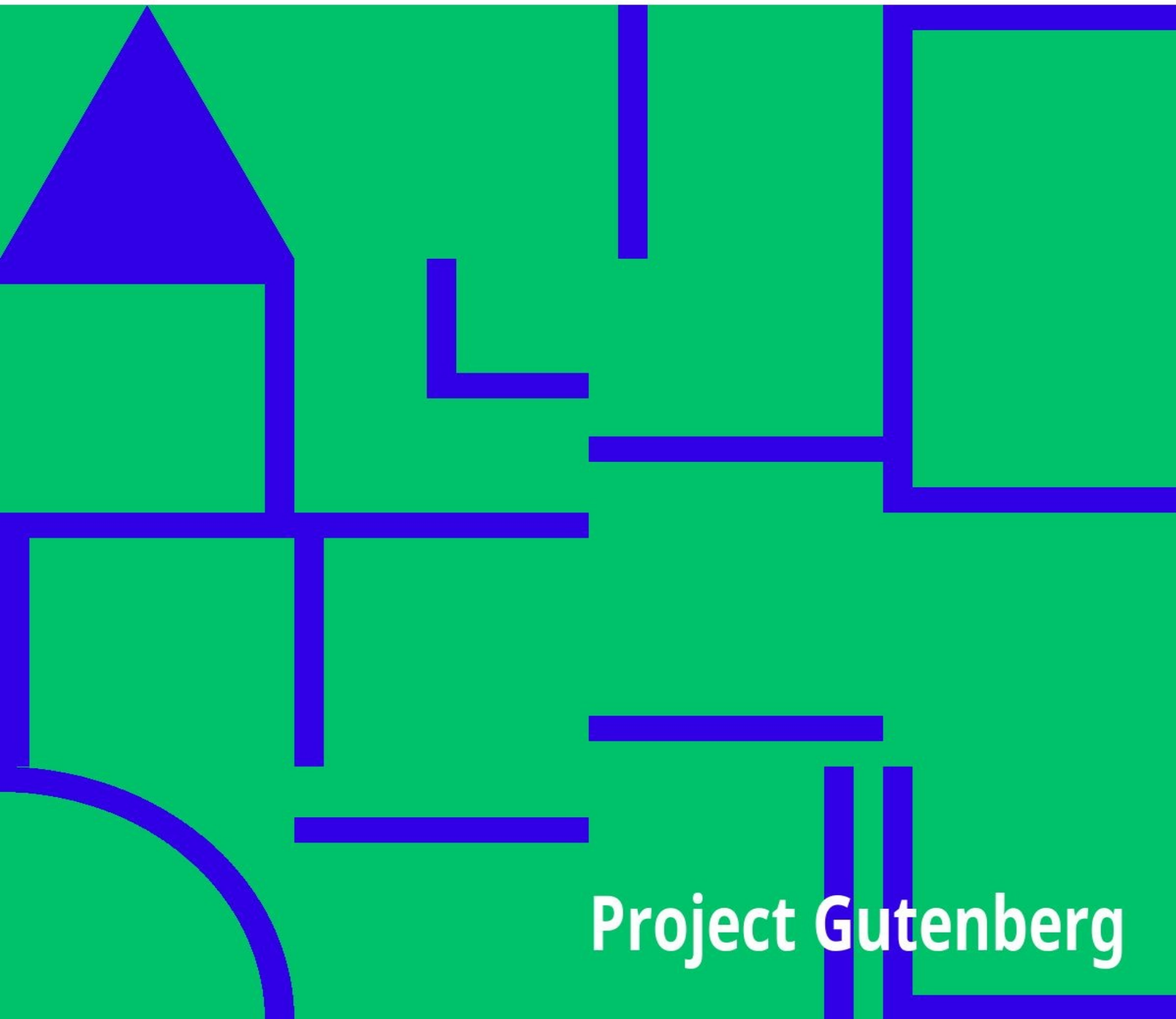


A Top-Floor Idyl

George Van Schaick



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A TOP-FLOOR IDYL

BY GEORGE VAN SCHAICK

**Author of "Sweetapple Cove," "The Son of the Otter," "The Girl
at Big Loon Post"**

**ILLUSTRATED BY
CHASE EMERSON**

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**TO
MY DEARLY LOVED SISTER
ELISE**

And always she was a friend, nothing but the dear friend.



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And always she was a friend, nothing but the dear friend.

No, she was only a woman, with a soul for harmony.

Her lovely head was bent down towards the sleeping mite.



A TOP-FLOOR IDYL



CHAPTER I

THE NIGHT ALARM

I smiled at my friend Gordon, the distinguished painter, lifting up my glass and taking a sip of the *table d'hôte* claret, which the Widow Camus supplies with her famed sixty-five cent repast. It is, I must acknowledge, a somewhat turbid beverage, faintly harsh to the palate, and yet it may serve as a begetter of pleasant illusions. While drinking it, I can close my eyes, being of an imaginative nature, and permit its flavor to bring back memories of ever-blessed *tonnelles* by the Seine, redolent of fried gudgeons and mirific omelettes, and felicitous with gay laughter.

"Well, you old stick-in-the-mud," said my companion, "what are you looking so disgruntled about? I was under the impression that this feast was to be a merry-making to celebrate your fortieth birthday. Something like a grin just now passed over your otherwise uninteresting features, but it was at once succeeded by the mournful look that may well follow, but should not be permitted to accompany, riotous living."

At this I smiled again.

"Just a moment's wool-gathering, my dear fellow," I answered. "I was thinking of our old feasts, and then I began to wonder whether the tune played by that consumptive-looking young man at the piano might be a wild requiem to solemnize that burial of two-score years, or a song of triumphant achievement."

"I think it's what they call a fox-trot," remarked Gordon, doubtfully. "Your many sere and yellow years have brought you to a period in the world's history when the joy of the would-be young lies chiefly in wild contortion to the rhythm of barbaric tunes. I see that they are getting ready to clear away some of the tables and, since we are untrained in such new arts and graces, they will gradually push us away towards the doors. The bottle, I notice, is nearly half empty, which proves our entire sobriety; had it been *Pommard*, we should have paid more respectful attention to it. Give me a light, and let us make tracks."

We rose and went out. A few couples were beginning to gyrate among the fumes of spaghetti and *vin ordinaire*. Gordon McGrath, unlike myself, lives in one of

the more select quarters of the city, wherefore we proceeded towards Fifth Avenue. The partial solitude of Washington Square enticed us, and we strolled towards it, sitting of common accord upon one of the benches, in the prelude of long silence resulting from philosophic bent and indulgence in rather tough veal. It was finally broken by Gordon; being younger, speech is more necessary to him.

"What about that sarcophagus you've lately selected for yourself?" he asked me.

"They are pleasant diggings," I answered. "Being on the top floor, they are remote as possible from hand-organs and the fragrance of Mrs. Milliken's kitchen. The room is quite large and possesses a bath. It gives me ample space for my books and mother's old piano."

"Wherefore a piano?" he asked, lighting another cigarette. "You can't even play with one finger."

"Well, my sister Jane took out nearly all the furniture, and the remainder went to a junkman, with the exception of the piano. Jane couldn't use it; no room for it in her Weehawken bungalow, besides which she already has a phonograph, purchased at the cost of much saving. You see, Gordon, that old Steinway was rather more intimately connected with my mother, in my memory, than anything else she left. She played it for us when we were kiddies. You have no idea of what a smile that dear woman had when she turned her head towards us and watched us trying to dance! Later on, when she was a good deal alone, it was mostly 'Songs without Words,' or improvisations such as suited her moods. Dear me! She looked beautiful when she played! So, of course, I took it, and it required more room, so that I moved. I've had it tuned; the man said that it was in very good condition yet."

"You were always a silly dreamer, Dave."

"I don't quite see," I began, "what——"

"I'll enlighten your ignorance. Of course you don't. David, old man, you've had the old rattle-trap tuned because of the hope that rises eternal. Visions keep on coming to you of a woman, some indistinct, shadowy, composite creature of your imagination. You expect her to float into your room, in the dim future and in defiance of all propriety, and sit down before that ancient spinet.

"You keep it ready for her; it awaits her coming. To tell you the truth, I'm glad

you had it tuned. It shows that you still possess some human traits. I'll come, some day, and we'll go over and capture Frieda Long. We will take her to dinner at Camus, and give her a benedictine and six cups of black coffee. After that we'll get a derrick and hoist her to your top floor, and she'll play Schubert, till the cows come home or the landlady puts us out. She's a wonder!"

"She's a great artist and a dear, lovable woman," I declared.

"That's probably why she never had a love story," conjectured Gordon. "Always had so much affection for the general that she could never descend to the particular. By the way, I went to her studio for a look at her portrait of Professor Burberry."

"It's good, isn't it?"

"Man alive! It's so good, I should think the old fellow would be offended. Through her big dabs of paint he's shown up to the life. You can see his complacency bursting out like a flaming sunflower. Upon his homely mug are displayed all the platitudes of Marcus Aurelius. He is instinct with ignorance that Horace was a drummer for Italian wines and an agent for rural residences, just a smart advertiser, a precursor of the fellows who write verse for the Road of Anthracite or canned soup, and Burberry has never found it out. He would buy splinters from the wooden horse of Troy, and only avoids gold bricks because they're modern. It's a stunning picture!"

That's one reason why I am so fond of Gordon. He's a great portraitist, and far more successful than Frieda, but he is genuine in his admiration of good work. He is rather too cynical, of course, but at the bottom of it there usually lies good advice to his friends. I'm very proud he continues to stick to me.

"I understand he was greatly pleased," I told him, "and I was awfully glad that Frieda got the commission. She needed it."

"Yes, I told her that she ought to go off for a rest in the country," he remarked, "but it seems she has one of her other queer ideas that must be worked out at once. She itched to be at it, even while she was painting Burberry. Mythological, I think, as usual, that latest notion of hers. Some demigod whispering soft nothings to a daughter of men. Showed me a dozen charcoal compositions for it, all deucedly clever. And how are the other animals in the menagerie you live in now?"

That's a way Gordon has. From one subject he leaps to another like a canary hopping on the sticks of his cage; but there is method in his madness. He swiftly exhausts the possibilities of a remark and goes to another without losing time.

"The animals," I answered, "are a rather dull and probably uninteresting lot. First, come two girls who live in a hall bedroom, together."

"It shows on their part an admirable power of concentration."

"I suppose so; their conversation is chiefly reminiscent and plentifully dotted with 'says I' and 'says she' and 'says he.' They are honest young persons and work in a large candy-shop. Hence they must be surfeited with sweets at a deplorably early age."

"Not with all of them; they will find some hitherto untasted, but just as cloying in the end," remarked Gordon.

"I hope not. There is also an elderly couple living on the bounty of a son who travels in collars and cuffs. Sells them, you know. Then I've seen three men who work somewhere and occasionally comment upon what they see in the newspaper. Murders fill them with joy, and, to them, accidents are beer and skittles. I suspect that they esteem themselves as what they are pleased to call 'wise guys,' but they are of refreshing innocence and sterling honesty. One of them borrowed a dollar from me, the other day, to take the two girls to the movies. He returned it on next pay day."

"Look out, David, he may be trying to establish a credit," Gordon warned me. "You are such an easy mark!"

"I'll be careful," I assured him. "Then we have a poor relation of the landlady. He looks out for the furnace in winter and is a night watchman in a bank. An inoffensive creature who reads the papers the other boarders throw away."

"Altogether it makes up a beautiful and cheering totality of ineptitude, endowed with the souls of shuttles or cogwheels," opined Gordon.

"Well, as Shylock says, if you prick them, they bleed," I protested. "At any rate they must have some close affinity with the general scheme of Nature."

"Nature, my dear Dave, is a dustbin in which a few ragmen succeed in finding an occasional crust of dry bread wherewith to help fill the pot and make their hearts glad. It is a horribly wasteful organization by which a lady cod produces a

million eggs that one fish may possibly reach maturity and chowder. Four trees planted on a hill commonly die, but, if you stick in a few thousands, there may be a percentage of survivals, besides nuts for the squirrels. Humanity represents a few tall trees and a host of scrubs."

Thus does Gordon always lay down the law, to which I generally listen with some amusement. He is dogmatic and incredulous, though he lacks scepticism in regard to his own opinions.

"Then all honor to the scrubs, my dear Gordon!" I interjected. "I admire and revere the courage and persistency with which they keep on growing, seeking a bit of sunlight here and there, airing their little passions, bearing their trials bravely. But I forgot to mention another inmate of my caravanserai. She's only there for a day or two, in a room opposite mine, hitherto vacant and only tenanted yesterday. I met her as she was coming up the stairs. She walked heavily, poor thing. I could only see her by the dim light of the gas-jet on the landing. It was a young face, deeply lined and unhappy. Downstairs I came across Mrs. Milliken, my landlady, who explained that the person I had met expected to go next day to a hospital. The Milliken woman had known her husband. He went off to the war, months ago, and the young wife's been teaching French and giving piano lessons, till she couldn't work any longer. The French government allows her twenty-five or thirty cents a day."

"I'm glad it keeps a paternal eye on the wives of its brave defenders," remarked Gordon.

"It does, to that extent, but it doesn't go very far in this country. She has a remarkable face; looks a good deal like that Madonna of Murillo's in the Louvre."

"That's a back number at this stage of the world's history. Most of us prefer snub noses. I notice that you said she plays the piano."

"I don't see what——"

"Well, you've just had yours tuned. Oh! I forgot you said she was going off to the hospital. Never mind, Dave, they come out again, so don't worry. I've known you to be disturbed for a whole week over somebody's sick dog and to go two blocks out of your way to steer a strayed and unpleasantly ragged blind man. What is it, appendicitis?"

"Mrs. Milliken darkly hinted, I think, that it was an expected baby."

"Oh! Well, I suppose a baby had to go with a Murillo; the picture would have been incomplete. I'm glad that this particular case appears to be a perfectly safe one."

"What do you know about it?" I asked.

"I mean from your standpoint. I dare presume that the Milliken female has a holy horror of sprouting infants, like all landladies. She would naturally foresee a notice to quit from the old couple, disturbed in their slumbers, and extravagance in the use of hot water and linen would stare her in the face. You have made me sympathize with you for nothing, for your Murillo-woman will vanish into space and become the handmaiden of a scrub in the making. Henceforth, the case will only interest the Bureau of Vital Statistics and the manufacturers of improvements on mother's milk. Give me another cigarette."

I handed him the cardboard box, for, although I have a silver case, I never know where it is. If I did, I wouldn't use it since I don't believe in flaunting one's vices. He took a cigarette, tapped it on the back of his hand, and engaged in conversation the lonely policeman, who had strolled over to see that we were not flouting the majesty of the law by dozing on the bench. He remarked that the night was fine but warm, Gordon assenting. Then my friend suddenly asked him what kind of boots he wore, and put down the address most carefully on his cuff, thanking him effusively, after which the guardian walked off, ponderously.

"Will you kindly explain your object?" I asked Gordon, who has what the French call the *coquetterie du pied* and asserts there's only one man in New York who can make boots, a delusion that costs him about fifteen dollars a pair.

"You're not lacking in sympathy," he instructed me, "but, on your part, the feeling is but an unintelligent instinct. Any idiot can feel sorry for a cripple or a man compelled by poverty to smoke cheap tobacco. I now call your attention to the fact that this old minion is ancient and corpulent. He's on his feet during all working hours, and his cogitations must often turn to his nether extremities. He carefully nurses them, while he raps those of lawless slumberers on these seats. Civilly, I spoke to him of the subject uppermost in his mind, and now he has left us, happy in the thought that he has put a fellowman on the right road. That's what I call taking a sympathetic interest in a deserving old ass. You didn't suppose for a moment that I'd wear such beastly things, did you?"

"You would rather go barefooted," I told him.

"I would," he assented. "If Gordon McGrath appeared in the street, naked as to his toes, the papers would mention the fact. The *Banner* would send me the famed Cordelia, who would insist on photographing my feet for publication in a Sunday supplement, with a hint to the effect that I am a rather well known painter. It would be an advertisement."

"If I went without boots, benevolent old ladies would stop me and hand out copper pennies," I remarked, without jealousy.

"You just wait till the 'Land o' Love' is out, old man," he told me, "and the same old dames will write for your autograph."

Gordon is quite daffy over the book I sent to my publishers last week. He has read the first, one middle and the last chapter, and predicts great things for it. Of course, I know better, for it will be just like the others. From four to six thousand copies sold, a few flattering notices, mostly in journals unheard of, and swift oblivion after some months. But I care nothing that I may be a scrub among writers, for the occupation suits me. I am not ambitious, and I can rise late in the morning, pound the keys of my old machine for an hour before lunch, waste a good part of the afternoon in one of the libraries, and go to work again after the hand-organs and knife-grinders have been abed some hours. Then, some time before sunrise, the rattle of milk-carts remind me of Mrs. Milliken's bedspring and mattress, and I go to bed. I am not doing so badly, and sell one or two short stories every month. Last year I opened an account in the savings bank. The time may come when I shall be classed among the malefactors of great wealth.

"But one reader ever wrote to me," I finally answered. "It was a young person anxious to know whether I could recommend the 'City's Wrath' as a birthday present to a Baptist aunt. I advised against it, thus cheating myself out of ten per cent. royalty on a dollar thirty-five."

"Oh! She'd have sent a second-hand copy," he answered consolingly, and shifted to a discussion of the ultimate blackening of vermilions, which seemed to give him some concern.

After this he looked at his watch and declared he had just twenty-five minutes to get to the Lambs Club. That's just like him; he will loll and sprawl around for hours with you, looking like a man without a responsibility in the world, and suddenly arise and sprint away to far regions, always arriving in the nick of time.

My way is to prepare far in advance to meet my rare engagements, to think of them persistently, and, usually, to arrive ten minutes late.

I walked over to the subway with him, at such a breathless pace that I wondered if the friendly policeman would change his mind about us, should we meet him in crossing the square. Gordon left me at the entrance, with a wave of one hand, the other searching for a nickel, and I was permitted to return leisurely to my domicile, in a profuse perspiration. I felt my wilted collar, knowing that Gordon would unquestionably reach the club, looking spick and span. That's also one of his traits.

As I crossed the square again, I saw a belated tramp leading an emaciated yellow dog by a string. The man looked hungrier than the dog, and I broke all precepts of political economy by handing him a dime. He was blameworthy, for he should have looked out for himself, and not have assumed foolish responsibilities. He was entirely wrong. What business had he to seek affection, to require the faithfulness of a rust-colored mongrel? How dared he ask charity that should have gone to the widow and orphan, wherewith to feed a useless quadruped? I sat down again, for it was only midnight, and thought pleasantly upon the vagaries of human nature. Suddenly, a splendid story suggested itself to me about a dog and tramp. It would be good for about four thousand words, and I hurried away to Mrs. Milliken's lest the inspiration might vanish on the way. I would have a dog all but human, a tramp all but dog, and the animal would sacrifice itself for a master redeemed at last by the spectacle of canine virtue. I knew just what magazine might accept it. A few minutes later I reached the house, which, like the Milliken woman, has seen better days. The frittering brownstone and discolored brick suit me as naturally as a hole in the sand befits a prairie dog. I let myself in, softly, with due regard to the slumbers of people compelled by the tragedy of life to go to bed at the behest of a clock, and trod the creaking stairs in utter darkness, guided by a friendly but shaky balustrade. Then I reached my landing, opened my door, turned on the light, put on my slippers and fired my coat on the bed. As soon as I had dropped my collar and tie on the floor, I was ready for work and sat down to my machine. Thank goodness, the inspiration had remained; clearly and cogently the sentences flowed; after I had finished the first page, I was already weeping in spirit for my noble dog. Then, suddenly, came a rap at my door, hurried, eager, impatient.

"Great Heavens!" I thought at once. "I am to be interrupted because that blessed woman objects to loud typewriting at one a.m. I'm glad she's going away to the hospital."

I went to the door, assuming my most austere mien, and opened it.



CHAPTER II

FRIEDA THE ANGEL

"Please help me!" cried the woman hoarsely. "My God! What shall I do?"

It was, as I had surmised, the Murillo-faced occupant of the room on the other side of the landing. In my dismay the desperate thought came to me that a lonely bachelor was the last individual she should have sought aid from. But her look of haggardness, the teeth pressed into her lips, the clenched hands, the chin carried forward in an expression of agonized supplication rebuked my egotism.

"I—I don't know," I confessed humbly.

She turned half way around, seized the balustrade and stared at me vacantly.

"Allow me to help you back to your room," I suggested shakily. "Then I'll run downstairs and get Mrs. Milliken."

She went with me, haltingly, and threw herself upon the decrepit horsehair sofa, as I abandoned her and ran downstairs, nearly breaking my neck on account of my slovenly old slippers. At the landlady's door I pounded till I chanced to remember she had informed me that she expected to spend the night at her married daughter's, in Fort Lee. In despond I bethought myself of the young women who sold candy. No! Such problems were not of their solving. Of course there was the negro cook, hidden in some ancillary cavern of the basement, but cowardice prevented me from penetrating such darkness, and I ran out of the house, coatless. Half way down the block were two doctors' signs. One shining in the freshness of new nickelling; the other an old thing of battered tin, with faded gold letters.

"This," I decided, "is a case requiring the mature experience of age," and I rang furiously, awaiting the appearance of the venerable owner of the ancient sign. A shock-headed and red-haired youth opened the door, clad in pajamas and rubbing his eyes.

"Yes," he said pleasantly.

"I need the doctor's services at once," I informed him. "Hustle him up

immediately, my good fellow. Please be quick, it may be a matter of life and death."

"Oh! I'm the doctor," he said, "and I'll be with you in a few seconds. Sit right down."

He left me in the darkness of the hallway and I sank down on a wooden seat, upon a palm leaf fan that crackled dismally beneath my slender weight. Faintly, in the back, I discerned a ghostly folding bed and heard the swishing of garments flying across the room. In spite of my feverish impatience the doctor came out again as fast as if he had been clothed by some magic art.

"What kind of a case?" he asked.

"I believe you are wanted to help increase and multiply," I answered.

"Should have told me at once. Got the wrong bag!" he reproved me, disappearing. At once he returned. I went out first, and he followed me, slamming the door with a sound that reverberated through the quiet street, and we sprinted off. I used the key with a shaking hand.

"Top floor," I informed him.

"All my patients seem to live on top floors," he replied.

At the woman's door I knocked.

"I—I have brought you assistance," I told her. "This—this young gentleman knows all about such things; he's a doctor. I—I'll be in the next room, if there's anything else I can do for you."

"Is there no woman in the place?" inquired the young man.

"No. Only some girls who know nothing save the price of caramels and the intricacies of tango. But I can find one inside of twenty minutes; I'll go and get her."

"That's good," he assented cheerfully, going to his patient, who looked at him in some fear.

But I reflected that the doctor seemed kindly, and by no means overwhelmed by the responsibility thrust upon him, so that I took the time to slip on my boots, after which I ran to Eleventh Street, where Frieda Long burrows in a small flat.

Her studio, shared with another woman, is farther uptown. Finally she opened the door, clad in a hoary dressing-gown and blinking, for she had not been able to find her spectacles.

"Who is it?" she demanded placidly, as if being awakened at two fifteen in the morning had been a common incident of her life.

"It's Dave, just Dave Cole," I answered. "I want you, Frieda—that is to say, a woman wants you badly, at my house—taking her share of the primal curse. Don't know who she is, but Mrs. Milliken's away. She's alone with a little half-hatched doctor, and—and——"

"Come in. Sit there in the front room. Cigarettes on that table. I'll close the door and be with you in five minutes," she assured me tranquilly.

I tried to smoke, but the thing tasted like Dead Sea fruit and I pitched it out of the open window. An amazingly short time afterwards Frieda was ready, bespectacled and wearing an awful hat. I think she generally picks them out of rag bags.

As we walked along, she entertained me with her latest idea for a picture. It would be a belted Orion pursuing the daughters of Pleione, who would be changing into stars. She explained some of the difficulties and beauties of the subject, and her conception of it, while I looked at her in wonder. I must say that, from her stubby, capable fingers, there flow pure poetry of thought and exquisiteness of coloring. Her form, reminding one of a pillow tied none too tightly in the middle, her tousled head containing a brain masculine in power and feminine in tenderness, her deep contralto, might be appanages of some back-to-the-earth female with an uncomfortable mission. But she's simply the best woman in the world.

She panted to the top floor and, at my desire, followed me into my room, where I had left the door open and the gas burning. She gave a swift glance around the place, and her eyes manifested disapproval.

"I wonder how you can ever find anything on that desk," she reproved me, as I searched in a bureau drawer. To my utter terror she began to put some papers in order.

"Here's an unopened letter from *Paisley's Magazine*," she announced.

I pounced upon it and tore it open, to discover a check for eighty dollars.

"Good!" I exclaimed. "I'd forgotten that story. It was called 'Cynthia's Mule'; I wonder what possessed me to write about a mule? Don't know anything about them."

"That's why it sold, most likely," said Frieda. "The public prefers poetry to truth in its prose. What are you wasting time for, fooling in that drawer?"

"I have it. It's a twenty-dollar bill," I told her. "I put it among my socks so that I shouldn't spend it. Might be very handy, you know. She might need something, and you could go out and buy it."

"Can you afford it, Dave?" she asked me.

"Of course, and you forget the check I've just received. Mrs. Milliken will cash it for me at her butcher's. He's very obliging."

Just then we heard something. Frieda stuffed the bill in some part of her ample bosom and ran away. I heard her knock at the door and go in.

There was nothing for me to do but to look at the nearly finished page that was still in the embrace of my typewriter. For some silly reason my gorge rose at the idea of the virtuous dog, but I remembered, as I was about to pull out and lacerate the paper, that my mind sometimes plays me scurvy tricks. When I am interrupted in the beginning of a story, and look over it again, it always seems deplorably bad. Another day I will look at it more indulgently. Moreover, what was the use of thinking about such trivialities when the world's great problem was unfolding itself, just seven steps away over the worn strip of Brussels on the landing.

So I settled down in my old Morris chair to ponder over the matter of babies coming to the just and the unjust, provided with silver spoons or lucky to be wrapped up in an ancient flannel petticoat. The most beautiful gift of a kindly Nature or its sorriest practical joke, welcome or otherwise, the arriving infant is entitled to respect and commiseration. I wondered what might be the fate of this one. In a few hours it will be frowned down upon by Mrs. Milliken, who will consider it as an insult to the genus landlady. The mother, naturally, will smile upon the poor little thing; she will dote upon it as women do on the ordinarily useless articles they purchase with money or pain at the bargain counter of life. This wee white and pink mite, since its daddy's away fighting and the mother is poor, must prove a tragedy, I am afraid. It will be a little vampire, pretending to feed on milk but really gorging itself on a heart's blood.

My cogitations were interrupted by the rattle of a thousand milk cans, more or less, clattering through the street, on top of a huge, white motor truck. I took off my coat, instinctively thinking that it was time to go to bed, and put it on again because my door was open and it behooved me to keep awake, since I might be required to run other errands. The question of sleep thus disposed of, I brought out my percolator.

For a wonder there was alcohol in the lamp, and I found the coffee in a can I discovered in my cardboard hat-box. Two months before, my sister Jane had told me that a silk hat was proper for the following of one's mother to the grave, and I obeyed her. Poor darling! It was the least and last thing I could do for her.

The lamp was alight and the steam coming, when the doctor came out, looking rather spectral in a white gown.

"Thank goodness!" I exclaimed, dropping some pulverized bean on the floor. "So it is all over!"

"Not yet," he informed me, smiling, "but so far everything goes well. The big, fat Providence in gig-lamps is sitting by the patient. Sometimes three make poor company. The solid dame came in and called her 'my dear' and rummaged things out of the trunk and fixed up the bed, and tears began to flow. It must be a wonderful thing for a woman, who feels abandoned of God and man, to have such a big brave creature come in to pound the pillows and make one feel that there is yet corn in Egypt. I left them with their heads together. The poor thing was crying a bit and beginning to tell the story of her past life. Yes, thanks! I'll be glad of a cup, with three lumps of sugar. Great little machine, that! And so I thought I'd walk in here for a minute. Some things a woman tells another must be pretty sacred, don't you think?"

I poured out the coffee appreciatively.

"The person whom you call the solid dame," I told him, "is no less a woman than Frieda Long, the poet in pigments."

"Keeps a Beauty Shop?" he inquired.

"If you mean to ask whether she shampoos and manicures females and supplies them with hair," I answered, "your guess is utterly wrong. She paints women, and men too, on canvas, and any ordinary individual, such as you and I, ought to grovel before her."

"Just say the word," he answered, "and I'll make a start. She's the best old girl I've come across in many a long day."

"Frieda Long is hardly thirty-eight," I told him, "and, to change the subject for a moment, I will acknowledge that I deemed such cases best attended by the serene and ancient. I rang you up because your sign suggested long experience."

"Not half bad, is it?" he replied. "I aged it by setting it up in the backyard and firing brickbats at it. Old Cummerly, next door to me, had his replated."

He swallowed his coffee, without winking, though I thought it was boiling hot, and left me hurriedly again. I took greater leisure in my own beverage and leaned back in my chair. This young fellow appealed to me. The man of tact is born, not made. What serves him for a soul possesses refinement to dictate his leaving, for a few minutes, while one woman poured out her heart to another. I think he is considerate and kindly; he is probably destined to make many friends and little money.

I rose and looked out of the window. The dawn was beginning and promised another stifling, red-hot day. A very *décolleté* baker had come out of a cave beneath the bread and cake shop, opposite, and sponged off his forehead with the back of his hand. An Italian woman, clad in violent colors, passed with a hundredweight or so of broken laths poised on her head. At the corner the policeman was conversing with a low-browed individual, issued from the saloon with a mop. New York was awakening, and I decided I might as well shave, to pass away the time. Taking my strop and razor I sat down to give the latter a thorough overhauling. I suppose I fell asleep during the process.

"Contemplating suicide?" I heard Frieda ask suddenly.

I jumped up, startled, with the weapon in my hand.

"Put that thing down," she ordered me. "It makes me nervous. She's sleeping quietly, and the doctor's gone. An awfully nice fellow. It's a boy with brown hair."

"Not the doctor," I objected, somewhat dazed.

"No, the baby, you silly! The doctor is very nice. I am going out to get my washerwoman's sister to come and stay with Madame Dupont—might as well say Mrs. Dupont. Her husband's French, but she comes from Rhode Island. You can go with me. Never mind about shaving now, you can stop at a barber's later

on. Your hair needs cutting. Put on a clean collar. After I get that woman, we'll stop at the flat; the milk will be there and I'll give you some breakfast. Come along!"

Frieda is a woman of the compelling kind, but it's a joy to obey her. After I had adjusted my collar and tie we started, but when we reached the door opposite she opened it, very quietly, while I waited, and tiptoed in.

"She's awake," she said, again opening the door. "She says she would like to thank you for your kindness. She knows she would have died, if you had not sought help for her."

"Stuff and nonsense," I said, quite low. "You don't expect me to go in there, do you?"

"I certainly do, because she wishes it. Don't be stupid!"

So I entered, rather embarrassed, thinking to see the face of a woman crucified. But her smile was the sweetest thing I had ever beheld, I'm very sure. I could hardly recognize her after that memory of haggard and tortured features. She put out her hand to me, weakly.

"I—I want to thank you—ever so much," she said. "It was so awfully kind of you, and—and you sent me an angel."

"Oh, yes," said Frieda, grinning. "I see myself with wings sprouting from my shoulder-blades. Good-by for a short time, my dear. You'll only be alone for a few minutes. Yes, the baby will be all right; don't you worry. No, he won't be hungry for a long time, the doctor said, and you are to let him sleep and do the same yourself. Now come along, David."

I was delighted to have Frieda's escort, as I scented danger below. Her support gave me boundless joy when, at the foot of the stairs, I saw Mrs. Milliken, returned on some frightfully early ferryboat. She looked at us with amazement and suspicion.

"My dear Mrs. Milliken," I began, in my most ingratiating tones, "a new boarder has arrived during the night. I can assure you the young man would not have intruded had he possessed greater experience of life. We will have to forgive him on account of his tender youth."

"They must be packed off at once," cried the woman. "How could you?"

"I beg to observe that it was not my tender heart but yours that gave her shelter," I said. "My own responsibility is extremely limited, and my part in the affair a most subsidiary one."

"And besides, Mrs. Milliken," put in Frieda, "no one but David Cole lives on that floor. If he makes no complaint, no others are very likely to, and then it would be inhuman to put the poor thing out now. In a few days she will be able to move. I am going to send a woman immediately, and you won't have the slightest trouble."

"For any little matter of extra expense, Mrs. Milliken, I will see that you are properly compensated," I added.

Had I been alone, Mrs. Milliken would probably have argued the matter for an hour, at the end of which I should have retired in defeat. But I think Frieda's size overawed her. She only stammered rather weakly that she knew it would all end badly.

"Don't mind her, David," said my friend, as we went out. "You can't expect the keeper of a cheap boarding-house to be an optimist. Her prediction may or not come true, but no one thinks that the bit of humanity upstairs can turn the world topsy-turvy for some time."

I felt greatly relieved and followed her towards the river, where, just west of Ninth Avenue, we found a tenement on the fourth floor of which there was a sort of rabbit-hutch where dwelt two women and a bevy of infants. I remained on the landing, while Frieda went in. Some of the children came out and contemplated me, all with fingers in their mouths. Remembering that I had changed a nickel on the previous evening, while waiting for Gordon, in order to obtain a cent's worth of assorted misinformation from my favorite paper, I pulled out the four remaining pennies and distributed them. By the infants my action was accepted as gentlemanly and urbane, I think, for they no longer considered me as a suspicious character and the gravity of their expressions changed into a look of unstinted approval.

"It's all right," said Frieda, coming out in a cloud of soapy steam. "She'll go at once. Putting her hat on now. Come along. I'm hungry as a hyena."

So I breakfasted with her at her flat. She had certainly worked much harder than I, during the night, and taken a great deal more out of herself, but she insisted on my sitting down while she juggled with a gas-stove and bacon and eggs and a

pot of jam. Her coffee, I thought, was better than mine. At eight o'clock we parted at the corner of the street.

"I must hurry along," she said. "I have an appointment with a man who can pose as Orion."

I had time but for a few words of heartfelt thanks before she was in the middle of the avenue, waving a hand to the motorman of her car. She scrambled aboard, smiling at me cheerfully from the step, and I was alone, wondering at the luck of a chap who could pose as Orion for Frieda. I would rather have her think well of me than any one I know of, I am very sure, and I regretted that my lank form and ill-thatched head were so unsuited to the make-up of a Greek demigod. Never mind, I know that when my next book comes out she will send for me, hurriedly, and make me feel for some minutes as if I were really worthy of tying her big, ugly, sensible shoes. She has read every one of my stories and possesses all the books I ever perpetrated, bless her soul! It is good indeed for a man to be able to look up to a woman, to know in his heart of hearts that she deserves it, and that she doesn't want to marry him, and he doesn't want to marry her. It is fine to think they are a pair of great friends just because they're capable of friendship, a much rarer accomplishment than most people are aware of.

So I returned to the scene of the night's invasion and climbed up the stairs, rather wearily. I had the morning paper, three circulars and a fresh box of cigarettes. Upon my landing I met a large female with a moustache and decided it must be the washerwoman's sister. She smiled pleasantly at me and I returned the courtesy.

In such words as I remembered from my erstwhile residence in Paris I asked how the mother and child were doing.

The lady, she informed me, was doing ever so well. As for the infant, it had beautiful eyes and was a cherished little cabbage.

Wondering upon the philosophy of endearments as attained by foreign nations I entered my room, closing the door carefully, and looked over those pages about the virtuous dog. They were promising, I thought. After putting them down, I took up my razor, for I hate a barber's scraping, and indulged in the luxury of a shave.

The instrument, I thought, possessed a splendid edge. Who knows, some day I might bequeath it to a cherished cabbage.



