shall we buy her a diamond ring, or some pearls?"

"We'll see, Daddy. When I can walk, and you can see, we shall do many things together that we cannot do now."

The old man bent down very near her. "Flower of the Dusk," he whispered, "when may I go?"

"Go where, Daddy?"

"To the city, you know, with Doctor Conrad. I want to begin to see."

Barbara patted his hand. "When I am strong enough to spare you," she said, "I will let you go. When you see me, I want to be well and able to go to meet you without crutches. Will you wait until then?"

"I want to see my baby. I do not care about the crutches, now that you are to get well. I want to see you, dear, so very, very much."

"Some day, Daddy," she promised him. "Wait until I'm almost well, won't you?"

"Just as you say, dear, but it seems so long."

"I couldn't spare you now, Daddy. I want you with me every day."

Miriam's Prayer

Though long unused to prayer, Miriam prayed that night, very earnestly, that Ambrose North might not recover his sight; that he might never see the daughter who lived and spoke in the likeness of her dead mother. It was long past midnight when she fell asleep. The house had been quiet for several hours.

As she slept, she dreamed. The door opened quietly, yet with a certain authority, and Constance, in her grave-clothes, came into her room. The white gown trailed behind her as she walked, and the two golden braids, so like Barbara's, hung down over either shoulder and far below her waist.

She fixed her deep, sad eyes upon Miriam, reproachfully, as always, but her red lips were curled in a mocking smile. "Do your worst," she seemed to say. "You cannot harm me now."

The Vision

The vision sat down in a low chair and rocked back and forth, slowly, as though meditating. Occasionally, she looked at Miriam doubtfully, but the mocking smile was still there. At last Constance rose, having come, apparently, to some definite plan. She went to the dresser, opened the lower drawer, and reached under the pile of neatly-folded clothing.

Cold as ice, Miriam sprang to her feet. She was wide awake now, but the room was empty. The door was open, half-way, and she could not remember whether she had left it so when she went to bed. She had always kept her bedroom door closed and locked, but since Barbara's illness had left it at least ajar, that she might be able to hear a call in the night.

Shaken like an aspen in a storm, Miriam lighted her candle and stared into the shadows. Nothing was there. The clock ticked steadily—almost maddeningly. It was just four o'clock.

She, too, opened the lower drawer of the dresser and thrust her hand under the clothing. The letters were still there. She drew them out, her hands trembling, and read the superscriptions with difficulty, for the words danced, and made themselves almost illegible.

Constance was coming back for the letters, then? That was out of Miriam's power to prevent, but she would keep the knowledge of their contents—at least of one. She thrust aside contemptuously the letter to Barbara—she cared nothing for that.

The Seal Broken

Taking the one addressed to "Mr. Laurence Austin; Kindness of Miss Leonard," she went back to bed, taking her candle to the small table that stood at the head of the bed. With forced calmness, she broke the seal which the dead fingers had made so long ago, opened it shamelessly, and read it.

"You who have loved me since the beginning of time," the letter began, "will understand and forgive me for what I do to-day. I do it because I am not strong enough to go on and do my duty by those who need me.

"If there should be meeting past the grave, some day you and I shall come together again with no barrier between us. I take with me the knowledge of your love, which has sheltered and strengthened and sustained me since the day we first met, and which must make even a grave warm and sweet.

"And, remember this—dead though I am, I love you still; you and my little lame baby who needs me so and whom I must leave because I am not strong enough to stay.

"Through life and in death and eternally,

"Yours,

"CONSTANCE."

In the letter was enclosed a long, silken tress of golden hair. It curled around Miriam's fingers as though it were alive, and she thrust it from her. It was cold and smooth and sinuous, like a snake. She folded up the letter, put it back in the envelope with the lock of hair, then returned it to its old hiding-place, with Barbara's.

"So, Constance," she said to herself, "you came for the letters? Come and take them when you like—I do not fear you now."

The Evidence

All of her suspicions were crystallised into certainty by this one page of proof. Constance might not have violated the letter of her marriage vow—very probably had not even dreamed of it—but in spirit, she had been false.

"Come, Constance," said Miriam, aloud; "come and take your letters. When the hour comes, I shall tell him, and you cannot keep me from it."

Triumph

She was curiously at peace, now, and no longer afraid. Her dark eyes blazed with triumph as she lay there in the candle light. The tension within her had snapped when suspicion gave way to absolute knowledge. Thwarted and denied and pushed aside all her life by Constance and her memory, at last she had come to her own.

XIII

"Woman Suffrage"

There was a shuffling step on the stairway, accompanied by spasmodic shrieks and an occasional "ouch." Roger looked up from his book in surprise as Miss Mattie made her painful way into the room.

"Why, Mother. What's the matter?"

Miss Mattie's Back

Miss Mattie sat down in the chair she had made out of a flour barrel and screamed as she did so. "What is it?" he demanded. "Are you ill?"

"Roger," she replied, "my back is either busted, or the hinge in it is rusty from overwork. I stooped over to open the lower drawer in my bureau, and when I come to rise up, I couldn't. I've been over half an hour comin' downstairs. I called you twice, but you didn't hear me, and I knowed you was readin', so I thought I might better save my voice to yell with."

"I'm sorry," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"About the first thing to do, I take it, is to put down that book. Now, if you'll put on your hat, you can go and get that new-fangled doctor from the city. The postmaster's wife told me yesterday that he'd sent Barbara one of them souverine postal cards and said on it he'd be down last night. As you go, you might stop and tell the Norths that he's comin', for they don't go after their mail much and most likely it's still there in the box. Tell Barbara that the card has a picture of a terrible high buildin' on it and the street is full of carriages, both horsed and unhorsed. If he can make the lame walk and the blind see, I reckon he can fix my back. I'll set here."

"Shan't I get someone to stay with you while I'm gone, Mother? I don't like to leave you here alone. Miss Miriam would——"

"Miss Miriam," interrupted his mother, "ain't fit company for a horse or cow, let alone a sufferin' woman. She just sets and stares and never says nothin'. I

have to do all the talkin' and I'm in no condition to talk. You run along and let me set here in peace. It don't hurt so much when I set still."

Roger's Errand

Roger obediently started on his errand, but met Doctor Conrad half-way. The two had never been formally introduced, but Roger knew him, and the Doctor remembered Roger as "the nice boy" who was with Ambrose North and Eloise when he went over to tell them that Barbara was all right.

"Why, yes," said Allan. "If it's an emergency case, I'll come there first. After I see what's the matter, I'll go over to North's and then come back. I seem to be getting quite a practice in Riverdale."

When they went in, Roger introduced Doctor Conrad to the patient. "You'll excuse my not gettin' up," said Miss Mattie, "for it's about the gettin' up that I wanted to see you. Roger, you run away. It ain't proper for boys to be standin' around listenin' when woman suffrage is bein' discussed by the only people havin' any right to talk of it—women and doctors."

Roger coloured to his temples as he took his hat and hurried out. With an effort Doctor Conrad kept his face straight, but his eyes were laughing.

What's Wrong?

"Now, what's wrong?" asked Allan, briefly, as Roger closed the door.

"It's my back," explained the patient. "It's busted. It busted all of a sudden."

"Was it when you were stooping over, perhaps to pick up something?"

Miss Mattie stared at him in astonishment. "Are you a mind-reader, or did Roger tell you?"

"Neither," smiled Allan. "Did a sharp pain come in the lumbar region when you attempted to straighten up?"

"'Twan't the lumber room. I ain't been in the attic for weeks, though I expect it needs straightenin'. It was in my bedroom. I was stoopin' over to open a bureau drawer, and when I riz up, I found my back was busted."

The Prescription

"I see," said Allan. He was already writing a prescription. "If your son will go down and get this filled, you will have no more trouble. Take two every four hours."

Miss Mattie took the bit of paper anxiously. "No surgical operation?" she asked.

"No," laughed Allan.

"No mortar piled up on me and left to set? No striped nurses?"

"No plaster cast," Allan assured her, "and no striped nurses."

"I reckon it ain't none of my business," remarked Miss Mattie, "but why didn't you do somethin' like this for Barbara instead of cuttin' her up? I'm worse off than she ever was, because she could walk right spry with crutches, and crutches wouldn't have helped me none when I was risin' up from the bureau drawer."

"Barbara's case is different. She had a congenital dislocation of the femur."

Miss Mattie's jaw dropped, but she quickly recovered herself. "And what have I got?"

"Lumbago."

"My disease is shorter," she commented, after a moment of reflection, "but I'll bet it feels worse."

"I'll ask your son to come in if I see him," said Doctor Conrad, reaching for his hat, "and if you don't get well immediately, let me know. Good-bye."

Roger was nowhere in sight, but he was watching the two houses, and as soon as he saw Doctor Conrad go into North's, he went back to his mother.

Miss Mattie's "Disease"

"Barbara's disease has three words in it, Roger," she explained, "and mine has only one, but it's more painful. You're to go immediately with this piece of paper and get it full of the medicine he's written on it. I've been lookin' at it, but I don't get no sense out of it. He said to take two every four hours—two what?"

"Pills, probably, or capsules."

"Pills? Now, Roger, you know that no pill small enough to swallow could cure a big pain like this in my back. The postmaster's wife had the rheumatiz last Winter, and she took over five quarts of Old Doctor Jameson's Pain Killer, and it never did her a mite of good. What do you think a paper that size, full of pills, can do for a person that ain't able to stand up without screechin'?"

"Well, we'll try it anyway, Mother. Just sit still until I come back with the medicine."

He went out and returned, presently, with a red box containing forty or fifty capsules. Miss Mattie took it from him and studied it carefully. "This box ain't more'n a tenth as big as the pain," she observed critically.

Roger brought a glass of water and took out two of the capsules. "Take these," he said, "and at half past two, take two more. Let's give Doctor Conrad a fair trial. It's probably a more powerful medicine than it seems to be."

A Difficulty

Miss Mattie had some difficulty at first, as she insisted on taking both capsules at once, but when she was persuaded to swallow one after the other, all went well. "I suppose," she remarked, "that these long narrow pills have to be took endways. If a person went to swallow 'em crossways, they'd choke to death. I was careful how I took 'em, but other people might not be, and I think, myself, that round pills are safer."

"I went to the office," said Roger, "and told the Judge I wouldn't be down to-day. I have some work I can do at home, and I'd rather not leave you."

"It's just come to my mind now," mused Miss Mattie, ignoring his thoughtfulness, "about the minister's sermon Sunday. He said that everything that came to us might teach us something if we only looked for it. I've been thinkin' as I set here, what a heap I've learned about my back this mornin'. I never sensed, until now, that it was used in walkin'. I reckoned that my back was just kind of a finish to me and was to keep the dust out of my vital organs more'n anything else. This mornin' I see that the back is entirely used in walkin'. What gets me is that Barbara North had to have crutches when her back was all right. Nothin' was out of kilter but her legs, and only one of 'em at that."

"Here's your paper, Mother." Roger pulled *The Metropolitan Weekly* out of his pocket.

"Lay it down on the table, please. It oughtn't to have come until to-morrow. I ain't got time for it now."

"Why, Mother? Don't you want to read?"

Proper Care

The knot of hair on the back of Miss Mattie's head seemed to rise, and her protruding wire hairpins bristled. "I should think you'd know," she said, indignantly, "when you've been takin' time from the law to read your pa's books to Barbara North, that no sick person has got the strength to read. Even if my disease is only in one word when hers is in three, I reckon I'm goin' to take proper care of myself."

"But you're sitting up and she can't," explained Roger, kindly.

"Sittin' up or not sittin' up ain't got nothin' to do with it. If my back was set in mortar as it ought to have been, I wouldn't be settin' up either. I can't get up without screamin', and as long as I've knowed Barbara she's never been that bad. That new-fangled doctor hasn't come out of North's yet, either. How much do you reckon he charges for a visit?"

"Two or three dollars, I suppose."

Miss Mattie clucked sharply with her false teeth. "'Cordin' to that," she calculated, "he was here about twenty cents' worth. But I'm willin' to give him a quarter—that's a nickel extra for the time he was writin' out the recipe for them long narrow pills that would choke anybody but a horse if they happened to go down crossways. There he comes, now. If he don't come here of his own accord, you go out and get him, Roger. I want he should finish his visit."

The Doctor's Visit

But it was not necessary for Roger to go. "Of his own accord," Doctor Conrad came across the street and opened the creaky white gate. When he came in, he brought with him the atmosphere of vitality and good cheer. He had, too, that gentle sympathy which is the inestimable gift of the physician, and which requires no words to make itself felt.

His quick eye noted the box of capsules upon the table, as he sat down and took Miss Mattie's rough, work-worn hand in his. "How is it?" he asked.

"Better?"

"Mebbe," she answered, grudgingly. "No more'n a mite, though."

"That's all we can expect so soon. By to-morrow morning, though, you should be all right." His manner unconsciously indicated that it would be the one joy of a hitherto desolate existence if Miss Mattie should be perfectly well again in the morning.

"How's my fellow sufferer?" she inquired, somewhat mollified.

"Barbara? She's doing very well. She's a brave little thing."

"Which is the sickest—her or me?"

"As regards actual pain," replied Doctor Conrad, tactfully, "you are probably suffering more than she is at the present moment."

"I knowed it," cried Miss Mattie triumphantly. "Do you hear that, Roger?"

But Roger had slipped out, remembering that "woman suffrage" was not a proper subject for discussion in his hearing.

Wanderin' Fits

"I reckon he's gone over to North's," grumbled Miss Mattie. "When my eye ain't on him, he scoots off. His pa was the same way. He was forever chasin' over there and Roger's inherited it from him. Whenever I've wanted either of 'em, they've always been took with wanderin' fits."

"You sent him out before," Allan reminded her.

"So I did, but I ain't sent him out now and he's gone just the same. That's the trouble. After you once get an idea into a man's head, it stays put. You can't never get it out again. And ideas that other people puts in is just the same."

"Women change their minds more easily, don't they?" asked Allan. He was enjoying himself very much.

"Of course. There's nothin' set about a woman unless she's got a busted back. She ain't carin' to move around much then. The postmaster's wife was tellin' me about one of the women at the hotel—the one that's writin' the book. Do you know her?"

"I've probably seen her."

All a Mistake

"The postmaster's wife's bunion was a hurtin' her awful one day when this woman come in after stamps, and she told her to go and help herself and put the money in the drawer. So she did, and while she was doin' it she told the postmaster's wife that she didn't have no bunion and no pain—that it was all a mistake."

"'You wouldn't think so,' says the postmaster's wife, 'if it was your foot that had the mistake on it.' She was awful mad at first, but, after she got calmed down, the book-woman told her what she meant."

"'There ain't no pain nor disease in the world,' she says. 'It's all imagination.'

"'Well,' says the postmaster's wife, 'when the swellin' is so bad, how'm I to undeceive myself?'

"The book-woman says: 'Just deny it, and affirm the existence of good. You just set down and say to yourself: "I can't have no bunion cause there ain't no such thing, and it can't hurt me because there is no such thing as pain. My foot is perfectly well and strong. I will get right up and walk."'

"As soon as the woman was gone out with her stamps, the postmaster's wife tried it and like to have fainted dead away. She said she might have been able to convince her mind that there wasn't no bunion on her foot, but she couldn't convince her foot. She said there wasn't no such thing as pain, and the bunion made it its first business to do a little denyin' on its own account. You have to be awful careful not to offend a bunion.

A Test

"This mornin', while Roger was gone after them long, narrow pills that has to be swallowed endways unless you want to choke to death, I reckoned I'd try it on my back. So I says, right out loud: 'My back don't hurt me. It is all imagination. I can't have no pain because there ain't no such thing.' Then I stood up right quick, and—Lord!"

Miss Mattie shook her head sadly at the recollection. "Do you know," she went on, thoughtfully, "I wish that woman at the hotel had lumbago?"

Doctor Conrad's nice brown eyes twinkled, and his mouth twitched, ever so slightly. "I'm afraid I do, too," he said.

"If she did, and wanted some of them long narrow pills, would you give 'em to her?"

"Probably, but I'd be strongly tempted not to."

Surprise

When he took his leave, Miss Mattie, from force of habit, rose from her chair. "Ouch!" she said, as she slowly straightened up. "Why, I do believe it's better. It don't hurt nothin' like so much as it did."

"Your surprise isn't very flattering, Mrs. Austin, but I'll forgive you. The next time I come up, I'll take another look at you. Good-bye."

Miss Mattie made her way slowly over to the table where the box of capsules lay, and returned, with some effort, to her chair. She studied both the box and its contents faithfully, once with her spectacles, and once without. "You'd never think," she mused, "that a pill of that size and shape could have any effect on a big pain that's nowheres near your stomach. He must be a dreadful clever young man, for it sure is a searchin' medicine."

XIV

Barbara's Birthday

"Fairy Godmother," said Barbara, "I should like a drink."

Fairy Godchild

"Fairy Godchild," answered Eloise, "you shall have one. What do you want—rose-dew, lilac-honey, or a golden lily full of clear, cool water?"

"I'll take the water, please," laughed Barbara, "but I want more than a lily full."

Eloise brought a glass of water and managed to give it to Barbara without spilling more than a third of it upon her. "What a pretty neck and what glorious shoulders you have," she commented, as she wiped up the water with her handkerchief. "How lovely you'd look in an evening gown."

"Don't try to divert me," said Barbara, with affected sternness. "I'm wet, and I'm likely to take cold and die."

"I'm not afraid of your dying after you've lived through what you have. Allan says you're the bravest little thing he has ever seen."

The deep colour dyed Barbara's pale face. "I'm not brave," she whispered; "I was horribly afraid, but I thought that, even if I were, I could keep people from knowing it."

"If that isn't real courage," Eloise assured her, "it's so good an imitation that it would take an expert to tell the difference."

"I'm afraid now," continued Barbara. Her colour was almost gone and she did not look at Eloise. "I'm afraid that, after all, I can never walk." She indicated the crutches at the foot of her bed by a barely perceptible nod. "I have Aunt Miriam keep them there so that I won't forget."

"Nonsense," cried Eloise. "Allan says that you have every possible chance, so don't be foolish. You're going to walk—you must walk. Why, you mustn't even

think of anything else."

"It would seem strange," sighed Barbara, "after almost twenty-two years, why —what day of the month is to-day?"

"The sixteenth."

Twenty-two

"Then it is twenty-two. This is my birthday—I'm twenty-two years old to-day."

"Fairy Godchild, why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I'd forgotten it myself."

"You're too young to begin to forget your birthdays. I'm past thirty, but I still 'keep tab' on mine."

"If you're thirty, I must be at least forty, for I'm really much older than you are. And Roger is an infant in arms compared with me."

"Wise lady, how did you grow so old in so short a time?"

"By working and reading, and thinking—and suffering, I suppose."

"When you're well, dear, I'm going to try to give you some of the girlhood you've never had. You're entitled to pretty gowns and parties and beaux, and all the other things that belong to the teens and twenties. You're coming to town with me, I hope—that's why I'm staying."

Barbara's blue eyes filled and threatened to overflow. "Oh, Fairy Godmother, how lovely it would be. But I can't go. I must stay here and sew and try to make up for lost time. Besides, father would miss me so."

Wait and See

Eloise only smiled, for she had plans of her own for father. "We won't argue," she said, lightly, "we'll wait and see. It's a great mistake to try to live to-morrow, or even yesterday, to-day."

When Eloise went back to the hotel, her generous heart full of plans for her protégé, Miriam did not hear her go out, and so it happened that Barbara was

alone for some time. Ambrose North had gone for one of his long walks over the hills and along the shore, expecting to return before Eloise left Barbara. For some vague reason which he himself could not have put into words, he did not like to leave her alone with Miriam.

When Miriam came upstairs, she paused at the door to listen. Hearing no voices, she peeped within. Barbara lay quietly, looking out of the window, and dreaming of the day when she could walk freely and joyously, as did the people who passed and repassed.

Miriam went stealthily to her own room, and took out the letter to Barbara. She had no curiosity as to its contents. If she had, it would be an easy matter to open it, and put it into another envelope, without the address, and explain that it had been merely enclosed with instructions as to its delivery.

Miriam Delivers the Letter

Taking it, she went into the room where Barbara lay—the same room where the dead Constance had lain so long before.

"Barbara," she said, without emotion, "when your mother died she left this letter for you, in my care." She put it into the girl's eager, outstretched hand and left the room, closing the door after her.

With trembling fingers, Barbara broke the seal, and took out the closely written sheet. All four pages were covered. The ink had faded and the paper was yellow, but the words were still warm with love and life.

The Letter

"Barbara, my darling, my little lame baby," the letter began. "If you live to receive this letter, your mother will have been dead for many years and, perhaps, forgotten. I have chosen your twenty-second birthday for this because I am twenty-two now, and, when you are the same age, you will, perhaps, be better fitted to understand than at any other time.

"I trust you have not married, because, if you have, my warning may come too late. Never marry a man whom you do not know, absolutely, that you love, and when this knowledge comes to you, if there are no barriers in the way, do not let anything on God's earth keep you apart.

"I have made the mistake which many girls make. I came from school, young, inexperienced, unbalanced, and eager for admiration. Your father, a brilliant man of more than twice my age, easily appealed to my fancy. He was handsome, courteous, distinguished, wealthy, of fine character and unassailable position. I did not know, then, that a woman could love love, rather than the man who gave it to her.

"There is not a word to be said of him that is not wholly good. He has failed at no point, nor in the smallest degree. On the contrary, it is I who have disappointed him, even though I love him dearly and always have. I have never loved him more than to-day, when I leave you both forever.

"My feeling for him is unchanged. It is only that at last I have come face to face with the one man of all the world—the one God made for me, back in the beginning. I have known it for a long, long time, but I did not know that he also loved me until a few days ago.

