Steadfast Falters

E. Mandevill Rogers

Table of Contents

Steadfast Falters

E. Mandevill Rogers

I

Randolph Crosby's philosophy of life forbade his feeling or expressing emotion, except for the slender, fair−haired girl who stood beside him, and who had in a measure taken the place of the wife whose memory she perpetuated. Nevertheless, the sight of the thoroughbreds as they filed past the club enclosure, their jockeys perching like monkeys on their glossy backs, made the muscles of his throat contract a little.

Excitement was an almost forgotten sensation for this man who had won as many as seven races in a day with horses he had bred and trained himself. It gave him a pleasurable feeling that youth, with all its joys and enthusiasms, was not irrevocably gone.

"Steadfast looks in the pink of condition," remarked a tall man standing beside him, and sufficiently like him to proclaim their relationship.

George Crosby was tall and straight like his brother, with the erect, easy carriage for which the family had long been noted. It was in the expression of eye and mouth that the main points of difference lay. George's eyes were heavy, with thick lids which gave them a languid, rather tired look, and dark−blue shadows encircled them. His lips were full, and drooped a little at the corners.

Randolph's eyes, on the contrary, looked out of an impassive, almost cynical face with the cold, critical gaze of one who for half a century had lived hard and, at times, fast. In his desire to experience every sensation that life could offer, he might have followed paths that were shadowed and devious; but through it all he had carried a sense of responsibility to the code of his ancestors—"Play the game for all it's worth, but play it square!"

George, the younger of the brothers, maintained that Randolph's feeling in regard to family tradition was an obsession.

"Your Uncle Randolph's a bit dotty on the subject, Norman," he had remarked to his son one evening, in the confidence of an after−dinner chat, a slight sneer curling the corners of his lips. "Leans over backward when it comes to a point of what he calls honor. Personally, I don't see what difference it makes to the family tree."

Norman had replied ruefully:

"Wish I had a thousand dollars for each of the dusty old codgers! It would come close to getting me out of debt."

His father had eyed the dissipated young face sharply.

"Just the same, don't hit it up too hard, my son. The paternal exchequer has its limitations, you know, and your dad isn't too old to want some of the good things of life himself!"

And Norman had laughed, and said he wouldn't.

He was standing beside his father now, watching the horses with a strained look on his white face.

"Pat says he's in perfect shape," replied Randolph Crosby, in answer to his brother's remark.

His keen eyes softened as they lingered on the horse who hitherto had always carried his colors to victory.

"Are you backing him?" asked George, glancing at the card he held in his hand.

His brother nodded.

"Went in rather deep this time. It looks like such a sure thing. The odds are pretty heavy, and you have to plunge a bit to make it worth while."

He turned to listen to his daughter, who was calling his attention to one of the other horses.

"Dad!" said Norman in a low voice, from which he could not entirely exclude the excitement he evidently felt. "Steadfast isn't going to win!"

His father glanced at him quickly, his heavy eyes narrowing as he concentrated his attention on Norman's subdued tone.

"I've just left the stable," Norman went on; "and I tell you, Steadfast is not going to win!"

George Crosby scrutinized his son's face for a moment in silence. Then they moved quietly toward a thick−set man, with a diamond horseshoe pin in his vivid tie, who was standing on the outskirts of the crowd.

A short, faultlessly dressed man with a military carriage put his hand on Randolph Crosby's shoulder.

"Steadfast going to win, Rand?" he asked in a well−modulated voice.

Randolph Crosby lowered the glasses through which he had been following the string of horses as they

moved'slowly up the stretch, and turned toward the speaker.

"Hope so, I'm sure, Tod," he answered.

Major Barry smiled at him affectionately.

"Advise my staking half my pay on him?" he asked.

Crosby smiled back at him half seriously.

"Betsy," he said, turning to his daughter, read your godfather a lecture. He's on the verge of succumbing to temptation!"

Elizabeth turned, her bright face illumined by the smile which Major Barry always said made you feel that all nature had suddenly burst into song, and shook her finger at him.

"Really," she exclaimed, "if you boys don't behave, I shall have to take you home! It's bad enough having one of my fathers plunging heavily; but if you both do, and Steadfast should lose, who is going to keep me supplied with gardenias?"

"Horrors!" Major Barry raised his eyebrows in exaggerated concern. "What a ghastly suggestion! I shall most certainly refrain!"

With a laugh, he walked away with his light, springy step.

Randolph Crosby raised his glasses to his eyes and fixed them on the shifting group of horses on the far side of the green oval. His hand was not as steady as usual as he readjusted the lenses, but it was in an even, perfectly controlled voice that he said "They're off!" as the barrier was sprung.

The words were taken up by the people in the grand stand on the other side of the railing, and simultaneously the crowd rose to its feet.

"Steadfast leads! Steadfast leads!" came an exultant chorus of voices.

The horse had been a consistent winner ever since the season opened, and consequently was high in popular favor. His capture of the richest stake of the year was taken almost as a foregone conclusion, and a great crowd had turned out to see the race and to bring home its share of the proceeds.

The horses swept into the home−stretch with Steadfast well in the van. It looked as if the race was over, and Randolph Crosby was about to lower his glasses when he saw Steadfast falter.

It was only for a second. The boy on the horse's back tightened the rein, and then gave him his head; but in that second before Steadfast regained his stride, Pursuit, who had been playing second to him all the year, and now was following close on his heels, gained perceptibly. His nose crept up until it was outlined against Steadfast's quarter. Then it blotted out Pat's white leg, and then it reached the band on the bridle.

"What's wrong with Steadfast?"

The question flashed through Randolph Crosby's mind. Certainly there was a marked difference in his running. It was labored, forced, quite unlike the easy swing that had made him famous.

"Pursuit! Pursuit!"

The cry broke in upon him in an agony of apprehension as the horses swept by the grand stand. Pat was riding far forward, urging Steadfast with hand and voice, and the jockey on Pursuit's back was whipping his mount briskly.

"Give Steadfast the whip! The whip!" shouted the crowd in a frenzy of excitement; but Pat did not heed them, and the horses passed the judges' stand with Pursuit's nose a foot to the fore.

An angry tumult of disappointment surged over the crowd. Randolph Crosby's keen eyes were fixed on Pat's white face as he trotted back to the weighing−stand. As the jockey raised his whip, Crosby's breath escaped through his lips in a little sigh, as if insensibly he had been holding it in expectation of something, he did not know quite what.

The fair girl beside him turned her sweet, troubled face to him.

"Oh, father!" she exclaimed, her blue eyes limpid with sympathy. "I'm so sorry!"

"All in the day's work, Betsy!" he answered with an attempt at gaiety, looking fondly at her. "Can't always win! That would be monotonous. I think I'll go and speak to Pat; he looks a bit cut up."

He strolled off through the brightly colored groups scattered over the lawn. Elizabeth turned to the tall man beside her.

"Poor dad!" she said. "He is disappointed! He idolizes that horse, and I can see it has really hurt him to have him beaten."

"It's too bad! I am sorry!" returned Fairfax Cary, with a regretful glance at the erect gray head disappearing into the crowd. "Steadfast is a great horse, but—"

"You thought so, too!" exclaimed Elizabeth, with a quick glance at the clean−cut profile. "I didn't want to say anything to father, but"—she looked inquiringly into the gray eyes fixed intently on her face—it seemed to me—"

She stopped abruptly, and the delicate color slowly deepened in her cheeks.

"You're looking very lovely this afternoon," said Cary in a low voice. "I've been wanting to tell you so for two hours, but there's always such a crowd around you!"

Elizabeth laughed a little tremulously.

"What a relief it must be to get it off your mind at last!" she flashed back at him, with a look from under the broad brim of her hat that made the expression in his eyes deepen dangerously.

"It is," he assented seriously. "That's a perfectly new dimple you've developed just under your right eye. How dare you spring anything so distractingly—"

"Where's your father, Elizabeth?" asked a full voice at the girl's elbow.

Elizabeth turned quickly and looked into the handsome, carefully penciled face beside her, whose prominent eyes were staring disapprovingly at Cary's lean, brown countenance.

"Oh, Aunt Maude, is it you? Father went to the stables to speak to Pat. He knew the boy would be heart−broken. You remember Mr. Cary?"

She had introduced them numberless times before, but it always seemed to be necessary to repeat the formality. She had adopted the habit of doing it immediately, in order to take away as much strain as possible from a situation which was always difficult when the two were together.

Cary raised his hat with the quizzical look in his eyes that Elizabeth had learned to expect, and bowed with an almost imperceptible exaggeration of his usual courtly manner.

Mrs. Crosby acknowledged the salutation mechanically, her full eyes wandering indifferently past him.

"Pat's not the only one who is heartbroken," she retorted abruptly. "Practically every one was backing Steadfast, and I know several people who have been pretty hard hit." The thin line of her mouth hardened. She herself had lost more than she could afford on the race, and she was looking for some one on whom to lay the blame. "How about you, Mr. Cary?" she went on, the vaguest suggestion of a sneer in the throaty voice. "Or don't you ever bet?"

"Not often, Mrs. Crosby," answered Cary calmly. "In the first place, I can't afford to lose; in the second, I don't follow the races closely enough to form an intelligent opinion on the relative merits of the horses."

Mrs. Crosby laughed a little unpleasantly.

"Then it is something besides the horses that brings you here?" she asked meaningly.

A slight flush spread over Cary's sensitive face, and the firm line of his chin stiffened.

"Oh, don't put me quite outside the pale," he answered lightly. "You know we Virginians love a good horse, and a race is an inspiring sight, even to one who has never been in a position to follow the sport—or any other, for that matter," he added whimsically, with a side glance at Elizabeth.

She returned his look with a smile that caused Mrs. Crosby to hunch her plump shoulders uncomfortably as she realized her mistake.

Fairfax Cary had left the family estate in the Shenandoah Valley ten years before, and had come to New York with little besides the clothes on his back, and practically nothing in them. He had met Randolph Crosby in the settlement of an estate against which Crosby had a claim. Struck by the young man's ability, Crosby had employed him in several minor cases of his own. Gradually social intercourse had developed from business relations, until Fairfax Cary became an acknowledged friend of the family, and was in frequent attendance on Elizabeth.

The intimacy had increased so fast that. Mrs. Crosby had undertaken to remonstrate with her brother−in−law one afternoon when he had dropped in to tea.

"Good Heavens, Maude!" he had retorted impatiently. "The girl isn't going to marry every man who takes her in to dinner!"

"No, Randolph," answered Mrs. Crosby in the long−suffering way that some women adopt when they feel that the men of their family are deliberately obtuse. "Of course not; but she's going to marry one of them, and you know how easy it is to make a mistake. A girl with Elizabeth's prospects is very attractive, especially to a man

with none."

"I don't agree with you that Cary has no prospects. He's a very able chap, and as straight as a string."

Mrs. Crosby had raised her penciled eyebrows slightly.

"Perhaps," she agreed unwillingly, "from a man's standpoint, he may"—there was the faintest possible emphasis on the word— "be all that is desirable; but I'm sure, if Helen had lived, she would have agreed with me that Elizabeth is too rare a girl to be thrown away on an unknown."

A slight quiver had passed over Randolph Crosby's face at the mention of his wife's name. For a moment he was silent, then he said:

"Better not call Fairfax Cary an unknown in Virginia!"

Mrs. Crosby had shrugged her shoulders.

"Virginia is not New York. If you want Elizabeth to bury herself in the country, why, of course, I have nothing to say." She paused, then she added in a lowered voice: "You know I've always felt that I must take as far as I can her mother's place to Elizabeth, and I can't see her sacrifice herself without a word of protest. I love the girl as dearly as if she were the daughter who was denied to me."

She raised a lace−trimmed handkerchief and dabbed her eyes carefully.

"Awfully good of you, Maude, I'm sure," replied Crosby, uneasily moving his neatly incased foot. "But I don't think we need either of us worry about Elizabeth. She's as level−headed a young woman as I know, and when she makes up that mind of hers"— he looked whimsically at his sister−in−law, a smile, half of pride, half of helplessness, spreading over his face—"I don't think there's any power in heaven or on earth that will move her!"

Mrs. Crosby had spread out her plump, jeweled fingers and raised her eyebrows meaningly, indicating that at least she had done her duty, and the rest lay with him.

She turned now to greet her husband and son as they emerged from the throng about them. There was an intangible atmosphere of elation about them, and Norman's face was flushed.

"Too bad, Betty," he remarked in a rather thick voice to his cousin. "Beastly hard luck! Uncle Randolph's disappointed, I guess—what? Great race, though!"

He pushed back his straw hat from his damp forehead, and taking out his cigarette−case, offered it to Cary with a, hand that shook perceptibly. When Fairfax declined, he took out a cigarette, struck the end of it once or twice on the gold lid, lit it, and placed it between his loose lips.

"A lot of money changed hands," he remarked confidentially to Cary, his bloodshot eyes glistening.

The lines of the other man's face hardened, and unconsciously he drew himself up. Turning to Elizabeth, he asked, in an undertone that excluded the others, if she would care to go to the paddock.

Elizabeth glanced at him in quick gratitude, and after a few words of explanation to her aunt they moved away.

Randolph Crosby, in the mean time, had succeeded in making his way through the groups of well−dressed men and women who, eager to sympathize with him and hear his explanation of the defeat, were impeding his progress to the stable. When he reached his destination, he found Pat watching Jim, the stable−boy, who was rubbing Steadfast down. The boy's angry face was flushed, and a white line encircled his mouth.

"I tell ye it wa'n't no put−up game!" he was saying hotly to another boy, who sat on the bottom of an overturned pail. "I rode a straight race! What do ye take me fer, ye miserable tout?"

He turned threateningly toward the other. The sneer that met him seemed to drive away his last vestige of self−control. Shaking his fist in the other boy's face, his little figure trembling with rage, Pat shouted:

"Ye're a low−mouthed, dirty, snivelin' liar, an' ye know ye're lyin'—" He stopped abruptly as his eyes fell on his employer.

"Well, Pat," remarked Mr. Crosby quietly, watching with a half smile his jockey's tormentor as he slipped hastily away, what's it all about?"

The boy struggled vainly to regain his self−control.

"The miserable, rotten little kike—"

"Yes, yes," broke in Mr. Crosby coolly. "Leave all that out!"

Pat raised his working face and looked full into the dark eyes that somehow seemed to have lost their cynical expression.

"He said I pulled Steadfast!" he exclaimed. "Said I lost on purpose!"

He turned away abruptly and laid his hand, as if to steady himself, on the horse's deep−breathing side.

"The dirty hound!" he muttered under his breath. "An' me with every cart−wheel I could scrape together on the hoss! If he knowed what that race meant to me!"

Again Pat stopped, his voice trembling.

"Ye don't risk what ye've been workin' fer since ye wuz a kid, scrimpin' an' screwin' so as ye kin hev a place ter put yer sister where she'll be safe from that"—his eyes glanced significantly to the paddock, where flashily dressed men loitered about the horses, discoursing on their points to the painted women who accompanied them—It unless ye've got a dead−sure thing. It ain't no fault o' mine that Steadfast didn't win that race—ye know that, don't ye, Mr. Crosby?"

He drove his hands into the pockets of his breeches and looked appealingly into the older man's face. Mr. Crosby nodded.

"Why did Steadfast lose, Pat?" he asked gravely.

Pat shifted his position uneasily.

"I dunno, sir—I swear I don't. The hoss wuz goin' like a bunch o' machinery, an' I thought I had the race won; an' then all ter once I feels him give, sudden like, just like somethin' inside him had broke down. I done my best, but he'd lost his spring, an' I knowed then he couldn't win; but what the matter wuz—" The boy shook his head despondently. "Did ye hear the crowd yellin' at me to give him the whip? Steadfast! Can ye beat that? Lot they know about hosses!" Pat's voice was brimming with scorn as he ran his hand over the animal's glossy neck. "Why, it would ha' broke his heart!"

The horse turned his head and, fastening his great, velvety eyes on the boy, laid his muzzle on Pat's shoulder. The boy hid his face quickly in the horse's mane, but not in time to prevent Crosby's seeing the pitifully quivering chin. For a moment all that broke the silence was the stamping of the other horses in their stalls and the far−off throb of the band.

"Pat!" said Mr. Crosby at last. "Come here, my lad—I want to ask you a question." They drew a little apart until they were quite alone. "Could any one have got at Steadfast?"

The question was almost inaudible, but the jockey's sharp ears caught it, and he shook his head in vehement denial.

"I ain't lef' him day or night, Mr. Crosby," he answered quickly. "I even slep' In the stall—an' when I had ter go and change me togs I lef' Mr. Norman an' Molly with him. Surely he couldn't ha' been no safer?"

The lad looked interrogatively at his employer. Mr. Crosby shook his head, and after telling Pat not to worry any more about the race, and giving him some instructions for the following day, he walked back toward the clubhouse.

As he passed the paddock a short, stocky man in a check suit came toward him. His deep−set eyes brightened as they caught sight of Randolph Crosby, and he stretched out a thick, muscular hand adorned with a large cameo ring.

"How−do, Mr. Crosby? How are you?" he asked, taking an enormous unlighted cigar out of his mouth. "What was wrong with Steadfast?" His keen black eyes, under their shaggy eyebrows, fixed themselves penetratingly on Crosby's face.

Randolph Crosby raised his eyebrows.

"Nothing, Tutney, as far as I know. I've just been talking to Pat. He says the horse was in perfect shape until the middle of the race; then he seemed to crumple up. I can't understand it."

Tutney replaced the cigar in his mouth, and twisted it around and around with his tongue. The expression on his immovable face never changed.

"Were you backin' him?" he asked bluntly,

Crosby nodded.

"That race cost me quite a lot of money," he replied quietly. " The odds were heavy, and it was a good purse."

Tutney grunted.

"Thought they were wrong!"

"What do you mean?"

The stocky man shifted his weight from one white−gaitered foot to the other and gave the cigar another twist.

"Oh, just some remarks I overheard. Crowd's pretty sore— always is when it loses!"

"What did you hear?" said Crosby, looking sharply at the other.

Tutney hesitated, and Crosby repeated his question in a quiet, cold voice.

"Why, they were sayin," the man began, lowering his voice, "that the Crosbys had won a lot of money on the race."

Crosby stared incredulously at the stolid face.

"Are they saying that?" he asked in an undertone, as if speaking to himself.

Tutney scrutinized the cold, impassive face sharply. He took the cigar out of his mouth.

"Mr. Crosby," he said at last, "you and I have known each other for ten years—eleven, to be exact—haven't we?"

Crosby inclined his head.

"And we've had a good many deals together of one kind or another." Again Tutney waited for the other man's assent. "And in that time, in spite of the fact that there were plenty of chances for shady practise, I want to go on record as sayin' you're the squarest man I ever met, bar none!"

He turned abruptly away, as if ashamed of the emotion that had crept into his voice. Randolph Crosby's keen eyes softened.

"Thank you, Tutney," he said quietly. "That means a great deal, coming from you."

He stretched out his hand, and Tutney grasped it firmly.

"Good−by, Mr. Crosby," he said huskily. He cleared his throat loudly. "I'm off to South Africa to−morrow. Got to look after things there a bit. Let me know if at any time I can be of service to you."

Crosby thanked him again, and his eyes followed Tutney with an expression almost of tenderness as the stocky man disappeared into the crowd. Then he resumed his walk toward the club enclosure. Unconsciously his shoulders had straightened and his head gone up.

At the entrance he saw the Porter Chadwicks, who, with the Crosbys, had lunched at the clubhouse before the races. Chadwick glanced in Randolph Crosby's direction and said something in an undertone to his wife, and they passed quickly through the wicket.

A quiet smile played around the corners of Crosby's thin lips, but the tired, cynical look in his eyes deepened. He stepped into the enclosure and almost ran into the arms of Griswold Peyton, who had been a classmate of his at Harvard, and was one of his most intimate friends. Peyton started violently and turned scarlet.

"Too—too bad—about the—race, old man!" he stammered. "Must speak to—to—Mrs. Phillips. See you again!"

He fled precipitately. A slight frown contracted Crosby's straight brows, and his lips tightened. He walked to where Elizabeth and Cary stood a little apart.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked his daughter. "I don't want to hurry you, but as the races are over—"

"Quite ready," answered Elizabeth.

She smiled joyously at her father, and her voice seemed brimming with the silver purity of the hermit−thrush. She put her hand through his arm, and they turned to leave the enclosure.

"Oh, Betsy!" A dark, vivacious face appeared at her shoulder. "I was so afraid you would leave before I had a chance to speak to you!" The speaker put out her hand to Randolph Crosby. " So sorry about the race!"

"Thank you, Trixie"; and Crosby's hand closed warmly over hers. "Beatrix! Beatrix! Come here at once!"

The words came almost in a wail from a small, much−corseted woman in a purple crepe de Chine, heavily trimmed with Cluny lace. An expression of anguish shone through the powder on her horrified face.

"She only calls me that on occasions of great urgency!" laughed Trixie. "I shall have to go; but remember, Betsy— you're coming to me at Lawrence for a long visit this summer. I won't be put off again!"

She pressed Elizabeth's hand, and with a nod to the men flew off to rejoin her mother.

"Mrs. Hunnewell seems rather upset," remarked Elizabeth wonderingly.

"Very much so," replied her father grimly. They started toward the exit. "Why, Humphrey!" he exclaimed, and then stopped.

A tall, fine−looking man with iron−gray hair and mustache looked at him coldly and passed without speaking.

Randolph Crosby's face whitened. With muscles so tense that they showed like cords through the skin, he walked to the waiting automobile. He stood back for Elizabeth to enter; then he got in and dropped down beside her.

"Coming, Fairfax?" he asked in a voice strangely unlike his own. "No? Well, drop in soon. All right, Foster—home, then!"

He settled back in his corner.

When the parlor−maid went into the library of the Crosbys' apartment the next morning and pulled up the shade, the sun fell full on the figure of Randolph Crosby, sunk deep in his big armchair. His head was turned a little to one side, as if trying to catch a sound that eluded him, and over his lips hovered the faint shadow of a smile, not cynical or sarcastic, but as if the pettiness of life and its sordid estimates had passed him by forever, and he had found again the one who had always understood.

II

Mrs. George Crosby sat at her desk in the morning−room, a pile of unpaid bills before her and a thin line of worry between her eyebrows. An indescribable atmosphere of unrest and weariness hovered about her, accentuating the traces of wear which years of struggle had left behind. The limp folds of her tea−gown hanging dejectedly around her stressed her dispirited appearance. The room, with its worn rug, soiled, cretonne−upholstered furniture and shabby hangings, seemed to fasten upon her the imprint of hard usage, as if to revenge itself for her neglect of it by proclaiming aloud, in the privacy of the third−floor back, what she fought with desperate determination to conceal from the critical eyes of the habitues of her perfectly appointed drawing−room.

She pushed away the papers petulantly is her husband entered the room.

"Really, George," she exclaimed irritably, turning toward him, "I don't see how I'm going to meet this additional expense! I've a pile of bills here now that there isn't the least prospect in the world of my ever being able to pay, and some of the people are positively uncivil in their demands. Now, if I have to buy an entire mourning outfit, I don't see where I'm coming out!"

She looked at him in angry reproach.

"Too bad, old girl," returned her husband nonchalantly, sinking into a deep chair by the window and opening the newspaper he held. "But don't blame me—it isn't my fault!"

"Don't be absurd, George! Of course, Randolph's death isn't your fault; but I won't go to the length of saying that our being so strapped isn't!" Her eyes ran impatiently over his relaxed figure. "And I assure you I haven't the slightest intention of going to Newport this summer without the proper wardrobe. If I have to put on mourning—and I suppose I must, or people will talk, and they're doing enough of that as it is—it's got to be of the best. Cheap mourning is impossible; so you'll have to arrange to give me some money. Remember, it's your brother, not mine!"

George Crosby lowered his paper irritably.

"Upon my word, Maude," he exclaimed, "you might show a little feeling! The way you're acting is abominable. One would think Randolph had died on purpose!"

"How do you know he didn't?" rejoined his wife with acerbity. "No one seems to have the faintest idea why he died. Even the doctors can't agree. Half of them say something about his heart, and the rest talk vaguely about a stroke. For my part, I think the disgrace of that Steadfast affair was the cause."

"You mean?"

