Senator North

Gertrude Atherton

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"When, Mr. President, a man, however eminent in other pursuits and whatever claims he may have to public confidence, becomes a member of this body, he has much to learn and much to endure. Little does he know of what he will have to encounter. He may be well read in public affairs, but he is unaware of the difficulties which must attend and embarrass every effort to render what he may know available and useful. He may be upright in purpose and strong in the belief of his own integrity, but he cannot even dream of the ordeal to which he cannot fail to be exposed; of how much courage he must possess to resist the temptations which must daily beset him; of that sensitive shrinking from undeserved censure which he must learn to control; of the ever recurring contest between a natural desire for public approbation and a sense of public duty; of the load of injustice he must be content to bear even from those who should be his friends; the imputations on his motives; the sneers and sarcasms of ignorance and malice; all the manifold injuries which partisan or private malignity, disappointed of its object, may shower upon his unprotected head. All this, if he would retain his integrity, he must learn to ear unmoved and walk steadily onward in the path of public duty, sustained only by the reflection that time may do him justice; or if not, that his individual hopes and aspirations and even his name among men should be of little account to him when weighed in the balance of a people of whose destiny he is a constituted guardian and defender."

—WILLIAM PITT FESSENDEN

In memorial address before the Senate, 1866.

Part I. Miss Betty Madison embarks on the Political Sea. Her Discoveries, Surprises, and Triumphs.

I

“If we receive this Lady Mary Montgomery, we shall also have to receive her dreadful husband.”

“He is said to be quite charming.”

“He is a Representative!”

“Of course they are all wild animals to you, but one or two have been pointed out to me that looked quite like ordinary gentlemen—really.”

“Possibly. But no person in official life has ever entered my house. I do not feel inclined to break the rule merely because the wife of one of the most objectionable class is an Englishwoman with a title. I think it very inconsiderate of Lady Barnstaple to have given her a letter to us.”

“Lee, never having lived in Washington, doubtless fancies, like the rest of the benighted world, that its officials are its aristocracy. The Senate of the United States is regarded abroad as a sort of House of Peers. One has to come and live in Washington to hear of the 'Old Washingtonians,' the 'cave−dwellers,' as Sally calls us; I expected to see a coat of blue mould on each of them when I returned.”

“Really, Betty, I do not understand you this morning.” Mrs. Madison moved uneasily and took out her handkerchief. When her daughter's rich Southern voice hardened itself to sarcasm, and her brilliant hazel eyes expressed the brain in a state of cold analysis, Mrs. Madison braced herself for a contest in which she inevitably must surrender with what slow dignity she could command. Betty had called her Molly since she was fourteen months old, and, sweet and gracious in small matters, invariably pursued her own way when sufficiently roused by the strength of a desire. Mrs. Madison, however, kept up the fiction of an authority which she thought was due to herself and her ancestors. She continued impatiently,—

“You have been standing before that fireplace for ten minutes with your shoulders thrown back as if you were going to make a speech. It is not a nice attitude for a girl at all, and I wish you would sit down. I hope you don't think that because Sally Carter crosses her knees and cultivates a brutal frankness of expression you must do the same now that you have dropped all your friends of your own age and become intimate with her. I suppose she is old enough to do as she chooses, and she always was eccentric.”

“She is only eight years older than I. You forget that I shall be twenty−seven in three months.”

“Well, that is no reason why you should stand before the fireplace like a man. Do sit down.”

“I'd rather stand here till I've said what is necessary—if you don't mind. I am sorry to be obliged to say it, and I can assure you that I have not made up my mind in a moment.”

“What is it, for heaven's sake?”

Mrs. Madison drew a short breath and readjusted her cushions. In spite of her wealth and exalted position she had known much trouble and grief. Her first six children had died in their early youth. Her husband, brilliant and charming, had possessed a set of affections too restless and ardent to confine themselves within the domestic limits. His wife had buried him with sorrow, but with a deep sigh of relief that for the future she could mourn him without torment. He had belonged to a collateral branch of a family of which her father had been the heir; consequently the old Madison house in Washington was hers, as well as a large fortune. Harold Madison had been free to spend his own inheritance as he listed, and he had left but a fragment. Mrs. Madison's nerves, never strong, had long since given way to trouble and ill−health, and when her active strong−willed daughter entered her twentieth year, she gladly permitted her to become the mistress of the household and to think for both. Betty had been educated by private tutors, then taken abroad for two years, to France, Germany, and Italy, in order, as she subsequently observed, to make the foreign attache. Feel more at ease when he proposed. Her winters thereafter until the last two had been spent in Washington, where she had been a belle and ranked as a beauty. In the fashionable set it was believed that every attache, in the city had proposed to her, as well as a large proportion of the old beaux and of the youths who pursue the business of Society. Her summers she spent at her place in the Adirondacks, at Northern watering−places, or in Europe; and the last two years had been passed, with brief intervals of Paris and Vienna, in England, where she had been presented with distinction and seen much of country life. She had returned with her mother to Washington but a month ago, and since then had spent most of

her time in her room or on horseback, breaking all her engagements after the first ten days. Mrs. Madison had awaited the explanation with deep uneasiness. Did her daughter, despite the health manifest in her splendid young figure, feel the first chill of some mortal disease? She had not been her gay self for months, and although her complexion was of that magnolia tint which never harbours colour, it seemed to the anxious maternal eye, looking back to six young graves, a shade whiter than it should. Or had she fallen in love with an Englishman, and hesitated to speak, knowing her mother's love for Washington and bare tolerance of the British Isles? She looked askance at Betty, who stood tapping the front of her habit with her crop and evidently waiting for her mother to express some interest. Mrs. Madison closed her eyes. Betty therefore continued,—

"I see you are afraid I am going to marry an Oriental minister or something. I hear that one is looking for an American with a million. Well, I am going to do something you will think even worse. I am going in for politics."

"You are going to do what?" Mrs. Madison's voice was nearly inaudible between relief and horrified surprise, but her eyes flew open. "Do you mean that you are going to vote?—or run for Congress?—but women don't sit in Congress, do they?"

"Of course not. Do you know I think it quite shocking that we have lived here in the very brain of the United States all our lives and know less of politics than if we were Indians in Alaska? I was ashamed of myself, I can assure you, when Lord Barnstaple asked me so many questions the first time I visited Maundrell Abbey. He took for granted, as I lived in Washington, I must be thoroughly well up in politics, and I was obliged to tell him that although I had occasionally been in the room with one or two Senators and Cabinet Ministers, who happened to be in Society first and politics afterward, I didn't know the others by name, had never put my foot in the White House or the Capitol, and that no one I knew ever thought of talking politics. He asked me what I had done with myself during all the winters I had spent in Washington, and I told him that I had had the usual girls'−good−time,—teas, theatre, Germans, dinners, luncheons, calls, calls, calls! I was glad to add that I belonged to several charities and had read a great deal; but that did not seem to interest him. Well, I met a good many men like Lord Barnstaple, men who were in public life. Some of them were dull enough, judged by the feminine standard, but even they occasionally said something to remember, and others were delightful. This is the whole point—I can't and won't go back to what I left here two years ago. My day for platitudes and pouring tea for men, who are contemptible enough to make Society their profession, is over. I am going to know the real men of my country. It is incredible that there are not men in that Senate as well worth talking to as any I met in England. The other day I picked up a bound copy of the Congressional Record in a book−shop. It was frantically interesting."

"It must have been! But, my dear—of course I understand, darling, your desire for a new intellectual occupation; you always were so clever—but you can't, you really can't know these men. They are—they are—politicians. We never have known politicians. They are dreadful people, who have come from low origins and would probably call me 'marm.'"

"You are all wrong, Molly. I bought a copy of the Congressional Directory a day or two ago, and have read the biography of every Senator. Nine−tenths of them are educated men; if only a few attended the big Universities, the rest went to the colleges of their State. That is enough for an American of brains. And most of them are lawyers; others served in the war, and several have distinguished records. They cannot be boors, whether they have blue blood in them or not. I'm sick of blue blood, anyway. Vienna was the deadliest place I ever visited. What makes London interesting is its red streak of plebeianism;—well, I repeat, I think it really dreadful that we should not know even by name the men who make our laws, who are making history, who may be called upon at any moment to decide our fate among nations. I feel a silly little fool."

"I suppose you mean that I am one too. But it always has been my boast, Betty, that I never have had a politician in my house. Your father knew some, but he never brought them here; he knew the fastidious manner in which I had been brought up; and although I am afraid he kept late hours with a good many of them at Chamberlin's and other dreadful places, he always spared me. I suppose this is heredity working out in you."

"Possibly. But you will admit, will you not, that I am old enough to choose my own life?"

"You always have done every single thing you wanted, so I don't see why you talk like that. But if you are going to bring a lot of men to this house who will spit on my carpets and use toothpicks, I beg you will not ask me to receive with you." "Of course you will receive with me, Molly dear—when I know anybody worth receiving. Unfortunately I am not the wife of the President and cannot send out a royal summons. I am hoping that Lady Mary Montgomery will help me. But my first step shall be to pay a daily visit to the Senate Gallery."

“What!” Mrs. Madison's weary voice flew to its upper register. “I *do* know something about politics—I remember now—the only women who go to the Capitol are lobbyists—dreadful creatures who—who—do all sorts of things. You can't go there; you'll be taken for one.”

“We none of us are taken very long for what we are not. I shall take Leontine with me, and those interested enough to notice me will soon learn what I go for.”

Mrs. Madison burst into tears. “You are your father all over again! I've seen it developing for at least three years. At first you were just a hard student, and then the loveliest young girl, only caring to have a good time, and coquetting more bewitchingly than any girl I ever saw. I don't see why you had to change.”

“Time develops all of us, one way or another. I suppose you would like me to be a charming girl flirting bewitchingly when I am forty−five. I am finished with the meaningless things of life. I want to live now, and I intend to.”

“It will be wildly exciting—the Senate Gallery every day, and knowing a lot of lank raw−boned Yankees with political beards.” “I am not expecting to fall in love with any of them. I merely discovered some time since that I had a brain, and they happen to be the impulse that possesses it. You always have prided yourself that I am intellectual, and so I am in the flabby 'well−read' fashion. I feel as if my brain had been a mausoleum for skeletons and mummies; it felt alive for the first time when I began to read the newspapers in England. I want no more memoirs and letters and biographies, nor even of the history that is shut up in calf−skin. I want the life of to−day. I want to feel in the midst of current history. All these men here in Washington must be alive to their finger−tips. Sally Carter admires Senator North and Senator Maxwell immensely.”

“What does she say about politicians in general?” Mrs. Madison looked almost distraught. “Of course the Norths and the Maxwells come of good New England families—I never did look down on the North as much as some of us did; after all, nearly three hundred years are very respectable indeed—and if these two men had not been in politics I should have been delighted to receive them. I met Senator North once— at Bar Harbor, while you were with the Carters at Homburg—and thought him charming; and I had some most interesting chats with his wife, who is much the same sort of invalid that I am. But when I establish a standard I am consistent enough to want to keep to it. I asked you what Sally Carter says of the others.”

“Oh, she admits that there may be others as *convenable* as Senator North and Senator Maxwell, and that there is no doubt about there being many bright men in the Senate; but she 'does not care to know any more people.' Being a good cave−dweller, she is true to her traditions.”

“People will say you are *passee*,” exclaimed Mrs. Madison, hopefully. “They will be sure to.”

Her daughter laughed, showing teeth as brilliant as her eyes. Then she snatched off her riding−hat and shook down her mane of warm brown hair. Her black brows and lashes, like her eyes and mouth, were vivid, but her hair and complexion were soft, without lustre, but very warm. She looked like a flower set on so strongly sapped a stem that her fullness would outlast many women's decline. She had inherited the beauty of her father's branch of the family. Mrs. Madison was very small and thin; but she carried herself erectly and her delicately cut face was little wrinkled. Her eyes were blue, and her hair, which was always carefully rolled, was as white as sea foam. Betty would not permit her to wear black, but dressed her in delicate colours, and she looked somewhat like an animated miniature. She dabbed impatiently at her tears.

“Everybody will cut you—if you go into that dreadful political set.”

“I am on the verge of cutting everybody myself, so it doesn't matter. Positively—I shall not accept an invitation of the old sort this winter. The sooner they drop me the better.”

Mrs. Madison wept bitterly. “You will become a notorious woman,” she sobbed. “People will talk terribly about you. They will say—all sorts of things I have heard come back to me—these politicians make love to every pretty woman they meet. They are so tired of their old frumps from Oshkosh and Kalamazoo.” “They do not all come from Oshkosh and Kalamazoo. There are six New England States whose three centuries you have just admitted lift them into the mists of antiquity. There are fourteen Southern States, and I need make no defence—”

“Their gentlemen don't go into politics any more.”

“You have admitted that Senator North and Senator Maxwell are gentlemen. There is no reason why there should not be many more.”

“Count de Bellairs told me that there was a spittoon at every desk in the Senate and that he counted eight toothpicks in one hour.”

“Well, I'll reform them. That will be my holy mission. As for spittoons and toothpicks, they are conspicuous in every hotel in the United States. They should be on our coat−of−arms, and the Great American Novel will be called 'The Great American Toothpick.' Statesmen have cut their teeth on it, and it has been their solace in the great crises of the nation's history. As for spittoons, they were invented for our own Southern aristocrats who loved tobacco then as now. They decorate our Capitol as a mere matter of form. I don't pretend to hope that ninety representative Americans are Beau Brummels, but there must be a respectable minority of gentlemen— whether self−made or not I don't care. I am going to make a deliberate attempt to know that minority, and shall call on Lady Mary Montgomery this afternoon as the first step. So you are resigned, are you not, Molly dear?”

“No, I am not! But what can I do? I have spoiled you, and you would be just the same if I hadn't. You are more like the men of the family than the women—they always would have their own way. Are they all married?” she added anxiously.

“Do you mean the ninety Senators and the three hundred and fifty−six Representatives? I am sure I do not know. Don't let that worry you. It is my mind that is on the *qui vive*, not my heart.”

“You'll hear some old fool make a Websterian speech full of periods and rhetoric, and you'll straight−way imagine yourself in love with him. Your head will be your worst enemy when you do fall in love.”

“Webster is the greatest master of style this country has produced. I should hate a man who used either 'periods' or rhetoric. I am the concentrated essence of modernism and have no use for 'oratory' or 'eloquence.' Some of the little speeches in the Record are masterpieces of brevity and pure English, particularly Senator North's.”

“You *are* modern. If we had a Clay, I could understand you—I am too exhausted to discuss the matter further; you *must* drop it for the present. What will Jack Emory say?”

“I have never given him the least right to say anything.”

“I almost wish you were safely married to him. He has not made a great success of his life, but he is your equal and his manners are perfect. I shall live in constant fear now of your marrying a horror with a twang and a toothpick.”

“I promise you I won't do that—and that I never will marry Jack Emory.”

II

Betty Madison had exercised a great deal of self−control in resisting the natural impulse to cultivate a fad and grapple with a problem. Only her keen sense of humour saved her. On the Sunday following her return, while sauntering home after a long restless tramp about the city, she passed a church which many coloured people were entering. Her newly awakened curiosity in all things pertaining to the political life of her country prompted her to follow them and sit through the service. The clergyman was light in colour, and prayed and preached in simpler and better English than she had heard in more pretentious pulpits, but there was nothing noteworthy, in his remarks beyond a supplication to the Almighty to deliver the negro from the oppression of the “Southern tyrant,” followed by an admonition to the negro to improve himself in mind and character if he would hope to compete with the Whites; bitter words and violence but weakened his cause.

This was sound commonsense, but the reverse of the sensational entertainment Betty had half expected, and her eyes wandered from the preacher to his congregation. There were all shades of Afro−American colour and all degrees of prosperity represented. Coal−black women were there, attired in deep and expensive mourning. “Yellow girls” wore smart little tailor costumes. Three young girls, evidently of the lower middle class of coloured society, for they were cheaply dressed, had all the little airs and graces and mannerisms of the typical American girl. In one corner a sleek mulatto with a Semitic profile sat in the recognized attitude of the banker in church; filling his corner comfortably and setting a worthy example to the less favoured of Mammon.

But Betty's attention suddenly was arrested and held by two men who sat on the opposite side of the aisle, although not together, and apparently were unrelated. There were no others quite like them in the church, but the conviction slowly forced itself into her mind, magnetic for new impressions, that there were many elsewhere. They were men who were descending the fifties, tall, with straight gray hair. One was very slender, and all but distinguished of carriage; the other was heavier, and would have been imposing but for the listless droop of his shoulders. The features of both were finely cut, and their complexions far removed from the reproach of “yellow.” They looked like sun−burned gentlemen.

For nearly ten minutes Betty stared, fascinated, while her mind grappled with the deep significance of all those two sad and patient men expressed. They inherited the shell and the intellect, the aspirations and the possibilities of the gay young planters whose tragic folly had called into being a race of outcasts with all their own capacity for shame and suffering.

Betty went home and for twenty−four hours fought with the desire to champion the cause of the negro and make him her life−work. But not only did she abominate women with missions; she looked at the subject upon each of its many sides and asked a number of indirect questions of her cousin, Jack Emory. Sincere reflection brought with it the conclusion that her energies in behalf of the negro would be superfluous. The careless planters were dead; she could not harangue their dust. The Southerners of the present generation despised and feared the coloured race in its enfranchised state too actively to have more to do with it than they could help; if it was a legal offence for Whites and Blacks to marry, there was an equally stringent social law which protected the coloured girl from the lust of the white man. Therefore, as she could not undo the harm already done, and as a crusade in behalf of the next generation would be meaningless, not to say indelicate, she dismissed the “problem” from her mind. But the image of those two sad and stately reflections of the old school sank indelibly into her memory, and rose to their part in one of the most momentous decisions of her life.

III

The Montgomerys had come to Washington for the first time at the beginning of the previous winter, while the Madisons were in England. Lady Mary had left her note of introduction the day before Betty's declaration of independence.

Betty was anxious to meet the young Englishwoman, not only because she possessed the charmed key to political society, but her history as related by certain gossips of authority commanded interest.

Randolph Montgomery, a young Californian millionaire, had followed his mother's former ward, Lady Maundrell, to England, nursing an old and hopeless passion. What passed between him and the beautiful young countess the gossips did not attempt to state, but he left England two days after the tragedy which shelved Cecil Maundrell into the House of Lords, and returned to California accompanied by his mother and Lady Barnstaple's friend, Lady Mary Montgomery. Bets were exchanged freely as to the result of this bold move on the part of a girl too fastidious to marry any of the English parvenus that addressed her, too poor to marry in her own class. The wedding took place a few months later, immediately after Mrs. Montgomery's death; an event which left Lady Mary the guest in a foreign country of a young bachelor.

From all accounts, the marriage, although a wide deflection from the highest canons of romance, was a successful one, and the Montgomerys were living in splendid state in Washington. Lady Mary was approved by even the “Old Washingtonians”—a thoughtful Californian of lineage had given her a letter to Miss Carter, who in turn had given her a tea— and as her husband was brilliant, accomplished, and of the best blood of Louisiana, the little set, tenaciously clinging to its traditional exclusiveness amidst the whirling ever−changing particles of the political maelstrom, found no fault in him beyond his calling. And as he was a man of tact and never mentioned politics in its presence, and as his wife was not at home to the public on the first Tuesday of the month, reserving that day for such of her friends as shunned political petticoats, the young couple were taken straight into the bosom of that inner set which the ordinary outsider might search for a very glimpse of in vain.

How Lady Mary stood with the large and heterogeneous political set Betty had no means of knowing, and she was curious to ascertain; she could think of no position more trying for an Englishwoman of Mary Gifford's class.

As she drove toward the house several hours after announcing her plan of campaign to her mother, she found Massachusetts Avenue blocked with carriages and recalled suddenly that Tuesday was “Representatives' day.” She gave a little laugh as she imagined Mrs. Madison's plaintive distaste. And then she felt the tremor and flutter, the pleasurable desire to run away, which had assailed her on the night of her first ball. That was eight years ago, and she had not experienced a moment of nervous trepidation since.

“Am I about to be re−born?” she thought. “Or merely rejuvenated? I certainly do feel young again.”

She looked about critically as she entered the house. Her own home, which was older than the White House, was large and plain, with lofty rooms severely trimmed in the colonial style. There were no portieres, no modern devices of decoration. Everything was solid and comfortable, worn, and of a long and honourable descent. The dining−room and large square hall were striking because of the blackness of their oak walls, the many family portraits, and certain old trophies of the chase, as vague in their high dark corners as fading daguerreotypes.

So imbued was Betty with the idea that anything more elaborate was the sign manifest of too recent fortune, that she had indulged in caustic criticism of the modern palaces of certain New York friends. But although the immediate impression of the Montgomery house was of soft luxurious richness, and it was indubitably the home of wealthy people determined to enjoy life, Miss Madison's dainty nose did not lift itself.

“At all events, the money is not laid on with a trowel,” she thought. And then she became aware of a curious sensuous longing as she looked again at the dim rich beauty about her, the smothered windows, the suggested power of withdrawal from every vulgar or annoying contact beyond those stately walls.

“I should like—I should like—” thought Betty, striving to put her vague emotion into words, “to live in this sort of house when I marry.” And then her humour flashed up: it was a sense that sat at the heels of every serious thought. “What a combination with the twang and the toothpick! Can they really be my fate? Of course I might reform both, and cut off his Uncle Sam beard while he slept.”

She had taken the wrong direction and entered a room in which there was not even a stray guest. A loud buzz of voices rose and fell at the end of a long hall, and she slowly made her way to the drawing−room, pausing once to watch a footman who was busily sorting visiting−cards into separate packs at a table. She handed him her card, and he slipped it into a pack marked “I Street.”

The drawing−room was thronged with people, and as many of them surrounded the hostess, while constant new−comers pressed forward to shake a patient hand, Betty decided to stand apart for a few moments and look at the crowd. She was in a new world, and as eager and curious as if she had been shot from Earth to Mars.

Lady Mary was quite as handsome as her portraits: a cold blue and white and ashen beauty whose carriage and manifest of race were in curious contrast, Lee had told Betty, to a nervous manner and the loud voice of one who conceived that social laws had been invented for the middle class. But there was little vivacity in her manner to−day, and her voice was not audible across the large room. She looked tired. It was half−past five o'clock, and doubtless she had been on her feet since three. But she was smiling graciously upon her visitors, and gave each a warmth of welcome which betrayed the wife of the ambitious politician.

“Her mouth is not so selfish as in her photographs,” observed the astute Betty. “I suppose in the depths of her soul she hates this, but she does it; and if she loves the man, she must think it well worth while.”

She turned her attention to the visitors. There were many women superbly dressed, in taste as perfect as her own. She never had seen any of them before, but they had the air of women of importance. The majority looked frigid and bored, a few dignified and easy of manner. The younger women of the same class were more animated, but no less irreproachable in style.

There were others, middle−aged and young, with all the native style of the second−class, and still others who were clad in coarse serges, cashmeres, or cheap silks, shapelessly made with the heavy hand of many burdens. These did not detain the hostess in conversation, but gathered in groups, or walked about the room gazing at the many beautiful pictures and ornaments. There were only three or four really vulgar−looking women present, and they were clothed in conspicuous raiment. One, and all but her waist was huge, wore a bodice of transparent gauze; another, also of middle years, had crowned her hard over−coloured face with a large gentian−blue hat turned up in front with a brass buckle. Another was in pink silk and heavily powdered. But although these women were offensively loud, they did not suggest any lack of that virtue whose exact proportions so often elude the most earnest seeker after truth.

Betty turned impulsively to an old woman clad in shabby black who stood besides her gazing earnestly at the crowd. Her large bony face was crossed by the lines and wrinkles of long years of care, and her eyes were dim; but her mouth was smiling.

“Tell me,” exclaimed Betty, “please—are all these people in politics? I—I—am a stranger, and I should like to know who they are.”

“Well, I can tell you pretty near everything you want to know, I guess,” replied the old lady. She had the drawl and twang and accent of rural New England. “I guess you've come here, like myself, jest to see the folks. A few here, like you and me, ar'n't in official life, but the most are, I guess. Nearly all the Cabinet ladies are here to−day and a good many Senators' wives and darters. That there lady in heliotrope and fur is the wife of the Secretary of War, and the one in green velvet and chinchilla is Mis' Senator Maxwell. That real stylish handsome girl just behind is her darter, and I guess she has a good many beaux. They're real elegant, ar'n't they? I guess we have good cause to be proud of our ladies.”

She paused that Betty might express her approval, and upon being assured that Paris was responsible for many of the gowns present, continued in her monotonous but kindly drawl,

“And some of them began life doin' their own work. The President ain't no aristocrat, and most of his friends ain't neither; but I tell you when their wives begin to entertain they do it jest as if they was born to it. I presume if my husband—he was a physician—had gone into politics and had luck, I'd have been jest like those ladies; but as he didn't, I'm still doin' most of my own work and look it. But the Lord knows what he's about, I guess. Senator Maxwell's a swell; they've always been rich, the Maxwells, and he married a New York girl, so she didn't have much to learn, I guess. Mis' Senator Shattuc—she's the one in wine colour—was the darter of a big railroad man out West, so I guess she had all the schoolin' and Yurrup she wanted. Now that real pretty little woman jest speakin' to Lady Montgomery is Mis' Senator Freeman. They do say as how she was the darter of a baker in Chicago and used to run barefoot around the streets, but she looks as well as any of 'em now and she dines at

every Embassy in Washington. Her dresses are always described in the *Post*: she wears pink and blue mostly. You kin tell by her face that she's got a lot of determination and that she'd git where she had a mind to. I guess she'd dine with Queen Victoria if she had a mind to."

"I feel exactly as if I were at a pantomime," cried Betty, delightedly. "Even you—" She caught herself up. "I mean I always thought the New England playwrights invented all their characters. Who are these plainly dressed women and—and—half−way ones?" "Oh, they're Representatives' wives mostly," drawled the old lady, who looked puzzled. "They take a day off and call on each other. One or two is Senators' wives. Some of the Senators is rich, but some ar'n't. Mis' Montgomery's jest as nice to them as to the swells, and she told me to be sure and go into the next room and have a cup of tea. I don't care much about tea excep' for lunch, and she don't have a collation—I presume she can't; too many people'd come, and I guess she has about enough. Now, those ladies that don't look exactly as if they was ladies," indicating the large birds of tawdry plumage and striking complexions, "they don't live here. Washington ladies don't dress like that. I guess they're the wives of men out West that have made their pile lately and come here to see the sights. First they look at all the public buildin's, and I guess they about walk all over the Capitol, and hear a speech or two in the Ladies' Gallery—from their Senators, if they can—and after that they go about in Society a bit. You see, Washington is a mighty nice place fur people who haven't much show at home—those that live in small towns, fur instance. There is so many public receptions they can go to—The White House, the Wednesdays of the Cabinet ladies, the Thursdays of the Senator's wives, and six or seven Representatives—mebbe more—who have real elegant houses; and then there is several Legations that give public receptions. You can always see in the *Post* who's goin' to receive; and those women can go home and talk fur the rest of their lives about the fine time they had in Washington society. Amurricans heighst themselves whenever they git a chance. I don't care to do that. My sister—she's a heap younger 'n I am and awful spry—and I come down from the north of New Hampshire every winter and keep a boardin'−house in Washington so that we can see the world. We don't go home with ten dollars over railroad fare in our pockets, but we don't mind, because the farm keeps us and we've had a real good time. I often sit down up in New Hampshire and think of the beautiful houses and dresses and pictures I've seen, and I can always remember that I've shaken hands with the President and his wife and the ladies of the Cabinet. They're just as nice as they can be."

Betty, whose sympathies were quick and keen, winked away a tear. "I'm so glad you enjoy it so much," she exclaimed, "and that there is so much for you here to enjoy. I never thought of it in that way. I'm awfully interested in it all, myself, and I feel deeply indebted to you."

"Well, you needn't mind that. My sister says I always talk when I can git anybody to listen to me, and I guess I do. Where air you from? New York, I guess."

"Oh, I am a Washingtonian. My name is Madison."

"So? I don't remember seeing it in the society columns."

"We are never mentioned in society columns," exclaimed Betty, with her first thrill of pride since entering the new world. "But I seldom have passed a winter out of Washington, although—I am sorry to say—I never have met any of these people."

"You don't say. I ain't curious, but you don't look as if you had to stay to home and do the work. But Amurrican girls are so smart they can about look anything they have a mind to." "Oh—I am really sorry, but everybody seems to be going, and I haven't spoken to Lady Mary yet. I'm *so* much obliged to you."

"Now, you needn't be, for you're a real nice young lady, and I've enjoyed talkin' to you. Likely we'll meet again, but I'd be happy to have you call. Here's my card. Our house is right near here—in the real fashionable part; and we've several ladies livin' with us that you might like to meet."

"Oh, thanks! thanks!" Betty put the card carefully into her case, shook her new friend warmly by the hand, and went forward. Lady Mary's tired white face had set into an almost mechanical smile, but as her eyes met Betty's they illumined with sudden interest and her hard− worked muscles relaxed.

"You are Betty Madison!" she exclaimed. And as the two girls shook hands they conceived one of those sudden and violent friendships which are so full of interest while they last.

"How awfully good of you to call so soon!" continued Lady Mary, after Betty had expatiated upon her long−cherished desire for this meeting. "I hoped you would, although Miss Carter rather frightened me with her account of your mother's aversion to political people. But they have all been so good to me—all your delightful set." She lowered her voice, which had rung out for a moment in something of its old style, albeit platitudes had

worn upon its edges. “I *couldn't* stand just this—although I must add that many of the official women are charming and have the most stunning manners; but many are the reverse, and unfortunately I can't pick and choose. It seems that when one gets into politics in this country that is the end of nine−tenths of one's personal life; and Washington is certainly the headquarters of democracy. Here every American really does feel that he is as good as every other American; I wish to heaven he didn't.”

“Washington is a democracy with a kernel of the most exclusive aristocracy,” said Betty, with a laugh. “Some one has said that it is the drawing−room of the Republic. It is the hotel drawing−room with a Holy of Holies opening upon the area. I'm sick of the Holy of Holies, and I Ve never enjoyed a half−hour so much as while I've been looking on here—waiting for you to be disengaged.”

“Oh, this is nothing. You must let me take you to a large evening reception. That is really interesting, for you see so many famous people. Can't you dine with me to−morrow? We've a big political dinner on. About fifteen members of a Senate and a House Committee that are deliberating a very important bill are coming. Senator North—he is well worth meeting—is Chairman of the Senate Committee, and my husband, although a new member, stands very high with the Chairman of his Committee, most of whom are old members of the House. Senator Ward also will be here. Do come, if you have nothing more important on hand. I can easily get another member of the House Committee.”

“Come! I'd break twenty engagements to come.” Betty's eyes sparkled and she lifted her head with a motion peculiar to her when reminded that she was the favoured of the gods. “I suppose there is a good deal of fag about this sort of life to you, but it has all the charm of the undiscovered country for me.”

“Oh, I am deeply interested,” said Lady Mary. The two women were alone now, and the hostess, released after three hours of stereotyped amenities, surrendered herself to the charm of natural intercourse with one of her own sort, and rang for tea. “I always liked politics, and I feel quite sure that my husband will achieve his high ambitions. It interests me greatly to help him.”

“Of course he'll be President!” cried Betty, enthusiastic in the warmth of her new friendship and its possibilities. She was surprised by a tilt of the nose and an emphatic shake of the head.

“No, indeed!” exclaimed Lady Mary, “Presidents are politicians only. My husband aspires higher than that. To be a Senator of the first rank requires very different qualities.”

“Ah! I shall quote that to Mol—my mother. She is not predisposed in their favour.”

“Of course there are Senators and Senators,” said Lady Mary, hastily. “You can't get ninety men of equal ability together, anywhere. There are the six who are admittedly the first,—North, Maxwell, Ward, March, Howard, and Eustis,—and about ten who are close behind them. Then there is the venerable group to which Senator Maxwell also belongs; and the younger men of forty−five or so who are not quite broken in yet, and whose enthusiasm is apt to take the wrong direction; and the fire−eaters, Populists usually; and the hard− working second−rate men, many of them millionaires (Western, as a rule) who are accused of having bought their legislatures to get in, but who do good work on Committee, whether or not they came under the delusion that they had bought an honour with nothing beneath it: a man who presumed on his wealth in the Senate would fare as badly as a boy at Eton who presumed on his title. Beyond all, are the nonentities that are in every body. So, you see, it is worth while to aim for the first place and to keep it.”

“There are certainly all sorts to choose from! I'll never mistrust my instincts again. I am glad I shall meet Senator North to−morrow. I suppose he is a courtly person of the old school with a Websterian intellect.”

“I don't know anything about Webster; I can't read your history and live in it, too; but certainly there is nothing of the old school about Senator North. He is very modern and has a truly Republican—or shall I say aristocratic?—simplicity—although no one could dress better—combined with a cold manner to most men and a warm manner to most women.”

“Tell me all about him!” exclaimed Betty, sipping her tea. “I never was so happy and excited in my life. I feel as if I was Theodosia Burr, or Nelly Custis, or Dolly Madison come to life. And now I'm going to know an American statesman before his coat has turned to calf−skin. Quick! How old is he?”

“Just sixty, and looks much younger, as most of the Senators do. He is a hard worker—he is Chairman of one Committee and a member of five others; a brilliant debater, the most accomplished legislator in the Senate, unyielding in his convictions, and absolutely independent. He is not popular, as it has never occurred to him to conciliate anybody. He is very kind and attentive to his invalid wife and proud of his sons, and he adored a

daughter who died four years ago. Rumor has it that more than one charming woman has consoled him for domestic afflictions and political trials, but I do not pay much attention to rumours of that sort. How odd that I, an alien, should be instructing a Washingtonian in politics and the personalities of her Senators; but I quite understand. I do hope Mrs. Madison will not object to your coming to−morrow night."

"I shall come. And go now. I feel a brute to have let you talk so much, but I never have been so interested!"

The two women kissed and parted; and Lady Mary's dreams that night were undisturbed by any vision of herself in the ranks of the Fates.

IV

Betty returned home much elated with the success of her visit. She heard the voice of her cousin Jack Emory in the parlor and went at once to her room to dress. The voice sounded solemn, and so did her mother's; they doubtless were sitting in conference upon her. She selected her evening gown with some care; her cousin was an old story, but he was a very attractive man, and coquetry would hold its own in her, become she never so intellectual.

Jack Emory had been her undeclared lover since his middle teens. Somewhere in the same immature interval, just after her first return from Europe, she had imagined herself passionately in love with him. But she had a large fortune left her by her maternal grandfather, besides a hundred thousand her father had died too soon to spend, and Jack was the son of a Virginian who had been a Rebel to his death, haughtily refusing to have his disabilities removed, and threatening to shoot any negro in his employ who dared to go to the ballot box. He had left his son but a few thousands out of his large inheritance, and adjured him on his death bed to hold no office under the Federal government and to shoot a Yankee rather than shake his hand. Jack inherited his father's prejudices without his violent temper. He had a contemptuous dislike for the North, a loathing for politics, and adistaste for everybody outside his own diminishing class. Love for Betty Madison had driven him West in the hope of retrieving his fortunes, but he was essentially a gentleman and a scholar; the hustling quality was not in him, and he returned South after two years of unpleasant endeavour and started a small produce farm adjoining an old house on the outskirts of Washington, left him by his mother. Here he lived with his books, and made enough money to support himself decently. He never had asked Betty to marry him, although he knew that his aunt would champion his cause. During the period of Betty's maiden passion his pride had caused her as much suffering as her youth and buoyant nature would permit; but as the years slipped by she felt inclined to personify that pride and burn a candle beneath it. Even before her mind had awakened, the energy and strength of her character had cured her of love for a man as supine as Jack Emory. He was charming and well read, all that she could desire in a brother, but as a husband he would be intolerable. As his love cooled she liked him better still, particularly as his loyalty would not permit him to acknowledge even to himself that he could change; but its passing left him with fewer clouds on a rather melancholy spirit, a readier tongue, and a complete recovery from the habits of sighing and of leaving the house abruptly.

Betty's maid dressed her in a bright blue taffeta, softened with much white lace, and she went slowly down to the hall, rustling her skirts that Emory might hear and come out for a word before dinner if he liked. It was a relief to be able to coquet with him without fearing that he would go home and shoot himself; and it helped him to sustain the pleasant fiction that he still was in love with her.

He came out at once and raised her hand to his lips, murmuring a compliment as his grandfather might have done. He was only thirty−two, but his face was sallow and lined from trouble and fever. Otherwise he was very handsome, with his golden head and intellectual blue eyes, his haughty profile and tall figure, listlessly carried as it was. In spite of the fact that he took pride in dressing well, he always looked a little old−fashioned. When with Betty, invariably as smart as Paris and New York could make her, he almost appeared as if wearing his father's old clothes. His Southern accent and intonation were nearly as broad as a negro's. Betty had almost lost hers; she retained just enough to enrich and individualize without a touch of provincialism. She belonged to that small class of Americans whose ear−mark is the absence of all Americanisms.

Mr. Emory looked perturbed.

“There is something I should like to say,” he remarked hesitatingly. “There is yet a quarter of an hour before dinner. I think this old hall with its portraits of your grandmothers is a good place to say it in—”

“Molly has pressed you into service, I see. Let us have it out, by all means. Please straighten your necktie before you begin. You cannot possibly be impressive while it looks as if it were standing on one leg.”

“Please be serious, Betty dear. I am indeed most disturbed. It surely cannot be that you meant what you told your mother this morning,—that you intended to change the whole current of your life in such an unprecedented manner.”

“Great heavens! One would think I was about to go on the stage or enter a convent.”

“I would rather you did either than soil your mind with the politics of this country. I say nothing about there being no statesmen;—there is not an honest man in politics the length and breadth of the Union. The country is a sink of corruption, as far as politics are concerned. Every Congressman buys his seat or is put in as the agent of some disgraceful trust or syndicate or railroad corporation.”

Betty drew her eyelids together in a fashion that robbed her eyes of their coquetry and fire and made them look unpleasantly judicial.

“Exactly how much do you know about American politics?” she asked coldly. “I have known you all my life and I never heard you mention them before—”

“I never have considered them a fit subject for you to listen to—”

“I have been in your library a great many times and I do not recall a copy of the Congressional Record. You have said often that you despise the newspapers and only read the telegrams; that the only paper you read through is the London *Times*. So, I repeat, what do you know about the American politics of to−day?”

“What I have told you.”

“Where did you learn it? Do you ever go to the Senate or the House?”

“God forbid! But I am a man, and those things are in the atmosphere; a man's brain accumulates naturally all widely diffused impressions. I've been a great deal in the smoking−cars of railroad−trains, and spent two years in a Western State where a man who had taken a fortune out of a mine made no bones of buying a seat in the Senate from the Legislature, nor the Legislature about selling it. It was the most abominable transaction I ever came close to, and had as much to do with my leaving the place as anything else.”

“And you mean to say that you judge all the old States of the country by a newly settled community of adventurers out West?”

“New York and Pennsylvania are notorious.”

“There are bad boys in every school. What I want to know is—can you assert on your knowledge that all the Southern and New England States are corrupt and send only small politicians to Washington? This is a more serious charge than Molly's assertion that they all use toothpicks.”

“I repeat that I do not believe there is an honest man in that Capitol.”

“Do you know this? Have you investigated the life of every man in the Senate and the House?” “What a good district attorney you would make!”

“You are talking a lot of copybook platitudes with which you have allowed your mind to stagnate. But you must convince me, for if what you say is true I shall have nothing to do with politics. Let us begin with Senator North. How and when did he buy his seat, and what Trust does he represent?”

“Oh, I never have heard anything against North. He is too big a gun in Washington—”

“You will admit then that *he* is not corrupt—”

“I don't doubt he has his own methods—”

“I don't care three cents about your suppositions. I want facts. How about Senator Maxwell?”

“He has been in Congress since before I was born. One never hears him discussed.”

“And his Puritanical State has heaped every honour on him that it can think of. Tell me the biography of Senator Ward—all that is too awful to be printed in the Congressional Directory—”

“He is from one of those dreadful North−western States and bound to be corrupt,” cried Emory, triumphantly. He wished desperately that he had waited and got up his case. He spoke from sincere conviction. “There may be a rag of decency left in the older States, but the West is positively fetid. I give you my word I am speaking the truth, Betty dear, and in your own interest. If I have no more details to give you, it is because I promised my father on his death−bed that I would have nothing to do with politics, and I have kept my word to the extent of reading as little about them as possible. But I can assure you that I know as much about them as anybody not in the accursed business. It is in the air—” “There are so many things in the air that they get mixed up. Your whole argument is based on air. Now, *mon ami*, you turn to to−morrow and study up the record of every man in that Senate, as well as the legislative methods of his State. When you know all about it, I shall be delighted to be instructed. But I don't want any more air. Now come in to dinner, and if you allude to the subject before Molly, I'll leave the table.”

He bowed over her hand again with his old−fashioned courtesy. “When you issue a command I am bound to obey,” he said, “and although you have set me an unpleasant, an obnoxious task, I certainly shall accomplish that

also to the best of my ability. You belong to this old house, Betty, to this old set; I love to think of you as the last rose on the old Southern tree, and you shall not be blighted if I can help it."

Betty tapped him lightly with her fan.

"I belong to the whole country, my dear boy; I am no old cabbage rose on a half−dead bush, but the same vegetable under a new name,—the American Beauty Rose. Do you see the parable? And I've a great many thorns on my long stem. Remember that also."

V

Betty, in accordance with a time−honoured habit, was the last to arrive at the dinner−party on the following evening. She had arranged her heavy large−waved hair low on her neck, and the pale green velvet of her gown lifted its dull mahogany hue and the deep Southern whiteness of her skin. She did not take a beautiful picture, for her features had the national irregularity, but she seldom entered a room that several men did not turn and stare at her. She carried herself with the air of one used to commanding the homage of men, her lovely colouring was always enhanced by dress, and she radiated magnetism. It was such an alive, warm, buoyant personality that men turned to her as naturally as children do to the maternal woman; even when they did not love her they liked to be near her, for she recalled some vague ideal. She knew her power perfectly, and after one or two memorable lessons had put from her the temptation to give it active exercise. It should be the instrument of unqualified happiness when her hour came; meanwhile she cultivated an impersonal attitude which baffled men unable to propose and tempered the wind to those that could.

During the few moments in the drawing−room she could gather only a collective impression of the men who stared at her to−night. There was a general suggestion of weight, in the sculptor's sense, and repose combined with alertness, and they stood very squarely on their feet. Betty had only had time to single out one long beard dependent from a visage otherwise shorn, and to observe further that some of the women were charmingly dressed, while others wore light silk afternoon frocks, when dinner was announced.

Her partner was evidently one of the younger Senators, one of those juvenile enthusiasts of forty−five who beat their breasts for some years upon the Senate's impassive front. He was extremely good− looking, with a fair strong impatient face, trimmed with a moustache only, and a well−built figure full of nervous energy. He had less repose than most of the men about him, but he suggested the same solidity. He might fail or go wrong, but not because there was any room in his mind for shams. His name was Burleigh, but what his section was, Betty, as they exchanged amenities and admired the lavish display of flowers, could not determine; he had no accent whatever, and although his voice was deep and sonorous, it had not the peculiar richness of the South. His gray eyes smiled as they met hers, and his manners were charming; but Betty, accustomed to grasp the salient points of character in a first interview, fancied that he could be overbearing and truculent.

“Are they going to talk politics to−night?” she asked, when the platitudes had run their course.

“I hope not. I've had enough of politics, all day.”

“Oh, I hoped you would,” said Betty, in a deeply disappointed tone.

He looked amused.

“Why?” he asked.

“Oh, I am so interested. That sounds very vague, but I am. When Lady Mary told me she was dining members of the two Committees, I thought it was to talk politics, and—and—settle it amicably or something.” Betty could look infantile when she chose, and was always ready to cover real ignorance with an exaggerated assumption which inspired doubt.

“We have the excessive pleasure of discussing the bill in Senator North's comfortable Committee room for several hours every few days, and we usually are amiable. We are merely dining out to−night in each other's good company. Still, I guess your desire will be more or less gratified. Second nature is strong, and one or two will probably get down to it about the middle of dinner.”

“You are from New England,” exclaimed Betty, triumphantly. “I have been waiting for you to say 'I reckon' or 'I guess.'”

“I was born and educated in Maine, but I went west to practise law as soon as I knew enough, and I am Senator from one of the Middle Western States.”

“Ah!” Betty gave him a swift side glance. He looked anything but “corrupt,” and that truculent note in his voice did not indicate subservience to party bosses. She determined to write to Jack Emory in the morning and command him to look up Senator Burleigh's record at once.

“I suppose all the Senators here to−night are the—big ones?”

“Oh, no; North and Ward are the only two on this Committee belonging to the very first rank. The other four here are in that group that is pressing close upon their heels; and myself, who am a new member: I've been here four years only. Would you mind telling me who you are? Of course American women don't take much interest in politics, but—do you know as little as you pretend?”

“I wish I knew more; but I've been abroad for the last two years, and my mother prefers rattlesnakes to politics. Which is Senator North?”

“He is at the head of the table with Lady Mary, but that rosebush is in the way; you cannot see him.”

“And which is Senator Ward?” “Over there by Mrs. Shattuc,—the woman in ivory−white and heliotrope.”

Betty flashed him a glance of renewed interest. “You like women,” she exclaimed. “And you must be married, or have sisters.”

“I like women and I am not married, nor have I any sisters. I particularly like woman's dress. If you'll pardon me, that combination of pale green and white lace and soft stuff is the most stunning thing I've seen for a long while.”

“Law, politics, and woman's dress! How hard you must have worked!”

“Our strong natural inclinations help us so much!” He gave her an amused glance, and his manner was a trifle patronizing, as of a prominent man used to the admiration of pretty girls. It was evident that he knew nothing of her and her long line of conquests.

“Senator Ward looks half asleep,” she remarked abruptly.

“He usually does until dinner is two−thirds over. He is Chairman of one Committee and serving on two others; and all have important bills before them at present. So he is tired.”

“He doesn't look corrupt.”

“Corrupt? Who? Ward? Who on earth ever said he was corrupt?”

“Well, I heard his State was.”

“'Corruption' is the father of more platitudes than any word in the American language. There are corrupt men in his State, no doubt, and one of the Trusts with which we are ridden at present tried to buy its Legislature and put their man in. But Ward won his fight without the expenditure of a dollar beyond paying for the band and a few courtesies of that sort. His State is proud of him both as a statesman and a scholar, and he is likely to stay in the Senate until he drops in his tracks.”

“Then he comes here with the intention of remaining for life? I think you should all do that.”

“You are quite right. When a man achieves the honour of being elected honestly to the United States Senate,—it is the highest honour in the Republic,—he should feel that he is dedicating himself to the service of the country, and should have so arranged his affairs that he can stay there for life.”

Betty's eyes kindled with approval. “Oh, I am glad,” she said, “I am glad.”

“Glad of what, may I ask?”

“Oh—” And then she impulsively told him something of her history, of her determination to take up politics as her ruling interest, and of the opposition of her mother and cousin. Senator Burleigh listened with deep attention, and if he was amused he was too gallant to betray the fact, now that she had honoured him with her confidence.

“Well,” he said, “that is very interesting, very. And you are quite right. You'll do yourself good and us good. Mind you stand to your guns. Would you mind telling me your name? Lady Mary never thinks a mere name worth mentioning.”

“Madison—Elizabeth Madison. I had almost forgotten the Elizabeth. I have always been called Betty.”

“Ah!” he said, “ah!” He turned and regarded her with a deeper interest.

“Have you heard of me?” she asked irresistibly. “Who has not?” he said gallantly. “And although you are a great deal younger than I,—I am forty−four,—my father, who was in Congress before me, was a great friend of your father's. He wears a watch to this day that Mr. Madison gave him. He always expressed regret that he never met your mother, but she seemed to have an unconquerable aversion to politics.”

“And they met at Chamberlin's!” exclaimed Betty, with a delighted laugh. “It will be the last straw—my having gone into dinner with the son of one of papa's hated boon companions. My mother is a lovely intelligent woman,” she added hastily, “but she is intensely Southern and conservative. Her great pride is that she never changes a standard once established.”

“Oh, that's a very safe quality in a woman. But of course you have a right to establish your own, and I am glad it points in our direction. And anything you want to know I'll be glad to tell you. Can't I take you up to the Senate to−morrow and put you in our private gallery? There ought to be some good debating, for North is going to attack an important bill that is on the calendar.”

“I will go; but let me meet you there. I must ask you to call in due form first, as my poor mother must not have too many shocks. Will you come a week from Sunday?—I am going to New York for a few days.”

“I will, indeed. If I were unselfish, I should let you listen for a few minutes, for they are all talking politics; not bills, however, but the possibility of war with Spain. I don't think I shall, though. Tell me what you want to know and I will begin our lessons right here.” “Why should we go to war with Spain?”

“Oh dear! Oh dear! Where have you been? There is a small island off the coast of Florida called Cuba. It has many natives, and they are oppressed, tormented, tortured by Spain.”

“I visited Cuba once. They are nothing but a lot of negroes and frightfully dirty. Why should we go to war about them?”

“Only about one−third are negroes and there is a large brilliantly educated and travelled upper class. And I see you need instruction in more things than politics,—humanity, for instance. Forget that you are a Southerner, divorce yourself from traditions, and try to imagine several hundred thousand people—women and children, principally— starving, hopeless, homeless, unspeakably wretched. Cannot you feel for them?”

“Oh, yes! Yes!” Betty's quick sympathy sent the tears to her eyes, and he looked at her with deepening admiration,—a fact the tears did not prevent her from grasping. “And are we going to war in order to release them?”

“Ah! I do not know. There is a war feeling growing in the country; there is no doubt of that. But how high it will grow no one can tell. The leading men in Congress are indifferent, and won't even listen to recognizing the Cubans as belligerents. North will not discuss the subject, and I doubt not is talking over the latest play with Lady Mary at the present moment.”

“And you? Do you want war?”

“I do!” His manner gave sudden rein to its inherent nervousness, and his voice rang out for a moment as if he were angrily haranguing the Senate. “Of course I want it. Every human instinct I have compels me to want it, and I cannot understand the apathy and conservatism which prevents our being at war at the present moment. We have posed as the champions of liberty long enough; it is time we did something.”

“Ah, this is the youthful enthusiasm of the Senate,” thought Betty. “And I have been accustomed to think of forty−five as quite elderly. I feel a mere infant and shall not call myself an old maid till I'm fifty.” She smiled approvingly into the Senator's illuminated face, and he plunged at once into details, including the entire history of Spanish colonial misrule. The history was told in head−lines, so to speak, but it was graphic and convincing. Betty nodded encouragingly and asked an occasional intelligent question. She knew the history of Spain as thoroughly as he did, but she would not have told him so for the world. It is only the woman with a certain masculine fibre in her brain who ever really understands men, and when these women have coquetry also, they convince the sex born to admire that they are even more feminine than their weaker sisters. When Senator Burleigh finished, Betty thanked him so graciously and earnestly, with such lively pleasure in her limpid hazel eyes, that he raised his glass impulsively and touched it to hers.

“You must have a *salon*” he exclaimed. “We need one in Washington, and it would do us incalculable good. Only you could accomplish it: you not only have beauty and brains—and tact?—but you are so apart that you can pick and choose without fear of giving offence. And you are not *blas?* of the subject like Congressmen's wives, nor has the wild rush and wear and tear of official society chopped up your individuality into a hundred little bits. It would be brutal to mention politics to a woman in political life, and consequently we feel as if no one takes any interest in us unless she has an axe to grind. But you are what we all have been waiting for I feel sure of that! Let it be understood that no mere politician, no man who bought his legislature or is under suspicion in regard to any Trust, can enter your doors. Of course you will have to study the whole question thoroughly; and mind, I am to be your instructor−in−chief.”

Betty laughed and thanked him, wondering how well he understood her. He looked like a man who would waste no time on the study of woman's subtleties: he knew what he wanted, and recognized the desired qualities at once, but by a strong masculine instinct, not by analysis.

A few moments later the women went into the drawing−room, and the conversation for the next half−hour was a languid babble of politics, dress, New York, the lady of the White House, and the play. Betty thought the women very nice, but less interesting than the men, possibly because they were women. They certainly looked more intelligent than the average one sat with during the trying half− hour after dinner; but their conversation was fragmentary, and they oddly suggested having left their personality at home and taken their shell out to dinner. Betty also was interested to observe that their composite expression was a curious mingling of fatigue, unselfishness, and peremptoriness. “What does it mean?” she asked of Lady Mary, with whom she stood apart for a moment.

“Oh, they are worked to death,—paying calls, entertaining, receiving people on all sorts of business, and helping their husbands in various ways. They have no time to be selfish,—rich or poor,—and they have acquired the art of disposing of bores and detrimentals in short order. Even their own sort they pass on much in the fashion of royalty. How do you like Senator Burleigh?”

“I never learned so much in two hours in my life. My head feels like a beehive.”

“I never saw him quite so devoted.”

“I thought you were occupied with Senator North.”

“I was, but my eyes and ears understand each other. He wants to meet you after dinner. He knows all about you.”

“He has been pointed out to me, but in those days when I was only interested in possible partners for the German. I do not recall him.”

“That is he, the second one.”

The men were entering the drawing−room. Betty was relieved that the political beard was not on Senator North. He wore only a very short moustache on his ugly powerful face.

He stood for a few moments talking to his host, and Betty, to whom the political beard was immediately presented, gave him an occasional glance of exploration while her companion was assuring her, with neither a twang nor an accent, that he had long looked forward to the pleasure of meeting the famous Miss Betty Madison. Senator Shattuc was in his late fifties, but it was evident that the cares of Congress had not smothered his appreciation of a pretty woman. He had a strong face and an infantile complexion, and his beard sparkled with care. Senator Ward, who was presented a few moments later, told her that he had envied Burleigh throughout the long dinner. Betty decided that the senatorial manner certainly was agreeable.