"Since then, my world has been chaos, illumined by this unutterable light. I have been a true wife, and when I can be true no longer, it is time to take the one way out. I cannot live here and run the risk of seeing him constantly, yet trust myself not to speak; I cannot bear to know that the little space lying between us is, in reality, the whole world.

"He is bound, too. He has a wife and a son only a little older than you are. If I stay, I shall be false to your father, to you, to him, and even to myself, because, in my relation to each of you, I shall be living a lie.

The Message

"Tell your dear father, if he still lives, that he has been very good to me, that I appreciate all his kindness, gentleness, patience, and the beautiful love he has given me. Tell him I am sorry I have failed him, that I have not been a better wife, but God knows I have done the best I could. Tell him I have loved him, that I love him still, and have never loved him more than I do to-day. But oh, my baby, do not tell him that the full-orbed sun has risen before one who knew only twilight before.

"And, if you can, love your mother a little, as she lies asleep in her far-away grave. Your father, if he has not forgotten me, will have dealt gently with my memory—of that I am sure. But I do not quite trust Miriam, and I do not know what she may have said. She loved your father and I took him away from her.

She has never forgiven me for that and she never will.

A Burden

"If I have done wrong, it has been in thought only and not in deed. I do not believe we can control thought or feeling, though action and speech can be kept within bounds. Forgive me, Barbara, darling, and love me if you can.

"Your

"MOTHER."

The last words danced through the blurring mist and Barbara sobbed aloud as she put the letter down. Blind though he was, her father had felt the lack—the change. The pity of it all overwhelmed her.

Her thought flew swiftly to Roger, but—no, he must not know. This letter was written to the living and not to the dead. Aunt Miriam would ask no questions—she was sure of that—but the message to her father lay heavily upon her soul. How could she make him believe in the love he so hungered for even now?

As the hours passed, Barbara became calm. When Miriam came in to see if she wanted anything, she asked for pencil and paper, and for a book to be propped up on a pillow in front of her, so that she might write.

Miriam obeyed silently, taking an occasional swift, keen look at Barbara, but the calm, impassive face and the deep eyes were inscrutable.

The Meaning Changed

As soon as she was alone again, she began to write, with difficulty, from her mother's letter, altering it as little as possible, and yet changing the meaning of it all. She could trust herself to read from her own sheet, but not from the other. It took a long time, but at last she was satisfied.

It was almost dusk when Ambrose North returned, and Barbara asked for a candle to be placed on the small table at the head of her bed. She also sent away the book and pencil and the paper she had not used. Miriam's curiosity was faintly aroused, but, as she told herself, she could wait. She had already waited long.

"Daddy," said, Barbara, softly, when they were alone, "do you know what day it is?"

"No," he answered; "why?"

"It's my birthday—I'm twenty-two to-day."

"Are you? Your dear mother was twenty-two when she—I wish you were like your mother, Barbara."

"Mother left a letter with Aunt Miriam," said Barbara, gently. "She gave it to me to-day."

The old man sprang to his feet. "A letter!" he cried, reaching out a trembling hand. "For me?"

Barbara Reads to her Father

Barbara laughed—a little sadly. "No, Daddy—for me. But there is something for you in it. Sit down, and I'll read it to you."

"Read it all," he cried. "Read every word."

"Barbara, my darling, my little lame baby," read the girl, her voice shaking, "if you live to read this letter, your mother will have been dead for many years, and possibly forgotten."

"No," breathed Ambrose North—"never forgotten."

"I have chosen your twenty-second birthday for this, because I am twenty-

two now, and when you are the same age, it will be as if we were sisters, rather than mother and daughter."

"Dear Constance," whispered the old man.

"When I came from school, I met your father. He was a brilliant man, handsome, courteous, distinguished, of fine character and unassailable position."

Barbara glanced up quickly. The dull red had crept into his wrinkled cheeks, but his lips were parted in a smile.

"There is not a word to be said of him that is not wholly good. He has failed at no point, nor in the smallest degree. I have disappointed him, I fear, even though I love him dearly and always have. I have never loved him more than I do to-day, when I leave you both forever.

"Tell your dear father, if he still lives, that he has been very good to me, that I appreciate all his kindness, gentleness, patience, and the beautiful love he has given me. Tell him I am sorry I have failed him——"

"Oh, dear God!" he cried. "*She* fail?"

"That I have not been a better wife," Barbara went on, brokenly. "Tell him I have loved him, that I love him still, and have never loved him more than I do to-day.

"Forgive me, both of you, and love me if you can. Your Mother."

In the tense silence, Barbara folded up both sheets and put them back into the envelope. Still, she did not dare to look at her father. When, at last, she turned to him, sorely perplexed and afraid, he was still sitting at her bedside. He had not moved a muscle, but he had changed. If molten light had suddenly been poured over him from above, while the rest of the room lay in shadow, he could not have changed more.

As by Magic

The sorrowful years had slipped from him, and, as though by magic, Youth had come back. His shoulders were still stooped, his face and hands wrinkled, and his hair was still as white as the blown snow, but his soul was young, as never before.

"Barbara," he breathed, in ecstasy. "She died loving me."

The slender white hand stole out to his, half fearfully. "Yes, Daddy, I've always told you so, don't you know?" Her senses whirled, but she kept her voice even.

"She died loving me," he whispered.

The clock ticked steadily, a door closed below, and a little bird outside chirped softly. There was no other sound save the wild beating of Barbara's heart, which she alone heard. Still transfigured, he sat beside the bed, holding her hand in his.

Far-Away Voices

Far-away voices sounded faintly in his ears, for, like a garment, the years had fallen from him and taken with them the questioning and the fear. Into his doubting heart Constance had come once more, radiant with new beauty, thrilling his soul to new worship and new belief.

"She died loving me," he said, as though he could scarcely believe his own words. "Barbara, I know it is much to ask, for it must be very precious to you, but—would you let me hold the letter? Would you let me feel the words I cannot see?"

Choking back a sob, Barbara took both sheets out of the envelope and gave them to him. "Show me," he whispered, "show me the line where she wrote, 'Tell him I love him still, and have never loved him more than I do to-day.'"

When Barbara put his finger upon the words, he bent and kissed them. "What does it say here?"

He pointed to the paragraph beginning, "I have made the mistake which many girls make."

"It says," answered Barbara, "'There is not a word to be said of him that is not wholly good.'" He bent and kissed that, too. "And here?" His finger pointed to the line, "I did not know that a woman could love love, rather than the man who gave it to her."

"That is where it says again, 'Tell him I have loved him, that I love him still, and have never loved him more than I do to-day.'"

"Dear, blessed Constance," he said, crushing the lie to his lips. "Dear wife, true wife; truest of all the world."

Barbara could bear no more. "Let me have the letter again, Daddy."

After Years of Waiting

"No, dear, no. After all these years of waiting, let me keep it for a little while. Just for a little while, Barbara. Please." His voice broke at the end.

"For a little while, then, Daddy," she said, slowly; "only a little while."

His Illumined Face

He went out, with the precious letter in his hand. Miriam was in the hall, but he was unconscious of the fact. She shrank back against the wall as he passed her, with his fine old face illumined as from some light within.

In his own room, he sat down, after closing the door, and spread the two sheets on the table before him. He moved his hands caressingly over the lines Constance had written in ink and Barbara in pencil.

"She died loving me," he said to himself, "and I was wrong. She did not change when I was blind and Barbara was lame. All these years I have been doubting her while her own assurance was in the house.

"She thought she failed me—the dear saint thought she failed. It must take me all eternity to atone to her for that. But she died loving me." His thought lingered fondly upon the words, then the tears streamed suddenly over his blind face.

"Oh, Constance, Constance," he cried aloud, forgetting that the dead cannot hear. "You never failed me! Forgive me if you can."

XV

The Song of the Pines

Upon the couch in the sitting-room, though it was not yet noon, Miss Mattie slept peacefully. She had the repose, not merely of one dead, but of one who had been dead long and was very weary at the time of dying.

As Doctor Conrad had expected, her back was entirely well the morning following his visit, and when she awoke, free from pain, she had dinned his praises into Roger's ears until that long-suffering young man was well-nigh fatigued. The subject was not exhausted, however, even though Roger was.

A Wonder-Worker

"I'll tell you what it is, Roger," Miss Mattie had said, drawing a long breath, and taking a fresh start; "a young man that can cure a pain like mine, with pills that size, has got a great future ahead of him as well as a brilliant past behind. He's a wonder-worker, that's what he is, not to mention bein' a mind-reader as well."

She had taken but a half dozen of the capsules the first day, having fallen asleep after taking the third dose. When Roger went to the office, very weary of Doctor Conrad's amazing skill, Miss Mattie had resumed her capsules and, shortly thereafter, fallen asleep.

She had slept for the better part of three days, caring little for food and not in the least for domestic tasks. At the fourth day, Roger became alarmed, but Doctor Conrad had gone back to the city, and there was no one within his reach in whom he had confidence.

The Sleeping Woman

At last it seemed that it was time for him to act, and he shook the sleeping woman vigorously. "What's the matter, Roger?" she asked, drowsily; "is it time for my medicine?"

"No, it isn't time for medicine, but it's time to get up. Your back doesn't hurt

you, does it?"

"No," murmured Miss Mattie, "my back is as good as it ever was. What time is it?"

"Almost four o'clock and you've been asleep ever since ten this morning. Wake up."

"Eight—ten—twelve—two—four," breathed Miss Mattie, counting on her fingers. Then, to his astonishment, she sat up straight and rubbed her eyes. "If it's four, it's time for my medicine." She went over to the cupboard in which the precious box of capsules was kept, took two more, and returned to the couch. She still had the box in her hand.

"Mother," gasped Roger, horrified. "What are you taking that medicine for?"

"For my back," she responded, sleepily.

"I thought your back was well."

"So 'tis."

"Then what in thunder do you keep on taking dope for?"

Miss Mattie sat up. She was very weary and greatly desired her sleep, but it was evident that Roger must be soothed first.

Getting her Money's Worth

"You don't seem to understand me," she sighed, with a yawn. "After payin' a dollar and twenty cents for that medicine, do you reckon I'm goin' to let it go to waste? I'm goin' to keep right on takin' it, every four hours, as he said, until it's used up."

"Mother!"

"Don't you worry none, Roger," said Miss Mattie, kindly, with a drowsy smile. "Your mother is bein' took care of by a wonderful doctor. He makes the lame walk and the blind see and cures large pains with small pills. I am goin' to stick to my medicine. He didn't say to stop takin' it."

"But, Mother, you mustn't take it when there is no need for it. He never meant for you to take it after you were cured. Besides, you might have the same trouble

again when we couldn't get hold of him."

"How'm I to have it again?" demanded Miss Mattie, pricking up her ears, "when I'm cured? If I take all the medicine, I'll stay cured, won't I? You ain't got no logic, Roger, no more'n your pa had."

"I wish you wouldn't, Mother," pleaded the boy, genuinely distressed. "It's the medicine that makes you sleep so."

"I reckon," responded Miss Mattie, settling herself comfortably back among the pillows, "that he wanted me to have some sleep. In all my life I ain't never had such sleep as I'm havin' now. You go away, Roger, and study law. You ain't cut out for medicine."

The last words died away in an incoherent whisper. Miss Mattie slept again, with the box tightly clutched in her hand. As her fingers gradually loosened their hold, Roger managed to gain possession of it without waking her. He did not dare dispose of it, for he well knew that the maternal resentment would make the remainder of his life a burden. Besides, she might have another attack, when the ministering mind-reader was not accessible. If it were possible to give her some harmless substitute, and at the same time keep the "searching medicine" for a time of need.

A Bright Idea

A bright idea came to Roger, which he hastened to put into execution. He went to the druggist and secured a number of empty capsules of the same size. At home, he laboriously filled them with flour and replaced those in the box with an equal number of them. He put the "searching medicine" safely away in his desk at the office, and went to work, his heart warmed by the pleasant consciousness that he had done a good deed.

When he went home at night, Miss Mattie was partially awake and inclined to be fretful. "The strength is gone out of my medicine," she grumbled, "and it ain't time to take more. I've got to set here and be deprived of my sleep until eight o'clock."

Roger prepared his own supper and induced his mother to eat a little. When the clock began to strike eight, she took two of the flour-filled capsules, confidently climbed upstairs, and—such is the power of suggestion—was shortly asleep.

Favourable Opportunity

Having an unusually favourable opportunity, Roger went over to see Barbara. He had not seen her since the night before the operation, but Doctor Conrad had told him that in a few days he might be allowed to talk to her or read to her for a little while at a time.

Miriam opened the door for him, and, he thought, looked at him with unusual sharpness. "I guess you can see her," she said, shortly. "I'll ask her."

In the pathetically dingy room, out of which Barbara had tried so hard to make a home, he waited until Miriam returned. "They said to come up," she said, and disappeared.

Roger climbed the creaking stairs and made his way through the dark, narrow hall to the open door from whence a faint light came. "Come in," called Barbara, as he paused.

Ambrose North sat by her bedside holding her hand, but she laughingly offered the other to Roger. "Bad boy," she said; "why haven't you come before? I've lain here in the window and watched you go back and forth for days."

"I didn't dare," returned Roger. "I was afraid I might do you harm by coming and so I stayed away."

"Everybody has been so kind," Barbara went on. "People I never saw nor heard of have come to inquire and to give me things. You're absolutely the last one to come."

Last but Not Least

"Last—and least?"

"Not quite," she said, with a smile. "But I haven't been lonely. Father has been right beside me all the time except when I've been asleep, haven't you, Daddy?"

"I've wanted to be," smiled the old man, "but sometimes they made me go away."

"Tell me about the Judge's liver," suggested Barbara, "and Fido. I've been thinking a good deal about Fido. Did his legal document hurt him?"

"Not in the least. On the contrary, he thrived on it. He liked it so well that he's eaten others as opportunity offered. The Judge is used to it now, and doesn't mind. I've been thinking that it might save time and trouble if, when I copied papers, I took an extra carbon copy for Fido. That pup literally eats everything. He's cut some of his teeth on a pair of rubbers that a client left in the office, and this noon he ate nearly half a box of matches."

"I suppose," remarked Barbara, "that he was hungry and wanted a light lunch."

"That'll be about all from you just now," laughed Roger. "You're going to get well all right—I can see that."

"Of course I'm going to get well. Who dared to say I wasn't?"

"Nobody that I know of. Do you want me to bring Fido to see you?"

"Some day," said Barbara, thoughtfully, "I would like to have you lead Fido up and down in front of the house, but I do not believe I would care to have him come inside."

So they talked for half an hour or more. The blind man sat silently, holding Barbara's hand, too happy to feel neglected or in any way slighted. From time to time her fingers tightened upon his in a reassuring clasp that took the place of words.

Acutely self-conscious, Roger's memory harked back continually to the last evening he and Barbara had spent together. In a way, he was grateful for North's presence. It measurably lessened his constraint, and the subtle antagonism that he had hitherto felt in the house seemed wholly to have vanished.

At last the blind man rose, still holding Barbara's hand. "It is late for old folks to be sitting up," he said.

"Don't go, Daddy. Make a song first, won't you? A little song for Roger and me?"

He sat down again, smiling. "What about?" he asked.

"About the pines," suggested Barbara—"the tallest pines on the hills."

There was a long pause, then, clearing his throat, the old man began.

Small Beginnings

"Even the tall and stately pines," he said, "were once the tiniest of seeds like everything else, for everything in the world, either good or evil, has a very small beginning.

"They grow slowly, and in Summer, when you look at the dark, bending boughs, you can see the year's growth in paler green at the tips. No one pays much attention to them, for they are very dark and quiet compared with the other trees. But the air is balmy around them, they scatter a thick, fragrant carpet underneath, and there is no music in the world, I think, like a sea-wind blowing through the pines.

"When the brown cones fall, the seeds drop out from between the smooth, satin-like scales, and so, in the years to come, a dreaming mother pine broods over a whole forest of smaller trees. A pine is lonely and desolate, if there are no smaller trees around it. A single one, towering against the sky, always means loneliness, but where you see a little clump of evergreens huddled together, braving the sleet and snow, it warms your heart.

"In Summer they give fragrant shade, and in Winter a shelter from the coldest blast. The birds sleep among the thick branches, finding seeds for food in the cones, and, on some trees, blue, waxen berries.

A Love Story

"Before the darkness came to me, I saw a love story in a forest of pines. One tree was very straight and tall, and close beside it was another, not quite so high. The taller tree leaned protectingly over the other, as if listening to the music the wind made on its way from the hills to the sea. As time went on, their branches became so thickly interlaced that you could scarcely tell one from the other.

"Around them sprang up half a dozen or more smaller trees, sheltered, brooded over, and faithfully watched by these two with the interlaced branches. The young trees grew straight and tall, but when they were not quite half grown, a man came and cut them all down for Christmas trees.

"When he took them away, the forest was strangely desolate to these two, who now stood alone. When the Daughters of Dawn opened wide the gates of

darkness, and the Lord of Light fared forth upon the sea, they saw it not. When it was high noon, and there were no shadows, even upon the hill, it seemed that they might lift up their heads, but they only twined their branches more closely together. When all the flaming tapestry of heaven was spread in the West, they leaned nearer to each other, and sighed.

Bereft

"When the night wind stirred their boughs to faint music, it was like the moan of a heart that refuses to be comforted. When Spring danced through the forest, leaving flowers upon her way, while all the silences were filled with life and joy, these two knew it not, for they were bereft.

"Mating calls echoed through the woods, and silver sounds dripped like rain from the maples, but there was no love-song in the boughs of the pines. The birds went by, on hushed wings, and built their nests far away.

"When the maples put on the splendid robes of Autumn, the pines, more gaunt and desolate than ever, covered the ground with a dense fabric of needles, lacking in fragrance. When the winds grew cool, and the Little People of the Forest pattered swiftly through the dead and scurrying leaves, there was no sound from the pines. They only waited for the end.

"When storm swept through the forest and the other trees bowed their heads in fear, these two straightened themselves to meet it, for they were not afraid. Frightened birds took refuge there, and the Little People, with wild-beating hearts, crept under the spreading boughs to be sheltered.

"Vast, reverberating thunders sounded from hill to hill, and the sea answered with crashing surges that leaped high upon the shore. Suddenly, from the utter darkness, a javelin of lightning flashed through the pines, but they only trembled and leaned closer still.

"One by one, with the softness of falling snow, the leaves dropped upon the brown carpet beneath, but there was no more fragrance, since the sap had ceased to move through the secret channels and breathe balm into the forest. Snow lay heavily upon the lower boughs and they broke, instead of bending. When Spring danced through the world again, piping her plaintive music upon the farthest hills, the pines were almost bare.

As One

"All through the sweet Summer the needles kept dropping. Every frolicsome breeze of June carried some of them a little farther down the road; every full moon shone more clearly through the barrier of the pines. And at last, when the chill winds of Autumn chanted a requiem through the forest, it was seen that the pines had long been dead, but they so leaned together and their branches were so interlaced, that, even in death, they stood as one.

"They had passed their lives together, they had borne the same burdens, faced the same storms, and rejoiced in the same warmth of Summer sun. One was not left, stricken, long after the other was dead; their last grief was borne together and was lessened because it was shared. I stand there sometimes now, where the two dead trees are leaning close together, and as the wind sighs through the bare boughs, it chants no dirge to me, but only a hymn of farewell.

Together with Love

"There is nothing in all the world, Barbara, that means so much as that one word, 'together,' and when you add 'love' to it, you have heaven, for God himself can give no more joy than to bring together two who love, never to part again."

"Thank you," said Barbara, gently, after a pause.

"I thank you too," said Roger.

Ambrose North rose and offered his hand to Roger. "Good-night," he said. "I am glad you came. Your father was my friend." Then he bent to kiss Barbara. "Good-night, my dear."

"Friend," repeated Roger to himself, as the old man went out. "Yes, friend who never betrayed you or yours." The boy thrilled with passionate pride at the thought. Before the memory of his father his young soul stood at salute.

Barbara's eyes followed her father fondly as he went out and down the hall to his own room. When his door closed, Roger came to the other chair, sat down, and took her hand.

"It's not really necessary," explained Barbara, with a faint pink upon her cheeks. "I shall probably recover, even if my hand isn't held all the time."

"But I want to," returned Roger, and she did not take her hand away. Her cheeks took on a deeper colour and she smiled, but there was something in her

deep eyes that Roger had never seen there before.

"I've missed you so," he went on.

"And I have missed you." She did not dare to say how much.

"How long must you lie here?"

"Not much longer, I hope. Somebody is coming down next week to take off the plaster; then, after I've stayed in bed a little longer, they'll see whether I can walk or not."

She sighed wistfully and a strange expression settled on her face as she looked at the crutches which still leaned against the foot of her bed.

"Why do you have those there?" asked Roger, quickly.

"To remind me always that I mustn't hope too much. It's just a chance, you know."

"If you don't need them again, may I have them?"

"Why?" she asked, startled.

"Because they are yours—they've seemed a part of you ever since I've known you. I couldn't bear to have thrown away anything that was part of you, even if you've outgrown it."

"Certainly," answered Barbara, in a high, uncertain voice. "You're very welcome and I hope you can have them."

"Barbara!" Roger knelt beside the bed, still keeping her hand in his. "What did I say that was wrong?"

"Nothing," she answered, with difficulty. "But, after bearing all this, it seems hard to think that you don't want me to be—to be separated from my crutches. Because they have belonged to me always—you think they always must."

"Barbara! When you've always understood me, must I begin explaining to you now? I've never had anything that belonged to you, and I thought you wouldn't mind, if it was something you didn't need any more—I wouldn't care

what it was—if——"

"I see," she interrupted. A blinding flash of insight had, indeed, made many things wonderfully clear. "Here—wouldn't you rather have this?"