CHAPTER III

I WATCH AN INFANT

It was all very well for Frieda to tell Mrs. Milliken that, if I had no objection to that baby, no one else could resent its presence. She assumes too much. If I had really belonged to the order of vertebrates I should have objected most strenuously, for its presence is disturbing. It diverts my attention from literary effort. But of course, since I am as spineless as a mollusk, I sought to accept this heaven-sent visitation with due resignation. My endeavor to continue that story was a most pitiful farce. Four times, in reading over a single page, I found the word *baby* inserted where I had meant to write *dog* or one of the few available synonyms. I wondered whether it was owing to lack of sleep that my efforts failed and threw myself upon the bed, but my seeking for balmy slumber was more ghastly than my attempt at literature. Never in all my life had I been more arrantly wakeful. A desperate resolve came to me and I flipped a quarter. Heads and I would sit down and play solitaire; tails and I would take a boat to Coney Island, a place I abhor. The coin rolled under the bed, and I was hunting clumsily for it with a stick when a tremendous knock came at the door, followed by the immediate entrance of the washerwoman's sister, whom I afterwards knew as Eulalie Carpaux.

I explained my position, half under the bed, feeling that she had caught me in an attitude lacking in dignity, but the good creature sympathized with me and discovered my money at once, after which she insisted on taking my whiskbroom and vigorously dusting my knees.

"I have come, Monsieur," she informed me, "to ask if your door may be left open. The heat is terrible and the poor, dear lamb has perspiration on her forehead. I know that currents of air are dangerous, but suffocation is worse. What shall I do?"

"You will open as many doors as you please," I answered meekly.

"Thank you. One can see that Monsieur has a good heart, but then any friend of Mademoiselle Frieda must be a good man. She is adorable and uses a great deal of linen. May I ask who does Monsieur's washing?"

"A Chinaman," I answered shortly. "He scrubs it with cinders and irons it with a nutmeg grater. I keep it in this closet on the floor."

"My sister," she informed me, "has four children and washes beautifully. I am sure that if Monsieur allowed me to take his linen, he would be greatly pleased."

"Take it," I said, and waved my hand to signify that the interview was closed, whereupon she mopped her red face, joyfully, with her apron and withdrew.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish. Immediately the most gorgeous ideas for my story crowded my brain and the language came to me, beautiful and touching. But the Murillo-woman's door was open and so was mine. Since Eulalie had ventured to leave the room, it was most probable that her charge was sleeping. The typewriter, of course, would awaken her at once. Was that infant destined to deprive me of a living, to snatch the bread from my mouth? But I reflected that temperatures of ninety in the shade were inconstant phenomena. It would be but a temporary annoyance and the best thing I could do, since I was driven out of house and home, was to take my hat and go to the beach for a swim. The die was cast and I moved to the door, but had to return to place a paperweight on loose sheets littering my desk, whereupon my eyes fell on the old pack of cards and I threw the hat upon the bed and began solitaire. My plans often work out in such fashion. Ten minutes later I was electrified by a cry, a tiny squeak that could hardly have disturbed Herod himself. But it aroused my curiosity and I tiptoed along the hallway, suspecting that the woman Eulalie might not be attending properly to her duties, whatever they were. Everything was still again, and the unjustly mistrusted party was rocking ponderously, with an amorphous bundle in her lap. She smiled at me, graciously. Upon the bed I caught a glimpse of wonderful chestnut hair touched by a thread of sunlight streaming tenuously from the side of a lowered blind; also, I saw a rounded arm. Eulalie put a fat finger to rubicund lips and I retired, cautiously.

How in the world could I have been bothering my head about a trumpery and impossible dog? In that room Nature was making apologetic amends. A woman had obeyed the law of God and man, which, like all other laws, falls heaviest on the weak. She was being graciously permitted to forget past misery and, perchance, dream of happier days to come, while David Cole, scrub coiner of empty phrases, bemoaned the need of keeping quiet for a few hours. I decided that I ought to be ashamed of myself. "The Professor at the Breakfast Table" was at my hand and I took it up, the volume opening spontaneously at the "Story of Iris," and I lost myself in its delight.

An hour later came a light step, swiftly, and the little doctor appeared. He is as tall as I, but looks so very young that he seems small to me. He entered my room, cheerfully, looking as fresh and nice as if rosy dreams had filled his night.

"Well! How are things wagging?" he inquired breezily.

He was fanning himself with his neat straw hat, and I asked him to sit down for a moment.

"Sure! But only for a minute or two. I have a throat clinic to attend at one o'clock. There's just time for this visit, then a bite at Childs' and a skip to Bellevue."

I looked at my watch and found he had allowed himself just fifty minutes for these various occupations.

"Don't let me detain you, my dear boy," I told him. "I—I just wanted to say that I haven't the least idea whether—whether that young creature in the other room has a cent to bless herself with. It seems to me—I think that she should have every care, and I shall be glad if you will consider me responsible—er—within the limits of a moderate income."

"Thanks," he said, "that's very kind of you."

His eyes strayed on my desk, and he pounced upon a copy of "The City's Wrath."

"Tell you what," he said, "that's a tip-top book. I borrowed my mother's copy and read it all night. The fellow who wrote it knows something about the slender connection between body and soul, in this big city. He's looked pretty deep into people's lives."

No compliments I ever received, with the exception of Frieda's, gave me greater pleasure than the appreciation of this honest, strong lad.

"Will you kindly give me your full name?" I asked him.

"Thomas Lawrence Porter," he answered.

I took the volume and wrote it down on the first page, adding kindest regards and my signature, and handed it to him, whereat he stared at me.

"D'ye mean to say you're the chap who wrote that book," he said, and wrung my

hand, painfully. "I'm proud to meet you. If you don't mind, I'd like to come in some time and—and chat about things with you, any evening when you're not busy. You know an awful lot about—about people."

"My good friend," I told him, "don't permit youthful enthusiasm to run away with you. But I shall be delighted to have you drop in. And now, since your time is so limited, you had better go and see your patient."

He tucked his book under his arm and went down the hallway. After remaining in the room for perhaps a quarter of an hour, he came out again, cheerfully.

"Doing exceedingly well," he called to me. "By-by; see you again very soon, I hope."

He vanished down the stairs, and I took up my book again, holding it in one hand while I went to the windows, intending to draw down a blind against the sunlight that was streaming in. The heat was entering in gusts and, for a second, a sparrow sat on my window ledge with head drooping, as if it were about to succumb. Then I drew down the blinds and immediately let them up again, reflecting that in the room opposite mine they were lowered for the sake of darkness and air and that my action would lessen the latter. So I sponged off my cranium and panted. It was being revealed to me that babies, whatever their other qualifications, were exquisitely complicated nuisances.

Yet an Arab, I told myself, refuses to step on a piece of paper, lest upon it might be written the name of the Deity, while some Hindoos carry little brooms and sweep the path before them, that they may not tread upon one of Buddha's creatures. Who knows whether divinity does not leave its signature on every infant, and who can reasonably doubt that infinite goodness possesses an equity in prospective men and women. Shall I be less civil than a sand-washed Bedouin or the monk of a Benares shrine? It behooves me to welcome a chance to acquire merit by showing patience.

The book I held was as charming as ever, of course, but since I knew the story by heart I dropped it on my knees and waged a losing fight against a fly, which persisted in perching itself on my brow. Before me flitted the idea that a skull-cap made of sticky fly-paper might be patentable and sell by the million, combining protection and revenge; I must look into the matter. Finally hunger troubled me and I decided to go out for refreshment. Before my neighbor's door I stopped for an instant, my eyes seeking to penetrate the dimness. Eulalie came to me at once and began to whisper.

"Would Monsieur be so very kind as to remain here for a few moments and watch?" she said. "I am going to run over to my sister's and tell her to buy a chicken and make broth. It will be very good for our poor, dear lady. In ten minutes I will be back."

Man's freedom of action is apparently a mere academic concept. Theoretically, I was entirely at liberty to refuse, to look down upon this woman from the superior height of my alleged intellectuality and inform her that my soul craved for an immediate glass of iced tea and some poached eggs on toast. I could have asserted that I did not purpose to allow myself to be bulldozed by an infant seven hours and ten minutes old. As a matter of fact, I was helpless and consented, Eulalie shaking the stairs during her cautious, down-ward progress. It was with some of the feelings of an apprentice in the art of lion-taming that I entered the room. Would the proceeding be tranquil and dignified, or accompanied by roars?

I sat down upon the rocker just vacated by Eulalie and gazed on the horsehair sofa as if the package resting on it were explosive, with a fuse alight. I had feared that it would be thrust upon my lap, but it is likely that my competency had been justifiably suspected. I dared not move the chair, fearing to make a noise, and could see nothing of the white arms or the Murillo face. Suddenly, an orgy of steam-whistling began, rousing my apprehensions while recalling workers to their factories. It proved but a false alarm and stillness prevailed in the top-floor back, for at least three minutes, when the dreaded wail arose.

"Please, Eulalie," came a husky, low voice. "Give me my baby."

It was then that my already damp brow began to stream. She wanted her baby and wouldn't be happy till she got it. My duty, I realized, was to go to the sofa and pick up the animated and noisy parcel. It would then have to be conveyed to the bed! Nervously, I prepared to obey.

"Eulalie has gone out for a few minutes," I explained, in the subdued tones I deemed suitable to a sickroom. "Here—here is the bundle. I think it wriggles."

"Thank you ever so much and—and please turn him the other way—yes, those are the feet. And would you pull up the shade a little bit, I think I would have more air."

I raised the thing, letting in a flood of light, and feasted my eyes in utter liberty. Poor child, she must have a cold, for she suffers from hoarseness. She paid little more heed to me than did the ancient Roman ladies to the slaves they refused to

recognize as men. I realized my small importance when she tenderly pushed aside the little folds and revealed diminutive features over which she sighed, contentedly, while I drew my chair a little nearer to the bed. Since a Murillo was on free exhibition, I might as well gaze upon it and admire. That faint little wailing had stopped at once.

"Don't you think he is ever so good and well-behaved?" she asked me, after a while.

I assented, forbearing to tell her that his existence had not yet been sufficiently long to prove him entirely free from all taint of original sin.

"It's such a comfort," she assured me.

Already, by the saintly grace of a mother's heart, she was endowing her offspring with all the virtues. The wondrous optics of motherhood revealed beauty, wisdom, good intent, the promise of great things to come, all concentrated in this tabloid form of man. So mote it be!

The tiny head rested on her outstretched rounded arm and she closed her eyes once more. The plentiful chestnut hair had been braided tight and pinned at the top of her head.

"I wish Gordon McGrath could see her," I told myself. "No, Frieda wouldn't do the picture justice. She would seek to improve on Nature's handiwork; she would etherealize it, make it so dainty that it would become poetry instead of the beautiful plain language the universal mother sometimes speaks. Gordon would paint something that lived and breathed. He would draw real flesh and blood, recognizing that truth unadorned is often very splendid."

At this time I bethought myself of the baby's father. The man was over there, taking his part in the greatest tragedy ever enacted. At this very moment, perhaps, he was engaged in destroying life and knew nothing of this little son. I pitied him. Ye Gods! But for the strength and insolence of some of the mighty ones of this earth he would have been in this room, and I should have been quietly engaged in consuming poached eggs. He would have been appeasing the hunger of his eyes and the longing of his soul with the sight of the picture now before me, in the solemn happiness that must surely come to a man at such a time. A feeling of chilliness came over me as I inopportunistly remembered an interview I had some months ago with a fellow called Hawkins. I was in his office downtown when the telephone rang, and he took down the receiver.

"A son," he called back. "Good enough! I was afraid it might be another girl!"

Then he dictated a short letter to his stenographer and calmly picked up his hat.

"Come along, Cole," he said. "They tell me I have a boy. Let's go out and have a highball."

Knowing Hawkins as I do, I am certain he would have had the drink anyway. This new-born offspring of his merely served him as a peg whereon to hang the responsibility for his tippie. The great and wonderful news really affected him little.

But why was I thinking of such monsters? The father of this little baby, I am sure, must be a decent and normal man. He would have come in, hatless and breathless, and thrown himself upon his knees to worship and adore. The very first clumsy touch upon the tiny cheek would have sent a thrill through him, and tears would have welled up in his eyes!

Such were my thoughts when I remembered that, as a delver in fiction, it was probably becoming my second nature to exaggerate a little. To me, after all, a recent father was perhaps like the mule whose story had brought the check. My notions in regard to them were of pure imagination, and I only knew them as potentially picturesque ingredients of literary concoctions. Yet, on further reflection, I conceded to myself the right to imagine newly made fathers as I saw fit. Millions of them are produced every year and among them must be some counterparts of my special conception of the type.

I was thus comforting myself when I heard a familiar wheezy breathing on the stairs. It was Frieda, who presently irrupted into the room.

"David," she commanded, "you go right out and have something to eat. I'm sure you are starving. I will stay here till that woman comes back. I left her at the corner, carrying a fowl to her sister's, and she told me I would find you here."

She deposited voluminous parcels on the sofa, handled the infant with absolute confidence in her ability, and waved me out of the room. Some men are born meek and lowly, while others become monarchs and janitors; my place was to obey, after I had caught the smile suddenly come to the Murillo-woman's pale features. Frieda, I know, sees more affectionate grins than any one in Greater New York. Her presence suffices to make them sprout and grow. Mrs. Dupont had also smiled at me, true enough, but I think it was but a ray of sunshine really

intended for the baby, and I had found myself in the same general direction and intercepted a trivial beam of it.

Downstairs, Mrs. Milliken met me with a frown, but her features relaxed when I handed her my week's rental and board, which I seldom partake of. Seeing her in such a happy disposition, I hastened to the door.

"I'm going upstairs to take a look at it," she announced gloomily.

I thanked Providence that Frieda was on guard and felt that I had no cause for worry. The landlady, after all, is undeniably a woman and I believe she is the erstwhile mother of several. Her asperity must surely be smoothed down by the sight of the baby's face.

As I put my hand upon the door, the old lady appeared.

"How is that baby?" she shouted, putting a hard-rubber contrivance to her ear.

"Doing splendidly and endowed with all the virtues," I clamored in the instrument.

"I'd give him sugared water for it," she responded severely.

I rushed out. Dr. Porter had strictly forbidden the stuff, calling it a fount of potential colic. I must say that I felt a sneaking sympathy with the old lady's view. Why refuse a bit of sweetness to a tiny infant, perhaps destined to taste little of it in afterlife? But, fortunately, the realization of my ineptitude came uppermost. That silly, romantic tendency of mine was leading me to think more of future privations than immediate pains in a diminutive stomach. I wondered whether I should ever become a practical member of society. The doctor's orders must and shall be obeyed, or my name is not David Cole!

CHAPTER IV

THE BOLT

"And by the way," asked Gordon, a few days later, "how's Frieda getting along?"

"Very well," I answered. "I think she's painting nymphs and angels, as usual."

"Angels, eh? The natural history of such fowl is interesting."

I had met him in the middle of Bryant Park as I was on the way to the Public Library to look up information in regard to feminine garb of the Revolutionary period. It appeared that he was returning from an interview with a Fifth Avenue picture dealer. At once we sought a bench and found seats between a doubtfully-clean young gentleman, reading the sporting page of a dilapidated paper, and an old lady, with rheumy eyes, who watched a ragged urchin.

I nodded, much interested, and he pursued the subject.

"You may have noticed that the very first angels all belonged to the masculine persuasion and you are, perhaps, also aware that it was rather late in the world's growth before women were accorded the possession of a soul. Hence, at the time, there could be no female angels, either worthy or evil. To-day, we have changed all that, as Molière said. In order to flatter the feminine taste people began to talk of little boy angels, because women think more of boy babies than of girl ones. The time arrived when men forgot about the women, the dogs and the walnut trees and, instead of taking a club to the ladies, they began to write sonnets to them. It is evident that no one can rhyme words without everlastingly trying to gild the lily. To call a spade a spade, or a woman a woman, became scant courtesy, and, hence, the poets devised female angels. The painters and sculptors naturally pounced upon them, for their decorative effect, and the she-angel took a firmly-established place in art and fiction. Let me see, I think you said that your Murillo lady describes her little sprout as an angel. This merely shows her to be a normal creature of her sex."

"You are entirely wrong, if by normal you mean just average," I retorted reproachfully. "Frieda declares that she is the most beautiful thing she ever saw."

"Frieda is a waddling and inspired goose, whose goslings are all swans," he asserted disrespectfully. "Through her unbecoming goggles humanity assumes pink and mauve colors instead of remaining drab. It may be good for Frieda and enables her to turn out some very attractive stuff, but it isn't the real thing. Well, I'll have to run away! Couple of fellows waiting to drive me over to Long Beach. By-by!"

He was gone with his usual startling suddenness, and I went off to the library, pondering. When Gordon is talking to me, I can hardly help believing him. Indeed, if the man had been a life insurance agent he would have made a fortune. At first, one feels absolutely compelled to accept all his statements, and it is only after he departs that I begin to wonder whether some flaws can't be picked in his arguments. I occasionally discover a few, I am quite sure. Humanity is no more drab than the flowers of the field, except in terms of the million. There is but slight beauty in violets by the ton, as I have seen them in Southern France, brought in cartloads to the perfume factories. They become but a strongly-scented mass of color. I desire to pick mine as I wander afield, one at a time, and admire the petals, while making myself believe that they grew for my pleasure. Gordon would scoff at the idea and declare it an accidental meeting, but what does he know of the forces that may direct our footsteps? There is comfort in the Mohammedan belief that everything is written before-hand.

The particular book I wanted was being read by a snuffy old gentleman, seated at the long table in the Department of History. I wondered why he should be interested in the frocks and flounces of a past century, and asked for a volume on Charles the Great, a ponderous tome I carried reverently to the big oaken table.

It was exceedingly warm, and flies were buzzing drowsily. A big handsome girl was extracting wisdom from a dusty folio and taking notes on sheets of yellow paper. I remember that her face was finely colored and her lashes long. Three chairs away, on the opposite side, a little deformed man looked up from his book, stealthily, and glanced at her. She never saw him, I am very certain, nor was she ever conscious of the deep-set and suffering eyes that feasted on her beauty. To him she could be no more than a splendid dream, something as far from his reach as the Koh-i-noor might be from mine. But I wondered whether such visions may not be predestined parts of life, making for happiness and charm. The young women at Mrs. Milliken's, who sell candy, will hand you out material sugar-plums, yet even those have but an evanescent flavor and become only memories.

Frieda has returned my twenty-dollar bill, which I stuffed in my pocket.

"One has to be very careful about such things," she told me. "Neither of us would offend the poor thing for any consideration. I have found out that she has a little money, but it cannot be very much because she was very anxious about the doctor's fee and how much Eulalie would charge. But I didn't think it best to proffer any help just now, saving such as we can render by making her feel that she has a friend or two in the world. Isn't it hot?"

I assured her that it was and said I was very glad that Mrs. Dupont was not quite destitute. By this time the baby was a week old and most reasonably silent. Mrs. Milliken felt reassured, and the two young women who sold candy had come up, one evening, to admire the infant. From the goodness of their hearts they had brought an offering of gummy sweets, which I subsequently confiscated and bestowed upon Eulalie for her sister's children, who, she assures me, are to be envied in the possession of iron stomachs. The commercial young men have instinctively slammed their doors less violently, and the deaf old lady, precluded by age from ascending to top floors, sent up a pair of microscopic blue and white socks and a receipt for the fashioning of junket, which, I understand, is an edible substance.

"Tell you what!" exclaimed Frieda. "You might take me to Camus this evening. Dutch treat, you know. I insist on it. I'm tired to-day and don't want to wrestle with my gas-stove. Besides, I want to talk to you about Kid Sullivan."

"I'm afraid I'm unacquainted with the youthful Hibernian," I said. "Is it another baby that you take a vicarious interest in?"

"No, he would have been the lightweight champion, but for his losing a fight, quite accidentally," she explained. "He told me exactly how it happened, but I don't remember. At any rate, it was the greatest pity."

"My dear Frieda," I told her, "no one admires more than I a true democracy of acquaintance and catholicity of friendship, but don't you think that consorting with prizefighters is a little out of your line?"

"Don't talk nonsense," she said, in her decided way. "I just had to get a model for Orion, and he's my janitress's brother. The most beautiful lad you ever saw. He already has a wife and two little children, and his shoulders are a dream!"

"So far," I told her, "I have fought shy of the squared circle in my literary studies

and know little about it. But I surmise that, if your Orion continues his occupation, he is likely to lose some of his good looks. Be sure and paint his face first, Frieda, while the painting is still good, and before his nose is pushed askew and he becomes adorned with cauliflower ears."

"I know nothing of such things," she answered, "and he's a delight to paint."

"But for that perfectly accidental defeat, the man would have refused to appear as a demigod," I asserted. "A champion would think himself too far above such an individual."

"That's neither here nor there," she asserted, impatiently. "When I try to talk, you're always wandering off into all sorts of devious paths. What I wanted to say was that, if any of your acquaintances happen to require a very competent truck-driver, the Kid is out of a job. Of course I can't afford to pay him much. He poses for me to oblige his sister."

"The youth appears to have several strings to his bow," I remarked, wondering why Frieda should ever think I could possibly know people in need of truck-drivers. But then, she never leaves a stone unturned, when she seeks to help more or less deserving people.

In my honor she put on her most terrific hat, and we went arm in arm to Camus, where she revelled in olives and radishes and conscientiously went through the bill of fare.

"Do you know, Frieda, I am thanking goodness for the advent of that baby," I told her. "It has permitted me to enjoy more of your company than I have for months and months. Every minute I can feel that you are growing nearer and dearer to me."

She showed her fine teeth, laughing heartily. She delights in having violent love made to her by some one who doesn't mean it. To her it constitutes, apparently, an excruciatingly funny joke. Also to me, when I consider her hat, but, when she is bareheaded, I am more serious, for, then, she often looks like a real woman, possessing in her heart the golden casket wherein are locked the winged passions. *Quien sabe?* She is, perhaps, fortunate in that filmy goddesses and ethereal youths have so filled her thoughts that a mere man, to her, is only the gross covering of something spiritual that has sufficed for her needs. Poor, dear, fat Frieda! A big gold and crimson love bursting out from beneath the varnish covering her hazy pigments would probably appal and frighten her.

"Will you have some of the *sole au vin blanc*?" she asked, bringing me down to earth again.

I thanked her and accepted, admiring the witchery whereby the Widow Camus can take a vulgar flounder and, with magic passes, translate it into a fair imitation of a more heavenly fish. One nice thing about Frieda is that she never appears to think it incumbent upon her companion to devote every second of his attention to her. If I chance to see a tip-tilted nose, which would serve nicely in the description of some story-girl, and wish to study it carefully and, I hope, unobtrusively, she is willing to let her own eyes wander about and enjoy herself, until I turn to her again. I was observing the details of a very fetching and merry little countenance, when a girl rose from an adjoining table and came up to Frieda.

"I happened to turn my head and see you," she exclaimed. "So I just had to come over and say howdy. I'm so glad to see you. I have my cousin from Mackville with me and am showing him the town."

She was a dainty thing, modestly clad, crowned with fluffy auburn, and with a face pigmented with the most genuine of cream and peaches. Frieda presented me, and she smiled, graciously, saying a few bright nothings about the heat, after which she rejoined her companion, a rather tall and gawky youth.

"She posed for me as Niobe two years ago," said my friend. "At present, she teaches physical culture."

"What!" I exclaimed, "that wisp of a girl."

"Yes, I don't know how many pounds she can lift; ever so many. She's a perfect darling and looks after an old mother, who still deplores Mackville Four Corners. Her cousin is in safe hands."

I took another look at the six-footer with her, who smoked a cigarette with evident unfamiliarity.

"Would," I said, "that every youth, confronted by the perils of New York for the first time, might be guided in such security. She is showing him the revelry of Camus and has proved to him that a slightly Bohemian atmosphere is not incompatible with personal cleanliness and a soul kept white. It will broaden his horizon. Then she will take him home at a respectable hour, after having demonstrated to him the important fact that pleasure, edible viands and a

cheerful atmosphere may be procured here out of a two-dollar bill, leaving a little change for carfare."

"If I were a man," said Frieda, "I should fall in love with her."

"If you were a man, my dear, you would fall in love a dozen times a day."

"Gordon McGrath says it's the only safe way," she retorted.

"Don't be quoting him to me," I advised her. "To him it is a mere egotistic formula. Like yourself, he has always been afraid to descend from generalities. I don't like the trait in him, whereas, in you, I admire it, because, with you, it is the mere following of a tendency to wholesale affection for your fellow-beings. Yet it is a slightly curious and abnormal condition."

"Like having to wear spectacles," she helped me out.

"Just so, whereas in Gordon it is simply the result of a deliberate policy, a line of conduct prepared in advance, like a chess-opening. Some day, in that game of his, a little pawn may move in an unexpected way, and he will be hoist with his own petard."

"I hope so," she answered cheerfully. "It will probably be very good for him."

"But it might also break his heart," I suggested.

"Don't get gloomy," Frieda advised me. "What about yourself? Here you are abusing your friends because they fight shy of the archer godling. I should like to know what you have done to show any superiority."

"Well, if my memory serves me right, I have proposed to you, once or twice."

"O dear no! You may have meant to, perhaps, but never really got to the point," she answered, laughing. "I haven't the slightest doubt that once or twice you came to my flat all prepared for the sacrifice. But, suddenly, you doubtless became interested in some other trifling matter. Give me three lumps of sugar in my coffee, and don't let them splash down. This is my best gown."

We left Camus and returned together to Mrs. Milliken's. Frieda had a curious notion to the effect that, as she hadn't seen the baby since several hours, something very fatal might happen to it, if she failed to run in again. My landlady and her ancient male relative were sitting on the steps, fanning themselves and discussing the price of coal. By this time, the woman ate right

out of Frieda's hand, although the latter does not seem to be aware that she has accomplished the apparently impossible. The old night-watchman informed us that he was enjoying a week's holiday from the bank. He was spending it, cheerfully, dividing his leisure between the front steps and the backyard. He also told us of a vague and ambitious project simmering in his mind. He was actually planning to go all the way to Flatbush and see a niece of his. For several years he had contemplated this trip, which, he apprised us, would take at least an hour each way. I bade him good courage, and we went upstairs. While Frieda went into Mrs. Dupont's room, I turned on the gas in mine and sat before my window, with my feet on the ledge, smoking my calabash.

"Has Monsieur looked upon his bed?" Eulalie startled me by asking suddenly.

Now, in order to respond with decent civility, I was compelled to remove my feet from their resting place, to take the pipe from my mouth and turn in my chair. Women can sometimes be considerable nuisances.

"No," I answered, "I have not looked upon the bed. Why should I? A bed is the last resource of the weary and afflicted, it is one of the things one may be compelled to submit to without becoming reconciled to it. I take good care never to look at it so long as I can hold a book in my hand or watch passers-by in the street."

"Very well, Monsieur," she answered placidly. "It is all there, and I have darned the holes in the socks."

This was highly interesting and I hastily rose to inspect her handiwork. She had placed my washing on the coverlet and the result looked like an improvement on Celestial efforts. I took up the topmost pair of socks and gazed upon it, while a soft and chastened feeling stole over me.

"Thank you, Eulalie," I said, with some emotion. "It is exceedingly nice; I am glad you called my attention to it. In the future I shall be obliged, if you will stuff it in the chiffonier. Had I first seen all this on going to bed, I am afraid I should have pitched it on the floor, as usual, and been sorry for it next morning."

She smilingly complied at once with my request and withdrew, bidding me a good night, while I sat again, feeling great contentment. I had now discovered that a man, if lucky, might have his socks darned without being compelled to take a wife unto himself, with all the uncomfortable appurtenances thereof. It was a new and cheering revelation. No sooner had I begun to cogitate over the

exquisiteness of my fate than I was disturbed again, however. Frieda partly obeyed conventionality by knocking upon my open door and walking in.

"Frances Dupont wants me to thank you ever so much for the pretty roses, David," she told me. "It was really very kind of you to bring them. I have snipped the stems and changed the water and put them on the window sill for the night."

"Yes," I explained, "I had to change that twenty-dollar bill, and there was a hungry-looking man at the corner of Fourteenth Street, who offered them to me for a quarter. So we had to go over to the cigar store to get the note broken up into elementals. The fellow really looked as if he needed money a great deal more than roses, so I gave him a dollar."

"But then why didn't you take a dollar's worth of flowers?" asked Frieda, high-priestess of the poetic brush, who is a practical woman, if ever there was one.

"Never thought of it," I acknowledged; "besides, he had only three bunches left."

"And so you didn't want to clean out his stock in trade. Never mind, Dave, it was very sweet of you."

She hurried away, and, finally, I heard the front door closing, after which I made a clean copy of that dog story, flattering myself that it had turned out rather neatly. It was finished at two o'clock, and I went to bed.

The next morning was a Sunday. I dawdled at length over my dressing and sallied forth at eleven, after Mrs. Milliken had knocked at my door twice to know if she could make the room. If I were an Edison, I should invent an automatic room-making and womanless contrivance. These great men, after all, do little that is truly useful and practical.

My neighbor's door was open. I coughed somewhat emphatically, after which I discreetly knocked upon the doorframe.

"Come in, Mr. Cole," said a cheery, but slightly husky, voice. "Come in and look at the darling."

"That was my purpose, Madame Dupont," I said most veraciously.

"Eulalie has gone out again," I was informed, after the infant had been duly exhibited, as it slept with its two fists tightly closed. "She has gone for a box of

Graham crackers and the Sunday paper."

I smiled, civilly, and opined that the day's heat would not be so oppressive.

"Don't you want to sit down for a moment?" she asked me.

I was about to obey, when I heard the elephantine step of the washerwoman's sister, who entered, bearing her parcels and the *Courrier des Etats Unis*.

"Excuse me for just a second," said the husky little voice.

I bowed and looked out of the window, upon yards where I caught the cheery note of a blooming wisteria.

Suddenly, there came a cry. The bedsprings creaked as the young woman, who had raised herself upon one elbow, fell back inertly.

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" bellowed Eulalie, open-mouthed and with helpless arms hanging down.

I rushed to the bed, with some vague idea of bringing first aid. In the poor little jar of roses I dipped my handkerchief and passed it over Mrs. Dupont's brow, scared more than half to death. Presently, she seemed to revive a little. She breathed and sighed, and then came a flood of tears. She stared at me with great, deep, frightened eyes, and with a finger pointed to a column of the paper. I took it from her and held it out at a convenient distance from my eyes, about two feet away. There was a printed list referring to reservists gone from New York. For many weeks, doubtless, she had scanned it, fearing, hopeful, with quick-beating heart that was only stilled when she failed to find that which she tremblingly sought.

I caught the name, among other announcements of men fallen at the front.

—Paul Dupont—

I also looked at her, open-mouthed, stupidly. She stared again at me, as if I could have reassured her, sworn that it was a mistake, told her not to believe her eyes.

Then, she rose again on her elbow and turned to the slumbering mite at her side, but, although the salty drops of her anguish fell on the baby's face, he continued to sleep on.

CHAPTER V

GORDON HELPS

The passing of the next week or two can only be referred to in a few words, for how can a man gauge the distress of a soul, measure the intensity of its pangs, weight the heavy burden of sorrow? That good little Dr. Porter came in very often. Most tactfully he pretended that his visits were chiefly to me, and would merely drop into the other room on his way out of mine; at any rate the smallness of the bill he rendered long afterwards made me surmise that this was the case.

In the meanwhile, the weather remained very warm and the doors were often left open. I went into the room quite frequently. Eulalie is the salt of the earth, but she still has a little of the roughness of the unground crystal so that, for conversational purposes, Frances Dupont perhaps found my presence more congenial. Her faithful, but temporary, retainer was always there, exuding an atmosphere of robust health and lending propriety to my visits. She was generally darning socks.

The hungry one snatches at any morsel presented to him, while those who are dying of thirst pay little heed to the turbidity of pools they may chance upon. The poor Murillo-girl, perforce, had to be content with such friendship and care as her two new friends could give her. Frieda always came in once a day, but she was tremendously busy with her Orion. Indeed, her visits were eagerly awaited; she brought little doses of comfort, tiny portions of cheer that vied with Porter's remedies in efficacy and, possibly, were much pleasanter to take.

From my friend Hawkins I borrowed baby-scales, fallen into desuetude, and triumphantly jotted down the ounces gained each week by Baby Paul. I believe that the humorous peculiarities of my countenance excited the infant's risibilities; at any rate, the young mother assured me that he smiled when he looked at me. Presently, after the violence of the blow had been slightly assuaged and the hours of silent weeping began to grow shorter, she managed, at times, to look at me as if I also brought a little consolation.

I remember so well the morning when I found the bed empty and neatly made up

and the young woman sitting in an uncomfortable rocker. I insisted on returning at once to my room for my old Morris chair, knowing that she would be much easier in it. At first, to my consternation, she refused to accept it, under some plea that she did not want me to be deprived of it. When she finally consented, her eyes were a little moist and I was delighted when she acknowledged that it gave her excellent comfort. A little later came the chapter of confidences, memories of brief happy days with her husband, the warp and woof of an existence that had already suffered from broken threads and heart-strings sorely strained.

She had an Aunt Lucinda, it appeared, and when the teacher of singing in Providence had declared that the girl's voice was an uncut jewel of great price that must be smoothed over to perfection by study abroad, the aunt had consented to extend some help and Frances had gone over.

There had been nearly two years of hard study, with some disappointments and rebuffs, and, finally, great improvement. The crabbed teacher had begun to smile at her and pat her on the back, so that other young women had been envious. This, I presume, was tantamount to a badge of merit. Then, she had sung in one or two concerts and, suddenly, Paul Dupont, the marvelous, had come into her life. He was a first prize of the *Conservatoire*, for the violin, and, people said, the coming man. There had been another concert and, among other things, Frances had sung Gounod's "Ave Maria" while Paul had played the obligato. It was then that, for the first time, her own voice thrilled her. Joined to the vibrant notes the man could cause to weep and cry out in hope, her song had sounded like a solemn pæan of victorious achievement. Critics had written of her power and brilliancy, of her splendid ease of execution.

And then had come the making of love. He had played again for her, and she had put her soul in the songs, for him to revel in, for her to cry out the beating of her heart. It seemed to have come with the swiftness of a summer storm, and they had married, with just a few friends present to witness the ceremony and rejoice in their happiness.

Aunt Lucinda had written that a woman, who would go abroad and espouse a Papist and a fiddler, was utterly beyond the pale. Let her never show her face in Providence again!

But what did it matter! Happiness lay in the hollow of their hands, rosy and bright, full of wondrous promise. Yet she had written to Aunt Lucinda, dutifully,

expressing hope that at some later time she might be looked upon with greater indulgence. And there had been more beautiful songs, and Paul had played, and their souls had vibrated together. Finally, a man from New York had engaged them to come over to America and give a series of concerts. When they started away, she thought she was getting a bad cold, for her voice was beginning to get a little husky. Paul asserted that the trip at sea and the long rest would certainly make everything all right. But in New York she had been compelled to call on a doctor, who was an exceedingly busy man, with hosts of patients, who sprayed her throat and gave her medicine to take and charged very high fees, and—and the voice had kept on growing huskier and—and it was no use trying to sing, and—and the engagement had been broken. And Paul had been so good and swore she would be better by and by, and he had played in concerts, without her, and everything went on very well, except her voice. Then, one day, she had told a most marvelous secret to Paul, and they had rejoiced together and been very happy. Then the war had come like a bolt from the blue, and Paul had taken the very first boat with hundreds of other reservists. She would follow him to France after the baby was born, and there she would wait for him in the dear old house of his parents, who were country people, cultivating a farm and oh! so proud of their wonderful son. They had been ever so good and kind to her. She had written to them several times, but no answer had ever come and then some one told her that the small village in which they lived had been razed to the ground. It was over there on the other side of the Marne. And now it was ever so long since she had received any word from Paul, and they had saved very little, because money came so easily, and—and now Paul was dead and she couldn't sing!