The two men fell into conversation with one another, and Betty turned her attention to Senator North. He was standing alone for the moment, glancing about the room. His attitude was one of absolute repose; he did not look as if he ever had hurried or wasted his energies or lost his self−control in his life. His face was impenetrable; his eyes, black and piercing, were wholly without that limpidity which reveals depths and changes of expression; his mouth was somewhat contemptuous, and betrayed neither tenderness nor humour. If possible, he stood even more squarely on his feet than the other men. He had the powerful thick−set figure which invariably harbours strong passions.

“I don't know whether I like him or not,” thought Betty. “I think I don't—but perhaps I do. He might be made of New England rock, and he looks as if the earth could swallow him before he'd yield an inch. But I can feel his magnetism over here. Why have all these men so much magnetism? Is that, too, senatorial?”

Senator North caught her eye at the moment, and turned at once to Lady Mary. A moment later he had been presented to Betty and they stood alone.

“I once mended your hoop for you, when you were a little girl, just in front of your house; but I am afraid you have forgotten it.” “Oh,—I think I do remember it. Yes—I do.” She evoked the incident out of the mists of childish memories. “Was it you? I am afraid I was looking harder at the hoop than at its mender. But—I recall—I thought how kind you were.”

And then he inquired for her mother, and spoke pleasantly of his own and his wife's acquaintance with Mrs. Madison at Bar Harbor. Betty wondered afterward why she had thought his face repellent. His eyes defied investigation, but his mouth relaxed into a smile that was very kind, and his voice had almost a caress in it. But at the moment she was too eager to hear him express himself to receive a strong personal impression, and while she was casting about in her mind for a leader, she was obliged to give him her hand.

“Good−night,” she said with a little pout, “I am so sorry.”

“So am I,” he said, smiling, and shaking her hand. “Good−night. I shall look forward to meeting you again soon.”

“Miss Madison, may I see you to your carriage?” asked Senator Burleigh. “I have tried to get near you ever since dinner,” he said discontentedly, as they walked down the hall, “and now you are going. But you will come to the Senate to−morrow? Come right up to the door of the Senators' Gallery at precisely three o'clock and I will meet you there.”

A few moments later, Betty paused on her way to her own room and opened her mother's door softly.

“Molly,” she whispered.

“Well?” asked a severe voice.

“I went in to dinner with the son of one of papa's old Chamberlin companions, and he was simply charming. So were all the others, and I never met a man who could shake hands as well as Senator North. I had a heavenly time.”

Mrs. Madison groaned and turned her face to the wall.

“And there wasn't a toothpick, and I didn't hear a twang.”

“Kindly allow me to go to sleep.”

VI

As soon as Betty awoke the next morning, she turned her mind to the events of the night before. Unlike most occasions eagerly anticipated, it had contained no disappointment; she had, indeed, been pleasurably surprised, for despite her strong common−sense the dark picture of corruption and objectionable toilet accessories had made its impression upon her. She foresaw much amusement in witnessing the unwilling surrender of her mother to even Senator Shattuc, him of the political beard. As for Senator Burleigh, she would yield to his magnetism and power of compelling interest in himself, while pronouncing his manners too abrupt and his personality too "Western." And if he admired intelligently the old lace which she always wore at her throat and wrists and on her pretty head, she would confess that there might be exceptions even to political rules.

But somewhat to Betty's surprise it was not of Senator Burleigh that she thought most, although she had talked with him for two hours and pronounced him charming. She had talked with Senator North for exactly six minutes, but she saw his face more distinctly than Burleigh's and retained his voice in her ear. He had not paid her a compliment, but his manner had expressed that she interested him and that he thought her worth meeting. For the first time in her life Betty felt flattered by the admiration of a man; and she had held her own with more than one of distinction on the other side. Even royalty had not fluttered her, but she conceived an eager desire to make this man think well of her. It irritated her to remember that she could have made no mental impression on him whatever. She became uncheerful, and reflected that the subtle flattery in his manner was probably a mere habit; Lady Mary had intimated that he liked women and had loved several. Well, she cared nothing about that; he was thirty years older than herself and married; but she admired him and wished for his good opinion and to hear him talk. Doubtless they soon would meet again, and if they were left in conversation for a decent length of time she would ask him to call. She cast about in her mind for a subterfuge which would justify a note, but she could think of none, and was too worldly−wise to evoke a smile from the depths of a man's conceit.

Her mother refused to bid her good−by when, accompanied by her maid, she started for the Capitol at twenty minutes to three. A few moments later she found herself admiring for the first time the big stately building on the hill at the end of Pennsylvania Avenue. She always had thought Washington a beautiful city, with its wide quiet avenues set thick with trees, its graceful parks, each with a statue of some man gratefully remembered by the Republic, but she had given little heed to its public buildings and their significance. As she approached the great white Capitol, she experienced a sudden thrill of that historical sense which, after its awakening, dominates so actively the large intelligence. The Capitol symbolized the greatness of the young nation; all the famous American statesmen after the first group had moved and made their reputations within its walls. All laws affecting the nation came out of it, and the Judges of the Supreme Court sat there. And of its kind there was none other in the civilized world, had been but one other since the world began.

The historic building shed an added lustre upon Senator Burleigh; but it was of Senator North that she thought most as she half rose in the Victoria and scanned the long sweep. The cleverest of women cannot class with anything like precision the man who has stamped himself into her imagination. Betty knew that there were six men in the Senate who ranked as equals; their quiet epoch gave them little chance to discover latent genius other than for constructive legislation; nevertheless she arbitrarily conceived the Capitol to−day as the great setting for one man only; and the building and the man became one in her imagination henceforth. The truth was that Betty, being greatly endowed for loving and finding that all men fell short of her high standard, was forced to seek companionship in an ideal. She had had several loves in history, but had come to the conclusion some years since that dead men were unsatisfactory. Since then she had fancied mightily one or two public men on the other side, whom she had never met; but in time they had bored or disappointed her. But here was a conspicuous figure in her own country, appealing to her through the powerful medium of patriotic pride; a man so much alive that he might at any moment hold the destinies of the United States in his hands, and who, owing to his years and impenetrable dignity, was not to be considered from the ordinary view−point of woman. She would coquet with Senator Burleigh; it was on the cards that she would love him, for he was brilliant, ambitious, and honourable; but Senator North was exalted to the vacant pedestal reserved for ideals, and Betty settled herself comfortably to his

worship; not guessing that he would be under her memory's dust−heap in ten days if Senator Burleigh captured her heart.

The coachman was directed by a policeman to the covered portico of the Senate wing. Betty had a bare glimpse of corridors apparently interminable, before another policeman put her into the elevator and told her to get off when the boy said “Gallery.”

Senator Burleigh was waiting for her, and she thought him even manlier and more imposing in his gray tweed than in evening dress. He shook her hand heartily, and assured her in his abrupt dictatorial way that it gave him the greatest pleasure to meet her again.

“I'm sorry I haven't time to take you all over the building,” he said,” but I have two Committee meetings this afternoon. You must come down some morning.”

His manner was very businesslike, and he seemed a trifle absent as he paused a moment and called her attention to the daub illustrating the Electoral Commission; but this, Betty assumed, was the senatorial manner by day. In a moment he led her to one of the doors in the wall that encloses the Senate Gallery.

“You see this lady,” he said peremptorily to the doorkeeper, who rose hastily from his chair. “She is always to be admitted to this gallery. Take a good look at her.”

“Yes, sir; member of your family, I presume?”

“You can assume that she is my sister. Only see that you admit her.”

“The rules are very strict in regard to this gallery,” he added, as he closed the door behind them. “It is only for the families of the Senators, but you will like it better than the reserved gallery. Send for me if there should be trouble at any time about admittance.”

“I usually get where I wish! I sha'n't trouble you.”

“Don't you ever think twice about troubling me,” he said. “Let us go down to the front row.”

The galleries surrounding the great Chamber were almost dark under the flat roof, but the space below was full of light. It looked very sumptuous with its ninety desks and easy−chairs, and a big fire beyond an open door; and very legislative with its president elevated above the Senators and the row of clerks beneath him. There were perhaps thirty Senators in the room, and they were talking in groups or couples, reading newspapers, or writing letters. One Senator was making a speech.

“I don't think they are very polite,” said Betty. “Why don't they listen? He seems to be in earnest and speaks very nicely.” “Oh, he is talking to his constituents, not to the Senate—although he would be quite pleased if it would listen to him. He does not amount to much. We listen to each other when it is worth while; but this is a Club, Miss Madison, the most delightful Club in the United States. Just beyond are the cloakrooms, where we can lounge before the fire and smoke, or lie down and go to sleep. The hard work is in the Committee rooms, and it is hard enough to justify all the pleasure we can get out of the other side of the life. Now, I'll tell you who these are and something about them.”

He pointed out one after the other in his quick businesslike way, rattling off biographical details; but Betty, feeling that she was getting but a mass of impressions with many heads, interrupted him.

“I don't see Senator North,” she said. “I thought he was going to speak.”

“He will, later. He is in his Committee room now, but he'll go down as soon as a page takes him word that the clerk is about to read the bill whose Committee amendments he is sure to object to. Now I must go. I shall give myself the pleasure of calling a week from Sunday. You must come often, and always come here. And let me give you two pieces of advice: never bow to any Senator from up here, and never go to the Marble Room and send in a card. Then you can come every day without attracting attention. Good−bye.”

Betty thanked him, and he departed. For the next hour she found the proceedings very dull. The unregarded Senator finished his speech and retired behind a newspaper. Other members clapped their hands, and the pages scampered down the gangways and carried back documents to the clerk below the Vice−President's chair, while their senders made a few remarks meaningless to Betty. Two or three delivered brief speeches which were equally unintelligible to one not acquainted with current legislation. During one of them a man of imposing appearance entered and was apparently congratulated by almost every one in the room, the Senators leaving their seats and coming to the middle aisle, where he stood, to shake him by the hand. Betty felt sorry for Leontine, who was on the verge of tears, but determined to remain until Senator North appeared if she did not leave until it should be time to dress for dinner.

He entered finally and went straight to his desk. He looked preoccupied, and began writing at once. In a few moments the clerk commenced to read from a document, and Senator North laid aside his pen and listened attentively. So did several other Senators. It was a very long document, and Betty, who could not understand one word in ten as delivered by the clerk's rumbling monotonous voice, was desperately bored, and was glad her Senators had the solace of the cloak−rooms. Several did in fact retire to them, but when the clerk sat down and Senator North rose, they returned; and Betty felt a personal pride in the fact that they were about to listen to the Senator whom herself had elected to honour.

She had to lean forward and strain her ears to hear him. It was evident that he did not recognize the existence of the gallery, for he did not raise his voice from beginning to end; and yet it was of that strong rich quality that might have carried far. But it neither “rang out like a clarion,” nor “thundered imprecation.” Neither did he utter an impassioned phrase nor waste a word, but he denounced the bill as a party measure, exposed its weak points, riddled it with sarcasm, and piled up damaging evidence of partisan zeal. “This is an honourable body,” he concluded, “and few measures go out of it that are open to serious criticism by the self−constituted guardians of legislative virtue, but if this bill goes through the Senate we shall invite from the thinking people of the country the same sort of criticism which we now receive from the ignorant. If the high standard of this body is to be maintained, it must be by sound and conservative legislation, not by grovelling to future legislatures.”

Having administered this final slap, he sat down and began writing again, apparently paying no attention to the Chairman of the bill, who defended his measure with eloquence and vigour. It was a good speech, but it contained more words than the one that had provoked it and fewer points. Senator North replied briefly that the only chance for the bill was for its father to refrain from calling attention to its weak points, then went into the Republican cloak−room, presumably to smoke a cigar. Betty, whose head ached, went home.

VII

That evening, as Betty was rummaging through a cupboard in the library looking for a seal, she came upon a box of Cuban cigars. They could have been her father's only and of his special importation: he had smoked the choicest tobacco that Havana had been able to furnish.

She knew that many men would prize that box of cigars, carefully packed in lead and ripened by time, and she suddenly determined to send it to Senator North. She felt that it would be an acute pleasure to give him something, and as for the cigars they were too good for any one else. She took the box to her room and wrapped it up carefully and badly; but when she came to the note which must accompany it, she paused before the difficulties which mechanically presented themselves. Senator North might naturally feel surprise to receive a present from a young woman with whom he had talked exactly six minutes. If she wrote playfully, offering a small tribute at the shrine of statesmanship, he might wonder if she worked slippers for handsome young clergymen and burned candles before the photograph of a popular tenor. She might send them anonymously, but that would not give her the least satisfaction. Finally, she reluctantly decided to wait until she met him again and could lead the conversation up to cigars. “Perhaps he will see me in the gallery to−morrow,” she thought.

But although he sat in his comfortable revolving−chair for two hours the next afternoon, he never lifted his eyes to the gallery. She heard several brief and excellent speeches, but went home dissatisfied. On the day after her return from New York, whither she went to perform the duty of bridesmaid; she had a similar experience, twice varied. Senator Burleigh made a short speech in a voice that was truly magnificent, and following up Senator North's attack on the bill unpopular on the Republican side of the Chamber. He was answered by “Blunderbuss” Pepper, the new Senator who had turned every aristocrat out of office in his aristocratic Southern State and filled the vacancies with men of his own humble origin. He was a burly untidy− looking man, and frequently as uncouth in speech, a demagogue and excitable. But the Senate, now that three years in that body had toned him down, conceded his ability and took his abuse with the utmost good−nature. Betty recalled his biography as sketched by Senator Burleigh, and noted that almost every Senator wheeled about with an expression of lively interest, as his reiterated “Mr. President, Mr. President,” secured him the floor. They were not disappointed, nor was Betty. In a few moments he was roaring like a mad bull and hurling invective upon the entire Republican Party, which “would deprive the South of legitimate representation if it could.” He was witty and scored many points, provoking more than one laugh from both sides of the Chamber; and when he finished with a parting yell of imprecation, his audience returned to their correspondence and conversation with an indulgent smile. Betty wondered what he had been like before the Senate had “toned him down.”

That night she addressed the cigars to Jack Emory and sent them off at once. “I do believe I came very close to making a fool of myself,” she thought. “What on earth made me want to give those cigars to Senator North?—to give him anything? What a little ninny he would have thought me!” She puzzled long over this deflection from her usual imperious course with men, but concluding that women having so many silly twists in their brains, it was useless to try to understand them all, dismissed the matter from her mind.

VIII

"How many politicians are coming this afternoon?" asked Mrs. Madison, at the Sunday midday dinner. Her voice indicated that all protest had not gone out of her.

"Senator Burleigh and Mr. Montgomery—and Lady Mary. Not a formidable array."

"They are exactly two too many. I have written and asked Sally Carter to come over and chaperon you in case I do not feel equal to the ordeal at the last moment. I am surprised that she takes your course so quietly, but on the whole am relieved; you need some one respectable to keep you in countenance."

"This house reeks with respectability; no one would ever notice the absence of a chaperon. Sally is not only quiescent, but sympathetic. She knows that I have got to the end of teas and charities, and she believes in people choosing their own lives. She says she would join a travelling circus if her proclivities happened to point that way."

Mrs. Madison shuddered. "I do not pretend to understand the present generation, and the more I hear of it the less I wish to. As for Sally I love her, but I should detest her if I didn't, for she is the worst form of snob: she is so rich and so well born that she thinks she can dress like a servant−girl and affect the manners of a barmaid."
"Molly! So you were haunting 'pubs' when I supposed you were yawning at home? I hope you did not tell the barmaids your real name."

"Well, I suppose I should not criticise people that I know nothing about," said Mrs. Madison, colouring and serious. She changed the subject hastily. "Jack, I hope you will stay this afternoon. It would be the greatest comfort to have you in the house."

"I will stay, certainly," said Emory. He had taken his Sunday dinner at the old house in I Street for almost a quarter of a century. To−day he had been unusually silent, and had contracted his brows nervously every time Betty looked at him. She understood perfectly, and amused herself by turning round upon him several times with abrupt significance. However, she spared him until they had taken Mrs. Madison to the parlor and gone to the library, where he might smoke his after−dinner cigar. He sat down in front of a window, and the sunlight poured over him, glistening his handsome head and illuminating his skin. Betty supposed that some women might fall quite desperately in love with him; and in addition to his beauty he was a noble and high−minded gentleman, whose narrowness was due to the secluded life he chose to lead.

"Now!" she exclaimed, "come out with it! You've had eleven days, and one can learn a good deal in that time."

He bit sharply at the end of his cigar, but answered without hesitation.

"It is almost impossible to learn anything in Washington to the detriment of the Senate. There seems to be a sort of *esprit de corps* in the entire city. They look politely horrified if you suggest that a Senator of the United States, honouring Washington with the society of his wives and daughters, is anything that he should not be. I was obliged to go to New York and Boston to get the information I wanted, and even now it is far from complete. I don't believe it is possible to arrive at anything like accurate knowledge on the subject."

"Well, what did you get? Washington is a well−ordered community with a high moral tone—it is said to have fewer scandals than any city in the country—and there is no sordid commercial atmosphere to lower it. It is the great city of leisure in everything but legislation and paying calls; so it seems to me that it would be the last place to fondle in its bosom ninety distinguished scoundrels. But go on. What did you learn in Boston and New York?"

"That a little of everything is represented in the Senate,—that is about what it amounts to. There are unquestionably men there who bought their seats from legislatures, and there are men who are agents for trusts, syndicates, and railroad corporations, as well as three party bosses—"

"Ninety Senators leave a large margin for a number of loose fish. What I want to know is, how do the big men stand—North, Maxwell, Ward, March—and fifteen or twenty others, all the men who are the Chairmen of the big Committees? The New England men seem to have charge of everything of importance in the House and of a good deal in the Senate."

"Some of the Southern and North−western and most of the New England States seem to have honest enough

legislatures," said Emory, unwillingly. "But that leaves plenty of others. Only a few of the Western States are above suspicion, and as for New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, they would not waste time defending themselves; and as no Senators are better than the people that elect them—"

"Oh, yes, they are sometimes—look at the Senator from Delaware. I too have been asking questions for eleven days. It all comes to this: there are millionaireism and corrupting influences in the Senate, but that element is in the minority, and the greater number of leading, or able Senators are above suspicion. And they seem to have things pretty much all their own way. They could not if the majority in the Senate were scoundrels. No corrupt body was ever led by its irreproachable exceptions—"

"In another ten years there will be no exceptions. All that are making a desperate stand for honesty to−day will be overwhelmed by the unprincipled element—"

"Or have forced it to reform. The good in human nature predominates; we are a healthy infant, and do not know the meaning of the word 'decadent;' and we are extraordinarily clever. Senator Burleigh says that you can always bank on the American people going right in the end. They may not bother for a long time, but when they do wake up they make things hum."

"Senator Burleigh evidently has all the easy−going optimism of this country. But, Betty, I am no more reconciled than I was before to your having anything to do with these people. Politics have a bad name, whatever the truth of the matter. I think myself our sensational press is largely to blame—" "There is nothing so interesting as the pursuit of truth," said Betty, lightly. "Reconcile yourself to the sight of me in pursuit of it—"

"Ah, here you are!" exclaimed a staccato voice. Sally Carter entered the room, kissed Betty, shook hands heartily with Emory, and threw herself into a chair. Her fortune equalled Betty's, but it was her pleasure to wear frocks so old and so dowdy that her friends wondered where they had come from originally. She had been a handsome girl, and her blue eyes were still full of fire, her fair hair abundant, but her face was sallow and lined from many attacks of malarial fever. Her manner was breezy and full of energy, and she was not only popular but a very important person indeed. She lived alone with her father in the old house in K Street and entertained rarely, but she had strawberry leaves on her coronet, and it was currently reported that when she arrived in England, clad in a rusty black serge and battered turban,— which she certainly slept in at intervals during the day,—she was met in state by the entire ducal family—including a prolific connection— whose ancestor had founded the great house of Carter in the British colonies of North America. What their private opinion was of this representative of the American dukedom was never quite clear to the Washington mind, but to know Sally Carter in her own city meant complete social recognition, and not to know her an indifferent success.

"Senator North tells me that he met you the other day and would like to meet you again," she said to Betty, who lifted her head with attention. "I dropped in on my way here for a little call on Mrs. North, poor dear! There's a real invalid for you—something the matter with her spine—is liable to paralysis any minute. It must be so cheerful to sit round and anticipate that. Why on earth do women let their nerves run away with them, in the first place? Nerves in this country are a mixture of climate, selfishness, and stupidity. I could be as nervous as a witch, but I won't. I walk miles every day and don't think about myself. Well! I told Mr. North all about the bold course of the young lady weary of frivolities, and he seemed much interested, paid you some compliment or other, I've forgotten what. He said he would look out for you in the Senate gallery and go up and speak to you—"

Emory rose with an exclamation of disgust. "I hope you told him to do nothing of the kind."

"On the contrary, I told him not to forget, for as Betty would sail her little yacht on the political sea, I wanted her to be recognized by the men−of−war, not by the trading−ships and pirates."

Emory threw away his cigar. "I think I will go in and see my aunt," he said. "All this is most distasteful to me."

He left the room, followed by Betty's mocking laugh. But Miss Carter said with a sigh,—

"He can't expect us all to live up to his ideals. It is better not to have any, like my practical self. But I'm afraid he sits out there in his damp old library and dreams of a world in which all the men are Sir Galahads and all the women Madame Rolands. He is an ideal himself, if he only knew it; I've always been half in love with him. Well, Betty, how do you like your new toy? After all, what is even a Senate but a toy for a pretty woman? That is really your attitude, only you don't know it. Life is serious only for women with babies and bills. As for charities, they were specially invented to give old maids like myself an occupation in life. What—what—should I have done without charities when Society palled?"

“Why did you never marry, Sally?” asked Betty, abruptly. The question never had occurred to her before, but as she asked it her eyes involuntarily moved to the empty chair before the window.

“What on earth should I do with a husband?” asked Miss Carter, lightly. “I only love men when they are in bronze in the public parks. Poor dear old General Lathom proposed to me four times, and the only time I felt like accepting him was when I saw his statue unveiled. I couldn't put a man on a pedestal to save my life, but when my grateful country does it I'm all humble adoration. Could you idealize a live thing in striped trousers and a frock coat?”

“Woolen is hopeless,” said Betty, with an attempt at playfulness. “We must do the best we can with the inner man.”

“How on earth do you know what a man is like on the inside? Idealize is the right word, though. Women make a god out of what they cannot understand in a man. If he has a bad temper, they think of him as a 'dominant personality.' If he is unfaithful to his wife, he is romantic in the eyes of a woman who has given no man a chance to be unfaithful to her. If he comes to your dinner with an attack of dyspepsia, you compare him sentimentally with the brutes that eat. *You* haven't married yet, I notice, and you are on the corner of twenty−seven.”

“American men don't give you a chance to idealize them,” said Betty, plaintively. “They tell you all about themselves at once. And although Englishmen have more mystery and provoke your curiosity, they don't understand women and don't want to; the women can do the adapting. I never could stand that; and as I can't endure foreigners I'm afraid I shall die an old maid. That's the reason I've gone into politics—”

The butler announced that Senator Burleigh was in the parlor.

“What of his inner man?” asked Sally.

“I never have given it two thoughts. But his outer is all that could be desired.”

“He would look well in bronze. I understand that his State thinks a lot of him: as you know, I read the *Post* and *Star* through every day to papa. I *have* to know something of politics.”

They found Senator Burleigh talking to Mrs. Madison, apparently oblivious of her frigid attempt at tolerance and of Emory's sullen silence. Sally Carter's eyes flashed with amusement, and she shook the Senator warmly by the hand.

“Such a very great pleasure!” she announced in her staccato tones. “Now the only time I really allow myself pride is when I meet the statesmen of my country. I am sure that is the way you feel, dear Cousin Molly—is it not? We are such oysters, the few of us who always have lived here, that a whiff from the political world puts new life into us.”

Emory left the room. Burleigh looked surprised but gratified, and assured her that it was the greatest possible pleasure as well as an honour to meet Miss Carter. He appeared to have left his businesslike manner on Capitol Hill, and he was even less abrupt than on the night of the dinner. Only his exuberant vitality seemed out of place in that dark old room, and it was an effort for him to keep his sonorous voice in check.

“Mrs. Madison says she takes no interest in politics,” he added, “and fears to be a wet blanket on the conversation. I have been assuring her that on one day of the week politics are non−existent so far as I am concerned.”

Mrs. Madison, who had been staring at Sally Carter, replied with an evident attempt to be agreeable, “Of course I always find it interesting to hear people talk about what they understand best.” “Politics are what I should like to understand least. Since I have come to the Senate I have endeavoured to forget all I ever knew about them. I rely upon my friends to keep me in office while I am making a desperate attempt to become a fair−minded legislator.”

He spoke lightly. Betty could not determine whether he was posing or telling the simple truth to people who would be glad to take him at his word. There was a twinkle of amusement in his eye; but he looked too impatient for even the milder sort of hypocrisy.

Mrs. Madison thawed visibly. “You younger men should try to restore the old ideals,” she said.

“Ah, madam,” he replied, “if you only knew what the censors said about the old ideals when they were alive! If Time will be as kind to us, we can swallow our own dose with a reasonable amount of philosophy. John Quincy Adams arraigned the politics of his day in the bitterest phrases he could create; but to−day we are asked to remember the glorious past and hide our heads.”

The Montgomery's entered the room. Randolph, who was as tall as Senator Burleigh and very slender, looked

so distinguished that Mrs. Madison immediately decided to remember only that his family was as old as her own. He had lost none of the repose he had found during his three years' residence in Europe, but the effort to keep it in the House had made his handsome face thin and touched his mouth with cynicism. His hair was still black, and there were no lines about his cool gray eyes.

“Blessed day of rest!” exclaimed his wife. “I got up just one hour ago. Do you know, Miss Madison, I paid twenty−six calls on Thursday, eighteen on Friday and twelve on Saturday? Never marry into political life.”

Senator Burleigh, who had been talking to Miss Carter, turned round quickly. “Some women are so manifestly made for it,” he said, “that it would be folly for them to attempt to escape their fate.”

IX

A month passed. Betty received with Lady Mary on Tuesdays, and under that popular young matron's wing called on a number of women prominent in the official life of the dying Administration, whom she received on Fridays. They were very polite, and returned her calls promptly; but they did not always remember her name, and her personality and position impressed but a few of these women, overwhelmed with social duties, visiting constituents, and people−with−letters. Most of them paid from fifteen to twenty calls on six days out of seven, and had filled their engagement books for the season during its first fortnight. Betty was chagrined at first, then amused. Moreover, her incomplete success raised the political world somewhat in Mrs. Madison's estimation; she had expected that her house would be besieged by these temporary beings, eager for a sniff at Old Washington air. Betty realized that she must be content to go slowly this winter, and begin to entertain as soon as the next season opened. Lady Mary took her to four large receptions, and she was invited to two or three dinners of a semi−official character; for several women not only fancied her, but appreciated the fact that the official were not the highest social honours in the land, and were glad to further her plans.

Senator Burleigh called several times. One day he arrived with a large package of books: Bryce's “American Commonwealth,” a volume containing the Constitution and Washington's Farewell Address, and several of the “American Statesmen” monographs.

“Read all these,” he said dictatorially. (“He certainly takes me very seriously,” thought Betty. “Doubtless he'll stand me in a corner with my face to the wall if I don't get my lessons properly.”) “I want you to acquire the national sense. I don't believe a woman in this country knows the meaning of the phrase. Study and think over the characters of the men who created this country: Washington and Hamilton, particularly. You'll know what I mean when you've read these little volumes; and then I'll bring you some thirty volumes containing the letters and despatches and communications to Congress of these two greatest of all Americans. I don't know which I admire most. Hamilton was the most creative genius of his century, but the very fact that he was a genius of the highest order makes him hopeless as a standard. But all men in public life who desire to attain the highest and most unassailable position analyze the character of Washington and ponder over it deeply. There never was a man so free from taint, there never was such complete mental poise, there never was such cold, rarified, unerring judgment. The man seems to us—who live in a turbulent day when the effort to be and to remain high−minded makes the brain ache— to have been nothing less than inspired. And his political wisdom is as sound for to−day as for when he uttered it; although, for the life of me, I cannot help disregarding his admonition to keep hands out of foreign pie, this time. I want the country to go to the rescue of Cuba, and I'll turn over every stone I can to that end.”

Betty had listened to him with much interest. “Would Washington have gone?” she asked. “Would he advise it now, supposing he could?”

“No, I don't believe he would. Washington had a brain of ice, and his ideal of American prosperity was frozen within it. He would fear some possible harm or loss to this country, and the other could be left to the care of an all−merciful Providence. I love my country with as sound a patriotism as a man may, and I revere the memory of Washington, but I have not a brain of ice, and I think a country, like a man, should think of others besides itself. And the United States has got to that point where almost nothing could hurt it. A few months' patriotic enthusiasm, for that matter, would do it no end of good. If you care to listen, I'll read the Farewell Address to you.”

He read it in his sonorous rolling voice, that must have done as much to make him a popular idol in his State as his more distinguished gifts for public life. Betty decided that the more senatorial he was the better she liked him. She knew that he was a favourite with men, and had a vague idea that men, when in the exclusive society of their own sex, always told witty anecdotes, but she could not imagine herself making small talk with Senator Burleigh. Her day for small talk, however, she fervently hoped was over.

She had seen Senator North again but once. Lady Mary Montgomery gave a great evening reception, as magnificent an affair of the sort as Betty was likely to see in Washington. It was given in honour of a

distinguished Englishman, who, rumour whispered, had come over in the interests of the General Arbitration Treaty between the United States and Great Britain, now at the mercy of the Committee on Foreign Relations. There was another impression, equally alive in Washington that Lady Mary aspired to be the historic link between the two countries. Certain it was that the Secretary of State, the British Ambassador, and the Committee on Foreign Relations dined and called constantly at her house. The Distinguished Guest had called on her every day since his arrival.

Betty knew what others divined; for the friends were inseparable, and Mary Montgomery was very frank with her few intimates. “Of course I want the treaty to go through,” she had said to Betty, only the day before her reception; “and I am quite wild to know what the Committee are doing with it. But of course they will say nothing. Senator Ward kisses my hand and talks Shakespeare and Socrates to me, and when I use all my eloquence in behalf of a closer relationship between the two greatest nations on earth—for I want an alliance to follow this treaty—he says: 'Ma belle dame sans merci, the American language shall yet be spoken in the British Isles; I promise you that.' He is one of the few Americans I cannot understand. He has eyes so heavy that he never looks quite awake, and he is as quick as an Italian's blade in retort. He has a large and scholarly intellect, and it is almost impossible to make him serious. You never see him in his chair on the floor of the Senate, although he sometimes drifts across the room with a cigar in the hollow of his hand, and he is admittedly one of its leading spirits, and the idol of a Western State—of all things! Senator North is the reverse of transparent, but sometimes he goes to the point in a manner which leaves nothing to be desired. He is not on the Committee of Foreign Relations, so I asked him point blank the other day if he thought the treaty would go through and if he did not mean to vote for it. He is usually as polite as all men who are successful in politics and like women, but he gave a short and brutal laugh. 'Lady Mary,' he said, 'when some of my colleagues were cultivating their muscles on the tail of your lion in the winter of 1895, I told them what I thought of them in language which only senatorial courtesy held within bounds. If the Committee on Foreign Relations—for whose members I have the highest respect: they are picked men—should do anything so foolish and so unpatriotic as to report back that treaty in a form to arouse the enthusiasm of the British press, I fear I should disregard senatorial courtesy. But the United States Senate does not happen to be composed of idiots, and the President may amuse himself writing treaties, but he does not make them.'

“Then I asked him if he had no sentiment, if he did not think the spirit of the thing fine: the union of the great English−speaking races; and he replied that he saw no necessity for anything of the sort: we did very well on our separate sides of the water; and as for sentiment, we were like certain people,—much better friends while coquetting than when married. He added that the divorce would be so extremely painful. I asked him what was to prevent another lover's quarrel, if there were no ring and no blessing, and he replied: 'Ah that is another question. To keep out of useless wars with the old country and to tie our hands fast to her quarrels are two things, and the one we will do and the other we won't do.'

“That is all he would say, but fortunately there is a less conservative element in the Senate than his, although I believe they all become saturated with that Constitution in time. I can see it growing in Senator Burleigh.”

All elements had come to her reception to−night. Ambassadors and Envoys Extraordinary were there in the full splendour of their uniforms. So were Generals and Admirals; and the women of the Eastern Legations had come in their native costumes. The portly ladies of the Cabinet were as resplendent as their position demanded, and the aristocracy of the Senate and the women of fashion were equally fine. Other women were there, wives of men important but poor, who walked unabashed in high−neck home−made frocks; and their pretty daughters, were as simple as themselves. One wore a cheese−cloth frock, and another a blue merino. The dames of the Plutocracy were there, blazing with converted capital,—Westerners for the most part, with hogsheads of money, who had come to the City of Open Doors to spend it. It was seldom they were in the same room with the Old Washingtonians, and when they were they sighed; then reminded themselves of recent dinners to people whose names were half the stock in trade of the daily press. Sally Carter, who regarded them through her lorgnette with much the same impersonal interest as she would accord to actors on the boards, wore a gown of azure satin trimmed with lace whose like was not to be found in the markets of the world. Her hair was elaborately dressed, and her thin neck sufficiently covered by a curious old collar of pearls set with tiny miniatures. Careless as she was by day, it often suited her to be very smart indeed by night. She looked brilliant; and Jack Emory, who had been commanded by Betty to accept Lady Mary's invitation, did not leave her side. And she snubbed her more

worldly− minded followers and devoted herself to his amusement.

All the men wore evening clothes. It seemed to be an unwritten law that the politician should have his dress−suit did his wife wear serge for ever. Consequently they presented a more uniformly fine appearance than their women, and most of them held themselves with a certain look of power. Their faces were almost invariably keen and strong. Few of the younger members of the House were here to−night, only those who had been in it so many years that they were high in political importance. Among them the big round form and smooth round head of their present and perhaps most famous Speaker were conspicuous: the United States was moving swiftly to the parting of the ways, and there are times when a Speaker is a greater man than a President.

What few authors Washington boasts were there, as well as Judges of the Supreme Court, scholars, architects, scientists, and journalists. And they moved amid great splendour. Lady Mary had thrown open her ball−room, and the walls looked like a lattice−work of American Beauty roses and thorns. Great bunches of the same expensive ornament swung from the ceiling, and the piano was covered with a quilt of them deftly woven together. The pale green drawing−room was as lavishly decorated with pink and white orchids and lilies of the valley. Lady Mary felt that she could vie in extravagance with the most ambitious in her husband's ambitious land.

Betty was entertaining four Senators, the Distinguished Guest, and the Speaker of the House when she caught a glimpse of Senator North. She immediately became a trifle absent, and permitted Senator Shattuc, who liked to tell anecdotes of famous politicians, to take charge of the conversation. While he was thinking her the one woman in Washington charming enough to establish a *salon*, she was congratulating herself that she should meet Senator North again when she looked her best. She wore a wonderful new gown of mignonette green and ivory white, and many pearls in her warm hair and on her beautiful neck. She looked both regal and girlish, an effect she well knew how to produce. Her head was thrown back and her eyes were sparkling with triumph as they met Senator North's. He moved toward her at once.

“I should be stupid to inquire after your health,” he said as he shook her hand. “You are positively radiant. I shall ask instead if you still find time to come up and see us occasionally, and if we improve on acquaintance?”

“I go very often indeed, but I have seen you only three times.”

“I have been North for a week, and in my Committee Room a good deal since my return.”

Betty was determined not to let slip this opportunity. She resented the platitudes that are kept in stock by even the greatest minds, and wished that he would hold out a peremptory arm and lead her to some quiet corner and talk to her for an hour. But he evidently had a just man's appreciation of the rights of others, for he betrayed no intention to do anything of the kind. His eyes dwelt on her with frank admiration, but Washington is the national headquarters of pretty women, and he doubtless contented himself with a passing glimpse of many. And this time Betty felt the full force of the man's magnetism. She would have liked to put up a detaining hand and hold him there for the rest of the evening. Even were there no chance for conversation, she would have liked to be close beside him. She forgot, that he was an ideal on a pedestal and shot him a challenging glance. “I have hoped that you would come up to the gallery and call on me,” she said pointedly.

He moved a step closer, then drew back. His face did not change.

“I certainly shall when I am so fortunate as to see you up there,” he said. “But the fourth of March is not far off, and the pressure accumulates. I am obliged to be in my Committee Room, as well as in other Committee Rooms, for the better part of every day. But if I can do anything for you, if there is any one you would care to meet, do not fail to let me know. Send word to my room, and if possible I will go to you.”

Betty looked at him helplessly. She wanted to ask him to call at her house on Sunday, but felt a sudden diffidence. After all, why should he care to call on her? He had more important things to think of; and doubtless he spent his few leisure hours with some woman far more brilliant than herself. Her head came down a trifle and she turned it away. He stood there a moment longer, then said,—

“Good−night,” and, after a few seconds' hesitation, and with unmistakable emphasis: “Remember that it would give me the greatest possible pleasure to do anything for you I could.” Immediately after, he left the room.

When she was alone an hour later, she anathematized herself for a fool. Diffidence had no permanent part in her mental constitution. She was sure that if she could talk with him for thirty consecutive minutes she could interest him and attach him to her train. Her pride, she felt, was now involved. She should estimate herself a failure unless she compelled Senator North to forget the more experienced women of the political world and spend his leisure hours with her. She had been a brilliant success in other spheres, she would not fail in this.

But two more weeks passed and she did not see him. He came neither to the floor of the Senate within her experience of it, nor to the gallery. Nor did he appear to care for Society. Few of the Senators did, for that matter. They did not mind dining out, as they had to dine somewhere, and an agreeable and possibly handsome partner would give zest to any meal; but they were dragged to receptions and escaped as soon as they could.

X

Betty rose suddenly from the breakfast−table and went into the library, carrying a half−read letter. She had felt her face flush and her hand tremble, and escaped from the servants into a room where she could think alone for hours, if she wished.

The letter ran as follows:—

THE PARSONAGE, ST. ANDREW, VIRGINIA. To MISS ELIZABETH MADISON:

DEAR MADAM,—I have a communication of a somewhat trying nature to make, and believe me; I would not make it were not my end very near. Your father, dear madam, the late Harold Carter Madison, left an illegitimate daughter by a woman whom he loved for many years, an octaroon named Cassandra Lee. Before his death he gave poor Cassie a certain sum of money, and made her promise to leave Washington and never return. She came here and devoted the few remaining years of her life to the care of her child. I and my wife were the only persons who knew her story, and when she was dying we willingly promised to take the little one. For the last ten years Harriet has lived here in the parsonage and has been the only child I have ever known,—a dearly beloved child. She has been carefully educated and is a lady in every sense of the word. I had until the last two years a little school, and she was my chief assistant. But the public school proved more attractive—and doubtless is more thorough—and this passed from me. Last year my wife died. Now I am going, and very rapidly. I have only just learned the nature of my illness, and I may be dead before you receive this letter. I write to beg you to receive your sister. There is no argument I can use, dear lady, which your own conscience will not dictate. You will not be ashamed of her. She shows not a trace of the taint in her blood. The money your father gave Cassie has gone long since, but Harriet asks no alms of you, only that you will help her to go somewhere far from those who know that she is not as white as she looks, and to give her a chance to earn her living. She is well fitted to be a governess or companion, and no doubt you could easily place her. But she is lonely and frightened and miserable. Be merciful and receive her into your home for a time.

“I dare not write this to your mother. She has no cause to feel warmly to Harriet. But you are young, and wealthy in your own right. Her future rests with you. Here in this village she can do absolutely nothing, and after I am buried she will not have enough to keep her for a month. Answer to her—she bears my name.”

I am, dear lady,

Your humble and obd't servant,

ABRAHAM WALKER.

P. S. Harriet is twenty−three. She has letters in her possession which prove her parentage.

Betty's first impulse was to take the next train for St. Andrew. Her heart went out to the lonely girl, deprived of her only protector, wretched under the triple load of poverty, friendlessness, and the curse of race. She remembered vividly those two men in the church whose bearing expressed more forcibly than any words the canker that had blighted their manhood. And this girl bore no visible mark of the wrong that had been done her, and only needed the opportunity to be happy and respected. Could duty be more plain? And was she a chosen instrument to right one at least of the great wrongs perpetrated by the brilliant, warm−hearted, reckless men of her race?

But in a moment she shuddered and dropped the letter, a wave of horror and disgust rising within her. This girl was her half−sister, and was, light or dark, a negress. Betty had seen too much of the world in her twenty−seven years to weep at the discovery of her father's weakness, or to shrink from a woman so unhappy as to be born out of wedlock; but she was Southern to her finger−tips: the blacks were a despised, an unspeakably inferior race, and they had been slaves for hundreds of years to the white man. To be sure, she loved the old family servants, and rarely said a harsh word to them, and it was a matter of indifference to her that they had been freed, as she had plenty of money to pay their wages. But that the negro should vote had always seemed to her incredible and monstrous, and she laughed to herself when she met on the streets the smartly dressed coloured folk out for a walk. They seemed farcically unreal, travesties on the people to whom a discriminating Almighty had given the world. To her the entire race were first slaves, then servants, entitled to all kindness so long as they

kept their place, but to be stepped on the moment they presumed. She recoiled in growing disgust from this girl with the hidden drop of black in her body.

But her reasoning faculty was accustomed to work independently of her brain's inherited impressions. She stamped her foot and anathematized herself for a narrow−minded creature whose will was weaker than her prejudices. The girl was blameless, helpless. She might have a mind as good as her own, be as well fitted to enjoy the higher pleasures of life. And she might have a beauty and a temperament which would be her ruin did her natural protectors tell her that she was a pariah, an outcast, that they could have none of her. Betty conjured her up, a charming and pathetic vision; but in vain. The repulsion was physical, inherited from generations of proud and intolerant women, and she could not control it.

She longed desperately for a confidant and adviser. Her mother she could not speak to until she had made up her mind. Emory and Sally Carter would tell her to give the creature an allowance and think no more about her; and the matter went deeper than that. The girl had heart and an educated mind; her demands were subtle and complex. Senator Burleigh? He would laugh impatiently at her prejudices, and tell her that she ought to go out and live in the free fresh air of the West. They probably would quarrel irremediably. Mary Montgomery would only stare. Betty could hear her exclaim: “But why? What? And you say she is quite white? I do not think that negroes are as nice as white people, of course; but I cannot understand your really tragic aversion.”

There was only one person to whom it would be a luxury to talk, Senator North. She knew that he would not only understand but sympathize with her, and she was sure he would give her wise counsel. She regretted bitterly that she had not been able to make a friend of him, as she had of several of his colleagues. She would have sent for him without hesitation.

She glanced at the clock; it pointed to ten minutes past ten. He was doubtless at that moment in his Committee Room looking over his correspondence. She knew that Senators received letters at the rate of a hundred a day, and were early risers in consequence. If only she dared to go to him, if only he were not so desperately busy. But he had intimated that he had leisure moments, had taken the trouble to say that it would give him pleasure to serve her. Why should he not? What if he were a Senator? Was she not a Woman? Why should she of all women hesitate to demand a half−hour's time of any man? She needed advice, must have it: a decision should be reached in the next twenty− four hours. Not for a second did she admit that she was building up an excuse for the long−desired interview with Senator North. She was a woman confronted with a solemn problem. Her coupe was at the door; she had planned a morning's shopping. She ran upstairs and dressed herself for the street, wondering what order she would give the footman. She changed her mind hurriedly twenty times, but was careful to select the most becoming street−frock she possessed, a gentian blue cloth trimmed with sable. There were three hats to match it, and she tried on each, to the surprise of her maid, who usually found her easy to please. She finally decided upon a small toque which was made to set well back from her face into the heavy waves of her hair. She was too wise to wear a veil, for her complexion was flawless, her forehead low and full, and her hair arranged loosely about it; she wore no fringe.

As the footman closed the door of the coupe and she said curtly, “The Capitol,” she knew that her mind had made itself up in the moment that it had conceived the possibility of a call upon Senator North.

That point settled, she was calm until she reached the familiar entrance to the Senate wing, and rehearsed the coming interview.

But her cheeks were hot and her knees were trembling as she left the elevator and hurried down the corridor to the Committee Room which Burleigh, when showing her over the building one morning, had pointed out as Senator North's. She never had felt so nervous. She wondered if women felt this sudden terror of the outraged proprieties when hastening to a tryst of which the world must know nothing. And she was overwhelmed with the vivid consciousness that she was actually about to demand the time and attention of one of the busiest and most eminent men in the country. If it had not been for a stubborn and long−tried will, she would have turned and run.

A mulatto was sitting before the door. When she asked, with a successful attempt at composure, for Senator North, he demanded her card. She happened to have one in her purse, and he went into the room and closed the door, leaving her to be stared at by the strolling sight−seers.

The mulatto reopened the door and invited her to enter a large room with a long table, a bookcase, and a number of leather chairs. Before he had led her far, Senator North appeared within the doorway of an inner room.

“I am glad to see you,” he said. “I know that you are in trouble or you would not have done me this honour. It

is an honour, and as I told you before I shall feel it a privilege to serve you in any way. Sit here, by the fire."

Betty felt so grateful for his effort to put her at her ease, so delighted that he was all her imagination had pictured, and had not snubbed her in what she conceived to be the superior senatorial manner, that she flung herself into the easy−chair and burst into tears.

Senator North knew women as well as a man can. He let the storm pass, poked the already glowing fire, and lowered two of the window−shades.

"I feel so stupid," said Betty, calming herself abruptly. "I have no right to take up your time, and I shall say what I have to say and go."

"I have practically nothing to do for the next hour. Please consider it yours."

Betty stole a glance at him. He was leaning back in his chair regarding her intently. It was impossible to say whether his eyes had softened or not, but he looked kind and interested.

"I never have told you that your father was a great friend of mine," he said. "You really have a claim on me." In spite of the fact that the Congressional Directory gave him sixty years, he looked anything but fatherly. Although there never was the slightest affectation of youth in his dress or manner, he suggested threescore years as little. So strong was his individuality that Betty could not imagine him having been at any time other than he was now. He was Senator North, that was the rounded fact; years had nothing to do with him.

"Well, I'm glad you knew papa; it will help you to understand. I—But perhaps you had better read this."

She took the clergyman's letter from her muff, and Senator North put on a pair of steel−rimmed eyeglasses and read it. When he had finished he put the eyeglasses in his pocket, folded the letter, and handed it to her. He had read the contents with equal deliberation. It seemed impossible that he would act otherwise in any circumstance.

"Well?" he said, looking keenly at her. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I am ashamed to tell you how I have felt. But we Southerners feel so strongly on—on—that subject—it is difficult to explain!"

"We Northerners know exactly how you feel," he said dryly. "We should be singularly obtuse if we did not. However, do not for a moment imagine that I am unsympathetic. We all have our prejudices, and the strongest one is a part of us. And for the matter of that, the average American is no more anxious to marry a woman with negro blood in her than the Southerner is, and looks down upon the Black from almost as lofty a height. Only our prejudice is passive, for he is not the constant source of annoyance and anxiety with us that he is with you."

"Then you understand how repulsive it is to me to have a sister who is white by accident only, and how torn I am between pity for her and a physical antipathy that I cannot overcome?"

"I understand perfectly."

"That is why I have come to you—to ask you what I *must* do. This is the first time I have been confronted by a real problem; my life has been so smooth and my trials so petty. It is too great a problem for me to solve by myself, and I could not think of anybody's advice but yours that—that I would take," she finished, with her first flash of humour.

"I fully expect you to take the advice I am going to give you. Your duty is plain; you must do all you can for this girl. But by no means receive her into your house until you have made her acquaintance. Take the ten o'clock B. O. to−morrow morning and go to St. Andrew; it is about four hours' journey and on the line of the railroad. Spend several hours with the girl, and, if she is worth the trouble, bring her back with you and do all you can for her: it would be cruel and heartless to refuse her consolation if she is all this old man describes—and you are not cruel and heartless. And if this drop of black blood is abhorrent to you, think what it must be to her. It is enough to torment a high−strung woman into insanity or suicide. On the other hand, if she is common, or looks as if she had a violent temper, or is conceited and self−sufficient like so many of that hybrid race, settle an income on her and send her to Europe: in placing her above temptation you will have done your duty."

"But that is the whole point—to be sure that *you* do the right thing."

"I almost hope she will be impossible, so that I can wipe her off the slate at once. Otherwise it will be a terrible problem."

"It is no problem at all. There is no problem in plain duty. Problems exist principally in works of fiction and in the minds of unoccupied women. If you meet each development of every question in the most natural and reasonable manner,—presupposing that you possess that highest attribute of civilization, common−sense,—no

question will ever resolve itself into a problem. And difficulties usually disappear as the range of vision contracts. If your house takes fire, you save what you can, not what you have elaborately planned to save in case of fire. Train your common−sense and let the windy analysis pertaining to problems alone."

"But how can I ever get over the horror of the thing, Mr. North?"

"You will forget all about it when she has been your daily companion for a few weeks. If she lacked a nose, you would as soon cease to remember it. If this girl is worth liking, you will like her, and soon cease to feel tragic. Leave that to her!"

"I know that you are right, and of course I shall take your advice. I did not come here to trouble you for nothing. But if I liked her at first and not afterward—"

"Pack her off to Europe. Europe will console an American woman for every ill in life. If you take the right attitude in the beginning, it all rests with her after that. You will have but one duty further. If she wishes to marry, you must tell the man the truth, if she will not. Don't hesitate on that point a moment. Her children are liable to be coal−black. That African blood seems to have a curse on it, and the curse is usually visited on the unoffending."

"I will, I will," said Betty. She rose, and he rose also and took her hand in both of his. She felt an almost irresistible desire to put her head on his shoulder, for she was tired and depressed.

"Your attitude in the matter is the important thing to me," he said. "That is why I have spoken so emphatically. You are a child yet, in spite of your twenty−seven years and your admirable intelligence. This is practically your first trial, the first time you have been called upon to make a decision which, either way, is bound to have a strong effect on your character, and to affect still greater decisions you may be called upon to make in the future. You have only one defect; you are not quite serious enough—yet."

"I feel very serious just now," said Betty, with a sigh; and in truth she did, and her new−found sister was not the only thing that perplexed her.

"One of these days you will be a singularly perfect woman," he added, and then he dropped her hand and walked to the door. As he was about to open it, she touched his arm timidly.

"Will you come and see me on Sunday?" she asked. "I shall have been through a good deal between now and then, and I shall want—I shall want to talk to you."

"I will come," he said.

"Not before half−past four. My mother will be asleep then, and my cousin, Jack Emory, have gone home—there will be so many things I shall want to talk to you about."

"I shall be there at half−past four," he said. "Good−bye. Good−bye."

XI

Betty went home to her room and cried steadily for an hour. She would not analyze the complex source of her emotions, but addressed a bitter reproach to her father's shade; and she reassured herself by frankly admitting that it would give her pleasure to win the approval of Senator North.

She bathed her eyes and went to her mother's room. The sooner that ordeal was over, she reflected, the better. Mrs. Madison was reading an amusing novel and looked up with a smile, then pushed the book aside.

“Have you been crying, darling?” she asked. “What can be the matter?”

Betty told her story without preamble. Her mother's nerves could stand a shock, but not three minutes of uncertainty. Mrs. Madison listened with more equanimity than Betty anticipated.

“I suppose I may consider myself fortunate that I have not had one of his brats thrust on me before,” she remarked philosophically. “What are we to do about this creature?”

“There is only one human thing to do. It is not her fault, and she is very wretched at present. And now that I know the truth I suppose I am as responsible as my father would be if he were alive. I shall go to see her to−morrow, and if she is presentable and seems good I shall bring her to Washington. Of course I shall not bring her here without your permission—it is your house. Let me read you his letter.”

“Do you feel very strongly on the subject?” Mrs. Madison asked when Betty had finished.

“Oh, I do! I do! I will promise not to bring her to Washington at all if she is impossible, but if she is all I feel sure she must be, let me bring her here for a few weeks, until we have decided what to do for her. I know it is a great deal to ask—her presence cannot fail to be hateful to you—”

“My dear, I have outlived any feeling of that sort, and I have not put everything on your shoulders all these years to thwart you now, when you feel so deeply. Moreover, an old memory came to me while you were reading that letter. When I was a little girl, about eight or ten, I spent an entire summer with Aunt Mary Eager at her home in Virginia. She had a house full, and there were five other little girls beside myself. A brook ran across the foot of the plantation, and we were very fond of playing there. Directly across was the hut of a freed slave who had a little girl about our own age. The child was a beautiful octaroon. I can see her plainly, with her honey−coloured skin, her immense black eyes, her long straight black hair, and her stiff little white frock tucked to the waist. Her mother took the greatest pride in her, and was always changing her clothes.