A Knot of Blue Ribbon

She slipped a knot of pale blue ribbon from the end of one of her long, golden braids, and gave it to him.

"Yes," he said. Then he added, anxiously, "are you sure you don't need it? If you do——"

"If I do," she answered, smiling, "I'll either get another, or tie my braid with a string."

Outwardly, they were back upon the old terms again, but, for the first time since the mud-pie days, Barbara was self-conscious. Her heart beat strangely, heavy with the prescience of new knowledge. When Roger rose from his chair with a bit of blue ribbon protruding from his coat pocket, she laughed hysterically.

But Roger did not laugh. He bent over her, with all his boyish soul in his eyes. She crimsoned as she turned away from him.

Please?

"Please?" he asked, very tenderly. "You did once."

"No," she cried, shrilly.

Roger straightened himself instantly. "Then I won't," he said, softly. "I won't do anything you don't want me to—ever."

XVI

Betrayal

The long weeks dragged by and, at last, the end of Barbara's imprisonment drew near. The red-haired young man who had previously assisted Doctor Conrad came down with one of the nurses and removed the heavy plaster cast. The nurse taught Miriam how to massage Barbara with oils and exercise the muscles that had never been used.

"Doctor Conrad told me," said the red-haired young man, "to take your father back with me to-morrow, if you were ready to have him go. The sooner the better, he thought."

Barbara turned away, with love and terror clutching coldly at her heart. "Perhaps," she said, finally. "I'll talk with father to-night."

Her own forgotten agony surged back into her remembrance, magnified an hundred fold. Fear she had never had for herself strongly asserted itself now, for him. "If it should come out wrong," she thought, "I could never forgive myself—never in the wide world."

When the doctor and nurse had gone to the hotel and Miriam was busy getting supper, Ambrose North came quietly into Barbara's room.

"How are you, dear?" he asked, anxiously.

"I'm all right, Daddy, except that I feel very queer. It's all different, some way. Like the old woman in *Mother Goose*, I wonder if this can be I."

There was a long pause. "Are they going back to-morrow," he asked, "the doctor and nurse who came down to-day?"

"Yes," answered Barbara, in a voice that was little more than a whisper.

The old man took her hand in his and leaned over her. "Dear," he pleaded, "may I go, too?"

Barbara was startled. "Have they said anything to you?"

Long Waiting

"No, I was just thinking that I could go with them as well as with Doctor Conrad. It is so long to wait," he sighed.

"I cannot bear to have you hurt," answered Barbara, with a choking sob.

"I know," he said, "but I bore it for you. Have you forgotten?"

There was no response in words, but she breathed hard, every shrill respiration fraught with dread.

"Flower of the Dusk," he pleaded, "may I go?"

"Yes," she sobbed. "I have no right to say no."

"Dear, don't cry." The old man's voice was as tender as though she had been the merest child. "The dream is coming true at last—that you can walk and I can see. Think what it will mean to us both. And oh, Barbara, think what it will be to me to see the words your dear mother wrote to you—to know, from her own hand, that she died loving me."

Systematic Lying

Barbara suddenly turned cold. The hand that seemingly had clutched her heart was tearing unmercifully at the tender fibre now. He would read her mother's letter and know that his beloved Constance was in love with another; that she took her own life because she could bear it no more. He would know that they were poor, that the house was shabby, that the pearls and laces and tapestries had all been sold. He would know, inevitably, that Barbara's needle had earned their living for many years; he would see, in the dining-room, the pitiful subterfuge of the bit of damask, one knife and fork of solid silver, one fine plate and cup. Above all, he would know that Barbara herself had systematically lied to him ever since she could talk at all. And he had a horror of a lie.

"Don't," she cried, weakly. "Don't go."

"You promised Barbara," he said, gently. Then he added, proudly: "The Norths never go back on their spoken or written word. It is in the blood to be true and you have promised. I shall go to-morrow."

Barbara cringed and shrank from him. "Don't, dear," he said. "Your hands are cold. Let me warm them in mine. I fear that to-day has been too much for you."

"I think it has," she answered. The words were almost a whisper.

"Then, don't try to talk, Barbara. I will talk to you. I know how you feel about my going, but it is not necessary, for I do not fear in the least for myself. I am sure that the dream is coming true, but, if it should not—why, we can bear it together, dear, as we have borne everything. The ways of the Everlasting are not our ways, but my faith is very strong.

If the Dream Comes True

"If the dream comes true, as I hope and believe it will, you and I will go away, dear, and see the world. We shall go to Europe and Egypt and Japan and India, and to the Southern islands, to Greece and Constantinople—I have planned it all. Aunt Miriam can stay here, or we will take her with us, just as you choose. When you can walk, Barbara, and I can see, I shall draw a large check, and we will start at the first possible moment. The greatest blessing of money, I think, is the opportunity it gives for travel. I have been glad, too, so many times, that we are able to afford all these doctors and nurses. Think of the poor people who must suffer always because they cannot command services which are necessarily high-priced."

Barbara's senses reeled and the cold, steel fingers clutched more closely at the aching fibre of her heart. Until this moment, she had not thought of the financial aspects of her situation—it had not occurred to her that Doctor Conrad and the blue and white nurses and even the red-haired young man would expect to be paid. And when her father went to the hospital—"I shall have to sew night and day all the rest of my life," she thought, "and, even then, die in debt."

But over and above and beyond it all stood the Lie, that had lived in her house for twenty years and more and was now to be cast out, if—Barbara's heart stood still in horror because, for the merest fraction of an instant, she had dared to hope that her father might never see again.

"I could not have gone alone," the old man was saying, "and even if I could, I should never have left you, but now, I think, the time is coming. I have dreamed all my life of the strange countries beyond the sea, and longed to go. Your dear mother and I were going, in a little while, but—" His lips quivered and he stopped abruptly.

Three Things

"What would you see, Daddy, if you had your choice? Tell me the three things in the world that you most want to see." With supreme effort, Barbara put self aside and endeavoured to lead him back to happier things.

"Three things?" he repeated. "Let me think. If God should give me back my sight for the space of half an hour before I died, I should choose to see, first, your dear mother's letter in which she says that she died loving me; next, your mother herself as she was just before she died, and then, dear, my Flower of the Dusk—my baby whom I never have seen. Perhaps," he added, thoughtfully, "perhaps I should rather see you than Constance, for, in a very little while, I should meet her past the sunset, where she has waited so long for me. But the letter would come first, Barbara—can you understand?"

"Yes," she breathed, "I understand."

The hope in her heart died. She could not ask for the letter. He took it from his pocket as though it were a jewel of great price. "Put my finger on the words that say, 'I love him still.'"

Blinded with tears and choked by sobs, Barbara pointed out the line. That, at least, was true. The old man raised it to his lips as a monk might raise his crucifix when kneeling in penitential prayer.

"I keep it always near me," he said, softly. "I shall keep it until I can see."

Long after he had gone to bed, Barbara lay trembling. The problem that had risen up before her without warning seemed to have no possible solution. If he recovered his sight, she could not keep him from knowing their poverty. One swift glance would show him all—and destroy his faith in her. That was unavoidable. But—need he know that the dead had deceived him too?

The innate sex-loyalty, which is strong in all women who are really fine, asserted itself in full power now. It was not only the desire to save her father pain that made Barbara resolve, at any cost, to keep the betraying letter from him. It was also the secret loyalty, not of a child to an unknown mother, but of woman to woman—of sex to sex.

To-Day and To-Morrow

The house was very still. Outside, a belated cricket kept up his cheery fiddling as he fared to his hidden home. Sometimes a leaf fell and rustled down the road ahead of a vagrant wind. The clock ticked monotonously. Second by second and minute by minute, To-Morrow advanced upon Barbara; that To-Morrow which must be made surely right by the deeds of To-Day.

"If I could go," murmured Barbara. She was free of the plaster and she could move about in bed easily. Ironically enough, her crutches leaned against the farther wall, in sight but as completely out of reach as though they were in the next room.

Barbara sat up in bed and, cautiously, placed her two tiny bare feet on the floor. With great effort, she stood up, sustained by a boundless hope. She discovered that she could stand, even though she ached miserably, but when she attempted to move, she fell back upon the bed. She could not walk a step.

Vanishing Hopes

Faint with fear and pain, she got back into bed. She knew, now, all that the red-haired young man had refused to tell her. He was too kind to say that she was not to walk, after all. He was leaving it for Doctor Conrad—or Eloise.

Objects in the room danced before her mockingly. Her crutches were veiled by a mist—those friendly crutches which had served her so well and were now out of her reach. But Barbara had no time for self-pity. The dominant need of the hour was pressing heavily upon her.

With icy, shaking fingers, Barbara rang her bell. Presently Miriam came in, attired in a flannel dressing-gown which was hopelessly unbecoming. Barbara was moved to hysterical laughter, but she bit her lips.

"Aunt Miriam," she said, trying to keep her voice even, "father has a letter of mine in his coat pocket which I should like to read again to-night. Will you bring

me his coat, please?"

Miriam turned away without a word. Her face was inscrutable.

"Don't wake him," called Barbara, in a shrill whisper. "If he is not asleep, wait until he is. I would not have him wakened, but I must have the coat to-night."

From his closed door came the sound of deep, regular breathing. Miriam turned the knob noiselessly, opened the door, and slipped in. When her eyes became accustomed to the darkness, she found the coat easily. It had not taken long. Even Barbara might well be surprised at her quickness.

Perhaps the letter was not in his coat—it might be somewhere else. At any rate, it would do no harm to make sure before going in to Barbara. Miriam went into her own room and calmly lighted a candle.

The Letter Recovered

Yes, the letter was there—two sheets: one in ink, in Constance's hand, the other, in pencil, written by Barbara. Why should Barbara write to one who was blind?

With her curiosity now thoroughly aroused, Miriam hastily read both letters, then put them back. Her lips were curled in a sneer when she took the coat into Barbara's room and gave it to her without speaking.

The girl thrust an eager hand into the inner pocket and, with almost a sob of relief, took out her mother's letter and her own version of it.

"Thank you, Aunty," breathed Barbara. "I am sorry—to—to—disturb you, but there was no—other way."

The Letter Destroyed

Miriam went out, as quietly as she had come, carrying the coat and leaving Barbara's door ajar. When she was certain that she was alone, Barbara tore the letter into shreds. So much, at least, was sure. Her father should never see them, whatever he might think of her.

Miriam was standing outside the blind man's door. She fancied she heard him stir. It did not matter—there was plenty of time before morning to return the

coat. She took it back into her own room and sat down to think.

Her mirror reflected her face and the unbecoming dressing-gown. The candlelight, however, was kind. It touched gently upon the grey in her hair, hid the dark hollows under her eyes, and softened the lines in her face. It lent a touch of grace to her work-worn hands, moving nervously in her lap.

After twenty-one years, this was what Constance had to say to Barbara—that she loved another man, that Ambrose North was not to know it, and that she did not quite trust Miriam. Also that Miriam had loved Ambrose North and had never quite forgiven Constance for taking him away from her.

Out of the shadow of the grave, Miriam's secret stared her in the face. She had not dreamed, until she read the letter, that Constance knew. Barbara knew now, too. Miriam was glad that Barbara had the letter, for she knew that, in all probability, she would destroy it.

A Crumbling Structure

The elaborate structure of deceit which they had so carefully reared around the blind man was crumbling, even now. If he recovered his sight, it must inevitably fall. He would know, in an instant of revelation, that Miriam was old and ugly and not beautiful, as she had foolishly led him to believe, years ago, when he asked how much time had changed her. She looked pitifully at her hands, rough and knotted and red through untiring slavery for him and his.

She and Barbara would be sacrificed—no, for he would forgive Barbara anything. She was the only one who would lose through his restored vision, unless Constance might, in some way, be revealed to him as she was.

"I do not quite trust Miriam. She loved your father and I took him away from her." The cruel sentences moved crazily before her as in letters of fire.

The letter was gone. Ambrose North would never see the evidence of Constance's distrust of her, nor come, without warning, upon Miriam's pitiful secret which, with a woman's pride, she would hide from him at all costs. None the less, Constance had stabbed her again. A ghostly hand clutching a dagger had suddenly come up from the grave, and the thrust of the cold, keen steel had been very sure.

Scheming Miriam

For twenty years and more, she had been tempted to read to the blind man the letter Constance had written to Laurence Austin just before she died. For that length of time, her desire to blacken Constance, in the hope that the grief-stricken heart might once more turn to her, had warred with her love and her woman's fear of hurting the one she loved. To-night, even in the face of the letter to Barbara, she knew that she should never have courage to read it to him, nor even to give it to him with her own hands.

In case he recovered his sight, she might leave it where he would find it. She was glad, now, that the envelope was torn, for he would not be apt to open a letter addressed to another, even though Constance had penned the superscription and the man to whom it was addressed was dead. His fine sense of honour would, undoubtedly, lead him to burn it. But, if the letter were in a plain envelope, sealed, and she should leave it on his dresser, he would be very sure to open it, if he saw it lying there, and then——

Miriam smiled. Constance would be paid at last for her theft of another woman's suitor, for her faithlessness and her cowardly desertion. There was a heavy score against Constance, who had so belied the meaning of her name, and the twenty years had added compound interest. North might not—probably would not—turn again to Miriam after all these years; she saw that plainly to-night for the first time, but he would, at any rate, see that he had given up the gold for the dross.

Miriam got her work-box and began to mend the coat lining. She had not known that it was torn. She wondered how he would feel when he discovered that the precious letter was lost. Would he blame Barbara—or her?

It would be too bad to have him lose the comfort those two sheets of paper had given him. Miriam had seen him as he sat alone for hours in his own room, with the door ajar, caressing the written pages as though they were alive and answered him with love for love. She knew it was Constance's letter to Barbara, but she had lacked curiosity as to its contents until to-night.

The Plot

The letter to Laurence Austin was written on paper of the same size. There was still some of it, in Constance's desk, in the living-room downstairs. Suppose she should replace one letter with the other, and, if he ever read it, let him have it all out with Barbara, who was trying to save him from knowledge that he should have had long ago.

The coat slipped to the floor as Miriam considered the plan. Perhaps one of them would ask her what it was. In that case she would say, carelessly: "Oh, a letter Constance left for Laurence Austin. I did not think it best to deliver it, as it could do no good and might do a great deal of harm." She would have the courage for that, surely, but, if she failed at the critical moment, she could say, simply: "I do not know."

She crept downstairs and returned with a sheet of Constance's note-paper. Neither she nor Barbara had ever been obliged to use it, and it was far back in a corner of a deep drawer, together with North's check-book, which had been useless for so many years.

As she had expected, it exactly matched the other sheet. She folded the two together, with the letter to Laurence Austin inside. North would not be disappointed, now, when he reached into his pocket and found no fond letter

from his dead but still beloved Constance. Barbara could not change this, by rewriting into anything save a cry of passionate love.

Subtle Revenge

Miriam's whole being glowed with satisfaction. She thrilled with the pleasure of this subtle revenge upon Constance, who was fully repaid, now, for writing as she had.

"I do not quite trust Miriam. She loved your father and I took him away from her."

She repeated the words in a whisper, and smiled to think of the deeply loving, passionate page to another man that had filled the place. Let the Fates do their worst now, for when he should read it——

The Irony of Fate

Some way, Miriam was very sure that his sight was to be restored to him. She perceived, now, the irony of his caressing the letter Constance had written to Barbara. How much more ironical it would be to see him, with that unearthly light upon his face, moving his hand across the page Constance had written to Laurence Austin just before she died. Miriam well knew that the other letters had come first and that Constance's last word had been to the man she loved.

The hours passed on, slowly. The mist that hung over the sea was faintly touched with dawn before Miriam arose, and, taking the coat, went back to Ambrose North's room. She paused outside the door, but all was still.

She entered, quietly, and laid the coat on a chair. She started back to the door, but, before she touched the knob, the blind man stirred in his sleep.

"Constance," he said, drowsily, "is that you? Have you come back, Beloved? It has seemed so long."

Surging Hatred

Miriam set her lips grimly against the surging hatred for the dead that welled up within her. She went out hastily, and noiselessly closed the door.

XVII

"Never Again"

Barbara did not mind lying in bed, now that the heavy plaster cast was gone and she could move about with comparative freedom. Every day, Aunt Miriam massaged her with fragrant oils, and she faithfully took the slight exercises she was bidden to take, even though she knew it was of no use. She was glad, now, that she had kept the crutches in sight, for they had steadily reminded her not to hope too much.

Bitterly Disappointed

Still, she was bitterly disappointed, though she thought she had not allowed herself to hope—that she had done it only because Eloise wanted her to. Perhaps the red-haired young man knew, and perhaps not—she was not so sure, now, that he had refrained from telling her through motives of kindness. But Doctor Conrad would know, instantly, and he and Eloise would be very sorry. Barbara wiped away her tears and compressed her lips tightly together. "I won't cry," she said to herself. "I won't, I won't, I won't."

Her father had gone to the city with the red-haired young man and the nurse. He had been gone more than a week, and Barbara had received no news of him save a brief note from Doctor Conrad. He said that her father had been to a specialist of whom he had spoken to her, and that an operation had been decided upon. He would tell her all about it, he added, when he saw her.

Day by day, Barbara lived over the last evening she and her father had spent together—all the fear and foreboding. She did not for a moment regret that she had taken his precious letter from him and destroyed it. She would face whatever she must, and as bravely as she might, but he should not be hurt in that manner—she had taken the one sure way to spare him that.

A Long Farewell

When he came back, and realised to the full how steadily she had deceived him, he could love her no more. When he said good-bye to her the morning he

went away, it had been good-bye in more ways than one. It was a long farewell to the love and confidence that had bound him to her; an eternal separation, in spirit, from the child he had loved.

The tears came when she remembered how he had said good-bye to her. Aunt Miriam and the red-haired young man and the nurse had left them alone together for what might be the last time on earth, and was most surely the last time as regarded the old, sweet relation so soon to be severed—unless he came back blind, as he had gone.

The old man had leaned over her and kissed her twice. "Flower of the Dusk," he had said, with surpassing tenderness, "when I come back, the dusk will change to dawn. If the darkness lifts I shall see you first, and so, for a little while, good-bye."

He had gone downstairs quickly and lightly, as one who is glad to go. When she last saw him, he was walking ahead of the young doctor and the nurse, straight and eager and almost young again, sustained by the same boundless hope that had given Barbara strength for her ordeal.

Dr. Conrad Comes Again

It was almost two weeks before Doctor Conrad came down. He had been obliged, lately, to miss several Sundays with Eloise. When Aunt Miriam came and told Barbara that he was downstairs, she felt a sudden, sharp pang of disappointment, not for herself, but for him. He had tried so hard and done so much, and to know that he had failed— Even in the face of her own bitter outlook, she could be sorry for him.

But, when he came in, he did not seem to need anyone's sympathy. He was so magnificently young and strong, so full of splendid vitality. Barbara's failing courage rose in answer to him and she smiled as she offered a frail little hand.

"Well, little girl," said Doctor Allan, sitting down on the bed beside her, "how goes it?"

"Tell me about father," begged Barbara, ignoring the question.

The Main Trouble

"Father is doing very well," Allan assured her. "He has recovered nicely from

the operation and we have strong hope for the sight of one eye if not for both. I can almost promise you partial restoration, but, of course, it is impossible to tell definitely until later. His heart is very weak—that seems to be the main trouble now."

Barbara lay very still, with her eyes closed.

"Aren't you glad?" asked Doctor Allan, in surprise.

"Yes," answered Barbara, with difficulty. "Indeed, yes. I was just thinking."

"A penny for your thoughts," he smiled.

"Are they going to take off the bandages there at the hospital?"

"Why, yes—of course."

"They mustn't!" cried Barbara, sitting up in bed. "Or, if they have to, I must go there. Doctor Conrad, I must see my father before he regains his sight."

"Why?" asked Allan. "Don't cry, little girl—tell me."

His voice was very soothing, and, as he spoke, he took hold of her fluttering hands. The strong clasp was friendly and reassuring.

"Because I've lied to him," sobbed Barbara.

"I've made him think we were rich instead of poor. He doesn't know that I've earned our living all these years by sewing, and that we've had to sell everything that anybody would buy—the pearls and laces and everything. He hates a lie and he'll despise me. It will break his heart. I'd rather tell him myself than to have him find it out."

"Little girl," said Allan, in his deep, tender voice; "dear little girl. Nobody on earth could blame you for doing that, least of all your father. If he's half the man I think he is, he'll only love you the more for doing it."

Barbara looked up at him, her deep blue eyes brimming with tears. "Do you think," she asked, chokingly, "that he ever can forgive me?"

Allan laughed. "In a minute," he assured her. "Of course he'll forgive you. But

I'll promise you that you shall see him first. As far as that is concerned, I can take the bandages off myself, after he comes home."

"Can you really? And will you?"

"Surely. Now don't fret about it any more. Let's see how you're getting on."

In an instant the man was pushed into the background and the great surgeon took his place. He went at his work with the precision and power of a perfect machine, guided by that unspoken sympathy which was his inestimable gift. He tested muscles and bones and turned the joint in its socket. Barbara watched his face anxiously. His forehead was set in a frown and his eyes were keen, but the rest of his face was impassive.

"Sit up," he said. "Now, turn this way. That's right—now stand up."

Barbara obeyed him, trembling. In a minute more he would know.

"Stand on this side only. Now, can you walk?"

"No," answered Barbara, in a sad little whisper, "I can't." She reached for her faithful crutches, which leaned against the foot of the bed, but Doctor Allan snatched them away from her.