Frieda was in the room with me when the tale was told. She rushed out, and I found her, a few minutes later, in my room, her nose swollen and her eyes devastated by weeping. But she used my wash-basin and towels for plentiful ablutions and returned to the room where I left her alone with Frances Dupont, realizing the futility of a man in such circumstances.

At the end of another week our stout angel burst again into my room. Eulalie had been discharged, with mutual regrets, and little Paul was growing apace. Three and a half ounces in seven days!

"Dave! We've got to find something for Frances to do! In a very short time she will not have a penny left. Go to work at once and, in the meanwhile, I'll do my best also. Yes, I know perfectly well that the two of us will see that she doesn't suffer, but she doesn't want charity; she wants work!"

She was off again, and I knew that she would at once inquire of the butcher, the baker and the candlestick-maker in regard to positions suited to a young woman with a Murillo-face and a baby. I put on my hat and went at once to Gordon's studio, facing Central Park. I was lucky enough to find him in.

"Sit down and don't bother me," he said pleasantly. "I must use up the last of this light."

Before him stood an easel with a wonderful portrait of a young woman endowed with splendid neck and arms. He was working at some detail of the gown, which the lady had evidently sent over for him, since the garment was disposed about a large mannikin with a vacuous face. I watched delightedly the sure touches with which he reproduced the sheen of the silk. Gordon doesn't want to talk while he paints, pretending that in order to do his best work a man must bend all his energies to it, whether he is sawing wood or writing elegies.

"People wouldn't begin chatting to a fellow while he played Chopin," he told me one day. "What right have they to disturb the harmonies in a man's mind when he's creating melodies in color? Hang their impertinence!"

I presume, however, that painting a silk dress was somewhat mechanical work to him, for, after some minutes of silent toil, during which he only stepped back once to survey his work, he began to speak. Like many other people, he has not the slightest objection to the infringing of his own rules. It only behooves others to obey them.

"That's Miss Sophia Van Rossum," he told me, taking his short pipe out of his mouth and putting it down on his stool. "She's been coming in from Southampton three times a week, to pose. Drives her own car, you know, and has been arrested a dozen times for speeding. So I finished the face and hands first, and now I'm sticking in the dress. Don't need her for that."

"Very rich people, are they not?" I asked.

"You bet. Zinc and lead, I believe; the old man made it in. Fine buxom creature, isn't she? And mighty good hearted in her way. She hasn't much more brains than a linnet, I think, and she swims and rows and shoots. Golf and tennis, too. Found her rather hard to paint, because it's difficult for her to keep still. Keeps on asking indignantly why I put blue on her nose, and reaching out for the box of chocolates. I told her last time I couldn't paint her with one cheek all bulged out with *pralinés*. It made her laugh, and I lost fifteen minutes before I could quiet

her down."

He worked hard for another ten minutes, during which I considered that he was rather severe on the young lady, or else had idealized her, which is not a habit of his. To me she looks kindly and not a bit unintelligent, a rather fine specimen of the robustious modern young woman. Gordon picked up his brushes.

"That'll do," he said. "The light is changing. Now what the devil do you want? Awfully glad to see you."

My friend is a good listener. I told him about Frances Dupont, giving him a brief account of her story and explaining that Frieda and I wanted to find something for her to do.

"Of course," I finally said, "I suppose that you are going away very soon to spend the rest of this hot summer in the country. Otherwise, I would have asked if you couldn't make use of her for a model, at least till we can find something else."

"I'm not going away yet," he answered, "and I emphatically cannot employ her, or, at any rate, I won't, which comes to the same thing. Hitherto I have kept my serenity of mind unimpaired by the simple process of fighting shy of females in distress. There are lots of models who can be depended on to keep their mouths shut and not bother a fellow. My interest is in my picture and nothing else, and I refuse to have it diverted by the economical problems of ladies on their uppers. If you want a check, I'll give it to you for her, not on her account, but because you're the best, old, weak-minded idiot in this burg and I'm glad to help you out, however silly your quixotic ideas may be. Wait a minute, I'll write one out for you."

"No," I answered, "I've just sold two stories and got some advance royalty on my novel. I'd come and ask you for money, if I needed it, urgently. I might have to, some day. But this poor thing's worrying herself to death and that's what I want to remedy at once, if possible. A little occupation would give her something else to think about. If I tell her that she will have to pose in silence, that it's a part of the work she's engaged for, she won't say a word. She's an intelligent woman."

"Why doesn't Frieda employ her?" he asked.

"Because she's no slender, ethereal sprite. Doesn't have anything of the woodland nymph about her, that's why. Besides, Frieda's doing an Orion with a

covey of Pleiades scattering before him, at present."

"I have nothing for the Winter Academy, just now," said Gordon, appearing to relent a little. "Strangely enough, Miss Van Rossum doesn't care to have her portrait exhibited. If I really found a remarkable type, I'd like to do a mother and child. If you really think this Mrs. Dupont will keep still and is willing to earn a few weeks of bread and cheese by the silence of her tongue and some ability to sit quietly in a chair without getting the fidgets, I shouldn't mind trying her. But, of course, she'd have to come up to specifications. I'll have to look at her first. Have you spoken to her about it?"

"Not a word," I answered, "I didn't want to see her disappointed."

"Of course, it's a foolish thing to do," he said, "but you're so anxious about it that I'll see whether it can be managed. She's just heard of her husband's death, has she? Well, she won't be thinking of other men for a while and won't expect to be made love to. Take up your hat, and we'll go over to that nursery of yours. I'll look her over."

If I hadn't known him so well, I should have been provoked at his speaking as if the woman had been some second-hand terrier I wanted to dispose of. We took the elevator and were shot down to the ground floor.

"Mind you," he warned me, "it's ten to one that I'll discover something that will make this errand useless. The mere fact of a woman's having a broken-down voice and a baby doesn't necessarily qualify her to pose as a mother. The woods are full of them. You've probably endowed her with good looks that exist only in your imagination."

To this I made no answer. The mere fact of his having consented to investigate was already a distinct triumph for me. Twenty minutes later we were climbing up the stairs of what he called my zoological boarding-house.

On the second landing, he stopped abruptly and listened. Then he turned to me with a corner of his mouth twisted in the beginning of one of his sarcastic grins.

"Who's that playing your piano?" he asked.

"I—I fancy it must be Mrs. Dupont," I answered. "You see, she's very much alone, and my door was open, and I suppose she saw the thing and walked in, not knowing that I should return so soon."

"Oh! You needn't look so sheepish," he told me. "You look as if a policeman had caught you with a jimmy in your hip-pocket. My dear old boy, I hope she isn't the straw that's going to break your back, you old Bactrian camel! The little wagons they use for the carrying of dynamite in New York, wherewith to soften its tough old heart and permit the laying of foundations, are painted red and marked *explosives*. Were I the world's czar, I should have every woman labelled the same way. They're dangerous things."

Gordon is somewhat apt to mix his metaphors, a thing rather natural to one who seeks to wed his wit with a pose of scepticism. Really simple language, clothing ordinary common sense, is inadequate for a scoffer; also, I am afraid, for a man who writes about mules and virtuous dogs.

I think we both instinctively stepped more lightly in ascending the remaining stairs. She was playing very softly. It was a dreamy thing with recurring little sobs of notes. For a moment we stopped again; I think it had appealed to us. Then I went in, accompanied by Gordon, and she ceased at once, startled and coloring a little.

"I am so glad you were diverting yourself with the old piano," I told her. "I hope you will always use it when I am out, and—and perhaps once in a while when I am in. My mother used to play such things; she wasn't always happy. I beg to present my friend Gordon McGrath, who is a great painter. He's awfully fond of Frieda."

This, I think, was a canny and effective introduction. Any friend of Frieda's must be very welcome to her.

"Madame," said Gordon, after she had proffered her hand, "won't you oblige us by sitting down. You have been caught in the act and deserve the penalty of being humbly begged to play that over again."

She looked at me, uncertainly.

"It would give me ever so much pleasure," I assured her.

At once she sat again and touched the keys. I know so little of music that my opinions in regard to it are utterly worthless, but I knew at once that she was no marvelous pianist. No, she was only a woman with a soul for harmony, which found soft and tender expression on my mother's old Steinway. Gordon, I noted, sat down in my worst chair, with an elbow on his knee, his chin resting on the

closed knuckles. It was evident that he was watching her, studying her every motion, the faint swaying of her shapely head, the wandering of her hands over the keyboard. Once, she stopped very suddenly and listened.

No, she was only a woman, with a soul for harmony.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "I thought it was Baby."

She went on, reassured, to an ending that came very soon. It left in me a desire for more, but I could not ask her to continue. She had brought a tiny bit of herself into the room, but she belonged body and soul to the mite in the other.

"I am ever so much obliged to you," I said, as she rose.

"Madame," said Gordon, "it was indeed a treat."

"I am very glad you liked it," she said very simply, "and—and now I must go back."

She smiled, faintly, and inclined her head. We had both risen and thanked her again. She passed out of the room and, once she had regained her own, I heard her faint, husky voice.

"It's mother's own wee lamb!" it said.

Gordon picked up one of my cigarettes, looked at it, put it down, and took one of his own from his case. Then, he went and stood in front of my open window, looking out, with his hands stuffed deeply in his trousers pockets. I maintained a discreet silence.

"Come over here," he ordered, brusquely, as is often his way, and I complied, holding on to my calabash and filling it from my pouch.

"Dave," he said, very low, that his voice might not carry through the open doors into the next room. "Those powder-wagons aren't in it. When the dynamite happens to blow up some Dago, it's a mere accident; the stuff itself is intended

for permissible purposes. A woman like that is bound to play havoc with some one, and I'm afraid you're the poor old idiot marked by fate. You're as weak as a decrepit cat. I can see the whole programme; sympathy at first and the desire to console, all mixed up with the imagination that has permitted you to write that 'Land o' Love.' My dear man, you might just as well go and commit suicide in some decent way. If you don't look out, you're done for!"

"Don't be an ass, Gordon," I told him, lighting my pipe.

"All right, it's your own funeral. But don't come to me, afterwards, and weep on my shirtfront, that's all. Women get over the loss of a husband, they even become reconciled to the death of a baby, sometimes. And this one has music in her soul, and for ever and a day she is going to deplore the song that fled from her lips. She'll always be unhappy and you'll have to keep on consoling, and the freedom of your thoughts will vanish, and, when you try to write, you will have her and her miseries always before you. Then you will shed tears on your typewriter instead of producing anything. Better give Frieda some money for her and go fishing. Don't come back until the Milliken woman sends a postal telling you that the coast is clear."

"I know nothing about fishing," I answered.

"Then go and learn."

"You're talking arrant nonsense," I informed him.

"I am giving you the quintessence of solid wisdom," he retorted. "But now I'll tell you about her posing for me. I'm not doing this for your sake or hers, but because she has a really interesting head, and I know myself. I can get a good picture out of her, and I'll employ her for about three weeks. That'll be plenty. After that, I expect to go away and stay with the Van Rossums in the country. While Mrs. Dupont is busy posing for me, you and Frieda can look up another job for her. Let me see; I might possibly be able to pass her on to some other studio, if she takes to posing, properly."

I put my pipe down, intending to strike while the iron was hot.

"Come in with me," I told him.

"Of course you understand that in some ways she's going to be a good deal of a nuisance," he said hurriedly. "The baby squalling when I've just happened to get into my stride and the mother having to retire to feed the thing. But never mind,

she's got quite a stunning face."

I knocked at her door, although I could see her sitting at the window with the baby in her arms.

"Please don't trouble to get up," I said. "My friend Gordon happens to need a model; he's thinking of a picture of a mother and child and has told me that, if you could pose for him, he would be glad to employ you. It wouldn't last very long, but you would have the baby with you. By the way, painters have to think very hard when they're at work and so they can't talk much at the same time, so that models have to keep very still. I know you won't mind that, because it's part of the work."

The top button of her waist was open. Instinctively her hand went up to it and covered the very small expanse of white neck that had been revealed.

"A model!" she exclaimed huskily. "I—I don't know——"

Gordon's face looked as if it was graven in stone.

"It is just for the face and hands," he said coldly. "It will be a picture of a woman sitting at an open window; just as you were when we came in. Of course, if you don't care to——"

"Oh! Indeed, I shall be very glad and—and grateful," she answered, very low. "I will do my best to please you."

"Thanks! I shall be obliged, if you will come on Monday morning at ten."

"Certainly. I shall be there without fail," she answered.

"Very well. I am glad to have met you, Mrs. Dupont. David, I wish I could dine with you at Camus, this evening, but I have an appointment to meet some people at Claremont. Good-by."

He bowed civilly to Frances Dupont, waved a hand at me, and was gone.

"Gordon is a tip-top painter," I told her. "His ways are sometimes rather gruff, but you mustn't mind them. He means all right."

"Oh! That makes no difference. Some of my teachers were pretty gruff, but I paid no attention. I only thought of the work to be done."

"Of course, that's the only thing to keep in mind," I answered.

"Yes, and I am ever so much obliged to you," she said gratefully. "You're the best and kindest of friends."

With this I left her and returned to my room, hoping that Gordon wouldn't be too exacting with her, and thinking with much amusement of all his warnings and his fears for my safety. That's the trouble with being so tremendously wise and cynical; it doesn't make for optimism.



CHAPTER VI

A BIT OF SUNSHINE

The ignorance of modern man is deplorable and stupendous. The excellent and far-famed Pico della Mirandola, for one whole week, victoriously sustained a thesis upon "*De Omne Scibile*." Now we have to confess that human knowledge, even as it affects such a detail as women's raiment, is altogether too complicated for a fellow to pretend he possesses it all. The display windows of department stores or a mere glance at an encyclopedia always fill me with humility.

Frances sadly showed us some things she had pulled out of a trunk and, foolishly, I exclaimed upon their prettiness. She looked upon them, and then at me, with a rather pitiful air.

"I can't wear them now," she said, her lip quivering a little. "But this black one might do, if——"

This halting was not in her speech and merely represents my own limitations. She explained some of the legerdemain required by the garment, and Frieda told her of a woman, related to Eulalie, who was talented in juggling with old dresses and renovating them. This one looked exceedingly nice to me, just as it was, but I was pityingly informed that some things were to be added and others removed, before it could possibly be worn. The sleeves, as far as I could understand, were either too long or short; the shoulders positively superannuated and the skirt, as was evident to the meanest intellect, much too narrow, or, possibly, too wide.

Also, there was the absolute need of a new hat. They discussed the matter, and Frieda led her away to unexplored streets adjoining the East River. With great caution I warned the young woman, secretly directing her attention to Frieda's impossible headgear, but I received a confident and reassuring glance. After a time they returned with an ample hat-box adorned with one of the prominent names of the Ghetto, and pulled the thing out, having come to my room to exhibit to me the result of their excursion.

"How much do you think we paid for it?" asked Frieda, with a gleam of triumph.

"I can speak more judiciously, if Mrs. Dupont will be so kind as to put it on," I

told her.

My request was immediately acceded to. I surveyed the hat from many angles and guessed that it had cost eighteen dollars. I was proudly informed that the price had been three twenty-seven, reduced from eight seventy-nine, and that they had entered every shop in Division Street before they had unearthed it.

"It is very nice and quiet," Frieda informed me. "There wasn't much choice of color, since it had to be black. I think it suits her remarkably well."

"It certainly does," I assented. "Oh, by the way, Frieda, you may be glad to hear that my publishers have accepted the 'Land o' Love' and are to bring it out very early next Spring. It is a very long time to wait. I am afraid that Jamieson, their Chief High Lord Executioner, is rather doubtful in regard to it. He's afraid it is somewhat of a risky departure from my usual manner and may disappoint my following, such as it is."

"Poor old Dave," said Frieda encouragingly. "Don't worry, I'm sure it will sell just like the others."

"I hope so, and now what do you say to celebrating that new hat by going over to Camus for dinner?"

"Oh! I couldn't think of such a thing!" exclaimed Frances Dupont. "In—in the first place it is much too soon—after—and then you know I haven't a thing to wear."

"In the first place, not a soul will know you at Camus," said Frieda firmly, "and, in the second, you have a hat anyway, and I'm going to fix that black dress a little. Just a dozen stitches and some pins. Come into your room with me."

She dragged her out of the room, and I was left to wonder how that complicating baby would be disposed of. I had begun to think the infant sometimes recognized me. When I touched one of his little hands with my finger, he really appeared to respond with some manifestations of pleasure; at least it never seemed to terrify or dismay him. His mother was confident that he liked it.

Perhaps an hour later they came out, and I looked at Frances in some surprise. I gained the impression that she was taller and more slender than I had thought.

"You give me that baby," commanded Frieda. "I want you to save your strength, my dear. I should make David carry it, but he would drop it or hold it upside

down. Come along, my precious, we're going out to walk a by-by."

Master Paul seemed to make no objection. I call it a dreadful shame that Frieda never married and had a half a dozen of her own. She's the most motherly old maid in the world, and infants take to her with absolute enthusiasm. I followed them, somewhat doubtfully, wondering what figure Master Paul would cut at Camus. I knew that they allowed little dogs and there was a big tortoise-shell cat that wandered under the chairs and sometimes scratched your knee for a bit of fish, but I had never seen any young babies in the widow's establishment. This one might be deemed revolutionary or iconoclastic. Should we be met by uplifted and deprecating palms and informed with profuse apologies that the rules of the house did not favor the admission of such youthful guests?

In a few minutes my doubts were set at rest, for we walked off to the hive inhabited by the washerwoman. At the foot of the stairs Mrs. Dupont kissed her baby, as if she were seeing it for the last time. Then Frieda hastened upstairs with it and came down, two minutes later, blowing like a porpoise.

"He'll be perfectly safe," she declared. "Madame Boivin says he is an angel, and Eulalie was there. She said he would sleep straight on end for two hours. I told her we should be back before—I mean in good time. Now come along!"

I could see that the young mother only half approved of the scheme originated in Frieda's fertile brain. Two or three times she looked back as if minded to return at once and snatch up her baby, never to leave it again.

"My dear," said Frieda, "don't be getting nervous. Nothing can possibly happen, and you know how very careful Eulalie is. Little by little you must get back into the world. How are you going to face it, if it frightens you? Put on a brave, bold front. Here is a chance for you to have a few moments of enjoyment. Seize upon it and don't let go. A dark cellar is no place to pick up courage in, and you must come out of the gloom, child, and live a little with the others so that you may be able to live for Baby Paul. There's a good girl!"

Frances opened a little black bag and pulled out a handkerchief with which she dabbed her eyes once or twice. Then she looked up again.

"Oh! Frieda! I ought to be thanking God on my bended knees for sending you to me, and—and Mr. Cole too. Indeed I'll do my best to be brave. It's—it's difficult, sometimes, but I'm going to try, ever so hard."

I am afraid that the little smile with which she ended these words was somewhat forced, but I was glad to see it. It was a plucky effort. She was seeking to contend against a current carrying her out to sea and realized that she must struggle to reach the shore in safety. I saw Frieda give her arm a good hug, and the three of us walked to Seventh Avenue, then north a couple of blocks, after which we turned to the right till we came to the electric lights of the Widow Camus's flamboyant sign, that winked a welcome at us.

I remember little about the dinner itself, but, after the rather insipid fare at Mrs. Milliken's, I know that Frances enjoyed it. The place did not surprise her, nor the people. During her life in Paris, after her marriage, she had probably been with her husband to some more or less Bohemian resorts, such as are beloved of artists. At first, she choked a little over the radishes and olives, but took her *consommé* with greater assurance and was quite at her ease before the chicken and salad. With her last leaf of lettuce, however, came over her a look of anxiety, and I pulled out my watch.

"Don't be afraid," I told her, "we have only been away from the washerlady for fifty minutes. See yourself, there is no deception."

"I am absolutely certain that he is sleeping yet," Frieda assured her, and turned to the perspiring waiter, ordering three Nesselrodes and coffees.

Now, when I treat myself to a *table d'hôte* dinner, I love to linger over my repast, to study the people about me, or at least pretend to. Also, I sip my coffee very slowly and enjoy a Chartreuse, in tiny gulps. Frieda, if anything, is more dilatory than myself. But the dear old girl positively hurried over the little block of ice-cream, and I suspect that she scalded her mouth a trifle with her coffee. A few minutes later we were out in the street again, hurrying towards Madame Boivin's, and I wondered whether such unseemly haste could be compatible with proper digestion. We reached the tenement in a very short time.

"Frances is going upstairs with me," announced Frieda. "You had better not wait for us, for we might be detained a little. I'll bring her home, and we shall be perfectly safe. You go right back and smoke your old pipe till we return."

"Don't hurry," I told her. "I might as well wait here as anywhere else. It is an interesting street. If I get tired of waiting, I'll stroll home; take your time."

So they went up the stairs, Frieda panting behind, and I leaned against a decrepit iron railing. A few steps away some colored men were assembled about a

lamppost, their laughter coming explosively, in repeated peals. Opposite me, within an exiguous front yard, a very fat man sat on a rickety chair, the back resting against the wall, and gave me an uncomfortable sense of impending collapse of the spindly legs. Boys, playing ball in the middle of the street, stopped suddenly and assumed an air of profound detachment from things terrestrial as a policeman went by, majestic and leisurely, swinging his club. Somewhere west of me an accordion was whining variations on Annie Laurie, but, suddenly, its grievous voice was drowned by a curtain lecture addressed to a deep bass by an exasperated soprano. To the whole world his sins were proclaimed with a wealth of detail and an imagery of expression that excited my admiration. Then the clamor ceased abruptly and a man's head appeared at the window. I speculated whether he was contemplating self-destruction, but he vanished, to appear a moment later in the street, garmented in trousers, carpet-slippers and undershirt and armed with an empty beer-pail. With this he faded away in the corner saloon, to come forth again with his peace-offering.

With such observations I solaced myself and whiled away the time. Humanity in the rough is to me fully as interesting as the dull stones picked up in Brazil or the Cape Colony. Some are hopelessly flawed, while others need but patient grinding to develop into diamonds of the first water.

Nearly a half an hour had gone by, and I had seated myself upon the railing, in a position once dear to me when I shared a fence with Sadie Briggs, aged fourteen, and thought that the ultimate had come to me in the way of love and passion. Fortunate Sadie! She afterwards married a blacksmith and did her duty to the world by raising a large family, while I pounded typewriter keys and wrote of imaginary loves, in shirt-sleeves and slippers, lucky in the egotistic peace of the enviable mortal responsible for no human being's bread and butter but his own.

Then Frieda and Frances appeared. The latter held her baby in her arms, surely feeling that it had received enough vicarious attention.

"Why, Dave!" exclaimed the former. "I'm awfully sorry you waited so long. Our little darling was sleeping ever so comfy, like a blessed angel, and we sat down, while Madame Boivin rested from her ironing, and we just talked about starch and cockroaches and things, and then Paul awoke and we were afraid he might cry in the street and it was nearly time anyway and—and he was ever so greedy. And now he's sleeping again."

I reflected that, gastronomically, Master Paul had probably enjoyed himself

better than ourselves. He had not been hurried. His little lips had not been scalded, nor had he been compelled to hasten over a *ravigote* that should have been eaten in seemly leisure and respect. I wished he had been able to realize the compensations he was getting now for whatever might come later on. For him I trust there will be little of sorrow, and yet there must be some, since pain and shadow are indispensable, in this world, to the appreciation of light and of ease.

I noticed how well the young mother walked with her burden. It appeared to lend her form added grace and to complete her beauty.

On the steps leading to the front door of Mrs. Milliken's refuge nearly all the lodgers were assembled, taking the cool of the evening. The two girls who sold candy clamored for a view of little Paul. The old lady looked at us in stern disapproval and said the baby should have been in bed for hours. The landlady, mindful of her interests, maintained a neutral attitude. One of the young men assured Mrs. Dupont that her baby was a corker.

"This," said Mrs. Milliken, urbanely waving her hand towards a heavy and florid gentleman, who had kept in the background, "is Mr. O'Flaherty. He owns the garage on the next block and has the second floor back."

This individual bowed to the ladies, keeping a large black cigar in the corner of his mouth, and gave me a crushing grasp. I rejoiced for Mrs. Milliken that she had the room rented, but promised myself to keep my hands behind my back in his presence. We declined an invitation to share the steps and went upstairs, where Mrs. Dupont, after putting the baby down on the lounge, came to me with both hands extended.

"Thank you," she said. "Thank you ever so much. Indeed I enjoyed every minute of it."

So we parted, and I went to my room and put on my old slippers, feeling that I had also enjoyed a pleasant couple of hours. Frances Dupont says that my typewriting does not trouble her at all, and I went to work, having thought of a story about a blind man. I wrote a couple of pages and then had to stop and close my eyes. How do blind men really feel, and through what gift from on high does that peculiar smile come, which their faces always show? I always have to try and put myself in the place of folks I write about. The other day I told this to McGrath, but he answered that I had evidently done so in regard to the mule I have spoken of and had failed, later on, to throw off the disguise. Of course I laughed. The real test of true friendship is the ability to call the other chap

names, with a smile on one's lips and affection in one's heart.

Then Frieda came in for a moment, to say good night.

"It has done the poor child a lot of good," she said. "I am sure she will have a good sleep. Well, good-by, Dave. Ever so much obliged to you."

She went away, ponderously and yet swiftly. The night was becoming cooler and the door opposite was closed. I also shut mine and lit the calabash. It didn't seem so difficult, after all, to write about the blind man. When you think of it, it is possible that the difference between him and ourselves is merely one of degree.

A few more days passed and the Monday came, and be it said to my shame that I was sound asleep when Mrs. Dupont started away with little Paul to keep her engagement. When I awoke, I reproached myself for having failed to be on hand to speed her on her journey and wish her good luck. She had gone out all alone with her child to confront the problem of keeping body and soul together, poor girl.

Early in the afternoon I had to go over to Brooklyn and view the Erie Basin, because my story unfortunately required the blind man to fall into it and be saved by the main girl, and I pride myself upon some accuracy of description. The result, if I remember correctly, was condensed into a score of lines which, if I got two cents a word for them, would leave a slight profit after paying carfare and increasing the small sum of my knowledge. Also, I had become acquainted with a gentleman on a canal boat, who grew geraniums and bachelor's buttons in a box on deck. He showed me his pleasant cabin and introduced me to his wife. The man was leading a peaceful life of leisurely travel, one that offered many possibilities. I imagined myself drifting along the tranquil borders of canals, edged with lush grasses and silvery willows. It was ideal! What more could a man require for happiness?

When I returned, I was very anxious to interview Frances and ask about her experiences with her first day's posing, but her door was closed.

No longer was she a sick woman, one whose bed was the clothing of illness, the garment of pain. She had entirely recovered and, since I could bring no solace of her troubles, I no longer had the right to intrude upon her, even by knocking at her door. Normal life had claimed her again, pitiless for her infirmities of voice and heart. She was working now to earn the bread that would permit her to live for her child. Her existence was her own, and the freedom of her privacy. All

that I could do now was to hope that, if she chanced to need any aid, she would recognize some little claim upon her friendship by coming to me again, as a bee may return for honey, leaving behind some of the pollen that means life prolonged and other flowers to come. To me such fertilizing dust would be replaced by a new interest given a life that was sometimes dull, by an occasionally tired brain made younger and mayhaps stronger through contact with a fresh young creature. All this she could proffer, but I had no right to beg for it. 'Twould have been like asking for a return of the few half-faded roses I had brought her, or payment for the running of a few errands.

So I closed my door also and took up the "Light That Failed" and my calabash, setting myself very determinedly to the task of reading and puffing away my unseemly curiosity and, I am afraid, failing dismally. I was wondering how Gordon had behaved towards her and whether she had found the task a hard and ungrateful one? Was she already thinking wearily about having to return there on the morrow?

Frieda, as a hundred times before, presently appeared to my rescue. I have not the slightest doubt that her curiosity was fully as keen as mine, and, of course, she could not have a man's reasons for discretion, knowing that her coming would be hailed with an exclamation of pleasure, or, perhaps, only a sigh of relief. I recognized her weighty steps on the landing, heard her quick knock at the door, and was left again to cogitate, while I put down my pipe and laid the book aside. Frieda can always be relied on.

Fifteen minutes later she penetrated my den.

"Oh! You're in!" she exclaimed. "I asked Frances, and she said you must be away since you would surely have knocked at the door. Of course she wouldn't take the chance of disturbing you, if you had returned."

"Well, I didn't want to intrude either," I answered; "she might have been changing—changing her boots for slippers or—or refreshing the baby."

"You might have tried to find out."

"Yes, that's obvious. I'm afraid I've been remiss in my duty," I replied, duly chastened.

Thus it was that the best of intentions had, as usual, gone to the place paved with such things. Yet I was rather pleased than otherwise. I learned that I was firmly

enough established in the good graces of these dear women to be permitted to lay aside minor points of etiquette and act according to my first impulses. Since these must always be based on high regard and friendship, I can have little fear that they will ever be misunderstood.



CHAPTER VII

THE OTHER WOMAN

As we were speaking, Frances came to my room and I advanced a chair for her.

"Thanks," she said, "I am not at all tired, Mr. Cole."

"Yet I beg that you will sit down for a moment," I asked her. "I shall take the piano-stool and you ladies will give me the delightful feeling of receiving a pleasant visit. I shall do my best to entertain two callers charitable enough to penetrate a sere and yellow bachelor's quarters. I shall proceed to make some tea."

"Gracious, Dave!" exclaimed Frieda hungrily, "you live in the lap of luxury."

"At least your presence here gives me the illusion of it," I answered, pulling out my alcohol lamp and other utensils.

There is little excuse for poor tea, unless it be considered as a vulgar flavoring intended to lend a different taste to the water taken from the faucet. A pound of the best lasts me for the greater part of a year, for I take it seldom, and a dollar more than the price of green and fibrous rubbish permits me to offer my friends and delight myself with a cup such as brings joy and an eagerness for a second filling.

"Of course, I was a little afraid at first," confessed Frances, as I measured out a spoonful for each of us and one for the greedy pot. "Mr. McGrath was exceedingly civil, however, and briefly explained that for the time being I must consider myself as one of his materials, like a tube of paint or his easel."

"That's just like Gordon," I interjected.

"Well, it seemed quite right," she went on. "He made me sit down a dozen times, in various ways, and then he'd look at me and move my chin a little, or change the position of my arm. It took him quite a long time and the more he shifted me around, the more he frowned, so that at last I asked him just what he wanted.

"I want you to hold that baby and look at it as if it were the biggest thing on

earth, and forget me, and forget that you're posing,' he said, and I asked him to let me try all by myself. So I moved around a bit and held my head differently, and he said that was just what he was looking for. He told me to keep still and went to work at once. In a half an hour he asked me if I didn't want to rest, and I told him I had pins and needles in my legs, and he said I must get up and walk a few times around the studio. A few minutes later I sat down again, and—and that's all, I think."

"What did he talk about?" asked Frieda.

"He didn't talk; just kept on glaring at me and then staring at his canvas and working away, ever so quickly. At the end of an hour he asked me how it was that the baby kept so quiet, and I told him it was asleep.

"When he wakes up he'll howl, won't he?' he asked me.

"I don't think so. Paul never howls,' I told him, and just then the poor wee thing woke up and began. It was perfectly dreadful! He never cried so loud before. Then Mr. McGrath told me to go into the next room and see if it was pins or hunger and to take my own time. So when I came back he was walking up and down in front of his canvas and paid no attention to me for the longest time. Then he said we might as well go on, and I suppose he worked for another hour. He stopped suddenly and told me I could take off the queer shawl he'd put about my shoulders and run away. He warned me to be on time to-morrow, because he didn't like to wait. After that he took his hat and went away and his Japanese man showed me out, when I was ready."

"I told you it wouldn't be so dreadfully hard," said Frieda, "and Gordon, in spite of his queer ways, is a very nice and decent fellow. He paints like an angel, he does, but he's as cold-blooded about his work as a pawnbroker."

"I'm glad," said Frances. "It makes it much easier."

I poured out the tea and produced a small box of vanilla wafers, which Frieda is ever so fond of.

"I wonder Gordon didn't get mad, when Baby Paul began to scream," she said.

"My dear," I remarked, "a man generally gets angry only at the unexpected. He had made up his mind that the weather would be squally and would have been rather disappointed if no shower had come. Before I had the pleasure of Master Paul's acquaintance, I mistakenly thought that every interval between waking

and feeding, in a baby's life, must be taken up with lusty shrieking. I'm positively frightened and hopeless, sometimes, when I think of how much there is for me to learn. I know I'll never catch up."

"You know good tea, for one thing," answered Frieda. "Give me another cup."

I complied, and, presently, Frances, at our urging, sat down to the old piano and played something that was very pretty and soft. And then the old desire to sing must have come upon her, suddenly, for her low and husky voice brought forth a few words of a sweet, old French song. This, all at once, must have evoked some of the memories that weighed so heavily upon her heart. Her hands went up to her face and she sobbed. Frieda rose, swiftly and silently, and put her big, able hand upon the girl's shoulder.

"I—I can't even sing to my baby!" Frances moaned.

What a cry from the heart! All else would have amounted to so little, if she could only have poured out some of the melody in her soul to the poor little mite. She was brave; working for Baby Paul was of small moment; even the loss of the gallant soldier lad who had poured his stream of life for the motherland was not for the moment the paramount source of her distress. No! She could not sing for the diminutive portrait of himself, the man had left behind!

As usual, in the presence of a woman's tears, I was mute and incapable of giving comfort. I feared to utter some of the platitudes which cause the sorrowing to revolt against the futility of wordy consolation. Frieda's kindly touch was worth more than all I could have said in a dog's age. Soon, the streaming eyes had been dabbed again to dryness, but the smile I had hoped for did not return.

"I—I am sorry I was so weak," said Frances, and ran away to her room, possibly for the powder surely invented by a great benefactor of humanity, since it may serve to obliterate the traces of women's tears and enables them to look at you again, hopefully and with courage renewed.



After this, three weeks went by. The literary agent upon whose kindly head I pour my short stories announced the sale of my virtuous dog's tale, on the strength of which I took Frieda and Frances to a moving-picture theatre, one Saturday night. The latter's posing for Gordon was always a subject of

conversation. The picture, it appeared, was now quite finished, and we were moving heaven and earth in our endeavors to find something wherewith a woman with a young baby might earn a few dollars. Frances spoke little of her experiences at the studio, except to gratify our curiosity. It was always the same thing. Baby was generally ever so good and Mr. McGrath fairly patient with his occasional relapses from slumbering silence. An impression made its way in my mind to the effect that Gordon rather awed his model. She had watched the picture's growth and this process of creation, utterly new to her, seemed to fill her with some sort of amazement.

"Tell me just what it is like," I asked her, as we sat on the stoop, waiting for Frieda to turn up.

"I suppose it looks like me," she said, doubtfully, "but then, it isn't a portrait, of course. I—I don't think I look just like that. Sometimes he stands in front of me for the longest time and glares, looking more and more disappointed, and all at once he says I've got a Sphynx of a face or a deuce of a mouth, or something just as complimentary. Then he turns to the picture again and changes something, with merely a touch of one of those big brushes, and plasters on another dab of paint and moves off to look at it. After this, he says it's much better, or declares he's spoiled everything, and he lights his pipe and goes to work again. Sometimes he wears the expression of a bulldog worrying a bone, and a minute later he'll be just as nice as nice can be. He's a strange man."

"He certainly is," I assented. "At any rate, I am glad that your experience with him, on the whole, has not proved a disagreeable one."

"Indeed, sometimes I have rather enjoyed it. Yesterday, I didn't. He began, *à propos* of nothing, to tell me about one of your books, and said that your idea about a girl called Laura was so silly he had no patience with you, because you had idealized her until it was rather a caricature than a portrait, and you didn't know any more about women than the baby did. So, of course, I got angry at him and he looked at me, with a smile that was half a sneer, and told me to keep on looking just like that. It seems that I had just the expression he wanted to bring out. When you look too long at the baby,' he said, 'you get the likeness of a girl who's been scolded at table and is going to cry into the soup. I thought I'd wake you up!' I was ever so provoked, and he painted right along without minding me in the least. When he was through, he put on his most polite air and told me that all he had said about that Laura was nonsense, and that she was just a fool girl like any other. As for the picture, he said it would make some fellows sit up and

take notice. He appeared to be intensely pleased with it and thanked me for being so patient with him."