“Every day she used to come to the edge of her side of the brook and watch us. We never noticed her, for although we often played with the little black piccaninnies, the yellow child of a freed slave was another matter. One day—I think she had watched us for about a week— she came half−way across the bridge. We stared at each other, but took no notice of her. The next day she walked straight across and up to us, and asked us very nicely if she might play with us. We turned upon her six scarlet scandalized faces, and what we said, in what brutal child language, I do not care to repeat. The child stared at us for a moment as if she were looking into the Inferno itself, and I expect she was, poor little soul! Then she gave a cry, and tore across the bridge and up the 'pike as hard as she could run. As long as we could see her she was running, and as I never saw her again—we avoided the brook after that—it seemed to me for years as if she must be running still. And for years those flying feet haunted me, and I used to long as I grew older to do penance in some way. I befriended many a poor yellow girl, hoping she might be that child. Then life grew too sad for me to remember the sins of my childhood. But I like the idea of making penance at this late day and receiving this girl for a few weeks into my house: it will be a penance, for I do not fancy sitting at the table with a woman with negro blood in her veins, I can assure you. But I shall do it. I believe if I did not I should be haunted again by those little flying feet. There is no chance of this being her daughter, for she would have been too old to attract your father's fancy. But that is not the point. I make one condition. No one must know the truth, not even Sally or Jack. She must pass for a distant relative, left suddenly destitute.” “She would probably be the last to wish the truth known. But you have taken a weight off my mind, Molly dear, and I am deeply grateful to you.”

XII

The next day Betty left the train a few minutes after two o'clock and walked up the winding street of a small village to the parsonage. She passed a number of cottages picturesquely dilapidated, a store in which a half−dozen men were smoking, and about thirty lounging negroes. On rising ground was a large house, but the village looked forlorn, neglected, almost lifeless.

The men in the store came out and stared at her; so did the women from the cottages. And the negroes stood still. Doubtless they thought her a wealthy vision; the day was cold, and she wore a brown cloth dress and a sable jacket and toque.

"What a life for an intelligent woman!" she thought, glancing about her with deep distaste. "It would be enough to induce melancholia without the 'taint.'"

She had made a desperate effort in the last twenty−four hours to overcome her repugnance, but had only succeeded in making sure that she could conceal it. She had recalled her interview with Senator North again and again. His indubitable interest gave her courage, and a desire to use the best that was in her. And she had turned her mind more often still to those men in the church and the sentiments they had inspired. The shutters of the parsonage were closed, there was crape on the door. Betty turned the knob and entered. A number of people were in a room on the right of the hall. At the head of the room, barely out−lined in the heavy shadows, was a coffin on its trestle.

The house smelt musty and damp. Betty pushed back the door and let in the bright winter sunlight. Some one rose from the group beside the coffin and came slowly forward. Betty waited, clinching her hands in her muff, her breath coming shorter. The dark figure in the dark room looked like the shadow of death itself. But it was not superstition that made Betty brace herself. In a moment the figure had stepped into the sunlight beside her.

Betty had imagined the girl handsome; she was not prepared for splendid beauty. Harriet Walker was far above the ordinary height of woman, and very slender and graceful. Her hair and eyes were black, her skin smooth and white, her features aquiline. Hauteur should have been her natural expression, but her eyes were dreamy and melancholy, her mouth discontented. Betty, in that first rapid survey, detected but two flaws in her beauty: her chin was weak and her hands were coarse.

"You are Miss Madison," she said, with the monotonous inflection of grief. "Thank you for coming."

"I am your half−sister," said Betty, putting out her hand. And then the desire to use the best that was in her overcame the repugnance that made her very knees shake, and she put her arms about the girl and kissed her.

"You are mighty kind," said the other. "Will you come into my room?" Betty followed her into a small room, simpler than any in her own servants' quarter. But it was neat, and there was an attempt at smartness in the bright calico curtains and bedspread. The furniture looked home−made, and there was no carpet on the floor.

"Poor girl! poor girl!" exclaimed Betty, impulsively. "Have you ever been happy—here?"

"Well, I don't reckon I've been very happy, ever; but I've given some happiness and I've been loved and sheltered. That is something to be thankful for in this world."

"I am going to take you away," said Betty, abruptly. "Mr. Walker wrote me that you'd be willing to come."

"Oh, yes, I'll go, I reckon. I told him I would. I want to hold up my head. Here I never have, for everybody knows. The white men all round here insulted me until they got tired of trying to make me notice them. One of the young men up on the plantation fell in love with me, and they sent him away and he was drowned at sea. He never knew that I had the black in my blood, and he had asked me to marry him. They did not tell him the truth, for they feared he would then wish to make me his mistress."

She spoke without passion, with a deep and settled melancholy, as if her intelligence had forbidden her to combat the inevitable. Betty burst into tears.

"Don't cry," said the other. "I never do—any more. I used to. And if you'll kindly take me away, I know I'll feel as if I were born over. If there is anything in this world to enjoy, be right sure I shall enjoy it. I'm young yet, and I reckon nobody was made to be sad for ever."

"You shall be happy," exclaimed Betty. "I will see to that. I pledge myself to it. I will make you

forget—everything."

Harriet shook her head. "Not everything. Somewhere in my body, hidden away, but there, is a black vein, the blood of slaves. I might get to be happy with lots of books and kind people and no one to despise me for what I can't help, but every night I'd remember *that* , and then I reckon I'd feel mighty bad."

"You think so now," said Betty, soothingly, and longing for consolation herself. "But when you are surrounded by friends who love you for what you are, by all that goes to make life comfortable and— and—gay; it seems terribly soon to speak of it, but I shall take you to all the theatres and buy you beautiful clothes, and I shall settle on you what your father left me: it is only right you should have it and feel independent. You will travel and see all the beautiful things in Europe. Oh, I know that in time you will forget. When you are away from all that reminds, you cannot fail to forget."

Harriet, who had followed Betty's words with an eager lifting of her heavy eyelids and almost a smile on her mouth, brought her lips together as Betty ceased speaking, and held out her hand.

"Do you see nothing?" she asked.

Betty took the hand in hers. "What do you mean?" she demanded. "All that—the roughness—will wear off. It will be gone in a month."

"There is something there that will never wear off. Look right hard at the finger−nails."

Betty lifted the hand to her face, vaguely recalling observations of her mother when discussing suspicious looking brunettes seen in the North. There was a faint bluish stain at the base of the nails; and she remembered. It was the outward and indelible print of the hidden vein within. The nails are the last stronghold of negro blood. She dropped the hand with an uncontrollable shudder and covered her face with her muff.

"I feel so horribly sorry for you," she said hastily. "It seemed to me for the moment as if your trouble were my own."

If the girl understood, she made no sign; hers had been a life of self−control, and she had been despised from her birth.

"Tell me what you wish me to do now," said Betty, lifting her head. "When can you leave here? Do you wish me to stay with you? Is it impossible for you to go to−day?"

"I cannot leave him until he is buried. And you couldn't stay here. This is Tuesday. I'll go Thursday."

Betty thrust a roll of bills into a drawer. "They are yours by right," she said hurriedly. "Go first to Richmond and get a handsome black frock; you will be sure to find what you want ready made, and it will be better—on account of the servants—for you to look well when you arrive. Spend it all. There is plenty more. Buy all sorts of nice things. I will go now. There is a train soon. Telegraph when you start for Washington and I will meet you. Good by, and please be sure that I shall make you happy."

Harriet walked out to the gate, and Betty saw that there were fine lines on her brow and about her mouth. But she was very beautiful, sombre and blighted as she was. She clung to Betty for a moment at parting, then went rapidly into the house.

When Betty reached the street, she restrained an impulse to run, but she walked faster than she had ever walked in her life, persuading herself that she feared to miss her train. She waited three quarters of an hour for it, and there were four dreary hours more before she saw the dome of the Capitol. She arrived at home with a splitting headache and an animal craving to lock herself in her room and get into bed. For the time being no mortal interested her, she was exhausted and emotionless. She described the interview briefly to her mother, then sought the solitude she craved. And as she was young and healthy, she soon fell asleep.

XIII

When she awoke next morning she arose and dressed herself at once: in bed the will loses its control over thought, and she wished to think as little as possible. But her mind reverted to the day before, in spite of her will, and she laughed suddenly and went to her desk and wrote on a slip of paper,—

"Every woman writes with one eye on the page and one eye on some man, except the Countess Hahn−Hahn, who has only one eye."—HEINE.

"Some day when I know him better I will give him this," she thought, and put the slip into a drawer by itself.

The load of care had lifted itself and gone. She had done the right thing, the momentous question was settled for the present, and Betty Madison had merely to shake her shoulders and enjoy life again. She threw open the window and let in the sun. There had been a rain−storm in the night and then a severe frost. The ice glistened on the naked trees, encasing and jewelling them. A park near by looked as if the crystal age of the world had come. The bronze equestrian statue within that little wood of radiant trees alone defied the ice−storm, as if the dignity of the death it represented rebuked the lavish hand of Nature.

Betty felt happy and elated, and blew a kiss to the beauty about her. She always had had a large fund of the purely animal joy in being alive, but to−day she was fully conscious that the tremulous quality of her gladness was due to the knowledge that she should see Senator North within five more days and the light of approval in his eyes. Exactly what her feeling for him was she made no attempt to define. She did not care. It was enough that the prospect of seeing him made her happier than she ever had felt before. That might go on indefinitely and she would ask for nothing more. Her recent contact with the serious−practical side of life—as distinct from the serious− intellectual which she had cultivated more than once—had terrified her; she wanted the pleasant, thrilling, unformulated part. For the first time one of her ideals had come forth from the mists of fancy and filled her vision as a man; and he was become the strongest influence in her life. As yet he was unaware of this honour, and she doubtless occupied a very small corner of his thought; but he was interested at last, and he was coming to see her. And then he would come again and again, and she would always feel this same glad quiver in her soul. She felt no regret that she could not marry him; the question of marriage but brushed her mind and was dismissed in haste. That was a serious subject, glum indeed, and dark. She was glad that circumstance limited her imagination to the happy present. She felt sixteen, and as if the world were but as old. Love and the intellect have little in common. They can jog along side by side and not exchange a comment.

"Come down and take a walk," cried a staccato voice. Sally Carter was standing on the sidewalk, her head thrown back. Betty nodded, put on her things and ran downstairs. Miss Carter was wrapped in an old cape, and her turban was on one side, but she looked rosier than usual.

"I've been half−way out to Chevy Chase," she said, "and I was just thinking of paying poor old General Lathom a visit. He does look so well in bronze, poor old dear, and all that ice round him will make him seem like an ogre in fairy−land. He wasn't a bit of an ogre, he was downright afraid of me."

"I suppose a man really feels as great a fool as he looks when he is proposing to a woman he is not sure of. I wonder why they ever do. After I gave up coquetting, came to the conclusion that it wasn't honest, they proposed just the same."

"Some women unconsciously establish a habit of being proposed to. I've had very few proposals, and I know several really beautiful women who have had practically none. As I said, it's a habit, and you can't account for it."

"I went yesterday to Virginia to call on a relative who has just lost her last adopted parent," said Betty, abruptly, "and she looked so forlorn that I asked her to visit us for a while. I hope you'll like her."

"Ah? She must be some relation of mine, too. You and I are third cousins."

"Don't ask me to straighten it out. The ramifications of Southern kinships are beyond me. She is a beauty—very dark and tragic."

"That is kind of you—to run the risk of Senator Burleigh going off at a tangent," said Miss Carter, sharply. "By the way, you cannot deny that you have given him encouragement; you have neither eyes nor ears for any one else when he is round."

“He is usually the most interesting person 'round;' and I have a concentrative mind. But I never intend to marry, and Senator Burleigh has never even looked as if he wanted to propose. By the way, Molly has actually asked him to come to the Adirondacks for a few days. Can't you and your father come for a month or two? Jack has promised to stay with us the whole summer, and we'll be quite a family party.”

“Yes, I will,” said Miss Carter, promptly. “I haven't been in the Adirondacks for six years and I should love it.”

“Harriet Walker—that's our new cousin—will be with us too, most likely. She looks delicate, and I shall try to persuade her that she needs the pines.”

“Ah! Look out for the Senator—in the dark pine forests on the mountain.”

“I don't know why you should be so concerned for me. I usually have kept an admirer as long as I wanted him.”

“Oh, no offence, dear. The dark and tragic lady merely filled my eye at the moment. By the way, Mrs. North thinks of going to the Lake Hotel this summer. Isn't that close by your place?”

“It is just across the lake. There is your old General. He does look like an ogre, and he's got a patch of green mould on his nose. You ought to take better care of him.”

“He looks so much better than he did in life that I have no fault to find. The doctor has told Mrs. North that the pine forests may do her all the good in the world, prolong her life, and Mr. North has written to see if he can get an entire wing for her. I hope he can go too, but he always seems to have so much to do at home in summer. I do like him. He's the only man I know who, I feel positive, never could make a fool of himself.”

“I am half starved. Come home and have your breakfast with me.”

“I should like to. Senator North—”

“There is Mr. Burleigh on horseback—with Mr. Montgomery. He *will* look well in bronze—but they only put Generals on horseback, don't they? There—he sees me. I am going to ask them to come in to breakfast.”

“I believe you like him better than you think, my dear. Your eyes shine like two suns, and I never saw you look so happy.”

“The morning is so beautiful and I am so glad that I am alive. I know exactly how much I like Mr. Burleigh.”

XIV

“Do all Southerners make such delicious coffee?” asked Senator Burleigh, as the four sat about the attractive table in the breakfast− room.

“The Southerners are the only cooks in the United States,” announced Miss Carter. “The real difference between the South and the North is that one enjoys itself getting dyspepsia and the other does not.”

“There are just six kinds of hot bread on this table,” said Burleigh, meditatively.

“And no pie and no doughnuts. Mr. Montgomery, you are really a Southerner—ar'n't you glad to get back to darky cooks?”

“I was until we began on this tariff bill, and now there is not an object you can mention, edible or otherwise, that I don't loathe.”

“The details of such a bill must be maddening,” said Betty, sympathetically, “but, after all, it is an honour to be on the Ways and Means Committee. There is compensation in everything.”

“I don't know. When a man lobbyist tries to find out your weak spot and play on it, you can kick him out of the house, but when they set a woman at you, all you can do is to bow and say: 'My dear madam, it is with the greatest regret I am obliged to inform you that I have sat up every night until three o'clock studying this subject, and that I have made up my mind.' Whereupon she talks straight ahead and hints at trouble with certain constituents next year who want free coal and an exorbitant duty on Zante currants, raisins, wine, and wool. The whole army of lobbyists have camped on my doorstep ever since we began to draw up this bill. How they find time to camp on any one's else would make an interesting study in ubiquity.”

“I am afraid some of your ideals have been shattered, and I am afraid you are shattering some of Miss Madison's,” said Burleigh, smiling into Betty's disgusted face.

“I hate the dirty work of politics,” said Montgomery, gloomily. “Of course it doesn't demoralize you so long as you keep your own hands clean, but it is sickening to suspect that you are sitting cheek by jowl in the Committee Room with a man whose pocket is stuffed with some Trust Company's shares.”

“I used to hate it, but I don't see any remedy until we have an educated generation of high−class politicians, and I think that millennium is not far off. As matters stand, there is bound to be a certain percentage of scoundrels and of men too weak to resist a bribe in a great and shifting body like the House. Any scoundrel feels that he can slink among the rest unseen. The old members who have been returned term after term since they began to grow stubby beards on their cast−iron chins are an argument against rotation; they have had a chance to acquire the confidence of the public, they are experienced legislators, and they are incorruptible.”

Betty drew a long sigh of relief. “You have cleared up the atmosphere a little,” she said. “I thought I was going to learn that the House, at least, was one hideous mass of corruption, praying for burial.”

“That is what they think of us outside,” said Montgomery. “We might as well all be gangrene, for we get the credit of it.”

“I don't like your similes,” said Miss Carter; “I haven't finished my breakfast. Mr. Burleigh, you've put on your senatorial manner and I like you better without it. I thought you were going to say, 'Don't interrupt, please,' or 'Would you kindly be quiet until I finish?' at least twice.”

“I beg pardon humbly. I am flattered to know that you have thought it worth while to listen to any remarks I may have been forced to make in the Senate.”

“I have been twice to the gallery with Betty, and both times you were talking like a steam−engine and warning people off the track.”

It was so apt a description of Burleigh's style when on his feet that even he laughed.

“I don't like to be interrupted or contradicted,” he said, “I frankly admit it.”

“Better not marry an American girl.”

“Some Englishwomen have wills of their own,” remarked Mr. Montgomery.

“Some men are tyrants in public life and slaves at home—to a beautiful woman,” remarked Senator Burleigh.

“Some men are so clever,” said Miss Carter. “Give me another waffle, please.”

XV

Betty went to the Senate Gallery that afternoon for the first time in several days. It was hard work to keep up with the calling frenzy of Washington and cultivate one's intellect at the same time. There was no one in the private gallery but an old man with a hayseed beard and horny hands. He sat on the first chair in the front row, but rose politely to let Betty pass; and she took off her veil and jacket and gloves and settled herself for a comfortable afternoon. She felt almost as much at home in this family section of the Senate Gallery as in her own room with a copy of the Congressional Record in her hand. Sometimes save for herself it would be empty, when every other gallery, but the Diplomats', of that fine amphitheatre would be nearly full. It was crowded, however, when it was unofficially known that a favourite Senator would speak, or an important bill on the calendar provoke a debate. Leontine no longer accompanied her mistress; she had threatened to leave unless exempted from political duty.

To−day a distinguished Senator on the other side of the Chamber was attacking with caustic emphasis a Republican measure. He was the only man in the Senate with a real Uncle Sam beard. Senator Shattuc's waved like a golden fan from his powerful jaw; but the Democratic appendage opposite was long and narrow, and whisked over the Senator's shoulder like the tail of a comet, when he became heated in controversy. It was flying about at a great rate to−day, and Betty was watching it with much interest, when a proud voice remarked in her ear,—

“That's my Senator, marm. He's powerful eloquent, ain't he?”

Betty nodded. “He's quite a leader.”

“I allow he is. He's been leadin' in our State fur twenty years. I allus wanted to hear him speak in Congress, and when I called on him last Monday—when I come to Washington—he told me to come up here to− day and hear him, and he would set me in the Senators' Gallery. And he did.”

His voice became a distant humming in Betty's ears. Senator North had entered and taken his seat. He apparently settled himself to listen to the speech, and he looked as calm and unhurried as usual.

“That's North,” whispered the old man. “There wuz a lady in here a spell since who pinted a lot of 'em out to me. He looks a little too hard and stern to suit me. I like the kind that slaps you on the back and says 'Howdy.' Now Senator North, he never would: I know plenty that knows him. He's aristocratic; and I don't like his politics, neither. I allus suspicion that politicians ain't all right when they're aristocratic.”

“He does not happen to be a politician.”

“Hey?”

“Don't you want to listen to your Senator? He is very eloquent.”

“He's been speakin' fur an hour steady,” said the visitor to Washington, philosophically. “I kinder thought I'd like to talk to you a spell. Hev you seen the new library?” “Oh, yes; I live here.”

“Do ye? Well, you're lucky. For this city's so grand it's jest a pleasure to walk around. And that Library's the most beautiful buildin' I ever saw in all my seventy−two years. I've been twice a day to look at it, and it makes me feel proud to be an Amurrican. If Paradise is any more beautiful than that there buildin', I do want to go there.”

Betty smiled with the swift sympathy she always felt for genuine simplicity, and the old man's pride in his country's latest achievement was certainly touching. She refrained from telling him that she thought the red and yellow ceilings hideous, and delighted him with the assurance that it was the finest modern building in the world.

“What's happened to ye?” he asked sharply, a moment later. “You've straightened up and thrown back your head as if ye owned the hull Senate.”

Senator North had wheeled about slowly and glanced up at the private gallery. Then he had risen abruptly and gone into the cloak−room.

“Perhaps I do,” said Betty.

She spoke thickly. It seemed incredible that he was coming up to the gallery at last. She had another humble moment and felt it to be a great honour. But she smiled so brilliantly at the old man that he grinned with delight.

“I presume you're the darter of one of these here Senators,” he said; “one of the rich ones. You look as if ye hed it all your own way in life, and seein' as you're young and pretty, meanin' no offence, I'm glad you hev. Is

your pa one of the leadin' six?"

"My father is dead." She heard the door open and turned her head quickly. It was Senator Shattuc who had entered. He walked rapidly down the aisle, took a seat in the second row of chairs, and gave her a hearty grip of the hand.

"How are you?" he asked. "I was glad to see you were up here. You always look so pleased with the world that it does me good to get a glimpse of you."

Betty liked Senator Shattuc, and held him in high esteem, but at that moment she would willingly have set fire to his political beard. She was used to self−control, however, and she chatted pleasantly with him for ten minutes, while her heart seemed to descend to a lower rib, and her brain reiterated that eternal question of woman which must reverberate in the very ears of Time himself.

He came at last, and Senator Shattuc amiably got up and let him pass in, then took the chair behind the old man and asked him a few good− natured questions before turning to Betty again.

"I started to come some time ago," said Senator North, "but I was detained in one of the corridors. It is hard to escape being buttonholed. This time it was by a young woman from my State who wants a position in the Pension Office. If it had been a man I should have ordered him about his business, but of course one of your charming sex in distress is another matter. However, I got rid of her, and here I am."

"I knew you were coming. I should have waited for you." Now that he was there she subdued her exuberance of spirit; but she permitted her voice to soften and her eyes to express something more than hospitality. He was looking directly into them, and his hard powerful face was bright with pleasure.

"It suddenly occurred to me that you might be up here," he said; "and I lost no time finding out." He lowered his voice. "Did you go? Has it turned out all right?"

"Yes, I went! I'll tell you all about it on Sunday. I never had such a painful experience."

"Well, I'm glad you had it. You would have felt a great deal worse if you had shirked it. However—Yes?"

Senator Shattuc was asking him if he thought the Democratic Senator was in his usual form.

"No," he said, "I don't. What is he wasting his wind for, anyway? We'll pass the bill, and he's all right with his constituents. They know there's no more rabid watch−dog of the Treasury in America."

"I suspect it does him good to bark at us," said Senator Shattuc.

The old man looked uneasy. "Ain't that a great speech?" he asked.

The two Senators laughed. "Well, it's better than some," said Shattuc. "And few can make a better when he's got a subject worthy of him," he added kindly.

"That's perlite, seein' as you're a Republican. I allow as I'll go. Good−day, marm. I'll never forgit as how you told me you'd bin all over Yurrup and that there ain't no modern buildin' so fine as our new Library. Good−day to ye, sirs."

Senator Shattuc shook him warmly by the hand. Senator North nodded, and Betty gave him a smile which she meant to be cordial but was a trifle absent. She wished that Senator Shattuc would follow him, but he sat down again at once. He, too, felt at home in that gallery, and it had never occurred to him that one Senator might be more welcome there than another. Senator North's face hardened, and Betty, fearing that he would go, said hurriedly,—

"Ar'n't you ever going to speak again? I have heard you only once."

"I rarely make set speeches, although I not infrequently engage in debate—when some measure comes up that needs airing."

"You ought to speak oftener, North," said Senator Shattuc. "You always wake us up."

"You have no business to go to sleep. If I talked when I had nothing to say, you'd soon cease to be waked up. Our friend over there has put three of our esteemed colleagues to sleep. He'll clear the galleries in a moment and interfere with Norris's record.—I suppose you have never seen that memorable sight," he said to Betty: "an entire gallery audience get up and walk out when a certain Senator takes the floor?"

"How very rude!"

"The great American public loves a show, and when the show is not to its taste it has no hesitation in making its displeasure known."

"Why do you despise the great American public? You never raise your voice so that any one in the second row up here can hear you."

“I have no love for the gallery. Nor do I talk to constituents. When it is necessary to talk to my colleagues, I do so, and it matters little to me whether the reporters and the public hear me or not. When my constituents are particularly anxious to know what stand I have taken on a certain question, I have the speech printed and send it to them; but as a rule they take my course for granted and let me alone.”

“But tell me, Mr. North,” said Betty, squaring about and putting her questions so pointedly that he, perforce, must answer them, “would you really not like to make a speech down there that would thrill the nation, as the speeches of Clay and Webster used to? And you could make a speech like that. *Why* don't you?”

“My dear Miss Madison, if I attempted to thrill the American people by lofty emotions and an impassioned appeal to their higher selves, I should only bring down a storm of ridicule from seven−eighths of the American press. I could survive that, for I should not read it, but my effort would be thrown away. The people to whom it was directed would feel ashamed of what thrill was left in it after it had reached them through the only possible medium. This is the age—in this country—of hard practical sense without any frills, or thrills. It is true that there is a certain amount of sham oratory surviving in the Senate, but the very fact that it is sham protects it from the press. The real thing would irritate and alarm the spirits of mediocrity and sensationalism which dominate the press to−day. A sensational speech, one in which a man makes a fool of himself, it delights in, and it encourages him by half a column of head−lines. A speech by a great man, granted that we had one, carried away by lofty patriotism and striving to raise his country, if only for a moment, to his own pure altitude, would make the press feel uneasy and resentful, and it would neutralize every word he uttered by the surest of all acids, ridicule. An American statesman of to−day must be content to legislate quietly, to use his intellect and his patriotism in the Committee Room, and to keep a sharp eye on the bills brought forward by other Committees. As for speeches, those look best in the Record which make no appeal to the gallery. There, you cannot say I have not made you a speech!” “Well, make me another, and tell me why you even consider the power of the press. I mean, how you bring yourself even to think about it. You have defied public opinion more than once. You have stood up and told your own State that it was wrong and that you would not legislate as it demanded. I am sure you would defy the whole country, if you felt like it.”

“Ah, that is another matter. The hard−headed American respects honest convictions, especially when they are maintained in defiance of self− interest. I never shall lose my State by an unwavering policy, however much I may irritate it for the moment. I could a heterogeneous Western State, of course, but not a New England one. We are a conservative, strong−willed race, and we despise the waverer. We are hard because it always has been a hard struggle for survival with us. Therefore we know what we want, and we have no desire to change when we get it. There goes the bell for Executive Session. You and I must go our different ways.”

XVI

“Do you dislike her?” asked Betty anxiously of her mother on the night of Harriet's arrival. “I do not, and yet I feel that I never can love her—could not even if it were not for *that*.”

“It is that. You never will love her. I cannot say that she has made any impression on me whatever, so far. She seems positively congealed. I suppose she is frightened and worn out, poor thing! She may improve when she is rested and happier.”

And the next day, as Betty drove her about the city and showed her the classic public buildings, the parks, white and glittering under a light fall of snow, the wide avenues in which no one seemed to hurry, and the stately private dwellings, Harriet's eyes were wide open with pleasure, and she sat up straight and alert.

“And I am really to live in this wonderful city?” she exclaimed. “How long will it be before I shall have seen all the beautiful things inside those buildings? Do you mean that I can go through all of them? Why, I never even dreamed that I'd really see the world one day. All I prayed for was books, more books. And now I'm living in a house with a right smart library, and you will let me read them all. I don't know which makes me feel most happy.”

“I will ask my cousin, Mr. Emory, to take you to all the galleries, and you must go to the White House and shake hands with the President.”

“Oh, I should like to!” she exclaimed. “I should like to! I should indeed feel proud.” She flushed suddenly and turned away her head. Betty called her attention hastily to a shop window: they had turned into F Street. She was determined that the obnoxious subject should never be mentioned between them if she could help it.

“I'll take you to New York and show you the shops there,” she continued. “New York was invented that woman might appreciate her superiority over man.”

“I'd love a yellow satin dress trimmed with red and blue beads,” said Harriet, thoughtfully.

Betty shuddered. For the moment F Street seemed flaunting with old Aunty Dinah's bandannas. She replied hurriedly,—

“You will have all sorts of new ideas by the time you go out of mourning. I suppose you will wear black for a year.”

“That makes me think. While I'm in black I can't see your fine friends. I'd like to study. Could I afford a teacher?”

“You can have a dozen. I've told you that I intend to turn over to you the money father left me. Mr. Emory will attend to it. You will have about five hundred dollars a month to do what you like with.”

The girl gasped, then shook her head. “I can't realize that sum,” she said. “But I know it's riches, and I wish—I wish *he* were alive.”

“If he were you would not have it, for I should not know of you. You will enjoy having a French teacher and a Professor of Belles Lettres. Have you any talent for music?”

“I can play the banjo—”

“I mean for the piano.”

“I never saw one till yesterday, so I can't say. But I reckon I could play anything.”

Her Southern brogue was hardly more marked than Jack Emory's, but she mispronounced many of her words and dropped the final letters of others: she said “hyah” for “here” and “do'“ for “door,” and once she had said “done died.” Betty determined to give special instructions to the Professor.

Senator Burleigh and Emory dined at the house that evening, and although Harriet was shy, and blushed when either of the men spoke to her the deep and tragic novelty of their respectful admiration finally set her somewhat at her ease, and she talked under her breath to Emory of the pleasurable impression Washington had made on her rural mind. After dinner she went with him to the library, where he showed her his favourite books, and advised her to read them.

“Will you have a cigarette?” he asked. “Betty accuses me of being old− fashioned, but I am modern enough to think that a woman and a cigarette make a charming combination: she looks so companionable.”

“I've smoked a pipe,” said Harriet, doubtfully; “but I've never tried a cigarette. I reckon I could, though.”

He handed her a cigarette, and she smoked with the natural grace which pervaded all her movements. She sank back in the deep chair she had chosen, and puffed out the smoke indolently.

“I am so happy,” she said. “I reckoned down there that the world was beautiful somewhere, but I never expected to see it. And it is, it is. Poor old uncle used to say that nothing amounted to much when you got it, but he didn't know, he didn't know. This room is so big, and the light is so soft, and this chair is so lazy, and the fire is so warm—” She looked at Emory with the first impulse of coquetry she had ever experienced; and her eyes were magnificent.

“Are you, too, happy?” she asked softly.

He stood up suddenly and gave a little nervous laugh, darting an embarrasing glance over his shoulder.

“I feel uncommonly better than usual,” he admitted.

XVII

Betty awoke the next morning with the impression that she was somewhere on the border of a negro camp−meeting. She had passed more than one when driving in the country, and been impressed with the religious frenzy for which the human voice seemed the best possible medium. As she achieved full consciousness, she understood that it was not a chorus of voices that filled her ear, but one,—rich, sonorous, impassioned. It was singing one of the popular Methodist hymns with a fervour which not even its typical African drawl and wail could temper. It was some moments before Betty realized that the singer was Harriet Walker, and then she sprang out of bed and flung on her wrapper.

"Great heaven!" she thought. "How shall we ever be able to keep her secret? A bandanna gown and a voice like a cornfield darky's! I suppose all the servants are listening in the hall."

They were,—even the upper servants, who were English,—but they scuttled away as their mistress appeared. She crossed the hall to Harriet's room, rapped loudly, and entered. Her new sister, still in her nightgown, was enjoying the deep motion of a rocking−chair, hymn− book in hand. She brought her song to a halt as Betty appeared, but it was some seconds before the inspired expression in her eyes gave place to human greeting. Her face happened to be in shadow, and for the moment Betty saw her black. Her finely cut features were indistinct, and the ignorant fanaticism of a not remote grandmother looked from her eyes. "Harriet!" exclaimed Betty. "I don't want to be unkind, but you must not do that again. If you want to keep your secret, never sing a hymn again as long as you live."

"Ah!" Harriet gave a gasp, then a half−sob. "Ah! But I love to sing them, honey. I have sung them every Sunday all my life, and *he* loved them. He said I could sing with anybody, he wouldn't except angels. I 'most felt he was listening."

"You have a magnificent voice, and you must have it cultivated. But never sing another hymn."

"When I go to church I know I'll just shout—without knowing what I'm doing."

"Then don't go to church," said Betty, desperately.

"I must! I must! What'll the Lode say to me? Oh, my po' old uncle!"

She was weeping like a passionate child. Betty sat down beside her and took her hand.

"Come," she said, "listen to me. The first time I saw you the deepest impression I received of you was one of fine self−control. Doubtless you wept and stormed a good deal before you acquired it—at all the different stages of what was both renunciation and acquisition. The last few days have unsettled you a little because you have found yourself in a new world, minus all your old responsibilities and trials, and the experience has made you feel younger, robbed you of some of your hold on yourself. But that habit of self−control is in your brain,—it is the last to leave us,—and all you have to do is to sit down and think hard and adjust yourself. It is even more important that you make no mistakes now than it was before. Fate seldom gives any one two chances to begin life over again. Think hard and keep a tight rein on yourself."

Betty had more than negro hymns in her mind, but she did not care to be explicit. The generalities of the subject were disagreeable enough.

Harriet had ceased her sobbing and was listening intently. She dried her eyes as Betty finished speaking.

"You are right, honey," she said. "And I reckon you haven't spoken any too soon, for I was likely to get my head turned. I'll go to church and I *won't* sing. First I'll tie a string round my neck to remember, and after that it'll be easy. I'm afraid I'm just naturally lazy, and if I didn't watch myself I'd soon forget all the hard lessons I've learned and get to be like some fat ornary old nigger who's got an easy job."

Betty shuddered. "The white race is not devoid of laziness. If you want a reason for yours, just remember that the Southern sun has prevented many a man from becoming great. Keep your mind as far away from the other thing as possible."

"Oh, I think I'll forget it. I felt that way yesterday. But perhaps I'd better not," she added anxiously, as her glance fell on the hymn− book. "No cross, no crown."

"You will find crosses enough as you go through life," said Betty, dryly. She rose to go, and Harriet rose also

and drew herself up to her full height. For the moment she looked again the tragic figure of the first day of their acquaintance.

“You must have seen by this time how ignorant I am,” she said mournfully. “Poor old uncle gave me all the schooling he had himself, but I knew even then it wasn't what they have nowadays. And I've had so few books to read. Once I found a five−dollar bill, and as he wouldn't take it—the most I could do—I tramped all the way to the nearest town and back, twenty miles, and bought a big basket full of cheap reprints of English standard novels. Those and the few old Latin books and the Bible and the Pilgrim's Progress are about all I've ever read. I felt like writing you that when I read his letter, and also telling you that I was afraid you wouldn't find me a lady in your sense of the word—”

“You are my sister,” interrupted Betty; “of course you are a lady. Dismiss any other idea from your mind. And in a year you will know so much that I shall be afraid of you. I have neglected my books for several years.”

“You are mighty good, and I'll humbly take all the advice you'll give me.”

Betty went back to her room and sought the warm nest she had left. “She makes me feel old,” she thought. “Am I to be responsible for the development of her character? I can't send her off to Europe yet. There's nothing to do but keep her for at least a year, until she knows something of the world and feels at home in it. Meanwhile I suppose I must be her guide and philosopher! I believe that my acquaintance with Senator North has made me feel like a child. He is so much wiser in a minute than I could be in a lifetime; and as I have made him the pivot on which the world revolves, no wonder I feel small by contrast.

“But after all, I am twenty−seven, and what is more, I have seen a good deal of men,” she added abruptly. And in a moment she admitted that she had allowed her heart, full of the youth of unrealities and dreams, to act independently of her more mature intelligence.

“And that is the reason I have been so happy,” she mused. “There is a facer for the intelligence. As long as I have exercised it I have never felt as if I were walking on air and song.”

But still her imagination did not wander beyond today's meeting and many like it. He was married, and, independent as she was, she had received that sound training in the conventions from which the mind never wholly recovers. She registered a vow then and there that she would become his friend of friends, the woman to whom he came for all his pleasant hours, in time his confidante. She would devote her thought to the making of herself into the companion he most needed and desired; and she would conceal her love lest he conceive it his duty to avoid her. She wondered if she had betrayed herself, and concluded that she had not. Even he could not guess how much of her admiration emanated from frankness and how much from coquetry. She would be careful in the future.

“That point settled,” she thought, curling down deeper into her bed and preparing for a nap, “I'll anticipate his coming and think about him with all the youthful exuberance I please.”

XVIII

Betty had invited Senator Burleigh to dinner on Saturday, that he might feel free to call elsewhere on Sunday. At four o'clock, when Mrs. Madison had retired for her nap, she commanded Jack Emory to take Harriet for a long walk and a long ride on the cable cars, and to stop for Sally Carter. No one else was likely to call, and she retired to her boudoir, a three−cornered room in an angle between the parlor and library, to await Senator North.

The boudoir was a room that any man might look forward to after a hard day on Capitol Hill. Its easychairs were very soft and deep, its rugs were rosy and delicate, and the walls and windows and doors were hung with one of those old French silk stuffs with a design of royal conventionality and uniformly old rose in colour. All of Betty's own books were there, her piano, several handsome pieces of carved oak, and a unique collection of ivory. Betty had banished the former girlish simplicity of this room a few days after her introduction to the Montgomery house. She had imagined herself greeting Senator North in it many times, and had received no other man within its now sacred walls.

She wore a white cloth gown today and a blue ribbon in her hair. There was also a touch of blue at the neck, to make her throat look the whiter. Otherwise, the long closely fitting gown was without ornament as far down as the hem, which was lightly embroidered in white. She looked tall and lithe, but her figure was round, and did not sway like a reed that a strong wind would beat to the ground, as Harriet's did. Although that possible descendant of African kings possessed the black splendour of eyes and hair and a marble regularity of feature, Betty was the more beautiful woman of the two; for her colour filled and warmed the eye, she seemed typical of womanhood in its highest development, and she was a chosen receptacle of enchantment. Moreover, she was more modern and original, and as healthy as had been the fashion for the past generation, Harriet looked like an old Roman coin come to life, with a blight on her soul and little blood in her thin body. It was not in Betty's nature to fear any woman, much less to experience petty jealousy, but it was not without satisfaction she reflected that she and Harriet would hardly attract the same sort of man. Jack was doing his duty nobly, and he liked vivacious women who amused him, poor soul! As for Senator Burleigh, he had said politely that she was handsome but looked delicate, and then unquestionably dismissed her from his mind. He and Betty had talked politics on the previous evening until Mrs. Madison had slipped off to bed an hour earlier than usual.

Betty dismissed them all from her mind and glanced at the clock. It was half−past four. She thrust the poker between the glowing logs, and the flames leaped and sent a quivering glow through the charming room. Betty leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes, almost holding her breath that she might hear the advancing step of the butler the sooner. In what seemed to her exactly thirty minutes she looked at the clock again. It was twenty−five minutes to five. She nestled down, assuring herself that nobody could be expected to come on the moment, but this time she did not close her eyes; she watched the clock.

And the joy imperceptibly died out of her; the hands travelled inexorably round to ten minutes to five; she remembered that she had not seen Senator North since Wednesday, and that in four days a busy legislator might easily forget the existence of every woman he knew, except perhaps of the woman he loved. Within her seemed to rise a tide of bitter memories, the memories of all those women who had sat and waited through dreary hours for man's uncertain coming. She shivered and drew close to the fire and covered her face with her hands. Her heart ached for the helpless misery of her sex.

But she sprang suddenly to her feet. The butler was coming down the hall. A moment later he had ushered in Senator North, and Betty forgot the misery of the world, forgot it so completely that there was no violent reaction; she was merely what she had been at half−past four, full of pleasurable excitement held down and watched over by the instinct of caution.

“I must apologize humbly for being late,” he said, “but on Sunday I always sit with my wife until she falls asleep, and to−day she was nearly an hour later than usual. What a room to come into out of a biting wind! Thank heaven I was able to get here.”

Betty thought of the sister and cousin she had turned out into the cruel afternoon, and then looked at Senator North deep in the chair where she had so often imagined him, and forgot their existence. This was her hour—her

first, at least—and visions of pneumonia and possible consumption should not mar it. She sat opposite him in a straight dark high−backed chair, and she was quite aware that she made a delightful picture.

"Well?" he asked. "What of your visit and its consequences?"

Betty told the story; and her description of the dilapidated parsonage at the head of the miserable village, the group of silent women about the coffin in the dark room, and her interview with her melancholy relative was as dramatic as she had felt at the time.

"I thought I was running from a nightmare when I left the house," she concluded, smiling at him as if to demonstrate that it had left no shadow in her brain; "but now we both feel better. She wants a gown of many colours, and this morning she roused the house at five o'clock singing camp−meeting hymns. But I think she is quick and observant, and will soon cease to be in any danger of betraying herself. But she is a great responsibility, and I really felt old this morning."

Senator North laughed. "I hope she won't give you any real trouble. If she does, I shall feel more than half responsible. But otherwise she will be an interesting study for you. She is nearly all white; how much of racial lying, and slothfulness, barbarism, and general incapacity that black vein of hers contains will give you food for thought, for she certainly will reveal herself in the course of a year."

"You must admit that a nature like that is a great responsibility."

"Yes, but she alone can work through all the contradictions to the light, and she will do it naturally, under pressure of new experiences, within and without. Don't suggest even the word 'problem' to her, and don't look upon her as one, yourself. You have put her in the right conditions. Leave her alone and Time will do the rest. His work is indubious; never forget that. Are you going to marry Burleigh?" he added abruptly.

She answered vehemently, "No! No!" "I thought not. I know you very little, so far, but I was willing to deny the report."

"I often wonder why I don't fall in love with him. He really has every quality I admire. But much as I like him I should not mind if I knew I never should see him again. I have thought a good deal about it and I should like to understand it."

She looked at him coaxingly, and he smiled, for he understood women very well; but he gave her the explanation she desired.

"The reason is simple enough. The admired qualities, even when they are the component parts of a personality of one who more or less resembles a cherished ideal, never yet inspired love. Love is the result of two responsive sparks coming within each other's range of action. Their owners may be in certain ways unfitted for one another, but the responsive sparks, rising Nature only knows out of what combination of elements, fly straight, and Reason sulks. To put it in another way: Love is merely the intuitive faculty recognizing in another being the power to give its own lord happiness. It is a faculty that is very active in some people," he added with a laugh, "and when it is overworked it often goes wrong, like any other machinery. That is the reason why men who have loved many women make a mistake in marrying; the intuitive faculty is both dulled and coarsened by that time. They are still susceptible to charm, and that is about all."

"Have you loved many women?" asked Betty, without preamble.

He stood up and turned his back to the fire. Betty noted again how squarely he planted himself on his feet. "A few," he said bluntly. "Not many. I have not overworked my intuitive faculty, if that is what you mean. I was not thinking of myself when I spoke."

He stared down at her for a few moments, during which it seemed to Betty that the air vibrated between them. Her breath began to shorten, and she dropped her eyes, lest their depths reveal the spark which was active enough in her.

"Will you play for me?" he asked. "I lost a little girl a few years ago who played well, although she was only sixteen. I have disliked the piano ever since, but I should like to hear you play."

She played to him for an hour, with tenderness, passion, and brilliancy. A gift had been cultivated by the best masters and hours of patient study.

When he thanked her and rose to go and she put her hand in his, her face expressed all the bright earnestness of genuine friendship; there was not a sparkle of coquetry in her eyes.

"Will you come in often on your way home when you are tired and would like to forget bills and things, and let me play to you? I won't talk —you must get so tired of voices!—and the practice will do me good."

“Of course I will come. The pleasantest thing in life is a charming woman's face at the close of a busy day. Good−bye.”

When he had gone, Betty got into the depths of a chair and covered her eyes with her hand. For the first time she knew out of her own experience that love means a greater want than the satisfaction of the eye and mind. She would have given anything but her inherited ideals of right and wrong if he had come back and taken her in his arms and kissed her; and she loved him with adoration that he did not, that in all probability he never would, that although he had the great passions which stimulate all great brains, the inflexible honour which his State had rewarded and never questioned for thirty−five years must make short work of struggles with the ordinary temptations of man.

As soon as a man awakens a woman's passions she begins to idealize him and there is no limit to the virtues he will be made to carry. But let a man be endowed by Nature with every noble and elevated attribute she has in her power to bestow, if he lacks sensuality a woman will see him in the clear cold light of reason. Betty Madison, having something of the intuitive faculty, in addition to that knowledge of man which any girl of twenty−seven who has had much love offered her must possess, made fewer mistakes even in the thick of a throbbing brain than most women make; the great danger she did not foresee until time had accustomed her somewhat to the wonder of being able to love at last, and Reason had resumed her place in a singularly clear and logical mind.

XIX

When Betty awoke next morning, she made up her mind that she would not suffer so long as she could see him. Beyond the present she absolutely refused to look. She had found more on the political sea than she had gone in search of, but if she could have foreseen this tumult that would have overwhelmed a weaker woman, she would not have clung to the shore. For although the ultimate of love was forbidden her, she had come into her kingdom, and was immeasurably happier than the millions of women whose love had run its course and turned cold, or been cast back at them. After all, there were so few people who were really happy, why should she complain because her love could not come to rice and old shoes, instead of being a beautiful secret thing, the more perfect, perhaps, because Commonplace, that ogre whose girth increases from year to year, and who sits remorseless in the dwellings of the united, could not breathe upon it?

Harriet had returned without a cold, and the next morning Emory came in and took her to the Congressional Library, where they had luncheon. He also engaged her masters, and before the week was over she had settled down to steady work.

“She has a wonderful mind, I am positive of that,” he said to Betty. “She has made so much out of so few advantages. I shall take the greatest interest in watching a mind like that unfold. What relation is she to us, anyway? I can't make out, for the life of me. There was Cousin Amelia—”

“For heaven's sake, don't ask me to write up the genealogical tree. Didn't I refuse to join the Colonial Dames because it meant raking over the bones of all my ancestors—whom may the Saints rest! Most Southern relationships amount to no relationship at all, and Harriet's is too insignificant to mention.”

“Well, I must say it is angelic in you to take her in and shower blessings on her in this way—” “Her father had a great claim on us, but that is a family secret, even from you. Mind you take her tomorrow to see the 'Declaration of Independence' and the portrait of Hamilton.”

The days passed very quickly to the end of the session. It was the short term; Congress would adjourn on the fourth of March. Although the great official receptions were over, dinners and luncheons crowded each other as closely as before, for Washington pays little attention to Lent beyond releasing its weary hostesses from weekly reception days, and their callers from an absurd and antiquated custom. Betty went frequently to the gallery on Capitol Hill, and although she sometimes was bored by “business,” she seldom heard a dull speech, for the intellectual average of the Senate is very high, and its aptitude and the variety of its information unexcelled. Harriet accompanied her two or three times, but her mind turned naturally to the past and concerned itself little with the present. She found the history of the Roman Empire vastly more entertaining than debates on the Arbitration Treaty.

Betty had recently met a Mrs. Fonda, a handsome widow in the vague thirties, who had that fascination of manner and that brilliant talent for politics which went to make up Miss Madison's ideal of the women with whom tired statesmen spent their leisure hours. She was the daughter of a former distinguished member of the House and the widow of a naval officer, and her life may be said to have been passed in Washington with intervals of Europe. Although the Old Washingtonians knew her not, her position in the kaleidoscope of official society was always brilliant. She professed to have no party politics, but to be profoundly interested in all great questions affecting the nation. During the early winter she had visited Cuba and had announced upon her return that no other subject would command her attention until the United States had exterminated Spanish rule in that unhappy island. She occupied one of the smaller houses in Massachusetts Avenue, and her dining−room seated only ten people with comfort. Betty had heard that as many as nine of her country's chosen men had sat about that board at the same time and decided upon matters of state; and she envied her deeply. As Mrs. Fonda lived with no less than two elderly aunts who wore caps, and was a devout member of St. John's Church, Mrs. Madison, with a sigh, concluded that there was no reason why Betty should not go to her house.

“I suppose she is no worse than the rest,” she added. “I prefer people with husbands, but the more you see of this new life the sooner you may get tired of it.”

Mrs. Fonda paid Betty marked attention whenever they happened to meet, and upon the last occasion had

offered playfully to tell her “all she knew” about politics. “They are engrossing,” she added with a sigh, “so engrossing that they have taken the best of my years. A woman should be married and happy, I think, but I have become quite depersonalized. And I really think I have done a little good. You will marry, of course; you are young and so beautiful; but let politics be your second great interest. You will, indeed, never give them up if you let them absorb you for one year, and I am more glad than I can say that you already have gone so far.” She then invited Betty to a dinner she was giving, and even made an appointment for an hour's “talk” beforehand; but this appointment Betty was unable to keep, as her mother fell ill for a day or two, and Mrs. Fonda's hour occurred while Mrs. Madison desired to have her hand held.

Betty went to the dinner, however, and expected brilliant and unusual things. Mrs. Fonda, who was tall and dark and distinguished looking, and too wise in her unprotected position to annul the attentions of Time with those artifices which are rather a pity but quite condonable in the married woman, was handsomely dressed in black net embroidered with gold, and received with an aunt on either side of her. Her manner was very fine, and, without any relaxation of the dignity which was an integer of her personality, she made each comer feel the guest of the evening. To Betty she was almost affectionate, and surrounded her with the aunts, who looked at her with such kindly and cordial, albeit sadly patient eyes, that Betty almost loved them.

The dining−room accommodated twelve tonight, and two were not the aunts. Betty wondered if they were picking up crumbs in the pantry. She suspected that Mrs. Fonda was more worldly than she would admit, and that ambition and love of admiration had somewhat to do with her patriotism.

There were four members of the Senate present, two wives of members who had been unable to come, and three eminent Representatives. It was seldom that Mrs. Fonda's invitations were declined, for no man went to her house with the miserable conviction that he was about to eat his twenty−seventh dinner by the same cook. Mrs. Fonda had picked up a woman in Belgium who was a genius.

Betty went in with Senator Burleigh, and they examined the menu together.

“By Jove,” he said, “it's even more gorgeous than usual. And did you ever see so many flowers outside of a conservatory?”

The room was a bower of violets and lilies of the valley. The mantelpiece was obliterated, the table looked like a garden, and great bunches of the flowers swung from the ceiling. As what could be seen of the room was green and gold, the effect was very beautiful. The lights were pink, and in this room Mrs. Fonda defied Time and looked so wholly attractive that it was not difficult to fancy her the cause of another war, albeit not its Helen.

But much to Betty's disappointment the conversation, which was always general when that radiant hostess presided, soon wandered from the suffering Cuban and fixed itself interminably about a certain measure which had been agitating Congress for the last four years. It was a measure which demanded an immense appropriation, and so far Senator North had kept it from passing the upper chamber; it was generally understood that it would fare still worse at the hands of the Speaker, did it ever reach the House. These two intractable gentlemen had evidently not been bidden to the feast; but three of the Senators, Betty suddenly observed, were members of the Select Committee for the measure under discussion.

Five courses had come and gone, and still the conversation raged along a tiresome bill that happened to be Betty's pet abomination, the only subject discussed in the Senate that bored her. Mrs. Fonda, in the brightest, most impersonal way, defended the unpopular measure, pointing out the immense advantage the country at large must derive from the success of the bill, and, while appealing to the statesmen gathered at her board to set her right when she made mistakes,—she couldn't be expected to keep up with every bill while her head was full of Cuba,—assailed the weak points in those statesmen's arguments.

“I'm bored to death,” muttered Betty, finally. “I wish I hadn't come. You won't talk to me and I can't eat any more.”

Burleigh turned to her at once. “I've merely been watching her game,” he whispered. “Now, I'm nearly sure.”

“What?” asked Betty, interested at once.

“She has given a dinner a week this winter, and there is a rumour that she is spending the money of the syndicate interested in this much desired appropriation. Heretofore, when I have been here, at least, although she has always graciously permitted the subject to come up and has delivered herself of a few trenchant and memorable remarks, this is the first time she has deliberately made it run through an entire dinner; every attempt to turn the conversation has been a sham. She's in the ring for votes, there's no further doubt in my mind on that

subject; and she's getting desperate, as it is so near the end of the session."

"Then she is a lobbyist," said Betty, in a tone of deep disgust, and pushing away her plate.

"'Sh! She is too clever to have got herself called that. She has very successfully made the world believe that the great game alone interests her; there never has been a more subtle woman in Washington. During the last two years there has been one of those vague rumours going about that she has lost heavily through certain investments; but one hasn't much time for gossip in Washington, and it is only lately that this other rumour has been in the wind. How long she has been doing this sort of thing, of course no one knows."

"But do you mean to say these other men don't see through her?"

"More than one does, no doubt. If he is against the bill he will be amused, as I am, and probably decline her invitations in the future. If he is for it—and there is a good deal to be said in favour of the bill, only we cannot afford the appropriation at present—he will make her think, as a reward for her excellent dinner, that she has secured his vote. Others may be influenced by having it thrashed out in these luxurious surroundings, so different from the chill simplicity of legislative halls. Those that she may be able to get in love with her, of course will believe nothing that is said of her, and when she travels from the Committees to the more or less indifferent members of both chambers, and gets to work on the nonentities whose convictions can always be readjusted by a clever and pretty woman,—and whose vote is as good as North's or Ward's,—you see just how much she can accomplish."

"And if I have my *salon*, shall I come under suspicion of being a high−class lobbyist?"

"There is not the slightest danger if you are careful to have only first−rate men, and avoid the temptation to make a pet of any bill. Besides, as I have told you, your position peculiarly fits you for having a *salon*. No one could question your motive in the beginning, and your tact would protect you always. Don't give up the idea, for its success would mean not only the best political society in the country, but a famous *salon* would tend to draw art and literature to Washington. And you are just the one woman who could make it famous; and we'd all help you. North would be sure to, his ambition for Washington is so great. He won't put his foot in this house. I never heard him discuss her, but I am convinced that he has seen through her for a long while."

The next day Betty left a card on Mrs. Fonda and struck her from her list; but she carefully secluded her discovery from Mrs. Madison.

XX

Senator North, until the last six days of the session, came twice a week to see her. She played for him, and they talked on many subjects, in which they discovered a common interest, usually avoiding politics, of which he might reasonably be supposed to have enough on Capitol Hill. He told her a good deal about himself, of his early determination to go into public life, the interest that several distinguished men in his State had taken in him, and of the influence they had had on his mind.

“They were almost demi−gods to my youthful enthusiasm,” he said, “and doubtless I exaggerated their virtues, estimable as is the record they have left. But the ideals this conception of them set up in my mind I have clung to as closely as I could, and whatever the trials of public life—I will tell you more about them some day—the rewards are great enough if no one can question your sense of public duty, if no accusation of private interest or ignoble motive has ever been able to stand on its feet after the usual nine days' babble.”

“Would you sacrifice yourself absolutely to your country?” asked Betty, who kept him to the subject of himself as long as she could.