"No," he said, with his face illumined. "Never again."

New Hopes

Barbara gasped. "What do you mean?" she asked, terror and joy strangely mingling in her voice.

"Never again," Doctor Allan repeated. "You're never to have your crutches again."

Barbara gazed at him in astonishment. She stood there in her little white night-gown, which was not long enough to cover her bare pink feet, with a great golden braid hanging over either shoulder and far below her waist. Her blue eyes were very wide and dark.

"Am I going to walk?" she asked, in a queer little whisper.

"Certainly, except when you're riding, or sitting down, or asleep."

"I can't believe it," she answered, with quivering lips. Then she threw her arms around Doctor Allan's neck and kissed him with the sweet impulsiveness of a child.

"Thank you," he said, softly. "Now we'll walk."

Walking Again

He put his arm around her and Barbara took a few stumbling steps. Aunt Miriam opened the door and came in.

"Look," cried Barbara. "I'm walking."

"So I see," replied Miriam. "I heard the noise and came up to see what was the matter. I thought perhaps you wanted something." She retreated as swiftly as she had come. Allan stared after her and seemed to be on the verge of saying something very much to the point, but fortunately held his peace.

"You'll have to learn," he said, to Barbara, with a new gentleness in his tone. "Your balance is entirely different and these muscles and joints will have to learn to work. Keep up the exercise and the massage. You can have a cane, if you like, but no crutches. Is there someone who would help you for an hour or so every day?"

"Roger would," she said, "or Aunt Miriam."

"Better get Roger—he'll be stronger. And also more willing," he thought, but he did not say so. "Don't tire yourself, but walk a little every day, as you feel like it."

When he went, he took the crutches with him. "You might be tempted," he explained, "if they were here, and your father's cane is all you really need. Be a good girl and I'll come up again soon."

A Great Success

Eloise was watching from the piazza of the hotel, and, when he came in sight, she went up the road to meet him.

"Oh, Allan," she cried, breathlessly, as she saw the crutches. "Is she——?"

"She's all right. It's one of the most successful operations ever done in that line, even if I do say it as shouldn't."

"Of course," smiled Eloise, looking up at him fondly. "I know *that*."

They walked together down to the shore, followed by the deep and open interest of the rocking-chair brigade, marshalled twenty strong, on the hotel veranda. It was October and the children had all been taken back to school. The exquisite peace of the place was a thing to dream about and be spoken of only in reverent whispers.

The tide was going out. Allan hurled one of the crutches far out to sea. "They've worked faithfully and long," he said, "and they deserve a little jaunt to Europe. Here goes."

He was about to throw the other, but Eloise took it from him. "Let me," she suggested. "I'd love to throw a crutch over to Europe."

She tried it, with the customary feminine awkwardness. It did not go beyond the shallow water, and speared itself, sharp end downward, in the soft sand.

Allan laughed uproariously and Eloise coloured with shame. "Never mind," she said, with affected carelessness, "you couldn't have made it stick up in the sand like that, and I think it'll get to Europe just as soon as yours does, so there."

They sat down on the beach, sheltered from prying eyes by a sand dune, and directly opposite the crutch, which wobbled with every wave that struck it. "Think what it means," said Eloise, "and think what it might mean. It might be part of a shipwreck, or someone who needed it very much might have dropped it accidentally out of a boat, or the one who had it might have died, after long suffering."

"Or," continued Allan, "someone might have outgrown the need of it and thrown it away, as the tiny dwellers in the sea cast off their shells."

Thanks

Eloise turned to him, with her deep eyes soft with luminous mist. "I haven't thanked you," she said, "for all you have done for my little girl." She lifted her sweet face to his.

"If you're going to thank me like that," said Allan, huskily, "I'll cut up the whole township and not even bother to save the pieces."

"You needn't," laughed Eloise, "but it was dear of you. You've never done anything half so lovely in all your life."

"It was you who did it, dear. I was but the humble instrument in your hands."

"Was Barbara glad?"

"I think so. She kissed me, too, but not like that."

"Did she, really? The sweet, shy little thing. Bless her heart."

"I infer, Miss Wynne," remarked Allan, in a judicial tone, "that you're not jealous."

"Jealous? I should say not. Anybody who can get you away from me," she added, as an afterthought, "can have you with my blessing and a few hints as to your management."

Really Glad

"Safe offer," he commented. "Are you really glad I've done what I have for Barbara?"

"Oh, my dear! So glad!"

"Then," suggested Allan, hopefully, "don't you think I should be thanked again?"

"I forgot to ask you about that dear old man," said Eloise, after a little. "Is he going to be all right, too?"

"Pretty much so, I think. We're very sure that he can see a little—he will not be totally blind. He will probably need glasses, but there will be plenty of time for that. His heart is the main trouble now. Any sudden excitement or shock might easily prove fatal."

"Of course he won't have that."

"We'll hope not, but life itself is more or less exciting and you can never tell what's going to break loose next. I have long since ceased to be surprised at anything, except the fact that you love me. I can't get used to that."

"You will, though," said Eloise, a little sadly. "You'll get so used to it that you won't even look up when I come into the room—you'll keep right on reading your paper."

"Impossible."

"That's what they all say, but it's so."

"Have all your previous husbands changed so quickly that you're afraid to try me?"

"I've seen it so much," sighed Eloise.

A great light broke in upon Allan. "Is that why?" he demanded, putting his arm around her. "No, you needn't try to get away, for you can't. Is that why I'm sentenced to all this infernal waiting?"

Eloise bit her lips and did not answer.

"Is it?" he asked, authoritatively.

"A little," she whispered. "This is so sweet, and sometimes I'm afraid——"

"Darling! Darling!" he said, drawing her closer. "You make me ashamed of my fellowmen when you say that. But do you want the year to stand still always at June?"

"No," she answered. "I'm willing to grow with Love, from all the promise of Spring into the harvest and even into Winter, as long as the sweetness is there. Don't you understand, Allan? Who would wish for June when Indian Summer fills all the silences with shimmering amethystine haze? And who would give up a keen, crisp Winter day, when the air sets the blood to tingling, for apple blossoms or even roses? It's not that—I only want the sweetness to stay."

"Please God, it shall," returned Allan, solemnly. He was profoundly moved.

"It shouldn't be so hard to keep it," went on Eloise, thoughtfully. "I've been thinking about it a good deal, lately. Life will give us back whatever we put into it. In a way, it's just like a bank. Put joy into the world and it will come back to you with compound interest, but you can't check out either money or happiness when you have made no deposits."

"Very true," he responded. "I never thought of it in just that way before."

"If you put joy in, and love, unselfishness, and a little laughter, and perfect faith—I think they'll all come back, some day."

A scarlet leaf from a maple danced along the beach, blown from some distant bough where the frost had set a flaming signal in the still September night. A yellow leaf from an elm swiftly caught it, and together they floated out to sea.

When?

"Sweetheart," said Allan, "do you see? The leaves are beginning to fall and in a little while the trees will be bare. How long are you going to keep me waiting for wife and home?"

"I—don't—know."

"Dear, can't you trust me?"

"Yes, always," she answered, quickly. "You know that."

"Then when?"

"When all the colour is gone," she said, after a pause. "When the forest is desolate and the wind sighs through bare branches—when Winter chills our hearts—then I will come to you, and for a little while bring back the Spring."

"Truly, Sweetheart?"

"Truly."

"You'll never be sorry, dear." He took her into his arms and sealed her promise upon her lips.

XVIII

The Passing of Fido

Alone in the Office

Fido had been in the office alone for almost three hours. The old man, who he knew was his master, and the young man, who was inclined to be impatient with him when he felt playful, had both gone out. The door was locked and there was nobody on the other side of it to answer a vigorous scratch or even a pleading whine. When people knocked, they went away again, almost immediately.

The window-sills were too high for a little dog to reach, and there was no chair near. He walked restlessly around the office, stopping at intervals to sit down and thoughtfully contemplate his feet, which were much too large for the rest of him. He chased a fly that tickled his ear, but it eluded him, and now buzzed temptingly on a window-pane, out of his reach.

It seemed that something serious must have happened, for Fido had never been left alone so long before. If he had known that the old man was conversing pleasantly with some fellow-citizens at the grocery store, and that the young one had his arm around a laughing girl in white, trying to teach her to walk, he would have been very indignant indeed.

Several times, lately, Fido had noticed, the young man had gone out shortly after the old one went to the post-office. It would be, usually, half a day later when his master returned with a letter or two, or often with none. The young man took pains to get back before the old one did, which was well, for there should always be someone in a lawyer's office to receive clients and keep dogs from being lonely.

Pangs of Hunger

The pangs of a devastating hunger assailed Fido, which was not strange, for it was long past the hour when the old man usually took a bulky parcel out of his desk, spread a newspaper upon the floor, and bade Fido eat of cold potatoes, meat, and bread. There was, nearly always, a nice, juicy bone to beguile the

tedium of the afternoon. Fido and the old man seldom went home to supper before half past five, and Fido would have been famished were it not for the comfort of the bone.

He sniffed around the larger of the two desks. A tempting odour came from a drawer far above. He stood on his hind legs and reached up as far as he could, but the drawer was closed. So was every other drawer in the office, except one, and that was in the young man's desk. Probably there was nothing in it for a hungry dog—there never had been.

The Little Red Box

Still, it might be well to investigate. Fido laboriously climbed up on the chair and put his paws upon the edge of the open drawer. There was nothing in it but papers and a small, square, red box with a rubber band around it.

Fido took the box in his mouth and jumped down. He pushed it with paws and nose over to his own particular corner, sniffing appreciatively meanwhile. It took much vigorous chewing to get the rubber band off and to make a hole in one corner of the box, out of which rolled a great number of small, cylindrical objects. They were not like anything Fido had ever eaten before, but hungry little dogs must take what they can find. So he gulped them all down but one. This one refused to be swallowed and Fido quickly repented of his rashness, for it was distinctly not good. He ate the rubber band and all but a little piece of the red box before the taste was quite gone out of his mouth. Even then, a drink of fresh, cool water would have been very acceptable, but there was nobody to care whether a little dog died of thirst or not.

The bluebottle fly buzzed loudly upon the window-pane, but Fido no longer aspired to him. A vast weariness took the place of his former restlessness. He sat and blinked at his ill-assorted feet for some time, then dragged himself lazily toward his cushion in the corner. Before he reached it, he was so very sleepy that he lay down upon the floor. In less than five minutes, he was off to the canine dreamland, one paw still caressingly laid over the fragments of the little red box.

The Judge Returns

When the Judge came in, an hour later, he was much surprised to find the office locked and the cards of three valued clients on the floor under the door. There had been four, but Fido had eaten the first one. Two of them were marked with the hour of the call. It indicated, plainly, to a logical mind, that Roger had left the office soon after he did, and had not returned. It was very strange.

Fido slumbered on, though hitherto the sound of his master's step would awaken him to noisy and affectionate demonstrations. The Judge turned Fido over with a friendly foot, but there was no answer save a wide yawn. He brought the parcel of bread and meat and opened it, leaving it on the floor close by. Then he took a chicken bone and held it to the sleeper's nose, but Fido turned away as though from an annoying fly.

As the dog had never before failed to take immediate interest in a chicken bone, the Judge was alarmed. He picked up the fragments of the little red box and wondered if anyone could have poisoned his pet. He brought fresh water, but Fido, hitherto possessed of an unquenchable thirst, failed to respond.

When Roger came in, belated and breathless, he found his explanations coldly received. Whether or not Barbara North ever walked was evidently a matter of no particular concern to the Judge. It was also of no immediate importance that clients had come and found the office empty, even though one of them, presumably, had intended to settle an account of long standing. The vital question was simply this: what was the matter with Fido?

Roger did not know. Though Fido's disdain of food and drink might be abnormal, his position on the floor and his deep breathing were quite natural.

An Inquiry

Then the fragments of the little red box were presented to Roger, and inquiry made as to the contents. Also, had Roger tried to poison the Judge's pet?

Roger had not. The box had contained a prescription for lumbago which Doctor Conrad had given his mother. It was in the drawer in his desk. He might possibly have left the drawer open—probably had, as the box was gone.

The Judge was deeply desirous of knowing why Mrs. Austin's lumbago cure should be kept in the office, within reach of unwary pets. After considerable hesitation, Roger explained.

The owner of Fido was highly incensed. First, he condemned the entire procedure as "criminal carelessness," setting forth his argument in unparliamentary language. Then, remembering that Roger had not really loved Fido, he brought forth an unworthy motive, and accused the hapless young man of murderous intent.

The Judge Commands

Roger would kindly borrow the miniature express waggon which was the prized possession of the postmaster's small son, place the cushion in it, with its precious burden, and convey Fido, with all possible tenderness, to his other and larger cushion in the Judge's own bedroom. He would take the cold chicken, too, please, for if Fido ever wanted anything again in this world, it would probably be chicken.

The Judge would follow as soon as he had written to his clients and expressed his regret that his clerk's numerous social duties did not permit of his giving much time to his business. And, the Judge added, as an afterthought, if Fido should die, it would not be necessary for Roger to return to the office. He wanted someone who could be trusted not to poison his dog while he was out.

Roger was too much disturbed to be conscious of the ludicrous aspect he presented to the public eye as he went down the main thoroughfare of Riverdale, dragging the small cart which contained the slumbering Fido and his cushion. He did not even hear the pointed comments made by the young of both sexes whom he encountered on his interminable walk, and forgot to thank the postmaster for the loan of the cart when he returned it, empty save for a fragment of cold chicken and a faint, doggy smell.

On the Beach

For obvious reasons, he could not go to the office and he did not like to take his disturbing mood to Barbara. Besides, his mother, who now had long wakeful periods in the daytime, might see him and ask unpleasant questions. He went down to the beach, yearning for solitude, and settled himself in the shelter of a sand dune to meditate upon the unhappy events of the day.

He did not realise that the sand dune belonged to Eloise, and that she was wont to sit there with Doctor Conrad, out of the wind, and safely screened from the argus-eyed rocking-chairs on the veranda. He was so preoccupied that he did

not even hear the sound of their voices as they approached. Turning the corner quickly, they almost stumbled over him.

"Upon my word," cried Eloise. "Sir Knight of the Dolorous Countenance, what has gone wrong?"

"Nothing," answered Roger, miserably.

"Anybody dead?" queried Allan, lazily stretching himself upon the sand.

"Not yet, but somebody is dying."

"Who?" demanded Eloise. "Barbara, or your mother? Who is it?"

"Fido," said Roger hopelessly, staring out to sea.

Allan laughed, but Eloise returned, kindly: "I didn't know you had a dog. I'm sorry."

"He isn't mine," explained Roger; "I only wish he were. If he had been," he added, viciously, "he'd have died a violent death long ago."

Miss Wynne's Plans

Little by little, the whole story came out. Allan kept his face straight with difficulty, but Eloise was genuinely distressed. "Don't worry," she said, sympathetically. "If Fido dies and the Judge won't take you back, I can probably find an opening for you in town. Your office work will pay your expenses, so you can go to law school in the evenings and be ready for your examinations in the Spring."

"Oh, Miss Wynne," cried Roger. "How good you are! I don't wonder Barbara calls you her Fairy Godmother."

"Barbara is coming to town to spend the Winter with me," Eloise went on, happily. "She's never had a good time and I'm going to give her one. As soon as she's strong enough, and can walk well, I'm going to take her, bag and baggage. It's all I'm waiting here for."

In a twinkling, Roger's despair was changed to something entirely different. "Oh," he cried, "I do hope Fido will die. Do you think there is any chance?" he asked, eagerly, of Allan.

"I should think, from what you tell me," remarked Allan, judicially, "that Fido was nearly through with his earthly troubles. A dose of that size might easily keep any of us from worrying any longer about the price of meat and next month's rent."

"Mother won't like it," said Roger, soberly. "She may not be willing for me to go."

"She should be," returned Allan, "as you've saved her life at the expense of Fido's. When I go up to see Barbara this afternoon, I'll stop in and tell her."

Unexpected Call

Miss Mattie was awake, but yawning, when he knocked at her door. "There wasn't no call for you to come," she said, inhospitably; "the medicine ain't used up yet."

"Let me see the box, please."

She shuffled off to the kitchen cupboard and brought it to him. There were half a dozen flour-filled capsules in it. Allan observed that the druggist, in writing the directions on the cover, had failed to add the last two words.

"Idiot," he said, under his breath. "I wrote, 'Take two every four hours until relieved.'"

"I was relieved," explained Miss Mattie, "and I've had fine sleep ever since. It's wore off considerable in the last three days, though."

Allan then told her, in vivid and powerful language, how the druggist's error might have had very serious results, had it not been for Roger's presence of mind in substituting the flour-filled capsules for the "searching medicine." He was surprised to find that Miss Mattie was ungrateful, and that she violently resented the imposition.

Notion of Economy

"Roger's just like his pa," she said, with the dull red rising in her cheeks. "He never had no notion of economy. When I'm takin' a dollar and twenty cents' worth of medicine, to keep it from bein' wasted, Roger goes and puts flour into the covers of it, and feeds the expensive medicine to Judge Bascom's Fido. He thinks more of that dog than he does of his sick mother."

"My dear Mrs. Austin," said Allan, solemnly, "have you not heard the news?"

"What news?" she demanded, bristling.

"Little Fido is dying. He took all the medicine and has been asleep ever since. By morning, he will be dead."

Miss Mattie's jaw dropped. "Would you mind tellin' me," she asked, suspiciously, "why you took it on yourself to give me medicine that would pizen a dog? I might have took it all at once, to save it. Once I was minded to."

"Roger saved your life," said Allan, endeavouring to make his tone serious. "And because of it, he is about to lose his position. The Judge is so disturbed over Fido's approaching dissolution that he has told Roger never to come back any more. Unless we can find him a place in town, he has sacrificed his whole future to save his mother's life."

"Where is Roger?"

"I left him down on the beach, with Miss Wynne. I suppose he is still there."

"When you see him," commanded Miss Mattie, with some asperity, "will you kindly send him home? It's no time for him to be gallivantin' around with girls, when his mother's been so near death."

"I will," Allan assured her, reaching for his hat. "I hope you appreciate what he has done for you."

The Doctor Laughs

When he went down the road, his shoulders were shaking suspiciously. Miss Mattie was watching him through the lace curtains that glorified the parlour windows. "Seems as if he had St. Vitus's dance," she mused. "Wonder why he doesn't mix up some dog-pizen, and cure himself?"

When he was sure that he was out of sight, Allan sat down on a convenient boulder at the side of the road, and gave himself up to unrestrained mirth. The medicine which was about to prove fatal to Fido would have caused only prolonged sleep if taken in small doses, at proper intervals, by an adult. "It's a wonder she didn't take 'em all at once," he thought. "And if she had—" He speculated, idly, upon the probable effect.

His conscience pricked him slightly on account of the exaggeration in which he had mischievously indulged, but he told himself that Roger would be far better off in the city and his mother's consent would make his going much less difficult. He also realised that if Roger were there to amuse Barbara, Eloise might have more spare time than she would otherwise.

He stopped long enough to give the druggist a bad quarter of an hour, and then went back to the beach. Eloise and Roger were where he had left them, and the boy's gloom was entirely gone.

"Your mother wants you," he said, as he sat down on the other side of Eloise.

"All right—I'll go right up. How did she take it?"

"Very well. Just remember that you've saved her life, and you'll have no trouble."

Light-Hearted

When Roger went up the street, he was whistling, from sheer light-heartedness. Eloise had made so many plans for his future that he saw fame and fortune already within his reach.

When he knocked, never having been allowed the freedom of a latch key, he noted that all the blinds in the house were closed and wondered whether his mother had gone to sleep again. After a suitable interval, she opened the door, clad in her best black silk, and portentously solemn.

"Why, Mother, what's the matter?"

"Come in," she whispered. "Doctor Conrad has just been tellin' me how near I come to death. Oh, my son," she cried, throwing her arms around his neck, "you have saved my life."

Two Greetings

It seemed to Roger like a paragraph torn from *The Metropolitan Weekly*, but he patted her back soothingly as she clung to him. Maternal outbursts of this sort were extremely rare. He remembered only one other greeting like this—the day he had been swimming in the river with three other small boys and had been brought home in a blanket, half drowned.

"I suppose I shouldn't regret takin' dog-pizen, if it cured my back and give me the sleep I needed, but it was a dreadful narrow escape. And your takin' the medicine away from me and feedin' it to Fido was certainly clever, Roger. Every day you remind me more and more of your pa."

"Thank you," answered Roger. He was struggling with various emotions and found speech almost impossible.

"It's no more'n right," she resumed, "that, after having pizened Fido and lost you your place, that Doctor Conrad should stir himself around and get you a better place in the city, but I do hate to have you go, Roger. It'll be dreadful lonesome for me."

"Cheer up, Mother; I haven't gone yet. The dog may get well."

Miss Mattie shook her head sadly. "No, he won't," she sighed. "I took enough of that medicine to know how powerful it is, and Fido ain't got no chance. To-morrow I'll look over your things."

An atmosphere of solemnity pervaded the house, and the evening was spent very quietly. Miss Mattie read her Bible, as on Sunday evenings when she did not go to church, and sternly refused to open *The Housewife's Companion*, which lay temptingly near her.

Nightmare

She went to bed early, and Roger soon followed her, having strangely lost his desire to read, and not daring to go to see Barbara more than once a day. His night was made hideous by visions of himself drawing the cart containing the slumbering Fido into the church where Eloise and Doctor Conrad were being married, while Judge Bascom at the house, was conducting Miss Mattie's funeral.

In the morning, after breakfast, Roger seriously debated whether or not he should go down to the office. At last he tossed up a coin and muttered a faint imprecation as he picked it up.