"I am not surprised," I told her. "When our good little friend, Dr. Porter, who is the best-hearted chap you'll meet in a long day's journey, becomes very interested in some dreadful malady and wants to make experiments, I am sure he considers guinea-pigs and rats in the light of mere material. Gordon will not have the slightest compunction about vivisecting a model, if it suits his purpose."

"But he can be ever so kind. He very often is," declared Frances. "On the very first day he told me not to allow myself to get overtired, and he's kept on asking me ever since, if I didn't want to take a rest. Sometimes he made me stop, when I could very well have kept on."

Frieda appeared, coming around the corner under full steam, and we got in the car and went off to the movies. The services of Eulalie had been obtained, to mind the baby for a couple of hours. She likes to do it, and it gives her an opportunity to go into my room and rummage in my bureau drawers, where she hunts for missing buttons with the eagerness of a terrier looking for rats.

When we returned, satiated with picturesque tragedy and second-rate vaudeville, Frances, as usual, flew upstairs, obsessed with the idea that obviously grease-painted and false-whiskered villains such as we had seen on the screen must have penetrated the citadel and stolen her baby. Frieda had left us at the door, and I climbed up in more leisurely fashion, meeting Eulalie on the stairs, loaded with my soiled linen, who bade me good evening, pleasantly.

Frances was waiting for me on her door-sill.

"Paul is all right. Nothing has happened," she confided to me. "Good night, Mr. Cole, and thank you ever so much."

She smiled at me, and I was pleased that I had been able to divert her thoughts for a few moments. How glad I should be if I could render more permanent that little look of happiness she showed for an instant!

On my desk I found a message from Gordon, asking me to come to the studio next day, which was a Sunday, for lunch.

I kept the appointment, walking all the way up. As I passed Bryant Park, I noticed that the leaves were becoming slightly yellow. It was evident that the summer was giving a hint of impending departure. I reached the big building,

just before noon, knowing that I should be somewhat ahead of time, but glad to have a chat with Gordon.

"I know you've been dying to see that canvas," he told me. "That young woman's a wonder. A clever and intelligent woman's the one to really understand what a fellow's after and help him out. I really think she took some interest in the thing. If she isn't otherwise occupied when I return from Southampton, I might possibly make use of her for another week or two. And there's Spinelli, the sculptor, who has a commission for a big group of sirens, for a fountain. He was in here and looked at the picture. Asked about her, he did, but I told him I didn't think she'd pose that way."

"I should think not," I declared.

"You needn't get mad," he retorted. "I've been looking around to see if I could get her something to do. Come in the front room and light your pipe, if you want to. Windows are open. I'm expecting a couple of women in to lunch. Glad you came in early. Yumasa's juggling in the kitchenette; the chap's an artist, when it comes to playing tunes on a chafing-dish. Well, how does it strike you?"

The picture stood before me. It was practically finished. I sank down on the cushioned bench that ran beneath the broad window facing the north and stared at the canvas.

"Great Heavens, Gordon!" I exclaimed.

"It hits right out from the shoulder, doesn't it," he said. "Ever see anything much more alive than this?"

"She's going to lift her eyes from the baby," I answered. "She's going to indulge in that little half-timid and half-boastful look of the young mother challenging the whole world to say that her infant isn't perfection in flesh and blood!"

Gordon made no answer. He was standing before the canvas, his left arm crossed over his breast with the right elbow resting upon it and the square bluish chin in the grasp of long thin fingers.

"You've evidently stuck to the model a great deal," I commented further, "but you've also idealized, made poetry of her."

"And you're talking like a donkey," my friend told me, rather impatiently. "I simply have better eyes than you. Of course, I suppose you've seen a lot of her,

for she seems to think the sun rises and sets on you, but you haven't studied every bit of her face as I've done. I've idealized nothing at all, but my own appreciation of her, and perhaps a trick or two, have caught you. The light came right through this open window, naturally, and caused that glint of the fluffy ends of hair, like powdered sunlight dusted over the dark chestnut. It also threw those strong high lights over the edges of the features. Then, I stuck those roses between her and the window and they gave the reflected tints. It's just a portrait, you old idiot, and nothing else, except perhaps for the fancy shawl. Of course, everything that wasn't directly illumined was in subdued tones, which account for the softness. You may think it's rather ideal, but that's only because I saw her right and got an effective pose. Hang it all, man! If I gave you a pond and a bunch of trees and blue hills back of them, you might describe them accurately, and yet make the picture an interesting one, in one of those fool stories of yours."

"She is very beautiful," I said, knowing that he expected no direct answer to his tirade.

"If she hadn't been, I shouldn't have bothered with her," he replied, in a tone that rather rasped on my feelings. "That's just what's the matter with her; she's a good-looker and you daren't change anything. If I were to use her again for anything important, fellows would ask if I intend to stick to the same old model, all my life. If I get her to pose just once more, it will be about the end of her usefulness to me, and I'd do it just for the fun of making another study of an interesting type, something to stick among the unframed things piled up against the wall and show people, after this one's sold."

He moved off to get a cigarette from the small square stool on which he keeps brushes and tubes, leaving me to stare in great desolation at the picture of Frances and her baby. So he's going to sell it! Indeed, the more I looked at it the better I realized that it was the woman herself, described by a master. He had naturally seen things I had not noticed, that was all. I think I've never had a great desire for money, but the idea was very irksome that her portrait would be sold and that it would hang on some rich man's wall, stared at only by people merely concerned with the beauty their dollars had bought.

It is, perhaps, just as well that I have some sense of humor. The idea of this wonderful thing hanging in my rather dingy room suddenly struck me as rather incongruous. As well think of a necklace of brilliants about some ragged pauper's neck. To the best of my belief I have never envied the people who can

afford to possess the gauds I have sometimes admired in the windows of shops, in which only the rich can ever deal. Why this sudden obsession of a desire to have that picture of the young woman where I could look at it, daily, and delight in its perfection? I have often thought that in my den or in her own room she is as nearly out of place as her picture would be. She impresses one as being able to lend further grace to the most splendid dwelling-place.

Once more I catch myself communing with my folly. After all, Madame Dupont is just a woman; her smile gives charm to her surroundings. When she sits in my old Morris chair, she converts it into the throne of beautiful motherhood and the place into a palace of grace. Why should I care for daubs, for splashes of paint never so cleverly put on, since I can see the model from time to time and rejoice that she counts me among her friends?

"You're the grumpiest old curmudgeon I ever knew," said Gordon, interrupting my cogitations. "You haven't said a word for ten minutes. And so you like it, do you?"

"You've never done anything half so good," I affirmed.

"To tell you the truth, I've a notion I've happened to do something pretty big," he said, nodding. "But a fellow's apt to get hypnotized by his own work, sometimes. I'll have to stop looking at the thing. It'll stay here while I go off to the country for a few weeks and, when I come back, I'll have the right perspective again. But I know it's devilish good. I feel as I did once at the *Salon*, when I got the *Mention Honorable* for that codfish and lobster on a marble table. You know, the one Tilson bought. I knew it was right, as soon as I'd finished it."

Mutely, I committed him to the devil and all his fallen angels. What had this picture to do with still-life in a fishmonger's shop? Hang it, I really believe Gordon has no soul! Or can it be a part of the pose inseparable from him, of which he certainly is sometimes unconscious?

At this moment, the bell rang and Yumasa came out of some cubby and rushed to the outer door. Gordon followed him and warmly welcomed a rather stout lady of uncertain age and very youthful hair, after which he held out his hand to the original of Miss Van Rossum's portrait.

"The steamer was awfully early," explained the young lady, "but she took forever to dock. Don't you think we were awfully good to come in town on such a warm day? I could have played thirty-six holes, you know, but, of course, we hadn't

seen Dad for a long time. Mamma asked him to come with us, but he said he'd have to run over to the Club. He'll join us here at three."

"Let me see, he was gone four months, wasn't he?" said Gordon.

"Yes, something like that," answered the mother, holding up a tortoise-shell lorgnette and looking at me.

"I want to introduce my friend, David Cole, Mrs. Van Rossum," hastened Gordon. "Miss Van Rossum, David is my very best pal. He's the novelist, you know."

"How very interesting!" clamored the young lady. "Gordon has given me two of your books to read. Now that I have met you, I shall certainly have to begin them. You see, there is so much to do in summer, Mr. Cole."

"Indeed there is, Miss Van Rossum," I assented. "I hardly find time even to look over the morning paper."

"Oh! Newspapers are such rubbish," she declared, airily.

"Why, Sophia!" cried Mrs. Van Rossum. "One of them had your picture last week."

"It was rotten," said Miss Sophia, with some firmness.

"Oh, my dear! Why will you use such dreadful language?" the mother reproved her.

"That's all right, Ma, every one says it now."

Miss Van Rossum, having thus established the status of her vocabulary, at least to her own satisfaction, took a few steps across the big studio and stopped before the picture.

"Oh! I say! Did you do that, Gordon?" she asked. "Isn't she a stunner? Was it her own baby or did she borrow it? Cunning little mite, isn't it?"

"A study from a model," Gordon informed her. "Yes, it is her own baby."

The older lady also came forward and inspected the painting.

"Of course, you must have flattered her a great deal," she opined. "You have *such* an imagination, my dear Mr. McGrath!"

"It isn't a patch on David's," he replied. "Novelists can beat painters all hollow at that sort of thing."

"I'm awfully hungry," interrupted Miss Van Rossum. "Had to get up at an unearthly hour to come down and meet Dad."

At once we went to the small table in the next room. The flowers were exquisite. The young lady crunched radishes, with enthusiasm, and spoke disparagingly of a certain hackney which, according to her, had unfairly been awarded a blue ribbon at Piping Rock, gaining a decision over her own palfrey. Also, she discussed Mrs. Pickley-Sanderson's form at tennis and spoke of the new shotgun her father had brought over for her, from England.

"What's your handicap at golf, Mr. Cole?" she asked me, graciously.

"I'm afraid David's a fossil," put in Gordon. "He's utterly ignorant of the most important things of life."

"What a pity," she sympathized. "And how do you manage to spend the time?"

"I—I don't spend it, Miss Van Rossum," I answered, inanely. "I try to save it and make it last as long as possible."

"How funny," she declared, and gave me up as hopeless, directing the remainder of her conversation at Gordon.

Finally, I took my leave, conscious that I had been asinine in my remarks and had made a deplorable impression. Upon the picture I cast one more look before leaving. Those wonderful eyes of Frances were directed towards the baby, of course, but for an instant I felt that she was about to raise them and smile at me. At any rate she doesn't consider me as a useless incumbrance of the earth because I can't play golf or shoot birds. She is restful and gentle, whereas Miss Van Rossum appears to me to have the soothing qualities of a healthy bass drum. But then, I may be mistaken.

CHAPTER VIII

WE TAKE AN EXCURSION

The day was a hot one. In Gordon's studio a slight breeze had blown in and mingled with the scent of the flowers with which his table was adorned, and the behavior of my collar had been of the best. The ladies, secure in the absence of starched things such as we men throttle ourselves with, had been pictures of comfortable coolness. But in the street I plunged in an atmosphere of sodden heat and refused to obey the instinct that usually leads me to walk whenever I am not pressed for time. This happens often, for the productive hours of a writer are few, leaving many to be employed in alleged thoughts. Of these the most harrowing lie in the fact that a laborer can dig for eight hours a day, whereas helplessness comes to me after writing a few pages.

I took the car, turning in my mind the observations I had made in the studio. Several times I had heard Miss Van Rossum call my friend by his first name, and the mother had manifested no surprise. They are probably old acquaintances. I think he once told me that he had first met them in Paris. For aught I know, however, he may have dandled her on his knees when she was a child. The process now would be lacking in comfort, for she outweighs him by a good thirty pounds. Her forearms seem larger and just as hard as those of Frieda's pugilistic model. And then, Gordon is a misogynist and considers the feminine form divine from a chilly, artistic standpoint. From this I judged that Miss Van Rossum is a young lady who calls every man she meets two or three times by his first name. Gordon certainly doesn't mind it, but then, he got five thousand for the portrait, a sum that excuses some lack of formality.

The young woman's looks are undeniable. She's an utterly handsome creature and, as far as I have been able to see, accepts the fact as she does the family fortune. It is something due to a Van Rossum, and she is too ladylike to boast of such advantages. This serves to make her very simple and natural. Like many of the mortals built on a generous scale she is good tempered. I wondered that she had asked so few questions in regard to the model of the picture she had seen. Practically, she had come, looked and turned away to the contemplation of scrambled eggs with truffles, followed by squabs. True, she had inquired

whether the baby belonged to the model. To Pygmalion his sculptured beauty came to life, but from the young lady's standpoint I think that the purchased beauty that is to be changed into limned or chiselled grace must be already considered to have turned to paint or stone. If I had declared that a model was probably a thing of pulsing blood and quivering nerves, it is likely that she would have opened her fine blue eyes in surprise. But then, most of us, subconsciously, are apt to feel that those we deem beneath us in position or talent or virtue can really possess but the outward semblance of humanity.

The foregoing platitudes came to me, I think, because I actually resented the scanty attention they had paid to Frances. They had looked at the "Mother and Child," and approved. The signature made it a valuable work of art and, as such, had awakened a polite interest. But then, after all, it was worth but a few thousand dollars, and a Van Rossum couldn't very well go into ecstasies over an article of such moderate worth.

Poor Frances! She has come down to the rank of the women who stand behind counters till ready to drop; of those who toil in spite of aching heads and weary limbs. It is appalling to think of men by the million considered as food for cannon, but it seems just as cruel on the part of fate to designate women in equal numbers as carriers of burdens, destined for most of their lives to bear pain and weariness and the constant effort to smile in spite of these.

And then, Frances is further punished on account of that little child. It hangs about her neck, a heavy treasure. She has fulfilled the most glorious purpose of womanhood, and, for the time being, her reward lies in the fact that she can scarce find an occupation that will keep body and soul together. There is no room for sprouting manhood in workrooms, in offices, in any of the places wherein only the ripe are of avail to be squeezed into the vintage of the prosperity destined to a few. Her gift of voice and her inheritance of beauty have served but to bring bitterness. Had she possessed a shrill voice and ordinary looks, there would have been no going abroad, no love for a kindred artistic soul, no tiny infant to weep over. By this time she might have been a nice schoolmarm, conscious of superiority over the small flock in her care and tranquil in the expectation of a modest salary. Also, there might have been dreams of a plush-covered parlor in a little home, some day, when honest John or Joe should at last decide to let her teach little pupils of her own providing. I suppose that such dreams must come to all. Even the little cripple in the library, the other day, who was looking at the fine girl who never noticed him, indulges in them, and who shall say that they do not brighten some of his hours even if, at

other times, they deepen his darkness.

Gordon seems to me like the only exception I know to the rule I have just formulated. He has the brain of an artist, but the soul of an actuary, and, sometimes, I wish I were not so fond of him. The way he speaks of Frances actually revolts me. For another week or two he may, perhaps, make use of her, forsooth! But he must not indulge such weakness too long, for fear he may be considered as a man of one model. He has plucked the flower of her beauty and spread it on canvas, destined to bring forth admiration and dollars. But now, like squeezed out paint tubes and worn out brushes she may be discarded. He has obliged me, and made a good speculation. Next week he will be playing golf and cultivating damsels and dowagers who may desire immortality in paint. On the putting-green he may obtain commissions, and in the tennis court inveigle some white-flanneled banker into leaving his facial characteristics to posterity. I could have forgiven him, if he had shown a little real enthusiasm in his model and deplored his inability to employ her further. After all, she has inspired him to great accomplishment and he is a cold-blooded opportunist, in spite of our mutual fondness. The last word I heard from him as he saw me to the door was a whispered one, as he jerked his head towards the studio, where we had left the ladies.

"I'm going to do the old girl this fall," he said.

The man has put all of his art and wonderful taste into his picture of Frances. Just as hard he will toil over the fat face of the good lady he thus disrespectfully alluded to. It may, perhaps, pay him better. The man's temperature, if my young friend Porter took it, would probably turn out to be that of a fish.

My thoughts made me forget the heat, but I arrived home in a dilapidated state of moisture and with a face thoroughly crimsoned. As soon as I reached my room I changed my stiff shirt and collar for a softer and lighter garment of alleged silk, purchased at a bargain sale. When I came out, Frances's door was opened and I looked in. She was sitting in the armchair, with the baby in her lap, and the smile she greeted me with could do little to conceal the fact that she had been a prey to unhappy thoughts.

"Isn't it hot?" I observed, with scant originality.

"It is dreadful," she answered, "and—and I wonder if Baby suffers from it. Do you think he is looking pale?"

At once, I inwardly decided that he was. The idea would probably not have entered my head without her suggestion, but an uneasy feeling came over me, born probably of reading something in the paper about infant mortality. I took a blessed refuge in prevarication.

"He is looking splendidly," I told her. "But they take sick babies and give them long jaunts out on the bay, with nurses and doctors. If that sort of thing can cure an ailing infant, it must make a healthy one feel like a fighting-cock. Get ready, and we'll take the boat to Coney Island and spend a couple of hours at sea. It will put better color in the little man's cheeks and do no harm to your own. I'm craving for the trip, come along and hurry up!"

She began the usual objections, to which I refused any attentions. I suspect I have a little of the bully in my nature. At any rate we sallied forth, soon afterwards, and went to the Battery, where we percolated through the crowd into a couple of folding seats on the upper deck.

"Oh! It is such a blessed relief," she said, after the boat had started and made a breeze for us, since, on the water, none but the tiniest flaws rippled the surface. I called her attention to the remarkable sight of Manhattan fading away behind us in a haze that softened the lines, till they appeared to be washed in with palest lavenders and pinks.

"The insolence of wealth and the garishness of its marts are disappearing," I told her. "Our moist summer air, so worthless to breathe and cruel to ailing babes, is gilding a pill otherwise often hard to swallow. All about us are people, most of whom live away from the splendors we behold. Some of them, like ourselves, burrow in semi-forgotten streets and some dwell on the boundary where humanity rather festers than thrives. They are giving themselves up to the enjoyment of a coolness which, an hour ago, appeared like an unrealizable dream. Let us do likewise."

Frances smiled at me, indulgently. Like all really good women, she has an inexhaustible patience with the vagaries and empty remarks of a mere man. Women are more concerned with the practicalities of life. About us the fairer sex was apparently in the majority and the discussions carried on around us concerned garments, the price of victuals and the evil ways of certain husbands. Young ladies, provided with male escorts, sprinkled poetry, or at least doggerel, over the conversation of more staid matrons. Their remarks and exclamations seldom soared to lofty heights, but in them there was always the undertone of

present pleasure and anticipated joys. One thin little thing, who had mentioned a ribbon-counter, looked up with something akin to awe at a broad-faced and pimply youth, who spoke hungrily of a potential feast of Frankfurter sausages. I have no doubt that to her he represented some sort of Prince Charming. Close to her a buxom maiden addressed a timid-looking giant, all arms and legs, and described the bliss of shooting the chutes. It was evident that he aspired to the dignity and emoluments of a gay suitor, but was woefully new or incompetent at the game. She was helping him to the best of her ability, with a perseverance and courage entitling her to my respect. In her companion she must have discerned the makings of a possible husband or, at least, the opportunity to practise a talent of fascination she thinks ought not to lie fallow.

"And how is Baby Paul enjoying himself?" I asked my companion.

"For the time being, he is asleep," she answered, "and so, I suppose, is having an excellent time. He's an exceedingly intelligent child and of the happiest disposition. I'm sure he is aware that he has a mother to love him, and that's enough to keep him contented."

"Of course," I assented. "That somewhere there is a good woman to love him is all that a baby or a grown man needs to know in order to enjoy perfect bliss. Those who are fortunate enough to reach such a consummation are the elect of the world."

She looked at me with a smile, and I saw a question hanging on her lips. It was probably one I had heard very often. Frieda and some others, when hard put to it for a subject of conversation, are apt to ask me why I don't get married. I tell them that the only proof of the pudding is the eating and that, strangely enough, all the good wives I know are already wedded. Moreover, I know that very few women would deign to look with favor upon me. I have always deemed myself a predestined bachelor, a lover of other people's children and a most timid venturer among spinsters.

Frances, however, permitted the question to go unasked, which showed much cleverness on her part. She recognized the obviousness of the situation. As we went on, she gazed with admiration upon the yachts, many of which were lying becalmed, but picturesque. The big tramps at anchor awakened in her the wonder we all feel at the idea of sailing for faraway shores where grow strange men and exotic fruits. Then, when the steamer had turned around the great point of the island and her eyes caught the big open sea, I saw them filling, gradually. She

was thinking of the gallant lad who had fallen for his first and greatest mother. Recollections came to her of sailing away with him, with hopes and ambitions rosier than the illumined shores before us, that were kissed by the sun under a thin covering veil of mist. She remembered the days of her toil, rewarded at last by the ripening of her divine gift, and the days of love crowned by the little treasure on her lap. But now, all that had been very beautiful in her life was gone, saving the tiny one to whom she could not even sing a lullaby and whose very livelihood was precarious.

I knew that when she was in this mood it was better to say nothing or even appear to take no notice. Suddenly, a child running along the deck fell down, a dear little girl I ran to and lifted in my arms. Confidingly, she wept upon my collar which, fortunately, was a soft one. A broad shouldered youth made his way towards me.

"Hand her over, Mister," he said, pleasantly, "she's one o' mine."

He took the child from me, tenderly, and I looked at him, somewhat puzzled, but instant recognition came to him.

"Say," he declared, breezily, "you's the guy I seen th' other day when I wuz havin' me picture took."

He extended a grateful hand, which I shook cordially, for he was no less a personage than Kid Sullivan, who would have been champion, but for his defeat. On my last call upon Frieda at her studio I had seen him in the lighter garb of Orion, with a gold fillet about his brow, surmounted by a gilt star. I bade him come with me, but a couple of steps away, to where Frances sat, and I had left a small provision of chocolate drops.

"This," I said, "is my friend Mr. Sullivan. The child belongs to him, and I have come to see whether I cannot find consolation for her in the box of candy."

Frances bowed pleasantly to him, and he removed his cap, civilly.

"Glad to meet ye, ma'am," he said. "Thought I'd take the wife and kids over to the Island. The painter-lady found me a job last week. It's only a coal wagon, but it's one o' them five-ton ones with three horses. They're them big French dappled gray ones."

I looked at Frances, fearing that this mention of his steeds might bring back to her the big Percherons of Paris, the omnibuses climbing the Montmartre hill or

rattling through the Place St. Michel, that is the throbbing heart of the Latin Quarter. But she is a woman, as I may have mentioned a hundred times before this. Her interest went out to the child, and she bent over to one side and took a little hand within hers.

"I hope you were not hurt," she said, tenderly.

At the recollection of the injury the little mouth puckered up for an instant. Diplomatically, I advanced a chocolate and the crisis was averted.

"She's a darling, Mr. Sullivan," ventured Frances.

"Yes'm, that's what me and Loo thinks," he assented. "But you'd oughter see Buster. Wait a minute!"

About ten seconds later he returned with a slightly bashful and very girlish little wife, who struggled under the weight of a ponderous infant.

"Mr. Cole, Loo," the Kid introduced me, "and—and I guess Mrs. Cole."

"No," I objected, firmly. "There is no Mrs. Cole. I beg to make you acquainted with Mrs. Dupont. Please take my chair, Mrs. Sullivan, you will find it very comfortable. My young friend, may I offer you a cigar?"

"I'm agreeable, sir," said the young man, graciously. "I've give up the ring now, so I don't train no more."

The two of us leaned against the rail, while the women entered upon a pleasant conversation. At first, Frances was merely courteous and kindly to the girl with the two babies, but in a few minutes she was interested. From a fund of vast personal experience little Mrs. Sullivan, who looked rather younger than most of the taller girls one sees coming out of the public schools, bestowed invaluable information in regard to teething. Later, she touched upon her experience in a millinery shop.

"I seen you was a lady, soon as I peeped at yer hat," she declared, in a high-pitched, yet agreeable, voice. "There's no use talking, it ain't the feathers, not even them ecrets and paradises, as make a real hat. It's the head it goes on to."

As she made this remark, I stared at the youthful mother. She was unconscious of being a deep and learned philosopher. She had stated a deduction most true, an impression decidedly profound. The hat was the black one bought in Division

Street, where the saleswomen come out on the sidewalk and grab possible customers by the arm, so Frieda told me.

Frances smiled at her. In her poor, husky voice she used terms of endearment to Mrs. Sullivan's baby. It was eleven months and two weeks old, we were informed, and, therefore, a hoary-headed veteran as compared to Baby Paul. Had they been of the same age, there might have been comparisons, and possibly some trace of envy, but in the present case there could be nothing but mutual admiration.

"Is you folks going ashore?" asked the Kid.

"We were thinking of remaining on the boat," I told him.

"Say, what's the matter with goin' on the pier and sittin' down for a while? 'Tain't as cool as the boat, but it's better'n town, and the later ye gets back, the cooler it'll be."

Mrs. Sullivan confirmed her husband's statements. I looked enquiringly at Frances, who listened willingly to the words of experience. In a few minutes we landed and found a comfortable seat.

Suddenly, as we were chatting pleasantly, there passed before us Mr. O'Flaherty, of the second floor back. He wore a cap surmounted by goggles and an ample gray duster, and with him walked several other large and florid-looking gentlemen. His eyes fell on Frances and then upon me. I thanked goodness that her head was turned so that she could not possibly have seen the odious wink and the leer he bestowed upon me.

"Say," whispered Mr. Sullivan, in my ear. "D'ye see that big guy look at ye? Made ye mad, didn't he? For two cents I'd have handed him one."

"My good friend," I whispered back, "none of us are beyond reach of the coarse natured."

"That's so," he answered, "but a wallop in the jaw's good for 'em."

An hour later we took the boat back. The little girl slept all the way home, in her father's arms. Frances gazed dreamily on the water. Little Mrs. Sullivan sat on a chair very close to her husband, with the baby secure on her lap. Her head soon rested on the young prizefighter's shoulder, and she dozed off. I am sure he endured exquisite discomfort with pins and needles rather than disturb her.

And I, like a fool, worried on account of a man perpetually scented with gasoline and spotted with transmission grease who had taken the infernal liberty of winking at me because of my being with poor Frances, taking the air on a proletarian pier.

"The world," Gordon had told me, one day, "utterly refuses to permit a man and woman to be merely good friends. Since the days of Noah's Ark, it has been recognized as an impossibility, and, therefore, society has ever frowned down upon any attempt in so foolish a direction."

I replied hotly that the world was evil-minded, at times, and he retorted that the world was all right, but some men were jackasses. He remarked that Carlyle had been too lenient when he declared that his countrymen were mostly fools. But then, Carlyle was insular, after all, and unduly favored the inhabitants of his isle, as any British subject would. Nearly all men all over the world were fools, Gordon asserted. Coyotes and foxes had an instinctive dread of traps, but men walked into them so innocently that merely to behold them was enough to drive a man to drink.

After all, I don't care what O'Flaherty and such cattle think! As long as I can save Frances, or any other good woman, from shedding one more tear than has been ordained for her, I shall do so. I refuse to be envious of the intelligence of foxes and coyotes, and I will always resent uncouthness and mean thoughts.

She looked rather tired when we came down the steps of the elevated road. I begged her to let me take Baby Paul in my arms, and she finally consented, after first declining. It did not awaken him, and we reached the house in becoming tranquillity. Some of our fellow lodgers were on the steps and greeted us civilly. They were the three young men and the two girls. Thank goodness they appeared to be too unversed in the wickedness of this world to entertain such ideas as must have passed through the bullet-head of O'Flaherty!



On the next day, I went up to Gordon's studio, and I confess it was with the purpose of looking again at that picture. He was superintending the packing of his suit cases and a trunk. I told him something of my experience, my indignation throbbing in my throat.

"You're a donkey, Dave," he consoled me. "What right or title have you to the

belief that the millennium has come? I suppose the poor girl is entitled to some commiseration, for her troubles are in the nature of a series of accidents and misfortunes which no one could foresee. Yours, on the other hand, are simply due to congenital feebleness of some parts of your gray matter. By-by, old fellow, my taxi's waiting for me!"



CHAPTER IX

I HEAR RUMORS ABOUT GORDON

When we reached the top floor, Frances took the baby from me, while I lit her gas-jet. She kissed Baby Paul effusively, and placed him on the bed, after which she turned to me.

"It has done him ever so much good," she declared. "See how splendidly he looks now. Tell me, why are you so kind to me?"

Women have been in the habit of propounding riddles ever since the world began. This was a hard one, indeed, to answer, because I didn't know myself. I could hardly tell her that it was because, at least theoretically, every beautiful woman is loved by every man, nor could I say that it was because she had inspired me with pity for her.

"We have had a few pleasant moments together," I replied, "and I am ever so glad that Baby Paul has derived so much benefit. The kindness you speak of is mere egotism. I have given myself the great pleasure of your company. I do not suppose you realize how much that means to a chap whose usual confidant is his writing machine, and whose society, except at rare intervals, is made up of old books. My dear child, in this transaction I am the favored one."

I was surprised to see a little shiver pass over her frame.

"Oh! Mr. Cole, sometimes I can't help feeling such wonder, such amazement, when I think of how differently all these things might have come to pass. I—I was going off to the hospital on the next day. I should surely have met kindness and good enough care, but no one can understand what it was to me to have Frieda come in, with her sweet sympathetic face. It was as if some loving sister had dropped down to me from Heaven, and—and she told me about you. I—I remember her very words; she said that you were a man to be trusted, clean of soul as a child, the only one she had ever met into whose keeping she would entrust all that she holds most dear."

"Frieda is much given to exaggeration," I remarked, uneasily.

"She is not. Think of what my feelings would have been on the day when they would have sent me out of the hospital, with not a friend in the world, not a kindly heart to turn to!"

"My dear child," I said, "I believe that, if you have not been altogether forgotten by the gods and goddesses, it was because you were worthy of their kindest regard. I am confident that our little trip on the water will make you sleep soundly, and I trust that you will have pleasant dreams."

Yes! I occasionally call her my dear child, now. Neither my forty years nor the thinness of my thatch really entitles me to consider myself sufficiently venerable to have been her parent. But I am the least formal of men and find it difficult to call her Madame or Mrs. Dupont. If I did so now, I think that she would wonder if I was aggrieved against her, for some such foolish reason as women are always keen on inventing and annoying themselves with. Once in a while I even call her Frances, but it is a habit I ought not to permit to grow upon me. There are altogether too many O'Flaherty's in the world, masculine, feminine and neuter.

She closed her door, after a friendly pressure of our hands, and I went to my room to write. The ideas, however, came but slowly and, upon arrival, were of the poorest. I, therefore, soon took my pipe, put my feet on the window ledge and listened to a distant phonograph. At last, came silence, a gradual extinguishing of lights in windows opposite, and yawns from myself. I must repeat these trips, they make for sound slumber.

On the next day I took it upon myself to go to the small house in Brooklyn where Frances had formerly boarded. She was anxious to know if any letters might have come for her that had not been forwarded. She had wondered why her husband's parents had never written to announce the dreadful news which, however, had been briefly confirmed on inquiry at the Consulate. In the eastern section of our Greater City, which is about as familiar to me as the wilds of Kamchatka, I promptly lost myself. But kindly souls directed me, and I reached a dwelling that was all boarded up and bore a sign indicating that the premises were to be let. Thence, I went to a distant real estate office where the people were unable to give me any indication or trace of the former tenants, who had rented out rooms.

On my return I found Eulalie rummaging among my bureau drawers. She held up two undergarments and bade me observe the perfection of her darning,

whereupon I assured her that she was a large, fat pearl without price.

"*Oui, Monsieur*," she assented, without understanding me in the least. "Madame Dupont has gone to my cousin, Madame Smith. Her name was Carpaux, like mine, but she married an American painter."

"An artist?" I inquired.

"*Oui, Monsieur*. He used to paint and decorate and put on wallpaper. Then, he went away to Alaska after gold and never sent his address. So Félicie has opened a cleaning and dyeing shop and is doing very well. She has not heard from Smith for sixteen years, so that she thinks he is, perhaps, lost. She has told me that she wanted an American person, who could speak French, to wait on customers and keep the books and send the bills and write names and addresses on the packages. She lives in the back of the store. There is a big bed that would be very commodious for putting the baby on. Madame Dupont has gone to see. Next week I go to work there also and I will keep an eye on the baby when Madame is at the counter."

I know the shop; it is on Sixth Avenue, not far away. In the window always hang garments intended to show the perfection of dyeing and cleaning reached by the establishment. There is a taxidermist on one side of it and a cheap restaurant on the other. When weary of the odor of benzine and soap suds, Frances will be able to stand on the door-sill for a moment and inhale the effluvia of fried oysters or defunct canaries.

Eulalie left my room, and I remained there, appalled. I wish I could have found some better or more pleasant occupation for Frances.

When the latter returned, she looked cheerfully at me and announced that she had accepted the position tendered to her.

"I shall be able to have Baby with me," she explained, "and it will keep our bodies and souls together. I hope I shall suit Madame Smith. Do you know anything about how to keep books?"

At once I took paper and pencil and launched into a long explanation, undoubtedly bewildering her by the extent of my ignorance. Then I went out and got her a little book on the subject, over which she toiled fiercely for two days, after which she went to work, bearing little Paul in her arms, and returned at suppertime, looking very tired.

"It is all right," she announced. "Félicie is a very nice, hard-working woman, and tells me that Baby is a very fine child. I'll get along very well."

When a woman is really brave and strong, she makes a man feel like rather small potatoes. Her courage and determination were fine indeed, and I must say my admiration for her grew apace. After the hopes she had entertained; after the years spent in study, the fall must have seemed a terrible one to her. Yet she accepted the pittance offered to her, gratefully and with splendid pluck.

A week after this Gordon ran up to town in somebody's car, to make a selection of cravats at the only shop in New York where, according to him, a man could buy a decent necktie.

"Your limitations are frightful," I told him. "I know of a thousand."

"I know you do," he replied, "and most of your ties would make a dog laugh. The rest of them would make him weep. Come along with me for a bite of lunch at the Biltmore."

Over the Little Neck clam cocktails he announced some great triumphs he had achieved at golf.

"And I can nearly hold my own with Miss Van Rossum at tennis," he said. "She's a wonder at it. We got arrested last Friday on the Jericho turnpike for going fifty miles an hour, but she jollied the policeman so that he only swore to thirty, and we were let off with a reprimand. Good thing she was at the wheel. If I'd been driving, I'd have been fined the limit."

"You would have deserved it," I told him.

"I think the old judge knew her father; pretty big gun on the island, you know. By the way, what's become of—of the Murillo young woman?"

I explained to him how she was occupied.

"The deuce! You could certainly have found something easier for her to do, if you'd tried hard enough," he reproached me.

"I did all I could, and so did Frieda, but our hunt was in vain, on account of the baby."

"Yes, there's that plagued infant," he said, reflectively.

"I'll be glad, if you can shed the light of your genius on the situation, old man," I told him. "Among your enormous circle of friends——"

"You go to the devil! I'm not going to have people saying that Gordon McGrath is so interested in his model that he's trying to get rid of her by placing her somewhere or other. No, old boy, if I should hear of anything, I will let you know, but I'm not going to hunt for it. Do you know, that woman's got a wonderful face. Did you ever see such a nose and mouth? When she opens those big eyes of hers and looks at you and speaks in that hoarse voice, it's quite pathetic. I—I think I'll take her on again, for a short time."

"I'm afraid you won't," I replied. "I wouldn't advise her to lose steady employment for the purpose of posing a couple of weeks for you."

"I suppose not. How do you like that Spanish omelette?"

Thus he cut short all reference to Frances, and, soon afterwards, we parted on the Avenue.



During the next two months there was little worthy of being chronicled. Frances, I think, grew a little thinner, but always asserted that she was in the best of health. Baby Paul was rapidly accumulating weight, and Frieda and I offered him a small baby carriage, which folded up most cleverly and took little room in the shop or at home. It was on the occasion of the completion of his fourth month that the presentation was made by my dear old friend.

