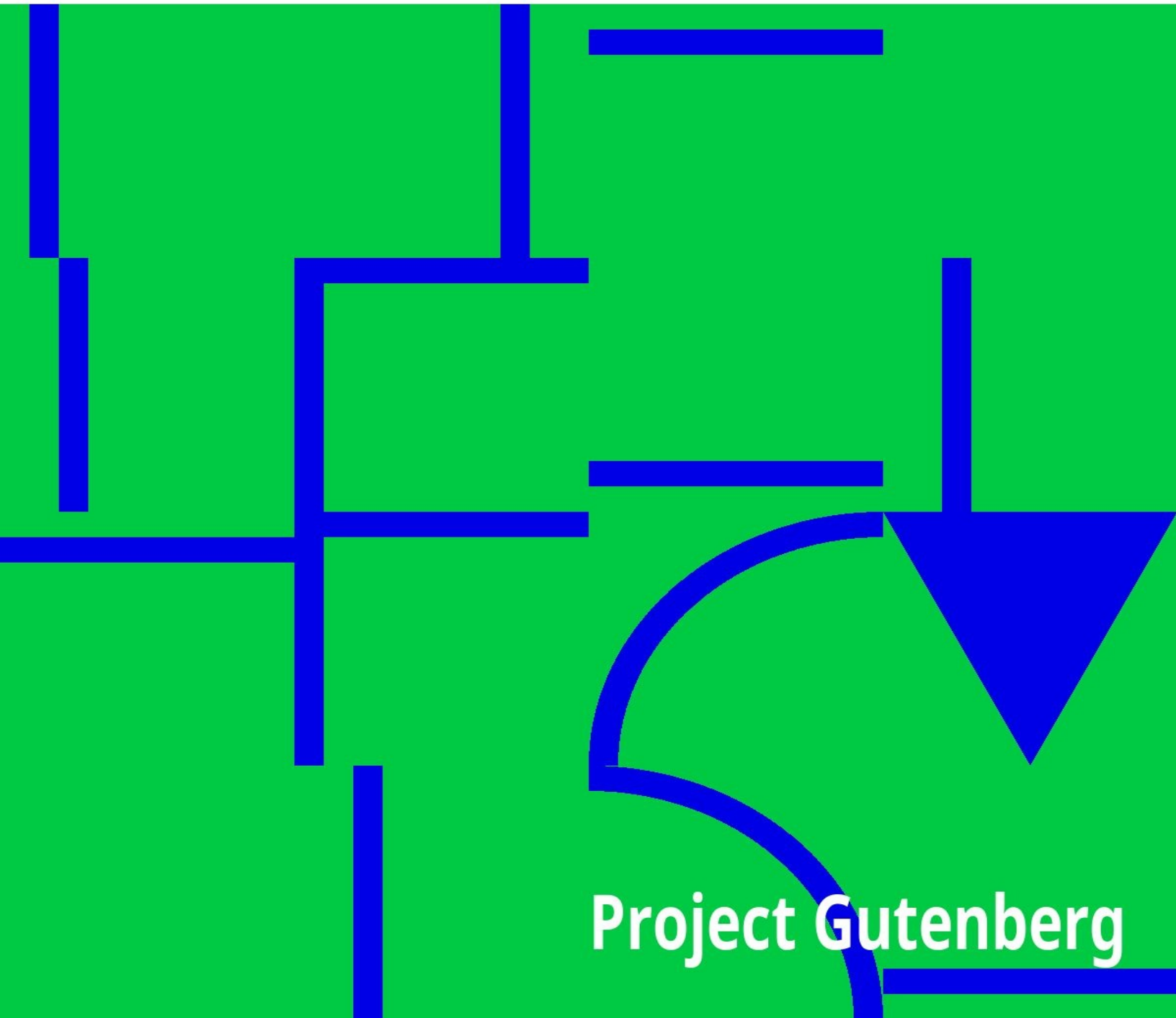
The Gorgeous Girl

Nalbro Bartley



Title: The Gorgeous Girl

Author: Nalbro Bartley

Release Date: August 22, 2009 [eBook #29753]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ISO-8859-1

E-text prepared by Roger Frank
and the Project Gutenberg Online Distributed Proofreading Team
(http://www.pgdp.net)

"*He was very diplomatic in his undertaking*"

THE GORGEOUS GIRL

BY

NALBRO BARTLEY

emblem

Illustrated

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK

DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY

1920

ILLUSTRATIONS

THE GORGEOUS GIRL

THE GORGEOUS GIRL

CHAPTER I

“Before long two bank accounts will beat as one,” Trudy said to Mary Faithful. “Tra-la-la-la-la,“ humming the wedding march while the office force of the O’Valley Leather Company listened with expressions ranging from grins to frowns.

“Sh-h-h! Mr. O’Valley has just opened his door.” As she was private secretary and general guardian to Steve O’Valley, president of the concern, Miss Faithful’s word usually had a decisive effect.

But Trudy was irrepressible. Besides boarding at the Faithful home and thus enjoying a certain intimacy with Mary, she was one of those young persons who holds a position merely as a means to an end—the sort who dresses to impress everyone, from the president of the concern if he is in the matrimonial or romantic market to the elevator boy if said elevator boy happens to have a bank account capable of taking one to all the musical shows and to supper afterward. Having been by turns a milliner’s apprentice, assistant in a beauty parlour, and cashier in a business men’s restaurant, Truletta Burrows had acquired a certain chicness enabling her to twist a remnant of chiffon or straw into a creation and wear it in impressive contrast with her baby-blue eyes and Titian-red hair. In the majority of cases where a girl has neither family nor finances she must seek a business situation in order to win a husband. Trudy went after her game in no hesitating manner.

She had no intention of becoming one of the multitude of commercial nuns who inhabit the United States of America this day—quiet women with quick eyes, a trifle cold or pensive if analyzed, severely combed hair, trim tailor suits and mannish blouses with dazzling neckties as their bit of vanity—the type that often shoulders half the responsibility of the firm. Whether achieving a private office and a nervous stenographer who is disappointed at having a lady boss is to be preferred to a house-and-garden career is, like all vital issues, a question for debate.

Neither did Trudy propose to shrivel into a timid, slave-like type of person kept on the pay roll from pity or by reason of the fact that initiating a novice would be troublesome. Such a one was Miss Nellie Lunk, who sat in a corner of the hall making out requisition slips and taking care of unwelcome visitors—a pathetic

figure with faded eyes and scraggly hair, always keeping a posy on her old-style desk and crocheting whenever there was a lull in work. Thirty years in business was Miss Lunk's record, twenty-five in Mark Constantine's office and five in the employ of Mr. O'Valley, that lovable, piratical Irishman who achieved his success by being a brilliant opportunist and who, it would seem, ran a shoestring into a fortune by a wink of his blue eyes.

Trudy knew that Miss Lunk lived alone—the third story back, where she cooked most of her meals, while a forlorn canary cheeped a welcome. She possessed a little talking machine with sentimental records, and on Sundays she went to a cafeteria for a good, hearty meal unless cousins asked her to their establishment. Some day Miss Lunk would find herself in a home with other no longer useful old people and here she would stay with her few keepsakes, of which the world knew nothing and cared less, the cousins dropping in at intervals to impress upon her how carefree and fortunate she was!

In conclusion Trudy had decided not to accept the third choice of the modern business woman, which, she decided, was Mary Faithful's fate—to give your heart to a man who never had thought of you and never would think of you as other than a reliable and agreeable machine; as someone—should Florida and a certain Gorgeous Girl named Beatrice Constantine beckon—who would say:

"Yes, Mr. O'Valley, I understand what to do. I arranged the New Haven sale this morning. You were at the jewellery store to see about Miss Constantine's ring. So I long-distanced Martin & Newman and put it through. If the ring is sent in your absence I know what you have ordered and can return it if it does not comply with instructions—platinum set with diamonds, three large stones of a carat each and the twenty smaller stones surrounding them. And a king's-blue velvet case with her initials in platinum. And you want me to discharge Dundee and divide up his work. Yes, I gave the janitor the gold piece for finding your pet cane. I'll wire you every day."

And Steve O'Valley had swung jauntily out of the office, secure in his secretary's ability to meet any crisis, to have to work alone in the almost garish office apparently quite content that she was not going to Florida, too. Trudy's imagination pictured there a someone petulant, spoiled, and altogether irresistible in the laciest of white frocks and a leghorn hat with pink streamers, at whose feet Steve O'Valley offered some surprise gift worth months of Mary Faithful's salary while he said: "I ran away from work to play with you, Gorgeous Girl! See how you demoralize me? Even your father frowned when I said I was coming. How are you, darling? I don't give a hang if I make poor

Miss Faithful run the shop for a year as long as you want me to play with you."

Having the advantage of studying Mary Faithful's position both from the business and family aspects Trudy had long ago decided that she was not going to be like her. In no way did she envy Mary's position.

Since her dreamer of a father had died and left dependent upon her her four-year-old brother and a mother whose chief concern in life was to have the smartest-looking window curtains in the neighbourhood, Mary went to work at thirteen with a remnant of an education. Possessions spelled happiness to Mrs. Faithful; poetical dreams had been Mr. Faithful's chief concern, and as an unexpected consequence their first child had been endowed with common sense. With Mary at the wheel there had been just enough to get along with, so they stayed on in the old-fashioned house while Mrs. Faithful bewailed Mary's having to work for a living and not be a lady, as she could have been if her father had had any judgment.

Mrs. Faithful had become quite happy in her martyrdom as she was still able to maintain the starched window curtains. After a conventional period of mourning she began to relive the past, her husband's mistakes, her own girlhood and offers of marriage—such incidents as these sufficed to keep her from enjoying the present, while Mary rose from errand girl to grocery clerk, with night school as a recreation, from grocery clerk to filing clerk, assistant bookkeeper, bookkeeper, stenographer, and finally private secretary to Steve O'Valley, one of the war-fortune kings. And she had given her heart to him in the same loyal way she had always given her services.

At home Trudy noted that Mary worked round the house because she liked the change from office routine, deaf to the complaining maternal voice reciting past glories in which Mary had no part. If the parlour furniture with its tidies and a Rogers group in the front window sometimes got on her nerves she forced herself to laugh over it and say: "It's mother's house, and all she has." She concerned herself far more with Luke, an active, fair-to-middling American boy somewhat inclined to be spoiled. Mary had taken Luke into the office after school hours to keep a weather eye on him and make him contribute a stipend to the expenses.

"If a man won't work he should not eat," she informed him as she proportioned his wage.

Recalling Mary's position at home—though Trudy rejoiced in her own front room and the comforts of the household—she shrugged her shoulders in

disapproval. Certainly she could never endure the same lot in life. For if one man will not love you why waste time bewailing the fact? Find another. Mary could have had other suitors. Mr. Tompkins, the city salesman, and young Elias, of Elias & Son, had both made brave attempts to plead their cause, only to be treated in the same firm manner that Luke was treated when he hinted of making off to sea.

“She’ll spend her life loving Steve O’Valley and slaving for him,” Trudy had confided to her dozen intimate friends, who never repeated anything told them. “And he will spend his life being trampled on by Beatrice Constantine, and after they are married she will be meaner than ever to him. But he will love her all the more. Honest, business men make the grandest husbands! College professors are lots harder to get along with—but business men are as cross as two sticks in their offices and at home they’re so sweet it would melt pig iron.”

The first plank in Trudy’s platform was to marry a business man as nearly like Steve O’Valley as possible. The second was—whether or not she had a stunning home with brick fireplaces—never to spend her days hanging round them. Her most envied friend lived in New York, and her life was just one roof garden after another. She had everything heart could desire—Oriental rugs, a grandfather’s clock, a mechanical piano, bird-of-paradise sprays for her hat, a sealskin ulster, and plenty of alimony. And in case said business man proved unsatisfactory Trudy had resolved to exchange him for unlimited legal support at the earliest possible opportunity.

But she would not trespass upon Mary’s platform, which consisted of loving Steve O’Valley yet knowing of his love for the Gorgeous Girl, as Mark Constantine had named his daughter. And of course Mary must have realized that though she might earn three thousand a year as private secretary she would eternally lock her desk at six o’clock and trudge home to her mother and the starched window curtains, watch Luke fall in love and scorn her advice, wash her hemstitched ruffles and black her boots, and keep her secret as she grew older and plainer of face!

Trudy often tried to decide just how handsome and how plain Mary was; it was a matter for argument because the expression of Mary Faithful’s eyes largely determined her charm. She was a sober young person with thick braids of brown hair and surprising niceties of dress, sensible shoes, a frill of real lace on her serge dress, no hint of perfume, no attempt at wearing party attire for business as the rest of the staff not only attempted but unfortunately achieved. She had honest gray eyes, the prophecy of true greatness in her face with its flexible

mouth and prominent cheek bones, the sort of woman who would be the mother of great men, tall and angular in build and walking with an athletic stride offset by a feminine cry-baby chin and the usual mediocre allotment of freckles on the usual mediocre nose! Mary Faithful was not pretty; she was a “good-looking thing,” Trudy would usually conclude, glancing in a near-by mirror to approve of the way her fluff of pink tulle harmonized with her pink camisole under the tissue-paper bodice.

Indulging in one of these reveries Trudy suddenly realized that she had not added the checks on her desk. She went to work disdainfully, first feeling of her skirt and waist at the back, slipping a caramel in her mouth, and making eyes at a clerk who passed her desk.

Mary came out of her office and stopped before Trudy accusingly. “I’ve been waiting for these,” she said.

“It’s so grand out to-day—look at that sunshine! May’s the hardest month of the year to work; you just can’t help planning your summer clothes.”

“Miss Constantine is coming to call for Mr. O’Valley and I want his O. K. on those before he gets away.”

“Listen, don’t you think the diamonds he is buying her are vulgar? A bunch of electric bulbs is what I call it, I certainly would not permit——”

Mary’s pencil tapped authoritatively on the desk, then she signed an order someone brought her.

“Are they going to be married at high noon in church?”

“Yes—June the first.”

“Lucky girl! She’s older than me; everyone says so. It’s only her money and clothes that has built her up. I don’t think she’s so much. Her nose is as flat as a pancake and she rouges something fierce. I saw them at the theatre and I certainly was——”

Mary took the checks out of Trudy’s hand and walked away. Undecided as to her course of action Trudy hummed a few bars of “Moving Man, Don’t Take My Baby Grand” and then followed Mary into her office.

Mary added up the checks without glancing at her caller. Then she said sharply: “I cannot pay out someone else’s money for work that is not done.”

“Don’t get a grouch on; it will spread through the whole plant. When you’re

cross everybody’s cross.”

“Then do your work—for it isn’t much.” She could not help adding: “You think I can smooth over everything just because you board with me.”

Trudy giggled. “It’s the wedding in the air, and spring, and those diamonds! She never works, she never does anything but spend the money we make for her. All she has is a good time, and what’s the use of living if you don’t have a good time? I’ll have it if I have to steal it. Oh, you needn’t look so horrified. Steve O’Valley almost stole his fortune just because he had to be a rich man before Constantine would let him marry his daughter. Anyway, I’d rather have a good time for a few years and then die than to live to be a hundred and never have an honest-to-goodness party. Wouldn’t you?”

“You’re foolish to-day. If you only wouldn’t wear such low-cut waists and talk to the men! Mr. O’Valley has noticed it.”

“I can get another job and another boarding house,” Trudy began, defiantly.

“You wouldn’t last out at either. You need this sort of a place and our sort of house, you ridiculous little thing. Besides, you have Gaylord at your beck and call”—Trudy blushed—“and you seem to manage to have a pretty good time when all is said and done. I do feel responsible for you because at twenty-three you are more scatterbrained than——”

“Finish it—than you were at thirteen! Well, what of it? I’m out for a good time and you are always talking about the right time, I suppose. I’ll take your lecture without weeping and promise to reform. But don’t be surprised at anything I may do regarding tra-la-la-la-la.” She burst into the wedding march again and vanished, Mary shaking her head as she prepared to sign off some letters.

Steve O’Valley opened the door connecting their offices, displaying a face as happy as a schoolboy’s on a Christmas holiday. “Miss Constantine is downstairs, I’m going to escort her up,” he announced, shutting the door as abruptly as he had opened it.

Presently there came into Steve’s office someone who was saying in a light, gay voice: “Perfectly awful old place, Stevuns—as bad as papa’s. I hate business offices; make my head ache. It was Red Cross to-day, and after that I had to rush to cooking school——”

Steve answered in rapt fashion: “I’ll have to talk to Miss Faithful for half a jiffy and then I’m free for the rest of the day——” opening the door of Mary’s office and beckoning to her.

Coming into his office Mary nodded pleasantly at the Gorgeous Girl, who nodded pleasantly in return and settled herself in an easy-chair while Steve rehearsed the things to be attended to the following day since he was not to be at the office.

“I’m getting Miss Faithful ready to run the shop single-handed,” he explained, telling Mary details which she already knew better than he but to which she listened patiently, her twilight eyes glancing now at Beatrice and back again at Steve.

Outside the hum of commerce played the proper accompaniment to Steve O’Valley’s orders and Mary’s thoughts and Beatrice’s actions—a jangling yet accurate rhythm of typewriters and adding machines and office chatter, pencil sharpeners, windows being opened, shades adjusted, wastebaskets dragged into position, boys demanding their telegrams or delivering the same, phone bells ringing, voices asking for Mr. O’Valley and being told that he was not in, other voices asking for Miss Faithful and being told she was not at liberty just now—would they be seated? Trudy’s giggle rose above the hum at odd intervals, elevators crept up and down, and outside the spring air escorted the odour of hides and tallow and what not, grease and machine oil and general junk from across the courtyard; trucks rumbled on the cobblestones while workingmen laughed and quarrelled—a confusing symphony of the business world. While Steve hurriedly gave his orders Mary Faithful in almost the panoramic fashion of the drowning swiftly recalled the incidents of Steve’s life and of the Gorgeous Girl’s and her own as well, forcing herself mechanically to say yes and no in answer to his questions and to make an occasional notation.

“*The Gorgeous Girl had never known anything but the most gorgeous side of life*”

The panorama rather bewildered her; it was like being asked to describe a blizzard while still in it, whereas one should be sitting in a warm, cheery room looking impersonally at the storm swirl.

First of all, she thought of Steve O’Valley’s Irish grandfather, by like name, who spent his life in Virginia City trying to find a claim equal to the Comstock lode, dying penniless but with a prospector’s optimism that had he been permitted to live *manana* surely would have seen the turning of the tide. Old O’Valley’s only son and his son’s wife survived him until their ability to borrow was at an end

and work would have been their only alternative. So they left a small, black-haired, blue-eyed young man named Stephen O'Valley to battle single-handed with the world and bring honour to his name.

The first twelve years of the battle were spent in an orphanage in the Grass Valley, the next four as a chore boy on a ranch, after which the young man decided with naïve determination that in order to obtain anything at all worth while he must be fully prepared to pay its price, and that he desired above all else to become a rich man—a truly rich man, and marry a fairy-princess sort of person. And as far as education was concerned he felt that if he was not quite so brushed up on his A B C's as he was on minding his P's and Q's the result would not be half bad. Unconsciously his attitude toward the world was a composite of the philosophy of Marcus Aurelius, the cynical wisdom of Omar Khayyam, and plain and not to be duplicated Yankee pep.

As Steve planned it he was to leave his mark on the world and not endure the world's mark upon himself. This straight-limbed and altogether too handsome youngster—his grandmother had been a Basque—possessed the same quality of the fortune hunter as his grandfather, only he did not propose to do his prospecting in the mines of Nevada. Following the general tactics of a Stone Age man—a belief in muscle and great initiative—Steve found himself at twenty-four in the city of Hanover and in the employ of Mark Constantine, a hide-and-leather magnate who was said to be like all hard-boiled eggs—impossible to beat. After Steve advanced to the top notch of his ability he discovered that the only reason he was not considered as a junior member of the firm was because he could not buy stock. At this same time Beatrice Constantine had become interested in him.

To her mind Steve was different in other ways than merely being handsome and possessed of physical strength. And she considered that if he had a fortune he would be far more wonderful than any of the young gentlemen of her set who wondered which would be the lucky chap to lead Constantine's Gorgeous Girl to the wedding-license bureau.

In the seventeen-year-old patronizing fashion of a Gorgeous Girl she permitted Steve to see that she was interested, and Steve with the romance of his Basque grandmother and the audacity of his Irish grandfather immediately thought of what a strange and wonderful thing it would be if he could by hook or crook become a rich man all in the twinkling of an eye, and marry this superior, elegant little person.

The Gorgeous Girl had never known anything but the most gorgeous side of life. Her father, self-made from a boyhood as poor as Steve's, carved his way to the top without delay or remorse for any one he may have halted or harmed in the so doing. He had wisely married a working girl whom he loved in undemonstrative fashion, and when at the turning point of his career she bore him a daughter and then died he erected an expensive monument to her memory and took his oath that their daughter should be the most gorgeous girl in Hanover and that her life should be spent in having as good a time as her father's fortune allowed. He then invited his widowed sister to live with him and take charge of his child.

After this interlude he returned to his business grimmer of face and harsher of heart, and the world was none the wiser regarding his grief for the plain-faced woman in the churchyard. As his fortune multiplied almost ironically he would often take time to think of his wife Hannah, who was so tired of pots and pans and making dollars squeal so that he might succeed and who was now at rest with an imposing marble column to call attention to the fact.

So the Gorgeous Girl, as Hanover called her, half in ridicule and half in envy, developed into a gorgeous young woman, as might be expected with her father to pay her bills and her Aunt Belle to toddle meekly after her. Aunt Belle, once married to a carpenter who had conveniently died, never ceased to rejoice in her good fortune. She was never really quite used to the luxury that had come to her instead of to the woman in the churchyard. She revelled in Beatrice's clothes, her own elaborate costumes, ordered the servants about, went to Florida and the Bermudas whenever the Gorgeous Girl saw fit, rolled about the country in limousines, and secretly admired the hideous mansion Constantine had built—an ornate, overbearing brick affair with curlicue trimmings and a tower with a handful of minor turrets. It was furnished according to the dictates of a New York decorator, though Constantine added several large pieces of village colour after the decorator had pronounced his work as ended.

Hannah had always planned for a red-velvet cozy corner, and Constantine didn't give a dozen damns if they were out of date—a red velvet cozy corner was going to be installed in the blue drawing room. A Swiss music box was another thing Hannah had hankered after—spoken of just before she died—so the Swiss music box was given a place of honour beside the residence pipe organ, and likewise some draperies with plush tassels. The decorator, having his check, did not attempt to argue, since his clientele were not apt to stop off at Hanover and discover the crime.

Aunt Belle saw that Beatrice had a governess, a dancing teacher, more party

frocks than any other little girl in Hanover, and later on a French maid and other accessories necessary to being a Gorgeous Girl. In reality a parasitical little snob, hopelessly self-indulged, though originally kind-hearted and rather clever; and utterly useless but unconscious of the fact. She was sent to a finishing school, after which she thought it would be more fun to go abroad to another finishing school and study music and art, travelling summers instead of having a formal début. Most of her chums were doing this and so she went with them. The red velvet cozy corner and the music box and so on disappeared immediately upon her first return visit. Likewise Beatrice succeeded finally in dissuading Aunt Belle from wearing her jewellery while travelling, though that outspoken lady never could refrain from vivid descriptions of it to her fellow passengers.

After the European sojourn the Gorgeous Girl went in for Hanover society and proved herself a valuable asset. She was nearly twenty-four, almost as slight of figure as a child, as dainty as Watteau's most delicate imaginings, with tiny, nondescript features, lovely sunshine hair, and big dove-coloured eyes with pale-gold lashes. Meantime, the question of a husband for this lovely young person was before the household. She had had a dozen offers of marriage but accepted none of them because she had plenty of time and loads of money and she wanted to make the best of her unencumbered youth as long as possible. Besides, it was now considered great fun to go in for charities, she was ever so busy serving on committees, she never had a moment for herself, and it would take months to plan a trousseau and a wedding and decide about her house. Most important of all was the fact that when she was about to go to the French finishing school she had told Steve O'Valley that if he did not come to her farewell party she would be quite hurt. She felt he did not appreciate the honour in having been asked.

Steve, who would have lain down and let her walk over him roughshod, said simply: "But I'm poor. I'm not in a position to meet your friends."

"Then be rich—and I'll ask you again," she challenged.

"If I were a rich man—would you let me try?"

"See if I wouldn't." And she disappeared before he realized she had practically said yes.

Characteristically Steve lost no time. He went to her father the day after she had sailed, having sent her a veritable washtub of flowers for bon voyage—and said briefly: "I have loved your daughter ever since I first saw her. I'm as poor as you were once, but if I see my way to making a fortune and can give her everything she ought to have will you oppose my efforts to make her marry me?"

The daring of the thing pleased Constantine to the point of saying: “Do you want a loan, O’Valley? I think you’ll make good. Then it’s up to my daughter; she knows whom she wants to marry better than I do. You’re a decent sort—her mother would have liked you.”

“I don’t want a loan just yet. I want to make her marry me because I have made my own money and can take care of my own wife. I’m just asking you not to interfere if I do win out. I’ve saved a little—I’m going to take a plunge in stocks and draw out before it’s too late. Then I’m going into business if I can; but I’ll have to try my luck gambling before I do. When I hang out my shingle I may ask you to help—a little. Self-made men of to-day are made on paper—not by splitting logs or teaching school in the backwoods in order to buy a dictionary and law books—we haven’t the time for that. So I’ll take my chances and you’ll hear from me later.”

While Beatrice was skimming through school and taking walking trips through Norway punctuated by fleeting visits home, remaining as childish and unconcerned as to vital things as her mother had been at fourteen, Steve left the Constantine factory and took the plunge.

Good luck favoured him, and for five golden years he continued to rise in the financial world, causing his rivals to say: “A fool’s luck first then the war made him—the government contracts, you know. He’s only succeeded because of luck and the fact of it’s being the psychological moment. Worked in the ordnance game—didn’t see active service—money just kept rolling in. Well, who wants a war fortune? Some folks in 1860 bought government mules for limousine prices and sold them for the same. Besides, it’s only so he can marry the Gorgeous Girl. I guess he’ll find out it was cheap at half the price!”

While talk ran riot Steve’s fortune multiplied with almost sinister speed. He learned that flattery and ridicule were the best weapons known to man. And while the Gorgeous Girl flew home at the first war cloud to bury herself in serious war activities Steve climbed the upward path and never once glanced backward lest he grow dizzy.

At thirty-two, in the year 1919, he was able to say to Mark Constantine, in the fashion of a fairy-story hero: “I still love your daughter, sir, and I’ve made my fortune. We want to be married. Your blessing, please.” And to himself: “I’ll show the worst side of me to the world so wolves won’t come and steal my precious gold that I had to have in order to win her; and I’ll show my best side to the woman I love, and that’s fair enough!”

With surprising accuracy Mary Faithful's keen mind, aided by a tender heart, had pieced this mosaic business and love story together, and as she finished the panorama she glanced at the Gorgeous Girl in her mink dolman and bright red straw hat, the useless knitting bag on her arm, and Steve's engagement ring blazing away on her finger, and she sighed unconsciously.

"Don't tell Miss Faithful any more," Beatrice protested. "I'm sure she knows about everything, and it's late—I'm tired."

"All right, lady fair. That's all, Miss Faithful. Good-night," Steve dismissed her abruptly.

As Mary left the room he was saying tenderly: "What did you do at cooking school?"

And the Gorgeous Girl was answering: "We made pistachio fondant; and next week it will be Scotch broth. It takes an hour to assemble the vegetables and I dread it. Only half the class were there, the rest were at Miss Harper's classical-dancing lesson. That's fun, too. I think I'll take it up next year. I was just thinking how glad I am papa built the big apartment house five years ago; it's so much nicer to begin housekeeping there instead of a big place of one's own. It's such work to have a house on your hands. Are you ready?"

"Hold on. Don't I deserve a single kiss?... Thank you, Mrs. O'Valley." Then the door closed.

Mary Faithful picked up her notations. She tried to comfort herself with the thought that no one should ever have reason to guess her secret. If all honest men steal umbrellas and kisses, so do all honest women fib as to the size of their shoes and the person they love best of all the world!

CHAPTER II

Sunday was a much-dreaded day in Mary's calendar, partly because she surrendered herself to the maternal monologue of how dreadful it was to have a daughter in business and not a lady in a home of her own, and partly because she missed the office routine and the magical stimulation of Steve's presence. Besides, Trudy was a thorn in Mary's flesh and on Sundays the thorn had a chance to assert herself in particularly unendurable fashion.

For instance—the Sunday morning following the Gorgeous Girl's visit to Steve's office Trudy unwillingly dragged herself downstairs at half-past ten in a faded, bescrolled kimono over careless lingerie, her hair bundled under a partially soiled boudoir cap, and her feet flopping along in tattered silk slippers.

"Oh, dear, it's Sunday again," she began. "Goodness me, Mary, I'd hate to be as good as you are—always up and smiling! Why don't you have a permanent smile put on your face? It would be lots easier."

At which joke Luke giggled, and Mrs. Faithful, ensconced in a large rocker behind the starched curtains so that nothing passing on the street could escape her eagle, melancholy eye, nodded approval and added: "I should think Mary would lie abed the one morning she could. But no, she gets Luke up no matter what the weather is, and flies round like a house afire. When I was in my father's house I never had to lift a finger. Trudy, I wish you could have seen my bedroom. I had a mahogany four-poster bed with white draperies, and a dresser to match the bed, and my father bought me a silver toilet set when he was in Lexington, Kentucky, one time. He used to go there to sell horses. I remember one time I went with him and if I do say so I was much admired.

"I rode horseback those days and I had a dappled-gray pony named Pet, and everyone said it was just like looking at a picture to see me go prancing by. Of course I never thought about it. I wore a black velvet riding habit with a long train and a black velvet hat with a white plume just floating behind, and I had white gauntlets, too.

"Mary, Trudy wants her coffee. Hot cakes? Oh, pshaw, they won't hurt you a mite. I was raised on 'em. I guess I'll have another plateful, Mary, while you're

frying ’em. I’m so comfortable I hate to get up.... You poor little girls having to go out and hustle all week long and not half appreciated! Never mind, some Prince Charming will come and carry you off sometime.” Whereat she waddled to the table to wait for the hot cakes to arrive.

Mrs. Faithful had pepper-and-salt-coloured hair and small dark eyes that snapped like an angry bird’s, and a huge double chin. Her nondescript shape resolved itself into a high, peaked lap over which, when not eating hot cakes, her stubby hands seemed eternally clasped.

“Mary takes after her pa, poor child,” she had told Trudy confidentially. “Lean and lank as a clothes pole! And those gray eyes that look you straight through. I wish she didn’t think so much of the office and would get a nice young man. I’d like to know what it is in those books she finds so fascinating. Can you tell me? I tried to read Omar Canine myself but it was too much for me.”

“I’m no highbrow,” Trudy had laughed. “Mary is; and a fine girl, besides,” she had added, resentfully.

With all Trudy’s shallow nature and shrewd selfishness she was as fond of Mary as she was capable of being fond of any one. Besides, it was more comfortable to be a member of the Faithful household for nine dollars a week and be allowed hot cakes and sirup à la kimono on Sunday morning; to have Gaylord Vondeplosshe, her friend, frequent the parlour at will; to use the telephone and laundry, and to occupy the best room in the house than to have to tuck into a room similar to Miss Lunk’s—and she was truly grateful to Mary for having taken her in. She felt that Mrs. Faithful underestimated her man of the family.

Mary at the present time earned forty dollars a week. Out of this she supported her family and saved a little. At regular intervals she tried persuading her mother to leave the old-fashioned house and move into a modern apartment, which would give her the opportunity of dispensing with Trudy as a boarder. But her mother liked Trudy, with her airs and graces, her beaux, her startling frocks. Trudy was company; Mary was not. She was the breadwinner and a wonderful daughter, as Mrs. Faithful always said when callers mentioned her. But the mother had never been friends with her children nor with their father. So Mary had grown up accustomed to work and loneliness; and, most important of all, accustomed to considering everyone else first and herself last. It was Mary who saw beneath the boisterousness of Luke’s boy nature and spied the good therein, trying to develop it as best she could. Aside from Luke and her business she found amusement in her dream life of loving Steve O’Valley and vicariously

sharing his joys and sorrows, safeguarding his interests.

She had told herself four years ago: “You clumsy, thin business woman—the idea of halfway dreaming that such a man as Steve would ever love you! Of course he’s intended for the Gorgeous Girl; the very law of opposites makes him care for her—pretty, useless doll. So take your joy in being his business partner, because the Gorgeous Girl can never share the partnership any more than you could share his name; and there’s a heap of comfort in being of some use.”

After which self-inflicted homily Mary had set to work and followed her own advice. She had discovered very shortly that there were many things to enjoy and be thankful for.

As soon as she was able Mary had refurnished her father’s study and taken it for her own. Here she made out household bills, lectured Luke, planned work, sewed, and read. It was a shabby, cheery room with a faded old carpet, an open fireplace, some easy-chairs, and a black-walnut secretary over which her father had dreamed his dreams. On the walls were stereotyped engravings such as Cherry Ripe and The Call to Arms, which Mrs. Faithful refused to part with; no one, herself included, ever knowing just why.

Mary also took herself to task in the little study in as impersonal a manner as a true father confessor. “You are twenty-six and growing set in your ways,” she would mentally accuse—“always wanting a certain table at the café and a certain waitress. Old Maid! Must have your little French book to read away at as you munch your rolls and refuse to be sociable. Hermitess! And always buy chocolates and a London *News* on Saturday night. Getting so you fuss if you have square-topped hairpins instead of round, and letting milliners sell you any sort of hats because you are too busy to prink! Going to art galleries and concerts alone—and quite satisfied to do so. Now, please, Mary, try not to be so queer and horrid!” Followed by a one-sided debate as to whether or not these were normal symptoms of maturity, and if she were mistress of a house would she not entertain equally set notions regarding brands of soap, and so on?

“Office notions are not so nice as the frilly, cry-on-a-shoulder-when-the-biscuits-burn notions,” she would end, dolefully. “Fancy my tall self weeping on the superintendent’s shoulder because a cablegram has gone astray! Making women over into commercial nuns is a problem—some of us take it easily and don’t try to fight back, some of us fight and end defeated and bitter, and some of us don’t play the game but just our own hand—like Trudy. And what’s the square game for a commercial nun? That is what I’d like to know.”

She would then find herself dreaming of two distinct forks in the road, both of which might be possible for her but only one of which was probable. Each fork led to a feminine rainbow ending.

The more probable fork would resolve itself, a few years hence, into a trim suburban bungalow with a neat roadster to whisk her into business and whisk her away from it. The frilly, cry-on-a-shoulder-when-the-biscuits-burn part of Mary would have long ago vanished, leaving the business woman quite serene and satisfied. She would find her happiness in mere things—in owning her home; in facing old age single-handed and knowing it would not bring the gray wolf; in helping Luke through college while her mother was in a comfy orthodox heaven with plenty of plates of hot cakes and dozens of starched window curtains; in rejoicing at some new possession for her living room, at her immaculate business costumes, new books, tickets for the opera season; in vacationing wherever she wished, sometimes with other commercial nuns and sometimes alone; in having that selfish, tempting freedom of time and lack of personal demands which permit a woman to be always well groomed and physically rested, and to take refuge in a sanitarium whenever business worries pressed too hard. To sum it up: it meant to sit on the curbstone—a nice, steam-heated, artistically furnished curbstone, to be sure, and have to watch the procession pass by.

The other fork in the road led to a shadowy rainbow since Mary knew so little concerning it. It comprised the exacting, unselfish role of having baby fingers tagging at her skirts and shutting her away from easy routines and lack of responsibility; of having a house to suit her family first and herself last; of growing old and tired with the younger things growing up and away from her, and the strong-shouldered man demanding to be mothered, after the fashion of all really strong-shouldered and successful men—requiring more of her patience and love than all the young things combined; of subordinating her personality, perhaps her ideas, and most certainly her surface interests. To be that almost mystical relation, a wife; which includes far more than having Mrs. Stephen O’Valley—just for example—on a calling card.

To her lot would fall the task of always being there to welcome the strong man with tender joy when he has succeeded or to comfort him with equal tenderness when he has failed, and at all times spurring him to live up to the ideal his wife has set for him. To stay aloof from his work inasmuch as it would annoy him, yet to be adviser emeritus, whether the matter involved hiring a new sweeper-out or moving the whole plant to the end of the world. Someone who ministered to the

needs of the strong man’s very soul in unsuspected, often unconscious and unthanked fashion; such a trifle as a rose-shaded lamp for tired eyes; a funny bundle of domestic happenings told cleverly to offset the jarring problems of commerce; a song played by sympathetic fingers; a little poem tucked in the blotter of the strong man’s desk, an artful praising of the strong man’s self!

Mary realized this latter fork was not probable—nor was she unhappy because of it. She sometimes retired to her study to vow eternal wrath upon Trudy Burrows for having attached herself to the household; or to pray that her mother be enlightened to the extent of moving; but beyond an occasional “mad on,” as Luke said, Mary viewed life from the angle of the doughnut and not that of the hole.

“I wish someone else would try baking these greasy things,” she said, coming in with another plateful.

“Why don’t you slip on a kimono instead of a starched house dress, Mary? Whoever is spick-and-span on Sunday morning?”

“Don’t get Mary to lecturing,” Mrs. Faithful warned between bites. “She’ll make us all go to church if we’re not careful. Are you going out with Gay to-day, Trudy?”

“Yes. And I’m awfully mad at him, too. It’s fierce the way he gambles.”

“Don’t be too harsh; it’s a mistake to nag too much beforehand. He’s a lovely young man and I wish Luke could have one of those green paddock coats. I always like a gentleman’s coat with a sealskin collar, don’t you?”

“If it’s paid for.” Trudy’s eyes darkened. “Just because Gay comes of a wonderful family he thinks he has the keys to the city.”

“He’s a lovely young man,” Mrs. Faithful reiterated. “Oh, what did Beatrice Constantine wear when she came down to the office?”

“Clothes.” Mary was deep in the Sunday paper art section.

“She looked like a Christmas tree on fire,” Luke supplemented. “Lovely butter-coloured hair she has!”

“That will do. She is very nice, but different from our sort.” Mary glanced up from her paper.

Trudy bridled. “She’s no different; she has money. My things have as much style. Gaylord knows her intimately, and he says she is a wretched dancer and

pouts if things don't please her. The best tailors and modistes in the country make her things. Who wouldn't look well? If I had one tenth of her income I'd be a more Gorgeous Girl than she is—and don't I wish I had it! Oh, boy! Why, that girl has her maid, the most wonderful jewellery you ever saw, two automobiles of her own and a saddle horse, and her father owns the best apartment house in town, and Beatrice is going to have the best apartment in it when she marries Steve. And you can just bet she knew she was going to marry him a long time ago—because she knew he'd rob the Bank of England to get a fortune. She's flirted with everyone from an English nobleman to the Prince of Siam, and now she's marrying the handsomest, brightest, most devoted cave man in the world." Trudy glanced at Mary. "Yet she doesn't really care for him, she just wants to be married before she is considered passée." Trudy was very proud of her occasional French. "She'll be twenty-six her next birthday!"

"Dear me, girls take their time these days; I was eighteen the day Mr. Faithful led me to the altar."

"When are you going to get married?" Luke asked Trudy with malice aforethought.

"Oh, I'll give Mary a chance. She don't want to dance in the pig trough."

Mary laid down the paper. "I wish you people would finish eating. Luke, are you going fishing with me out at the old mill? Then you better get the walks swept. We'll be home in time for dinner, mother. I'll leave the things as nearly ready as I can. How about you, Trudy?"

"Gay wants me to go to the Boulevard Café—they dance on Sunday just the same as weekdays—and then we'll do a movie afterward. I suppose Steve and his Beatrice are now revelling in the Constantine conservatory, with Steve walking on all fours to prove his devotion. Why is it some girls have everything? Look at me—no one cares if I live or die. First I had a stepmother, and then I tried living with a great-aunt, and then I went to work. Here I am still working, and a lot of thanks I get for it. I'd like to see the Gorgeous Girl have to work—well, I would!"

Mary brushed by with some dishes. Whereupon Trudy settled herself in an easy-chair and ran through the supplement sections, discussing the latest New York scandal with Mrs. Faithful. The next thing on Trudy's Sunday program was washing out "just a few little things, Mary dear; and have you a bit of soap I could borrow and may I use the electric iron for half a jiffy?"

Presently there were hung on the line some dabs of chiffon and lace, and Trudy,

taking advantage of her softened cuticle, sat down and did her nails, Mrs. Faithful admiring the high polish she achieved and reading Advice to the Anxious aloud for general edification.

After ironing the few little things Trudy shampooed her hair with scented soap and by the time its reddish loveliness was dry it was high noon and she repaired to her bedroom to mend and write letters. At one o'clock, in the process of dressing, she rapped at Mary's door and asked to borrow a quarter.

"I'm terribly poor this week and if I should have a quarrel with Gay I want to have enough carfare to come home alone—you know how we scrap," she explained.

About two o'clock there emerged from the front bedroom an excellent imitation of the Gorgeous Girl. Trudy had not exaggerated when she boasted of her own style. Though patronizing credit houses exclusively and possessing not a single woollen garment nor a penny of savings, she tripped down the stairs in answer to Luke's summons, a fearful, wonderful little person in a gown of fog-coloured chiffon with a violet sash and a great many trimmings of blue crystal beads. She boasted of a large black hat which seemed a combination of a Spanish scarf and a South Sea pirate's pet headgear, since it had red coral earrings hanging at either side of it. Over her shoulders was a luxurious feline pelt masquerading comfortably under the title of spotted fox. White kid boots, white kid gloves, a silver vanity case, and a red satin rose at her waist completed the costume.

Standing in the offing, about to decamp with Mary, Luke gave a low whistle to tip her off to look out the window and not miss it. Mrs. Faithful was peeking from behind the starched window curtains as there glided before her eyes the most elegant young woman and impressive young man ever earning fifteen dollars and no dollars a week respectively.

"How do they do it?" Mary sighed. "Come, Luke, let's get on the trail of something green and real."

A few moments later there hurried along the same pathway a tall young woman in an old tailored suit which impressed one with the wearer's plainness. Instead of a silver vanity case she was laden with a basket of newspapers, string, and a garden trowel, indicating that fern roots would be the vogue shortly. Shouldering fishing tackle Luke turned his freckled face toward Mary as they began a conversation, and his perpetual grin was momentarily replaced by an expression of respect. At least his sister was not like the average woman, who depends solely on her clothes to make her interesting.

Meantime, Trudy and Gaylord Vondeplosshe were beginning their Sunday outing by walking to the corner in silence—the usual preliminary to a dispute. Gaylord was quite Trudy's equal as to clothes, not only in style but in forgetfulness to pay for them. Still, he was not unusual after one fully comprehended the type, for they flourished like mushrooms. His had been a rich and powerful family—only-the-father-drank-you-see variety—the sort taking the fastest and most expensive steamer to Europe and bringing shame upon the name of American traveller after arriving. Gaylord had been the adored and only son, and his adored and older sister had managed to marry fairly well before the crash came and debts surrounded the entire Vondeplosshe estate.

He was small and frail, a trifle bow-legged to be exact, with pale and perpetually weeping eyes, a crooked little nose with an incipient moustache doing its best to hide a thick upper lip. His forehead sloped back like a cat's, and his scanty, sandy hair was brushed into a shining pompadour, while white eyelashes gave an uncanny expression to his face. Abortive lumps of flesh stuck on at careless intervals sufficed for ears, and his scrawny neck with its absurdly correct collar and wild necktie seemed like an old, old man's when he dresses for his golden-wedding anniversary. Everything about Gaylord seemed old, exhausted, quite ineffectual. His mother had never tired boasting that Gaylord had had mumps, measles, chicken pox, whooping cough, St. Vitus dance, double pneumonia, and typhoid, had broken three ribs, his left arm, his right leg, and his nose—all before reaching the age of sixteen. And yet she raised him!

Coupled with this and the fact of his father's failure people were lenient to him.

“He’s Vondeplosshe’s boy,” they said; so they gave him a position or a loan or a letter of introduction, and thought at the same time what a splendid thing it was Vondeplosshe was out of it instead of having to stand by and see his son make a complete foozle. For some time Gaylord had been scampering up and down the gauntlet of sympathy, and as long as he could borrow more money in Hanover than he could possibly earn he refused to go to work.

Originally he would have been almost as rich as the Gorgeous Girl herself, but as it was he was poor as Trudy Burrows, only Trudy was a nobody, her family being a dark and uncertain quantity in the wilds of Michigan.

Whereas Gaylord was Vondeplosshe and he could—and did—saunter past a red-brick mansion and remark pensively: “I was born in the room over the large bay window; the one next to it was my nursery—a dear old spot. Rather tough, old dear, to have to stand outside!” Or: “Father was a charter member of the club, so they carry me along without dues. Decent of them, isn’t it? Father was a prince among men, robbed right and left, y’know—always the way when a gentleman tries to be in business. Some say it was Constantine himself who did the worst of it. Of course never repeat it, will you? It takes a man with Steve O’Valley’s coarseness to forge ahead.”

His wobbly, rickety little body always wore the most startling of costumes. A green paddock coat, well padded, a yellow walking stick in the thin fingers, a rakish hat, patent-leather boots, striped suits, silk shirts with handkerchiefs to match, a gold cigarette case, and a watch chain like a woman’s, were a few of Gaylord’s daily requisites. He lived at a club called The Hunters of Arcadia, where he paid an occasional stipend and gambled regularly, sometimes winning. He also promoted things in half-dishonest, half-idiotic fashion, undertaking to bring on opera singers for a concert, sometimes realizing a decent sum and sometimes going behind only to be rescued by an old family friend.

Gaylord was always keen on dinner invitations. And because he was a son of Vondeplosshe the same family friends endured his conceited twaddle and his knock-kneed, wicked little self, and sighed with relief when he went away. It would be so much easier to send these dethroned sons of rich men a supply of groceries and an order for coal!

Besides these lines of activity Gaylord wrote society items for the paper, and as he knew everyone and everything about them he was worth a stipend to the editor. He was considered a divine dancer by the buds, and counted as a cutey by widows. But his standing among creditors was: If he offered a check for the

entire amount or a dollar on account, pass up the check!

Steve had destroyed several IOU's with Gaylord's name attached for the sole reason that Gay had been a playmate of Beatrice's and she rather favoured him.

"He is so convenient," she had defended. "You can always call him up at the last minute if someone has disappointed for cards or dinner, and he is never busy. He can shop with you as well as a woman, lunch with you, dance with you—and he does know the proper way to handle small silver. Besides, he loves Monster." Monster was Bea's pound-and-a-half spaniel, which barked her wonder at the silken beauty of Beatrice's boudoir.

So Gaylord travelled his own peculiar gait, with his married sister occasionally sending him checks; as busy as a kitten with a ball of yarn in making everyone tolerate though loathing him. When he visited Steve's office in the first flush of Steve's success, to ask the thousandth favour from him, and spied Trudy Burrows in all her lemon-kid booted, pink-chiffon waisted, red-haired loveliness—as virile and bewitching as any one Gaylord's pale little mind could picture—he proved himself a "true democrat," as he boasted at the club, and offered her his hand in marriage in short order.

Having just despaired of winning a moneyed bride Gaylord chose Truletta, reasoning that if she were a little nobody it would give him the whiphand over her, since she would feel that to marry a Vondeplosshe was no small triumph. Besides, a chic red-haired wife who knew how to make the most of nothing and to smile, showing thirty-two pearly teeth as cleverly as any dental ad, would not be a bad asset among his men friends. Had the Vondeplosshe fortunes remained intact and Gay met Trudy he would still have pressed his attentions upon her, though they might not have taken the form of an offer of marriage. Trudy's virile, magnetic personality would have commanded this weakling's attention and admiration at any time and in any circumstances—which is the way of things.

Very wisely Trudy kept the engagement somewhat of a secret. She estimated that by being seen with Gay she might meet a not impoverished and real man; and Gay—who still hoped for an heiress to fall madly in love with him—was willing to let the matter be a mere understanding. So this oversubscribed flirt and this underendowed young gentleman had been waiting for nearly two years for something to live on in order to be married or else two new affinities in order that they might part amicably.

They did not speak until they were in the café, where it looked well for Gaylord

to be attentive and Trudy gracious.

Under the mask of a smile Trudy began: “I’m cross. You were gambling again—yes, you were! Never mind how I know. I know!... I’ll have macaroni, ripe olives, and a cream puff.”

“The same,” Gay said, mournfully; adding: “Well, deary, I have to live!”

“Why not work? I do. You sponge along and waste everyone’s time. I’m not getting any younger, and it’s pretty rough to be in an office with horrid people ordering you round—to have to hear all about Beatrice Constantine and her wonderful wedding. I’m as good as she is—yet I’ll not be asked, and you will be.”

“Of course I am. I’m her oldest playmate,” he said, proudly.

Trudy’s temper jumped the stockade. “So, you paste jewel, you’ll go mincing into church and see her married and dance with everyone afterward; and I’ll sit in the office licking postage stamps while you kiss the bride! I’m better looking than she is; and if you are good enough to go to that wedding so am I!”

“Why, Trudy,” he began, in a bewildered fashion, “don’t make a scene.”

“No use making a scene in a fifty-cent café,” she told him, bitterly, “but I’m plenty good looking enough to have a real man buy me a real dinner with a taxi and wine and violets as extras. Don’t think you are doing me a big favour by being engaged to me.”

“Oh, you’re a great little girl,” he said, nervously; “and it’s all going to come out right. It does rile me to think of your working for Steve. Never mind, my ship will come in and then we’ll show them all.”

“I’m twenty-three and you’re twenty-six, and my eyes ache when I work steadily. I’ll have to wear glasses in another year—but I’ll wash clothes before I’ll do it!”

“When it gets that bad we’ll be married,” he said, seriously.

The humour passed over Trudy’s head. “Married on what?” She was her prettiest when angry and she stirred in Gaylord’s one-cylinder brain a resolve to play fairy-godfather husband and somehow deliver a fortune at her feet.

“I can’t live at your club,” she continued; “and your sister is jealous of her husband and wouldn’t want me round. We couldn’t live with the Faithfuls; Mary’s a nice girl but I can’t go their quiet ways. I only stay because it’s cheap. I

owe more than two hundred dollars right now."

Gaylord was sympathetic. "I owe more than that," he admitted; "but I'm going to have some concerts and there'll be good horse races soon—sure things, you know. You'll see, little girl. What would you say if I showed you a real bank account?"

"I wouldn't waste time talking. I'd marry you." Her good humour was returning. "Honest, Gay, do you think you might draw down some kale?"

Like all her kind she had an absurd trust in any one who was paying her attention. With a different type of man Trudy would have been beaten, courageously had the gentleman arrested, and then interfered when the judge was directing him to the penitentiary.

"I wish you wouldn't talk that way. When we are married and you meet my friends you'll have to brush up on a lot of things."

"I guess I'll manage to be understood," she retorted; "and when we are married maybe you can get my job so as to support your wife!"

The orchestra began playing a new rag, and Trudy and Gay immediately left their chairs to be the first couple on the floor. They were prouder of their dancing than of each other.