With his hat firmly on and his hands in his pockets, Roger fared forth, whistling determinedly. He did not want to go to the office, and he dreaded, exceedingly, his next meeting with the irascible Judge.

As it happened, it was not necessary for him to go, for, at the corner of the street which led to the Judge's house, he met the postmaster's small son, laboriously dragging the fateful cart of yesterday. In it were all of Roger's books and other belongings, including an umbrella which he had loaned to the Judge on a rainy night and expected never to see again.

A Brief Message

The message was brief and very much to the point. Fido had died painlessly at four o'clock that morning.

XIX

The Dreams Come True

Gaining Strength

The hours Roger had taken from his work in the office had brought nothing but good to Barbara. She gained strength rapidly after she began to walk, and was soon able to dispense with the cane, though she could not walk easily, nor far. She tired quickly and was forced to rest often, but she went about the house slowly and even up and down the stairs.

Aunt Miriam made no comment of any sort. She did not say she was glad Barbara was well after twenty-two years of helplessness, even though she had taken entire care of her, and must have felt greatly relieved when the burden was lifted. She went about her work as quietly as ever, and fulfilled all her household duties with mechanical precision.

Spicy odours were wafted through the rooms, for Eloise had ordered enough jelly, sweet pickles, and preserves to supply a large family for two or three years. She had also bought quilts and rag rugs for all of her old-lady friends and taken the entire stock of candied orange peel for the afternoon teas which she expected to give during the Winter.

Barbara was hard at work upon the dainty lingerie Eloise had planned, and found, by a curious anomaly, that when she did not work so hard, she was able to accomplish more. The needle flew more swiftly when her fingers did not ache and the stitches blur indistinguishably with the fibre of the fabric. When Roger was not there to help her, she divided her day, by the clock, into hours of work and quarter-hours of exercise and rest.

She had been out of the gate twice, with Roger, and had walked up and down the road in front of the house, but, as yet, she had not gone beyond the little garden alone.

One Dark Cloud

Upon the fair horizon of the future was one dark cloud of dread which even Doctor Conrad's positive assurance had mitigated only for a little time. Barbara knew her father and his stern, uncompromising righteousness. When the bandages were taken off and he saw the faded walls and dingy furniture, the worn rugs, and the pitiful remnant of damask at his place at the table; when he realised that his daughter had deceived him ever since she could talk at all, he must inevitably despise her, even though he tried to hide it.

Dimly, Barbara began to perceive the intangible price that is attached to the things of the spirit as well as to the material necessities of daily life. She was forced to surrender his love for her as the compensation for his sight, yet she was firmly resolved to keep, for him, the love that refused to reckon with the barrier of a grave, but triumphantly went past it to clasp the dead Beloved closer still.

A Vague Dream

Of late, she had been thinking much of her mother. Until Roger had found his father's letter, and she had received her own, upon her twenty-second birthday, she had felt no sense of loss. Constance had been a vague dream to her and little more, in spite of her father's grieving and her instinctive sympathy.

With the letters, however, had come a change. Barbara felt a certain shadowy relationship and an indefinite bereavement. She wondered how her mother had looked, what she had worn, and even how she had dressed her hair. Since her father had gone to the hospital, she had wondered more than ever, but got no satisfaction when she had once asked Aunt Miriam.

She finished the garment upon which she was working, threaded the narrow white ribbon into it, folded it in tissue paper and put it into the chest. It was the last of the second set and Eloise had ordered six. "Four more to do," thought Barbara. "I wonder whether she wants them all alike."

The afternoon shadows had begun to lengthen, and it was Saturday. It was hardly worth while to begin a new piece of work before Monday morning, especially since she wanted to ask Eloise about a new pattern. Doctor Conrad was coming down for the weekend, and probably both of them would be there late in the afternoon, or on Sunday.

"How glad he'll be," said Barbara, to herself. "He'll be surprised when he sees how well I can walk. And father—oh, if father could only come too." She was eager, in spite of her dread.

In the Attic

Simply for the sake of exercise, Barbara climbed the attic stairs and came down again. After she had rested, she tried it once more, but was so faint when she reached the top that she went into the attic and sat down in an old broken rocker. It was the only place in the house where she had not been since she could walk, and she rather enjoyed the novelty of it.

A decrepit sofa, with the springs hanging from under it, was against the wall at one side, far back under the eaves. It was of solid mahogany and had not been bought by the searchers for antiques because its rehabilitation would be so expensive. That and the rocker in which Barbara sat were the only pieces of furniture remaining.

There were several trunks, old-fashioned but little worn. One was Aunt Miriam's, one was her father's, and the others must have belonged to her dead mother. For the first time in her life, Barbara was curious about the trunks.

The Old Trunk

When she was quite rested, she went over to a small one which stood near the window, and opened it. A faint, musty odour greeted her, but there was no disconcerting flight of moths. Every woollen garment in the house had long ago been used by Aunt Miriam for rugs and braided mats. She had taken Constance's underwear for her own use when misfortune overtook them, and there was little else left.

Barbara lifted from the trunk a gown of heavy white brocade, figured with violets in lavender and palest green. It was yellow and faded and the silver thread that ran through the pattern was tarnished so that it was almost black. The skirt had a long train and around the low-cut bodice was a deep fall of heavy Duchess lace, yellowed to the exquisite tint of old ivory. The short sleeves were trimmed with lace of the same pattern, but only half as wide.

"Oh," said Barbara, aloud, "how lovely!"

There was a petticoat of rustling silk, and a pair of dainty white slippers, yellowed, too, by the slow passage of the years. Their silver buckles were tarnished, but their high heels were as coquettish as ever.

"What a little foot," thought Barbara. "I believe it was smaller than mine."

She took off her low shoe, and, like Cinderella, tried on the slipper. She was much surprised to find that it fitted, though the high heels felt queer. Her own shoe was more comfortable, and so she changed again, though she had quite made up her mind to wear the slippers sometime.

Treasured Finery

In the trunk, too, she found a white bonnet that she tried on, but without satisfaction, as there was no mirror in the attic. This one trunk evidently contained the finery for which Miriam had not been able to find use.

One by one, Barbara took out the garments, which were all of silk or linen—there was nothing there for the moths. The long bridal veil of rose point, that Barbara had sternly refused to sell, was yellow, too, but none the less lovely. There was a gold scent-bottle set with discoloured pearls, an amethyst brooch which no one would buy because it had three small gold tassels hanging from it, and a lace fan with tortoise-shell sticks, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. A thrifty woman at the hotel had once offered two dollars for the fan, but Barbara had kept it, as she was sure it was worth more.

Down in the bottom of the trunk was an inlaid box that she did not remember having seen before. She slid back the cover and found a lace handkerchief, a broken cuff-button, a gold locket enamelled with black, a long fan-chain of gold, set with amethysts, a small gold-framed mirror evidently meant to be carried in a purse or hand-bag, a high shell comb inlaid with gold and set with amethysts, and ten of the dozen large, heavy gold hairpins which Ambrose North, in an extravagant mood, had ordered made for the shining golden braids of his girl-wife.

A Photograph

On the bottom of the box, face down, was a photograph. Barbara took it out, wonderingly, and started in amazement as her own face looked back at her. On the back was written, in the same clear hand as the letter: "For my son, or daughter. Constance North." Below was the date—just a month before Barbara was born.

The heavy hair, in the picture, was braided and wound around the shapely head. The high comb, the same that Barbara had just taken out of the box, added a finishing touch. Around the slender neck and fair, smooth shoulders fell the

Duchess lace that trimmed the brocade gown. The amethyst brooch, with two of the three tassels plainly showing, was pinned into the lace on the left side, half-way to the shoulder.

But it was the face that interested Barbara most, as it was the counterpart of her own. There was the same broad, low forehead, the large, deep eyes with long lashes, the straight little nose, and the tender, girlish mouth with its short upper lip, and the same firm, round, dimpled chin. Even the expression was almost the same, but in Constance's deep eyes was a certain wistfulness that the faint smile of her mouth could not wholly deny.

The woman who looked back at her daughter seemed strangely youthful. Barbara felt, in a way, as though she were the mother and Constance the child, for she was older, now, than her mother had been when she died. The years of helplessness and struggle had aged Barbara, too.

A Sweet Face

The slanting sunbeams of late afternoon came into the attic, but Barbara still studied the sweet face of the picture. Constance was made for love, and love had come when it was too late. What tenderness she was capable of; what toilsome journeys she would undertake without fear, if her heart bade her go! And what courage must have nerved her dimpled hands when she opened the grey, mysterious door of the Unknown! There was no hint of weakness in the face, but Constance had died rather than to take the chance of betraying the man who held her pledge. Barbara's young soul answered in passionate loyalty to the wistfulness, the hunger, and the unspoken appeal.

"He shall never know, Mother, dear," she said aloud. "I promise you that he shall never know."

Like her Mother

The shadows grew longer, and, at length, Barbara put the picture down. If she had on the gown, and twisted her braids around her head, she would look like her mother even more than now. She had a fancy to try it—to go downstairs and see what Aunt Miriam would say when she came in. Her eyes sparkled with delight when she drew on the long white stockings of finest silk and put on the white slippers with the tarnished silver buckles.

The gown was too long and a little too loose, but Barbara rejoiced in the faded brocade and in the rustle of the silk petticoat that cracked in several places when she put it on, the fabric was so frail. The ivory-tinted lace set off her shoulders beautifully, but she could only guess at the effect from the brief glimpses the tiny mirror gave her. She put on the amethyst brooch, hung the fan upon its chain and put it around her neck. Then she wound her braids around her head and fastened them securely with the gold hairpins. With the aid of the small-gold mirror, she put the comb in place, and loosened the soft hair on either side, so that it covered the tops of her ears.

She walked back and forth a few times, the full length of the attic, looking back to admire the sweep of her train. Then she sat down upon the decrepit sofa, trying to fancy herself a stately lady of long ago. The room was very still, and, without knowing it, Barbara had wearied herself with her unaccustomed exertion. Her white woollen gown and soft low shoes lay in a little heap on the floor near the window. She must not forget to take them when she went down to look in the mirror.

Presently, she stretched herself out upon the sofa, wondering, drowsily, whether her mother would have lain down to rest in that splendid brocade. She did not intend to sleep, but only to rest a little before going downstairs to surprise Aunt Miriam. Nevertheless, in a few minutes she was fast asleep and dreaming.

The Home-Coming

Eloise went down to the three o'clock train to meet Allan, and was much surprised when Ambrose North came, too. His eyes were bandaged, but otherwise he seemed as well as ever. They offered to go home with him, but he refused, saying that he could go alone as well as he ever had.

They strolled after him, however, keeping at a respectful distance, until they saw him enter the grey, weather-worn gate; then they turned back.

"Is he all right, Allan?" asked Eloise, anxiously.

"I hope so—indeed, I'm very sure he is. The operation turned out to be an extremely simple one, though it wasn't even dreamed of twenty years ago.

Barbara's case was simple too,—it's all in the knowing how. She has made one of the quickest recoveries on record, owing to the fact that her body is almost that of a child. When you come down to the root of the matter, surgery is merely the job of a skilled mechanic."

"But you'd be angry if anyone else said that."

"Of course."

"When do the bandages come off?"

A Case of Conscience

"I'm going up to-morrow. They'd have been off over a week ago, but Barbara insisted that she must see him first and ask him to forgive her for deceiving him. She thinks she's a criminal."

"Dear little saint," said Eloise, softly. "I wish none of us ever did anything more wicked than that."

"So do I, but there is an active remnant of a New-England conscience somewhere in Barbara. I'm not sure that the old man hasn't it, too."

"Do you suppose, for a moment, that he won't forgive her?"

"If he doesn't," returned Allan, concisely, "I'll break his ungrateful old neck. I hope she won't stir him up very much, though—he's got a bad heart."

Miriam's Welcome

Still, the old man showed no sign of weakness as he went briskly up the walk and knocked at his own door. When Miriam opened it, astonishment made her welcome almost inarticulate, for she had not expected him home so soon. He gave her the small black satchel that he carried, his coat and hat.

"How is Barbara?" he asked, eagerly. "How is my little girl?"

"Well enough," answered Miriam.

"Is she asleep?"

Miriam went to the stairs and called out: "Barbara! Oh, Barbara!" There was no answer.

She started upstairs, but he called her back. "Don't wake her," he said. "Perhaps I can take her supper up to her."

"Suit yourself," responded Miriam, shortly.

She did not see fit to tell him that Barbara was up and could walk. Doctor Conrad could have told him, if he had wanted to—at any rate, it was not Miriam's affair. She bitterly resented the fact that he had not even shaken hands with her when he came home, after his long absence. She hung up his coat and hat, lighted the fire, as the room was cool, went out into the kitchen, and closed the door.

The familiar atmosphere and the comfortable chair in which he sat brought him that peculiar peace of home which is one of the greatest gifts travel can bestow. Even the ticking of the clock came to his senses gratefully. Home at last, after all the pain, the dreary nights and days of acute loneliness, and only one more day to wait—perhaps.

"To see again," he thought. "I am glad I came home first. To-morrow, if God is good to me, I shall see my baby—and the letter. I have dreamed so often that she could walk and I could see!"

He took the two sheets of paper from his pocket and spread them out upon his knee. He moved his hands lovingly across the pages—the one written upon, the other blank. "She died loving me," he said to himself. "To-morrow I shall see it, in her own hand."

Why Not To-Day

Sunset flamed behind the hills and brought into the little room faint threads of gold and amethyst that wove a luminous tapestry with the dusk. The clock ticked steadily, and with every cheery tick brought nearer that dear To-Morrow of which he had dreamed so long. He speculated upon the difference made by the slow passage of a few hours. To-morrow, at this time, his bandages would be off—then why not to-day?

The letter fell to the floor and he picked it up, one sheet at a time, fretfully. The bandage around his temples and the gauze and cotton held firmly against his eyes all at once grew intolerable. It was the last few miles to the weary traveller, the last hour that lay between the lover and his beloved, the darkness before the dawn. He had been very patient, but at last had come to the end.

He Opens his Eyes

If only the bandages were off! "If they were," he thought, "I need not open my eyes—I could keep them closed until to-morrow." He raised his hands and worked carefully at the surgical knots until the outer strip was loosened. He wound it slowly off, then cautiously removed the layers of cotton and gauze.

He breathed a sigh of relief as he leaned back in his chair, with his eyes closed, determined to keep faith with the physicians, and, above all, with Doctor Conrad, who had been so very kind. There was no pain at all—only weakness. If the room were absolutely dark, perhaps he might open his eyes for a moment or two. Why should to-morrow be so different from to-day?

The letter was in his hands—that dear letter which said, "I have loved him, I love him still, and have never loved him more than I do to-day." The temptation worked subtly in his mind as strong wine might in his blood. Perhaps, after all, he could not see—the doctors had not given him a positive promise.

The fear made him faint, then surging hope and infinite longing merged into perfect belief—and trust. Unable to endure the strain of waiting longer, he opened his eyes, and as swiftly closed them again.

"I can see," he whispered, shrilly. "Oh, I can see!"

The blood beat hard in his pulses. He waited, wisely, until he was calm, then opened his eyes once more. The room was not dark, but was filled with the soft, golden glow of sunset—a light that illumined and, strangely, brought no pain. Objects long unfamiliar save by touch loomed large and dark before him. Remembered colours came back, mellowed by the half-light. Distances readjusted themselves and perspectives appeared in the transparent mist that seemed to veil everything. He closed his eyes, and said, aloud: "I can see! Oh, I can see!"

Reading the Letter

Little by little the mist disappeared and objects became clear. The velvety softness of the last light lay kindly upon the dingy room. When he tried to read the letter the words danced on the page. Trembling, he rose and took it over to the window, where the light was stronger. As he stood there, with his back to the door, Miriam, unheard, came into the room.

The bandages on the floor, the eagerness in every line of his body as he stood at the window, and the letter in his hand, gave her, in a single instant, all the information she needed. Her heart beat high with wild hope—the hour of her vengeance had come at last.

She feared he would not be able to read it. Then she remembered the yellowed page on which the writing stood out as clearly as though it had been large print. If he could see at all, he could see that.

Little by little, sustained and supported by his immeasurable longing, the man at the window spelled out the words, in an eager whisper:

"You who have loved me since the beginning of time—will understand and forgive me—for what I do to-day. I do it because I am not strong enough—to go on—and do my duty—by those who need me."

Miriam nodded with satisfaction. At last he knew why Constance had taken her own life.

"If there should be—meeting—past the grave—some day you and I—shall come together again—with no barrier between us." He put his hand to his forehead as though he did not quite understand, but hurried on to the next sentence, for his eyes were failing under the strain.

"I take with me—the knowledge of your love—which has strengthened—and sustained me—since the day—we first met—and must make—even a grave—warm and sweet."

Radiance of Soul

The light in the room seemed to Miriam to be not wholly of the golden sunset. Some radiance of soul must have made that clear soft light which veiled but did not hide. It was sunset, and yet the light was that of a Summer afternoon.

"And remember this—dead though I am—I love you still—you—and my little lame baby—who needs me so—and whom—I must leave—because I am not strong—enough to stay. Through life—and in death—and eternally yours—Constance."

There was a tense, unbearable silence. Miriam moistened her parched lips and chafed her cold hands. "At last," she thought. "At last."

The Assurance

"She died loving me," said Ambrose North, in a shrill whisper. His eyes were closed again, for the strain had hurt—terribly. Dimly, he remembered the other letter. This was not the same, but the other had been to Barbara, and not to him. He did not stop to wonder how it came to be in his pocket. It sufficed that some Angel of God, working through devious ways and long years, had given him at last, face to face, the assurance he had hungered for since the day Constance died.

In a blinding instant, Miriam remembered that no names had been mentioned in the letter. He had made a mistake—but she could set him right. Constance should not triumph again, even in an hour like this.

Ambrose North turned back into the shadow, fearing to face the window. The woman cowering in the corner advanced steadily to meet him. He saw her, vaguely, when his eyes became accustomed to the change of lights.

"Miriam!" he cried, transfigured by joy. "She died loving me! I have it here. It was only because she was not strong—she was ill, and she never let us know." He held forth the letter with a shaking hand.

"She—" began Miriam.

"She died loving me!" he cried. "Oh, Miriam, can you not see? I have it here." His voice rang through the house like some far silver bugle chanting triumph over a field of the slain. "She died loving me!"

Triumphant Cry

Barbara had already wakened and she sat up, rubbing her eyes. The attic was almost dark. She went downstairs hurriedly, forgetting her borrowed finery until her long train caught on a projecting splinter and had to be loosened. When she reached her own door she started toward her mirror, anxious to see how she looked, but that triumphant cry from the room below made her heart stand still.

White as death and strangely fearful, she went down and into the living-room, where the last light deepened the shadows and lay lovingly upon her father's

illumined face.

Barbara smiled and went toward him, with her hands outstretched in welcome. Miriam shrank back into the farthest shadows, shaking as though she had seen a ghost.

There was an instant's tense silence. All the forces of life and love seemed suddenly to have concentrated into the space of a single heart-beat. Then the old man spoke.

"Constance," he said, unsteadily, "have you come back, Beloved? It has been so long!"

Radiant with beauty no woman had ever worn before, Barbara went to him, still smiling, and the old man's arms closed hungrily about her. "I dreamed you were dead," he sobbed, "but I knew you died loving me. Where is our baby, Constance? Where is my Flower of the Dusk?"

Burden of Joy

Even as he spoke, the overburdened heart failed beneath its burden of joy. He staggered and would have fallen, had not Miriam caught him in her strong arms. Together, they helped him to the couch, where he lay down, breathing with great difficulty.

"Constance, darling," he gasped, feebly, "where is our baby? I want Barbara."

For the sake of the dead and the living, Barbara supremely put self aside. "I do not know," she whispered, "just where Barbara is. Am I not enough?"

"Enough for earth," he breathed in answer, "and—for—heaven—too. Kiss me —Constance—just once—dear—before——"

The Passing

Barbara bent down. He lifted his shaking hands caressingly to the splendid crown of golden hair, the smooth, fair cheeks, the perfect neck and shoulders, and died, enraptured, with her kiss upon his lips.

XX

Pardon

The Burial Service

Crushed and almost broken-hearted, Barbara sat in the dining-room. The air was heavy with the overpowering scent of tuberoses. From the room beyond came the solemn words of the burial service: "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

The words beat unbearably upon her ears. The walls of the room moved as though they were of fabric, stirred by winds of hell. The floor undulated beneath her feet and black mists blinded her. Her hands were so cold that she scarcely felt the friendly, human touch on either side of her chair.

Roger held one of her cold little hands in both his own, yearning to share her grief, to divide it in some way; even to bear it for her. On the other side was Doctor Conrad, profoundly moved. His science had not yet obliterated his human instincts and he was neither ashamed of the mist in his eyes nor of the painful throbbing of his heart. His fingers were upon Barbara's pulse, where the lifetide moved so slowly that he could barely feel it.

On the other side of the room, alien and apart, as always, sat Miriam. She wore her best black gown, but her face was inscrutable. Perhaps the lines were more sharply cut, perhaps the rough, red hands moved more nervously than usual, and perhaps the deep-set black eyes burned more fiercely, but no one noticed—or cared.

The Minister

The deep voice in the room beyond was vibrant with tenderness. The man who stood near Ambrose North as he lay in his last sleep had been summoned from town by Eloise. He did not make the occasion an excuse for presenting his own particular doctrine, bolstered up by argument, nor did he bid his hearers rejoice and be glad. He admitted, at the beginning, that sorrow lay heavily upon the hearts of those who loved Ambrose North and did not say that God was

chastening them for their own good.