"There, my dear, is a gimcrack thing David insisted on buying. The man at the store swore it couldn't possibly fold up suddenly with the baby in it. And now what do you think of my having that old blue dress of mine dyed black?"

The reply of Frances was a heartfelt one as to the perambulator, but discouraging in regard to the garment.

"Oh, never mind," said Frieda. "I'll make paint rags out of it, then. I only thought I'd help out the shop. Now let us get David to give us a cup of tea."

We were talking cheerfully together, when Gordon dropped in from the skies, most unexpectedly. We were glad to see him and, since four people in my room crowded it considerably, my friend took a seat on the bed. I had first met him in

the Bohemia of the Latin Quarter, when his necktie out-floated all others and any one prophesying that he would become the portrayer in ordinary to the unsubmerged would have been met with incredulous stares. At that time, for him, Béranger was the only poet and Murger the only writer. And now his clothes are built, while his shoes are designed. Yet, in my top floor, he showed some of the old Adam, joining gladly in our orgy of tea and wafers and utterly forgetting all pose. I noticed that he looked a great deal at Frances, but it was no impertinent stare. She was quite unconscious of his scrutiny or, if at all aware of it, probably deemed it a continuation of his method of artistic study. She had become accustomed to it in his studio.

"David tells me that you are lost to me as a model," he said, suddenly, with a sort of eagerness that showed a trace of disappointment.

"I must now plod along without interruption," she answered.

"I had thought of making another study. The finished thing is all right, but one doesn't come across a face like yours very often."

"No," put in Frieda, "and it's a good thing for you that you've had the exclusive painting of it. If she had continued as a model and been done by every Tom, Dick and Harry——"

"True. Since I can't paint her again, I'm glad no one else will. No, thank you, I won't have any more tea. How's the new picture, Frieda?"

For a few minutes the two monopolized the conversation. To some extent they spoke a jargon of their own, to which Frances and I listened with little understanding.

"And what do you think of it, Dave?" he asked, turning abruptly to me.

"It is a beautiful thing," I answered. "If I had Frieda's imagination and her sense of beauty, I should be the great, undiscovered American novelist. She makes one believe that the world is all roses and violets and heliotropes, touched by sunshine and kissed by soft breezes. It is tenanted only by sprites and godlings, according to her magic brush."

"The world is no such thing," he retorted, sharply.

"The world is what one's imagination, one's sentiment and one's conscience makes it," I asserted, "at least during some precious moments of every lifetime."

"Oh! I know. You can sit at that old machine of yours and throw your head back and see more upon your ceiling than the cracked plaster, and Frieda does the same thing. Now my way is to take real flesh and blood, yes, and dead lobsters and codfish and dowagers and paint them in the best light I can get on them, but it's the light I really see."

"It is nothing of the kind," I emphatically disclaimed. "It is the light your temperament sees, and your rendering of it is not much closer to truth than Caruso's 'Celeste Aïda' can be to an ordinary lover's appeal. There is no such thing as realism in painting, while, in literature, it has chiefly produced monsters."

"Isn't he a dear old donkey?" Gordon appealed to the two women.

"One of those animals once spoke the truth to a minor prophet," remarked Frances, quietly.

"You are quoting the only recorded exception," he laughed, "but the hit was a good one. Yet Dave is nothing but an incurable optimist and a chronic wearer of pink glasses."

"That, I think, is what makes him so loveable," put in Frieda, whereat Frances smiled at her, and I might have blushed had I not long ago lost the habit.

Gordon rose, with the suddenness which characterizes his movements, and declared he must run away at once. He shook hands all around, hastily, and declined my offer to see him down to the door.

"In Italy," said Frieda, "I have eaten a sauce made with vinegar and sweet things. They call it *agrodolce*, I believe, and the Germans make a soup with beer. Neither of them appeal to me at all. Gordon is a wonderful painter, but he's always trying to mix up art with iconoclasm. It can't spoil his pictures, I'm sure, but it may—what was the expression Kid Sullivan was fond of using? Oh yes, some day it may hand out a jolt to him. He has a perfectly artistic temperament and the greatest talent, but he stirs up with them a dreadful mess of cynicism and cold-blooded calculation. My dear Dave, let you and I stick to our soft colors and minor tones. If either of us ever abandoned them, we should be able to see nothing but dull grays."

"We understand our limitations, Frieda," I told her, "and there is nothing that fits one better to enjoy life. Gordon says that it is all foolishness, and can't

understand that a fellow should walk along a mile of commonplace hedge and stop because he has found a wild rose. The latter, with due respect to him, is as big a truth as the privet, and a pleasanter one."

Presently, Frieda, after consuming a third cup of tea and finishing the crackers, said that she must be going home. I insisted on accompanying her down the stairs and naturally followed her to her domicile, where she informed me that she was going to wash her hair and forbade my entering.

On the other side of the street, on my return, I saw Frances going into Dr. Porter's office. He has prevailed upon her to let him do something to her throat, and she goes in once or twice a week. He has begged her to come as a special and particular favor to him. I'm sure I don't know what he expects to accomplish, for he is somewhat reticent in the matter. Perhaps he may have thought it well to arouse a little hope in her. I am afraid that in her life she sees a good deal of the dull grays Frieda was speaking of.



And now a few more weeks have gone by and the middle of winter has come. On Sunday afternoons we always have tea in my room, except when we go through the same function at Frieda's. To my surprise, Gordon's visits have been repeated a number of times. Frieda and he abuse one another most unmercifully, like the very best of friends, and he persistently keeps on observing Frances. It looks as if she exerted some strange fascination upon him, of which she is perfectly ignorant. He never goes beyond the bounds of the most simple friendliness, but, sometimes, she sharply resents some cynical remark of his, without seeming to disturb him in the least.

Meanwhile, my friend Willoughby Jones has told me that Gordon is doing Mrs. Van Rossum's portrait, while the younger lady roams about the studio and eats chocolates, talking about carburetors and tarpon-tackle. The family will leave soon in search of the balmy zephyrs of Florida. My friend's chatter also included the information that Gordon might soon take a run down there.

"They say he's becoming a captive of her bow and spear," he told me. "It looks as if he were trying to join the ranks of the Four Hundred. It has been said that the Van Rossums, or at least Miss Sophia, show some willingness to adopt him. Wouldn't it be funny?"

Funny! It would be tragic! I can't for an instant reconcile myself to such an idea, for I hardly think that Miss Van Rossum is the sort of young woman who would inspire Gordon with a consuming love. Come to think of it, I have never known him to be in love with any one, so how can I know the kind of fair charmer that will produce in him what the French call the lightning stroke? And then, Willoughby Jones is known as an inveterate and notorious gossip. The whole matter, if not an utter invention, is simply based on Gordon's policy to cultivate the people who can afford to pay five thousand for a full-length portrait. I wonder whether it would not be well for me to give him a word of warning? No! If I did such a thing, he would certainly tell me not to be a donkey, and I should deserve the rebuke.



CHAPTER X

THE WORK LOST

However platitudinous it may sound, I am compelled to remark how the time flies. From the calendar's standpoint there are but three weeks to come before the advent of Spring, and I trust the sprite will be better clad than she is in one of Frieda's pictures. In this particular latitude March is not very apt to temper the wind to such a shorn lamb as smiles out of that painting, clad with Cupid-like garments of infinite grace, but questionable warmth. She should have worn a heavy sweater.

Day by day I have watched the growth of Baby Paul, but it is only on Sundays that I have been able to see much of his mother, who comes home rather weary, as a rule, and always has ever so much sewing to do after her return. I have heard her discuss ways and means with Frieda, till I felt my small allowance of brains positively addling. Together they have been planning tiny garments for the babe and larger ones for themselves, while I sat there conscious of my inferiority and looking at them admiringly, but with something of the understanding of an average lap-dog. I find them very indulgent, however.

Dear me! What a time we had of it at Christmas. My midday meal took place at my sister's, in Weehawken, but the dinner was at Frieda's, where I was permitted to contribute the turkey. It could not be made to penetrate the exiguous oven of the little gas-stove, but we bribed the janitress to cook it for us. I had been in grave consultation with my dear old friend in regard to the toys I might purchase for Baby Paul, being anxious that his first experience of the great day should be a happy one, but Frieda frowned upon woolly lambs, teddy bears and Noah's Arks.

"If you will insist, Dave," she told me, "you can go and buy him a rubber elephant or some such thing, but he is altogether too young to play games. I know you have a sneaking desire to teach him checkers. If you will persist in wasting your money on presents, give me a five-dollar bill and I'll go around and buy him things he really needs. I'll put them in a box and send them with your best love."

"What about Frances?" I asked.

"A good pair of stout boots would be wisest," she informed me, "but perhaps you had better make it flowers, after all. More useful things might remind her too much of present hardship and poverty. A few American Beauties will give her, with their blessed fragrance, some temporary illusion of not being among the disinherited ones of the earth. I—I can give her the boots."

And so we had that dinner, just the three of us together, with Baby Paul just as good as gold and resting on Frieda's sofa. There was a box of candy sent by Kid Sullivan to his benefactress, and, although the contents looked positively poisonous, they came from a grateful heart, and she appreciated them hugely. I had brought a little present of flowers in a tiny silver vase, and they graced the table. I wore a terrible necktie Frieda had presented me with. It was a splendid refecation.

The little dining-room was a thing of delight. From the walls hung many pictures, mostly unframed. They were sketches and impressions that had met favor from their gifted maker and been deemed worthy of the place. The table was covered with a lovely white cloth, all filmy with lace, and there was no lack of pretty silver things holding bonbons and buds. It all gave me a feeling of womanly refinement, of taste mingled with the freedom of an artistic temperament unrestrained by common metes and bounds.

Frances had one of my roses pinned to her waist, and often bent down to inhale its fragrance. When will some profound writer give us an essay on the Indispensability of the Superfluous?

Again we had a feast on New Year's eve, in my room. Gordon, who was going to a house-party at Lakewood, lent me his chafing-dish. I'll say little about the viands we concocted; at least they were flavored with affection and mutual good wishes, with the heartiest hopes for good things to come. It was not very cold, that night, and on the stroke of twelve I threw my window wide open. We listened to the orgy of sound from steam-whistles and tin horns. There floated to us, through the din, a pealing of faraway chiming bells. When I closed the window again, Frieda took the chafing-dish for a housewifely cleaning. Baby Paul had been sleeping on my bed and Frances was kneeling beside him, looking at the sleeping tot. For a moment she had forgotten us and the trivialities of the entertainment, and was breathing a prayer for her man-child.

Thus passed the New Year's eve, and on the next morning Frances was up early,

as usual, and went off to work. I pottered idly about my room till Mrs. Milliken chased me out. On the afternoon of the first Sunday of the year Gordon came in again.

Until last Autumn he had invaded my premises perhaps once in a couple of months, but, now, he is beginning to come as regularly as Frieda herself. He gives me the impression of being rather tired, and I explain this by the fact that he leads too active a life and takes too much out of himself. I am sure few men ever painted harder than he does. When I watch him at his work, it looks very easy, of course, but I know better. His is powerful, creative work, such as no man can accomplish without putting all his energy into his toil. I am often exhausted after a few hours of writing, and I am sure that Gordon also feels the drag and the travail of giving birth to the children of his soul. Then, after a day of this sort of thing, he goes out to the theatres or the Opera and prolongs the night at the club and delves into books, for he is a great reader, especially of what he terms modern thought and philosophy. The first rays of good working light find him again at his canvas, sometimes pleased and sometimes frowning, giving me often the impression of a latter-day Sisyphus.

"I'm getting there," he said to me, one morning, in his studio. "Last year I made thirty-five thousand and this year I'll do better than that. The time is coming soon when I won't have to go around as a sort of drummer for myself. They'll be coming to me and begging me to paint them. I'll do it for six or seven months a year, and, during the remainder of the time, I'll take life easily. My plans are all cut and dried."

"I am glad to hear it, Gordon. You deserve your success. But——"

"Go on," he snapped at me, "I know that everything must be paid for."

"I'm not so sure of that. I was merely about to say that I don't know whether you can be so very sure of being able to take life in such a leisurely way as you hope to."

"Don't you worry, old man," he answered. "I know what's best for me and how to go to work to obtain it."

"I trust you do," I replied. "Well, I'll be going now. See you next Sunday."

"Why next Sunday?" he asked sharply.

"Simply because you've lately acquired the excellent habit of calling on that

day."

"I'll not be there," he declared. "I have other fish to fry."

I took my leave, somewhat surprised. But three days later, as we were taking our habitual Sabbathical refection of tea and biscuits, he appeared again, bearing a box of what he calls the only chocolates in New York fit to eat. But he came in a taxi, for he wouldn't be seen carrying anything but his cane and gloves. For a second, as I looked at him, he seemed slightly embarrassed, although I may have erred in so thinking.

Frieda seized upon the chocolates, greedily. She is one of those dear stout people, who assure you that they hardly ever eat anything and whom one always finds endowed with a fine appetite.

"It's too bad about Baby Paul," she said. "He is yet too young to be stuffed with sweets or amused with toys."

"I presume that a nursling is the only really normal human being," remarked Gordon. "He possesses but the most natural desires, has no ambitions unconnected with feeding and sleeping, and expresses his emotions without concealment. Affectation is foreign to him, and his virtues and vices are still in abeyance."

"Paul," declared Frances, indignantly, "is extremely intelligent and has no vices at all."

"I stand corrected, Mrs. Dupont. He is the exception, of course, and I only spoke in general. Frieda, my dear, won't you be so obliging as to open the piano and play something for us? I don't suppose it will awaken the baby, will it?"

"He just loves music," asserted his mother. "When I play, he often opens his eyes and listens quietly, ever so long. I know that it pleases him, ever so much. His—oh! He must have music in his soul! How—how could it be otherwise?"

Frieda hurried to the piano and opened it, after giving the stool a couple of turns. She began with some Mendelssohn. Frances was holding her baby in her arms, her wonderful head bent towards the little one, with a curve of her neck so graceful that it fascinated me. Gordon was also looking at her with a queer, eager look upon his features. He knew as well as I that she had heard again some vibrant music of former days, had felt the sound-waves that trembled in her own soul, and that, to her, the child represented something issued from wondrous

melodies, a swan's song uplifted to the heavens and bearing with it the plaint of a lost happiness.

"Oh! Frieda, some—something else," she cried. "I—I—Just play some Chopin."

At once Frieda complied. Where on earth does the woman find the ability to play as she does? She tells me that she hardly ever practises, and, in my many visits to her, I have never chanced to find her at the piano, though she possesses a very fair instrument. But I think I understand; what I mistake for technique must chiefly be her wonderful sentiment and the appreciation of beauty that overshadows some faults of execution. Frieda's real dwelling place is in a heaven of her own making, that is all beauty and color and harmony. From there come her painting and her music, which evidently enter her being and flow out at the finger-tips. I have always thought that if her color-tubes had not possessed such an overwhelming attraction for her, she might have become one of the most wonderful musicians of the world.

Gradually, Frances raised her head again, until it finally rested on the back of the armchair, with the eyes half-closed under the spell of Frieda's playing. By this time she had perhaps forgotten the memories evoked by the "Songs Without Words," that had for a moment brought back to her the masterful bow that had made her heart vibrate, for the first time, with the tremulousness of a love being born. Chopin did not affect her in the same way, and she was calm again. Frieda came to the end of the "*Valse Brillante*" and took up the "*Berçeuse*." Then the young mother closed her eyes altogether. The melody brought rest to her, and sweetness with a blessed peace of soul.

When I looked at Gordon, he was still staring, and by this time I thought I knew the reason of his visits. Beyond a peradventure Frances was the lodestone that attracted him. Did her wonderful features suggest to him a new and greater picture? Was he ruminating over the plan of some masterpiece and seeking inspiration from her? It seemed probable indeed. When the idea comes to me for a novel, I am apt to moon about, searching the recesses of my mind, digging in the depths of my experience, staring into a vacancy peopled only by faint shadows that begin to gather form and strength and, finally, I hope, some attributes of humanity. At such times I often fail to recognize friends on the street or, even, I may attempt to read books upside down. Is it possible that Gordon suffers from similar limitations and needs to muse and toil and delve before he can bring out the art that is in him?

Only yesterday I saw in the paper that he led a cotillon at the Van Rossums. Moreover, at the Winter Exhibition I had the shock of my life. I hurried there to see again the "Mother and Child," instead of which I found his signature on the portrait of a railroad president. The papers spoke of it as a wonderful painting, and one of them reproduced it. I freely acknowledge that it deserves all the encomiums lavished upon it, for it is a bold and earnest piece of work. But he has never done anything like the picture of Frances.

I met him there and looked at him, questioningly. He understood me at once.

"I'll get half the financial big guns now," he told me coolly, and left me to greet a millionaire's bride.

I am not so foolish as to think he can be in love with Frances, and I doubt very much whether he is in love with any one else, in spite of the gossip that has reached me. No, he must simply be thinking of some great composition with which he expects, in his own good time, to take the world by storm. And yet, what if I should be mistaken? The mere idea makes me feel very cold and uncomfortable, for no reason that I know of.

When he finally took his leave, he thanked Frieda for playing to us, and said good-by to Frances as perfunctorily as he does everything else. We began to clean up the teacups, and Frieda folded the frivolous little tablecloth she has contributed to my outfit and put it away, while Frances and I quarreled.

"I am not going," she said firmly.

"You are utterly mistaken," I insisted, "and you're a bold, mad, rebellious creature. You will go at once and put on your best hat, and your cloak, and dab powder on your nose, if it will make you happy, and come along like a good child."

"But what is the use of my paying board to Mrs. Milliken and then having you spend money for dinners at restaurants?" she objected.

"The use is obvious. It affords us the joy of permitting ourselves, once in a blue moon, to behave like spendthrifts; it allows us to indulge in the company of the young and ambitious, as well as of the old and foolish. Moreover, an occasional change of diet was recommended by Hippocrates. Who are you to rebel against the most ancient and respectable medical authority, pray?"

"It is utterly wrong," she persisted. "I am always accepting your kindnesses, and

Frieda's, and there is nothing I can do in return, and—and——"

She seemed to choke a little. Her voice came hoarse and muffled as ever, and I fear that Dr. Porter's ministrations are doing her little, if any, good.

"My dear Frances," said Frieda, "we both understand you, perfectly. It is the most splendid thing for a woman to keep her self-respect and refuse to be a drag upon her friends. But when she can give them genuine pleasure by accepting a trifling thing like this, now and then, she ought to be loath to deprive them. David says that the company downstairs rather stifles his imagination, and he further alleges that dining alone at Camus is a funereal pleasure. Now go and get ready. There is plenty of time, and I'll come in and hook up your waist, if you want me to."

So Frances ran away to her room, with Baby Paul on her arm. She often rebels like this, yet generally succumbs to our wiles. The pair of us, fortunately, is more than she can successfully contend against.

Frieda followed her to her room, and I rummaged among the Sunday papers, finding the French daily. Frances likes to look at it and I have ordered the newsman at the corner to deliver me the Sunday number regularly. But to-day she has been busy with a lot of mending so that it remained unopened. My first glance revealed a column giving a list of unclaimed letters in the hands of the French Consul. There was one for Madame Paul Dupont, it appeared.

I seized the paper and ran with it to the door of her room. My hand was already lifted to knock, when I bethought myself that a delay of a few minutes would be unimportant, and that it was best to run no chances of interfering with Baby Paul's entertainment. I returned to my room and paced up and down the worn Brussels. She had often told me how sorry she was that she had never heard from her late husband's parents. This letter, in all probabilities, was from them. If I told Frances about it immediately, she would worry over it until next day. Why not wait at least until our return from Camus, or even until the morning? If she knew about it, she would probably not have a wink of sleep. I determined to postpone the announcement.

Poor child! She will be harrowed by that letter. It will give her such details as the old people have been able to obtain and bring the tragedy back to her. She will read the lines breathlessly. The months that have gone by have assuaged her pain a little, I think, but, now, it will return in full force, as poignant as ever. I am sorry that I looked at that paper. If I had put it aside as I often do, without even

looking at it, I should never have known anything about that letter and it might have been better for her peace of mind. Now, of course, I feel bound to let her know, but, at least, I will let her have a tranquil night!

How keen and shrewd women are! No sooner did they return to my room, all primped up and ready to go, with Baby Paul clad in his best, than Frieda innocently asked what was the matter with me. Frances also asked if I were angry. Had she made me wait too long?

I was compelled to declare that my feelings were in apple-pie order, that happiness reigned in my bosom and that I enjoyed waiting, before they were satisfied. I wish my emotions did not show so plainly on my face. It is for this reason, I suppose, that Gordon once adjured me never to learn the ancient game of draw-poker. He said that fleecing me would be child's play for the merest beginner.

We went down and directed our steps towards Madame Félicie Smith's shop. One can get in, even on Sundays, since the good woman lives there. She is always delighted to mind Paul for a couple of hours, and this arrangement is far superior to the old one, which entailed a long westerly jaunt to the home of the washerlady, besides the climbing of many stairs.

The folding baby carriage was left at home, for the walk is but a short one and Frances loves to carry her little one. My offer to assume the charge was at once rejected, Frieda complaining that even she was considered somewhat unreliable as a beast of burden. Frances laughed, cheerfully, but held on to her treasure. She is no longer nervous and fretful when leaving Baby Paul for a couple of hours, knowing that, if he happens to awaken, there will be soothing words of affection for him. We had to ring a tinkling bell for admittance and Félicie, buxom and of high color, welcomed us all. Certainly she would care for the angel; most evidently she would look after the precious lamb; with not the slightest doubt she would love and cherish the little cabbage. While I remained in the penumbra of the half darkened shop, it took the three of them to see the baby properly installed on the bed in the back room. Frances and Frieda heard the solemn promise made to them, to the effect that there would be no adventitious aid to happiness such as a lump of sugar tied in a rag, and presently we sallied forth.

Lest my readers be already weary of Camus, I can only say that I am one of those individuals who stick to old friends, either through an inborn sense of faithfulness or, more probably, because of a tendency to slothfulness, which

makes me consider it exceedingly troublesome to wander afield and search for pastures new. We had our dinner in quiet enjoyment and felt, as we came out again, that the world was a very fair sort of a dwelling-place. We had enjoyed the food and I fancy that, under the table, my foot had beaten time to the melody eked out by the orchestra. The fiddler, I am glad to say, is looking somewhat stouter. The good meals provided by the widow may be responsible for this. At any rate, I rejoice to think so, since it would go to show that a dinner at Camus is not only a pleasant, but also a hygienic, pursuit.

For an instant our enjoyment of the music was interrupted by the clang and clatter of passing fire engines. We looked about us, perfunctorily, and decided that the conflagration was neither under our chairs nor above our rafters and continued to sip our coffee with the contempt due to a New Yorker's familiarity with steam-pumps and water towers. A couple of minutes later we left and, reaching Sixth Avenue, found it somewhat crowded. A block further we came to a panting engine and hurried on. Cars were blocked by a line of hose stretched across the street. Frances caught my arm, nervously, and a look of terror came over her. Then we ran, Frieda puffing behind. The fire was in the middle of the block and streams of water crashed through windows. Ladders were going up and the firemen, conscious that it was but a moderate blaze, from their standpoint, worked calmly and effectively.

"You stay there!" I shouted to my two companions and elbowed my way through the crowd, which was being pushed back by policemen. One of them seized me and threatened to use his locust on my cranium if I advanced any farther. I drew back and dashed through another opening till I reached Félicie's door, entering the place and nearly falling over a large osier basket in which were piled up a lot of tangled garments.

"Take de handle!" commanded the good woman.

"The baby! Little Paul!" I shouted.

"Under the silk dress. Take de handle," she repeated.

We issued from the place, meeting with a policeman who suspected us of unworthy motives. We had to exhibit the infant and establish our identity before he would let us proceed with the huge basket. It was about time! Firemen bearing a length of pipe dashed by us and entered the cleaning establishment. The fire, it appeared, was in the restaurant next door and threatened to invade Félicie's premises.

My two friends were wringing their hands as they dashed towards us, and upon their heads their hats were awry.

"Paul is all right!" I assured them. "But they took us for robbers."

Frances picked her infant out of the basket, hysterically. She had tried to follow me and had wrestled with a sinewy policeman, who had defeated her. We reached Mrs. Milliken's, where Paul was deposited on his mother's bed, soundly sleeping, and the basket, which it had taxed the good woman's strength and mine to carry upstairs, was placed on the floor. After this, Frieda threw her fat arms around my neck and called me a hero. Frances would have followed suit but, being forestalled, had to content herself with embracing the cleaning lady who, puffing, soon disengaged herself and fanned herself with a newspaper.

"The brigands," she declared, "will soak everything with water, but I have saved most of my customers' things."

She finally went off to spend the night at Eulalie's sister's, leaving the plunder in our care. On the next morning, when Frances went off to work, she found that the fire had invaded a part of the shop, that the plate-glass window was broken and chaos reigned. Félicie was there and deplored the fact that, until insurance matters were adjusted and repairs made, all business would have to be suspended.

The poor girl came home to throw herself on her knees beside little Paul. Then, she bethought herself of me and knocked at my door, hurriedly. I opened it. My face, unfortunately, was covered with lather.

"I—I'm out of work. It—it will be several weeks before Félicie can open the shop again. Oh! What shall I do?"

"My dear child," I said, "you will, for the time being, return to little Paul and let me finish scraping my face. You will also please remember that you have some good friends. As soon as I am shaved, we will hold a session and form ourselves into a Committee of Ways and Means. In the meanwhile remember about the little sparrow falling to the ground."

"I—I'm afraid a cat often gets him," she said sadly, and went back to her room.



CHAPTER XI

GORDON VACILLATES

It behooved me to waste no time and, as soon as I was ready, I briefly conferred with Frances, telling her that Gordon would probably be very glad to employ her for a short time that would tide over the interval before Félicie would be ready to resume business at the old stand. She looked at me, rather uncertainly, as if the suggestion were not altogether a pleasing one. At any rate a tiny wrinkle or two showed for an instant between her brows.

"Don't you think it is a good idea?" I asked her.

"I—I suppose it is," she answered slowly, and then, impulsively, put her hand on my arm.

"Of course it is, you dear good friend," she declared. "I am ready to go there as soon as he may want me. He—he has been so friendly, of late, bringing us candies and flowers, and chatting with us, that—that it will seem a little bit harder, but, of course, it will be just the same as before, and he will think of nothing but his painting."

"I will go and see him at once," I told her, "I may find that he is busy with a portrait and has no time for other work, but I might as well go and ascertain."

I was being shot up the elevator towards Gordon's studio when I suddenly remembered that letter at the consul's. I must confess that it had altogether escaped my memory. I consoled myself with the idea that my interview with Gordon would be brief, and that I should immediately return and tell Frances about it. Perhaps she would allow me to go downtown with her to obtain it. She must not go alone, of course, since she would open the thing there and then. I could imagine her in that office, among indifferent people, weeping and without a friend to take her arm and lead her out, with not a word of consolation and encouragement. Yes, I would go with her!

"Hey, Mister! Didn't you say the tenth floor?"

Thus did the elevator boy interrupt my cogitations; but for him I might have kept

on going up and down a dozen times, so busily was I engaged in picturing to myself the emotions of Frances when she should receive that letter. I got out of the cage, hurriedly, and rang Gordon's bell, the Jap opening with a polite grin of recognition.

"Can I go into the studio?" I asked. "Is Mr. McGrath engaged?"

"No, sir, but I tell him."

The man went in, after taking my hat and coat, and Gordon rushed out to meet me.

"Hello, Dave!" he greeted me. "When you rang the bell, I thought it was Lorimer—the Lorimer. He told me last night at the Van Rossums that he would drop in and see me."

"You are certainly making good headway among the millionaires," I told him.

"They're the fellows I'm gunning for," he answered quietly.

"Look here, Gordon," I began at once. "Frances Dupont is out of a job. Fire in the shanty next door, and her employer has been flooded out. You were saying something about wishing to—"

"Yes, I know I was," he replied, staring vaguely at the floor. "I—I'll have to think about it."

"I suppose you have some other pressing work on hand."

He made no answer, going up to the humidor on the mantel and selecting a cigar, which he lighted very deliberately.

"Have one?" he asked me.

"No, thanks," I declined. "I'll help myself to a cigarette. One of those perfectos so early in the morning would set my head whirling."

He looked at me, twirling his fine moustache, without appearing to see me, and began pacing up and down the wonderful silk rug on the floor, his cigar in his mouth and his hands deep in his trousers pockets.

"I'll tell you, Dave," he began, but was interrupted by another ring at the bell. A moment later Mr. Lorimer was admitted, a big man with a leonine head, strong and rather coarse features and eyes like Toledo blades, who spoke slowly,

weighing his words.

"Good morning, Mr. McGrath," he said. "I shall be obliged, if you will show me some of your work."

"I want to introduce my friend, David Cole," said Gordon; "he's a writer of charming novels."

"Always glad to meet any one who can do things, Mr. Cole," said the big man, putting out his hand. "What have you written?"

Gordon at once came to my rescue, mentioning two or three titles of my books.

"The First Million"! You wrote that, did you? Read it on my way to Europe, three years ago. You're a clever man, Mr. Cole, but it was a mistake on your part to make a millionaire sympathetic and refined. Didn't make much out of the book, did you?"

"It only sold about four thousand," I acknowledged.

"Thought so. That fellow Lorgan was neither fish, flesh, fowl or good red herring. In a novel, a very rich man should be made bearable by foolishly giving away huge sums of money, or else unbearable in order to show the contrast offered by the poor, but honest, hero. That's what the public wants, I should judge. As a simple human being a magnate is impossible in modern fiction."

"My friend Gordon works from the model and sticks to it," I ventured. "I have been silly enough to depend altogether on my imagination, Mr. Lorimer, but I'm getting cured of that failing. In future I will cling to the people I have an opportunity of studying."

"You'll turn out something pretty good, one of these days," he said. "And now for the paintings, Mr. McGrath. I have only a few minutes to spare."

He looked at a few portraits and a still-life or two, resting his square jaw in the palm of his hand.

"I've been a bit of a doubting Thomas," he suddenly said. "Had an idea that a chap who goes in so much for society couldn't do very serious work, but this is first rate. Good, honest stuff, I call it, but I doubt if you will keep it up. Let's have a look at something else."

He paid not the slightest attention to Gordon, who looked as mad as a hornet.

The Japanese servant lifted up a picture that was turned with the face against the wall.

"Not that one," directed Gordon, but Lorimer had caught a glimpse of the canvas as the Japanese turned.

"Oh, yes! Put that on the easel," he said. "That seems to be in a rather different style. Now, my dear sir, if you keep on all your life working like that, I'll take back what I said. A man capable of doing that can take Sargent's place, some day, but he'll have to stick to his last to keep it up. How much do you want for it?"

"It—it isn't for sale," said Gordon, hesitating.

Lorimer stood before the picture, with his hands clasped behind his back, for several minutes. Then he turned again to Gordon.

"Already sold, is it?"

"No, Mr. Lorimer, it is not. But it's about the best thing I ever did, and yet I think I can improve on it. I shall keep it for comparison, as I intend to try another from the same model, in a somewhat different manner. After it is finished, I shall be glad to have you look at it again, and perhaps——"

"I'm afraid that what I said rather sticks in your crop, Mr. McGrath, but don't be offended. When I began life my knowledge of men was about the only asset I had. It didn't come by study and I take no credit for it. I was born with it, as a colt may be born with speed in him. Some Frenchman has said that the moneymaking instinct is like the talent of certain pigs for smelling truffles. In Perigord they pay a high price for a shoat with that kind of a nose. I have learned something about painting because I love it, and I know how to make money. But if I stopped for a year, I'd get so rusty I'd be afraid to buy a hundred shares. Same way with you. If you stop painting and putting in the best that's in you, then you'll go back. That's the reason I wanted this picture, but I'm willing to wait and see the other. Let me know when it's finished. Glad to have met you, Mr. Cole. Thank you for showing me the pictures, Mr. McGrath. Must run downtown now. Hope to see you again soon."

He walked off, sturdily, Gordon accompanying him to the door while I sat down in front of the picture.

Ay, Lorimer was a mighty good judge; of that there could be no doubt. He had at

once appreciated the powerful rendering, the subtle treatment, the beauty that radiated from the canvas, grippingly.

But I could only see Frances, the woman beautiful, who, unlike most others, has a soul to illumine her comeliness. I filled my eyes with her perfection of form, tall, straight and slender, with all the grace that is hers and which Gordon's picture has taught me to see more clearly. I felt as if a whiff of scented breeze came to me, wafted through the glinting masses of her hair. The eyes bent upon the slumbering child, I felt, might at any moment be lifted to her friend Dave, the scribbler, who, for the first time in his life, was beginning to learn that a woman's loveliness may be beyond the power of a poet's imagining or even the wondrous gift of a painter. The scales had indeed fallen from my eyes! At first I had thought that Gordon had idealized her, mingling his fancy with the truth and succeeding in gilding the lily. But now, I knew that all his art had but limned some of the tints of her sunshot hair and traced a few points of her beauty.

I did not wonder that he was eager to try again. Wonderful though his painting was, the man's ambition was surging in him to excel his own work and attain still greater heights. Could he possibly succeed?

"Well, what do you think of millionaires now that you have met one in the flesh?" asked Gordon, returning.

"This one is pretty human, it seems to me, and pretty shrewd."

"You're not such a fool as you look, Dave," said my friend quietly, but with the twinkle in his eyes that mitigates his words. "One moment I could have clubbed him over the head, if I'd had at hand anything heavier than a mahlstick, but I daresay he knew what he was talking about. I'll have to work harder."

"You already toil as hard as a man can, and are doing some great stuff," I replied. "The trouble is that you keep altogether too busy. It might be worth your while to remember that a man who accomplishes so much is at least entitled to eight hours' sleep a day."

"You're a fine one to preach, you old night owl."

"In the first place, I am only David Cole. Besides, I put in a full allowance of time in bed. Mrs. Milliken daren't come in before eleven. Then, I don't smoke strong perfectos, especially in the morning, and I have a drink of claret perhaps once a week."

"Yes, I'll paint you with a halo around your old bald head, some day," he retorted.

"And now, what shall I say to Frances?" I asked, deeming it urgent to revert to my errand.

"I don't want her! Busy with other things!"

I looked at him, in surprise and disappointment, and walked off towards the hall where hung my hat and coat.

"Very well," I said, "I shall try and find something else for her to do. Good-by, Gordon."

"Good-by, Dave. Come in again soon, won't you?"

I made some noncommittal reply and rushed over to the elevator, ringing several times. When I reached the street I hurried to the cars, thinking that *la donna* may be *mobile*, but that as a weathercock Gordon was the limit. I got out at the Fourteenth Street station and soon reached home, at the very same time as a big scarlet runabout which I had noticed in the street, in front of the studio building. It halted with a grinding of brakes.

"I say, Dave! Tell her to come to-morrow morning. I am off to lunch at Ardsley. By-by."

It was Gordon, bearing in his pocket a summons for overspeeding, which he proudly exhibited.

"I got the car this week," he informed me. "It's a bird to go. So long!"

He was off again, skidding around the next corner in such fashion as to make me sympathize with his life insurance company, and I started up the stairs to see Frances. I must say that I was rather nervous. The task of telling her about that letter seemed, now that it was so nearly impending, a rather tough one to carry out. As usual in such cases, my footsteps became slow on the last of the stairs.

I knocked at the door, which was opened by Frieda.

"Come in, Dave," she said. "I thought I'd drop in to see that Baby Paul was none the worse for his experience. I might as well have saved my breath, as far as I can see. Frances needs a little bracing up; I think she's rather discouraged this morning."

"One moment," I excused myself. "I forgot a paper I wanted to show her."

My room appeared to have been ransacked, but I saw that Mrs. Milliken, in spite of my stern commands, had indulged her passionate longing for putting things in order. A quarter of an hour's arduous searching, however, revealed the journal I sought. The door had been left open, and I walked right in.