After several dances they became optimistic over the future and finished their dinner with the understanding that at the first possible moment they would be married and Trudy was to be a hard-working little bride causing her husband's men friends to be nice to the Vondeplosshes, while husband would persuade the Gorgeous Girl to be nice to his wife.

They decided, too, that Mary Faithful was clever and good—but queer.

That Steve O'Valley would discover that a self-made man could not marry an heiress and make a go of it as well as a man of an aristocratic family could marry an adorable red-haired young lady and elevate her to his position.

That Trudy was far more beautiful than Beatrice Constantine, and as one lived only once in this world—why not always strive for a good time?

Whereat they had a farewell dance and moved on to the moving-picture world, where they held hands and stared vapidly at the films, repairing to a cafeteria on a side street for a lunch, and then to the Faithful parlour. Mary had gone to church, Luke had boy friends in to discuss a summer camp, and his mother snored mildly on the dining-room sofa.

They took possession of the front parlour, and the enlarged crayons of the Faithful ancestors bore witness that for more than two hours these young people giggled over the comic supplement, debated as to the private life of the movie stars, tried new dance steps, and then planned how to get everything for nothing and, having done so, not to share their spoils.

“A perfectly lovely time!” Trudy said, glibly, as she kissed Gay good-night.

“Perfectly lovely!” he echoed, politely. “Don’t work too hard to-morrow, Babseley, will you? And do nothing rash until you see me.”

“Call me up to-morrow at eight, Bubseley,” she giggled. The pet names were of Gay’s choice.

So Bubseley tottered down the walk while Babseley turned out the lights and retired to her room with a bag of candy and a paprika-brand of novel. At midnight she tossed it aside and with self-pity prepared to go to sleep.

“And I’ll have to go to work to-morrow,” she sighed, planning her next silk dress as she did up the Titian hair in curlers.

CHAPTER III

WHEN the world was considerably younger it dressed children in imitation of its adults—those awful headdresses and heavy stays, long skirts to trip up tender little feet, and jewelled collars to make tiny necks ache. Now that the world "is growing evil and the time is waxing late" the grown-ups have turned the tables and they dress like the children—witness thereof to be found in the costume of Aunt Belle Todd, Mark Constantine's sister, who had shared her brother's fortunes ever since his wife had been presented with the marble monument.

Like all women who have ceased having birthdays Aunt Belle had not ceased struggling. She still had hopes of a financier who would carry her off in a storm of warmed-over romance to a castle in Kansas. Her first husband was Thomas Todd, the carpenter, chiefly distinguished for falling off a three-story building on which he was working and never harming a hair of his head; also for singing first bass in the village quartet. Aunt Belle had slightly recoloured her past since she had lived with her brother. The account of Mr. Todd's singing in the quartet was made to resemble a brilliant début in grand opera which was abandoned because of Aunt Belle's dislike of stage life and its temptations, while his rolling off the three-story building was never alluded to except when Mark Constantine wished to tease.

She was a short, plump person with permanently jet-black hair and twinkling eyes. Prepared to forgo all else save elegance, she had brought up her gorgeous niece with the idea that it was never possible to have too much luxury. Seated in the Gorgeous Girl's dressing room she now presented excellent proof that the world was growing very old indeed, for her plump self was squeezed into a short purple affair made like a pinafore, her high-heeled bronze slippers causing her to totter like a mandarin's wife; and strings of coral beads and a gold lorgnette rose and fell with rhythmic motion as she sighed very properly over her niece's marriage.

"It will never be the same, darling," she was saying, glancing in a mirror to see if the light showed the rouge boundaries too clearly—"never quite the same. You'll understand when your daughter marries—for you have been just as dear as one."

Beatrice, who was busy inspecting some newly arrived lingerie, did not glance up as she answered: “Don’t be silly. You know it’s a relief. You can sit back and rest from now on—until I’m divorced,” she added with a smile.

“How can you even say such a thing?”

Beatrice tossed the filmy creamy silk somethings or other away and delivered herself of her mind. “Alice Twill was divorced before she married this specimen; so was Coralie Minter; and Harold Atwater; and both the Deralto girls were divorced, and their mother, too. And Jill Briggs is considering it, and I’m sure I don’t blame her. Everyone seems to think a divorce quite the proper caper when things grow dull. You may as well have all the fun you can. Steve wants me to have everything I fancy, and I’m sure he’d never deny me a divorce.”

“You are marrying a splendid, self-made young man who adores you and who is making money every day in the week. No girl is to be more envied—you have had a wonderful ten years of being a ‘Gorgeous Girl,’ as your dear papa calls it, and at twenty-six you are to become the bride of a wonderful man—neither too early nor too late an age. I cannot really grieve—when I realize how happy you are going to be, and yet——”

“Don’t work so hard, aunty,” Bea said, easily. “Of course Steve’s a wonderful old dear and all that—I wish I had asked him for the moon. I do believe he’d have gotten an option on it.” She laughed and reached over to a bonbon dish to rummage for a favourite flavour. She selected a fat, deadly looking affair, only to bite into it and discover her mistake. She tossed it on the floor so that Monster could creep out of her silk-lined basket and devour the remains.

“If you call natural feelings of a mother and an aunt ‘working hard’ I am at a loss——” her aunt began with attempted indignation.

“Oh, I don’t call anything anything; I’m dead and almost buried.” She looked at her small self in the pier glass. “Think of all I have to go through with before it is over and we are on our way west. Here it is half-past twelve and I’ve not eaten breakfast really. I’m so tired of presents and bored with clothes that I cannot acknowledge another thing or decide anything. I think weddings are a frightful ordeal. Did you know the women on my war-relief committee presented me with a silver jewel box? Lovely of them, wasn’t it? But I deserve it—after slaving all last winter. My bronchitis was just because I sold tags for them during that rainy weather.”

“No, I haven’t seen it. But I am glad you decided on a church wedding—there is such a difference between a wedding and just a marriage.”

Beatrice shoved the box of lingerie away. “Those are all wrong, so back they go; and I can’t help it if that woman does need money, I told her I wanted a full inch-and-a-half beading and she has put this crochet edge all round everywhere. I shan’t accept a single piece!”

Whereupon she sat down at her dressing table and rang for her maid. Madame Pompadour herself had no lovelier boudoir than Beatrice. It was replete with rose-coloured taffeta curtains, padded sky-blue silk walls with garlands of appliquéd flowers. Lace frills covered every possible object; the ivory furniture was emphasized by smart rose upholstery, and the dressing table itself fairly dazzled one by the array of gold-topped bottles and gold-backed brushes.

Johanna, the maid, began brushing the sunshiny hair, the Gorgeous Girl stamping her feet as snarls asserted themselves.

“Two more days before the wedding,” she complained. “There’s the Twill luncheon to-day and a bridge and tea at Marion Kavanaugh’s—I hate her, too. She gave me the most atrocious Chinese idol. I’m going to tell her I have no proper place for it, that it deserves to be alone in a room in order to have it properly appreciated.” She laughed at herself. “So I’ll leave it for papa. The apartment won’t hold but just so much—it’s a tiny affair.” She laughed again, the apartment having only eleven rooms and a profusion of iron grille work at all the windows. “But it’s a wonderful way to start—in an apartment—it is such a good excuse for not dragging in all the terrible wedding presents. I can leave everything I like with papa because he never minds anything as long as he has old slippers and plenty of mince pie. After a year or so I’m going to have a wonderful house copied after one I saw in Italy. By then they will all have forgotten what they gave me and I can furnish it so we won’t have to go about wearing blinders.... The blue dress, Jody, that’s right.”

“And what is it to-night?” her aunt asked, meekly.

“The Farmsworth dinner; and to-morrow another luncheon and the garden party at the club. Then the dinner here, rehearsal; and Wednesday, thank heaven, it will be all ended!”

Johanna helped fasten the king’s-blue satin with seed-pearl trimmings and place a trig black hat atilt on the yellow hair.

“The ermine scarf, please.”

The Gorgeous Girl was slipping matronly looking rings on her fingers and adding an extra dab of powder. She took another chocolate, hugged Monster,

gave orders about sending back the lingerie, remarked that she must send her photograph to the society editor for the next day's edition, and she thought the one taken in her Red Cross outfit would be the sweetest; and then kissing the tip of her aunt's right ear she sailed downstairs and into the closed car to be whirled to Alice Twill's house, a duplicate of the Gorgeous Girl's. There she was enthusiastically embraced and there followed a mutual admiration as to gowns, make-ups, and jewellery, and a mutual sympathy as to being desperately tired and busy.

"My dear, I haven't had time to breath—it's perfectly awful! I'll have to drop out of things next winter. Steve will never allow me to be so overburdened. I can't sleep unless I take a powder and I can't have any enthusiasm in the morning unless I have oodles of black coffee. Of course one has had to do serious work—thank heavens the war is over!—but you can't give up all the good times.... What a lovely centre piece! And those cunning little gilt suitcases for favours! A really truly gold veil pin in each one? You love! Oh, let's have a cocktail before any one comes in. It does pick me up wonderfully.... Thanks.... Yes, I had breakfast in bed—some coffee and gluten crackers was all, and aunty had to stay in my room half the morning trying to be pensive about my wedding! No, Markham didn't make my travelling suit half as well as he did Peggy Brewster's. I shall never go near him again.... And did you hear that Jill found her diamond pendant in her cold cream jar, so it wasn't a burglar at all!

"Yes, Gaylord Vondeplosshe is going to be an usher.... Well, what else could I do at the last moment? Wasn't it absurd for a grown man like Fred Jennings to go have the mumps? Gay knows everyone and I'm sure he is quite harmless.... Oh, Steve is well and terribly busy, you know. He is giving me the most wonderful present. Papa hasn't given me his yet and I'm dying to know what it is, he always gives me such wonderful things, too.... There's the bell. I do hope it isn't Lois Taylor, because she always wants people to sign petitions and appear in court. It is Lois Taylor! Why didn't you leave word to have all petitions checked with wraps?" Giggles. "Good heavens, what a fright of a hat. Well, are you ready to go down?"

Five hours later Beatrice was being dressed for the evening's frolic, dipping into the bonbon box for a stray maple cream, and complaining of her headache. At this juncture her father tiptoed clumsily into her room and laid a white velvet jewel case on her dressing table, standing back to watch her open it.

"You dear——" she began in stereotyped, high-pitched tones as she pressed the spring. "You duck!" she added a trifle more enthusiastically, viewing the

bowknot of gems in the form of a pin—a design of diamonds four inches wide with a centre stone of pigeon's-blood ruby. "You couldn't have pleased me more"—trying it against her dressing gown. "See, Jody, isn't this wonderful? I must kiss you." She rustled over to her father and brushed her lips across his cheek, rustling back again to tell Jody that she must try the neck coil again—it was entirely too loose.

"I guess Steve can't go any better than that," her father said, balancing himself on his toes and, in so doing, rumpling the rug.

He was a tall, heavily built man with harsh features and gray hair, the numerous signs of a self-made man who is satisfied with his own achievements. He had often told his sister: "Bea can be the lady of the family. I'm willing to set back and pay for it. It'd never do for me to start buying antiques or quoting poetry. I can wear a dress suit without disgracing Bea, and make an after-dinner speech if they let me talk about the stockyards. But when it comes to musicals and monocles I ask to be counted out. I had to work too hard the first half of my life to be able to play the last half of it. I wasn't born in cold storage and baptized with cracked ice the way these rich men's sons are. I've shown this city that a farmer's boy can own the best in the layout and have his girl be the most gorgeous of the crew—barring none!

"This is a joy," Beatrice was saying, rapidly, her small face wrinkled with displeasure.

She wished her father would go away because she wanted to think of a hundred details of the next forty-eight hours and her nerves were giving warning that their limit of endurance was near at hand. This big, awkward man who was so harsh a task-master to the world and so abject a slave to her own useless little self annoyed her. He offended in an even deeper sense—he did not interest her. Things which did not interest her were met with grave displeasure. Religion did not interest her; neither did Steve O'Valley's business—her head ached whenever he ventured to explain it. She never had to listen to anything to which she did not wish to listen; the only rule imposed upon her was that of becoming the most gorgeous girl in Hanover, and this rule she had obeyed.

"Tired?" he asked, timidly.

"Dead. It's terrible, papa. I don't know how I'll stay bucked up. I want to burst out crying every time a bell rings or any one speaks to me.... Oh, Jody, your fingers are all thumbs! Please try it again."

"It looks nice," her father ventured, indicating the puff of gold hair.

Beatrice did not answer; she sighed and had Johanna proceed.

“The Harkin detectives will watch the presents,” her father ventured again. “There are some more packages downstairs.”

“I’m tired of presents; I want to be through unwrapping crystal vases and gold-lined fruit dishes and silly book ends and having to write notes of thanks when I hate the gifts. My mind seems quivering little wires that won’t let me have a moment’s rest.” She took another piece of candy.

“When I married your mother,” her father remarked, softly, evidently forgetting Johanna’s presence, “we walked to a minister’s house in Gardenville about five miles south of here. Your mother was working for a farmer’s wife and she didn’t say she was going to be married. She was afraid they might try talking her out of it—you know how women do.” He looked round the elegant little room. “I was getting ten dollars a week—that seemed big money in those days. I rented two rooms in the rear cottage of a house on Ontario Street—it’s torn down now. And I bought some second-hand stuff to furnish it.”

He paced up and down; he had a habit of so doing since he was always whisked about in his motor car and he feared growing stiff if he did not exercise.

“But your mother liked the rooms—and the things. I remember I bought a combination chair and stepladder for a dollar and it didn’t work.” He gave a chuckle. “It stayed in a sort of betwixt and between position, about one third stepladder and about two thirds chair, and that worried me a lot. A dollar meant a good deal then. But your mother knew what to do with it, she used it for kindling wood and said we’d charge it up to experience. Yes, sir, we walked to the minister’s—she wore a blue-print dress with a little pink sprig in it, and a sort of a bonnet.” His hand made an awkward descriptive gesture.

“The minister was mighty nice—he took us into his garden and let your mother pick a bunch of roses, and then he hitched up his horse and buggy and drove us back to the farmer’s house. The farmer’s wife cried a little when we told her; she liked your mother. She gave us a crock of butter and some jam. While your mother packed her little trunk—it wasn’t any bigger than one of your hatboxes—I went out and stood at the gate. I kept thinking, ‘By jingo, I’m a married man! Mr. and Mrs. Mark Constantine.’ And I felt sort of afraid—and almost ashamed. It frightened me because I knew it was two to feed instead of one, and I wondered if I’d done wrong to take Hannah away from the farmer’s wife when I was only getting ten dollars a week.

“Well, when she came out of the door she looked as pretty as you’ll look in all

your stuff, and she came right up to me and said, game as a pebble, ‘Mark, we’re man and wife and we’ll never be sorry, will we? And when you’re rich and I’m old we will stay just as loving!’ I didn’t feel sorry or frightened any more—not once. Not until you came and they told me she had gone on. Then I felt mighty sorry—and frightened. She looked so tired when I saw her then—so tired.”

He paused, staring at his sunken gardens as seen from Beatrice’s windows. Some men lazily raked new-cut grass and a peacock preened itself by the sundial. The glass conservatory showed signs of activity. The florists were at work for the coming event. Then he looked at his daughter, who waited with polite restraint until his reverie was ended.

“I’ve given you all she would have had,” he said, as if in debate with himself that this was the last rebuttal against possible criticism.

Beatrice glided over beside him; she looked out of the window, too, and then at her father. Something quite like tears was in his harsh eyes.

“Daddy,” she began with a quick indrawing of her breath, “do you think she’d have wanted me to have all—all this?”

“Why wouldn’t she?” he answered, taking her arm gently. He had always treated her with a formality amounting almost to awe.

“I don’t know—only I sometimes do almost think—would you suspect it? When I go to the office and watch those queerly dressed women bending over desks and earning a few dollars a week and having to live on it—and when I see how they manage to smile in spite of it—and how I waste and spend—and shed a great many tears—well, I wonder if it is quite safe to start as Steve and I are starting!” Then she threw her arms round him. “Steve won’t believe that I’ve been serious, will he? Now, daddy dear, please go ’way and let me dress, for I’m ’way late.”

She kissed him almost patronizingly and he tiptoed out of her room, rather glad to get into his own domain—the majestic library with its partially arranged wedding gifts.

“We’re doing ourselves proud,” he remarked to his sister, who had been rearranging them.

“What I told Beatrice this morning. Only she is all nerves. She can’t enjoy anything—it will be a relief to me, Mark, as well as a loss, when it is over.”

Her brother viewed her with a quizzical expression. Like the rest of the world his

sister never fooled him. But like all supermen there was one human being in whom all his trust was centred, and who very often thus brought about his defeat. In his case, as with Steve O'Valley, it chanced to be Beatrice.

Regarding her both men—merciless with their associates and dubbed as fish-blooded coroners by their enemies—were like gullible children following a lovely and willful Pied Piperess. But Mark's sister with her vanities and fibs irritated and amused him by turns. Perhaps he resented her sharing this material triumph instead of the tired-faced woman in the churchyard.

"Do you remember the time you did the beadwork for the head carpenter's wife and when she paid you for it you spent the dollar for liquid rouge? Todd was so mad he wouldn't speak for a week," he chuckled, unkindly.

"Don't say such things! Think how it would embarrass Bea. Of course I don't remember. Neither do you."

"Oh, don't I? What's the harm recalling old times? I remember when you tried to make Todd a winter overcoat and he said it looked most as good as a deep-sea diver's outfit. My Hannah nearly died a-laughing."

Fortunately Steve appeared, flourishing Beatrice's corsage by way of a greeting.

"Aha, the conquerer comes. My dear lad, your lady love has just ousted me from her room, she'll be down presently. Belle, Steve and I are going into the den to smoke."

"I'm trying to look as amiable as possible, but I wish fuss and feathers were not the mode." Steve smiled his sweetest at Aunt Belle and then took Constantine's arm. "The cave-man style of clubbing one's chosen into unconsciousness and strolling at leisure through the jungle with her wasn't half bad. By the way, I did sell the Allandale man to-day, and the razor-factory stock is going to boom instead of flatten out—I'm sure of it."

He lit a cigarette and threw himself into an easy-chair. Constantine selected a cigar and trimmed its end, watching Steve as he did so.

"You've come on about as well as they ever do," he remarked, unexpectedly. "None of these rich young dogs could have matched you. Seen the presents?"

"Scads of 'em. Awful stuff. I don't know what half of it is for. Bea is going to hand you most of it. The apartment is to be a thing of beauty and she won't hear of taking the offerings along."

"How is the shop?"

“Splendid—Mary Faithful will manage it quite as well as I do. I shall hear from her daily, you’ll stroll over that way, and I can manage to keep my left little finger on the wheel.”

“Mary’s a good sort,” Constantine mused. “Sorry I ever let her go over to your shebang. What’s her family like?”

“Don’t know. Never thought about ’em. Her kid brother works round the place after school. Guess Mary’s the man of the family.”

“How much do you pay her?”

“Forty a week.”

“Cheap enough. A man would draw down seventy and demand an assistant. I never had any luck with women secretaries—they all wanted to marry me,” he admitted, grimly.

“Mary’s not that sort. Business is her life. If she were a man I’d have a rival. I’m going to give her fifty a week from now on; she’s giving up her vacation to stay on the job.”

“Don’t spoil her.”

“No danger. I’ve promised Beatrice to really learn to play bridge,” he changed the conversation.

“Accept my sympathy——” Constantine began and then Beatrice in a lovely Bohemian rainbow dinner gown came stealing in to stand before them and complain of her headache and admire her corsage and let Steve wrap her in her cape and half carry her to the limousine.

“I shan’t see you a moment until we’re married,” he began, mournfully. “I’ve been most awfully neglected. But as you are going to be all mine I can’t complain. You’re prettier than ever, Bea.... Love me?... Lots?... Whole lots? You don’t say it the way I want you to,” laughing at his own nonsense.

“I’ll scream it and a crowd can gather to bear witness.” She dimpled prettily and nibbled at a rose leaf. “It’s all like a fairy tale—everyone says so, and lots of the girls would like to be marrying you on Wednesday.”

“Tell them I belong to the Gorgeous Girl until six men are walking quietly beside me and assisting me to a permanent resting place. Even then I’ll belong to her,” he added.

“Your nose is so handsome,” she said, wistfully, recalling her own.

“Talking of noses! Bea, sometimes it’s terrible to realize that my ambitions have become true. To dream and work without ceasing and without much caring what you do until your dream merges into reality—it makes even a six-footer as hysterical as a schoolgirl.”

“You’re intense,” she said, soberly. “Jill says you’d make a wonderful actor.”

Steve looked annoyed. “Those scatterbrained time wasters—don’t listen to them. Let’s find our real selves—you and I; be worth while. Now that I’ve made my fortune I want to spend it in a right fashion—I want to be interested in things, not just dollars and cents. Help me, dearest. You know about such things; you’ve never had the ugliness of poverty bruise the very soul of you.”

“You mean having a good time—and parties——” she began.

“No; books, music; studying human conditions. I want to study the slow healing of industrial wounds and determine the best treatment for them. I have made the real me go ’way, ’way off somewheres for a long time until I won my pile of gold that helped me capture the girl I loved. Now it is done the real me wants to come back and stay.”

“Oh, I see,” she said, vaguely. “Of course there are tiny things to brush up on—greeting people, and you mustn’t be so in earnest at dinner parties and contradict and thump your fist. It isn’t good form.”

“When whippersnappers like Gaylord Vondeplosshe——”

“Sh-h-h! Gay’s a dear. He is accepted every place.”

“We’re nearly there, tough luck! One kiss, please; no one can see. Say you care, then everything else must true up.”

The wedding took place at high noon in church, with the bishop and two curates to officiate. There was a vested choir singing “The Voice That Breathed O’er Eden”; a thousand dollars’ worth of flowers; six bridesmaids in pastel frocks and picture hats, shepherdess’ staffs, and baskets of lilies of the valley; a matron of honour, flower girls, ushers; a best man, a papa, an aunty in black satin with a large section of an ostrich farm for her hat—and a bridegroom.

After the wedding came the breakfast at the Constantine house. Though certain guests murmured that it was a trifle too ultra like the house itself, which was half a medieval castle and half the makings of a village fire department, it was generally considered a success. Nothing was left undone. The bride left the church amid the ringing of chimes; her health was drunk, and she slipped up to

the rose-taffeta-adorned boudoir to exchange her ivory satin for a trim suit of emerald green. Everyone wished on the platinum circlet of diamonds and there was the conventional throwing of the bouquet, the rush through the back of the grounds to the hired taxi, the screams of disappointment at the escape—and Mr. and Mrs. O'Valley were en route on their honeymoon.

It remained for the detectives to guard the presents, the society reporters to discover new adjectives of superlative praise, and the guests to drink up the champagne and say: "Wonderful." "Must have cost thousands." "Handsome couple. Couldn't have happened in any other country but America." "War fortune." "Oh, yes, no doubt of it—hides and razors turned the trick." "Well, how long do you think it is going to last?"

The office forces of the O'Valley and Constantine companies had been excused so as to be present at the ceremony. But Mary Faithful and Trudy Burrows had not availed themselves of the opportunity. Womanly rebellion and heartache suddenly blotted out Mary's emotionless scheme of action. Besides, there was a valid excuse of waiting to catch an important long-distance call. With Trudy it was mere envy causing her to say over and over: "See Gay, the ragged little beggar, walk up the aisle with one of those rich girls and never glance at me—just because he's a Vondeplosshe? And me have to sit beside Nellie Lunk, who'll cry when the organ plays and wear that ridiculous bathtub of a hat? Never! I won't go unless I can walk up the aisle with Gay. Wait until I see him to-night; I'll make it very pleasant."

Life seemed rather empty for Trudy as she sat in the deserted offices pretending to add figures and trying to hum gayly. Even the box of wedding cake laid on her desk—it was laid on everyone's desk—brought forth no smile or intention of dreaming over it. Was she to spend her days earning fifteen dollars a week in this feudal baron's employ? Tears marred the intensive cultivation on her rouged cheeks as she looked out the window to see the office force being brought back from the church in trucks.

"Like cattle—peasants—all because of money. A war profiteer, that's what he was. And she isn't anything at all except that she has her father's money." She glanced toward Mary's closed door. "Poor Mary," she thought; "she cares! I don't—that makes it easier. Well, he could have done worse than to take Mary," tossing her head as she tried to create the impression of indifference now that the employees were coming back to their desks.

For there was a forked road for Trudy as well as for Mary Faithful. Women are

no longer compelled to accept the one unending pathway of domesticity. Trudy's forked road resolved itself into either marriage with Gay as a stepping stone to marriage with someone else, or a smart shop with society women and actresses as patrons, being able to live at a hotel and do as she wished, inventing a neat little past of escaping from a Turkish harem or being the widow of an English officer who died serving his country. Trudy was not without resources, in her own estimation, and whether she married Gay or achieved the shop was a toss-up. Like the rest of the world she considered herself capable of doing both!

Hearing the scuffle of feet Mary opened the door and forced herself to ask about the wedding. Presently the excitement died down and the round of mechanical drudgery took its place. An hour later someone knocked at an inner door which led to steep side stairs connecting with a side street entrance. Wondering who it was Mary opened it, to find Steve, very flushed and handsome, a flower in his buttonhole yet no hint of rice about him.

"Sh-h-h! Not a word out loud! I want to escape. Mrs. O'Valley is waiting round the corner in a cab. I forgot the long-distance call—the one we expected yesterday."

"It came while everyone was at the church. I stayed here in case it did. They will pay your price, so I closed the deal."

"Hurrah for Mary Faithful! But I wish you could have been there. It was like a picture. I never saw her look so lovely. Well, that's settled. Wire me at Chicago. I think that's everything. Oh, you're to have fifty a week from now on. What man isn't generous on his wedding day? Good-bye, Miss Head of Affairs." A moment later he was climbing down the rickety flight of stairs.

For a long time Mary sat watching the hands of her desk clock slowly proceed round the dial. Someone knocked at the door and she said to come in, but her voice sounded faint and far away.

Fifty dollars a week—generous on his wedding day! She ought to be very glad; it meant she could save more and have an occasional treat for Luke. It was good to think that women had forked roads these days. How terrible if she were left in the shelter of a home to mourn unchecked. Besides, she was guarding his business; that was a great comfort. The Gorgeous Girl was sharing him with Mary Faithful—would always share him. That was a comfort, too.

After the errand boy left, Mary tried to write a letter but she found herself going into the washroom off Steve's office and without warning weakly burying her face in an old working coat he had left behind. She had just made a great many

dollars for him which he would spend on the Gorgeous Girl; she would make many more during the long summer while she stayed at the post and was Miss Head of Affairs. She had laid her woman's hopes on the altar of commerce because of Steve O'Valley, and he rewarded her with a ten-dollar-a-week raise since a man was always generous on his wedding day.

Yet there was a distinct satisfaction in the heartache and the responsibility, even in the irony of the ten-dollar-a-week advance. Life might be hard—but it was not empty! She was glad to be in the deserted office replete with his belongings and breathing of his personality. She was glad to be an acknowledged Miss Head of Affairs.

"You'd miss even a heartache if it was all you had," she whispered to herself from within the folds of Steve's office coat.

CHAPTER IV

During the summer the O’Valley Leather Company discovered that Mary Faithful made quite as efficient a manager as Steve O’Valley himself. Nor did she neglect any of a multitude of petty details—such as the amount of ice needed for the water cooler, the judicious issue of office supplies; the innovation of a rest-room for girls metamorphosed out of a hitherto dingy storeroom; the eradication of friction between two ancient bookkeepers who had come to regard the universe as against them. Even the janitor’s feelings were appeased by a few kind words and a crossing of his palm with silver when Mary decided to houseclean before Steve’s return.

It is impossible for a business woman not to have feminine notions. They stray into her routine existence like blades of pale grass persistently shooting up between the cracks of paving blocks. Quite frilly curtains adorned Mary’s office windows, fresh flowers were kept in a fragile vase, a marble bust of Dante guarded the filing cabinet, and despite the general cleaning she used a special little silk duster for her own knicknacks. On a table was a very simple tea service with a brass samovar for days when the luncheon hour proved too stormy for an outside excursion.

Sharing Steve with the Gorgeous Girl, Mary had decided to clean his business home just as the Gorgeous Girl would have the apartment set in spick-and-span order. It was during the general upsetting with brooms, mops, paint pots, and what not, while Mary good-naturedly tried to work at a standing desk, that Mark Constantine dropped in unexpectedly.

“Gad!” he began, characteristically. “Thought I’d find you in your cool and hospitable office inviting me to have a siesta.” He mopped his face with a huge silk handkerchief.

“Try it in a few days and we will be quite shipshape.” Mary wheeled up a chair for him. “Anything I can do for you?”

He sank down with relief; his fast-accumulating flesh made him awkward and fond of lopping down at unexpected intervals. He glanced up at this amazing young woman, crisp and cool in her blue muslin dress, the tiny gold watch in a

black silk guard being her only ornament. His brows drew into what appeared to be a forbidding frown; he really liked Mary, with her steady eyes somehow suggesting eternity and her funny freckled nose destroying any such notion.

“How are you getting on?” was all he said.

“Splendidly. We expect Mr. O’Valley a week from Monday—but of course you know that yourself.”

“Gad,” Constantine repeated.

“And how is Mr. Constantine?” Mary asked, almost graciously.

“In the hands of my enemy,” he protested. “Bea left a hundred and one things to be seen to. My sister has sprained her ankle and is out of the running. It’s the apartment that causes the trouble—Bea has sent letter after letter telling what she wants us to do. I thought everything was all set before she went away but—here!” He drew out violet notepaper and handed it over. “Sorry to bother you, but when that girl gets home and settled I hope she’ll be able to tend to her own affairs and leave us in peace. I guess you understand how women are about settling a new house.”

Reluctantly Mary deciphered the slanting, curlicue handwriting, which said in part:

> Now, papa dear, I’m terribly worried about the painted Chinese wall panels for the little salon. They are likely to be the wrong design. Jill has written that hers were. So please get the man to give you a guarantee that he will correct any mistakes. I want you to go to Brayton’s and get white-and-gold jars that will look well in the dining room—Brayton knows my tastes. Besides this, he is to have two rose pots of old Wheldon ware for me—they will contain electrically lighted flowers—like old-fashioned bouquets. I wish you and aunty would drive out to the arts-and-crafts shop and bid on the red lacquer cabinet and the French clock that is in stock; I am sure no one has bought them. I could not decide whether I wanted them or not until now, and I must have them. They will tone in beautifully with the rugs.

Mary turned the page:

> Also, Aunt Belle has not answered my letter asking her to order the monogrammed stationery—four sizes, please, ashes of roses shade and lined with gold tissue. I also told Aunt Belle to see about relining my mink cape and muff. I shall wish to wear it very early in the season, and I want something in a smart striped effect with a pleated frill for the muff. And the little house for Monster completely slipped my mind—Aunt Belle knows about it—with a wind-harp sort of thing at one side and funny pictures painted on the outside. I have changed my mind about the colour scheme for the breakfast nook—I am going to have light gray, almost a silver, and I would like some good pewter things.
>
> It seems to me I shall never be rested. Steve wants to see every sunrise and explore every trail. We have met quite nice people and the dancing at the hotels is lovely. Oh, yes, if you need any help I know Miss Faithful will be glad to help, and Gaylord has ripping ideas.

Loads of love to you, dear papa. Your own

BEA.

Mary returned the letter without comment.

“Will you help me?” Constantine demanded almost piteously. “Belle’s out of the running, you know.”

“I’m cleaning my own house,” Mary began, looking at the surrounding disorder, “but I can run up to the apartment with you and see what must be done; though it seems to me——”

“Seems to you what, young woman?”

“—that your daughter would prefer to do these at her leisure—they are so personal.”

Constantine moved uneasily in his chair. “I guess women don’t like to do things these days”—rather disgruntled in general—“but she might as well have asked an African medicine man as to ask me. What do I know about red lacquered cabinets and relining fur capes? I just pay for them.”

Mary smiled. Something about his gruff, merciless personality had always attracted her. She had sometimes suspected that the day would come when she would be sorry for him—just why she did not know. She had watched him from afar during the period of being his assistant bookkeeper, and now, having risen with the fortunes of Steve O’Valley, she faced him on an almost equal footing—another queer quirk of American commerce.

She realized that his tense race after wealth had been in a sense his strange manner of grieving for his wife. But his absolute concentration along one line resulted in a lack of wisdom concerning all other lines. Though he could figure to the fraction of a dollar how to beat the game, play big-fish-swallow-little-fish and get away with it, he had no more judgment as to his daughter’s absurd self than Monster, who had gone on the honeymoon wrapped in a new silken blanket. You cannot have your cake and eat it, too, as Mary had decided during her early days of running errands for nervous modistes who boxed her ears one moment and gave her a silk remnant the next. Neither can a man put all his powers of action into one channel, blinding himself to all else in the world, and expect to emerge well balanced and normal in his judgments.

As Mary agreed to help Constantine out of his débris of French clocks and pewter for the breakfast room she began to feel sorry for him even if he was a business pirate—for he had paid an extremely high price for the privilege of

being made a fool of by his own child.

He escorted her to the limousine and they whirled up to the apartment house, where in all the gray stone, iron grille work, hall-boy elegance there now resided three couples of the Gorgeous Girl type, and where Bea's apartment awaited her coming, the former tenants having been forced to vacate in time to have the place completely redone.

"I wouldn't ask Gaylord if I had to do it myself," Constantine said, brushing by the maid who opened the door. "There is a young man we could easily spare. If he ever gets as good a job as painting spots on rocking-horses I'll eat my hat."

Mary was surveying the room. "Where—where do we go to from here?" she faltered.

Constantine sank into a large chair, shaking his head. "Damned if I know," he panted. "Look at that truck!"—pointing to piles of wedding gifts.

Mary walked the length of the drawing room. It had black velvet panels and a tan carpet with angora rugs spread at perilous intervals; there was a flowered-silk chaise-longue, bright yellow damask furniture, and an Italian-Renaissance screen before the marble fireplace.

Opening out of this was a salon—this was where the Chinese panels were to find a haven—and already cream-and-gold furniture had been placed at artistic angles with blue velvet hangings for an abrupt contrast. There was a multitude of books bound in dove-coloured ooze; cut glass, crystal, silver candelabra sprinkled throughout. Men were working on fluted white satin window drapes, and Mary glanced toward the dining room to view the antique mahogany and sparkle of plate. Someone was fitting more hangings in the den, and a woman was disputing with her co-worker as to the best place for the goldfish globe and the co-worker was telling her that Monster's house was to occupy the room—yes, Monster, the O'Valley dog—a pound and a half, he weighed, and was subject to pneumonia. Here they began to laugh, and someone else, knowing of Constantine's presence, discreetly closed the door.

Flushing, Mary returned to the drawing room and standing before Constantine's chair she said swiftly: "I'm afraid I cannot help you, sir. I'm not this sort. I shouldn't be able to please. Besides, it is robbing your daughter of a great joy—and a wonderful duty, if you don't mind my saying it—this arranging of her own home. We have no right to do it for her."

"She's asked us to do it," spluttered the big man.

“Then you will have to ask her to excuse me.”

Mary was almost stern. It seemed quite enough to have to stay at her post all summer, run the business and houseclean the office for his return, without being expected to come into the Gorgeous Girl’s realm and do likewise. In this new atmosphere she began to feel old and plain, quite impossible! The yellow damask furniture, the rugs, the silver and gold and lovely extravagances seemed laughing at her and suggesting: “Go back to your filing cabinet and your old-maid silk dusting cloths, to your rest-rooms for girls, and to your arguments with city salesmen. You have no more right here than she will ever have in your office.”

When Constantine would have argued further she threw back her head defiantly, saying: “Someone explains the difference between men and women by the fact that men swear and women scream, which is true as far as it goes. But in these days you often find a screaming gentleman and a profane lady—and there’s a howdy-do! You can’t ask the profane lady—no matter if she is a right-hand business man—to come fix pretties. You better write your daughter what I’ve said, and if you don’t mind I’d like to get back to the office.”

Constantine rose, frowning down at her with an expression that would have frightened a good many women stauncher than Mary Faithful. For she had mentioned to him what no one, not even his sluggish conscience, had ever hinted at—his daughter’s duty.

But all he said was: “Profane ladies and screaming gentlemen. Well, I’ve put a screaming-gentleman tag on Gaylord Vondeplosshe—but what about yourself? Where are you attempting to classify?”

“Me? I’ll be damned if I help you out,” she laughed up at him as she moved toward the door.

Chuckling, yet defeated, Constantine admitted her triumph and sent her back to the office in the limousine.

At that identical moment Gaylord, alias the screaming gentleman, had been summoned to Aunt Belle’s bedside. For Beatrice believed in having two strings to her bow and she had written her aunt a second deluge of complaints and requests. Bemoaning the sprained ankle—and the probable regaining of three pounds which had been laboriously massaged away—Aunt Belle had called for Gaylord’s sympathy and support.

While Mary, rather perturbed yet unshaken in her convictions, returned to the

office and Constantine had decided his blood pressure could not stand any traipsing round after folderols, Gaylord was eagerly taking notes and saying pretty nothings to the doleful Mrs. Todd, who relied utterly on his artistic judgment and promptness of action.

Whereupon Gaylord proudly rolled out of the Constantine gates in a motor car bearing Constantine's monogram, and by late afternoon he had come to a most satisfactory understanding with decorators and antique dealers—an understanding which led to an increase in the prices Beatrice was to pay and the splitting of the profits between one Gaylord Vondeplosshe and the tradesmen.

"A supper!" Mark Constantine demanded crisply that same evening, merely groaning when his sister told him that Gaylord had undertaken all the errands and was such a dear boy. "And send it up to my room—ham, biscuits, pie, and iced coffee, and I'm not at home if the lord mayor calls."

He departed to the plainest room in the mansion and turned on an electric fan to keep him company. He sat watching the lawn men at their work, wondering what he was to do with this barn of a place. Beatrice had told him forcibly that she was not going to live in it. Wherein was the object of keeping it open for Belle Todd and himself when more and more he wished for semi-solitude? Noise and crowds and luxuries irritated him. He liked meals such as the one he had ordered, the plebeian joy of taking off tight shoes and putting on disreputable slippers, sitting in an easy-chair with his feet on another, while he read detective stories or adventurous romances with neither sense nor moral. He liked to relive in dream fashion the years of early endeavour—of his married life with Hannah. After he finished the reverie he would tell himself with a flash of honesty, "Gad, it might as well have happened to some other fellow—for all the good it does you." Nothing seemed real to Constantine except his check book and his wife's monument.

It was still to dawn upon him that his daughter partly despised him. He had always said that no one loved him but his child, and that no one but his child mattered so far as he was concerned. Since Beatrice's marriage he had become restless, wretched, desperately lonesome; he found himself missing Steve quite as much as he missed Beatrice. Their letters were unsatisfactory since they were chiefly concerned with things—endless things that they coveted or had bought or wanted in readiness for their return. As he sat watching the lawn men gossip he knitted his black brows and wondered if he ought to sell the mansion and be done with it. Then it occurred to him that grandchildren playing on the velvety lawn would make it quite worth while. With a thrill of anticipation he began to

plan for his grandchildren and to wonder if they, too, would be eternally concerned with things.

As he recalled Mary's defiance he chuckled. "A ten-dollar-a-week raise was cheap for such a woman," he thought.

Meantime, Trudy informed the Faithful family at supper: "Gay has telephoned that he is coming to-night. Were you going to use the parlour, Mary?" A mere formality always observed for no reason at all.

"No, I'm going to water the garden. It's as dry as Sahara."

Luke groaned.

"Don't make Luke help you. He's stoop-shouldered enough from study without making him carry sprinkling cans," Mrs. Faithful objected.

"Nonsense! It's good for him, and he will be through in an hour."

"Too late for the first movie show," expostulated Luke.

"A world tragedy," his sister answered.

"I wanted to go to-night," her mother insisted. "It's a lovely story. Mrs. Bowen was in to tell me about it—all about a Russian war bride. They built a whole town and burnt it up at the end of the story. I guess it cost half a million—and there's fighting in it, too."

"All right, go and take Luke. But I don't think the movies are as good for him as working in a garden."

"You never want me to have pleasure. Home all day with only memories of the dead for company, and then you come in as cross as a witch, ready to stick your nose in a book or go dig in the mud! Excuse me, Trudy, but a body has to speak out sometimes. Your father to the life—reading and grubbing with plants. Oh, mother's proud of you, Mary, but if you would only get yourself up a little smarter and go out with young people you'd soon enough want Luke to go out, too! I don't pretend to know what your judgment toward your poor old mother would be!"

Mary's day had included a dispute with a firm's London representative, the Constantine incident, a session at the dentist's as a noon-recess attraction, housecleaning the office, and two mutually contradictory wires from Steve. She laid her knife and fork down with a defiant little clatter.

"I can't burn the candle at both ends. I work all day and I have to relax when I

leave the office. If my form of a good time is to read or set out primroses it is nothing to cry thief for, is it? I want you to go out, mother, as you very well know. And you are welcome to fill the house with company. Only if I'm to do a man's work and earn his wage I must claim my spare time for myself."

"Now listen here, dear," interposed Trudy, who took Mary's part when it came to a real argument, "don't get peeved. Let me buy your next dress and show you how to dance. You'll be surprised what a difference it will make. You'll get so you just hate ever to think of work."

"Splendid! Who will pay the butcher, baker, and candlestick maker?" Mary thought of the wedding presents carelessly stacked about Beatrice's apartment. One pile of them, as she measured expenses, would have paid the aforementioned gentlemen for a year or more.

"Now you've got her going," Luke objected. "Say, Trudy, you don't kill yourself tearing off any work at the shop!"

"Luke," began his mother, "be a gentleman. Dear me, I wish I hadn't said a word. To think of my children in business! Why, Luke ought to be attending a private school and going to little cotillion parties like my brothers did; and Mary in her own home." She pressed her napkin to her eyes.

"I admit Mary carries me along on the pay roll—I'm Mary's foolishness," Trudy said, easily. "Mary's a good scout even if she does keep us stepping. She has to fall down once in a while, and she fell hard when she hired me and took me in as a boarder."

Mary flushed. "I try to make you do your share," she began, "and——"

"I ought to pay more board," Trudy giggled at her own audacity. "But I won't. You're too decent to make me. You know I'm such a funny fool I'd go jump in the river if I got blue or things went wrong, and you like me well enough to not want that. Don't worry about our Mary, Mrs. Faithful. Just let her manage Luke and he won't wander from her apron strings like he will if you and I keep him in tow."

Luke made a low bow, scraping his chair back from the table. "I'll go ahead and get reserved seats and mother can come when she's ready," he proposed.

Mrs. Faithful beamed with triumph. "That's my son! Get them far enough back, the pictures blur if I'm too close."

"I'll do the dishes," Mary said, briefly. "Go and get ready."

“I’d wipe them only Gay is coming so early,” Trudy explained, glibly.

“I’d rather be alone.” Mary was piling up the pots and pans.

“Now, deary, if you don’t feel right about mother’s going,” her mother resumed a little later as she poked her head into the kitchen, “just say so. But I certainly want to see that town burnt up; and besides, it’s teaching Luke history. Dear me, your hair is dull. Why don’t you try that stuff Trudy uses?”

“Because I’m not Trudy. Good-bye.”

“You’re all nerves again. I’d certainly let someone else do the work.”

“I need a vacation.”

“That means you want to get away from us. Well, I try to keep the home together. Leave that coffeepot just as it is, I’ll want a drop when I get back.” Waddling out the door Mrs. Faithful left Mary to assault the dishes and long for Steve’s return.

“I wonder why the great plan did not make it possible for all folks to like their relatives?” she asked herself as she finally hung the tea towels on the line; “or their star boarder?”

Then she became engrossed in the way the newly set out plants had taken root. Bending over the flower beds she was hardly conscious that darkness had fallen over the earth—a heavenly, summer-cool darkness with veiled stars prophetic of a blessed shower. She repaired to the porch swing to dream her dreams of fluffs and frills, arrange a dream house and live therein. It should be quite unlike the Gorgeous Girl’s apartment—but a roomy, sprawling affair with old furniture that was used and loved and shabby, well-read books, carefully chosen pictures, dull rugs, and oddly shaped lamps, a shaggy old dog to lie before the open fireplace and be patted occasionally, fat blue jugs of Ragged Robin roses at frequent intervals. Perhaps there would be a baby’s toy left somewhere along the stairway leading to the nursery. When one has the cool of a summer’s night, a porch screened with roses and a comfortable swing, what does it matter if there are unlikable persons and china-shop apartment houses?

Had Mary known what was taking place in the front parlour it would not have jarred her from her dreams. For Gaylord, resplendent in ice-cream flannels, and Trudy, wearing an unpaid-for black-satin dress with red collar and cuffs, were both busier than the proverbial beaver planning their wedding. It was to be an informal and unexpected little affair, being the direct result of the Gorgeous Girl’s demands as to settling her household.

“You’ve no idea how jolly easy it was, Babseley. There was a dressing case I know Bea will keep—it brought me a cool hundred commission—it had just come in. I plunged and bought two altar scarfs she can use for her reading stand—she likes such things, besides all the bona-fide orders. I’ve been working for fair—and I’ve made over a thousand dollars.”

Trudy kissed Bubseley between his pale little eyes. “You Lamb! Sure you won’t have to give it back or that they will tell?”

“Of course not! They’d give their own selves away. That’s the way such things are always done, y’know. I’ve an idea that I’ll go in seriously for the business by and by. I don’t feel any compunction; I’m entitled to every cent of it; in fact, I call it cheap for Bea at a thousand.”

“But will they really pay you?” Trudy was skeptical. It seemed such a prodigious amount for buying a few trifles.

“The Constantine credit is like the Bank of England. I’ll have my money and we’ll make our getaway before Bea arrives in town.”

“Why?” Trudy did not approve of this. The contrast between her marriage and the Gorgeous Girl’s wedding rankled.

Gay hesitated. “I want to go to New York and see concert managers and father’s friends,” he evaded. “Then we’ll visit my sister in Connecticut as long as she’ll have us. And when we come back—well, you’ll—you’ll know the smart ways better.”

He was a trifle afraid of Trudy and he did not know how best to advise her that her slips in speech and manners would be more easily remedied by setting her an example of the correct thing than by staying in Hanover and leading a cat-and-dog life, getting nowhere at all.

Trudy kissed him again. “Hurrah for the eternal frolic!” she said, adding: “But we’ll know Beatrice and Steve socially, won’t we?”

“Of course!” he said, in helpless concession.

His one-cylinder little brain had not yet reckoned with Trudy’s determination to conquer the social arena. He knew he must have her to help him; his efforts with creditors were failing sadly of late. Besides, he admired her tremendously; he felt like a rake and a deuce of a chap when they went out together, and he relied on her vivacity—Pep had been his pet name for her before he originated Babseley—to carry him through. It really would be quite an easy matter to live

on nothing a year until something turned up. The graft from Beatrice was the open sesame, however, and the Gorgeous Girl would never suspect the truth.

“Keep right on working hard,” Trudy said, fondly, as they kissed each other good-night. “I’ll tell Mary to-morrow. I want to leave my big trunk here because we might want to stay here for a few days when we come back.”

“Never!”—masterfully pointing his cane at the moon. “My wife is going to have her own apartment. One of father’s friends has built several apartment houses and he’ll be sure to let me in.”

“Are we dreaming?” Trudy asked, thinking of how indebted she was to Beatrice O’Valley, yet how she envied and hated her.

“No, Babseley, I’ll phone you to-morrow and come down. If you see me flying about in a machine don’t be surprised; I’m to use their big car as much as I like. But it would be a little thick to have us seen together—just yet.”

“I’ll see that the whole social set gets a draft from me that will open their eyes,” Trudy promised, loath to have him go.

“If old man Constantine knew I drew that money down!” Gay chuckled with delight. “When his favourite after-dinner story is to tell how Steve O’Valley lay on his stomach and watched goats for an education.”

“I’d hate to have my finger between his teeth when he learns the truth,” Trudy prompted.

She spent half the night taking inventory of her wardrobe, her debts, and her personal charms, practising airs and graces before her mirror and calculating how long the thousand would last them. All the world was before her, to Trudy’s way of thinking. She would be Mrs. Gaylord Vondeplosshe, and with Gay’s name and her brain—well, to give Trudy’s own sentiments, they would soon be able to carry the whole show in their grip and use the baggage cars to bring back the profits!

CHAPTER V

Gaylord’s sudden marriage and departure for New York caused no small comment. In the Faithful family Mary and Luke stood against Mrs. Faithful, who declared with meaning emphasis that some girls had more sense than others and it was better to marry and make a mistake the first time than to remain an old maid. With Trudy’s style and high spirits she was going to carry Gaylord into the front ranks without any effort. Luke described the event by saying that a bad pair of disturbers had teamed for life, and relied upon Mary to take up the burden of the proof.

“Don’t mourn so, mother. I’m a happy old maid,” she insisted when the comments grew too numerous for her peace of mind. “Trudy was not the sort to blush unseen, and it’s a relief not to have to cover up her mistakes at the office. Everything will be serene once more. As for Gay’s future—I suppose he is likely to bring home anything from a mousetrap to a diamond tiara. I don’t pretend to understand his ways.”

“Of course it isn’t like Mrs. O’Valley’s wedding,” her mother resumed, with a resonant sniffle. “You have been so used to hearing about her ways that poor little Trudy seems cheap. Perhaps your mother and brother and the little home seem so, too. But we can’t all be Gorgeous Girls, and I think Trudy was right to take Gaylord when he had the money for a ring and a license.”

“He had more than that,” Mary ruminated. “People don’t walk to New York.”

“Did he win it on a horse race?” Luke had an eye to the future.

“Maybe his father’s friends helped him,” Mrs. Faithful added.

“Can’t prove anything by me.” Mary shook her head.

Neither Trudy nor Gaylord knew that all Beatrice’s bills were sent to Mary to discount, and Mary, not without a certain shrewdness, had her own ideas on the matter. But it amused more than it annoyed her. Gay might as well have a few hundred to spend in getting a wife and caretaker as tradesmen whose weakness it was to swell their profits beyond all respectability.

“I wonder where they will live.” Mrs. Faithful found the subject entirely too fascinating to let alone.

“Not here,” her daughter assured her. “And if you’d only say yes I could get such a sunny, pretty flat where the work would be worlds easier.”

“Leave my home? Never! It would be like uprooting an oak forest. Time for that when I am dead and gone.” The double chin quivered with indignation. “I don’t see why Trudy and Gay won’t come here and take the two front rooms. They’d be company for me.”

She approved of Trudy’s views of life as much as she disapproved and was rather afraid of this young woman who wanted to bustle her into trim house dresses instead of the eternal wrappers.

“I kept Trudy only because she needed work—and a home,” Mary said, frankly; “and because you wanted her. But my salary does nicely for us. Besides, it would be a bad influence for Luke to have such a person as Gay about. We must make a man out of Luke.”

“Don’t go upsetting him. He eats his three good meals a day and always acts like a little gentleman. You’ll nag at him until he runs away like my brother Amos did.”