He laughed. “That is not a fair question to ask any man, for an affirmative makes a prig of him and a negative a mere politician. I will therefore generalize freely and tell you that a man who believes himself to be a statesman considers the nation first, as a matter of course. Howard, for instance, nearly killed himself at the end of last session over a measure which was of great national importance. He should have been in his bed, and he worked day and night. But although it was touch and go with him afterward, it was no more than he should have done, for almost everything depends on the Chairman of a Committee; and as Howard is a man of enormous personal influence and knows more about the subject than any man in Congress, he dared not resign in favour of any one. And yet he is accused of being hand−in− glove with one of the greatest moneyed interests in the country.”

“Is he?” asked Betty, pointedly.

“Those are accusations that it is almost impossible to prove. Howard is a rich man, and his wealth is derived from the principal industry of his State, which is unquestionably monopolized by a Trust. It would be his duty to look after it in Congress in any case, as it is his State's great source of wealth; so it is hard to tell. It does not interfere with his being one of the ablest legislators and hardest workers in the Senate—and over matters from which he can derive no possible gain. But the suspicion will lower his position in the history of the Senate.”

“Does any one know the truth about the Senate? Even Bryce says it is impossible to get at it, the country is so prone to exaggeration; but estimates that one−fifth of the Senate is corrupt.”

“No one knows. The whole point is this: the Senate is the worst place in the world for a weak man, and there are weak men in it. A Senatorship is the highest honour to−day in the gift of the Republic; therefore ambitious men strive for it. A man no sooner achieves this ambition than he finds himself beset by many temptations. He is tormented by lobbyists who will never let him alone until he has proved himself to be a man of incorruptible character and iron will; and that takes time. He also finds that the Senate is a sort of aristocracy, the more so as many of its members are rich men and live well. If he never wanted money before, he wants it then, and if he does not, his wife and daughters do. Then, if he is weak, he finds his way into the pocket of some Trust Company or Railroad Corporation, and his desire for re−election—to retain his brilliant position— multiplies his shackles; for if he proves himself useful, the Trust will buy his Legislature—if it happens to be venal—and keep him in his place. But these instances I know must be rare, for I know the personal character of every man in the Senate. One Senator who is nearing the end of his first term told me the other day that he should not return, for his experience in the Senate had given him such a keen desire to be a rich man that he should go into Wall Street and try to make a fortune. He is honest, but his patriotism is a poor affair. But if the Senate makes a weak man weaker, it makes a strong man stronger, owing to the very temptations he must resist from the day he enters, the compromises he is forced to make, and the danger to his convictions from the subtler brains of older men. And the Senate is full of strong men. But they don't make picturesque 'copy' for the enterprising press; the weak and the corrupt do, and so much space is given them, as well as so much attention by the comic weeklies,—which are regarded as a sort of current history,—that the average man, who does not do his own thinking, accepts the minority as the type.”

He talked to her sometimes about his family life. His wife had been a beautiful and accomplished girl, the daughter of a Governor of his State, and he had married her when he was twenty−four. She had been a great help to him, both at home and in Washington, during those years when he needed help. She had not broken down until after the birth of his daughter, but that was twenty years ago, and she had been an invalid ever since. He spoke of this long period of imperfect happiness in a matter−of−fact way, and Betty assumed that by this time he was used to it. He alluded to his wife once as “a very dear old friend,” but Betty guessed that she was nearly obliterated from his life. Of his sons he expected great things, but the larger measure of his affections had been given to his daughter, or it seemed so, now that he had lost her.

During the last week of the Session she saw him from the Senate Gallery only, but she consoled herself by admiring the cool deliberation with which he worked his bills through, with Populists thundering on either side of him.

XXI

On Thursday she not only witnessed the last moments of the last session of the Fifty−fourth Congress, but the initial ceremonies of the inauguration of a President of the United States. She had seen the galleries crowded before, but never as they were to−day. Even the Diplomatists' Gallery, usually empty, was full of women and attaches, and the very steps of the other galleries were set thick with people. Thousands had stood patiently in the corridors since early morning, and thousands stood there still, or wandered about looking at the statues and painted walls. The Senators were all in their seats; most of them would gladly have been in bed, for they had been up all night; and the Ambassadors and Envoys were brilliant and glittering curves of colour: the effect greatly enhanced by the Republican simplicity of the men to whose country they were accredited. The Judges of the Supreme Court, in their flowing silk gowns, alone reminded the spectator that the United States had not sprung full−fledged from nothing, without traditions and without precedent.

What little is left of form in the Republic was observed. Two Senators and one Representative, the Committee appointed to call on the retiring President, who had just signed his last bill in his room close by, entered and announced that Mr. Cleveland had no further messages for the Senate, and extended his congratulations to both Houses of Congress upon the termination of their labours. The United States had been without a ruler for twenty minutes when the assistant doorkeeper announced the Vice−President, two pages drew back the doors, and Mr. Hobart entered on the arm of a Senator and took the seat on the dais beside his predecessor, who still occupied the chair of the presiding officer of the Senate. Then there was another long wait, during which the people in the galleries gossiped loudly and the Senators yawned. Finally the President elect and the ex−President, after being formally announced, entered arm in arm. Both looked very Republican indeed, especially poor Mr. Cleveland, who toiled along with the gout, leaning what he could of his massive figure upon an umbrella. The women stood up, and with one accord pronounced their President−elect as good−looking as he undoubtedly was strong and amiable and firm and calm and pious. Mr. Hobart took the oath of office, and after the necessary speeches and the proclamation for an Extra Session, the new Senators were sworn in by the new Vice− President, and Betty wondered how any man would dare to break so solemn an oath.

As soon as the move began toward the platform outside, Betty escaped through the crowd and went home. As she drove down the Avenue, she heard the stupendous shout of joy, some fifty thousand strong, with which the American public ever greets its new President and the consequent show. Be he Republican or Democrat, it is all one for the day; he is an excuse to gather, to yell, and to gaze.

Betty turned her head and caught a glimpse of a bareheaded man on his feet, bowing and bowing and bowing, and of a heavy figure with its hat on seated beside him. She speculated upon the sardonic reflections active inside of that hat.

She did not expect to see Senator North for at least twenty−four hours, but his card was brought to her while she was still at luncheon. She went rapidly to her boudoir, and found him standing with his overcoat on and his hat in his hand.

Although he had been up all the night before and had not had his full measure of rest for a week, he looked as calm as usual, and there was not a hint of fatigue in his face nor of disorder in his dress.

“You deserted us last night,” he said, smiling. “I thought perhaps you would sit up and see us through.”

“I was up there at nine this morning and saw the Senate floor littered with papers. It had a very allnight look. Have you had luncheon? Won't you come in?”

“I should be glad to, but I haven't time. I find I must go North to− night, and am on my way home to get a few hours' rest. I wanted to thank you for many pleasant hours—in this room.” His eyes moved about slowly and softened somewhat. It is not improbable that he would have liked to throw himself among the cushions of the divan and go to sleep.

“Well! You might postpone that until we part for life,” said Betty, lightly. “You forget that Congress will convene in Extra Session on the fifteenth.”

“Yes, but there is no necessity for me to be here until some time in May at earliest. The principal object of the

Session is the revision of the Tariff, and the new bill originates with the Ways and Means Committee. After it has been thrashed out in the House and returned to the Committee for amendments, it will be referred to the Finance Committee of the Senate. All that takes time. I am not a member of the Finance Committee this term, and I shall not return until the debate opens in the Senate. As to the Arbitration business, Ward will look after that. I would not stir if there were a chance of the Treaty coming back to the Senate in its original form, but there is not. When Ward telegraphs me I shall come down and cast my vote."

His long speech had given Betty time to recover from his first announcement, and her eyes were full of the frank earnestness which had established the desired relation between herself and Senator North.

"I am glad you are going to have a rest," she said; "that is, if you are."

"Oh, it is work that sits very lightly on me, and is very congenial: I am going to do all I can to allay this war fever in my own State. It is not too late to appeal to their reason; but it might be at any moment."

"Well, at all events, you go to the bracing climate of the North. But I am sorry you go so soon. Mother cannot stay in Washington after the third week in May. I am afraid we shall not meet again until you come to the Adirondacks."

"Ah, the Adirondacks!" he said. "Yes, I shall see you there. Good− bye."

He did not smile. There were times when he seemed to turn a key and lock up his features. This was one of them. Betty felt as if she were looking at a mask contrived with unusual skill.

He shook her warmly by the hand, however. "I forgot to say that I shall be in Washington off and on—for a day or so. My wife remains here. It is still too cold for her in the North. Good−bye again."

He left her, and she did not return to her luncheon.

XXII

Betty, after several long and restless nights, decided that she was not equal to the ordeal of sitting down patiently in Washington awaiting the rare and flying visits of Senator North. If she could place herself quite beyond the possibility of seeing him before the first of June, she could get through the intervening months with a respectable amount of endurance, but not otherwise. Hers was not the nature of the patient watcher, the humble applicant for crumbs. She might put up with slices where she could not get the whole loaf, but her head lifted itself at the notion of crumbs. Her heart had not yet begun to ache. She determined that it should not until it was in far more desperate straits than now. When Lady Mary Montgomery, who was tired and wanted a long rest before December, invited her to go to California, she accepted at once; and, a week after the adjournment of Congress, went through the formality of obtaining her mother's consent. “Well,” said Mrs. Madison, philosophically, “I have lost you for three months at a time before, and I suppose I can stand it again. I think you need a change. You've been nervous lately, and you're thinner than you were. As long as you don't marry I can resign myself quite gracefully to these little partings.”

“You're a dear, Mollyanthus. I only wish you were going with me, but I'll keep a journal for you and post it every night. I am glad you do not dislike Harriet. Of course if you did I should not go, for it is too soon to turn her adrift.”

“She is inoffensive enough, poor soul, and so deep in her books that I should not know she was in the house if she didn't come to the table.”

“Make Jack take her to the theatre once a week. She has promised me that she will go for a walk every day with Sally.”

“Sally says she is convinced Harriet is a Roman empress reborn, and may astonish Washington at any moment,” said Mrs. Madison, anxiously. “Do you believe in reincarnation?”

“I don't believe or disbelieve anything I don't understand. We none of us can even guess what is latent in Harriet—for the matter of that I don't know what is latent in myself. I can only suspect. I don't think Harriet will ever go very deep into herself; she has not imagination enough. If circumstances are not too unfavourable, she may slip through life happy and respected, in spite of her tragic appearance: she is so slothful by nature, so much more susceptible to good influences than to bad. All of us possess every good and bad instinct in the whole book of human nature, but few of us have imagination enough to find it out. And the less we know of ourselves the better.”

“Betty, you certainly do need a change. You looked tragic yourself as you said that; and if you became tragic it would mean something. I'm afraid your conscience is tormenting you about Mr. Burleigh, and perhaps I did not do right in asking him to come to the Adirondacks; but probably he would have come to the hotel, anyhow; and if I did have to lose you—”

“You'll never get rid of me.” And she went to her room to consult with Leontine.

The night before she left Harriet came into her room and said timidly,—

“Betty, I sometimes wonder if you have told Mr. Emory the truth about myself—”

“Certainly not. Why should I tell Mr. Emory—or anyone else?”

“Well, he is so kind to me and we have become such friends, I thought perhaps you would think he ought to know.”

“That is pure nonsense. Do you suppose I tell my friends everything I know? No friend is so close as to demand to know more than you choose to tell him.”

“All right, honey; but I am always afraid he will see my finger−nails when he is helping me with my lessons—”

“He is very near−sighted; and I doubt if anyone would notice those faint blue marks unless they were looking for them.”

“Of course they seem the most conspicuous things I've got, to me.”

“Are you happy here, Harriet?” asked Betty, gently. Harriet nodded and looked at her benefactor with glowing

eyes. “Oh, yes,” she said. “Yes —yes. It is like heaven, in spite of the hard work they make me do. I'm right down afraid of that old Frenchman, and when Professor Morrow shuts his eyes and groans, 'Door—d−o−o−r, Miss Walker, *not* d−o−u−g− h,' I could cry. But I'm happy all the same, and I forgot *that* for a whole week.”

“Well, forget it altogether. And remember to have a thin travelling dress and a lot of summer things made. And of all people do not confide in Jack Emory or Sally Carter—or any other Southerner.”

Part II. Senator North, Miss Betty Madison, and several other Characters in this History go in search of a Mountain Lake and find an Ocean.

I

Betty never denied that she enjoyed her visit to California, despite the several thousand miles between the Atlantic and the Pacific coasts, and Senator North's rooted aversion to writing letters. She received exactly three brief epistles from him in almost as many months, but in one he said that he missed her even in the North, in another that Washington was not Washington without her, and in the third that he looked forward with pleasure to the cool Adirondacks and herself. And a woman can live on less than that. Betty read and re− read these simple and possibly perfunctory statements until they were weighted with love.

And although she visited all the wonders of the most wonderful State in the Union, and was deeply grateful to them, they never pushed the man from the forefront of her mind for a moment. The egoism of love reduces scenery to a setting and the splendours of sunset to a background. Betty thought of him by day and by night, in company and in solitude, but even the agony of longing to which her imagination sometimes rose contained no heartbreak. For the future was all over there, on the far side of the continent; its grave−clothes were deep under lavender and rosemary. To think of him was a luxury and a delight, and would remain so until Imagination had been pushed aside by the contradictory details of Reality. Sometimes she wept pleasurably, but she smiled oftener. And still, although she laid no reins on her imagination, she refused to look beyond the summer among the Adirondack pines, the frequent and more frequent hours at the close of busy days. If pressed, she would doubtless have answered that she must bow to Circumstance, but that in Thought he was wholly hers.

II

Betty reached her part of the Adirondacks late at night. There were two miles between the station and the house, and Jack Emory and Sally Carter came to meet her. They told her the recent news of the family as the horses toiled up the steep road cut through the dark and fragrant forest.

“Aunt is unusually well and seems to enjoy interminable talks with Major Carter,” said Emory. “Harriet is very much improved; she holds herself regally and sometimes has a colour. She studied until the last minute, and even here is always at her books. I don't say she hasn't intervals of laziness,” he added with a laugh, “but she always pulls up; and it is very creditable of her, for she is full of Southern indolence. She would like to lie in the sun all day and sleep, I am sure; although she won't admit it.”

“Does she seem any happier? She had suffered too much privation to have become really happy before I left.”

“I am sure she is—” Jack began, but Sally interrupted him.

“I think she is one of those people who hardly know whether they are happy or not. She seems to me to be in a sort of transition state. One moment she will be gay with the natural gayety of a girl, and the next she will look puzzled, and occasionally tragic. I think there must be a big love affair somewhere in her past.”

“I am sure there is nothing of the sort. Have the Norths come?”

“Mrs. North is here, and the Senator brought her, but he had to go back; for that disgraceful Tariff bill still hangs on. I believe we are to pay for the very air we breathe: a Trust company has bought it up. Oh, by the way, you have a new housekeeper;” and both she and Emory laughed. “Do you mean that old Mrs. Sawyer has left? She was invaluable.”

“Her son wanted her to keep house for him, and she secured the services of a female from a neighboring village. Miss Trumbull is forty−odd and unmarried. She has a large bony face, the nondescript colouring of the average American, and a colossal vanity. We amuse ourselves watching her smirk as she passes a looking−glass. But she is an excellent housekeeper, and her vanity would be of no consequence if she would keep her place. The day we arrived she hinted broadly that she wanted to sit at table with us, and one night when John was ill and she had to help wait, she joined in the conversation. She's a good−natured fool, but an objectionable specimen of that 'I'm−as−good− as−you−are' American. I've been waiting for you to come and extinguish her.”

“I certainly shall extinguish her.”

“She victimizes poor Harriet, whom she seems to think more on her level,” said Miss Carter, not without unction.

Betty could feel her face flush. “The sooner she puts that idea out of her head the better,” she said coldly. “I am surprised that Harriet permits a liberty of that sort.”

“Harriet lacks pride, my dear, in spite of her ambition and what Nature has done for her outside. She is curiously contradictory. But that lack is one which persons of Miss Trumbull's sort are quick to detect and turn to their own account. Your housekeeper's variety of pride is common and blatant, and demands to be fed, one way or another.”

Mrs. Madison had not retired and was awaiting her daughter in the living−room. Betty found the household an apparently happy one. The Major was a courtly gentleman who told stories of the war. Harriet in her soft black mull with a deep colour in her cheeks looked superb, and Betty kissed and congratulated her warmly; as Senator North had predicted, the physical repulsion had worn away long since. The big room with its matting and cane divans and chairs, heaped with bright cushions, and the pungent fire in the deep chimney—for the evenings were still cold—looked cosey and inviting; no wonder everybody was content. Even Jack looked less careworn than usual; doubtless the pines, as ever, had routed his malaria. Only Sally's gayety seemed a little forced, and there was an occasional snap in her eye and dilation of her nostril.

When Betty had put her mother to bed and talked her to sleep, she went to her own room and opened the window. She could hear the lake murmuring at the foot of the terrace, the everlasting sighing of the pines; but it was very dark: she could hardly see the grim mountains across the water. Just below them was a triple row of lights. He should have been behind those lights and he was not. For the moment she hated politics.

She closed the window and wrote the following letter:—

DEAR MR. NORTH,—I am home, you see. Don't reply and tell me that the Tariff Bill surrounds you like a fortress wall. I am going for a walk at five o'clock on Saturday morning, and I expect to meet you somewhere in the forest above the north end of the lake. You can reach it by the path on your side. I shall row there. Do not labour over an excuse, my friend. I know how you hate to write letters, and you know that I am a tyrant whose orders are always obeyed.

BETTY MADISON.

“That should not worry him,” she thought, “and it should bring him.”

III

As soon as she awoke next morning, she dressed and went downstairs. A woman stood in the lower hall, and from Sally's description Betty recognized Miss Trumbull. The woman's large mouth expanded in a smile, which, though correct enough, betrayed the self−satisfaction which pervaded her being. She was youngish−looking, and not as ugly as Miss Carter's bald description had implied.

“Good−mornin',” She drawled. “I had a mind to set up for you last night, but I was tired. You like to get up early, don't you? It's just six. Miss Walker and Miss Carter don't git up till eight, Mr. Emory till nine fifteen, and your ma till eleven. The Major's uncertain. But I'm real glad you like gittin' up early—”

“Will you kindly send me a boy?” interrupted Betty. “I wish a letter taken to the post−office.”

The woman came forward and extended her hand. “I'll give it to him,” she said.

“Send the boy to me. I have other orders to give him.”

As the woman turned away, Betty thought she detected a shade of disappointment on her face. “Has she that most detestable vulgarity of her class, curiosity?” she thought. “She seems to have observed the family very closely.”

The boy came, accompanied by Miss Trumbull, who made a slight but perceptible effort to see the address of the letter as Betty handed it to him.

“Take this at once and bring me back a dollar's worth of stamps; and go also to the village store and bring me some samples of worsted.”

She thought of several other things she did not want, reflecting that she must in the future herself take to the post−office such letters as she did not wish Miss Trumbull to inspect and possibly read. The boy went his way, and Betty turned to the housekeeper and regarded her sharply.

“I'm afraid you will find this a lonely situation,” she said. “We are only here for a few months in the summer.”

“Well, of course I like the society of nice people, but I guess I can stand it. Poor folks can't pick and choose, and I suppose you wouldn't mind my havin' a friend with me in the winter, would you?”

“Certainly not,” said Betty, softening a little. But she did not like the woman, who was not frankly plebeian, but had buttered herself over with a coat of third−rate pretentiousness. And her voice and method of speech were irritating. She had a fat inflection and the longest drawl Betty had ever heard. Upon every fourth or fifth word she prolonged the drawl, and accomplished the effect of smoothing down her voice with her tongue. Capable as she might be, Betty wondered if she could stand Miss Trumbull through the summer. But the position was a very difficult one to fill. Even an old couple found it lonely, and a woman with a daughter never had been permitted to remain for two consecutive years. If the woman could be kept in the background, it might be worth while to give her a trial.

Betty went out of doors and down to the lake. It lay in the cup of a peak, and about it towered higher peaks, black with pine forests, only a path here and there cutting their primeval gloom. Betty stepped into a boat and rowed beyond sight of her house and the hotel. Then she lay down, pushed a cushion under her head, and drifted. It had been a favourite pastime of hers since childhood, but this morning her mind for the first time opened to the danger of a wild and brooding solitude, still palpitating with the passions which had given it birth, for those whose own were awake.

“Civilization does wonders for us,” she said aloud; she could have raised her voice and been unheard, and she revelled in her solitude. “It makes us really believe that conventions are the only comfortable conditions in the world, certainly indispensable. Up here—”

“If he and I were here alone for one week,” she continued uncompromisingly and aloud to the mountains, “the world would cease to exist as far as we both were concerned. And I wish he were here and the Adirondacks adrift in space!”

She sat up suddenly after this wish; but although it had flushed her face, she had said the words deliberately and made no haste to unsay them. She looked ahead to the north end of the lake and the dark quiet aisles above. And when she met him there on Saturday morning, she must hold down her passion as she would hold down a

mad dog. She must look with bright friendly eyes at the man to whose arms her imagination had given her unnumbered times. It seemed to her that she was an independent intellect caught and tangled in a fish−net of traditions. To violate the greatest of social laws was abhorrent to every inherited instinct. Her intellect argued that man was born for happiness and was a fool to put it from him. The social laws were arbitrary and had their roots in expediency alone; man and his needs were made before the community. But the laws had been made long before her time, and they were bone of her bone.

She knew that he would not be the one to break down the barrier, that he would leave her if she manifested uncontrollable weakness,—not from the highest motives only, but because he had long since ceased to court ruin by folly; his self−control was many years older than herself. Doubtless he would never betray himself to her, no matter how much he might love her, unless she so tempted him that passion leaped above reason. And she knew that this was possible. There was no mistaking the temperament of the man. He was virile and sensual, but he had ordered that his passions should be the subjects of his brain; and so no doubt they were.

Betty had no intention of forcing any such crisis, often as she might toy with the idea in her mind. But for the first time she compelled herself to look beyond the present, beyond the time when she could no longer sit in her boudoir and play to him, and shake him lightly by the hand as he left her. Perhaps she could not even get through this summer without betraying the flood that shook her nerves. If the barriers went down she must look into what? She gave her insight its liberty, and turned white. It seemed to her that the lake and the forest disappeared and a blank wall surrounded her. She lay down in the boat and pressed the corner of the cushion against her eyes. A thousand voices in her soul, for generations dumb and forgotten, seemed to awake and describe the agony of women, an agony which survived the mortal part that gave it expression, to live again and again in unwary hearts.

She sat up suddenly and took hold of the oars. “That will do for this morning,” she said. “It is so true that none of us can stand more than just so much intensity that I suppose if this dear dream of mine went to pieces I should have intervals when life would seem brilliant by contrast with my misery. I might even find mental rest in pouring tea again for attaches. And there is always the pleasure of assuaging hunger. I am ravenous.”

IV

After breakfast—an almost hilarious meal, for Emory and Sally Carter were in the highest spirits and sparred with much vigour—Betty and Harriet went for a walk. There was a long level path about the lake for a mile or more before they turned into the forest, and Betty noted that Harriet, although her gait still betrayed indolence, held herself with an air of unmistakable pride. She had improved in other respects; her arrangement of dress and hair no longer looked rural, she not only had ceased to bite her nails, but had put them in vivid order, and the pronunciation of her words was wholly white.

"She will be a social success one of these days," thought Betty, "or with that voice and beauty she could doubtless win fame and wealth, and have a brilliant and enjoyable life. The tug will come when she wants to marry; but perhaps she won't want to for a long while—or will fall in love with a foreigner who won't mind."

She longed to ask Harriet if she were happy, if she had forgotten; but she dreaded reviving a distasteful subject. She would be glad never to hear it alluded to again.

Harriet did not allude to it. She talked of her studies, of the many pleasures she had found in Washington, of the kindness of Mr. Emory and Sally Carter, and of her delight to see Betty again. As she talked, Betty decided that the change in her went below the surface. She had regained all the self−control that her sudden change of circumstances had threatened, and something more. It was not hardness, nor was it exactly coldness. It was rather a studied aloofness. "Has she decided to shut herself up within herself?" thought Betty. "Does she think that will make life easier for her?"

Aloud she said,—"Would not you like to go to Europe for a year or so? I could easily find a chaperon, and you would enjoy it."

"Oh, yes, I shall enjoy it. I feel as if I held the world in the hollow of my hand, now that I have got used to gratifying every wish;" and she threw back her head and dilated her nostril.

"What *have* I launched upon the world?" thought Betty. "She certainly will even with Fate in some way." But she said, "I am glad you and Sally get on well. She has her peculiarities."

"I reckon I could get on with any one; but she doesn't like me, all the same."

"Are you sure? Why shouldn't she?"

"I don't know," replied Miss Walker, dryly. "Women don't always understand each other."

Sally's name suggested the housekeeper to Betty.

"I don't want you to be offended with me, Harriet," she said hesitatingly, "if I ask you not to be familiar with Miss Trumbull. You have not had the experience with that type that I have had. You cannot give them an inch. If you treat them consistently as upper servants when they are in your employ, and ignore them if they are not, they will keep their place and give you no annoyance; but treat them with something more than common decency and they leap at once for equality."

"Well—you must remember that I was not always so fine as I am now, and Miss Trumbull does not seem so much of an inferior to me as she does to you. To tell you the truth, it does me good to come down off my high horse occasionally. I reckon I'll get over that; sometimes I want to so hard I could step on everybody that is common and second− class. I don't deny I'm as ambitious as I reckon I've got a right to be, but old habits are strong, and I'm lazy, and it's lonesome up here. Your mother and Major Carter talk from morning till night about the South before the War. Mr. Emory and Sally are always together, and talk so much about things I don't understand that I feel in the way. Miss Trumbull knows the private affairs of most every one in her village, and amuses me with her gossip; that is all."

Betty pricked up her ears at one of Harriet's revelation, and let the painful fact of her hospitality for vulgar gossip pass unnoticed.

"Do you mean," she asked, "do you think that Mr. Emory is beginning to care for Sally?"

"One can never be sure. I am certain he likes and admires her."

"Oh, yes, he always has done that. But I wish he would fall in love with her. I am nearly sure that she more than likes him."

“I am quite sure,” said Harriet, dryly. “She would marry him about as quickly as he asked her. I knew that the first time I saw them together.”

“And she certainly would make him happy,” said Betty, thinking aloud. “She is so bright and amusing and cheerful. She is the only person I know who can always make him laugh, and the more he laughs the better it is for him, poor old chap! And I think he is too old now for the nonsense of ruining his happiness because a woman has more money— Harriet!”

Harriet had one of those mouths that look small in repose, but widen surprisingly with laughter. Betty, who had only seen her smile slightly at rare intervals, happened to glance up. Harriet's mouth had stretched itself into a grin revealing nearly every tooth in her head. And it was the fatuous grin of the negro, and again Betty saw her black. She gasped and covered her face with her hands.

“Oh, never do that again,” she said sharply. “Never laugh again as long as you live. Oh, poor girl! Poor girl!”

“I won't ask you what you mean,” said Harriet, hurriedly. “I reckon I can guess. Thank you for one more kindness.”

And the horror of that grin remained so long with Betty that it was some time before she thought to wonder what had caused it.

V

Betty amused herself for the next day or two observing Jack Emory and Sally Carter. They unquestionably enjoyed each other's society, and Sally at times looked almost pretty again. But at the end of the second day Miss Madison shook her head.

“He is not in love,” she thought. “It does not affect him in that way.” And she felt more satisfaction in her discovery than she would have anticipated. A woman would have a man go through life with only a skull cap where his surrendered scalp had been. To grow another is an insult to her power and pains her vanity.

It occurred to Betty that she was not the only observant person in the house. She seemed always stumbling over Miss Trumbull, who did not appear to listen at doors but was usually as closely within ear−shot as she could get. It was idle to suppose that the woman had any malignant motive in that well−conducted household, and she seemed to be good−natured and even kindly. Interest in other people's affairs was evidently, save vanity, her strongest passion. It was the natural result of an empty life and a common mind. But simple or not, it was objectionable.

Her vanity, her mistress had cause to discover, was more so. On Wednesday morning Betty returned home from a long tramp, earlier than was her habit, and went to her room. Miss Trumbull was standing before the mirror trying on one of her hats.

“That's real becomin' to me,” she drawled, as Miss Madison entered the room. “I always could wear a hat turned up on one side, and most of your colours would suit me.”

Betty controlled her temper, but the effort hurt her. She would have liked to pour her scorn all over the creature.

“You may have the hat,” she said. “Only do me the favour not to enter my room again unless I send for you. The maid is very neat, and it needs no inspection.”

The woman's face turned a dark red. “I'm sorry you're mad,” she said, “but there's no harm, as I can see, in tryin' on a hat.”

“It is a matter of personal taste, not of right or wrong. I particularly dislike having my things touched.”

“Oh, of course I won't, then; but I like nice things, and I haven't seen too many of them.”

Again Betty relented. “I will leave you a good many at the end of the summer,” she said. And the woman thanked her very nicely and went away.

“I am glad I was not brutal to her,” thought Betty. “Democracy is a great institution in spite of its nuisances. Still, I admire Hamilton more than Jefferson.”

When, that night, Mrs. Madison had a painful seizure, and Miss Trumbull was sympathetic and efficient, sacrificing every hour of her night's rest, Betty was doubly thankful that she had not been brutal. In the morning she gave her a wrap that matched the hat. Miss Trumbull tried it on at once, and revolved three times before the mirror, then strutted off with such evident delight in her stylish appearance that Betty's smile was almost sympathetic. But she dared not be more gracious, and Miss Trumbull only approached her when it was necessary.

On Thursday afternoon Betty and Sally were rowing on the lake when the latter said abruptly,—

“Have you noticed anything between Jack and Harriet?”

Betty nearly dropped her oars. “What—Jack and Harriet?”

Sally nodded. Her mouth was set. There was an angry sparkle in her eyes. “Yes, yes. They pretend to avoid each other, but they are in love or I never saw two people in love. I suspected it in Washington, but I have become sure of it up here. What is the matter? I don't think she is his equal, if she is our thirty−first cousin, for I would bet my last dollar there was a misalliance somewhere—but you look almost horror−struck.”

“I was, but I can't tell you why. I don't believe it's true, though. She is not Jack's style. She hasn't a grain of humour in her.”

“When a man's imagination is captured by a beauty as perfect as that, he doesn't discover that it is without humour till he has married it. Besides, any man can fall in love with any woman; I'm convinced of that. You might as well try to turn this lake upside down as to mate types.”

“I don't think she would deceive me,” exclaimed Betty, hopefully. “I cannot tell you all, but I am nearly sure she would never do that.”

“Any woman who has a secret constantly on her mind is bound to become secretive, not to say deceitful in other ways. What is her secret?” she asked abruptly. “Has she negro blood in her veins?”

“Oh, Sally!” This time Betty did drop the oars, and her face was scarlet as she lunged after them. She was furious at having betrayed Harriet's secret, but Sally Carter had a fashion of going straight for the truth and getting it.

“I thought so,” said Miss Carter, dryly. “Don't take the trouble to deny it. And don't think for a moment, Betty dear, that I am going to embarrass you with further questions. I could never imagine you actuated by any but the highest motives. I should consider the whole thing none of my business if it were not for Jack. Faugh! how he would hate her if he knew!”

“I am afraid he would. I don't believe he is man enough to love her better for her miserable inheritance.”

“He is a Southern gentleman; I should hope he would not. I am by no means without sympathy for her. I pity her deeply, and have ever since I discovered that she loved him. For he must be told.”

“Shall you tell him?”

Sally did not answer for a moment, and her face flushed deeply. Then she said unsteadily: “No; for I could not be sure of my motive. Here is my secret. I have loved Jack Emory ever since I can remember. It is impossible for me to assure myself that I would consider interference in their affairs warrantable if I cared nothing for him. I cannot afford to despise myself for tattling out of petty jealousy. But you are responsible for her. You should tell him.”

“I will speak to her as soon as we go back. If it is true that they are engaged, and if she refuses to tell him, I shall. But I'd almost rather come out here and drown myself.”

“So should I.”

“You're a brick, Sally, and I wish to heaven you were going to marry Jack to−morrow. That would be a really happy marriage.”

“So I have thought for years! When he got over his attack of you, I began to hope, although I'd got wrinkles crying about him. I never thought of any other woman in the case.” She laughed, with a defiant attempt to recover her old spirits. “And I cannot have the happiness of seeing him one day in bronze, and feeling that he is all mine! For he hasn't even that spark of luck which so often passes for infinitesimal greatness, poor dear!”

“How did you guess that she had the taint in her?” asked Betty, as they were about to land. “She has not a suggestion of it in her face.”

“I *felt* it. So vaguely that I scarcely put it in words to myself until lately. And I never saw such an amount of pink on finger−nails in my life.”

VI

Betty went in search of Harriet, and found her in a summer−house reading an innocuous French romance which her professor had selected. There was no place near by where Miss Trumbull might lie concealed, and Betty went to the point at once.

"Harriet," she said, "I am obliged to say something horribly painful— if you want to marry any man you must tell him the truth. It would be a crime not to. The prejudices of—of—Southerners are deep and bitter; and—and—Oh, it is a terrible thing to have to say—but I must—if you had children they might be black."

For a moment Betty thought that Harriet was dead, she turned so gray and her gaze was so fixed. But she spoke in a moment.

"Why do you say this to me—now?"

"Because I fear you and Jack—Oh, I hope it is not true. The person who thinks you love each other may have been mistaken. But I could not wait to warn you. I should have told you in the beginning that when the time came either you must tell the man or I should; but it was a hateful subject. God knows it is hard to speak now."

Harriet seemed to have recovered herself. The colour returned slowly to her face, her heavy lids descended. She rose and drew herself up to her full height with the air of complete melancholy which recalled one or two other memorable occasions. But there was a subtle change. The attitude did not seem so natural to her as formerly.

"Your informant was only half right," she said sadly. "I love him, but he cares nothing for me. He is the best, the kindest of friends. It is no wonder that I love him. I suppose I was bound to love the first man who treated me with affectionate respect. I reckon I'd have fallen in love with Uncle if he'd been younger. Perhaps—in Europe—I may get over it. But he does not love me."

Betty rose and looked at her steadily. *What* was in the brain behind those sad reproachful eyes? She laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Harriet," she said solemnly, "give me your word of honour that you will not marry him without telling him the truth. It may be that he does not love you, but he might—and if you were without hope you would be unhappy. Promise me."

Down in the depths of those melancholy eyes there was a flash, then Harriet lifted her head and spoke with the solemnity of one taking an oath.

"I promise," she said. "I will marry no man without telling him the truth."

This time her tone carried conviction, and Betty, relieved, sought Sally Carter.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Carter, when Betty had related the interview. "He is in love with her, although for some reason or other he is making an elaborate effort to conceal it."

"She spoke very convincingly," said Betty, who would not admit doubt.

"Anything with a drop of negro blood in it will lie. It can't help it. I wish the race were exterminated."

"I wish the English had left it in Africa. They certainly saddled us with an everlasting curse."

She was tempted to wish that Mr. Walker had never discovered her address; but although she did not love Harriet, she was grateful still for the opportunity to rescue her from the usual fate of her breed. But assuredly she did not wish her old friend to be sacrificed.

Again she observed him closely, and came to the conclusion that Harriet had spoken the truth. He was gayer than of old, but his health was better and he was in cheerful company, not living his days and nights in his lonely damp old house on the Potomac River. He appeared to enjoy talking to Harriet, but there was nothing lover−like in his attitude, and he was almost her guardian. True, he was occasionally moody and absent, but a man must retain a few of his old spots; and if he avoided somewhat the cousin whom he had once loved to melancholy, it was doubtless because she found him as uninteresting as she found all men but one, and was not at sufficient pains to conceal her indifference. And then she admitted with a laugh that in the back of her mind she had never acknowledged the possibility of his loving another woman.

She but half admitted that she wished to believe no storm was gathering under her roof. She had no desire to

handle a tragedy.

VII

It was Saturday morning. Betty arose at four, brewed herself a cup of coffee over a spirit lamp, and ate several biscuit with it. She hoped Senator North would take the same precaution. Healthy animals when hungry cannot take much interest in each other.

She dressed herself in airy white with a blue ribbon in her hair. There was no necessity for a hat at that hour in the morning, but she took a white organdie one down to the boat and put it under a seat, lest she be late in returning and the sun freckling.

It was faintly dawn as she pulled out into the middle of the lake and rowed toward its northern end. Even the trailing thickets on the water's edge looked black, and the dark forest rising on every side seemed to whisper of old deeds of war and heroism, the bravery and the treachery of Indian tribes, the mortal jealousies of French and English. Every inch of ground about her was historical. These forests had resounded for years with the ugly sounds of battle, and more than once with the shrieks of women and children. To−day the woodpecker tapped, the bluejay cried in those depths unaffrighted; the singing of a mountain stream, the roar of a distant waterfall alone lifted a louder voice to the eternal whisper of the pines. The forest looked calmly down upon this flower of a civilization which no man in its first experience of man would have ventured to forecast, skimming the water to keep tryst with one whose ancestors had hewn a rougher wilderness than this down to a market−place that their inheritor might win the higher honours of the great Republic to come.

But Betty was not thinking of the honours he had won. She was wondering if by so much as a glance he would betray that he cared a little for her. Or did he care? In her thought he had been as full of love as herself. But reality was waiting for her there in the forest, —reality after three months of uninterrupted imaginings. Perhaps he merely found her agreeable and amusing. But the idea did not start a tear. The uncertainty of his affections and the certainty that she was about to see him again were alike thrilling and gladdening. Pleasurable excitement possessed her, and her hands would have trembled but for their tight grip on the oars.

He stood watching her as she rowed toward him, and she was sure that she made a charming picture out on that great dark lake below the pines. The forest rose almost straight behind him, but she knew the winding paths which made ascent easy, and many a dry leafy platform where one might sit. A hundred times she had imagined herself in that forest with him; its dim vast solitude had become almost his permanent setting in her fancy. But as the boat grazed the shore, she said hurriedly,—

“Get in and let us float about. I am sure it is cold in there. I am so glad to see you again.” As her hands were occupied, he took the seat in the stern at once, and she pulled out a few yards, then crossed her oars.

“You see, I have obeyed orders,” he said, smiling. “Fortunately, I am an early riser, particularly in the country.”

“I thought the change would do you good. It must be hot in Washington.”

“It is frightful.”

He looked as well as usual, however, and his thin grey clothes became his spare though thickset figure. He was smiling humorously into Betty's eyes, but his own were impenetrable. They might harbour the delight of a lover at a precious opportunity, or the amusement of a man of the world. But there was no doubt that he was glad to see her and that he appreciated the picture she made.

“I hope I never may see you in anything but white again,” he said. “You are a gracious vision to conjure up on stifling afternoons in the Senate.”

Betty did not want to talk about herself. “Tell me the news,” she said. “How is that Tariff Bill going?”

“A story has just leaked out that a stormy scene occurred in the Ways and Means Committee Room between our friend Montgomery and two members of the Committee whose names I won't mention. He openly accused them of accepting bribes from certain Trusts. It even is reported that they came to blows, but that is probably an exaggeration. We have had our sensation also. One of our fire−eaters accused—−at the top of his voice—the entire Senate of bribery and corruption. He is new and will think better of us in time. Meanwhile he would amuse us if such things did not affect the dignity of the Senate with the outside world. Unfortunately we are obliged to

accept whomsoever the people select to represent them, and can only possess our souls in patience till time and the Senate tone the raw ones down."

"Is he representative, that man? And those hysterical members of the House, whose speeches make me wonder if humour is really a national quality?"

"They are only too representative, unfortunately, but they are more hysterical than the average because they have the opportunity their constituents lack, of shouting in public. The House is America let loose. When a former private citizen belonging to the party out of power gets on his feet in it, he develops a species of hysteria for which there is no parallel in history. He seems to think that the louder he shouts and the more bad rhetoric he uses, the less will his party feel the stings of defeat. Some of them tone down and become conscientious and admirable legislators, but these are the few of natural largeness of mind. Party spirit, a magnificent thing at its best, warps and withers the little brain in the party out of power. But politics are out of place in this wilderness. There should be redskins and bows and arrows on all sides of us. I used to revel in Cooper's yarns, but I suppose you never have read them."

Betty shook her head. "When can you come up here to stay?"

"Probably not for a month yet. There will be a good deal more wrangling before the bill goes through. I don't like it in its present shape and don't expect to in its ultimate; neither do a good many of us. But I shall vote for it, because the country needs a high tariff, and anything will be better than nothing for the present. Later, the whole matter will be reopened and war waged on the Trusts."

"Sally says they have bought up the atmosphere."

"They may be said to have bought up several climates. I have spent a great many hours puzzling over that question, for they have put an end to the old days when young men could go into business with the hope of a progressive future. Now they are swallowed up at once, depersonalized, and the whole matter is one of the great questions affecting the future development of the Republic."

He was not looking at Betty; he was staring out on the lake. His eyes and mouth were hard again; he looked like a mere intellect, nothing more.

As Betty watched him, she experienced a sudden desire to put him back on the pedestal he had occupied in the first days of their acquaintance, and to worship him as an ideal and forget him as a man. That had been a period of intellectual days and quiet nights. And as he looked now, he seemed to ask no more of any woman.

But in a moment he had turned to her again with the smile and the peculiar concentration of gaze which made women forget he was a statesman.

"Not another word of politics," he said. "I did not get up at four in the morning to meet the most charming woman in America and talk politics. Do you know that it is over three months since I saw you last?"

"You left Washington, so, naturally, I left it too."

"I wonder, how much you mean? If I were to judge you by myself—Your few notes were very interesting. Did you enjoy California?"

"California was made to enjoy, but I felt very much alone in it."

"Of course you did. Nature is a wicked old matchmaker. You have felt quite as lonely up here since your return."

"Yes, I have! But I have had a good deal to occupy my mind. Sally terrified me by asserting that Harriet and my cousin Jack Emory were in love with each other."

"Who is Harriet?"

"Oh, you have forgotten! And you made me take her into the bosom of my family."

"Oh—yes; I had forgotten her name. I hope she is not making trouble for you."

"She admitted that she loves him, but insists that he does not love her, and I don't think he does."

"Probably not. I should as soon think of falling in love with a weeping figure on a tombstone."

"What kind of women do you fall in love with?" asked Betty, irresistibly. She was sure of herself now. The passions of women are often calmed by the presence of their lover. Passion is so largely mental in them that it reaches heights in the imagination that reality seldom justifies and mere propinquity quells. For this reason they often are recklessly unfair to men, who are made on simpler lines.

They had floated under the spreading arms of a thicket on the water's edge, and she was a brilliant white figure in the gloom.

“I have no recipe,” he said, smiling. “Certainly not with the women that weep, poor things!” Betty wondered what his personal attitude was to the tears of twenty years. She knew from Sally that Mrs. North had long attacks of depression. But his mind had been occupied; that meant almost everything. And his heart?

“Do you love anybody now?” she broke out. “Is there a woman in your life? Some one who makes you happy?”

The smile left his lips. It was too much to say that it had been in his eyes, but they changed also.

“There is no woman in my life, as you put it. Why do you ask?”

“Because I want to know.”

They regarded each other squarely. In a moment he said deliberately: “The greatest happiness that I have had in the past few months has been my friendship with you. If I were free, I should make love to you. If you will have the truth, I can conceive of no happiness so great as to be your husband. I have caught myself dreaming of it—and over and over again. But as it is I am not going to make love to you. When the strain becomes too great, I shall leave you. Until then—Ah, don't!”

Betty, who had dropped her head when he began to speak, had raised it slowly, and her face concealed nothing.

“I, too, love you,” she said in a moment. “I love you, love you, love you. If you knew what a relief it is to say it. That is the reason I would not go up into the forest with you just now. I was afraid. I have been with you there too often!”

For the first time she saw the muscles of his face relax, and she covered her face with her hands. “I shouldn't have told you,” she whispered, “I shouldn't have told you. I have made it harder. You will go away at once.”

He did not speak for some minutes. Then he said,—

“Can you do without what we have?”

“Oh, no!” she said passionately. “Oh, no! No!”

“Nor can I—without the hope and the prospect of an occasional hour with you, of the sympathy and understanding which has grown up between us. I have conquered myself many times, relinquished many hopes, and I think and believe that my self−control is as great as a man's can be. I shall not let myself go with you unless you tempt me beyond endurance; for as I said before, if I find that I am not strong enough, I shall leave you. You are a beautiful and seductive woman, and your power if you chose to exert it would madden any man. Will you forget it? Will you help me?”

She dropped her hands. “Yes,” she said, “I'd rather suffer anything; I'd rather make myself over than do without you. And I couldn't! I couldn't! Every least thing that happens, I want to go straight to you about it. I know that trouble is ahead, although I haven't admitted it before. I want you in every way! in every way! And I can't even have you in that. I never will speak like this again, but I'd like you to know. If you love me, you must know how terrible it is. I am not a child. I am twenty−seven years old.”

“I know,” he replied; and for a few moments he said no more, but looked down into the water. “I am not a believer in people parting because they can't have everything,” he continued finally. “It is only the very young who do that. They take the thing tragically; passion and disappointment trample down common−sense. If love is the very best thing in life, it is not the only thing. Every time I have seen you I have wanted to take you in my arms, and yet I have enjoyed every moment spent in your presence. The thought of giving you up is intolerable. We both are old enough to control ourselves. And I believe that any habit can be acquired.”

“And will you never take me in your arms? Have I got to go through life without that? I must say everything to−day—I will row out into the middle of the lake if you like, but I must know that.”

“You can stay here. There are certain things that no man can say, Betty, even to the most loved and trusted of women. The only answer that I can make to your question is, that if I find I must leave you, I certainly shall take you in my arms once.”

“Are you sorry I told you I loved you? Would it be easier if I had not?”

“Probably. But I am not sorry! Love can give happiness even when one is denied the expression of it.”

“I never intended to tell you. I was afraid if I did you would leave me at once.”

“So I should if you were not—you. But I should think myself a fool if I did not make an attempt to achieve the second best. I may fail, but I shall try. And life is made up of compromises.”

“You are more certain of smashing the Trusts,” she said with the humour which never bore repression for

long. “In dealing with methodical scoundrels you know at least where you are. A man and woman never can be too certain of what five minutes will bring forth. That ends it. We never will discuss the question again until it comes up for the last time—if it does. I do not mean that I shall not tell you again that I love you, for I shall. I have no desire that you shall forget it. I mean that we will not discuss possibilities again, nor give expression to the passionate regret we both must feel. Is it a compact?”

“I will keep my part in it. I promise to be good. I have prided myself on my intelligence. I am not going to disgrace it by ruining the only happiness I ever shall have. I love you, and I will prove it by making your part as easy as I can, and by giving you all the happiness I am permitted to give you.”

He leaned toward her for the first time, but he did not touch her.

“And I promise you this, my darling,” he said softly: “if you ever should be in great trouble and should send for me—as of course you would do—I will take you in my arms then and forget myself. Now, change seats with me and I will row you part of the way home; I shall get out a half−mile from the hotel. There really was no reason why you should have made me walk nearly the entire length of the lake.”

“I had fancied you in this particular part of the forest, and I wanted to find you here.”

“That is so like a woman,” he said humorously. “But all of us make an occasional attempt to realize a dream, I suppose.”

VIII

He came over to dinner that night, and Betty, who had walked about in a vague dreamy state all day, dressed herself again in white. She woke up suddenly as she came into his presence, and was the life of the dinner. Harriet seemed absent of mind and nervous, but Emory's spirits were normal, and he was more attentive to Sally Carter than she to him. But Betty's interest in her friends' affairs had dropped to a very low ebb. She was in a new mental world, stranger than that entered by most women, for her hands were empty, but she was happy. She had reflected again—in so far as she had been capable of reflection—that most marriages were prosaic, and that her own high romance, her inestimable happiness in loving and being loved by a man in whom her pride was so great, was a lot to be envied of all women. It was not all the destiny she herself would have chosen, but it compassed a great deal. She would have made him wholly happy, been his whole happiness; marriage between them never would have been prosaic, and she would not have cared if it were; she would have made him forget the deep trials and sorrows of his past and the worries and annoyances of the present. But this was not to be, and there was much she could do for him and would.

They talked politics through dinner, and Mrs. Madison noted with a sigh that Betty's interest in the undesirable institution was unabated. She admired Senator North, however, and felt pride in his appreciation of her brilliant daughter. She expressed her regret amiably at not being able to meet again Mrs. North, who would see none but old friends in these days, and Senator North assured her of his wife's agreeable remembrance of her brief acquaintance with Mrs. Madison.

“How wonderfully well people behave whose common secret would set their world by the ears,” thought Betty. “Our worst enemies could detect nothing; and on what there is heaven knows a huge scandal could be built.”

After dinner she played to him for an hour, while the others, with the exception of Mrs. Madison, who went to sleep, became absorbed in whist. But she did not see him for a moment alone, and Jack rowed him across the lake.

She went to her bed, but not to sleep. She hardly cared if she never slept again. Night in a measure gave him to her, and to sleep was to forget the wonder that he loved her.

It was shortly after midnight that she heard a faint but unmistakable creaking on the tin roof of the veranda. She sat up. Some one was about to pass her window. She sprang out of bed, crossed the room softly, and lifted the edge of the curtain. A figure was almost crawling past. It was a woman's figure; the stars gave enough light to define its outlines at close range. She had a shawl over her head, but her angular body was unmistakable. She was Miss Trumbull.

Betty dropped the curtain and stared into the darkness. “Whom is she watching?” she thought. “Whom is she watching?”

She went back to bed and listened intently. In half an hour she heard the same sound again.

“She is going back to her room,” thought Betty. “What has she seen?”

The next morning she sent for Miss Trumbull to come to her room. She had no intention of asking her to sit down, but the woman did not wait to be invited. She took a chair and fanned herself with a palm leaf that she picked from the table.

“Lawsy, but it's hot,” she said. “I had a long argument with Miss Walker yesterday about New York State bein' hotter 'n down South, and she wouldn't believe it. But I usually know what I'm talkin' about, and hotter it is. I near lost my temper, for I guess I know when it's hot—”

“What were you doing on the roof of the veranda last night?” asked Betty, abruptly.

Miss Trumbull turned the dark ugly red of her embarrassed condition.

“I—” she stammered.

“I saw you. Whom were you watching?”

“I warn't watchin' anybody. I was takin' a walk. I couldn't sleep.”

“You know perfectly well that the roof of a veranda is not intended to be walked on. Your curiosity is insufferable. I suppose it has become professional. Or are you hoping for blackmail? If so, the hotel is the place

for you.”

This time Miss Trumbull turned purple.

“I like money as well as anybody, I guess,” she stuttered; 'but I'd never sell a secret to get it. I ain't low down and despicable if I am poor.” “Then you admit it is mere curiosity? I would rather you stole.”

“Well, I don't steal, thank heaven. And I don't see any harm in tryin' to know what's goin' on in the world.”

“Read the newspapers and let your neighbours alone, at all events the people in this house. I have twice seen you reading over the addresses of the letters of the outgoing mail. Don't you ever do it again. You are a good housekeeper, but if I find you attending to anything but your own business, once more, you go on the moment. That is all I have to say.”

The woman left the room hurriedly. An hour or two later Betty met Harriet on the terrace.

“I am sorry to appear to be always admonishing you,” she said, “but I must ask you to have nothing more to do with Miss Trumbull.”

“I don't want to have anything more to do with her, honey. She has taken to arguing with me in that long self−satisfied drawl, and I have 'most got to hate her. I wouldn't mind so much if she was ever right, but she is a downright fool, and I reckon all fools are pretty much alike. And I have a horrible idea that she suspects something. I have seen her staring at my finger−nails two or three times. And I am 'most sure some one has gone through the little trunk I keep my letters in. Of course the key is always in my purse, but she may have had one that fits, and the things are not like I left them, I am 'most sure.”

“She probably envies your finger−nails, and the trunk, doubtless, was upset in travelling. Besides, I don't think she's malignant. Like most underbred persons, she is curious, and she has cultivated the trait until it has become a disease.”

“But there's no knowing what she might do if she took a dislike to me. She's not bad−hearted at all, but she could be spiteful, and I can't and won't stand her any longer. I reckon I'd like to go to Europe, anyhow. I feel as if every one was guessing my secret. Over there you say they don't mind those things, and I'd enjoy being in that kind of a place.”

“Go, by all means. I'll write at once and inquire about a chaperon—”

“Oh, I don't want to go just yet. September will do. I reckon these mountains are about as cool at this time of the year as anywhere, and they make me feel strong.” She added abruptly: “Does Sally suspect?”

Betty nodded. “Yes, she surprised the truth out of me. I am more sorry—”

Harriet had gripped her arm with both hands. Her face was ghastly. “She knows? She knows?” she gasped. “Then she will tell him. Oh! Why was I ever born?”

Betty made her sit down and took her head in her arms. Harriet was weeping with more passion than she ever had seen her display.

“You believe me always, don't you?” she said. “For Miss Trumbull I cannot answer, but for Sally I can—positively. She never would do a mean and ignoble thing.”

“She loves him!”

That is the more reason for not telling him. Cannot you understand high−mindedness?”

“Oh, yes. You are high−minded, and *he*—that is the reason I should die if he found out; for he hates, he loathes deceit. Oh, I've grown to hate this country. I love you, but I'd like to forget that it was ever on the map. I wish I was coal black and had been born in Africa.”

“Why don't you go there and live, set up a sort of court?” asked Betty, seized with an inspiration.

“And live among niggers? I despise and abhor niggers! If one put his dirty black paw on me, I'd 'most kill him!”

Betty turned away her head to conceal a smile; but Harriet, who was wholly without humour, continued:

“Betty, honey, I want you to promise me that if I ever do anything to disappoint you, you'll forgive me. I love you so I couldn't bear to have you despise me.”