"Good morning," I said. "I have seen Gordon this morning and he will be pleased to employ you again, Frances, and—and I have a paper here. It is yesterday's, and I found something that may perhaps interest you, and—and _____"

But she had risen quickly and took the paper from me, her voice trembling a little.

"Where—what is it?" she asked eagerly.

It took me a minute to find that column again. When I pointed out the notice, she took the sheet from me, staring at it as if doubting her eyes.

"Yes—it is for Madame Paul Dupont. I—I must go there at once! Oh! Frieda dear, will you mind little Paul for me while I am gone? I will go and return just as quick as I can and won't keep you very long."

"I will do anything you want me to, Frances, but you are not very familiar with downtown streets. I had better accompany you there. We can take little Paul with us."

"I had intended to offer my services as a guide," I put in.

Frances had sunk in her chair and was still looking at the paper, as if, between the lines, she might have been able to find more than the mere mention of her name.

"You must let me go, Dave," whispered Frieda to me. "She—she might faint, poor thing, or feel very badly, and—and a woman is better at such times. I will try to make her wait until we get back, before she opens the thing, and you can be here when we return."

Man, that is born of woman, is commonly her humble slave. I could do nothing but bow to my stout friend's will and retired to my room to leave their preparations unhampered by my presence. When I propose a dinner or the

moving pictures, they always hurry as fast as they can and are usually ready in fifteen or twenty minutes. On this occasion, about ninety seconds seemed to suffice.

"Good-by, Dave," they called out to me, waving their hands and disappearing down the stairs.

I had any number of important things to do. A fine disorder, said Boileau, is an effect of art. It behooved me to disturb the beautifully orderly and thoroughly deplorable piling up of my books indulged in by Mrs. Milliken. Also, there were separate loose sheets of virginal paper to be separated from those bearing my written vagaries, for she had played havoc with them. Moreover, I had been told that my hair ought to be cut. Then, I ought to have sat down and continued a short story I had made a fine beginning of, about a poverty-stricken young lady finding an emerald necklace. The plot was most exciting and the ending possessed what the editors call a good punch. I had a plethora of things to do, wherefore I lighted my pipe and pondered upon what to begin with, seated the while in front of my window and observing the houses opposite.

It took me but a moment to decide that quietude would be wisdom. How could I accomplish anything requiring judgment and calmness of mind, while I was so obsessed with problems of many kinds! What would be the effect of that letter on Frances? Would it make her feel so badly, that she would be unable to go to Gordon's on the next day? Why had my friend first manifested eagerness to make another picture of Frances, then refused to employ her, and, finally, risked breaking his neck in his haste to have me make an appointment with her?

I have always been a poor hand at riddles and actually resent being asked why a chicken crosses the road. Such foolish queries constitute a form of amusement quite unable to appeal to me. I dislike problems and complicated things that have to be solved. Once, I tried to write a detective story, but was wise enough to tear up the thing as soon as it was finished. In the first place, it looked like an effort to encourage crime, which I abhor, and my detective was so transparent and ingenuous that an infant would have penetrated his wiles. He was positively sheeplike in his mansuetude, whereas I had intended to make him a stern avenger of virtue.

An hour went by, and then another, during which I rushed to the balustrade on the landing every time I heard the front door opening. Disappointment came so often that I determined to move no more, until I could hear their voices. Since

the stairs make Frieda quite breathless, she insists on talking all the time while she climbs them, and her puffing carries up at least two flights.

Finally, I heard them. For a wonder Frieda was silent, but there was no mistaking her ponderous step. Frances came behind, carrying Baby Paul. They came to my room, hurrying across the landing. The young mother looked at me, one corner of her lips twitching nervously.

"David!" she cried. "Oh, David! There—there are two women called Madame Paul Dupont and—and the other one got my letter! She came to the Consulate early this morning."

"But how do you know that it was your letter, then?" I asked.

"Well! Of course, I don't really know, but—but it should have been for me, of course. They gave me the other woman's address. She lives in Little Ferry in New Jersey, and I'm going there at once."



CHAPTER XII

GORDON BECOMES ENGAGED

Frances and I started away on the trip, immediately, for there was not a moment to lose. That letter must at once be retrieved. The dreadful woman had evidently seized upon one never meant for her, and must be bearded in her den. From her the missive must be rescued, by force of arms if necessary; it must be snatched from the burning, seized and brought back, even at the cost of bloodshed.

This, it may be, is but the vague impression I gathered from the profuse and simultaneous conversation of my two dear friends. When I humbly suggested again that the Jersey person might perhaps have a perfect equity in the document, they looked at me with the pitying condescension accorded the feeble-minded and the very young by the gentler sex. Also, I proposed to hie me to Little Ferry alone, interview the termagant in question and make her disgorge, in case she was illegally detaining words meant for another.

This was once more met by a look from Frieda to Frances, and vice-versa, which was then turned upon me and made me feel like an insignificant and, I hope, a harmless microbe.

"My dear Dave," said Frieda, tolerantly, "you are not Madame Paul Dupont. Why should that abominable woman give up the letter to you?"

"When she sees me and Baby," declared Frances, "she will not have the heart to refuse."

The upshot of it was that we departed, leaving Frieda behind. For the first time in his life little Paul was shot through a tunnel, emerged in Jersey, none the worse for his experience, and was taken aboard a train. Soon afterwards we were observing the great meadows and the Hackensack River, a vacillating, sluggish stream, running either up or down, at the behest of a tide that always possesses plenty of leisure, through banks winding in a great valley of cat-tails and reeds among which, in the summertime, legions of grackles and redwings appear to find a plenteous living. But at this time the stream was more than usually turbid, filled with aimlessly floating cakes of ice, and the green of fairer weather had given place to a drab hue of discouraged weeds awaiting better days. While

waiting at the station, I had found that the Telephone Directory contained at least a dozen Duponts, that the City Directory held a small regiment of them, and considered that New Jersey had a right to its share of citizens of that name.

The train stopped, and we got out in a place that was mostly constituted by a bridge, small houses lining a muddy pike and a vista of many houses partly concealed among trees. After consultation with a local butcher, followed by the invasion of a grocer's shop, we were directed to a neat frame cottage within a garden. I opened the gate and walked in, first, deeming it my duty to face the dangers and protect the convoy in my rear.

There was no need to ring a bell. The front door opened and a white-haired woman appeared, her locks partly hidden under a white cap that was the counterpart of many I had seen in the Latin Quarter, among janitresses or ladies vending vegetables from barrows. Her form was concealed in a wide, shapeless garment, of the kind adopted by French women whom age has caused to abandon the pomps and vanities. I believe they call it a *caraco*. The cotton skirt was unadorned and the slippers ample for tender feet. Also, the smile on her face was welcoming in its sweetness. Near her a fat blind dog wheezed some sort of greeting.

"Madame Paul Dupont?" I asked.

"*Pour vous servir*," she answered politely.

So this was the Gorgon in question, the purloiner of correspondence, to be placated if possible and defeated *vi et armis* in case of rebellion!

Frances hastily pushed me to one side, though with all gentleness. She spoke French very fluently. I easily understood her to say that she was also Madame Paul Dupont, that her husband had been to the war, that she had heard of his being killed, that—that——

She was interrupted. The white-bonneted old woman took her to her bosom, planting a resounding kiss on her cheek, and clamored in admiration of the baby.

"Come in the house," she said. "I am delighted to see you. I shall have to ask Paul if he ever had any cousins or nephews who came to this country. But no; he would have told me. I am sorry that Paul is not here to see you. He is the pastry-cook at the Netherlands; you should taste his puff-paste and his *Baba au Rhum*. He did not go to the war because he is fifty-nine and has a bad leg. But I have a

son over there. He has killed many Boches. I have thirty-seven postal cards from him."

"But, Madame," I put in, "we came on account of a letter written in care of the Consulate, and we were informed——"

"That was a letter from my niece Pétronille, whose husband keeps a *café* in Madagascar. She wanted to let me know of the birth of her fourth daughter. Have you ever seen a letter from there? It is a country very far away, somewhere in China or Africa. I will show you."

She sought her spectacles, looked over a large and orderly pile of papers, and brought us the document.

"Please read it," she said, "it is very interesting."

Frances glanced over it, looking badly disappointed, and passed it to me. It contained vast information as to Pétronille's growing family and the price of chickens and Vermouth in Antanarivo, also certain details as to native fashions, apparently based on the principle of least worn, soonest mended.

Before we left, we were compelled to accept a thimbleful of *cassis*, most delectable, and to promise to return very soon. Her husband would make us a *vol-au-vent*, for which he had no equal. He would be sorry to have been absent. She wished her son had been married to such a nice woman as Frances and had possessed a son like Baby Paul. Alas! She might never see the boy again, and then there would be nothing left of him, no little child to be cherished by the old people. It was such a pity!

She insisted on seeing us all the way back to the station and on carrying Paul, whom she parted with after many embraces. Peace be on her good old soul, and may the son come back safely and give her the little one her heart longs for!

"She is a darling," said Frances sorrowfully, "and, oh! I'm so terribly disappointed."

The poor child had so hoped for news, for some details as to the manner in which her own Paul had been sacrificed to his motherland, and this visit made her very sad. For many days afterwards her thoughts, which had perhaps begun to accept the inevitable with resignation, turned again to the loved one buried somewhere in France.

Neither Frieda, who came in after suppertime, nor I, was able to give her much consolation. Again, I wished I had never seen that announcement and deplored my well-intended folly in calling her attention to it. She seemed very weary, as if the short trip had been a most fatiguing one, and retired very soon, alleging the need to rise early to do some mending of Baby's clothes, and acknowledging the fact that she felt headachy and miserable.

Frieda looked at me indulgently, but I suspect that she blamed me strongly for the whole occurrence. Doubtless, I ought not to have looked at that paper, I should not have spoken of it, and my permitting Frances to go to Jersey had been a sinful act of mine.

But, after all, Frieda is the best old girl in the world, I believe and declare. She patted my shoulder as if I had promised her never to be wicked again, and permitted me to see her home, as some snow had fallen and she was dreadfully afraid of slipping. I prevailed on her to accept pair of old rubbers of mine and, once in the street, she grasped my arm with a determination that left a blue mark next day.

"So she is going again to the studio," she said, after I had piloted her to her flat, which she invited me to invade. "Do you really think that Gordon has the slightest idea that he can improve on that first picture?"

"I suppose that he just hopes to," I replied. "Whenever I begin a new story, I haven't the slightest idea whether it will be good or not. Sometimes, I don't even know after it is finished. Take the 'Land o' Love,' for instance; I really thought it a good piece of work, but Jamieson looks positively gloomy about it."

"He must be a very silly man," said Frieda, unswerving in her loyalty to me, but swiftly changing the subject. "Baby Paul is becoming very heavy. He'll be seven months old, come next Friday, and Frances looks dreadfully tired. It is hard for her to take him every day to that studio and back."

"I could get up early in the morning and help her," I suggested recklessly.

"And then you could wait outside for two or three hours and help her back," she laughed. "No, Dave, it isn't so bad as all that. But I'm afraid she's badly discouraged. That little Dr. Porter is still fiddling away at her throat, training it, he calls it, but she's not a bit better. In fact, she thinks it's getting worse. And she says she can never pay him for all he's done and she might as well stop going. On Sunday morning he says he's going to do something to it, that may hurt a

little, and she's afraid. She asked me to go with her."

"I'll go with you, if she will let me and Porter doesn't chase me out," I proposed. "I have great confidence in that boy."

"So have I, but he hasn't assured her that it will bring her voice back."

I told her that this showed the man was not a cocksure humbug, and expressed fervent hopes as to the result, after which Frieda made a disreputable bundle of my rubbers and I left with them, in a hard flurry of snow. My room, after I reached it, seemed unusually cold. The landlady's ancient relative sometimes juggles rather unsuccessfully with the furnace, and she bemoaned before me, yesterday, the dreadful price of coal. Hence, I went to work and warmed myself by writing the outline of a tale with a plot unfolding itself during a hot wave of August. So kindly is my imagination that, by midnight, I was wiping my brow and sitting in my shirt-sleeves, till a sudden chill sent me to bed. This, I am glad to say, had no serious consequence. I remember wondering about the new picture Gordon would begin and, before I fell asleep, some trick of my mind presented the thing to me. It was a queer composite of the Murillo in the Louvre, of Raphael's Madonna of the Chair and of Frances herself. From the canvas she was looking at me, with lids endowed with motion and smiling eyes. There came to me, then, a dim recollection of some strange Oriental belief, to the effect that on the Day of Judgment sculptured and painted figures will crowd around their makers, begging in vain for the souls that have been denied them. But I felt that Gordon's "Mother and Child" will never thus clutch despairingly at their painter's garment. The very soul of them is in that picture, already endowed with a life that must endure till the canvas fritters itself away into dust.

When I awoke, I found, with shamed dismay, that it was nearly ten o'clock. On leaving my room I saw that the door opposite was wide open, with Mrs. Milliken wrestling with a mattress. Frances was gone, bearing her little Paul, through the still falling snow, to that studio where Gordon would again spread some of her beauty and soul on the magic cloth.

A few hours after, she returned in a taxicab.

"He insisted that I must take it," she explained. "He came downstairs with me and told the man to charge it to him, at the club. The light was very poor and he could do no painting. Spent the time just drawing and rubbing the charcoal out again. I think he must be working very hard, for he looks nervous and worried. No, I'm not hungry. He made me take lunch at the studio, while he went out to

the club. He—he seems very impatient when I hesitate or don't wish to—to accept his kindnesses, and becomes very gruff. He hardly said a word from the time when he returned, till he bade me go home in the taxi. And—and now I must do some sewing."

I left her, having an appointment with my literary agent, who has asked me for a story for a new magazine. I reached his office and was asked to wait for a few minutes, as he was busy with an author whose words are worth much gold.

On the oaken table in the waiting-room, among other publications, there was a weekly of society and fashion. I took it up for a desultory glance at the pages. The first paragraph my eyes fell upon stated that the most distinguished of our younger painters, it was whispered, was about to announce his engagement to a fair Diana whose triumphs over hurdles, on the links and on the tennis courts were no less spoken of than her wealth and beauty.

I supposed that Gordon had seen those lines, for he takes that paper. According to Frances, he is worried and nervous. How can this be? She must surely be mistaken. He has captured and safely holds the bubble of reputation, his work commands a reward that seems fabulous to such as I, and now he is to marry beauty and wealth. Can there be any hitch in his plans?

After I had finished my business with my agent, I strolled out with a commission to write a five thousand word story. My way then led me up Fifth Avenue, to the place where I get the tea Frieda and Frances so greatly appreciate. At the Forty-Second Street crossing my arm was seized from behind.

"Hold on, old boy. Those motors are splashing dreadfully," said Gordon, rescuing me from a spattering of liquid mud. "Come with me to the club."

I followed him with the sheeplike acquiescence that is part of my nature, feeling rather glad of the opportunity to talk with him and perhaps congratulate him. As usual, he was most spick and span. His fur coat had a collar of Alaska seal and the black pearl in his necktie was probably worth a couple of square feet of his painting, though the general effect was quiet and unobtrusive.

We sat down in the most deserted corner he could find and looked at one another in silence, for a few moments. It is to be presumed that my patience outlasted his.

"You're the dullest old curmudgeon ever permitted to come into polite society,"

he declared, looking aggrieved.

"I was serenely waiting for your announcement," I replied.

"Oh! So you've seen that thing also!" he retorted, with evident annoyance.

"Well, my dear fellow, I wanted to know whether to congratulate you or whether the information was somewhat premature. Come, Gordon, I used to think that we were a replica of Damon and Pythias! Won't it do you a bit of good to talk it over? Do you never feel the need of confiding in a friend, nowadays?"

For a moment he looked down at his boots, after which he deliberately placed both elbows on the little table that separated us and stared at me.

"The announcement is all right. Bought a solitaire for her last week. I suppose that she is wearing it. There is to be a reception soon, and you'll get a card to it."

I pushed my hand over to him and he took it, rather lukewarmly.

"Oh! That's all right! I know you wish me happiness. Well, I'm getting it, am I not? I'm just as merry as a grig. Here, boy!"

The lad in buttons took his order for whiskies and soda, after which Gordon glared at the portrait of the club's distinguished first president.

"Rotten piece of work, I call it. Chap who did it used a lot of beastly bitumen too, and it's cracking all over. Awful rubbishy stuff."

"I suppose so," I assented, on faith.

"Ben Franklin was a shrewd old fellow," he continued, with one of his habitual lightning changes. "Tells us that a man without a woman is like half a pair of scissors. I'm to be the complete thing, now. Stunning girl, Miss Van Rossum, isn't she? She talks of having a studio built at Southampton, for effect, I presume. How the deuce could a fellow expect to paint with a parcel of chattering women around him?"

"Oh! I daresay you might get used to it," I told him, soothingly.

"I won't! She is going to read books about painting. Told me she wanted to be able to talk intelligently about it, and I advised against it. People don't talk intelligently about painting, they only pretend to. They must insist on airing their views about futurists, or the influence of Botticelli or such truck. They make me

yawn, and I try to turn the conversation, but it's a tough job. Why the deuce are you looking at me like that?"

He snapped the question out so quickly that I was somewhat taken aback, and he began again, without waiting for an answer.

"Oh! It's no use trying to make a practical man of the world out of a sentimental writer of impossible love stories. You're staring at me because I don't answer to your preconceived ideas of a fellow contemplating the joys of matrimony. Why the deuce should I?"

"I don't know, old fellow," I confessed. "I acknowledge that I have always regarded wedded life in the abstract, but I must say that my——"

"I know. Your ideal is a freckled youth with a left shoulder upholding the head of a pug-nosed girl, who weeps tears of joy in his bosom, the while he gazes up at the heavens in thankfulness. I'm all right, Dave! I've accomplished all that I was aiming at, and there are no problems left to solve. Where's that devilish boy with those drinks?"

I could not help looking at him again, for I was becoming more and more convinced that he was far from representing the happy man I had been eager to congratulate. Our beverages came, and he tossed his down, hurriedly, as if it furnished a welcome diversion to his thoughts. Five minutes later, I was walking alone to the shop where I buy my tea.

"I wonder what's wrong?" I asked myself, pushing the door open.

CHAPTER XIII

DR. PORTER GOES TO WORK

On Saturday, I received the card Gordon had mentioned. It was a tastefully engraved thing, merely announcing that the Van Rossums would be at home on the Seventeenth of March, from four until seven. In a corner, in smaller letters, was written "To meet Mr. Gordon McGrath, N. A."

I don't know whether I have mentioned the fact that Gordon is really an extremely handsome fellow, in a strong and masculine way, with a pleasant voice and manners that can be quite exquisite, at least when he isn't talking to an old pal. I am not at all surprised that Miss Sophia, or any other woman, for that matter, should have been attracted by his looks, while his great talent and growing reputation must have added to his ability to find favor in her eyes. His is not a descent from an old family, I believe, for the dead and gone McGraths dealt in pottery, in a small way, and left him about a thousand dollars a year, upon which he managed to go abroad and study art, to return, at last, and take New York by storm, at least from the standpoint of portrait painting. The young lady, I am sure, is a woman of ready affection, of easy enthusiasms and hopeful disposition. I honestly believe that she deserves much happiness and that she is capable of giving a sturdy love to a decent fellow, who will not interfere too much with her passion for various sports. An uncomfortable feeling comes to me that she is worthy of something better than Gordon will give her. I may be an old donkey, but, for the life of me, I can see no indication of true love in his feelings. The thought is rather revolting that he is marrying her as a mere incident in a line of conduct mapped out long ago, and it makes me feel less friendly to him. If my deductions are correct, there can be no excuse for a behavior which bears the earmarks of cynicism and cold calculation carried too far. May I be forgiven, if I err. Indeed, I earnestly hope that I am mistaken and that he is a man who conceals sentiments really creditable to him under an exterior less attractive.

Frieda and Frances were in my room, that afternoon, when the card arrived. I passed it to Frieda, who handed it over to her friend. The reception referred to led the former to some discussion of prevailing fashions. The painter of Orion dresses in a manner all her own, while the slender purse of Frances compels a

garb of nearly monastic simplicity. But they appear to have a great knowledge of stylish clothing and an interest in it, which must be rather an instinct than the result of deep study.

I have not mentioned Gordon's engagement to them, probably for the reason that the subject is somewhat distasteful to me. Since my friend has not spoken of it to his model, there is no particular reason why I should do so. Let him attend to his own announcing.

In the evening, I took both of them to the movies. This was the result of a conspiracy between Frieda and myself, as we had agreed that it would be best to try and amuse Frances, if possible, and make her forget the morrow's ordeal. Yet, on our way home, the poor child could not help mentioning it.

"He says that my throat is beautifully trained and he can touch all sorts of things in it, now, with his instruments. I no longer mind it in the least. He tells me that he doesn't think it will hurt me, but, of course, I care nothing about a little pain. He's an awfully good fellow. What I'm afraid of is that it will do no good and that I shall never be able to use my voice again. I'm awfully hoarse now."

It was quite true that her voice was more husky, and the element of sadness in it made it sound worse. She spoke very low as she bade us good night, for I was going to take Frieda home.

In the morning I rose at an unearthly hour, spurred by the knowledge that I was going to the doctor's with Frances at eleven o'clock. I was bathed, shaved and clad in my Sunday suit by nine, after which I went out and brought back an armful of Sunday papers, which I tossed on my table and never looked at.

Soon afterwards, Eulalie came in, rather bashfully, to ask me if I could lend Madame Dupont the *Courier*. Also, she confided to me the fact that she was to mind Baby Paul during our absence.

"The doctor is going to cut the poor lamb's throat and it is terrible, Monsieur, but she is not afraid. I am going away for a half an hour now, because it will do no harm to burn a candle before the Blessed Virgin for the success of the operation. Yes, I think I will put two candles. Now if Monsieur believed——"

I swiftly pulled a bill from my trousers pocket.

"Here, Eulalie, is a dollar," I told her. "You will be so good as to dispose of it as if I were a brother to a cardinal. Faith, I believe, comes before hope and charity.

Would that mine were as strong as your own, especially as concerns a certain friend of mine. Hurry away and return with seven-leagued boots."

"Monsieur is a very good man; any one can see that. *Ça vous portera bonheur.*"

Her assurance that my offering would bring me happiness comforted me, I think. Few of us can resist the temptation to think that luck is a manna whose falling may occasionally be guided by our actions, and that ill-chance may be averted by touching wood or, as is the way of Italians, extending the fore and little finger as a safeguard against the evil eye.

For a time, I sought to read, but the pages of the Sunday papers seemed to be blurred. I paced the room, nervously, thinking of Gordon and of Frances. The latter had described her recent visits to the studio as funereal functions, during which Gordon painted fast and doggedly, while biting at the stem of an empty pipe, and occasionally swore at the canvas. Sometimes, he tired her nearly to death, working for hours without interruption, while, on other occasions, he insisted on her resting every few minutes and called himself a brute for taking advantage of her patience.

"But then, you know, Mr. McGrath is a very peculiar man," she said, as if this condoned all his faults.

Presently, Eulalie returned, knocking violently at my door, and assured me that every cent of my dollar was now burning brightly, where it would do most good, and informed me that the two ladies were waiting for me.

"It is time to go, Dave," said Frieda, who seemed to be making hard weather of her efforts at composure. "Frances is all ready and Baby Paul is sleeping. Eulalie will take the best care of him. Come along!"

And so we trooped off to Dr. Porter's office. He was waiting for us, clad in an immaculate white jacket. Frances entrusted her hat to Frieda and sat down quietly on a chair in a dark corner. Porter drew down some blinds, whereby we were plunged in semi-darkness, and turned on a powerful light which strongly illumined a small circle of his patient's face. I was sitting down on a sofa, rather close to Frieda. A few moments later we were leaning on one another for support. One of her good fat hands was trembling a little, in mine, which may possibly have been similarly affected.

"We'll take lots of time," I heard Porter say. "Yes, this is novocaine. Open wide

now—breathe through your mouth—slowly. That's very good—now rest a little. Once again, I want to get a thorough anæsthesia—another little rest—we are in no hurry. Don't be afraid. You have the finest throat to work on I ever saw, a superb control over it. That comes from all the training I have given you—now the last touch of novocaine—that's all right—you'll feel nothing—I'm very sure."

Frieda was digging her nails into my hand, excruciatingly, and we both breathed hard as we saw Porter take up other long and shiny tools that gleamed in the obscurity. He was doing something with them, quietly, with a constant flow of encouraging language. I wondered how the man's voice could remain so calm. Frieda's left heel rested for a moment on my right big toe, crushingly, but she knew not what she was doing, and I bore the torture without a cry, till I could push her away. I had not realized that a man could suffer so much. And Porter was still working away, looking ghostly in the penumbra. Then, suddenly, he let out an ejaculation imitated from the Comanches, rose from his chair, ran to the window and admitted a flood of light that nearly blinded us. Frieda, shamefaced, lifted her head from my shoulder and rose with incredible swiftness.

"Is—is it all over?" she asked, tremulously.

"Surest thing you know," replied our young friend. "The finest little growth upon the right chord you ever saw. I had made up my mind not to go at it halfcocked, and that's why I've taken so much time to get her so that a fellow could do anything he wanted to her larynx. But it pays, I can tell you!"

"And—and will I be able to sing again?" asked Frances, hoarsely.

"You will have to use your voice just as little as possible for a few days," he answered. "Not a word more than you can help. I hope—I believe that you will be able to sing again, after the chord heals up, but you must not try for a long time. And then it will take a lot of practice, of course, because your throat has forgotten nearly all it ever knew about singing. It will have to come back slowly and gradually. Be sure and come in to-morrow and let me have a look at it."

Frances thanked him, huskily, and Frieda and I wrung his hand. After this we left, in the bright sunshine of a day of cloudless skies, and returned to Mrs. Milliken's, where I left the two women at the door, returning a half an hour later with a small bunch of pink roses. When I reached my landing, her door was open; Frieda was at work with a crochet needle on a diminutive blue sock, while Frances was lying down on the sofa. She never looked up as I came in, for her lovely head was bent down towards the sleeping mite.

Her lovely head was bent down towards the sleeping mite

"Maybe I shall sing to you after all, *mon petit Paul chéri*," she said, hoarsely, and looked up at me, a few tears in her eyes vanishing as she saw the buds I was bringing her.

My finger went to my mouth, as an invitation to silence.

"You have spoken to Master Paul," I said, "and we will have to forgive you. It would have been cruel to forbid you such small comfort. But now, Frieda and I are to attend to all the conversation, for you are to keep as silent as the Sphinx. Eulalie, will you be so kind as to put these flowers in water?"

A moment later came up a messenger with a box, an oblong cardboard thing of immense size. I signed his ticket and bestowed ten cents upon him, because he had curly hair and a snub nose. Then, at a signal from Frances, I opened the box, from which cascaded American Beauties, lilies of the valley and several sprigs of white lilac. I handed the enclosed card to the little mother. She had been staring at the flowers and gazed at the pasteboard in wonder. Then she passed it over to me. It was one of Gordon's, marked "With best wishes. Please don't think of coming for a few days until you are quite well."

"Isn't it nice of him!" exclaimed Frieda, rushing out of the room.

Presently, she returned, bearing two icewater pitchers and a dreadful china vase in which she disposed the flowers, placing them on the mantel-piece. But I was touched when I saw that she put my little roses on the table, in the middle of the room, and told Frances what a delightful odor they had.

"I—I never told him I was going to have the operation," whispered the latter.

"I think I mentioned it to him a few days ago," I said, "and he evidently remembered."

"Gordon is the dearest fellow," declared Frieda. "Frances, you will have to sit down and write him a little note, this evening. And now lie down again on the sofa, my dear, and I'll read the paper to you, if you like. Here is the fashion part of the *Times*. There is not the slightest doubt that skirts are going to be worn

short and somewhat fuller than last year, and the footwear is going to be very elaborate. For my part, I refuse to wear shoes with white uppers because they make fat ankles look ever so much bigger. Oh! Just look at this design for an evening dress!"

I withdrew, seeing them so well occupied. It was only then that I remembered I had had no breakfast, so I took my hat and went out for a solitary refecton of coffee and omelette. Passing in front of the erstwhile dyeing and cleaning establishment, I noted that much blistered paint had been scraped off and read a sign stating that the shop would be opened again in a couple of weeks. This looked hopeful; once again will the wind be tempered to the poor lamb. Gordon will finish his picture and she will return to keeping accounts and advising anxious ladies as to the possibilities of renovating sere and yellow waists and skirts. It does not seem probable to me that she will sing again, in spite of the ordeal she has been through. It would sound like too good a thing to be true, and she can't speak above a whisper.

Later in the afternoon, after I had taken a hygienic walk, followed by the absorption of varied information from the papers, Frieda came in again. She considers Frances as a person requiring the utmost care and has brought her a pink shawl to put over her shoulders. I have seen it hang for years from a gas-fixture in Frieda's parlor.

When I proposed the usual refecton of tea, Frieda held my arm as if the little pot I brandished had been a lethal weapon, with which I expected to destroy our patient. How could I venture on the responsibility of giving Frances tea without knowing whether it would be good for her? I declared that I would go and find out, and clattered down the stairs, rushing over to Porter's. The street was steeped in sabbatical peace and I reflected that the doctor would probably be out, attending to his growing practice and soothing the fevered brow. The rather slouchy maid of all work opened the door. Looking down the hall I saw Porter's red head issuing cautiously from the edge of a portière. A look of relief came to his features, and he came to me.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"No, I came to find out whether it is safe to give Mrs. Dupont a cup of tea?"

"Yes, and anything else she wants. Don't you want to come in the office and meet some fellows? We are playing penny ante. You'll take a hand, won't you?"

"Young man," I said, severely, "gambling is frowned upon by the police."

"Well, the sergeant of the precinct is one of us," he replied. "Plays a mighty good hand."

"Then you have my blessing," I replied, "but I can't accept. I must go back at once and make the tea. Another time I shall be delighted to lose my coppers to one of our brave defenders. Good-by and good luck to you!"

I went away, clad with authority to dispense the cup that cheers, and reflected with regret that Gordon would no longer drop in, as he had been wont to. All his spare hours he would now spend with Miss Van Rossum. I supposed that they would sit on a sofa and hold hands, a good part of the time, unless this occupation be also one of the many inventions issued from the brains of fervid writers. But why do I keep on thinking about him? I am beginning to disapprove of him, and he is drifting away from me. He has crossed a Rubicon and left no bridge for me to go over. I would give anything to know that he is desperately in love with Miss Van Rossum. It would exalt him in my eyes. Her wealth means nothing. True love comes in spite of iron bars or golden ingots. In his attractive personality and wonderful talent he has fully as much to offer as the young woman can bestow upon him. The question before me is whether he is really giving her all he has; his heart as well as his genius; his faith and passion as well as the solitaire she is wearing. I hope I am not unjust to him. But whether I am or not, I presume I am now destined to see little of him. It makes me rather sad to think that one more of my few golden links of friendship is to be broken or slowly dissolved.

For a few moments I stood before the outer door, with the latch-key in my hand, cogitating so deeply that I forgot to fit it in the lock. Presently, I sighed and went in, making my way up the stairs quite slowly and heavily, as if a few more years had suddenly piled themselves up on my head. The ancient stair-carpet looked more than usually unattractive and the wallpaper more decrepit. The fourth step on the second flight, ever inclined to complain, positively groaned under my weight, perhaps mistaking me for Frieda.

Finally I reached my landing.

"He's such a dear old stick-in-the-mud," I heard. "Never happy unless he's worrying over some lost sheep or puzzling over the way of being kind to some one. Frieda, you ought to take him by the nape of the neck, hale him to the Bureau of Licenses, and thence to a parson. After that you could roll him up in

cotton-batting and make him happy all his life."

"I'm much too busy," replied Frieda, laughing, "and I don't really think he would like it."

I took a few quick steps and the three looked up. Gordon was sitting on the corner of the bed, looking very fine with a gardenia in his buttonhole. Frieda's face was expanded in the fat and lovable smile it always bears when any one speaks of her marrying. Frances just welcomed me as usual, with a look of her wonderful eyes.

"Hello, Gordon! What's new?" I asked him, rather embarrassed.

"Nothing very much," he replied. "Thought I'd like a cup of tea."



CHAPTER XIV

I BEGIN TO PLOT

I had the mourning band taken from my silk hat, while I have worn my frock coat so little that it looked very nicely. A new pair of gloves and a scarf purchased for the occasion completed my war-paint for the Van Rossum reception, as I made my way to the mansions glorifying the eastern edge of the Park. It was a civility due to my friend and a mark of respect I was only too glad to pay so handsome and unaffected a young millionairess as Miss Sophia; moreover, as a second, and perhaps unworthy, thought, I considered that a visit to such a princely establishment might give me the atmosphere I so often needed during the course of some of my stories. Hummingbirds, bees and novelists gladly draw sustenance from the humblest flowers, at times, but are never averse to the juices of scions of the horticultural nobility.

My hat and coat were seized upon in an anteroom, after I had deposited my card in a great chased receptacle, and I made my way up the wide staircase, softly carpeted in crimson and adorned at the sides with balusters of ancient, black, carved oak. The great hallway I had just left gave an impression of respectable age, like a neat and primped up old gentleman still able to wear a flower in his buttonhole. There were just enough ancient cavaliers looking from the walls to afford, with two shining suits of armor, a suggestion that the Van Rossums were reaping the just reward due to the offspring of noble swashbucklers.

In my ascension I closely followed three young ladies and blessed the fate that had abolished long trains. But for its decree, I should have been filled with the hot trepidation of the man who knows that he is apt, at the slightest opportunity, to tread on sweeping flounces, and who has had his share of furious and transfixing haughty looks. Others were coming behind me in a stream. The music of fiddles and mandolins hidden in a bower of palms, on the landing, mingled with a murmur of many voices. I soon entered a great parlor, through huge doors, and followed a line of matrons and damsels diversified by a scattering of the masculine element.

I immediately recognized Mrs. Van Rossum, very resplendent in pearl gray silk, and her daughter's goodnatured face, very smiling and friendly to all. Gordon

was standing quite near, chatting with some ladies. Mr. Van Rossum I knew at once, since his countenance has been, many times and oft, represented in the press among other portraits of enviable men of wealth. So urbane and mild did he look that I wondered how any one could hesitate to borrow a million from him. My chance to make my bow came very soon. The elder lady smiled to me most charmingly, in most evident and utter forgetfulness of my identity, but Miss Sophia showed an excellent memory.

"My dear Mr. Cole! How very kind of you to come! Yes, it's a most charming day. Lucy, dearest, this is Mr. Cole who writes the most delightful books. You must read them, but he will tell you all about them."

Swiftly, she turned to others and I was left in the care of the dearest little lady, just five feet nothing in highest heels, who looked like a rosebud wrapped in lace, and smiled at me.

"I am going to take you right over there by the window," she said. "I just dote on people who write books and I remember your name perfectly well. You are the author of 'The World's Grist' and 'Meg's Temptation.'"

She sat down, with a little sign extending her gracious permission for me to do likewise, whereupon I hastened to assure her that I made no claim to the reputation so thoroughly deserved by the authors of those magnificent novels.

"Then, tell me the names of your books, won't you?"

Somewhat diffidently I acquainted her with a few of the titles, whereupon she joyfully declared that she remembered one of them perfectly.

"The heroine was called Rose," she said, triumphantly.

"It seems to me that it was Kate," I replied, modestly.

"Yes, Kate, of course, and do you really think she was happy ever after with that extraordinary man Jonas?"

"I think I recollect marrying her off to one Fitzjames, but that is only a minor detail. A novelist, my dear young lady, may assert with some show of confidence that the weddings he brings about are warranted not to crock, but you must remember he deals with fiction. The future lies in the hollow of no man's hand and, since I write chiefly of modern days, I save myself the saddening task of following my heroines to the grave. To me they are all alive, yet, happy as the

day is long, revelling in sunshine and basking in undying love."