George Crosby gazed intently at his wife's face, haggard and worn without its customary make−up. "Oh, George! Why do you make me go into details? You know as well as I that there was something wrong with the horse on Thursday, and it was pretty generally suspected that he had been tampered with. At all events, I saw some of Randolph's most intimate friends cut him dead as he was leaving the grounds, and Randolph was not the sort of man to stand that."

She looked meaningly into her husband's startled face.

"Poor old Rand!"

George Crosby's voice shook. He turned his heavy eyes toward the window and stared, unseeing, at the backs of the houses opposite.

"It's horrid! The whole thing is perfectly abominable!" continued his wife in a tone of extreme exasperation. "Here I've gone to the expense of a complete outfit for the summer—"

Her husband jumped to his feet.

Yes, yes!" he exclaimed irritably. "I'll get you the money somehow; but you'll have to make it go as far as possible."

"Trust me for that!" retorted his wife with a hard little laugh. "Years of training have taught me to get as much out of a dollar as one hundred cents will buy, and maybe a little more, I'm sick of it! I'm tired to death of having to plan and scrimp until even my fingers are beginning to look like claws!" She held out her crooked fingers before him. "How is it that Randolph had plenty of money and could live like a prince, while we've always been pinched

to the last degree?"

George Crosby shrugged his shoulders and moved toward the door. It was not the first time the question had been put to him, and it aroused, even now, a feeling of antagonism against the brother whose inheritance had been the same as his own, but who had increased his property tenfold, while George's had steadily dwindled.

"Perhaps an extravagant wife and son have had something to do with it!" he flung back over his shoulder as he lingered on the threshold. "Well, poor Randolph can't enjoy his pile any more. What did you decide about Elizabeth?"

"She's coming to us, of course. She can't live alone, and if I have her under my eye I can perhaps keep away undesirables."

She looked full at her husband, who nodded understandingly.

"Quite right, Maude; the girl's a catch, and is bound to have a lot of attention. Much better to have her here. Will she go with you to Newport?"

"Oh, yes; she needn't go out, and Norman will be there to amuse her. I want the boy to take a good long rest this summer; he looks desperately thin."

"You can't lay that to overwork! replied her husband with a short laugh. Almost the only thing that ever brings him to the office is the urgent need of funds."

"Like father, like son!" murmured his mother. "I never noticed a deep love of work in you, either!"

"Maybe not, but my father wasn't so lenient as Norman's is, and I had to work when I was his age. You can't blame me for wanting to take life a bit easy now." He stretched luxuriously, and a self−indulgent smile widened the full lips. "After all, one only lives once, and at my age there aren't so many years left to enjoy."

Mrs. Crosby shuddered.

I wish you wouldn't everlastingly keep referring to that extremely unpleasant subject. It's positively gruesome! We all have to die some time, of course, but there's no use in perpetually harping on the fact."

Crosby laughed again, lazily.

"Well, I'm off," he said, turning toward the stairs. "I want to get Randolph's affairs straightened out as far as I can before the hot weather comes." He paused once more. "Tell Norman I expect him at twelve—that is, unless it's too early for him," he added with an exaggerated air of concern.

But when Norman finally appeared in his father's office, George Crosby foresaw at once, from the haggardness of the boy's face, what the interview portended. These heated scenes had occurred with increasing frequency since Norman was fifteen, and were to be dreaded even more than the hardly less stormy encounters with the boy's mother.

Norman sank into the deep leather armchair that stood at the corner of his father's writing−table. Swinging one leg over the other, he began nursing his slender, silk−incased ankle.

"I'm in the devil of a hole, dad!" he began moodily,

"You always are, aren't you?" retorted his father, with a scornful look from under his thick eyelids. Norman laughed uneasily.

"More or less," he admitted; "but this time it's no merry jest!"

"I have never found it so at any time," returned his father coldly.

Norman shifted his position uncomfortably. His bloodshot eyes were wandering about the room; finally they came back to his father's face.

"I've had hard luck," he began with an effort; "deuced hard luck."

"Yes?" George Crosby's tone was hardly encouraging.

Norman's eyes dropped to the Turkish rug which covered the floor.

"Well, what's the demnition total?" asked his father after a pause, attempting a facetiousness which the tone of his voice indicated he was far from feeling.

"Fifty thousand," said the boy desperately.

"Fifty thousand! Good Heavens, boy, are you crazy?"

George Crosby leaned far out of his chair, his hands gripping the arms, his wide eyes for once alight, gazing incredulously into the sullen face before him.

Norman shook his head resentfully.

"Not yet, but I soon shall be, if this keeps on!"

"You— you!" retorted his father, his face ablaze with anger. "You'll have us all, your mother and me included, in the madhouse or in jail—I don't know which! And it's only yourself you stop to think of! Fifty thousand dollars! Do you realize what that means to me?"

The boy's face blanched, and his sullen expression deepened.

How did it happen?" asked his father in a low voice, which he was evidently exerting his utmost will−power to control.

"Playing auction."

"Auction! What stake?"

"Fifty cents."

"Fifty cents a point?" An incredulous look stole over George Crosby's face. "You say you were playing auction for fifty cents a point?" Then, as no answer was vouchsafed, he added, as if to himself: "Just ten times my limit!"

For a moment neither spoke. A tense, living silence wrapped itself about them, which the monotonous hum of the city booming in through the open window seemed to accentuate.

"How do you expect to pay this debt of—er—honor?" queried his father at last, a sneer curling the corners of his mouth.

The boy crouched back in his chair, as if for support, and raised miserable, hunted eyes to his father's grim face.

"I don't know, dad," he whispered huskily, "unless—"

"Unless what?"

Norman swallowed hard. He roused himself from his half−reclining position, and his slender figure suddenly became tense with energy.

"See here, dad!" he began. "I've just heard of a wonderful proposition, perfectly safe, and a dead−sure thing,"

His father looked at him suspiciously from under lowered lids.

"You've told me before of dead−sure things!" he retorted scornfully.

"But this one is absolutely on the level," Norman reiterated. "I happen to know the man who is at the head of it, and he swears that you would double your money in three months. What's more, he proved it to me."

"How?" asked his father laconically.

"It's a rubber company, formed to take over the Belgian interests in the Congo. At present prices rubber is a veritable goldmine, and the demand for it is unlimited. They can't get enough on the other side, and you know how it's gone up here."

The color had come back into the boy's face, and his voice was quick and sharp. George Crosby eyed him in silence.

"How much money does he want?" he asked at last. "Oh, a hundred thousand or so."

"My Heavens, boy! You talk as if I were made of money!"

Norman's eyes dropped from his father's to the writing−table before which he sat. It was strewn with papers. They lingered there for a moment; then he looked back at his father significantly.

"I thought—perhaps," he hesitated, "you might—be willing to invest some—of—Uncle Randolph's money—in it."

George Crosby turned violently toward the boy, who was tensely awaiting the result of his suggestion. "Do you realize that that would be a State's prison offense?" he asked bluntly.

Norman's white face quivered.

"It's probably State's prison if you don't!" be retorted desperately. "What do you mean?" The question came in a harsh voice strangely unlike George Crosby's usual suave tones.

"I mean this." The boy was evidently goaded to desperation. "I raised the check you gave me for five hundred to fifty thousand to pay Henry Armstrong, and I gave it to him last night."

George Crosby turned slowly back to the writing−table, and his gray head dropped into his hands. Lower and lower it sank until it fell on his outstretched arms, resting on the table.

Again that black silence folded itself about them. Once or twice a deep sigh broke from the bowed figure, and the broad shoulders shuddered.

"Good God!" The words seemed to have been wrung from him in spite of his efforts at restraint. "Good God!"

A frightened look stole over Norman's face.

"Don't, dad, don't!" he whispered huskily, rising and laying a shaking hand on the older man's shoulder.

"Don't touch me!" His father sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing, his drawn face working. "You thief!"

Norman swayed back as if his father had struck him, and a look as of an animal at bay crept into his face.

"You— you call me—that!" he breathed hoarsely. " You! Why, you don't know the meaning of the word honesty! Don't talk to me!" The words were tumbling out of his mouth in a frenzy of anger. "Why, ever since I was a kid I've heard you and mother planning and arranging how you were going to get out of paying your bills! And now you call me a thief!" The young man's voice rose almost to a shriek. "How do you expect me to be honest when I've been brought up never to pay for anything unless I had to?"

"Silence!"

George Crosby raised his hand as if to quell the torrent of words by force, if necessary. For a moment father and son glared angrily into each other's face; then, with a catch in his breath that was almost a sob, the young man's slight figure crumpled up and fell into the chair behind him.

His father sank into his armchair, and his face fell forward on his chest. His eyes, no longer languid, stared vacantly out of his strained, white face at the litter of papers before him. It seemed as if some unseen spirit had cast a spell over him, robbing him forever of the atmosphere of youth which had long been the wonder and envy of his friends.

The consequences of the boy's act loomed dark and sinister over him; his son's words stung him with unanswerable force.

He passed his hands in a dazed way across his eyes, as if attempting to brush away a mist that obscured them, and the papers scattered on the table began to assume shape. Mechanically he stretched out his hand and took up a neat bundle secured by a rubber band. He listlessly read the name on the wrapper.

Once more his head sank forward, and his eyes stared out before him, as if trying to penetrate the granite wall that concealed the future. A hunted look crept into them, and the grip on the packet tightened. He turned his head, but not his eyes, in the direction of the youth cowering in the depths of the big chair.

"You say you know the head of this—er—rubber concern?" he asked coldly.

The tense look on Norman Crosby's face lifted.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "It's Henry C. Hargis."

"Hargis! I know him. If you should happen to run across him, tell him I should like to talk to him."

He turned again to the table.

Norman rose. It seemed as if a heavy weight which had been crushing him had been removed, and he walked quickly to the door. With a backward glance toward the silent figure so absorbed as to be apparently oblivious to his existence, he slipped noiselessly out.

III

In the tasteful library in which her father's presence still seemed to linger Elizabeth Crosby wandered about, stopping now and again to touch tenderly some object that had been especially closely associated with him. In the week that had elapsed since his death she had emerged from girlhood into the fuller estate of woman, but there still lingered about her that exquisite trustfulness of childhood, produced by the protecting arm of a love that had enveloped her like a garment.

She picked up a photograph of her father, the look of sad tenderness deepening on her pale face.

"My precious dad!" she whispered, passing her hand caressingly over the face. "I wonder if you know how I miss you! It's very lonely without you, dear."

She replaced the photograph on the table, her eyes blinded by tears, and groped her way to the armchair in which the last night of her father's life had been spent. Sinking down on the arm, she laid her cheek against the spot where his head had rested.

"If only I could—have been with you—through it—all!" she murmured brokenly. "I can't bear to think that you had to face it all alone, with no one that you loved to help you and say good−by. Oh, that's the bitterest part of it all! To think that you had to go without my being able to give you even a kiss, or one word to tell you how I love you! If only I could let you know how grateful I am for all the happiness you gave me, and all the sacrifices you made for me! And now you'll never know! Oh, darling, couldn't you come back for just one little minute, just long enough to let me hold you in my arms and kiss you good−by?"

A great sob shook her slender form. She sat up resolutely and pushed back the heavy golden coils of hair that had fallen over her forehead. A watery little smile played over the pale face.

"Father wouldn't like me to give way like this," she thought self−reproachfully.

She got up and walked toward the door, glancing at the clock on the mantel as she passed it.

"Nearly five!" she exclaimed under her breath. "I must hurry. Fairfax is due now!"

It still lacked a few minutes of the hour when the portieres which separated the drawing−room from the library parted, and Fairfax Cary stepped into the room. In an instant Elizabeth's light footsteps sounded on the stairs, and she came into the library holding out both hands in warm welcome.

"How glad I am to see you!" she exclaimed as their hands met.

"It's so good of you to let me come!" he answered, his eyes devouring her face. Major Barry gave me your message."

"Dear Uncle Tod!" Elizabeth led the way to a roomy sofa and sank down into the corner. "He has been very good to me."

Cary dropped down beside her.

"He naturally would be. He idolized your father, and I know there isn't anything on earth he wouldn't do for him or for you. But tell me how you are."

"Oh, very well," she answered indifferently. The thrushlike lilt had gone out of her voice and great shadows lay under her eyes. "I'm a little tired, naturally; there's so much to be done." She glanced wearily around the room. "I'm giving up the apartment, you know."

Cary nodded sympathetically.

"That's a wrench, I'm sure."

"Yes," assented Elizabeth. "We've been here so long—ever since I was a little girl; and although it's only rented, everything is so associated with—father that I feel as if I were living in a perpetual parting with him." She resolutely forced back the great tears which had sprung to her eyes. "But Aunt Maude thinks I'm too young to live alone, so I'm to go to them. Uncle George is my guardian until I'm twenty−eight. I suppose they're right, but—" She sighed. Then she added in a sudden burst of confidence: "I wish the three years were over! You see, our ideas of what is worth while in life don't agree. It's going to be hard for me to see my friends, too; and I detest Newport!"

"It isn't just the thing for you this summer," agreed Cary. "Can't you persuade Mrs. Crosby to go to a quieter place?"

"Dear me, no! I shouldn't think of asking her. Imagine Aunt Maude cut off from her Newport season! She'd be like a caged lion!" A wistful look had crept into the girl's blue eyes. "Will you be coming down, do you think?"

Certainly not to stay with the Crosbys," he replied, a smile twitching at the corners of his lips.

Elizabeth laughed a little uncertainly.

"I don't understand it," she said thoughtfully. "I don't see why aunt dislikes you; you are always so nice to her."

"She naturally thinks none but the most gorgeous butterflies should flutter around such a brilliant little candle."

A delicate flush crept into the girl's thin checks.

"How silly!" she exclaimed. "I don't think even Aunt Maude could be so absurd! No one could possibly think of you as a butterfly, and some day we shall all be trying to bask in the rays of your glory!" Fairfax Cary laughed. Her praise and faith were very sweet to him, coming as they did after years of combat with obstacles the difficulties of which none but he had half realized.

"When that day comes—if it ever does," he said in a voice vibrant with feeling, "the glory will all be yours to do with as you like; for any success I may achieve will be entirely due to your faith in me and to your father's help."

Elizabeth raised her hand in protest.

"Oh, no," she denied vehemently. "It was your ability that first attracted father's notice; and as for my faith in you, if you had not had the qualities, the faith would never have been inspired."

She looked at him triumphantly, as if defying him to refute her argument.

An overpowering desire to catch her in his arms and tell her of the place she held in his life took hold of Fairfax; but she looked so young, so unprotected, as she half reclined among the cushions of the deep corner, surrounded by the evidences of wealth, that he crushed it back.

"What right have I to ask her to marry me?" he thought savagely. "She's lonely now, poor little girl, and she sees in me a man in whom her father believed, and who consequently has a sort of temporary glamour for her. Wait until you have something real to offer her, man! Even if she cares, it isn't right to take so much and give so little."

When do you go to Newport?" he asked aloud.

"Next week. There are some legal matters to attend to and clothes to get." She looked significantly at her black frock, "There are always so many things to do after—"

"Yes, I know," Cary assented sympathetically. "If there is anything I can do, I'm sure you'll remember that I would consider it a privilege to be allowed to help you."

Elizabeth thanked him with a wan little smile.

"And I want to tell you," he went on gently, "that I shall always think of your father as `one who dared do all that may become a man'—a man too fine to stoop to a meanness, too great of heart to profit through another's hurt."

Elizabeth looked at him gratefully, her eyes brimming with tears. Impulsively she laid her hand on his arm.

"Ah," she murmured, "you were one of the few who really knew him for what he was!" Her chin quivered. "The rest"—she shrugged her shoulders sadly—"they mean to be consoling, but you—you're the first who has really comforted me."

Cary's hand closed warmly over her fingers, and his eyes looked fixedly into hers, as if trying to convey a message which the firm lips resolutely withheld.

"I shall miss you," she said sadly, withdrawing her hand.

Afraid to trust himself further, Fairfax rose.

"If at any time you need me," he said gently in his deep, even voice, "promise me that you will send for me!"

"I promise," answered Elizabeth readily.

"I want you to feel that you can call on me for anything at any time. Will you remember?"

"Yes," replied the girl, putting her hand in his. "Good−by!"

Her eyes followed the straight, thin figure, with its dark, proudly held head, as it disappeared into the hall, and a wave of desolate loneliness swept over her. Unconsciously she took a quick step after him and held out her hands, but the outside door closed softly. She stopped, and her hands fell to her sides.

IV

Notwithstanding Elizabeth's forebodings, the weeks that followed the Crosbys' move to Windy Bluff, their place at Newport, passed rapidly and almost happily for her. Of course there were times when the realization of what she had lost by her father's death overcame her with almost unbearable pain; but as day followed day she became more or less accustomed to the loneliness which at first seemed insupportable. She learned to watch the gay life about her with eyes that no longer shrank from the sight as from an overpowering light,

At first Mrs. Crosby had declined the invitations showered upon her, but by degrees she slipped back into the social swing, encouraged by the fact that Elizabeth seemed to take her going out as a matter of course. But the girl resolutely refused to enter into the pastimes of her aunt's pleasure−loving friends. She spent her time at the grand piano in the music−room, with a book on the ocean−lapped rocks in front of the Crosbys' house, or working at the Red Cross branch which had been organized in town by Mrs. Maitland Andrews.

Her uncle and aunt treated her with affectionate consideration, not pressing her too hard when they found that she was adamant in her desire for seclusion, but making her feel that her presence was at all times a pleasure to them. It was only when Norman, after much letter−writing and telegraphing on the part of his mother, at last appeared at Windy Bluff that Mrs. Crosby interfered with the girl's wish for solitude.

"It isn't right, dear, for a girl of your age to spend so much time alone," she expostulated one afternoon when, after careful manipulation, she had succeeded in persuading Norman to ask Betty to take a sail with him in his sloop—an invitation which Betty bad politely declined. "And then, too, Betty dear, Norman is very fond of you, and I think you might try to make his vacation pleasant. It's so long since he's had a chance to get any outdoor sport, and he needs the fresh air."

So Betty pinned on a wide−brimmed hat and accompanied her cousin to the little white boat bobbing serenely on the sparkling waters of the harbor.

"Betty," said Norman, after the sails had been raised and the boat had slipped away from her moorings, "do you like that?"

He indicated the fast−retreating shore with a toss of his head.

"What?" asked Betty innocently.

"That," and again he gave the contemptuous toss.

"Do you mean Newport?"

An amused look crinkled the corners of her eyes. Norman nodded and glanced up at the white sail stretching like a great wing above them.

"I do and—I don't," replied Betty thoughtfully. "As a specimen of social life, it's perfection; as a specimen of human life, it's—" She paused, and her face assumed an expression of deep seriousness.

"Rotten!" supplemented Norman understandingly. "Just what I think. How the mater can be so daffy about it is more than I can see. Dad, too—he's not so bad, of course; but in his inmost heart, in spite of the fact that he pretends it bores him, he loves it, too. Look out! You're going to jibe!"

Betty shifted the tiller, and the boat danced along on her course, leaving two curling white waves bubbling behind her. The rush of the exhilarating air on her face, the feeling of the boat under her controlling hand, brought a bright flush to her cheeks, and at least temporarily lightened the heavy burden of her sorrow.

"Now this—this is great!" exclaimed Norman enthusiastically. "You feel as if you were doing something! Gee, Betty, it's fine having you to play with!"

In the few days he had been with them his eyes had partly lost their hunted, bloodshot look, and his pasty cheeks had begun to fill out and glow with a semblance of health.

"You're such a bully sort," he went on. "You've a way about you that gets me—as if you had plenty of ballast aboard, and a gust of wind wouldn't be apt to capsize you!"

Betty laughed. In spite of his dissipations, she was fond of her cousin, for she realized intuitively that his weakness of character was largely due to his defective bringing up.

Immersed in the social life about them, his pleasure−loving parents had left the boy to the care of servants during the early part of his life, and to even less desirable companions, most of whom were unknown to them, as

the lad grew into manhood. It was hardly to be wondered at that, with plenty of money, an inherited taste for excitement, and practically no supervision or restraining influence, he should have succumbed to the temptations which surrounded him.

"I suppose it's due to father," she answered. "He was so wonderful—so keen for a good time, and yet he always seemed to know just when to stop. `Drink the top and leave the dregs,' he used to say; and, after all"—she looked brightly into the face beside her, with its weak chin and loose lips—"the top is good enough, without the nastiness of the dregs!"

"It's so hard to stop, though, when you once get started."

"I know," assented Betty gravely; "but that's where you show the stuff you're made of—whether you're just sand, or sand and cement."

She smiled gently into the boy's troubled face.

"But suppose—suppose the cement has been entirely left out of your make−up! Suppose you're just sand, and shifting sand at that, and suppose you don't even want to be anything else!"

Norman moved restlessly and wound the sheet he held around his thin hand.

"I can't imagine any one, even if he doesn't acknowledge it, not wanting to stand up against what he knows will sooner or later be his ruin. Father used to say that life was like any other business. Everything we do goes down in the day−book on either the debit or the credit side. Every once in a while we have to balance the book to find out how we stand in our bank−account. It must be a horrid experience to find one has overdrawn!"

The boy did not reply, and kept his head resolutely turned away.

"Betty," he said at last, "if you found out that some one you thought was on the level had played you a dirty trick, what would you do?"

"Some one I really cared for?"

Betty's eyes searched his face thoughtfully. Norman nodded, his eyes still fixed on the glistening expanse of water.

"Why, I don't know, I'm sure." Betty hesitated. "You'd have to take so many things into consideration—the reason the person had for wronging you, the motives, I mean. If it were done simply to injure you, why, of course, it would be hard; but if it were the result of some overwhelming force, some terrible temptation that had swept him off his feet, that would be different, and much easier to forgive. Why do you ask?"

She looked at him curiously. Norman moistened his dry lips.

"Oh, nothing! I was just wondering," he replied evasively.

When they got back to the house they found Mr. and Mrs. Crosby on the broad veranda, Mrs. Crosby busying herself with the tea things, which had just been brought in. In their absence George Crosby had returned from a flying trip to New York.

He looked unusually worn and exhausted. In the past few weeks he had lost weight, and his skin hung loosely on his cheeks. His eyes were hollow, and unnaturally bright and restless; and he had acquired a habit of tearing stray bits of paper, which his wife found extremely trying.

"There's a letter for you on the table, Betty," remarked her aunt, after a searching glance at the faces of the two young people.

Elizabeth picked up the letter, which was addressed in Beatrix Hunnewell's handwriting, and moved toward the steps leading to the ocean path.

"No tea?" called Mrs. Crosby.

"Not this afternoon, thank you, aunt."

A little flush had crept into her face, and her eyes were luminous. She walked quickly down the gravel path to her favorite spot among the rocks and, sinking down on a smooth stone, opened the letter. It ran: DEAR BETSY:

When are you coming to us? I'm longing to see you, for I have so much to tell you that I can't very well write.

As I told you in my last letter, your friend, Fairfax Cary, has joined the club, and I'm seeing a great deal of him. We play tennis together nearly every afternoon, and he very often comes back with me to dinner. I don't know when I've met a man I admire so much. He's so entirely free from all meannesses, and has such a wonderfully broad outlook! He's coming this afternoon to take me for a ride in his new car, for he says it's too hot for me to play tennis.

I must stop now to dress. I want to look my best, for I find Fairfax very exigeant! Write soon. As ever,

affectionately, TRIXIE.

As if scorched by a devastating heat, Elizabeth drooped against the rock behind her. The flush ebbed out of her face, and her eyes took on the pained look of a wounded fawn. The hand which held the letter fell into her lap, and she turned her eyes toward the harbor, where the gorgeous lights of the sunset lay reflected in molten masses of color. Great angry clouds obscured the sun, without entirely hiding it, as it sank slowly into their embrace; and a silence breathless with sinister expectancy hovered over the waters.

The scene before her accorded perfectly with Betty's mood, and a very passion of revolt seized her. Slowly her mind grasped the import of the letter. Its air of joyous possession of a new−found happiness stole over her like the insidious poison of a tropical plant, benumbing her senses, but leaving her brain alert. With it came the feeling that Trixie, in spite of her protestations of friendship, had taken advantage of her absence to appropriate that which she knew Betty prized above all else. But did she know? A thin frown of perplexity fluttered over Betty's straight brows. Had even Betty herself known?