“What have you been doing?” asked Betty, anxiously.

“Nothing, honey,” replied Harriet, promptly. “I mean if I did.”

“Don't do anything that requires forgiveness. It makes life so much simpler not to. And remember the promise you made me.”

“Oh, I don't reckon I'll ever forget that.”

IX

Senator North started for Washington that afternoon. Betty did not see him again. He did not write, but she hardly expected that he would. He had remarked once that two−thirds of all the trouble in the world came out of letters, and Betty, with Miss Trumbull in mind, was inclined to agree with him. He would not return for a fortnight.

On Friday, very late, Senator Burleigh arrived. He was on the Finance Committee, but had written that he should break his chains for this brief holiday if he never had another. He had sent her two boxes of flowers since her return, and had written her a large number of brief, emphatic, but impersonal letters during her sojourn in California.

He looked big and breezy and triumphant as he entered the living−room, and he sprinkled magnetism like a huge watering−pot. Betty knew by this time that all men successful in American politics had this qualification, and had come in contact with it so often since her introduction to the Senate that it had ceased to have any effect on her except when emanating from one man.

“Are you not frightfully tired?” she asked. “What a journey!”

“Anything, even a fourteen hours' train journey, is heaven after Washington in hot weather. The asphalt pavements are reeking, and your heels go in when you forget to walk on your toes—and stick. But it is enchanting up here.”

His eyes dwelt with frank delight on her fresh blue organdie. “Oh, Washington does not exist,” he exclaimed. “I thought constantly of you when we were struggling over that Tariff Bill in Committee, and I wanted to put all the fabrics you like on the free list, as a special compliment to you.”

“The unwritten history of a Committee Room! Law does not seem like law at all when one knows the makers of it. But you must be starved. If you will follow me blindly down the hall, I promise that you will really be glad you came.”

Miss Trumbull had attended personally to the supper, and he did it justice, although he continued to talk to Betty and to let his eyes express a more fervent admiration than had been their previous habit.

“There's no hope for me,” thought Betty, when Emory had taken him to his room. “He has made up his mind to propose during this visit. If I can only stave it off till the last minute!”

As she went up the stair, she met Miss Trumbull, who was coming down.

“Your supper was very good,” she said kindly. “Thank you for sitting up.”

That was enough for the housekeeper, who appeared to have conceived a worship of the hand that had smitten her. It had seemed to Betty in the last few days that she met her admiring eyes whichever way she turned. Miss Trumbull put out her hand and fumbled at the lace on Miss Madison's gown.

“Tell me,” she drawled wheedlingly, “that's your beau, ain't it? I guessed he was when those flowers come, and the minute I set eyes on him, I said to myself, 'That's the gentleman for Miss Madison. My! but you'll make a handsome couple.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Betty. “Oh!” Then she laughed. The woman was too ridiculous for further anger. “Good−night,” she said, and went on to her room.

X

Betty had organized a picnic for the following day, inviting several acquaintances from the hotel; and they all drove to a favourite spot in the forest. Mrs. Madison's maid had charge of many cushions, and disposed her tiny mistress—who looked like a wood fairy in lilac mull—comfortably on a bed of pine needles. Major Carter felt young once more as he grilled steaks at a camp−fire, and Harriet enchanted him with her rapt attention while his memory rioted in deeds of war.

Senator Burleigh had never appeared so well, Betty thought. There was an out−of−door atmosphere about him at any time; no doubt he had been a mighty wind in the Senate more than once during the stormy passage of the Tariff Bill; but with all out−doors around him he looked nothing less than a mountain king. His large well−knit frame, full of strength and energy, was at its triumphant best in outing tweeds and Scotch stockings; his fair handsome face was boyish, despite its almost fierce determination, as he pranced about, intoxicated with the mountain air.

“If you ever had spent one summer in Washington, you would understand,” he said to Betty. “This is where I'd like to spend the rest of my life. I'd like to think I'd never see a city or the inside of a house again.”

“Then you'd probably hew down the forest, which would be a loss to the State: you would have to do something with your superfluous energy. And what would you do with your brain? Mere reading, when your arm ached from chopping, never would content you.”

“No, that is the worst of civilization. It either produces discontented savages like myself or goes too far and turns the whole body into brain. I have managed to get a sort of steam−engine into my head which gives me little rest and would wear out my body if I didn't happen to have the constitution of a buffalo. But I doubt if I shall be what North is, sixteen years hence. That man is the best example of equilibrium I have ever seen. His mental activity is enormous, but his control over himself is so absolute that he never wastes an ounce of force. I've seen him look as fresh at the end of a long day of debate as he was when he got on his feet. He never lets go of himself for a moment.”

That was the only time Betty heard Senator North's name mentioned during Burleigh's visit, for the younger man was much more interested in himself and the object of his holiday.

“I think if it hadn't been for this Extra Session I should have followed you to California,” he said abruptly. “I didn't know how much I depended for my entire happiness upon my frequent visits to your house until I came back after the short vacation and found you gone.”

“It would have been jolly to have had you in California. But you must feel that your time has not been thrown away. Are you satisfied with the Tariff Bill?”

“I liked it fairly well as we re−wrote it, but I don't expect to care much about it after it comes out of conference. But there are no politics in the Adirondacks, and when a weary Senator is looking at a woman in a pale green muslin—”

“You look anything but weary. I expect you will tramp over half the Adirondacks before you go back. And I am sure you will eat one of those beefsteaks. Come, they are ready.”

But although she managed to seat him between Sally Carter and an extremely pretty girl, he was at her side again the moment the gay party began to split into couples.

“Will you come for a walk?” he asked. “I do want to roam about on the old trails the Indians made, and to get away from these hideous emblems of modern civilization—sailor hats. Thank heaven you don't wear a sailor hat.”

Betty shot a peremptory glance at Sally Carter, who nodded and started to follow with a small dark attache who had pursued herself and her million for five determined years. He was titled if not noble, a clever operator of a small brain, and a high−priest of teas. He knew the personnel of Washington Society so thoroughly that he never had been known to waste a solitary moment on a portion−less girl, and he had successfully cultivated every art that could commend him to the imperious favourites of fortune. Betty Madison had disposed of him in short order, but Miss Carter, although she refused him periodically, allowed him to hang on, for he amused her and read her favourite authors. They had not walked far when he seized the picturesque opportunity to press his suit, and

Miss Carter, while scolding him soundly, forgot the rapid walkers in front.

Betty, as she tramped along beside the large swinging presence the forest seemed to embrace as its own, wondered why she did not love him, wondered if she should, had she never met the other man. Doubtless, for he possessed all the attributes of the conquering hero, and she would have excavated the ideals of her romantic girlhood, brushed and re−cut their garments, and then deliberately set fire to her imagination. If the responsive spark had held sullenly aloof, awaiting its time, she, knowing nothing of its existence, would soon have ceased to remember the half−conscious labours of the initial stage of her affections, and doubtless would have married this fine specimen of American manhood, and been happy enough. But the responsive spark had struck, and illumined the deepest recesses of her heart in time to burn contempt into any effort of her brain, now or hereafter. The question did assail her—as Burleigh talked of his summer outings among the stupendous mountains of his chosen State— could she turn to him in time were she suddenly and permanently separated from the other? She shook her head in resentment at the treasonable thought; but her brain had received every advantage of the higher civilization for twenty−seven years, and worked by itself. She was young and she had much to give; in consequence, much to receive. She could find the highest with one man only, for with him alone would her imagination do its final work. But Nature is inexorable. She commands union; and as the years went by and one memory grew dimmer— who knew? But the thought gave her a moment of sadness so profound that she ceased to hear the voice of the man beside her. She had had moments of deep insight before, and again she stared down into the depths where so many women's agonized memories lie buried. She suddenly felt a warm clasp round her hand, and for a second responded to it gratefully, for hers had turned cold. Then she realized that she was in the present, and withdrew her hand hurriedly.

“Forgive me,” he said. “I simply couldn't help it. I could in Washington, and I felt that I must wait. But up here—I want to marry you. You know that, do you not?”

Betty glanced over her shoulder. There was to be no interruption. She was mistress of herself at once.

“I cannot marry you,” she said. “I almost wish I could, but I cannot.”

He swung into the middle of the path and stood still, looking down upon her squarely. There was nothing of the suppliant in his attitude. He looked unconquerable.

“I did not expect to win you in a moment,” he said. “I should not have expected it if I had waited another year. I knew from the beginning that it would be hard work, for if a woman does not love at once it takes a long time to teach her what love is. I have tried to make you like me, and I think I have succeeded. That is all I can hope for now. You have been surfeited and satiated with admiration, and you regard all men as having been born to burn incense before you. I love you for that too. I should hate a woman who even had it in her to love a man out of gratitude. You have your world at your feet, and I want mine at my feet. You have won yours without effort, for you were born with the crown and sceptre of fascination, I have to fight for mine. But the same instinct is in us both, the same possibilities on different lines. I am not making you the broken passionate appeal of the usual lover, because so long as I know you do not love me I could not place myself at the mercy of emotion—I have no thought of making a fool of myself. But when I do win you—then—ah! that will be another matter.”

She shook her head, but smiling, for she never had liked and admired him more. She knew of what passion he was capable, and how absurd he would have looked if lashed by it while her cool eyes looked on. His self−control made him magnificent.

“I never shall marry,” she said, and then laughed, in spite of herself, at the world−old formula. Burleigh laughed also.

“There isn't time enough left before chaos comes again to argue with a woman a question which means absolutely nothing. I am going to marry you. I have accomplished everything big I have ever strived for. I never have wanted to marry any other woman, and I want to marry you more than I wanted to become a Senator of the United States. Nothing could discourage me unless I thought you loved another man, but so far as I can see there is no other suitor in the field. You appear to have refused every proposing man in Washington. Is there any one on the other side?” he asked anxiously.

“No one. I have no suitor beside yourself; but—”

“I don't understand that word, any more than I understand the word 'fail,'“ he said in his rapid truculent tones. Then he added more gently: “I am afraid you think I should be a tyrant, but no one would tyrannize over you, for you are any man's equal, and he never would forget it. I could not love a fool. I want a mate. And I should love

you so much that I never should cease atoning for my fractious and other unpleasant qualities—”

“You have none! I cannot do less than tell you I think you are one of the finest men this country has produced, and that I am as proud of you as she will be—”

“Let me interrupt you before you say 'but.' That I have won so high an opinion from you gives me the deepest possible gratification. But I want much more than that. Let us go on with our walk. I'll say no more at present.”

XI

He did not allude to the subject again by so much as a tender glance, and Betty, who knew the power of man to exasperate, appreciated his consideration. She wondered how deep his actual knowledge of women went, how much of his success with them he owed to the strong manly instincts springing from a subsoil of sound common−sense which had carried him safely past so many of the pitfalls of life.

Nor did his high spirits wane. He stayed out of doors, in the forest or on the lake, until midnight, and was up again at five in the morning. Betty was fond of fresh air and exercise, but she had so much of both during the two days of his visit that she went to bed on the night of his departure with a sense of being drugged with ozone and battered with energy. The next day she did not rise until ten, and was still enjoying the dim seclusion of her room when Sally tapped and entered. Miss Carter looked nervous, and her usually sallow cheeks were flushed.

“I've come to say something I'm almost ashamed to say, but I can't help it,” she began abruptly. “I'm going away. I can't, I *can't sit down at the table any longer with her, and treat her as an equal. I writhe every time she calls me 'Sally.' I know it's a silly senseless prejudice—no, it isn't. Black blood is loathsome, horrible!—and the less there is of it the worse it is. I don't mind the out−and−out negroes. I love the dear old darkies in the country; and even the prosperous coloured people are tolerable so long as they don't presume; but there is something so hideously unnatural, so repulsive, so accursed, in an apparently white person with that hidden evidence in him of slavery and lechery. Paugh! it is sickening. They are walking shameless proclamations of lust and crime. I'm sorry for them. If by any surgical process the taint could be extracted, I'd turn philanthropic and devote half my fortune to it; but it can't be, and I'm either not strong−minded enough, or have inherited too many generations of fastidiousness and refinement to bring myself to receive these outcasts as equals. I feel particularly sorry for Harriet. She shows her cursed inheritance in more ways than one, but without it, think what she would be,—a high−bred, intellectual, charming woman. She just escapes being that now, but she does escape it. The taint is all through her. And she knows it. In spite of all you've done for her, of all you've made possible for her, she'll be unhappy as long as she lives.” “She certainly will be if everybody discovers her secret and is as unjust as you are.” Betty, like the rest of the world, had no toleration for the weaknesses herself had conquered. “We cannot undo great wrongs, but it is our duty to make life a little less tragic for the victims, if we can.”*

“I can't. I've tried, I've struggled with myself as I've never struggled before, ever since I learned the truth. It sickens me. It makes me feel the weak, contemptible, common clay of which we all are made, and our only chance of happiness is to forget that. But I've said all I've got to say about myself. I'm going, and that is the end of it. I'll wear a mask till the last minute, for I wouldn't hurt the poor thing's feelings for the world. And I'd die sixteen deaths before I'd betray her. But, Betty, get rid of her. She wants to go to Europe. Let her go. Keep her there. For as sure as fate her secret will leak out in time. She *breathes* it. If I felt it, others will, and certainty soon follows suspicion. Jack would have felt it long since if he were not blinded and intoxicated by her beauty; but you can't count on men. He'll soon forget her if you send her away in time, and for your own sake as well as his get rid of her. You don't want people avoiding your house!”

“She is going. She has no desire to stay, poor thing! Of course, I know how you feel. I felt that way myself at first, but I conquered it. Others won't, I suppose, and it is best that she should go where such prejudices don't exist. I spoke to her again a day or two ago about it—for your idea that Jack loves her has made me nervous, although I can see no evidence of it—and I suggested that she should go at once; but she seems to have made up her mind to September, and I cannot insist without wounding her feelings. I wish Jack would go away, but he always is so much better up here than anywhere else that I can't suggest that, either.”

“Well, I'm going now to tell papa he must prepare his mind for Bar Harbor. Say that you forgive me, Betty, for I love you.”

“Oh, yes, I forgive you,” said Betty, with a half laugh, “for a wise man I know once said that our strongest prejudice is a part of us.”

XII

After Major Carter and Sally left, Betty had less freedom, for her mother was lonely; moreover, she dared not leave Emory and Harriet too much together. The danger still might be averted if she did her duty and stood guard. She never had seen Jack look so well as he looked this summer. The very gold of his hair seemed brighter, and his blue eyes were often radiant. His beauty was conventional, but Betty could imagine its potent effect on a girl of Harriet Walker's temperament and limited experience. But he had appeared to prefer Sally's society to Harriet's, and his spirits dropped after her departure.

It was only when Harriet offered to read to Mrs. Madison and settled down to three hours' steady work a day, that Betty allowed herself liberty after the early morning. From five till eight in the evening and for an hour or two before breakfast she roamed the forest or pulled indolently about the lake. The hours suited her, for the hotel people were little given to early rising; and although they boated industriously by day, they preferred the lower and more fashionable lake, and dined at half−past six.

Life with her no longer was a smooth sailing on a summer lake. There was a roar below, as if the lake rested lightly on a subterranean ocean; and the very pines seemed to have developed a warning note.

Harriet looked like a walking Fate, nothing less. Since Sally's abrupt departure she had not smiled, and Betty knew that instinct divined and explained the sudden aversion of a girl who did so much to add to the cheerfulness of her friends. Emory also looked more like his melancholy self, and wandered about with a volume of Pindar and an expression of discontent. Did he love Harriet? and were her spirits affecting his? Since Harriet's promise Betty felt that she had no right to speak. He had weathered one love affair, he could weather another. When Harriet was safe in Europe, she would turn matchmaker and marry him to Sally Carter. Betty thought lightly of the disappointments of men, having been the cause of many. So long as Jack did not dishonour himself and his house by marriage with a proscribed race, nothing less really mattered. But she played his favourite music and strove to amuse him.

She rallied him one day about the change in his spirits since the departure of Sally Carter, and he admitted that he missed her, that he always felt his best when with her.

“Not that I love her more than I do you,” he added, fearing that he had been impolite. “But she strikes just that chord. She always makes me laugh. She is a sort of sun and warms one up—”

“The truth of the matter is that she strikes more chords than you will admit. She's just the one woman you ought to marry. If you'd make up your mind to love her, you'd soon find it surprisingly easy, and wonder why it never had occurred to you before.” Betty thought she might as well begin at once.

He shook his head, and his handsome face flushed. It was not a frank face; he had lived too solitary and introspective a life for frankness; but he met Betty's eyes unflinchingly.

“She is not in the least the woman for me. She lacks beauty, and I could not stand a woman who was gay—and—and staccato all the time. It is delightful to meet, but would be insufferable to live with.”

“What is your ideal type?”

He rose and raised her hand to his lips with all his old elaborate gallantry. “Oh, Betty Madison! Betty Madison!” he exclaimed. “That you should live to ask me such a question as that?”

“I'd like to box his ears if he did not mean that,” thought Betty. “I particularly should dislike his attempting to blind me in that way.”

And herself? She asked this question more than once as she rowed toward the northern end of the lake in the dawn, or in the heavier shadows at the close of the day. Could it last? And how long? And did he believe that it could last? Or was he, with the practical instinct of a man of the world, merely determined to quaff that fragrant mildly intoxicating wine of mental love−making, until the gods began to grin?

She had many moods, but when a woman is sure that her love is returned and is not denied the man's occasional presence, she cannot be unhappy for long, perhaps never wholly so. For while there is love there is hope, and while there is hope tears do not scald. Betty dared not let her thought turn for a moment to Mrs. North. Her will was strong enough to keep her mind on the high plane necessary to her self− respect. She would not even

ask herself if he knew how low the sands had dropped in that unhappy life. The horizon of the future was thick with flying mist. Only his figure stood there, immovable, always.

"And it is remarkable how things do go on and on and on," she thought once. "They become a habit, then a commonplace. It is because they are so mixed up with the other details of life. Nothing stands out long by itself. The equilibrium is soon restored, and unless one deliberately starts it into prominence again, it stays in its proper place and swings with the rest."

She knew her greatest danger. She had it in her to be one of the most intoxicating women alive. Was this man she loved so passionately to go on to the end of his life only guessing what the Fates forbade him? The years of the impersonal attitude to men which she had thought it right to assume had made her anticipate the more keenly the freedom which one man would bring her. She frankly admitted the strength of her nature, she almost had admitted it to him; should she always be able to control the strong womanly vanity which would give him something more than a passing glimpse of the woman, making him forget the girl? If she did anything so reprehensible, it would be the last glimpse he would take of her, she reflected with a sigh, She wondered that passion and the spiritual part of love should be so hopelessly entangled. She was ready to live a life of celibacy for his sake; she delighted in his mind, and knew that had it been commonplace she could not have loved him did he have every other gift in the workshop of the gods; she worshipped his strength of character, his independence, his lofty yet practical devotion to an ideal; she loved him for his attitude to his wife, the manly and uncomplaining manner with which he accepted his broken and shadowed home life, when his temperament demanded the very full of domestic happiness, and the heavy labours of his days made its lack more bitter; and she sympathized keenly in his love for and pride in his sons. There was nothing fine about him that she did not appreciate and love him the more exaltedly for; and yet she knew that had he been without strong passions she would have loved him for none of these things. For of such is love between man and woman when they are of the highest types that Nature has produced. Betty hated the thought of sin as she hated vulgarity, and did not contemplate it for a moment, but if she had roused but the calm affection of this man she would have been as miserable as for the hour, at least, she was happy.

XIII

Betty was determined that Saturday and Sunday should be her own, free of care. She sent Emory to New York to talk over an investment with her man of business, and she provided her mother with eight new novels. As Harriet loved the novel only less than she loved the studies which furnished her ambitious mind, Betty knew that she would read aloud all day without complaint. Miss Trumbull, of whom she had seen little of late, and who had looked sullen and haughty since Harriet with untactful abruptness had placed her at arm's length, she requested to superintend in person the cleaning of the lower rooms.

Her mind being at rest, she arose at four on the morning of Saturday. She rowed across the lake this time and picked up Senator North about a half−mile from the hotel. His hands were full of fishing−tackle.

“Will you take me fishing?” he said. “Can you give me the whole morning? I hear there is better fishing in the lake above, and a farmhouse where we can get breakfast. Do you know the way?”

She nodded, and he took the oars from her and rowed up the lake.

“My wife always sleeps until noon,” he said. “We can have seven hours if you will give them to me.”

“Of course I'll give them to you. I may as well admit that I intended to have them. I made an elaborate disposition of my household to that end.”

They were smiling at each other, and both looked happy and free of desire for anything but seven long hours of pleasant companionship. The morning, bright and full of sound, mated itself with the superficial moods of man, and was not cast for love−making.

“Well, what have you been doing?” he asked. “I have had you in a permanent and most refreshing vision, floating up and down this lake, or flitting through the forest, in that white frock. I know that Burleigh was here—”

“I did not wear white for him.”

“Ah! He has looked very vague, not to say mooning, since his return. I am thankful he is not seeing you exactly as I do. How is the lady of the shadows?”

“Sally's Southern gorge rose so high, after she discovered the taint, that she left precipitately. She couldn't sit at the table with even a hidden drop of negro blood.”

“You Southerners will solve the negro problem by inspiring the entire race with an irresistible desire to cut its throat. If a tidal wave would wash Ireland out of existence and the blacks in this country would dispose of themselves, how happy we all should be! What else have you been doing?”

“I have read the Congressional Record every day, and the *Federalist* and State papers of Hamilton; to say nothing of the monographs in the American Statesmen Series. Mr. Burleigh insisted that I must acquire the national sense, and I have acquired it to such an extent that half the time I don't know whether I am living in history or out of it. Even the Record makes me feel impersonal, and as 'national' as Mr. Burleigh could wish.”

“Burleigh intends that his State shall be proud of you.”

Betty flushed. “Don't prophesy, even in fun. I believe I am superstitious. His idea is that politics are to become a sort of second nature with me before I start my *salon*—Why do you smile cynically? Don't you think I can have a *salon?*” “You might build up one in the course of ten years if you devoted your whole mind to it and made no mistakes; nothing is impossible. But for a long while you merely will find yourself entertaining a lot of men who want to talk on any subject but politics after they have turned their backs on Capitol Hill. They will be extremely grateful if you will provide them with some lively music, a reasonable amount of punch, and an unlimited number of pretty and entertaining women. But don't expect them to invite you down the winding ways of their brains to the cupboards where they have hung up their great thoughts for the night. I do not even see them standing in groups of three, their right hands thrust under their coat fronts, gravely muttering at each other. I see them invariably doing their poor best to make some pretty woman forget they could be bores if they were not vigilant.”

“The pretty women I shall ask will not think them bores. The thing to do at first, of course, is to get them there.”

“Oh, there will be no difficulty about that. Why do you want a *salon*? Are you ambitious?”

Betty nodded. “Yes, I think I am. At first I only wanted a new experience. Now that I have met so many men

with careers, I want one too. If I succeed, I shall be the most famous woman in America."

"You certainly would be. Very well, I will do all I can to help you. It is possible, as I said. And you have many qualifications—"

"Ah!" Betty's face lit up. "If there is war with Spain, they will talk of nothing else—Don't frown so at me. I'm sure I don't want a war if you don't. Those are my politics. Here is the water lane between the two lakes. I almost had forgotten it. I hope it isn't overgrown."

She spoke lightly, but more truly than she was wholly willing to admit. Women see political questions, as they see all life, through the eyes of some man. If he is not their lover, he is a public character for whom they have a pleasing sentiment.

Senator North pulled into the long winding lane of water in a cleft of the mountains. It was dark and chill here they were in the heart of the forest; they had but to turn their heads to look straight into the long vistas, heavy with silence and shadows.

He rowed for some moments without speaking. He felt their profound and picturesque isolation, and had no desire to break the spell of it. She recalled her wish that the Adirondacks would swing off into space, but smiled: she was too happy in the mere presence of the man to wish for anything more. He let his eyes meet hers and linger in their depths, and when he smiled at the end of that long communion it was with tenderness. But when he spoke he addressed himself to her mind alone.

"No, you must not wish for war with Spain. If we ever are placed in a position where patriotism commands war, I shall be the last to oppose it. If England had not behaved with her calm good sense at the time of the Venezuela difficulty, but had taken our jingoes seriously and returned their insults, we should have had no alternative but war,— the serious and conservative of the country would have had to suffer from the errors of its fools, as is often the case. But for this war there would be no possible excuse. Spain at one time owned nearly two− thirds of the earth's surface. She has lost every inch of it, except the Peninsula and a few islands, by her cruelty and stupidity. Her manifest destiny is to lose these islands in the same manner and for the same reasons. And brutal and stupid as she is, we have no more right to interfere in her domestic affairs than had Europe to interfere in ours when we were torn by a struggle that had a far greater effect on the progress of civilization than the trouble between dissatisfied colonists and decadent Spaniards in this petty island. God only knows how many intellects went out on those battlefields in the four years of the Civil War, which, had they persisted and developed, would have added to the legislative wisdom of this country. We knew what we were losing, knew that the longer the struggle lasted the longer would our growth as a nation be retarded, and the horrors of our battlefields were quite as ghastly as anything set forth in the reports from Cuba. And yet every thinking man among us, young and old, turned cold with apprehension when we were threatened with a European interference which would have dishonoured us. That Spain is behaving with wanton brutality would not be to the point, even if the reports were not exaggerated, which they are,—for the matter of that, the Cubans are equally brutal when they find the opportunity. The point is that it is none of our business. The Cubans have rebelled. They must take the consequences, sustained by the certainty of success in the end. Moreover, we not only are on friendly terms with Spain, we not only have no personal grievance as a nation against her, but we are a great nation, she is a weak one. We have no moral right, we a lusty young country, to humiliate a proud and ancient kingdom, expose the weaknesses and diseases of her old age to the unpitying eyes of the world. It would be a despicable and a cowardly act, and it horrifies me to think that the United States could be capable of it. For Spain I care nothing. The sooner she dies of her own rottenness the better; but let her die a natural death. My concern is for my own country. I don't want her to violate those fundamental principles to whose adherence alone she can hope to reach the highest pitch of development."

Betty smiled. "Mr. Burleigh says that Washington had a brain of ice, and that his ideal of American prosperity was frozen within it. I suppose he would say the same of you."

"I have not a brain of ice. I know that the only hope for this Republic is to anchor itself to conservatism. The splits in the Democratic party have generated enough policies to run several virile young nations on the rocks. The Populist is so eager to help the farmer that he is indifferent to national dishonour. The riff−raff in the House is discouraging. The House ought to be a training−school for the Senate. It is a forum for excitable amateurs. The New England Senators are almost the only ones with a long—or any—record in the House."

"They are bright, most of those Representatives—even the woolly ones; as quick as lightning."

“Oh, yes, they are bright,” he said contemptuously. “The average American is bright. If one prefixes no stronger adjective than that to his name, he accomplishes very little in life. Don't think me a pessimist,” he added, smiling. “All over the country the Schools and colleges are instilling the principles of conservatism and practical politics on the old lines, and therein lies hope. I feel sure I shall live to see the Republic safely past the dangers that threaten it now. The war with Spain is the worst of these. No war finishes without far− reaching results, and the conscience of a country, like the conscience of a man, may be too severely tried. If we whip Spain—the 'if,' of course, is a euphemism—we not only shall be tempted to do things that are unconstitutional, but we are more than liable to make a laughing− stock of the Monroe doctrine. For reasons I am not going into this beautiful summer morning, with fish waiting to be caught, we are liable to be landed in foreign waters with all Europe as our enemy and our second−rate statesmen at home pleading for a new Constitution— which would mean a new United States and unimaginable and interminable difficulties. Have I said enough to make you understand why I think we owe a higher duty to a country that should and could be greater than it is, than even to two hundred thousand Cubans whom we should but starve the faster if we hemmed them in? Very well, if you will kindly bait that hook I will see what I can get. The rest of the world may sink, for all I care this morning.”

They had entered another lake, smaller and even wilder in its surroundings, for there was no sign of habitation.

“Few people know of this lake, I am told,” said Senator North, contentedly; “and we are unlikely to see a living soul for hours, except while we are discovering that farmhouse. Are you hungry?”

“Yes, but catch a lot of fish before we go to the farmhouse—I know where it is—for I detest bread and milk and eggs.”

The fish were abundant, and he had filled his basket at the end of an hour. Then they tied up their boat and went in search of the farmhouse. It was a poor affair, but a good−natured woman fried their fish and contributed potatoes they could eat. Betty was rattling on in her gayest spirits, when her glance happened to light on a photograph in a straw frame. She half rose to her feet, then sank back in her chair with a frown of annoyance.

“What is it?” he asked anxiously.

“A photograph of my housekeeper, a woman who is all curiosity where her brain ought to be.”

“Well, it is only her photograph, not herself, and this woman does not know my name. You are not to bother about anything this morning.”

They went back to the lake. He caught another basket of fish, and then they floated about idly, sometimes silent, sometimes talking in a desultory way about many things that interested them both. Betty wondered where he had found time to read and think so much on subjects that belong to the literary wing of the brain and have nothing to do with the vast subjects of politics and statesmanship, of which he was so complete a master. She recalled what her mother had said about her brain being her worst enemy when she fell in love. It certainly made her love this man more profoundly and passionately, for her own was of that high quality which demanded a greater to worship. And if she loved the man it was because his whole virile magnetic being was the outward and visible expression of the mind that informed it. It was almost noon when they parted, pleased with themselves and with life. They agreed to meet again on the following morning.

XIV

As Betty ascended the terrace, she was amazed to see Jack Emory sitting on the veranda. He threw aside his cigarette and came to meet her.

“Anderson had gone to the other end of Long Island—Sag Harbor,” he said; “and as I did not like to follow him into his home on a matter of business, I came back. New York is one vast oven; I could not make up my mind to wait there. I'd rather take the trip again.”

Betty concealed her vexation, and replied that she was sorry he had had a disagreeable journey for nothing, while wondering if her conscience would permit her to absent herself for seven hours on the morrow.

But Harriet had read one novel through and begun another. It was evident that she had not left Mrs. Madison's side, and Jack had been home for two hours. Betty lightly forbade her to tire herself further that day, and after luncheon they all went for a drive. When Mrs. Madison retired for her nap at four o'clock, Betty, who longed for the seclusion of her room and the delight of re−living the morning hours, established herself in the middle of the veranda, with Harriet beside her and Jack swinging in a hammock at the corner. “Thank heaven she wants to go to Europe in September,” she thought. “If I had to be duenna for six months, I should become a cross old−maid. I'll never forgive Sally for deserting me.”

She could have filled the house with company, but that would have meant late hours and the sacrifice of such solitude as she now could command. She had always disliked the burden of entertaining in summer, never more so than during this, when her loneliest hours were, with the exception of just fifteen others and twenty−one minutes, the happiest she ever had known.

Jack and Harriet manifested not the slightest desire to be together, and Betty went to bed at nine o'clock, wondering if she were not boring herself unnecessarily.

She was deep in her first sleep when her consciousness struggled toward an unaccustomed sound. She awoke suddenly at the last, and became aware of a low, continuous, but peremptory knocking. She lit a candle at once and opened the door. Miss Trumbull stood there, her large bony face surrounded by curl−papers that stood out like horns, and an extremely disagreeable expression on her mouth. She wore a grey flannel wrapper and had a stocking tied round her throat. Betty reflected that she never had seen a more unattractive figure, but asked her if she were ill—if her throat were ailing—

Miss Trumbull entered and closed the door behind her.

“I'm a Christian woman,” she announced, “and an unmarried one, and I ain't goin' to stay in a house where there's sech goin's on.” “What do you mean?” asked Betty coldly, although she felt her lips turn white.

“I mean what I say. I'm a Christian—”

“I do not care in the least about your religious convictions. I want to know what you wish to tell me. There is no necessity to lead up to it.”

“Well—I can't say it. So there! I warn't brought up to talk about sech things. Just you come with me and find out for yourself.”

“You have been prying in the servants' wing, I suppose. Do I understand that that is the sort of thing you expect me to do?”

“It ain't the servants' wing—where I've been listenin' and watchin' till I've made sure—out of dooty to myself.” She lowered her voice and spoke with a hoarse wheeze. “It's the room at the end of the second turning.”

Betty allowed the woman to help her into a wrapper, for her hands were trembling. She followed Miss Trumbull down the hall, hardly believing she was awake, praying that it might be a bad dream. They turned the second corner, and the housekeeper waved her arm dramatically at Harriet's door.

“Very well,” said Betty. “Go to your room. I prefer to be alone.”

Miss Trumbull retired with evident reluctance. Betty heard a door close ostentatiously, and inferred that her housekeeper was returning to a point of vantage. But she did not care. She felt steeped in horror and disgust. She wished that she never had felt a throb of love. All love seemed vulgar and abominable, a thing to be shunned for ever by any woman who cared to retain her distinction of mind. She would not meet Senator North to−morrow.

She did not care if she never saw him again. She would like to go into a convent and not see any man again.

She never ceased to be grateful that she was spared hours of musing that might have burnt permanently into her memory. She had not walked up and down the hall for fifteen minutes before the door at the end of the side corridor opened and Emory came out.

Betty did not hesitate. She advanced at once toward him. He did not recoil, he stood rigid for a moment. Then he said distinctly,—

"We have been married three months. Will you come downstairs for a few moments?"

She followed him down the stair, trembling so violently that she could not clutch the banisters, and fearing she should fall forward upon him. But before she had reached the living−room she had made a desperate effort to control herself. She realized the danger of betraying Harriet's secret before she had made up her mind what course was best, but she was not capable of grappling with any question until the shock was over. Her brain felt stunned.

Emory lit one of the lamps, and Betty turned her back to it. He was very white, and she conceived a sudden and violent dislike to him. She never before had appreciated fully the weakness in that beautiful high−bred intellectual face. It was old−fashioned and dreamy. It had not a suggestion of modern grip and keenness and determination.

"I have deceived you, Betty," he began mournfully; but she interrupted him.

"I am neither your mother nor your sister," she said cuttingly. "I am only your cousin. You were under no obligation to confide in me. I object to being made use of, that is all."

"I am coming to that," he replied humbly. "Let me tell you the story as best I can. We did not discover that we loved each other until after you left. It had taken me some time to realize it—for—for—I did not think I ever could change. I was almost horrified; but soon I made up my mind it was for the best. I had been lonely and miserable long enough, and I had it in my power to take the loneliness and misery from another. I was almost insanely happy. I wanted to marry at once, but for a few days Harriet would not consent. She wanted to be an accomplished woman when she became my wife. Then she suggested that we should be married secretly, and the next day we went over into Virginia and were married—in a small village. She begged me not to tell you till you came back. When you returned, her courage failed her, for after all you were her benefactor and she had deceived you. She protested that she could not, that she dared not tell you. It has been an extremely disagreeable position to me, for I have felt almost a cad in this house, but I understood her feeling, for you had every reason to be angry and scornful. So we agreed to go to Europe in September and write to you from there. She wanted to go at once—soon after you returned; but I must wait till certain money comes in. I cannot live on what you so generously gave her. She would not go without me, and in spite of everything, I am almost ashamed to say, I have been very happy here—"

"Is that all? I will go to my room now. Goodnight." She hurried upstairs, wishing she had a sleeping powder. As she closed the door of her room, the tall sombre figure of Harriet rose from a chair and confronted her. Betty hastily lit two lamps. She could not endure Harriet in a half light,—not while she wore black, at all events.

"He has told me," she said briefly, answering the agonized inquiry in those haggard eyes. "I told him nothing."

Harriet drew a long breath and swayed slightly. "Ah!" she said. Ah! Thank the Lord for that. I hope you will never have to go through what I have in this last half−hour." She seemed to recover herself rapidly, for after she had walked the length of the room twice, she confronted Betty with a tightening of the muscles of her face that gave it the expression of resolution which her features always had seemed to demand.

"This is wholly my affair now," she said. "It is all between him and me. It would be criminal for you to interfere. When I realised I loved him, I made up my mind to marry him at once. I knew that you would not permit it, and although I hated to deceive you, I made up my mind that I would have my happiness. I intended to tell you when you got back, but after what you said to me that day I was scared you'd tell him. If you do—if you do—I swear before the Lord that I'll drown myself in that lake—"

"I have no intention of telling him. As you say, it is now your own affair."

"It is; it is. And although I may have to pay the price one day, I'll hope and hope till the last minute. I shall not let him return to America, and perhaps he will never guess. Somehow it seems as if everything must be right different over there, as if all life would look different."

"You will find your point of view quite the same when you get there, for you take yourself with you. I'd like

to go to bed now, Harriet, if you don't mind. I'm terribly tired."

"I'll go. There is only one other thing I want to say. I shall have no children. I vowed long ago that the curse I had been forced to inherit should not poison another generation. Your cousin's line will die, undishonoured, with him. The crimes of many men will die in me. No further harm will be done if Jack never knows. And I hope and believe he never will. Good−night."

XV

Betty slept fitfully, her dreams haunted by Miss Trumbull's expression of outraged virtue surrounded by curl−papers. She rose at four, almost mechanically, rather glad than otherwise that she had some one with whom to talk over the events of the night. But although she admired Senator North the more for his distinguished contrast to Jack Emory, she felt as if all romance and love had gone out of her. Harriet's case was romantic enough in all conscience, and it was hideous.

She met Miss Trumbull in the lower hall. Outraged virtue had given way to an expression of self−satisfied importance. “Well, I'm real glad they're married,” she drawled. “It warn't in human nature not to listen, and I did—I ain't goin' to deny it, but I couldn't have slept a wink if I hadn't. Ain't you glad I told you?”

“I certainly am not glad that you told me, and I wish I had dismissed you three weeks ago. When I return I shall give you a month's wages and you can go to−day.”

She hurried down to the lake and unmoored her boat. Her conscience was abnormally active this morning, and she reflected that she too was going to a tryst of which the world must know nothing. True, it was kept on the open lake and was as full of daylight as it was of impeccability, but it was not for the world to discover, for all that. She made no attempt to smile as Senator North stepped into the boat, and he took the oars without a word and pulled rapidly up the lake. When they were beyond all signs of human habitation, he brought the boat under the spreading limbs of an oak and crossed his oars.

“Now,” he said, “what is it? Something very serious indeed has happened.”

“Jack Emory and Harriet have been married three months.” She filled in the statement listlessly and added no comment.

“And your conscience is oppressed and miserable because you feel as if you were the author of the catastrophe,” he replied. “What have you made up your mind to do?” It was evident that her attitude alone interested him, but he understood her mood perfectly. His voice was friendly and matter−of−fact; there was not a hint of the sympathizing lover about him.

“It seems to me that as I did not act at the right time I only should make things worse by interfering now. As she said, it is a matter between her and him.”

“You are quite right. Any other course would be futile and cruel. And remember that you have acted wisely and well from the beginning. You have nothing to reproach yourself for. You brought the girl to your house for a period, because justice and humanity demanded it. The same principles demanded that you should keep her secret—for the matter of that your mother made secrecy one of the conditions of her consent. I had hoped that you would get rid of her before she obeyed the baser instincts of her nature. For she was bound to deceive some man, and her victim is your cousin by chance only. Have you noticed in Washington—or anywhere in the South—that a negro is always seen with a girl at least one shade whiter than himself? The same instinct to rise, to get closer to the standard of the white man, whom they slavishly admire, is in the women as well as in the men. They are the weaker sex and must submit to Circumstance, but they would sacrifice the whole race for marriage with a white man. If you had left this girl to her fate, she would have gone to the devil, for a woman as white as that would have starved rather than marry a negro. If you had given her money and told her to go her way, she would have established herself at once in some first−class hotel where she would be sure to meet men of the upper class. And she would have married the first that asked her and told him nothing. I am sorry that your cousin happens to be the victim, because he is your cousin. But if you will reflect a moment you will see that he is no better, no more honourable or worthy than many other men, one of whom was bound to be victimized. I don't think she would have been attracted to a fool or a cad; I am positive she would have married a gentleman. These women have a morbid craving for the caste they are so close upon belonging to.”

“I hate men,” said Betty, viciously.

“I am sure you do, and I shall not waste time on their defence. I am concerned only in setting you right with yourself.”

“I always feel that what you say is true—must be true. I suppose it will take possession of my mind and I shall

feel better after a while."

"You will feel better after several hours' sleep. I am going to take you home now. Go to bed and sleep until noon."

"My conscience hurts me. I have spoiled your visit."

"I can live on the memory of yesterday for some time, and I shall return in a fortnight."

"Well, I am glad you were here when it happened. I don't know what I should have done if I couldn't have talked to you about it. I feel a little better—but cross and disagreeable, all the same."

"You are a woman of contrasts," he said, smiling. "A machine is not my ideal."

He rowed her back to the point where he had boarded the boat, and shook her warmly by the hand.

"Good−bye," he said. "Be sensible and take the only practical view of it. If you care to write to me about anything, I need not say that I shall answer at once." When she reached home, she took his advice and went to bed; and whether or not her mind obeyed his in small matters as in great, she slept soundly for five hours. When she awoke, she felt young and buoyant and untarnished again. She went at once to her mother's room and told the story. Mrs. Madison listened with horror and consternation.

"It cannot be!" she exclaimed. "It cannot be! Jack Emory? It never could have been permitted. The very Fates would interfere. His father will rise from his grave. Why, it's monstrous. The woman ought to be hanged. And I thought her buried in her books! I never heard of such deceit."

"It was the instinct of self−defence, I suppose."

"He too! It never occurred to me to watch him or to warn him; for that such a thing could ever threaten a member of my family never entered my head. What on earth is to be done?"

It took Betty an hour to persuade her mother that Jack must be left to find out the truth for himself; that they had no right, after placing Harriet in the way of temptation, to make her more wretched than she was when they had rescued her. But she succeeded, as she always did; and Mrs. Madison said finally, with her long sigh of surrender,—

"Well, perhaps he is paying for some of the sins of his fathers. But I wish he did not happen to be a member of our family. As the thing is done, I suppose I may as well be philosophical about it. It is so much easier to be philosophical now that I have let go my hold on most of the responsibilities of life. As long as nothing happens to you, I can accept everything else with equanimity. What story of her birth and family do you suppose she told him? He must have asked her a good many questions."

"Heaven knows. She is capable of concocting anything; and you must remember that we had accepted her as a cousin. She could put him off easily, for he had no suspicion to start with. I must now go and have a final delightful interview with Miss Trumbull."

She met her in the hall, and experienced a sudden sense of helplessness in the face of that mighty curiosity. She almost respected it.

"I just want to say," drawled Miss Trumbull, tossing her head, "that I know more'n you think I do. There just ain't nothin' I don't know, I'll tell you, as you've turned me out as if I was a common servant. I know who you meet up the lake and take breakfast in farmhouses with, and I know why Miss Harriet was so dreadful scared you'd find out—"

Betty understood then why some people murdered others. Her eyes blazed so that the woman quailed.

"Oh, I ain't so bad as you think," she stammered. "I'd never think any harm of you, and I'd never be so despisable as to take away any woman's character. I'm a Christian and I don't want to hurt any one. likewise, I'd never tell him *that*. Bad as she's treated me—I who am as good and better'n she is any day—I wouldn't do any woman sech a bad turn as that. Only I'm just glad I do know it. When I'm settin' in my poor little parlor waitin' for another position to turn up—six months, mebbe—it'll be a big satisfaction to me to think that I could ruin her if I had a mind to—a big satisfaction."

Betty went to her room, wrote a cheque for three months' wages and returned with it. "Take this and go," she said. "And be kind enough not to look upon the amount as a bribe. The position of housekeeper is not an easy one to find, and I do not wish to think of any one in distress."

XVI

Miss Trumbull left that afternoon, and although Betty half expected the woman, who had possessed some of the attributes of the villain in the play, to reappear at intervals in the interest of her role, the grave might have closed over her for all the sign she gave. But Miss Trumbull had done enough, and the Fates do not always linger to complete their work. The housekeeper, with all her self−satisfaction, never would have thought of calling herself a Fate; but motives are not always commensurate with results. She was only a common fool, and there were thousands like her, but her capacity for harm−doing was as far−reaching as had she had the brain of a genius and the soul of a devil.

As Emory positively refused to go to Europe until money of his own came in, although Betty offered to lend him what he needed, and as he was really well only when in the Adirondacks, and an abrupt move to one of the hotels would have animated the gossips, it was decided finally that he and his wife should remain where they were until it was time to sail. Harriet offered to take charge of the servants until another housekeeper could be found; and as she seemed anxious to do all she could to make amends for deceiving her benefactress, Betty let her assume what would have been to herself an onerous responsibility. After a day or two of constraint and awkwardness, the little household settled down to its altered conditions; and in a week everybody looked and acted much as usual, so soon does novelty wear off and do mortals readjust themselves. Jack and Harriet seemed happy; but the former, at least, was too fastidious to vaunt his affections in even the little public of his lifelong friends. He spent hours swinging in a hammock, reading philosophy and smoking; occasionally he read aloud to his aunt and Harriet, and in the afternoon he usually took his wife for a walk.

Harriet at this period was a curious mixture of humility and pride. She could not demonstrate sufficiently her gratitude to Betty, but the very dilation of her nostril indicated gratified ambition. She had held her head high ever since her marriage; since her acknowledgment by the world as a wife, her carriage had been regal. Betty gave a luncheon one day to some acquaintances at the hotel, and when she introduced Harriet as Mrs. Emory, she saw her quiver like a blooded horse who has won a doubtful race.

As for Mrs. Madison, she finished by regarding the whole affair in the light of a novel, and argued with Betty the possible and probable results. Her interest in the plot became so lively that she took to discussing it with Harriet; and although the heroine was grateful at first for her interest, there came a time when she looked apprehensive and careworn. Finally she begged Mrs. Madison, tearfully, not to allude to the subject again, and Mrs. Madison, who was the kindest of women, looked surprised and hurt, but replied that of course she would avoid the subject if Harriet wished.

“It's just this,” said Mrs. Emory, bluntly; “the subject is so much on your mind that I'm in constant terror you'll begin talking of it before Jack.”

“My dear girl, I never would tell him; for his sake as well as your own, you can rely on me.”

“I know you would never do it intentionally, ma'am, but I'm scared you'll do it without thinking; you talk of it so much, more than anything. The other night when you began to talk of the crime of miscegenation, I thought I should die.”

“That was very inconsiderate of me. Poor girl, I'll be more careful.” But in her secluded impersonal life few romantic interests entered, and although she was too courteous to harp upon a painful subject, it was evident that she avoided it with an effort, and that it dwelt in the forefront of her mind. One evening after Betty had been playing some of the old Southern melodies, she caught Jack's hand in hers, and assured him brokenly that no people on earth were bound together as Southerners were, and that he must think of her always as his mother and come to her in the dark and dreadful hours of his life. He pressed her hand, and continued smoking his cigarette; he never had doubted that his aunt loved him as a mother. Harriet rose abruptly and left the room. She returned before long, however, and after that night she never left her husband alone with Mrs. Madison for a moment.

XVII

Betty herself was happy again. She hated the dark places of life, and got away from them and out into the sunshine as quickly as possible. Although she was too well disciplined to shirk her duty, she did it as quickly as possible and pushed it to the back of her mind. Jack and Harriet were married; that was the end of it for the present. Let life go on as before. She gave several hours of the day to her mother, the rest to the forest and the lake. When Senator North came up again, she was her old gay self, the more attractive perhaps for the faint impression which contact with deep seriousness is bound to leave. If Jack and Harriet had been safely out of the country, she would have felt like a Pagan, especially after the Tariff Bill passed and Senator North came up to stay.

"I shouldn't have a care in the world," she said to him one morning, "if I did not know, little as I will permit myself to think of it, that exposure may come any day. There is only a chance that somebody at St. Andrew will hear of the marriage and denounce her, but it might happen. If only they were in Europe! She told me the other night that she knows she can keep him there, her influence is so great. I hope that is true, but she cannot make him go till he has his own money to go with."

"What she means is that he won't leave her. He has her here now and is in no hurry to move. He should be able to rent his farm. It is a very good one." "He has rented it for a year—from September. He gets nothing till then. If pride were not a disease with him, he would let me advance the money, but he is not as sure as he might be of the man who has rented the farm and he will not take any risks, I am sorry for Harriet. She has the idea on her mind now that Molly will blurt it out, and she has the sort of mind that broods and exaggerates. I sincerely wish they had got off to Europe undiscovered and sent the news back by the pilot. I had to speak to Molly once or twice myself; I never knew her so garrulous about anything."

Senator North laughed. "You have a great deal of trouble with your parent," he said. "I fear you have not been firm enough with her in the past. Will you come into the next lake? I like the fish better there. You are not to worry about anything, my dear, while we have the Adirondacks to imagine ourselves happy in."

"Ar'n't you really happy?" she asked him quickly.

"Not wholly so," he replied. "But that is a question we are not to discuss."

XVIII

Senator North had been formally invited by Mrs. Madison for dinner that evening, and Betty, who had parted from him just seven hours before, restrained an impulse to run down the terrace as his boat made the landing. Emory and Harriet were on the veranda, however, and she managed to look stately and more or less indifferent at the head of the steps. There were pillars and vines on either side of her, and bunches of purple wistaria hung above her head. It was a picturesque frame for a picturesque figure in white, and a kindly consideration for Senator North's highly trained and exacting eye kept her immovable for nearly five minutes. As he reached the steps, however, self− consciousness suddenly possessed her and she started precipitately to meet him. She wore slippers with high Louis Quinze heels. One caught in a loosened strand of the mat. Her other foot went too far. She made a desperate effort to reach the next step, and fell down the whole flight with one unsupported ankle twisted under her.

For a moment the pain was so intense she hardly was aware that Senator North had his arm about her shoulders while Emory was straightening her out. Harriet was screaming frantically. She gave a sharp scream herself as Emory touched her ankle, but repressed a second as she heard her mother's voice.

Mrs. Madison stood in the doorway with more amazement than alarm on her face.

“Betty?” she cried. “Nothing can have happened to Betty! Why, she has not even had a doctor since she was six years old.”

“It's nothing but a sprained ankle,” said Emory. “For heaven's sake, keep quiet, Harriet,” he added impatiently, “and go and get some hot water. Let's get her into the house.”

Betty by this time was laughing hysterically. Her ankle felt like a hot pincushion, and the unaccustomed experience of pain, combined with Harriet's shrieks, delivered with a strong darky accent, and her mother's attitude of disapproval, assaulted her nerves.

When they had carried her in and put her foot into a bucket of hot water, she forgot them completely, and while her mother fanned her and Senator North forced her to swallow brandy, she felt that all the intensity of life's emotions was circumferenced by a wooden bucket. But when they had carefully extended her on the sofas and Emory, who had a farmer's experience with broken bones, announced his intention of examining her ankle at once, Betty with remarkable presence of mind asked Senator North to hold her hand. This he did with a firmness which fortified her during the painful ordeal, and Mrs. Madison was not terrified by so much as a moan.

“You have pluck!” exclaimed Senator North when Emory, after much prodding, had announced that it was only a sprain. “You have splendid courage.”

Emory assured her that she was magnificent, and Betty felt so proud of herself that she had no desire to undo the accident.

In the days that followed, although she suffered considerable pain, she enjoyed herself thoroughly. It was her first experience of being “fussed over,” as she expressed it. She never had had so much as a headache, no one within her memory had asked her how she felt, and she had regarded her mother as the centre of the medical universe. Now a clever and sympathetic doctor came over every day from the hotel and felt her pulse, and intimated that she was his most important patient. Mrs. Madison insisted upon bathing her head, Emory and Harriet treated her like a sovereign whose every wish must be anticipated, even the servants managed to pass the door of her sitting−room a dozen times a day. Senator North came over every morning and sat by her couch of many rose−coloured pillows; and not only looked tender and anxious, but suggested that the statesman within him was dead.

“It is hard on you, though,” she murmured one day, when they happened to be alone for a few moments. “Two invalids are more than one man's portion. And no one ever enjoyed the outdoor life as you do.”

“This room is full of sunshine and fresh air, and I came up here to be with you. I don't know but what I am heartless enough to enjoy seeing such an imperious and insolently healthy person helpless for a time, and to be able to wait on her.”

“I feel as if the entire order of the universe had been reversed.”

“It will do you good. I hope you will have every variety of pleasure at least once in your life.”

“You are laughing at me—but as I am a truthful person I will confide to you that I almost hate the idea of being well again.”

“Of course you do. And as for the real invalids they enjoy themselves thoroughly. The great compensation law is blessed or cursed, whichever way you choose to look at it.”

“I wonder if you had happened to be unmarried, what price we would have had to pay.”

“God knows. The compensation law is the most immutable of all the fates.”

“I have most of the gifts of life,—good looks, wealth, position, brains, and the power of making people like me. So I am not permitted to have the best of all. If I could, I wonder which of the others I'd lose. Probably we'd have an accident on our wedding journey, which would reduce my nerves to such a state that I'd be irritable for the rest of my life and lose my good looks and power to make you happy. It's a queer world.”

He made no reply.

“What are you thinking of?” she asked, meeting his eyes.

“That you are not to become anything so commonplace as a pessimist. Get everything out of the present that is offered you and give no thought to the future. What is it?” he added tenderly, as the blood came into her cheeks and she knit her brows.

“I moved my ankle and it hurt me so!” She moved her hand at the same time, and he took it, and held it until her brows relaxed, which was not for some time.

The best of women are frauds. Betty made that ankle the pivot of her circle for the rest of the summer. When she wanted to see Senator North look tender and worried, she puckered her brows and sighed. When she felt the promptings of her newly acquired desire to be “fussed over,” she dropped suddenly upon a couch and demanded a cushion for her foot, or asked to be assisted to a hammock. She often laughed at herself; but the new experience was very sweet, and she wondered over Life's odd and unexpected sources of pleasure.