“Better run away from us than run over us,” Mary argued; “but there is no need of planning for Trudy’s return. Their home will be in a good part of the city, if it consists in merely hanging onto a lamp-post. You don’t realize that Gay is a bankrupt snob and married Trudy only because he could play off cad behind his pretty wife’s skirts. Men will like Trudy and the women ridicule and snub her until she finds she has a real use for her claws. Up to now she has only halfway kept them sharpened. In a few years you will find Mr. and Mrs. Gaylord Vondeplosshe in Hanover society with capital letters, hobnobbing with Beatrice O’Valley and her set and somehow managing to exist in elegance. Don’t ask how they will do it—but they will. However, they would never consider starting from our house. That would be getting off on a sprained ankle.”

Mrs. Faithful gulped the rest of her coffee. “No one has any use for me because I haven’t money. Our parlour was good enough for them to do their courting in, and if they don’t come and see me real often I’ll write Trudy a letter and tell her some good plain facts!”

“Be sure to say we all think Gay’s mother must have been awful fond of children to have raised him,” Luke suggested from the offing.

Mary tossed a sofa pillow at him and disappeared. She could have electrified her mother by telling her that Steve was to return that morning, that the office was prepared to welcome him back, and that Mrs. O'Valley would be anchored at the telephone to get into communication with her dearest and best of friends.

As she walked to the street car she reproached herself for not having told the news. It was a tiny thing to tell a woman whose horizon was bounded by coffee pots, spotted wrappers, and inane movies.

"You're mean in spots," Mary told herself. "You know how it would have pleased her."

She sometimes felt a maternal compassion for this helpless dear with her double chins and self-sacrificing past, and she wondered whether her father had not had the same attitude during the years of nagging reproach at his lack of material prosperity. She resolved to come home that night with a budget of news items concerning Steve's return, even bringing a rose from the floral offering that was to be placed on his desk.

"After all, she's mother," Mary thought, rounding the corner leading to the office building, "and like most of us she does the best she can!"

She tried to maintain a calm demeanour in the office as she answered inquiries and opened the mail. But all the time she kept glancing at her desk clock. Half-past nine—of course he would be late—surely he must come by ten. She wished she had flung maidenly discretion to the winds and worn the white silk sport blouse she had just bought. But she had made herself dress in a crumpled waist of nondescript type. The floral piece on Steve's long-deserted desk made her keep glancing up to smile at its almost funeral magnificence.

She answered a telephone call. Yes, Mr. O'Valley was expected—undoubtedly he would wish to reserve a plate for the Chamber of Commerce luncheon—unless they heard to the contrary they could do so. ... Oh, it was to include the wives and so on. Then reserve places for Mr. and Mrs. O'Valley. She hung up the receiver abruptly and went to making memoranda.

Even if she demanded and would receive a share of Steve's time and attention it would be the thankless, almost bitter portion—such as reserving plates for Mr. and Mrs. O'Valley or O.K.ing Mrs. O'Valley's bills. Still it was hers, awarded to her because of keenness of brain and faithfulness of action. Steve needed her as much as he needed to come home to his miniature palace to watch the Gorgeous Girl display her latest creation, to be able to take the Gorgeous Girl fast in his arms and say: "You are mine—mine—mine!" very likely punctuating the words

with kisses. Yet he must return each day to Mary Faithful and say: “You are my right-hand man; I need you.”

“A penny for your thoughts.” Steve O’Valley was standing beside her. “You look as if work agreed with you. Say something nice now—that a long holiday has improved me!”

She managed to put a shaking hand into his, wondering if she betrayed her thoughts. Being as tall as Steve she was able to look at him, not up at him; and there they stood—the handsome, reckless man with just a suggestion of nervous tension in his Irish blue eyes, and the plain young woman in a rumpled linen blouse.

“Ah—so I don’t please,” he bantered. “Well, tell us all about it. I’ve a thousand questions—my father-in-law says you are the only thing I have that he covets. How about that?” He led the way into his office, Mary following.

Then he fell upon his mountain of mail and memoranda, demands for this charity and that patriotic subscription, and Mary began a careful explanation of affairs and they sat talking and arguing until the general superintendent looked in to suggest that the shop might like to have Mr. O’Valley say hello.

“It’s nearly eleven,” Steve exclaimed, “and we haven’t begun to say a tenth of all there is to discuss. See the funeral piece, Hodges? Why didn’t you label it ‘Rest in pieces’ and be done with it, eh? I shall now appear to make a formal speech.” Here he cut a rosebud from the big wreath and handed it gravely to Mary; he cut a second one and fastened it in his own buttonhole. “Lead me out, Hodges. I’m a bit unsteady—been playing too long.”

Mary stood in the doorway, one hand caressing the little rose. That Beatrice should have had the flower was her first thought. Then it occurred to her that Beatrice would have all the flowers at the formal affairs to be given the bridal couple, besides sitting opposite Steve at his own table. She no longer felt that she had stolen the rose or usurped attention. There was a clapping of hands and the usual laughter which accompanies listening to any generous proprietor’s speech, a trifle forced perhaps but very jolly sounding. Then Steve returned to his office to become engrossed in conversation with Mary until Mark Constantine dropped in to bowl him off to the club for luncheon.

“She’s kept things humming, hasn’t she?” Constantine asked, sinking into the nearest chair.

“A prize,” Steve said, proudly. “I don’t find a slip-up any place. I’ll be back at

two, Miss Faithful, in case any one calls.... How is Bea?" His voice softened noticeably.

Mary slipped away.

"Bea doesn't like one half of her things and the other half are so much better than the apartment that she says they don't show up," her father admitted, drolly. "She is tired to death—so you'll find her at home, my boy, with a box of candy and the latest novel. Belle was talking her head off when I left the house and the girls keep calling her on the telephone for those little three-quarters-of-an-hour hello talks. It seems to me that for rich girls, my daughter and her friends are the busiest, most tired women I ever knew—and yet do the least." He put on his hat and waited for Steve to open the door.

"I don't pretend to understand them," Steve answered. "Maybe that's why I'm so happy. Bea fusses if the shade of draperies doesn't match her gown, and if Monster has a snarl in her precious hair it is cause for a tragedy. But I just grin and go along and presently she has forgotten all about it."

"I tried to get that young woman helper of yours to help me fix up Bea's things," Constantine complained. "Let's walk to the club—my knees are going stiff on me."

"Well?"

"She looked round the apartment and plain refused to put away another woman's pots and pans. It was just spunk. I don't know that I blame her. So Belle got that low order of animal life——"

"Meaning Gaylord?"

"Yes; and now the husband, I understand, of one of your thinnest clad and thinnest brained former clerks. Gay was in his element; he kept the machine working overtime and flattered Belle until he had everything his own way. Yet Beatrice seems quite satisfied with his achievements."

"You must have been hanging round the house this morning."

"I couldn't get down to brass tacks," he admitted. "You've had her all summer—but you can bet your clothes you wouldn't have had her if I hadn't been willing." He slapped Steve on the shoulder good-naturedly.

Steve nodded briskly. Then he suggested: "Bea has the New York idea rather strong. Has she ever hinted it to you?"

“Don’t let that flourish, Steve. Kill it at the start. She knew better than to try to wheedle me into going. I’m smarter than most of the men round these parts but I’d be fleeced properly by the New York band of highbinders if I tried to go among them. And you’re not as good at the game as I am. Not——” He paused as if undecided how much would be best to tell Steve. He evidently decided that generalities would be the wisest arguments, so he continued: “Don’t wince—it’s the truth, and there must be no secrets between us from now on. Besides, you’re in love and you can’t concentrate absolutely. My best advice to you is to stay home and tend to your knitting.

“You and Bea can go play round New York all you like. Let the New York crowd come to see you and be entertained, they’ll be glad to eat your dinners and drink your wine if they don’t have to pay for it. We can get away with Hanover but we’d be handcuffed if we tried New York. When I made a hundred thousand dollars I was tempted to try New York instead of staying here—to make Bea the most gorgeous girl in the metropolis. But horse sense made me pass it by and stay on my own home diamond. So I’ve made a good many more hundreds of thousands and, what’s to the point, I’ve kept ’em!”

Here the conversation drifted into more technical business detail with Steve expostulating and contradicting and Constantine frowning at his son-in-law through his bushy eyebrows, admiring him prodigiously all the while.

Beatrice had telephoned Steve’s office, to be told that her husband was at lunch and would not be in until two o’clock.

“Have him come to our apartment,” she left word, “just as soon as he can. I am just leaving Mr. Constantine’s house to go there.”

After which she began telling Aunt Belle good-bye.

“Dear me, Bea, what a wonderful hat!” her aunt sighed. “I never saw anything more becoming.”

It took ten minutes to admire Bea’s costume of rosewood crape and the jewelled-cap effect, somewhat like Juliet’s, caught over each ear by a pink satin rose.

“Steve doesn’t appreciate anything in the way of costumes,” she complained. “He just says: ‘Yes, deary, I love you, and anything you wear suits me.’ Quite discouraging and so different from the other boys.”

“I’d call it very comfortable,” suggested her aunt.

“I suppose so—but comfortable things are often tiresome. It is tiresome, too, to

see too much of the same person. I was really bored to death in the Yosemite—Steve is so primitive—he wanted to stay there for days and days."

"Steve comes from primitive people," her aunt said, soberly, not realizing her own humour.

"Don't mention it. Didn't he force me to go to Virginia City, the most terrible little ghost world of tumbledown shacks and funny one-eyed, one-suspendered men, and old women smoking pipes and wearing blue sunbonnets! He was actually sentimental and enthusiastic about it all, trying to hunt up old cronies of his grandfather's—I was cross as could be until we came back to Reno. Now Reno is interesting."

She spent the better part of an hour describing the divorcees and their adventures.

"Well, I'm off for home. I think I shall entertain the Red Cross committee first of all. It's only right, I believe"—the dove eyes very serious—"they've been under such terrible strains. I'm going to send a large bundle of clothes for the Armenian Relief, too. Oh, aunty, the whole world seems under a cloud, doesn't it? But I met the funniest woman in Pasadena; she actually teed her golf ball on a valuable Swiss watch her husband had given her! She said her only thrills in life came from making her husband cross."

"Was he—when he found it out?"

"No; she was dreadfully disappointed. He called her a naughty child and bought her another!"

When Beatrice reached the apartment she found Steve standing on the steps looking anxiously up and down the street.

“What’s happened?” he asked, half lifting her out of the car.

“Don’t! People will see us. I was telling aunty about Reno. Oh, it’s so good to be here!” as she came inside her own door. “I hope people will let me alone the rest of the day. I’m just a wreck.” She found a box of chocolates and began to eat them.

“A charming-looking wreck, I’ll say.” He stooped to kiss her.

The rose-coloured glasses were still attached to Steve’s naturally keen eyes. Like many persons he knew a multitude of facts but was quite ignorant concerning vital issues. He had spent his honeymoon in rapt and unreal fashion. He had realized his boyhood dream of returning to Nevada a rich and respected man with a fairy-princess sort of wife. The deadly anaesthesia of unreality which these get-rich-quick candidates of to-day indulge in at the outset of their struggle still had Steve in its clutch. He had not even stirred from out its influence. He had accomplished what he had set out to accomplish—and he was now about to realize that there is a distinct melancholy in the fact that everyone needs an Aladdin’s window to finish. But under the influence of the anæsthesia he had proposed to have an everlasting good time the rest of his life, like the closing words of a fairy tale: “And then the beautiful young princess and the brave young prince, having slain the seven-headed monster, lived happily ever, ever after!”

With this viewpoint, emphasized by the natural conceit of youth, Steve had passed his holiday with the Gorgeous Girl.

“What did you want, darling?” he urged.

“To talk to you—I want you to listen to my plan. You are to come with me to New York for the fall opera and all the theatres—oh, along in November. It’s terribly dull here. Jill Briggs and her husband and some of the others are going, and we can take rooms at the Astor and all be together and have a wonderful time!”

“I’d rather stay in our own home,” he pleaded. “It’s such fun to have a real home. We can entertain, you know. Besides, I’m the worker and you are the player, and I don’t understand your sort of life any more than you can understand mine. So you must play and let me look on—and love me, that’s all I’ll ever ask.”

“You’re a dear,” was his reward; “but we’ll go to New York?”

“I’ll have to take you down and leave you—I’m needed at the office.”

“But I’d be the odd one—I’d have to have a partner. Steve, dear, you don’t have to grub. When we were engaged you always had time for me.”

“Because you had so little for me! And so I always shall have time for you,” the anæsthesia causing his decision. “Besides, those were courtship days—and I wasn’t quite so sure of you, which is the way of all men.” He kissed her hair gently.

She drew away and rearranged a lock. “I don’t want a husband who won’t play with me.”

“We’ll fix it all right, don’t worry. Now was that all you wanted?”

“I want you to stay home and go driving with me. I want you to call on some people—and look at a new cellaret I’d like to buy. It is expensive, but no one else would have one anywhere near as charming. I need you this afternoon—you’re so calm and strong, and my head aches. I’m always tired.”

“Yet you never work,” he said, almost unconsciously.

“My dear boy, society is the hardest work in the world. I’m simply dragged to a frazzle by the end of the season. Besides, there is all my war work and my clubs and my charities. And I’ve just promised to take an advanced course in domestic science.”

“I see,” Steve said, meekly.

“I think it is the duty of rich women to know all about frying things as well as eating them,” she said, as she took a third caramel.

“Quite true. Having money isn’t always keeping it”

“Oh, papa has loads of money—enough for all of us,” she remarked, easily. “It isn’t that. I’d never cook if I were poor, anyway; that would be the last thing I’d ever dream of doing. It’s fun to go to the domestic-science class as long as all my set go. Well—will you be a nice angel-man and stay home to amuse your fractious wife?”

“I’ll call Miss Faithful on the phone and say I’m going to play hooky,” he consented. “By the way, you must come down to the office and say hello to her when you get the time.”

Beatrice kissed him. “Must I? I hate offices. Besides, Gaylord has married your prettiest clerk, and there will be no one to play with me except my husband.”

“Funny thing—that marriage,” Steve commented. “If it was any one but Gay I’d send condolences for loading the office nuisance onto him.”

“Wasn’t she any use at all?” she asked, curiously.

“None—always having a headache and being excused for the day. That was the only thing I ever questioned in Mary Faithful—why she engaged Trudy and took her into her own home as a boarder.”

“Oh, so Mary isn’t perfection? Don’t be too hard on the other girl. I’d be quite as useless if I ever had to work. I’d do just the same—have as many headaches as the firm would stand for, and marry the first man who asked me.”

“But think of marrying Gay!”

“Poor old Gay—his father was a dear, and he is terribly well behaved. Besides, see how obliging he is. Your Miss Faithful refused to help me out, and Gay ran his legs off to get everything I wanted. I’ll never be rude to Gay as long as he amuses me.”

“That’s the thing that leads them all, isn’t it, princess?”

CHAPTER VI

After the first round of excessively formal entertainments for Mr. and Mrs. O'Valley, Steve found a mental hunger suddenly asserting itself. It was as if a farm hand were asked to subsist upon a diet of weak tea and wafers.

In the first place, no masculine mind can quite admit the superiority of a feminine mind when it concerns handling said masculine mind's business affairs. Though Steve insisted that Mary had done quite as well as he would have done, he told himself secretly that he must get down to hard work and go over the letters and memoranda which had developed during his absence.

With quiet amusement Mary had agreed to the investigation, watching him prowl among the files with the same tolerant attitude she would have entertained toward Luke had he insisted that he could run the household more efficiently than a mere sister.

"Poor tired boy," she used to think when Steve would come into the office with a fagged look on his handsome face and new lines steadily growing across his forehead. "You don't realize yet—you haven't begun to realize."

And Steve, trying to catch up with work and plan for the future, to respond graciously to every civic call made upon him, would find himself enmeshed in a desperate combination of Beatrice's dismay over the cut of her new coat, her delight at the latest scandal, her headaches, the special order for glacé chestnuts he must not forget, the demand that he come home for luncheon just because she wanted him to talk to, the New York trip looming ahead with Bea coaxing him to stay the entire time and let business slide along as it would. All the while the anæsthesia of unreality was lessening in its effect now that he had attained his goal.

The rapt adoration he felt for his wife was in a sense a rather subtle form of egotism he felt for himself. The Gorgeous Girl or rather any Gorgeous Girl personified his starved dreams and frantic ambitions. He had turned his face toward such a goal for so many tense years, goading himself on and breathing in the anæsthesia of indifference and unreality to all else about him that having obtained it he now paused exhausted and about to make many disconcerting

discoveries. Had the Gorgeous Girl had hair as black as his own or a nose such as Mary Faithful's she would have still been his goal, symbol of his aims.

Having finished the long battle Steve now felt an urge to begin to battle for something else besides wealth and social position. He felt ill at ease in Beatrice's salon and among her friends, who all seemed particularly inane and ridiculous, who were all just as busy and tired and nervous as Beatrice was for some strange reason, and who considered it middle class not to smoke and common to show any natural sentiment or emotion. He soon found it was quite the thing to display the temperament of an oyster when any vital issue was discussed or any play, for example, had a scene of deep and inspiring words. A queer little smirk or titter was the proper applause, but one must wax enthusiastic and superlative over a clever burglary, a new-style dance, a chafing-dish concoction, or, a risqué story retold in drawing-room language.

Before his marriage Beatrice had always been terribly rushed and he had had more time in which to work and glow with pride at the nearing of his goal. She kept him at arm's length very cleverly anchored with the two-carat engagement ring and Steve had to fight for time and plead for an audience. It fired his imagination, making him twice as keen for the final capture.

But when two persons live in the same apartment, notwithstanding the eleven rooms and so on, a monotony of existence pervades even the grandeur of velvet-panelled walls. There are the inevitable three meals a day to be gone through with—five meals if tea and a supper party are counted. There are the same ever-rising questions as to the cook's honesty and the chauffeur's graft in the matter of buying, new tires. There are just so many persons who have to be wined and dined and who revenge themselves by doing likewise to their former host; the everlasting exchanging of courtesies and pleasantries—all the dull, decent habits of ultra living.

Steve found his small store of possessions huddled into a corner, his pet slippers and gown graciously bestowed upon a passing panhandler, and he was obliged to don a very correct gray "shroud," as he named it in thankless terms, and to put his cigar and cigar ashes into something having the earmarks of an Etruscan coal scuttle, though Beatrice said it was a priceless antique Gay had bought for a song! There were many times when Steve would have liked to roam about his house in plebeian shirt sleeves, eat a plain steak and French-fried potatoes with a hunk of homemade pie as a finish, and spend the evening in that harmless, disorderly fashion known to men of doing nothing but stroll about smoking, playing semi-popular records, reading the papers, and very likely having another

hunk of pie at bedtime.

Besides all this there were the topics of the day to discuss. During his courtship love was an all-absorbing topic. There were many questions that Beatrice asked that required intricate and tiring answers. During the first six weeks of living at the apartment Steve realized a telling difference between men and women is that a woman demands a specific case—you must rush special incidents to back up any theory you may advance—whereas men, for the most part, are content with abstract reasoning and supply their own incidents if they feel inclined. Also that a finely bred fragile type of woman such as Beatrice inspires both fear and a maudlin sort of sympathy, and that man is prevented from crossing such a one to any great extent since men are as easily conquered by maudlin sympathy as by fear.

When a yellow-haired child with dove-coloured eyes manages to squeeze out a tear and at the same moment depart in wrath to her room and lock the doors, refusing to answer—the trouble being why in heaven's name must a pound-and-a-half spaniel called Monster, nothing but a flea-bearing dust mop, do nothing but sit and yap for chocolates?—what man is going to dare do otherwise than suppress a little profanity and then go and whisper apologies at the keyhole?

After several uncomfortable weeks of this sort of mental chaos Steve determined to do what many business men do—particularly the sort starting life in an orphan asylum and ending by having residence pipe organs and Russian wolfhounds frolicking at their heels—to bury himself in his work and defend his seclusion by never refusing to write a check for his wife. When he finally reached this decision he was conscious of a strange joy.

Everything was a trifle too perfect to suit Steve. The entire effect was that of the well-set stage of a society drama. Beatrice was too correctly gowned and coiffured, always upstage if any one was about, her high-pitched, thin voice saying superlative nothings upon the slightest provocation; or else she was dissolving into tears and tantrums if no one was about.

Steve could not grasp the wherefore of having such stress laid upon the exact position of a floor cushion or the colour scheme for a bridge luncheon—he would have so rejoiced in really mediocre table service, in less precision as to the various angles of the shades or the unrumpled condition of the rugs. He had not the oasis Mark Constantine had provided for himself when he kept his room of old-fashioned trappings apart from the rest of the mansion.

Steve needed such a room. He planned almost guiltily upon building a shack in

the woods whither he could run when things became too impossible for his peace of mind. If he could convince his wife that a thing was smart or different from everything else its success and welcome in their house were assured. But an apple pie, a smelly pipe, a maidless dinner table, or a disorderly den had never been considered smart in Beatrice's estimation, and Steve never attempted trying to change her point of view.

Beatrice wondered, during moments of seriousness, how it was that this handsome cave man of hers rebelled so constantly against the beauty and correctness of the apartment and yet never really disgraced her as her own father would have done. It gave her added admiration for Steve though she felt it would be a mistake to tell him so. She did not believe in letting her husband see that she was too much in love with him.

Despite his growls and protests about this and that, and his ignorance as to the things in life Beatrice counted paramount, Steve adapted himself to the new environment with a certain poise that astonished everyone. The old saying "Every Basque a noble" rang true in this descendant of a dark-haired, romantic young woman whom his grandfather had married. There was blood in Steve which Beatrice might have envied had she been aware of it. But Steve was in ignorance, and very willingly so, regarding his ancestors. There had merely been "my folks"—which began and ended the matter.

Still it was the thoroughbred strain which the Basque woman had given her grandson that enabled Steve to be master of his house even if he knew very little of what it was all about. It was fortunate for his peace of mind—and pocketbook—that Beatrice had accepted the general rumour of a goat-tending ancestry and pried no further. Had she ever glimpsed the genealogy tables of the Benefacio family, from which Steve descended, she would have had the best time of all; coats of arms and family crests and mottoes would have been the vogue; a trip to the Pyrenees would have followed; mantillas and rebozos would have crowded her wardrobe, and Steve would have been forced to learn Spanish and cultivate a troubadourish air.

Moreover, the Gorgeous Girl was not willing that her husband be buried in business. She could not have so good a time without him—besides, it was meet that he acquired polish. Her father was a different matter; everyone knew his ways and would be as likely to try to change the gruff, harsh-featured man as to try surveying Gibraltar with a penny ruler. Now Beatrice had married Steve because cave men were rather the mode, cave men who were wonderfully successful and had no hampering relatives. Besides, her father favoured Steve

and he would not have been amiable had he been forced to accept a son-in-law of whom he did not approve. Mark Constantine had never learned graciousness of the heart, nor had his child.

So Beatrice proceeded to badger Steve whenever he pleaded business, with the result that she kept dropping in at his office, sometimes bringing friends, coaxing him to close his desk and come and play for the rest of the day. Sometimes she would peek in at Mary Faithful's office and baby talk—for Steve's edification—something like this:

"Ise a naughty dirl—I is—want somebody to play wif me—want to be amoosed. Do oo care? Nice, busy lady—big brain."

Often she would bring a gift for Mary in her surface generous fashion—a box of candy or a little silk handkerchief. She pitied Mary as all butterflies pity all ants, and she little knew that as soon as she had departed Mary would open the window to let fresh air drive out distracting perfume, and would look at the useless trifle on her desk with scornful amusement.

Before the New York trip Steve took refuge in his first deliberate lie to his wife. He had lied to himself throughout his courtship but was most innocent of the offence.

"If Mrs. O'Valley telephones or calls please say I have gone out to the stockyards," he told Mary. "And will you lend me your office for the afternoon? I'm so rushed I must be alone where I can work without interruption."

Mary gathered up her papers. "I'll keep you under cover." She was smiling.

"What's the joke?"

"I was thinking of how very busy idle people always are and of how much time busy people always manage to make for the idle people's demands."

He did not answer until he had collected his work materials. Then he said: "I should like to know just what these idle people do with themselves but I shall never have the time to find out." He vanished into Mary's office, banging the door.

Beatrice telephoned that afternoon, only to be given her husband's message.

"I'll drive out to the stockyards and get him," she proposed.

"He went with some men and I don't believe I'd try it if I were you," Mary floundered.

“I see. Well, have him call me up as soon as he comes in. It is very important.”

When Steve reached home that night he found Beatrice in a well-developed pout.

“Didn’t you get my message?” she demanded, sharply.

“Just as I was leaving the office. I looked in there on—on my way back. I saw no use in telephoning then. What is it, dear?”

“It’s too late now. You have ruined my day.”

“Sorry. What is too late?”

“I wanted you to go to Amityville with me; there is a wonderful astrologer there who casts life horoscopes. He predicted this whole war and the Bolsheviki and bombs and everything, and I wanted him to do ours. Alice Twill says he is positively uncanny.”

Steve shook his head. “No long-haired cocoanut throwers for mine,” he said, briefly, unfolding his paper.

“But I wanted you to go.”

“Well, I do not approve of such things; they are a waste of time and money.”

“I have my own money,” she informed him, curtly.

Steve laid aside the paper. “I have known that for some time.”

“Besides, it is rude to refuse to call me when I have asked you to do so. It makes me ridiculous in the eyes of your employees.”

Recalling the shift of offices Steve suppressed a smile. “It was nothing important, Bea, and I am mighty busy. Your father never had time to play; he worked a great deal harder than I have worked.”

“I can’t help that. You must not expect me to be a little stay-at-home. You knew that before we were even engaged. Besides, I’m no child—–”

“No, but you act like one.” He spoke almost before he thought. “You are a woman nearly twenty-six years old, yet you haven’t the poise of girls eighteen that I have known. Still, they were farm or working girls. I’ve sometimes wondered what it is that makes you and your friends always seem so childish and naïve—at times. Aren’t you ever going to grow up—any of you?”

“Do you want a pack of old women?” she demanded. “How can you find fault with my friends? You seem to forget how splendidly they have treated you.”

A cave man must be muzzled, handcuffed, and Under the anæsthetic of unreality and indifference to be a satisfactory husband for a modern Gorgeous Girl.

“Why shouldn’t they treat me splendidly? I have never robbed or maltreated any of them. Tell me something. It is time we talked seriously. We can’t exist on the cream-puff kind of conversation. What in the world has your way of going through these finishing schools done for you?”

The dove-coloured eyes flickered angrily. “I had a terribly good time,” she began. “Besides, it’s the proper thing—girls don’t come out at twenty and marry off and let that be the end of it. You really have a much better time now if you wait until you are twenty-five, and then you somehow have learned how to be a girl for an indefinite period. As for the finishing school in America—well, we had a wonderful sorority.”

“I’ve met college women who were clear-headed persons deserving the best and usually attaining it—but I’ve never taken a microscope to the sort of women playing the game from the froth end. I’m wondering what your ideas were.”

“You visited me—you met my friends—my chaperons—you wrote me each day.”

“I was in love and busy making my fortune. I was as shy as a backwoods product—you know that—and afraid you would be carried off by someone else before I could come up to the sum your father demanded of me. I have nothing but a hazy idea as to a great many girls of all sorts and sizes—and mostly you.”

“Well, we had wonderful lectures and things; and I had a wonderful crush on some of the younger teachers—that is a great deal of fun.”

“Crushes?”

“You must have crushes unless you’re a nobody—and there’s nothing so much a lark. You select your crush and then you rush her. I had a darling teacher, she is doing war work in Paris now. She was a doll. I adored her the moment I saw her and I sent her presents and left flowers in her room, orchids on Sundays, until she made me stop. One day a whole lot of us who had been rushing her clipped off locks of our hair and fastened them in little gauze bags and we strung a doll clothes line across her room and pinned the little bags on it and left a note for her saying: ‘Your scalp line!’”

“What did that amount to?”

“Oh, it was fun. And I had another crush right after that one. Then some of the

classes were interesting. I liked psychology best of all because you could fake the answers and cram for exams more easily. Math. and history require facts. There was one perfectly thrilling experience with fish. You know fish distinguish colours, one from the other, and are guided by colour sense rather than a sense of smell. We had red sticks and green sticks and blue sticks in a tank of fish, and for days we put the fish food on the green sticks and the fish would swim right over to get it, and then we put it on the red sticks and they still swam over to the green sticks and waited round—so it was recognizing colour and not the food. And a lot of things like that."

Steve laughed. "I hope the fish wised up in time."

Beatrice looked at him disapprovingly. "If you had gone to college it might have made a great difference," she said.

"Possibly," he admitted; "but I'll let the rest of the boys wait on the fishes. Did you go to domestic science this morning?"

"Yes, it was omelet. Mine was like leather. The gas stove makes my head ache. But we are going to have a Roman pageant to close the season—all about a Roman matron, and that will be lots of fun."

"You eat too much candy; that is what makes your head ache," he corrected.

She pretended not to hear him. "It is time to dress."

"Don't say there's a party to-night," he begged.

"Of course there is, and you know it. The Homers are giving a dinner for their daughter. Everyone is to wear their costumes wrong side out. Isn't that clever? I laid out a white linen suit for you; it will look so well turned inside out; and I am going to wear an organdie that has a wonderful satin lining. There is no reason why we must be frumps."

"I'd rather stay home and play cribbage," Steve said, almost wistfully. "There's a rain creeping up. Let's not go!"

"I hate staying home when it is raining." Beatrice went into her room to try the effect of a sash wrong side out. "It is so dull in a big drawing room when there are just two people," she added, as Steve appeared in the doorway.

"Two people make a home," he found himself answering.

The Gorgeous Girl glanced at him briefly, during which instant she seemed quite twenty-six years old and the spoiled daughter of a rich man, the childish,

senseless part of her had vanished. “Would you please take Monster into the kitchen for her supper?” she asked, almost insolently.

So the owner of the O’Valley Leather Works found his solace in tucking the pound-and-a-half spaniel under his arm and trying to convince himself that he was all wrong and a self-made man must keep a watch on himself lest he become a boor!

The day the O’Valleys left for New York in company with three other couples Mr. and Mrs. Gaylord Vondeplosshe arrived in Hanover, having visited until their welcome was not alone worn out but impossible ever to be replaced. A social item in the evening paper stated that they had taken an apartment at the Graystone and would be at home to their friends—whoever they might be.

If Gay’s club and his friends had determined merely to be polite and not welcome his wife, Trudy had determined that they would not only welcome her but insist upon being helpful to them; as for her former associates—they would be treated to a curt bow. This, however, did not include the Faithfuls. Mary was not to be ignored, nor did Trudy wish to ignore her. All the good that was in Trudy responded to Mary’s goodness. She never tried to be to Mary—no one did more than once. Nor did she try to flatter her. She was truly sorry for Mary’s colourless life, truly grieved that Mary would not consent to shape her eyebrows. But she respected her, and it was to Mary’s house that Mrs. Vondeplosshe repaired shortly after her arrival.

It was quite true that Beatrice Constantine would have developed much as Trudy had were the pampered person compelled to earn her living, and, like Trudy, too, would have married a half portion, bankrupt snob. As Trudy dashed into the Faithful living room, kissing Mary and her mother and shaking a finger at Luke, Mary thought what a splendid imitation she was of Beatrice returning from her honeymoon.

“As pretty as a picture,” Mrs. Faithful declared, quite chirked up by the bridal atmosphere. “How do you do it, Trudy? And why didn’t you write us something besides postals? They always seem like printed handbills to me.”

“Especially mine,” Luke protested. “One of Sing Sing with the line: ‘I am thinking of you.’”

Trudy giggled. “I didn’t have a minute and I bought postals in flocks. Oh, I adore New York! I’m wild to live there. I nearly passed away in New England, but of course we had to stay as long as they would have us.”

She looked at herself in a mirror, conscious of Mary's amused expression. She wore a painfully bright blue tailored suit—she had made the skirt herself and hunted up a Harlem tailor to do the jacket—round-toed, white leather shoes stitched with bright blue, white silk stockings, an aviatrix cap of blue suéde, and a white fox fur purchased at half price at a fire sale.

"I haven't any new jewellery except my wedding ring," she mourned. "I expected Gay's sister to give me one of her mother's diamond earrings—I think she might have. They are lovely stones—but she never made a move that way—she's horrid. As soon as I can afford to be independent I shall cut her, for she did her best to politely ask us to leave."

"You were there several weeks, weren't you?" Mary ventured.

"Yes—I grew tame. I learned a lot from her—I was pretty crude in some ways." Which was true. Trudy was quite as well-bred looking, at first glance, as the Gorgeous Girl. "It is always better to get your experience where the neighbours aren't watching. I didn't lose a minute. If I never did an honest day's work for Steve O'Valley I worked like a steam engine learning how to be a real lady, the sort Gay tried to marry but couldn't!"

"As if you weren't a little lady at all times," Mrs. Faithful added.

"Of course we are stony broke but Gay's brother-in-law just had to loan us some money in order to have us go. They gave us fifty dollars for a wedding present. Well, it was better than nothing. Gay has talked to a lot of concert managers and he's going to have some wonderful attractions next season. People have never taken Gaylord seriously; he really has had to discover himself, and he is——"

"Are you practising small talk on me?" Mary asked.

"You've said it," Trudy admitted. "That last is the way I'm going to talk about Gaylord to his friends. I'll make him a success if he will only mind me. Just think—I'll be calling on Beatrice O'Valley before long! She will have to know me because Gay helped furnish her apartment and was one of her ushers. It will mean everything for us to know her—and I'm never going to appear at all down and out, either. People never take you seriously if you seem to need money. Debt can't frighten me. I was raised on it. All I need is Gay's family reputation and my own hair and teeth and I'll breeze in before any of the other entries. I came to ask if you won't come to see where I live?" She smiled her prettiest. "Gay is at his club and we can talk. It was quite a bomb in the enemies' camp when he married—people just can't dun a married man like they do a bachelor."

“I’ll come next week.” Mary tried putting off the evil day.

“No—now. I want your advice—and to show you my clothes.”

“You will have clothes, Trudy, when you don’t have food.”

“You have to these days—no good time unless you do.”

She kissed Mrs. Faithful and promised to have them all up for dinner. Then she tucked her arm in Mary’s and pranced down the street with her, talking at top speed of how horrid it was that they had to walk and not drive in a cab like Beatrice, and concluding with a dissertation on Gaylord’s mean disposition.

“I’m not mean, Mary, unless I want to accomplish something—but Gaylord is mean on general principle. He sulks and tells silly lies when you come to really know him. Oh, I’m not madly in love—but we can get along without throwing things. It’s better than marrying a clod-hopper who couldn’t show me anything better than his mother’s green-plush parlour.”

“Doesn’t it seem hard to have to pretend to love him?”

“No, he’s so stupid,” said the debonair Mrs. Vondeplosshe as she brought Mary up before the entrance of the Graystone, a cheap apartment house with a marble entrance that extended only a quarter of the way up; from there on ordinary wood and marbleized paper finished the deed. The Vondeplosshes had a rear apartment. Their windows looked upon ash cans and delivery entrances, the front apartments with their bulging bay windows being twenty-five dollars a month more rent. As it was, they were paying forty-five, and very lucky to have the chance to pay it.

Trudy unlocked the door with a flourish. All that Trudy had considered as really essential to the making of a home was a phonograph and a pier glass; the rest was simple—rent a furnished place and wear out someone else’s things. The bandbox of a place with four cell-like rooms was by turns pitiful and amusing to Mary Faithful.

“We are just starting from here,” Trudy reminded her as she watched the gray eyes flicker with humour or narrow with displeasure. “Wait and see—we’ll soon be living neighbour to the O’Valleys. Besides, there is such an advantage in being married. You don’t have to worry for fear you’ll be an——”

“Old maid,” finished Mary. “Out with it! You can’t frighten me. I hope you and Gay never try changing your minds at the same time, for it would be a squeeze.”

She selected a fragile gilt chair in the tiny living room with its imitation fireplace

and row of painted imitation books in the little bookcase. This was in case the tenants had no books of their own—which the Vondeplosshes had not. If they possessed a library they could easily remove the painted board and give it to the janitor for safekeeping. There were imitation Oriental rugs and imitation-leather chairs and imitation-mahogany furniture, plated silver, and imitations of china and of linen were to be found in the small three-cornered dining room, which resembled a penurious wedge of cake, Mary thought as she tried saying something polite. The imitation extended to the bedroom with its wall bed and built-in chiffonier and dresser of gaudy walnut. Trudy had promptly cluttered up the last-mentioned article with smart-looking cretonne and near-ivory toilet articles. There was even a pathetic little wardrobe trunk they had bought for $28.75 in New York, and Trudy had painstakingly soaked off old European hotel labels she had found on one of Gay's father's satchels and repasted them on the trunk to give the impression of travel and money.

The kitchen was nothing but a dark hole with a rusty range and nondescript pots and pans. "Being in the kitchen gets me nothing, so why bother about it?" Trudy explained, hardly opening the door. "We have no halls or furnace to care for, and an apartment house sounds so well when you give an address. I wish we could have afforded a front one; it will be hard to have people climbing through the back halls. I have put in a good supply of canned soups and vegetables and powdered puddings, and we can save a lot on our food. We'll be invited out, too, and when we eat at home I can get a meal in a few minutes and I'll make Gay wash the dishes. Besides, I have a wonderful recipe for vanishing cream that his sister bought in Paris, and I'm going to have a little business myself, making it to supply to a few select customers as a favour. I'll sell small jars for a dollar and large ones for three, and I can make liquid face powder, too. Oh, we won't starve. And if you could wait for the money I know I owe you——"

"Call it a wedding present," Mary said, briefly.

"You lamb!"

Trudy fell on her neck and was in the throes of explaining how grateful she was and how she had an evening dress modelled after one of Gay's sister's, which cost seven hundred dollars before the war, when Gay appeared—very debonair and optimistic in his checked suit, velours hat, and toothpick-toed tan shoes, and his pale little eyes were quite animated as he kissed Trudy and dutifully shook hands with Mary, explaining that the Hunters of Arcadia had just offered him a clerical position at the club, ordering supplies and making out bills and so on—because he was married, very likely. It would pay forty a month and his lunches.

“And only take up your mornings! You can slip extra sandwiches in your pockets for me, deary. I’ll give you a rubber-pocketed vest for a Christmas present,” Trudy exclaimed. “Oh, say everything in front of Mary—she knows what we really are!”

At which Mary fled, with the general after impression of pale, wicked eyes and a checked suit and a dashing, red-haired young matron with a can opener always on hand, and the fact that the Vondeplosshes were going to lay siege to the O’Valleys as soon as possible.

Mary decided that it was a great privilege to be a profane lady concealing a heartache compared to other alternatives. At least heartaches were quite real.

CHAPTER VII

It was almost Christmas week before the realization of Trudy's ambition to have Beatrice call upon her as the wife of Gaylord Vondeplosshe instead of an unimportant employee of her own husband. Trudy counted upon Beatrice to help her far more than Gaylord dared to hope.

"Bea is like all her sort," he warned Trudy when the point of Beatrice's having to invite the Vondeplosshes for dinner was close at hand; "she is crazy about herself and her money. She would cheat for ten cents and then turn right round and buy a thousand-dollar dress without questioning the price."

Which was true. Beatrice had never had to acquire any sense of values regarding either money or character. By turns she was penurious and lavish, suspecting a maid of stealing a sheet of notepaper and then writing a handsome check for a charity in which she had only a passing interest. She would send her soiled finery to relief committees, and when someone told her that satin slippers and torn chiffon frocks were not practical she would say in injured astonishment: "Sell them and use the money. I never have practical clothes."

If a maid pleased her Beatrice pampered her until she became overbearing, and there would be a scene in which the maid would be told to pack her things and depart without any prospect of a reference; and someone else would be rushed into her place, only to have the same experience. Beatrice was like most indulged and superfluously rich women, both unreasonable and foolishly lenient in her demands. She had no schedule, no routine, no rules either for herself or others. She had been denied the chance of developing and discovering her own limitations and abilities. She expected her maids and her friends to be at her beck and call twenty-four hours out of the twenty-four, she would not accept an excuse of being unfitted by illness for some task or of not knowing how to do any intricate, unheard-of thing which suddenly it occurred to her must be done.

When a servant would plead her case Beatrice always told her that for days at a time she left her alone in her beautiful home with nothing to do but keep it clean and eat up all her food and very likely give parties and use her talking machine and piano—which was quite true—and that she must consider this when she was

asked to stay on duty until three or four o’clock in the morning or be up at five o’clock with an elaborate breakfast for Beatrice and her friends just returning from a fancy-dress ball.

On a sunny day she often sent the maids driving in her car, and if a blizzard came up she was certain to ask them to walk downtown to match yarn for her, not even offering car fare. She would borrow small sums and stamps from them and deliberately forget to pay them back, at the same time giving her cook a forty-dollar hat because it made her own self look too old. She had never had any one but herself to rely upon for discipline, and whenever she wanted anything she had merely to ask for it. When anything displeased her it was removed without question.

American business men do not always toil until they are middle-aged for the reward of being made a fool by a chorus girl or an adventuress. That belongs to yellow-backed penny-dreadfuls and Sunday supplement tales of breach-of-promise suits. More often the daughter of the business man is both the victim and the vampire of his own shortsighted neglectfulness. The business man expresses it as “working like a slave to give her the best in the land.” And sometimes, as in the case of Steve O’Valley, it is his own wife instead of a blonde soul mate who lures him to destruction in six installments.

When Beatrice first knew of Gaylord’s return she was inclined to pay no attention to his wife, despite her remarks to Steve. Then Gaylord telephoned, and she had him up for afternoon tea, during which he told her all about it. He was very diplomatic in his undertaking. He pictured Trudy as a diamond in the rough, and in subtle, careful fashion gave Beatrice to understand that just as she had married a diamond in the rough—with a Virginia City grandfather and a Basque grandmother and the champion record of goat tending—so he, too, had been democratic enough to put aside precedent and marry a charming, unspoiled little person with both beauty and ability, and certainly he was to be congratulated since he had been married for love alone, Truletta knowing full well his unfortunate and straitened circumstances.... Yes, her people lived in Michigan but were uncongenial. Still, there was good blood in the family only it was a long ways back, probably as far back as the age of spear fighting, and he relied upon Beatrice, his old playmate, to sympathize with and uphold his course.

Secretly annoyed that the tables had been so skillfully turned, yet not willing to admit it to this bullying morsel, Beatrice was obliged to say she would call upon his wife and ask them for dinner the following week.

Gaylord fairly floated home, to find Trudy remodelling a dress, scraps of fur and shreds of satin on the floor.

“Babseley, she’s coming to call to-morrow!” he said, joyfully, hanging up his velours hat and straddling a little gilt chair.

“Really? I wish we had a better place. I feel at a disadvantage. If it were a man I wouldn’t mind, I could act humble and brave—that sort of dope. But it never goes with a woman; you have to bully a rich woman, and I’m wondering if I can.”

“I did,” he said, his pale eyes twinkling with delight. “It was easy, too. I dragged in O’Valley’s orphan-asylum days and all, and how we both married diamonds in the rough. Woof, how she squirmed!” He rose and went to the absurd little buffet, pouring out two glasses of “red ink” and gulping down one of them. “I wish I had O’Valley’s money; I’d put away a houseful of this stuff. I’m going to dig up a few bottles at the club—in case of illness.” Trudy did not want her glass, so he drank that as well.

“You take too much of that stuff,” Trudy warned, gathering up her débris; “and when you have taken too much you talk too much.”

Gaylord rewarded her by consuming a third glass. “Shall we eat out?”

She shook her head. “Too expensive. There’s no need for it now. I bought some potato salad and I have canned pineapple and sugar cookies.”

She dumped her work into a basket and flew round the dining room until she summoned Gaylord to join her in a meal laid out on the corner of a dingy luncheon table.

The wine dulled Gay's appetite and Trudy's had been taken quite away by Beatrice's proposed visit. Besides, they put the latest jazz record on their little talking machine, which helped substitute for a decent meal. They danced a little while and then Trudy planned what she should wear for the O'Valley dinner party and Gaylord figured how much money he needed before he would dare try buying an automobile, and they finished the evening by attending the nine-o'clock movie performance and buying fifteen cents' worth of lemon ice and two sponge cakes to bring home as a pièce de resistance.

Beatrice found herself amused instead of annoyed as she climbed the stairs to the Vondeplosshe residence. At Trudy's request Gay had discreetly consented to be absent. He had pretty well picked up the threads of his various enterprises and what with his club duties, his second-rate concerts, his gambling, and commissions from antique dealers, he managed to put in what he termed a full day. So he swung out of the house early in the afternoon to buy himself a new winter outfit, wondering if Trudy would row when she discovered the fact.

Gaylord's theory of married life was "What's mine is my own, and what's yours is mine." He relied on Trudy to mend his clothes and make his neckties, keep house and manage with a laundress a half day a week, yet always be as well dressed and pretty as when she had slacked in the office and boarded without cares at Mary's house. She must always seem happy and proud of her husband and have her old pep—being on the lookout for a way to make their fortunes. She must also remain as young looking as ever and always be at his beck and call. Gaylord was rapidly developing into an impossible little bully, the usual result of an impoverished snob who manages to become a barnacle-like fixture on someone a trifle more foolish yet better of nature than himself.

Had he been less aristocratic of family and stronger of brawn he would have beaten Trudy if she displeased him. As it was, after the first flush of romance passed, he began to sneer at her in private when she made mistakes in the ways of the smart set into which Gaylord had been born, and when she protested he only sneered the louder. He felt Trudy should be eternally grateful to him. Trudy found herself bewildered, hurt—yet unable to combat his contemptible little laughs and sneers. Trudy was shallow and she knew not the meaning of the word "ideal," but for the most part she was rather amiable and unless she had a certain

goal to attain she wished everyone about her to be happy and content. As she had married Gaylord only as a stepping-stone she was fair enough to remind herself of this fact when unpleasant developments occurred. As long as he was useful to her she was not going to seize upon pin-pricks and try to make them into actual wounds.

She decided to wear her one decent tea gown when Beatrice called, pleading a bad headache as an excuse for its appearance. She knew the tea gown was an excellent French model, a hand-me-down from Gay's sister, and her nimble fingers had cleaned and mended the trailing pink-silk loveliness until it would make quite a satisfactory first impression.

She cleaned the apartment, recklessly bought cut flowers, bonbons, and two fashion magazines to give an impression of plenty. She even set old golf clubs and motor togs in the tiny hall, and she timed Beatrice's arrival so as to put the one grand-opera record on the talking machine just as she was coming up the stairs.

Then she ran to the door in pretty confusion, to say spiritedly: "Oh, Mrs. O'Valley, so good of you. I'm ever so happy to have you. I'm afraid it isn't proper to be wearing this old tea gown but I had a bad headache this morning and I stayed in bed until nearly luncheon, then I slipped into the first thing handy.... Oh, no. Only a nervous headache. We took too long a motor trip yesterday, the sun was so bright.... No, indeed; you do not make my headache worse. It's better right this minute.... Now please don't laugh at our little place. Can't you play you're a doll and this is the house you were supposed to live in? I do—I find myself laughing every time I really take time to stand back and look at the rooms.... Put your coat here. Such a charming one, the skins are so exquisitely matched. I do so want to talk to you."

She had such an honest, innocent expression that Beatrice found herself won over to the cause. Trudy understood Beatrice at first sight; she knew how to proceed without blundering.

"Sit here, Mrs. Steve, for I can't call you Mrs. O'Valley with Gay singing the praises of Bea and Beatrice and the Gorgeous Girl."

"Then—er—call me Beatrice," she found herself saying.

"How wonderful! But only on condition that I am Trudy to you. How pleased Gay is going to be! He adores you. You have no idea of how much he talks about you and approves all you do and say. I used to be a teeny weeny bit jealous of you when I was a poor little nobody." She passed the chocolates, nodding

graciously as Beatrice selected the largest one in the box.

Trudy chattered ahead: “I was glancing through these fashion books this afternoon to get an idea for an afternoon dress. Of course I can’t have wonderful things like you have”—looking with envy at the Gorgeous Girl’s black-velvet costume—“still, I don’t mind. When one is happy mere things do not matter, do they—Beatrice?”

Beatrice hesitated. Then she fortified herself by another bonbon. This strange girl was both interesting and dangerous. Certainly she was not to be snubbed or ridiculed. Vaguely Beatrice tried to analyze her hostess, but as she had never been called upon to judge human nature she was sluggish in even trying to exercise her faculties.

In China fathers have their daughters’ feet bound and make them sleep away from the house so their moans will not disturb the family. In America fathers often repress their daughters’ self-sufficiency and intellect by bonds of self-indulgence, and when the daughters realize that a stockade of dollars is a most flimsy fortress in the world against the experiences which come to every man and woman the American girls are the mental complement of their physically tortured Chinese cousins—hopeless and without redress.

“You have made this place look well,” Beatrice said, presently, “It is a perfect tinder box. Papa knows the man who built it.”

Trudy flushed. “We are merely trying out love in a cliffette,” she said, sweetly, “instead of the old-style cottage. We can’t expect anything like your apartment. We have that prospect to look forward to. Besides, we have the advantage of knowing just who our real friends are,” she added, smiling her prettiest.

Beatrice disposed of another chocolate. She told herself she was being placed in an awkward position. She had occasion to keep thinking so every moment of her visit, for Trudy hastened to add that she had never liked office work and yet Mr. O’Valley had been so good to her, and wasn’t it splendid that America was a country where one had a chance and could rise to whatsoever place one deserved; and when one thought of Beatrice’s own dear papa and handsome husband, well, it was all quite inspiring and wonderful—until Beatrice was as uncomfortable about Steve’s goat tending and her father’s marital selection of a farmer’s hired girl as Trudy really was of the apartment and her second-hand frock.

Trudy lost no time in introducing the magic vanishing-cream and liquid face power, and before the call ended Beatrice had ordered five dollars’ worth of each

and some for Aunt Belle, and she had offered to take Trudy to her bridge club some time soon.

As the door closed Trudy sank back in her chair, informing the imitation fireplace joyously: “It was almost too easy; I didn’t have to work as hard as I really wanted to.” Wearily she dragged off her tea gown for a bungalow apron and then prepared a supper of delicatessen baked beans and instantaneous pudding for her lord and master.

The dinner with the O’Valleys was equally fruitful of results. Despite Steve’s protests that he did not wish to know Gay and that Trudy was impossible he was forced to listen to their inane jokes and absurd flatteries and to look at Trudy in her taupe chiffon with exclamatory strands of burnt ostrich, and watch her deft fashion of handling his wife, realizing that people with one-cylinder brains and smart-looking, redheaded wives usually get by with things!

After their guests had departed Steve began brusquely: “Do you like’em?”

“No; I told you before that they amused me. She is fun, and poor Gay is a dear.”

“Are you going to have them round all the time? That woman’s laugh gets on my nerves, and I want him shot at sunrise. They can’t talk about anything but the movies and jazz dancing and clothes.”

“What do you want them to talk about? Don’t pace up and down like a wild beast.” Beatrice came up and stood before him to prevent his turning the corner.

He looked down at her without answering. She was clad in shimmering white loveliness cut along the same medieval lines as the gown another Beatrice had worn when Dante first saw her walking by the Arno; her hair was very sunshiny and fragrant and her dove-coloured eyes most appealing.