Scene after scene of her intercouse{sic} with Fairfax Cary sprang up vivid and lifelike before her, culminating in the hour that he had spent with her after her father's death. With a little start of surprise, she was forced to admit that even she herself had not guessed the nature of her feeling for him.

"What a fool! What a fool!" she murmured, clenching her hands impotently. "And now it's too late!"

A wild desire to test the sincerity of his promise to come to her at any time or place swept over her; but even as she planned the meeting she knew it would never take place.

For a long time she sat motionless, her pale face turned toward the fading light. Little by little the flaming brilliance softened into cool pinks and lilacs, melting at last into blue and neutral gray. And then, out of the shadows, as if hung by an invisible hand, shone the light of the evening star. Clearer and clearer it burned, with a steady effulgence that acted like balm on her wound; and at last a semblance of peace settled down upon her. With a little sigh she roused herself and walked listlessly back to the house.

In the privacy of Mrs. Crosby's boudoir a stormy scene had been taking place.

The International and Congo Rubber Company, in which, at Norman's suggestion, George Crosby had invested heavily, was not proving the gold−mine of promise. It was more like a bottomless pit which swallowed with avidity the funds fed to it, and demanded more with ever−increasing insistence. To save what he had already invested, George Crosby desperately staked all that he could lay hands on.

The last statement of the concern had been the reason for his hurried trip to New York, and the unsatisfactory conditions that he found on his arrival at the company's offices had caused his worst fears to be realized. Nearly all of Betty's fortune was already swept away.

He was pacing up and down the floor now, his face drawn, his eyes staring wildly from beneath his contracted brows. Mrs. Crosby sat tense and rigid in a big chair by the window, and her son leaned against the mantelpiece. Their faces were ghastly, and a frightened look lurked in Norman's eyes.

"George! How could you have been so foolish?" demanded his wife, her angry eyes fixed on her husband.

George Crosby turned furiously to her.

"For Heaven's sake, Maude," he exclaimed between his teeth, "try not to make it any harder for me than it already is! You know perfectly well why I did it—it was to save this young scoundrel from State's prison!" He pointed a trembling finger at Norman, who cowered under the lash of his words. "And now," he went on bitterly, "it looks as if I should have to take his place!"

"Can nothing be done?"

George Crosby spread out his hands hopelessly.

"I don't see any way out," he groaned, sinking into a deep chair.

The sight of his collapse galvanized Mrs. Crosby into action.

"Very well, then, I'll find a way!" she exclaimed grimly. "If you think I'm going to sit calmly by and accept the ruin you two men have brought on me, you have a very inadequate conception of my character. I decline to be either the wife or the mother of a jailbird!"

Both men shrank from the scorn in her voice, but neither answered her. Her husband took up an empty envelope and began feverishly tearing it to pieces, but at her "George, put that down!" he obediently laid the scraps in a neat little pile on the table at his elbow.

"How much of Randolph's money is gone?" she asked in a voice like ice.

"Practically all."

"You put everything into this rubber speculation?"

"All but the fifty thousand I had to refund the firm."

Norman shivered under the biting contempt in his father's voice and eyes.

"Well, Norman," said his mother coldly, "as far as I can see, as you are the one responsible for this catastrophe, you'll have to be the one to get us out!"

"How?" The word came in a husky whisper, barely audible.

"By marrying Betty."

Norman gave a hoarse, mirthless laugh and looked for an instant with haggard eyes into his mother's face.

"Marry Betty!" he jeered. "Why, that girl would as soon think of marrying me as she would—" The words trailed off into nothingness, and his head sank forward on his chest.

"Why?" demanded his mother.

"Why? Because she knows I'm not fit to sit in the same room with her, much less marry her!"

"How does she know? Have you been such a fool as to confide your—er—escapades to her?"

"Hardly!" A sneer curled the boy's lips.

Give me credit for some sense!"

"You haven't led us to believe you had overmuch!" retorted his mother contemptuously.

The muscles of the boy's mouth tightened, and he glared for a moment at the pitiless face below him. Then he shrugged his shoulders impatiently and returned to his moody contemplation of the rug.

"There is nothing," Mrs. Crosby went on impressively, "that a girl of Betty's temperament likes better than to reform a man. I think if you could impress on her how much her influence could do for you, you would find that she was far from averse to marrying you. I know she's extremely fond of you. In fact, she told me so only this morning."

Evidently Norman doubted the truth of his mother's words; but, taught by long experience, he refrained from arguing the point with her.

"Did you ever stop to think that it's a pretty bum deal we're giving her?" he asked grimly.

"It's no time to think of that now," answered his mother impatiently. "She will surely marry some one, and there's no reason on earth why she shouldn't be as happy with you as with any one else—that is, if you choose to make her so."

"Perhaps she would," assented the young man dubiously. "But I can't help feeling sorry for her."

"Sorry for her! Sorry for her! Naturally I'm sorry for her, too; but—how about your mother?" broke in Mrs. Crosby hotly. "Aren't you sorry for her?"

Norman was silent. He knew that even the comparatively few years he had lived had made him unfit to be the husband of any woman. Genuinely fond as he was of Elizabeth, the idea of injuring her beyond what he had already done was repellent to him, realizing as he did that even her influence could not wean him from the life that had ensnared him.

He was on the point of declining to fall in with his mother's plans when his eyes fell on the stricken figure of his father, huddled in the big chair, George Crosby's face was gray with the unearthly pallor of a mortal illness, and Norman stared at him in remorseful silence.

"All right, mother," he said huskily. "I'll do my best." He hastily left the room.

V

It was an unusually silent party that gathered around the softly lighted table for dinner that evening, and the conversation, in spite of Mrs. Crosby's efforts to enliven it, dragged perceptibly. Dish after dish left the room practically untouched, each one being so bent on concealing his or her lack of appetite that the same condition of the others passed unnoticed. But of the frequency with which Norman's wine−glass was refilled his mother was more observant; and at last she indicated, with an imperious gesture that brought immediate compliance, that he had had enough.

It was with a distinct feeling of relief that, the meal being ended, Mrs. Crosby rose and, drawing Elizabeth's hand through her arm, led the girl to the veranda, which was lighted by the uncertain rays of a swinging lantern. Sinking back among the cushions of a wicker sofa, she drew her niece down beside her.

"I feel as if I hadn't half told you how happy it makes me to have you here with us," she murmured, pressing Betty's arm gently. "You're very dear to me, child!"

A rush of tenderness swept over Elizabeth. Her parched soul, craving love with the intense desire begot by long denial, reached out with an inarticulate cry for the first demonstration of affection she had received since her father's death.

"Dear aunty!" she whispered brokenly, her hand clinging to the older woman's arm. "You're very good to me. I can never thank you enough!"

"No, dear," remonstrated her aunt; "it is I who should be the grateful one. You are filling the place in my heart of the little daughter I have always longed for. Sons are very nice, Betty, but a mother's heart is always empty, and her life incomplete, until she has the warm sympathy of a daughter who understands in a way impossible to a man. I should love to feel that you were going to be with us always, that no one could ever take you away."

"No one ever will, aunty," whispered the girl tremulously.

The ache in her heart was becoming more and more unendurable, and she grasped eagerly at the home that she had accepted so reluctantly a few weeks before.

Mrs. Crosby gave her arm a gentle pat and then released her.

"That's right!" she exclaimed warmly; then, as the men came through the doorway, she added: "Now let Norman take you on the rocks; the moonlight is gorgeous on the water to−night. Norman, fetch a wrap for Betty."

Norman threw a scarf over Betty's bare shoulders, rising white and smooth out of the filmy black of her gown. She reluctantly accompanied him to the water's edge and sank down on the rock over which he had spread a rug. He dropped down beside her, and for a while neither spoke.

Betty's eyes were fixed on the path of moonlight which wavered on the dark waters. Her mind, wandering off to the Hunnewells' home, pictured Trixie and Fairfax Cary strolling along the paths of the rose−scented garden, or watching this same moon from the pagoda, with its curtain of fragrant honeysuckle.

Norman, too, seemed content to sit in silence, and puffed away vigorously at the cigar which apparently absorbed his attention. At last he spoke.

"Betty," he began hesitatingly, " could you—love—a man you didn't—respect?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, Norman," replied Elizabeth uncertainly. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I was just wondering how a girl like you would feel about that sort of thing—marriage, I mean, with a man who hadn't always—kept straight."

"Marriage!" breathed Betty almost fiercely. "I'm never going to marry!"

Norman gave a little snort of incredulity.

"Ha! That's what almost all girls say—generally just before they announce their engagements!"

"Well, in this case it's true," insisted Betty finally. "I haven't the least intention of marrying—ever!"

"If you thought it would help some one—help him to keep out of trouble, and all that—wouldn't you?"

There was a wistful note in his voice. Betty turned her eyes, in which the hurt look still lingered, to the recumbent figure of the boy beside her, his flushed face dimly visible in the uncertain light.

"Why do you ask?" she questioned wonderingly.

Norman turned impulsively to her.

"Just this, Betty. I can't seem to be able to—keep straight. I've tried my best, and I just can't do it; and I thought perhaps, if you could bring yourself to take me on— you're so strong, I know—I could stand out against it all. I'm sure I could! Oh, Betty, don't you think you could bring yourself to marry me?"

The words came out in a torrent of desperation. Betty looked at him as if, in spite of the fact that she heard them, their meaning had passed her by.

"Marry you?" she repeated vaguely.

"Yes, Betty—darling, I love you!"

He roused himself from his reclining position and, putting his arm around her, bent his head down to hers. His breath, heavy with wine and the smell of the cigar, sickened her, and she pushed him away almost violently.

"Don't, Norman, don't!"

Norman took away his arm and, leaning his elbows on his drawn−up knees, stared gloomily before him.

"Well, I can't say I blame you," he remarked morosely.

Something in the boy's humility turned Betty's feeling of resentment into one of contrition.

"But, Norman," she exclaimed, "it isn't that! Oh, please believe me! I'd do anything in the world to help you, but I couldn't marry any one I didn't love. Norman dear, you know I'm fond of you—really fond of you, but it isn't the same!"

"Do you think if I gave up drinking, and kept away from trouble generally, you could ever—"

But Betty shook her head emphatically.

"No, dear; it isn't the kind of feeling which, no matter how strong it grew, could ever turn into the love I must have for the man I'm going to marry."

For a moment neither spoke; then Norman said curiously: "Have you ever known a man you could love like that?"

Betty did not reply, and nothing but the splash of the waves as they dashed impotently against the rocks at their feet broke the silence.

"Who was it, Betty?" asked Norman at last. "Was it Fairfax Cary?"

Betty started violently.

"Fairfax Cary?" she repeated in a startled voice. "Oh, no!"

"I'll bet it was!" declared Norman.

He's just the sort of guy who would get a girl like you. Well, I wish you joy of him! Awful prig, but he wouldn't keep you up nights worrying!" He got up and stretched himself lazily. "Well, me for bed! How about it, fair coz?"

Betty rose quickly to her feet and put her hand on Norman's shoulder.

"You're all wrong about my loving Mr. Cary, Norman," she said emphatically. "It's absolutely untrue. I don't care for him at all, except as a friend; but he isn't a prig, Norman. He's the finest—"

"All right!" agreed Norman indifferently, stooping to pick up the rug. "But don't get so stewed about it! I didn't say he wasn't."

They turned toward the house.

"It's no use, mater," he announced sullenly to his mother, after Betty had bid them good night. "Just as I thought, she's in love with that Cary chap."

"Did she tell you so?" asked his mother sharply.

"Not in so many words, but she showed it pretty plainly. He's just the kind of man she would fall for—always gassing about ideals and uplift and all that hot air. Any one could see—"

"Well," ruminated his mother, half to herself, "perhaps when Elizabeth learns that her father did not leave behind him the savory reputation she sets such store by, she will realize that his daughter may not hold the same attraction as she did for a man of Cary's stamp."

"What do you mean?" asked the boy fearfully.

"Never mind what I mean, Normie. Go to bed! I think before long your pretty cousin will be thankful to marry you!"

But it was well past midnight before Mrs. Crosby followed the advice she gave her son, and even then it was not to sleep. Hour after hour she lay staring at the moonlight filtering in through the filmy curtains, and causing the familiar objects in the room to assume grotesque and, to Mrs. Crosby's tortured mind, vindictive shapes.

Enraged at finding herself entangled in a net which wrapped itself tighter and tighter about her, threatening her very existence, she groped about blindly, feverishly, to find the means of escape which she insisted must exist. It couldn't be that she, Maude Crosby, after all these years of comparative immunity—due to skilful manipulation on her part, she reminded herself—should come to grief because a girl, a mere child, opposed her will!

Keyed to its highest pitch, her mind reviewed the conditions that confronted her. Plan after plan formulated itself, only to crumble away at the fancied touch of the girl's hand. But at last a course of action presented itself which she thought would solve her difficulties, and she dropped off into a fitful doze.

The broad sunlight was streaming in through the open windows when she awoke and found her French maid standing by her bedside, a dainty tray containing Mrs. Crosby's breakfast in the girl's hands.

VI

The sultry atmosphere that had enveloped the Crosby household during dinner lasted throughout the next morning, but Elizabeth did not suspect that she was even remotely the cause of it. Accustomed to her aunt's moods, which succeeded one another with such frequency and rapidity that Betty had learned to regard them with a more or less amused tolerance, she avoided Mrs. Crosby by spending the morning at the Red Cross rooms. But when the feeling of oppression lasted through luncheon, she began to fear that Norman had confided her rebuff of him to his parents, and that their changed attitude toward her was the evidence of their resentment.

When the meal was over she followed her uncle into his den, where he was generally to be found at times of domestic unrest.

"Uncle George," she began, pausing on the threshold.

"Come in, Betty," he replied from the depths of his leather chair. "Come in—I want to talk to you."

Betty dropped down among the cushions on the window−seat. "That sounds nice!" she said with her bright smile.

Her uncle's likeness to her father had increased as the younger man lost weight, and with it his air of indolent ease; and in the months she had passed in his home, when she had learned something of the burden under which he labored, her affection for him had increased fourfold.

She watched him fondly as he reclined in his big chair, his head resting against the back, his half−closed eyes following the rings of smoke from the cigar that he had just taken from his mouth. Betty waited for him to begin; but as he did not seem inclined to open the conversation she remarked quietly:

"Uncle George, will you please give me five hundred dollars?"

The hand that held the cigar dropped nervelessly on the arm of the chair, and the cigar fell to the floor. Muttering something about inexcusable carelessness, her uncle stooped down and picked it up. When he straightened, and Betty saw his face, she was shocked at its appearance.

"Uncle, are you ill?" she asked, coming to him and bending solicitously over him.

"I'm all right, thank you," he replied huskily, and reached with a trembling hand for the match−box.

Betty leaned against the edge of the table beside him, and watched him doubtfully as he unsteadily applied the light to his cigar. Then she went on:

"Mrs. Maitland Andrews, the chairman of our Red Cross branch, is raising money for an ambulance to be sent to France, and I promised her five hundred dollars."

Betty made the announcement with the calm assurance of one who, never having been denied money in reasonable amounts, did not consider a refusal possible. George Crosby settled even deeper in his chair.

"Betty, I'm sorry," he began at last, but until I get your father's affairs straightened out, I'm—I'm afraid—it's impossible, quite impossible for—me to let you have so—much money."

Betty looked at him, her blue eyes round with wonder.

"But, uncle," she expostulated, " father told me just before he died that he always kept several thousand dollars on deposit for emergencies, and that he never drew on that account."

"There have been some pretty heavy drafts on it lately, however—funeral expenses and outstanding bills that you asked me to pay at once," he reminded her.

"Yes, I know, Uncle George, but they couldn't have exceeded a couple of thousand dollars, and there must have been some income from the estate during the past months."

George Crosby's eyes fell before the girl's steady gaze. He examined the end of his cigar carefully.

"Betty," he said at last in a strained, hard voice, "I've been meaning to tell you about it for a long time, but I thought I would wait until—well, until you had got your strength back after the shock and grief of your father's death. There isn't any estate."

"No estate!" echoed Betty incredulously, bending toward him the better to see his face.

Her uncle shook his head, his eyes still fixed on his cigar.

"No," he went on. "Your father made unfortunate investments before he died, and practically his entire fortune was lost. It was thought that the shock and disappointment, and all that, were the cause of his death."

He replaced the cigar between his lips and drew deeply on it.

"I can't see how it is possible!" exclaimed Betty, clasping her hands piteously.

"My dear child"—George Crosby turned his haggard, twitching face toward her—"when you've lived as long as I, you'll realize that in the financial world it's generally the impossible that happens, especially in times such as these. Your father had the reputation of being a clever, hard−headed business man, but since I've been going over his affairs I've been surprised, and I may say shocked, to find the number of wildcat investments he made. Of course, in time some of them may be worth something, but at present—" He paused significantly, and for a fleeting instant his eyes sought hers.

"Then I'm a—pauper" faltered Betty, her face white and frightened.

"Don't say that, dear child! You'll always have a home with us, of course, and the best we can give you; but I'm afraid five−hundred−dollar subscriptions will have to be cut out for the present at least. You understand, I know, that it isn't because I don't want you to have the money, don't you, Betty?—but simply because it isn't there!"

He rose and put his arm around the drooping figure. Betty raised her white face to him.

"Thank you, Uncle George," she whispered tremulously. "You've always been very good to me, and I'm very grateful; but what hurts me"—her voice broke—"is that any one should think that father was involved in transactions that weren't—quite—"

"Don't let that worry you, my dear. The world is so used to heavy jolts after men die that such a thing is no longer even a nine days' wonder."

"Oh, but—but father was—different!" interrupted Betty almost fiercely. "He was not like that! Any one who knew him at all must have realized that he wasn't that kind of man. Why, he had the biggest heart and soul of any one I knew!"

"Bigness of heart and soul don't necessarily mean fulness of pocket, though," her uncle hastened to assure her, with a dubious shake of his head. "Quite the reverse! Well, I'll do the best I can, and perhaps, as I say, some of the investments will turn out better than we anticipate; but in the mean time we'll have to go a bit slow."

As if in a dream, Betty crept up to the seclusion of her room and sank into a rocking−chair in the deep bay window. She gazed out at the expanse of water roughened into whitecaps under the lash of a strong south wind. Benumbed and heavy−limbed, she watched the gulls as they poised against the currents of air, hanging suspended and almost motionless for an instant, and then with unerring precision swooping down into the dark water and reappearing with their prey dangling in their beaks.

Hour after hour she sat as motionless as if a freezing breath had turned her into ice. The shadows crept across the lawn to the water's edge, and still she sat with the look of pain deepening in her eyes.

It was almost dark when Mrs. Crosby knocked at the door, and without waiting for Betty's "Come in!" opened it and entered the room. She had just returned from a bridge−party at Mrs. Peyton Grenville's, and an air of antagonism emanated from her, as if the afternoon had not been a profitable one.

Mrs. Crosby was one of those people who lay their winnings to their own skill and their losings to the malice of fate, against which they protest long and loudly. This afternoon luck had been decidedly against her. She had come directly from the motor to her niece's room, and was unaware of Elizabeth's interview with her husband; but she had definitely made up her mind that the only way out of the difficulties which were closing in about them was through the marriage of Elizabeth and Norman. As Betty had long since learned, it was not well to frustrate Mrs. Crosby's plans.

"I want to talk to you a little, Betty," she began, sinking into the chair that her niece drew up for her and pulling off her long, white gloves.

Betty fixed her great eyes on her aunt's face in an almost visible effort to concentrate on her words. Inwardly she shrank from what she realized was in store for her; for Mrs. Crosby's face had the implacable look that meant:

"There's only one path to follow, and that follows me!"

"It's about Norman, dear," Mrs. Crosby went on. She was trying to untie the dotted veil which so cunningly hid the marks that time and worry had left on her face, and Betty jumped to her assistance. "Thank you, dear; you're such a helpful little daughter!"

She patted the girl's hand as she took the veil from her. Then she continued: "You know that boy is simply infatuated with you, child; he talks of nothing else, and this afternoon, before I left for Mrs. Grenville's, he told

me again how much your influence has done for him."

"I'm very glad, Aunt Maude," murmured Betty dully.

"Men are strange creatures, Betty," her aunt went on. "Although they call us the weaker sex, it seems as if we women are continually obliged to make allowance for their failings, and to strengthen them in their hours of temptation. And, Betty dear, I don't suppose there is any higher vocation for a woman than that of saving a man from the purgatory in which he would end if it were not for her help." She stopped to study the serious face before her, and added playfully: "Don't look so solemn, child! A man's love ought to bring joy, happiness, and not sadness!" The lines of Betty's face obediently relaxed into a pitiful attempt at a smile.

"I am glad, Aunt Maude," she reiterated.

"Then will you let me tell the dear boy so, Betty?" asked Mrs. Crosby, an exultant look stealing over her face. "He thinks you don't care. In fact, he told me so; and I should love to be the one to bring him the news that he's wrong!"

"He knows that I care for him, aunt, but—"

"But what?"

The question was like the crack of a gun.

"But"—it seemed as if the girl's white lips could not frame the words, but after a pleading look into her aunt's relentless face Betty went on desperately—"Norman asked me to marry him, and I—I can't!"

"Why not?"

Mrs. Crosby's voice was like ice.

"Oh, aunt!" Betty clasped her trembling hands piteously. "It's quite impossible—quite; you must see that!"

"I see nothing," answered her aunt uncompromisingly, "except that the boy loves you, and you are the one woman who could save him from—ruin!"

Mrs. Crosby's voice broke over the last word. This sign of unwonted emotion brought a throb of pity into Betty's throat and made her task even more difficult.

"But, Aunt Maude," she faltered, "before he—died, father made me promise that I would never marry a man I wasn't sure of or that he wouldn't have approved of. I don't think—in fact, he would not have I'm quite certain that wanted me to marry Norman."

"Your father was hardly one to assume the position of judge of men, my dear!"

The words came with a cutting emphasis that pierced the girl's brain like a knife.

"What do you mean?" she asked hoarsely.

"Just what I say. Your father's life was not so exemplary that he could afford to criticise those who were simply entering on the paths that he had already trod!"

Betty shrank back as if seared by a flame.

"Do you mean to insinuate that my father was dishonorable?"

"I insinuate nothing. I state"—Mrs. Crosby paused for an instant so that the full force of her words should strike home— "that Randolph Crosby, before he died, was publicly cut by his most intimate friends!"

As if unable fully to grasp the import of her aunt's words, Betty stared wide−eyed into her face.

"My, father?" she gasped at last, a quiver of incredulous pain passing over her ashen face. "I don't believe it!"

Mrs. Crosby looked at her curiously. Such suffering as the girl exhibited at the assault on her father's name was incomprehensible to her. After all, what did it matter? But she was quick to see the advantage it gave her, and she followed it up with ruthless celerity.

"Well, whether you believe it or not, the fact remains that after Steadfast was so disgracefully beaten for the Withers Stake there was a great deal of talk about foul play, and I myself saw Humphrey Welsh and several others refuse to speak to your father. It was suspected that he had won a great deal of money on the race—much more than enough to offset the loss of the purse!"

All the rancor of the past months over her loss on the race, for which she had always blamed Randolph Crosby, came out in the bitterness of Mrs. Crosby's words.

Elizabeth drooped further into her chair, and the line of pain between her eyebrows deepened. As a flash of lightning reveals a scene in the darkness of the night, the picture of the club enclosure after the race rose before her. She recalled her own and Fairfax Cary's doubts as to Steadfast's running, and her father's tense face when he came back from his interview with Pat.

As a logical sequence came the remembrance of Mrs. Hunnewell's peculiar behavior when Trixie had joined them, and her insistence that the girl should return to her at once. There was evidently some truth behind her aunt's words, but that her father was in any way connected with anything that bore the least resemblance to crookedness she resolutely refused to believe.

Mrs. Crosby evidently realized that she had said enough, for her manner softened almost to tenderness.

"Forgive me, child, if I've hurt you," she said gently; "but your words struck me in a very vulnerable place. When her only son is attacked, a mother naturally resents it. Your reflections on Norman's character goaded me into doing what I long ago decided I would never do—let you know the estimation in which the world held your father before his death. You see, it would hardly be possible, under the circumstances, for him to object to Norman as a son−in−law!"