He spoke of Life as the rainbow that brilliantly spans two mysterious silences, one of which is dawn and the other sunset. This flaming arc must end, as it begins, in pain, but, past the silence, and, perhaps, in even greater mystery, the circle must somewhere become complete and round back to a new birth.

Could not the God who ordained the beginning be safely trusted with the end? Forgetting the grey mists of dawn in which the rainbow began, should we deny the inevitable night when the arc bends down at the other end of the world? Having seen so much of the perfect curve, could we not believe in the circle? And should we not remember that the rainbow itself was a signal and a promise that there should be no more sea? Even so, was not this mortal life of ours, tempered as it is by sorrow and tears, a further promise that, when the circle was completed, there should be no more death?

God's Love

The deep voice went on, even more tenderly, to speak of God; not of His power, but of His purpose, not of His justice, but His forgiveness, not of His vengeance, but of His love. A love so vast and far-reaching that there is no place where it is not; it enfolds not only our little world, poised in infinite space like a mote in a sunbeam, but all the shining, rolling worlds beyond. Every star that rises within our sight and all the million stars beyond, in misty distances so great as to be incomprehensible, are guided and surrounded by this same love. It is impossible to conceive of a place where it is not—even in the midst of pain, poverty, suffering, and death, God's love is there also. The minister pleaded with those who listened to him to lean wholly upon this all-sustaining, all-forgiving love; to believe that it sheltered both the living and the dead, and to trust, simply, as a little child.

At the Close of the Service

In the stillness that followed, Eloise went to the piano. The worn strings answered softly as her fingers touched the keys. In her full, low contralto she sang, to an exquisite melody:

"When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,

Nor shady cypress tree;
Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet;
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.

"I shall not see the shadows,
I shall not feel the rain;
I shall not hear the nightingale
Sing on, as if in pain:
And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise nor set,
Haply I may remember,
And haply may forget."

The deep, manly voice followed with a benediction, then the little group of neighbours and friends went out with hushed and reverent step, into the golden Autumn afternoon. Miriam came in, to all outward appearance wholly unmoved. She stood by him for a moment, then turned away.

Eloise closed the door and Roger and Allan brought Barbara in. She bent down to her father, who lay so quietly, with a smile of heavenly peace upon his lips, and her tears rained upon his face. "Good-bye, dear Daddy," she sobbed. "It is Barbara who kisses you now."

When Ambrose North went out of his door for the last time, on his way to rest beside his beloved Constance until God should summon them both, Roger stayed behind, with Barbara. Doctor Conrad had said, positively, that she must not go, and, as always, she obeyed.

The boy's heart was too full for words. He still kept her cold little hand in his. "There isn't anything I can say or do, is there, Barbara, dear?"

"No," she sobbed. "That is the pity of it. There is never anything to be said or done."

"I wish I could take it from you and bear it for you," he said, simply. "Some way, we seem to belong together, you and I."

They sat in silence until the others came back. Eloise came straight to Barbara and put her strong young arms around the frail, bent little figure.

"Will you come with me, dear?" she asked. "We can get a carriage easily and I'd love to have you with me. Will you come?"

For a moment, Barbara hesitated. "No," she said, "I must stay here. I've got to live right on here, and I might as well begin to-night."

Allan took from his pocket several small, round white tablets, and gave them to Barbara. "Two just before going to bed," he said. "And if you're the same brave girl that you've been ever since I've known you, you'll have your bearings again in a short time."

By the Open Fire

Roger stayed to supper, but none of them made more than a pretence of eating. The odour of tuberoses still pervaded the house and brought, inevitably, the thought of death. Afterward, Barbara sat by the open fire with one hand lying listlessly in Roger's warm, understanding clasp. In the kitchen, Miriam vigorously washed the few dishes. She had put away the fine china, the solid silver knife and fork, the remnant of table damask, and the Satsuma cup.

"Shall I read to you, Barbara?" asked Roger.

"No," she answered, wearily. "I couldn't listen to-night."

The hours dragged on. Miriam sat in the dining-room alone, by the light of one candle, remorsefully, after many years, face to face with herself.

She wondered what Constance would do to her now, when she went to bed and fearfully closed her eyes. She determined to cheat Constance by sitting up all night, and then realised that by doing so she would only postpone the inevitable reckoning.

Miriam felt that a reckoning was due somewhere, on earth, or in heaven, or in

hell. Mysterious balances must be made before things were right, and her endeavours to get what she had conceived to be her own just due had all failed.

She wondered why. Constance had wronged her and she was entitled to pay Constance back in her own coin. But the opportunity had been taken out of her hands, every time. Even at the last, her subtle revenge had been transmuted into further glory for Constance. Why?

The answer flashed upon her like words of fire—"*Vengeance is mine; I will repay.*"

Then, suddenly, from some unknown source, the need of confession came pitilessly upon her soul. Her lined face blanched in the candle-light and her worn, nervous hands clutched fearfully at the arm of her chair.

The Still Small Voice

"Confess," she repeated to herself scornfully as though in answer to some imperative summons. "To whom?"

There was no answer, but, in her heart, Miriam knew. Only one of the blood was left and to that one, if possible, payment must be made. And if anything was due her, either from the dead or the living, it must come to her through Barbara.

Miriam laughed shrilly and then bit her lips, thinking the others might hear. Roger heard—and wondered—but said nothing.

After he went home, Barbara still sat by the fire, in that surcease which comes when one is unable to sustain grief longer and it steps aside, to wait a little, before taking a fresh hold. She could wonder now about the letter, in her mother's writing, that she had picked up from the floor, and which her father had found, and very possibly read. She hesitated to ask Miriam anything concerning either her father or her mother.

Miriam's Confession

But, while she sat there, Miriam came into the room, urged by goading impulses without number and one insupportable need. She stood near Barbara for several minutes without speaking; then she began, huskily, "Barbara——"

The girl turned, wearily. "Yes?"

"I've got something to say and I don't know but what to-night is as good a time as any. Neither of us are likely to sleep much."

Barbara did not answer.

"I hated your mother," said Miriam, passionately. "I always hated her."

"I guessed that," answered Barbara, with a sigh.

"Your father was in love with me when she came from school, with her doll-face and pretty ways. She took him away from me. He never looked at me after he saw her. I had to stand by and see it, help her with her pretty clothes, and even be maid of honour at the wedding. It was hard, but I did it.

"She loved him, in a way, but it wasn't much of a way. She liked the fine clothes and the trinkets he gave her, but, after he went blind, she could hardly tolerate him. Lots of times, she would have been downright cruel to him if I hadn't made her do differently.

"The first time they came here for the Summer, she met Laurence Austin, Roger's father, and it was love at first sight on both sides. They used to see each other every day either here or out somewhere. After you were born, the first place she went was down to the shore to meet him. I know, for I followed.

"When your father asked where she was, I lied to him, not only then, but many times. I wasn't screening her—I was shielding him. It went on for over a year, then she took the laudanum. She left four notes—one to me, one to your father, one to you, and one to Laurence Austin. I never delivered that, even though she haunted me almost every night for five years. After he died, she still haunted me, but it was less often, and different.

"When you sent me into your father's room after that letter he had in his pocket, I took time to read it. She said, there, that she didn't trust me, and that I had always loved your father. It was true enough, but I didn't know she knew it.

"After you took the letter out, I put in the one to Laurence Austin. I'd opened it and read it some little time back. I thought it was time he knew her as she was, and I never thought about no name being mentioned in it.

"When he tore off the bandages, he read that letter, and never knew that it wasn't meant for him. Then, when you came in in that old dress of your mother's, he thought it was her come back to him, and never knew any different."

There was a long pause. "Well?" said Barbara, wearily. It did not seem as if anything mattered.

"I just want you to know that I've hated your mother all my life, ever since she came home from school. I've hated you because you look like her. I've hated your father because he talked so of her all the time, and hated myself for loving him. I've hated everybody, but I've done my duty, as far as I know. I've scrubbed and slaved and taken care of you and your father, and done the best I could.

"When I put that letter into his pocket, I intended for him to know that Constance was in love with another man. I'd have read it to him long ago if I'd had any idea he'd believe me. When he thought it was for him, I was just on the verge of telling him different when you came in and stopped me. You looked so much like your mother I thought Constance had taken to walking down here daytimes instead of back and forth in my room at night.

"I suppose," Miriam went on, in a strange tone, "that I've killed him—that there's murder on my hands as well as hate in my heart. I suppose you'll want to make some different arrangements now—you won't want to go on living with me after I've killed your father."

A Wonderful Joy

"Aunt Miriam," said Barbara, calmly, "I've known for a long time almost everything you've told me, but I didn't know how father got the letter. I thought he must have found it somewhere in the desk or in his own room, or even in the attic. You didn't kill him any more than I did, by coming into the room in mother's gown. What he really died of was a great, wonderful joy that suddenly broke a heart too weak to hold it. And, even though I've wanted my father to see me, all my life long, I'd rather have had it as it was, and he would, too. I'm sure of that.

"He told me once the three things he most wanted to see in the world were mother's letter, saying that she loved him, then mother herself, and, last of all, me. And for a long time his dearest dream has been that I could walk and he could see. So when, in the space of five or ten minutes, all the dreams came true, his heart failed."

"But," Miriam persisted, "I meant to do him harm." Her burning eyes were keenly fixed upon Barbara's face.

"Sometimes," answered the girl, gently, "I think that right must come from trying to do wrong, to make up for the countless times wrong comes from trying to do right. Father could not have had greater joy, even in heaven, than you and I gave him at the last, neither of us meaning to do it."

Human Sympathy and Love

The stern barrier that had reared itself between Miriam and her kind suddenly crumbled and fell. Warm tides of human sympathy and love came into her numb heart and ice-bound soul. The lines in her face relaxed, her hands ceased to tremble, and her burning eyes softened with the mist of tears. Her mouth quivered as she said words she had not even dreamed of saying for more than a quarter of a century:

"Will you—can you—forgive me?"

All that she needed from the dead and all they could have given her came generously from Barbara. She sprang to her feet and threw her arms around Miriam's neck. "Oh, Aunty! Aunty!" she cried, "indeed I do, not only for myself, but for father and mother, too. We don't forgive enough, we don't love enough, we're not kind enough, and that's all that's wrong with the world. There isn't time enough for bitterness—the end comes too soon."

At Peace

Miriam went upstairs, strangely uplifted, strangely at peace. She was no longer alien and apart, but one with the world. She had a sense of universal kinship—almost of brotherhood. That night she slept, for the first time in more than twenty years, without the fear of Constance.

And Constance, who was more sinned against than sinning, and whose faithful old husband had that day lain down, in joy and triumph, to rest beside her in the churchyard, came no more.

XXI

The Perils of the City

"Roger," remarked Miss Mattie, laying aside her paper, "I don't know as I'm in favour of havin' you go to the city. Can't you get the Judge another dog?"

"Why not, Mother?" asked Roger, ignoring her question.

"Because it seems to me, from all I've been readin' and hearin' lately, that the city ain't a proper place for a young person. Take that minister, now, that those folks brought down for Ambrose North's funeral. I never heard anything like it in all my life. You was there and you heard what he said, so there ain't no need of dwellin' on it, but it wasn't what I'm accustomed to in the way of funerals." Miss Mattie's militant hairpins bristled as she spoke.

"I thought it was all right, Mother. What was wrong with it?"

Everything Wrong

"Wrong!" repeated Miss Mattie, in astonishment. "Everything was wrong with it! Ambrose North wasn't a church-member and he never went more'n once or twice that I know of, even after the Lord chastened him with blindness for not goin'. There was no power to the sermon and no cryin' except Barbara and that Miss Wynne that sang that outlandish piece instead of a hymn.

"Why, Roger, I was to a funeral once over to the Ridge where the corpse was an unbaptized infant, and you ought to have heard that preacher describin' the abode of the lost! The child's mother fainted dead away and had to be carried out of the church, it was that powerful and movin'. That was somethin' like!"

It was in Roger's mind to say he was glad that the minister had not made Barbara faint, but he wisely kept silent.

Life in the City

"That's only one thing," Miss Mattie went on. "What with religion bein' in that condition in the city, and the life folks live there, I don't think it's any fit

place for a person that ain't strong in the faith, and you know you ain't, Roger. You take after your pa.

"I was readin' in *The Metropolitan Weekly* only last week a story about a lovely young orphan that was caught one night by a rejected suitor and tied to the railroad track. Just as the train was goin' to run over her, the man she wanted to marry come along on the dead run with a knife and cut her bonds. She got off the track just as the night express come around the curve, goin' ninety-five miles an hour.

Miss Mattie's Fears

"This man says to her, 'Genevieve, will you come to me now, and let me put you out of this dread villain's power forever?' Then he opened his arms and the beautiful Genevieve fled to them as to some ark of safety and laid her pale and weary face upon his lovin' and forgivin' heart. That's the exact endin' of it, and I must say it's written beautiful, but when I wake up in the night and think about it, I get scared to have you go.

"You ain't so bad lookin', Roger, and you're gettin' to the age where you might be expected to take notice, and what if some designing female should tie you to the railroad track? I declare, it makes me nervous to think of it."

Roger did not like to shake his mother's faith in *The Metropolitan Weekly*, but he longed to set her fears at rest. "Those things aren't true, Mother," he said, kindly. "They not only haven't happened, but they couldn't happen—it's impossible."

"Roger, what do you mean by sayin' such things. Of course it's true, or it wouldn't be in the paper. Ain't it right there in print, as plain as the nose on your face? You can see for yourself. I hope studyin' law ain't goin' to make an infidel of you."

"I don't think it will," temporised Roger. "I'll keep a close watch for designing females, and will avoid railroad tracks at night."

Miss Mattie shook her head doubtfully. "That ain't a goin' to do no good, Roger, if they once get set after you. I've noticed that the villain always triumphs."

"But only for a little while, Mother. Surely you must have seen that?"

The Villain Foiled

She settled her steel-bowed spectacles firmly on the wart and gazed at him. "I believe you're right," she said, after a few moments of reflection. "I can't recall no story now where the villain was not foiled at last. Let me see—there was *Lovely Lulu, or the Doctor's Darling*, and *Margaret Merriman, or the Maiden's Mad Marriage*, and *True Gold, or Pretty Crystal's Love*, and *The American Countess, or Hearts Aflame*, and this one I was just speakin' of, *Genevieve Carleton, or the Brakeman's Bride*. In every one of 'em, the villain got his just deserts, though sometimes they was disjointed owin' to the story bein' broke off at the most interestin' point and continued the followin' week."

"Well, if the villain is always foiled, you're surely not afraid, are you?"

"I don't know's I'm afraid in the long run, but I don't like to have you go through such things and be exposed to the temptations of a great city."

"Why don't you come with me, Mother, and keep house for me? We can find a little flat somewhere, and——"

"What on earth is that?"

Apartments and Flats

"I've never been in one myself, but Miss Wynne said that, if you wanted to come, she would find us a flat, or an apartment."

"What's the difference between a flat and an apartment?"

"That's what I asked her. She said it was just the rent. You pay more for an apartment than you do for a flat."

"I wouldn't want anything I had to pay more for," observed Miss Mattie, stroking her chin thoughtfully. "You ain't told me what a flat is."

"A few rooms all on one floor, like a cottage. It's like several cottages, all under one roof."

"What do they want to cover the cottages with a roof for? Don't they want light and air?"

"You don't understand, Mother. Suppose that our house here was an

apartment house. The stairs would be shut off from these rooms and the hall would be accessible from the street. Instead of having three rooms upstairs, there might be six—one of them a kitchen and the others living-rooms and bedrooms. Don't you see?"

"You mean a kitchen on the same floor with the bedrooms?"

"Yes, all the rooms on one floor."

"Just as if an earthquake was to jolt off the top of the house and shake all the bedrooms down here?"

"Something like that."

"Well, then," said Miss Mattie, firmly, "all I've got to say is that it ain't decent. Think of people sleepin' just off kitchens and washin' their faces and hands in the sink."

"I think some of them must be very nice, Mother. Miss Wynne expects to live in an apartment after she is married and she has a little one of her own now. If you'll come with me we'll find some place that you'll like. I don't want to leave you alone here."

"No," she answered, after due deliberation, "I reckon I'll stay here. You can't transplant an old tree and you can't take a woman who has lived all her life in a house and put her in a place where there are several cottages all under one roof with bedrooms off of kitchens and folks washin' in the sinks. Miss Wynne can do it if she likes, but I was brought up different."

"I'm afraid you'll be lonesome."

"I don't know why I should be any more lonesome than I always have been. All I see of you is at meals and while you're readin' nights. You're just like your pa. If I propped up a book by the lamp, it would be just as sociable as it is to have you settin' here. Readin' is a good thing in its place and I enjoy it myself, but sometimes it's pleasant to hear the human voice sayin' somethin' besides 'What?' and 'Yes' and 'All right' and 'Is supper ready?'

"I've been lookin' over your things to-day and gettin' 'em ready. The moths has ate your Winter flannels and you'll have to get more. I've mended your coat linin's and sewed on buttons, and darned and patched, and I've took Barbara North's blue hair ribbon back to her—the one you found some place and had in your pocket. You mustn't be careless about those things, Roger—she might think you meant to steal it."

"What did Barbara say?" he stammered. The high colour had mounted to his temples.

"She didn't know what to say at first, but she recognised it as her hair ribbon. I told her you hadn't meant to steal it—that you'd just found it somewheres and had forgot to give it to her, and it was all right. She laughed some, but it was a funny laugh. You must be careful, Roger—you won't always have your mother to get you out of scrapes."

Roger wondered if the knot of blue ribbon that had so strangely gone back to Barbara had, by any chance, carried to her its intangible freight of dreams and kisses, with a boyish tear or two, of which he had the grace not to be ashamed.

"Your pa was in the habit of annexin' female belongin's, though the Lord knows where he ever got 'em. I suppose he picked 'em up on the street—he was so dreadful absent-minded. He was systematic about 'em in a way, though. After he died, I found 'em all put away most careful in a box—a handkerchief and one kid glove, and a piece of ribbon about like the one I took back to Barbara. He was flighty sometimes: constant devotion to readin' had unsettled his mind.

"That brings me to what I wanted to say when I first started out. I don't want you should load up your trunk with your pa's books to the exclusion of your clothes, and I don't want you to spend your evenin's readin'."

"I'm not apt to read very much, Mother, if I work in an office in the daytime and go to law school at night."

"That's so, too, but there's Sundays. You can take any ten of your pa's books that you like, but no more. I'll keep the rest here against the time the train is blocked and the mails don't come through. I may get a taste for your pa's books myself."

Roger did not think it likely, but he was too wise to say so.

"And I didn't tell you this before, but I've made it my business to go and see the Judge and tell him how you saved my life at the expense of Fido's. I don't know when I've seen a man so mad. I was goin' to suggest that we get him another dog from some place, and land sakes! he clean drove it out of my mind.

"I don't know how you've stood it, bein' there in the office with him, and I told him so. He's got a red-headed boy from the Ridge in there now, and I think maybe the Judge will get what's comin' to him before he gets through. I've learned not to trifle with anybody what has red hair, but seemin'ly the Judge ain't. It takes some folks a long time to learn.

"Barbara's goin' to the city, too, to spend the Winter with that Miss Wynne in the cottage that's under the same roof with other cottages and the bedrooms off the kitchen. I don't know how Barbara'll take to washin' in the sink, when she's always had that rose-sprigged bowl and pitcher of her ma's, but it's her business, not mine, and if she wants to go, she can.

"Me and Miriam"

"Me and Miriam'll set together evenings and keep each other from bein' lonesome. She ain't much more company than a cow, as far as talkin' goes, but there's a feelin,' some way, about another person bein' in the house, when the wind gets to howlin' down the chimney. We may arrange to have supper together, once in a while, and in case of severe weather, put the two fires goin' in one house, which ever's the warmest.

"I don't know what we shall do, for we ain't talked it over much yet, but with church twice on Sunday and prayer-meetin' Wednesday evenings, and the sewin' circle on Friday, and two New York papers every week, and Miriam, and all your pa's books to prop up against the lamp, I don't reckon I'll get so dreadful lonesome. I've thought some of gettin' myself a cat. There's somethin' mighty comfortable and heartenin' about a cup of hot tea and the sound of purrin' close by. And on the Spring excursion to the city, I reckon I'll come up and see you, if I don't have no more pain in my back."

Dr. Conrad's Automobile

"I'd love to have you come, Mother, and I'd do all I could to give you a good

time. I know the others would, too. Doctor Conrad has an automobile and——"

Miss Mattie became deeply concerned. "Is he treatin' himself for it?" she demanded.

"I don't think so," answered Roger, choking back a laugh.

"It beats all," mused Miss Mattie. "They say the shoemaker's children never have shoes, and it seems that doctors have diseases just like other folks. I disremember of havin' heard of this, but I know from my own experience that a disease with only one word to it can be dreadful painful. Is it catchin'?"

"Not with full speed on," replied Roger. "An automobile is very hard to catch."

"Well, see that you don't take it," cautioned Miss Mattie. The first part of his answer was obscure, but she was not one to pause over an uninteresting detail.

"You've warned me about almost everything now, Mother," he said, smiling. "Is there anything else?"

"Nothing but matrimony, and that's included under the head of designing females. I shouldn't want you to get married."

"Why not?"

"I don't know as I could tell you just why, only it seems to me that a person is just as well off without it. I've been thinking of it a good deal since I've had these New York papers and read so much about two souls bein' welded into one. My soul wasn't never welded with your pa's, nor his with mine, as I know of.

"Marriage wasn't so dreadful different from livin' at home. It reminded me of the Summer ma took a boarder, your pa required so much waitin' on. And when you came, I had a baby to take care of besides. If I was welded I never noticed it —I was too busy."