He burst out laughing at his own protest. “Am I a bear? Come and kiss me. If you like them or they amuse you just tote ’em about, darling. Only can’t you manage to do it while I am out of town? They do fleck me on the raw.”

“Hermit—beast,” she dimpled and shook her finger at him.

“I just want you,” he said, simply; “or else people who can do something besides spend money or sponge round for it.”

“Sometimes you frighten me—you sound booky.”

“I’m not; I want real things, Bea. I feel hungry for plain people.”

“You have them all day long in your office and your shops; I should think when you come home you’d welcome a good time.”

“Our definitions differ. Anyhow, I’m not going to find fault with your friends. I’ve nothing against them except that they are time wasters.”

“Trudy boarded at your wonderful Miss Faithful’s house.”

“In spite of Mary’s common sense, and not because of it.”

“You think a great deal of that girl, don’t you?” she asked, patting his sleeve.

“She deserves a great deal of credit; she has worked since she was thirteen, and she is as true-blue as they come.”

“Do you think she will ever marry and leave you?” she asked, laying the sunshiny head on his arm.

“I never want her to; I’d feel like buying off any prospective bridegroom.”

“That’s not fair.” Her hand stole up to pat his cheek. “She has the right to be happy—as we are, Steve!”

He stared at her in all her lovely uselessness. “You funny little wife,” he whispered—“fighting over losing a postage stamp one minute and buying a new motor car the next; going to luncheon with the washed of Hanover and spending the afternoon with Trudy; making fun of Mary Faithful’s shirt waists and then pleading for her woman’s happiness.... Beatrice, you’ve never had half a chance!”

The next afternoon Mary and Luke Faithful were summoned home. Later in the day Steve received word that their mother had succumbed to a violent heart attack. He found himself feeling concerned and truly sorry, wondering if Mary had any one to see to things and relieve her of the responsibility. Then he wondered if this death would cause a dormant affection to become active love as often happens, causing him to lose his right-hand man. He reproached himself for knowing so little of her private life. When he went into her deserted office to find a letter it seemed distinctly lonesome. It was hard to realize how suddenly things happen and how easily the world at large becomes accustomed to radical changes. Already a snub-nosed little clerk was taking up a collection for the flowers.

For the first time in years Steve felt depressed and weary. The anaesthesia was losing its power.

Within the coming week as vital a mental change was to come to Steve as the death of Mrs. Faithful was to cause in Mary's life. And as Mary, to all purposes, would resume her business routine with not a hint of the change, so would Steve fail to betray the mental revolution that was to take place in his hitherto ambitious and obedient brain.

Briefly what was to happen was this—after visiting Mary in her home and after seeing the Gorgeous Girl during a test of one's abilities, Steve was to realize that there are two kinds of person in the world: Those who make brittle, detailed plans, and those who have but a steadfast purpose. His wife belonged to the former class and Mary to the latter, which he was to discover was his choice at all times!

CHAPTER VIII

The day of Mrs. Faithful's funeral was the day that Beatrice O'Valley had arranged to introduce Trudy Vondeplosshe to her bridge club, the members of which were keen to see Gay's wife in order to prove whether or not Bea's report concerning her was correct—that she was a clever young person quite capable of taking care of both her own and Gay's futures.

Beatrice particularly looked forward to the afternoon. Introducing Trudy served as an attraction, and besides the hostess had telephoned her that she had just received a box of Russian sweetmeats made by a refugee who was starting life anew in New York, and two barrels of china, each barrel containing but three plates and each plate being valued at six hundred dollars. Furthermore, Beatrice was wearing an afternoon costume that would demand no small share of attention, and there was the additional joy of dazzling Trudy by her tapestry-lined winter car. So when Steve reminded her in a matter-of-fact way that the funeral services for Mrs. Faithful were to be at three she stared in amazement.

"My dear boy, I am very sorry your secretary's muzzy has died—but I cannot change my plans. I accepted for both Trudy Vondeplosshe and myself more than a week ago."

Steve wondered if he had heard correctly. "You don't imagine for an instant that Trudy will not go? She boarded there; they did everything for her."

Beatrice shrugged her shoulders. "She was phoning me before lunch and is all agog with excitement. Poor little thing, it means a lot for her. She will be ready at three and I am to call for her."

"I don't think she understands the funeral is to-day. I know she is heartless and shallow, but even she would scarcely omit such a duty."

Beatrice gave a long sigh. "Dear me, you ought to have been an evangelist. I can't understand why you suddenly become punctilious and altruistic. For years you never did anything but try to make money and wonder if I would marry you—you never cared who was dead or what happened as long as you were secure."

“Quite true. But I have made a fortune and married you, and it is time for other things.”

“You are welcome to them,” she said, quite enjoying the argument. “Besides, I sent my card with the flowers.”

“It isn’t the same as going yourself, it is your duty to go, Bea. The girl has taken the brunt of business while we played and she has only the reward of a salary. Her mother has died, which means that her home is gone. I call it thick to choose a bridge party instead of paying a humane debt.”

“Why am I dragged into it? She isn’t working for me! Papa never asked me to go when any of his people had relatives who died. I don’t think he ever went himself unless there was a claim to be adjusted.”

“I shouldn’t ask it if it were any one else—but Mary Faithful is different.”

“You are quite ardent in your defence of her. Be sensible, Steve. What does it matter whether I go or don’t go? I think it quite enough if you appear. Now if she were in need of actual money——”

“Oh, certainly!” he said, bitterly. “That would give you the chance to play off Lady Bountiful, drive up in state with your check book and accept figurative kisses on the hand! But when a plain American business girl who has served me more loyally than she has herself loses her mother you won’t be a few moments late at a bridge party in order to pay her the respect employers should pay their employees. I don’t blame Trudy—I expect nothing of her—but I do blame you.”

“So my plans are to be set aside——?”

“Plans!” he interrupted. “If someone else were to tell you that they had an East Indian yogi who was going to give a seance this very afternoon you would hotfoot it to the telephone to inform Trudy that you must break your engagement with her, and send word to your original hostess as well. That is about all your plans amount to.”

Beatrice’s eyes had grown slanting, shining with rage. “I wish you would remember you are speaking to your wife and not to an employee. I would not go to that funeral now if it meant—if it meant a divorce.” She pushed her chair back from the table—they were at luncheon—and stood up indignantly.

Looking at her in her gay light chiffon with its traceries of gold Steve wondered vaguely whether or not he had been wrong in selecting his goal, whether he would ever be able really to understand this Gorgeous Girl now that she

belonged to him, or would discover that there was nothing much to understand about her, that it could all be summed up in the statement that her father by denying her a chance at development had stunted the growth of her ability and her character into raggle-taggle weeds of self-indulgence and willful temper.

“I shall not ask you to go with me,” he knew he answered. It is quite as terrifying to find that one’s goal has been wrongly chosen and ethically unsound as to find a boyhood dream merging into gorgeous reality.

Beatrice swept out of the room. Steve made an elaborate pretense of finishing his meal. Then he went into the drawing room in search of a newspaper. He came upon Beatrice sitting on a floor cushion, feeding Monster some bonbons.

“Have you been at her house?” she said, curiosity overcoming the pique.

“Yes. Where is that paper? I dropped it in this chair when I came in for luncheon.”

“I had it taken away. I abominate newspapers in a drawing room—or muddy shoes,” she added, looking at his own. “What did she say? What sort of a house is it?”

Steve stared at her in bewilderment. “What the devil difference does it make to you?” he demanded, roughly.

She gave a little scream. “Don’t you dare say such things to me.” Then she began to cry very prettily in a singsong, high-pitched voice. “Monster—nobody loves us—nobody loves us—we can’t have a merry Christmas after all.”

“I shan’t be home for dinner,” Steve added more politely. “Miss Faithful’s absence just now makes things quite rushed—I’ll work until late.”

Beatrice sprang up, letting Monster scramble unheeded to the floor. “Oh, you are trying to punish me!”—pretending mock horror. “Stevuns dear, don’t mind my not going! Plans are plans, you must learn to understand. And I’ll send her a lovely black waist and a plum pudding for her Christmas. Tell her I was laid up with one of my bad heads.... No? You won’t let me fib? Horrid old thing—come and kiss me!... Ah, you never refuse to kiss me, nice cave man with bad manners and muddy shoes, wanting to thump his strong dear fists on my little Chippendale tables—and grow so good and booky all in an instant. Forgets he was ever a bad pirate and robbed everyone until he could buy his Gorgeous Girl. Good-bye, story-book man, don’t let the old funeral frazzle you!”

Steve left the house, undecided whether he was taking things too seriously and

ought to apologize for being rude to Beatrice or whether his intuitive impression was correct—that Beatrice was not the sort of person he had imagined but that he, per se, was to blame in the matter.

Steve chose to take a street car to the Faithful house. He shrank from creating the atmosphere of a generous and overbearing magnate whose chauffeur opened the door of his machine and waited for him to step majestically upon terra firma. He felt merely a sympathetic friend, for some reason, as he walked the three blocks from the street car through slush and ice, and realized that Mary Faithful trudged back and forth this same pathway twice a day.

Unexpectedly he met Mary at the door, rather white faced and grayer of eyes than usual, but the same sensible Mary who did not believe in any of the customary agonies of grieving proper, as she afterward told him. The old house had not assumed a funereal air. There were flowers on the tables and the cheery fire crackled in the grate, and even the face of the dead woman seemed more content and optimistic than it had ever been in life.

Steve was not expected to go to the cemetery so he trudged back through the same slush to the street car. A fish-market doorway proved a haven during a long wait. He lounged idly against the doorway as if he were an unemployed person casting about for new fields of endeavour instead of the rushed young Midas whose office phone was ringing incessantly.

He was thinking about Mary Faithful’s pleasant manner, the atmosphere of the old-fashioned house, where there was no effort to be smart or gorgeous or to conceal its shabbiness. He hoped Mary would return to the office within the next few days. He wanted her more than he wanted any one else, but he told himself this was because he was selfish and she was a capable machine. No, that was not it, he decided a moment later as he looked in at the activities of the fish market with passing interest.

Mary no longer seemed a mere machine but a remarkable woman, a womanly woman, too. He liked the old house with its atrocious horsehair sofa and chair tidies and the Rogers group in the front bay window. The fire had been so elemental and soothing, so were the pots of flowers, the shabby piano, and even more shabby books. One could rest there, distributing whole flocks of newspapers where he would. The death awe had not been permitted to take a paramount place. How lucky Luke was, to have such a sister.

Mary was about Beatrice’s age. At thirteen she had begun to earn her own living. At thirteen Beatrice had had a pony cart, a governess, a multitude of frocks, her

midwinter trip to New York, where she saw all the musical comedies and gorged on chocolates and pastry.

The upshot of it was that Steve decided to call on Mary the following afternoon; it was only courtesy he told himself by way of an excuse. He wanted to talk to her—not of business but of life, of the shabby old house. Outwardly he wanted to ask if he might help her and what her plans were, but in reality he wanted her to help him. He no longer felt displeased that Beatrice had not come with him; he felt positive Mary would understand, that she would dismiss Trudy's slight with proper scorn. Beatrice would have insisted upon arriving in state. By this time the bridge club with its Russian sweetmeats, its six-hundred-dollar china plates, the new afternoon frock, and the spoofing of Trudy must be well under way!

The fish market was not doing a land-office business. Stray purchasers approached and halted before the cashier's cage. Steve began watching them. Suddenly he became aware of the gorgeous young woman presiding behind the wire cage, reluctantly pushing out change and accepting slips, completely preoccupied in her own thoughts, while a copy of the *High Blood Pressure Weekly* lay at one side. What attracted Steve was the horrible similarity between this young person and his own wife! Both had the same fluffed, frizzled hair and a gay light chiffon frock with gold trimmings. Though it was December the toothpick point of a white-kid slipper protruded from the cage. An imitation Egyptian necklace called attention to the thin, powdered throat. The cashier was altogether a cheap copy of Beatrice's general appearance. She had the same tiny, nondescript features and indolent expression in her eyes; she was most superior in her fashion of dealing with the customers, never deigning to speak or be spoken to. As soon as she spied Steve, however, she smiled an invitation to enter and become owner of half a whitefish or so.

Then the car came and he leaped aboard. It seemed unbearable that a counterpart of Beatrice O'Valley was making change at Sullivan's Fish Market—but more unbearable to realize that women in the position of Beatrice O'Valley dressed and rouged—and acted very often—in such a fashion that women in the position of Trudy and this cashier queen sought industriously to imitate them.

Luke showed his grief in the normal manner of any half-grown, true-blue lad, singularly thoughtful of his sister's wishes, and mentioning everyone and everything except their mother and her death.

"We won't give up having a home," Mary told him the night of the funeral;

“we’ll move into a smaller place so I can take care of it.”

“I guess I’ll work pretty hard at school,” was all he answered.

“Of course you will. I’m proud of you now, and if you work and show you deserve it I’ll help you through college.”

Luke shook his head. “Takes too long before I could get to earning real money. You ought to have it easy pretty soon.”

“I love my work. Besides, you will live your own life, and so you must grow up and love someone and marry her. I can’t depend on any one but myself,” she added, a little bitterly.

Luke stared into the fire. Perhaps this tousle-haired, freckle-faced boy surmised his sister’s love-story. If so no one—least of all his sister—should ever hear of the facts from his lips.

“I’m never going to get married. I want to make a lot of money like Mr. O’Valley did—quick. Then we’ll go and live in Europe and maybe I’ll get a steam yacht and we’ll hunt for buried treasure,” he could not refrain from adding.

“All right, dear. Just work hard for now and be my pal; we’ll let the future take care of itself. Another thing—we want to have as merry a Christmas as if mother were with us. It’s the only thing to do or else we’ll find ourselves morbid and unable to keep going.”

Shamed tears were stoically refused entrance into Luke’s blue eyes. “I guess I’ll buy you a silver-backed comb and brush. I got some extra money.”

“Oh, Luke—dear!” Mary made the fatal error of trying to hug him. He wriggled away.

“Trudy never came near us,” he said, sternly.

Mary was silent.

“But Mr. O’Valley came like a regular——”

“Don’t you think you ought to get to bed?” Mary changed the subject. “Sleep in the room next to mine if you like.”

“When are you coming upstairs?”

“Soon. I want to look over the letters.”

Luke rose and pretended a nonchalant stretching.

“Are you going to the office right away?”

“Not until New Year’s.”

Something in the tired way she spoke evoked Luke’s pity and sent him away to smother his boy-man’s grief by promises of a glorious future in which his sister should live in the lap of luxury.

With its customary shock death had for the time being given Mary a false estimate of her mother and herself, the usual neurasthenic experience people undergo at such a time. It seemed, as she sat alone by the fire, that she must have been a strangely selfish and ungrateful child who misunderstood, neglected, and underestimated her mother, and she would be forced to live with reproachful memories the rest of her days. Each difference of opinion—and there had been little else—which had risen between them was magnified into brutal injustice on Mary’s part and righteous indignation on her mother’s. This state of mind would find a proper readjustment in time but that did not comfort Mary at the present moment. Her mother was dead, and when a mother is gone so is the home unless someone bravely slips into the absent one’s place without delay and assumes its responsibilities and credits. For Luke’s sake this was what Mary had resolved to do.

As she could not sleep she rummaged in a cabinet containing old letters and mementos, which added fuel to her self-reproach and misery. She had borne up until now. Mary had always been the sort who could meet a crisis. Reaction had set in and she felt weak and faulty, longing for a strong shoulder upon which to cry and be forgiven for her imagined shortcomings. As she read yellowed letters of bygone days and lives, finding the record of a baby sister who had lived only a few days and of whom she had been in ignorance, a scrap of her mother’s wedding gown, old tintypes—she realized that her family was no more and that everyone needed a family, a group of related persons whose interests, arguments, events, and achievements are of particular benefit and importance each to the other and who unconsciously challenge the world, no matter what secret disagreements there may be, to disrupt them if they dare! Now only Luke and Mary comprised the family.

After midnight Mary battled herself into the commonsense attitude of going to bed. Wakening after the dreamless sleep of the exhausted she found low spirits and self-blame had somewhat diminished and though her state of mind was as serious as her gray eyes yet life was not utterly bereft of compensations.

Luke had thoughtfully risen early, clumsily tiptoeing about to get breakfast.

Neighbours had furnished the customary donations of cake, pie, and doughnuts, which gave Luke the opportunity of spreading the breakfast table with these kingly viands and doing justice to them in no half-hearted fashion.

The sun streamed through the starched window curtains, and even the empty rocking-chair seemed serene in the relief from its morbid burden. Christmas was only a few days away. Mary decided that they should have a truly Christmas dinner, and that the words she had bravely spoken as a three-year-old runaway, found a mile from home and offered assistance by kindly strangers, should become quite true: “Not anybody need take care of myself,” Mary had declared in dauntless fashion.

Later in the day Luke went to the office because Mary thought it best. So when Steve called he found her alone, the same cheery fire burning in the grate, the same posies blooming in their window pots, and the smell of homemade bread pervading the house, Mary in a soft gray frock presiding over the walnut secretary.

“I’m sorry not to be at the office,” she began, thinking he had come to persuade her to return. “Sit down. Well—you see,” indicating the stacks of addressed envelopes—“I really can’t come back until after the New Year. Do you mind? There is a great deal to be seen to here, and I feel I’ve earned the right to loaf for a week. I want particularly to make the holidays happy for Luke.”

“Of course you do. Besides, you never had your vacation.”

“We’ll call this a vacation and I’ll work extra hard to prove to you that it was worth the granting.” Still she did not understand that he wanted to talk to her for the very comfort of her companionship, to enjoy the fire, the smell of homemade bread, the atmosphere of shabby, lovely, everyday plain living.

“We’ll decide that later. I came to see just—you. Surprised? I wanted to ask if there is anything I can do for you. I want to help if I may.”

“I’ve no exact plans. Just a definite idea of finding a small apartment and making it as homey as possible. I loathe apartments usually,” she added, impulsively, “but we must have a home and I can’t assume a whole house. We will take our old things and fix them over, and the worst of them we’ll pass on to someone needing them badly enough not to mind what they are.” She was quite frank in admitting the tortured walnut and the engravings.

“I’m glad you are not going to break up and board—though it’s none of my business. I brought some fruit. Do you mind?” He had been trying to hide behind

the chair a mammoth basket of fruit.

“No. How lovely of you and Mrs. O’Valley!”

“It was not possible for Mrs. O’Valley to come yesterday,” he forced himself to say. “She was very sorry and is going to call on you later.”

“Thank you,” Mary answered, briefly.

“You have a nice old place here. Mind if I stroll about and stare? I have very seldom been in rooms like this one. An orphan asylum, a ranch, a hall bedroom, star boarder, a club, a better club, the young palace—is my record. How different you seem in your home, Miss Faithful. Perhaps it’s the dress. I like soft gray——” he caught himself in time.

Mary was blushing. She called his attention to some wood carving her father had done. Presently Steve changed the subject back to himself.

“You don’t know how I’d like a slice of homemade bread,” he pleaded. “Must I turn up my coat collar and go stand at the side door?”

“I made it because Luke had eaten nothing but pie and cake. You really don’t want just bread?”

“I do—two slices, thick, stepmother size, please.”

It seemed quite unreal to Mary as she was finally prevailed upon to bring in the tea wagon with the bread and jam trimmings to accompany the steaming little kettle.

“Man alive,” sighed Steve, stretching out leisurely, “I came to console you and I’m being consoled and fed—in body and mind—made fit for work.... I say, what do you think of letting the Boston merger be made public at the banquet on——” He began a budget of business detail upon which Mary commented, agreeing or objecting as she felt inclined.

It was so easy to become clear-headed about work—details became adjusted with magical speed—when one had a gray-eyed girl with a tilted freckled nose sitting opposite. The soft gray dress played a prominent part, too, even if the Gorgeous Girl would have been amused at its style and material. Besides this, there was the wood fire, the easy-chair with gay Turkey-red cushions designed for use and not admiration, and no yapping spaniel getting tangled up in one’s heels.

Before they realized it twilight arrived, and simultaneously they began to be self-

conscious and formal, telling themselves that this would never do, no, indeed! Dear me, what queer things do happen all in a day! Still, it would always be a splendid thing to remember.

Certainly it was more edifying than to confront a nervous Gorgeous Girl who had discovered that her maid had been reading her personal notes.

“I sprinkled talcum powder on them and the powder is all smudged away, so Jody has been spying. She is packing her things now and I shall refuse any references. But who will ever take such good care of me, Steve? And please get dressed; we are invited to the Marcus Baynes for dinner. They have a wonderful poet from Greenwich Village who is spending the holidays with them—long hair, green-velvet jacket, cigar-box ukulele, and all. A darling! And I am going to take Monster because he does black-and-white sketches and I want one of my ittey, bittey dirl.” And so on.

Certainly it was more pleasing than to have a shamed and confused Trudy elegantly attired come dashing in with a jar of vanishing cream as a peace offering, presumably to smooth out any wrinkles of grief, and to explain hastily that it looked like a lack of feeling not to be at the funeral but most certainly it was not—no, indeed; it was just tending to business. She was sure Mary realized how essential it was not to offend the Gorgeous Girl. How dreadful it was for poor Mary. She, Trudy, had cried her old eyes out thinking about it. Did Mary get the flowers she and Gay sent? She wished she could do something nice for Mary. How would she like to have a black-satin dress made at cost price? No? She wasn’t going to wear mourning! Well, it was very brave but it would certainly look queer and cause talk.... Gay’s moustache was coming on beautifully and no one at the bridge club had dared to spoof her!

At least there was some excuse for the delivery on Christmas Day of a parcel addressed to Miss Mary Faithful. It contained Steve’s card, some wonderful new books with an ivory paper knife slipped between them. And when Mary wrote to thank him she found herself inclosing a demure new silver dime, explaining:

“I must give you a coin because you gave me a knife, and unless I did so the old superstition might come true—and cut our ‘business affections’ right straight in two!”

CHAPTER IX

Mary returned to the office with a premeditatedly formal air toward Steve. She had taken a New Year's resolution to refrain from letting an impulsive expression of sympathy assume false meanings in her heart. On the other hand, Steve felt a boor for having sent the books. He was so used to being called cave man and told not to do this or say that that he now pictured himself an awkward villain who had best confine himself to writing checks and growling at the business world.

He almost dreaded seeing Mary lest she show she considered the gift improper despite her delightful little note of thanks. This demeanour, however, was of short duration. They became their real selves before the morning passed, the medium being the question of keeping John Gager, an old clerk pressed into service during the war period and now superfluous.

"Are you going to let him go?" Mary reproached Steve.

"I think so; he's a doddering nuisance they tell me."

"But he's old and he has always served so faithfully. I don't think it's right to send him away now. He does do what is expected of him."

Mary's vacation had somewhat dimmed her business sagacity.

"I suppose; but we'll be doddering idiots some day, too. No one will keep us. No one can expect to be carried along indefinitely."

"It's the first time I have ever asked you to do such a thing," she insisted, fearlessly. "To see him trying to act as fit as twenty-five, wearing juvenile shirts and ties, struggling to be brisk, slangy, to oblige everyone and step along, you know. Oh, don't turn him away just yet; he is honest and he tries. I can't tell him, and can't you see his old face quiver when he opens his envelope and finds the dismissal slip?"

Steve's resolutions faded like mist before the sun. He found himself saying: "You ought to be a little sister to the poor. I guess we'll keep Gager for a while. He doesn't smoke cigarettes all day and try to lie about it. How did you like

those books?” he added, boyishly.

Mary laid a finger on her lips. “Sh-h-h. It’s business. But I did like them—so would you.”

“I’d read them if I had an easy-chair and some homemade bread and tea. Do you know what I had to do for my Christmas Day?”

“Please—I’d rather not——”

“I must tell someone, and ask if I’m all wrong about it,” he said, half humorously, half in earnest. “I told my father-in-law in part and it struck him as a huge joke. He purpled with laughing and said: ‘Gad, she’ll always have her way!’” Steve was thinking out loud. He was realizing that Constantine was not even conscious he had raised his daughter to be a rebel doll and he, apparently an honourable citizen, encouraged and upheld her in her doctrine.

“Well, what did you have to do?” Mary asked in spite of herself.

“I had to officiate at Monster’s Christmas tree, which was in the boudoir, laden with the treasures of the four corners. I presented a diamond-studded gold purse and a sable cape to my wife and received a diamond-studded cigar knife—I have two others—and a mink-lined coat in return. I was dragged to a half-dozen different houses to deliver presents and collect the same, and witness the tragedy of Bea’s receiving a vanity case she had given someone else two years before and which had evidently been going the rounds. It was a bit disconcerting to have it turn up.

“I had a ponderous seven-course dinner at Mr. Constantine’s, during which I had to kiss Aunt Belle under the mistletoe and pretend to be elated, hear several yards of grand opera torn off on the new talking machine in its nine-hundred-dollar Chinese case, take my father-in-law to the club, return to find Trudy and Gay having a Yuletide word with my wife. Trudy brought a concoction of purple chiffon, jet beads, and exploded hen which was entitled a breakfast jacket, and in return she drew down a pair of silver candlesticks.

“After that we dressed in all our grandeur for the fancy-dress ball at Colonel Tatlock’s, Beatrice as Juliet and I as the young and dashing Romeo! Shivering in our finery we drove to the Tatlock’s to make fools of ourselves until three A. M. and shiver home again with aching heads and a handful of damaged cotillion favours. About the same sort of thing happened on New Year’s.” He laughed, but it was not a pleasant sound, inviting a response.

Beatrice dashed in, to Mary’s relief, to bestow—over a week late—a Christmas

present of perfume and a black-silk waist.

“Mr. O’Valley has explained how rushed I have been with my classes,” she began, prettily, “but I have thought of you in all your sorrow. I lost my dear mother when I was too young to remember her, still it means a bond between us.... Oh, you are not wearing black? Dear me, that’s too bad.... Well, you may have to go to somebody’s funeral where you feel you want to wear it—a black waist is always useful.”

She managed to carry Steve off to look at a set of pink glass sherbet cups she was to give her father for his birthday, and Mary was conscious of a certain pity for the Gorgeous Girl—prompted not so much by her present state of affairs as her inevitable future.

The last of January Steve was called away on a business trip through the Middle West. Beatrice had no desire to go with him; she said she simply could not conceive of having a good time in Indiana and Illinois, and what was the sense in bearing with him in his misery? But she was quite willing Steve should stay away as long as he was needed by business entanglements. In fact, Beatrice now betrayed a certain driving quality in trying to make him feel that as their honeymoon was ended and everyone had entertained for them it was high time Steve must retire from social life to a degree, and outdo her own father in the making of a vast fortune. She seldom begged him to ride with her or come home to luncheon to fritter away the best part of the afternoon in a pursuit of silver-pheasant ornaments for the dinner table. That phase of her selfishness was at an end. It was when Steve demanded the luxury of merely staying at home with no chattering peacocks of women and asinine, half-tipsy men playing with each other until early morning that Beatrice refused her consent.

She did not wish any personal domestic life, Steve decided after several experiences along these lines. She could not see the pleasure in a Sunday afternoon hike; walking to see a sunset was absurd! All very well to be whisked by at twenty miles an hour and give a careless nod at the setting golden sphere, but to trudge through wintry roads and up an icy hill and stand, frozen and fagged, weighted down by sweaters, to——Dear me, Steve really needed to see a doctor! Perhaps he had better start to play golf with papa!

Meals tête-à-tête caused her spirits to droop, and she soon fell into the habit of waiting until Steve was away or having her luncheon in her room. She was seldom up for breakfast, and when he protested against this hotel-like custom she would say: “I don’t expect you to appreciate my viewpoint and my wishes,

but at least be well-bred enough to tolerate them!”

He was on the point of reminding her that his viewpoint and wishes were treated only with argument and ridicule—but as usual he refrained. Silence on the part of one who knows he is in the right yet chooses apparently to yield the point in question is a significant milestone on the road of separation. An argument with Beatrice meant one of two outcomes: A violent scene of temper and overwrought nerves with tears as the conquering slacker’s weapon or a long, sulky period of tenseness which made him take refuge in his office and his club.

He wondered sometimes how it was he had never before realized the true worth of his wife, how he had been so madly infatuated and adoring of her slightest whim during the years of earning his fortune and the brief period of their formal engagement. Almost reluctantly the anæsthesia of unreality and distorted values was disappearing, leaving Steve with but one conclusion: That it had been his own conceited fault, and therefore he deserved scant pity from either himself or the world at large.

Mark Constantine, whose activities lessened each month, due to ill health, began prowling about Steve’s office at unexpected hours, cornering him for prosy talks and conferences, under which Steve writhed in helpless surrender. Since he realized the true meaning of his marriage he began placing the blame on the culprit—Beatrice’s father. As he did so he wondered if it was possible that Constantine did not realize the havoc he had wrought. His wealth and Steve’s speedily accumulated fortune via hides and government razors suddenly seemed stupid, inane; and he no longer felt a sense of pride at what he had accomplished. He never wanted to hear details of Constantine’s more gradual and bitter rise in the world; there was certain to be slimy spots of which Steve in his new frame of mind could no longer approve. He was weary of hearing about money, just as his good sense caused him to be weary of socialistic prattling and absurd pleas for Bolshevism. It seemed to him that the dollar standard was the paramount means both magnate and socialist used to value inanimate and animate objects. He longed for a new unit of measure.

He was keen on business trips. At least he could have the freedom of his hotel and could roam about without being pointed out as the Gorgeous Girl’s husband, the lucky young dog and so on. Neither would he be dragged from this house to that to sit on impossible futurist chairs while young things of thirty-nine clad in belladonna plasters and jet sequins gathered about to tell him what perfectly wonderful times their class in cosmic consciousness was having.

Mary Faithful was keen to have him go. She dreaded any furthering of the personal understanding between them. When one has become master of a heartache and thoroughly demonstrated that mastery it is not sensible to let it verge toward a heart throb, even if one is positive of the ability to change it back at will into the hopeless ache. It is like unhandcuffing a prisoner and saying: “Sprint a bit, I can catch up to you.”

On the other hand, Beatrice had any number of activities to take up her time. Her period of being a romantic parasite—the world called it a sweet bride—was ended. She was now bent on becoming as mad and ruthless a butterfly as there ever was, and to the accomplishment of her aim she did not purpose to stint herself in any way. She still drew her own allowance from her father and accepted extra checks for extra things necessary for her welfare and popularity.

More than once Steve counted the monthly expenditures, with the same result—Beatrice was living on her father’s income quite as much as on his own. Her position was not unlike that of people who say to their prosperous neighbours possessing a motor car: “We’ll furnish the lunch and the gasolene, and you take us to the picnic grounds!” Constantine still owned the figurative motor car, or the substantial end of Beatrice’s expenses, while Steve furnished the lunch and the gasolene, trying to delude himself that he was supporting his wife. Beatrice’s clothes were beyond his income, for he was not yet a millionaire. Neither could he afford the affairs which she gave, with favours of jewellery; nor the trips here and there in private cars.

Furnishing the lunch and gasolene and perhaps a possible tire or so does not give one the sense of ownership that having the motor car gives; nor was it Steve’s notion of being the possessor of a home. He spoke to Beatrice about it, only to be kissed affectionately and scolded prettily by way of answer; or else to have those eternal omnipresent tears reproach him for being cross “when papa wants me to have things and he has no one else in the world to spend all his money on.”

After a few attempts he gave it up but resolved to make his fortune equal to his father-in-law’s, as Beatrice wished. He saw no other way out of the situation. To do so in his present interests was impossible—he had fancied that half a million was a fair sum to offer a Gorgeous Girl—but he saw it was only a nibble at the line. He must outdo Constantine. He cast about for some unsuspected fields of effort, this time to strike out into work of which Constantine was ignorant. He began to resent the fact that after his lucky strike on the exchange he had played copy cat and gone mincing into the hide-and-leather business, using

Constantine’s good will as his stepping stone. The same was true of the stock bought in the razor factory; he had merely paid for the stock; he did not know the steps of progress necessary to the business.

This time he would prove his own merit, he would not take Constantine into his confidence. Unknown to any one save Mary, Steve selected a new-style talking machine to promote. He knew as much about talking machines as Beatrice knew about cooking a square meal. But Steve had lost his clear-headedness and he thought, as do most get-rich-quick men, that, possessed of the Midas touch, he could come in contact with nothing but gold.

He began backing the inventor and looking round for a factory site. He sought it away from Hanover, for he wanted it to be a complete surprise. He begrudged his father-in-law's knowing anything of it. He went into the enterprise rather heavily—but it did not worry him, for he was quite sure he possessed the luck eternal, and he must support his own wife. Side speculating was the only way he thought it possible to do so.

Meanwhile, Beatrice found Trudy to be both a good foil and a dangerous enemy, one who was not to be ridiculed or set aside. Trudy had never stopped working since the day Beatrice climbed the rear stairs of the Graystone and had been bullied into buying the vanishing cream. Beatrice scarcely knew the various steps which Trudy had climbed in a figurative sense, dragging Gay after her, grumbling and sneering but quite willing to be dragged.

"You see, aunty," she explained one stormy February afternoon while they were having a permanent wave put in their hair, "Trudy is so obliging and useful, and I'm sorry for her. She tries to do so many nice things for me that I never have a chance to become offended. I've tried! But she just won't break away. And I like to tease Steve by knowing her, Steve is such a bear when he doesn't like people. Rude is a mild term. He particularly hates Gay. Now Gay is quite a dear and he always played nicely with me. I should hate to lose him—so how can I offend his wife; particularly when she takes so well with older men?"

Aunt Belle sniffed. "Men old enough to be her father—you'd think they would appreciate mellowed love instead of a selfish little chicken."

The beauty doctor, who had spent the greater share of the day at the Constantine house, suppressed a smile and stored up the remark for her next customer.

"Oh, I don't know," Beatrice murmured as she consulted a hand glass. "I am beginning to wish I had married a man about papa's age. It would have been much jollier in some ways. Steve is so strenuous and rude. A cave man is fun to be engaged to and keep a record about in your chapbook—but when you marry him it is a different matter. I remember how thrilled and enthusiastic about Steve I used to be when he was working for papa and living in a hall bedroom. I knew

he adored me yet had to keep his place, and I used to dream about him and wonder if he really would keep his word and make a fortune so he could marry me. But now he has done it——” She shrugged her shoulders.

“I wouldn’t be too disappointed. Elderly men usually have wheel chairs and diets after a little, and you’d feel it your duty to play nurse.”

“Oh, it’s far better to be disappointed in one’s husband than one’s friends,” Beatrice agreed. “I know that. For you can manage to see very little of your husband; but your friends—deary me, they your very existence.”

“Does Trudy ever mention the days she worked in Steve’s office?”

“Yes. Clever little thing, she knows enough to admit it prettily every now and then, so there is nothing to badger her about. She has even trained Gay to talk of it occasionally. She has done wonders for him; one of the clubmen is backing him to go into the interior-decorating business. Of course he will make good because everyone will feel morally obliged to go there. So the Vondeplosshes on the strength of this have moved to the Touraine, a different sort of apartment house, I assure you. They are entertaining, if you please; everyone asks them everywhere. Gay is painting garlands of old-fashioned flowers in panels for Jill’s boudoir. I think I’ll have the same thing done in mine.”

“Gay is painting them?”

“Oh, no. Some limp artist who could never get the commission for himself. Gay stands about in a natty blue-serge effect and takes the credit and the check. What’s new?”—turning to the beauty doctor. “I’m as dull as the Dead Sea.”

Miss Flinks informed them of a labour revolt in the West.

“Horrid creatures, always wanting more! Well, they won’t get it. I think Steve is ridiculous with his banquets and bonuses and all, and upon my word, Mary Faithful has as good an Oriental rug in her office as I have in my house. Tell us something really important, Miss Flinks.”

Retrieving her error the beauty doctor whispered a scandal concerning the newly married Teddy Markhams, who had had such a violent quarrel the week before that Mrs. Teddy had pushed the piano halfway out the window and police had rushed to the scene thinking it might be another bomb explosion.

“How ripping!”

Beatrice was all animation, and she gave Miss Flinks no peace until she learned all the details, and the rumour about the actress who had rented an expensive

town house for the season and a débutante who was being rushed to a retreat to prevent her marriage to a gypsy violinist who had already taught her the drug habit.

Trudy telephoned the latter part of the afternoon, and as it was a gray, blowy day with nothing special to do to revive one's spirits Beatrice urged her to come in for tea—tea to be cocktails and buttered toast.

Within a few moments she appeared—a symphony of blonde broadcloth set in black furs, very charming and chic, and so solicitous about Aunt Belle's recently removed mole and the scar left by the electric needle, and so admiring of the two newly beautified ladies that they were quite won in spite of themselves.

"Were you near here when you telephoned?" Beatrice asked, curiously. "You weren't ten minutes getting here and you look as spick and span as if you had stepped out of a bandbox."

"Look outside and you'll see that Gay and I have had a true case of auto-intoxication!"

Outside the window there proved to be a smart, selfish roadster, battleship-gray with vivid scarlet trimmings.

"Well!" Beatrice said in astonishment. At this identical moment she began to envy Trudy. She was really ashamed of the fact, nor did she understand why she should envy this bankrupt yet progressive little nobody in her homemade bargain-remnant costume. The reason was that Beatrice's latent abilities longed to be doing something, achieving something, capturing, inventing, destroying, earning if need be—but doing something. The daughter of Mark and Hannah Constantine could not help but have the germ of great ability within her, sluggish and spoiled as it might be; and it must perforce duly manifest itself from time to time. Beatrice realized that Trudy felt a greater joy and satisfaction in displaying this not-paid-for cheap machine—having sat up half the night to make the shirred curtains—than Beatrice ever could feel in her tapestry-lined, orchid-adorned limousine. So she began to envy Trudy just as Trudy envied her. Trudy had done nothing but struggle to be able to live, as she termed it; Beatrice had never been allowed to struggle!

"We owe for all but the left back tire," Trudy said before any one had the chance to hint of the fact; "but Gay has to have it for his new business, and it is such a joy! I hope you approve, Beatrice. And what a darling gown!"

There was nothing left for Beatrice but to order the cocktails and toast, and for

Aunt Belle to agree smilingly with Trudy's clever suggestions.

Trudy never came to see Beatrice unless she gained some material point or had one in view, and the point she had come to gain this afternoon was of no small importance. In her own fashion she managed to inform her hostess that Gay had received an order from—well, it was a tremendous secret and he would be terribly cross if he knew she told even her dearest Bea and her sweet Aunt Belle, but she just couldn't help it—he had an order from Alice Twill, who thought she was going to beat everyone in town to the greatest sensation of the year: To have the barn of a Twill mansion remodelled, decorated and so on, from coal bin to cupola, until it was an exact copy of a French palace—she really forgot just which one. ... Yes, Alice's aunt in Australia had died and left her everything; Alice said she was not going to wait until she was on crutches before she spent it. Gay was simply out of his head trying to plan the thing and Alice was to move to a hotel for several weeks until a newly furnished wing was ready to be inhabited.

There was no reason why New York persons should have their homes like palaces and châteaux and so on, and turn their noses up at upstate residences. Alice was going to show them. And—this very subtly—Gay had said that if only Beatrice could have the authority to redecorate her father's home into an Italian villa Alice Twill would be the loser when comparisons were made—since the Constantine house had twice the possibilities and so on, and Beatrice twice the taste. And what an achievement it would be; a distinct civic improvement!... Yes, Gay was working with the best firms in New York, and there was no doubt of his success in the enterprise.

Before she left, Trudy had almost secured Beatrice's promise that the Constantine house should be made into an Italian villa and that, if she so decided, Gay should have the commission. There was a place at Frascati she had always admired, and they could use some ideas from a show place in Florida.

Had Trafalgar terminated differently Napoleon would have been no more surprised or jubilant than Trudy, who fairly skidded home to the new and more pretentious apartment, where she found Gay in one of his sneering, sulky moods and quite angry to think Trudy was carrying the day.

"How do I know Alice Twill will really come across?" he began. "And I suppose you've got the machine covered with mud, too. Anyway, what do I know about decorating? I work on my reputation and everyone's sympathies and I'm in fear all the time some real decorator will turn up and show my hand or else refuse to

work under me and split commissions. You're too damned optimistic."

"If I wasn't optimistic where would we be? Starving," she said with no attempt at politeness. Common courtesies between them had long since been dispensed with. "I've gotten you nearly everything you have, and if you'll do as I say I'll go right on getting things for you. But you're lazy and jealous—that's what's the matter."

He gave a sneering little laugh. "Why, you poor nobody, people only tolerate you because of me. They roar behind your back."

"Do they? They pity me because I'm married to such a weak fish! Men are nice to you because of me—and there isn't a woman I've met that I have not made afraid of me. Beatrice hasn't the will power of a slug; you can hand her flattery in chunks as big as boulders and she swallows them without choking. It's her husband who sees through us."

"What—the goat tender? Oh, beg pardon—treading on someone else's toes. Or didn't they have goats in Michigan?"

"We'll never hang together another year," she said, recklessly. "The first chance I have to exchange you for a real man your day is over."

"You think any one else would marry you?"

"I don't think. I just go ahead grabbing everything I can, and when a person has to grab for someone else as well as herself it keeps them moving."

"You're a crude and impossible little fool."

Without warning Trudy's hand shot out, and on Gay's cheek rested a red mark for the greater part of the evening.

A half hour later he was trying to apologize, having bucked himself up to it with brandy, in order to borrow enough money to play pool with that same evening.

CHAPTER X

After Gay left, Trudy put on her things and trudged over to Mary's house. Gay had driven off in the car and she was glad he had. Like Steve the day of the funeral, she did not wish to drive but to have the nervous outlet of walking.

Trudy was seldom angry. But when she found Mary in the old library, the same true-blue, good-looking thing with just a little coldness of manner as Trudy tried to enthuse over her, Trudy felt ashamed. And she was angry far more often than she was ashamed.

"Where is Luke?" she asked, taking off her things and lying down wearily on the sofa. "Oh, Mary mine, you don't know how good it is to be here again, to be able to talk—really talk to someone."

"Luke is at basketball——" Mary began, stopping as she discovered that Trudy was in tears. "Why, what is it?" as Trudy sobbed the harsh, long sobs of a tormented and frail mind.

"You ought to hate me—selfish, insincere hypocrite—cheat—liar. Oh, I hate myself! I hate him, and Bea, and all of them! They aren't worth your blessed little finger. Mary, Mary, please stay quite contrary and never change. Never get to be a Gorgeous Girl, will you? ... Nerves, I suppose; and I haven't had the right things to eat." She sat up and began smoothing her injured flounces.

"You're so thin, and there are funny lilac shadows under your eyes. You can't live on nerve energy forever. And I know your delicatessen suppers or else the rich orgies to which you are invited—not enough sleep—and always that eternal upstage pose!"

"Gay wears on me; he is growing strong, with never an ache or pain. I never used to have them but I'm all unnerved and weak. He hates me, Mary. Yes, he does." She began a detailed recital of woes.

"Why not leave him?" Mary asked as there came a pause.

"Without any one else to marry?" Trudy's eyes were wide open in surprise.

"Must you have someone waiting to pay your board bill?"

“I couldn’t go to work again.”

“I thought you worked rather hard right now.”

“That’s different. I’m working to have a good time. And I’m a wonder; everyone says so. The clubmen are so nice to me. Beatrice has done a great deal, even if Steve hates us and acts as if we were poison.... He isn’t happy.”

Mary knew she was flushing. “Tell me some more about yourself.”

But Trudy was not to be swerved from the other topic. “Beatrice makes fun of him and she flirts shamefully. She has half a dozen flames all the time. One was a common cabaret singer; she had him for tea when Steve wasn’t there. Now she is tired of him. You see, she had to have someone to take Gay’s place! I don’t think Steve flirts with any one; he isn’t that sort. He’s so intense he will break his heart in the old-fashioned way and then go and be a socialist or something dreadful. They scarcely see each other, and of course Beatrice’s father thinks everything is lovely and they are both perfection. He just can’t see the truth. Steve is a cave man and Beatrice is a butterfly—I’m a fraud—and you’re just an old dear!

“Yes, I am a fraud,” she said, with sudden honesty. “I wouldn’t come to see you unless I wanted something. I want to talk to you with all barriers down. I wish you had ever done some terrible thing or were unhappy. I don’t know why, Mary dear; it’s not as horrid as it sounds. I think it’s because I want to know the real soul of you, and if you showed me how you met troubles and trials, you being so good, I’d be the better woman for it in meeting my problems.”

It was truly a tired, oldish Trudy speaking. In the last sentence Trudy had touched the greatest depths of which she was capable—causing Mary to hint of her one deep secret.

“You’re growing up, that’s all. And I’m not good—not a bit good. Why, Trudy, do you know I have had to fight hard—terribly hard about something? I’ve never told any one before. I can’t really tell what it is!”

“Over what? You saint in white blouses and crisp ties, always smiling and working and helping people! How have you battled? Tell me, tell me!”

Mary came over to the sofa and sat beside Trudy, holding the white, cold hands laden with foolish rings. “I loved and do love someone very much who never did and never will love me. I must be near that person daily, be useful to him, earn my own living by so doing—and I’ve made myself be content of heart in spite of it and not live on starved hopes and jealous dreams.... You see, I’m quite

human.”

Trudy drew her hands away. She had caused Mary to confirm her suspicions, and she was sorry she had done so. The better part of her knew that she had been admitted into the very sanctuary of the girl’s soul, and that the worst part of her, which usually dominated, was not worthy to be trusted with such a secret. She wished Mary had not said the words—since it changed everything and made a singularly pleasing weapon to use against Beatrice O’Valley should occasion rise. Mary was good—and it was safer to slander a good person than a bad one because there was less chance of a come-back. As she tried to make herself forget what she had just heard she knew that in the heat of anger or to gain some material goal she would use this effectual weapon without thinking and without remorse.

“Oh, my poor girl!” was all she said; and Mary, believing that Trudy so reverenced her secret that she was not going to stab it with clumsy words, kissed her and very practically set about getting a lunch.

Trudy went home taking some biscuit and half a cake with her, and by the time she reached the Touraine she was in a cheerful frame of mind once more. The relief of confession, the home food, and the knowledge of Mary’s secret had buoyed her up past caring for or considering Gay.

To her surprise Gay was at home, jubilant and repentant. He had won at pool and had also consumed some 1879 Burgundy, which conspired to make him adore his red-haired wife and tell her that he had quite deserved and enjoyed having his face smacked.

The pool money in her safe keeping, visions of a new hat to wear at the next luncheon caused Trudy to equal his elation. Together they ate up Mary’s biscuits and cake and talked about Beatrice’s remodelling the Constantine mansion at the cost of many thousands.

“We could almost retire,” Trudy suggested; “but I’m afraid Steve will never give his consent.”

“Don’t worry. Bea would never let a little thing like a husband stand in the way of her progress.”

In March, just as Steve was returning, Beatrice and her aunt departed for a whirl in Florida, with a laconic invitation that Steve and his father-in-law follow them. Steve declined the invitation with alarming curtness.

Though Constantine worried in his peculiar way because Steve did not rush

down to Florida to play with the rest of the snapping turtles Beatrice had about her heels he did not succeed in getting anything but a logical explanation as to a business rush from his son-in-law. More and more Steve was being saddled with Constantine's end of the game as well as his own—and he did not know how to proceed with the double responsibility. So Constantine went to Florida alone, to find his daughter revelling in new frocks and flirtations, both of which she temporarily sidetracked while she made her father give his consent to having the house done over after the manner of a Frascati villa.

"Gad," commented her father, during the heat of the argument, "I thought you were pretty well off as you were. Will Steve like it?"

"He doesn't care what I do," she hastened to assure him. "Of course he will—he ought to—I'm paying for it. He'll have as wonderful a home as there is in the United States. Alice's will be a caricature by contrast. Gay says so. As soon as we go home I'm going to signal them to begin."

"Well, don't touch my room or I'll burn down the whole plant," her father warned. "And if I were you I'd tell Steve first—it's only right."

"But it's my money," she insisted.

"Yes, yes, I know—but you could pretend to consult him. Your mother and I never bought a toothpick that we hadn't agreed on beforehand."

"Dear old papa." She kissed him graciously by way of dismissal.

So Steve received the letter announcing the plans a few days later. It was a semi-patronizing, semi-affectionate letter with a great many underlined words and superlative adjectives and intended to convey the impression that he was a mighty lucky chap to have married a fairy princess who would spend her ducats in rigging up an uncomfortable moth-eaten villa of the days of kingdom come.

As he finished it Gay appeared, having received a letter telling him to hurry ahead with the plans and contracts. Gay was rather obsequious in his manner since he did not know whether it was Steve or Beatrice who was to pay for this transformation.

"If my wife insists, go ahead—but don't move your arts-and-crafts shop into my office. I'm not enough interested to see designs and so on. I never had time to be one of the leisure class, and I'm too old to be kidded into thinking I'm one of them now. But I did make a mistake," he added, slowly, whether for Gay's benefit or not no one could tell—"I thought the world owed me more than a living—that it owed me a bargain. And there never was a bargain cheaply won

that didn’t prove a white elephant in time.”

Gay’s one-cylinder brain did not follow the intricacies of the statement. He merely thought of Steve in more than usually profane terms—and concluded that Beatrice was paying the bill.

CHAPTER XI

It was April before Steve found himself visiting with Mary Faithful again and admiring as heartily as Luke had admired the new apartment Mary had chosen for her family.

It had, to Steve's mind, the same delightful air of freedom and attractive shabbiness that he had come to consider as essential for a true home. While Beatrice was launched on her new object in life—making the house into a villa, from upholstering a gondola in sky-blue satin and expecting people to use it as a sofa to having the walls frescoed with fat, pouting cherubs—Mary had selected funny old chairs and soft shades of blue cretonne found in the remnant department, queer pottery, Indian blankets, and a set of blue dishes which just naturally demanded to be heaped with good things and eaten before an open fire at Sunday-night supper.

The whole expense came within Mary's economical pocketbook, yet it seemed to Steve to have the combined richness of a Persian palace and the geniality of a nursery on Christmas Eve.

He deliberately invented an excuse to call, some detail of work which, more easily than not, could have waited until the next day. He was not only using the detail of work as a means to visit Mary but as an excuse to escape a parlour lecture on "What astral vibrations does your given name bring you?" by a pale-faced young woman. The pale-faced young woman boasted of an advanced soul and was making a snug bank account from the rich set in undertaking occult analyses of their names by which to decide whether or not the accompanying astral vibrations harmonized with their auras; and if they did not—and were therefore detrimental and hampering to spiritual development and material progress—she would evolve occult names for them which would be sort of spiritual bits of cheese in material mousetraps baiting and capturing all the good things of this world and the next.

Convinced that Beatrice was not the proper name for her the Gorgeous Girl had ordered a chart of cabalistic signs and mystical statements, the sum total of which was that Radia was the name the astral forces wished her to be called, and

by using this name she would develop into a wonderful medium. She paid fifty dollars to discover that she ought to be called Radia and that her aura was of smoky lavender, denoting an advanced soul—according to the pale-faced young woman, who had tired of teaching nonsensical flappers, had no chance to marry, and had hit upon this as her means of painlessly extracting a little *joie de vie*.