She smiled sweetly at the girl; but Betty, her face drawn and rigid, continued staring fixedly at her aunt. She did not relax when the older woman rose, and, laying her hand on her niece's shoulder, leaned over her and said:

"Well, may I take a little ray of hope to the dear boy?"

In a voice that sounded as if it came from a great distance, Betty responded:

"I shall never marry any one—now!"

Mrs. Crosby raised her eyebrows despairingly. She withdrew her hand and moved toward the door.

"I hope in time you'll feel differently," she remarked. "By the bye, Mrs. Goodhue has just returned from Lawrence, and she told me this afternoon that your little friend Trixie Hunnewell is engaged to Fairfax Cary."

Betty did not reply, so Mrs. Crosby passed out into the hall, the perplexed frown lingering around her eyes.

VII

Like a wounded thing stricken unto death, Betty sat alone, hardly aware that her aunt had gone. Her great eyes, distended and dark with pain, gazed out into the fading twilight. She was forcing her mind back over the events which just preceded her father's death.

Scene after scene presented itself vividly to her, like little pieces of mosaic which fitted accurately into one another; and at last a completed picture was disclosed which solved problems hitherto inexplicable. The sudden falling away of people whom she had thought her friends, and whose unsympathetic bearing at the time of her sorrow had puzzled and hurt her beyond words; the coolness of others with whom she had unavoidably been brought into contact—the revelations of the afternoon explained it all.

The twilight deepened into night, and still she sat motionless, staring out into the dark, her brain groping through the maze of memories for the image of her father. Her brow contracted as she struggled to visualize the presence that always seemed to linger near her. When at last she succeeded, and the cold, keen−eyed, rather cynical face was outlined against the dark clouds of doubt that her uncle and aunt had raised, her lips trembled into a happy smile of restored confidence.

She rose stiffly and switched on the light. Going to the writing−table, on which stood the large picture of her father, she took it up and looked tenderly into the stern face. Unflinchingly the keen eyes returned her gaze until the questioning expression in her eyes turned into one of perfect trust, and the taut lines of her face relaxed.

"No matter what they say," she whispered softly, "I shall always believe you were as true as steel!"

At her words the eyes seemed to soften into the look of tenderness they had always held for her.

Her eyes wandered from the photograph to the dainty things about her—the flowered chintses, the tasteful furnishings, the pretty French prints, their wires concealed by shirred ribbons surmounted by a bow; the glass−topped dressing−table with its array of silver−backed toilet articles; the inviting bed where she had passed so many restful nights. The conviction came over her that she could no longer remain a member of that household.

But where to go? She knew her world too well not to understand that the homes where the daughter of the prosperous Randolph Crosby was so eagerly welcomed would be closed to the child of the discredited outcast. But though no alternative suggested itself to her, the fact remained glaringly apparent that it was impossible for her to stay at Windy Bluff.

A knock sounded at the door, and Marie, the French maid, asked if she could be of any assistance to mademoiselle. Betty replied that as she had a headache she did not want any dinner and would not need her again that night. Then she locked the door quietly, drew out a suit−case from the depths of the closet, placed the photograph of her father carefully in it, and began hurriedly packing it with things from the closet and drawers. Every now and then she glanced at the little gilt clock on the mantel, feverishly ticking the minutes away.

She took off the white muslin she had worn all day, and put on a black suit and a hat, over which she tied a heavy veil. Then, with a final lingering look about the room, she turned off the lights, picked up the suitcase, and opened the door.

After listening intently for a moment, she stole along the corridor and down the stairs to the large hall below. Subdued voices came from the dining−room, but the drawing−rooms were deserted, and Betty made her way unnoticed to the front door. Opening it softly, she crept out into the friendly darkness. Fearful lest the gravel of the drive should betray her flying footsteps, she sped across the lawn toward the entrance gates, and with a deep sigh of relief passed between them into the highway beyond.

The moisture−laden wind was blowing in fitful gusts that gave promise of rain in the near future, and Betty quickened her pace once more. She kept her eyes anxiously alert for a conveyance that would take her to her destination, for the suit−case increased in weight with every step and seriously impeded her progress; but at that hour all the public hacks were in demand to take diners−out to the homes of their respective hosts, and Betty did not dare to ask a lift in any of the returning private motors, for fear that the chauffeurs might recognize her.

Notwithstanding the fact that she was thankful for the protection the darkness gave her, she started violently at every unusual sound. Once or twice she had to stop, rest her suit−case on the ground, and lean for support against

a railing or tree until she recovered her breath sufficiently to be able to go on.

It was with an involuntary "Thank Heaven!" that she at last spied the bright lights of the wharf, which revealed the shadowy hulk of the boat alongside. A continuous ebbing and flowing stream of dark figures passed up and down the gangway, and Betty, realizing that not many minutes remained before the hour for starting, hastily made her way to the ticket−office and procured her passage for New York.

As she passed down the corridor—through which white−coated stewards were hurrying, calling vociferously, "All ashore! All ashore!"—she came face to face with Mrs. Maitland Andrews. Mrs. Andrews stared at her doubtfully for a moment, trying to penetrate the heavy veil. Then, as Betty tried to edge past to her stateroom, she exclaimed, laying her hand on the girl's shoulder:

"Aren't you—why, yes, you are Betty Crosby!"

Realizing that it was impossible to escape recognition, and anxious to explain to Mrs. Andrews her inability to make good her promise in regard to a donation for the ambulance, Betty drew the older woman into her stateroom.

"Would you mind coming in for a minute?" she pleaded. "I want to tell you—"

Perceiving from the tremulous tones of the faltering voice that something was amiss, Mrs. Andrews readily accompanied the girl.

"Why, of course, dear," she responded heartily. "We'll have a nice talk—not a soul to interrupt us!"

Betty untied her veil and took it off before she spoke again.

Mrs. Andrews's role of confidante to every sort and condition of man occupied almost all the time that she did not spend at the board−meetings of the many societies she practically ran and supported. Bishops and newsboys, great financiers and debutant girls, poured their difficulties into her sympathetic ears, and went away strengthened by her sound counsel. Betty had always been an especial favorite with her, and with open arms she had welcomed the girl into the Red Cross work, knowing that it was the most effectual means of alleviating her sorrow.

It was with deep concern that she noted the ghastliness of the young face and the tightly compressed lips. She settled herself comfortably on the lounge and, in order to give Betty time to compose herself—for she saw that the girl had difficulty in beginning—remarked beamingly:

"I'm going to New York to order the ambulance. Isn't it splendid? All the money has been promised, and I want to get it off at once."

A tremor passed over Betty's face.

"That's what I want to tell you," she began impulsively, laying her hand on Mrs. Andrews's arm. "I can't—it's impossible for me to give you the money I promised this morning."

Mrs. Andrews placed her hand gently over the girl's.

"That's all right, dear; it won't matter in the least. It 'll come in from somewhere—it always does. Please don't fret about it!" Two great tears overflowed Betty's eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

"I was afraid you wouldn't understand," she whispered tremulously. "I was afraid you might think I wanted to pose as being very generous before all those women this morning and then back out in private; but I thought I had the money, and—and it isn't there!"

She caught her lower lip in her teeth in an attempt to still its trembling. Mrs. Andrews took the girl's hand between hers and began stroking it gently.

"Tell me all about it, dear; perhaps I can help you."

But Betty shook her head hopelessly.

"No one can help, as far as the money goes. It's all gone— every penny of it. Apparently father made investments that didn't turn out well, and instead of being a rich man he was quite the reverse. I'm on my way to New York now to look for something to do."

"Have you left your uncle's for good?"

Betty nodded.

"I couldn't possibly stay—there were conditions that made it quite out of the question. Not that Uncle George wasn't perfectly sweet, and told me that they allways expected me to make my home with them, but—"

"I understand," answered Mrs. Andrews gravely. "You don't want to be under obligations to them. Sometimes it's like that, and the obligations keep mounting up and mounting up until it seems as if they would crush you, no matter what you do in return. It's much pleasanter to stand on your own feet, even though it means hard work.

What sort of place are you thinking of taking?"

Betty turned a wan little face, over which flickered a watery smile, to the older woman.

"Beggars can't be choosers," she said bravely. "I'm ready to take anything."

"Have you had any training?" asked Mrs. Andrews. "Stenography, typewriting, or any of those things? So many of the girls have been taking them up lately as a sort of fad."

Betty shook her head dispiritedly.

"Father wouldn't let me take up anything like that. He said that I would never have to use it, and that it was a waste of time and energy. The only thing he let me do was a course in Red Cross first aid and home nursing, which was a thing he said every woman should know; but, of course, that's just the thing that won't be of any use to me now, with so many trained nurses about!"

A look of deep dejection settled over her, and for a moment they sat silent, listening to the ceaseless pulse of the engines as the boat forged its way into the dark.

Mrs. Andrews rose and, placing her hands on Elizabeth's shoulders as she stood beside her, said gently:

"I'm very glad I ran across you. I want you to go to bed now, and to sleep, mind you—no lying awake thinking and worrying! To−morrow things will look brighter—they always do. Promise me!"

Elizabeth's face darkened as if a dense cloud, the forerunner of a storm, had passed over it.

"Ah," she said passionately, "you tell me not to worry, but how can I help it when people are saying such dreadful things about my father?"

"Are they?" asked Mrs. Andrews thoughtfully. "I haven't heard anything, but then I don't often hear slander. People know it isn't exactly in my line." The even tones were a trifle contemptuous. "Or perhaps," she added whimsically, "they knew it wouldn't be any use. You see, child, I happened to know your father!"

She stooped and kissed the girl impulsively. Betty clung to her a moment, unable to speak; then her arms dropped, and she smiled bravely into the other's face.

"Good night," she whispered tremulously, "and thank you again and again!"

"Now remember, no worrying!"

Mrs. Andrews shook her finger playfully as she disappeared through the door. And, strange to relate, Betty, worn out and exhausted, followed her advice and slept peacefully throughout the night, a pitiful little smile hovering over her lips.

VIII

It was fully a month after Elizabeth's return to New York when Fairfax Cary ran across Major Barry in the Pennsylvania Station as they were hurrying to their respective trains. At the risk of missing his connection, the major laid an arresting hand on Cary's arm.

"Have you seen Betty Crosby lately?" he asked hurriedly. Then, as Fairfax shook his head, he added: "She's disappeared— can't be found anywhere. Her uncle's nearly distracted. When can I see you?"

"To−morrow at eleven, at my office," responded Fairfax, and they parted precipitately.

It was only when Fairfax was speeding through the cool tunnel under the river that he began to grasp the full import of the major's words. Betty Crosby gone! Without a trace! It was inconceivable! Things like that didn't happen in the set in which she moved. After her promise to him, too! No, he absolutely refused to believe it.

But the more he dwelt on the major's news, the deeper grew his concern. That she should leave the uncongenial atmosphere of the Crosby home did not surprise him, but that she should go without telling any one of her destination gave him, in spite of his determination not to credit the report, a feeling of extreme disquietude.

"There must have been an upheaval of some sort," he thought grimly. "Mrs. Crosby's a pretty difficult proposition at best, and she probably played on the child's nerves like a rasp. Can't say I blame her for cutting it all; but why in thunder didn't she let the rest of us know?"

It was this same question that he put to Trixie Hunnewell when they met on the club veranda as soon as he had succeeded in drawing her away from the group of people with whom he found her; for, as he speedily learned, she was in as deep ignorance as Major Barry and himself as to Elizabeth's whereabouts.

"She promised me before she left town that she would call on me if she was ever in trouble," he said, adding ruefully, half to himself: "As I knew mighty well she would be before long! And Betty Crosby's not one to break a promise."

Trixie eyed the tense, troubled face thoughtfully, and a feeling came over her that perhaps, in some way, she had been the cause of that broken promise. She realized that her letters to Betty had been full of Fairfax Cary. It was highly probable that Betty had imagined, as she herself had believed, that Cary's attentions were of a different significance from what it now appeared was their real character. For Trixie had come to see that her attraction for him lay in the fact that she was Elizabeth's friend and in constant communication with her.

"If it were really that way with them," she thought self−reproachfully, "I'm afraid Betsy felt that I wasn't very true to her; but why didn't they tell me? I certainly had no way of guessing!"

But her contrition only added to her concern, and made her even more desirous of aiding in the search.

"I shall depend on you to let me know how I can help," she told Fairfax when he left her. "I shall be on tenter−hooks until I hear what Major Barry has to tell you to−morrow."

That the intervening hours had been trying for Fairfax, too, was evident from the alacrity with which he rose to greet the major on his entrance into Cary's private office as the clock struck eleven the following morning.

"Sit here, major," he said, indicating a chair on the other side of his flat desk.

Major Barry laid his hat and cane carefully on the desk and sat down. His usual cheery expression had given place to one of deep seriousness, and he nervously fingered his eye−glasses on their broad black ribbon.

"The first intimation I had of this," he began without preliminary, "was two days ago, when I met George Crosby at Delmonico's. He looks like an old man. Have you seen him?" Fairfax shook his head, and the major went on: "You know how the Crosbys have always held themselves—as if there wasn't any one quite good enough—you know—just manner, of course, but—well, it's all gone as far as George is concerned. He has positively crumpled up! I thought he'd been ill, and stopped to hear about it, but he insisted he was all right. It was only when I inquired for Elizabeth—you know I'm her godfather, always was very intimate with Randolph and his wife—you knew, of course?"

He fixed his kind, candid eyes on Cary's face. Fairfax nodded understandingly. He had heard of the major's romance—how the two men had loved and courted the beautiful Helen Rogers, and how, when Crosby had succeeded in winning her, the major—or captain, as he then was—had laid his hand on Randolph's shoulder and said:

"You win, old man! Just as well, I guess; an army post's no place for a girl like that! But if you don't make her happy, by gad, sir, you'll have to answer for it to me!"

And when at the end of a year she had died, leaving the little flaxen−haired miniature of herself to take her place, the two men had accepted the trust that was confided to them and lavished the deepest tenderness and care on the little maid.

"She isn't quite sure which is her real father," chuckled Randolph when, on her third birthday, Barry had "dropped in as he happened to be passing," as he put it, and Betty held out her arms to him with a gurgle of delight. He "happened to be passing" so often those days that it had come to be a joke between the two men.

"All right, old man, I understand—you just keep on," Randolph had said with a slap on the back as he handed the major his glass of whisky−and−seltzer. "Between the two of us she may get one fairly decent father!"

And Tod Barry had laughed, and said that he was willing and anxious to contribute his share. So it was evident from the major's manner, as he sat in Cary's big chair and twirled his eye−glasses, that Betty's lack of confidence had hurt him to the quick.

"It is strange she didn't communicate with you," mused Fairfax.

"I can't understand it—it makes me afraid the child has come to some harm."

Barry moved uneasily, and began beating a tattoo on the edge of the desk with his carefully kept nails.

"Did you find out the reason for her leaving?" asked Fairfax anxiously.

"Some family trouble, as far as I can make out from what George said. I couldn't really get at the facts, but George hinted something about Norman's wanting to marry her. Evidently Betty wouldn't have it—you know what a miserable, dissipated little cur he is, and I suppose Mrs. George cut up rusty and made it unpleasant for her; so she just left one night, taking a suit−case full of clothes, and they haven't heard of her since."

"Well, at all events, there's satisfaction in the knowledge that she has plenty of money," commented Cary.

That's just the rub! Has she? put in the major impatiently. "George as good as told me that Randolph's affairs were pretty well involved when he died. He intimated that Elizabeth had gone off with the idea of supporting herself. Imagine—Betty! "

"But I don't understand!" Fairfax exclaimed. "Randolph Crosby's fortune gone? Why, it's impossible! I know too well—"

The major looked at him attentively.

"Did you know anything about his investments?"

"Well, not such a great deal. Mr. Crosby was too reticent a man, too self−reliant, to confide anything more than was absolutely necessary, even to his lawyer, and of course I did only a small part of his legal work. But, from what I saw of his holdings and from my knowledge of the man, I should say that what you suggest is a rank impossibility."

The two men eyed each other thoughtfully.

"Is George Crosby sole trustee?"

In his effort to make it unconcerned, the major's voice sounded strained and unnatural.

"Sole trustee and guardian, so Miss Crosby told me."

"Humph!" The major was carefully examining the spring of his eye−glasses. "Cary," he said at last, looking directly into the dark, keen face across the desk, "I think it's time Elizabeth Crosby's friends took a hand. As her godfather, I feel a certain responsibility in regard to her, and I ask you to assist me in whatever search it is necessary to make to determine the child's whereabouts and the condition of her affairs."

"I will gladly do anything in my power, Major Barry. As you know, or perhaps you don't know, everything that concerns Miss Crosby concerns me very deeply."

Major Barry looked at him sharply.

"Why the dickens, man, didn't you tell her so?" he exclaimed. Then all this would have been avoided!

But Fairfax shook his head positively.

"She knew, or at all events she must have guessed; but I couldn't ask her to marry me when I had practically nothing to offer her."

"Good Lord, Cary, you had a fine young man and a fine old name to offer her! What more could any girl want?"

"Thank you, major. It's very kind of you; but even if it were true, that's not enough for a girl like Elizabeth

Crosby!"

"It's enough for any girl, especially for one of Betty's stamp. Why, every bit of this would have been avoided!"

"You speak as if you think she would have taken me!"

There was a badly concealed tremor in Cary's voice, and the hand that held the pencil with which he was scrawling illegible words on the pad before him shook visibly.

"Take you! Why, man, are you blind? Self−depreciation is one thing, but imbecility—there, there—"

He stopped and looked quickly at Cary, evidently afraid that he had gone too far; but the radiant expression on Cary's face told him that he could have continued indefinitely in the same strain.

"Cary," he asked abruptly, "have you heard anything derogatory to Randolph Crosby since he died?"

Fairfax Cary paused for a moment before answering, his eyes wandering to the tall buildings pressing closely in on his only window, a look of seriousness driving away the happy light in the dark eyes. He turned back to the major and nodded regretfully.

"I was with them when they left the race−track that afternoon, and I saw several of Mr. Crosby's friends refuse to speak to him. Afterward I tried to find out the reason for it. As far as I could learn, it was pretty generally conceded that his horse, Steadfast, had been doctored—"

The major inclined his head.

"And of course the blame was laid on him, in spite of the fact that he lost the purse

"They claimed that he had more than offset that."

Again Major Barry nodded.

"Well, of course I don't believe a word of it—don't see how any one could who knew the man; but the question is, how can we prove it's false? I'm not satisfied to let the good name of my best friend and the father of that child go down to posterity blackened. We've got to clear it, and we've got to find Elizabeth! Now, what do you suggest?"

"Have any steps been taken?"

"George Crosby has employed a private detective, but they're so afraid of people's talking, and of a scandal, that they're tremendously handicapped. You see how it was with me—I only learned by chance."

"I think I'll go and have a talk with Pat," ruminated Fairfax. "The boy may be able to tell us something. You know, one of the last things Mr. Crosby did before he died was to send the boy enough money to make up what he lost on the race. Pat told me about it just after the funeral. He was all broken up. It seems he has a sister who is a bit of a high−flier, from all I hear, and he's very anxious to establish her somewhere away from the track influences. He had saved enough money to give her a start, but he lost most of it when Steadfast was beaten, so you can imagine his gratitude at Mr. Crosby's generosity."

"Just like Rand!" The major's face twitched. "Well, let me know what you learn."

He rose and took up his hat and stick.

"I will, Major Barry. Could you meet me at the Sussex Club to−night at, say, eleven o'clock? I can't tell just when I can see Pat."

The major assented, and the hands of the two men met in a firm clasp.

IX

As soon as he was alone, Fairfax despatched a letter to the jockey's headquarters at Sheepshead Bay, and spent the rest of the day in impatient perturbation awaiting his reply; but when the answer came, it was a hurried scrawl from his sister. DEAR MR. CARY:

Pat's been hurt awful bad in the steeplechase this afternoon. Come as quickly as you can. MOLLY DELANEY.

Fairfax grasped his hat and rushed to the elevator. When he reached the street he jumped into a taxi and told the chauffeur he would double the fare if he reached the Pennsylvania Station in time for the six seventeen train. Fairfax got his train and the man his fare, and the young lawyer settled himself with as much patience as he could command to pass the interval which must elapse before he could reach Pat.

Molly had evidently left word at the office of his coming, for when Cary reached the cheap hotel where the Delaneys had their rooms a small boy took him in charge. The guide conducted him at once up the steep stairs and down the narrow hall lighted by a flaring gas−jet which disclosed the gilt and green wall−paper disfigured by great spots of mold. The boy indicated a door on the right.

"He's in there!" he said in a hoarse, terror−stricken whisper and fled precipitately.

Cary knocked softly, and the door was immediately opened by a thin youth with furtive eyes.

"It's him!" said this individual in a sepulchral voice and disappeared into the corridor.

Cary stepped into the dim room and closed the door. On the iron bedstead he could just distinguish the indistinct outline of the jockey's figure. Out of the bandages that swathed his head burned two bright eyes, feverishly restless. He pressed the boy's hand as it lay motionless on the counterpane.

"I'm very sorry for this, Pat!" he said gently.

A little smile stole over the blanched, freckled face.

"The jig's up, I guess, Mr. Cary. That steeplechasin's pretty sure ter git us sooner or later. Mr. Crosby wouldn't never let me do it, but— Well, I'm mighty glad ye got here in time. I've been wantin' ter see ye."

A spasm of pain passed over his face.

"Are they doing everything they can for you?" asked Cary, bending solicitously over him.

"Oh, yep! Sit down, Mr. Cary. I told Jim ter put a chair fer ye; ain't he done it?" Then, as Cary sat down, Pat went on faintly: "They had a couple of doctors here, an' they patched me up some, but there ain't nothin' ter be done, I guess. Kind o' tough, ain't it? I'd 'most got me pile tergether fer that little home fer Molly. I don't like the way things is goin'!"

For a moment he searched the sympathetic face before him, and then, as if satisfied with what he saw, he continued confidentially:

"Mr. Norman's begun hangin' round again. He's in there with her now." With a quick glance of his eyes he indicated the door opposite the bed, whence issued the low rumble of a man's voice punctuated by the shrill tones of a woman. I don't like it!" he concluded hoarsely. When gents like him comes followin' up girls like Molly, ye kin jest betcher sweet life it ain't fer no good!"

"Has it been going on for long?" asked Cary.

"Off an' on. He went ter Newport fer a while, an' I wuz hopin' it wuz all off, but fer the past few weeks he ain't hardly lef' her fer a minute. Now ye kin see why I wuz so set on gettin' a quiet little place off somewhere. Race−tracks ain't no place fer a girl. If I could only ha' got that fixed, an' ha' felt Steadfast under me once agin, it wouldn't ha' been so hard ter go. Gee, Mr. Cary!" A film came over the bright eyes. "Ye don't know how I felt ter see that lout Burns ridin' that hoss! Why, he's got hands like a plowman!"

"I'm sure it must have been hard," Cary said softly. "I want to ask you about Steadfast and that race for the Withers Stake, Pat. Have you ever suspected that there was anything wrong with the horse that day?"

"Yer mean he'd been doped? I didn't think so then, Mr. Cary; but lately, from things Molly's let drop, I've kind o' suspicioned—well, I dunno. Ye see, when a girl gits jealous, she says all kinds o' things. When Mr. Norman went off ter Newport, Molly got it inter her nut that he wuz rushin' some queen there, an' one night she had sort o' high−strikes, an' she said if he wuzn't goin' ter make good she'd peach. Then she said somethin' about what

happened before the Withers race; but all of a sudden she stopped, an' I couldn't git nuttin' more out o' her."

The weak voice trailed off and stopped, and the eyes closed.

A feeling of compunction came over Cary. He could see that the boy's strength was ebbing very fast, but he felt that he must do all that he could to get some clue to the mystery of Elizabeth's hiding−place.

"Pat," he said, bending over the limp form, "do you know where Miss Crosby is now?"

"Miss Crosby? Miss Betty?" The blue eyes opened suddenly and stared into his.

"Why, ain't she at Newport?"

Cary shook his head.

"She left about a month ago."

"That's queer! Don't he know?"