Roger's heart softened into unspeakable pity. In missing the "welding," Miss Mattie had missed the best that life has to give. Somewhere, doubtless, the man existed who could have stirred the woman's soul beneath the surface shallows and set the sordid tasks of daily living in tune with the music that sways the

world.

"Un-marriage"

"There's a good deal in the papers about un-marriage, too," resumed Miss Mattie, "and I can't understand it. When you've stood before the altar and said 'till death do us part,' I don't see how another man, who ain't even a minister, can undo it and let you have another chance at it. Maybe you do, bein' as you're up in law, but I don't.

"It looks to me as if the laws were wrong or else the marriage ceremony ought to be written different. If a man said, 'I take thee to be my wedded wife, to love and to cherish until I see somebody else I like better,' I could understand the un-marriage, but I can't now. When you get to be a power in the law, Roger, I think you should try to get that fixed. I never was welded, but after I'd given my word, I stuck to it, even though your pa was dreadful aggravatin' sometimes. He didn't mean to be, but he was. I guess it's the nature of men folks."

Deeply moved, Roger went over and kissed her smooth cheek. "Have I been aggravating, Mother?"

Miss Mattie's eyes grew misty. She took off her spectacles and wiped them briskly on one corner of the table-cover. "No more'n was natural, I guess," she answered. "You've been a good boy, Roger, and I want you should be a good man. When you get away from home, where your mother can't look after you, just remember that she expects you to be good, like your pa. He might have been aggravatin', but he wasn't wicked."

Remember

All the best part of the boy's nature rose in answer, and the mist came into his eyes, too. "I'll remember, Mother, and you shall never be disappointed in me—I promise you that."

XXII

Autumn Leaves

Autumn Glory

Summer had gone long ago, but the sweetness of her passing yet lay upon the land and sea. The hills were glorious with a pageantry of scarlet and gold where, in the midnight silences, the soul of the woods had flamed in answer to the far, mysterious bugles of the frost. Bloom was on the grapes in the vineyard, and fairy lace, of cobweb fineness, had been hung by the secret spinners from stem to stem of the purple clusters and across bits of stubble in the field.

From the blue sea, now and then, came the breath of Winter, though Autumn lingered on the shore. Many of the people at the hotel had gone back to town, feeling the imperious call of the city with the first keen wind. Eloise, with a few others, waited. She expected to stay until Barbara was strong enough to go with her.

But Barbara's strength was coming very slowly now. She grieved for her father, and the grieving kept her back. Allan came down once a fortnight to spend Sunday with Eloise and to look after Barbara, though he realised that Barbara was, in a way, beyond his reach.

What We Need

"She doesn't need medicine," he said, to Eloise. "She is perfectly well, physically, though of course her strength is limited and will be for some time to come. What she needs is happiness."

"That is what we all need," answered Eloise.

Allan flashed a quick glance at her. "Even I," he said, in a different tone, "but I must wait for mine."

"We all wait for things," she laughed, but the lovely colour had mounted to the roots of her hair that waved so softly back from her low forehead.

"When, dear?" insisted Allan, possessing himself of her hand.

"I promised once," she answered. "When the colour is all gone from the hills and the last leaves have fallen, then I'll come."

"You're not counting the oaks?" he asked, half fearfully. "Sometimes the oak leaves stay on all Winter, you know. And evergreens are ruled out, aren't they?"

"Certainly. We won't count the oaks or the Christmas trees. Long before Santa Claus comes, I'll be a sedate matron instead of a flyaway, frivolous spinster."

"For the first time since I grew up," remarked Allan, with evident sincerity, "I wish Christmas came earlier. Upon what day, fair lady, do you think the leaves will be gone?"

"In November, I suppose," she answered, with an affected indifference that did not deceive him. "The day after Thanksgiving, perhaps."

"That's Friday, and I positively refuse to be married on a Friday."

"Then the day before—that's Wednesday. You know the old rhyme says: 'Wednesday the best day of all.'"

So it was settled. Allan laughingly put down in his little red leather pocket diary, under the date of Wednesday, November twenty-fifth, "Miss Wynne's wedding." "Where is it to be?" he asked. "I wouldn't miss it for worlds."

"I've been thinking about that," said Eloise, slowly, after a pause. "I suppose we'll have to be conventional."

"Why?"

"Because everybody is."

"The very reason why we shouldn't be. This is our wedding, and we'll have it to please ourselves. It's probably our last."

"In spite of the advanced civilisation in which we live," she returned, "I hope and believe that it is the one and only wedding in which either of us will ever take a leading part."

"Haven't you ever had day-dreams, dear, about your wedding?"

"Many a time," she laughed. "I'd be the rankest kind of polygamist if I had all the kinds I've planned for."

"But the best kind?" he persisted. "Which is in the ascendant now?"

An Ideal Wedding

"If I could choose," she replied, thoughtfully, "I'd have it in some quiet little country church, on a brilliant, sunshiny day—the kind that makes your blood tingle and fills you with the joy of living. I'd like it to be Indian Summer, with gold and crimson leaves falling all through the woods. I'd like to have little brown birds chirping, and squirrels and chipmunks pattering through the leaves. I'd like to have the church almost in the heart of the woods, and have the sun stream into every nook and corner of it while we were being married. I'd like two taper lights at the altar, and the Episcopal service, but no music."

"Any crowd?"

Her sweet face grew very tender. "No," she said. "Nobody but our two selves."

"We'll have to have a minister," he reminded her, practically, "and two witnesses. Otherwise it isn't legal. Whom would you choose for witnesses?"

"I think I'd like to have Barbara and Roger. I don't know why, for I have so many other friends who mean more to me. Yet it seems, some way, as if they two belonged in the picture."

Right Now

A bright idea came to Allan. "Dearest," he said, "you couldn't have the falling leaves and the squirrels if we waited until Thanksgiving time, but it's all here, right now. Don't you remember that little church in the woods that we passed the other day—the little white church with maples all around it and the Autumn leaves dropping silently through the still, warm air? Why not here—and now?"

"Oh, I couldn't," cried Eloise.

"Why not?"

"Oh, you're so stupid! Clothes and things! I've got a million things to do before I can be married decently."

He laughed at her woman's reason as he put his arms around her. "I want a wife, and not a Parisian wardrobe. You're lovelier to me right now in your white linen gown than you've ever been before. Don't wear yourself out with dressmakers and shopping. You'll have all the rest of your life for that."

"Won't I have all the rest of my life to get married in?" she queried, demurely.

"You have if you insist upon taking it, darling, but I feel very strongly to get married to-day."

"Not to-day," she demurred.

"Why not? It's only half past one and the ceremony doesn't last over twenty minutes. I suppose it can be cut down to fifteen or eighteen if you insist upon having it condensed. You don't even need to wash your face. Get your hat and come on."

His tone was tender, even pleading, but some far survival of Primitive Woman, whose marriage was by capture, stirred faintly in Eloise. "Our friends won't like it," she said, as a last excuse.

He noted, with joy, that she said "won't," instead of "wouldn't," but she did not realise that she had betrayed herself. "We don't care, do we?" he asked. "It's our wedding and nobody's else. When we can't please everybody, we might as well please ourselves. Matrimony is the one thing in the world that concerns nobody but the two who enter into it—and it's the thing that everybody has the most to say about. While you're putting on your hat, I'll get the license and see about a carriage."

"I thought I'd wait until Barbara could go to town with me," she said.

"There's nothing to hinder your coming back for her, if you want to and she isn't willing to come with Roger. I insist upon having my honeymoon alone."

"All alone? If I were very good, wouldn't you let me come along?"

Allan coloured. "You know what I mean," he said, softly. "I've waited so

long, darling, and I think I've been patient. Isn't it time I was rewarded?"

They were on the beach, behind the friendly sand-dune that had been their trysting place all Summer. Thoroughly humble in her surrender, yet wholly womanly, Eloise put her soft arms around his neck. "I will," she said. "Kiss me for the last time before——"

"Before what?" demanded Allan, as, laughing, she extricated herself from his close embrace.

"Before you exchange your sweetheart for a wife."

More Secure

"I'm not making any exchange. I'm only making my possession more secure. Look, dear."

He took from his pocket a shining golden circlet which exactly fitted the third finger of her left hand. Their initials were engraved inside. Only the date was lacking.

"I've had it for a long, long time," he said, in reply to her surprised question. "I hoped that some day I might find you in a yielding mood."

When she went up to her room, her heart was beating wildly. This sudden plunge into the unknown was blinding, even though she longed to make it. Having come to the edge of the precipice she feared the leap, in spite of the conviction that life-long happiness lay beyond.

In the fond sight of her lover, Eloise was very lovely when she went down in her white gown and hat, her eyes shining with the world-old joy that makes the old world new for those to whom it comes, be it soon or late.

Beautifully Unconventional

"It's beautifully unconventional," she said, as he assisted her into the surrey. "No bridesmaids, no wedding presents, and no dreary round of entertainments. I believe I like it."

"I know I do," he responded, fervently. "You're the loveliest thing I've ever seen, sweetheart. Is that a new gown?"

"I've worn it all Summer," she laughed "and it's been washed over a dozen times. You have lots to learn about gowns."

"I'm a willing pupil," he announced. "Shouldn't you have a veil? I believe the bride's veil is usually 'of tulle, caught with a diamond star, the gift of the groom.'"

"You've been reading the society column. Give me the star, and I'll get the veil."

"You shall have it the first minute we get to town. I'd rob the Milky Way for you, if I could. I'd give you a handful of stars to play with and let you roll the sun and moon over the golf links."

"I may take the moon," she replied. "I've always liked the looks of it, but I'm afraid the sun would burn my fingers. Somebody once got into trouble, I believe, for trying to drive the chariot of the sun for a day. Give me the moon and just one star."

"Which star do you want?"

The Love-star

"The love-star," she answered, very softly. "Will you keep it shining for me, in spite of clouds and darkness?"

"Indeed I will."

The horses stopped at Barbara's door. Allan went across the street to call for Roger and Eloise went in to invite Barbara to go for a drive.

"How lovely you look," cried Barbara, in admiration. "You look like a bride."

"Make yourself look bridal also," suggested Eloise, flushing, "by putting on your best white gown. Roger is coming, too."

Barbara missed the point entirely. It did not take her long to get ready, and she sang happily to herself while she was dressing. She put a white lace scarf of her mother's over her golden hair, which was now piled high on her shapely head, and started out, for the first time in all her twenty-two years, for a journey beyond the limits of her own domain.

Allan and Roger helped her in. She was very awkward about it, and was

sufficiently impressed with her awkwardness to offer a laughing apology. "I've never been in a carriage before," she said, "nor seen a train, nor even a church. All I've had is pictures and books—and Roger," she added, as an afterthought, when he took his place beside her on the back seat.

"You're going to see lots of things to-day that you never saw before," observed Allan, starting the horses toward the hill road. "We'll begin by showing you a church, and then a wedding."

"A wedding!" cried Barbara. "Who is going to be married?"

"We," he replied, concisely. "Don't you think it's time?"

"Isn't it sudden?" asked Roger. "I thought you weren't going to be married until almost Christmas."

"I've been serving time now for two years," explained Allan, "and she's given me two months off for good behaviour. Just remember, young man, when your turn comes, that nothing is sudden when you've been waiting for it all your life."

The Little White Church

The door of the little white church was open and the sun that streamed through the door and the stained glass windows carried the glory and the radiance of Autumn into every nook and corner of it. At the altar burned two tall taper lights, and the young minister, in white vestments, was waiting.

The joking mood was still upon Allan and Eloise, but she requested in all seriousness that the word "obey" be omitted from the ceremony.

"Why?" asked the minister, gravely.

"Because I don't want to promise anything I don't intend to do."

"Put it in for me," suggested Allan, cheerfully. "I might as well promise, for I'll have to do it anyway."

Gradually, the hush and solemnity of the church banished the light mood. A new joy, deeper, and more lasting, took the place of laughter as they sat in the front pew, reading over the service. Barbara and Roger sat together, half way down to the door. Neither had spoken since they entered the church.

A shaft of golden light lay full upon Eloise's face. In that moment, before they

went to the altar, Allan was afraid of her, she seemed so angelic, so unreal. But the minister was waiting, with his open book. "Come," said Allan, in a whisper, and she rose, smiling, to follow him, not only then, but always.

The Ceremony

"Dearly Beloved," began the minister, "we are gathered here together in the sight of God and in the face of this company, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony." He went on through the beautiful service, while the light streamed in, bearing its fairy freight of colour and gold, and the swift patter of the Little People of the Forest rustled through the drifting leaves.

It was all as Eloise had chosen, even to the two who sat far back, with their hands clasped, as wide-eyed as children before this sacred merging of two souls into one.

A little brown bird perched on the threshold, chirped a few questioning notes, then flew away to his own nest. Acorns fell from the oaks across the road, and the musical hum and whir of Autumn came faintly from the fields. The taper lights burned in the sunshine like yellow stars.

"That ye may so live together in this life," the minister was saying, "that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting. Amen."

After the Ordeal

It was over in an incredibly brief space of time. When they came down the aisle, Allan had the satisfied air of a man who has just emerged, triumphantly, through his own skill, from a very difficult and dangerous ordeal. Eloise was radiant, for her heart was singing within her a splendid strophe of joy.

When Barbara and Roger went to meet them, the strange, new shyness that had settled down upon them both effectually hindered conversation. Roger began an awkward little speech of congratulation, which immediately became inarticulate and ended in silent embarrassment.

But Allan wrung Roger's hand in a mighty grip that made him wince, and Eloise smiled, for she saw more than either of them had yet guessed. "You're kids," she said, fondly; "just dear, foolish kids." Impulsively, she kissed them both, then they all went out into the sunshine again.

The minister's eyes followed them with a certain wistfulness, for he was young, and, as yet, the great miracle had not come to him. He sighed when he put out the tapers and closed the door that divided him from the music of Autumn and one great, overwhelming joy.

On the Way Home

On the way home, neither Barbara nor Roger spoke. They had nothing to say and the others were silent because they had so much. They left the two at Barbara's gate, then Allan turned the horses back to the hill road. They were to have two glorious, golden hours alone before taking the afternoon train.

Barbara and Roger watched them as they went slowly up the tawny road that trailed like a ribbon over the pageantry of the hill. When they came to the crossroads, where one road led to the church and the other into the boundless world beyond, Eloise leaned far out to wave a fluttering bit of white in farewell.

"And on her lover's arm she leant,
And round her waist she felt it fold,
And far across the hills they went
In that new world which is the old,"

quoted Barbara, softly.

O'er the Hills

"And o'er the hills, and far away,
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
Beyond the night, across the day,
Through all the world she followed him,"

added Roger.

The carriage was now only a black speck on the brow of the hill. Presently it descended into the Autumn sunset and vanished altogether.

"I'm glad they asked us," said Roger.

"Wasn't it dear of them!" cried Barbara, with her face aglow. "Oh, Roger, if I ever have a wedding, I want it to be just like that!"

XXIII

Letters to Constance

Faith in Results

Roger was in the library, trying to choose, from an embarrassment of riches, the ten of his father's books which he was to be permitted to take to the city with him. With characteristic thoughtfulness, Eloise had busied herself in his behalf immediately upon her return to town. She had found a good opportunity for him, and the letter appointing the time for a personal interview was even then in his pocket.

Neither he nor his mother had the slightest doubt as to the result. Miss Mattie was certain that any lawyer with sense enough to practise law would be only too glad to have Roger in his office. She scornfully dismissed the grieving owner of Fido from her consideration, for it was obvious that anyone with even passable mental equipment would not have been disturbed by the accidental and painless removal of a bull pup.

Roger's ambition and eagerness made him very sure of the outcome of his forthcoming venture. All he asked for was the chance to work, and Eloise was giving him that. How good she had been and how much she had done for Barbara! Roger's heart fairly overflowed with gratitude and he registered a boyish vow not to disappoint those who believed in him.

It seemed strange to think of Eloise as "Mrs. Conrad." She had signed her brief note to Roger, "Very cordially, Eloise Wynne Conrad." Down in the corner she had written "Mrs. Allan Conrad." Roger smiled as he noted the space between the "Wynne" and the "Conrad" in her signature—the surest betrayal of a bride.

"If I should marry," Roger thought, "my wife's name would be 'Mrs. Roger Austin.'" He wrote it out on a scrap of paper to see how it would look. It was certainly very attractive. "And if it were Barbara, for instance, she would sign her letters 'Barbara North Austin.'" He wrote that out, too, and, in the lamplight, appreciatively studied the effect from many different angles. It was really a very

beautiful name.

Lost in Reverie

He lost himself in reverie, and it was nearly an hour afterward when he returned to the difficult task of choosing his ten books. Shakespeare, of course—fortunately there was a one-volume edition that came within the letter of the law if not the spirit of it. To this he added Browning. As it happened, there was a complete one-volume edition of this, too. Emerson came next—the Essays in two volumes. That made four. He added *Vanity Fair*, *David Copperfield*, a translation of the *Æneid*, and his beloved Keats. He hesitated a long time over the last two, but finally took down Boswell's *Life of Johnson* and the *Essays of Elia*, neither of which he had read.

A Little Old Book

Behind these two books, which had stood side by side, there was a small, thin book that had either fallen down or been hidden there. Roger took it out and carefully wiped off the dust. It was a blank book in which his father had written on all but the last few pages. He took it over to the table, drew the lamp closer, and sat down.

The gay cover had softened with the years, the pages were yellow, and some of them were blurred by blistering spots. The ink had faded, but the writing was still legible. At the top of the first page was the date, "*Evening, June the seventh*."

"I have lived long," was written on the next line below, "but a thousand years of living have been centred remorselessly into to-day. I cannot go over, though in this house and in the one across the road it will seem very strange. I knew the clouds of darkness must eternally hide us each from the other, that we must see each other no more save at a great distance, but the thunder and the riving lightning have put heaven between us as well as earth.

"I cannot eat, for food is dust and ashes in my mouth. I cannot drink enough water to moisten my dry, parched throat. I cannot answer when anyone speaks to me, for I do not hear what is said. It does not seem that I shall ever sleep again. Yet God, pitiless and unforgiving, lets me live on."

The remainder of the page was blank. The next entry was dated: "*June tenth.*

Night."

No Other Way

"I had to go. There was no other way. I had to sit and listen. I saw the blind man in the room beyond, sitting beside the dark woman with the hard face. She had the little lame baby in her arms—the baby who is a year or so younger than my own son. I smelled the tuberoses and the great clusters of white lilacs. And I saw her, dead, with her golden braids on either side of her, smiling, in her white casket. When no one was looking, I touched her hand. I called softly, 'Constance.' She did not answer, so I knew she was dead.

"I had to go to the churchyard, with the others. I was compelled to look at the grave and to see the white casket lowered in. I heard that awful fall of earth upon her and a voice saying those terrible words, 'Dust to dust, earth to earth, ashes to ashes.' The blind man sobbed aloud when the earth fell. The dark woman with the hard face did not seem to care. I could have strangled her, but I had to keep my hands still.

"They said that she had not been sleeping and that she took too much laudanum by mistake. It was not a mistake, for she was not of that sort. She did it purposely. She did it because of that one mad hour of full confession. I have killed her. After three years of self-control, it failed me, and I went mad. It was my fault, for if I had not failed, she would not have gone mad, too. I have killed her."

"*June fifteenth. Midnight.*

"I am calmer now. I can think more clearly. I have been alone in the woods all day and every day since—. I have been thinking, thinking, thinking, and going over everything. She left no word for me; she was so sure I would understand. I do not understand yet, but I shall.

Estranged

"There was no wrong between us, there never would have been. We were divided by the whole earth, denied by all the leagues of sundering sea. Now we are estranged by all the angels of heaven and all the hosts of hell.

"My arms ache for her—my lips hunger for hers. In that mysterious darkness, does she want me, too? Did her heart cry out for me as mine for her, until the

blood of the poppies mingled with hers and brought the white sleep?

"It would have been something to know that we breathed the same air, trod the same highways, listened together to the thrush and robin, and all the winged wayfarers of forest and field. It would have been comfort to know the same sun shone on us both, that the same moon lighted the midnight silences with misty silver, that the same stars burned taper-lights in the vaulted darkness for her and for me.

One Hour

"But I have not even that. I have nothing, though I have done no wrong beyond holding her in my arms for one little hour. Out of all the time that was before our beginning, out of all the time that shall be after our ending, and in all the unpitying years of our mortal life, we have had one hour."

"*June nineteenth.*

"I have been to her grave. I have tried to realise that the little mound of earth upon the distant hill, over which the sun and stars sweep endlessly, still shelters her; that, in some way, she is there. But I cannot.

"The mystery agonises me, for I have never had the belief that comforts so many. Why is one belief any better than another when we come face to face with the grey, impenetrable veil that never parts save for a passage? Freed from the bonds of earth, does she still live, somewhere, in perfect peace with no thought of me? Sentient, but invisible, is she here beside me now? Or is she asleep, dreamlessly, abiding in the earth until some archangel shall sound the trumpet bidding all the myriad dead arise? Oh, God, God! Only tell me where she is, that I may go, too!"

"*June twenty-first.*

The Hand Stayed

"It is true that the path she took is open to me also. I have thought of it many times. I am not afraid to follow where she has led, even into the depths of hell. I have had for several days a vial of the crushed poppies, and the bitter odour, even now, fills my room. Only one thought stays my hand—my little son.

"Should I follow, he must inevitably come to believe that his father was a coward—that he was afraid of life, which is the most craven fear of all. He will see that I have given to him something that I could not bear myself, and will despise me, as people despise a man who shirks his burden and shifts it to the shoulders of one weaker than he.