Declining to learn his astral name Steve left Gaylord to mop up the astral vibrations. Beatrice did not mind his absence though he neglected to say that the work was to be done at Miss Faithful's apartment and not at the office. Never having questioned Steve in such details Beatrice merely murmured inwardly that goat tending in one's past strangely enough led to pigheadedness in later life. It was a relief to have him away, for if drawn into an argument he still thumped his fists. For everyday living Beatrice preferred her own pet robins and angel-ducks, as she called the boys of the younger set, who flocked to flirt with her because she was extremely rich and pretty and they were in no danger of being matrimonially entangled.

Of course Gaylord ate up this occult-name affair. It was discovered that Gaylord's was a most hampering name and had his parents only consulted the stars and named him Scintar—who knows to what heights he might not have risen? Trudy's astral title should have been Urcia, which she now adopted, blushing deeply as she recalled the vulgar Babseley and Bubseley of former days. But when Aunt Belle was informed that Cinil was the cognomen needed to make her discover an Indian-summer millionaire waiting to bestow his heart upon her Mark Constantine had packed his bags and departed unceremoniously for Hot Springs.

Meantime, Mary did not know just how to treat this imperious lonesome young man who came boldly into her household without apology or warning.

"You don't know how often I've wanted to come and see you," he said, unashamedly, delighted that Luke was out of the way and he could play in his fashion the same as Beatrice did in hers. "It isn't business, really. I just wanted to talk to you. You assume so much formality at the office that though I admit it may be wise I miss the real you."

"You mean you just trumped up an excuse——"

Then Mary began to laugh.

"I do. The DeGraff muddle can wait. It's nice to be able just to sprawl about—sprawl in a comfortable old chair. I like this little room. We are being turned into an Italian villa, you know. I don't quite see how I'll ever live up to it." As he

spoke he took out a plebeian tobacco pouch and a nondescript pipe. “May I?”

“Do! Only you ought not to be here at all”—trying to be severe, and failing.

“Why not?”

“Because you think only of yourself and of what you wish,” she surprised him by answering. “Why not think of the other chap occasionally?”

He paused in the lighting of his pipe. “Oh—you mean my coming here.” He looked like an unjustly punished child without redress. “You mean to consign me to the gloom of the grill room or one of those slippery leather chairs in a far corner of the club? Come, you can’t say that. I won’t listen if you do. I just want to be friends with someone.”

With unsuspected coquetry she suggested: “Why not your wife?”

“We’re not friends—merely married.” He lit his pipe and flipped the match away. “Cheap to say, isn’t it? Don’t look at me like that; you make me quite conscience-stricken. You seem to be aiming at me as directly as a small boy aims his snowball. Why?”

“It wouldn’t do the slightest good to tell you what I think.”

“Yes, it would; someone must tell me. I’ve never been as lonesome in my life as now—when I’m a rich man and the husband of a very lovely woman. It sort of chills me to the marrow at first thought. I’ve been in a delirium, quite irresponsible. These last few months I’ve been coming down to earth. Only instead of getting my feet planted firmly on the sod I think I’ve struck a quicksand bed. I say, lend us a hand.”

“Why ask me?”

“I don’t just know. I don’t think I shall ever be quite so sure of anything again. After all, a person has just so much capacity for joy and sorrow, and so much energy, and so much will power, allotted at birth; and if he chooses to go burn it all up in one fell swoop doing one thing—he is at liberty to do so; but he is not given any second helping. Isn’t that true? Quite a terrible thing to realize when you know you used up your joy allotment in anticipation—and it has been so much keener and finer than any of the realization. And all my energy went into making money the easiest way I could; but it does not pay.”

Mary clasped her hands tightly in her lap; she was afraid to let him see her joy at the long-awaited confession.

“Yet you ask me, a reliable machine, to help you in your perplexities?”

“I don’t think of you as a capable machine any more. I used to, that is true enough. I didn’t know or care whether your hair was red or your eyes green—but I know now that you have gray eyes, and——”

“You really want to know my opinions?” she interrupted, breathlessly.

“As much as I used to seek out the stock reports.”

“Well—I think people who have planned as exactly as you and Mr. Constantine have planned always banish real principle at the start. After a time you are punished by having an almost fungous growth of sickly conscience—you don’t want to face the truth of things, yet isolated incidents, sentimental memories, certain sights and definite statements annoy, haunt, heartbreak you! Still, you have lost your principle, the backbone of the soul, and the fungus-like growth of conscience is such a clumsy imitation—like a paper rose stuck in the ground. Mr. Constantine’s type—your type—is flourishing and multiplying among us, I fear, and such are the wishbone, or sickly conscience, and not the backbone, or sterling principle, of the nation. After all, fortunes alone do not make real gentility—thanks be! But you know as well as I that all the—the Gorgeous Girls and their kind and you and I and the next chap we meet belong to the great majority, and of that we have every right to be proud.

“Furthermore, we ought to hold to our place in the social scheme and be the backbone of the nation, keep our principle and not be nagged eternally by a sickly conscience after we have gone and sold our birthrights. Gorgeous Girls and their sort have the sole fortification of dollars, endless dollars, endless price tags; their whims bring whole wings of foreign castles floating across the ocean by the wholesale to be reassembled somewhere in good old helpless Illinois or New Jersey. And these people try to be everything but good old American stock—which is quite wrong, for their example causes spendthrifts and Bolsheviki to flourish without end.”

“Go on,” he said, almost sulkily, as she paused.

“I’ve watched it for thirteen years from the various angles of the working girl with an average amount of brain and disposition. When all is said and done you really have to work before you have earned the right to pass judgment—work—not read or patronize or take someone else’s statements as final. Do you know how I used to identify the kinds of people that rode in the street cars with me?... From seven until eight there were the Frumps. The majority boasted of white kid boots or someone’s discarded near-electric-seal jacket, plumes in their hats, and

an absence of warm woollens. And everyone yawned, between patting thin cheeks with soiled face chamois, ‘What d’ja do las’ night?’

“From eight to nine came the Funnies; and the majority had white kid boots and flimsy silk frocks cut as low as our grandmothers’ party gowns, and plumes in their hats and silver vanity cases. Their main topics of conversation were: ‘He said,’ and ‘She said,’ and ‘I don’t care if I’m late. I’m going to quit anyway!’

“From nine until noon came the Frills—the wives of modest-salaried men who cannot motor, yet write to out-of-town relatives that they do so.

“And every one of those Frumps, Funnies, and Frills apes the Gorgeous-Girl kind—white kids for shopping, low-cut pumps in January, bizarre coat, chiffon waist disclosing a thin little neck fairly panting for protection, rouged cheeks, and a plume in her hat—and not a cent of savings in the bank!

“Now there’s something wrong when we’ve come to this, and the wrong does not lie with these people but with those they imitate—Gorgeous Girls, new-rich with sickly consciences and lack of principle and common sense; and these Gorgeous Girls in turn take their styles, slang phrases, and modes of recreation, as well as theories of life from the boldest dancer, the most sensational chorus girl—and it’s wrong and not what America should be called upon to endure. And it all reverts back in a sense to you busy, unprincipled, yet conscience-stricken American business men who write checks for these Gorgeous Girls—and the heathen in Africa—and wonder why golf doesn’t bring your blood pressure down to normal—when your grandfather had such a wonderful constitution at eighty-four! Don’t you know that get-rich-quick people always pay a usurer’s interest on the suddenly accumulated principle?”

“Keep on,” he said in the same surly tone.

“And when I go downtown and view the weary, unwashed females and the overly ambitious painted ones, people in impossible bargain shoes and summer furs; fat men in plaid suits and Alpine hats; undernourished children being dragged along by unthinking adults; stray dogs wistfully sniffing at passers-by in hopes of finding a permanent friend; tired, blind work horses standing in the sun and resignedly being overloaded for the day’s haul; fire sales of fur coats; candy sales of gooey hunks; a jewellery special of earrings warranted to betray no tarnish until well after Christmas; brokers’ ads and vaudeville billboards and rows upon rows of awful, huddled-up, gardenless homes with families lodged somewhere between the first and twelfth stories—the general chasing after nothing, saving nothing and, saddest of all, the complacent delusion that they

have achieved something well worth while—it makes me willing to earn and learn as I do."

"Don't leave me in the quicksand. What can we do about it?"

"Make that sort of American woman realize that she is more needed in the home and can accomplish more with that as her goal than in any other place in the world. You don't know all my dreams for the American woman—don't you think that this Gorgeous Girl parasitical type is a result of the Victorian revolt? Too late for themselves the Victorian matrons said: 'Our daughters shall never slave as we have done; they shall be ladies—and have careers, too, bless their hearts.' The Victorian matrons were emerging from the unfair conditions of ignorance and drudgery and they could realize only one side of the argument—that all work and no play made Jill quite a stupid girl.

"But we must grasp the other side of the matter—that all play and no work make her simply impossible; that culture and self-sufficiency can go hand in hand. The American woman really is—and must continue to be—the all-round, regular fellow of the feminine world. Then she will not only teach a great and needed truth to her backward European sisters but she will produce a great future race. American women have tried frivolity in nearly every form and they have worked seriously likewise; they have intruded into men's professions and careers and in cases have beaten men at their own game. They have successfully broken down the narrow prejudice and limitations which the Victorian era tried making immortal under the title of sentiment—but after they have had the reward of victory and the knowledge of the game, why not be square, as they really are, and do the part the Great Plan meant them to do? Be women first—let the career take the woman if need be, but always thank the good Lord if it needn't be."

"And to think you have been working for me," Steve said, softly.

"I know that culture and enjoyment of life may be yoked with so-called drudgery. I know, too, that women are retiring not in defeat but with honour and victory in its truest sense when they step out of business life back to their homes. Nor are they empty-handed like the Victorian matrons; but with the energy of tried and true warriors, the ballot in one hand, the child led by the other, they are in a position to right old wrongs, for they have won new rights. They will be able to put into practice in their homes all they have gleaned from the sojourn in the world; the ill-given service of unfitted menials will disappear, as will waste and nerve-racking detail.

"And love must be the leavener of it all—with all her progress and her ability,

trained talents and clever logic, the American woman must not and will not renounce her romance—for it is part of God's very promise of immortality."

"How often may I come here?" he begged.

Mary shook her head. "You've got me started, as Luke says, and I'm hard to check. But have you never thought that out of all the world the American woman is the only woman who cooks and serves her dinner if it is necessary, adjourns to her parlour afterward and discusses poetry and politics and the latest style hat with her guests? For she has learned how to possess true democracy, not rebellion, courage and not hysterical threats to play the rebel, the slacker.

"And now I'll make you a cup of coffee. And never let me catch you here again!"

When Luke arrived home he found Steve O'Valley basking in the big chair he was wont to occupy, though it was past ten o'clock and he had anticipated questions from Mary as to his tardiness. Instead he found a very rosy-cheeked, almost sunrise-eyed sister who stammered her greeting as the flustered Mr. O'Valley found his hat and the neglected business portfolio and took his leave.

CHAPTER XII

To keep down the rising tide of overweight Beatrice abandoned the occult method of having a good time and turned her interest to new creeds containing continual bogus joy and a denial of the vicarious theory of life. But when she discovered that optimism was no deterrent to the oncoming tide of flesh she began a vigorous course in face bleaching, reducing, massage, and electrical treatments, with Trudy playing attentive friend and confidante and secretly chuckling over the Gorgeous Girl's fast-appearing double chin and her disappearing waistline.

The extensive work of making the house into an Italian villa kept Beatrice from brooding too much over her *embonpoint*. She enjoyed the endless conferences with the decorators, drapers, artists, and who-nots, with Gay's suave, flattering little self always at her elbow, his tactful remarks about So-and-so being altogether too thin, and the wonderful nutritive value of chocolate.

"Bea will look like a fishwife when she is forty," he told Trudy soon after the villa was under way and the first anniversary drew near. "She eats as much candy in a week as an orphan asylum on Christmas Day. Why doesn't someone tell her to stop?"

Gay felt rather kindly toward Beatrice, for his commissions from the villa transformation made him secure for some time to come; Alice Twill's idea of a French château, however, had blown up unexpectedly.

"Well, why don't people tell you that you look an utter fool with that extra-intelligent edition of tortoise-shell glasses that you wear?" Trudy retorted. Gay was her husband and her property as long as she saw fit to stay his wife, and she did not approve of his constant attendance on the Gorgeous Girl. Even her deliberate retaliation by flirting with the gouty-toe brigade did not make amends. She had moments of depression similar to the time she had learned Mary's secret. But she did not go back to Mary in the same abandoned spirit. It would never do. If she were not careful she would begin to think for herself and want to take to sensible shoes and a real job, hating herself so utterly that she could never have any more good times. So she saw Mary only at intervals and tried to

do nice trifles for her. Trudy was thinner than ever and she had an annoying cough. She still used a can opener as an aide-de-camp in housekeeping and laughed at snow flurries in her low shoes and gauze-like draperies.

It delighted her to have Beatrice become heavy of figure—it almost gave her a hold on her, she fancied—for Beatrice sighed with envy at Trudy's one hundred and ten pounds and used Trudy as an argument for eating candy.

"Trudy eats candy, lots of it, and she stays thin," she told Steve.

"Yes; but she works and you don't. You don't even pay a gymnasium instructor for daily perseverance, for you could do exercises yourself if you wanted. You sleep late and keep the house like the equator," he continued.

Beatrice looked at him in scorn. "Do I ever please you?"

"You married me," he said, gallantly.

"When I did that I was thinking about pleasing only you, I'm afraid," was his reward. "I wish you would study French—you have such a queer education you can't help having queer ideas. And you can't always go along with such funny views and be like papa. There isn't room for two in the same family."

"Do you know the Bible?" he demanded.

Beatrice giggled.

"There you are! You think I haven't studied in my own fashion. Well, if you did know the Bible intellectually, and Milton——"

"It sounds like a correspondence-school course. Don't, Stevuns! Do you know the latest dance from Spain—the *paso-doble*? Of course you don't. You don't know any of the romance of the Ming Dynasty or how to tell a Tanagra figurine from a plaster-of-paris shepherdess. You haven't read a single Russian novel; you just glare and stare when they're mentioned. You won't play bridge, you can't sing or make shadow pictures or imitate any one. Good gracious, now that you've made a fortune—enjoy it!"

Steve was silent. It was not only futile to argue—it was nerve-racking. Besides, he had found someone else with whom argument was a rare joy and a personal gain—Mary Faithful. At frequent intervals he had won a welcome at the doorway of the little apartment. He almost wished that Beatrice would find it out and row about it, leaving him in peace. He had not yet assumed unselfish views as to the matter. He was no longer in love with his wife but he was not yet in love with Mary. Instead he was passing through that interlude, whose brevity has

made the world doubt its existence, known as platonic friendship. Platonic friendship does exist but it is like tropical twilight—the one whirlwind second in which brilliant sunshine and blue skies dip down and the stars and the moon dash up—and then the trick is done!

But like the thief who audaciously walks by the house of his victim, Steve was never accused of anything worse than using his leisure time to frequent those low restaurants where they serve everything on a two-inch-thick platter. Which, he had retorted, was a relief from eating turtle steak off green-glass dinner plates.

The first wedding anniversary was a rather disappointing affair since Beatrice had to remodel her wedding gown in order to wear it. That fact alone was distressing. And at the eleventh hour Steve was called out of town, which left Beatrice in the hands of her angel-duck brigade, who all felt it their duty to paint Steve in terms of reproach.

“Now Steve felt just as badly about going as you do to have him away,” her father said by way of clumsy consolation. “And he bought you a mighty handsome gift.”

“But I have one quite as lovely,” Beatrice objected. “It was unpardonable of him to go, even if there was a strike and a fire. Let the police arrest everybody.”

She laid aside the gift, a glittering head-dress in the form of platinum Mercury wings set with diamonds, fitting close to the head and giving a decided Brunnhilde effect. “I hate duplicates; I always want something different and novel.”

“It’s a good thing I gave you a check,” said her father.

“Yes, because Gay can always find me something”—brightening. “And tell me, how is the salon fresco coming on?”

Her father held up his hands in protest. “Ask something easy. A mob of workmen and sleek gentlemen that tiptoe about like undertakers’ assistants—that’s all I know. But not one of them touches my room!”

“All right, papa.” She kissed him prettily. “And as I’m dead for sleep and aunty is snoring in her chair, suppose you wake her up and run along?”

Summoning Aunt Belle, who was approaching the Mrs. Skewton stage of wanting a continuous rose-curtain effect, Beatrice stood at the window with unusual affection to wave the last of her guests a good-bye.

She sat up until daylight, to her maid’s dismay, still in her remodelled wedding

gown. She was thinking chaotic, rebellious, ridiculous nothings, punctuated with uneven ragged thoughts about matching gloves to gowns or getting potted goose livers at the East-Side store Trudy had just recommended. The general trend of her reverie was the dissatisfaction not over this first year of married life but at the twenty-seven years as a Gorgeous Girl, the disappointment at not having some vital impelling thing to do, which should of course supply a good time as well as a desirable achievement. The inherited energy was demanding an outlet. She recalled the evening's entertainment—a paper chase with every room left littered and disordered, her lace flounce badly torn, her head thumping with pain, the latest dances, the inane music, the scandal whispered between numbers, the elaborate supper and favours, the elaborate farewells—and the elaborate lies about the charm of the hostess and the good time.

She began to envy Steve as well as Trudy, Steve in his hotel busy with Labour delegates, wrangling, demanding, threatening, winning or losing as the case might be. She, too, must do something. She had finished with another series of adventures—that of being a mad butterfly. It was shelved with the months of a romantic, parasitical existence misnaming jealous monopoly as love, an existence which all at once seemed as long ago as another lifetime.

She would now be an advanced woman, intellectual, daring; she would allow her stunted abilities to have definite expression. Either she would find a new circle of friends or else swerve the course of the present circle into an atmosphere of Ibsen, Pater, advanced feminine thought, and so on—with Egyptology as a special side line. She would even become an advocate of parlour socialism, perhaps. She would encourage languid poets and sarcastic sex novelists with matted hair and puff satin ties. She would seek out short-haired mannish women with theories and oodles of unpublished short stories, and feed them well, opening her house for their drawing-room talks. She would be a lion tamer! She was done with sighing and tears, belonging to the first stage of Glorious Girlism; and with pouting and flirting, which belonged to the second—she would now make them roar, herself included!

At noon the next day she sought Mary Faithful in her office, to everyone's surprise. To her own astonishment she discovered her husband busily engaged in conversation with some members of the Board of Trade, his travelling bag on a side table.

"I didn't bother to telephone you or wire—I got in at eight this morning and came right up here. I knew you'd not be up," he added, curtly. "Would you mind waiting in Miss Faithful's office until I'm at liberty?"

Beatrice was forced to consent graciously and pass into the other room, where Mary was giving dictation.

When Mary finished she offered Beatrice a magazine but the Gorgeous Girl declined it and began in petulant fashion:

“I’ve been thinking about you, Miss Faithful, and I do envy you. Do you know why? You have more of my husband than I have; that was what I came to tell you. For business is his very life and you are his business partner. I only have the tired remnant that occasionally wanders homeward.”

Mary wondered what Beatrice would say if she knew of the supper talks she had had with the tired remnant, who flung discretion to the winds and clamoured for invitations as keenly as he had once begged for the Gorgeous Girl’s kisses.

“Oh, no, that’s not true. You see——” she began, but she simply could not finish the lie.

“I’ve decided that if business is more important to my husband than his wedding anniversary I shall be of importance to him in his business,” she continued. “Be careful—you’ve a rival looming ahead.”

Steve opened the door and nodded for his wife to come in. Mary was left with rather unsteady nerves and a pessimistic attitude to round out her day. Beatrice’s hint had had an unpleasant petty sound that she did not quite understand. She wished she had never allowed Steve to draw her out of her businesslike attitude. However, when she learned that he had very unexpectedly called off work for the rest of the day to do his wife’s bidding she told herself she was needlessly alarmed, though it was always a rash thing to try exchanging her heartache for a temporary joyful mirage!

The next evening, when Mary was in the throes of explaining this thing in guarded fashion to Steve and Steve was arguing angrily and begging for his welcome, Trudy Vondeplosshe happened in unexpectedly and very much rejoiced inwardly at finding this delightful little tête-à-tête in full progress.

Of course the couple gave business and the recent strike as an alarming necessity for a private conference, and then Steve scuttled away, leaving Mary to try to look unconscious and change the subject to Trudy’s new hat. But ever mindful of Mary’s confession Trudy was not to be swerved from the topic.

“I’m glad Beatrice was not with me,” she said, sweetly, “for like all heartless flirts she is jealous—ashamed of Steve half of the time and mad about him the other half. I’d try to have the business all transacted at the office. You used to.

And Beatrice says business isn't half as brisk as it was then."

The upshot of the matter resulted in Mary's applying for a two-months' leave of absence. Spent in the Far North woods with Luke it would make common sense win over starved dreams.

"I think I've earned it," was all she said to Steve.

"A year ago I went away and you stayed. Of course you have earned it. But I am going to miss you."

The day before she left—it was well into July before she could conscientiously see her way clear to go—she received a plaid steamer rug. There was no card attached to the gift, and when she was summoned to Steve's apartment to inform him about some matters, Steve having a slight attack of grippe, she was so formal to both Steve and Beatrice, who stayed in the room, making them very conscious of her apricot satin and cream-lace presence, that Beatrice remarked later:

"It's a fortunate thing that she isn't going to visit the North Pole; she'd be so chilly when she returned you'd have to wrap the entire office in a warming pad. I was thinking this morning that with the way she lives and manages she must have saved some money. Do you know if she has—and how much? I hope you won't pay her her salary while she is gone. It's no wonder she can afford nervous prostration if you do!"

"I didn't know she had it," Steve said, dully.

"Whatever it is, then, that makes her take all this time. The way employees act, walking roughshod in their rights! And now, deary, hurry and get well, for I've a wonderful surprise for you." She knelt beside the couch and patted his cheek. "I'm going to be your private secretary during her absence—yes, I am. As soon as I finish making the mannikins for the knitting bags at the kermis. Then I'm going to try to take her place—well, a tiny part of her place to start with, and work into the position gradually. Yes, I am. I'm determined to try it. I've worried and worried to decide what to do with myself."

Worry was Beatrice’s sole form of prayer. Steve wondered if what Mary had recently said to him could be true, at least in his own case. She had said that defeat at thirty should be an incentive—only after fifty could it be counted a definite disaster.

CHAPTER XIII

“You don’t know how I’ve missed you,” Steve told Mary upon her return. “Don’t I look it?” he added, wistfully.

Mary had appeared at the office late one September afternoon rather than appear the following morning as a model of exact punctuality. She had had to force herself to remain away until her leave of absence expired. It was Luke who rejoiced in the freedom of the woods and the green growing things in which his sister had tried to take consolation, telling herself they would revive her common sense and banish absurd notions concerning Steve O’Valley. It was Luke who rejoiced at catching the largest trout of the season, who never wearied of hayrack rides and corn roasts and bonfires with circles of ghostlike figures enduring the smoke and the damp and the rapid-fire gossiping and giggling. Luke had returned with a healthy coat of tan and a large correspondence list, pledging himself to revisit the spot every season.

But Mary felt defeated in the very purpose of her holiday. The atmosphere of weary school-teachers trying to appear as golden-haired flappers foot-loose for a romance; the white shoes always drying outside tents or along window sills; the college professors eternally talking about their one three-months’ tour of Europe; the mosquitoes; the professional invalid, the inevitable divorcee; the woman with literary ambitions and a typewriter set in action on the greenest, most secluded spot for miles about; the constant snapshotting of everything from an angleworm to a group of arm-entwined bathers about to play splash-me; the cheap talk and aping of such Gorgeous Girls as Beatrice Constantine—all this on one side, and a great and eternal loneliness for Steve on the other.

It was small wonder that defeat was the result. And yet in her heart of hearts Mary was glad that it was so. There is something splendid and breathless in trying to shut away a forbidden rapture, and being unable to do so; in telling oneself one will never try repression again but will shamelessly acknowledge the forbidden rapture and register a desire to thrill to it whenever possible.

Besides the irritations of the summer camp Mary had been forced to leave Hanover remembering Steve as ill, worried over business; of Beatrice’s hinting

that she would usurp her place. There had been so many womanly trifles she would have done for Steve had she been in Beatrice's position—a linen cover for the water glass; a soft shade on the window instead of the glaring white-and-gold-striped affair; exile for that ubiquitous spaniel; home cooking, with old-fashioned milk toast and real coffee of a forefather's day.

Strange how such homey trifles persist in the mind of a commercial nun through two months of supposed enjoyment and liberty. In the same way incongruous associations of ideas spring into the brain with no apparent reason at all causing fossilized professors to write essays-under-glass that elucidate matters not in the slightest.

So Mary returned to the office two days ahead of time, her heart thumping so loudly that she thought Miss Lunk would surely detect the sound. She deliberately dressed herself in a demure new suit and a becoming black-winged hat which made her seem as if delightfully arrayed for afternoon tea. And it was with a charming timidity that she tiptoed into the office.

Before Steve had asked her opinion she had given one swift look about the two offices, and she was glad that they looked as they did. It would have been disappointing to have found them spick and span and quite self-sufficient, without a hint that Mary Faithful was missed or irreplaceable.

Evidences of Beatrice's brief sojourn in the business world still remained—an elaborate easy-chair with rose pillows, a thermos bottle and cut-glass tumbler, a curlicue French mirror slightly awry and, on her desk, a gay-bordered silk handkerchief, a silver-mesh bag, and a great amount of cluttered notations; all of which proved that the understudy secretary had not yet mastered the law of efficiency.

It seemed amusing to Mary. She thought: "How stupid! How can she—when the wicker basket is the one logical place for——"

Then she spied Steve's desk, bearing a suggestion of the same disorder about it. When she spoke his name and he started up, holding out both hands, she saw a queer, bright look in his eyes, as if he, too, were trying to convince himself that everything was all right.

"So you really missed me?"

"Missed you! Heaven alone can record the unselfish struggle I endured to let you play. I give you my word."

He wheeled up a chair for her, just as he used to wheel up a chair for Beatrice,

and sitting opposite him Mary heard an almost womanish enumeration of petty troubles and disturbances, a pathetic threat as to the avalanche of work which would await her in the morning.

“And now I will be polite enough to ask if you had a good time?”

“Very! And Mrs. O’Valley?”

It was so horrid to have to pretend when each knew the other was pretending; and as they pretended to the world in general, what a relief and blessed lightening of tension it would have been to have said merely an honest: “We don’t care about Mrs. Gorgeous Girl or any one else. We are quite content with each other. True, this is still platonic friendship—with one of us—but all tropical twilight is of short duration. It won’t be platonic much longer. So let’s talk about ourselves all we like!”

But being thoroughbred young persons they felt it was not the thing even to think frankly.

“She is well,” Steve said, briefly.

“She came down here, she wrote me, when she wanted to find out about something or other. I’ve forgotten just what.”

Steve smiled. “Yes, for nearly a week Mrs. O’Valley managed to create a furore among her own set. Before she came here she ordered an entire new outfit of clothes—business togs. There were queer hats and shirt waists and things.” He laughed at the remembrance. “Then she had to practise getting up early; that took a lot of time. Meanwhile, Miss Sartwell did your work just as we planned. It was found necessary to postpone her business career still further because of an out-of-door pageant that required her services as a nymph. She caught cold at rehearsal and enjoyed a week of indoors.

“Then Gay turned up with a whole flock of new decorators for the d—–for the villa thing, and I was left without aid from the *ennuied* for another ten days. Jill Briggs had a wedding anniversary and relied on Beatrice’s aid. Of course she could not refuse, and Trudy, who, by the way, has come on very rapidly, persuaded Beatrice to take a booth at a charity kettledrum.

“So after several weeks my wife appeared on my business horizon and hung that mirror up and had those other things moved in and then she discovered that the impudent girls were all copying her coats and hats and stuff and even used her sort of perfume, and she decided that her duty lay not in making me a competent secretary but in reforming these extravagant young persons so that she could

wear a model gown in comfort and not see it copied within a month. It was quite an experience for her; she was here about five days. Miss Sartwell just moved her desk out there and we managed nicely. Beatrice also had a private teacher for typewriting and so on, but she gave it all up because she felt the confinement and long hours made her head ache and she gained weight. She fled in haste. Sorry she had to do so, but under the circumstances it was better to jeopardize my business career than her own figure!"

"Aren't you a little unfair?" Mary said, seriously.

"Am I? I never thought so. Wait—I must finish the tale. For a whole week after being my business partner she tried what she called holiness as a cosmetic, and became high-church and quite trying. At the end of that time she felt a veritable dynamo of nerves and scandal and proceeded to become a liberated and advanced woman. You'll soon enough see what I mean. She doesn't run to short-haired ladies with theories so much as to hollow-eyed gentlemen embroidering cantos in the drawing room and trying to make the world safe for poetry. De-luxe adventuresses strike her as harmonious just now. You'll hear about one Sezanne del Monte who is staying in town and living off of Bea and her set."

"The woman who is divorced every season—and stars in musical comedy?"

"The same. Sezanne is now writing the intimate story of her life; sort of heart throbs instead of punctuation marks—lots of asterisks, you know, separating the paragraphs. Beatrice is going to finance the publication of it and Gay is going to be the sales manager. Yes, it's funny, but a blamed nuisance when you come home and you find yourself wandering through a crowd of Sezanne del Montes and Gays and Trudys, all bent on playing parlour steeplechase, and you can't find a plain chair to sit down or eat a plain meal or read a newspaper. It's more than a blamed nuisance—it's cause for a trial by jury," he added, whimsically. "Now what's wrong?"—watching Mary's face.

"It isn't cricket to tell all this."

Somehow the old struggle began with renewed energy in Mary's heart, the puritanical part saying: "Forget you ever thought twice of this man"; and the dreamer part urging: "You have earned the right to love him. She has not. Just be fair—merely fair. You have the right; don't let your opportunity slip by."

"*It was with a charming timidity that she tip-toed into the office*"

“Why can’t I tell you? I have no one else to whom I can tell things—and I’m so everlastingly tired. Goat tending and living off dried buffalo meat never fagged me like trying to dance with Trudy and living on truffles and champagne. First you are mentally bewildered and physically fagged, then you become defiant; then you realize that that is no use, you’ve brought this on your own self—it is quite the common fate of men like myself—and so you keep on with the steady grind; and by and by you find yourself longing to play in your own way with your own sort. The other sort have no use for you so long as you pay their bills; you are hardly missed, if the truth were told.

“Well, you must keep on with the grind. And you want your sort of playmates and fun, and it’s such decent, upright fun in comparison—oh, pshaw!” He stood up, kicking the edge of the rug with his foot in almost boyish, shamed fashion.

“Business isn’t quite so good,” he began anew in an impersonal, even voice. “Mr. Constantine thinks that the abnormal prosperity is on the wane for keeps—we must prepare for it—but Mr. Constantine has practically retired since you have been away. He’s not well. To-morrow morning, if you don’t mind, I’ll take you over there and we can straighten out some things for him. He is selling the greater share of stock to men from the West. And he’s saved out some pretty nice sugar plums to hand over to me. I haven’t been asked whether or not I want them.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I knew you would be, Miss Iconoclast.”

“Why do you accept them?”

“How can I refuse?”

“By saying you are not prepared to be a mental wreck at forty—which you will be if you try such a gigantic scheme with so little preparation. I’ve an idea that when Mr. Constantine is known to have withdrawn from the business world there will be a change in many things. And when you are known to be alone in the fort—” She paused.

“Go on,” he demanded, irritably. “Can I never make you understand how much I want your advice, your opinions, your scoldings?”

“I think you will have new enemies with whom to deal—enemies you never thought existed. I don’t believe you can deal with them because you have always been so cotton-woolled, so to speak, by being Constantine’s special project—–”

“I’ve done what I’ve done myself,” he interrupted, “and I’m afraid of no one.”

“You think you have,” she corrected. “You have done what you have because Constantine was back of you—and now he is an old, tired man, and very soon he will think more of his days with Hannah than of the present. Which is perfectly safe for him to do. Because Mr. Constantine reckoned on his enemies he knew to a man who hated him and who was afraid of him, who admired him and who would be indifferent; and that is just as essential to success as to reckon on your friends. You never did that—you hadn’t the time—it was all so dazzling and sudden with the war helping things along at breakneck speed. You will find that if you have an Achilles’ heel it will be because you did not reckon on your enemies and are somewhat like a blindfolded man with money in your purse set down in a strange locality.... There. How does that sound for a welcome?”

Steve was pacing up and down the floor. “I’d like enemies,” he said. “I’d like to see them try jumping at my throat. I’d make them cry quits. You don’t frighten me; you stimulate me.”

“That was my intention”—picking up her purse.

“Don’t go—or let me come to supper,” he begged.

She shook her head. Someone came in just then to whom she spoke of the pleasure it was to be back at the office; the word spread that Miss Faithful was back and girls came in groups to smile and say some pretty thing, and the men nodded with a pleased expression. Watching the procedure Steve realized that Mary was as dominant a personality in his office as he was himself, and instead of feeling a vague disapproval of the fact he was genuinely elated that it was so.

After the last of the visitors had gone and the clock pointed to five he said: “Of course I’m going to be dragged some place this evening, so I wouldn’t have much time—but may I come to supper? I’m going out of town next week. There, isn’t that a good reason to come to-night?”

“Suppose the world knew this—our little business world?”

“Hang the world!”

“You never did. You flattered it, and were delighted when the world patted you on the head and said, ‘Nice Stevens, come in and bring your bags of gold—the living’s fine.’”

“Are you starting in to tell me that people would misunderstand my motives? Sezanne del Monte has chapters along those lines. And Beatrice has quite a fad

of slumming and taking a notebook along to write down new slang phrases or oaths or bits of heart-broken philosophy spilled in a drunken moment.... I've grown careless to everything presumably orderly and conventional. I'm ready to walk the plank for my indifference if need be—but I do want to come home with you for supper!"

Mary did not answer for a moment. Then she said, in a quick breathless tone, as if she did not want to hear her own words: "I wonder if it would do any good to try explaining—really explaining and not fibbing or pretending——"

"It has always done me good when you have explained—and I can't imagine you telling cheap untruths."

"Then I will try it." The gray eyes grew stormy. "For if we are to continue as employer and secretary—and you must have such a person and I must earn my living—it would be much easier if you really understood and it was all settled. You've talked about early hardships, misunderstood childhood, goat tending, and what not; and the world gives you credit for your achievements. Then surely you must understand the woman's end of the game—the American woman's part in business, for it's not easy to be errand girl or to fill endless underpaid clerical positions. It's not easy to pile out every morning at such and such an hour and stand at a desk and work as if you had neither heart nor eye for the other things in life until gradually the woman part of yourself is changed and it is often too late to enjoy anything but desk drudgery—and a bonus!

"Now the man in the business game forgoes nothing; he has the world's applause if he succeeds and the kisses of the woman he loves for his recreation, and all is complete and as it should be. But we commercial women of to-day do a man's work and earn a man's wage. We do stay starved women, even if that fact doesn't appear on the surface. We cannot have the things of romance as well as our livelihood. And by the very nature of the average business woman's life she is often in love with someone in her office—from propinquity if for no other reason. She must. Don't you see? They're practically the only men she really comes to know or who come to know her, and she just can't stab her heart into sudden death.

"So she wears her prettiest frock for this man—a wooden-faced bookkeeper perhaps; or a preoccupied president—and she dreams of him and is jealous of him and very likely gossips about him. And the years pass and she stays just as shut away and misunderstood and starved. And sometimes a woman, originally the most honest in the world, under these circumstances will deliberately steal

another woman’s husband if she has the chance. Yes, she will—she does.”

“What do you mean, Mary?” He was almost unconscious of using the name.

“That I am no different from the others. I came here with the same starved heart and woman’s hopes, and I put into your career the devotion and service and very prayers that I should have put into a home and a family—your joys were my joys, your problems mine. It has not been my clever brain that has made me worth so much to you. That is what the superficial public says, but I know better. It’s been the love—yes, the love for you that has made me indispensable! The unreturned and unsuspected and I presume wicked love I felt for you. And now I’ve told you—broken precedent and told the truth. And as you don’t love me you’ll feel very uncomfortable with me about. And you won’t want to play off pal; you’ll fight shy of me except for everyday work. So it has been the only square thing to do—humiliate myself into telling.

“I love you, I always have, and I always will—but I’m no home-wrecking, emotional being and I expect that you will resume our old relationships and I shall go on serving you and knowing my recompense will be a handsome farewell gift and a pension.

“Oh, the business woman’s life isn’t all beer and skittles. We’re expected to lie about our hearts, yet be as reliable as an adding machine about our columns of figures; to be shut away from the social world, thrown with men more hours a day than their wives see them and yet remain immovable, aloof, disinterested! Just good fellows, you know. Isn’t it hideous to think I’ve really told the truth?”

At this identical moment their platonic friendship, alias tropical twilight, ended, and Mary’s evening star of romance rose to stay. But such being the case Steve was the last person in the world to try to convince her that it was so.

All he said was: “I never appreciated you before. Please don’t feel that telling me this will make any difference save that I’ll stay aloof—as you suggest. I can forget it, somewhat, if that will make you feel any better about it. It is all quite true and equally hopeless—true things usually are—and if you like I’ll send you home in the car, because you must be a trifle tired.”

“Thank you,” she remembered answering as she told Steve’s chauffeur where to drive.

“You look as tired as before we went away,” Luke complained that same night when Mary sat at her desk adding up expenses and making out checks.

“Oh, no. This shade makes everyone look ghastly,” she said.

“I’ll have to get a hump on and make my pile,” he consoled. “I don’t want my sister being all tired out before she’s too old to have a good time.”

“A good time?” Mary repeated. “Are you inoculated, too?”

“What’s wrong with a good time? I guess Steve O’Valley plays all he likes!”

“Yes, dear, I guess he does,” Mary forced herself to answer.

When Steve returned home that evening he found one of those impromptu dinner parties on hand instead of a formal engagement. They had become quite the fad in Bea’s set. The idea was this—young matrons convened in the afternoon at one of their homes for cocktails and confidences; very likely Sezanne del Monte would drop in to read her last chapter or Gay Vondeplosshe would arrive brandishing his cane and telling everyone how beautiful the Italian villa was to be; and by and by they would gather round the piano to sing the latest songs; then when the clock struck six there would be a wild flutter and a suggestion:

“Let’s phone cook to bring over our dinner. Then our husbands can come along or not just as they like. We’ll have a parlour picnic; and no one will bother about being dressed. And we’ll go to the nickel dance hall later.”

This was followed by a procession of cooks arriving in state in various motor cars and carrying covered trays and vacuum bottles and departing in high spirits at the early close of their day’s work. Then the procession of subdued husbands would follow, and conglomerate menus would be spread on a series of tea tables throughout the rooms, with Sezanne smoking her small amber-stemmed pipe and describing her sojourn in a Turkish harem while Gay picked minor chords on his ukulele. After a later diversion of nickel dance halls and slumming the young matrons would say good-bye, preparing to sleep until noon, quite convinced that any one would have called it a day.

Such a party greeted Steve, with Gay showing plans for Beatrice’s secret room with a sliding panel—clever idea, splendid when they would be playing hide and seek—and the cooks en route with the kettles and bottles of wine and the husbands meekly arriving in sulky silence.

A little before two in the morning Steve escorted Aunt Belle back to the Constantine house.

Beatrice had started to go to bed, but thinking of something she wished to ask Steve she stationed herself in his room, some candy near at hand and Sezanne’s manuscript as solace until he should arrive.

“I wanted to ask you if Mary Faithful has returned,” she said, throwing down the manuscript as he came in. “Heavens, don’t look like a thundercloud! You used to complain about getting into evening dress for dinner; and now when they are as informal as a church supper you row even more. How was papa? Did you go in to see him? Does the house look terrible?”

“Of course I didn’t see your father at two in the morning; he was asleep. Your aunt fell into a bucket of plaster.”

“Plaster! Why did the men leave it where she could fall into it? Did it hurt her dress?”

“No, just her bones.” Steve laughed in spite of himself. “The dress hadn’t started to begin where the bones hit the bucket.”

Beatrice giggled. “Aunt Belle will try to look like a Kate Greenaway creation. And isn’t Jill stout? I’d eat stones before I’d get like her. Well, what about the Faithful woman?”

“Why such a title? It was always Mary Faithful, and even Mary.”

“I don’t know—but ever since I worked with you this summer I’ve realized what an easy time she has. She isn’t burdened with friends and social duties. It’s all so clearcut and straight-ahead sailing for her. I suppose she laughs at her day’s work.”

“She has returned.”

“Then we can go to the Berkshires. Sezanne knows an artist and some people from Chicago who are ripping company and they are going to visit her cousin at Great Barrington and we are all invited there——”

“Once and for all,” Steve said, shortly, to his own surprise, “I am not in on this! Just count yourself a fair young widow for the time being. I cannot run my business, help close up your father’s affairs, be a social puppet, and go chasing off with bob-haired freaks to the Berkshires, and expect to survive. I’m going to work and keep on the job—it will be bad enough when I have to live in an Italian villa. Who knows what new tortures that will bring? But for a few months I am certain of my whereabouts, so plan on going alone.”

“So you won’t come with me! Oh, Steve, sometimes I can just see the whole mistake—you should never have made a fortune. Rather you should have been a nice foreman with a meek little wife in four-dollar hats and a large portion of offspring. You should have lived in a model bungalow with even a broom closet

in the kitchen and leaded windows at one side. You would have been a socialist and headed labour-union picnics. But as my husband and my father's assistant and all that—you are as impossible as that Faithful woman would be if she tried to be a lady!"

For a moment Steve hesitated. But the average day does not include losing ten thousand on the stock exchange from sheer folly, finding out that your blood pressure is too high, that your faithful secretary loves you and is truer blue than ever, and discovering at the same moment that you love her yet may not tell her so. Nor is a day so hectic usually concluded by finding an impromptu parlour picnic in full swing at home where rest was sought—finding, too, the full realization that you not only do not love your wife but you do not even approve of her.

So he said, quietly: "If you wish to make some radical change regarding your husband would you mind waiting until he has had a chance at a shower bath and some breakfast?"

For the first time in her life the Gorgeous Girl found herself gathering up Monster, the candy, and the novel manuscript in her lace-draped arms and standing outside her husband's firmly closed door.

The shock was so great that she could not squeeze out a single tear.

CHAPTER XIV

Mary Faithful felt no regrets at having told the truth about her love for Steve O'Valley. The regrets were all on Steve's side of the ledger. Contrary to customary procedure it was he who practised nonchalance and indifference, and the office force saw no whit of difference in the attitude of the president toward his private secretary or vice versa.

Long ago the force had accepted the attitude of these two persons as strictly businesslike and their conception of Mary Faithful was tinged with awe and a bit of envy at her success. To imagine her desperately in love with her employer, working for and with him each day, and finally in extreme desperation telling the truth as brutally as women sometimes tell it to women over clandestine cups of tea—was farthest from their comprehension.

Nor would they have thought it credible that Steve, married to his coveted fairy princess, should first become attached to Mary Faithful by friendship and then find that friendship replaced by a deep and never-to-be-changed love. It was an impossible situation, they would have said.

The morning following Beatrice's parlour picnic and Mary's hard-wrung confession Steve made it a point to be at his desk when Mary came in, despite the few hours' sleep and the fact that Beatrice had willfully chosen to take breakfast with him in sulky, tearful reproach. When Mary was taking off her hat and coat he came to the door of her office and made a formal little bow.

He found himself more in love with her than the night previous. There was something so pathetic and lonely about her, successful business woman that she was; the very fact of people's not suspecting it, labelling her as self-sufficient and carefree, only emphasized this loneliness now that he looked at her with a lover's eyes. He realized that whereas he had had to win a fortune to marry the Gorgeous Girl it would be as necessary to lose a fortune to marry Mary—if such a thing were possible; that she was a woman not easy to win, one who would find her happiness not in taking hastily accumulated wealth but in making a man by slow processes and honourable methods until he was fitted to obtain a fortune and then enjoy it with her.

“Good morning”—wondering if he looked confused—“I wanted to say that I am on the country-club committee to welcome English golfers, and I’ll be away this week off and on. And—and whenever you want me to I’ll try to keep under cover for a bit.... I think I do appreciate your telling me the truth last night more than anything else that has ever happened to me; there was something so stoically splendid about it—and I don’t want to abuse the confidence. Please don’t mind my just mentioning it, I’ll promise not to do so again; and we’ll go on as before. I was a cad to play about your fireplace—quite wrong—and you had to make me realize it. Do you know, I was half afraid you’d send in your resignation this morning? Women always do those things in books. Please say something and help a chap out.”

Mary was at her desk opening mail with slow, steady fingers.

“I have my living and Luke’s living to make, and I could not resign unless you asked me to do so,” she told him. “I wondered whether or not you would feel it the thing for me to do. It is a unique situation,” she said in a slightly more animated tone—“not the situation, but my calm betrayal of it. Usually my sort go along in silence and take our bursts of truthful rebellion on our mothers’ shoulders or in sanitariums. I really feel a great deal better now that I have told you.” Her gray eyes were quite fearless in their honesty as she glanced up. “I feel that I can settle down in an even routine and be of more service to everyone.”

“We’ll be friends,” he urged, impulsively. It seemed hard not to say foolish, loverish little things, try to make her believe in miracles, make wild and impossible rainbow plans, precluding any Gorgeous Girls and newly remodelled Italian villas.

“I wanted to add a postscript,” she interrupted. “That’s only running true to form, isn’t it? Here it is: If you ever at any time, because you are emotional and in many ways untried, find yourself unhappy and at cross purposes, and try to lean on a sentimental crutch which inclines in my direction—I shall leave this office just as they do in novels. And I shall not come back, which they always do in novels. This would deprive you of a good employee and myself of a good position and be foolish all round. You men are no different from us women; once a woman knows a man loves her she cannot quite hate him even if her heart is another’s. Instinctively she labels him as a rainy-day proposition and during some wild thunderstorm—well, idiotic things happen! Whereas if she never knew he cared she might go about finding a mild mission in life. A man is the same; and since I have trusted you with my secret, and that secret happens to

concern yourself, the logical consequence is that you will never quite hate me because I care. In some moods you might even try telling yourself that you cared, too. Then I should not only leave your employ but I should stop caring."

She went on with the morning's mail. Outside, the office force was stirring. Raps at the door and phone calls would soon begin.

"Would you really?" he asked, so soberly that Mary's hands trembled and she blotted ink on her clean desk pad as she tried to make a memorandum.

"Really. I never can bring myself to believe in warmed-over magic."

"Then I shall never have any such moods."

He answered a phone call and there fell upon the office an atmosphere of strange peace which had been missing for many months.

During the winter the rift between Steve and Beatrice became noticeable even to the Gorgeous Girl's friends, to Trudy's infinite delight; and by the time spring came it was an accepted thing that Steve's share in the scheme of things was to write checks and occupy as little space as possible in the apartment, whereas Beatrice's part in the scheme of things was to badger and nag at her husband eternally or be frigidly polite and civil, which was far harder to endure than her temper.

The Gorgeous Girl's endeavours to become an advanced woman, an intellectual patroness and so on, were amusing and ineffectual. She soon found neither pleasure nor satisfaction in any of her near-lions. Nor did she succeed in making them roar. Whether it was a parlour lecture on Did a Chinese Monk Visit America a Thousand Years before Columbus? or a Baby Party at which Beatrice and Gay dressed as twins and were wheeled about in a white pram by Trudy, dressed as a French *bonne*—the reaction was one of depression and defeat. Though Beatrice still had her name printed on the reports of charity committees she no longer took what was termed an active part. She shrugged her shoulders carelessly and gave the reason that it was all so hopeless—and no fun at all.

Inanimate things afforded the most satisfaction; at least she could buy an individual breakfast service costing a thousand dollars and have the item recorded in all the fashion journals, with her photograph, and she could have the most unique dinner favours and the smartest frocks, and they never disappointed her.

Besides, the Italian villa was to be finished shortly and that would necessitate a new round of entertainments and minor adjustments and no end of enviable

publicity and comment. This diversion would take her through the late spring and summer, and in the fall she fully intended to take up dress reform and become a feminist. She had an idea of wearing nothing but draped Grecian robes—which could be made to look quite fetching if one had enough jewellery to punctuate the drapes—and of going in for barefoot dancing on the lawn. It would be more convenient if she could persuade her father and aunt not to stay on at the Villa Rosa, as it was to be called. And certainly it would have been more æsthetic to look across the street and see something besides another expensive and hopelessly mediocre brick house which another rich man somewhat after Constantine's own heart had built with pride and joy. She wished she had bought a site back from the town and created a real estate. The fact that she had not done so made her miserable for over a week, during which Gay consoled her in most flattering fashion, neglecting his own wife to do so.

Well, after the Villa Rosa—what then? Life seemed very empty. With a certain natural squareness of nature Beatrice was not the sort of woman to indulge in unwise affairs beyond a certain discreet point. She had never learned how to study, so she could not become a devotee of some fascinating and exacting subject. Her really keen mind had merely skimmed through her studies.

Nor was she over fond of children. As she told Trudy, children were absorbing things and goodness knew if she ever had any of her own she would have a wonderful enough nursery and sun parlour with panels designed by a child psychologist; there was everything in first impressions. But take care of one of them? The actual responsibility? Heavens, what a fate! She would engage a trained baby nurse—and then drop in at the nursery for a few moments each day to see that everything was going well.

Later, after the trying first years, she would be very proud of her children. Besides, planning children's clothes was a great deal of fun; and if she had a daughter she would see that the daughter married properly. Whether or not she was thinking of Steve, Trudy did not dare to ask; but she evidently was, as she added that one might better marry an impoverished nobleman and live in an atmosphere of culture and smart society than marry someone who never attempted to be anything.

A child demanded of one intelligence up to a certain point, and faithful service, but it did not require keen intellect. A primitive knowledge of what their hurt or hunger or plain-temper cry meant—and a primitive tender fashion of coping with whichever it might be—were all that young babies demanded; and hence the Gorgeous Girl, like all finely bred and thoroughly selfish women of to-day

who are bent on psychological nursery panels, refused to be tied down to the narrow routine of a nursemaid, as she called it. Love-gardening is the title old-fashioned gentlewomen originated.

Then Beatrice cited how carefree Jill Briggs was with her four children. Goodness knew that Jill was always within hailing distance of the big time; and except for a few little illnesses and the fact that the oldest boy had died of croup the children were a complete success and perfect darlings, and Jill dressed them like old-style portraits. Besides, Jill had tried out a new system of education on the oldest boy; he had been taught to develop his individuality to the highest possible degree. At eight, just before the croup attack—though he did not know his alphabet or how to tell time and had never been cuddled or rocked to sleep with nursery jingles as soothing mental food—he could play quite a shrewd game of poker and drive a bug roadster. Beatrice, in talking over the child problem with Trudy, decided that if she ever had a son she, too, would develop the poker shark in him rather than the admirer of Santa Claus and the student of Mother Goose.

“Of course Steve thinks a woman should drudge and slave over those crying mites as if the nation depended upon it,” she concluded, “but I should never pay any attention to him. He said, in front of Jill, that he always felt well acquainted with rich children, for he had passed a similar childhood—meaning that living in an orphan asylum and being brought up by a nursemaid were much the same thing. Quite lovely of him, wasn’t it?”