Pat glanced meaningly at the door between the two rooms. Again Cary shook his head. Pat stared thoughtfully at him. "Well," he said at last, "it ain't fer the likes o' me ter be sizin' up gents like Mr. George Crosby an' Mr. Norman; but in me own mind I allays puts 'em in a pretty low class, an' I knows Mr. Tutney thinks the same. I ain't a bit surprised she couldn't stan' 'em! "

"Tutney?" repeated Cary. Barney Tutney?"

"Yep; owns them big diamond−mines in South Africky—least, him an' Mr. Crosby does together."

"Where can I find him?"

"Dunno jes' where; he's down there now, wherever they are."

"I wonder how I can get hold of him!" mused Cary.

The boy's head moved restlessly on the pillow. The short twilight had darkened into night, and the little room was shrouded in shadows. Outside, an indistinct murmur of voices floated up from the group of youths that Cary had noticed standing on the bedraggled plot of grass before the hotel steps, but the words were indistinguishable.

"Mr. Cary!" came in a frightened whisper. "Mr. Cary! Are ye there?"

"Yes, Pat; what is it?"

Cary's hand closed over the cold fingers.

"I thought ye'd gone!" There was a world of relief in the weak voice. "It's all right—only I wuz kin' o' lonesome. I s'pose I wuz light−headed fer a minute, an' I thought I wuz alone. It's kind o' hard ter die when ye ain't never really lived!"

Cary bent over the slight figure, motionless in the glow of the electric light which flickered up from the street below.

"Is there anything you'd like me to do for you, Pat?" he asked gently.

"If ye could—I don' hardly like ter ask it o' ye, but ye're so kind—if ye could"—there was infinite entreaty in the ashen face—"look after Molly a bit? Ye see, there won't be any one after—after—"

With a lump in his throat, Fairfax promised to do everything in his power for the girl.

"I've got to go now, Pat," he added regretfully. "I told Major Barry I would meet him at eleven o'clock in town. He's trying to find Miss Betty, too, but I'll be down again the first thing in the morning."

The boy's fingers tightened for a moment around the sinewy hand; then he released it.

Good−by!" he whispered huskily. "Ye're on the level—I kin trust ye. I've tried ter be straight, too," he added wistfully.

"You've tried, and you've succeeded, Pat!" Cary stooped over him, his voice deep with feeling. "That's what Mr. Crosby used to say—`That boy's as straight as a string; I'd trust him anywhere!'"

"Did he say that?" came in a hoarse, eager whisper.

"Often."

"He ain't never said it ter me—"

"He will soon, Pat. I know he's waiting now to tell you."

A slow smile flitted over the boy's face.

"It's kind o' comfortin', ain't it," he faltered, "ter think there's some one ye know out there?" He raised his eyes to the window, open at the top to admit as much as possible of the night air. The new moon shone through the blackness, and Pat fixed his eyes on it. "Do ye really think he is?"

"I'm sure of it," answered Cary confidently. "Now shall I call Molly?"

"All right, an' thank ye fer comin'!"

Cary knocked at the door between the two rooms, told Molly Delaney that he had to leave, and with a last clasp of Pat's limp hand let himself out into the hall. He glanced at his watch as he passed the gas−jet, and, startled at the lateness of the hour, hurried down the stairs and through the group of loungers still loitering in the front yard. Jumping into a hack that stood at the curb, he directed the driver to make all possible speed to the station.

"Wonder if Pat's dead?" remarked one of the group in a hushed voice. "That cove's just lef' him. Mike said his name is Cary, an' he took him up ter see Pat."

"He looked kind o' cut up," answered another of the crowd. "I guess he's pretty close ter gone, poor old Pat!"

Cary, in the mean time, was hurrying to the train, which was just pulling out as they reached the station. He darted across the platform and swung upon the last car. He was still panting a little when he walked down the aisle and came face to face with George Crosby, who had entered the car from the other end.

"Oh—ah—Cary—how−do?" he hesitated and held out his hand. "Was it you I saw making that flying leap for the train?"

Crosby was evidently trying to speak with his old−time lightness. "Close shave!" replied Cary laconically.

"Come and speak to Mrs. Crosby," continued the other, and Fairfax followed him somewhat reluctantly to where Maude Crosby sat.

"I thought it was you," she exclaimed as she put out her hand; " but I've never seen you in such mad haste before, and I couldn't quite reconcile it—"

"With my usual Southern laziness?" supplemented Cary, with a little laugh.

As usual when he was with Mrs. Crosby, he was possessed by an intense desire to irritate her by voicing her insinuations, and then watching her discomfiture; but in his present frame of mind the mood did not last long.

"I've just come from Pat Delaney," he said quietly to Mr. Crosby. "He's been dreadfully smashed up in a steeplechase, and I'm afraid he's done for, poor little chap!"

He looked past Mrs. Crosby to the dim outlines of the plain, stretching unbroken and dark to meet the star−flecked sky.

"Too bad!" ejaculated Crosby. "He was a nice boy."

"Who's that—Randolph's jockey?" asked Mrs. Crosby of her husband.

He nodded and sank down beside her.

"How's Miss Crosby?" asked Fairfax in as careless a voice as he could command.

"Quite well, thank you," answered Mrs. Crosby quickly. She looked straight into the keen, dark eyes, and added with the least possible quiver of her eyelashes: "It has been a great pleasure to have her with us this summer."

"I'm sure of it," agreed Fairfax. "Will she be with you this winter?"

He experienced a curious sensation, almost of admiration, as he watched the skill with which she met his thrusts. Crosby, on the contrary, had sunk farther into his seat, and the unnatural pallor of his skin had become more accentuated.

"Yes, indeed!" replied Mrs. Crosby. "We're devoted to the child, and can't possibly get along without her!"

"Please remember me to her," said Cary gravely.

With a word of farewell he walked through the car into the one ahead, in search of a vacant seat. He settled himself in it with the thought:

"The major's right—George Crosby looks twenty years older than he did in June. Too bad! Well, it happens that way sometimes. Mrs. Crosby, too, doesn't look quite as youthful as she did. I wonder if they're really so worried over Betty's disappearance! I wouldn't have given them credit for so much heart. They weren't going to let me in on the secret. They evidently thought I didn't know!"

The muscles of the firm chin tightened, and unconsciously he straightened his shoulders.

"Well, they're right—I don't know much; but I'm going to know more before long! I'll find Betty Crosby, if I have to search every inch of the way between here and San Francisco; and when I do, there won't be any more shilly−shallying! There isn't any reason for it, now that the money's gone. I'm almost glad of it!" A half smile curved the proud lips. "And if what the major says is true, then—"

It still lacked a few minutes to eleven when Cary entered the door of the Sussex Club, but, knowing the major's unusual punctuality, he went at once to the room where they had arranged to meet.

X

When Fairfax Cary entered the lounge of the Sussex Club he found young Tony Page, who had just returned from France after three months' service as a stretcher−bearer in connection with the American Ambulance, holding forth to a good−sized audience.

"But the peach experience of them all," Fairfax heard him remark as he passed on his way to the corner where he was to meet Major Barry, "was the time I got wounded." He glanced at his arm, which he carried in a sling. "It was before Verdun, and every one had been working his heart out day and night trying to get the wounded back. It was some job, for there were so many that every hospital was overflowing, and we stretcher−bearers thought we were lucky if we got three hours' sleep out of the twenty−four. Every once in a while one of us would be knocked out, and then there would be the dickens, and all to find a man to take his place. Well, that night it seemed as if all Hades was let loose. Generally they talk about a curtain of fire behind the force attacked, but this time it seemed as if we were in the center of it. The shrapnel had been falling round us like hail, and finally a splinter struck Tom Strawbridge—you know Tom—Philadelphia man—polo−player?"

He paused and looked interrogatively at Lindlay Strong, who nodded.

"We had a man on the stretcher," Tony went on, "and of course we had to take him in; but when we reached the hospital we made up our minds we'd get Tom or die in the attempt. We knew it would be frightfully difficult, if not impossible, but we weren't going to let that stop us if we could get the extra man. Apparently there wasn't one to be found for love or money. Small wonder, too, for it looked like almost certain death to go back into that inferno. Then some one tapped me on the arm. I turned and saw a boy—little chap he was; young, too, from his voice. It was dark; I couldn't really get a good look at him, but he asked me if he might go with us. Of course I snapped him up, and we jumped on the ambulance and drove like mad to the place where we'd left Tom. That sure was some ride! The road was all torn to bits by heavy traffic and by the shells, and every once in a while we would jounce into a pit that seemed as if we would never get out of it. All the time those great, screeching Jack Johnsons were crashing around us, exploding with a fury that seemed to tear the very insides out of the earth. It was awful!"

Tony Page stopped and shuddered, and then, as if to emphasize the reality of his present surroundings, shook the ice against the side of the glass he held in his hand.

"Did you get Tom?" asked Strong anxiously.

"Yes, finally. He was about all in, but we put him on the stretcher and started back to the ambulance. Those beastly shells never let up for a minute, and at last one exploded about fifty yards from us, and a great piece of it caught me in the arm. I felt a gush of blood, and knew that a big vein had been cut. Fortunately we were close to the ambulance, so we shoved Tom in, and then the little chap we'd picked up started to put a tourniquet on my arm. His hands looked awfully small for a boy's, and he had the most wonderful touch! I tried to see his face, but his cap was pulled down over his eyes, and I was sort of dazed from the shock, so I didn't really care much; but when we got back to the hospital, and I was taken into the ward, I took a good look at him. Fellows, who do you suppose it was?"

There was a tense silence, while Tony Page's quick eyes ran over the eager faces about him. Major Barry had come in, and he and Fairfax stood a little to one side, listening to the young man's story.

"Who?" asked some one.

"Elizabeth Crosby!"

Fairfax Cary caught the back of the armchair behind which he stood, as if to steady himself. Major Barry stepped impulsively toward Tony Page.

"Randolph Crosby's daughter?" he ejaculated.

"The same," acquiesced Tony cheerfully. "She's been working in the hospital. Mrs. Maitland Andrews sent her over and paid her expenses; and when Betty heard we were short a man, she took the clothes of one of the wounded soldiers and went out with us. Pretty sandy, wasn't it?"

"Are you sure?"

Horrified incredulity shone on Major Barry's face, from which the ruddy color had fled.

"Am I sure? Am I sure I'm alive?" Tony looked significantly at his arm. "Why, of course I'm sure! That girl saved my life," he asserted gratefully. "I've always known Betty; used to play tennis with her a lot at the Country Club and different places. I always knew she had grit; but believe me, that night was enough to make the nerve of the strongest man crack, much less a woman's. She didn't seem to care, though; she walked through that Hades as quietly as if she'd been strolling along Fifth Avenue. I tell you, there was some commotion in that hospital when what she'd done got out!"

Fairfax Cary was hanging on every word, his face livid, his eyes like coals of fire. Tony took up a cigarette and held it against the match that some one lit for him.

"Paul Townsend's at the head of the hospital. You remember him, don't you? Big, strapping fellow, looks like Adonis, fair hair, very bright blue eyes. He's a fiend for work, simply eats it up, has that hospital humming day and night, and no matter what time you bring in a poor wretch he's always on the job. Well, he's in love with Betty—absolutely dotty about her. I think it began long before he went to France. At all events, when he found out what she'd done, he went right up in the air— said he was responsible for the nurses under him, and such a thing must never happen, again. Betty stood there with a quiet little smile on her face and asked him what it mattered. Gee, that girl has sand! You ought to have seen old Paul's face! He was fairly sputtering with rage and excitement!" Tony chuckled delightedly. "But he made her promise not to do it again. He told her he'd send her home if she did, and that settled it."

Fairfax Cary walked to an armchair in the corner and dropped into it. He covered his eyes with his hand, and Major Barry heard him gasp under his breath.

The major laid his hand on Cary's shoulder.

"It's all right, my boy," he said quietly. She's safe enough!"

Cary's hand dropped, and he raised tortured eyes to the major.

"But think of her going through that!"

The major's eyebrows were twitching nervously. He nodded.

"Frightful! It never should have happened. I don't know what Mrs. Andrews was thinking about. The front's no place for a girl like Betty. Never stops to think of herself. She's just as apt as not to do it again!" he concluded fearfully, forgetting his consoling counsel of a moment before.

Fairfax agreed disconsolately, and they stared anxiously into each other's face.

"Tell you what, old man!" The major emphasized his words by bringing down his clenched fist into his open palm. "One or the other of us—or both of us, if necessary—must go over and bring that child back!"

Cary nodded gloomily, but his eyes brightened at the suggestion.

"Now which shall it be?" the major went on thoughtfully. "I'd give half my life to go, but"—a quizzical, rather wistful light gleamed in his kind eyes—"I think, Fairfax, perhaps you'd have more influence."

It was the first time the major had called him by his Christian name, and it seemed to Cary as if in some way it brought him nearer to Elizabeth, and gave him a part ownership in her. He impulsively put out his hand and grasped the major's.

"Thank you, major!" be exclaimed a little huskily.

The light in Major Barry's eyes increased until it illumined his whole face.

"And, Fairfax," he went on whimsically, "if Betty wants to stop in Paris and get her trousseau, tell her it will be my wedding−present." He hesitated before he added softly: "They tell me the Bermudas make an ideal wedding−trip at this time of the year!"

The color mounted into Cary's face.

"I'm afraid it isn't going to be as easy as all that," he answered with a rueful shake of his head.

"You can't tell, my boy; you can't tell!" Then the major asked abruptly: "How about this fellow Townsend?"

The flush died out of Cary's face, and was replaced by an anxious frown.

"He was at the head of the Rockefeller Institute for a while. He's always been a great admirer of Betty."

"Well, the sooner you get off the better." Major Barry reached for the evening paper, which lay on a table near them, and, adjusting his eye−glasses carefully, turned to the shipping news. "The Touraine sails tomorrow morning at six thirty. Can you make it?"

"I can!" declared Fairfax so emphatically that the major chuckled.

"I'll give you some letters. It would be useless going without the proper credentials. By the way, did you see

Pat?"

"Yes; I've just come back from Sheepshead Bay. The poor little chap met with a bad accident this afternoon, and I'm afraid he's done for," Fairfax said sadly.

"Too bad! I'm sorry to hear that!" The major's face expressed real concern. "What happened?"

"He got smashed up in a steeplechase. He was nearly gone when I left."

"Too bad! He was a nice little lad. Good sort—absolutely straight. No chance for him?"

He looked interrogatively at Fairfax, who shook his head.

"I'm afraid not."

"Shame! Randolph never would let him ride in those steeplechases—said he was too light, and also too good a boy." The major paused for a moment before asking: "Did he say anything about the race?"

"Nothing definite; but be seemed to suspect that something was wrong with Steadfast, and he intimated that Molly—his sister, you know—had information that would throw light on it."

The major raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips under the gray mustache. "So?" he asked thoughtfully.

Fairfax went on.

"Norman Crosby seems to be running her pretty hard. Pat's been a good deal worried over it."

"I don't wonder!" commented the major grimly.

"He also told me that Mr. Crosby was interested in some diamond−mines in South Africa with a man by the name of Tutney— do you know him?"

"Tutney? Oh, yes, I know Tutney. Randolph was in a lot of schemes with him. He's a keener, all right, but I guess he's honest without any question; and he thought a lot of Randolph— that I'm sure of. Did Pat say where he was to be found?"

Fairfax shook his head.

"South Africa, somewhere—that was all the information he could give me."

"Rather a large order, eh? Well, all right, old man; I'll hunt up the address and cable it to you. Perhaps that would be as good a wedding−trip as the other," he added chaffingly.

Fairfax smiled uncertainly.

"I hope you're a good prophet," he replied, rising and pushing back his chair. "Will you write those letters here or at my diggings?"

"I'll come with you, I guess."

The two men walked out of, the room, stopping on the way to get the number of Betty's hospital from Tony.

XI

The sun was just rising behind the tall buildings in Brooklyn the next morning when Fairfax jumped from a taxi at the wharf of the French line. Picking his way through the bustling throng of porters, he boarded the vessel, went at once to his stateroom, undressed, and went to bed. They were well past Fire Island when he awoke, to hear the rhythmic throb of the engines as the boat plowed her way through the deep waters.

With a feeling that for the present he had done as much as lay in his power, he turned over and went to sleep again. He dreamed that the boat had been sunk by a torpedo, and that Betty, dressed in a torn, bloodstained khaki uniform, was standing on a miraculously floating stretcher, holding out her hands in an effort to save him as he struggled in the water.

In a base hospital somewhere in France, Betty, oblivious to the commotion her disappearance had caused, toiled night and day, stilling the pain of her heart by the ministrations of her hands. It was trying, nerve−racking work, which made demands on heart and sympathies as well as on muscles, and which sent her to bed so nervously and physically exhausted that she perforce must sleep. But at times, when she was on night duty, and the occupants of her ward were quiet, a feeling of desolation crept over her that made her gaze almost enviously at some gaunt form in a near−by bed on whose face dwelt that expression of aloofness which showed that he was nearing the shadow−land.

It was after one of those night−watches that Dr. Townsend stopped her in the corridor as she was on her way to her room.

As Cary had said, she had known the doctor well in New York, and the fact that he was in charge of the hospital had been one of the reasons for her acceptance of Mrs. Andrews's suggestion. It had also influenced Mrs. Andrews in making the offer to Betty; for, knowing the man and his admiration for Betty, she realized that the girl would be well looked after. Indeed, she hoped that, in time, in the close association of the work, the feeling which she knew existed at least on Townsend's side might develop into a stronger attachment which would solve the girl's difficulties.

That she had been right in her predictions was apparent from the look of concern on the doctor's face as he laid a detaining hand on Betty's arm.

"Are we working you too hard, Miss Crosby?" he asked solicitously.

"No, indeed"; she answered with an attempt at lightness. "Work is what I came over for!"

"I know, but we don't want to overdo it. You look mighty thin to me!" His eye ran over the almost ethereal lightness of the girl's figure.

"I wasn't exactly portly when I arrived!" laughed Betty.

"No, I know," he said sympathetically. His eyes came back to hers with a look of more than concern. "But I can't run any risk of your breaking down."

Betty's eyes dropped.

"No fear of that," she answered resolutely. "I wouldn't allow myself to give out, after seeing the wonderful way in which you work."

"It's been play since you came!" answered Townsend softly. "You've filled the whole place with sunshine, and it seems now as if I couldn't get tired. You've been an inspiration as well as a help!"

A deep flush spread over Betty's face.

"It's awfully good of you to be so encouraging," she answered gratefully; "for, of course, I realize that I must have failed horribly in my work."

"Failed nothing!" retorted Townsend emphatically. "I can tell you that your deft ways and the sight of your sweet face have helped many a man to endure without a word tortures that have wrung his soul! And I—well, I simply can't get along without you! "

The words sounded extravagant, and Betty raised her eyes with a little laugh to his; but the expression on his face caused the laugh to die on her lips.

"Tell me I won't have to do without you!" he entreated, coming a step nearer to her.

But Betty shrank from him and put out her hand, palm outward.

"Oh, please—please!" she pleaded.

"But, my darling"—the strong hand closed over hers—"I love you! Don't you think in time you could—"

Elizabeth quickly drew away her hand.

"Oh, not now, not now!" she breathed tremulously. "I couldn't possibly, yet!"

She sped up the stairs to her room and, flinging herself face down on her bed, sobbed convulsively.

With the assistance of Major Barry's letters, which seemed to have the effect of magic in making difficult paths straight, Fairfax, one afternoon about ten days later, found himself wending a tortuous way from Paris in the direction of a great smoke−cloud which hung pendent from the sky. In and out of the many vehicles that blocked the road, his chauffeur picked a way past huge sign−posts, devastated fields marked with mounds bearing little wooden crosses and soldiers' caps, streams swarming with bathing soldiers, their horses lining the banks and drinking their fill.

The air was choking with dust, white and fine, that sifted through and into everything, covering all, yet never seeming to rest. Nearer and nearer to the great smoke−cloud they drew, an incessant booming as of thunder roaring in their ears. Under the cloud Fairfax could see the flash of mighty guns, whose concussion shook the earth with terrific power.

A sharp scream rang in their ears, and a great black object hurled itself past them and buried itself violently in a deep, self−made grave. Cary involuntarily ducked and grasped the side of the car, while the chauffeur grinned sardonically at him over his shoulder.

They entered the remains of a village. Tom houses, piles of brick and mortar, debris of every kind lay scattered about. Desolation and ruin even more marked than that of the forlorn countryside through which they had passed emphasized the destruction the war had brought.

The chauffeur stopped the car before a long, low building over which floated the Red Cross flag. Fairfax jumped out and, entering the doorway, arrested a young man who was dashing through the hall. His hands were full of dressings, and he hardly paused long enough to hear Cary out.

"Miss Crosby?" he repeated breathlessly. "Can't say, I'm sure, whether you can see her or not. We're rushed to death this morning. Three hundred wounded came in last night, and we've none of us had any sleep. I'll see if she can be spared for a few minutes."

He vanished up the steep stairs, leaving Fairfax waiting impatiently in the bare hall, breathing that indescribable atmosphere of suffering induced by the pungent smell of anesthetics and disinfectants. Through half−closed doors he saw endless rows of closely packed beds, and in each a figure swathed in bandages, the same look of patient suffering carved on each face. Outside, the continuous bursting of shells—dangerously near, Fairfax thought—caused his nerves to twitch spasmodically.

He heard a light step behind him, and, turning, saw a slender figure in the uniform of a Red Cross nurse coming toward him. At first he did not recognize the pale face that looked out from under the white head−dress with its little red emblem. It was only when Betty smiled and stretched out her hand that he saw that it was she.

"Betty!" he exclaimed, clasping her hand in both of his. "How did you find me?" she asked quietly.

"I learned from Tony Page, at the Sussex Club. He was telling how you saved his life. I was waiting for the major and happened to overhear him—it was by the merest chance. Betty, why did you do it?"

"What?" asked Betty innocently, the shadow of a smile flitting over her face.

Cary dropped her hand abruptly.

"Why did you go off like that and not let any of us know?"

"I didn't think any one would care particularly."

Her tone was hard and cold.

"Care?" repeated Fairfax in a puzzled way. "Care? Why, what do you mean?"

"Come in here." Betty turned to a little room, half office, half reception−room, which happened to be empty. "Just as I say, I didn't think any one would care."

Fairfax looked at her gravely. Great shadows encircled her eyes, and her shoulders drooped wearily.

"Not your uncle or aunt, or Major Barry"—he paused—"or I?"

Betty's chin quivered.

"Dear Uncle Tod!" she murmured regretfully. "Did he worry?"

Fairfax took a restless turn up and down the room.

"Really, Betty," he said severely, "I don't think you've been overkind!"

Betty looked out of the window at the ruins on every side. Then she turned back to Fairfax.

"If I'd told Uncle Tod, he would have told Uncle George, who would have insisted on my coming back to New York, and that I'm not going to do!" Again she looked out of the window, a rebellious light in her eyes. "I suppose he knows all about it now?" she asked impatiently.

"I don't know what the major has done since I left," answered Cary stiffly. "I started a few hours after I heard—"

"Why did you come?" asked Betty calmly; but behind the quiet words and tone lay an inexorable resolve.

The face before her was like stone.

"To take you home!"

"Home? Home?" answered Betty. "I have no home!"

The stern face softened, and Cary came toward her impetuously.

"Let me make one for you, Betty!"

Instinctively Betty recoiled from him, and a dark flush spread over her face. "You!" she exclaimed in a horrified voice. "You!"

For a moment Fairfax studied the condemning face. That she would refuse him, in spite of the major's predictions, he had fully expected; but that she should show such repugnance startled him. Outside the thunder rolled ceaselessly, punctuated now and again by the screech of a shell as it tore its way through the air.

Betty broke the awkward silence by remarking coldly:

"It was very good of you to come so far, and I assure you I'm very grateful for your interest, but it's quite useless. I'm happy here, and Dr. Townsend seems to find me useful, which is something—"

"Betty," broke in Fairfax impulsively, are you going to marry Townsend?"

An expression of anger crossed the girl's face.

"What right have you to ask me that?" She looked at him in cold defiance.

"The right my love for you gives me," retorted Fairfax steadily.

"Your love!" repeated Betty scornfully.

"Yes," reiterated Fairfax gravely, "my love—the love I've had for you ever since we first met, when I had as little hope of ever being able to tell you of it as if you were on a different planet. When conditions changed I thought that perhaps, after all, I did have something to offer you that you might be willing to accept; and I know that your innate generosity will prompt you to tell me whether you have already pledged yourself to another man."