XIX

Senator Burleigh came up for a few days to the hotel before going West, and Betty, who had anticipated his visit, invited two of the prettiest girls she knew to assist her to entertain him. They had been at one of the hotels on the lower lake, and came to her for a few days before joining their parents. She showed Burleigh every possible attention, permitting him to eat nothing but breakfast at his hotel; but he did not see her alone for a moment. When he left, he felt that he had had three cheerful days among warm and admiring friends, but his satisfaction was far from complete.

“Betty,” said Senator North, one morning a fortnight later, “how much do you like Burleigh? If you had not met me, do you think you could have loved him?”

“I think I could have persuaded myself that I liked him better than I ever could have liked anybody; but it would not have been love.”

“Are you sure?”

“Oh, yes, I am sure! You know that I am sure. It may be possible to mistake liking for love, but it is not possible to mistake love for anything else. And you cannot even pretend to believe that I do not know what love is.”

“Oh, yes,” he said softly, “I think you know.” He resumed in a moment: “You are so young—I would leave you in a moment if I thought that you did not really love me, that you were deluding yourself and wasting your life. But I believe that you do; and you are happier than you would be with a man who could give you only the half that you demand. Marriage is not everything. I love you well enough to make any sacrifice for you but a foolish one. And I know that there is much less in the average marriage than in the incomplete relation we have established. And there is another marriage that is incomparably worse. I shall never let you go—so long as I can hold you—unless I am satisfied that it is for your good.”

“If you leave me for any Quixotic idea, I'll marry the first man that proposes to me,” said Betty, lightly. “I am too happy to even consider such a possibility. There are no to−morrows when to−day is flawless— Hark! What is that?”

They were on the upper lake. Over the mountains came the sonorous yet wailing, swinging yet rapt, intonation of the negro at his hymns.

“There is a darky camp−meeting somewhere,” said Senator North, indifferently. “I hope they don't fish.”

The fervent incantation rose higher. It seemed to fill the forest, so wide was its volume, so splendid its energy. The echoes took it up, the very mountains responded. Five hundred voices must have joined in the chorus, and even Senator North threw back his head as the columns of the forest seemed to be the pipes of some stupendous organ. As for Betty, when the great sound died away in a wail that was hardly separable from the sighing of the pines, she trembled from head to foot and burst into tears.

He took hold of the oars, and rowed out of the lake and down to the spot where he was in the habit of landing. She had quite recovered herself by that time, and nodded brightly to him as he handed her the oars and stepped on shore.

At the breakfast−table she mentioned casually that there was a negro camp−meeting in the neighborhood, and that she never had heard such magnificent singing. She saw an eager hungry flash leap into Harriet's eyes, but they were lowered immediately. Harriet had lost much of her satisfied mien in the last few weeks, and of late had looked almost haggard. But she had fallen back into her old habit of reticence, a condition Betty always was careful not to disturb. That afternoon, however, she asked Betty if she could speak alone with her, and they went out to the summer−house.

“I want to go to that camp−meeting,” she began abruptly. “Betty, I am nearly mad.” She began to weep violently, and Betty put her arms about her.

“Is there any new trouble?” she asked. “Tell me and I will do all I can to help you. Why do you wish to go to this camp−meeting?”

“So that I can shout and scream and pray so loud perhaps the Lord'll hear me. Betty, I don't have one peaceful

minute, dreading your mother will tell him, and that if she doesn't that dreadful Miss Trumbull will. She hated me, and she laughed that dry conceited laugh of hers when she said good−bye to me. What's to prevent her writing to Jack any minute? I lost her a good place, and we both insulted her common morbid vanity. What's to prevent her taking her revenge? Ever since that thought entered my head it has nearly driven me mad."

The same thought had occurred to Betty more than once, but she assured Harriet as earnestly as she could that there was no possible danger, that the woman was conscientious in her way, and prided herself on being better than her neighbors.

"You must put these ideas out of your head," she continued. "Any fixed idea soon grows to huge proportions, and dwarfs all the other and more reasonable possibilities. You sail now in a few weeks. Keep up your courage till then—"

"That's why I want to go to the camp−meeting. I used to go to them regularly every year with Uncle, and they always did me good. I'm right down pious by nature, and I loved to shout and go on and feel as if the Lord was right there: I could 'most see him. Of course I gave up the idea of going to camp−meetings after you made a high−toned lady of me, and I've never sung since you objected that morning; but it's hurt me not to—*it's all there; and if it could come out in camp− meeting along with all the rest that's torturing me, I think I'd feel better. You've always been fine and happy, you don't know the relief it is to holler."*

Betty drew a long breath. "But, Harriet, I thought you did not like negroes. I don't think any white people are at this camp."

"I despise them except when they're full of religion, and then we're all equal. Betty, I must go. Can you think of an excuse to make to Jack? Couldn't I pretend to stay at the hotel all day?"

"There is no reason to lie about it. Nothing would induce him to go to a camp−meeting. But he knows that you are a Methodist, and that you were raised in the thick of that religion. I will row you to the next lake to−morrow morning before he is up, and tell him that I am to return for you. I don't approve of it at all. I think it is a horrid thing for you to do, if you want to know the truth, and there are certain tastes you ought to get rid of, not indulge. But if you must go, you must, I suppose."

XX

She sent a note over to Senator North that evening, explaining why she could not meet him in the morning; but as she rowed Harriet up the lake, she saw him standing on the accustomed spot. He beckoned peremptorily, and she pulled over to the shore, wondering if he had not received her note.

"Will you take me with you?" he asked. "I cannot get a boat, and I should like to row for you, if you will let me."

He boarded the boat, and Betty meekly surrendered the oars. She sat opposite him, Harriet in the bow, and he smiled into her puzzled and disapproving eyes. But he talked of impersonal matters until they had entered the upper lake, and explained to Harriet the whereabouts of the farmhouse whence she might be directed to the camp. Harriet had not parted her lips since she left home. She sprang on shore the moment Senator North beached the boat, and almost ran up the path.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "Did you suppose that I should allow you to row through that lane alone? There is no lonelier spot in America; and with the forest full of negroes—were you mad to think of such a thing?"

"I never thought about it," said Betty, humbly. "I am not very timid."

"I never doubted that you would be heroic in any conditions, but that is not the question. You must not take such risks. I shall return with you tonight—"

"And Harriet!" exclaimed Betty, in sudden alarm. "Perhaps we should not leave her."

"She will be with the crowd. Besides, it is her husband's place to look after her. I am concerned about you only. And I certainly shall not permit you to go to a camp−meeting, nor shall I leave you to take care of her. So put her out of your mind for the present."

And Betty Madison, who had been pleased to regard the world as her football, surrendered herself to the new delight of the heavy hand. He re−entered the long water lane in the cleft of the mountain, and she did not speak for some moments, but his eyes held hers and he knew of what she was thinking.

"I wonder if you always will do what I tell you," he said at length. She recovered herself as soon as he spoke.

"Too much power is not good for any man! Nothing would induce me to assure you that you held my destiny in your hands, even did you!"

His face did not fall. "You are the most spirited woman in America, and nothing becomes you so much as obedience."

"Nevertheless—"

"Nevertheless, you always will do exactly what I tell you."

"Even if you told me to marry another man?"

"Ah! I never shall tell you to do that. On your head be that responsibility." He did not attempt to speak lightly. His face hardened, and his eyes, which could change in spite of their impenetrable quality, let go their fires for a moment.

"Of course, if you wanted to go, I should make no protest. But so long as you love me I shall hold you—should, if we ceased to meet. And whatever you do, don't marry some man suddenly in self−defence. No man ever loved a woman more than I love you, but you can trust me."

"Ah!" she said with her first moment of bitterness, "you *are* strong. And you believe that if you held out your arms to me now, in the depths of this forest, I would spring to them. I might not stay. I believe, I hope I never should see you alone again; but−"

"You are deliberately missing the point," he said gravely. "I am not willing to pay the price of a moment's incomplete happiness. I have lived too long for that. And I should not have ventured even so far on dangerous ground," he added more lightly, "if it were not quite probable that five hundred people are ranging the forest this minute. We are later than we were yesterday, and they are not at their hymns. This evening when we return I shall discuss with you the possible age of the Adirondacks, or tell you one of Cooper's yarns." She leaned toward him, her breath coming so short for a moment that she could not speak. Finally, with what voice she could command she said,—

“Then, as we are safe here and you have broken down the reserve for a moment, let me ask you this: Do you know how much I love you? Do you guess? Or do you think it merely a girl's romantic fancy—”

“No!” he exclaimed. “No! No!” This time she did not cower before the passion in his face. She looked at him steadily, although her eyes were heavy. “Ah!” she said at last. “I am glad you know. It seemed to me a wicked waste of myself that you should not. And if you do—the rest does not matter so much. For the matter of that, life is always making sport of its ultimates. The most perfect dream is the dream that never comes true.”

He did not answer for a moment, but when he did he had recovered himself completely.

“That is true enough,” he said. “We who have lived and thought know that. But there never was a man so strong as to choose the dream when Reality cast off her shackles and beckoned. Imagination we regard as a compensation, not as the supreme gift. The wise never hate it, however, as the failures so often do. For what it gives let us be as thankful as the poet in his garret. If we awake in the morning to find rain when we vividly had anticipated sunshine, it is only the common mind who would regret the compensation of the dream.”

XXI

Jack had almost finished his breakfast when Betty entered the dining− room. He looked beyond her with the surprised and sulky frown of the neglected husband.

“Where on earth is Harriet?” he asked. “Her natural inclination is to lie in bed all day. What induced her—”

“She wanted to go to the camp−meeting,” said Betty, not without apprehension. “You know she always went with her adopted father, who was a Methodist clergyman—”

“Great heaven!” Her apprehension was justified. His face was convulsed with disgust. “My wife at a camp−meeting! And you let her go?”

“Harriet is not sixteen. And when a person has been brought up to a thing, you cannot expect her to change completely in a few months. Poor Harriet lived in a forsaken village where she had no sort of society; I suppose the camp−meeting was her only excitement. And you know how emotionally religious the—the Methodists are—You glare at me so I scalded my throat.”

“I am sorry, and I am afraid I have been rude. But you must—you must know how distasteful it is for me to think of my wife at a camp− meeting. Great heaven!”

“It is even worse than my going over to politics, isn't it? Don't take it so tragically, my dear. The truth is, I suspect, Harriet worries about having deceived Molly and me, and the camp−meeting is probably to the Methodist what the confessional is to the Catholic. Both must ease one's mind a lot.”

“Harriet will have to ease her mind in some other way in the future. And it will be some time before I can forget this.” “Thank heaven I am not married. Are you going after her? Shall you march her home by the ear?”

“I certainly shall not go after her—that is, if she is in no danger. Where is this camp−meeting?”

“Oh, there are five hundred or so of them, and it is near a farmhouse.” It was evident that he had forgotten the colour of the camp. “Seriously, I would let her alone for to−day. That form of hysteria has to wear itself out. I did not like the idea of her going, and told her so, but I saw what it meant to her, and took her. When you get her over to Europe, settle in some old town with a beautiful cathedral and a dozen churches, where the choir boys are ducky little things in scarlet habits and white lace capes, and there are mediaeval religious processions with gorgeous costumes and solemn chants, and the bells ring all day long, and there is a service every five minutes with music, and a blessed relic to kiss in every church. She will be a Catholic in less than no time, and look back upon the camp−meeting with a shudder of aristocratic disgust.”

“I hope so. If you will excuse me I will go out and smoke a cigarette.”

She said to Senator North as they approached the head of the lake that evening, “A tempest is brewing in our matrimonial teapot. He looked ready to divorce her when I told him where she had gone.”

“I hope he won't divorce her when she gets home. Keep them apart if you can. She has developed more than one characteristic of the race to which she is as surely forged as if her fetters were visible. If she has all its religious fanaticism in her, she is quite likely to work up to that point of hysteria where she will proclaim the truth to the world.”

“Ah!” cried Betty, sharply. “Why did I not think of that? What a poor guardian I am! If I had warned her, she never would have gone—but probably she won't, as we have thought of it. The expected so seldom happens.”

“Don't count too much on that when great crises threaten,” he said grimly. “The law of cause and effect does not hide in the realm of the unexpected when intelligent beings go looking for it. To tell you the truth, I have been apprehensive ever since I saw her face this morning. All the intelligence had gone out of it. With her race, religion means the periodical necessity to relapse into barbarism, to act like shouting savages after the year of civilized restraints. I will venture to guess that Harriet has forgotten to−day everything she has learned since she entered your family. Within that sad, calm, high−bred envelope is—I am afraid—a mind which has the taint of the blood that feeds it.”

“I have thought that for a long while. Poor thing, why was she ever born?”

“Because sin has a habit of persisting, and is remorseless in its choice of vehicles. I do not see anything of her.”

They waited almost an hour before she came hurrying down the path. She barely recognized them, but dropped on her seat in the bow and crouched there, sobbing and groaning.

It was a cheerless journey through the forest and down the lake, and the element of the grotesque did nothing to relieve it. Betty, distracted at first, soon realized that upon her lay the responsibility of averting a tragedy, and she ordered her brain to action. She leaned forward finally and whispered to Senator North:

“Row me to my boat−house and I will ask Jack to row you home. He is too courteous to suggest sending a servant if I make a point of his taking you.”

He nodded. She saw the confidence in his eyes, and even in that hour of supreme anxiety her mind leapt forward to the winning of his approval as the ultimate of her struggle to save the happiness of two human beings who were almost at her mercy.

Jack was walking on the terrace. Betty called to him, and he consented with no marked grace to be boatman. He had taken the oars before he noticed that his wife, whom he was not yet ready to forgive, was being hurried off by his cousin.

“Mrs. Emory is very tired and her head aches,” said Senator North. “Miss Madison is anxious to get her into bed. Can't you dine with me to−night? It would give me great pleasure, and men are superfluous, I have observed, when women have headaches.”

And Jack, who was not sorry to punish his wife, accepted the invitation and did not return home till midnight.

XXII

Betty took Harriet to her own room and put her to bed. She had dinner for both sent upstairs, but Harriet would not eat; neither would she speak. She lay in the bed, half on her face, as limp as the newly dead. Occasionally she sighed or groaned. Betty tried several times to rouse her, but she would not respond. Finally she shook her.

“You shall listen,” she said sternly. “As you seem to have left your common−sense up there with those negroes, you are not to leave this room until you have recovered it—until I give you permission. Do you understand?” She had calculated upon striking the slavish chord in the demoralized creature, and her intelligence had acted unerringly. Harriet bent her head humbly, and muttered that she would do what she was told.

When Betty heard Jack return, she went out to meet him, locking the door behind her.

“Harriet is with me for to−night,” she said. “She needs constant care, for she is both excited and worn out; and as you still are angry with her—”

“Oh, I am sorry if she is really ill, and I will do anything I can—”

“Then leave her with me for to−night. You know nothing about taking care of women.”

Jack, who was sleepy and still sulky, thanked her and went off to his room. She returned to Harriet, who finally appeared to sleep.

Betty took the key from the door and put it in her pocket, then lay down on the sofa to sleep while she could: she anticipated a long and difficult day with Harriet. She was awakened suddenly by the noise of a door violently slammed. Immediately, she heard the sound of running feet.

She looked at the bed. Harriet was not there. A draught of cold air struck her, and she saw a curtain flutter. She ran to the window. It was open. She stepped out upon the roof of the veranda, and went rapidly round the corner to Emory's room. One of the windows was open. Betty looked up at the dark forest behind the lonely house and caught her breath. What should she see? But she went on. A candle burned in the room. Harriet sat on a chair in her nightgown, her black hair hanging about her.

“I told him,” she said, in a hollow but even voice. “I was drunk with religion, and I told him. I didn't come to my senses till I looked up —I was on the floor—and saw his face. He has gone away.”

“What did he say?”

“Nothing. Not a word.”

She drew a long sigh. “I'm so tired,” she said. “I reckon I'll go to bed.”

XXIII

For four days they had no word from Jack Emory. Harriet slept late on the first day. When she awoke she was an intelligent being again, and strove for the controlled demeanor which she always had seemed to feel was necessary to her self−respect. But more than once she let Betty see how nervous and terrified she was.

“I am sure he will come back,” she said, with the emphasis of unadmitted doubt. “Sure! He adores me. Of course he would not have married me if he had known, but that is done and cannot be undone. When he realizes that, he will come back, for he loves me. We are bound together and he will return in time.”

Betty, who scarcely left her, gave her what encouragement she could. Men were contradictory beings. Jack had the fanatical pride and prejudices of his race, but he was in love. It was possible that after a few months of loneliness in his old house he would give way to an uncontrollable longing and send for his wife. She had made inquiries at the railroad station, and ascertained that he had taken a ticket for New York. Undoubtedly he had gone on to Washington.

She reproached herself bitterly for having slept and allowed Harriet to escape; but Harriet, to whom she did not hesitate to express herself, shook her head.

“You could not have stayed awake for twenty−four hours, and I should have found a chance sooner or later. The idea came to me up there while I was shouting and nearly crazy with excitement and the excitement of all those half−mad negroes in that wild forest,—the idea came to me that I must tell him, and I believed that it came straight from the Lord. It seemed to me that He was there and told me that was my only hope,—to tell him myself before he found it out from your mother or Miss Trumbull. The idea never left me for a minute; it possessed me. I was so afraid you wouldn't have waited when I found out I was late,—that they would tell him before I got home. But I wanted to tell him alone. When you ordered me not to leave the room, I felt like I wanted to do anything you told me, but when I found you'd gone to sleep, I felt like I couldn't wait another minute. I crawled out of the window and went to him. And perhaps I did right. I can't think it wasn't an inspiration to confess and be forgiven before he found out for himself.”

Betty was in the living−room with Senator North when a letter from Jack Emory was brought to her. With it, also bearing the Washington postmark, was another, directed in an unfamiliar and illiterate hand. Betty, cold with apprehension, tore open Emory's letter. It read:—

Dear Betty,—You know, of course, that my wife confessed to me the terrible fact that she has negro blood in her veins. My one impulse when she told me was to get back to my home like a beaten dog to its kennel. I did little thinking on the train; whether I talked to people or whether I was too stupefied to think, I cannot tell you. But here I have done thinking enough. At first I hated, I loathed, I abhorred her. I resolved merely never to see her again, to ask you to send her to Europe as quickly as possible, to threaten her with exposure and arrest if she ever returned. But, Betty, although I have not yet forgiven her, although the thought of her awful hidden birthmark still fills me with horror and disgust, I know the weakness of man. The marriage is void according to the laws of Virginia, and I know that if I returned to her she would insist upon remarriage in a Northern State—and I might succumb. And rather than do that, rather than dishonour my blood, rather than do that monstrous wrong, not only to my family but to the South that has my heart's allegiance—as passionate an allegiance as if I had fought and bled on her battlefields—I am going to kill myself.

Do not for a moment imagine, Betty, that I hold you to account. I can guess why you did not warn me in the beginning, why you did not tell me when it was too late. Would that I had gone on to the end faithful to my ideal of you! My lonely years in this old house were brightened and made endurable with the mere thought of you. But man was not made to live on shadows, and I loved again, so deeply that I dare not trust myself to live.

I send her only one message—she must drop my name. She has no legal title to it according to the laws of Virginia; the marriage would be declared void were it known that she had black blood in her. I would spare her shame and exposure, but she shall not bear my name, and it is my dying request that you use any means to make her drop it. Good− bye.

JACK EMORY.

Betty thrust the letter into Senator North's hand. “Read it!” she said. “Read it! Oh, do you suppose he has—”

Her glance fell on the other letter and she opened it with heavy fingers. It read:—

Mis Betty,—Marse Jack done shot himself. He tole me not to telegraf. Yours truly,

JIM.

Betty stood staring at Senator North as he read Jack's letter. When he had finished it, she handed him the other. He read it, then took her cold hands in his.

“You must tell her,” he said. “It is a terrible trial for you, but you must do it.”

“Ah!” she cried sharply. “I believe you are thinking of me only, not of that poor girl.”

“My dear,” he said, “that poor creature was doomed the moment she entered the world. No amount of sympathy, no amount of help that you or I could give her would alter her fate one jot. For all the women of that accursed cross of black and white there is absolutely no hope—so long as they live in this country, at all events. They almost invariably have intelligence. If they marry negroes, they are humiliated. If they pin their faith to the white man, they become outcasts among the respectable Blacks by their own act, as the act of others has made them outcasts among the Whites, Their one compensation is the inordinate conceit which most of them possess. Do not think I am heartless. I have thought long and deeply on the subject. But no legislation can reach them, and the American character will have to be born again before there is any change in the social law. It is one of those terrible facts of life that rise isolated above the so−called problems. If Harriet lives through this, she will fall upon other miseries incidental to her breed, as sure as there is life about us, for she has the seeds of many crops within her. So it is true that all my concern is for you. In a way I helped to bring this on you; but you did what was right, and I have no regrets. And you must think of me as always beside you, not only ready to help you, but thinking of you constantly.”

She forgot Harriet for the moment. “Oh, I do,” she said, “I do! I wonder what strength I would have had through this if you had not been behind me.”

“You are capable of a great deal, but no woman is strong enough to stand alone long. Send for Harriet to come here. I don't wish you to be alone with her when she hears this news.”

Betty rang the bell, and sent a servant for Harriet. She put Emory's letter in her pocket.

“I shall not give her that terrible message of his until she quite has got over the shock of his death,” she said. “Let her be his widow for a little while. Then she can go to Europe and resume her own name. She soon will be forgotten here.”

Harriet came in a few moments. She barely had sat down since she had risen after a restless night. But she had refused to talk even to Betty. As she entered the room and was greeted by one of those silences with which the mind tells its worst news, she fell back against the door, her hands clutching at her gown. Betty handed her the servant's letter.

She took it with twitching fingers, and read it as if it had been a letter of many pages. Then she extended her rigid arms until she looked like a cross.

“Oh!” she articulated. “Oh! Oh!”

But in a moment she laughed. “I don't feel surprised, somehow,” she said sullenly. “I suppose I knew all along he'd do it. Every day that I live I'll curse your unjust and murderous race while other people are saying their prayers. May the black race overrun the world and taint every vein of blood upon it. For me, I accept my destiny. I'm a pariah, an outcast. I'll live to do evil, to square accounts with the race that has made me what I am. I'll go back to that camp, and leave it with whatever negro will have me, and when I'm so degraded I don't care for anything, I'll go out and ruin every white man I can. I'll keep the money you gave me, so that I'll be able to do more harm—”

“You can go,” said Betty, “but not yet. You shall go with me first and bury your husband. If you attempt to escape until I give you permission, I shall have you locked up. I shall take two menservants with us. Now come upstairs with me and pack your portmanteau.”

She slipped her hand into Senator North's. “Good−bye,” she said hurriedly. “I shall return Friday night. Please come over Saturday morning.”

Harriet preceded Betty upstairs, and obeyed her orders sullenly. Betty locked her in her room, and went to break the news to her mother. Mrs. Madison received it without excitement, remarking among her tears that it was one of the denouements she had imagined, and that on the whole it was the best thing he could have done. She

consented to go with her maid to the hotel till Friday, and the party left for Washington that evening.

XXIV

They returned late on Friday night. As Betty had anticipated, Harriet's exhausted body had not harboured a violent spirit for long. When they arrived in New York, she bought herself a crape veil reaching to her toes, and when she entered the dilapidated old house where her husband lay dead, she began to weep heavily. Her tears scarcely ceased to flow until she had started on her way to the mountains again, and, hot as it was, she never raised her veil during the nine hours' train journey from New York to the lake, except to eat the food that Betty forced upon her.

Mrs. Madison had returned, and Betty, after telling her those details of the funeral which elderly people always wish to know, went to her room, for she was tired and longed for sleep. But Harriet entered almost immediately and sat down. She barely had spoken since Monday; but it was evident that she was ready to talk at last, and Betty stifled a yawn and sat upon the edge of her bed. Harriet was a delicate subject and must be treated with vigilant consideration, except at those times where an almost brutal firmness was necessary. She looked sad and haggard, but very beautiful, and Betty reflected that with her voice she might begin life over again, and in a public career forget her brief attempt at happiness. If she failed, it would be because there was so little grip in her; Nature had been lavish only with the more brilliant endowments.

“Betty,” she began, “I want to tell you that I'm sorry I said those dreadful words when I learned he was dead. But suspense and the doubt that had begun to work had nearly driven me crazy. I don't mind saying, though, that I wish I had kept on meaning them, that I could do what I said I'd do, for I meant them then—I reckon I did! But I haven't any backbone, my will is a poor miserable weak thing that takes a spurt and then fizzles out. And I'd rather be good than bad. I reckon that has something to do with it. I'd have gone to the bad, I suppose, if you hadn't taken hold of me; I'd have just drifted that way, although I liked teaching Sunday−school, and I liked to feel I was good and respectable and could look down on people that were no better than they should be. And now that I've been living with such respectable and high−toned people as you all are, I don't think I could stand niggers and poor white trash again—”

“I am sure you will be good,” interrupted Betty, encouragingly. “And you owe him respect. Don't forget that, and make allowances for him.”

“Ah, yes!” “Her face convulsed, but she calmed herself and went on. “You will never know how I loved him. I was proud enough of the name, but I worshipped him; and he killed himself to get rid of me! Oh, yes, I'll make allowances, for I killed him as surely as if I had pulled that trigger—” “Put the heavier blame on those that went before you,” said Betty, with intent to soothe. “You did wrong in deceiving him, but helpless women should be forgiven much that they do, in their desperate battle with Circumstance. Think of it as a warning, but not as a crime.” Don't let *anything* make you morbid. Life is full of pleasure. Go and look for it, and put the past behind you.”

Harriet shook her head. “I am not you,” she said. “I am *I.* And I feel as if there was a heavy hand on my neck pressing me down. If I should live to be a toothless old woman, I should never feel that I had any right to be happy again. Heaven knows what I might be tempted to do, but I should laugh at myself for a fool, all the same.”

The colour rushed over her face, but she continued steadily: “There's something else I must tell you before I can sleep to−night. I've read his letter to you. I knew he'd written it, and down there while you were asleep I took it out of your pocket and read it. It was I who suggested going over to Virginia, for I was afraid some newspaper would get hold of it if we were married in Washington, where he was so well known. I didn't know there was such a law in Virginia. So, you see, the Lord was on his side a little. I don't bear his name. I'm as much of an outcast as the vengeance of a wronged man could wish—”

“I am sure he thought of you kindly at the last, and I never shall think of you in that—that other way. You must go to Europe and begin life over again.”

Harriet rose and kissed Betty affectionately. “Good−night,” she said. “You are just worn out, and I have kept you up. But I felt I wanted to tell you—and that no matter how ungrateful I sometimes appear I always love you; and I'd rather be you than any one in the world, because you're so unlike myself.”

Betty went with her to the door. “Go to sleep,” she said. “Don't lie awake and think.”
“Oh, I will sleep,” she said. “Don't worry about that.”

XXV

Betty slept late on the following morning, but arose as soon as she awoke and dressed herself hurriedly. Senator North was an early visitor. Doubtless he was waiting for her on the veranda.

She ran downstairs, feeling that she could hum a tune. The morning was radiant, and for the last five days it had seemed to her that the atmosphere was as black as Harriet's veil. She wanted the fresh air and the sunshine, the lake and the forest again. She wanted to talk for long hours with the one man who she was sure could never do a weak or cowardly act. She wanted to feel that her heavy responsibilities were pushed out of sight, and that she could live her own life for a little.

She almost had reached the front door when a man sprang up the steps and through it, closing it behind him. It was John, the butler, and his face was white.

“What is it?” she managed to ask him. “What on earth has happened now?” “It's Miss Walker, Miss. They found her three hours ago—on the lake. The coroner's been here. They're bringing her in. I told them to take her in the side door. I hoped we'd get her to her room before you come down. I'll attend to everything, Miss.”

Betty heard the slow tramp of feet on the side veranda. It was the most horrid sound she ever had heard, and she wondered if she should cease to hear it as long as she lived. She went into the living−room and covered her face with her hands. She had not cried for Jack Emory, but she cried passionately now. She felt utterly miserable, and crushed with a sense of failure; as if all the wretchedness and tragedy of the past fortnight were her own making. Two lives had almost been given into her keeping, and in spite of her daring and will the unseen forces had conquered. And then she wondered if the water had been very cold, and shivered and drew herself together. And it must have been horribly dark. Harriet was afraid of the dark, and always had burned a taper at night.

She heard Senator North come up the front steps and knock. As no one responded, he opened the door and came into the living−room.

“I have just heard that she has drowned herself,” he said; and if there was a note of relief in his voice, Betty did not hear it. She ran to him and threw herself into his arms and clung to him.

“You said you would,” she sobbed. “And I never shall be in greater grief than this. I feel as if it were my entire fault, as if I were a terrible failure, as if I had let two lives slip through my hands. Oh, poor poor Harriet! Why are some women ever born? What terrible purpose was she made to live twenty−four wretched years for? You wanted me to become serious. I feel as if I never could smile again.”

He held her closely, and in that strong warm embrace she was comforted long before she would admit; but he soothed her as if she were a child, and he did not kiss her.

Part III. The Political Sea Turns Red

I

Betty Madison arrived in Washington two days before Christmas, with the sensation of having lived through several life−times since Lady Mary's car had left the Pennsylvania station on the fourteenth of March; she half expected to see several new public buildings, and she found herself wondering if her old friends were much changed.

People capable of the deepest and most enduring impressions often receive these impressions upon apparently shallow waters. They feel the blow, but it skims the surface at the moment, to choose its place and sink slowly, surely, into the thinking brain.

Betty's immediate attitude toward the tragic fact of Harriet's death was almost spectacular. She felt herself the central figure in a thrilling and awful drama, its horror stifling for a moment the hope that the man whose footsteps followed closely upon that tramping of heavy feet would fulfil his promise and take her in his arms. And when he did her sense of personal responsibility left her, as well as her clearer comprehension of what had happened to bring about this climax so long and so ardently desired.

But she had not seen Senator North since the day following the funeral. Mrs. Madison had announced with emphasis that she had had as much as she could stand and would not remain another day in the Adirondacks; she wanted Narragansett and the light and agreeable society of many Southern friends who did not have frequent tragedies in their families. Betty telegraphed for rooms at one of the large hotels at the Pier, and thereafter had the satisfaction of seeing her mother gossip contentedly for hours with other ladies of lineage and ante−bellum reminiscences, or sit with even deeper contentment for intermediate hours upon the veranda of the Casino. When she herself was bored beyond endurance, she crossed the bay and lunched or dined in Newport, where she had many friends; and she spent much time on horseback. When the season was over, they paid a round of visits to country houses, and finished with the few weeks in New York necessary for the replenishment of Miss Madison's wardrobe. She had hoped to reach Washington for the opening of Congress, but her mother had been ill, prolonging the last visit a fortnight, and gowns must be consulted upon, fitted and altered did the world itself stand still. And this was the one period of mental rest that Betty had experienced since her parting from Senator North.

She had been much with people during these five months, seeking and finding little solitude, and few had found any change in her beyond a deeper shade of indifference and more infrequent flashes of humour. She permitted men to amuse her if she did not amuse them, to all out− door sports she was faithful, and she read the new books and talked intelligently of the fashions. When the conversation swung with the precision of a pendulum from clothes and love to war with Spain, her mind leapt at once to action, and she argued every advocate of war into a state of fury. She had responded heavily to the President's appeal in behalf of the reconcentrados, but her mind was no longer divided. The failure of the belligerency resolutions to reach the attention of the House during the Extra Session of Congress had rekindled the war fever in the country; and the constant chatter about the suffering Cuban and the duty of the United States, the black iniquity of the Speaker and the timidity of the President, were wearying to the more evenly balanced members of the community. “You say that we need a war,” said Betty contemptuously one day, “that it will shake us up and do us good. If we had fallen as low as that, no war could lift us, certainly not the act of bullying a small country, of rushing into a war with the absolute certainty of success. But we need no war. American manhood is where it always has been and always will be until we reach that pitch of universal luxury and sloth and vice which extinguished Rome. Those commercial and financial pursuits should make a man less a man is the very acme of absurdity. If our men were drawn into a righteous war to−morrow or a hundred years hence, they would fight to the glory of their country and their own honour. But if they swagger out to whip a decrepit and wheezy old man, when the excitement is over they will wish that the whole episode could be buried in oblivion. And I would be willing to wager anything you like that if this war does come off, so false is its sentiment that it will not inspire one great patriotic poem, nor even one of merit, and that the only thing you will accomplish will be to drag Cuba from the relaxing clutches of one tyrant and fling her to a horde of politicians and greedy capitalists.”

But, except when politics possessed it, her brain seldom ceased, no matter how crowded her environment, from pondering on the events of the summer, and pondering, it sobered and grew older. She had engaged in a conflict with the Unseen Forces of life and been conquered. She had been obliged to stand by and see these forces work their will upon a helpless being, who carried in solution the vices of civilizations and men persisting to their logical climax, almost demanding aloud the sacrifice of the victim to death that this portion of themselves might be buried with her. Despite her intelligence, nothing else could have given her so clear a realization of the eternal persistence of all acts, of the sequential symmetrical links they forge in the great chain of Circumstance. It was this that made her hope more eager that the United States would be guided by its statesmen and not by hysteria, and it was this that made her think deeply and constantly upon her future relation with Senator North.

The danger was as great as ever. Her brain had sobered, but her heart had not. Separation and the absence of all communication—they had agreed not to correspond—had strengthened and intensified a love that had been half quiescent so long as its superficial wants were gratified. Troubled times were coming when he would need her, would seek her whenever he could, and yet when their meetings must be short and unsatisfactory. When hours are no longer possible, minutes become precious, and the more precious the more dangerous. If she were older, if tragedy and thought had sobered and matured her character, if she were deprived of the protection of the lighter moods of her mind, would not the danger be greater still? The childish remnant upon which she had instinctively relied had gone out of her, she had a deeper and grimmer knowledge of what life would be without the man who had conquered her through her highest ideals and most imperious needs; and of what it would be with him.

She had no intention of making a problem out of the matter, constantly as her mind dwelt upon the future. Senator North had told her once that problems fled when the time for action began. She supposed that one of two things would happen after her return to Washington: great events would absorb his mind and leave him with neither the desire nor the time for more than an occasional friendly hour with her; or after a conscientious attempt to take up their relationship on the old lines and give each other the companionship both needed, all intercourse would abruptly cease.

II

“I am going to have my *salon*, or at all events the beginning of it, at once,” said Betty to Sally Carter on the afternoon of her arrival, “and I want you to help me.”

“I am ready for any change,” said Miss Carter. Her appearance was unaltered, and she had spoken of Emory's death without emotion. Whether she had put the past behind her with the philosophy of her nature, or whether his marriage with a woman for whose breed she had a bitter and fastidious contempt had killed her love before his death, Betty could only guess. She made no attempt to learn the truth. Sally's inner life was her own; that her outer was unchanged was enough for her friends.

“I am going to give a dinner to thirty people on the sixth of January. Here is the list. You will see that every man is in official life. There are eight Senators, five members of the House, the British Ambassador, and the Librarian of Congress. Some of them know my desire for a *salon* and are ready to help me. I shall talk about it quite freely. In these days you must come out plainly and say what you want. If you wait to be too subtle, the world runs by you. I am determined to have a *salon*, and a famous one at that. This is an ambitious list, but half−way methods don't appeal to me.”

“Nobody ever accused you of an affinity for the second best, my dear; but you may thank your three stars of luck for providing you with the fortune and position to achieve your ambitions: beauty and brains alone wouldn't do it. Senator North,” she continued from the list in her hand: “Mrs. North is wonderfully improved, by the way; has not been so well in twenty years. Senator Burleigh: he is out flat−footed against free silver since the failure of the bi−metallic envoys, and his State is furious. Senator Shattuc is for it, so they probably don't speak. Senator Ward might be induced to fall in love with Lady Mary and turn his eloquence on the Senate in behalf of a marriage between Uncle Sam and Britannia. There is no knowing what your *salon* may accomplish, and that would be a sight for the gods. Senator Maxwell will inveigh in twelve languages against recognizing the belligerency of the Cubans. Senator French will supply the distinguished literary element. Senator March represents the conservative Democrat who is too good for the present depraved condition of his State. If you want to immortalize yourself, invent a political broom. Senator Eustis: he thinks the only fault with the Senate is that it is too good−natured and does not say No often enough. Who are the Representatives? The only Speaker, the immortal Chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means—don't place me near him, for I've just paid a hideous bill at the Custom House and I'd scratch his eyes out. Mr. Montgomery: he and Lady Mary are getting almost devoted. Trust a clever woman to pinch the memory of any other woman to death. The redoubtable Mr. Legrand, also of Maine, upon whom the shafts of an embittered minority seem to fall so harmlessly; and Mr. Armstrong—who is he? I thought I knew as much about politics as you, by this time, but I don't recall his name.”

“I met him at Narragansett, and had several talks with him. He is a Bryanite, but very gentlemanly, and his convictions were so strong and so unquestionably genuine that he interested me. I want the best of all parties. We can't sit up and agree with each other.”

“Don't let that worry you, darling. Mr. North has been contradicting everybody in the Senate for twenty years. Your devoted Burleigh quarrels with everybody but yourself. Mr. Maxwell snubs everybody who presumes to disagree with him, and French is so superior that I long for some naughty little boys to give him a coat of pink paint. Your *salon* will probably fight like cats. If the war cloud gets any bigger, your mother will go to bed early on *salon* nights and send for a policeman. I look forward to it with an almost painful joy. I want to go in to dinner with Mr. March, by the way. He is the noblest−looking man in Congress—looks like what the statues of the founders of the Republic would look like if they were decently done. I'll paint the menu cards for you, and I'll wear a new gown I've just paid ninety−three dollars duty on—I certainly shall tear out the eyes of 'the honourable gentleman from Maine.'”

III

When Sally had gone, after an hour of consultation on the various phases of the dinner, Betty sat for some moments striving to call up something from the depths of her brain, something that had smitten it disagreeably as it fell, but sunk too quickly, under a torrent of words, to be analyzed at the moment. It had made an extremely unpleasant impression;—painful perhaps would be a better word.

In the course of ten minutes she found the sentence which had made the impression: “Mrs. North is wonderfully improved, by the way; has not been so well in twenty years.”

The words seemed to hang themselves up in a row in her mind; they turned scarlet and rattled loudly. Betty made no attempt to veil her mental vision; she stared hard at the words and at the impression they had produced. Mrs. North was out of danger, and the fact was a bitter disappointment to her. In spite of the resolute expulsion of the very shadow of Mrs. North from her thought, her sub−consciousness had conceived and brought forth and nurtured hope. What had made her content to drift, what had made her look with an almost philosophical eye on the future, was the unadmitted certainty that in the natural course of events a woman with a shattered constitution must go her way and leave her husband free. Had he thought of this? He must have, she concluded. She was beginning to look facts squarely in the face; it was an old habit with him, older than herself. There never was a more practical brain.

For the first time in her life she almost hated herself. She had done and felt many things which she sincerely regretted, but this seemed incomparably the worst. And despite her protest, her bitter self− contempt, the sting of disappointment remained; she could not extract it.

She went out and walked several miles, as she always did when nervous and troubled. She came to the conclusion that she was glad to have heard this news to−day. She and Senator North were to meet in the evening for the first time in five months. She had looked forward to this meeting with such a mingling of delight and terror that several times she had been on the point of sending him word not to come. But the impression Sally's information had made had hardened her. She was so disappointed in herself, so humiliated to find that a mortal may fancy himself treading the upper altitudes, only to discover that the baser forces in the brain are working independently of the will, that she felt in anything but a melting mood. She knew that this mood would pass; she had watched the workings of the brain, its abrupt transitions and its reactions, too long to hope that she suddenly had acquired great and enduring strength. The future had not expelled one jot of its dangers, perhaps had supplemented them, but for the hour she not only was safe from herself, but the necessity to turn him from her door had receded one step.

She had intended to receive him in the large and formal environment of the parlor, but in her present mood the boudoir was safe, and she was glad not to disappoint him; she knew that he loved the room. And if her brain had sobered, her femininity would endure unaltered for ever. She wore a charming new gown of white crepe de chine flowing over a blue petticoat, and a twist of blue in her hair. She had written to him from New York when to call, and he had sent a large box of lilies of the valley to greet her. She had arranged them in a bowl, and wore only a spray at her throat. Women with beautiful figures seldom care for the erratic lines and curves of the floral decoration. She heard him coming down the corridor and caught her breath, but that was all. She did not tremble nor change colour.

When he came in, he took both her hands and looked at her steadily for a moment. They made no attempt at formal greeting, and there was no need of subterfuge of any sort between them. No two mortals ever understood each other better.

“I see the change in you,” he said. “I expected it. You have given me a great deal, and your last survival of childhood was not the least. The serious element has developed itself, and you look the embodiment of an Ideal.” He dropped her hands and walked to the end of the room. When he returned and threw himself into a chair, she knew that his face had changed, then been ordered under control.

“What shall I talk to you about?” he asked with an almost nervous laugh. “Politics? Comparatively little happened in the Senate before the holidays. The President's message was of peculiar interest to me, inasmuch as it

indicated that he is approaching Spain in the right way and will succeed in both relieving the Cubans and averting war if the fire−eaters will let him alone. The Cubans probably will not listen to the offer of autonomy, for it comes several years too late and their confidence in Spain has gone forever; but I am hoping that while this country is waiting to see the result, it will come to its senses. The pressure upon us has been intolerable. Both Houses have been flooded with petitions and memorials by the thousands: from Legislatures, Chambers of Commerce, Societies, Churches, from associations of every sort, and from perhaps a million citizens. The Capitol looks like a paper factory. If autonomy fails soon enough, or if some new chapter of horrors can be concocted by the Yellow Press, or if the unforeseen happens, war will come. The average Congressman and even Senator does not resist the determined pressure of his constituents, and to do them justice they have talked themselves into believing that they are as excited as the idle minds at home who are feeling dramatic and calling it sympathy. And the average mind hates to be on the unpopular side.

"Forgive me if I am bitter," he said, standing up suddenly and looking down on her with a smile, "but a good many of us are, just now. We can't help it. A great and just war would be met unflinchingly and with all pride; but the prospect of this hysterical row between a bull pup and a senile terrier fills us with impatience and disgust. The President must feel that he is expiating all the sins of the human race. The only man in the United States to be envied, so far, is the Speaker of the House; it is almost a satisfaction to think that he looks like the monument he is; and for the time being his importance overshadows the President's. If the President can hold on, however, he will negotiate Spain out of this hemisphere in less than a year."

"I knew you were worried about it," she said softly. "I felt that so keenly that I never lost an opportunity to war against the war. I made enemies right and left, and acquired a reputation for heartlessness."

"Our minds are much alike," he said, staring down at her and dropping his voice for a moment. "You may have done it for me, but you are as sincere as I am. I have stimulated your mind, that is all. How much you can do here in Washington—among the men who legislate—I cannot say. A woman who takes a high and definite stand is always an influence for good; but the women who influence men's votes are not of your type. They are women who sacrifice anything to gain their ends, or those who have educated themselves to play upon the vanity and other petty qualities of men; every peg in their brain is hung with a political trick. The only men who attract you are too strong to vote under the influence of any woman, even if they loved her. If Shattuc were not as obstinate as a mule," he added more lightly, "I should ask you to convert him to the principles of sound currency. That is another ugly cloud ahead: there is going to be an attempt made to pass through both Houses a concurrent resolution advocating the free and unlimited coinage of silver and to pay the public debt with it. As far as our honour goes, the passing of such a resolution would affect us as deeply as if it were to become a law. We should stand before the world as willing and ready to violate the national honour, ignore our pledges and recklessly impair our credit. I don't think the resolution will pass the House, the Republican majority is too strong there, but I am afraid it will pass the Senate; although we are in the majority, a good many Republicans are Western men and Silverites. A certain number on both sides of the Chamber are voting merely to please their constituents, feeling reasonably sure that the resolution will fail in the House. They appear to care little for the honour of the Senate; they certainly have not the backbone to defy their constituents if they do care for it. To the outside world the Senate is a unit; every resolution that passes it might come out of one gigantic skull at peace with itself. This one will be passed by a small majority who have not imagination enough to read the works of future historians, nor even to grasp public opinion as unexpressed by their constituents.

"There is one fact that the second−rate politician never grasps," he said, walking impatiently up and down; Betty had never seen him so restless. "That is, that the true American respects convictions; no matter how many fads he may conceive nor how loud he may clamour for their indulgence, when his mind begins to balance methodically again, he respects the man who told him he was wrong and imperilled his own re−election rather than vote against his convictions. Many a Senator has lost re−election through yielding to pressure, for elections do not always occur at the height of a popular agitation; and when men have had time to cool off and think, they despise and distrust the waverer. If you will read the biographies in the Congressional Directory, you will see that with a very few exceptions the New Englanders are the only men who come back here—to both Houses—term after term. They practically are here for life; and the reason is that they belong to the same hard−headed, clear−thinking, unyielding, and puritanically upright race as the men who elect them to office. They have their faults, but they represent the iron backbone of this country, and in spite of fads and aberrations, and gales in

general on the political sea, they will remain the prevailing influence. If I speak seldom in the Senate, I certainly make a good many speeches to you. But I want you to understand all I can teach you and to do what you can."

"Yes," she said, rising abruptly, "I want an object in life, a vital interest. I need it! A year ago I took up politics out of curiosity and ennui; to−day they represent a safeguard as well as a necessity. I cannot write books nor paint pictures; charities bore me and I never shall marry. My heart must go to the wall, and my brain is very active. The more one studies and observes politics the more absorbing they become. But that is only a part of it. I want to be of some use to the country, to accomplish something for the public good; and it will be a form of happiness to think that I am working with you—for I certainly agree with you in all things, whatever the cause. When the time comes that we meet in public only, I can have that much happiness at least; and I always shall know where I can help you—"

"The mere fact that you are alive is help enough—and torment enough. I shall go now. We have gotten through this first meeting better than I had hoped."

They both laughed a little as they shook hands, for politics had cleared the air.

IV

He came in again on Sunday, but Burleigh and other men were there; and as the Senate had adjourned until the fifth, there was no excuse for him to call at the late hour when she was sure to be alone; so he dropped in twice to luncheon, and they went for a long walk in Rock Creek Park afterward. On one of these occasions Sally Carter joined them; and on the other, although but for the occasional passer−by they were alone for two hours in the wild beauty of rocky gorges and winter woods, they talked of war and Spain. He left her at the door.

On Thursday night she was to have her dinner, and in spite of her stormy inner life she felt a pleasurable nervousness as the hour approached; for on its results depended the colour of her future. With love or without it she had to live on, and if she could see the way to serve her country, to preserve some of its higher ideals as well as to win a distinguished position, she had no doubt that in time she should find resignation.

All her invitations but one had been accepted: the British Ambassador was attending a diplomatic dinner, but would come in later. Betty was not altogether regretful, for the question of precedence, with all her personages, was sufficiently complicated. The Speaker ranked the Senators, but there were eight Senators to be disposed of with tact; they might overlook a mistake, but their wives or daughters would not.

She had spared no pains to honour her guests. She still scorned the plutocratic multiplication of flowers until they seemed to rattle like the dollars they stood for, but the table looked very beautiful, and the silver and china and crystal had endured through several generations. Some of it had been used in the White House in the days when it was an honour to have a President in one's family. Her father's wine−cellar had been celebrated, and she had employed connoisseurs in its replenishment ever since the duties of entertaining had devolved upon her. She also had her own *chef,* and knew with what satisfaction he filled the culinary brain−cells of the patient diner out in Washington. All the lower house was softly lit with candles; except her boudoir, which was dark and locked.

She wore a gown of apple−green satin which looked simple and was not. Mrs. Madison was like an exquisite miniature, in satin of a pinkish gray hue, trimmed with much Alencon, a collar of diamonds, and a pink spray in her soft white hair. Her blue eyes were very bright, and there was a pink colour in her cheeks, but she looked better than she felt. She was, indeed, hot and cold by turns, and she held herself with a majesty of mien which only a tiny woman can accomplish.

Sally Carter was the first to arrive, and looked remarkably well in her black velvet of Custom House indignities. The Montgomerys followed, and Lady Mary wore the azure and white in which she appeared harmless and undiplomatic. No one was more than ten minutes late, and at eight o'clock the party was seated about the great round table in the dining−room.

Senator North sat on Betty's right, Senator Ward on her left. Next to that astute diplomatist was the lady in azure and white, whom he admired profoundly and understood thoroughly. She never knew the latter half of his attitude, however. He was a gallant American, and delighted to indulge a pretty woman in her fads and ambitions. Mrs. Madison achieved resignation between the Speaker of the House and Senator Maxwell, and Sally Carter was paired with Senator March.

Betty had meditated several hours over the placing of her guests, and had invited as many pretty and charming women as the matrimonial entanglements of her statesmen would permit. Fortunately it was early in the year, and a number of wives had tarried behind their husbands. The family portraits on the dark old walls had not looked down upon so brilliant a gathering for half a century, and Betty's eyes sparkled and she lifted her head, her nostrils dilating. The light in her inner life burned low, and her brain was luminous with the excitement of the hour. And as he was beside her, there really was no cause for repining.

At once the talk was all of war. Washington, like the rest of the country, did not rise to its highest pitch of excitement until after the destruction of the *Maine*, but no other subject could hold its interest for long. In ordinary conditions politics are barely mentioned when the most political city in the world is in evening dress, but war is a microbe.

“I am for it,” announced Lady Mary, “if only to give you a chance to find out whom your friends are.”

“There is nothing in the history of human nature or of nations to disprove that our friends of to−day may be

our enemies of to−morrow," observed Senator North.

"I believe you hate England."

"On the contrary, I am probably the best friend she has in the Senate. My mission is to forestall the hate which leads so many ardent but ill−mated couples into the divorce courts."

"Well, you will see," said Lady Mary, mysteriously.

"I do not doubt it," said Senator North, smiling. "And we shall be grateful. If the circumstances ever are reversed, we shall do as much for her."

"How much?"

"That will depend upon the quality of statesmanship in both Houses."

"I wish you would explain what you mean by that." Lady Mary's wide voice was too well trained to sharpen. Her cold blue eyes wore the dreamy expression of their most active moments.

"I wish I knew whether the statesmen of the future were to be Populists or Republicans."

"Well, whatever you mean you have no sentiment."

"I have no sentimentalism."

Lady Mary shrugged her shoulders and turned to Senator Ward. She knew better than to talk politics to him before dinner was two thirds over, but she bent her pretty head to him, and gave him her distinguished attentions while he re−invigorated his weary brain. He smiled encouragingly.

"The statesmen of the future will be Populists, Senator," announced Betty's last recruit, a man with a keen sharply cut face and a slightly nasal though not displeasing voice. He was forty and looked thirty.

"The Populist will have called himself so many things by that time that 'statesman' will do as well as any other," growled the Speaker. "'The Statesmen's Party' would sound well, and would be worthy of the noble pretensions of your leader."

"Well, they are noble," said Armstrong tartly, but glad of the opportunity to talk back to the personage who treated him in the House as a Czar treats a minion. "We are the only party that is ready to cling to the Constitution as if it were the rock of ages."

"Well, you've clung so hard you've turned it upside down, and the new inventions and patent improvements you've stuccoed it with will do for the 'Statesmen's Party,' but not for the United States—Madam?"

Mrs. Madison had touched his arm timidly, and asked him if he liked terrapin. Her colour was deeper, but she exerted herself to keep the attention of this huge personality whom a poor worm might be tempted to assassinate.

Senator Burleigh's voice rose above the chatter. "Who would be a Western Senator?" he said plaintively. "My colleague and I received a document today, signed by two thousand of our constituents, the entire population of an obscure but determined town, in which we were ordered to acknowledge the belligerency of the Cubans at once or expect to be tarred and feathered upon our return. The climate of my State is excellent for consumption, but bad for nerves. Doubtless most of these men come of good New England stock, whose relatives 'back East' would never think of doing such a thing; but the intoxicating climate they have been inhaling for half a generation, to say nothing of the raw conditions, makes them want to fight creation."

Senator Maxwell, who had more of the restlessness of youth than the repose of age, threw back his silver head and gave his little irritated laugh. "That is it," he said. "It is the lust of blood that possesses the United States. They don't know it. They call it sympathy; but their blood is aching for a fight, so that they can read the exciting horrors of it in the newspapers. You might as well reason with mad dogs."

"I shall not attempt to reason with my kennel," said Burleigh. "In the present congested state of the mails this particular memorial has gone astray."

"The trials of a Senator!" cried Sally Carter. "Petitions and lobbyists, election clouds, fractious and dishonest legislatures, unprincipled bosses and the country gone mad!"

"I can give you a list as long as my arm," said Senator March, grimly; "and you may believe it or not, but it is all I can do to walk in my Committee−room and I haven't a chair to sit on. I live under a snow− storm of petitions, memorials, and resolutions. I expect to see them come flying through the window, and I dream of nothing else."

Betty had taken part in the general conversation until the last few moments, but as it concentrated on the subject of Cuban autonomy and her guests ceased to appeal to her, she fell into conversation with Senator North, who she knew would be willing to dispense with politics for a few moments.

"You have no idea how I miss Jack Emory," she said. "He half lived with us, you know, and I am always

expecting to meet him in the hall. When I was writing my invitations I caught myself beginning a note, 'Dear Jack.' It is uncanny."

"It is the only revenge the dead have; and doubtless it is this vivid after life of theirs in memory that is at the root of the belief in ghosts. You say that you are going to open your *salon* every year with a dinner to the original members. It will be interesting to watch the two faces in some of the seats—if you attempt to fill the vacant chairs."