Trudy could not suppress her giggle.

“I’m sure the children get on well enough. Just think, if you had to plan all the meals and dress and undress them and all the baths—ugh, I never could! And when Steve begins his eloquent stories about these nursemaids who neglect children or dope them or do something dreadful I simply leave the room. He actually told Mrs. Ostrander that he saw her nurse slap her child across the face, and proceeded to add: ‘It is never fair to strike a child that way. It breeds bad things in him. And he wasn’t doing anything; it was just nurse’s day for nerves.’ Of course the Ostranders will never forget it. Now, Mrs. Ostrander is a member of the Mothers’ Council, and a dear. She just slaved over her children’s nursery and she reads all their books before she allows the nurse to read them aloud. I’m sure no children were ever brought up as scientifically; they have a wonderful schedule. She told me she had never held them except when they were having their pictures made—never!—and that crying strengthens the lungs. Of course Steve says we feed our lap dogs when they whine but close the door on the baby

when he tries it. So what can you do with such a person?”

To which Trudy agreed. Trudy agreed to anything Beatrice might say until the bills for the villa were settled and the O’Valleys established in the gondola-endowed home. Trudy sometimes pinched herself to realize that in such a short space of time she was living in the Touraine apartment house and that her husband, whom she loathed more each day, had actually scrambled into the position of being the best decorator in Hanover and was busy splitting commissions and wheedling orders from New York art dealers and Hanover’s social set.

Sometimes Nature takes her own methods of revenge, and to Mark Constantine’s child she saw fit to send no son or daughter. Constantine never mentioned his hunger for grandchildren. He had a strange shyness about admitting the desire and the plans he had made for them. But when he saw the completion of this villa and realized the thousands of dollars squandered upon it and the impossible existence his daughter would lead living therein he went to his untouched plain room, looking out on sunken gardens, to try to figure out how this had all come about.

He fumbled in mental chaos as to the meaning of all this nonsense and longed more than ever for a grandchild, someone who should be quite unspoiled and who would not approach him with light, begrudged kisses and a request for money.

The formal Venetian ball which Beatrice gave to open her new home merely amused Steve, who had really dreaded it with the hysteria of a schoolgirl. He hated the whole scheme of the house and the man who was reaping a rich harvest by engaging the army of persons who had done the work therein. He rejoiced openly at each delay on the part of the plumber, the tinsmith, the decorator; and openly gave a thanksgiving when the illustrated wall paper for the halls, which told the legend of Psyche and Cupid, had been sent to Davy Jones’s locker en route from Florence. Steve’s name for the Villa Rosa was the Fuller Gloom.

But when they did move into the new-old home and Steve was led through each room of gammon and spinach, as he had faintly whispered to Mary Faithful, he found himself only amused. Now that he considered it, it was a relief to know Beatrice had such a new and absorbing plaything to take up her time and keep her aloof from his personal affairs. He sought out his father-in-law in his plain room with its walnut set and stand of detective stories, and sat down in relief,

though the two men honourably refrained from criticizing a certain person openly.

At the ball Beatrice appeared in a wonderful black gown, so wonderful and expensive that its creator had given it a distinct title—The Plume. Steve did his duty as a handsome figurehead, as someone called him; after which he was free to stroll in the gardens and smoke and wonder what manner of folks inhabited the stars.

An inspection of the house had taken place with Beatrice and Gay leading the procession, and Aunt Belle bringing up the rear. The oh's and ah's and exclamations of approval, resultant of fairy cocktails, rewarded Beatrice for her expenditure. When she brought them into her own apartment she stood back, while Gay lisped out the story of the greatest achievement and novelty of the entire house, watching the faces of her guests so as to catch the first expression of envy which should reveal itself.

The novelty consisted in the set of bedroom furniture, which, though the rest of the house was Italian, as Gay hastily explained, was of Chinese workmanship, carved and inlaid in intricate design—two dragons fighting over pearls, with the various stages of the struggle represented on the bed legs, the bureau drawers, the easy-chair, the dressing table, and so on. The set had been made for the Emperor of China, but when his private council inspected it, it was found that one of the carved dragons on top of the four-poster bed had captured the pearl for which they had been fighting in sixty-seven or so other carvings. This signified bad luck for the emperor; misfortune and rebellion would be his lot if he slept in the bed. Though regretting the loss of the furniture the emperor felt the loss of his kingdom would be even greater, and the furniture was placed on the market. To Mrs. Stephen O'Valley was awarded the ownership as well as the privilege of writing the check that made the purchase possible. On the bed was a pillow of the material woven for emperors only, thrown in on account of the ill luck that would attend him who slept in the bed beneath the conquering dragon; and on a carved bone platter was an antique Maltese shawl which gave a rare note to the entire room.

Steve, who had regarded the emperor's rejected furniture as a cross between a joke and an outrage, gave way to his feelings by pacing up and down the hall and capturing a tray of sandwiches being carried to the supper room. But Beatrice, after Gay's speech, felt a rare joy—for every guest in the room hated her for having won the prize. What more could she ask by way of reward?

When they were alone in the new-old home Steve felt it only decent to congratulate her. Somehow he had come to feel that keeping up sham courtesies made everything easier.

“You have worked very hard, haven’t you?” he asked. “But you have wonderful results.”

“Do you think so? Everyone hates me now, for there will never be another royal bedroom set like mine on the market—when you think that Gay skirmished about and won it for me, it is quite remarkable. And it shows what Gay can do when he has a little encouragement. Alice Twill was almost cross-eyed and crying; her husband nipped the château idea in the bud. New York men are coming here to take photographs next week. I wish the garden were in better shape. They are going to run feature stories about it.... Oh, Steve, do you think of any new place to go this summer?”

“I thought we had just moved to Venice,” he said, still dazed at the amount of carved fire screens, tapestries, dim, impractical candlelights, and soft-eyed Madonnas which smiled at him on all sides.

“I must have all the office force come and see this—it would be such a treat. And we can serve tea on the lawn.”

“Do. They don’t often take time to go to museums.”

Steve’s bad nature was getting the better of polite resolves. He was thinking of Mary’s clear, witty eyes as she would view the remains of a plain American house.

The next thing of interest to keep Beatrice at home was the advent of a real lion cub, following Monster's departure to canine heaven. Being too impossible of shape and disposition for any one's pride or comfort, Monster was disposed of and buried in a satin-lined coffin with a neat white headstone telling salient facts of her short existence.

While Steve was giving devout thanks for the event Beatrice was realizing that the gardens needed a dominating note, as Gay said. During her reading of old fables and romantic legends about superwomen or extremely wicked matrons she had discovered that they nearly all possessed a lion or a bear or a brace of elephants to gambol on the green. Such a pet symbolized its owner's power and fearlessness, and any young woman who could have the Emperor of China's bedroom suite brought post haste into Hanover, U. S. A., was surely entitled to something in the jungle line for her front yard!

For the first time in his daughter's life Mark Constantine made a faint protest, suggesting that she have a taxidermist mount several lion cubs and group them about the hall—while Steve sat back in cynical amusement and asked if she were going to request the goldfish to step aside in favour of a few Alaska seals?

"If she gets a live lion—and she will, because I'm writing to a circus man now," Gay told Trudy—"I'm going to sprain my ankle and be laid up from the day the beast arrives until he goes—he won't tarry long, the police won't have it. But I'm not going to take any chances. Still, it would never do to make a fat commission on the deal and then act as if I were afraid to come over and play cannibal with him. I guess you can go," he added, insolently.

Trudy looked at him in scorn. "You are cheap," she said. "Well, I will go! I'd just as soon be eaten by a lion as to have to live with a shrimp."

The lion arrived in due time and was named Tawny Adonis. Beatrice considered him a perfect love. He was a gay young cub and quite effective in the new background, well intentioned but lonesome for his old atmosphere of circus life and his mother and brothers. He was given a large run in the Constantine grounds, and while Aunt Belle stayed locked in her room the greater share of the time and Gay immediately sprained his ankle and was forced to send Trudy as his messenger, Mark Constantine and Steve found their time well occupied in convincing the authorities that the town infantry would not be devoured piecemeal. Hanover had never really approved of having an Italian villa crammed down its throat, and it was certainly not agreeable, to say the least, to have a lion cub at large as a dominating garden note.

“You cannot keep him, even if you pulled all his teeth and taught him to be a dope fiend,” Steve said in desperation after the roars of Tawny Adonis had been reported to the police as annoying. “He is growing bigger every day and all he has done is demolish flowers and shrubs and chew up fence posts. I’m sorry for him, and I’m not particularly afraid of him, but if there was an accident with a child even the owner of a dominating garden note could not expect to go scot-free.”

Her father and her friends championed Steve’s stand in the matter and after a little rebelling and pouting and having the pleasure of seeing her name in all the papers as the owner of the lion cub and so on, Beatrice consented to part with him on the condition that she be allowed to give him a farewell birthday party, he being nearly a year old. She was going to ask the children of all her friends. But getting a hint of the event her friends hastily arranged a Tom Thumb wedding for charity, and then assured Beatrice it was merely a coincidence that the two things interfered with each other, wasn’t it a shame? Realizing that this dominating note was not a social asset Beatrice hastily sided in with her father and the authorities.

Besides, she was tired of Tawny Adonis; he was destructive, and a secret source of worry if she could have been made to admit it. So she prepared for a birthday fête and determined to have the public-school children as the guests. But these refused her invitation as well; so she went into the slums and collected thirty harmless waifs who felt that a lion’s birthday party was not to be despised, and brought them triumphantly into the Italian gardens.

The waifs gathered round an outdoor table, too busy swallowing food to bother about their possible and likely fate. In the centre of the table was a huge birthday cake for Tawny Adonis. It was made of raw hamburger steak, generously iced with bone marrow, and the single anniversary candle took the form of a balanced soup bone. After the children had eaten their fill Tawny Adonis was let loose upon the scene and at the birthday cake, and during the wild smashing of glass and china and the excited shrieks of the waifs Tawny went to the birthday cake and devoured it, soup bone and all.

Gay was out of town the day of the party but Trudy bravely assisted, as did one or two others, Mark Constantine and his sister sitting in the windows to watch the procedure while Beatrice in a gown of turquoise velvet with a coronet of frosted leaves played Lady Bountiful and dismissed the slum brigade as soon as possible, sending them home with the confused knowledge that a beautiful lady in angel clothes and a wild animal sometimes meant plenty of ham sandwiches

and ice cream, as well as the opportunity to slip a fork into one's pocket.

Steve declined to take any part in the celebration, but at the conclusion of the event he appeared with policemen and a patrol wagon containing a cage, and amid gay farewells and grim coaxings Tawny Adonis was escorted to the railway station and shipped back to the circus man, at a loss of five hundred dollars—not counting the damage done—to the Gorgeous Girl!

CHAPTER XV

Trudy was keen as a brier whenever her own realm was threatened. With the shrewdness which caused her to refrain from ever speaking ill of a woman when talking to a man and never speaking aught but ill of women when talking to their own kind, she foresaw in Gay's constant attendance on the Gorgeous Girl the possibility of an unpleasant situation.

For the Gorgeous Girl had said not only to her husband but to her friends that she must find some other kind of a good time now the novelty of the Villa Rosa was exhausted. Even inky people bored her, she added; poets were no longer permitted in her drawing room, and the circle of pet robins and angel ducks had somehow wandered out of her safe keeping. An unusually pretty flock of sweetsome débutantes had thinned the bachelor ranks, and Jill Briggs's youngest boy died of some childish ailment, disturbing Beatrice more than she admitted, for some reason, and making her own thoughts poor company.

It was while she was talking of this child's death with Trudy that the latter glimpsed the handwriting on the wall, and with scantily concealed enmity determined to beat Beatrice at her own game.

"Jill is going away for the winter, poor thing," Beatrice said. "I don't blame her; it would be too horrible to have to stay and see all his things about. And it's the second child she's lost. Goodness me, she has spent hundreds on baby specialists and nurses! Well, you know yourself, Trudy—you've seen how wonderful she has been. This boy's death has so distressed her that she has decided to have two nurses stay with the children instead of one. Mighty sweet of her, as it all comes out of Jill's pocketbook and not her husband's. She says she cannot think of leaving them with one person, and she must go away because her nerves are frazzled.

"She is going to the West Indies with an artist friend, and they are going to make a marvellous collection of water-colour paintings of birds and flowers, a sort of memorial to the boy. Jill says she will sell them and give the proceeds for the *crèche* charity. Well, that is all very well for Jill to do; she has a real heartache to

live down. But when you have no earthly reason to go and paint wild birds and flowers and you are bored to distraction with everything—" She shrugged her shoulders.

"Meaning yourself?" asked Trudy. "Really?"—delighted that this was so.

"Are you ever bored?"

"Only enough to be fashionable. You see I have to live Gay's life and career and my own at the same time." Instinctively Trudy knew this caused envy in her hostess's heart for a multitude of reasons. "Gay never amounted to anything until we were married"—she paused for this to take full effect—"and I enjoy playing the game. I have grown fond of makeshifts and make-believes and hedging, bluffing, stalling, jumping mental hurdles—it's fun—it keeps you alive and never weighing more than a hundred and ten pounds."

Trudy rose to go. She was a *chic* little vixen in a fantastic costume of black velvet with a jacket of blush pink. No one but Trudy could have worn such a thing—a semi-Dick-Whittington effect—and have gotten away with it. Though she was physically very tired from sewing late the night before, and mal-nourished because she was too indolent to bother to cook, Trudy looked quite fit for a long stretch of hard running.

"Why don't you diet seriously?" she purred. "It's only right for your true friends to tell you. The double chin is permanent, I'm afraid." She shook her shapely little head, to Beatrice's inward rage.

As Beatrice sat looking up at this impertinent little person she suddenly became angered to think she had ever bothered with an ex-office girl or permitted Gaylord to coax her into being nice to his wife. And if this impossible person could bring Gaylord into the ranks of prosperity in a short time, making everyone accept her, what couldn't she, Beatrice O'Valley, do with Gay if she tried—seriously tried? He would not linger beside Trudy if Beatrice gave him to understand there was a place for him at her own hearth. She knew Gaylord too well; he suddenly assumed the figurative form of a goal, as she had once assumed to Steve—a play pastime—in the true sense. A real man would not play off property doll in the hands of any woman, not excepting his own wife; which Beatrice realized. Living with a cave man had taught her many things. Yet it would be rare fun to have a property doll all one's own, different from the impersonal, harmless herd of boys and poets, a really innocent pastime if you considered it in the eyes of man-written law. What a lark—to switch Gay from this cheap, red-haired little woman, dominate his life, suddenly assert her starved

abilities, and make him become far greater than anything Trudy had ever been able to do! It would cause such a jolly row and excitement and pep everyone up. Pet and flatter him and show Trudy that after all she had only been an incompetent clerk in Steve's office!

"Perhaps I will diet," was all she said, smiling sweetly. "And tell Gay he must come see me to-morrow. I have a plan that I want to tell him—and no one else. Besides, there is a flaw in the last pair of candlesticks he bought for me."

Trudy realized perfectly well that sweetness from the lips of an obese lady, after one has assured her of the arrival of a double chin, always augurs ill for everyone.

Originally Trudy had determined to use Gaylord as a stepping-stone, a rather satisfactory first husband. But since Beatrice's commission to do the villa and the stream of like orders from the new-rich who were trying to unload their war fortunes before they were caught at it, Trudy had grown content and even keen about Gaylord in an impersonal sense. She felt that she could not better herself if he continued to do as well as he had the last few months, and that she would continue to do her share of hill-climbing indefinitely. In other words, having won Gaylord in the remnant department, Trudy decided to keep him and make him answer the purpose of paying her board bill.

Besides, though she admitted it only to Mary, she felt anything but well. The more money Gaylord made the more he spent on himself, and he seemed to expect Trudy to manage out of the ozone, yet to appear as the indulged wife of her enterprising young husband. It never ended—the eternal searching for bargains; dyeing clothes and mending, cleaning, and pressing; living on delicatessen food; sitting up nights to help out with the work, often doing odds and ends of sewing, and appearing the next afternoon in the customer's house to admire the effect of the new drapery and tell of the bright-eyed Italian woman who had done the work.

Trudy saw little of Mary. Her better self made her stay aloof lest she win from her friend other details to add to her already safeguarded secret. And she never attempted to amuse Steve. She fought shy of him when he was about, wisely limiting herself to shy nods and smiles and occasionally a very meek compliment, which he usually pretended not to hear.

As she walked home from the villa—Gay had the roadster—she told herself that she must watch out or Beatrice would attempt to spoil Gay to the extent of making him wish to be rid of his wife. She realized that Gay was extremely

scornful and careless of her. Having married her and satisfied his one-cylinder brain that he was a deuce of a chap and a democratic rake in marrying this dashing nobody Gaylord turned bully and permitted Trudy to take the cares of the family on her shoulders. He was now enjoying the fruits of her industry with a fair credit rating, very different from formerly, a bank account of which Trudy knew nothing, and the congenial work of pussyfooting about boudoirs and guzzling tea while perched on Beatrice's blue-satin gondolas.

He no longer needed Trudy. He could see now that to be single-handed once more, but with his new standing and profession, would be a most satisfactory state of affairs. In fact, if Trudy would only fall in love with a travelling man and decamp—what a chap he would soon rise to be! For a broken heart is often a man's strongest asset and a woman's gravest suspicion. Trudy, however, gave him no hope in this direction. She hung about her fireplace contrary to her former plans concerning it. She really put in an eighteen-hour day as both slavey and sylph, and seemed filled with everlasting patience and jazz.

Coming into the Touraine apartment Trudy found Gaylord showing old prints to some woman customers and advising as to the smartness of having them framed and used in sun parlours or any intriguing little nook. Trudy was *de trop*—she was prettier than the prospective customers, but in their eyes she had only a Winter-Garden personality—and Gay frowned his welcome.

Had Trudy not come in Gay would have served cocktails of his own making, which would cause them to order the prints at fabulous prices; and then sat in the dusk talking about the occult and the popularity of Persian pussy cats and how to make pear-and-cottage-cheese salad and serve it on cabbage leaves, which was quite the mode. It never does for an interior decorator, particularly if specializing in boudoirs, to have a wife, Gaylord decided as his customers patronized Trudy and departed, Gaylord seeing them to their car and standing bareheaded to wave his bejewelled hand as they whirled round the corner.

He then returned to give Trudy his unbiassed opinion. "I thought you were going to stay away until evening," he said. "You spoiled the sale."

"Did I? What were you about to do—play soul mate if they'd take the old things? I'm the one who found those prints in a second-hand store and had sense enough to buy the lot. I'm the one who found the remnants of cretonne you paste them on—and told you to charge ten dollars each—and I'm the one who sits out in the little back room and pastes them on, too!"

She threw her purse down with an angry gesture.

“You are the crudest thing,” he said.

“I slapped you once for calling me a crude little fool—and the next time you try it I’ll do better than that!” She was unable to control her temper. “If you think being a bachelor and languishing in this place would keep you afloat you’re mistaken. It’s me—I’m the one that buys the bargains and runs the sewing machine half the night, sends out the bills and wheedles the salesmen into looking at you—to say nothing of doing the housekeeping, and keeping every good-looking woman afraid of me, yet polite. Why, if you were alone any real business man could come in here and start a shop and put you behind the bench overnight. You’re nothing! You never were. You lived on a dead man’s reputation until you married me, and now you’re living on a redheaded girl’s nerve. I’ll scold as shrilly as I like. If the neighbours hear, all the better!”

Trudy had lost control of herself. Besides, she was very tired. “Who told you to wear gray-velvet smocks in your drawing-room shop and to have soft ties poured down softer collars? You look a hundred per cent, better than when you hopped round in a check suit that gave you a gameboard appearance. I did that. If I’d ever worked for O’Valley as I have for you, thinking I’d get a good time out of it somehow, I’d have had Mary Faithful on the run.”

She did not add the rest of her ideas—that Beatrice O’Valley, not contented with her store of possessions and avenues of interests, contemplated playing property doll with this half-portion little snob who stood before her in his ridiculous smock costume, half afraid and half sneering.

The interview concluded with Trudy’s going to the kitchen for some kind of a supper and Gay’s driving off post haste to see Beatrice.

When Steve returned from his hurried two-day trip he asked Beatrice if she realized the amount of money she was spending.

“Why should I?” she answered, aggrievedly. Steve looked unusually handsome this afternoon, and seemed to fit into the antique chair; and, in contrast to her contemplated property doll, Beatrice felt amiable and willing to play for favour. “I haven’t asked you for one quarter of it.”

“That’s the trouble—your father has gone on paying your bills, and you don’t seem to realize I am not an enormously rich man—and never will be, abnormal business conditions having ceased. We are back where we started, so to speak, and I don’t look for a time of unheralded prosperity for some days to come. I was figuring up while I was away, in detail; and here are the results.” He handed

her a memorandum. “You see? I earn a splendid living and I have a neat nest egg not to be despised. But I have no Italian-villa income. Your father has, so you came back to your father to take his money and I am merely a necessary accessory to the entire ensemble.” His voice was bitter.

“Oh, no, Stevuns!” She was quite the romantic parasite as she came and knelt beside him in coaxing attitude. “Why, papa wishes me to have everything I want. He would be terribly worried if he thought I had to do without a single shoe button!”

“But must all the shoe buttons be of gold?” Steve interpolated.

She paid no attention to him. “I’m papa’s only heir—the money is all mine, anyway, and it always has been. You know how simple papa’s tastes are.”

“Like my own—like those of all busy people who are doing things. We haven’t time to pamper ourselves.”

“Someone has to buy up the trash! And you ought to thank us rich darlings of the gods for existing at all—we make you look so respectable by contrast.” She waited for his answer.

He rose and went over to the carved mantel, standing so he could look down the long room crowded with luxuries.

“But this place isn’t the home of an American man and his wife. It’s a show place—bought with your father’s money! And I’ve failed. I’m not supporting my wife. Good heavens, if I were I’d have to be cracking safes every week-end to do it. I can’t make any more money than I am making—and stay at large—and you cannot go on living off your father and being my wife. I won’t have it! I won’t be that kind of a failure!”

“What shall I do with the money, throw it to the birds?” Her head began to ache, as it always did when a serious conversation was at hand.

“Wait until it is yours and then spend it on something for the good—not the delight—of someone else, or of a great many other people. Be my wife—let me take care of you,” he begged, earnestly.

Beatrice hesitated. “I couldn’t,” was her final answer. “I couldn’t manage with the allowance you give me—don’t worry, dearest, there’s no reason at all that we shouldn’t have as good a time as there is. Papa wants us to.”

“Don’t you see what I’m trying to get at?” he insisted. “Won’t you try to see? Just try—put yourself in my place, make yourself think with my viewpoint as a

starting place. Suppose you had been a dreamer of a boy with a pirate's daring and a poet's unreal delusions, and you combined the two to produce a fortune, a fortune everyone marvelled at, the lucky turn of the wheel. Suppose you used that fortune with the same daring and fancy, loving someone with all your heart, to make money in a regular business and under the guidance of a well-trained merchant like your father—and then you married the person you loved and saw her deliberately belittle your manhood by going to her father's house to live, spending her father's money, and leaving you quite alone and without the joyous and needed responsibility of supporting your wife. Now what would you do?"

"I'd start right in spending my own money for things I wanted," she decided, glibly.

"But suppose you did not want things—cluttery, everlasting things, glaring, upholstered, painted, carved, what not—lugged from the four corners of the earth, not harmonizing with your own aims or interests? Suppose you wanted to create an individual and representative home and take care of it and the guardian angel who presided therein—then what would you do?"

"Oh—you mean you want another style of house? Then let's buy a country tract—and I promise to let you build and furnish just as you wish. That's a bully idea, dear, to have an abrupt contrast to this house—old-English manor type would be wonderful!"

The dinner gong brought a merciful release. Beatrice danced through the archway throwing him a kiss as the rest of her decision.

It was at this identical moment that Steve concluded it was too late for his wife ever to develop anything more than a double chin or so.

CHAPTER XVI

During Beatrice's house party, at which twenty or so equally Gorgeous Girls and their husbands were quartered in the Villa Rosa, while a string orchestra danced them further along the road toward nervous prostration each night, a fire ignited in the offices of the O'Valley Leather Company.

Steve's office and Mary's adjoining room were damaged by water rather than by the slight blaze itself and during an enforced recess from work both Mary and Steve found that a fire in an office building may cause a loss of time from routine yet be a great personal boon.

The day following the accident, Steve having been summoned at midnight to view the flames, Mary came to the office to try to rescue the files and sweep aside the débris.

"Nothing is really hurt, but they always mess things up," Steve said, coming to the doorway to hold up a precious record book. "See this? I wonder why they always leave such a lot of stuff to clear away. Now the whole extent of damage is the destroying of that rickety side stairway that is never used and could have been done away with long ago. Some boys, playing craps and smoking, left the makings of the fire and before it touched these rooms there was water poured into the whole plant. As a consequence, we have a three-day vacation and instead of having the side stairs torn down I'm in line for a chunk of insurance."

"Even the tea isn't spilled from my caddy," Mary answered; "Look."

"Wonder what they used this side stairway for? It was rickety when I bought the place." He looked at the blackened remains of steps.

"I don't know," Mary answered, absent-mindedly. She could have added that whenever she looked at those stairs or their closed door she saw but one thing—Steve on his wedding day as he came stealing up to ask about the long-distance telephone call, aglow with happiness and dreams. For her own reasons, therefore, Mary did not regret the destruction of the side stairs.

"They've shoved this cabinet over as if they had a special antagonism to it," he was saying, righting a small piece of furniture containing mostly Mary's papers.

“There—not hurt, is it? Do the drawers open?” He began pulling them out, one after another. The last refused to open.

“What’s in this one—it blocks the spring?”

Mary tried her hand at it. “Something wedged right at the edge. I’m sure I don’t see what it can be. I never used that drawer for anything but——”

At their combined jerk the drawer came flying into space, and with it the remains of a white cardboard box with the monograms of B. C. and S. O. entwined by means of a cupid and a tiny wreath of flowers. Dried cake crumbs lay in the bottom of the drawer. It was the Gorgeous Girl’s box of wedding cake which Mary Faithful had found on her desk.

Neither spoke immediately. Finally Mary said: “I suppose that’s as bad an omen as to break a mirror under a ladder on Friday the thirteenth. Now shall I have the men sweep the office out? There is no reason we cannot get to work to-morrow.”

“Wait a moment about sweeping out offices and going to work,” Steve insisted. “If you want to break the hoodoo you have just brought on yourself by smashing up wedding cake—let me talk and act as high priest.”

She shook her head. “You promised, and you’ve been true-blue—don’t spoil it. Besides, it can do no good.”

“I want to ask a question,” he insisted. “I’m not going to break faith with you or take advantage of knowing what you told me. I shall always try to appreciate the honour done me, no matter if I am unworthy. I want to ask a question in as impersonal a way as if I wrote in to a woman’s column.” He tried to laugh.

“Ask away.” Mary sat down in the nearest chair, the broken cardboard box at her feet.

“Why is it that a man can honestly be in love with the woman he marries and yet in an amazingly short time find himself playing the cad in feeling disappointed, discontented, utterly lacking affection? It’s a ghastly happening. Why is it he saw no handwriting on the wall? I am not stupid, Mary, neither am I given to inconstancy—I’ve had to struggle too much not to have my mind made up once and for all time. Why didn’t I see through this veneer of a good time that these Gorgeous Girls manage to have painted over their real selves? Why did I never suspect? And what is a man to do when he discovers the disillusionment? You see it all, there’s no sense in not admitting it—why do I find myself ill at ease, now tense, now irritable over trifles, now sulky, despondent—as plainly sulky and despondent as a wild animal successfully caged and labelled, which must

perforce stay put yet which will not afford its spectators the satisfaction of walking wistfully from cage corner to cage corner and yowling in unanswered anguish!”

“Is it as bad as that?” she asked, softly.

He nodded as he continued: “I sometimes feel the way the monkish fraternity did at Oxford when they claimed ‘they banished God and admitted women.’ I want a man-made world, womanless, without a single trace of romance or a good time. Not right, is it? Sometimes I think I’ll crack under the pretense, go raving mad and scream out the whole miserable sham under which I live—and every time I indulge myself in such a reverie I find myself writing Beatrice an extra check and going with her to this thing or that, steel-hammer pulses beating at my forehead and a languor about even the attempt at breathing.”

Mary would have spoken but he rushed ahead: “I like this fire, this debris. Most people would curse at it—it’s real and rather common, sort of plain boiled-dinner variety. It gives me an excuse to take time off from the eternal frolic. I’m glad when there’s a strike or a row and I dig out of town to stay in a commercial hotel. I have to get away from the whole tinsel show. And yet it was what I wanted, was willing to play modern Faust to any Wall Street Mephistopheles——”

“And you are sure it wasn’t a Mephistopheles?”

“Of course not—for that much I can draw a deep breath and give thanks—it was my own luck.”

“Other times, other titles,” she murmured.

“One time you told me what you thought of the future of American women, the all-round good fellows of the world—do you remember? I wish you had not told me. It’s just another thing to irritate. I’m driven mad by trifles—I’m starved for a big tragedy; that’s the way this craving for a fortune and a good time is playing boomerang. I’m so infernally weary of hearing about the cut-glass slipper heels of some chorus girl and so hungry to hear about a shipwreck, a new creed, a daring crime that——”

“You foolish, funny boy,” she said, taking pity on his involved analysis, “don’t you see what you have done? It’s quite the common fate of get-rich-quick dreamers; you merely symbolized your goal by Beatrice Constantine, she stood for the combined relationships of wife, comrade, lady luxury—and you captured your goal, and the greater effort ceased. You have had time to examine your

prize in microscopic fashion. It isn't at all what you intended—but it is quite what you deserve. No one can make a lie serve for the truth—at all times and for an indefinite period. There is bound to come a cropper somewhere—usually where you least expect it. And you lied to yourself in the beginning, a passive sort of falsehood, in merely refusing to see the truth and groping for the unreal. You had to justify your race for wealth, so you said, 'Oho, I'll love a story-book princess and let that be my incentive. Story-book princesses are expensive lovelies and you have to have money bags to jingle before their fair selves!' So you became more and more infatuated with the fairy-book princess who happened to be in your pathway—and it was Beatrice. She made you feel that anything your slightly mad and quite unrealizing young self might do was proper. Just as the boy with a new air rifle deliberately sets up a target to shoot away at because the savage in him must justify hitting something besides the ozone, so you have merely wooed and won your own falsehood and disillusionment."

"You say it rather neatly; but that isn't all. The thing is that I'm not game enough to go on and take the punishment. Are you surprised?"

"No. But are you prepared to give up the thing which won her?"

"My money? I've thought of it." He folded his arms and began walking up and down the littered, water-soaked office. "Would you like me any better?" he asked, tenderly.

Mary's eyes grew stormy. "If the men go to work at once we can have the rugs sent to the cleaner's and put down old matting for a temporary covering—and I can go ahead taking inventory," was her answer.

"I see," Steve made himself respond. "Well—I didn't trespass very much," he whispered as he passed her to leave the building.

Beatrice regarded the fire as an amusing happening and before Steve realized what was being done she had proposed that Gaylord refurnish the office in an arts-and-crafts fashion. It had long seemed to her a most inartistic and clumsy place and when Steve refused her offer and told her that a splint-bottomed chair and a kitchen chair were his office equipment some years ago she sent for Gaylord on her own initiative and told him to beard the lion in the den to see if he could win Steve to the cause of painted wall panels typifying commerce, industry, and such, and crippled beer steins and so on as artistic wastebaskets.

There had never been an active feud between Gaylord and Steve; it was always

that hidden enmity of a weak culprit toward a strong man. Neither had Trudy been able to win Steve by her Titian curls, baby-blue eyes, and obese compliments. In fact, Gaylord had avoided Steve the last year. He was the one Beatrice called upon to play with her, he accompanied her shopping, even unto the milliner's, and had been in New York one time when Beatrice had gone down to see about buying a moleskin wrap. Not even Trudy knew that he had actually adopted a monocle and squired Beatrice round in state.

So he approached Steve with the attitude of "I hate you and am only waiting to prove it but meanwhile I'll play off the friend lizard no matter how painful."

But after a few "my dear fellows" and "old dears" and gibes about the disordered office with its prosaic chairs and Mary Faithful, quite flushed and plain looking as she dashed round giving orders, Gaylord found himself being neatly set outside on the curbstone and told to remain in that exact position.

"I hate this decorating business," Steve said in final condemnation. "I agree with my father-in-law that when a man approaches me with a book of sample braids and cretonnes under his arm I feel it only righteous that he be shot at sunrise—and now you know how strong you stand with me. I don't mind Beatrice having her whirl at the thing. A new colour scheme as often as she has a manicure; that's different. But my office stays as I wish it and you can't rush in any globes of goldfish and inkstands composed of reclining young females with their little hands forming the ink cup, while a single spray of cherry blossoms flourishes over the hook I hang my hat and coat upon. Oh, no, trot back to your boudoirs and purr your prettiest, but stop trying to tackle real men."

Gaylord's one-cylinder brain had become more efficient by dint of daily sparring with his wife. So he retorted: "She is going to make you a present of it—your birthday gift, I understand. Does that alter the case?"

Steve looked at him with an even wilder frown. "Tell her to build a bomb-proof pergola for herself and mark it for me just the same. When we redecorate round here it takes Miss Faithful about a half hour to plan the show. Good-bye, Gay, I'm awfully rushed. Thanks just as much."

Gaylord sauntered outside, smiling, apparently as if he accepted the entire universe. But his one-cylinder brain harboured an unpleasant secret which concerned Steve. Gaylord knew that Steve had not reckoned with his enemies and that he was in no condition to begin doing so now. Constantine was no longer at the helm, fearless, respected, and dominating. Steve was quite the reckless egotist, out of love with his wife, mentally jaded, and weary of the

game—and his enemies surmised all this in rough fashion and were making their plans accordingly. How wonderful it would be if certain catastrophes did happen. How lucky Beatrice had her own income! She would never cease ordering bomb-proof pergolas or bird cages carved from rare woods.

The next day—before Beatrice and Steve had a chance to argue the matter out to a fine point—Mark Constantine had a stroke. It was like the sudden crashing down of a great oak tree which within had been hollow and decayed for some time but to all exterior appearances quite the sturdy monarch. Without warning he became first a mighty thing lying day after day on a bed, fussed over and exclaimed over and prayed over by a multitude of people. Then he assumed the new and final proportions of a childish invalid—his fierce, true grasp of things, his wide-sweeping and ambitious viewpoint narrowed hastily to the four walls of the sick room. Instead of the stock-market fluctuation bringing forth his "Gad, that's good!" or oaths of disapproval, the taste of an especially good custard or the way the masseuse neglected his left forearm were cause for joy or grief.

Life had suddenly changed into the monotonous and wearing routine of a broken, lonesome old man who had plenty of time to think of the past with his wife Hannah, recalling incidents he had not recalled until this dull, long day arrived. And after reaching many conclusions about many things Constantine was forced to realize that no one particularly cared for or sought out his opinions. He was placed in the category of all fallen oaks—someone who would have one of the largest funerals ever held in the city. And friends murmured that for Bea's sake they hoped it would not be long.

But it was to be long—for with the tenacity of purpose he had always exhibited Constantine readjusted himself to the narrow realm of four walls. His former tyranny toward the business world was now exercised toward his daughter and son-in-law, his sister and his attendants. He resolved to live—or exist—just as long as life was possible, to vampire-borrow from those about him all the vitality that he could, to have every care and comfort and every new doctor ever heard of called in to attend him; he now said he wished to live as many years as God willed. There was a God, now that he was partially paralyzed, a very real God, to whom he prayed in orthodox fashion. He wanted to keep remembering the past with Hannah, to shed the tears for her death which he had never taken the time to shed, to decide what it was that had been so wrong in his life in order that his death and hereafter might be very properly right.

Aunt Belle had taken this new affliction after the fashion of a Mrs. Gummidge. It affected her worse than any one else, first because the ridicule and fault-finding

to which her brother had always treated her were tripled in their amount and quality, and yet as she was dependent upon this childishly weak brother she must endure the treatment. Secondly, she was reminded that her age was somewhat near Mark Constantine's age and perhaps a similar fate lay in store for her. Lastly, it tied her down—propriety demanded that someone be in the sick room a share of the time and certainly Beatrice had no intention of undertaking the responsibility.

Steve had acted as Aunt Belle fancied he would act, genuinely concerned over the catastrophe and seeking refuge with this tired old child a greater share of the time. By degrees Aunt Belle left Steve to play the role of comforter and companion, since no nurse ever stayed at the Constantine bedside for longer than a fortnight. So she was allowed to gambol about in her pinafore frocks and high-heeled shoes, wondering if her brother had made a fair will, taking into account the fact that a woman is only as old as she looks—and with a tidy fortune who knows what might happen after the proper mourning period?

Beatrice had been prostrated at the news. For two days she stayed in bed and sobbed hysterically. Then she was prevailed upon to see her father and to take the sensible attitude of preparing for a long siege, as Steve suggested.

"How cold-hearted it sounds—a long siege!" she reproached.

"But it is true. He will not die—he will live until that splendid vitality of his has been snuffed out by a careless law of rhythm, so you may as well buck up and run in to see him every day and then go about as usual."

"A sick room drives me wild. I wish I had taken a course in practical nursing instead of the domestic-science things."

Steve did not answer.

"I can't bear to think of it. It's like having life-in-death in the very house. Oh, Steve, can't you talk him into going to a sanitarium? They'd have so many interesting kinds of baths to try!"

"He won't mind your parties, if that is what is bothering you. The only thing he asks is to be left in peace in his room with plenty of detective stories and plenty of medical attention, and he won't know if you dance the roof off. But if you really want to hasten the end send Gay up there with plans for remodelling his room—it will either kill or cure," he laughed.

"I must do something to help me forget and make it easier for him," she said, soberly. "I'm going to try a faith healer—not because I believe in them but

because I don’t want to leave any stone unturned. I think a new interest would help papa. Would you try adopting a child or my taking up classical dancing in deadly earnest?” She was quite sincere and emotionally wrought up as she came up to him and laid her head on his shoulder.

“Oh, I’d take up classical dancing,” he advised.

She gave a sigh of relief. “Yes, it’s what I really think would be the best. I will dance on the lawn so papa can watch me.”

He gave vent to his father-in-law’s favourite expletive, “Gad!” under his breath.

He did not add what was an unpleasant probability: that, having to assume full responsibility of affairs, there were likely to be astonishing complications. Crashed-down oak trees are quite helpless concerning their enemies, reckoned upon or otherwise, and Steve, who had never taken count of his foes, would be called upon to meet them all single-handed.

CHAPTER XVII

In a jewellery store Trudy Vondeplosshe, wrapped in wine-coloured velours, was coquetting with diamond rings under glass and trying to affect an air of indifference concerning them. With all her husband's rise in the world he did not see fit to bestow upon his wife any substantial token of his regard. The vague and transitory idea he once entertained of playing off fairy godfather to her and placing a fortune at her feet had become past history. Now that Gay did run a motor and wear monogrammed silk shirts he saw to it that Trudy had as little as the law allowed. She still continued remaking her dresses and haunting remnant counters, sewing on Gay's work, playing off the same overstrained, underfed Trudy as in the first days at the Graystone apartment. But as it was for a good time she never thought of faltering.

She had decided, however, that it was time now to adopt other and more forceful methods of obtaining the things she craved and felt she had earned. Foremost, as with many women, was a diamond ring. After obtaining this she would turn in her wedding ring for old gold, the price to apply on a platinum circlet studded with brilliants. For months Trudy's eyes had glittered greedily as she observed Gay's clientele with their jewelled bags, rings, brooches, watches, and what not—yet she possessed not a single gem.

She had often enough asked Gay for one, to which he would sneer: "What do you want with a diamond? You know I'm always on the ragged edge of failing!"

"Because you gamble and drink and are a born fool," she protested. "You could make real money if you would listen to me and keep quiet."

"I can't see what that has to do with your wanting a diamond ring! If I ever make real money you can have one but not when auto tires are as high as they are——"

"And when husbands grow tipsy and drive into ditches and have to be brought home by horses and wagons. Oh, no. But you'll go shopping with Beatrice and pick out her jewellery and tell her jewels have souls and a lot more bunk, and then get a commission as soon as her back is turned! Why don't you get me a diamond instead, and omit the bunk? I'll take one with a flaw—I'm used to seconds. You must believe me when I say that, because I married you."

Gay no longer feared Trudy; in fact, he felt he had little use for her. She was an obstacle to his making an excellent marriage. Through Trudy and all the rest of the complicated ladder climbing he was now recognized, and real men were extremely busy these days getting the tag ends of war-debris business in shape. It was quite a different situation—he could have had his choice of several widows. Take it all in all, he preferred a matron, his days at playing with debutantes were in the discard. The business of buying and selling antiques and interior decorating had so inflated his one-cylinder brain that he really fancied he needed a mature companionship and understanding.

“I’ll buy you a diamond ring, old dear,” he said, lightly, “when you have me in a corner, hands up—so set your wits to work and see what you can do about it.”

It was over their hurried breakfast that the discussion took place, with Trudy, quite a fright in a tousled boudoir cap and négligé, scuttling about the dining room with the breakfast tray and planning to send out bills, reorder some draperies, and call up her friends until one of them should offer to take her to a fashionable morning musical in the near future. After which she would go down town and make good at her star act—window wishing.

“You make me so tired I wonder why I don’t clear out,” she retorted. “You think I’m afraid to buy a diamond ring and charge it to you? Watch me!”

“Just try it and see what will happen.”

“I will, kind sir.” Dropping him a curtsy, Trudy repaired to do the dishes and swiggle an oil mop about the floor briefly. Then she burnt some scented powder and pulled down the window shades. This constituted getting the establishment in order, the slavey having gone tootling off on a party some days before.

Trudy did not refer to the breakfast-table discussion before she left the apartment. She was dangerously sweet, and even went into Gay’s room, where he was donning his gray-velvet studio blouse for the morning’s labours. She told him she was quite sure of securing a fairly good-sized order for some window shades. Gay did not think it necessary to answer. He did not glance at her; instead he yawned and sprinkled toilet water profusely on his pink lawn handkerchief.

After a moment’s hesitation she went her own way. When she had lingered about the jewellery counter like a wilful yet not quite wicked child—peering down at the wonderful, enchanting things which mocked her empty purse; recalling Gay’s first flush of romance and devotion; her own clever, untiring methods of pushing him into the front ranks; Mary and Mary’s little secret, so unsafe in Trudy’s keeping; Beatrice, who did not know quite how many rings she possessed; the whole maddening and really uninteresting tangle—she wondered if she could force Gay to buy her a ring. Should she boldly order such-and-such a stone and pick out a setting and present him with the bill? Why she hesitated she did not know; she was like all her wilful sisters who gaze and sigh, pity themselves, and then steal away to Oriental shops to appease the hunger by a near-silver ring with a bulging near-precious stone set in Hoboken style.

This Trudy did not do. For some reason or other she let her errands go by and

took a car to Mary's office, stopping at the corner to buy her a flower. Instinctively one connected Mary and flowers as one associated Beatrice and jewellery.

She found Mary had gone into the old office building to see about something and that Steve, who was always as restless as a polar bear when forced into a tête-à-tête with Trudy, was alone in his office. He was obliged to ask her to sit down and wait for Mary. Trudy peered curiously about the rooms. She had never lost that rare sense of triumph—returning as a fine lady to the very place where she had once worked for fifteen per. Smiling graciously at former associates she imagined that she created as much excitement as Beatrice's visits themselves.

"It seems so good to come back here," she began without mercy.

Steve had to lay aside his work and wonder why Miss Lunk ever let this creature into his private domain. He would see that it did not happen twice.

"Ah—I suppose," he knew he answered.

"You are such a busy man; you don't know how I admire you." Trudy tried fresh tactics.

"Um—have you seen the morning papers?"

"Thank you but Gay read them to me at breakfast.... You never come to our little home, do you? Too busy, I presume. Or are you one of those who can forgive everyone but the interior decorator?" This with an arch expression and a slight twinkle of the blue eyes—it could not quite be called a wink.

"I'm afraid so, Mrs. Vondeplosshe. I leave such things to Beatrice."

"Oh, I understand." Trudy took her cue quickly. "It is out of your province. You can't do big, gigantic things if you bother with doll-house notions. Now I really prefer—oh, far prefer—men like yourself, who——"

Steve started the electric fan whirring.

"Don't you ever long for camping trips or long horseback rides—something away from the everlasting fuss and feathers? I do. Would you believe it?" she fibbed glibly.

Had Steve been seventy-five he might have believed her. But he merely nodded and said that if there was a draft from the fan she could sit outside.

Piqued, Trudy turned to Mary Faithful.

"Mary is a wonderful girl, isn't she? Of course you have a Gorgeous Girl, too—

but she is for playtime. I should think it would mean a great deal to have Mary for your chief confidante—she is so good, and yet human and——”

Steve stood up abruptly and wondered why no kind friend saw fit to enter at this moment. He would have really welcomed Trudy’s husband. He looked at Trudy briefly, it did not take Steve long these days to look at Gorgeous Girls and Gorgeous Girl seconds and realize the whole story of their purpose and struggle—things, to have more gayly coloured or delicate coloured, gold, silver, velvet, carved, perfumed or whatever-the-mode-dictated things, flaunting these priceless sticks and stones in each other’s faces with pretended friendship.

He did not answer this last lead at conversation, but, not discouraged, Trudy went on down the list of her resources.

“How is dear old Mr. Constantine?”

“The same.” Steve thanked fortune his father-in-law was paralyzed and could furnish a neutral topic of debate.

“Poor dear. So hard for Bea, too. She says she will not do much this season. She feels if—if it should not be much longer, you understand”—a lowered tone of voice and a sigh—“that she wants to have nothing on her conscience. Still, a sick room is wearing, but of course love makes any task easy.”

Steve suppressed a smile. It was surprising how well this funny little person managed to ape the jargon and chatter of Bea’s set as well as their mode of appearance. She did it mightily well, everything considered, and when she proceeded to offer to go and sit with the old dear or bring her game board and play with him Steve released a broad grin as he pictured Constantine in his helpless captive state welcoming Trudy as an entertainer about as much as he would have begged for a tête-à-tête with a lady major bent on conquest.

“She would even marry him if she could dispose of Gay,” he thought, and rightly, as he watched her.

As she was telling him of the head-dress party she intended to give for Gay’s birthday and how he must come because she wanted him to wear a pirate turban, in came Mary, much flurried over a mistake made in a shipment, and her nose guilty of a slight but unmistakable shine.

“Oh, Trudy! Run home—your house is on fire! Your cretonnes will burn!” she said, half in earnest. “My dear child, I’m mighty busy. It is so stupid of Parker!” She turned to Steve. “He made the original error and I have to keep cross-examining everyone else to prove to him that I know he is at fault and that he

must ’fess up. But he won’t—people never want to say: ‘Yes, it is my fault and I’m sorry,’ do they?”

“Sort of habit since the Garden of Eden, I guess—you can’t expect it to change now.” Steve had lost his listless air. All unconsciously he had the same animated, interested attitude that he had had during the days of being engaged to the Gorgeous Girl. Trudy saw at a glance that Mary had not only realized her starved hopes but that she was quite ignorant of the fact that she had done so. To Trudy’s mind it was a most stupid situation; also an inexcusable one. Here was Mary, the good-looking thing who deserved a love such as Steve O’Valley’s yet never dared to hope he would ever think of her twice except if she asked for a raise in salary. This Trudy knew, also. And since it is inevitable that a cave man cannot exist on truffles, chiffon frocks that must not be rumpled, and an interior decorator with a ukulele at his beck and call, Steve had been forced into realizing Mary’s worth and loving her for it, giving to her the mature and steady love of a strong man who, like Parker, had made a mistake and not yet ’fessed up. Why Mary did not realize that happiness was within her reach, and why Steve did not realize that Mary adored him, and why they were not in the throes of talking over her lawyer and my lawyer and alimony but we love each other and let the whole world go hang—was not within Trudy’s jurisdiction to determine. She only knew what she would have done and be doing were she Mary—and Steve O’Valley loved her.

She felt the situation was as unforgivable and stupid as to have Gay offer her a two-carat diamond ring and to have her say: “No, Bubseley; sell it and let us use the money to start a fund for heating the huts of aged and infirm Eskimos. The Salvation Army has never dropped up that way.”

The great miracle had happened. And, envying Mary a trifle and pitying Steve for not having won his cause, Trudy justified a hidden resolve of long ago: To use Mary’s secret in case Beatrice became overbearing or impossible. It was mighty fine plunder, upon which she flattered herself she had a single-handed option.

So she released Steve from the agony of conversation, and watching the tender, happy look as he talked to Mary over some other detail of the cropper, she went inside to Mary’s office to powder her own little nose and realize that she was no nearer to obtaining a diamond ring than when she first began to crave for one.

“I’m going to bundle you off,” Mary informed her. “I really must—or was it anything special?”

It was all Trudy could do not to offer to play the confidential bosom friend and urge Mary to show Beatrice where she stood. But somehow the brisk business atmosphere, which was very real and brusque, prevented her from saying anything except that she had wanted to talk to her. She was lonesome—she was going to come some evening and have a good, old-time visit.

“Of course—just let me know when.”

“Oh”—archly—“are you busy on certain evenings?”

“Sometimes. French lessons; theatre; general odd jobs.”

“No particular caller?”

“No,” Mary laughed.

“I thought perhaps—you know, one time I came in and——”

“You came one time and found Mr. O’Valley,” Mary hastened to add. “Yes, I remember, but that was an unusual occurrence. He came in on business and when he discovered I did not object to a pipe—he stayed.”

Trudy was disappointed. “Did Beatrice ever know?”

“Don’t know myself.” Mary was determined to win out. “I can’t see why she should—it would not interest her. She never listens to things that do not interest her.... You won’t know Luke. He grows like a weed.”

Trudy found herself dismissed. She did not know just how it had come about but Mary was smiling her into the elevator and Trudy was sinking to the ground floor feeling that though it was none of her business unless she got a diamond ring she was just going to make other people unhappy, too.

Why this conclusion was reached was not at all clear to Trudy any more than to the rest of the world. But after all, it is only fair to leave something for the psychologists to debate about. At all events, it was the definite conclusion at which she arrived.

She could not resist paying a fleeting return visit to the largest of the jewellery stores. After which she told herself that it was little short of going without shoes or stockings through the streets to have been married the length of time she had been married and to possess not a single diamond.

Returning home for a canned luncheon she discovered Gaylord humming a love song and strumming on his ukulele.

“I say, old dear,” he began, “I have had the greatest luck! I call it nothing short of

a fairy tale.” He pointed at his neckscarf. Coming near, Trudy bent over and gave way to a shrill scream. A handsome diamond pin reposed in the old-rose silk.

“Where—where did you get it?” she managed to articulate.

“Beatrice really—the result of the raffle for the children’s charity. You remember we took tickets? She donated this scarfpin, and this morning Jill Briggs came in and presented the trophy. My number was the winning one: 56.”