The straightforward sincerity of his words caught Betty's attention. She looked long and fixedly into his eyes.

"How is it with you and Beatrix Hunnewell?" she asked at last.

"Miss Hunnewell?" repeated Fairfax wonderingly. "Why, we're very good friends—that's all."

Betty took a step nearer to him, her eyes still searching his face.

"I heard you were engaged," she said in a low voice.

"Engaged!" A look of incredulity leaped into the dark eyes. "Who told you that?"

"My aunt," answered Betty calmly, her eyes never leaving his face.

Well, it's a lie!" The strong jaw snapped. "There has never been anything of that kind between us. I admire Miss Hunnewell beyond words, but—"

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently. Betty drew another step nearer.

"But"—there was a note almost of pleading in her voice— "you've been seeing a great deal of her this summer?"

"Yes," assented Fairfax gravely, "I have. When you're separated from the one who is more to you than life itself, it sometimes makes existence easier if once in a while you hear something about that person, and Miss Hunnewell was in touch with you."

"Oh!" said Betty faintly.

Her face had turned very white, and her lips trembled. Fairfax was watching her intently, a hurt look in his sensitive eyes.

"What a cad you think me!" he exclaimed bitterly, walking to the window, where he stood gazing out, his hands thrust deep in his pockets.

Betty impulsively took a step after him. Her breast, under the white kerchief, was rising and falling

tumultuously.

"Fairfax!" she whispered timidly.

But the man's shoulders squared themselves resolutely, and the dark head proudly refused to turn. Betty walked quietly across the room and slipped her hand through his arm.

"Fairfax, forgive me!" she pleaded softly.

He turned quickly and caught her in his arms.

"Darling!" he whispered passionately, pressing her to him. "Don't you care for me just a little? I love you, dear; I love you—"

But Betty struggled to free herself.

"Let me go! Let me go!" she breathed. "I mustn't—oh, please let me go!"

Fairfax released her reluctantly.

"But some day, Betty?"

Betty stepped back.

"Perhaps some day—perhaps when my father's name is cleared," she whispered brokenly. "I shall never marry any one while any stain rests on it."

"Why, Betty!" exclaimed Fairfax impatiently. "No one believes—"

"They do!" she interrupted vehemently. "A great many people believe that he was involved in something dishonorable before he died! When it's proved to be false, then I may think of marrying. Until then—"

She shook her head resolutely. A nurse appeared in the doorway.

"Miss Crosby," she said with a glance at Fairfax, "Dr. Townsend wants you."

Betty turned to Fairfax and held out her hand.

"Good−by," she said hurriedly. "Thank you again for coming so far, and give my love to Uncle Tod!"

Fairfax grasped her hand.

"You had better write it to him; I sha'n't see him for some time."

"Why, aren't you going back?"

She paused on her way to the door and looked back at him over her shoulder.

"By way of South Africa. I'm going there to see Barney Tutney. He may be able to give me some points."

"Barney Tutney? Yes!" she mused. "He would know. You're taking a great deal of trouble," she added softly.

Fairfax laughed.

"Trouble!" he repeated happily. "Nothing is trouble that I do for you. I consider it a privilege to be able to do any service for you or for your father. You remember, I told you that once before."

"I remember. Thank you again!"

Once more Betty held out her hand; then she passed through the door and sped along the hall and up the stairs.

Fairfax got into the motor and hurried back to Paris. His firm mouth was drawn in a straight line, and his keen eyes looked unseeing at the tragic scenes through which they passed.

XII

A few days after Cary's visit a number of letters and papers reached Elizabeth. Except for an occasional note from Mrs. Andrews, they brought the first news she had had from home since her arrival in France, and she took them and ran to her room with a little throb of excitement.

Seating herself by the table which stood before the window, she spread them out before her. The letters were from Mrs. Crosby, Beatrix Hunnewell, Major Barry, and Fairfax Cary.

Cary's hastily scrawled line, written on the train, she read first. It was very short, and simply stated that he had started for Cape Town, and would see her on his way home. She slipped it back into its envelope, a little smile parting her lips, and picked up one addressed in Mrs. Crosby's rather bold hand.

Unconsciously Betty steeled herself. She opened the letter, and at the first words the smiling lips compressed themselves into a straight line. An angry flush spread over her face, and a horrified expression widened her blue eyes. Her face blanched, and she turned the page with a hand that trembled.

"Fairfax Cary!" she gasped. "Never! It's impossible! It's so inconceivable that it's ridiculous!"

The letter had ended with the sentence:

Your uncle and I met him on the train the evening of the murder, and he told us he had just left the Delaneys. His own words are an absolutely conclusive proof. Could any evidence be more convincing?

Elizabeth unfolded a newspaper clipping which her aunt had enclosed, and in great black letters the words jumped at her:

Sister of Well−Known jockey Found Murdered in Sheepshead Bay Hotel—Prominent Lawyer Suspected—Patrick Delaney Dies in Adjoining Room.

Her eyes devoured the column of small type which described how Molly Delaney's body had been discovered early on Saturday morning by the doctor who had come to see Pat. The boy was dead, and Molly was found lying half on the bed, half on the floor of her room, a bullet through her heart. Although the room was in great disorder, apparently nothing had been removed, for money and jewelry lay scattered about, showing that burglary had not been the motive for the crime.

Various clues had been followed, the most conclusive centering around Fairfax Cary, who had been seen by a number of persons hurriedly leaving the hotel. That he had been with the Delaneys was testified by Michael Frost, the hall−boy, who had conducted Cary to Pat Delaney's room shortly after seven o'clock. To make the evidence doubly convincing, a letter from Molly Delaney, written on the afternoon before the murder, and requesting him to call as soon as possible, had been found in Cary's office.

Cary, in the mean time, had disappeared, and no trace of him could be found. It was not thought, however, that he would be able to elude the police for very long, for descriptions of him had been sent broadcast throughout the country, and his apprehension was only a matter of time.

With a gasp of dismay Betty let the paper flutter to the table before her. She rested her elbows on it, and her head dropped into her hands. In spite of the newspaper report, in spite of her aunt's biting words, not even the shadow of a doubt of Cary's innocence entered her mind. It was impossible for her to believe that the man who had left her so recently, whom her father had respected and trusted, could be guilty of this atrocious crime. A hot burst of rage surged over her.

"How could any one connect a man like that with murder? It's wicked! Brutal!" Her hands clenched, and she raised her head defiantly. "It's a lie!"

But how to prove it?

Her eves fell on the other letters which had come in the same mail. She opened the major's first and, glancing hurriedly through the first pages filled with tender reproaches, concentrated her attention on the words that followed:

Fairfax Cary has been implicated in a nasty scandal, out of which I'm doing my best to extricate him. The evidence against him, however, is very strong, and I don't know how we're coming out. Whoever murdered Molly Delaney covered his tracks with incredible cunning, and now that Pat is gone, it seems almost impossible to get at the facts.

Whether or not the boy died before the murder was committed, we have been unable to ascertain. We only know that Cary left the hotel at about half past nine. The question is, was the girl alive when he went away? This only Cary can answer. Can you tell me his whereabouts? I've cabled to his address in Paris, but have had no reply. We need him and all the help we can get.

Won't you please come home?

"Dear Uncle Tod!" thought Betty penitently. "He's a trump! I'm afraid I haven't been very good to him."

She picked up Trixie's note. It was short and to the point: DEAR BETSY:

You must come home at once. We need you to help us to clear Fairfax Cary from this dreadful charge that's been brought against him. We shall expect you to stay with us. As ever, affectionately, TRIXIE.

Elizabeth gathered up the papers, dropped them into a drawer, and went in search of Dr. Townsend. Hurriedly, and it must be confessed rather incoherently, she explained to him that she must return to New York at once.

He gave his consent without comment. It was only when he stood by the motor which was to take her back to Paris that he showed what it was costing him to let her go.

"Good−by," he said gently, as he held her hand closely in his big clasp. "Will you come back to us?"

"I want to, and I'll do my best," answered Betty; "but it all depends—"

"If you don't, I'll come to you," he declared, with a look that sent the blood into Betty's face. "This horror must be over soon."

"I hope so," agreed Betty fervently. "Good−by, and thank you again for being so good to me!"

The motor started, and Betty, turning to wave her hand, saw him as he stood before the low building, the sunlight glinting on the gold of his hair and bringing into high relief the outlines of his muscular frame.

"That is a man!" she thought, and a feeling of self−reproach came over her at the thought that she was deserting the post of duty at the time of greatest need. "I will surely come back!" she hastened to assure herself. "Only now it seems as if I must go home!"

Never before had the trip across the Atlantic seemed of such interminable length, and it was almost in a frenzy of impatience that Betty stood on the deck as the steamer passed through the Narrows into New York Harbor and caught the first glimpse of the jagged outlines of the city emerging from the golden October haze. She had cabled Major Barry when to expect her, and as the vessel slipped smoothly into its berth, she scanned the waiting crowd eagerly for the erect figure and jovial face.

When she at last discovered him, in spite of his expression of glad welcome, she saw at once from the anxious look that lurked in his eyes that the situation had not improved. But it was not until they were seated in the Hunnewell motor, which Trixie had sent for her, that Betty asked the question which she had been restraining with difficulty ever since she landed.

"Has the murderer been found?"

Major Barry shook his head gloomily.

"No, I'm sorry to say!"

"And suspicion still rests on—"

The major nodded, and the lips under the close−trimmed mustache tightened.

"It's outrageous!" he asserted savagely. "The evidence is purely circumstantial, but they've piled it up, and piled it up, until really—" He shook his head dubiously.

"Have you engaged a lawyer?" asked Betty.

"Oh, yes, of course, right away—Sturgis and Fellows, capital men, both of them, and we're not leaving a stone unturned; but if I could only get in touch with Cary! Every minute that he's away seems to strengthen the case against him."

"How long will it take him to go to Cape Town and come back?" asked Betty.

The conviction was creeping over her that if it had not been for her Fairfax could have cleared himself long ago.

It may be a couple of months. Everything is so unsettled now that you can't tell how he'll be delayed."

"Is there any chance of his being arrested there?"

The major shrugged his shoulders.

"You can't tell. Sometimes, especially when you don't want them to be, these detectives are deuced clever at finding things out!"

"I wish they'd devote their energies to the situation here!" said Betty.

The motor turned into Fifth Avenue and fell into line with the endless procession of hurrying cars. Betty looked at the familiar scene with the eyes of an alien. The well−known faces framed in the windows of the swiftly passing limousines, smiling and nodding to her in recognition when the traffic paused, gave her a feeling of surprise that she should be remembered after the long interval which had elapsed since she took her part in the drama. It seemed as if she were looking at the spectacle from a great distance, as if it were being presented to her sight through the wrong end of an opera−glass.

The hurrying throngs on the streets passing in and out of the handsome shops, the same intent, strained look on the faces as the swinging doors swallowed or ejected them, forced themselves on her consciousness, and a helpless feeling of futility seized her. So lately removed from the scenes of combat where men with the courage born of high resolve struggled desperately to preserve the highest ideals of civilization—where they fought and died that liberty, the most precious heritage of man, might be transmitted as of old to the generations yet unborn—the picture before her looked crude and cruel in its selfish luxury and self−indulgence.

"No one seems to care!" she breathed at last with a little catch in her voice.

"It isn't good form to show one's feelings," the major reminded her whimsically, perceiving at once the trend of her thoughts. "But they're really not so heartless. They're most of them doing their bit; only, of course, they must have their good times, too!" he added indulgently.

"Are Uncle George and Aunt Maude in town?"

"I imagine so. I saw your uncle at the club yesterday."

"Did he know I was coming back from France?" An anxious look crept into the blue eyes.

"I told him."

I'm not going back to them!" exclaimed Betty, the fire of battle in her eyes.

The major looked at her with eyes full of tender interest.

"What are you going to do, my child?" he asked softly.

They had reached the park, and Betty's eyes wandered to the avenue of elms stretching their arms high above the path to clasp those outstretched to them from the other side.

"I don't know, Uncle Tod. I can always go back to France."

"Is France more alluring than home just now?" he asked anxiously.

"Well, not just now," admitted Betty slowly. "When some one who is sacrificing himself to do something for you gets into difficulties himself, you naturally want to do your best to help him out; but when it's all straightened out, why, then I'm going back."

A frown of disappointment appeared between the major's eyes.

"Well, here we are," he remarked as the motor stopped before the broad steps of the Hunnewells' house. "I think I see Trixie at the window."

They passed up the steps and into the hall, and Trixie caught Betty in her arms.

"Oh, Betsy!" she exclaimed, a little break in her voice. "How could you give us such a scare?"

Betty put her arm around the girl, surprised and touched by her exhibition of feeling.

"I never thought it would make such a commotion," she said, while a smile which was almost as bright as of old played over her face.

"Imagine!" exclaimed Trixie. "Didn't you know we would care? Have you heard anything new?" she asked, turning to the major.

"Not a thing," he replied. "I'm going down to see Sturgis now."

"But you'll come back?" asked Betty anxiously.

"Yes, about five o'clock. I may have something more to tell you then"; and be ran briskly down the steps.

"Come to your room," said Beatrix, drawing Betty toward the stairs.

They stopped to speak to Mrs. Hunnewell, who came out of her boudoir to greet Elizabeth. Contrary to Betty's expectations, she gave the girl a warm welcome, and seemed to be delighted to have her with them.

"We've been hearing your praises sung so loudly for the past month," she said, with a teasing glance at Beatrix, " that we're overjoyed to have a visit from you."

Elizabeth looked wonderingly at her, but Beatrix drew her up the stairs without giving her time to reply.

"Betsy's tired to death," she explained to her mother over her shoulder. "And Major Barry's coming back to

tea. She simply must rest!"

But when they reached Elizabeth's room Trixie's solicitude for her friend's health seemed to vanish. After having helped Elizabeth to divest herself of her hat and coat, she drew her into her own room and closed the door.

"Betsy," she began abruptly, " is Tony Page in love with you?"

"Tony Page! In love with me!" repeated Betty wonderingly. "Mercy, no! What ever put such an idea into your head?"

"Oh, well, I wanted to be sure this time. He talks incessantly about you—how you saved his life and how brave you are."

Elizabeth laughed softly.

"Ridiculous! Even if I did, that doesn't mean he's in love with me! And as to the bravery—" She paused, and the light died suddenly out of her face. "Trixie, when your life isn't worth two cents to you, it doesn't take more than two cents' worth of courage to risk it. And sometimes it takes all the courage in the world—much more than you possess—to face the prospect the future holds. No, Trixie, it wasn't courage that night; it was just the desire to end it all. You see, I didn't want to live." The thrushlike voice faltered.

"Is it different now, dear?"

Elizabeth considered for a moment before answering.

"Y−e−s," she hesitated. " I don't want to die now; at least not just yet."

"What changed you, Betsy?"

"I have something to do now—something that I must do!

"And that?"

"I'm determined to clear the names of my father and Fairfax Cary. I may be wrong, but the conviction is with me day and night that when Molly Delaney's murderer is found, the stain on my father's memory will be wiped away."

Trixie came very close to Elizabeth and looked earnestly into her eyes.

"Betsy, who do you think did it?"

"I don't know, Trixie; I haven't the faintest idea. But one thing I do know—I know it wasn't Fairfax Cary!"

Beatrix nodded.

"I know that, too," she agreed softly.

Elizabeth looked at her intently.

"Trixie," she said quickly, putting a hand through Trixie's arm and drawing her to the lounge, "will you forgive me if I ask you something?"

"Why, of course, Betsy, ask anything you like. I haven't anything to hide—at least not yet!

The bright color deepened under the cream of Trixie's skin, and unconsciously her eyes strayed to a large photograph that stood on her dressing−table. Betty's eyes followed hers, and she looked into Tony Page's smiling face. For the first time since her father's death her vivid smile played over her face.

"I think, on the whole"—the flutelike cadence of her laugh rang through the room—"I'll wait till then before I ask you!"

"Why, Betsy!" began Beatrix, startled at the change in the girl beside her. "What do you mean?"

Oh, nothing," replied Betty happily. Only it's heavenly being here with you, Trix!"

"I know it's heavenly having you!"

Trixie leaned over and kissed her warmly.

XIII

Major Barry noticed the change as soon as he entered the drawing−room at five o'clock and found the girls busily engaged with the tea things.

"What have you been doing to my goddaughter?" he asked, smiling at Beatrix as he shook hands.

The intervening hours had apparently had their effect on him, too, for he had regained some of his old−time cheeriness.

"Why, nothing special," replied Trixie wonderingly.

"Well, she looks like a different girl, almost as if she had anticipated the good news that reached me only a few minutes ago. Cary's on his way home," he added joyfully, turning to Elizabeth.

"Oh!" exclaimed Betty, coming eagerly to him. "When will he arrive?"

"That I don't know, but I had a letter from Bordeaux, saying that he would sail on the following day on the Rochambeau. He said he ran across Tutney at Madeira. Odd, wasn't it? And he intimated that he had had a most satisfactory interview with him."

"That was strange," agreed Elizabeth.

"Is Tutney coming back, too?"

"I hardly think so—at least not just yet. He expects to come over before long, however, for he wants to make investigations himself. I gleaned from Cary's letter that things are not quite to his liking."

"I wonder when the Rochambeau is due?"

Beatrix rang, and when the butler appeared she told him, to bring the evening paper. When it arrived Major Barry took it to a lamp on a near−by table.

"She's been sighted off Fire Island!" he exclaimed joyfully.

"That means she'll dock early to−morrow morning."

"You'll be there to meet him, won't you, Uncle Tod?" Betty asked anxiously.

"Don't worry your pretty head about that, my dear! I'll be there, if I have to camp out all night on the wharf. I've kept my campaigning outfit and am prepared for all emergencies," he added whimsically. He folded the paper carefully and placed it behind the lamp. A head−line had caught his eye which he did not care to have Betty see. Evidently the detectives, too, were aware of Cary's proximity, and his arrival would doubtless be simultaneous with his arrest; but this the major did not think it necessary for Betty to know. As it was, either apprehension or fatigue had driven the happy light from her face.

"Have the lawyers learned anything more?" she asked fearfully.

The major shook his head.

"Not a thing. As far as I can make out, it's all up to Cary. If he can prove that Molly Delaney was alive when he left the hotel, we're all right. If he can't—"

"Well?" The word was hardly more than a breath.

The major spread out his hands significantly.

"Well!" He hesitated a moment, then his eyes fell on her troubled face. "We'll have to establish his innocence in some other way," he concluded with a hopefulness that he was far from feeling.

True to his word, the next morning found Major Barry waiting impatiently, in the crisp air that was blowing in from the sea, for the great black vessel creeping up the teeming river. Near him stood unobtrusively two men, who evidently considered him an object of unusual interest, for they kept him constantly in sight. When he was joined by a short man with quick, alert eyes and a pointed nose, they evinced ever−increasing satisfaction.

"That's Sturgis, the lawyer," one of the men remarked in an undertone to his companion.

"I guess that settles it!" answered the other, a gleam of triumph lighting his keen eyes.

It was he who, when Fairfax Cary came quickly down the gangway, stepped forward and said quietly:

"We want you, Mr. Cary,"

Fairfax stopped abruptly, and the hand that he had stretched out in greeting to Major Barry fell to his side. He looked at the face at his shoulder inquiringly. The second man appeared on the other side.

"Better come quietly, Mr. Cary," he remarked, turning back his coat and revealing the shield pinned on his

waistcoat. "We'll explain later."

Fairfax looked in a perplexed way at Major Barry.

"It's a mistake, Fairfax, my boy, of course; but we'll just jump into the taxi with these two gentlemen and talk it over on the way. This is Mr. Sturgis," he added, indicating the man beside him.

Fairfax bowed in a dazed way and accompanied the men as they led the way to the street.

"What's it all about, major?" he asked as they passed through the crowd.

"Something to do with Molly Delaney's murder," answered the major, eying him keenly.

"Molly Delaney! Murdered!" gasped Fairfax. "Why—who—"

"Here we are!" exclaimed the major as they reached the curb. "Will you meet us there, Sturgis?" he asked.

A satisfied expression rested on his face, and his voice was almost jovial.

The short man assented, and the four took their places in the taxi.

When the major walked into the Hunnewells' drawing−room, two hours later, he was rubbing his hands delightedly.

"Just as we thought, Betty dear—that boy is no more implicated in the murder than I am," he announced joyfully to Elizabeth, who had left her seat on the sofa and came to meet him. "Whether he can prove it is another story. He's convinced that Molly was alive when he left. He says he could distinctly hear her talking."

"To whom?" asked Betty quickly.

"Ah, that he didn't say!"

"Does he know?"

"I imagine so, but he didn't tell us."

"Why didn't he? It may have been—probably was—the man who killed her."

The major shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Yes, I know; but you know what quixotic ideas of honor Cary has, and he didn't actually see the man, couldn't even recognize his voice."

Betty wrung her hands desperately.

"When can I see him?" she asked suddenly.

The major started.

"See him?" he ejaculated.

"Yes."

"Oh, you could hardly do that!"

"Why not?"

Betty's fair head went up defiantly. "Why, because—my dear child, he's been arrested! He's in the Tombs!"

"What difference does that make?"

Betty's face was very white, but her eyes gazed unflinchingly into the major's.

"Why, you could hardly go there, you know!" The major paused; then he added: "Of course, if you were his sister or his wife, that would be different."

"How different?" argued Betty rebelliously. "He got into this trouble doing something for me, and I insist on seeing him. If you won't take me, I shall have to go alone!"

The major groaned inwardly. The determined expression on Betty's face indicated that she was in deadly earnest.

"Well, some time," he temporized.

"This afternoon!" declared Betty emphatically. "I'm going this afternoon!"

"Sturgis is trying to arrange about bail. Couldn't you wait until Cary's out?" pleaded the major.

"I'm going this afternoon," repeated Elizabeth quietly. "Now will you take me?"

The major acquiesced reluctantly.

"Have you seen your aunt and uncle?" he asked on his way to the door.

Betty shook her head.

"My dear child," expostulated the major,

I really don't think you're treating them quite right. After all, you know, he's your father's brother, and they were very good to you last summer."

"I know," agreed Betty remorsefully. "I must go. I'll go this afternoon, late. Now go down and tell Fairfax I'm

coming." She took hold of the lapels of his coat and, raising herself on her toes, kissed his cheek. "You're such a dear!" she whispered tremulously. "I don't know what I should do without you!"

Major Barry stroked her hair gently.

"There, there," he said tenderly. "I'm doing nothing at all, nothing at all; but don't worry—I'm sure we shall be able to straighten things out before long."

But his optimism was all on the surface; for as he sped down−town to hear the result of Sturgis's efforts to get Cary out on bail, he gave himself over unreservedly to the depression that had gradually been closing in on him.

"No matter how hard one may try to put a cheerful face on it," he thought gloomily, "the fact remains that the situation is extremely grave."

And in this Sturgis agreed when he met him in front of the Tombs and they stopped for a few minutes' talk before going in. Bail had been refused, and the outlook was far from reassuring.

XIV

But Major Barry had thrown off his air of depression by the time he and Sturgis reached Cary's cell. He patted Fairfax on the shoulder as he rose to meet them.

"Well," he began cheerily, "luck's against us for the time being, my boy! The powers that be won't listen to any talk of bail."

A quiver passed over the finely chiseled features. Major Barry went on:

"So there's nothing to do but to establish your innocence as quickly as possible. Now, how are we going to do it?"

He and Sturgis sat down on the chairs, and Fairfax dropped down on the cot. Fairfax shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

"I only know that the girl was alive when I left the hotel. As to conjecturing who killed her, you can do that as well as I."

He pressed his hand wearily against the back of his head.

"Who was with her when you left, Mr. Cary?" asked the lawyer.

"That I can't tell you."

"It may give us the clue that will enable us to exonerate you."

Cary considered for a moment in silence, while the two men searched his face anxiously.

"I prefer not to express an opinion as to who it was," he replied at last, "I didn't see the man or recognize his voice."

"Well," said Sturgis, rising, "I know Major Barry has other matters to discuss with you, so I'll leave you."

He called to a guard who was passing and disappeared into the corridor.

"Now," began the major, drawing his chair closer to Cary, "tell me about Tutney. It was extraordinary your finding him as you did!"