She folded her little hands on her lap, opened her big blue eyes very widely and sighed gently.

"How awfully delightful!" she said, "and I think you're ever so clever. But—but I think you'll have to pardon me."

I rose, as she gained her feet and smiled at me again. Then she rushed off to another corner of the room and placed her hand on the coatsleeve of a six-footer who looked at her, joyfully. Her little turned-up face, in a fraction of a second, must have spoken several volumes. Then, slowly and very casually, they drifted off towards the big conservatory to the left.

Twenty minutes later, floating with the crowd, I chanced to be behind them. It is possible that they had found the retreat too populous.

"I am sure that you must have flirted disgracefully before I came," the man accused her, tenderly.

"Not a bit! I just sat down with the dearest old foggy who is supposed to write novels, so that you shouldn't be jealous, if you saw me," she replied, contentedly.

I moved away, rather swiftly. I should evidently have been delighted at the opportunity of rendering such signal service to so charming a little person. I had served as an ægid for her, as a buckler to protect her innocence and display it to the world in general and to six feet of stalwart manhood in particular. Yet, I confess that this little bud had driven a tiny thorn in me.

"Well," I reflected, "it is perhaps good to be an old foggy with scanty hair and the beginning of crow's feet. At any rate it helps make Frieda fond of me and has given me the trustful friendship of Frances. Baby Paul, I think, also appreciates his venerable friend."

Just then, Gordon came to me.

"By Jove, Dave! You're rather a fine figure of a man, when you're properly groomed," he told me.

"That's nonsense," I told him, severely. "I have just had a wireless informing me that I am a back number. Why are you no longer receiving at the side of your intended bride? She looks exceedingly handsome and graceful."

"The engagement has really not been announced yet," he answered. "It is not official. The Van Rossums are going to Florida, because the old gentleman has lost some tarpon he wants to find again. After that they are going to California where he is to look up something about an oil well. I may possibly run over there to see them. The—It won't happen for ever so long, perhaps not till fall. Wish I could go out with you and beat you at billiards, but I'm to stay till the bitter end. Isn't she looking splendidly?"

My eyes turned to where Miss Van Rossum was still receiving guests. She was certainly a fine creature, full of the joy of living. If some of her tastes in the way of pursuits were somewhat masculine, it detracted nothing from her elegance and charm. These might, in later years, become rather exuberant, I reflected, looking at the amplitude of form displayed by her parents, but, after all, none of us are beyond the grasp of Father Time.

"Just as splendidly as she does in your exquisite painting," I replied, nodding towards the portrait, wonderfully framed, that stood on an easel in the best light that could have been found for it.

A moment later he was torn away from me. From time to time he returned to the side of the young lady, who was always much occupied in conversation and pleasant laughter with many friends.

If Gordon thinks that the engagement is as yet something of a secret, he is badly in error. Hints, glances, little movements of heads in his direction, constantly apprised me that the information was scattered far and wide. Two dowagers close to me indulged in a stage whisper that revealed to me the fact that they wondered whether the projected marriage would not be something of a *mésalliance* on the part of dear Sophia.

"After all, you know, he's nothing but a painter, and no one heard of him until three or four years ago!"

"But they say he charges enormously," said the other.

This, evidently, was quite a redeeming feature in my friend's favor, but I am afraid it was the only one, from their point of view.

I soon decided that I had done my full duty and sought the stairway again. Here, I once more ran into Gordon.

"I know just what the hippo in the zoo feels like," he confided to me, "and he has

the advantage of a thicker skin. But I'm putting it all down to advertising expense. Good-by, Dave, old boy, give my kindest regards to—to Frieda."

I was glad when I reached the sidewalk again. I am no cynical detractor of the advantages of wealth, breeding, education and all the things that go towards refining away some of the dross which clings to the original man. Were it not for the hope of lucre, how many would be the works of art, how great would be the achievements of the world! Still, I felt that a man can have a little too much of the scent of roses, a surfeit of gilded lilies and gems in profusion. The good, old, hard sidewalk seemed to give me just as pleasant a welcome as that extended by softest rugs, while the keen and bracing air filled my lungs more agreeably than the warmed and perfumed atmosphere I had just left. I climbed on top of one of the auto-busses, holding on to my hat, and was taken all the way down to Washington Square, where some of the ancient aristocracy of Gotham lives cheek by jowl with the proletariat burrowing a little further south.

I walked away, slowly, seeking to remember in that crowded assembly uptown some face I could favorably compare with that of Frances. No, it had been a road from Dan to Beersheba, barren of such beauty as blossoms on the fourth floor back, of what Gordon calls my menagerie. One of my venturesome fancies painted for me the Murillo-woman gliding through those rooms. She would have been like a great evening star among twinkling asteroids. My imagination vaguely clothed her with a raiment of beauty, but the smile of her needed no changing.

I reached the house just as the young ladies who sell candy were returning. My silk hat, I think, impressed them, as well as my yellow gloves and the ancient gold-mounted Malacca I inherited from my father.

"My! Ain't you handsome to-day, Mr. Cole!" exclaimed one of them.

"You been to a weddin', Mr. Cole?" asked another.

"I have been to pay my respects to two people who are drifting that way, if signs don't fail," I answered. "I should be happy indeed to look just as handsome whenever any of you favors me with an invitation to her marriage."

At this they giggled, appearing rather pleased, and I made my way upstairs, glad indeed to climb them. How fortunate it is that I selected the higher levels, considering that they would give me greater privacy and less interference with typewriting at night! My lucky star, when I so decided, was plainly in its apogee.

I have been told that I am rather quiet and silent of movement. I certainly did not seek to conceal my coming, but when I reached the top floor I saw that my neighbor's door was open and a voice that was most familiar and yet utterly new to me was crooning something. I listened. It was a bit of a dear old Breton song with a little meaningless *ritournelle*:

*Gaiement je chante et chanterai; Ti-ho-ho,
Car mon bonheur je garderai. Ti-ho-ho-ho.*

For a moment my heart stood still and I awaited, breathless. But there was no more, they were the last two words of the song. She had been singing to her little one, very low and sweetly, and the huskiness seemed to have disappeared. I thought upon these words "Gaily I sing and I will sing, for my happiness I will keep." Was the great wish of her heart coming to her now? Would Baby Paul be able to listen to the voice that had entranced his father and crow with delight at the loving notes that had stolen the man's heart?

A tiny pain shot through me. The bird was finding its song; would it now also use its wings? Is Frances destined to become a great singer again? Will her life, after a time, be led away from humbler surroundings, from her modest friends, and is her personality to become in my memory but one of those dear and charming recollections every man stores away in his heart, as some hide away faded flowers, a scented note, or perchance the glove that has touched a beloved hand?

I coughed, prudently, to announce my coming. She was in the big chair with Baby Paul on her lap and put her finger to her lips, thus announcing that her offspring had fallen asleep. I entered on tiptoe and drew a chair towards her, with due precaution, assuming the air of a Grand Inquisitor.

"Frances," I accused her, severely, but in a low voice, "you have been guilty of singing. This you have most certainly done without the faculty's permission. Dr. Porter would scold you most sternly, if he heard of it, and I feel that it is my duty to take so disagreeable a job from his shoulders. You are a bad, bold, rebellious creature and I don't know what I shall do to you!"

"I—I think I shall be able to sing again," she whispered, her eyes shining brightly. "Dear—dear David, I—I am so happy!"

Across the body of Baby Paul she extended her arm and hand. I took her fingers in mine.

"You deserve to have them well rapped with a ruler," I told her, "but, as no such instrument of torture is at hand, I shall punish you otherwise."

So I was bold enough to touch them to my lips for a second and abandoned them, suddenly possessed by a huge fear that I had taken an inexcusable liberty, but she looked at the baby, smiling.

"Indeed, Frances, I share your happiness and trust that your anticipations are to be realized in fullest measure. A mean, little, selfish feeling came to me, a moment ago, that the fulfilment of your hopes might take you away from us. I confess that I am shamed and contrite at the thought, but I have become very fond of—of Baby Paul. Now, however, I rejoice with you. But, my dear child, for Heaven's sake remember what our good little doctor told you! I beg you not to spoil his magnificent work!"

"Oh! David! I'll be ever so careful, I promise, and, whatever happens, you will always be the same dear old David to us. I assure you I won't try again, for ever so long. I think I just began without knowing what I was doing. The first thing I knew I was just humming that bit of song to Paul, and then the words came quite clear, so easily that I hardly realized I was singing. But I won't try again, until Dr. Porter allows me to. And then, it will be very little at a time, ever so little."

"And then, you will have to go to the very best man in New York, and take more lessons and practise a lot, because your throat has been idle so long that it has forgotten all it ever knew, and—and——"

"And it would cost a dreadful lot of money, and I have none, and it is all a great big lovely dream, but I must awaken from it and go back to Mr. McGrath's for a few days more, and then to Félicie's shop, because it opens again next week and she declares she can't get along without me. I am afraid, my poor David, that I shall have to be quite content with singing to Baby Paul, as best I can, and, perhaps, to Frieda and you."

I rose, angrily, and paced the room several times.

"That's arrant nonsense," I finally declared. "You will go to Gordon's and you will also return to Madame Félicie Smith's, for a short time. In the meanwhile I will have the piano moved into your room, because it is a silly incumbrance in mine. You can practise a little by yourself, if Porter allows you to. Then, as soon as he says it is all right, you will go to the Signora Stefano, or to Richetti or some such expert teacher. I have some money in the bank and I am going to

advance it to you, because you can return it later on, when you give concerts or sing at the opera. If you don't give it back, I'll dun you, sue you, set the minions of the law after you, if such a promise can give you any comfort. Don't you dare answer, it is bad for your throat to speak too much, especially when it is nonsense. And I'm going to make a lot more money besides. I have an idea about an old maid and a canary that the magazines will bid for, hungrily. It's the finest thing I ever wrote, although it is still incubating in my head."

She rose, ever so carefully, so as not to awaken Baby Paul, and deposited him in his crib. Then she came to me with both hands outstretched.

"Do you really think, David, that I would squander your poor little savings? Do you think I am one to speculate on friendship and try to coin money out of kindness?"

She held both my shoulders, her great beautiful eyes seeming to search my soul, which the tears that trembled on her lashes appeared to sear as if they had been drops of molten lead. With some effort, I brought a smile to my lips and shook my head.

"You are a silly infant," I told her, gravely. "Little Paul, on the other hand, is a man, an individual endowed with intelligence beyond his months. He will understand that you are not at all concerned in this matter and that I only want to help him out. I want to give him a mother of whom he will be proud, one who will make the little scrivener she met on a top floor ever boastful that once upon a time he was a friend and still maintains her regard. I am only seeking to help him, since we are great pals, to graduate from long frocks to trousers, in anticipation of college and other steps towards useful manhood. He is a particular friend of mine; he smiles upon me; he has drooled upon my shirtfront and pulled my moustache. We understand one another, Paul and I, and together we deplore your feminine obstinacy."

To my frightful embarrassment Frances let go of my shoulders and seized my hands, which she carried swiftly as a flash to her lips, before I could draw them away.

"When I teach him to pray, you will not be forgotten, David. We—we will speak of this some other time, because, perhaps, after all, my voice will never return—as it was before, and then all this will have been but—but idle speculations—and—and I will never forget your goodness."

Just then, Baby Paul, perhaps thinking that our conversation had lasted long enough, gave the signal for me to retire. He is a rather impatient young man, and I stepped out, closing the door behind me, and went to my room where I thankfully removed the frock coat, after which, David was himself again.

Richetti, I have heard, is a marvelous teacher, and there is no better judge of the possibilities of a voice. I am going to interview him and explain the intricacies of the case. Then, I shall tell him that if he sees the slightest chance he will put me under lasting obligation by sending the bills to me, meanwhile, assuring Frances that he is teaching her gratuitously, in order to enhance his reputation by turning out such a consummate artist. She will fall in my snare and be captured by my wiles.

There are various fashions, I have always heard, of causing the demise of a cat. Here is where the shrewd and clever conspirator is going to use the plots of his fiction in real life. I am thankful that my professional training is at last to serve me so well!



CHAPTER XV

THE LIGHTNING STROKE

More days have gone by. This morning I happened to meet Jamieson, who is always exceedingly kind and urbane to his flock of authors.

"My dear fellow," he told me, "you must not be discouraged if the 'Land o' Love' does not sell quite so well as some of the others, for I have not the slightest doubt that your next book will more than make up for it. A man is not a machine and he cannot always maintain the same level of accomplishment. We are only printing a couple of thousand copies to start with, but, of course, your advance payment, on the day of publication, will be the same as usual."

He said all this so pleasantly that I almost forgot that this payment was called for on my contract and felt personally obliged to him.

"We will send you a few advance copies by the end of the week," he said. "It might pay you to look one of them over, carefully. You have not read the thing for a good many months, now, and you will get a better perspective on it. I have no doubt that you will agree with me that a return to your former manner is rather advisable. I am ever so glad to have seen you. Now, don't worry over this because you have not yet written half the good stuff that's in you, and I certainly look forward to a big seller from you, some day."

I shook hands with him, feeling greatly indebted, and walked slowly home. There can be few better judges than Jamieson, and his estimate of the "Land o' Love" leaves me rather blue. I have been so anxious to make money in order to be able to help in the improvement of those repaired vocal chords of Frances and start her on the way towards the success I believe is in store for her, that I feel as if the impending failure of my novel were a vicious blow of fate directed against her. Why was I ever impelled to leave aside some of the conventions of my trade, to abandon the path I have hitherto trodden in safety? One or two multimillionaires may have been able to condemn the public to perdition, but a struggling author might as safely, in broad daylight, throw snowballs at a chief of police. Before I go any further I must carefully read over the seven or eight score pages I have already done for the successor of "Land o' Love," and find out

whether I am not drifting into too iconoclastic a way of writing.

With my head full of such disquieting thoughts I walked home. As I turned the corner of my street, I saw Frances, a good way ahead of me. She was doubtless returning from Gordon's studio. Her darling little bundle was in her arms and she hurried along, very fast.

"Baby Paul must be hungry," I decided, "and she will run up the stairs. No use hastening after her, for her door will be closed. Frieda will soon come in, and we shall all go over to Camus, as we arranged last evening."

Once in my room I took up my manuscript and began to study it, trying to disguise myself under the skin of the severest critic. I started, with a frown, to read the lines, in a manner that was an excellent imitation of a grumpy teacher I remembered, who used to read our poor little essays as if they had been documents convicting us of manslaughter, to say the very least. And yet, so hopelessly vacillating is my nature that I had read but half a chapter before I was figuratively patting myself on the back, in egotistic approval of my own work. I continued, changing a word here and there and dreamily repeating some sentences, the better to judge of their effectiveness, until there was a knock at my door and Frieda came in, looking scared.

"See here, Dave, I've just been in to see Frances. She's come back with a dreadful headache and can't go out to dinner with us. I asked if I could make her a cup of tea and she wouldn't hear of it. The room is all dark and she's lying on the bed."

"I'll go out at once and get Dr. Porter!" I exclaimed.

"No, I proposed it, but she won't see any one. She assures me that it will be all right by to-morrow and insists that it is not worth while bothering about. She wants us to go without her."

"Well, at least I can go in and find out whether there is anything I can do," I persisted.

"No, Dave, she told me that she wanted to be left alone. Please don't go in. Her head aches so dreadfully that she must have absolute quiet, for a time."

I looked at Frieda, helplessly, and she returned the glance. This was not a bit like Frances; she is always so glad of our company, so thankful for my stout friend's petting and so evidently relieved by such sympathy as we can extend that we

could make no head nor tail of the change so suddenly come upon her. The two of us felt like children open-eyed at some undeserved scolding.

"Well, come along, Frieda," I said, much disgruntled. "I suppose we might as well have something to eat."

"I don't care whether I have anything or not," she answered, dubiously.

"Neither do I, my dear," I assented.

"Then put on your hat and coat and come to the flat. I have half a cold chicken in the icebox and a bottle of beer. I don't want to go to Camus."

So we departed, dully, passing before the door that had been denied us for the first time in lo, these many months. The loose stair creaked dismally under Frieda's weight, and the dim hall lights reminded me of Eulalie's churchly tapers. On the way to the flat I stopped at a bakery and purchased four chocolate éclairs wherewith to help console Frieda. Once in the apartment, my friend seemed to regain some of her flagging spirits. She exhumed the fowl from her icebox and cut slices from a loaf of bread, while I opened a can of small French peas, which she set in a saucepan placed on her gas-stove. Also, I laid the éclairs symmetrically on a blue plate I took from the dresser, after which Frieda signalled to me to open the bottle of beer and our feast began in silence.

"I wonder how Trappists enjoy their meals," I finally remarked.

"They don't!" snapped out Frieda.

Yet a moment later she was talking as fast as usual, giving me many interesting details in regard to the effects of sick-headache on womankind and gradually abandoning the subject to revert to painting.

"I have sold Orion," she said. "He is going to Chicago. I have been thinking of a Leda with a swan, but I'm afraid it's too hackneyed. Why don't you suggest something to me? That beer is getting flat in your glass; you haven't touched it. Hand me an éclair."

I held the plate out to her, the while I sought to remember something mythological, and she helped herself. With profound disdain she treated the few suggestions I timidly made.

"You had better go home, David," she told me at last. "We are as cheerful as the

two remaining tails of the Kilkenny cats. Good night, I am going to darn stockings."

So I took my departure and returned to Mrs. Milliken's where I found a message waiting for me:

"Why the devil don't you have a telephone? Come right up to the studio.

"GORDON."

I knocked very softly at the door of the room opposite mine and was bidden to come in. Frances was lying on her sofa, and the light was not turned on. I saw her only vaguely and thought that she put a hand up to her forehead with a weary motion rather foreign to her.

"I hope you will pardon me," I said. "I have just come back from dinner and find that I must go out again. Before leaving, I wanted to make sure that you were not very ill and to ascertain whether there is anything I can do for you."

"No, David. Thank you ever so much," she answered. "As always you are ever so kind. By to-morrow this will have passed away and I shall be as well as ever. It—it is one of those things that never last very long and I am already better. Mrs. Milliken sent me up something, and I need nothing more. Good night, David."

She had spoken very softly and gently, in the new voice that was very clear. The change in it was most remarkable. I had been so used to the husky little tone that I could hardly realize that it was the same Frances. And yet its present purity of timbre was like a normal and natural part of her, like her heavy tresses and glorious eyes or the brave strong soul of her.

"Well, good night, Frances," I bade her. "I do hope your poor head will let you have some sleep to-night, and perhaps dreams of pleasant things to come."

So I hastened down to the street and to the station of the Elevated, on my way to Gordon's, wondering why he was thus summoning me and inventing a score of explanations, all of which I rejected as soon as I had formulated them.

When I pressed the button at his door, my friend opened it himself, his features looking very set and grave. I followed him into the studio, that was only half-lighted with a few shaded bulbs, and sat down on the divan by the window while he took a cigar and cut off the end, with unusual deliberation.

"Hang it all!" he finally grumbled, "why don't you speak? Have you seen—Mrs. Dupont?"

"Yes, I have," I answered, rather surprised, because to me he generally called her Frances now, as we all did.

"And she has told you all about it, of course!"

"She only told me that she had a severe headache, and would see no one, not even Frieda."

He looked at me, sharply, after which he lit a match for his cigar, with a hand that was decidedly shaky. Then he paced up and down the big room, nervously, while I stared at him in anxious surprise.

"Oh! You can look at me!" he exclaimed, after a moment. "I'm the clever chap who warned you against that woman, am I not? Marked *explosive*, I told you she ought to be. And now you can have your laugh, if you want to. Go ahead and don't mind me!"

For a moment I felt my chest constricted as with a band of iron. I felt that I could hardly breathe, and the hand I put up to my forehead met a cold and clammy surface.

"For God's sake, Gordon!" I cried, "what—what have you——?"

He pitched the cigar in the fireplace and stood before me, his hands deep in his trousers pockets, his voice coming cold and hard, the words forced and sounding artificial and metallic.

"What have I done? You want to know, eh? Oh! It's soon enough told. First I did a 'Mother and Child,' a devil of a good piece of work, too. And, while I was painting it, I saturated every fiber of me with the essence of that wonderful face. Man alive! Her husky little voice, when I permitted her to speak, held an appeal that slowly began to madden me. Oh! It didn't come on the first day, or the first week, but, by the time I was putting on the last few strokes of the brush, I realized that I was making an arrant fool of myself, caught by the mystery of those great dark eyes, bound hand and foot by the glorious tresses of her hair, trapped by that amazing smile upon her face. Then, I worked—worked as I never did before, fevered by the eagerness to finish that picture and send her away, out of my sight. I was tempted to leave the thing unfinished, but I couldn't! I wanted to run away and called myself every name under the sun, and gritted

my teeth. Up and down this floor I walked till all hours. I decided that it was but a sudden fever, a distemper that would pass off when she was no longer near me. Every day I swore I would react against it. What had I in common with a woman who had already given the best of her heart and soul to another man, who still goes on weeping for his memory, who is but one amid the wreck and flotsam of that artistic life so many start upon and so few ever succeed in! And the picture was finished and I gave her the few dollars she had earned and sent her away, just as calmly as if she'd been any poor drab of a creature. My God! Dave! If she had stood there and asked me for all I had, for my talent, for my soul to tread beneath her feet, I would have laid them before her, thankfully, gladly. But I took her as far as the door of the lift, forsooth, and gave her my coldest and most civil smile. I'm a wonderful actor, Dave, and have mistaken my profession! I hid it all from her—I—I think I did, anyway, and she never knew anything, at that time. So, when she had gone, I told Yumasa to turn the picture to the wall and then I went out to the club, and treated myself pretty well, and then to the theatre and back to the club. Some of the fellows are a pretty gay lot, sometimes, and I was good company for them that night!"

For a moment he stopped and took up another cigar, mechanically, while I kept on staring at him in silence.

"Oh! I was able to walk straight enough when I came home. The stuff had little effect on me. In the taxi my head was whirling, though. But I got back here and took up the picture again and placed it on the easel, in a flood of light. It was wonderful! It seemed to me that she was coming out of the frame and extending her round arms and slender fingers to me till my heart was throbbing in my throat and choking me!"

He stopped again and took up his pacing once more, like some furred beast in a cage.

"In the morning I looked at myself," he resumed. "A fine wreck of manhood I appeared, bleared and haggard and with a mouth tasting of the ash heap. But, after a Turkish bath, I was like some imitation of my real self again, for I could hold myself in and think clearly. It meant the abandoning of all my plans and the awakening, some day, in a period of disillusionment, with a woman at my side carrying another man's child and bestowing on me the remnants of her love. Ay, man! I was egotist enough to think I should only have to ask, to put out my hand to her! But I gripped myself again and felt proud of the control I could exercise over my madness. The Jap packed up my things, and I went away over there,

where the other woman awaited me, with her horses and her autos, her rackets and her golf-clubs, with other rich women about her, laughing, simpering, chattering, but culling all the blossoms of a life I had aimed for and was becoming a part of. I had paid for it, Dave, in toil such as few other men have undergone, at the price of starvation in garrets, over there in the *Quartier*. No light o' loves for me, no hours wasted, never a penny spent but for food of a sort and the things I needed for painting. And it took me years. Then the reward was before me, for I had won time. Yes, man! I was the master of time! Fools say it is money! What utter rot! Money is time, that's what it is. It can bring time for leisure, and to enjoy luxury, to bask in smiles, to lead a life of ease and refinement, and time also to accomplish the great work of one's dreams!"

There was another pause.

"I didn't forget her, of course. She was before me night and day, but I thought I was mastering my longing, beginning to lord it over an insane passion. I could golf and swim and dance, and listen to fools prattling of art, and smile at them civilly and agree with their silly nonsense. They're not much more stupid than most of the highbrows, after all, and, usually, a devilish sight more pleasant to associate with. None of Camus's poison in their kitchens! And—and that other woman was a beauty, and she held all that I aimed for in her hand and was stretching it out to me. And she's a good woman too and a plucky one! Rather too good for me, I am sure. It was at night, going forty miles an hour, I think, that I finally made up my mind to ask her. And—and she consented. She was driving and never slowed down a minute, for we were late. I was half scared, and yet hoping that she might wrap that car around a telegraph pole, before we arrived. When we finally stopped, she declared it had been a glorious ride, and gave me her lips to kiss, and—and I went up to my room to dress for dinner, feeling that I had made an end of all insanity, that I had achieved all that I had fought so hard for!

"Then, later on, after some months, you came around to ask me to use Frances as a model again. I thought I was quite cured at that time, and I refused. Oh, yes! I had been coming to that shack of yours. On those Sunday afternoons the devil would get into me. A look at her would do no harm. You and Frieda would be there too. And I would come and sit on your rickety bed and look at her, and listen to you all, and watch you pouring out tea. But I thought all the time that I was keeping a fine hold on myself, just tapering off, the dope-fiends call it. Then it was that you came to me. You're ugly and gawky enough, Dave, but no evil angel of temptation was ever so compelling as you. I remember how you stared

when I said I didn't want her. And you hadn't been gone ten minutes before the devil had his clutches on me and flung me in my car and I met you at your door and told you to let her come!

"And I've been painting her again. Such beastly stuff as I've turned out! Daubing in and rubbing out again, and staring at her till I knew she was beginning to feel uneasy and anxious. But I always managed to keep a hold on my tongue. God! What a fight I was waging, every minute of the time, crazy to fling the palette to the floor, to kick the easel over, to rush to her and tell her I was mad for the love of her! And to-day the crisis came; I'd been shaking all over; couldn't hold a brush to save my life. I—I don't know what I said to her; but it was nothing to offend her, I am sure, nothing that a sweet, clean woman could not hear and listen to, from a man who loved her. But I remember her words. They were very halting and that poor voice of hers was very hoarse again.

"'Oh!' she cried, 'I—I am so miserably sorry. I—I thought you were just one of the dear kind friends who have been so good to me. I—I never said a word or did a thing to—to bring such a thing about. Please—please let me go away. It makes me dreadfully unhappy!'

"And so she picked up her hat and put it on, her hands shaking all over, and took the baby to her bosom and went out, and—and I guess that's all, Dave."

He sank down on the teakwood stool he generally uses to put his colors on and his brushes. His jaws rested in the open palms of his hands, and he looked as if his vision was piercing the walls and wandering off to some other world.

"Why don't you speak?" he finally cried.

"Because I don't know what to say," I replied. "I've an immense pity for you in my heart, old man. You—you've been playing with fire and your burnt flesh is quivering all over."

"Let it go at that, Dave," he answered, rising. "I'm glad you're not one of the preaching kind. I'd throw you neck and crop out of the window, if you were."

"What of Miss Van Rossum?" I asked, gravely.

"They went off a week ago to Palm Beach. Looking for those tarpon. Come along."

"You haven't treated her right, Gordon."

"Know that as well as you. Come on out!"

I followed him downstairs. His car was drawn up against the curb and he jumped in.

"Want a ride?" he asked.

"No, I think I had better go home now."

"All right. Thanks for coming. I didn't want you to think I had behaved badly to Frances, for I didn't, and I had to talk to some one. Good by!"

He let in his clutch, quickly, and the machine jerked forward. He turned into the Park entrance and disappeared, going like a crazy man.

So I returned home, feeling ever so badly for the two of them. I honestly think and hope that I am of a charitable disposition, but I could not extend all sympathy and forgiveness to my friend. He had deliberately gone to work and proposed to a woman he did not truly love, and she had accepted him. The poor girl probably thinks the world of him, in her own way, which is probably a true and womanly one. And now, after he is bound hand and foot by her consent, he goes to work and lays down his heart at the feet of another.

Honor, manliness, even common decency should have held him back! I wondered sadly whether the best and truest friend I ever had was now lost to me, and I could have sat down and wept, had not tears been for many years foreign to my eyes.

And then the picture of Frances seemed to appear before me, in all its glory of tint, in all its sweetness and loveliness, and I shook my head as I thought of the awful weakness of man and of how natural it was that, before such a vision, no strength of will or determination of purpose could have prevented the culmination of this tragedy. I am sure that he resisted until the very last moment, to be at last overwhelmed. Poor old Gordon!

Her door was closed and there was utter silence when I returned. I tried to write, but the noise of the machine offended me. For a long time I stared at the pages of an open book, never turning a leaf over, and, finally, I sought my bed, more than weary.

At two o'clock, on the next afternoon, I got a wire from Gordon.

"Am taking the *Espagne*. Lots of sport driving an ambulance at the front. May perhaps write.

"GORDON."

I stared at the yellow sheet, stupidly. After this there was a knock at the door and the colored servant came in, bringing me a parcel. I opened it and found some advance copies of the "Land o' Love," which I threw down on the floor. What did all those silly words amount to!



CHAPTER XVI

FRANCES READS MY BOOK.

A great extravagance of mine lies in the fact that I pay my board here, for the sake of Mrs. Milliken, and take a good many of my meals outside, for mine. Strange as it may seem to the inveterately domestic, I enjoy a little table of my own, with a paper or a book beside me and the utter absence of the "please pass the butter" or "I'll trouble you for the hash" of the boarding-house.

Hence, I rose from my chair for another refection outside and debated as to whether I might venture out without my overcoat, when Frieda came out of Frances's room and penetrated mine.

"She is all right now," I was informed. "Her headache has quite left her, and Madame Smith has been in to inform her that the shop is to be opened tomorrow. So I have told Frances she had better continue to lie down and have a good rest. I may come in again, later this afternoon, for a cup of tea."

"You are a million times welcome to it," I said, "but you will have to make it yourself. I have to go over to my sister's where there is another blessed birthday. I shall have to go out now and pick out a teddy bear or a Noah's ark. I am afraid they will keep me until late. Give Frances my love and insist on her going out tomorrow evening with us, to Camus."

"Very well, I certainly will," answered Frieda, bending over with much creaking of corset bones. "What are these books on the floor? You ought to be ashamed of yourself for ill-treating valuable, clean volumes."

"They may be clean, but I doubt their value," I said. "They're only copies of the 'Land o' Love.'"

"What a pretty cover design, but the girl's nose is out of drawing. Sit right down and sign one of them for me and I want to take another to Frances. It will help her to pass away the time."

I obeyed, decorating a blank page with my illegible hieroglyphics, and repeated the process on a second copy for Frances, after which I departed.

Goodness knows that I love the whole tribe of my sister's young ones, and my sister herself, and hold her husband in deep regard. He is a hard-working and inoffensive fellow, who means well and goes to church of a Sunday. He proudly introduces me as "my brother-in-law the author," and believes all he sees in his morning paper. Despite all this, I abhor the journey to their bungalow although, once I have reached it, I unquestionably enjoy the atmosphere of serene home life. The infants climb on my knees and wipe their little shoes on my trousers, bless their hearts! To little David, named after me, I was bringing a bat and baseball mitt, with some tin soldiers. He is now six years old and permitted to blow his own nose under his mother's supervision. The pride he takes in this accomplishment is rather touching.

A large box of candies would permit the others to share in my largess, and I arrived at the top of the Palisades laden like a commuter. After the many embraces, my expert advice was sought in regard to the proposed location of an abominable bronze stag, purchased cheap at an auction, and the thirst I was supposed to be dying from was slaked with homemade root beer. Thereafter, I was taken for a walk and made to inspect a new house under construction, that was being erected by an individual who is godfather to little Philippa. Upon our return, the scratchy phonograph was called upon to contribute to the general entertainment, my sister constantly running in and out of the parlor to the kitchen, where a perspiring straw-headed Swede toiled at the forthcoming dinner.

From this I arose at last, quite happy and slightly dyspeptic. In honor of the day the children were allowed an extra half-hour of grace before being driven off to bed. After peace reigned upstairs, I was consulted at length in regard to my views concerning the future prospects of the sewing-machine trade, in which John is interested, while my sister requested my opinion as to an Easter hat. I finally left, after contributing the wherewithal for a family visit to the circus, and John was so good as to accompany me all the way to the trolley tracks.

They are lovable, dear people, prudent in their expenditure in order that their offspring may be well brought up, and happy in their modest and useful lives. If I were only a successful writer, a maker of best sellers, I should rejoice in the ability to help them carry out their plans and achieve their reasonable ambitions. As it is, I can only assist Santa Claus in his yearly mission and try, at various time, to bring extra little rays of sunshine to them.

As the trolley and ferryboat brought me home, I had the feeling that the night

was far advanced and that I had been on a long journey which rendered the prospect of bed and slumber a highly desirable one. But once in the embrace of the big city, I realized that it was but the shank of the evening and that the hurried life of the town, maker of successes and destroyer of many hopes, was throbbing fast. My watch showed but ten o'clock when I reached my caravanserai, but I climbed up the last steps, carefully, anxious to avoid making any disturbance that might awaken Frances and her little one.

To my surprise I found that her door was still open. She was holding my book, closed, upon her lap, and as she lifted her head I saw her wonderful eyes gazing at me, swimmingly, and she rose with hand outstretched.

"Come in for a moment, David. Yes, leave the door open. Baby Paul is sleeping soundly and will not awaken. Take a chair and let me talk to you about that book. But—but before I speak of it, I want to have a long, long look at you. Yes, it is the same dear old David—you haven't changed a bit. And yet, Dave, you are a great big man. I never knew how big, until I read this volume. I have been at it ever since you left!"

"My dear child, it is all fiction and, I am afraid, not very good. Jamieson doesn't think very much of it."

"It makes no difference what he thinks. I know that I haven't been able to keep my eyes away from it since Frieda brought it in. Oh! David, where did you ever find such things to say; how did you ever discover and reveal such depths of feeling, such wonderful truth in the beats of struggling hearts. You should be so proud of yourself, so glad that this book of yours will bring comfort and hope to many. It has made me feel like a new woman, one who has received a message of cheer and gladness. Thank you, David, for those words written on the fly-leaf, and thank you still more for the strength and the courage those pages have brought me!"

I looked at her, rather stupidly, until I reflected that she had read the volume through the distorting glasses of her friendliness to me, of the interest she takes in my work.

"My dear," I told her, "I am happy indeed that you have been able to gather a little wheat from the chaff of the 'Land o' Love.' You have hypnotized yourself a little into thinking that whatever comes from your friend Dave must be very good. For your sake, as well as mine, and especially for the good of Baby Paul, I wish indeed that your impression may be shared by others."

"I know it will be! It can't help appealing to ever so many. It is perfectly wonderful. I like your other books, ever so much, but this one is different."

"That's the trouble," I informed her.

She shook her head, as if in despair at my pessimism.

"Don't be foolish, Dave. You have done a fine piece of work. Oh! You can smile, if you want to. I know I am nothing but a girl—I mean a woman—but since early girlhood I have lived in an atmosphere of art, which is nothing but truth expressed in all its beauty. I think I have always understood the big things in painting and in music, instinctively, and in this book I find a melody that uplifts me, a riot of splendid color which appeals to me, because it is all true."

"Gracious! My dear Frances!" I said, laughing. "I fear that, if you are ever tempted to read it again, you will meet with a great loss of illusion."

But she laughed also, her low sweet voice coming clear and happy.

"I—I had been feeling so badly, David, and the moment I set foot in your dear 'Land o' Love' I was glad again to be alive. My baby looked more beautiful than ever to me, and the years that are to come, more hopeful. Dear friend, I am so glad and proud that a man like you has come into my life!"

For a second only I looked at her, and then my eyes fell. I was glad indeed of her words, but I felt that her regard and affection would be all I should ever obtain from her. The love of so glorious a creature was never meant for a little scribbler, but how splendid a thing it was for a man to have been able to gain her esteem, to have succeeded in having her call him, trustfully, by his first name and permit him to sit beside her in the little room where she spends so many hours and croons to her baby!

"Dr. Porter says that my throat is doing ever so well," she told me, after a moment of silence. "He sees no objection to my beginning to sing a few scales. I must keep very carefully to the middle of my register, so that I may put no undue strain on my voice. Oh! David! I have always doubted that it would ever come back. Isn't it queer? Since I finished the book, I feel uplifted, hopeful. Indeed, I am beginning to believe that some day I shall sing again, just as I did when——"

A little cloud passed over her face, that darkened it for a moment. She was evidently thinking of the beautiful days that could never come back. But after a time it disappeared and she sat in her chair, with hands folded in her lap upon

which the book still rested, looking at me in her sweet friendly way. Then, suddenly, the little cloud came again and she leaned forward, swiftly.