"When temptation assails him, he will remember that his father yielded. When life looms dark before him and among the fearful shadows there is no hint of light, he will recall that his father was too much of a coward to go into those same shadows, carrying his own light.

"And if his heart is ever filled with an awful agony that requires all his strength to meet it, he will remember that his father failed. I could not rest in my grave if my son, living, should despise me, even though my narrow house was in the same darkness that hides Her."

"*July tenth. Dawn.*

Punishment

"This, then, is my punishment. Because for one hour my self-control deserted me, when my man's blood had been crying out for three years for the touch of her—because for one little hour my hungry arms held her close to my aching heart, there is no peace. Nowhere in earth nor in heaven nor in hell is there one moment's forgetfulness. Nowhere in all God's illimitable universe is there pardon and surcease of pain.

"The blind man comes to me and talks of her. He asks me piteously, 'Why?' He calls me his friend. He says that she often spoke of me; that they were glad to have me in their house. He asks me if she ever said one word that would give a reason. Was she unhappy? Was it because he was blind and the little yellow-haired baby with her mother's blue eyes was born lame? I can only say 'No,' and beg him not to talk of it—not even to think of it."

"*July twentieth. Night.*

"The beauty of the world at midsummer only makes my loneliness more keen. The butterflies flit through the meadows like wandering souls of last year's flowers that died and were buried by the snow. The harvest moon, red-gold and

wonderful, will rise slowly up out of the sea. The path of light will lie on the still waters and widen into a vast arc at the line of the shore. Cobwebs will come among the stubble when the harvest is gathered in and on them will lie dewdrops that the moon will make into pearls.

Cycle of the Seasons

"The gorgeous colouring of Autumn will transfigure the hills with glory, and fill the far silences with misty amethyst and gold. The year-long sleep will come with the first snow, and the stars burn blue and cold in the frosty night. April bugles will wake the violets and anemones, the dead leaves of Autumn will be starred with springtime bloom, May will dance through the world with lilacs and apple blossoms, and I shall be alone.

"I can go to her grave again and see the violets all around it, their exquisite odour made of her dust. I can carry to her the first roses of June, as I used to do, but she cannot take them in her still hands. I can only lay them on that impassable mound, and let the warm rains, as soft as woman's tears, drip down and down and down until the fragrance and my love come to her in the mist.

"But will she care? Is that last sleep so deep that the quiet heart is never stirred by love? When my whole soul goes out to her in an agony of love and pain, is it possible that there is no answer? If there is a God in heaven, it cannot be!"

"*October fifth. Night.*

"It is said that Time heals everything. I have been waiting to see if it were so. Day by day my loss is greater; day by day my grief becomes more difficult to bear. I read all the time, or pretend to. I sit for hours with the open book before me and never see a line that is printed there. Oh, Love, if I could dream to-night, in the earth with you!"

"*October seventh.*

"Just four months ago to-day! I was numb, then, with the shock and horror. I could not feel as I do now. When the tide of my heart came in, with agony in every pulse-beat, it rose steadily to the full, without pause, without rest. I think it has reached its flood now, for I cannot endure more. Will there ever be

recession?"

"*November tenth.*

Death of Passion

"I am coming, gradually, to have some sort of faith. I do not know why, for I have never had it before. I can see that all things made of earth must perish as the leaves. Passion dies because it is of the earth, but does not love live?

A Gift

"If only the finer things of the spirit could be bequeathed, like material possessions! All I have to leave my son is a very small income and a few books. I cannot give him endurance, self-control, or the power to withstand temptation. I cannot give him joy. If I could, I should leave him one priceless gift—my love for Constance, to which, for one hour, hers answered fully—I should give him that love with no barrier to divide it from its desire.

"I wonder if Constance would have left hers to her little yellow-haired girl? I wonder if sometimes the joys of the fathers are not visited upon their children as well as their sins?"

"*November nineteenth. Night.*

"I have come to believe that love never dies for God is love, and He is immortal. My love for Constance has not died and cannot. Why should hers have died? It does not seem that it has, since to-day, for the first time, I have found surcease.

"Constance is dead, but she has left her love to sustain and strengthen me. It streams out from the quiet hillside to-night as never before, and gives me the peace of a benediction. I understand, now, the blinding pain of the last five months. The immortal spirit of love, which can neither die nor grow old, was extricating itself from the earth that clung to it.

"*December third.*

"At last I have come to perfect peace. I no longer hunger so terribly for the

touch of her, for my aching arms to clasp her close, for her lips to quiver beneath mine. The tide has ebbed—there is no more pain.

"I have come, strangely, into kinship with the universe. I have a feeling to-night of brotherhood. I can see that death is no division when a heart is deep enough to hold a grave. The Grey Angel cannot separate her from me, though she took the white poppies from his hands, and gave none to me.

"*December eighteenth.*

Day by Day

"Constance, Beloved, I feel you near to-night. The wild snows of Winter have blown across your grave, but your love is warm and sweet around my heart. The sorrow is all gone and in its place has come a peace as deep and calm as the sea. I can wait, day by day, until the Grey Angel summons me to join you; until the poppies that stilled your heartbeats, shall, in another way, quiet mine, too.

"I can have faith. I can believe that somewhere beyond the star-filled spaces, when this arc of mortal life merges into the perfect circle of eternity, there will be no barrier between you and me, because, if God is love, love must be God, and He has no limitations.

"I can take up my burden and go on until the road divides, and the Grey Angel leads me down your path. I can be kind. I can try, each day, to put joy into the world that so sorely needs it, and to take nothing away from whatever it holds of happiness now. I can be strong because I have known you, I can have courage because you were brave, I can be true because you were true, I can be tender because I love you.

"At last I understand. It is passion that cries out for continual assurance, for fresh sacrifices, for new proof. Love needs nothing but itself; it asks for nothing but to give itself; it denies nothing, neither barriers nor the grave. Love can wait until life comes to its end, and trust to eternity, because it is of God."

A Man's Heart

Roger put the little book down and wiped his eyes. He had come upon a man's heart laid bare and was thrilled to the depths by the revelation. He was as one who stands in a holy place, with uncovered head, in the hush that follows prayer.

In the midst of his tenderness for his dead father welled up a passionate loyalty toward the woman who slept in the room adjoining the library, whose soul had "never been welded." She had known life no more than a prattling brook in a meadow may know the sea. Bound in shallows, she knew nothing of the unutterable vastness in which deep answered unto deep; tide and tempest and blue surges were fraught with no meaning for her.

The clock struck twelve and Roger still sat there, with his head resting upon his hand. He read once more his father's wish to bequeath to him his love, "with no barrier to divide it from its desire."

Hedged in by earth and hopelessly put asunder, could it at last come to fulfilment through daughter and son? At the thought his heart swelled with a pure passion all its own—the eager pulse-beats owed nothing to the dead.

Out into the Night

He found a sheet of paper and reverently wrapped up the little brown book. An hour later, he slipped under the string a letter of his own, sealed and addressed, and quietly, though afraid that the beating of his heart sounded in the stillness, went out into the night.

XXIV

The Bells in the Tower

The sea was very blue behind the Tower of Cologne, though it was not yet dawn. The velvet darkness, in that enchanted land, seemed to have a magical quality—it veiled but did not hide. Barbara went up the glass steps, made of cologne bottles, and opened the door.

The Tower Unchanged

She had not been there for a long time, but nothing was changed. The winding stairway hung with tapestries and the round windows at the landings, through which one looked to the sea, were all the same.

King Arthur, Sir Lancelot and Guinevere were all in the Tower, as usual. The Lady of Shalott was there, with Mr. Pickwick, Dora, and Little Nell. All the dear people of the books moved through the lovely rooms, sniffing at cologne, or talking and laughing with each other, just as they pleased.

The red-haired young man and the two blue and white nurses were still there, but they seemed to be on the point of going out. Doctor Conrad and Eloise were in every room she went into. Eloise was all in white, like a bride, and the Doctor was very, very happy.

Ambrose North was there, no longer blind or dead, but well and strong and able to see. He took Barbara in his arms when she went in, kissed her, and called her "Constance."

A sharp pang went through her heart because he did not know her. "I'm Barbara, Daddy," she cried out; "don't you know me?" But he only murmured, "Constance, my Beloved," and kissed her again—not with a father's kiss, but with a yearning tenderness that seemed very strange. She finally gave up trying to make him understand that her name was Barbara—that she was not Constance at all. At last she said, "It doesn't matter by what name you call me, as long as you love me," and went on upstairs.

An Unfinished Tapestry

One of the tapestries that hung on the wall along the winding stairway was new—at least she did not remember having seen it before. It was in the soft rose and gold and brown and blue of the other tapestries, and appeared old, as though it had been hanging there for some time. She fingered it curiously. It felt and looked like the others, but it must be new, for it was not quite finished.

In the picture, a man in white vestments stood at an altar with his hands outstretched in blessing. Before him knelt a girl and a man. The girl was in white and the taper-lights at the altar shone on her two long yellow braids that hung down over her white gown, so that they looked like burnished gold. The face was turned away so that she could not see who it was, but the man who knelt beside her was looking straight at her, or would have been, if the tapestry-maker had not put down her needle at a critical point. The man's face had not been touched, though everything else was done. Barbara sighed. She hoped that the next time she came to the Tower the tapestry would be finished.

In the Violet Room

She went into the violet room, for a little while, and sat down on a green chair with a purple cushion in it. She took a great bunch of violets out of a bowl and buried her face in the sweetness. Then she went to the mantel, where the bottles were, and drenched her handkerchief with violet water. She had tried all the different kinds of cologne that were in the Tower, but she liked the violet water best, and nearly always went into the violet room for a little while on her way upstairs.

As she turned to go out, the Boy joined her. He was a young man now, taller than Barbara, but his face, as always, was hidden from her as by a mist. His voice was very kind and tender as he took both her hands in his.

"How do you do, Barbara, dear?" he asked.

"You have not been in the Tower for a long time."

"I have been ill," she answered. "See?" She tried to show him her crutches, but they were not there. "I used to have crutches," she explained.

"Did you?" he asked, in surprise. "You never had them in the Tower."

"That's so," she answered. "I had forgotten." She remembered now that when

she went into the Tower she had always left her crutches leaning up against the glass steps.

"Let's go upstairs," suggested the Boy, "and ring the golden bells in the cupola."

Barbara wanted to go very much, but was afraid to try it, because she had never been able to reach the cupola.

"If you get tired," the Boy went on, as though he had read her thought, "I'll put my arm around you and help you walk. Come, let's go."

Up the Winding Stairs

They went out of the violet room and up the winding stairway. Barbara was not tired at all, but she let him put his arm around her, and leaned her cheek against his shoulder as they climbed. Some way, she felt that this time they were really going to reach the cupola.

It was very sweet to be taken care of in this way and to hear the Boy's deep, tender voice telling her about the Lady of Shalott and all the other dear people who lived in the Tower. Sometimes he would make her sit down on the stairs to rest. He sat beside her so that he might keep his arm around her, and Barbara wished, as never before, that she might see his face.

The Angel with the Flaming Sword

Finally, they came to the last landing. They had been up as high as this once before, but it was long ago. The cupola was hidden in a cloud as before, but it seemed to be the cloud of a Summer day, and not a dark mist. They went into the cloud, and an Angel with a Flaming Sword appeared before them and stopped them. The Angel was all in white and very tall and stately, with a divinely tender face—Barbara's own face, exalted and transfigured into beauty beyond all words.

"Please," said Barbara, softly, though she was not at all afraid, "may we go up into the cupola and ring the golden bells? We have tried so many times."

There was no answer, but Barbara saw the Angel looking at her with infinite longing and love. All at once, she knew that the Angel was her mother.

"Please, Mother dear," said Barbara, "let us go in and ring the bells."

The Angel smiled and stepped aside, pointing to the right with the Flaming Sword that made a rainbow in the cloud. In the light of it, they went through the mist, that seemed to be lifting now.

"We're really in the cupola," cried the Boy, in delight. "See, here are the bells." He took the two heavy golden chains in his hands and gave one to Barbara.

"Ring!" she cried out. "Oh, ring all the bells at once! Now!"

Ringing the Bells

They pulled the two chains with all their strength, and from far above them rang out the most wonderful golden chimes that anyone had ever dreamed of—strong and sweet and thrilling, yet curiously soft and low.

With the first sound, the mist lifted and the Angel with the Flaming Sword came into the cupola and stood near them, smiling. Far out was the blue sky that bent down to meet a bluer sea, the sand on the shore was as white as the blown snow, and the sea-birds that circled around the cupola in the crystalline, fragrant air were singing. The melody blended strangely with the sound of the surf on the shining shore below.

The Angel with the Flaming Sword touched Barbara gently on the arm, and smiled. Barbara looked up, first at the Angel, and then at the Boy who stood beside her. The mist that had always been around him had lifted, too, and she saw that it was Roger, whom she had known all her life.

Barbara woke with a start. The sound of the golden bells was still chiming in her ears. "Roger," she said, dreamily, "we rang them all together, didn't we?" But Roger did not answer, for she was in her own little room, now, and not in the Tower of Cologne.

She slipped out of bed and her little bare, pink feet pattered over to the window. She pushed the curtains back and looked out. It was a keen, cool, Autumn morning, and still dark, but in the east was the deep, wonderful purple that presages daybreak.

Oh, to see the sun rise over the sea! Barbara's heart ached with longing. She had wanted to go for so many years and nobody had ever thought of taking her. Now, though Roger had suggested it more than once, she had said, each time,

that when she went she wanted to go alone.

"I'll Try It"

"I'll try it," she thought. "If I get tired, I can sit down and rest, and if I think it is going to be too much for me, I can come back. It can't be very far—just down this road."

She dressed hurriedly, putting on her warm, white wool gown and her little low soft shoes. She did not stop to brush out her hair and braid it again, for it was very early and no one would see. She put over her head the white lace scarf she had worn to the wedding, took her white knitted shawl, and went downstairs so quietly that Aunt Miriam did not hear her.

She unbolted the door noiselessly and went out, closing it carefully after her. On the top step was a very small package, tied with string, and a letter addressed, simply, "To Barbara." She recognised it as a book and a note from Roger—he had done such things before. She did not want to go back, so she tucked it under her arm and went on.

It seemed so strange to be going out of her gate alone and in the dark! Barbara was thrilled with a sense of adventure and romance which was quite new to her. This journeying into unknown lands in pursuit of unknown waters had all the fascination of discovery.

An Autumn Dawn

She went down the road faster than she had ever walked before. She was not at all tired and was eager for the sea. The Autumn dawn with its keen, cool air stirred her senses to new and abounding life. She went on and on and on, pausing now and then to lean against somebody's fence, or to rest on a friendly boulder when it appeared along the way.

Faint suggestions of colour appeared in the illimitable distances beyond. Barbara saw only a vast, grey expanse, but the surf murmured softly on the shadowy shore. Crossing the sand, and stumbling as she went, she stooped and dipped her hand into it, then put her rosy forefinger into her mouth to see if it were really salt, as everyone said. She sat down in the soft, cool sand, drew her white knitted shawl and lace scarf more closely about her, and settled herself to wait.

Sunrise on the Sea

The deep purple softened with rose. Tints of gold came far down on the horizon line. Barbara drew a long breath of wonder and joy. Out in the vastness dark surges sang and crooned, breaking slowly into white foam as they approached the shore. Rose and purple melted into amethyst and azure, and, out beyond the breakers, the grey sea changed to opal and pearl.

Mist rose from the far waters and the long shafts of leaping light divided it by rainbows as it lifted. Prismatic fires burned on the boundless curve where the sky met the sea. Wet-winged gulls, crying hoarsely, came from the night that still lay upon the islands near shore, and circled out across the breakers to meet the dawn.

Spires of splendid colour flamed to the zenith, the whole east burned with crimson and glowed with gold, and from that far, mystical arc of heaven and earth, a javelin of molten light leaped to the farthest hill. The pearl and opal changed to softest green, mellowed by turquoise and gold, the slow blue surges chimed softly on the singing shore, and Barbara's heart beat high with rapture, for it was daybreak in earth and heaven and morning in her soul.

She sat there for over an hour, asking for nothing but the sky and sea, and the warm, sweet sun that made the air as clear as crystal and touched the Autumn hills with living flame. She drew long breaths of the wind that swept, like shafts of sunrise, half-way across the world.

The Boy in the Tower

At last she turned to the package that lay beside her, and untied the string, idly wondering what book Roger had sent. How strange that the Boy in the Tower should be Roger, and yet, was it so strange, after all, when she had known him all her life?

Before looking at the book, she tore open the letter and read it—with wide, wondering eyes and wild-beating heart.

Roger's Letter

"Barbara, my darling," it began. "I found this book to-night and so I send it to you, for it is yours as much as mine.

"I think my father's wish has been granted and his love has been bequeathed to me. I have known for a long time how much I care for you, and I have often tried to tell you, but fear has kept me silent.

"It has been so sweet to live near you, to read to you when you were sewing or while you were ill, and sweeter than all else besides to help you walk, and to feel that you leaned on me, depending on me for strength and guidance.

"Sometimes I have thought you cared, too, and then I was not sure, so I have kept the words back, fearing to lose what I have. But to-night, after having read his letters, I feel that I must throw the dice for eternal winning or eternal loss. You can never know, if I should spend the rest of my life in telling you, just how much you have meant to me in a thousand different ways.

"Looking back, I see that you have given me my ideals, since the time we made mud pies together and built the Tower of Cologne, for which, alas, we never got the golden bells. I have loved you always and it has not changed since the beginning, save to grow deeper and sweeter with every day that passed.

"As much as I have of courage, or tenderness, or truth, or honour, I owe to you, who set my standard high for me at the beginning, and oh, my dearest, my love has kept me clean. If I have nothing else to give you, I can offer you a clean heart and clean hands, for there is nothing in my life that can make me ashamed to look straight into the eyes of the woman I love.

"Ever since we went to that wedding the other day, I have been wishing it were our own—that you and I might stand together before God's high altar in that little church with the sun streaming in, and be joined, each to the other, until death do us part.

"Sweetheart, can you trust me? Can you believe that it is for always and not just for a little while? Has your mother left her love to you as my father left me his?

"Let me have the sweetness of your leaning on me always, let me take care of you, comfort you when you are tired, laugh with you when you are glad, and love you until death and even after, as he loved her.

"Tell me you care, Barbara, even if it is only a little. Tell me you care, and I can wait, a long, long time.

ROGER.

Barbara's heart sang with the joy of the morning. She opened the little worn book, with its yellow, tear-stained pages, and read it all, up to the very last line.

"Oh!" she cried aloud, in pity. "Oh! oh!"

Fully understanding, she put it aside, closing the faded cover reverently on its love and pain. Then she turned to Roger's letter, and read it again.

First Flush of Rapture

Dreaming over it, in the first flush of that mystical rapture which makes the world new for those to whom it comes, as light is recreated with every dawn, she took no heed of the passing hours. She did not know that it was very late, nor that Aunt Miriam, much worried, had asked Roger to go in search of her. She knew only that love and morning and the sea were all hers.

The tide was coming in. Each wave broke a little higher upon the thirsting shore. Far out on the water was a tiny dark object that moved slowly shoreward on the crests of the waves. Barbara stood up, shading her eyes with her hand, and waited, counting the rhythmic pulse-beats that brought it nearer.

She could not make out what it was, for it advanced and then receded, or paused in a circling eddy made by two retreating waves. At last a high wave brought it in and left it, stranded, at her feet.

A Fragment

Barbara laughed aloud, for, broken by the wind and wave and worn by tide, a fragment of one of her crutches had come back to her. The bit of flannel with which she had padded the sharp end, so that the sound would not distress her father, still clung to it. She wondered how it came there, never guessing that it was but the natural result of Eloise's attempt to throw it as far as Allan had thrown the other, the day he took them away from her.

A great sob of thankfulness almost choked her. Here she stood firmly on her own two feet, after twenty-two years of helplessness, reminded of it only by a fragment of a crutch that the sea had given back as it gives up its dead. She had outgrown her need of crutches as the tiny creatures of the sea outgrow their shells.

"Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,

As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!"

The beautiful words chanted themselves over and over in her consciousness. The past, with all its pain and grieving, fell from her like a garment. She was one with the sun and the morning; uplifted by all the world's joy.

The True Lover

Her blood sang within her and it seemed that her heart had wings. All of life lay before her—that life which is made sweet by love. She felt again the ecstasy that claimed her in the Tower of Cologne, when she and the Boy, after a lifetime of waiting, had rung all the golden bells at once.

And the Boy was Roger—always had been Roger—only she did not know. Into Barbara's heart came something new and sweet that she had never known before—the deep sense of conviction and the everlasting peace which the True Lover, and he alone, has power to bestow.

It was part of the wonder of the morning that when she turned, startled a little by a muffled footstep, she should see Roger with his hands outstretched in pleading and all his soul in his eyes.

Barbara's face took on the unearthly beauty of dawn. Her blue eyes deepened to violet, her sweet lips smiled. She was radiant, from her feet to the heavy braids that hung over her shoulders and the shimmering halo of soft hair, that blew, like golden mist, about her face.

Roger caught her mood unerringly—it was like him always to understand. He was no longer afraid, and the trembling of his boyish mouth was lost in a smile. She was more beautiful than the morning of which she seemed a veritable part—and she was his.

Flower of the Dawn

"Flower of the Dawn," he cried, his voice ringing with love and triumph, "do

you care? Are you mine?"

She went to him, smiling, with the colour of the fiery dawning on her cheeks and lips. "Yes," she whispered. "Didn't you know?"

Then the sun and the morning and the world itself vanished all at once beyond his ken, for Barbara had put her soft little hand upon his shoulder, and lifted her love-lit face to his.

THE END.

Transcriber's Notes:

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

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