Fairfax came out of the abstraction that had fallen on him and fixed his dark, penetrating eyes on the major's face.

"Yes," he assented, "it was great luck. He had just arrived from Cape Town, and was, I think, as glad to see me as I was to run across him. He asked me at once about Randolph Crosby's affairs. It seems that he and Mr. Crosby and a number of other men had formed a syndicate to develop this diamond−mine, with an agreement that no one should sell his interest without first giving the other directors a chance to buy it. Shortly after Mr. Crosby's death a large block of the stock was offered at public sale. Tutney, when he heard of it, was naturally a good deal upset, and immediately suspected that the stock was Mr. Crosby's. He evidently felt pretty badly about it, for he realizes what the future of the property will be, and he knew what a mistake it was to sell before its true value was reached. He's a great admirer of Miss Crosby, and I know he felt that if his supposition were correct, and the stock was her father's, that her executor didn't have her best interests at heart."

The major nodded, and remarked ironically:

"He's a man of much perception!"

"He asked me who the trustees were," continued Fairfax; "and when I told him that George Crosby was sole executor, he didn't seem overpleased. He said he thought it was a mistake to entrust a big estate like that to any one man, even though you had unlimited confidence in him. The chances for mistakes in judgment alone were too great."

"Then he thought the property was a large one?" queried the major quickly.

"Yes; he said he knew it was. He scoffed at the idea that Mr. Crosby had made unwise investments. He said any one who knew Randolph Crosby at all knew him for a sagacious business man, keen, and of remarkable acuteness, while at the same time he had an unusual sense of obligation and honor."

"Did you tell him that the entire fortune was gone, and that Crosby's daughter was working to support herself?"

Fairfax nodded.

"I asked him if it were possible, and he said not unless the trustee had mishandled the estate."

"Just as I thought!" The major leaned forward and tapped Fairfax lightly on the knee. "Mark my words, boy, George Crosby and that precious son of his have made away with that child's money! Now, it's going to be my business to find out where and how it has gone." He straightened up. "Betty wants to see you," he concluded abruptly.

Fairfax started. He glanced around the bare cell, at the stone walls, the iron door, and barred window through which a shaft of light slanted and lay in stripes across the cold floor.

"Here?" he breathed, a look of distress coming into his haggard eyes.

"Insists on it, my boy," continued the major briskly. "And, Fairfax, when you've known Betty as long as I have, you'll realize that when she makes up her mind—" He spread out his hands and shook his head helplessly, an indulgent smile twitching at the corners of his mouth. "You know what an old fool I am about her—simply can't refuse her anything. I don't have to tell you that I'm not particularly anxious to have her come here. No reflection on you, of course, but—well, it isn't just the thing under the circumstances—you understand?"

He looked a little pleadingly into the younger man's face.

"Of course," Fairfax assented gravely. "I understand perfectly."

"Well, she's coming, just the same. Says she has something of the utmost importance to tell you."

"When will she come?" Cary asked huskily.

"This afternoon, about three."

Cary took a turn up and down the cell and stopped before the major.

"Has what she is going to tell me got anything to do with Dr. Townsend?"

His voice sounded harsh and strained.

"Don't know, I'm sure."

The major looked sympathetically at him. He did not add that Betty had said that she intended shortly to return to France.

"If that's what she's coming to tell him, he'll know it soon enough," he thought pityingly. "I know what the poor boy's going through, and suspense, hard as it is to bear, is better than despair."

He patted Fairfax on the shoulder and bade him good−by, promising to return after luncheon.

If Elizabeth experienced any feelings of trepidation as she left the warm sunshine and entered the ominous chill of the massive gray building, Major Barry, who was watching her closely, failed to detect it. Even when the door was unlocked and they entered the long passage where tier upon tier of cells looked down upon them, each with its tragic−faced inmate tense with suppressed revolt or huddled in passive lethargy, she retained her expression of calm.

The guard stopped before a door and inserted the key. It opened, and Betty stepped into the cell. The door clanged back into place and the lock clicked.

Fairfax rose and turned quickly toward her. His face was very white, but there still clung to him his air of proud reserve, and the dark eyes looked out fearless and unashamed from under the straight brows.

Betty came quickly to him and held out her hand. He hesitated for a moment, and then, taking it, held it closely in his.

"It was very good of you to come," he said in a hushed voice.

Betty laughed a little tremulously.

"Now we're quits!" she exclaimed. That's what I said to you in the hospital!"

A semblance of a smile parted the sensitive lips. He indicated the chair beside which they stood. After Betty had seated herself, he sank once more on the cot and fixed his eyes on the shifting bars of light.

Betty pressed her hands tightly together in her lap, and a lump rose in her throat. Her eyes rested pitifully on the bowed, dark head. She swallowed hard; then, rising suddenly, she ran to the cot, seated herself beside him, and put her arm around his neck.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she whispered brokenly, laying her cheek against his. "I didn't tell you the truth that time in France. I do care, Fairfax. I love you, dear!"

A tremor passed over Fairfax. He clenched his hands until the knuckles showed white.

"Don't!" he breathed hoarsely. "Don't, for God's sake!"

"Don't what?" Betty drew back, and her great eyes, pansy−black in the uncertain light, rested on the white, averted face.

"You don't realize what you're doing!"

Betty looked relieved.

"Oh, yes, I do," she asserted. "I realize perfectly what I'm doing. I'm telling the man I honor above everything on earth that I love him. It's high time that he knew, for I've suddenly discovered that I've loved him for a very long time—much longer than I had any idea of!"

Cary got up suddenly and, walking with quick, nervous steps to the door of his cell, placed his hands on the grating. He shook it slightly; then he turned back to Betty, who had taken a step after him.

"It's real!" he whispered huskily. "Sometimes I think it must be a dream, and I have actually to go and feel the locked door before I can believe it. "But now," he went on, the look of pain deepening in his eyes, "those bars have begun to press in on me closer and closer, until I can feel them on my forehead. I know in time they'll reach my soul, and then I shall never be able to wipe away the taint!"

He strode past her and, sinking once more on the cot, buried his face in his hands.

"Fairfax!" Betty ran to him, sat down beside him, and put her arm around his shoulder. "You mustn't have such dreadful thoughts! Nothing can taint your soul but sin, and, darling, your friends know how far that is from you!"

Again a tremor passed over him.

"You don't know, no one knows until he's been locked in, what it means to be caged in a place like this, with the knowledge that no power on your part can get you out! It's hideous, horrible!" he whispered hoarsely. "The iron eats into your soul!"

Betty laid her hand on his head and drew it gently to her until it rested on her shoulder. Stooping over, she pressed her lips to his forehead.

"Darling," she whispered, "I love you!"

A great sob shook Fairfax. He raised himself and drew resolutely away.

"I should deserve to be kicked if I took what your pity and gratitude are prompting you to give!" he said. "No; I love you too dearly to allow you to sacrifice yourself for a man who has passed through an ordeal like this!"

Once more the dark head sank into his hands.

"Fairfax, that's absurd! You wanted to marry me when a stain rested on my name—"

"That's very different," he broke in. "The discredit in no way reflected on you."

"And if it had, would it have prevented you from loving me?"

"Never!" The word was sharp and decisive.

"Well," exclaimed Betty, with a little laugh of triumph, "then that's settled!" "What's settled?"

"That we're to be married!"

"Miss Crosby, don't you understand—"

"Don't call me Miss Crosby!" interrupted Betty imperiously. "And as to understanding, why"—her voice softened—"the big fact remains that we love each other, dear, and after that nothing matters. Dear heart, you do love me, don't you?"

Fairfax groaned and pressed his hands closer over his eyes.

"You're the most difficult man I ever proposed to," remarked Betty, with a tremulous little laugh. "Well, if you won't be nice, I'm going to ask you a question. Who was in the room with Molly Delaney that night when you were talking to Pat?"

Fairfax did not answer.

"Answer me, Fairfax!"

"I don't know. At least, I'm not sure."

"But you have a strong suspicion?"

"You can't implicate a man in a crime like this on a suspicion."

"But if that suspicion led to a correct solution?"

"It might not, and then it would bring unnecessary pain to innocent people. I know too much about that to be willing to inflict it on others," he concluded bitterly.

Betty sat for a moment wrapped in thought.

"If we could only get at the motive," she said, half to herself, "it might be a clue! Why should any one want to kill the girl? Do you know any reason?"

Fairfax moved restlessly.

"It's hard to tell," he answered evasively. "With people like that there are so many reasons. It might have been jealousy, fear of exposure, any one of half a dozen things."

"Well, I sha'n't rest night or day till I find out." Betty rose as the guard inserted his key in the lock. "I'll see you again soon."

"Did you learn anything?" asked Major Barry anxiously, when she joined him in the waiting−room.

Betty shook her head dejectedly.

"He absolutely refuses to tell who it was. Uncle Tod, I want to go down to Sheepshead Bay and look through those rooms. I'm convinced that there must be something there that will give us a clue."

"But, my dear child, the detectives have searched them thoroughly."

"Yes, I know," Betty assented obstinately. "But it may be the only chance of saving him!"

She was very pale, but her chin was firm and resolute.

"I'll try to arrange it, but I'm afraid there isn't much hope. Where are you going now?"

"To the Crosbys'. I want to tell them of my engagement to Fairfax."

"What?"

The major stopped in the crowded street along which they were walking on their way to the Elevated train and looked aghast at the girl's calm face.

"Why, Uncle Tod," she exclaimed, "you don't mean to tell me you didn't know?"

"Know! Know what?"

"Why, that we love each other!"

"I knew that Cary loved you, and I suspected that you cared for him; but really, Betty, I hardly think that—at present, if I were you—I would—"

"You hardly think that now's the time for me to tell the world of my belief in Fairfax's innocence?" she said defiantly. "You'll have to forgive me for differing with you. I can't imagine any time more appropriate!"

The major looked at her with a gleam of admiration in his eyes. The color had mounted in her cheeks, and her eyes shone bright under the level brows.

"Of course, my dear," he answered in a conciliatory voice, "we all believe that Fairfax is innocent. Tell me, how does Cary feel about it?"

The dimple under Betty's eye came into play, and she broke into a little laugh.

"Oh, he says he won't marry me!"

The major looked relieved.

"He means, of course, not till this mess is straightened out."

They crossed the street and passed up the steps to the Elevated. When they were seated in the train Betty answered.

"I don't know what he means," she said. "I only know that I'm going to marry him as soon as possible."

"Well, you modern girls certainly know your own minds!" remarked the major. "Now, in my day if was customary—"

"To wait until we were asked?" interposed Betty merrily. "Well, things have changed, Uncle Tod; now it's the other way round. You men don't realize it, but it's really the women who do the proposing. We let the men think the old custom is still in force. It makes them happier, and doesn't alter the fact!"

XV

But after she had said good−by to the major at her uncle's door and had entered the hall, the happy look faded from Elizabeth's face, and was replaced by one of firm resolve. She foresaw a struggle, and with characteristic energy determined to have it over as quickly as possible.

She went into the familiar drawing−room, and a slight feeling of surprise came over her at finding it exactly as it had been in the spring. The furniture stood in its accustomed places; the same photographs looked at her from their silver frames; the same copy of Omar Khayyam lay on the table by the same vase, which was filled as of old with pink carnations. Everything was just as she had left it; but, in spite of its familiarity, a different spirit brooded over the room, subtly conveying an impression of suspense, of dread.

"Absurd!" thought Betty, with a little shake of her shoulders. "I'm getting abnormally imaginative! It's I who have changed!"

She heard a step in the hall, and Mrs. Crosby parted the portieres and walked into the room. In spite of the carefully shaded light, in spite of her elaborate mauve tea−gown and artistic make−up, Betty was shocked at her aunt's appearance.

"Aunt Maude," she exclaimed, deep concern in her voice, "you've been ill!"

Mrs. Crosby kissed the girl's cheek mechanically and dismissed the question with a wave of her jeweled hand.

"Come into the library," she said. "Your uncle is there."

They crossed the hall and entered the luxurious room. George Crosby rose from a deep chair by the fire and came slowly toward Betty. He kissed her affectionately and, turning back to the fire, dropped again into his seat.

He held out his hands to the blaze. They were thin and wrinkled, and twitched spasmodically, and in the light of the fire his face showed gray and haggard.

"You've been gone a long time, Elizabeth," began Mrs. Crosby in a curiously restrained voice. She had seated herself in the corner of a sofa, on the other side of the fire, and Betty sank down beside her. "Do you think you have been very kind to us?"

Betty moved uneasily, and did not answer her aunt's question.

"Your uncle has hardly slept or eaten since you left," Mrs. Crosby went on plaintively; " and I—" She paused significantly.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" exclaimed Betty penitently. "I had no idea you would care!"

George Crosby turned his sunken eyes to her.

"Care?" he repeated dully.

What made you think we wouldn't care?" asked Mrs. Crosby reproachfully. "It has been a dreadful six weeks! I only hope you will never know such suffering and anxiety as you have caused us!"

Betty's lip trembled.

"Oh, Aunt Maude," she whispered, "I wasn't happy, either; but I couldn't stay—I had to do something!"

"You might at least have told us where you were. We had no idea, and it isn't safe for young girls—"

"Yes, I know, aunt. Believe me, I'm very sorry."

A silence fell on them, broken only by the crackling of the flames and the subdued snap of a log as it broke in the middle and parted in a shower of sparks.

"Where are you stopping?" asked Mrs. Crosby at last.

"With the Hunnewells."

"Oh!" Mrs. Crosby glanced furtively at the girl's pure profile as she gazed past her into the fire. "I can imagine that Mrs. Hunnewell is very happy over Beatrix's escape."

"Escape?" repeated Betty in a bewildered voice and with an inquiring look at her aunt.

"Yes—from her engagement to Fairfax Cary."

"Oh!" said Betty slowly. "That never existed."

"How do you know?" asked Mrs. Crosby sharply.

"Both Trixie and Fairfax told me," answered Betty. "I am going to marry Fairfax Cary," she added quietly.

"What?" exclaimed her uncle and aunt simultaneously.

A happy smile illumined the girl's face. "Yes," she went on, the thrushlike lilt ringing in her voice, "he came to see me in France, and asked me to marry him."

"Was this after the murder?"

Betty nodded.

"Yes; he sailed early the following morning, before he knew about it."

"Before any one else knew about it," interposed Mrs. Crosby bitingly. "But of course he has absolved you of your promise now?"

Betty laughed.

"Oh, I refused to marry him when he asked me; but later I found that I loved him and couldn't live without him, so this afternoon I told him so."

"Where did you see him?" asked George Crosby.

"At the Tombs," replied Betty calmly. Uncle Tod took me."

"Tod Barry took you to the Tombs!" exclaimed Mrs. Crosby incredulously.

Betty nodded, and again her face was illumined by a bright smile.

"So now we're engaged," she concluded happily at least I am to him. I suppose he isn't engaged to me, for he refuses to marry me!"

"I'm glad he has some sense of honor left!"

George Crosby sank back into his chair, a relieved expression stealing over his face. Betty's eyes dilated, but her voice was quiet and controlled as she replied:

"That's the trouble—he has an exaggerated sense of honor. If it were not for that we should know, or at least have a very definite idea, who Molly Delaney's murderer is. Fairfax knows who was with her while he was talking to Pat, but he won't tell!

A step had been coming along the hall, and when she finished speaking Betty looked up into Norman's livid face.

"Hello, Betty!" he exclaimed in a voice which he was evidently struggling to make sound natural. "So you've left your wounded soldiers?"

"Yes," answered Betty gravely, looking searchingly at the shrunken figure and restless, glittering eyes. "I thought just now I was needed more here."

"That nursing business has been run into the ground, anyway", observed Norman{sic} He lit a cigarette and inhaled a deep breath of the smoke. "Just a fad!"

"You wouldn't think so if you had ever been in one of those hospitals and seen the need!" retorted Betty quickly. "It's terrible! All that unspeakable agony—sorrow—death—"

The boy started nervously.

"Death!" he exclaimed passionately. "The whole world's gone mad on the subject! Can't we keep away from it?" He paced the room with quick, short steps. "It's got to a point where it's a morbid obsession with people. You hear it talked about wherever you go! You read it in every book, magazine, newspaper. It positively jumps at you from every street corner until your brain's fairly reeling! I should think at least in one's own home one could keep it out!"

He stopped at a mahogany chest that stood on a small table and, taking out a bottle, poured whisky into a glass. Raising the glass high above his head, his eyes burning feverishly, he exclaimed hoarsely: "To hell with death!" and gulped down the yellow liquid.

Norman!" exclaimed his mother in a horrified voice. "What is the matter with you? I've never seen any one change as you have in the past few weeks!" She looked meaningly at Elizabeth. "It's been like this ever since you left us at Newport!"

Norman dropped heavily into a chair by the table.

"Let's go away, mater, somewhere where it's warm and sunny. This beastly chill has got into my bones."

He shivered and drove his hands deep into his trouser−pockets.

"Come to the fire, dear," urged his mother. "Where would you like to go?"

Don't care, only let's start soon—tomorrow, if you can get off."

"Well, hardly to−morrow, dear; there isn't such desperate haste as all that, surely. The next day, perhaps." She considered thoughtfully for a moment and added: "We might go to the Hot Springs."

"For Heaven's sake, don't go where there are a lot of prying, gossiping people!" exclaimed Norman hastily. "Can't we take a sea trip to Rio, or some place like that?"

"Mercy!" expostulated Mrs. Crosby. "That's an interminable way off!"

"That's just what I want—an interminable way off. Come with us, Betty!"

Betty shook her head. "No; I've important work to do here," she announced.

"What?"

The boy eyed her narrowly.

"I'm going to find Molly Delaney's murderer."

For a moment no one spoke, and a tense stillness settled over the room. Then, as if unable to bear it, Norman jumped up.

"Well, I wish you luck!" he said huskily and disappeared through the door.

"He's been like that ever since you refused to marry him," said Mrs. Crosby, looking reproachfully at the pale face beside her. "As I told you at Newport, you could have done everything in the world for him, Betty; and now there are times when I'm really anxious about him. Don't you think you could come with us on this trip? It might mean saving the boy from—" She stopped.

Betty stared into the many−colored flames as they darted up the chimney, a feeling of apprehension clutching at her heart. This, then, and not the worry over her disappearance, was the reason for the atmosphere of anxiety and suspense that hung over the household. But, in spite of the fact that her heart was swelling with sympathy, she could not bring herself to leave New York just now.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Maude," she faltered. "If you'll only postpone the trip a little I might, but now—it's absolutely impossible. You must see that."

She looked pleadingly at her aunt.

"Do you think yourself cleverer than the police?" asked her uncle suddenly.

Betty spread out her hands desperately.

"I don't know, Uncle George. I only know that I've got to stay and do what I can. You see, I have a feeling that I may be able to discover why father—"

"Why father what?" asked George Crosby sharply.

"Why people were so unkind to him just before he died, and how he came to make such unfortunate investments. It's all so confused and unexplainable now, and I do so want to straighten it out! You must understand how I feel, don't you, Uncle George?"

She turned to him, eager for his sympathy and indorsement; but George Crosby did not reply. He sank deeper into his chair and covered his eyes with his shaking hand.

The tall clock in the corner struck six in silvery tones, and Betty rose quickly.

"I must go," she announced hurriedly. "I had no idea it was so late!"

"Shall I order the motor for you?" asked her aunt.

"Oh, no, thank you, aunt. It's only a step to Trixie's."

She kissed them both and passed out into the hall. Norman came out of the drawing−room.

"I'll walk back with you," he said, taking his hat and gloves from the hall table.

He opened the door, and they stepped out into the sharp night air.

"Betty," he began, as soon as they reached the sidewalk, " I wouldn't get mixed up in this Fairfax Cary mess if I were you. It won't do any good; and you can't afford—no girl can—to have your name connected with a scandal like that."

Betty straightened herself stiffly.

"As I'm going to change my name to Cary before long, I'm naturally more anxious to get Fairfax out of this trouble than I am to guard the name of Crosby!" she retorted bruskly.

"Betty," exclaimed Norman, stopping abruptly and staring at her, "you're not you're not going to marry that—"

"I am," interposed Betty calmly; "so don't make too many derogatory remarks about your future cousin!"

"Well, if that's the case, I've nothing further to say!"

They walked on to the Hunnewells' house in silence, and Norman rang the bell. The door was opened, and with a hurried good night he raised his hat and ran down the steps, leaving Betty to enter the luxurious warmth.

XVI

It was with steps heavy from fatigue that Major Barry entered the dark hall of his little apartment that evening, at about half past nine o'clock, and switched on the light. He took off his hat and coat in the tiny hall and, going into the sitting−room, lit the lamp. In his hand he held several letters. He settled himself in the comfortable chair by the table and, raising the lid of the humidor, took up his pipe and filled it leisurely.

"It certainly is good to have a little quiet at last," he said half aloud. "You must be getting old, Tod; you can't stand the pace the way you used to. This last month has taken it out of you, my boy!"

He lit his pipe and, placing his glasses, with their broad, black ribbon, on his nose, took up the pile of letters and ran over the addresses.

"Wonder whose writing this is?" he soliloquized, gazing thoughtfully at one addressed in a tight, cramped hand. He broke open the flap and took out the folded sheet. It was a short note from Barney Tutney, written from the Rossmore Hotel, asking when he might see the major.

Major Barry's hand shot out toward the telephone on the table beside him. He gave the number of Tutney's hotel, and in five minutes had arranged an immediate interview with him at the apartment. He hung up the receiver, a look of grim resolve on his face.

When the bell rang, a little later, he jumped to the door, all trace of his fatigue gone. He grasped Tutney's hand in cordial welcome, helped him off with his coat, and drew him into the cozy room.

"Sit down, Tutney," he said. "Do you smoke?" He opened the humidor, and Tutney selected a cigar. "I'm smoking a pipe," he went on. "I find it great company when I'm alone."

The major held a match to the other man's cigar and studied his face as he drew in the smoke.

"I'm very glad you decided to come over so soon," he remarked, settling himself back in his chair.

Tutney took the cigar from his mouth and examined the lighted end critically.

"I thought it was about time," he answered slowly. "By the bye, I'm mighty sorry about Cary." He looked sharply at the major from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"A bad business!" admitted the major. He puffed a moment in silence, then he added quietly: "Of course, he had absolutely no connection with the murder."

"Of course not," agreed Tutney. "But, just the same, I guess there are people who are glad to have him where he is—out of mischief!"

"Perhaps those same people won't be overjoyed to hear of your return," remarked the major grimly.

"Probably not—probably not!" The keen eyes snapped. "Things weren't goin' exactly right, and it don't do to let 'em get away from you. It's much better to take a hand in the beginnin', and oftentimes you can prevent a landslide."

"Yes," assented the major gravely. "But in this instance I'm afraid we're too late. I blame myself—"

"You couldn't do nothin', Major Barry," interposed the man, replacing the cigar in his mouth. He took a long puff and watched the smoke float off into the shadows. "How could you know how things were goin'? Now, if I'd been here, instead of in South Africa, things might have been different. When that stock was put up for sale I could have stepped right in."

"Are you sure it was Crosby's?"

"There ain't no doubt of it. The transaction was pretty well covered up, but I've managed to trace the brokers, and now I have my proofs. George Crosby's been speculatin' pretty heavily the last three months; and, besides, he got mixed up in a shyster rubber scheme, and from what I can learn, lost a pile of money in it."

Tutney stopped, and a great cloud of smoke rose around his head.

"Do you think there is any possibility of getting the estate—what is left of it—out of his hands?"

"Well, of course that's a question for a lawyer; but from the evidence I've been able to gather, I think Miss Crosby has a mighty strong case against her uncle. To my mind, there ain't no question but what she can force him to make good. There'd have to be a lawsuit, of course."

"That's the trouble; I don't know whether she would consent to it."

"She'll make a big mistake if she don't. If she waits for the three years to be up before she demands an

accounting, there won't be anything left. It don't seem possible," Tutney ruminated, "that Randolph Crosby's pile should all be gone in four months and his daughter workin' for a livin'! Well, it's the first and last time, to my knowledge, that Mr. Crosby got fooled in his man. He thought an awful sight of his brother."

"Which makes George Crosby's behavior just that much more reprehensible," said Major Barry indignantly.