Betty pressed her handkerchief against her lips, for she knew they had turned white. She was but twenty−eight, and if her *salon* was the success it promised to be she would sit at the head of this table for twenty−eight years to come, and then have compassed fewer years than the man beside her. She had refused resolutely to permit her thought to dwell on the tragic difference in their ages, a difference that had no meaning now, but would symbolize death and desolation hereafter; but her mind had moments of abrupt insight that no Will could conquer, and not long since she had gasped and covered her face with her hands.

"That was brutal of me," he said hurriedly. "Your dinner is the brilliant success that it deserves to be, and you should be permitted to be entirely happy. There is not a bored face, and if they are all jabbering about the everlasting subject, so much the better for you. It gives your *salon* its political character at once; you would have had a hard time getting them to begin on bimetallism and the census— perish the thought! Ward is now making Lady Mary think that she is a greater diplomatist than himself. Maxwell and the Speaker are wrangling across your mother, who looks alarmed; Burleigh is flirting desperately with Miss Alice Maxwell, who is purring upon his senatorial vanity; your Populist is breaking out into the turgid rhetoric of Mr. Bryan; French has persuaded that charming English girl that he is the most literary man in America, and Miss Carter is condoling with March about an ungrateful State. So be happy, my darling, be happy."

His voice had dropped suddenly. She made an involuntary movement toward him.

"I am," she said below her breath. "I am." She added in a moment, "Will you always come to my Thursday evenings, no matter what happens?"

"Always."

He had turned slightly, and one hand was on his knee. She slipped hers into it recklessly; they were safe in the crowd, and her hand ached for his. It ached from the grasp it received, for he was a man whose self−control was absolute or non−existent. But she clung to him as long as she dared, and when she withdrew her hand she sought for distraction in her company.

It looked as gay and happy as if war had been invented to animate conversation and make a bored people feel dramatic. Death was close upon the heels of two of the distinguished men present; but even though the eyes of the soul be raised everlastingly to the world above, they are blind to the portal. The busy member who had incurred Miss Carter's disapproval and the brilliant Librarian of Congress were among the liveliest at the feast.

It was Senator Ward at one end of the table and Burleigh at the other, who finally started the topic of Miss Madison's intended *salon*, not only that those unacquainted with her ambition might be enlightened, but that the great intention should receive a concrete form without further delay. A half−hour later, when the women left the table, Betty had the satisfaction of knowing that whatever the final result of her venture, her stand was as fully recognized as if she had written a book and found a publisher and critics to advertise her.

V

Betty went to the Senate Gallery on the following day at the request of Armstrong, and heard an exposition of the Populist religion by the benevolent−looking bore from Nebraska. He was followed by an arraignment of the "gold standard Administration" and the Republican Party, from the leading advocate of bimetallism with−or−without−the− concurrence−of−Europe. The utterances of both gentlemen were delivered with the repose and dignity peculiar to their body, and Patriotism and the Constitution would appear to be their watchword and fetish. Burleigh came up to the gallery as the Silver Senator sat down, and smiled wearily at Betty's puzzled comments.

"Of course they sound well," he replied. "In the first place there is always much to be said on both sides of any question, and a clever speaker can make his side dwarf the other. And of course no party could exist five minutes unless it had some good in it. There are several admirable principles in the Populist creed; there are enough windy theories to upset the Constitution of which they prate; and, by the way, the more wrong−headed a would−be statesman is the more hysterically does he plead for the Constitution. As to the other Senator—I sympathize as deeply with the farmer as any man, and I hoped against hope for the success of the bimetallic envoys; but the farmer is of considerably less importance than the national honour; and if a man is not statesman enough to take the national view when he comes to the Senate, he had better stay at home and become a party boss."

"Are you in trouble at home? I saw that you made a speech just before you left."

"They are furious, and elections are imminent; but I never have believed that it paid in the end to be a politician, and I propose to hold to that view. If I am not re−elected this time, I will venture to say that I shall be six years later—"

"Oh, I should be sorry! I should be sorry! Your heart is in the Senate. How could you settle down contentedly to practise law in a Western city for six years?"

"I certainly should have very little to offer a woman," he said bitterly. His frank handsome face had lost the expression of gayety which had sat so gracefully upon the determination of its contours; he looked harassed and a trifle cynical. "There is only one thing I hate more than leaving the United States Senate—and God knows I love it and its traditions: what that is I feel I now have no right—"

"Oh, yes, you have; for if I loved you I would live at the North Pole with you, and I hate cold weather. I don't want you to put me in that sort of position, both for the sake of your own pride and for our friendship."

"That is like you, and I shall take you at your word. Perhaps you can imagine what it cost me to come out and declare myself in a State howling for Silver, when I knew that to leave Washington meant losing my chance with you. For if I am not re−elected I must go out there and stay. I could afford to live here, of course—I hope you know that I have plenty of money—but my political future is there. Even if you made it a condition, I should not pull up stakes, for a man who despised himself for abandoning his ambitions and his power for usefulness could not be happy with any woman."

"I should not make such a condition. As I said, I willingly would go West with you if I loved you."

"Would to God you did! What I meant was that in going I lose my chance."

Betty looked at him and shook her head slowly.

"Yes!" he said. "Yes! Yes! I believe, I know that I could win you with time. And now that the future looks dark I want you more than ever."

"Ah, I wish I could love you," she exclaimed fervently. "I have enough of feminine insight to know that a woman is really happy only when she is making a man happy, and that she is almost ready to bless the troubles which give her the opportunity to console him."

She was looking straight down at Senator North as she spoke. Her voice was impassioned as she finished, and she forgot the man at her side. But he never had suspected that she loved another man. His face flushed and he lowered his head eagerly.

"Betty!" he said, "Betty! Come to me and I swear to make you happy. You don't know what love is. You need

to be taught. Any man can make a woman of feeling love him if he loves her enough and she has no antipathy to him. And there is no reason under heaven why we should not be happy together."

There was only one. Betty was convinced of that; and for the moment the dull ache in her heart prompted her to wish that she never had seen the man down there listening impassively to remarks on the Immigration bill. She wanted to be happy, she was made to be happy, and it was easy to imagine the most exacting woman deeply attached to Robert Burleigh. What was love that it defied the Will? Why could not she shake up her brain as one shakes up a misused sofa−cushion and beat it into proper shape? What was love that persisted in spite of the Will and the judgment, that came whence no mortal could discover, but an abnormal condition of the brain, a convolution that no human treatment could reach? But she only shook her head at Burleigh, although she knew that it would be wisdom to give him her hand in full view of the stragglers in the gallery.

"I must go now," she said. "I have calls to pay. Come and dine with us to−night. If there is even a chance of our losing you, my mother and I must have all of you that we can, meanwhile."

VI

"It is just a year ago to−day, Betty, that you nearly killed me by announcing your determination to go into politics—or whatever you choose to call it. I put down the date. A great deal has happened since then—poor dear Jack! And I often think of that unfortunate creature, too. But you and I are here in this same room, and I wonder if you are glad or sorry that you entered upon this eccentric course."

"I have no regrets," said Betty, smiling. "And I don't think you have. You like every man that comes here, and while they are talking to you forget that you ever had an ache. As for me—no, I have no regrets, not one. I am glad."

"Well, I will admit that they are much better than I thought. I must say I never saw a finer set of men than those at your dinner, and I felt proud of my country, although I was nervous once or twice. I almost love Mr. Burleigh; so I refrain from further criticism. But, Betty, there is one thing I feel I must say—"

She hesitated and readjusted her cushions nervously. Betty looked at her inquiringly, and experienced a slight chill. She stood up suddenly and put her foot on the fender.

"It is this," continued Mrs. Madison, hurriedly. "I think you are too much with Senator North. He was here constantly before you left Washington, and of course I know you boated with him a great deal last summer. Since your return he has been here several times, and you treat him with twice the attention with which you treat any other man. Of course I can understand the attraction which a man with a brain like that must have for you, but there is something more important to be considered. You have been the most noticeable girl in Washington for years—in our set—and now that you have branched out in this extraordinary manner and are even going to have a *salon*, you'll quickly be the most conspicuous in the other set. Mr. North is easily the most conspicuous figure in the Senate—a half dozen of your new friends, including that Speaker, have told me so—and if this friendship keeps on people will talk, as sure as fate. There is no harm done yet—I sounded Sally Carter—but there will be. That sort of gossip grows gradually and surely; it is not like a great scandal that blazes up and out and that people get tired of; they will get into the habit of believing all sorts of dreadful things, and they never will acquire the habit of disbelieving them."

Betty made no reply. She stood staring into the fire.

"It would have been more difficult for me to say such a thing to you a year ago; but you seem a good deal older, somehow. I suppose it is being so much with men old enough to be your father, and talking constantly about things that give me the nightmare to think of. And of course you have had two terrible shocks. But you are so buoyant I hope you will get over all that in time. Wouldn't you like to go to the Riviera, and then to London for the season?"

"And desert my *salon?*" asked Betty, lightly. "You forget this is the long term. I am praying that summer will come late, so that you can stay on. It never had occurred to me that any one would notice my friendship with Mr. North. I hope they will do nothing so silly as to comment on it."

"Well, they will, if you are not very careful. And there is no position in the world so unenviable as that of a girl who gets herself talked about with a married man. Men lose interest in her and raise their eyebrows at the clubs when her name is mentioned, and women gradually drop her. Money and position will cover up a good many indiscretions in a married woman or a widow, but the world always has demanded that a girl shall be immaculate; and if she permits Society to think she is not, it punishes her for violating one of its pet standards. Mr. North can be nothing to you. The day is sure to come when you will want to marry. No woman is really satisfied in any other state."

Betty turned and looked squarely at her mother, who had lost even the semblance of nervousness in her deep maternal anxiety.

"Do you believe that I love Mr. North?"

"Yes, I do. And I know that he loves you. There is no mistaking the way a man turns to a woman every time she begins to speak. But on that score I have no fears. I know that you not only must have the high principles of the women of your race, but that you are too much a woman−of−the−world to enter upon a *liaison*, which would

mean constant lying, fear, blackmail by servants, and general wretchedness. And I have perfect faith in him. Even a scoundrel will hesitate a long while before he makes himself responsible for the future of a girl in your position, and Mr. North is not a scoundrel but an honourable gentleman. Moreover he knows that a scandal would ruin him in his Puritanical State; and he adores his sons, who are prouder of him than if he were ten Presidents. But the world can talk and continue to talk, and to act as viciously about an imprudent friendship as about a *liaison*, for it has no means of proving anything and likes to believe the worst. Now, I shan't say any more. You are capable of doing your own thinking. Only do think—please." Betty nodded to her mother, and went to her boudoir and sat there for hours. Nothing could have put the ugly practical side of her romance so precisely before her as her mother's black and white statement, full of the little colloquial phrases with which an un−ambitious world expresses itself. Even for him, Betty reflected, she could not endure vulgar gossip, and wondered how any high−bred woman could for any man.

"For what else does civilization mean," she thought, "if those of us that have its highest advantages are not wiser and more fastidious than the mob? And unless a woman is ready to go and live in a cave, she cannot be happy in the loss of the world's regard, for it can make her uncomfortable in quite a thousand little ways. Expediency is the root of all morality. It is stupid to be unmoral, and that is the long and the short of it. I would marry him to−morrow if I had to cook for him, if he were dishonoured by his country, if he were smitten suddenly with ill−health and never could walk again. I am willing to go through life alone for his sake, even without seeing him, and after he is dead and gone. I love him absolutely, and if there is another world I must meet him there. But I am not willing to become a social pariah on his account."

She never had permitted her mind to linger on the practical aspect of a different relationship, to admit that such a chapter was possible outside of her imagination, but she did so now, deliberately. She knew that what her mother had intimated was true, that the happiness to be got out of it would amount to very little, and that the day would come when she would say that it was not worth the price. There were many times when she was not capable of reasoning coldly on this question, but she had been listening for two hours to Senator French on the restriction of immigration, and felt all intellect.

Her mind turned to Harriet. There was a creature foredoomed to destruction by the forces within her, struggling in vain, assisted and guarded in vain. Should she, with her inheritance of kindly forces within and without, deliberately readjust her manifest lines into a likeness of Harriet Walker's? And she knew that even if she hoodwinked the world, the miserable deception of it all, the nervous terrors, not only would wear love down, but shatter her ideals of herself and him. She would be infinitely more miserable than now.

It relieved her to have thought that phase out, and she put it aside. But the other? Must she give him up? What pleasure could she find in sitting here with him if her mother's apprehensive mind did not leave the room for a moment? What pleasure if a vulgar world were whispering? She reflected with some bitterness that one danger was receding. He had not entered this room since the day of her return. Although he had called several times, he had come in the evening, when she always sat with her mother, or in the morning, when Mrs. Madison again was sure to be present. She knew that he dared not come here, and that it was more than likely he never would call at the old hour again.

She realized these two facts suddenly and vividly; her mind worked with a brutal frankness at times. She began to cry heavily, the tears raining on her intellectual mood and obliterating it. If she were not to see him alone again, she might as well ask him to come to the house on Thursday evenings only, and to show her no attention in public; if she could not have the old hours again, she wanted nothing less. And she wanted them passionately; those hours came back to her with a poignancy of happiness in memory that the present had not revealed, and the thought that they had gone for ever filled her with a suffocating anguish that was as complete as it was sudden. She implored him under her breath to come to her, then prayed that he would not....

She became conscious that she was in a mood to take any step, were he here, rather than lose him; and the mood terrified her. Would the time come when this intolerable pain would kill every inheritance in her brain, its empire the more absolute because it made passion itself insignificant in the more terrible want of the heart? If it did, she would marry Burleigh. She made up her mind instantly. She would fight as long as she could, for she passionately desired to live her life alone with the idea of this man; but if she were not strong enough, she would marry and bury herself in the West. Nothing but an irrevocable step would affect a permanent mental attitude, and Burleigh would give her little time for thought.

VII

Betty went very often to the Senate Gallery in these days, for it was the only place where one might have relief from the eternal subject of Cuba. Although the House broke loose under cover of the Diplomatic and Consular Appropriation Bill when it was in the Committee of the Whole and free of the Speaker's iron hand, and raged for two days with the vehemence of long−repressed passion, the Senate permitted only an occasional spurt from its warlike members, and pursued its even way with the important bills before it. But at teas, dinners, luncheons, and receptions people chattered with amiability or in suavity about the hostile demonstrations at Havana against Americans, the Spanish Minister's letter, Spain's demand for the recall of Consul−General Lee, the dying reconcentrados, the exploits of the insurgents, and the general possibilities of war. The old Madison house, which had ignored politics for half a century, vibrated with polite excitement on Thursday evenings. About a hundred people came to these receptions, which finished with a supper, and it was understood that the free expression of opinion should be the rule; consequently several repressed members of both Houses delivered impromptu speeches, in the guise of toasts, before that select audience; much to the amusement of Senator North and the Speaker of the House. Burleigh's was really impassioned and brilliant; and Armstrong's, if woolly in its phrasing and Populistic in its length, was sufficiently entertaining.

As for Mrs. Madison, she became imbued with the fear that war would be declared in her house. Two Cabinet ministers had been added to the *salon*, and what they in conjunction with the colossal Speaker and Senators North and Ward might accomplish if they cared to try, was appalling to contemplate. She begged Betty to adjourn the *salon* till peace had come again.

But to this Betty would not hearken. It was the sun of her week, through whose heavy clouds flickered the pale stars of distractions for which she was beginning to care little. One of life's compensations is that there is always something ahead, some trifling event of interest or pleasure upon which one may fix one's eye and endeavour to forget the dreary tissue of monotony and commonplace between. Betty found herself acquiring the habit of casting her eye over the day as soon as she awoke in the morning, and if nothing distracting presented itself, she planned for something as well as she could.

She endeavoured to introduce the pleasant English custom of asking a few congenial spirits to come for a cup of afternoon tea. These little informal reunions are among the most delightful episodes of London life, and if established as a custom in Washington would be like the greenest of oases in the whirling breathless sandstorms of that social Sahara. But even Betty Madison, strong as she was both in position and personality, met with but a moderate success. When women have from six to twenty−five calls to pay every afternoon of the season, with at least one tea a day besides, they have little time or inclination for pleasant informalities. Doubtless Miss Madison's friends felt that they should be relieved of the additional tax. Even the women of the fashionable set, which includes some of the Old Washingtonians and many newer comers of equally high degree, and which ignores the official set, preserve the same ridiculous fashion of calling in person six days in the week instead of merely leaving cards as in older and more civilized communities. In London, society has learned to combine the maximum of pleasure with the minimum of work. Washington society is its antithesis; and although many of the most brilliant men in America are in its official set, and the brightest and most charming women in its fashionable as well as political set, they are, through the exigencies of the old social structure, of little use to each other. Betty occasionally managed to capture three or four people who talked delightfully when they felt they had time to indulge in consecutive sentences, but as a rule people came on her reception day only, and many of them walked in at one door of her drawing−room and out at the other.

The debate in the Senate on the payment of bonds interested her deeply, for she knew that it meant days of uneasiness for Senator North, who rarely was absent from his seat. His brief speech on the subject was the finest she had heard him make, and although it was bitter and sarcastic while he was arraigning the adherents of the resolution to pay the government debt in silver, he became impersonal and almost impassioned as he argued in behalf of national honesty.

Betty never had seen him so close to excitement, and she wondered if he found it a relief to speak out on any

subject. But if he ever thought of her down there he made no sign, for he neither raised his eyes to the gallery nor did he pay her a second visit in her select but conspicuous precinct.

The resolution passed the Senate, and on that evening Senator North called at the Madison house. It was two weeks since he had called before, and although he had come to her evenings and they had met at several dinners, they had not attempted conversation.

The Montgomery's and Carters had dined at the house, and all were in the parlour when he arrived. After a few minutes he was able to talk apart with Betty. They moved gradually toward the end of the room and sat down on a small sofa.

"I am glad you came to−night," she said. "It was my impulse to go to you when I heard how the vote had gone."

"I knew it," he replied, "and if I could have come straight up here to the old room, I should have hung up the vote with my overcoat in the hall."

He looked harassed, and his eyes, while they had lost nothing of their magnetic power, were less calmly penetrating than usual. They looked as if their fires had been unloosed more than once of late and were under indifferent control.

"You will not come to that room again!"

"No. And I soon shall cease to come here at all except on Thursdays."

"You almost have done that now. I think I get more satisfaction watching you from the gallery than anything else. You look very calm and senatorial, and you always are standing some one in a corner who is trying to make a speech."

"I am relieved to know that I do not inspire the amazement of my colleagues. It is a long while since I have felt calm and senatorial, however. But these are days for alertness of mind, and even the most distracting of women must be shut up in her cupboard and forgotten for a few hours every day."

"I think I rather like that."

"Of course you do. A woman always likes a strong lover. And you have plenty of revenge, if you did but know."

"I know," she said; and as she raised her eyes and looked at him steadily, he believed her.

"Tell me at least that you miss coming to that room—I want to hear you say it."

"Good God!"

Betty caught her breath. But when women feel fire between their fingers and are reckless before the swift approach of a greater wretchedness than that possessing them, they are merciless to themselves and the man.

"Can you stay away?" she whispered. "Can you?"

"It is the one thing I can do."

"Do you realize what you are saying?—that you have put me aside for ever? Are you willing to admit that it is all over? How am I to live on and on and on? Can you fancy me alone next summer in the Adirondacks—"

"Hush! Hush! Do you wish me to come? Answer me honestly, without any feminine subterfuge."

"No, I do not." "And I should not come if you did, for I know the price we both should pay better than you do, and only complete happiness could justify such a step. You and I could find happiness in marriage only—we both demand too much! But I also know that the higher faculties of the mind do not always prevail, and I shall not see you alone again."

She pushed him further. "You take this philosophically because you have loved before and recovered. You feel sure that no love lasts."

"When a man loves as I love you, he has no past. There are no experiences alive in his memory to help him to philosophy. With the entire world the last love is the only love. As for myself, I shall not love again and I shall not recover."

"I wore white because I knew you would come tonight," she said softly.

"Yes, and you would torment me if I went down on my knees and begged for mercy."

"Senator," said Montgomery, approaching them. "I suppose it is some satisfaction to you to know that that resolution cannot pass the House."

"I hope you will make a speech on the subject that will look well in the Record," said North, with some sarcasm.

Montgomery laughed. “That is a good suggestion. I wonder if some of our orators ever read themselves over in cold blood. The back numbers of the Record ought to be a solemn warning.”

“Unfortunately most people don't know when they have made fools of themselves; that is one reason the world grows wise so slowly. I don't doubt your speech will look well. You've been remarkably sane for a young man of enthusiasms. Reserve some of your logic, however, for the greater conflict that is coming. The pressure on the President is becoming very severe, and the worst of it is that a great part of it comes from Congressmen of his own party.”

“One of our Populists has christened these 'kickers' 'the reconcentrados;' which is not bad, as there is said to be a kickers' caucus in process of organization. But if the pressure on the President is severe, it is equally so on us, and I suppose the 'kickers' are those who have one knob too few in their backbones. Some, however, have got the war bee inside their skulls instead of in their hats, and will be fit subjects for a lunatic asylum if the thing doesn't end soon, one way or another. And they reiterate and reiterate that they don't want war, when they know that any determined step we can take is bound to lead to it. I have no patience with them. They either are fools or are trying to keep on both sides of the fence at once.”

“Politics are very complicated,” said Senator North, dryly.

“How do you and Mary manage to live in the same house?” asked Betty. “She is all for war.”

“Oh, I think she rather likes the opportunity to argue. And she is so divided between the desire for me to be a good American and the desire that England shall have an excuse to hug us that she could not get into a temper over it if she tried. She has made no attempt to influence my course. Heaven knows how much money I've been made to disburse in behalf of the reconcentrados, but I like women to be tender−hearted and would not harden them for the sake of a few dollars, even were they dumped in Havana Harbor—By the way, I wonder if the *Maine* is all right down there? She has the city under her guns, and they know it—”

“Oh, for heaven's sake, don't suggest any new horrors,” said Senator North, rising. “Besides, the Spaniards are not in the final stages of idiocy. It would be like the New York *Journal* to blow up the *Maine*, as it seems to have reached that stage of hysteria which betokens desperation; but the ship is safe as far as the Spaniards are concerned.”

Lady Mary rose to go; and Betty, who was informal with her friends, went out into the hall with her instead of ringing for a servant. Senator North remained in the parlor for a few moments to say good− night to Mrs. Madison and the Carters, and Betty, although the Montgomerys did not linger, waited for him to come out. There was nothing to reflect the light in the dark walls of the large square hall, and it always was shadowy, and provocative to lovers at any time.

When he entered it, he looked at her for a moment without speaking, and did not approach her.

“You might be the ghost of another Betty Madison—in that white gown,” he said. “Was there not a famous one in the days of 1812, and did she not love a British officer—or something of that sort?”

“They parted here in this hall—and she lived on and died of old age. Such is life. I sleep in her bed, where, I suppose, she suffered much as I do.”

She came forward and pushed her hand into his. “I am not a ghost,” she said.

He too believed it to be their last meeting alone, and he raised her hand to his lips and held it there.

“I wish we could have stayed on and on in the Adirondacks,” she said unsteadily. “Everything seemed to go well with us there.”

“People in mid−ocean usually are happy and irresponsible. They would not be if it were anything but an intermediate state. But it is enough to know that on land our troubles are waiting for us.”

She shivered and drew closer to him. The dangerous fire in her eyes faded.

“Mine are becoming very great,” she said. “All I can do is to distract my mind, to fill up my time.”

“And I can do nothing to help you! That is the tragedy of a love like ours: the more a man loves a woman he cannot marry the more he must make her suffer—either way; it is simply a choice of methods, and if he really loves her he chooses the least complicated.”

“It is bad enough.”

Her eyes filled for the first time in his presence since the morning of Harriet's death, but her mental temper was very different, and she looked at him steadily through her tears.

“*I* cannot help *you*,” she said. “That is the hardest part. You are harassed in many ways, and you are dreading

the bitterness of a greater defeat than today. I could be so much to you—so much. And I can be nothing. By that time you will have ceased to come here. I know that you mean not to come again after to−night, except when the house is full of company."

He began to answer, but stopped. She felt his heart against her arm, and his lips burnt her hand, his eyes her own.

"Listen," she said rapidly, "if war should be declared I shall be in the gallery to hear it. I will come straight home and shut myself up in my boudoir—for hours—to be with you in a way—Shall I? Will— would it mean anything to you?"

"Of course it would!"

His face was fully unmasked, and she moved abruptly to it as to a magnet. In another moment they were in the more certain seclusion of the vestibule, and she was in his arms. They clung together with a passion which despair with ironic compensation made perfect, and their first kiss which was to be their last expressed for a moment the longing of the year of their love and of the years that were to come. That such a moment ever could end was so incredible that when Betty suddenly found herself alone she looked about in every direction for him, and then the blood rushed through her in a tide of impotent fury.

It was this blind rage that enabled her to go back to the parlor and keep up until the Carters went home a few moments later, and her mother had gone to bed. Then she went to her boudoir and locked herself in.

How she got through that night without sending him an imperious summons she never knew, unless it were that she found some measure of relief in a letter she wrote to him. If she could not see him, he was still her lover, her only intimate friend, and her confessor. She promised not to write again, but she demanded what help he could give her.

She sent the letter in the morning, and he replied at once:—

I know. Do you think it was necessary to tell me? Do you suppose my mind left you for a moment last night, and that I know and love you so little that I failed to imagine and understand in a single particular? If I were less of a man and more of a god, I should go to you and give you the help you need, but I am only strong enough to keep away from you. Not in thought, however,—if that is any help.

We shall meet in public and speak together. I have no desire to forget you nor that you should forget me. We neither of us shall forget, but we shall live and endure, as the strongest of us always do. You tell me that you are tormented by the thought that you have added to my trials. Remember that all other trials sink into insignificance beside this, and yet that this greatest that has come to me in a long life is glorified by the fact of its existence. And if it is almost a relief to know that I shall not see you alone again, it is a satisfaction and a joy to remember that I have kissed you. R.N.

VIII

For a few days Betty was almost happy again. She had come so close to the nucleus of love that it had warmed her veins and intoxicated her brain. Imagination for a brief moment had given place to reality, and if she felt wiser and older still than after her five months of meditation on the events of the summer, she felt less sober. One great desire of the past year had been fulfilled, and its memory sparkled in her brain, and her heart was lighter. It had been hours before she had ceased to feel the pressure of his arms.

She wondered how she could have been so weak as to think of marrying Burleigh in self−defence, and she punished him by an indifference of manner which approached frigidity; until one of the evening journals copied a bitter attack upon him from the leading newspaper of his State, when she relented and permitted him to console himself in her presence. And although, as the weeks passed and she saw Senator North from the gallery of the Senate only, or for a few impersonal moments in the crowd, and the elixir in her veins lost its strength, still she felt that life was sufferable once more. She had endeavoured to put Mrs. North from her mind, but more than once she caught herself wishing that some one would mention her name. Nobody did in those excited days, and Betty had no means of learning whether her sudden good health had been final or temporary. Sally Carter did not allude to her again. When she and Betty met, it was to wrangle on the Cuban question, for Miss Carter was all for war.

And then one day the newsboys shrieked in the streets that the *Maine* had been blown up in Havana Harbor.

For a few days Congress held its peace, and the country showed a praiseworthy attempt to believe in the theory of accident or to wait for full proof of Spanish treachery. The *Maine* was blown up on Tuesday, and on Thursday night at the Madisons' the subject almost was avoided; it was the most peaceful *salon* Betty had held.

But it was merely the calm before the storm. The fever was still in the country's blood, which began to flow freely to the brain again as soon as the shock was over. The press could not let pass the most glorious opportunity in its history for head−lines; there were more mass meetings than even the press could grapple with, and all the latent oratorical ability in the country burst into flower. It seemed to Betty when she rose in the night and leaned out of her window that she could hear the roar of the great national storm.

And it rose and swelled and left the old landmarks behind it. The memory of the gales of the past year, with the intervals of doubt and rest, was insignificant beside this volume of fury pouring out of every State, to concentrate at last, fierce, unreasoning, and irresistible, about the White House and Capitol Hill. It was not long before the great quiet village on the Potomac seemed to epitomize the terrible mood of the country it represented, and the country had made up its mind long before the report of the Maine Court of Inquiry came in. The cry no longer was for the suffering Cuban, but for revenge. The Senate held down its “kickers” with an iron hand, but one or two of the inferior men managed to shout across the Chamber to their constituents. Senator North scarcely left his seat. Burleigh told Betty that he should not allude to the subject in the Senate until after the Court of Inquiry's report, but then, whatever the result, he should speak and ask for war. Betty argued with him by the hour, and although he discussed the matter from every side, it was evident that he did it merely for the pleasure of talking to her and that she could not shake his resolution for a moment. It was time for the United States to put an end to the barbarous state of affairs a few miles from her shores, and that was the end of it. He admitted the patriotism of Senator North's attitude, but contended that the United States would be more dishonoured if she disregarded this terrible appeal to her humanity. When Betty accused him of short− sightedness, he replied that a foretold result required a straight line of succession, and that when great events thickened the line of succession was anything but straight; therefore ultimates could not be foretold. He admitted that Senator North had proved himself possessed of the faculty of what Herbert Spencer calls representativeness more than once, but men as wise and calm in their judgment had been mistaken before. But he and others of his standing were preserving the dignity of the Senate, and that was something.

IX

“If you have this war,” said Lady Mary Montgomery to Betty, who had come to receive with her on one of her Tuesdays, “it will be strictly constitutional if you look at it in the right way. This is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, and as the people are practically a unit in their howl for war, they have a right to it, and the responsibility is on their shoulders, not on your few statesmen.”

“That is a real gem of feminine logic, but not only is one wise man of more account than ten thousand fools, but a unit is a unit and has no comparative state. The serious men from one end of the country to the other are doing all they can to quell the excitement; so are the few decent newspapers that we possess. But they are dealing with a mob; an excited mob is always mad, and in this case the keepers are not numerous enough for the lunatics. But no one will question that the intelligent keepers are right and the mob wrong. The average intelligence is always shallow, and in electric climates very excitable. We are dealing to−day no less with a huge mob, even if it is not massed and marching, than were the few sane men of the French Revolution. An exciting idea is like a venomous microbe; it bites into the brain, and if circumstances do not occur to expel it, it produces a form of mania. That is the only way I can account for Burleigh's attitude; he is one of the few exceptions. There are thousands of men in the United States whose brains could stand any strain, but there are hundreds of thousands who were born to swell a mob. As for 'government by the people,' that phrase should be translated to−day into 'tyranny of the people.' England under a constitutional monarchy is far freer than we are.”

“Well, I am suppressed and will say no more. I suppose I shall have a mob to−day. If anything, people are paying more calls than ever, for they can't stay indoors for twenty−five minutes with no one to talk to. It is getting monotonous. I wish that the President and the Senate would begin to play, but they look as impassive as the statues in the parks.”

The rooms filled quickly. By five o'clock the usual crowd was there, and if it had its dowdy battalion as ever, there was no evidence that the more fortunate had lost their interest in dress, despite the warlike state of their nerves. Not that all were for war, by any means. Many were clinging to a forlorn hope, but they could talk of nothing else.

Betty had just listened to the twenty−eighth theory of the cause of the Maine's destruction when she turned in response to a familiar drawl.

“Why, howdy, Miss Madison, I'm real glad to run across you at last.”

Betty was so taken aback that she mechanically surrendered her hand to the limp pressure of her former housekeeper. But she was not long recovering herself.

“Miss Trumbull, is it not? I was not aware that you were an acquaintance of Lady Mary Montgomery's.”

“Well, I can't say as I know her real intimate yet, but I guess I shall in time, as we're both wives of Congressmen.”

“Ah? You are married?” Betty experienced a fleeting desire to see the man who had been captivated by Miss Trumbull.

“Ye—as. I went out West to visit my sister after I left you and was married before I knew it—to Mr. George Washington Mudd. He's real nice, and smart—My! I expect to be in the White House before I die.”

“It is among the possibilities, of course. I hope you are happy, and that meanwhile he is able to take care of you comfortably.” Mrs. Mudd glistened with black silk and jet, but the cut of her gown was of the Middle West.

“Well, I guess! He's a lawyer and can make two hundred dollars a month any day. Of course I can't set up a house in Washington, but I live at the Ellsmere, and three or four of us Congressional ladies receive together and share carriages. I'll be happy to have you call—the first and third Tuesdays; but we always put it in the Post.”

“I have little time for calling. I am very busy in many ways.”

“Well, I'm sorry. You don't look as well as you did up in the mountains; you look real tired, come to examine you. But your dresses are always so swell one sees those first. I always did think you had just the prettiest dresses I ever saw.”

Betty did not turn her back upon the woman; it was a relief to talk on any subject that stood aloof from war.

Mrs. Mudd rambled on.

“I suppose you're engaged to Senator Burleigh by this time? He's our Senator, you know, but I don't know as he's likely to be, long. We want silver, and I guess we've got to have it.”

“I suppose you take quite an interest in politics now,” said Betty, looking at the woman's large self−satisfied face. So far, matrimony had not been a chastening influence. Mrs. Mudd looked more conceited than ever.

“Well, I guess I always knew as much about them as anybody; and now I'm in politics, I guess the President couldn't give me many points. If he don't declare war soon, I'll go up to the White House and tell him what I think of him.”

“Suppose you make a speech from the House Gallery. It is Congress that declares war, not the President.”

Mrs. Mudd's face turned the dull red which Betty well remembered. “I guess I know what I'm talking' about. It's the President—”

But Betty's back was upon her, and Betty was listening to the agitated comments of one of the year's debutantes upon the destruction of the Maine.

“Was night ever so welcome before?” thought Betty, as she settled herself between the four posts of her great−aunt's bed, a few hours later. “Here, at least, not an echo of war can penetrate, and if I think of other things that scald my pillow, it is almost a relief.”

X

On the following evening she went with the Montgomerys to the Army and Navy reception at the White House. Lady Mary had but to express a wish for a card to any function in Washington; and her popularity had much to do with her love for her adopted country.

It was the first time Betty ever had entered the historic mansion, and as she waited for twenty minutes in the crush of people on the front porch, she reflected that probably it was the last.

But when she was in the great East Room, which was hung with flags and glittered with uniforms, and was filled with the strains of martial music, she thrilled again with the historical sense, and almost wished there was a prospect of a war which would compel her to patriotic excitement.

They remained in the East Room for some time before going to shake hands with the President, that the long queue of people patiently crawling to the Blue Room might have time to wear itself down to a point. As Betty stood there eagerly watching the scene, and talking to first one and then another of the Army men who came up to speak to her, she became deeply impressed with the fact that this was the calmest function she had attended in Washington during the winter. There was no excitement on the faces of these men in uniform, and they said little and hardly mentioned the subject of war. They looked stern and thoughtful; and Betty felt proud of them, and wished they were doing themselves honour in a better cause.

She went down the long central corridor after a time, past the crowd wedged before the central door, gaping at the receiving party, to a room where she and the Montgomerys joined the diminished queue extending from a side entrance to the Blue Room. She was not surprised to see Mrs. Mudd in front of her, for although the Representative's wife should have received a card for another evening, she was quite capable of forcing her way in without one; as doubtless a good many others had done to−night. She wore her black silk gown and her bonnet, and although most of the women present were in brilliant evening dress, Mrs. Mudd had several to keep her in countenance. She glanced wearily over her shoulder during the slow progress of the queue, and caught sight of Betty. Her place was precious, but she left it at once and came down the line.

“I'll go in along with you,” she said. “George couldn't come and I've felt kinder lonesome ever sense I got here. And we've been three quarters of an hour getting this far. It's terrible tiresome, but as I've found you I guess I can stand the rest of it.”

Betty detected the flicker of malice in her former housekeeper's voice. They were on equal ground for once, and Miss Madison and Mrs. Mudd would shake hands with their President within consecutive moments. She smiled with some cynicism, but was too good−natured to snub the native ambition where it could do no harm.

“I saw Senator North to−day,” observed Mrs. Mudd, “and he looked crosser 'n two sticks. He's mad because they'll have war in spite of him. I call him right down unpatriotic, and so do lots of others.”

“That disturbs him a great deal. He is much more concerned about the country making a fool of itself.”

“This country's all right, and we couldn't go wrong if we tried. Them that sets themselves up to be so terrible superior are just bad Americans, that's the long and the short of it, and they'll find it out at the next elections. If Senator North should take a trip out West just now, they'd tar and feather him, and I'd like to be there to see it done. They can't say what they think of his setting on patriotic Senators loud enough. And as for the President—”

“Well, don't criticise the President while you are under his roof. It is bad manners. Here we are. Will you go in first?”

“Well, I don't see why I shouldn't. I'll hurry on so they can see your dress; it's just too lovely for anything.”

Betty wore a white embroidered chiffon over green; she shook out the train, which had been over her arm ever since she entered the house. Her name was announced in a loud tone, and she entered the pretty flowery Blue Room with its charmingly dressed receiving party standing before a large group of favoured and critical friends, and facing the inquisitive eyes in the central doorway. The President grasped her hand and said, “How do you do, Miss Madison?” in so pleased and so cordial a tone that Betty for a fleeting moment wondered where she could have met him before. Then she smiled, made a comprehensive bow to his wife and the women of the Cabinet, and passed on. Mrs. Mudd, who had shaken hands relentlessly with every weary member of the receiving party,

reached the door of exit after her and clutched her by the arm.

"Say!" she exclaimed with excitement, although her drawl was but half conquered. "Where *do* you s'pose I could have met the President before? I know by the way he said 'Mrs. Mudd,' he remembered me, but I just can't think, to save my life. My! ain't he fascinating?"

Betty had laughed aloud. "I am sorry to hurt your vanity," she replied, "but the President is said to have the best manners of any man who has occupied the White House within living memory."

"What d'you mean?" cried Mrs. Mudd, sharply. "D' you mean he didn't know me? I just know he did, so there! And he can pack his clothes in my trunk as soon as he likes."

"Good heaven!" "Oh, that's slang. I forgot you were so terrible superior. But you've got good cause to know I'm virtuous. Lands sakes! I guess nobody ever said I warn't."

"I don't fancy anybody ever did."

They were in the East Room again, with the stars and stripes, the moving glitter of gold, the loud hum mingled with the distant strains of martial music.

"It's really inspiring," said Lady Mary. "I wish I could write a war poem."

"I hope there is nothing coming to inspire war doggerel; the prospect of a new crop of war stories and war plays is too painful. We were all brought up on the Civil War and are resigned to its literature. But life is too short to get used to a new variety."

"Betty dear, ennui has embittered you, and I must confess that I am a trifle weary of the war before it has begun, myself. Randolph, I think I prefer you should vote for peace."

"I'm afraid we'll have no peace till we've had war first," said Mr. Montgomery, grimly.

"Oh, we're goin' to have war," drawled Mrs. Mudd. "Just don't you worry about that. Now don't blush," she said in Betty's ear. "Senator North's makin' straight for you. I suspicion you like him better 'n Burleigh—"

Betty had turned upon her at last, and the woman tittered nervously and fell back in the crowd.

Senator North and Miss Madison shook hands with that absence of emotion which is one of the conditions of a crowded environment, and Lady Mary suggested they should all go to the conservatory, where it was cooler.

Betty told Senator North of the impression the Army and Navy men had made on her, and he laughed.

"Of course they are not excited and say little," he said. "They will do the acting and leave the talking to the private citizens. The only argument in favour of the war and the large standing army which might be its consequence is that several hundred thousand more men would have disciplined brains inside their skulls."

"That dreadful housekeeper I had in the Adirondacks is here, married to a Representative named George Washington Mudd."

"I never heard of him, but I am sorry she has come here to remind you of what I should like to have you forget for a time. I do believe a specimen of every queer fish in the country comes to this pond."

They passed one of the bands, and conversation was impossible until they entered the great conservatory with its wide cool walks among the green. It was not crowded, and although there was no seclusion in it at any time, its lights were few and it had a sequestered atmosphere.

Betty and Senator North involuntarily drew closer together.

"In a way I am happy now," she said. "It is something to be with you and close to you. I will not think of how much this may lack until I am alone again and there is no limit to my wants."

"I feel the reverse of depressed," he said, smiling. "Are you quite well? You look a little tired."

"I am tired with much thinking; but that is inevitable. One cannot love hopelessly and look one's best. I always despised the heroines of romance who went into a decline, but Nature demands some tribute in spite of the strongest will."

He held her arm more closely, but he set his lips and did not answer. She spoke again after a moment.

"Since that night I have not been nearly so unhappy, however. I even feel gay sometimes, and my sense of humour has come back. It would be quite dreadful to go through life without that, but I thought I had lost it."

He had turned his eyes and was regarding her intently; but much as she loved them she felt as helpless as ever before their depths. They could pierce and burn, but they never were limpid for a moment.

"You do not misunderstand that?" she asked hurriedly. "It does not mean that I love you less, but more, if anything. And I am not resigned! Only, I feel as if in some way I had received a little help, as if—I cannot express it."

“I understand you perfectly. We are a little closer than we were, and life is not quite so grey.”

“That is it. And I would supplement your bare statement of the fact, if I dared.”

“If you do, I certainly shall kiss you right here in the crowd,” he said, and they smiled into each other's eyes. There was little need of explanations between them.

“That would form a brief diversion for Washington. And as for Mrs. Mudd—By the way, I hope I am not going off. You are the second person who has told me that I am not looking well.”

“You are improved as far as I am concerned. And if you ever faded, happiness would restore you at once. If happiness never came, perhaps you would not care—would you?”

She shrugged her beautiful shoulders and smiled quizzically.

“I don't know. *Je suis femme*. I think I might always find some measure of consolation in the mirror if it behaved properly.”

“Your sincerity is one of your charms. So walk and eat and live in the world, and think as little as you can.”

“This conservatory is fearfully draughty,” remarked Lady Mary, close to Betty's shoulder. “I don't want to stay all night, do you?”

“I am ready,” said Betty; but she sighed, for she had been almost happy for the hour.

XI

If the reception at the White House had been calm, Betty's *salon* on the following evening was not. On Tuesday the House, after duly relieving its feelings by an hour and a half of war talk, flaming with every variety of patriotism, passed the bill appropriating $50,000,000 for the national defence. On Wednesday the bill passed the Senate without a word beyond the “ayes” of its members. On the morrow the War Department would begin the mobilization of the army; and although the *Maine* Court of Inquiry had not completed its labours, the New York World, in the interest of curious humanity, had instituted a submarine inquiry of its own and given the result to the country. Even Senator North regarded war as almost inevitable, although the controvertible proof of explosion from without only involved the Spanish by inference.

The women who were privileged to attend the now famous *salon* wore their freshest and most becoming gowns, and most of the Senators would have been glad to have frivoled away the evening in compliments, so refreshing was the sight of an attractive face after a long and anxious day. But the eyes of the women sparkled with patriotic fire only. One burst into tears and others threatened hysterics, but got through the evening comfortably. Mrs. Madison sat on a sofa and fanned herself nervously; Senator Maxwell and Senator North at her request kept close to her side.

“They were not so excited during the Civil War,” she exclaimed, as a shrill voice smote her ear. “I suppose we have developed more nerves or something.”

“The mind was possessed by the Grim Fact during the Civil War,” said Senator Maxwell. “This is a second−rate thing that appeals to the nerves and not to the soul.”

Betty, who understood the patient longing of her statesmen for variety, had imported for the evening several members of the troupe singing at the Metropolitan Opera House. Conversation consequently was interrupted six or seven times, but it burst forth with increased vigour at the end of every song; and when the Polish tenor with mistaken affability sang “The Star Spangled Banner,” the women and some of the younger men took it up with such vehemence that Mrs. Madison put her fingers to her ears. When one girl jumped on a chair and waved her handkerchief, which she had painted red, white, and blue, the unwilling hostess asked Senator North if he thought Betty would be able to keep her head till the end of the evening, or would be excited to some extraordinary antic.

“There is not the least danger,” he replied soothingly. “Miss Madison could manage to look impassive if a cyclone were raging within her. It is a long while since the Americans have had a chance to be excited. You must make allowances.”

Betty for some time had suppressed her Populist with difficulty. He was one of those Americans to whom a keen thin face and a fair education give the superficial appearance of refinement. In a country as democratic as the United States and where schooling and intelligence are so widespread, it is possible for many half−bred men to create a good impression when in an equable frame of mind. But excitement tears their thin coat of gentility in twain, and Betty already regretted having invited Armstrong to her salon. He had not missed a Thursday evening, for he not only appreciated the social advantage of a footing in such a house, but his clever mind enjoyed the conversation there, and the frankly expressed opinions of well− bred people who argued without acerbity and never called each other names. With his slender well−dressed figure and bright fair sharply cut face, he by no means looked an alien, and if he could have corrected the habit of contradicting people up and down—to say nothing of his occasional indulgence in the Congressional snort—his manners would have passed muster in any gathering. He was a good specimen of the ambitious American of obscure birth and clever but shallow brain, quick to seize every opportunity for advancement. But politics were his strongest instinct, and exciting crises stifled every other.

He was very much excited to−night, for he had, during the afternoon, tried three times to bring in a war resolution, and thrice been extinguished by the Speaker. When the tenor started “The Star−Spangled Banner,” he braced himself against the wall and sang at the top of his lungs; and the performance seemed to lash his temper rather than relieve it. He twice raised his voice to unburden his mind, and was distracted by Betty, who kept him close beside her. Finally she attempted to change the subject by chatting of personal matters.

“I went to the White House last night,” she said, “and was delighted to find that the President had the most charming manners—”

“What's a manner?” interrupted Armstrong, roughly. “You women are all alike. I suppose you'd turn up your nose at William J. Bryan because he ain't what you call a gentleman. But if he were in the White House instead of that milk−and−water puppet of Wall Street, we'd be shooting those murderers down in Cuba as we ought to be. The President and the whole Republican party,” he shouted, “are a lot of hogs who've chawed so much gold their digestion won't work and their brains are torpid; and there's nothing to do but to kick them into this war—the whole greedy, white−livered, Trust−owned, thieving lot of them, including that great immaculate Joss up at the White House with his manners. Damn his manners! They come too high—”

“Armstrong,” said Burleigh soothingly, but with a glint in his eye, “I have an important communication to make to you. Will you come out into the hall a moment?” He passed his arm through the Populist's, and led him unresistingly away.

Betty glanced at her mother. Mrs. Madison was fanning herself with an air of profound satisfaction. As she met her daughter's eyes, she raised her brows, and her whole being breathed the content of the successful prophetess. Senator North looked grimly amused. Betty turned away hastily. She felt much like laughing, herself.

Burleigh returned alone. “I took the liberty of telling him to go and not to come again,” he said. “That sort of man never apologizes, so you are rid of him.”

Betty smiled and thanked him; then she frowned a little, for she saw several people glance significantly at each other. She knew that Washington took it for granted she would marry Burleigh.

They went in to supper a few moments later, and in that admirable meal the weary statesmen found the solace that woman denied him. And the flowers were fragrant; the candlelight was grateful to tired eyes, and the champagne unrivalled. Until the toasts—which in this agitated time had become a necessary feature of the *salon*—the conversation, under the tactful management of Betty and several of her friends, and the diverting influence of the great singers, was but a subdued hum about nothing in particular. When at the end of an hour Burleigh rose impulsively and proposed the health of the President, even the Democrats responded with as much warmth as courtesy.

“You manage your belligerents very well,” said Senator North, when he shook her hand awhile later. “Yours has probably been the only amiable supper−room in Washington to−night.”

XII

"Now!" exclaimed Sally Carter, who was sobbing hysterically, "I hope they will impeach the President if he delays any longer with the *Maine* report and if he doesn't send a warlike message on top of it. After that speech I don't see why Congress should wait for him at all."

It was the seventeenth of March, and she and Betty were driving home from the Capitol after listening to the Senator from Vermont on the situation in Cuba,—to that cold, bare, sober statement of the result of personal investigation, which produced a far deeper and more historical impression than all the impassioned rhetoric which had rent the air since the agitation began. He appeared to have no feeling on the matter, no personal bias; he told what he had seen, and he had seen misery, starvation, and wholesale death. He blamed the Spaniards no more than the insurgents, but two hundred thousand people were the victims of both; and the bold yet careful etching he made of the Cuban drama burnt itself into the brains of the forty−six Senators present and of the eight hundred people in the galleries.

"I cannot bring myself to think that death is the worst of all evils," said Betty, "and I do not think that we have any right to go to war with Spain, no matter what she chooses to do with her own. Besides, she is thoroughly frightened now, and I believe would rectify her mistakes in an even greater measure than she has already tried to do, if the President were given time to handle her with tact and diplomacy. If the country would give him a chance to save her pride, war could be averted."

"You are heartless! Don't argue with me. I hate argument when my emotions feel as if they had dynamite in them. I could sit down on the floor of the Senate and scream until war was declared. I hate Senator North. He never moved a muscle of his face during that entire terrible recital. He hardly looked interested. He is a heartless brute."

"He is not heartless. He fears everlasting complications if we go to war with Spain, the expenditure of hundreds of millions, as one result of those complications, and danger to the Constitution. The statesman thinks of his own country first—"

"I won't listen! I won't! I won't! Oh, I never thought I could get so excited about anything. I believe I'm going to have nervous prostration and I sha'n't see you again till war is declared. So there!"

The carriage stopped at her house, and she jumped out and ran up the steps. She kept her word, and it was weeks before Betty saw her to speak to again.

"If intelligent people get into that condition," thought Betty, "what can be expected of the fools? And the fools are more dangerous in the United States than elsewhere, because they are just bright enough to think that they know more than the Almighty ever knew in His best days."

A few days later she was crossing Statuary Hall on her way back from the House Gallery; whither she had gone during an Executive Session of the Senate, when she met Senator North. His face illuminated as he saw her, and they both turned spontaneously and went to a bench behind the immortal ones of the Republic, who in dust and marble were happier than their inheritors to−day.

"I am thinking of coming down here to live, renting a Committee Room," said Betty. "It is the only place where I do not have my opinion asked and where I do not quarrel with my friends. Molly is sure I shall be taken for a lobbyist, and if people were not too absorbed to notice me, I think I should engage a companion; but as it is, I believe I am safe enough. I have had this simple brown serge made, on purpose."

"There is not the least danger of your motives being misconstrued, and the Capitol is swarming with women, all the time. They seem to regard it as a sort of National Theatre, where the most exciting denouement may take place any minute. I fancy they have come from all over the country for the satisfaction of being able to say, for the rest of their lives, that they were in at the death. The poor Capitol has become a sort of asylum for wandering lunatics."

Betty laughed. "I feel calmer here than anywhere else, especially now that Molly has gone over to the Cubans since the publication of that speech. I suspect it has made a good many other converts. I didn't think the tide of excitement in the country could rise any higher, but it appears to have needed that last straw. Have you any hope

left?”

“None whatever. The politicians in both parties are rushing the President off his feet and inflaming the country at the same time. Sincere sympathizers with Cuba, like Burleigh, are holding their peace until the President shall have declared himself, but there is very little patriotism amongst politicians desirous of re−election. If Spain was a quick−thinking nation and was not stultified by a mulish obstinacy for which the word 'pride' is a euphemism, or if the President could hypnotize the country for six months, all would be well, but I do not look for a miracle. I have done all I can. I have persuaded my own State to keep quiet, and that has lessened the pressure a little; and I have persuaded no less than eight of our bellicose members to say nothing on the floor of the Senate until the President has sent in his message,—that delay is necessary if we are to meet war with any sort of preparation. That is all I can do, for I don't care to speak on the subject again, to bring it up in the Senate until it no longer can be held down. But I have said a good deal in the lobby.”

“I suspect you have! Do you mind all the talk about your being unpatriotic, and that sort of thing? I cried for an hour the other day over an article in a New York paper, headed 'A Traitor,' and saying the most hideous things about you.”

“I didn't read it. And don't spoil your eyes over anything sensational American newspapers may say of anybody; let them alone and read the few decent ones. For a public man to worry over such assaults would be a stupid waste of his mental energy; for if he is in the right he consoles himself with the reflection that the traitor of to−day is the patriot of to−morrow. But let politics go to the winds for a little. Tell me something about yourself. I have started no less than four times to go to see you—at half−past six in the afternoon—and turned back.”

“I go there and sit almost every afternoon. This excitement has been a godsend. If the world had been pursuing its even way during the last two months, I don't know what would have happened to me. What am I to do when it is over?” she broke out, for they were almost secluded. “The more I think of the future the more hopeless it seems. If there is war, I'll go as a nurse—”

“You will do nothing of the sort. Promise me that—instantly. There will be trained nurses without end, and you would run the risk of fever for nothing. Promise me.”

“But I *must* do something. I have hours that you cannot imagine. Ordinarily I keep up very well, for I have character enough to make the best of life, whatever happens; but one can control one's heart with one's will just so long and no longer. When the world is quiet and I am alone at night, if I don't go to sleep at once—it is terrible! Do you think I should be afraid of death? If I have got to go through life with this terrible ache in my heart, in my whole body —for when I cry my very fingers cramp—I'd a thousand times rather go to Cuba and have done with it.”

For a moment he only stared at her. Then he parted his lips as if to speak, but closed them again so firmly that Betty wondered what he was holding back. But his eyes, although they had flashed for a moment and burned still, told her nothing. He did not speak for fully a minute. Then he said,—

“Death can be met with fortitude by any strong brain, but not a lifetime of miserable invalidism. If you contracted fever down there, you might get rid of it in several years and you might not. Meanwhile,” he added, smiling, “you would become yellow and wrinkled. So promise me at once that you will not go.”