“She made you win it. You know she did, you toadying little abomination! You fairly lick her boots—and she has to tip you occasionally. And you sit there wearing that pin and never offering to have it set in a pin for me. You dare to keep it—you dare?” She lost her self-control.

Gay sprang up in alarm, the ukulele being the only weapon handy, holding her off at arm’s length. “How low!” he chattered. “How d-disgustingly low—–”

“Is it? I’ll show you—I’ll show you whether or not you can wear diamond stickpins while I have to endure a wedding ring like a washwoman’s!”

Before Gay knew what was happening Trudy had left the house. A half hour later a suave clerk’s voice from the jewellery store was asking him to step down at once, his wife had requested it, she had decided on a ring for herself but wished his seal of approval—so did the store—and a small deposit—would he be able to be with them shortly?

He would, struggling with a man-size rage. After all, the little five-eighths-carat stone he had so proudly adorned his bosom with would be dearly paid for in the end. That was what came of marrying beneath him, he reproached himself as he locked up the apartment and went down to the store. To make a scene in a fifty-cent café was not worth the effort, Trudy had once proclaimed, but to run the gauntlet of real rough-house emotion in a jewellery store frequented by his clientele would be social suicide. The only thing was to make Beatrice pay a larger commission on the things for her new tea house so that he could pay for this red-haired vixen’s ring. But this would not in the least dim the red-haired vixen’s triumph, which was the issue at stake. From that moment he began really to hate Trudy.

To her amazement he greeted her in honeyed tones, approved the ring, and suggested that the wedding ring be turned in for old gold and replaced by a modern creation and so on, produced a deposit, and walked out with Trudy, who wore the new symbol of triumph on her finger, proposing that they lunch downtown. He was determined to carry it through without a moment’s faltering.

Even Trudy was nonplussed. Once the treasure was secure in her possession she told herself it had been so easy that she was a fool not to have tried it before—she even complimented Gay on his scarfpin. But she began hating him also. No one would have suspected it, to watch these diamond-adorned young people guzzling crab-meat cocktails and planning fiercer raids on Beatrice O'Valley's pocketbook.

Moreover, Trudy did not change in her decision to make someone unhappy. She found that possessing a diamond ring did not remove her discontent—and a shamed feeling stole over her, causing her to wonder how loudly she had screamed at Gay and how she must have looked when she started to strike him in her blind rage; how horrible it was to go off on tangents just because you wanted rings on your fingers and bells on your toes when all the time the world did contain such persons as Mary Faithful, who did not choose to claim a paradise which longed to be claimed.

Trudy was unable to keep her fingers out of the pie. She found herself naturally gravitating over to see Beatrice. Ostensibly she wanted to display her new ring and talk about Gay's luck and the daring gypsy embroideries he had just received from New York but really to tell her Steve O'Valley, supposedly enslaved cave man, loved another and a plainer woman than her own gorgeous self.

She found Beatrice in a négligé of delicately embroidered chiffon with luxurious black-satin flowers as a corsage. She had seldom seen her look as lovely; even the too-abundant curves of flesh were concealed behind the lace draperies. She seemed this day of days to fit into the background of the villa, as if some old master had let his most adored brain child come tripping from a tarnished frame—a little lady in old lace, as it were.

Beatrice had taken up a new activity since her father's stroke. At first the stroke had frightened, then bored, then amused her. She really liked having what she termed a "comfortable calamity" in the family. It was something so new to plan for and talk about, such a valid excuse if she did not wish to accept invitations, and an excellent reason for runaway trips to Atlantic City or New York "to get away from it all for a little—poor, dear papa."

So she sat with her father rather more than one would have expected, made him listen to opera records which drove him to distraction, talked to him of nothing, and tried to be a little sister to the afflicted in a pink-satin and cream-lace setting.

She had lost her interest in Trudy—Trudy no longer amused or frightened her.

And Gay had become so useful and attentive that had the truth about the raffle been known it would be the astonishing information that as Beatrice donated the tie pin she decided she should pick the future owner—and Gay was the logical candidate to her way of thinking.

Also she was quite contented with Steve. He let her alone and he adored her—she never doubted that. He wanted her to have everything she wished—and that was the biggest, finest way to show one's love for another. It was the only way that she had ever known existed. Of course all brides have silly notions of perpetual adoration, that sort of thing, and Steve was a cave man first and last, bless his old heart, but they had passed any mid-channel which might exist and were happy for all time to come. They seldom quarrelled, and she no longer tried to make Steve over to her liking in small ways, and he seldom offered her suggestions. Moreover, he was so good to her father—and of course everything was as it should be. It was simply the rather drab fashion in which most lives are lived, and Beatrice was quite contented. She had never gotten another toy dog, not even as a contrast to Tawny Adonis. Really, Gay answered a multitude of needs!

But Trudy was a real person—and a constant reminder of what Beatrice herself might have been, and therefore Beatrice never ceased to envy her or to picture how much better she could do were she in Trudy's place. She preferred not having her about. Besides, Trudy was impossible in Italian villas—she belonged in a near-mahogany atmosphere with cerise-silk drapes and gaudy vases. Age-old elegancies did not harmonize with her vivid self.

So she was not overly cordial in greeting Trudy. But Trudy with an eye to mischief managed to draw her little lady-in-old-lace hostess into a heart-to-heart talk. And before the afternoon ended Beatrice had experienced the first real shock of her life. Her husband smoked a pipe in Mary Faithful's living room and never told her; and Mary Faithful admitted she loved someone very much and was with him each day in business and so on; and Trudy had seen the smile pass between them which signifies the perfect understanding! And oh, she did not know a tenth of it, deary; not a tenth of it! It was one of those subtle, hidden things, nothing tangible or dreadful—like a purgatorial state of mind which may result in brimstone or lovely angels with harps. Neither could she do anything about it since they were both perfect dears and always would be. Not for worlds, in Trudy's estimation, would they ever take it upon themselves to prove the brittleness of vows.

After which Beatrice thanked Trudy, wishing her a speedy death by way of

gratitude, going to her room to decide what her attitude should be.

To accuse Steve was crude; besides, she must be positive that it was true. To get up an affair herself would be no heart balm since she had never ceased having affairs—well-bred episodes, rather, perfectly harmless when all is said and done, quite like Steve's, for that matter! She could not find a new interest in life until she had reduced at least twenty pounds, since her dieting and exercises required all surplus will power and thought. She would go away only her plans were made for months ahead. She could not tell her father—the shock might kill him.... There was really nothing left to do but suffer—be wretched and wonder if it was true. A horrid state of uncertainty—to ask herself how it could ever have happened and what would be the end, and terrible things—just terrible things! No matter how large a check she might write to buy herself a new toy it would have no bearing whatsoever upon the matter. She wished to heaven Trudy had confined her gossip to the funny little manicure with champagne eyes who flirted with someone else's husband! This was her reward for having taken up with a shopgirl person!

The final conclusion she reached was that she did not believe a word Trudy had told her.

CHAPTER XVIII

Beatrice took occasion to go to see Mary within the next few days. In a particularly fetching costume of green satin with fly-away sleeves steadied by silver tassels and a black hat aglow with iridescent plumes she surprised Mary at an hour when Steve would be absent. On this occasion Beatrice dressed to dazzle and intimidate one of her own sex. But the result was unsatisfactory. She found Mary quite passable in cloud-blue organdie, a contented look in her gray eyes.

Her own satin costume and plumed bonnet seemed a trifle theatrical. She wished she had worn her trimmest tailored effect to impress upon this tall young woman that no one else could wear tailor things so well as Mrs. Beatrice O'Valley if she chose to do so.

"What can I do for Mrs. O'Valley?" Mary said, almost patronizingly, Beatrice fancied.

"I came in to say hello. I've neglected you lately. But you have been so horrid about not coming to see my gardens that you deserve to be neglected." Her dove-coloured eyes watched Mary closely. "Besides, I want to get something for Mr. O'Valley's desk—as a surprise. You must help me because, as I have realized, you know so much more about him than I do.... There, am I not generous?"

"Very." Mary surmised that something of greater importance lay behind the call than showing off the satin costume or selecting a surprise for Steve.

"What do you suggest? I'm such a frivolous person my husband never tells me his affairs or wishes. The rugs might be in rags and he would never ask me to replenish. I understand now so much more clearly than ever before why business men and women are prone to fall in love with each other; they see each other so constantly under tests of each one's abilities. They have to ask each other favours and grant them. Sometimes it is a loan of a pencil sharpener, more often it must be the aid of the other fellow's brain to help solve a problem. And they are so shut away from my world. I'm just the pretty mischief-maker who squanders the dollars, and by and by, when self-pity sets in, they find there is a mutual bond of admiration and sympathy. Quite a step toward love, isn't it? As I

came in here to-day I could not help thinking of how beautifully you keep business house for my husband. Why, Mary Faithful, aren't you afraid I am going to be jealous?" She was laughing, but the intention was to have the laugh blow away and the sting of the truth remain.

Mary knew this—and Beatrice knew that she did. So trying to make herself as formidable as a bunch of nettles Mary took heed to answer:

"I'm afraid you have been reading novels—the ones where the business woman grows paler and more interesting looking each day and somehow happens to be wearing a tempting little chiffon frock when the firm fails and the young and handsome junior partner takes refuge in her office and proceeds to brandish a gun and say farewell to the world. You see, you don't come down to play with us enough to know what prosaic rows there are over pencil sharpeners or who has spirited away the drinking cup or why the window must be six inches from the top because So-and-so has muscular rheumatism. I don't think you are fair, Mrs. O'Valley, and I'm going to risk being quite unpopular by telling you that you have no right to say such things even in jest."

Mary's eyes were very honest and her face seemed even firmer of chin as she leaned her elbows on her desk, looking up at this pretty figurine in satin and plumes.

"Do you fancy it is any fun to go to work at thirteen or fourteen? To rush through breakfast to stand in a crowded car, to have to make your heart very small as the Chinese say, in order to appreciate the pennies and keep them until they become dollars—when all of you longs to play Lady Bountiful? To rub elbows with untruthful mischief-makers, coarse-mouthed foremen, impossible young fools who wish to flirt with you and whom you do not dare to rebuke too sharply; to take your hurried noon hour with little food and less fresh air and come back to the daily grind; to walk home or hang on to the tag end of a street-car strap and finally get to your room or your home so tired in body and mind that you wish you had no soul, protesting faintly against girls and women having to be in business?

"No, I don't think you do realize. Or to run errands icy-cold days, down slushy streets or slippery hills? To carry great bundles of such daintiness as you are wearing and leave them at the doors of big houses such as your own, numbed, hungry, envious—and not understanding the wherefore of it? To catch glimpses of warm halls, the sound of a piano playing in a flower-scented salon, to see girls your own age in dainty silk dresses sitting in the window and looking at you

curiously as you go down the steps? Oh, I could tell you a great deal more, Mrs. O'Valley."

"Well?"

"Eventually some of us survive and some do not—which is another story! Those of us who do, who endure such days that we may go to night school, and who wear mended gloves and queer hats, forgoing the cheap joys of our associates—we do forge ahead and grow grimmer of heart and graver of soul. We realize that we are earning everything we are getting—perhaps more—only we cannot get the recognition we deserve. We are quite different from what you stay-at-home women fancy. Tempting chiffon frocks and love affairs de luxe with handsome junior partners are farthest from our thoughts. We plan for lonely old age—a home and an annuity, a trip to Europe or some other Carcassonne of our thwarted selves. We revel in things as you women do—but we revel in them because people are shut away from us. You women shut away people that you may revel in things.

"All this time the handsome junior partners and so on for whom we keep business house and through propinquity are supposed to love—they have fallen in love with sheltered girls such as your own self, and everything is quite as it ought to be. Now do you really think the capable business women of to-day are letting their abilities be spent in useless rebellion against their fate and loving the members of the firm in Victorian fashion or doing their work intelligently and earning their wage? I hardly think there is room for an argument. You must understand that the years of errand girl, night school, underpaid clerk have taken out of us a certain capacity for enjoyment which you women have had emphasized. But thank God it has also taken from us a capacity for hysterical suffering, for going on the rocks when we see some joy we crave yet know can never be ours!"

"Oh!" Beatrice murmured, wishing Steve would come in or else Mary be called to the telephone. "Oh——"

"But I do think there is a certain justice developed among modern business women which home women do not comprehend as a rule. Oh, not that I underestimate the home women or the sheltered women. There is a distinction between the two—but I say that the business woman who earns a man's wage and does his work has a certain squareness, for want of a better term, which makes her say, 'If I earn something it is mine and I shall not hesitate thus to label it. Look out—any one who tries to take it from me!' Do you see?"

Mary paused, annoyed at what she had been prevailed upon to say, and wondering if by good fortune her opinions had been delivered to empty ears.

“So you think you would fight for something to which you felt entitled?”

“Perhaps.” The gray eyes had a warrior’s strength in them. “Fight, win it, and then spend no time in sentimental regrets. We learn one thing that all women should learn in this great age of selection: That you must earn the things you win, and that if you do so you will most likely keep them.”

“And if you felt that you had earned something—and another woman had not—you would play off the conqueror and take the spoils?”

“If I felt it the right thing to do.”

Feeling as confused as a bank cashier when caught studying a railroad map Mary hastened to suggest a picture of Beatrice handsomely framed as a surprise for Steve. She was sure he would like nothing any better.

Beatrice felt chirked up upon hearing this. She told herself that Trudy was an inveterate gossip and this queer young person must be thinking aloud about revolutions in Russia or something like that; anything else was too absurd. So she repeated her invitation to come to see the gardens with their jewel-like pools and riotous masses of colour, and went on her way to select a most gorgeous frame for a most gorgeous portrait of herself.

Steve expressed his thanks for the surprise picture quite properly, and after giving it a few days of prominence on his desk he relegated it to a shelf beside a weather-beaten map of the Great Lakes which had always been in the office.

And here another phase of the Gorgeous Girl’s effort to do something and exercise her faculties occurred. Though she regarded Trudy’s gossip as absurd she did not forget it. No woman would. It lay in waiting until the right moment.

Her father’s illness and Steve’s worried look as he came home each night caused Beatrice to cast about for something noble and remarkable to do. The conclusion she reached was that it was her duty to retrench; she was not going to have floor-scrubbing duchesses corner all the economy feats. She would make it the mode to live simply, even be penurious in some ways—now that she had the Villa Rosa and a season’s budget of frocks. She began looking over the monthly bills in deadly earnest. The result was a blinding headache which prevented her going in to see her father. She retired to her room in cream lace with endless strings of coral, and left word for Steve to drop in on his way to his own room.

“Deary, I’ve been too extravagant,” she began faintly as he opened the door. She reached out her hand to find his.

He brought a chair over beside the chaise-longue and sat down obediently, holding the small, fragrant fingers in his own. “I’d be mighty glad if you felt you could live more simply.”

“You duck! Just what I’m about to do. I’m going to be the loveliest Queen Calico you ever did see—I’ve no doubt but what I’ll be making you a beefsteak pudding before long.”

Steve smiled. “Who will take this castle of gloom from under us?”

“Oh! We may as well stay here—I don’t mean that sort of retrenching—I mean in other ways. I’m not going to give expensive bridge parties or keep three motors and a saddle horse—I can’t ride any more, anyway—and I’m not going to have a professional reader for papa. Aunt Belle, you, and I can manage that—that will take fifteen dollars a week from the expenses. Besides, I am going to have three-course dinners from now on—no game, fish, or extra sweet. That will make a difference—in time. I shall not buy the new dinner set I had halfway ordered—it was wonderful, of course, but I have no right to use money for nonsense. Papa can give it to me for my birthday if he wants to. Gifts don’t count, do they, Stevuns?

“Then there is the servant question. Now cook is seventy-five dollars a month; the three maids are fifty each, besides all they steal and waste; the laundress and her helper, the chauffeur and all the garden men; the food, light, heat—to say nothing of extra expenses; my parties and trips and the enormous bills for taxes and upkeep that papa pays—I’m afraid to say how much it comes to each month. But it is going to stop! Then my clothes—I’m just ashamed to think—while you, poor dear, exist on nothing——Oh, thank you, Elsie.” A maid had brought in a supper tray.

“I didn’t want to come downstairs, so I sent for some lunch.” She watched Steve’s amused expression. “Aunt Belle gets on my nerves and unless we are having people in, the room is too big to have a family meal.”

On the tray was a dish heaped with tartlettes aux fruits, cornets à la crème, babas au rhum, petits fours, madeleines, and Napoléons. There was another dish filled with marrons glacés and malaga grapes preserved in sugar. A few faint wedges of bread and butter pointed the way to the pot of iced chocolate and the pitcher of whipped cream.

“Well,” Steve ventured, looking at the tray, “I’m afraid I don’t agree——”

“I know your ideas. You think I ought to be frying chops for you and giving praise because I have a nineteen-dollar near-taffeta dress. I can just see you walking round a two-by-four back yard measuring the corn and putting the watermelons into eiderdown sleeping bags so they won’t freeze; then telling everyone at the shop what an ideal home life you lead! No, deary, I’m retrenching because it’s a novelty, and you would like to retrench——”

“Because I may be forced to do so. I hate to worry you—I never mean to unless there is no other way out—but I must warn you that the abnormal war conditions are no longer inflating business and everyone is watching his step. I cannot take your father’s place; he carved it out step by step. I fairly aeroplaned to the top and found that while I was sitting there in fancied security other people were busy chopping down the steps and I should find myself having a great old fall down to earth. Now——”

“Don’t tell any more things,” she murmured, deep in a fruit tart. “I can’t understand. You are a big, strong man. Go keep your fortune; let me play. I’ll retrench for fun, and you must love me for it.”

“But you are not sincere,” he protested. “You don’t earn anything. You don’t save anything——”

Beatrice sat upright, laying aside her plate and fork. “So you believe that, too,” she half whispered.

“See here,” Steve added, in desperation. “I wish we were back in the apartment—or a simple house. I wish we kept a cook and a maid and you had a simple outfit of clothes and a simple routine. I wish we were just folks—you know the sort—you don’t find them any place else but America—it’s a tremendous chance to be just folks if you would only realize. I feel as if this were a soap-bubble castle, as if we were deliberately playing a wrong game all round.”

“You tell papa,” she begged; “and if he thinks I’m unhappy he will write me another check.”

“Then the retrenching is to be the elimination of the fifteen-dollar-a-week professional reader, who needs the work and earns the money, and two courses from our already aldermanic meals? What else?”

“I shall send the silver to the bank and use plate. The smartest people do that. I shall make aunty embroider my monograms; she can as well as not—the last

were frightfully expensive. I'm going to bargain sales after this, and take cook and drive out to the Polish market. Why, things are two and three cents a pound cheaper——"

Steve rose abruptly, tipping over the dainty chair as he did so. He tried to straighten out the pinky rug and set the chair properly upon it. Then he squared off his shoulders and dutifully stooped to kiss his economical little helpmate.

"All right, darling," he said, glibly, feeling that Gorgeous Girls were get-rich-quick men's albatrosses, "that will be very amusing for you. It will tide you over until the horse-show season. Now if you don't mind I'm going below to ask what the chances are for some roast beef!"

Toward Christmas, when Beatrice had gone to New York with friends and Mark Constantine discovered that dying is ever so much harder than death, Mary told Steve that she was considering a new position, with a firm dealing in fabrics, a firm of old and honourable reputation.

She laid the letter from her prospective employers on his desk, in almost naïve fashion. It was as if she wanted to show this was no woman's threat but a bona-fide and businesslike proposition. And if she blushed from sheer foolish joy at the disappointed and protesting expression that came into his face it was small solace after the struggle she had undergone before she made herself take this step.

"You are not going," he began, angrily. "I'm damned if you do!"

"Oh, my dear, my own dear," she murmured within. Outwardly she shook her head briskly and added, "Yes, I am. The hours—the salary——"

"The deuce take that stuff! How much more money do you want me to pay you? How few hours a day will you consent to work? You know so well it has been you who have done your own slave driving. Besides, I can't get on without you."

"You must; I haven't the right to stay."

Steve stood up, crumpling the letter in his hand. "You mean because of what I said—that time?"

"Partly; partly because I find myself disapproving of your transactions."

"They are a safe gamble," he began, vehemently.

"Are they? I doubt it. Don't ask me to stay. I want to remain poised and content. If I cannot be radiantly happy I can be content, the sort of old-lavender-and-star-

dust peace that used to be mine."

"Have I ever said things, made you feel or do——"

"Oh, no." As she looked at him the gray eyes turned wistful purple. "But it is what we may say or do, Mister Penny Wise."

Steve looked at the crumpled letter. "So you are going over to staid graybeards who deal in cotton and woollens, and play commercial nun to the end—is that it?"

"Yes."

"And you do care?" he persisted, brutally.

"Yes," she answered, defiantly.

"Well, I don't care about fool laws—they are mighty thin stuff. I love you," he told her with quiet emphasis.

Mary did not answer but the purple of the eyes changed back to stormy gray.

"Why don't you say something? Abuse me, claim me——"

"I haven't the courage even if I have the right," she said, presently. "Besides, the last year I have been loving an ideal—the Steve O'Valley who existed one time and might still exist if other things were equal. But in reality you are a prematurely nerve-shattered, blundering pirate; not my Steve." She spoke his name softly. "The failure of my ideal—and it's a little hard to live with and work with such a failure. My hands are tied, yet my eyes see. Besides, there is Luke to think about and care for until some other woman does it. I cannot endure this tangle; neither can I get you out of it. So I am going away. And I'll keep on loving my ideal and find the old-lavender-and-star-dust sort of peace."

"You are not going!" he repeated, sharply, taking her hand. "Do you hear? I love you. I have loved you enough to keep silent about it ever since that day. Does it mean nothing to you?"

"Don't say it again—it is so hopeless, part of the tangle. You haven't the faintest idea how hopeless it is; you are so involved you cannot judge. My boy, don't you see that the whole trouble lies in getting things you have never earned? The sort of joy you people indulge in and try to hold as your own is a state of mind and emotion from which no lessons may be learned—calm, stagnant pools of superlative surface pleasure. No one learns things worth while when he is too happy or too successful. That is why success is a wiser and more enduring thing

when it comes at middle age. The young man or woman has not been tried out, has not had to struggle and discover personal limitations. It's the struggle that brings the wisdom.

"But when you have a ready-made stock-market fortune handed to you, and a Gorgeous Girl wife, and the world comes to fawn upon you—you soon become intoxicated with a false sense of your own achievements and values. It does not last—nor does it pay. Such joy periods are merely recuperative periods. By and by something comes along and bumps into you and you are shoved out into the struggling seas—the learning and conquering game. It is not a sad state of affairs—but a mighty wise one. Then how can you, who have never earned, expect a joy to be yours forever?"

"You have struggled and earned. You have the right to love me!"

"Perhaps—but you cannot hide behind my skirts and claim the same right. I shall give you up. Why, this is no tragedy—it is the way many commercial nuns find their lives are cast. Commercial nuns, like their religious sisters, serve a novitiate—their vocation being tested out. We who find that the things of our fancy are husks leave them behind and go on in our abilities. We are needed women to-day; we must have recognition and respect. We possess a certain unwomanly honesty according to old standards, which makes us say such things as I have said to you. I love you, the ideal of you; yet I am hopeless to realize it. I refuse to keep on making my petty moan for sympathy when all the time the bigger part of me demands work and contentment—and things just like Gorgeous Girls."

"But there must be a way out. I can't lose you. Do you know what it will mean?"

"I fancy I do." The gray eyes were so maternal that Steve felt comforted.

"Are you pushing me out of a stagnant joy pool?" he tried saying lightly.

"Perhaps I'm heading that way when I stop serving you before all else."

"Mary, Mary, quite contrary"—he gave her a gentle little shake—"say it all again. Then tell me if this is a mood and you'll change your mind and stay. You must stay—or else you don't love me."

"Eternal masculine! That we love to be beaten, cry loudly, tell our neighbours, but we must prove our affections by crawling back to have you kiss the bruises." She shook her head. "You cannot believe that the world recognizes a difference between women with sentiments and sentimental women! Why, my boy, do you know that convictions, real convictions, do make a convict of a man, put a

mental ball and chain on him which he can never deny? I have told you my convictions—I am convinced I should be doing wrong to both of us to stay. I shall go—and love my ideal and spend my salary in soothing things."

"I'm not afraid of a divorce," he found himself insisting.

"Nor I. But should you get one I would not marry you."

"Not ever?" he asked.

Unconsciously they both looked at the photograph of the Gorgeous Girl smiling down on them in serene and frivolous fashion.

"Not ever," she told him, turning away.

There was a directors' meeting, which Steve was obliged to attend. He knew he sat about a table smoking innumerable cigars without a coherent idea in his head as to what was being said or considered. When he rushed back to the office Mary had gone home and left a note tucked in his blotter. He did not know that Beatrice had dropped in and discovered it, reading it with great satisfaction and carefully replacing it so as to have the appearance of never having been disturbed. All it said was:

"I shall go to the Meldrum Brothers on the fifteenth.—M. F."

He tore the note up in a despairing kind of rage and wrote Mary as impetuous a love letter as the Gorgeous Girl had ever received. Five minutes after writing it he tore that up, too. Then he called himself several kinds of a fool and dashed out to order an armful of flowers sent to her apartment. He had his supper in a grill room, to give him a necessary interlude before he went home. He walked round and round a city square watching the queer, shuffling old men with their trays of needles and pins, wrinkled-faced women with fortune-telling parrots, and silly young things prancing up and down, bent on mischief. Something about human beings bored him; he regretted exceedingly that he was one himself; and at the same tune he wished he might countermand the florist's order. He took a taxi home and wondered what apology he should make for being late. He had forgotten that there was a dinner party!

In silver gauze with an impressive square train Beatrice greeted him, to say he might as well remain invisible the rest of the evening, it would look too absurd to have him appear an hour late with some clumsy excuse—and as there was an interesting Englishman who made an acceptable partner for her everything was taken care of. Papa, minus the professional reader, was lonesome. He had discovered an intricate complaint of his circulation and would welcome an

audience.

With relief Steve stole away to Constantine’s room and amid medicine bottles and boxes, air cushions, hot-water bags, and detective stories, he listened with half an ear to the reasons why his blood count must be taken again and what horse thieves the best of doctors were anyhow!

CHAPTER XIX

The fifteenth of December Mary Faithful left the office of the O'Valley Leather Company, carrying the thing off as successfully as Beatrice O'Valley carried off her wildest flirtation. As Mary had often said: "When you can fool the letter man and the charwoman you have nothing to fear from the secret service."

And no employee of the office suspected that anything lay beneath the surface reasons given for changing firms. She accepted the handsome farewell gift with as much apparent pleasure as if she were to be married and it were a start toward her silver chest. Mary, too, had learned how to pretend. Nor did she permit Steve to come snarling—masculine fashion of sobbing—at her in vain protests trying to shake her from her resolve.

During the last days of rushed work to help her successor find the way comparatively easy Mary kept Steve at arm's length. The same strange joy at having told him her secret and released the tension was being relived again in knowing that she was to leave the tangle with the Gorgeous Girl in command of it, and go live her commercial nun's existence in the offices of unromantic old graybeards who merely thought of her as a mighty clever woman who would not demand an assistant.

Mary felt that she had truly passed her commercial novitiate; she made herself admit that a commercial life was hers for all time. She would leave a forbidden world of romance, watching Luke become a six-footer and an embryo inventor as her special pride and pleasure. It was good to have it settled, to have it a scar, pale and calm, throbbing only under extreme pressure. She even welcomed Beatrice's hurried visit to the office and met with gentle patience her half-veiled reproaches for leaving her husband's employ.

"I can't see why you go," Beatrice protested, undecided whether it was because Steve and Mary had come to some understanding, as Trudy hinted, and it would be wiser for Mary to be removed from the everyday scene of action; or whether Mary had never thought of Steve except as a man who would not pay her such and such a salary and therefore, being tailor-made of heart as well as dress, she coolly picked up her pad and pencil and was walking off the lot. With the

complacent conceit of all Gorgeous Girls who fancy that clothes can always conquer, Beatrice really inclined toward the latter theory. But being a woman she could not resist having a few pangs of unrest and trying out her fancied detective ability upon Mary.

She brought her a farewell gift also—a veil case which had been given to Beatrice two summers ago. A fresh ribbon had made it quite all right, so she acted the Lady Bountiful as she presented her offering and listened carefully to Mary's sensible reply.

"I can't go running off to Bermuda and Florida like you people can. I am forced to find my recreation in my work—and hides and razors are a queer combination for a woman who really likes gardens and sea bathing." She laughed so genuinely that Beatrice told herself that Trudy was an unpardonable little fool. "I have stayed at the post for some time, and now that I've the chance to change my recreation to fabrics—I'm tempted to try it. I'm sure you do understand—and it is with great regret that I leave the office."

"It will make it hard for Mr. O'Valley," Beatrice continued, blandly. "Of course I have realized what an unusual man my husband is—his phenomenal rise and all that; and papa has always said he never met any one who was so keen as Steve. I have always tried to be diplomatic in whatever I said to Mr. O'Valley about his business; I never encourage his discussing it at home since it is not fair to ask him to drag it into his playtime. So I can't talk over actual details with you. But I know it will be hard for him and he will have quite a time getting readjusted. He says this Miss Coulson is a nice girl but temperamentally a Jersey cow."

Beatrice smiled at this; she had viewed Miss Coulson immediately upon the news concerning Mary's resignation, and had felt more than satisfied. Even Beatrice realized that Miss Coulson was a nice pink-and-white thing who undoubtedly had a cedar chest half filled with hope treasures and would at the first opportunity exchange her desk for a kitchen cabinet and be happy ever after.

When Beatrice tried discussing the matter with Steve he responded so listlessly and seemed so apathetic about either Miss Coulson or Mary that Beatrice became vastly interested in fall projects of her own, telling Aunt Belle that her theory was correct: It was easier to be disappointed in one's husband than in one's friends, and that Steve was the sort who was never going to be concerned about his wife's disappointment; in fact, he would never realize it had occurred.

The night Mary left the office for good and all, leaving clean and empty desk room for Miss Coulson and the little tea appointments as a token of good will,

Luke met her at the corner and they walked home together.

“Are you sorry?” Luke asked, curiously. He had been too busy in technical high school to be office boy for some time past.

“No; only you grow accustomed to things. You remember how mother felt about the old house.” Somehow the thing was harder to discuss with Luke as a questioner than with any one else.

“I guess they’ll miss you a lot.”

“Everyone’s place can be filled, we must never forget that. And I think the change is wise. The new firm seems agreeable.”

“Did Mr. O’Valley give you anything?”

Mary flushed. It had been Luke who received the armful of flowers sent anonymously.

“The firm gave me the wonderful desk set; you saw it before it was sent to be monogrammed.”

“Yes, but I mean Mr. O’Valley himself.” Luke was quite manly and threatening as he strode along. “Something for a keepsake because you’ve worked so hard for him.”

They paused at a corner to wait for the traffic to abate. Mary felt faint and queer, as if she had lost her good right hand and was trying to tell herself it wasn’t such a bad thing after all because she would only have to buy one glove from now on. Never to go into Steve’s office, never to talk with him, listen to him, advise and influence him! She wanted to forget the sudden burst of affection, the protests of love, for she could not believe them true. What she wanted was to return to the old days of guarded control.

Beatrice’s cab whirled by just then and Mary caught a glimpse of the Gorgeous Girl in a gray cloak with a wonderful jewelled collar, and Steve beside her. As the cab passed and Mary and Luke struck out across the street Mary experienced a sense of defeat. As she talked to Luke of this and that to turn his mind from the too-fascinating question of who sent the flowers, she began to wonder if she, too, would not wish to be a Gorgeous Girl should the opportunity present itself? What would her brave platitudes count if she could wear bright gold tulle with slim shoulder straps of jet supporting it? Away with sport attire and untrimmed hats! To have absurdly frivolous little shoes of blue brocade; to wear the brown hair in puffs and curls and adorned with jade and pearls; to have a lace scarf

thrown over her shoulders and a greatcoat of white fur covering the tulle frock; to go riding, riding, riding, at dusk through the crowded streets filled with envying shop-girls and clerks, hard-working men and women. To ride in an elegant little car with fresh flowers in a gold-banded vase, a tiny clock saying it was nearly half after six, outside a gray fog and a rain creeping up to make the crowds jostle wearily that they might reach shelter before the storm broke. To have Steve, handsome and adoring, beside her, laughing at her indulgently, excusing her frivolous little self, adoring the fragile, foolish soul of her. At least it would be worth while trying.

“I can get a construction set for six dollars,” Luke was saying. “That will make the bridge models I told you about last week. I’m going to get one.”

“Yes, dear, I would,” she punctuated the conversation recklessly, and then another crowd swept about them and more elegant little cabs with more Gorgeous Girls and their cavaliers whirled by. Mary hated her stupid sophistry about commercial nuns, novitiates and all, her plain gray-eyed spinster self doomed to a Persian cat and a bonus at sixty. Empty, colourless—damnable!

She realized that she had merely given herself an anæsthetic, just as Steve had done, one of unreality and indifference, and that no one stays dormant under its power for all time. That all so-called commercial nuns try hard to convince themselves that watching the procession pass by is quite the best way of all. Yet there is scant truth or satisfaction in the statement. At some time or other the hunger for being loved crashes through the spinster’s brave little platform, the hunger for becoming necessary to someone in other ways than writing letters or adding figures—to be home, beside the hearth, keeping the fires burning, with woes and cares and monotonous incidents of such a narrowed horizon. It was for this we were created, Mary Faithful told herself—to be the dreamers and the ballast and the inspiration of the race. And if commercial nuns have managed to tell themselves otherwise—well, who shall be brutal enough to cry “I spy” on their little secret? She understood now the abnormal restlessness that she had seen in others of her friends—the marriages with men beneath them in class who earned but half what they did; unwise flirtations, even the sordid things that occasionally creep into the horizon. And she blamed none of them for any of it.

She knew now that should the chance come she would want to be a Gorgeous Girl. Gorgeous Girls have the faculty of being loved, even if they do not merit the emotion. Tailor-made nuns only love, and finally set their consciences to work to convince themselves that a new firm and more severe collars will be the best way to forget.

Luke was still talking about the construction set and the new invention and patent rights and heavy wool sweater with a bean cap for the summer vacation. Mary was saying: “Yes, of course,” and “How interesting!” at intervals; and so they reached home, where Mary could plead a headache and go to her room to battle it out alone.

She felt, too, that the town crier could truthfully announce that milady was returning to tea gowns for an indefinite period. And she felt a passionate hunger to be one of them. That women were going to rejoice, the majority of them, to take off their lady-major uniforms, stop driving tractors and wearing overalls, and with the precious knowledge of the experience they would evolve quite a new-old standard, as charming as lavender and lace and as old as Time—the gentlewoman! They would no longer accentuate their ugliness with that unlovely honesty of the feminist which has been quite as distressing as the impossible Victorian lack of honesty and everlasting concealment of vital things. They would no longer be feminists or ladies, but gentlewomen who sew their own seam, who neither struggle unseen nor flaunt their emotions in the face of sex psychologists.

And that both commercial nuns and Gorgeous Girls must be on the wane. Yet it was too late for Mary Faithful.

For many reasons Steve stayed away from Mary. At intervals he sent her flowers without a card, such a schoolboyish trick to do and yet so harmless that Mary sent him no word of thanks or blame. She merely dreamed her gentlewoman’s dreams and did her work in the new office with the same systematic ability as she had employed for Steve’s benefit, causing the new firm to beam with delight. She had an even more imposing office than formerly, spread generously with fur rugs, traps for the weak ankles of innocent callers. She was treated with great respect. One time Steve came to see about some civic banquet in which the head of Mary’s new firm was concerned, and Mary made herself close her door and begin dictating so as to appear to be occupied. The next day he slipped a love letter into the bouquet of old-fashioned flowers he selected for her benefit, and Mary forced herself to write a card and forbid his continuing the attentions.

In March Gaylord Vondeplosshe telephoned Mary, about nine o’clock one evening, that Trudy was quite ill and wanted to see her. Would Mary mind coming over if he called in the roadster? There was a fearsome tone in his voice which made Mary consent despite Luke’s protests.

Gay was even more pale and weaker eyed than ever when he came into the

apartment, his motor coat seeming to hang on his knock-kneed, narrow-chested self.

It seemed Trudy had not been really well for some time. She was such an ambitious little girl, he explained, excusing himself in the matter at the outset. He had begged her to rest, to go away, even commanding it, but she was so ambitious, and there was so much work on hand that she stayed. It all began with a cold. Those low-cut waists and pumps in zero weather. She would not take care of herself and she dragged round, and refused medicine, and he, Gay, had done everything possible under the circumstances; he wanted Mary to be quite clear as to this point.

They finally reached the apartment house, where Gay clambered out and offered Mary his left little finger as a means of support on the icy walk. When she came into the front bedroom of the apartment—a shabby room when one looked at it closely—and looked at Trudy she saw death written in the thin white face bereft of rouge, the red curls lying in limp confusion on the silly little head.

“Oh, Mary,” Trudy began, coughing and trying to sit up, “I thought you’d never come. Why, I’m not so sick——Gay, go outside and wait for the doctor and the nurse. Just think, I’m going to afford a nurse. Oh, the pain in the chest is something fierce.” She had lapsed into her old-time vernacular. “Every bone of me aches and my heart thumps as if it was awful mad at me. I guess it ought to be, Mary. How good it is to have you. Take off your things. Gee, that pain is some pain! Um—I wonder if the doctor can help.”

“Do you want me to stay all night?”

Mary was doing some trifle to make her more comfortable. Trudy seemed too weak to answer but she smiled like a delighted child. She pointed a finger, the one wearing the diamond ring, to a chair beside the bed. Mary drew it up closer and sat down.

“Now, my dear, you must put on a warm dressing gown and something to pad your chest—this nightgown is a farce,” she said, sternly, rising. “Where shall I find something? Oh, Trudy—don’t!”

Trudy had halfway lifted herself in bed with sudden pain, moaning and laughing in terrible fashion. Mary caught her in her arms. Trudy lay back, quite contented.

“My, but I’ve been a bluff,” she said, tears on the white, shiny cheeks. “Gee, but that doctor takes his time, too. I had to beg something great before husband would go for you. He’s awful mean, but I always told you he was, and he would

have a fine time if I should die, wouldn't he?" More terrible little laughs as Trudy still nestled in the warm curve of Mary's arm.

"You mustn't talk," Mary said. "That's an order."

Gay tiptoed in to say that the doctor had returned but no nurse was available. They might get one in a few days.

"I'll stay," Mary offered.

Trudy smiled again. "Rather—have—Mary," she managed to gasp.

The doctor was a preoccupied man who did not fancy late calls on foolish little creatures wearing silk nightgowns when they were nearing death. He gave some drastic orders and Gay was dispatched with a list of articles to be bought while Mary hunted high and low in the disorderly apartment, finally wrapping Trudy in thick draperies, the only sensible things she could discover.

Trudy lay very still for a few minutes. Mary thought she was dozing until she said in an animated voice: "Did you see the ring? It's a wonderful stone." Wilfully she thrust her skeleton-like fingers out from the bed covers.

Mary nodded. But Trudy was not to be discouraged.

"Gee, but that ring made a lot of trouble. Mary, come here, deary. Will you forgive me? They say you forgive the dead anything. Listen, I was awfully discouraged and Gay was so mean and I was all wrong, anyway—you know—foolish—see? Beatrice was mean, too.... I want you to marry Steve because he loves you, and a divorce won't break her heart—you just see if it does. I always knew he was the one you liked—and he does care now. Sure, he does. You can tell. Even I can tell, Mary.... I just told her so—and my, she is wild but won't admit it. She never asked me to her house after that if she could get out of it. And now I'm sorry—and I want you to have the ring. That will help some, won't it? You tell Gay what I said. You must have it. Your fingers are thin and long and can carry it off well. And so you do forgive me, don't you? I shouldn't have told her, but I couldn't help it, she was so mean. And now he cares—and you can be happy——"

"You told Mrs. O'Valley?"

Trudy was panting. Perspiration stood on the white forehead as she managed to finish: "I said you always loved her husband and now he loves you—and I am sorry. But I was mad at them all; you can't understand because you're not my sort.... But you can be happy now. Marry him and make him happy."

She dozed into a contented sleep. A little later it was all over.

CHAPTER XX

Gay's course of action was exactly what his wife had prophesied. He displayed all the proper symptoms of mourning and grief as far as his clothing and stationery went. After a brief period of retirement from the world, during which he chattered with fear when he wrapped Trudy's gay little possessions in bundles and gave them away, he emerged in the satisfactory role of a young widower on the loose who feels that "Perhaps it was all for the best; an idyl of youth, y'know; someone quite out of my sphere," and was welcomed by the old set enthusiastically.

Beatrice particularly saw to it that he was petted and properly cared for regarding invitations and dainties to eat and drink. In this new rôle, with a well-established business and no shrewd red-haired wife to point out his meannesses and try to make him go fifty-fifty with the profits, Gay felt at peace with all the world.

He did not even miss Trudy's work after a little. The only thing that bothered him was an occasional memory of the white, thin face and those limp, red curls, the hacking cough and the way her big eyes had stared at him that last night. He hated anything connected with suffering of any kind, let alone death itself.

Before long Gay found himself back at the club and running a neat shop on a prominent corner with deaf mutes from charity institutions ensconced in the back rooms to do the work. Memories of Trudy and of their life together became as remote as the menu of a dinner eaten twelve months past.

He had her ring set over for himself, Mary never having mentioned the matter. In fact, he avoided Mary as he avoided Steve, for it was Mary who had spent the last moments with Trudy, and whatever was said remained a most uncomfortable mystery, to Gay's way of thinking. She had remained at the apartment to help Gay through his sorrow, looking at him with brief scorn as he stammered inane thanks, scantily concealing his impatience to sample a basket of wine just sent in.

As Easter Sunday came slipping into the calendar, with Mary and Luke sightseeing in New York in plebeian fashion and not ashamed of it, there came a

great though not unexpected crash in Steve O'Valley's fortunes. Steve's unreckoned-with enemies were about to have their innings; they succeeded in bringing Steve down to the level of being forced to ask his father-in-law for aid and admit that he could not handle Constantine's affairs or what remained of them.

This was exactly what the enemies desired. A number of things combined to make the crash a mighty one. Steve still speculated, secure, he fancied, in his surplus savings; his speculations all ended disastrously and his factories were no longer hustling places of commerce. It was a case of keen competition for orders, and closing round Steve relentlessly was a circle of enemies forming a gigantic trust which played the big-fish-swallow-the-little-fish game. Knowing of Steve's disaster on the stock exchange, as well as the thin ice on which his industries were managing to survive, the trust now invited him to become one of them—at a ridiculous figure—or else be squeezed out of the game overnight.

Steve's first emotion upon receiving the offer was nonchalance and determination to appear unconcerned and weather it through—so he held out as long as he could, plunging in the stock market, with the result that he was beaten as if he had been a street vendor whose wares were confiscated by the police authorities.

It was not a time to do some new devil-may-care thing. Fortunes were not achieved as they had been from 1914 to 1919, and Steve told himself in vain that since it was luck that had made him it must be luck that should again bring him out on top of the heap. All at once luck seemed no jaunty chap with endless pockets of gold but rather a disgruntled, threadbare old chap who said: "None of you ever treats me rightly when I do smile on you; now go take care of yourselves any way you like, for you have ruined me, too."

With this pleasant state of affairs Steve came home to the Villa Rosa one April day, half of him wondering if Mary would let him come and tell his story and the other half trying to hope that the news of his failure would prove the saving grace between the Gorgeous Girl and himself, that she would accept his plea of becoming "just folks" and starting anew, her father's wealth in the background, entirely removed from Steve's new field of endeavours.

It did not take long to disillusion Steve as to this. Beatrice accepted the news of the stock failure and the new trust so easily that he saw she was incapable of changing her viewpoint.

“Why gamble so, my dear Stevuns?” she began, almost petulantly. “And do you know that every time I make engagements for you you are late? You are nearly a half hour late to-night.”

“I am losing the factory as well. I’ll have to sell out for a song. I can’t compete with cutthroats——”

“Are you going to hurry and dress so we can go?” She smiled her prettiest.

At one time Steve would have noted only that white tulle and pearls spun witchery, and her skirt possessed the charm of a Hawaiian girl’s dancing costume. Even at this juncture he recalled and smiled at past blindness.

“You don’t seem to understand what I am saying, and all that is happening. First I played Arizona copper until they taught me not to monkey with the band wagon; then I played Cobalt until the same thing took place.” He sank impolitely into an easy-chair. “Then I got the chance to come in with the gang—an insulting proposition any way you want to figure—a paltry sum for everything I have and the statement in veiled terms that I need not expect to have that unless I did as they dictate.”

“Well—sell your business to someone else before this happens!”

“I couldn’t even if I wished to cheat; it is quite the talk of the town.”

“Well—manage. Papa will tell you how. Why do you come running to me? Goodness, don’t stare like that. It’s nothing unusual to manage! I don’t know about business—you made a lot of money once and I should think you could do it again.”

“It doesn’t bother me as much as you think,” he said, almost breathlessly, eager to know the worst. “It means I am a poor man in your estimation. I can sell out to these people, who have thrown a steel ring round their game, so to speak, and had to do it until your father was out of the running. I can never buck them—I’m not fool enough to be goaded on to try. Your father could not win out the way things are now—but he could have prevented their ever getting the upper hand—because he knows every last turn of the wheel. They could not have fooled him. I didn’t know what was coming until it was too late. A get-rich-quick man always pays for his own speed!”

“Stevuns, you’ll make me so nervous I can’t go to-night. It’s a lovely party. You stay home and tell papa all about it, but leave me in peace.”

“Thank you, I will. And is this the sympathy and the understanding you give me when I say we are being ruined?”

“Don’t keep saying it.” She stamped her little foot. “Papa has lots of money in English and Chinese securities and I don’t know what-all. Why, that factory of his was the least of his fortune.”

“That is why your father deliberately lifted three fourths of his money from the business just before he was taken ill. He was not going to risk cutthroats getting together. He overestimated my ability to keep clear of disaster. But after all, I’m not sorry—I don’t want anything more than I have earned. For you always pay for it in some way. The world may not know but these snap-judgment profiteers, these get-rich-quick phenomena, always have to pay. But you don’t understand,” he added, gently, “do you? You must not be blamed for not understanding anything unless it comprises a good time!”

“I shall not try,” she said, petulantly, “and if you love me you will hurry to change your things and tell papa briefly. To-morrow will be time enough to go into detail and have him start you into something new.”

“I didn’t take your father’s money to marry you with, and even if I stole it in a sense it was my own efforts that brought it to pass. I took no help from him until I was established. And I shall not sneak back to let my wife’s father support me now. I’m going to drop out of this game, Beatrice. It is for you to decide whether you go with me or stay at the Villa Rosa.” He stood up suddenly and came close to her, looking down at her, in all her fragile loveliness, wondering, half hoping, halfway expecting that a miracle might happen even as he had hoped for the miracle of his fortune—that at this late hour she might cease to be a mere Gorgeous Girl and understand.

Beatrice frowned, playing with her fan. “You look shabby and tired,” she complained; “not my handsome Steve. You don’t mean such things, because you do love me and you know I could never be happy living any other way. I’m all papa has and he wants me to have everything I want. Of course I want this dear house and you and all that both of you mean, so be a lamb and get dressed and papa will help you into some nice safe business that can never fail.”

She stood on her tiptoes, about to kiss him. But he pushed her away.

“You mean you won’t begin with me, you won’t take our one chance for

happiness? Just to begin together to learn and earn, be real? Do you think for one instant I will be like Gay Vondeplosshe, subsisting on a woman's bounty? No. I shall support my wife; it was never my wish that we come here to live, and you insisted upon luxuries my purse could not afford. In the main, to the outsider, I have supported you. But we both know it is not true; I have merely been a needful accessory. From now on I shall either support you or else not live with you. I ask you to stop having a good time long enough to give me your decision."

"Oh, Stevuns—you funny old brutish dear!"

"If it were a direct loan of money from your father it would be a different matter—but it is one of those intricate, involved deals that mean more than you or I choose to admit. It means that I have learned the hollow satisfaction in being a rich man and husband of a Gorgeous Girl. I want to be a plain American with a wife who is content with something else save a Villa Rosa and pound-and-a-half lap dogs. I am going to be a mediocre failure in the eyes of your set, since it is the only way in which I can start to be a true success in other than dollar standards. The two elements that collect a crowd and breed newspaper headlines are mystery and struggle; remove them and you find yourself serene and secure. That is what I propose to do. I ask if it is too late for you to come with me or are you going to linger in the Villa Rosa? Answer me—I want something real, common, definite—can't you understand?"

"If you ever dare treat me like this again——" she began, whimpering.

Steve brushed by her and up the stairs. He went into Constantine's room, where the old man lay in helpless discontent, his dulling eyes looking at the sunken gardens and the chattering peacocks and his heart longing for Hannah and the early days together.

"Why, Steve," he said in a pleased tone, "you look as if they were after you. Thought you'd forgotten me. That nurse Bea engaged has a voice like a scissors grinder in action."

Briefly Steve told him what had taken place, not mentioning Beatrice's name. It had an astonishing effect; as a mental tonic it was not to be surpassed, for the fallen oak of a man throbbed anew with life, as much as was possible, his hands twitching with rage, his teeth grinding, and the dulled eyes bright with interest.

"The dogs! I knew it! Why didn't you tell me long before? Blocked 'em off—snuffed 'em out. Meddling with wildcat stocks—asinine any way you figure it! Well, I don't know that I blame you. The first success was too sweet to leave

untried again, eh?" He chuckled as if something amused him. "We'll close out to 'em. We'll start again——"

"I don't want another fortune handed me," Steve interrupted. "I want to earn it, if you please. I'm not a pauper in the true sense of the word; I am merely trained down to the proper financial weight for a man of my age and experience to carry, and I can now enter the ring with good chances. The other way was as absurd as the four-year-old prodigy who typewrites and is rather fond of Greek. But I loved your daughter and I thought it quite the right thing to do. I asked your daughter just now if she was willing to live with a poor man, according to her standards, as your wife lived with you—to give me her help and her faith in me.

"Do you know what she answered? She told me to come to you and truckle for another big loan, which I am not capable of handling, to cheat legally and never hint to the world the truth of the affair. She hadn't the most remote idea that I was in earnest when I told her I was going to be a failure in the eyes of the world—but I was not going to have my wife's father support me. I'm not sorry this has happened—feel as if the Old Man of the Sea had dropped off me. But this is the thing: either my wife and I will live in a home of our own, and such a home as I can provide, being an independent and proper family and keeping our problems and responsibilities within our gates; or else your daughter is going to stay with you and lose her one chance of freedom while I leave town."

The Basque grandmother and the Celtic grandfather lent Steve all their passionate determination and keenness of insight, as they once lent him chivalry, humour, and charm. He stood before the old man taut with excitement and flushed with sudden fury.

"It is you I blame," he added before Constantine could make answer. "You kept her as useless as a china shepherdess; it is not her fault if she fails to rise to the occasion now."

Constantine's face quivered; what the emotion was none but himself knew.