Tutney agreed and rose to go, promising to have his testimony ready at any time it was needed if a lawsuit were decided upon. For a long while after Tutney left Major Barry sat puffing at his pipe and staring into the shadows. On his usually genial face was the expression it had worn when he and his command pursued Red Wolf's band after the massacre of Pine Notch. If the major had been the judge, in spite of his kindly heart, there would be as little clemency shown in this as in the other case.

However, he decided to postpone telling Betty of his discovery until the web which entangled Fairfax Cary was untangled.

"The poor child has quite enough to worry her," he thought regretfully as he rose and switched off the light; "and she's really fond of her uncle."

Contrary to the major's predictions, he did obtain permission to visit the Delaneys' rooms, and the next morning he and Betty motored down to the hotel at Sheepshead Bay, where a detective met them. They mounted the steep stairs and passed down the narrow hallway, with its unwholesome wall−paper and threadbare carpet. There was a portentous chill in the stale air, and Elizabeth shivered a little as the detective stopped before one of the closed doors and inserted the key.

The door opened, and they entered the jockey's room, evidently untouched since the day after his death. It looked neglected and desolate, with its unmade bed, half−open bureau drawers, and scattered papers. In one corner lay a crumpled red−silk shirt next to a stained pair of riding−breeches, and standing near was a riding−boot, its mate lying beside it. By the bed stood a small table, its baize cover gray with dust. In the mirror of the ash chiffonier was a snap−shot picture of Randolph Crosby.

A sob clutched at Betty's throat, but she resolutely forced it back. She glanced at the door, slightly ajar, which led into the adjoining room.

"I should like to go in there first," she said to the detective.

"Very well, Miss Crosby!"

He pushed back the door and let her pass. The men followed, and instinctively the major took off his hat.

The room was in great disorder. A trunk half filled with a motley array of garments stood in front of the window. On a chair gaped a suit−case, out of which trailed a worn shirt−waist. On the top of the bureau was a mass of toilet articles, cosmetics, ribbons, veils, and gloves.

The mantel was littered with photographs of actors and actresses, jockeys and trainers. On one corner of it, on a stand, rested Molly's best hat. It was the one she had worn at the races on the afternoon before Randolph Crosby's death, and Betty saw once more the girl's audacious face sparkling under the crimson feather and purple rose.

The remembrance of that last happy afternoon brought the hot tears of regret into Betty's eyes, and to hide them she turned quickly to the mantel. She took up the hat and with gentle fingers brushed off the dust which lay thick on the drooping feather. A large photograph that stood behind the stand fell forward, disclosing a small, round object set in the wall.

"Why, what is that?" asked Betty.

Grimes, the detective, who had been idly turning over some old newspapers on a table near the window, came quickly to her side. Betty pointed to the wall.

"Well, if that don't beat all!" he said under his breath. "How do you suppose we came to pass that up?"

"What is it?"

The major left his place by the door, where he had lingered, and the expression of extreme distaste which had fixed itself on his face turned to one of liveliest interest.

Grimes's fingers ran lovingly over the little round disk.

"That's a dictograph. I wonder who put it there, and why he done it!

The sharp, gray eyes narrowed, and he stepped toward the door that led into Pat's room, the major following.

Betty took an irresolute step after them and stopped. Her eyes fell upon the bed against which Molly had been found, and as if drawn by a power she could not resist, she walked slowly to it. She stood for a moment gazing

down upon it, her imagination painting in vivid colors the last scene in the girl's life.

In the weeks of her hospital work, death had in a measure lost its horror for her, but this was different; this was death in its most revolting form, without the nobility of self−sacrifice. It was sordid, hideous, repulsive! A shudder passed over her, and she turned quickly, as if to rid herself of the room and its associations, when her eye was caught by the glint of something bright in the space between the mattress and the wooden side of the bed.

She stooped down and saw, lying on the slats, a small glittering object. From the other room came the indistinct murmur of the men's voices, broken once by an exclamation from the detective. Betty hastily put her hand into the narrow space; when she drew it out it held a gold cigarette−case. The case was half open, and the cigarettes under the gold bar were stained and dark. Betty looked at it, her eyes widening in horror.

Steps sounded behind her.

"That was a great find you made, Miss Crosby," said a voice at her shoulder. "Now, if we can discover why it was put there, and what went through it the night of the murder, I guess we'll have our man, all right!"

Elizabeth started violently and turned quickly, involuntarily keeping the hand that held the cigarette−case behind her.

The detective eyed her curiously.

"Have you found anything else?" he asked.

"Oh, no," answered Betty faintly.

Major Barry had joined them, and was standing beside her. At the man's words he, too, fastened his eyes on the girl's strained face.

"What have you in your hand?" demanded Grimes.

The blood receded from Betty's face, and she turned pleadingly to the major.

"Oh, nothing—nothing! Tell him it isn't anything!" she begged piteously.

"Miss Crosby"—the detective spoke impressively—"in the name of the law, I ask you to tell me what you have found."

He stepped toward her, and Betty, slowly drawing her hand from behind her back, held out the cigarette−case. Grimes seized it and examined it closely.

"Blood!" he exclaimed under his breath.

Where did you find it?"

"There," replied Betty in a hardly audible whisper, pointing to the bed.

"Slipped out of his pocket when he stooped over the girl!" mused Grimes. He turned the case over, searching for a mark on it. A monogram stood out in bold relief on the cover. "C," he ruminated. "Cary—"

"No! Not Cary!" Betty's words rang sharply through the room.

"Who, then?" asked Grimes quickly, his keen eyes fixed on her face.

Elizabeth did not answer, and the detective went back to his study of the letters.

"N, R, it looks to me; but I can't make it out for sure."

He held out the case to Major Barry for his corroboration; but the major shook his head.

"I haven't my glasses," he explained; "but I can see enough to know that the initials don't stand for Fairfax, which is Mr. Cary's name. I think this discovery will let him out, don't you?"

Grimes shook his head doubtfully, evidently loath to let a victim escape out of his net until he had another to take the vacant place.

"Maybe," he assented; "but it ain't for me to say. I'll take this to headquarters right off. You're sure you don't know who it belongs to?"

He looked distrustingly at Betty, who shook her head.

"Will this be used as evidence?" she asked.

The detective nodded.

"It's mighty important evidence. This and the dictograph are the best clues we've had yet, and we have you to thank for both of them, Miss Crosby. I dare say they'll clear everything up."

The major put his hand through Betty's arm.

"Come," he said gently. "Don't you think we might go now?"

XVII

With a hurried good−by to the detective, they passed into the hall. Neither spoke as they walked through the deserted corridor, their footsteps echoing desolately against the closed doors. It was only when they were alone in the taxi that Betty's self−control gave way. She clutched the major's arm, her horror−stricken eyes devouring his face.

"Oh, Uncle Tod," she gasped, " did you recognize the cigarette−case?"

The major took her hand and began stroking it tenderly.

"There, there, my child," he said soothingly. "You mustn't take it so to heart! You'll make yourself ill!" "Oh, Uncle Tod, don't stop to think about me! Do you know to whom it belongs?"

"Yes, I knew the initials."

Betty's hand tightened on his.

"What shall we do? Oh, why did it have to be I who found it?"

"Nonsense, child; some one was bound to find it sooner or later. As it happens, it is fortunate that it was you, for now we may be able to get the boy away before suspicion fastens on him. Will you tell the Crosbys, or shall I?"

"I will, of course," replied Betty hurriedly. "Oh, how ghastly, how awful for them! Do you really think he did it?"

She looked almost pleadingly into the candid face beside her. The major pursed up his lips and stroked his gray mustache thoughtfully.

"It's hard to say positively, Betty, but the boy's record is against him."

Betty nodded, and once again a tremor passed over her.

"Poor Uncle George!"

Her eyes filled with tears. Major Barry continued to stroke her hand, and began to tell her of the best course to be pursued to get Norman away. He drew a glowing picture of the openings for young men in faroff lands, where the boy would be cut off from his old associates and temptations. Gradually he led Betty's thoughts away from the horror of the situation, and she regained her self−possession.

But it was a very white, tremulous Betty who ascended the steps of her uncle's house, before which stood Norman's motor. As the major saw her disappear into the hall, he decided that he would follow her as soon as he had telephoned his discovery to Sturgis, who would convey the news to Cary.

Elizabeth went at once to the library, where she found Norman seated in a big chair with newspapers scattered around him. At the sight of her white face he jumped to his feet and came quickly to her.

"Betty!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "What is it?"

Steps sounded in the hall, and Norman glanced fearfully toward the door. A look of relief came into his face as his father and mother appeared.

"Has anything been found?" he faltered in a low voice, his eyes fixed on Betty's face.

"You must go—quick, Norman, quick! Don't stop to talk!" She was pushing him toward the door. "Your cigarette−case—it was found in Molly Delaney's room. Oh, Norman, hurry! Hurry!"

He started toward the door, but Mrs. Crosby laid a restraining band on his arm.

"Norman!" she cried. "What is it?"

He shook her off violently.

"Don't keep me! They've found—they'll be here for—for—"

He vanished up the stairs.

"Who are they, and what are they coming for?" asked George Crosby irascibly, coming toward Betty.

Elizabeth pressed her hands tightly together, and her lips quivered.

"Oh, Uncle George!" she moaned, going to him and laying her hand gently on his arm. "It's about Molly Delaney—"

Her voice trailed away into silence.

"Molly Delaney! Do they connect my son with that?"

Betty did not answer, but the expression on her face seemed to give him all the information he needed. He turned from her and, sinking into a big armchair, buried his head in his hands. Betty ran to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Oh, uncle dear!" she whispered.

A hurried step sounded in the hall, and Mrs. Crosby flew to the door.

"Good−by, my boy!" they heard her say.

George Crosby rose and with uncertain feet followed her. Betty walked beside him, watching him anxiously. When they reached the hall be put his hand into his breast pocket and, drawing out his wallet, took out the money it contained.

"You'll need this," he said huskily, and thrust it into Norman's hand.

There was a hurried good−by, the front door opened and slammed, and the feverish throb of the motor sounded in their ears. Swaying slightly, George Crosby turned again toward the library. Betty put her arm through his and guided him back to the chair by the fire. He fell into it, and his gray head dropped against the back. Mrs. Crosby followed them and stopped beside them.

"What does it all mean?" she asked harshly, turning to Betty.

As gently as she could, Betty told them of the search of Molly's room and the resulting discovery. "Who found the cigarette−case?"

Mrs. Crosby's tone was sharp and quick. Betty hesitated, and it seemed as if every drop of blood in her body had flowed back to her heart, leaving her numb and cold. George Crosby raised his head and fixed haggard eyes upon her. The silence closed in upon them like the crushing walls of an inquisitional room.

"Was it you?"

Mrs. Crosby stepped menacingly toward Betty, who shrank from the look of implacable rage and hatred in her aunt's face.

"It was you!" she breathed fiercely.

You—you—traitor! Living in our house, taking advantage of information you got while we were saving you from starvation! And now—now"—her voice rose almost to a shriek—"you've hounded my boy out of his home! God only knows where he can go! Why did you do it? You've brought nothing but misery to us!"

Under the lash of her aunt's words, Betty's eyes had widened until they looked like pools of dark water reflecting the storm−clouds above. She wrung her hands piteously.

"I never thought—" she faltered.

"Never thought! Never thought!" repeated her aunt angrily. "No, you never think of any one but yourself and that precious lover of yours!"

The scorn in her voice was biting, and it stung Betty beyond control.

"And my father!" she supplemented passionately.

"Your father?" sneered Mrs. Crosby.

"Yes!" repeated Betty in a strained voice which she hardly recognized as her own. "If it had not been for the stigma on my father's name, I should never have felt justified in entering on this search. As it was—"

"And what did you find?"

Mrs. Crosby's thin lips were drawn back in a derisive smile. Betty hesitated, and her eyes wandered to the gray head resting on the back of the chair. Her chin trembled a little.

"What did you find?" demanded Mrs. Crosby once more. "In spite of the ruin you've brought on us, you've found nothing that clears your father's name, or ever will!"

Major Barry's immaculate figure appeared in the doorway.

"I think you're wrong there," he remarked quietly, after a searching look at Elizabeth's quivering face. "We've been looking into Randolph's affairs a bit lately—some of his business associates and I—and we've discovered quite a number of things."

Mrs. Crosby's face blanched, the two brilliant spots of color standing out grotesquely on her cheeks. George Crosby's eyes fixed themselves feverishly on the major's face.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this, Mrs. Crosby—when Randolph died he left some very valuable stock, which has since been sold—"

George Crosby's hand tightened on the arm of his chair until even the nails showed white. His face was livid.

"How do you know?"

"I know through one of the other directors of the concern, in which Randolph held a large interest. This man has traced the sale of the stock." He turned suddenly to George Crosby. "Do you deny it?"

George Crosby sank even deeper into the big chair, and his hand went up to his sagging mouth. Unable to meet the accusing eyes fixed on him, his head fell forward until his chin rested on his chest. Betty took a hurried step forward.

"Uncle Tod, what is it? I don't quite understand—"

"My dear, it's simply this—your father died, as we all believed, a very rich man. It is since his death that his money has been dissipated."

"Oh!" The word was hardly more than a sigh. "Who—"

"That's just it; who could have sacrificed your interests and betrayed your father's confidence? Who had the power?"

Again the major's condemning eyes sought George Crosby's stricken figure.

"Uncle George, did you do this thing?" Betty drew nearer and nearer to him, her eyes wide, her mouth quivering. "You, whom my father loved and trusted? Oh, tell me it isn't true!"

She sank down on her knees beside him and clutched his arm. There was a long silence.

"It is true!" came at length, in hollow tones, from the bowed head.

Betty drew back slowly, as if still loath to believe what she heard. "My father's brother!" The words seemed drawn from her. "And he loved you!

The man before her shuddered.

"Betty!" he groaned. "I didn't mean—"

As if in hope that he was about to disclaim his culpability, Betty stooped eagerly toward him; but he stopped abruptly, and once more the gray head fell forward. A heavy silence wrapped itself about them, which at last Mrs. Crosby's harsh voice broke.

"Well, it's all out now!" she said violently. "I suppose you'll send your uncle to join Norman in prison!"

Betty looked at her aunt as if her words were husks void of the grain of meaning. Bending over her uncle's huddled form, she stroked his gray head tenderly; then she stooped over and kissed him.

"Uncle George, don't worry about it!" she whispered so softly that the words hardly reached the others. "I'm sure it was all a mistake. I don't believe it was for yourself you took the money. At all events, it will never make any difference between you and me."

A great sob shook the bent shoulders. George Crosby caught her hand and held it to his lips. Betty kissed him again, and then, holding out her hand to Major Barry, drew him out of the house.

XVIII

Major Barry's face was glowing with satisfaction as he sat in Cary's cell the next morning and rehearsed for his benefit the search in the Delaneys' rooms.

"I tell you, that little girl's a wonder, Fairfax!" he exclaimed. "She was in a nasty fix there, with the evidence of her cousin's guilt, which she had found herself, in her hand. She naturally didn't want to implicate him, and yet she had to exonerate you. I was sorry for the child."

The taut lines of Cary's face had relaxed in a tender smile.

"But you say she wouldn't let it go when the detective suggested that the `C' on the case stood for my name?"

The major laughed boyishly.

"No, sir! She spoke up loud and clear then, all right! Now, the next thing is to discover what was heard through that dictograph."

"That seems like an almost hopeless quest, now that Pat's gone," answered Fairfax gloomily.

Can't tell, my boy; luck's begun running for us now, and I wouldn't be surprised at anything. It was too bad Sturgis couldn't arrange about bail yesterday. I had hoped, when I telephoned, that you would be out last night."

"Apparently it couldn't be done. There's always so much red tape in a case like this."

"I wanted to come down and tell you all about the discovery myself, but I knew Sturgis would give you the facts, and I really felt that I must go to the Crosbys'. It was fortunate that I did, for that fiend, Maude Crosby, was at poor little Betty neck and crop, and, I think, would have rent her asunder if I hadn't turned up when I did. She's a devil, that woman!" The major's shoulders stiffened and his jaw snapped. "I should like to see her brought to her knees!"

Again the tender smile stole over Cary's face.

"And Betty isn't going to bring action against her uncle?"

"Won't consider it for a minute," returned the major. "Nothing I could say or do would convince her that she is making a mistake. She won't hear of a lawsuit."

"Well, after all, it's Betty's money, and she's the one to decide. It isn't as if she will really need it now."

"No; there's comfort in that thought. You're not going to let her go back to France, are you, Fairfax?" asked the major, eying the other man's face anxiously.

"She's not going out of this country for some time, if I have anything to say about it, and she seems to think I have, unless"—a light spread over Cary's face—"I can persuade her to take that trip to Bermuda that you suggested a while ago!"

"That would be great! The sooner the better." Major Barry glanced restlessly at his watch. "It seems to me that Sturgis ought to be along pretty soon now."

A guard appeared at the door and unlocked it; but the man who was with him was not the alert, keen−eyed lawyer, but a slender youth with slack shoulders and narrow, furtive eyes. The major looked inquiringly at Fairfax, who shook his head in answer to the unspoken question. The boy slouched into the cell and touched the brim of his hat awkwardly. "Mr. Cary," he began in a high, shrill voice, "you don't remember me, but I'm Jim—Jim Murphy. I used ter work fer Mr. Crosby."

A sudden flash illumined Cary's memory, and he held out his hand cordially.

"Why, Jim!" he exclaimed. "Of course I remember you! You used to take care of Steadfast."

The boy grasped his hand and wrung it.

"I sure did, Mr. Cary!"

"Sit down, Jim, sit down; of course I remember you, and so does Major Barry, I'm sure." The major nodded pleasantly to the boy, and Fairfax went on: "Weren't you with Pat the night he died? I seem to recall seeing you at the hotel."

He looked searchingly into Jim's face.

"Yes, sir; that's what I come ter see ye about. I wuz with Pat till late that night."

Jim was sitting on the edge of his chair, nervously twisting his hat around in his big−knuckled hands.

"Then you came back after I went away?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was Molly alive when you left?" The major asked the question eagerly, leaning far out of his seat.

"Yes, sir; she came in two or three times ter see how Pat wuz gettin' along."

Mr. Sturgis had arrived in time to hear the boy's words, and the three men looked at one another in undisguised pleasure.

"Well," exclaimed the major triumphantly to Fairfax, "that lets you out! I wish we had known this before," he added, turning to Murphy.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I didn't know nothin' about what happened after I lef' till about a week ago. The night Pat got smashed up I went to Texas with Mr. Vinton's horses. We wuz on a ranch, and didn't often get the newspapers. I wuz kind o' surprised that Molly didn't let me know how Pat wuz, but she an' I had had a row, and I s'posed she wuz too mad to write. It wuz only when I had a letter from a friend of mine that I knew"—his voice faltered—"that they wuz both dead."

The muscles of his face twitched, and he put his big hand over his mouth.

"This is most important evidence!" announced the lawyer.

"I knowed it would be, sir. I felt awful bad when I heard Mr. Cary wuz up fer murder, and I sez ter meself, `You fer the Great White Way, Jim!' an' I beats it right on. I should think any guy would know he ain't done it—that is, if they knew him at all."

"Who did do it, Jim?" The major's voice was like cold steel.

"Well, when I went away, Mr. Crosby—Mr. Norman Crosby—was in the next room with Molly. He'd been there all evenin', an' they'd been havin' it out hot an' heavy. We could hear 'em, Pat an' I, even with the door shut, but we couldn't make out what they wuz sayin'. Fer a long time Pat hadn't liked the way things wuz goin', so he rigged up one o' them dictograph things in Molly's room and strung the wires into his."

"What was it he suspected?"

The boy moistened his lips.

"He wanted ter find out about the Withers Stake—ye know, when Steadfast got licked?" He glanced interrogatively at Major Barry, who nodded. "Well," he went on, "I'd been givin' Pat some dope about what happened just before that race, when he went off ter dress, an' then Molly had let drop enough ter put him wise that somethin' wuz wrong. I wuz in the stable all the time Pat wuz gone. Mr. Norman an' Molly didn't know it, but I wuz in the stall just the other side of Steadfast's."

He stopped, and his face became ghastly.

"Why did you think—"

Jim swallowed hard.

"Molly an' me had been pals since we wuz kids, an' I wuz kind o' sore when she dropped me," he half whispered. "I knowed Mr. Norman wuz rushin' her, an' I wanted ter find out how far things had gone, so I hid an' listened."

Jim's big hand clenched, and a red light gleamed in the deep−set eyes.

He wuz tellin' her that he loved her, an' he kissed her. Then he went inter Steadfast's stall, an' I heard Molly askin' him what he wuz doin'. He said he wuz fixin' things so that he an' Molly could go off on a trip an' have a bang−up time. It wuz after I told Pat that that he got the dictograph; an' the night Pat died we heard the whole thing. Molly told him that she'd seen him dope Steadfast, an' there wasn't no use in his denyin' it, an' she'd fix him, all right, if he didn't do as he'd promised an' marry her. Pat made me write it all down. He wuz pretty far in, an' he wuz afraid he'd forget somethin'. He said Mr. Cary had promised ter come back in the mornin', an' he wanted ter have it fer him. So I wrote it down an' hid the paper under the cover o' the table by the bed, where Pat could reach it, an' where Molly wouldn't be apt ter find it. Then I had ter go. As it was, I nearly missed my train."

"Your testimony will be invaluable in clearing Mr. Cary," remarked Sturgis. "We shall want you to repeat this in court."

"Yes, sir; that's what I come on fer. I wasn't goin' ter let Mr. Cary be put out o' bizness fer what he ain't done. Mr. Cary's on the level, sir! He's all right, an' I couldn't stand by an' see him takin' what ought ter be comin' ter that—"

Jim stopped, and his nostrils quivered.

XIX

It was about four o'clock that afternoon that Fairfax Cary ran up the front steps of the Hunnewells' house. When he entered the hall the air was vibrant with the rich chords of the "Nocturne in F." He stood for a moment drinking in its tender harmonies. Wave after wave of the music passed over him, pulsing through his veins into his heart, until at last it seemed as if his soul had been washed white from the prison taint which, even after he left the Tombs, had hovered over him with a sickening sense of impurity.

Stronger and more penetrating rose the music, with its swelling chords and haunting melody. Fairfax pushed aside the portieres and stepped into the room. The music stopped abruptly, and Betty, with a little cry, rose from the piano. Her face turned very white.

"I didn't know—" she faltered.

He strode across the room and caught her in his arms.

"My dear, my dear!" she sobbed, clinging to him.

He held her to him, and kissed her hungrily with the pent−up passion of long months of waiting. When he half released her to gaze into her eyes, he found them full of tears.

"Darling," he expostulated, "you're crying!"

The tears overflowed, and Betty buried her face in his shoulder.

"Of course I am!" she cried.

"Will you tell me why?"

"I haven't had time to cry in weeks," answered Betty tremulously. "You don't suppose I could stop to cry when there was anything to do, do you?"

Cary's arms tightened around her, and he tenderly kissed the drops away.

"My darling!" he whispered. "Tell me that you love me! "

But she pushed him away with a tremulous little laugh.

"I've been telling you so for weeks. If you don't believe it now, you never will!"

She took his hand and led him to the sofa.

"I sha'n't feel sure of you until we're married," answered Fairfax. "We can be very soon, can't we, dear?"

"I told you in France that I wouldn't marry any one till father's name had been cleared."

"Darling, it has been! Jim Murphy, your father's stable−boy, came to see me this morning. He saw Norman dope Steadfast before the Withers race. Jim will swear to it in court."

"Norman!" exclaimed Betty. "How dreadful!"

"Molly was with him, and it was after her threat to expose the whole thing that he killed her."

"How ghastly, Fairfax! How perfectly dreadful! Poor Uncle George!"

"So now, darling, you won't keep me waiting any longer, will you?"

Betty snuggled closer to him and laid her head on his shoulder.

"I'm ready now, as far I can be," she whispered softly. "I can't get a big trousseau, Fairfax. You know why, don't you, dear? I haven't a cent in the world. Do you realize that you're getting a penniless bride?"

She raised troubled eyes and anxiously studied his face.

Fairfax laughed boyishly.

"Really?" he teased. "Then I can't marry you, my pretty maid!"

"I hate you!" and Betty pressed her lips to his.

THE END