“I swear it!” she said with an attempt at gayety. “Not even for you will I get yellow and wrinkled—and I adore you! Tell me,” she went on rapidly and with little further attempt at self−control; “what shall I do next? Shall I go abroad? There is no distraction in castles and cathedrals and crooked streets; they must be enjoyed when one is idle and tranquil. I'm tired of pictures. I suppose I've seen about twenty miles of them in my life. As for the old masters they give me nightmares. There is nothing left but society, and I don't like foreigners and should find little novelty in England—and many reminders! The future appalls me. I cannot face it. Am I inconsiderate to talk like this when you are so worried? Sometimes I feel that I have no right to be even sensible of my individuality when a whole nation is convulsed; it seems almost absurd that there are hundreds of thousands of tragedies within the great one—but there are! There are! And the war will bring oblivion to only those to whom it brings death.”

She stopped, panting, after the torrent of words. His hand had closed about her arm, and he was bending close above her. His face had flushed deeply, and once more he opened his lips as if to speak, but did not. Betty shook suddenly. Was the word he would not utter “Wait”? There could be no doubt that a word struggled for utterance, and that he held it back. If he did not, Betty felt that her love would turn cold. For a great love may be killed by a

sudden blow, and there is always some one thing that will kill the greatest. But she wished that his brain would flash its message to hers.

The silence between them became so intense and the strain on her eyes so intolerable that she dropped her head and fumbled with her muff. She dared not speak, dared not divert his mind. He was too much the master of his own fate.

"Don't ever hesitate to speak out through consideration for me, my dear," he said. "The only relief we both have is to speak our thoughts occasionally. And you can tell me nothing of yourself that I do not know already. I never forget that you are tormented. But Time will help you. The future which looms with a few dull and insupportable Facts is crowded with small details which consume both time and thought, and it is full of little unexpected pleasures. War is very diverting. One's attitude to a war after the first few shocks is as to a great military drama. If by a miracle ours should be averted, then go to England, where you will have men at least to talk to. When plans for the future are futile, live in the present and be careful to make no mistake. It is the only philosophy for those who are not in the favour of Circumstance. I am going now. Bend your ear closer. I have had so little opportunity to be tender with you, and I have thought of that as much as of anything else."

Betty inclined her head eagerly, and he whispered to her for a moment, then left her.

For a few moments she did not move. The buoyancy of her nature was still considerable, and his last words had thrilled her and made her almost as happy as if he would return in an hour. She rose finally and walked across the hall, her inclination divided between the Senate Gallery where she might look at him, and her boudoir where she might fling herself on her divan and think of him. As she was moving along slowly, seeing no one, her arm was caught by a bony hand, and a familiar drawl smote her ear.

"Laws, Miss Madison, have you gone blind all of a sudden? But you look as if you had two stars in your eyes."

"How do you do, Mrs. Mudd? These are times to make anybody absent− minded."

"Well, I guess! We're gettin' there and no mistake. Now look quick, Miss Madison—there's my husband, the one that's just got up off that bench. He's been talkin' to a constituent."

Betty glanced across the Hall with some interest: she occasionally had doubted the reality of George Washington Mudd. A tall stout man in a loose black overcoat, a black slouch hat, and a big cotton umbrella under his arm, was stalking across the Hall with his head in the air, as if to sniff at the marble effigies of the great. Betty felt young again and gave a delighted laugh.

"Why, I didn't know there really was anything like that!" she cried. "I thought—"

"Well, I guess I'd like to know what you mean," exclaimed an infuriate voice; and Betty, turning to Mrs. Mudd's dark red face, recovered herself instantly.

"I mean that your husband belongs to a type that our dramatists have thought worthy of preservation and of exercising their finest art upon. I often give writers credit for more creative ability than they possess, for I always am seeing some one in real life whose entire type I had supposed had come straight out of their genius. Take yourself, for instance. If I had not met you outside of a book, I should have thought you a triumph of imagination."

"Well—thanks," drawled Mrs. Mudd, mollified though doubtful. "I don't claim that George is handsome, but he's the smartest man in our district and he'll make the House sit up yet." She giggled and rolled her eyes. "He was downright jealous because I came home from the reception and raved over the President," she announced. "Oh, my!"

"Perhaps he's a Populist," suggested Betty.

"Not much he ain't. He's a good Democrat with Silver principles."

"Well, I'm glad you're happy. Good−afternoon."

"I love the greatest man in America and she loves George Washington Mudd," thought Betty, as she walked down the corridor. "Mortals die, but love is imperishable. A half−century hence and where will the love that dwells in every fibre of me now, have gone? Will it be dust with my dust, or vigorous with eternal youth in some poor girl who never heard my name?"

And then she went home to her boudoir.

XIII

Betty, who had come justly to the conclusion that she knew something of politics after a year's application to the science and several object lessons, made in the following weeks her first acquaintance with the intricacies which sometimes may involve political motives. The President was not given time to exhaust diplomacy with Spain, although in his War Message he was obliged to state that he had done so. To deal successfully with a proud and mediaeval country required months, not days, and as Spain had grudgingly but surely yielded all along the line to the demands of the United States, it is safe to assume that she would have withdrawn peacefully her forces from Cuba if her pride could have been saved. Sagasta was working in the interests of peace; but a bigoted old country, too indolent to read history, and puzzled at a youthful nation's industry in the cause of humanity, would move so fast and no faster.

The President was rushed off his feet and his hand was forced. An honest but delirious country was threatening impeachment and clamouring for war. Its representatives were hammering on the doors of the White House and shrieking in Congress. A dishonest press was inflaming it and injuring it in the eyes of the world by assaulting the integrity of the Executive and of the leading men in both Houses; and unscrupulous politicians were extracting every possible party advantage, until it looked as if the Democratic party, rent asunder by Mr. Bryan and his doctrines, would be unified once more. The House, after the President's calm and impersonal message on the *Maine* report, acted like a mutinous school of bad boys who had not been taught the first principles of breeding and dignity; the few gentlemen in it hardly tried to make themselves heard, and even the Speaker was powerless to quell a couple of hundred tempers all rampant at once. Every conceivable insult was heaped upon the head of the President as he delayed his War Message from day to day, hoping against hope, and gaining what time he could to strengthen the Navy.

It became necessary therefore for the high−class men in the Senate, particularly the Republicans, to present an unbroken front. Whatever the conclusions of the President, they must stand by him. It was their duty as Americans first and Republicans after; for they had elected him to the high and representative office he filled, they were responsible for him, he had done nothing to forfeit their confidence, and everything, by his wise and conservative course, to win their approval. And it was their duty to their party to uphold him, for internal dissensions in this great crisis would weaken their forces and play them into the hands of the Democrats. Therefore, Senator North and others, who had strenuously and consistently opposed war from any cause, until it became evident that the President had been elbowed into the position of a puppet by his people instead of being permitted to guide them, withdrew their opposition, and when his Message finally was forced from his hand, let it be known that they should support it against the powerful faction in the Senate which demanded the recognition of Cuba as a Republic. The Message meant war, but a war that no longer could be averted, and there was nothing left for any high−minded statesman and loyal party man to do but to defend the President from those who would usurp his authority and tie his hands, to demonstrate to the world their belief in a statesmanship which was being attacked at every point by those whom his Message had disappointed, and to provide against one future embarrassment the more.

When Betty had trodden the maze this far, she realized the unenviable position of the conservative faction in the Senate. North's position was particularly unpleasant. He had stood to the country as the embodiment of its conservative spirit, the spirit which was opposed uncompromisingly to this war. Several days before the speech of the Senator from Vermont exploded the inflamed nervous system of the country, he had made an address which had been copied in every State in the Union and been hopefully commented on abroad. In this speech, which was a passionless, impersonal, and judicial argument against interference in the domestic affairs of a friendly nation seeking to put down an insurgent population whose record for butchery and crime equalled her own, as well as a brilliant forecast of the evils, foreign and domestic, which must follow such a war, he demonstrated that if war was declared at this period it would be unjustifiable because it would be the direct result of the accident to the *Maine*, which, as the explosion could not be traced to the Spanish officials, was not a *casus belli*. Prior to that accident no important or considerable number of the American people had clamoured for war, only for according

belligerent rights to the Cubans, which measure they were not wise enough to see would lead to war. Therefore, had the *Maine* incident not occurred, the President would have been given the necessary time for successful diplomacy, despite the frantic efforts of the press and the loud−voiced minority; and it could not be claimed that the present clamour, dating from the fifteenth of February, was honestly in behalf of the suffering Cuban. It was for revenge, and it was an utterly unreasonable demand for revenge, as no sane man believed that Spain had seized the first opportunity to cut her throat; and until it could be proved that she had done so, it was a case for indemnity, not for war. Therefore, if war came at the present juncture it was because the people of the United States had made up their minds they wanted a fight, they would have a fight, they didn't care whether they had an excuse or not.

The speech made a profound impression even in the agitated state of the public mind, for bitterly as North might be denounced he always was listened to. The press lashed itself into a fury and wrote head− lines which would have ridden its editors into prison had the country possessed libel laws adequate to protect a noble provision of the Constitution. The temperate men in the country had been with North from the beginning, but the excited millions excoriated him the more loudly. He was denounced at public banquets and accused by excited citizens all over the Union, except in his own State, of every depravity, from holding an unimaginable number of Spanish bonds to taking a ferocious pleasure in the sufferings of the reconcentrados.

And in the face of this he must cast his vote for war.

A weaker man would have held stubbornly to his position, made notorious by his personality, and a less patriotic have chosen the satisfaction of being consistent to the bitter end and winning some measure of approval from the unthinking.

But North was a statesman, and although Betty did not see him to speak to for many weeks after the Message went to Congress, she doubted if he had hesitated a moment in choosing his course. He was a man who made a problem of nothing, who thought and acted promptly on all questions great and small. It was his manifest duty to support his President, who was also the head of his party, and to do what he could to win the sympathy of Europe for his country by making its course appear the right and inevitable one.

North's position was the logical result of the deliberations and decisions of the year 1787. Hamilton, the greatest creative and constructive genius of his century, never so signally proved his far− sighted statesmanship as when he pleaded for an aristocratic republic with a strong centralized government. As he was capable of anything, he doubtless foresaw the tyranny of the people into which ill− considered liberty would degenerate, just as he foresaw the many strong, wise, and even great men who would be born to rule the country wisely if given the necessary power. If the educated men of the country knew that its destinies were wholly in their hands, and that they alone could achieve the highest honours, there is not one of them who would not train himself in the science of government. Such men, ruling a country in which liberty did not mean a heterogeneous monarchy, would make the lot of the masses far easier than it is to−day. The fifteen million Irish plebeians with which the country is cursed would be harmlessly raising pigs in the country. Hamilton, in one of his letters, speaks of democracy as a poison. Some twenty years ago an eminent Englishman bottled and labelled the poison in its infinite variety, as a warning to the extreme liberals in his own country. We attempted one ideal, and we almost have forgotten what the ideal was. Hamilton's could not have fared worse, and there is good reason to believe that educated and thinking men, unhampered by those who talk bad grammar and think not, would have raised our standards far higher than they are, even with men like North patiently and dauntlessly striving to counteract the poison below. At all events, there would be no question of a President's hand being forced. Nor would such a class of rulers put a man in the White House whose hand could be forced.

Although Betty knew North would disregard the sneers of the press and of ambitious orators who would declaim while cannon thundered, she also knew that his impassive exterior hid a sense of humiliating defeat, and that the moment in which he was obliged to utter his aye for war would be the bitterest of his life. She fancied that he forgot her in these days, but she was willing to have it so. The intense breathless excitement of that time, when scarcely a Senator left his seat from ten in the morning till some late hour of the night, except to snatch a meal; the psychological effect of the silent excited crowds in the galleries and corridors of the Capitol and on its lawns and the immensity of its steps; the solemnity and incalculable significance of the approaching crisis, and the complete gravity of the man who possessed her mind, carried her out of herself and merged her personality for a brief while into the great personality of the nation.

XIV

It was half−past one o'clock in the morning of the nineteenth of April. A thousand people, weary and breathless but intensely silent, were crowded together in the galleries of the Senate. They had been there all night, some of them since early afternoon, a few since twelve o'clock. Outside, the corridors were so packed with humanity that it was a wonder the six acres of building did not sway. For the first time in hours they were silent and motionless, although they could hear nothing.

On the floor of the Senate almost every chair was occupied, and every Senator was singularly erect; no one was lounging, or whispering, or writing to−night. All faced the Vice−President, alone on his dais, much as an army faces its general. Every foot of the wide semicircle between the last curve of chairs and the wall was occupied by members of the House of Representatives, who stood in a dignified silence with which they had been little acquainted of late.

The Senate no longer looked like a Club. It recalled the description of Bryce: “The place seems consecrated to great affairs.”

The Secretary was about to call the roll for the vote which would decide the fate of Cuba and alter for ever the position of the United States in the family of nations.

Betty had been in the gallery all night and a part of the preceding day. When the Senate took a recess at half−past six in the evening, she and Mary Montgomery, while Mrs. Shattuc guarded their seats, had forced their way down to the restaurant, but had been obliged to content themselves with a few sandwiches bought at the counter. But Betty was conscious of neither hunger nor fatigue, although the strain during the last eight hours had been almost insupportable: the brief sharp debates, the prosing of bores, interrupted by angry cries of “Vote! Vote!” the reiterated announcement of the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations that the conferees could not agree, the perpetual nagging of two Democrats and one Populist, the long trying intervals of debate on matters irrelevant to the great question torturing every mind, during which there was much confusion on the floor: the Senators talked constantly in groups except when the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations brought in his amended bill;—all this had made up a day trying to the stoutest nerves, and more than one person had fainted and been carried from the galleries.

The blood throbbed in Betty Madison's head from repressed excitement and the long strain on her nerves. But the solemnity of the scene affected her so powerfully that her ego seemed dead, she only was conscious of looking down upon history. It seemed to her that for the first time she fully realized the tremendous issues involved in the calling of that roll of names. The attitude of the American people which she had deprecated and scorned was dignified by the attitude of that historical body below her. Even Senator North did not interest her. The Senate for the time was a unit.

It seemed to her an interminable interval between the last echo of the rumbling voice of the Clerk who had read the resolution amended by the report of the conferees, and the first raucous exasperated note of the Secretary's clerk, after a brief colloquy between Senators. This clerk calls the roll of the Senate at all times as if he hated every member of it, and to−night he was nervous.

Betty felt the blood throb in her ears as she counted the sharp decisive “ayes” and “nos,” although Burleigh, whom she had seen during the recess, had told her there was no doubt of the issue. As the clerk entered the M's, she came to herself with a shock, and simultaneously was possessed by a desire to get out of the gallery before Senator North's time came to say “aye.” She had heard the roll called many times, she knew there were fourteen M's, and that she would have time to get out of the gallery if she were quick about it. She made so violent an effort to control the excitement raging within her that her brain ached as if a wedge had been driven through it. She whispered hurriedly to Mary Montgomery, who was leaning breathlessly over the rail and did not hear her, then made her way up to the door as rapidly as she could; even the steps were set thick with people.

As she was passed out of the gallery by the doorkeeper, and found herself precipitated upon that pale trembling hollow−eyed crowd wedged together like atoms in a rock, her knees trembled and her courage almost failed her. Several caught her by the arms, and asked her how the vote was going; but she only shrugged her

shoulders with the instinct of self−defence and pushed her way toward a big policeman. He knew her and put out his hand, thrusting one or two people aside.

“This has been too much for you, miss, I reckon,” he said. “I'll get you downstairs. Keep close behind me.”

He forced a way through the crowd to the elevator. To attempt to part the compact mass on the staircase would invite disaster. The elevator boy had deserted his post that he might hear the news the sooner, but the policeman pushed Betty into the car, and manipulated the ropes himself. On the lower floor was another dense crowd; but he got her to the East door after rescuing her twice, called her carriage and returned to his post, well pleased with his bill.

For many moments Betty, bruised from elbows, breathless from her passage through that crush in the stagnant air, could not think connectedly. She vaguely recalled Mrs. Mudd's large face and black silk dress in the Diplomats' Gallery, which even a Cabinet minister might not enter without a permit from a member of the Corps. Doubtless the doorkeepers had been flung to and fro more than once to−night, like little skiffs in an angry sea. She wondered how she had had sufficient presence of mind to fee the policeman, and hoped she had not given him silver instead of the large bill which had seemed to spring to her fingers at the end of that frightful journey.

She leaned out of the open window, wishing it were winter, that the blood might be driven from her head; but there was only the slight chill of a delicious April morning in the air, and the young leaves fluttered gently in the trees. In the afternoon hundreds of boys had sold violets in the streets, and the perfume lingered, floating above the heavier scent of the magnolias in the parks. Betty's weary mind pictured Washington as it would be a few weeks hence, a great forest of brilliant living green amidst which one had almost to look for the houses and the heroes in the squares. Every street was an avenue whose tall trees seemed to cut the sky into blue banners—the word started the rearrangement of her scattered senses; in a few weeks the dust would be flying up to the green from thousands of marching feet.

She burst into tears, and they gave her some relief. The carriage stopped at the house a moment later, and she went directly to her boudoir. She took off her hat and pulled down her hair, rubbing her fingers against her burning head. Senator North took possession of her mind at once. The Senate was no longer a unit to her excited imagination; it seemed to dissolve away and leave one figure standing there beaten and alone.

She forgot the passionate efforts of other Senators in behalf of peace; to her the fine conservative strength of the Senate was personified in one man. And if there were others as pure and unselfish in their ideals, his at least was the master intellect.

She wondered if he remembered in this hour of bitter defeat that she had promised to come to this room and give him what she could of herself. That was weeks and weeks ago, and she had not repeated her intention, as she should have done. But he loved her, and was not likely to forget anything she said to him. Or would he care if he did remember? Must not personal matters seem of small account to−night? Or was he too weary to care for anything but sleep? Perhaps he had flung himself down on a sofa in the cloak−room, or in his Committee Room, and forgotten the national disaster while she watched.

She had been walking rapidly up and down the room. Her thoughts were not yet coherent, and instinct prompted her to get the blood out of her head if she could. A vague sense of danger possessed her, but she was not capable of defining it. Suddenly she stopped and held her breath. She had become aware of a recurring footstep on the sidewalk. Her window abutted some thirty feet away. She craned her head forward, listening so intently that the blood pounded in her ears. She expected to hear the gate open, the footsteps to grow softer on the path. But they continued to pace the stone flags of the sidewalk.

She opened her door, ran down the hall and into the parlor. Without an instant's hesitation she flung open a window and leaned out. The light from the street lamp fell full upon her. He could not fail to see her were he there. But he was not. The man pacing up and down before the house was the night watchman.

Betty closed the window hurriedly and stumbled back into the dark room. The disappointment and reaction were intolerable. She felt the same blind rage with Circumstance which had attacked her the night he had kissed and left her. In such crises conventions are non−existent; she might have been primeval woman for all she recalled in that hour of the teachings of the centuries. Had he been there, she would have called him in. He was hers, whatever stood between them, and she alone had the right to console him.

Her mind turned suddenly to his house. He was there, of course; it was absurd to imagine that his cool deliberation would ever forsake him. The moment the Senate adjourned he would have put on his hat, walked

down to the East door, called a cab and gone home. And he was in his library. Why she felt so positive that he was there and not in bed she could not have told, but she saw the light in the long wing. She put her hands to her face suddenly, and moved to the door. She stumbled over a chair, and then noticed the intense darkness of the room. But beyond she saw distinctly the big red brick house of Senator North, with the light burning in the wing. Was she going to him? She wondered vaguely, for her will seemed to be at the bottom of a pile of struggling thoughts and to have nothing to say in the matter. Surely she must. He was a man who stood alone and scorned sympathy or help, but he would be glad of hers because it was hers; there was no possible doubt of that. And in spite of his record he must for the hour feel a bitter and absolute failure.

A pebble would bring him to the window. He would come out, and come back here with her. She opened her arms suddenly. The room was so dark she almost could fancy him beside her. Would that he were!

She had no adequate conception of a morrow. The future was drab and formless. His trouble drew her like a magnet. She trembled at the mere thought of being able to make him forget.

And he? If he came out and saw her standing there, he would be more than a man if he resisted the impulse to return with her here and take her in his arms. And he too must be in a state of mind in which to−day dwarfed and blotted out to−morrow.

For the moment she stood motionless, almost breathless, realizing so vividly the procession of bitter and apprehensive thoughts in the mind which for so long had possessed and controlled hers that she forgot her intention, even her desire to go to him. It was this moment of insight and abstraction from self that saved her. Her own mind seemed to awake suddenly.

It was as if her thinking faculty had descended to her heart during the last hours and been made dizzy and dull by the wild hot whirl of emotions there. It climbed suddenly to where it belonged, and set the rested machinery of her brain to work.

Doubtless his impulse had been to come to her, to the room where he knew she was alone and would receive him if he demanded admittance. He had put the temptation aside, as he had put aside many others; and it had been in her mind, was in her mind still, to make the temptation irresistible. And if he felt a failure to−night, she had it in her power to wreck his life utterly.

It was more than possible that in the remaining years of his vigour dwelt his tardy opportunities for historical fame. The great Republic had sailed out of her summer sea into foreign waters, stormy, unfriendly, bristling with unimaginable dangers. Once more she would need great statesmen, not merely able legislators, and there could be no doubt in the mind of any student of the Senate that she would discover them swiftly. North was the greatest of these; and the record of his future, brilliant, glorious perhaps, seemed to unroll itself suddenly in the dark room.

Betty drew a long hard breath. Her cheeks were cool at last, and she wondered if her heart were dead, it felt so cold. What mad impulse nearly had driven her to him to−night, independently of her will; which had slept, worn out, like other faculties, by a day of hunger, excitement, fatigue, and physical pain? The impulse had risen unhindered and uncriticised from her heart, and if it had risen once it could rise again. The days to come would be full of excitement. She fancied that she already heard the roar of cannon, the beating of drums, the sobs of women. And below the racket and its sad accompaniment was always the low indignant mutter of a triumphant people at those who had dared to set themselves above the popular clamour and ask for sanity. The intolerable longing that had become her constant companion would be fed by every device of unpropitious Circumstance. Again and again she would experience this impulse to go to him, and some night the blood would not recede from her brain in time.

She groped her way out of the dark parlor and down the hall, grateful for an excuse to walk slowly. Her boudoir was brilliant, and the struggle of the last few moments seemed the more terrible and significant by contrast with the dainty luxurious room. She wondered if she ever should dare to enter the parlor again, and if it always would not look dark to her.

She sat down at her desk and wrote a letter. It ran:— Dear Mr. Burleigh,—I will marry you if you still wish it. Will you dine with us to−night?

Betty Madison.

She was too tired for emotion, but she knew what would come later. Nevertheless, she went to the front door and asked the watchman to post the letter. Then she went to bed.

XV

The Senate adjourned a few moments after Betty left the gallery. There was little conversation in the cloak−room. The Senators were very tired, and it surely was a brain of bubbles that could indulge in comment upon the climax of the great finished chapter of the old Republic.

North put on his hat and overcoat at once and left the Capitol. After the close confinement in heated and vitiated air for sixteen hours, the thought of a cab was intolerable: he shook his head at the old darky who owned him and whom he never had been able to dodge during his twenty years' service in Washington, plunged his hands into his overcoat pockets, and strode off with an air of aggressive determination which amused him as a fitting anti−climax. The darky grinned and drove home without looking for another fare. His Senator not only had paid him by the month for several years, but had supported his family for the last ten.

North inhaled the pure cool air, the delicious perfume of violet and magnolia, as Betty had done. Once he paused and looked up at the wooded heights surrounding the city, then down at the Potomac and the great expanse of roofs and leaves. The Washington Monument, the purest, coldest, most impersonal monument on earth, looked as gray as the sky, but its outlines were as sharp as at noonday. North often watched it from the window of his Committee Room; he had seen it rosy with the mists of sunset, as dark as granite under stormy skies, as waxen as death. Normally, it was white and pure and inspiring, never companionable, but helpful in its cold and lofty beauty.

"It *is* a monument," he thought, to−night, "and to more than Washington."

He turned into Massachusetts Avenue and strolled along, in no hurry to find himself between walls again. He was not conscious of physical fatigue, and experienced no longing for bed, but his brain was tired and he enjoyed the absence of enforced companionship and continued alertness, the cool air, the quiet morning in her last sleep.

Betty, like all brilliant women who love passionately, had over− imagined, in her solitude and excitement. It is true that North had felt the bitterness of defeat, that his mind had dwelt upon the miserable and blasting thought that after years of unquestioned statesmanship and leadership, of hard work and unremitting devotion, his will had had no weight against hysteria and delirium. But both bitterness and the sense of failure had been dismissed in the moment when he had, once for all, accepted the situation; and that had been several days before. Since then, he had shoved aside the past, and had given his undivided thought to the present and the future. He had uttered his "aye" almost indifferently; it had been given to the President days since.

Nevertheless, his brain, tired as it was, did not wander from the great climax in his country's history. To that country at large this climax meant simply a brief and arrogant chastisement of a cruel little nation; the generals would have been quite justified in sending their dress clothes and golf sticks on to Havana; but North knew that this officious "police duty" was the noisy prologue to a new United States, possibly to the birth of a new Constitution.

"Is this the grand finale of the people's rule?" he thought. "They have screamed for the moon as they never screamed before, and this time they have got it fairly between their teeth. Well, it is a dead old planet; will its decay vitiate their own blood and leave them the half−willing prey of a Circumstance they do not dream of now? Dewey will take the Philippines, of course. He would be an inefficient fool if he did not, and he is the reverse. The Spanish in Cuba will crumble almost before the world realizes that the war has begun. The United States will find itself sitting open−mouthed with two huge prizes in its lap. It may, in a fit of virtue which would convulse history, give them back, present them, with much good advice and more rhetoric, to their rightful owners. And it may not. These prizes are crusted with gold; and the stars and stripes will look so well in the breeze above that the pride of patriotism may decide they must remain there. And if it does—if it does... The extremists in the Senate will grow twenty years in one... With the bit between their teeth and the arrogance of triumph in their blood—"

He found himself in front of his own house. He turned slowly and looked intently for a moment toward I Street. His face softened, then he jerked out his latchkey, let himself in and went directly to the library. He still had no desire for bed, and threw himself into an easy−chair before the andirons. But it was the first time in several days that he had sat in a luxurious chair, and the room was full of soft warmth. He fell asleep, and although he

seemed to awaken immediately, he could only conclude, when the experience which followed was over, that he had been dreaming.

He suddenly became aware that a chair beside him was occupied, and he wheeled about sharply. His sense of companionship was justified; a man sat there. North stared at him, more puzzled than surprised, endeavouring to fit the familiar face to some name on his long list of acquaintances, and wondering who in Washington could have given a fancy−dress ball that night. His visitor wore his hair in a queue and powdered, a stock of soft lawn, and a dress−coat of plum−coloured cloth cut as in the days of the founders of the Republic.

Although it was some moments before North recognized his visitor, his resentment at this unseasonable intrusion passed quickly; the personality in the chair was so charming, so magnetic, so genial. He was a young man, between thirty and forty, with a long nose, a mobile mouth, dark gray−blue eyes full of fire and humour, and a massive head. It was a face of extraordinary power and intellect, but lit up by a spirit so audacious and impulsive and triumphant that it was like a leaping flame of dazzling brilliancy in some forbidding fortress. He was smiling with a delighted expression of good fellowship; but North experienced a profound conviction that the man was weighing and analyzing him, that he would weigh and analyze everybody with whom he came in contact, and make few mistakes.

“Who the deuce can he be?” he thought, “and why doesn't he speak?” And then it occurred to him that he had not spoken, himself. He was about to inquire with somewhat perfunctory courtesy in what manner he could serve his visitor, when his glance fell on the man's hands. He sat erect with a slight exclamation and experienced a stiffening at the roots of his hair. The hands under the lace ruffles were the most beautiful that ever had been given to a man, even to as small a man as this. They were white and strong and delicate, with pointed fingers wide apart, and filbert nails. North knew them well, for they were the hands of the man whom he admired above all men in the history of his country. But until to−night he had seen them on canvas only, in the Treasury Department of the United States. His feeling of terror passed, and he sat forward eagerly.

“The little lion,” he said caressingly, for the man before him might have been his son, although he had been in his tomb with a bullet in his heart for nearly a century. But he looked so young, so restless, so indomitable, that the years slipped out of the century, and Hamilton once more was the most brilliant ornament of a country which had never ceased to need him.

“Yes,” he said brightly, “here I am, sir, and you see me at last. This is that one moment in the lifetime of the few when the spirit burns through the flesh and recognizes another spirit who has lost that dear and necessary medium. I have been with you a great deal in your life, but you never have been able to see me until to−night.” He gave his head an impatient toss. “How I have wished I were alive during the last three or four months!” he exclaimed. “Not that I could have accomplished what you could not, sir, but it would have been such a satisfaction to have been able to make the effort, and then, when I failed, to tell democracy what I thought of it.”

North smiled. All sense of the supernatural had left him. His soul and Hamilton's were face to face; that was the one glorified fact. “I have been tempted several times lately to wish that we had your aristocratic republic,” he said, “and that I were the head and centre of it. I have felt a strong desire to wring the neck of that many− headed nuisance called 'the people,' and proceed as if it were where the God of nations intended those incapable of governing should be and remain without protest.”

“Oh, yes, you are an aristocrat. That is the reason I have enjoyed the society of your mind all these years. You were so like me in many ways when you were my age, and since then I seem to have grown older with you. I died so young. But in you, in the last twenty years, I seem to have lived on. You have built an iron wall all round those terrible fires of your youth, and roofed it over. It is only now and then that a panel melts and the flame leaps out; and the panel is so quickly replaced! I too should have conquered myself like that and made fewer and fewer mistakes.”

“God knows what I might not have been able to do for my country. I have been mad to leap into the arena often enough.”

“You are not dead. No man is, whose inspiration lives on. More than one of us would be of shorter stature and shorter gait if we never had had your accomplishment to ponder over. And as to what the nation would have been without you—”

“Yes!” cried Hamilton. “Yes! How can any man of ability submit to death without protest, shrug his shoulders cynically, and say that no man's disappearance causes more than a whirl of bubbles on the surface, that the world

goes on its old gait undisturbed, and does as well with the new as the old? Look at Great Britain. She hasn't a single great man in all her eleven million square miles to lead her. That is answer enough to a theory which some men are sincere enough in believing. This country always has needed great leaders, and sometimes she has had them and sometimes not. The time is coming when she will need them as she has not done since the days when three or four of us set her on her feet."

North stood up suddenly and looked down on Hamilton. "What are we coming to?" he asked abruptly. "Monarchy?"

The guest tapped the toe of his little slipper with the tips of his beautiful fingers. He laughed gayly. "I can see only a little farther ahead than your own far−penetrating brain, sir. What do you think?"

"As I walked home tonight, the situation possessed my mind, which by some process of its own seemed to develop link after link in coming events. It seemed to me that I saw a thoroughly disorganized people, unthinkingly but ruthlessly thrusting aside all ideals, and— consequently—in time—ready for anything."

Hamilton nodded, "If they had begun with my ideal, they would have remained there. Now they will leap far behind that—when there is a strong enough man down there in the White House. Certain radical changes, departures from their traditions and those of their fathers, will school them for greater changes still. In some great critical moment when a dictator seems necessary they will shrug their shoulders and say, 'Why not?'"

"I believe you are right, but I doubt if it comes in my time."

Hamilton shook his head. "Every state in Europe has its upper lip curled back above its teeth, and who knows, when the leashes snap, what our fate will be, now that we have practically abandoned our policy of non−interference in the affairs of the Eastern Hemisphere? If all Europe is at somebody's throat in the next five years, we shall not escape; be sure of that. Then will be the great man's opportunity. You always have despised the office of President. Work for it from this day. The reaction from this madness will help you. Democrats as well as Republicans will turn to you as the one man worthy of the confidence of the entire country."

"Not if they guessed that I meditated treason, sir. Nor should I. I agree with you that your ideal was the best, but there is nothing for me to do but to make the best of the one I've inherited. If I am aristocratic in my preferences, I am also a pretty thoroughgoing American."

"Yes, yes, I know, sir. You never will meditate what, if premeditated, would be treason. But when the great moment comes, when your patriotism and your statesmanship force you to admit that if the country is to be saved it must be rescued from the people, and that you alone can rescue it, then you will tear the Constitution down its middle. This country is past amendments. It must begin over again. And the whole great change must come from one man. The people never could be got to vote for an aristocratic republic. They must be stunned into accepting a monarchy. After the monarchy, then the real, the great Republic."

The two men looked long into each other's eyes. Then North said,—

"I repeat that I never should work nor scheme for the position that such a change might bring me. Nevertheless, believing, as I do, that we are on the threshold of a new and entirely different era in this country, if the time should come when I felt that I, as its most highly trained servant, could best serve the United States by taking her destinies entirely into my own hands, I should do so without an instant's hesitation. I have done all I could to preserve the old order for them, and they have called me traitor and gone their own way. Now let them take the consequences."

Hamilton set his mobile lips in a hard line. His eyes looked like steel. "Yes," he said harshly, "let them take the consequences. They had their day, they have gone mad with democracy, let them now die of their own poison. The greatest Republic the world ever will have known is only in the ante−room of its real history." He stood up suddenly and held out his hand. "Good−bye, sir," he said. "We may or may not meet again before you too are forced to abandon your work. But I often shall be close to you, and I believe, I firmly believe, that you will do exactly as I should do if I stood on solid ground to−day."

North took the exquisite hand that had written the greatest state papers of the century, and looked wonderingly at its white beauty. It suddenly gave him the grip of an iron vise. North returned the pressure. Then the strong hand melted from his, and he stood alone.

Exactly in what the transition from sleep to waking consisted, North was not able to define. There was a brief sense of change, including a lifting of heavy eyelids. Technically he awoke. But he was standing on the hearthrug. And his right hand ached.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What difference does it make whether he appeared to my waking eyes or passed through my sleeping brain and sat down with my soul?"

He plunged his hands into his pockets and stood thinking for many minutes. He said, half aloud, finally,—

"Not in my time, perhaps. But it will come, it will come."

XVI

When Betty awoke at four o'clock in the afternoon, she discovered with some surprise that she had slept soundly for eleven hours. Her head was a trifle heavy, but after her bath she felt so fresh again that the previous day and night seemed like a very long and very ugly dream. She reflected that if she had not written to Burleigh before she went to bed she certainly should do so now. He still seemed the one safeguard for the future; she had convinced herself that with her capacity for violent emotion and nervous exaltation, her head was not to be trusted.

She felt calm enough this afternoon, and she opened with no enthusiasm the note which had arrived from Burleigh. She might have drawn some from its superabundant amount, but she frowned and threw it in the fire. Then she went to her mother's room and announced her engagement.

“My dear!” exclaimed Mrs. Madison. “Well!—I am delighted.”

Then she looked keenly at Betty and withheld her congratulations. But she asked no questions, although the edge suddenly left her pleasure and she began to wonder if Burleigh were to be congratulated.

“He is coming to dinner,” Betty continued, “and I want you to promise me that you will not leave us alone for a moment, and that you will go with me to New York to−morrow.”

“I will do anything you like, of course, and I always enjoy New York.”

“I want to get away from Washington, and I want to shop more than anything in life. I hate the thought of everything serious,—the country, the war, everybody and everything, and I feel that if I could spend two weeks with shops and dressmakers I'd be quite happy—almost my old self again.”

“I wish you were,” said Mrs. Madison, with a sigh. “I wish this country never had had any politics.”

The instinct of coquetry was deeply rooted in Betty Madison, but that evening she selected her most unbecoming gown. She was one of those women who never look well in black, and look their worst in it when their complexion shows the tear of secret trouble and broken rest. She had a demi−toilette of black chiffon trimmed with jet and relieved about the neck with pink roses. She cut off the roses; and when arrayed had the satisfaction of seeing herself look thirty−five. For a moment she wavered, and Leontine, with tears, begged to be allowed to remove the gown; but Betty set her teeth and went downstairs.

She had the further satisfaction of seeing a brief flash of surprise and disappointment in Burleigh's eyes as he came forward to greet her; and, indeed, the gown seemed to depress the company for the entire evening. Betty tried to rattle on gayly, but the painful certainty that she looked thirty−five (perhaps more), and that Burleigh saw it, and her mother (who was visibly depressed) saw it, and the butler and the footman (both of whom, she knew through Leontine, admired her extravagantly) saw it, dashed her spirits to zero, and she fell into an unreasoning rage with Senator North.

“I am going to New York to−morrow, and you are not to follow me,” she said with a final effort at playfulness. “I have been at such a nervous strain over this wretched war that I must be frivolous and feminine for two whole weeks—and what so serious as being engaged?”

Burleigh sighed. His spirits were unaccountably low. He had forgotten his country for an entire day, and rushed up to the house ten minutes before the appointed hour, his spirits as high as a boy's on his way to the cricket field. But his apple had turned to ashes in a funereal gown, and there seemed no colour about it anywhere.

“Of course you want a change,” he said, “but I hope you will write to me.”

“I'll write you a little note every day,” she said with sudden contrition. “I know I'll feel—and look ever so much better in a few days.”

“There!” she thought with a sigh, “I've made this wretched sacrifice for nothing, and I'll never forget how I'm looking at the present moment, to my dying day. I know I'll wear my most distracting gown the next time he comes. Well, what difference? I've got to marry him, anyhow.”

She shook hands cordially with him when he rose to go, an hour later, but she did not leave her mother's side. He did not attempt to smile, but shook hands silently with both and left the room as rapidly as dignity would permit.

Mrs. Madison put her handkerchief to her eyes and burst into tears.

“Poor dear man!” she exclaimed. “I felt exactly as if we were having our last dinner together before he went off to the war to get killed. I never spent such a dismal evening in my life. And what on earth made you put on that horrid gown? You look a fright—you almost look older than he does.”

“Don't turn the knife round, please. I'm rather sorry, to tell the truth, but I didn't want him to be too overjoyed. I couldn't have stood it.”

“Are you sorry that you have engaged yourself to him?”

“No, I am glad—very glad.” But she said it without enthusiasm. When she went up to her room, she presented the black gown to Leontine and sent her to bed. Then she put on a peignoir of pink silk and lace and examined herself in the mirror. She looked fifteen years younger and wholly charming; there was no doubt of it.

XVII

The next day, before starting for New York, she wrote a note to Senator North:—

I am going to marry Robert Burleigh. On Tuesday morning I almost went to your house—to bring you back with me here. I came to my senses in time; but I might not again. I want you to understand.

I wish he were not on the winning side. But he is the only man I can even think of marrying.

I do not think this much is disloyal to him. But I will not say other things. B. M.

Burleigh came to the train to see her off, and Betty looked so charming in her rich brown travelling frock and little turban, and smiled so gayly upon him, that his heavy spirit lifted its wings and he begged to be allowed to go to New York on Saturday. But to this she would not listen, and he was forced to content himself with making elaborate preparations for her comfort in the little drawing−room, and buying a copy of every paper and magazine the newsboy had on sale.

“I am sure he will make an ideal husband,” said Mrs. Madison, as she waved her hand to him from the window. “He certainly is very much of a man,” admitted Betty, “but what on earth are we to do with all these papers? I haven't room to turn round.”

The excitement in Washington, great as it was, had been mostly within doors; in New York it appeared to be entirely in the streets, if one excepted the corridors of the hotels. The population, still pale and nervously talkative, surged up and down the sidewalks. On the morrow the city put forth her hundred thousand flags. The very air seemed to turn to stars and stripes.

The Madisons went to the Waldorf−Astoria, and in its refreshing solitudes felt for the first time in months that they must go in search of excitement if they wanted it; none would reach them here.

“Now that the war is declared, I am sorry;” admitted Mrs. Madison, “for so many Americans will be killed.”

“Instead of Cubans. I've done with the war. I won't even regret.”

For three days Betty shopped furiously, or held long consultations with her dressmaker. On Sunday, after church, she read to her mother, but refused to discuss her engagement, and on Monday she resumed her shopping. She wrote to Burleigh immediately after breakfast every morning, then dismissed him from her mind for twenty−four hours.

The beautiful spring fabrics were in the shops, and she bought so many things she did not want, even for a trousseau, that she wondered if Mrs. Mudd would accept a trunk full of “things.” She envied Mrs. Mudd, and would find a contradictory pleasure in making her happy. Miss Trumbull never had manifested any false pride, and matrimony had altered her little in other ways.

At night she slept very well, and if she did not think of Burleigh, neither would she think of Senator North.

She did not open a newspaper. What the country did now had no interest for her; it was marching to its drums, and nothing could stop it. And she would have her fill of politics for the rest of her natural life. As Mrs. Madison always was content with a novel, she made no complaint at the absence of newspapers, particularly as the fighting had not begun. Moreover, Betty took her to the theatre every evening, a dissipation which her invalidism endured without a protest.

It was on Wednesday afternoon that Betty, returning to her rooms, met Sally Carter in a corridor of the hotel. The two girls kissed as if no war had come between them, and Miss Carter announced that she was going to Cuba to nurse the American soldier.

“I almost feel conscience−stricken,” she remarked, “now that we actually are in for it. I don't think I believed it ever really could happen. It was more like a great drama that was about to take place somewhere on the horizon. But if the American boys have to be shot, I'm going to be there to do what I can.”

They entered the parlor of Mrs. Madison's suite, and that good lady, who had read until her eyes ached, welcomed Sally with effusion and demanded news of Washington.

“We haven't seen a paper or a soul,” she said. “We have our meals up here, and I feel as if I were a Catholic in retreat. It's been a relief in a way, especially after the *salon*, but I should like to know if Washington has burned down, or anything.”

“Washington is still there and still excited,” said Miss Carter, dropping into a chair and taking off her hat, which she ran the pin through and flung on the floor. “How it keeps it up is beyond the comprehension of one poor set of nerves. I am now dead to all emotion and longing for work. I'm even sorry I painted my best French handkerchiefs red, white, and blue. If you haven't seen the papers I suppose you don't know that Mrs. North is dead. She died suddenly of paralysis on the twenty−second. The strength she got in the Adirondacks soon began to leave her by degrees; the doctor—who is mine, you know—told me the other day that it meant nothing but a temporary improvement at any time; but he had hoped that she would live for several years yet. Betty, what on earth do you find so interesting in Fifth Avenue? I hate it, with its sixty different architectures.”

“But it looks so beautiful with all the flags,” said Betty, “and the one opposite is really magnificent.”

It was a half−hour before Sally ceased from chattering and went in search of her father. Betty had managed to control both her face and her knees, and listened as politely as a person may who longs to strangle the intruder and achieve solitude. The moment Sally had gone Betty went straight to her room, avoiding her mother's eyes, which turned themselves intently upon her.

She did not reappear for dinner, as her mother was made cheerful by the society of the Carters; but as Sally passed her room on her way to bed, she called her in, and the two girls had a few moments' conversation.

XVIII

“Molly,” said Betty, the next morning, “I should like to go up to the Adirondacks alone for a few weeks. Would you mind staying here with the Colonel and Sally for another ten days and then returning with them? Sally says she will move into my room and that she and the Colonel will take you to the theatre and do everything they can to make you happy. You know the Colonel delights to be with you.”

“I understand, of course, that you are going,” said Mrs. Madison. “I shall not be bored, if that is what you mean. I hope you will telegraph at once, so that the house will be warmed at least a day before you arrive. I suppose you have got to a point in your affairs where you must have solitude, but I wish you had not, and I wish you would go where it is warmer.”

“Oh, I shall be comfortable enough.” She added in a moment, “Don't think I do not appreciate your consideration, for I do.”

Then she sat down at the desk and wrote a note to Burleigh. It was a brief epistle, but she was a long while writing it. Her previous notes had been dashed off in ten minutes, and usually related to the play of the previous evening. His replies had been a curious mingling of half− offended pride and a passion which was only restrained by the fear that the lady was not yet ready for it.

Finally Betty concocted the missive to the satisfaction of her mind's diplomatic condition. She had not yet brought herself to begin any of her notes to him formally. “Dear Robert” was as yet unnatural, and “Dear Mr. Burleigh” absurd; so she ignored the convention.

“I suddenly have made up my mind to go to the Adirondacks for a month, *quite alone*,” she wrote. “When one is going to take a tremendous step, one needs solitude that one may do a great deal of hard thinking. I don't wonder that some Catholic women go into retreat. At all events, Washington, 'the world,' even my mother, even you, who always are so kind and considerate, seem impossible to me at present; and if I am to live with some one else for the rest of my life, I must have one uninterrupted month of solitary myself. Doubtless that will do me till the end of my time! So would you mind if I asked you not even to write to me? I have enjoyed your notes so much, but I want to feel absolutely alone. Don't think this is petty egoism. It goes far deeper than that! If we ever are to understand each other I am sure I need not explain myself further.

B. M.”

“It has a rather heartless ring,” she thought with a sigh, “but it will intrigue him, and—who knows? As heaven is my witness, I do not. But I do know this, that unless I get away from them all and fairly inside of myself, whatever I do will seem the wrong thing and I might end by making a dramatic fool of myself.”

XIX

The ice was on the lake this time, although it was melting rapidly, but the sun shone all day. She had to wear her furs in the woods, but the greens had never looked so vivid and fresh, and save for an occasional woodchopper and her own servants, there was not a soul to be met in that high solitude. The hotel across the lake would not open for a month. Even the birds still lingered in the South.

After she had been alone for two days she wondered why, when in trouble before, she had not turned instinctively to solitude in the forest. It is only the shallow mind that dislikes and fears the lonely places of Nature: the intellect, no matter what vapours may be sent up from the heart, finds not only solace in retirement, but another form of that companionship of the ego which the deeply religious find in retreat. The intellectual may lack the supreme self−satisfaction of the religious, but they find a keen pleasure in being able to make the very most of the results of years of consistent effort.

Betty, whether alone by a roaring fire of pine cones in the living− room, or wandering along the edge of the lake in the cold brilliant sunshine, or in the more mysterious depths of the forest, listening to the silence or watching the drops of light fall through the matted treetops, felt more at peace with the world than she had done since her fatal embarkation on the political sea. She put the memory of Harriet Walker, insistent at first, impatiently aside, and in a day or two that shadow crept back to its grave.

For a few days her mind, in its grateful repose, hesitated to grapple with the question which had sent her to the mountains; and on one of them, while thinking idly on the great political questions which had magnetized so much of her thought during the past year, the inspiration for which she had so often longed shot up from the concentrated results of thinking and experience, and revealed in what manner she could be of service to her country. This was, whatever her personal life, to gather about her, once a week, as many bright boys of her own condition as she could find, and interest and educate them in the principles of patriotic statesmanship. With her own burning interest in the subject and her personal fascination, she could accomplish far more than any weary professor could do.

She had come up to these fastnesses to decide the future happiness of one or two of three people, and she felt sober enough; but for almost a week she wished that she could live here alone for the rest of her life: she believed that in time she would be serenely content. She had the largest capacity for human happiness, but she guessed that the imagination could be so trained that when far from worldly conditions it could create a world of its own, and would shrink more and more from the practical realities. For Imagination has the instinct of a nun in its depths and loves the cloister of a picturesque solitude. It is a Fool's Paradise, but not inferior to the one which mortals are at liberty to enter and ruin.

But Betty could not live here alone, she could not ignore her responsibilities in any such primitive fashion; and so long as her heart was alive it would make battle for real and tangible happiness.

She had a question to decide which involved not only the heart but the mind: if she made a mistake now, she would be at odds with her higher faculties for the rest of her life. She dreaded the sophistry which sat on either side of the subject; and it was a question whether the very strength of her impulse toward the man she had loved for a year was not the strongest argument in its favour.

But she had given her word to another man, and she had the high and almost fanatical sense of honour of the Southern race. On the other hand, she had a practical modern brain, and during the last year she had been living in close contact with much hard common−sense. She had imagination, and she knew that she already had made Burleigh suffer deeply, and had it in her power to raise that suffering to acuteness; and if that buoyant nature were soured, a useful career might be seriously impaired. On the other hand, she had made a greater man more miserable still, and while he was finding life black enough she had rushed into the camp of the enemy; and his capacity for suffering was far deeper and more enduring than that of the younger man.

She tried to put herself as much aside from the question as possible, but she had her rights and they made themselves heard. She knew, had known at once, that she had outraged all she held most dear, in engaging herself to one man when she loved another, and she had begun to wonder—in irresistible flashes—before the news had

come which sent her to the mountains, if she should falter at the last moment. But breeding has carried many a woman over the ploughshares of life, and her mind was probably strong enough to go on to the inevitable without theatric climax. At the same time the idea of marriage with one man when she loved another was abhorrent; that it was particularly so since marriage with the other had become possible, she understood perfectly. And although she continued to reason and to argue, she had a lurking suspicion that while she might be strong enough to conquer a desire she might not be able to conquer a physical revolt, and that it would rout her standards and decide the issue.

She had made up her mind that she would hesitate for a month and no longer, and she also had determined that she would decide the question for herself and throw none of the responsibility on Senator North; she felt the impulse to write to him impersonally more than once. (Perhaps her sense of humour also restrained her.) She wondered if it were one year or twenty years since she had gone to him for advice; and she knew that whichever way she decided, the desire for his good opinion would have something to do with it.

There are only a certain number of arguments in any brain, and after they have been reiterated a sufficient number of times they pall. From argument Betty lapsed naturally into meditation, and the subject of these meditations, tender, regretful, and impassioned, was one man only; and Burleigh had no place in them. Occasionally she forced him into her mind, but he seemed as anxious to get out as she was to drive him; and after the ice melted and she was able to spend hours on the lake, and rest under spreading oaks, where she had only to shut her eyes to imagine herself companioned, she felt herself unfaithful if she cast a solitary thought to Burleigh.

At the end of the month she was not tired of solitude, but she was tired of her intellectual attitude. She was human first and mental afterward; and she wanted nothing on earth but to be the wife of the man whom she had loved for a lifetime in a year. The moment she formulated this wish, hesitation fled and she could not wind up her engagement with Burleigh rapidly enough. Her letter, however, was very sweet and apologetic, and it was also very honest. She knew that unless she told him she loved another man and intended to marry him, he would take the next train for the Adirondacks and plead his cause in person. His reply was characteristic.

“Very well,” it ran. “I do not pretend to say I was not prepared after your last letter from New York. And although I could not guess your motive in accepting me, I knew that you did not love me. But if I am not overwhelmed with surprise, the pain is no easier on that account, and will not be until the grass has had time to grow over it a little. And at least it is a relief to know the worst. Of course I forgive you. I doubt if any man could feel bitterly toward you. You compel too much love for that.

“Don't worry about me. I have work enough to do—a State to talk sense into and a nation to which to devote my poor energies. My brain such as it is will be constantly occupied, which is the next best good a man can have.”

ROBERT BURLEIGH.

Betty wrote him four pages of enthusiastic friendliness in reply, and paid him the compliment of postponing her letter to Senator North until the following day.

But on that day she rose with the feeling that the sun never would set.

She was as brief as possible, for she knew that he hated long letters. Nevertheless, she conveyed an exact impression of her weeks of deliberation and analysis.

“I want you to understand,” she went on, “that my only wish when I came here for solitary thought was to do the right thing, irrespective of my own wishes in the matter. But it seems to me there is exactly as much to be said on one side as on the other, and it all comes to this: right or wrong, I have decided for you because I love you; and if you no longer can admire me, if you think that I have violated my sense of honour, then at least I shall marry no one else. B. M.”

And as her imagination was strong she did allow herself to be tortured by doubts during the three days that elapsed before she heard from him. She had hoped he would telegraph, but he did not, and her imagination and her common−sense had a long and indecisive argument which threatened ultimate depression. On the third night, however, a messenger from the hotel opposite brought her a note from Senator North.

“I don't know that your mental exercise has done you any harm,” he had written, “but it certainly was thrown away. You have too much common− sense and too thorough a capacity for loving to do anything so foolish or so outrageous as to marry the wrong man. If you had followed a romantic impulse—induced by nervous excitement—and married him the day you learned that your word might be put to too severe a test, you would have been miserable, and so would Burleigh. A mistaken sense of duty has been the cause of quite one fourth of

the unhappiness of mankind, and few have been so bigoted as not to acknowledge this when too late. And a broken engagement is a small injustice to a man compared to a lifetime with an unloving wife. Burleigh is unhappy now, but it is no lack of admiration which prompts me to say that if he had married you he would have been unhappier still. You could do nothing by halves.

"Formalities with us would be an affectation unworthy of either, and I have come to you at once. I knew that you would send for me, but I preferred to wait until you wrote that your engagement was broken. What I felt when I received your note announcing it, I leave to your imagination, and I forgot it as quickly as possible. I understood perfectly, but you exaggerated the dangers; for my love for you is so great and so absorbing, so complete in all its parts, that nothing but marriage would satisfy me. I should have preferred a memory to a failure.

"If your mother were with you, I should go over to−night. But I shall wait for you at five to−morrow morning where you were in the habit of letting me board your boat. And the day will not be long enough! R. N."

Betty slept little that night, but felt no lack of freshness the next morning when she rose shortly after four. A broken night meant little to her now, and happiness would have stimulated every faculty if she had not slept for a week.

She rowed swiftly across the lake. It was almost June now, and the warmth of summer was in the air, the paler greens among the grim old trees of the forest. The birds had come from the South and were singing to the accompaniment of the pines, the roar of distant cataracts; and yet the world seemed still. The stars were white and faint; the moon was tangled in a treetop on the highest peak.

He might have been the only man awake as he stood with the forest behind him, and she recalled her fancy that although her horizon was thick with flying mist his figure stood there, immovable, always. He looked as if he had not moved since he stood there last, but the mist was gone.

As he stepped into the boat, she moved back that he might take the oars.

"I have on a white frock, and a blue ribbon in my hair," she said nervously, but smiling, "else I could not have forgotten that a year has come and gone."

He too was smiling. "I think it is the only year we ever shall want to forget," he said. And he rowed up the lake.

THE END.