"You poor fool boy!" he said, thickly. "Don't you know I made you a rich man all along the line? You never did anything at all. It wasn't luck on the stock exchange—it was Mark Constantine back of you. Gad, to have made what you did in the time you did you'd have had to do worse than dabble your hands in the mud. You'd have had to roll in it—like I did." He gave a coarse laugh. "That was what I figured out when you said you wanted Beatrice and what you were going to do to try to get her. I liked you, I wanted you for her husband. I hated the other puppies. So I wasn't going to have Beatrice's husband a cutthroat and a

highbinder as he would have to be if he had turned the whole trick.

“You young fool, don’t you suppose I made the stock exchange yield you the sugarplums? Gad, I knew every cent you spent and made. It was for my girl, my Gorgeous Girl, so why wouldn’t I do it? I saved your ideals and kept your hands white so that you would be good enough for her; that was what I figured out the hour after you had told me your intentions. I followed you like the fairy books tell of; I brought you your fortune and your factory and scotched all the enemies about you—and gave you the girl. And you thought you killed the seven-headed dragon yourself.... I don’t blame you for the foozle, Steve; I cotton-woolled you all along—it was bound to come. But, damme, you’ll come down to brass tacks and take more of my money now and keep her from being unhappy and stop this snivel about earning what you get and needing responsibilities—or you’ll find you’ve put your foot into hell and you can’t pull it out!”

White-heat anger enveloped Steve’s very soul, yet strangely enough he felt not like sinning but rather like Laertes crying out in mental anguish: “Do you see this, O God?”

CHAPTER XXI

Steve knew he brushed by Aunt Belle, who was coming in to see what her brother was roaring about, and down those detestable gilded curlicue stairs to seek out his wife and try again to make her realize that for once he was determined on what should come to pass as regarded their future together, to force her to realize even if he created a cheap scene.

Whatever blame fell upon Constantine's shoulders was not within his province to judge—Constantine was a dying man and Steve was not quite thirty-five. So that ended the matter from Steve's viewpoint. It was his intention not to try to evade his personal blame in the matter but to make reparation to his own self and to his wife if he were permitted. If he could once convince his wife that their sole chance of future happiness and sanity lay in beginning as medium-incomed young persons with all the sane world before them it would have been worth it all—excepting for Mary Faithful.

Even as Steve tried in a quick, tense fashion to dismiss Mary from his mind and say that Beatrice was his wife and that love must come as the leavener once this hideous wealth was removed, he knew the thing was impossible. The best solution of which he was capable was to say that he owed it to both Mary Faithful and Beatrice to play the game from the right angle and that in causing Beatrice to disclaim her title of Gorgeous Girl and all it implied he at least would find contentment—the same sort of uninteresting contentment of which Mary boasted.

He found Beatrice in a furore of tears and protests, angered at missing the dinner engagement and not understanding why any of it was necessary. She felt her own territory had been infringed upon, since making a scene was her peculiar form of mental intoxication.

But Steve was composed, even smiling, and as he came up to her she fancied her father had made everything all right as his check book had seen fit to do upon so many occasions. The slight worry over Steve's possible folly vanished, and she felt it safe to proceed to reproach him for having been so horrid.

"Now, my dear Stevuns, why did you get me all upset? And yourself and poor

papa, to say nothing of my having to send word at the last moment that we could not attend the dinner. Oh, Steve, Steve, will you ever be really tamed?”

“Come and sit beside me.” He drew out a notebook and pencil. “I must tell you some things.”

Rather curious, she obeyed, but keeping a discreet distance so her frock would not be ruffled. “I’m still cross,” she warned.

Steve was writing down figures, adding them and making notations.

“Look here, dear,” he began, patiently; “this is just where I shall stand—a poor man to your way of thinking, almost as poor as when I set out to win you. I’m going into a salaried job for a few years—a real hope-to-die job—and we can have a house——”

“I thought we talked that all out before,” she interrupted, half petulantly, half wistfully. “Why do you keep repeating yourself? You’ll be thumping your fists the first thing we know!”

“Do you fancy I am not going to do this? Are you not sufficiently concerned to listen, to realize that I have been a blind, conceited fool? But I have learned my lesson. I shall support my wife from now on and live in my own house or else I shall no longer be your husband.”

“Steve!”

She opened and shut her fan quickly, then it fell to the floor. But he did not pick it up.

“You were never keen for details, so I shall not irritate you now by introducing them. But the fact remains that I have been made and backed by your father merely because he wished me to be your husband. You picked me out—and I was keen to be picked out—and he decided to make me as proper a companion for you as possible. I am in some ways as untried to-day as any youngster starting out; as I was when I fancied I made the grand and initial stride by myself. Your father feels that I ought to be eternally grateful—but then, what else could the father of the Gorgeous Girl think? He has harmed me—but he has ruined you. I hardly thought you would meet me halfway, still it was worth the try.”

Forgetful of her flounces Beatrice crumpled them in her hands, saying sharply: “Are you taking this way of getting out of it?”

“Good heavens!” Steve murmured, half inaudibly, “I keep forgetting you have

never been taught values or sincerity! There is no way I can prove to you how in earnest I am, is there?”

“You mean to say that I am a failure?” she preened herself unconsciously.

“The most gorgeous failure we have with us to-day! And the worst of it is it is growing to be a common type of failure since gorgeousness is becoming prevalent. There are many like you—not many more gorgeous, and thousands less so. You are a type that has developed in the last twenty years and is developing these days at breakneck speed! And you can’t understand and you don’t want to and I’m damned if I’ll try to explain again.”

“Well,” she asked, shrewdly, quite the woman of the world, “what is it you are about to do? Wear corduroy trousers and a red bandanna and start a butcher-paper-covered East-Side magazine filled with ravings?”

“No; that is another type we plain Americans have on our hands.”

“Don’t spar for time.”

“I’m not. I’m through sparring; I want to go to work. I want——”

What was the use? He stopped before adding another spark to her wrath.

“I suppose you want to marry that woman—Mary Faithful, who has loved you so long and made herself so useful! She was clever enough to pretend to efface herself and go to work for someone else, but I dare say you have seen her as often as before. Oh, are you surprised I know? I gave you the credit of being above such a thing, but Trudy told me that this woman had told her the truth—so you see even your Mary Faithful cannot be trusted. You had better turn monk, Steve, be done with the whole annoying pack of us! Anyway, Trudy came running to me, but I never lost sleep over the rumour. I felt you were above such things, as I said, but presently little indications—straws, you know—told me she cared; and if a woman cares for a man and is able to pass several hours each day in his employ, unless she is cross-eyed or a blithering idiot she cannot fail to win the game! Now can she, Stevuns?”

Steve raised his hand in protest. “Please leave her out of it.”

“So—we must talk about my being a failure, my father clipping your wings of industry and all that—yet we must not mention a woman who has loved you—and gossiped about it.”

“She did not! You know Trudy—you know her nature,” he interrupted.

“Taking up her defence! Noble Stevuns! Then you do reciprocate—and you are planning one of those ready-to-be-served bungalows with even a broom closet and lovely glass doorknobs, where Mary may gambol about in organdie and boast of the prize pie she has baked for your supper. Oh, Stevuns, you are too funny for words!”

She laughed, but there was a malicious sparkle in her eyes. She was carrying off the situation as best she knew how, for she did not comprehend its true significance, its highest motive. Underneath her veneer of sarcasm and ridicule she was hurt, stabbed—quite helpless.

With her father’s spirit she resolved to take the death gamely—and make Steve as ridiculous as possible, to have as good a time as she could out of such a sorry ending. But she knew as she stood facing him, so tired and heavy-eyed, the rejected sheet of figures fallen on the brocaded sofa between them, that it was she who met and experienced lasting defeat.

By turns she had been the spoiled child of fortune, the romantic parasite, the mad butterfly, the advanced woman, the Bolshevik de luxe; and finally and for all time to come she was confronted with the last possibility—there was no forked road for her—that of a shrewd, cold flirt. She realized too late the injustice done her under the name of a father’s loving protection. Moreover, she determined never to let herself realize to any great extent the awfulness of the injustice. It was, as Steve said, a common fate these days—there was solace in the fact of never being alone in her defeat. But at five minutes after twelve she had glimpsed the situation and regretted briefly all she was denied. Still it was an impossibility to cease being a Gorgeous Girl.

She felt cheated, stunted, revengeful because of this common fate. Steve was setting out for new worlds to conquer—he very likely would have a good time in so doing. She must continue to be fearfully rushed and terribly popular, having a good time, too. How dull everything was! Strangely, she did not give Mary Faithful or her part in Steve’s future a thought—just then. She was thinking that Ibsen merely showed the awakened Nora’s going out the door—as have Victorian matrons shown their daughters, urging them to do likewise. But it really begins to be interesting at this very point since it is not the dramatic closing of the door that is so vital, but the pitfalls and adventures on the long road that Nora and her sisters have seen fit to travel.

Beatrice was deprived of even this chance, even the falling by the wayside and admitting a new sort of defeat, or travelling the road in cold, supreme fashion

and ending with selfish victory and impersonal theories warranted to upset the most domestic and content of her stay-at-home sisters. But she, like all Gorgeous Girls, must be content to stand peering through the luxurious gates of her father's house, watching Steve go down the long road, then glancing back at her lovely habitation, where no one except tradesmen really took her seriously, and where all that was expected of her, or really permitted, was to have a good time.

Steve shrugged his shoulders. He felt a great weariness concerning the situation, nonchalant scorn of what happened in the future of this woman. As for Mary Faithful—that was a different matter, but he could not think about Mary Faithful while standing in the salon of the Villa Rosa with the Gorgeous Girl as mentor.

"Suppose we do not try to talk any more just now?" he suggested. "We are neither one fit to do so. Wait until morning and then come to an agreement." He spoke as impersonally as if a stranger asking aid interrupted his busiest time.

Beatrice recognized the tone and what it implied. "I am agreed," she said, after a second's hesitation. "Do not fancy my father and I will come on our knees to you."

She swept from the room in a dignified manner. Steve waited until he heard the door of Constantine's room bang. He knew his wife had rushed to tell her father her side of the matter—to receive the eternal heart's ease in the form of a check so she could go and play and forget all about Stevuns the brute.

He walked unsteadily through the rooms of the lower floor, out on to the main balcony, and back again. He could not think in these rooms; he could not think in any corner of the whole tinsel house. It seemed a consolation prize to those who have been forbidden to think.

He went to his own ornate and impossible room, which should have belonged to an actor desiring publicity, or some such puppet as Gay. He tried to sleep, but that too was impossible. He kept pacing back and forth and back and forth, playing the white bear as Beatrice had so often said, wondering if it would be too much the act of a cad to go to Mary Faithful and merely tell her. He could think at Mary's house—he must have a chance to think, to realize that Beatrice refused to come with him and to tell himself that nothing should force him to remain in the Villa Rosa and be the husband of the Gorgeous Girl, set right by her father's checks, the laughingstock of the business world that had called his hand.

The humiliation, the failure, the loss—were good to have; stimulating.

Wonderfully alive and keen, he did not know how to express the new sensation

that took possession of his jaded brain. He was like a gourmand dyspeptic who has long hesitated before trying the diet of a workingman and when someone has whisked him off to a sanitarium and fed him bran and milk until he has forgotten nerves, headaches, and logginess he vows eternal thankfulness to bran and milk, and is humbly setting out to adopt the workingman’s diet instead of the old-time menus.

Steve could begin to work simply, to find his permanent place in the commercial world. He had enough money—or would have—to start a home in simple yet pleasant fashion; he had knowledge and ability that would place him favourably and furnish him the chance to work normally toward the top. That was all very well, he told himself toward early morning—but must it be done alone? He had had the Gorgeous Girl as the incentive to make his fortune, and now he had Mary Faithful as the incentive to lose it—and if the Gorgeous Girl stayed on at the villa and became that pitied, dangerous object, a divorcee; and if Mary did care——-Strange things, both wonderful and fearsome, happen in the United States of America.

CHAPTER XXII

Beatrice, never having gone to her father for anything save money, did not know how to broach the subject in heartfelt and deep-water fashion. When she went into his room she found him with scarlet spots burning in his grayish cheeks, his dark eyes harsher and more formidable than ever. He tried twisting himself on the bed, resulting in awkward, halfway muscular contortions and gruff moans punctuating the failure. He held out his arms to her and she went flying into them, not the dignified woman of the world putting a cave man in his proper place.

“He is impossible!” was all she said, giving way to hysterical sobs. “Don’t even try talking to him again——”

More gruff moans before Constantine began coherently: “He’ll do what I say or he’ll not stay in this house. I expected this——”

“Oh, you don’t understand, papa. He doesn’t want to stay here, not at all! He does not want me. There, now you know it! He must have said something of this to you—perhaps you didn’t believe him. Neither did I—at first. Oh, my head aches terribly and I know I shall be ill. He wants me to be a poor man’s wife—starting again, he calls it—while he earns a salary and we live in a poky house and I do the cooking. I’d think it awfully funny if it was happening to any of my friends—but this is terrible! Well, goat-tending tells, doesn’t it? And after all we have done for him—to babble on about honesty and earning and all those socialistic ideas. He is a dangerous man, papa; really. I don’t care.”

Constantine stopped moaning. “Look up at me.” He made her lift her face from the tangle of silk bed quilts. “Do you love him?”

“Why, papa, I always adored Stevuns—but of course I can’t give up the things to which I’ve been accustomed! It’s so silly that I think he is queer even to suggest it—don’t you?”

“You won’t love him if he goes out of here and you stay,” the old man said, slowly; “but if he will stay and do as I tell him—then you’ll love him?”

“Yes”—with great relief that she was not called upon to keep on explaining and

analyzing her own feelings and Steve's motives; it was entirely too much of a strain—"that is it. If Steve will stay here and do what you tell him—I think he'd better retire from business and just look after our interests—I shall forgive him. But if he keeps up this low anarchistic talk about dragging me to a washtub—oh, it's too absurd!—I'm going to Reno and be done with all of it." She drew away from her father and the same cold, shrewd look of the mature flirt replaced her confusion. "Don't you think that is sensible?"

Her father closed his eyes for a moment. Then he whispered: "So you don't love him."

Beatrice had to stoop to catch the words. "You can't be expected to love people that make you unhappy."

"Oh, can't you?" he asked. "Can't you? Did you never think that loving someone is the bravest thing in the world? It takes courage to keep on loving the dead, for instance; the dead that keep stabbing away at your heart all through the years. Loving doesn't always make you happy, it makes you brave—real love!"

He opened his eyes to look at her closely. Beatrice whimpered.

"Isn't it time for your drops? You're too excited, papa dear."

"Then you don't love him," he repeated. "Well, then, it's best for you both that he go—that's all I've got to say. I thought you cared."

Beatrice's eyebrows lifted. "Really, I can't find any one who can talk about this thing sensibly," she began.

Suddenly she thought of Gay. There was always Gay; at least she could never disappoint him, which was what she meant by having him talk sensibly. Gay knew everyone, how to laugh at the most foolish whims, pick up fans, exercise lap dogs, and wear a fancy ball costume. What a blessed thing it was there was Gay.

"It has been quite too strenuous an evening," she said, in conclusion, "so I'm off for bed. Steve and I will talk more to-morrow. Good-night, papa. I'm terribly distressed that this has come up to annoy you." She bent and kissed him prettily.

"I've seen you make more fuss when your lap dog had a goitre operation," her father surprised her by way of an answer. "It's all different in my mind now." The thick fingers picked at the bed quilt. "I thought it would break your heart, but it's just that you want to break his spirit; so it's better he should go."

Left alone, Constantine lay staring into darkness, his harsh eyes winking and

blinking, and the gnarled thick fingers, which had robbed so cleverly by way of mahogany-trimmed offices and which had written so many checks for his Gorgeous Girl, kept on their childish picking at the quilt. Yet his love for Beatrice, monument to his folly, never dimmed. He merely was beginning to realize the truth—too late to change it. And as the pain of loving his dead wife had never ceased throughout the years, so the new and more poignant pain of loving his daughter and knowing that she was in the wrong began tugging at his heartstrings. Well, he was the original culprit; he must see her through the game with flying colours. As for Steve—he envied him!

In the morning Steve was accosted by Aunt Belle, who felt she must say her conventional, marcelled, gray-satin, and violet-perfumed reproaches. All Beatrice had told her was that Steve was now an impossible pauper, that he loved Mary Faithful and had loved her for years, that it was quite awful, and she was going to divorce him. Her aunt, with the proper emotions of a Gorgeous Girl's aunt, and uncomfortable memories of love in a cottage with the late Mr. Todd, began to upbraid Steve. She began in a cold, stereotyped fashion, calling his attention to the broken-hearted wife, the sick man who lay upstairs and who had befriended him, and of the social ostracism that was to result should he take such a drastic step.

She felt it indelicate to mention Mary but she did say there were "other vicious deceits of which we are well aware, my young man," warning him that in years to come old age would bring nothing but remorse and terror, asking him what he would be forced to think when his marriage was recalled?

"My marriage?" Steve answered, too pleasantly to be safe. "I dare say in time I'll come to realize it is always the open season for salamanders." Which left Aunt Belle with the wild thought that she must accompany Beatrice to Reno to sit out in the sagebrush for the best part of a year.

Steve found his wife in her dressing room; she had waited as eagerly for his coming as she had done during the first days of their engagement. She, too, during a sleepless night had resolved that the only solution was a divorce, but she was going to have just as gay a time out of the event as was possible, which included making Steve as wretched as could be. Even with the rumours concerning Mary she believed, in the conceited fashion of all persons so cowardly that they merely consent to be loved, that Steve still adored her and that she was dealing with the deluded man of a few years ago.

She wore a sapphire-coloured negligé with slippers to match, and lay in her

chaise-longue gondola, her prayer books with their silver covers and a new Pom as touching details to the farewell tableau. Then Steve was permitted to come into the room.

She gazed at him in a sorrowful, forgiving fashion, quite enjoying the situation. Then she held out her hand, wondering if he would kiss it; but he took it as meaning that he might sit down or try to sit down on a perilous little hassock which he had always named the Rocky Road to Dublin despite its Florentine appearance.

“I hope you agree with me,” he began, in businesslike fashion as he noted the prayer books, the untouched breakfast tray, the snapping Pom, which never tolerated his presence without protest. “I am going to see your father, out of courtesy, and explain more in detail how things stand. It won’t interest you so I sha’n’t bore you. I have enough money and securities to cover the loss of any of his money. I shall apply for a position in another city. I am reasonably sure of obtaining it. It seems to me it would be better that I go away.”

“I forgive you, Steve,” she said, sadly, shaking her golden head.

“I presume you will want to do something about a legal separation—and if you do not I shall.”

The prayer books fell to the floor in collision with the slipping Pom but Beatrice did not notice.

“So you do love her!” There was a hint of a snarl in her high-pitched voice. “So you want to marry her after all!”

“I think,” Steve continued, in the same even voice, “that as you are going to tire of being a divorcee playing about, and will want a second husband to help with the ennui that is bound to occur, you had best select your form of a divorce and let me do what I can to aid in the matter. You are very lovely this morning, as you usually are. There is no doubt but what many men far better suited to you than I will try to have you marry them—they will wisely never expect to marry you. That was our great mistake, Beatrice. I thought I was marrying you—but you were really marrying me.”

“So you do love her,” she repeated, paying no heed to what else he said.

“Yes, I do,” Steve said, with sudden honesty. It was a relief to be as brutal and uncomplimentary as possible; it offset the silver-covered prayer books, the breakfast tray, the bejewelled Pom, the whole studied, inane effect of a discontented woman trying to play coquette up to the last moment.

“I have loved her a long time. I could no more have refrained from it than you can refrain from feeling a pique at the fact, though you have nothing but contempt for us both and only a passing interest if the truth were known. I am glad you have persisted in asking me until I told you. I think one of the most promising signs that women will survive is the fact that they are never afraid to ask questions, no matter how delicate the situation. Men keep silence and often bring disaster on their sulky heads as a result.”

“So—and you dare tell me this?”

“Of course I do. I dare to tell you the truth, which no one else has ever taken the pains to tell you. If you do not get a divorce I intend to. Not that I champion the custom as a particularly healthy institution, but it is sometimes a necessary one. If it is any satisfaction to you I do not think Miss Faithful has the slightest idea of marrying me. She has put that part of her aside for business and taking care of Luke. The time has passed when she would have married me. Still, I shall try to make her change her mind,” he added with the same spirit he had once displayed toward winning the Gorgeous Girl. “Only this time I shall not bargain for her.”

Beatrice gave an affected laugh. “Quite a satisfactory arrangement all round. I hope you do not bother me again. Tell my father what you like, and then take yourself off to the new position and do as you please. When I decide what course I shall pursue you will be informed. Would you please pick up my prayer book?” she added, languidly.

Steve bent over to grasp the intricate nothing in his hand and lay it gently in the sapphire-velvet lap.

“Good-bye, Beatrice,” he said, a trifle sadly—for the day the child discovers there are no fairies is one of sadness.

It was something of this Steve felt as he looked at his wife for the last time. How thrilled and adoring he would have one time been. Just such visions, a trifle cruder no doubt, had stirred his young soul in the bleak orphanage days—the boo’ful princess and the valiant young hero chaining the seven-headed dragon. And in America it was just bound to have come true!

“Good-bye, Stevuns,” she answered, in the same gay voice—but a trifle forced if one knew her well. “I hope you have a wonderful time leading a mob somewhere and your wife selling your photographs on the next corner curbstone!”

She pretended to become interested in the prayer book; and, with the Pom

shooing him out by sharp, ear-piercing barks, Steve left the room.

CHAPTER XXIII

Not an hour later Mrs. Stephen O'Valley's card was taken in to Mary Faithful as she sat trying to work in the new office—it never ceased to be new to her. She had heard the swift rumours of Steve's failure. Understanding that the visitor's card had a deeper significance than the messenger who delivered it realized, Mary closed the outer doors of her office and waited for her guest.

It was a very Gorgeous Girl who swept serenely into the room and lost no time in introducing the nature of her errand.

"I don't know how well informed you are in business reports," she began in her high-pitched voice, "but perhaps you have heard——"

"The report of the new leather trust—without including your husband's factory? Yes—but it was bound to come. I always told him so."

Beatrice lost sight of the business introduction she had so carefully planned while dressing and then driving downtown.

"You have told my husband a great many things, haven't you?" she insisted. "Don't seem to be surprised. I am quite well informed."

She was scrutinizing Mary as she talked. Within her mind was the undeniable thought that there was something about this thin, tall woman with gray eyes which was real and comforting. She even wished that Steve had fallen in love with someone else, and that she, Beatrice, might have come to Mary for comfort and advice. If any one could have set her right with herself it would be just such a good-looking thing, as Trudy used to say, a commercial nun who had kept her ideals and was not bereft of ideas. Faith and intellect had been properly introduced in Mary's mind.

Mary blushed. "I have always wished to speak to you about something Mrs. Vondeplosshe told you shortly before her death. Won't you sit down? I am sure we have much to say to each other."

Beatrice found herself obeying like a docile child. As she took a chair facing Mary's desk she realized that in just such a kind, practical fashion would Mary

proceed to manage Steve, that the years of experience in the business world as an independent woman would give Mary quite a new-fashioned charm in his eyes. Whether she was dealing with gigantic business interests in deft fashion or showing tenderness for the little girl who puts away her dolls for the last time, Mary possessed a flexibility of comprehension and power. One could not be cheap in dealings with her. And as the eternal sex barrier was not present in Beatrice's behalf she realized that her jargon so impulsively planned would never be said. Nor could she dismiss Mary patronizingly and say the halfway melodramatic things she had said to Steve. It occurred to her as Mary began to talk that Mary had been brave enough to love, not merely be loved, the truth of this causing her to wince within.

"In a malicious moment Trudy told you of my—my affection for your husband. It is true, if that is what you have come to ask me about. I told myself months ago that if you did come to ask me this thing I should answer you truthfully, and we must remain at least polite acquaintances over a hard situation. I think I have played fairly." Mary's face had a tired look that bore proof to the statement. "I even left his employ. As I once told you from an impersonal statement, I have a theory that many business women of to-day are in love with someone in their office. Propinquity perhaps and the shut-in existence that they lead account for much of it. Yet no woman is a true woman who forgets her employer is a married or engaged man.

"You and I know, however, that love does not stop to ask if this is the case, and I sometimes feel—impersonally, remember—that the business women earn the love of their employers and associates more than said employers' and associates' wives. Does it sound strange? Of course you need not agree—I hardly expect it. Yet the fact remains that we watch and save that you Gorgeous Girls may spend and play. In time the man, tense and non-understanding of it all, discovers that his trust and confidence may be placed in the business woman while romantic love is not enduring in his home. Not always, of course; but many times in these days of overnight prosperity and endless good times. So I have neither shame nor remorse—I have as much right to love your husband as you have—and because of that I shall be as fair to you as I would ask any woman to be toward me in similar circumstances."

"I think I understand," the Gorgeous Girl said, swiftly. "I see something of the light." She laughed nervously. It was easier to laugh than to cry, and one or the other was necessary at this moment. "I wanted to tell you that my husband is going away to take a rather mediocre position. I shall divorce him."

“He’s won out,” Mary said, in spite of herself.

“Has he? So you have been the urge behind him and his poverty talk?”

“I’d like to claim the credit,” Mary retorted.

“Really?”

Beatrice found herself in another mental box, undecided how to cope with the situation. She had fancied she could make Mary cry and beg for silence, be afraid and unpoised. Instead she felt as ornate as a circus rider in her costume, and as stupid regarding the truth as the snapping Pom under her arm. Her head began to ache. She wondered why all these people delighted in accepting sacrifice and seeking self-denial—and she thought of Gay again and of what a consolation he was. And through it all ran a curious mental pain which informed her that she had not the power to hurt or to please either of these persons, and she was being politely labelled and put in her own groove by Mary Faithful. This stung her on to action, just as any poorly prepared enemy loses his head when he sees the tide is turning.

In desperation she said, coldly: “After all, I shall play square with you because you have played square with him. I’ll give you the best advice a retiring wife can give her advancing rival. Don’t copy me—no matter how Steve may prosper in years to come, do you understand? Oh, I’m not so terrible or abnormal as you people think. I’d have done quite well if my father had never earned more than three thousand a year and I had had to put my shoulder to the wheel. But don’t ever start to be a Gorgeous Girl—stay thrifty and be not too discerning of handmade lace or lap dogs. You know, there’s no need to enumerate. Stay the woman who won my husband away from me—and you’ll keep him. What is more, I think you will make him a success—in time for your golden-wedding anniversary! There, that’s as fair as I can be.”

“Quite,” Mary said, softly.

“Once you admit to him there is a craving in your sensible heart to be as useless as I am—then someone else will come along to play Mary Faithful to your Gorgeous Girl.” There was a catch in the light, gay voice. “I don’t want him,” she added, vigorously. “Heavens, no, we never could patch it up! I shall always think of this last twelve months as *l’année terrible!* My Tawny Adonis was a far more soothing companion than Steve. Nor do I envy you and your future. I don’t really want Steve—and you deserve him. Besides, we women never feel so secure as novelists like to paint us as being in their last chapters! So I’m giving you the best hint concerning our mutual cave man that a defeated Gorgeous Girl

ever gave a Mary Faithful. As far as I am concerned the thing is painless. I shall have a ripping time out West, and some day perhaps marry someone nice and mild, someone who will stand for my moods and not spend too much of my money in ways I don't know about—a society coward out of a job! The thing that does hurt," she finished, suddenly, "is the fact that I'd honestly like to feel broken-hearted—but I don't know how. I've been brought up in such a gorgeous fashion that it would take a jewel robbery or an unbecoming hat to wring my soul."

"Thanks," Mary said, lightly. "I may as well tell you I've determined never to marry Steve, for all your good advice."

"Why?" All the tenseness of her nature rushed to the occasion. This was decidedly interesting, since it resembled her own whims. She felt almost friendly toward the other woman.

"Because," Mary answered, handing the psychologists another problem for a rainy afternoon.

Beatrice nodded, satisfied at the answer and the eternal damnable woman's notion inspiring it, for it was just what she would have replied in like circumstances. She felt there was nothing more to be said about the matter and that Gorgeous Girls and commercial nuns had much in common. As usual, Steve was appointed the official blackguard of the inevitable triangle!

Going home that night Mary felt that truly the "day was a bitter almond." It even began to be dramatically muggy and threatening, in keeping with her state of mind—the sort of forced weather that issues offstage in roars of thunder the moment the villain begins his plotting. She took a street car, having meant to walk and give herself time to pull together and adopt the fat smile of a professional optimist.

A tired-faced woman, heavily rouged, was talking to another tired-faced woman, also rouged. Mary listened because it was a relief to listen to someone else besides herself, to realize there were other persons in this world occupied with other problems besides a commercial nun with a heartache, a tired cave man about to start again, and a Gorgeous Girl defeated in no uncertain terms. The whole thing was beyond Mary's comprehension just now; as much as the graybeards' lack of understanding when they try to Freud the schoolboy's mind.

"That's me, too, Mame, all over—and when she tried telling me she was a natural blonde, never using lemon juice in even the last rinse water—well, when you've been handing out doll dope and baby bluster over the counter of a beauty

department as long as I have you know there ain't no such animal! Good-bye, Mame. I hope you get home safe."

"There ain't no such animal," Mary found herself repeating. "No, there sure ain't!"

There were no real commercial nuns; it was a premeditated affair entirely, merely a comfortable phrase borrowed by the lonesome ones unwilling to be called old maids; a big, brave bluff that women have adopted during these times of commercial necessity and economic stress. Commercial nuns! As foolish as the tales told children of the wunks living in the coalbins—as if there ever could be such creatures! The reason Mary would not marry Steve was because she, Mary, did not want to disappoint him even as the Gorgeous Girl had done. She did not want to be all helpmate, practical comrade; she had fed herself with this delusion during the years of loneliness. She had adopted the veneer, convinced herself that it was true, but she knew now that it was false. It had taken a Gorgeous Girl to scratch beneath the veneer in true feminine fashion. Mary did wish to be dependent, helpless—to have Gorgeous Girl propensities. The cheap phrases of the shopwomen kept interrupting her attempts to think of practical detail. "There ain't no such animal."

She found Luke wild-eyed and excited, brandishing an evening paper.

"Look what's happened—the O'Valley Leather Company has gone under! Won't Constantine help him out? I always said you were the mascot——"

"I'd rather not talk about it."

"Why? I always tell you everything."

Mary smiled. Luke was so boyish and square. She felt that particularly toward Luke must she keep up the delusion of being a commercial nun, content with her part in things.

"It's such a horrid day. I rode on a car that was as crowded as a cattle shipment. My head aches. The stenographer has left to be married."

"You mean you are not interested about Steve O'Valley?" Luke was not to be trifled with regarding the affair.

Mary sank down into the nearest chair. "Of course I am. But what right have I to be?" she asked, almost bitterly. "It never pays to be too keenly interested."

Luke laid the paper aside. "Mary," he began, his voice very basso profondo, "do you like this man?"

Mary gave a little cry. “Stop—all of you—all of you!” Then she began sobbing quite as helplessly as the Gorgeous Girl could have done.

Luke stood before her in helpless posture. He might have coped with her temper but his reliable tailor-made sister in tears?—Never. As she cried he experienced a new sympathy, a delightful sense of protectorship. He decided that his wife should cry occasionally—it became women.

“See here,” he began, shyly, “you mustn’t cry about him; it won’t do any good. If he has failed it isn’t your fault. And if you do like him—well, you like him. He likes you,” he finished with emphasis. “I know it. I’ve known it all along.”

“Oh, Luke!” Mary said, helplessly. “Luke!”

He put his arm round her, clumsily. “There—now I wouldn’t—please don’t, it makes me feel awful bad—there’s no sense worrying about it—you have a lot of good things ahead of you. There, that’s the girl.”

At that moment Luke grew up and became far more manly and self-sufficient than all Mary’s practical naggings and deeply laid plans could have achieved. He felt he must protect his sister; hitherto it had been his sister who had protected him. And he watched with pride the way she smiled up through her tears in rainbow fashion and patted his cheek, calling him a dear. She was a new kind of Mary. Both of them felt the better for the happening.

But when Steve came unceremoniously to Mary’s apartment that same evening, and Luke, very amusing and pathetic in his dignity, met him, innocent of the tornado of emotion sweeping about his nice boyish self—Mary almost wished the happening had not taken place. For a moment she feared that Luke would try to take command of the situation. There was something maternal in Mary’s wishing Luke to be ignorant of the hard things until the ripe time should come. And Luke, quite willing to be released, since it was a trifle beyond his powers of comprehension, retired to read a magazine and resolve to be ready for action at the first sound of a sister’s sob!

“I had to come,” Steve said, simply. “I’ve been like the man who never took time to walk because he had always been so busy running. I want to walk but I don’t know how.”

Mary shook her head, really shaking it at herself. “Go away, Steve.”

“I shall, after a little. But I had to come now. Her aunt said she saw you and made quite a time of it. I’m sorry.”

“I’m not. We are good friends, in a sense; far better than we have ever been before. We found we were in accord—after all.”

He looked at her in the same helpless fashion Luke had adopted.

“She will divorce you and marry someone else and continue to be a Gorgeous Girl,” Mary finished, quietly. “No terrible fate will overtake her, nothing occur to rouse or develop her abilities. She will remain young and apparently childish until she suddenly reaches the stately dowager age overnight. Gorgeous Girls are like gypsies—they should either be very young and lissom or old, crinkled, and vested with powers of fortune-telling—the middle stage is impossible. I realized this morning that I’ve been fooling myself, all the heart in me trying to be 100 per cent efficient, when I really want to be a Gorgeous Girl—fluffy, helpless—a blooming little idiot. And I’m glad you have come so I can tell you.”

“You don’t mean that,” he corrected.

“Being incurably honest I am bound to tell tales on myself. Yes, I do mean it. I’d probably be rushing round for freckle lotion and patent nose pins, to give me a Greek-boy effect. I’d take to swathing myself in chiffons and have my hair a different tint each season. I think every business woman would do the same, too—if she had the chance. We have to fool ourselves to keep on going down the broad highway; or else we would be sanitarium devotees, neurasthenic muddles. So we strike our brave pose and call ourselves superwomen, advanced feminists, and all the rest of the feeble rubbish until the right man comes along. Sometimes he never comes—so we keep right ahead, growing dry as dust at heart and even fooling ourselves. I did. But it took your wife to show me my smug conceit, my fancy that I was a bulwark of commerce, so proper, so perfect! She showed me that I was just plain woman making the best of having been born into the twentieth century! There is a Gorgeous Girl in all of us, Steve. So I can’t advise or comfort or do any of the things I used to—a bag of tricks we women in business have adopted to make the heart loneliness the less. Go away and make good! That is just what she told you—isn’t it? You will never believe in any of us again. And I don’t know that you should, after all. For cave men need Gorgeous Girls.”

Steve was laughing down at her. “True—but they need the right Gorgeous Girl. I’m glad you have finally told the truth; I always suspected it. You have over-emphasized it somewhat—and the woman I married was unfairly over-emphasized as well. But in the main, what you have said is the truth. I assure you I am twice as glad to have an incentive instead of a lady directress. And I

want you to be helpless—if you can; and fluffy—if you will! Don’t you see that you are the right Gorgeous Girl—and she was the wrong one—and I’m the culprit? Why, Mary, the worst thing you could do would be to descend upon me in curl papers under a pink net cap. Even that prospect does not frighten me!”

“Are you going away?” she asked, shyly.

“Not far—nothing spectacular or romantic. I’m done with that. Beatrice goes West, I believe. She is quite happy. She is going to New York first to get her divorce wardrobe. It is her father I pity—he has to face another son-in-law,” Steve laughed. “I am merely going to work for an old and reliable firm—use my nest egg for a house. A brown-shingled house, I think, with plain yard and a few ambitious shrubs blooming along the walks. I don’t know what they will be; I leave that to you!”

Luke wondered why he was not called upon for action, but he wondered still more as Mary came presently to ask that he tell Steve good-night. Her gray eyes were like captured sunrise.

“Luke, dear,” she said in as feminine a manner as Beatrice might have done, “don’t worry about me any more. I’m a queer old sister—but it’s all coming out all right,” kissing him before Steve, to his utter confusion.

CHAPTER XXIV

Beatrice sent for Gay before she decided to run down to New York to gather up some good-looking things to wear while West. More and more the novelty of the situation was appealing to her. She would ship her car out and take with her a maid, the Pom, and her aunt, besides three trunks of clothes. She also had learned of hot springs that were extremely reducing; and of a wonderful lawyer whom several of her friends recommended. It had grown very distressing to have a cave man prowl about the villa, the eternal disapproval of whatsoever she did, then her father's presence got on her nerves. Considering everything she was glad to escape, and she welcomed the sympathy and peculiar publicity that would be hers. The rôle of an injured woman is almost as attractive as that of a romantic parasite. All in all, she was just bound to have a good time.

To be sure she thought of Steve working for someone else, making one twentieth of his former income, marrying Mary and starting housekeeping in eight rooms and a pocket handkerchief of a lawn—and she envied them. This was only natural; it would be fun to be in Mary's place for a fortnight or so, so she could tell about it afterward. And she thought of Mary and of all she had admitted in the tenseness of their conversation.

When she returned from New York Gay met her at the train. He carried a single long-stemmed white rose, which, he lisped, stood for friendship. And Beatrice—three pounds heavier if the truth were told—quite languid and easily pleased, looked affectionately upon Gay, who was trying to smile his sweetest.

"Of course this is very hard"—feeling it the thing to say—"but inevitable."

"I always knew it," he supplemented, feeling that the gates of paradise were slowly opening for him. Within a year or so he would not even have the pretense at a business. "I understand only too well. May I say to my old friend, one whose opinions have swayed me far more than she has imagined, that I, too, have experienced a similar disillusionment which terminated more tragically?"

"Really?" Beatrice roused from her cushions. "Tell me, Gay, just when did you begin to regret having married Trudy?"

The barriers down, Gay began a rapid fire of incidents concerning Trudy's gross nature and lack of comprehension, and the patience it had required to bear with her. He twirled her diamond ring on his finger. Beatrice spied it.

"Why, that setting is just a little different from any I have," she said, almost crossly. "I never saw it before."

She held out her hand, and the minor question of a dead wife and a discarded husband was put aside until further ennui should overtake them.

Aunt Belle opposed the divorce trip more vigorously than any one else concerned. It seemed to her naught but a wild panorama of rattlesnakes and Indians, with no opportunity for her daily massage. Besides, she knew Beatrice's moods, and as time went on, between Constantine's ridicule and his daughter's tempers, Aunt Belle was forced to work hard to maintain a look of joyous contentment.

But there was nothing else for her to do unless she wished to be taken to an old ladies' home. Her brother had said he would be delighted to have her away, her pretenses and simpering nothings drove him to distraction; and he had at last secured a man attendant who knew how to dodge small articles skilfully for the compensation of a hundred dollars a month and all he could pilfer. Like Beatrice, Aunt Belle regretted that the actual divorce must lack a gorgeous setting; it was quite commonplace. But one cannot have everything, and Beatrice had as much as hinted that for her second wedding she would use the sunken gardens at the Villa Rosa and wear a cloth-of-gold gown without a veil but a smart aigrette of gilded feathers.

Beatrice shrank from saying good-bye to her father. It was more than her usual dislike of entering the sick room. She had come to realize that though her father caused her to be the sort of person she was, he himself had remained both real and simple, succeeding by force of this fact, and her contact with both Steve and Mary convinced her that she did not wish to know real, everyday persons—they had nothing in common with her and caused her to be restless and distressed. Gay was as wild a mental tonic as she desired.

However, she bent solicitously over him and murmured the usual things: "Take best care of yourself—miss you worlds—do be careful—will write every day."

Constantine looked up at her, tears in the harsh eyes, which had lost their black sparkle. "I'm sorry," he said, in childish fashion, as she waited for an equally conventional reply. "Your mother would have liked Steve."

“Papa!”—shocked at his lack of fairness—“how horrid!”

“Maybe I was wrong—maybe if your mother had lived it would have been different. She would have liked Steve.”

Beatrice played her final weapon against Steve’s reputation in her father’s eyes.

“He is going to marry Miss Faithful. He has loved her for a long time. Now you see what I have endured.”

“Are you sure?”

“Oh, quite. He admitted it. So did she.” Beatrice knew that Mary’s declaration against ever marrying Steve would have as much effect as to attempt to keep the sun from shining if it so inclined. “I’ve no doubt they will be the model couple of a model village, for if ever there was a reformer it is Steve. He never should have been a rich man.”

“Not at thirty,” his father-in-law championed. “So—it’s the woman who worked for him that won.... I guess it’s the way of things, Bea.”

“You uphold him?” Her temper was rising.

Constantine shook his head, closing the dull eyes. “I’m out of it all,” he excused himself. “There’s a check for you on the table.”

Either pretended or real, he seemed to go to sleep without delay.

Some months later Gaylord, very suave in white flannels, came in to tell Constantino that he was to meet Beatrice in Chicago, en route from the West, and that they were planning to announce their engagement shortly after their arrival in Hanover. At which Constantine managed to curse Gay in as horrid fashion as he knew how. But Gay was quite too happy and secure to mind the reception. Besides, there was nothing Constantine could do about it. It was a rather neat form of revenge since his daughter would bring into his family the son of one of the men he had ruthlessly ruined in his own ascent of the ladder.

Gay had done nothing but write letters to Beatrice, in which he copied all the smart sayings and quips of everyone else, purporting them as original, impoverishing himself for florists’ orders and gifts, and even taking a desperate run out to see Beatrice ensconced in state in a Western town with her tortured aunt and lady’s maid and a stout squaw to do the housekeeping. Gay knew that all this work would not count in vain. So when he proposed to Beatrice, having taken three days in which to write the love missive, he knew that he would be

accepted, and therefore counted Constantine's wrath as a passing annoyance.

Everything considered, Beatrice could do no better. She had inclined toward a minister as a second husband, she one time said, but her chances there were small since she was not a bona-fide widow. Gay would endure anything at her hands; he knew no pride, he had no purpose in existing save to have a good time, neither did he possess annoying theories about life. He was an adept at flattery, and he understood Beatrice's sensitiveness about being called stout. With a suitor at hand well trained for the part, why waste time looking further, she argued.

So the wedding in the sunken gardens with the cloth-of-gold-garbed bride was planned for the next season's calendar and there would be all the pleasure of talking it over, the entertainments, the new clothes, and so on. His father-in-law was paralyzed and his aunt-in-law was senile. Gay was bound to be master of all he surveyed before long.

Perhaps during the breaking up of his establishment he might be unpleasantly reminded of a red-haired girl who had died unmourned and whose very ring Beatrice now wore—in exchange for one of hers which Gay wore. But he could take an extra cordial if that was the case and soon forget. After all, Trudy, like Steve, had been impossible; and Gay felt positive that impossible people would not count at judgment day.

Likewise Beatrice, who regarded the whole thing as a lark, thought sometimes of Steve, who, she understood, was superintendent of a large plant some two hundred miles removed from Hanover, and of the time when the slightest flicker of her eyes made him glad for all the day, or the suggestion of a pout brought him to the level of despair. Perhaps she thought, too, of the very few moments as his wife during which she had wished things might have been as he wanted. No, not really wished—but wondered how it would have been. And of Mary she thought a great deal—that was to be expected. No one wrote her about Mary, no one seemed to think it would be interesting. The dozen dear friends who deluged her with weekly items of local scandal never once told her of her wife-in-law, as Gay dubbed her. Therefore she thought of her more than she did of any one else—even Gay.

She wondered if Mary was making simple hemstitched things for her trousseau; if she would shamelessly marry this divorced man, superintendent of a cement works; if she would go live in a brown-shingled house and belong to the town social centre and all the rest of the woman's-column, bargain-day, sewing-society things. And Beatrice knew that Mary would. Moreover, that she would

make a complete success of so doing. Whereas even now Beatrice merely regarded Gay as essential to complete her defeat.

When she reached home, in company with Gay, her aunt, the maid, and an armful of flowers, the attendant told them her father was dead. He had had a bad turn in the early morning—no pain—just drifted off. Well, the only intelligible things he had said were—should he repeat them now? Well, the two words he had said over and over again were “Steve—Hannah—Hannah—Steve.”

So the cloth-of-gold wedding with the sunken-garden setting was changed for a wedding at twilight in the conservatory, Beatrice dressed in shimmery mauve out of memory to dear papa!

“You have renounced your economic independence and you are now approaching the legal-vassal stage,” Steve warned Mary as they viewed the rooms of the new brown house. “Do you know what it all means?”

“No; probably that is why we women do so,” she retorted. “Luke says you are bully and everything is fino—and I set quite a store by Luke’s opinions.”

“You’ll have green-plush and golden-oak people call on you, I’m afraid, and a few who run to Sheraton and crystal goblets. There will be funny entertainments and dinner parties where the hostess fries the steak and then removes her apron to display her best silk gown.”

“I am prepared. And the maid will leave us before the month is over and I shall be her understudy. Well, I can. That is something.”

“I’m not going to ask permission to smoke—I’m going to sprawl in all the chairs and puff away at my leisure.”

“Do. I’ll try to remember it is good for moths.”

“Mary, are you satisfied?” he asked, wistfully.

“Of course. It never does to have it all perfect—to the last detail of the wallpaper designs. That never lasts.”

She went to lay her head on his shoulder for a brief second, almost boyishly darting away and running upstairs to see to some detail in which Steve was not concerned.

He went to the side doorway of the house to look out at the other houses and yards—pleasant, livable dwellings without romantic construction or extravagant details—the homes of the people who keep the world moving and mostly turning

to the right.

He felt he had earned this brown house—and the woman who was upstairs examining the linen-closet capacity. He had neither stolen nor bargained for either. It was true there was a tinge of regret, like a calm stretch of road without the suggestion of a stirring breeze. One cannot chain youth, romance, and Irish-Basque ancestry together and let them go breakneck speed without glorious and eternal memories of the feat.

Mary realized this—even though she might pretend ignorance of the fact. She had reckoned with it before she gave Steve her word. Perhaps it, too, had been a factor in stripping off the mask of commercial nun and showing him the Gorgeous-Girl propensities. Nothing would content him so much as to think of someone dependent upon him, make him shoulder responsibility, surround him in a halo of hero worship. Even if they both knew this to be a lovely rosy joke—aide-de-camp of romance, which even the most practical American woman will not forgo—Mary had been wise in telling him the truth. The only time women do at all well in fibbing is to each other. Besides, there is a vast difference between fibs and rosy jokes!

Steve had earned this, therefore it would be his for all time. And though he felt youth had gone from him—the optimistic swashbuckling youth which conquered all in his pathway—approaching middle age was good to have, and he rejoiced that this mad noonday was over. As he looked out at the simple grounds and thought of how sensible Mary was, and how sensible was the colour of their modest car, and a hundred similar facts—there crossed his mind a vision of the Gorgeous Girl like a frail, exotic jungle flower, clad in copper-coloured tulle with tiny rusty satin slippers and surrounded by a bodyguard of the season’s best dancers.

“Why, Stevuns,” he almost fancied her light, gay voice saying, “aren’t you funny!” Then the tiny rusty satin slippers tripped away to the latest of waltz tunes.

Well, that was at an end. Perhaps even to Mary, who had come downstairs, delighted at finding extra shelf room, Steve would never confide these fleeting visions that would cross his mind from time to time; also his banished boy heart. Mary would grow a trifle matronly of figure, become addicted to severe striped silks, perhaps insist on meatless days—and smokeless rooms, for all she said not just now. She would dominate a trifle and be on committees, raise a great hue and cry as to the right schools for the children. But she would always be his Mary Faithful, gray-eyed and incurably honest and loving him without pause and without thought of her own splendid self. Truly he was a fortunate man, for though there is an abundance of Gorgeous Girls these days there are seldom enough Mary Faithfuls to go round.

But he would never tell even his nearest and dearest of the visions. This would be Steve's one secret.

And as Steve thought sometimes of the Gorgeous Girl in copper-coloured tulle and with a dancing bodyguard, or in white fur coats being halfway carried into her motor car, so would the Gorgeous Girl sometimes find Gay and his simpering servility quite beside her own thoughts. Once more she would see Steve, young and flushed with a lover's dream!

The same germ of greatness in these Gorgeous Girls as in their fathers frequently causes them to produce good results in the lives of those they apparently harm. As in Steve's case—he found his ultimate salvation not so much by Mary Faithful's love and service as by realizing the Gorgeous Girl's shallow tragedy. With iron wills concealed behind childish faces and misdirected energy searching for novelty, so the Gorgeous Girls stand to-day a deluxe monument to the failure of their adoring, check-bestowing, shortsighted parents. They are neither salamanders nor vampires. Steve had not spoken truly. They are more chaste and generous of heart than the former, more aloof from sordid things than the latter. Wonderful, curious little creatures with frail, tempting physiques and virile endurance, playing whatever game is handy without remorse and without vicious intent just as long as it interests them—in the same careless fashion their fathers stoked an engine or became a baker's assistant as long as it proved advantageous.

Moreover, they are so apart from the workaday world that it is impossible to refrain from thinking of them in unwise fashion—even after life has fallen into pleasant channels and the dearly beloved of all the world is by one's side. So strong yet so weak, so tantalizing yet generous, they have the power to haunt at

strange intervals and in strange fashion. So it was with Steve. He could not experience a storm of definite reproach at the thought of Beatrice—nor bitter hatred. Only a vague, lonesome urge, which soon dulled beside the sharp commands of common sense.

It was only Mary who was done with visions and could give herself unreservedly to the making of her home, the rearing of her family. But Mary had realized her vision—not relinquished it.

THE END

THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is derived from the public domain (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg-tm License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg-tm License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg-tm.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg-tm License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg-tm work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg-tm web site (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg-tm License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm

License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH F3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS,' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTIBILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at http://www.gutenberg.org/fundraising/pglaf.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at http://www.gutenberg.org/about/contact

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit http://www.gutenberg.org/fundraising/pglaf

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: http://www.gutenberg.org/fundraising/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Each eBook is in a subdirectory of the same number as the eBook's eBook number, often in several formats including plain vanilla ASCII, compressed (zipped), HTML and others.

Corrected EDITIONS of our eBooks replace the old file and take over the old filename and etext number. The replaced older file is renamed. VERSIONS based on separate sources are treated as new eBooks receiving new filenames and etext numbers.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

http://www.gutenberg.org
This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.

EBooks posted prior to November 2003, with eBook numbers BELOW #10000,
are filed in directories based on their release date. If you want to
download any of these eBooks directly, rather than using the regular
search system you may utilize the following addresses and just
download by the etext year.

http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext06/
    (Or /etext 05, 04, 03, 02, 01, 00, 99,
     98, 97, 96, 95, 94, 93, 92, 92, 91 or 90)

EBooks posted since November 2003, with etext numbers OVER #10000, are
filed in a different way. The year of a release date is no longer part
of the directory path. The path is based on the etext number (which is
identical to the filename). The path to the file is made up of single
digits corresponding to all but the last digit in the filename. For
example an eBook of filename 10234 would be found at:

http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/0/2/3/10234

or filename 24689 would be found at:
http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/2/4/6/8/24689

An alternative method of locating eBooks:
http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/GUTINDEX.ALL
*** END: FULL LICENSE ***