"Did—did you see Mr. McGrath?" she asked.

"He sent for me last night," I acknowledged.

"And—and of course he told you——"

"Everything, I suppose."

She kept her eyes lowered, persistently, looking gravely and sadly at the worn carpet.

"At—at first I couldn't understand," she began. "Frieda told me days and days ago that he was engaged—she had seen it in a paper. Of course, he never spoke to me about it. When—when he began to say those things, I thought he was out of his senses and—and I was afraid. He was pale and trembling all over, and then I realized that he was asking me to marry him. Oh! David! For a moment a dreadful temptation came to me. My baby was in my arms—and this meant that I should always have bread for him—that he could be taken care of—that it wouldn't matter, then, if I ever could sing again. I—I could buy health and happiness for him, and strength. Oh! It came to me just like a flash, and then it went away again, thank God! I couldn't listen to him. It meant that I should have to give up the memories that are still living and abandon the struggle, yes, the blessed struggle for my livelihood and Baby's, to go to him as a loveless wife. No, it was impossible, David! And he was so unhappy, so frightfully unhappy when I told him I could never marry him, and—and then I ran away. And he had always been so kind to me, Dave, and so considerate—not like you, of course, because nobody could be like you, but he was always so nice and pleasant, and I never had the slightest idea that—that he had—that he was in love with me. And—and is it true, David, that he is engaged to another woman?"

"I am afraid so, Frances, and I think she is a very fine and good woman, and—and I am sorry for her. He can never have really loved her, of course, but you know that Gordon was always a schemer, that he had mapped out all his life like a man planning the building of a house. And then, all of a sudden, he found out that nature was too strong for him, that hearts and minds can't be shut within metes and bounds, and that the real love in him was paramount. Oh! The pity of it all!"

I could see that she was also strongly affected and that it had been a shock to her, a shrewd and painful blow, to hear my friend begging for a love she could not give. He had been one of a few people lately come into her life who had helped to mitigate its bitterness. Her soul, full of gratitude, had revolted at having been compelled to inflict pain on him, and yet she had been forced to do so and it had left her weak and trembling, with temples on fire and throbbing. Then, she had wanted to shut herself away from all, to try and close her eyes in the hope that the ever-present vision of this thing might vanish in the darkness of her room.

"I don't know why it was, Dave, but it seemed to break my heart. I was never so unhappy, I think, excepting on the day when—when I saw that terrible announcement. Why! David! How could there have been any love left in my heart to give away? How could I have listened to such things? Is there ever a night when I don't kneel down and pray for the poor soul of the man who lies somewhere on those dreadful fields, buried amid his comrades, with, perhaps, never a tiny cross over him nor a flower to bear to him a little of the love I gave him? How often I have wished that Baby were older, so that he could also join his little hands and repeat the words after me. I—I wouldn't tell you all this, David, if I didn't know how well you understand a woman's heart; if I didn't realize how splendid and disinterested your friendship is."

She stopped. Her eyes were turned towards the little bed where Paul was sleeping, while one of her hands had sought her forehead again, as if the pain had returned. And, as I looked at her, I became uneasy with a sense that she esteemed me too highly and gave me credit I didn't and couldn't deserve, for, in the heart of me, I knew I loved her with such intensity of feeling that it hurt me with the bitterest of pangs.

Ay! She had said it. There could be no other love for her! The old one was still strong in her soul, for the man she would never see again but whose image was graven so deep in her memory that he was still with her, a vision upstanding though silent, listening to the prayers she said for him and, perhaps, in her sleep, no longer a mute wraith of the beloved, but one who whispered again softly some of the words of long ago. I would fain, also, have prayed for courage never to bare my heart to her, for strength enabling me to remain the disinterested friend she deemed me, to whom she could at least give affection and trust.

"It is late, David," she finally said. "Good night. I think I will read that last chapter of the 'Land o' Love,' again, before I go to sleep. It will show me a world full of fine big things and bring the blessedness of new hope."

"I hope it will, my dear Frances," I answered, and returned to my room where I touched a match to the gas and filled my big calabash. As I looked about me, I felt that my little kingdom was a rather bare and shabby one. Hitherto it had been perfectly sufficient for my needs, nor had I ever seen in it anything to find fault with. In fact I had many a time thought myself fortunate in having so secure a retreat, which only the feet of faithful friends could be attracted to. They would come to it only for the sake of their old David. They were content to sit on the edge of the bed, if the chairs gave out. But now I realized that for some time strange dreams had been coming to me, of a possibility that in its occupant a marvelous and glorious creature might one day find something kindred, a heart to which her own would respond. I had begun to lift my eyes up to her and now I saw how pitiful the room and the lodger must seem to her. I felt that all that I should ever get out of life would be fiction, invention, the playing of tunes on hearts of my own creation that would never beat for me saving in printed pages. Never could they become my very own; always, they would go out to others, to laugh or weep or yawn over. They would represent but pieces of silver with which I might perhaps bring a bit of happiness to a few, after paying for my shelter and food, and the clothes which Gordon asserts are never really made for me.

Poor old Gordon! Frieda predicted that he would be hoist by his own petard, some day, and it has come to pass. He is now far out of sight of land, and his head is still awirl with the amazing wrecking of his schemes. It would have been a bigger thing for him to do, and a braver, to have gone to that splendid girl Sophia Van Rossum and confessed he had sinned against her, and begged her pardon, humbly. I suppose he has written to her and explained that he has lost the right even to touch the hem of her garment. It is good that he had the saving grace not to keep up his pretence of love for her, but his sudden and amazing departure shows how keenly he has felt the blow. His ambitions have flown, his plans gone a-gley, and the one thing that could remain was the eager searching for an immediate change, for a reckless occupation in whose pursuit he might gamble with his life and, perhaps, throw it away. I saw his purpose, clearly. In the ambulance corps there would be no long months of drilling, no marching up and down fields and roads clear of any enemy. He could at once go to work and play his part in the great game. May he return safely, and may the hand of time deal gently with him! Were I fitted for it, I should gladly take his place. The idea of also running away, before temptation becomes unendurable, is beginning to appeal to me with no little strength.

But what could I do at that front where they want men of youthful vigor and bravery, in whom the generous sap of life at its finest runs swiftly? I think I will have to remain here and continue to turn out my little stories. I will keep on giving them a happy ending, that my readers may finish them contentedly. But always I shall remain conscious of the tale of my own life, in which there will never be an entrance into that happiness I so freely bestow on the poor little children of my imagination.

Yet, who knows? It may be that, for many years yet, I may from time to time see Frances, even if her art should take her at times far from me. She may teach Baby Paul to look upon me as some sort of uncle, who bears him great affection and even love. The boy may, in the future, come to me and tell me of his pleasures and his pains, and listen to the advice old fellows so freely and uselessly give. And I will talk to him of his mother, of the brave good woman who toiled for him, who shed the benison of her tenderness on him, and yet had some left that she could bestow on the obscure scribbler. Never will I tell him that the writer of stories loved her, for that is something that must remain locked up in my heart.



CHAPTER XVII

MISS VAN ROSSUM CALLS

For some time I have permitted these pages to lie fallow. I thought I would not continue to jot down the events and the feelings that crowded themselves upon me, since they could serve only to make more permanent to mind and memory a period of my life in which there has been much sweetness and comfort of mind mingled, however, with the sadness that comes upon the man who knows he can never achieve his heart's desire. I deemed it best to cease my unprofitable ruminations over things flavored with some distress. Why keep on rehearsing them over and over again and sitting down in the wee small hours to make confidants of heartless sheets of paper?

Yet to-day I feel that, in after years, they may possibly prove of value to me. Man is so fortunately constituted that he remembers happiness and joy more vividly than pain. The day may come when I shall pick up these sheets and smile a little over my sorrows, whose edges will be blunted, and think, dreamily and with a mind at ease, over many hours scattered here and there, which made up for the days of unprofitable longing.

Many surprising things have happened since I last wrote. In spite of what Frances told me, David Cole seems to have changed. In my own purview I can distinguish no alteration in my personality, but it appears to be rather evident to some of my acquaintances.

Jamieson, some weeks ago, met me on Broadway. His wide and hearty palm failed to smite me as usual on the back. He rushed across the street with hand extended and greeted me as a long lost friend, instead of a pleasant business acquaintance. His memory, the excellence of which I have heard him boast of, appeared to have suffered a partial lapse.

"Why! Mr. Cole!" he exclaimed. "Ever so happy to see you! I always told you I had every reason to believe that some day you would make a killing. It is great! Have you seen the *Nation*, and the *Times*, and the *Springfield Republican* and the *Boston Observer*? Of course you have! They're giving columns to the 'Land o' Love.' The biggest shop on the Avenue keeps its show-windows filled with it.

The first printing melted like a snowflake on a hot stove. Five more of them already, and another on the way. How are you getting on with the new manuscript?"

In his enthusiasm he appeared to remember nothing of his former rather dark views as to the prospects of my book. He was now exuberant, enthusiastic, and quite impressed by his infallibility. I informed him that the new book was coming on fairly well and expressed my delight at the popular demand for the novel so kindly spoken of by the critics. He insisted on my taking lunch with him, deplored my inability to accept his invitation and made me promise to dine with him very soon. He was anxious that I should meet Mrs. Jamieson and the children, and carefully saw to my safety as far as the Subway station.

Needless to say that this sudden stroke of good fortune, after first leaving me somewhat dazed, has given me a great deal of happiness. It was only a couple of days after I had been first informed of the way the public was clamoring for the book that I invaded my neighbor's room, stormily.

"Frances," I announced to her, "I have just been to see Professor Richetti. I had an introduction to him from Jamieson, who knows everybody. He received me very charmingly, quite in the manner of the *grand seigneur*, and then just melted. His bow is a revelation, and his smile a treat. It appears that he has heard of you. 'I know, I know,' he exclaimed, as soon as I mentioned your name. 'La Signora Francesca Dupont, oh, yes. More as one year ago I 'ear of la Signora. My friend Fiorentino in Paris he wrote me she come right away to America. Him say she has one voice *di primo cartello*, a very fine beautiful *mezzo-soprano*, very much *maravigliosa*. I much wonder I do not 'ear about the Signora. Her disappear, no one know nothing. Ah, her was sick in de throat! And now all well again. No use the voice long time. *Per favore*, Signor Cole, you bring me him lady *subito*, and I listen, I 'ear 'er sing, I take 'er and make a great *cantatrice* of 'er again!'"

Frances looked at me. She rose from her chair and paced about the room, once or twice. Then she leaned against the piano, that had been placed in her room, and held her forehead in her hand.

"Listen, David," she said slowly. "Don't make me do this. Don't put such temptation before me. I'm only a weak woman."

"Frances, but for the thinness of my locks I'd pull out my hair in despair at your obstinacy," I cried. "I am telling you that they are selling that book faster than they can print it and that money will soon be flowing into my coffers. Jamieson

has intimated that I could have a large advance at once, if I wanted it. Moreover, Richetti is—he isn't going to charge anything. He—he says that you can pay him long after your tuition is ended."

She came to me, swiftly, and put her hands on my shoulders, her eyes searching mine, which could not stand her gaze.

"My poor dear Dave. You—you are such a poor hand at deceiving. I—I don't think you could fool even Baby Paul. There is too much candor and honesty in you for that sort of thing."

"Well," I answered, rather lamely, "I—I told him, of course, that I would guarantee the payment of his honorarium, and he answered that he must try your voice first, because, if it was not promising, he would refuse to waste his time on it. He was very frank. Then he told me that Jamieson's note stated that I was a *scrittore celebre*, a *romanziero molto distinto*, and that whatever arrangements I wanted to make would be perfectly satisfactory. He declared, with his hand on his heart, that money was a great means to an end, but that the thing that really mattered in this world was art, *Per Bacco!* and the *bel canto* from voices divine! And now, my dear child, you and I are trembling over the edge of a most frightful quarrel, of a bitter fight, of weepings and gnashings of teeth! You shall obey me, or I will take Baby Paul and feed him to the hippopotamuses—no, they eat hay and carrots and things; but I will throw him to the bears in the pit or squeeze him through the bars of the lion's cage. Do you hear me?"

She took a step back and sank in the armchair, her hands covering her face.

"Hello! What's the matter?" came from the open doorway.

It was Frieda, a fat and rosy *dea ex machina*, arriving to my rescue.

"Frances," I informed her, "is beginning to shed tears, because she is going to Richetti's to have her voice made over again, renovated like my gray suit. She wants to weep, because she will have to sing scales and other horrid things, and be scolded when she is naughty and does not open her mouth properly."

"Oh! I'm so glad!" chuckled Frieda, her double chin becoming more pronounced owing to the grin upon her features. "Isn't it fine!"

"But—but it means that David wants me to be a drag on him," objected Frances, rising quickly. "He is guaranteeing the fees, and—and I should probably have to stop working at Madame Félicie's, and it means——"

"It means that he will have to advance a little money for your expenses while you study," said Frieda judicially.

"Yes, of course, and after months and months of study we may find out that my voice will never again be the same, and that all this has been wasted, and that I shall never be able to pay it back. He has always worked dreadfully hard and denied himself ever so many things in order to be kind to others, and now——"

"And now he is making money hand over fist. I just went to see a friend off on the steamer to Bermuda and every other passenger has a copy of that blessed book in his hand. Now that Dave is being rewarded at last, and is entitled to a bit of extravagance, to a little of the comfort money can bring, you won't help him. You know that it will make him perfectly miserable, if you don't accept. Oh, dear! I think I'm talking a lot of nonsense. Do behave yourself, Frances, and let the poor fellow have his own way, for once."

And so it was finally settled, after another tear or two and some laughter, and Frieda joyously sat down to the piano and began to play some horrible tango thing and Baby Paul awoke and protested, as any sensible infant would. The next day, I took Frances over to Richetti's, and he was ever so pleasant and courteous to her, and most sympathetic. I left her with him, fearing that my presence might distract her attention from more important matters, and went to a tailor to order a suit of clothes. It gratified me considerably to feel that, for the time being, there would be no sinful extravagance in eschewing the ready-made. There is indeed a great comfort in the inkling that one is beginning to get along in the world. After this I had my hair cut, and returned, exuding bay rum, to Richetti's studio.

Frances was waiting for me. The *maestro* was already engaged with another pupil, and we went out to find seats on an open car.

"He says he thinks it will be all right," she told me, eagerly. "The tone is there and the volume. All I need is exercise, much judicious exercise. He is the first teacher I ever met who told me that my breathing was all right. They always want you to follow some entirely new method of their own. He will give me three lessons a week, in the morning. That will be enough for the present. At first, I must only practise an hour a day. And so I can go back to Madame Félicie, because she will be very glad to have me every afternoon and three mornings a week and so I can keep on making a little money and I won't have to borrow so much from you. Isn't it splendid?"

"I wish you would give up the shop," I told her.

But she shook her head, obstinately, and, of course, she had to have her own way. That evening we went to Camus, and I doubt whether the place ever saw three happier people. Frieda beamed all over and gorged herself on mussels *à la marinière*. She had just finished a portrait that pleased her greatly, and was about to take up a nymph and faun she had long projected.

"I don't suppose I would do for the nymph?" asked Frances.

"You a nymph! I want some slender wisp of a child just changing into womanhood, my dear. You are the completed article, the flower opened to its full beauty. If I ever paint you, it will have to be as some goddess that has descended to the earth to mother a child of man."

"And I presume that as a faun I should hardly be a success," I ventured.

"What an idea! Frances, think of our dear old Dave prancing on a pair of goat's legs and playing pipes of Pan."

They laughed merrily over the farcical vision thus evoked, and, of course, I joined in the merriment. We remained for some time, watching the dancing that took place in a space cleared of tables. Not far from us rose an old gentleman who might have been profitably employed in reading Victor Hugo's "Art of being a Grandfather," who danced with a pretty young girl who looked at him, mischievously. From the depth of my virtue I somewhat frowned upon him, until he returned to the table where a white-haired old lady and a young man were still sitting. The girl put her hand on the old lady's arm, and I heard her say something to the effect that Daddy was growing younger every day, so that I felt properly contrite.

There may be much folly in all this dancing, in the spending of many hours that might be employed in more useful pursuits, but, after all, our hearts are in great part such as we make them. The wicked will always find no lack of opportunity for the flaunting of evil ways, and the good will never be any the worse for anything that cheers them, that lightens drearier bits of life, that may bring smiles to lips trained to the speaking of truth and kindness.

After this little feast of ours, some more weeks went by, marked by the parading in the streets of a few old men engaged in selling pussy-willows, after which the shops displayed the first lilacs which presently grew so abundant that they were peddled on every street-corner, wherefore I knew that the Spring was fairly established and swiftly turning into summer. Frances was going to Richetti's,

regularly, and practising every evening, with the assistance of my piano. To me her scales and exercises sounded more entrancing than any diva's rendering of masterpieces, I think. It was all in the voice, in the wonderful clear notes which, like some wonderful bloom come out of a homely bulb, had so quickly sprung from the poor little husky tones I remembered so well. Even then there had been charm and sweetness in them, but, now, her song added greater glory to Frances and seemed to be taking her farther away from me, to make her more intangible.

I met Richetti in the street, the other day, and he grasped my arm, enthusiastically.

"But a few more weeks of lessons," he told me, beamingly. "After that the *cara signora* Francesca will work by herself for a few months, when I go to Newport. By September I return and we begin again. Ah! Signore Cole, we give again to the world a great voice, a ripe full-throated organ, with flexibility, with a timbre *magnifico*! She makes progress so quick I cease not to marvel. By middle of winter I give my concert of pupils. Yesterday, I make her sing Massenet's 'Elégie.' It make me cry very nearly. She have a soul full of music, *per Bacco*! *Addio, caro signore*! I see my friend Gazzoro-Celesti. A thousand pardons!"

He shook hands effusively and ran across Broadway, where he greeted the great *basso buffo* of the Metropolitan, and I was left to rejoice by myself, as I went into a shop to buy a new typewriter ribbon.

And so a time came when the lessons were stopped for some weeks. Richetti deplored the fact that Frances could not go to Newport, where he would have kept on teaching her, but assured her that she was getting on marvelously and that her practice would suffice to prevent her from losing anything she had gained back.

With the beginning of the hot weather, Frances grew somewhat anxious about Baby Paul, who was weaned and did not keep up his steady gain in weight. She was looking rather tired, and I insisted on calling in Dr. Porter, who advised an immediate change of air.

"What you need is a month or two in the country," he declared. "You have been working very hard in that shop, and practising at night, and looking after that young ogre. If you expect to keep your health, you must take care of it. Without it, there can be no good singing, nor any big, vigorous Baby Paul."

"It isn't possible," asserted Frances.

"It is, and shall be done," I contradicted severely. "When I took my gray suit over to Madame Félicie to clean and press, she complained that there was very little business now. I know that she can spare you for a time. She will have to do so anyway, when you begin to sing in public. I know just the place for you to go to."

"Good!" exclaimed Dr. Porter, "and you, Mr. Cole, had better do the same thing. You ought to take a holiday. Get some of the cobwebs off your mind and gather in a little country atmosphere to put into your next book."

"All I need," I said, "is some pills. I shall get you to prescribe them for me."

"I won't," he retorted rudely. "You must go to bed at a reasonable hour, consume regular meals, and breathe clean air and take plenty of exercise. So long, get a move on you and take my advice at once, undiluted."

"It would be ever so nice, if you could go, David," said Frances, as soon as our good little doctor had left. "I am sure you are tired also. As for me, I know it is not so bad as he thinks. I can take Baby up on the Palisades, and to Staten Island and back on the ferry, and perhaps on the Coney Island boat, and——"

"Nothing of the sort," I interrupted. "Of course I don't care anything about Baby Paul and yourself, but I have a great pecuniary interest in your voice and I am going to have my money back, and you will have to sing in order to earn it, and ——"

"And you can keep on saying all the horrid things you want to," she put in. "Now, David, be reasonable. You know that a stay in the country would do you ever so much good."

"Very well," I answered. "Then I shall hire Eulalie to elope with Baby Paul and I'll go along to watch his teething, and you can stay here and inhale benzine at Madame's, and lose all your voice and grow thin and ugly, and be well punished for disobedience and rebellion, and by the time you've——"

We were interrupted by the sound of steps on the stairs. They were somewhat heavy, but not the deliberate thumps of Frieda's climbing. It was a swift and confident progress, in which I recognized none of the inmates of our menagerie. A second later I turned. A fine young woman of healthful color and dressed in excellent taste stood at the door.

"I—I beg your pardon," she said. "The colored woman told me to go right up to

the top floor. How—how do you do, Mr. Cole?"

It was Miss Sophia Van Rossum, big as life, with a face perhaps more womanly and handsome than I had ever given her credit for possessing. In our surroundings she appeared like a fine hot-house flower suddenly transplanted to a poor little tenement yard. She was looking curiously at Frances, who was standing at my side.



CHAPTER XVIII

DIANA AMONG MORTALS

"I am awfully sorry that you took the trouble of coming all the way up here," I told her. "I am afraid that the colored maid is little accustomed to social usages. There is a little parlor downstairs."

"Oh! It's all right, Mr. Cole. I asked for you and she just pointed up with her thumb and said 'Top floor,' so I climbed up."

She took a step towards Frances, extending her hand.

"I know I have seen you before," she said pleasantly, "but I can't for the moment remember where we met."

"I think, Miss Van Rossum, that you have only been acquainted with Mrs. Dupont through the medium of my friend Gordon's talent. You may remember a 'Mother and Child' in his studio."

"Of course. I remembered the face at once. Gordon is such a wonderful painter, so clever in obtaining the most marvelous likenesses. And—and he didn't flatter his models a great deal, either. I am very glad to meet you, Mrs. Dupont."

Frances smiled, in her graceful way, and expressed her own pleasure.

"You—you also know Gordon, of course, since you posed for him, Mrs. Dupont. I—I came here to speak with Mr. Cole about him."

"I can hardly offer you the hospitality of my room, Miss Van Rossum," I told her. "It is a rather disorderly bachelor's den. If you will allow me to lead you downstairs to the little parlor the landlady provides her guests with, I shall be delighted to——"

"No, if you don't mind, I shall remain here for a moment. Mr. Cole, you are Gordon's best friend; he used to say that you were the great exception, a man one could always trust in everything. I hope Mrs. Dupont will not mind, she—she is a woman and may be able to advise me. I have legions of friends—we know thousands of people, but it doesn't seem to me that there is another soul to whom

I may come for—for a little——"

She interrupted her words. I had pushed a chair forward for her and she acknowledged the offer with a smile, but did not avail herself of it at once, for she went to the bed where Baby Paul was, for a wonder, lying awake and rolling his eyes about. On his face, however, there was something that Frances and I considered a polite little grin.

"Is this the dear baby of the picture?" she asked. "He has grown such a lot. What a dear lamb of a child it is! Oh! Mrs. Dupont, how proud and happy a woman must be to be the mother of such a darling!"

Decidedly Miss Sophia was revealing herself in a very fine light. For all of her riding astride after hounds, and her golfing and shooting and tennis, she was a very real woman and her heart was in the right place. Frances took up Baby Paul and sat down with him on her lap, where he promptly went to sleep again.

"I remember how Gordon spoke of you, several times, Mrs. Dupont," said Miss Van Rossum. "He said a queer thing, once, one of the strange little sentences he always used to bring out. I was looking at your picture and told him it represented a very beautiful woman, and he answered that she was one of those ideals the other fellow always gets hold of. But—but I don't see that there was anything very ideal about that painting. It was just you."

For a moment Frances looked away. The phrase reminded her of an unhappy circumstance, I have no doubt, but, to me, it represented cynicism carried to an unpermissible length.

"But I must come to the point," continued Miss Van Rossum, with a slight frown, which I deemed an indication that she had something rather difficult to say. "Of course you've been wondering at my coming here. I know it's a bit unconventional, but I didn't want to write and ask you to come and see me. We have only just returned from California and are off to Southampton in the morning. I—I simply felt that I must take my chance of finding you at home. I told you a minute ago that Gordon always said you were a man to be trusted to the utmost, and—and I want to find out something about him. Please, Mr. Cole, have you any news of him?"

"I have received but one very short letter," I replied. "I will go and get it for you."

I think I was glad to escape for a moment and leave her with Frances, for I foresaw a long cross-examination. She had looked very brave and strong at the moment of her amazing arrival, and I had wondered at such an unusual proceeding. But now I realized that she was very profoundly disturbed, that her show of pluck was but a veil to cover a heart which could suffer the same pains as gnaw at the breasts of so many of her sisters of humbler station. Gordon, old friend, I fear I shall never quite forgive you! You have done vivisection without the excuse of scientific need, without the slightest idea that it could profit any one but yourself!

I found the note, but did not return immediately. I asked myself how much she knew, seeing that there were many possibilities of inflicting further pain on a very fine young woman who was already undergoing unmerited punishment. Finally, I went back, slowly, to find her sitting in front of Frances, with their two heads quite near one another and their eyes directed to Baby Paul's little pink mouth.

"I have it here. Miss Van Rossum. You will see that it is quite short. He must be tremendously busy and surely snatched a precious moment for a word to an old friend."

I handed her the letter, in an envelope that had been opened by the censor and pasted over with a bit of thin paper. She took it with a very steady hand.

The girl was engaged in playing a game, I could plainly see. It was one in which her heart was involved and perhaps her pride somewhat aroused. She opened the thing and looked over the brief sentences.

"Dear old Dave:

"Found a lot of fellows I knew. Didn't have a bit of trouble getting in. I'm going to drive one of those cars I wouldn't have been found dead in, in old New York. They tell me they do very well as ambulances, though. I'm close to the front now and have seen a good deal of the crop being garnered there. It makes a fellow feel that he doesn't amount to much. There isn't any harrowing of one's own mind that can last very long in the presence of this real and awful suffering.

"Ever your old GORDON.

"P.S. Give my love to Frieda."

Miss Van Rossum read it over at least twice. Then her eyes slowly rose from the page and, perhaps, without seeing very clearly, swept over Frances and me. She folded it and replaced it in the envelope, very carefully, before handing it back.

"I—I have no doubt that it has greatly appealed to him," she said, now vaguely looking out of the window into yards chiefly adorned with fluttering raiment dependent from a very spider's web of intricate lines. "It—it was a sporting thing to do, you know, very manly and fine. But he also wrote to me and—I have never been able to understand. Of course I wouldn't have interfered with—with a plan like that. I have only wished I could have gone over and done something too—something that would count and make one feel that she could be of some use in the world. Yes—it's a big thing he's done—but why did he write me such a letter?"

She opened a small bag she had been carrying and pulled out a missive that bore my friend's monogram, a very plain G.M. cleverly interlaced.

"Won't you please look at it, Mr. Cole? I got it the day we left Florida. I—I was rather bunkered at first, you know."

I took it from her, doubtless displaying far more nervousness than she was showing, for she appeared to be quite calm. I saw that she had taken the blow as Frieda's pugilistic friend might have accepted what he calls a wallop, with a brave smile, after the first wince. I also read it over twice.

"My dear Sophia:

"It's rather hard on a fellow to be compelled to acknowledge he's anything but a decent sportsman. I'm afraid I shall have to. In your kindness you may, perhaps, forgive me. I have made a bad mess of things. I wouldn't mind so much if it wasn't hitting you also, because you're a good pal and a splendid girl who deserves a better chap. I'm off abroad to play chauffeur to the cripples, and, of course, there is no telling when I'll be back.

"I hope to God you will find some decent fellow who really deserves you and will make you happy.

"Affectionately,

"GORDON."

After I had finished this horrible and clumsy message, I looked at Miss Van

Rossum. There was something very wistful and strong in the glance that rested upon me. I had no doubt that she had been studying my face, as I read, and watching the impression made on me. Of course, he had been greatly agitated when he wrote. I felt sure that he must have torn up one letter after another and finally sent the worst of all. It had dwindled into a few lines, which explained nothing, being merely brutal and final, like a knockout blow. He had made a mess of things, forsooth! Well, the reading of such a letter might have made one think that he had robbed a bank or cheated at cards!

"You see, Mr. Cole, it doesn't say much, does it? I just had to tell my mother that Gordon had felt called upon to go off and—and do a big thing, and that of course the—the whole thing was put off indefinitely. I—I don't think she was disappointed. Of course, they had allowed me to have my own way, and they liked Gordon very well, but they had a notion that in our own circle—But, of course, that's neither here nor there. Naturally, I knew at once that Gordon could never have done anything really wrong. He's a very true and genuine man, in his way, and incapable of—of a nasty action. So I just had to suppose that perhaps some other woman had come into his life and that he didn't love me any more. And he—he was never very demonstrative, you know; it wasn't his way. But he had always been such a good friend, and so wonderfully clever, and—But of course, you know all that. His letter to you, I think, gives me what they call a clue. He—he sends his love to—to somebody I don't know. Of course I'm not going to ask—I really only came to know whether there was anything I could do. I wondered whether there was, perhaps, some money trouble, or something like that, and I'd have been so glad to—to help out. You were his best friend and could have told me how to manage it, but now I see——"

She interrupted her words, rising from the chair I had offered her and looking very handsome and, I must say, dignified.

"I wouldn't have troubled you, you know, but I have been all at sea. It—it has been rather tough, because Gordon is a man whom a woman could love very deeply—at any rate I never realized how I felt towards him, until I had gone away and then received this letter."

I had been listening, looking into her fine, clear, blue eyes, which honestly and truly, with the frankness and candor of the child or the chaste woman, had expressed the love that had been in her heart and, perhaps, lingered there still. So intent had I been upon her words that I had failed to hear adventitious sounds. Frances, also, with her hand pressed to her bosom, showed eyes dimmed by

gathering tears. She had risen with the impulse to go forward and press this suffering woman to her heart. I was about to explain the message of love in Gordon's postscript, when there was a wheezing at the door, which had been left open.

Fat and beaming, with her most terrible hat and a smudge of yellow ochre on her chin, Frieda came in.

"Beg your pardon," she panted. "It's getting real warm and the stairs are becoming steeper every day. How's the angel lamb?"

"Miss Van Rossum," I said, "let me introduce our excellent friend Miss Frieda Long. Every one who knows her loves her. She's the next best painter to Gordon in this burg, or any other, and a second mother to Baby Paul."

Miss Sophia stared at her for an instant. Then, came a little smile in which there was relief and comprehension. She advanced with arm outstretched, and Frieda went right up to her.

"My dear," said the latter, "our dear old Dave and Gordon have told us enough about you to make me feel glad indeed to know you. I saw that portrait of yours and it didn't flatter you a bit, in fact, it seems to me that it missed something of your expression. But it was mighty good, just the same, like everything he ever did."

She backed off as far as the bed, on which she sat down, fanning herself violently with a newspaper. An instant later she rushed to Frances, took up the baby with the usual robust delicacy she always shows in that process, and began to ask news relating to important developments in dentition.

Miss Sophia observed her. I saw that some ray of gladness had entered her heart since a terrible question appeared to be settled satisfactorily. To her tall and graceful womanhood the idea that our darling, pudgy Frieda, with her crow's feet, from much staring through her spectacles, with that fright of a hat, could for a second have been mistaken for a rival was nothing less than amusing.

"Well, Mr. Cole, I think I will have to be going now," she said. "I—I am glad—oh, I mean that I hope you will be so kind as to let me know whether you get any further news. I shall always have a deep interest in Gordon's welfare. Letters would reach me at Southampton, all summer. Good-by, Mrs. Dupont, I am delighted to have had the pleasure of meeting you. Mrs.—I mean Miss Frieda, I

hope you will be so kind as to let me see your pictures, some day. I remember now that Gordon showed me one of them at the winter exhibition. I wanted to buy it, but somebody had already snapped it up, of course, because it was so lovely. No, Mr. Cole, please don't take the trouble."

She had shaken hands with my two friends and insisted on kissing the baby, who appreciated the attention by crowing at her.

I followed her out in spite of her request.

"You must permit me to see you to the door, Miss Van Rossum," I said, "it is the least I can do. I will surely let you know, if I hear anything."

She nodded, very pleasantly, and went down the distressing stair-carpet with the ease of her perfect physical training. At the door there was a big brute of a sixty horsepower runabout and a chauffeur, who swiftly cast aside a half-consumed cigarette and stood at attention. She stopped on the stoop and turned to me.

"I—I don't think I know any more than when I came," she said, rather haltingly. "There—there wasn't anything wrong, was there, Mr. Cole?"

"My dear young lady, I am proud to say that Gordon is incapable of doing anything that would infringe the laws. But he certainly has done an evil thing, for he has treated you very brutally, and I will never forgive him. He has failed to appreciate—to understand. If he has discovered that his heart—that he was incapable of giving you the strongest and most genuine love, it is his misfortune and—I am afraid, perhaps yours, and he did well to go away. But he should have been more considerate, he ought to have explained things in person instead of _____"

"But you must remember that I was in Florida, Mr. Cole," she interrupted.

"Then he should have taken the first train and joined you there. A man has no business to shirk a duty," I said indignantly.

"Oh! Mr. Cole! You must remember that Gordon isn't—isn't a man quite like others. He has the quick and impulsive temperament of so many artistic people."

"He always pretends to be so cool and to act only after the most mature deliberation," I objected.

"True enough, but then, you know, that sort of thing is often rather a pose. I

suppose that none of us is quite free from a little pretense, under which the true man or woman shows."

"I am glad indeed to hear you take his part," I told her, "and I hope he will do some fine manly things over there and return in his right mind, with his eyes open to—to what he has been so foolish as to——"

"I know that he will give the best of himself, Mr. Cole," she put in. "Gordon is a first rate sportsman, and that means a man who will play the game, strongly and honestly, without taking the slightest advantage. And perhaps——"

"My dear lady, I know a good woman who burns candles when she wants anything badly, and prays before the Virgin. I shall get her to exert her good offices in our behalf. I'd give anything to know that everything will turn out as I heartily wish it may, for both your sakes. In you, I know that he has found all that a man may wish and long for in the world, and yet has failed to appreciate his good fortune."

She put her gloved hand in mine.

"Thank you," she said simply. "I—I'll wait, a long time."

She went down the steps and entered the machine, sitting before the big wheel, strongly aslant and grooved to give a strong grip. The chauffeur jiggled something, whereat the great beast began to hum. She nodded again to me and started without the slightest jerk. Evidently she drove better than Gordon. She turned the nose of the thing around till the front wheels were an eighth of an inch from the sidewalk, backed again in circular fashion, and swept off towards the avenue. Sixty horses, I reflected, could lie obediently in the hollow of her hand, but just one man, who should have thanked Heaven upon his knees, had squirmed away like an arrant fool.

I went up the stairs, slowly, chewing upon the fact that I had given her no inkling of how matters really stood. But, in deference to the feelings of Frances, it had been impossible for me to do so, especially since she was no longer an element in the case. Gordon had given up all hope of her and run away, so that this closed one part of the incident. Then, if I had told Miss Van Rossum of Gordon's proposal to Frances, it would have made her very unhappy and she might possibly have blamed the model. Women, the very best and dearest of them, are sometimes not quite fair to their own sex.

Yes, it was a matter that belonged to Frances and Gordon, and I had no right to be a bearer of tales, so that Miss Van Rossum is unaware that Gordon went away for love of another woman. I hope she never hears of it. Should anything happen to him, while driving his ambulance at the front, she will be able to maintain a high regard for his memory. As the months pass on, her feelings may become easier to bear. I wish she could meet and become fond of some fine fellow, who would recognize what a splendid woman she is and adore her ever after. I feel that she deserves it.

When I returned upstairs, I found my two friends discussing Miss Van Rossum, together with her nose and complexion and other appurtenances, including her dress. Their criticisms were highly flattering, I remember. Our stout friend soon left, having merely come in for her daily inspection of Baby Paul.

"Now, David," said Frances, "I must say that I feel more unhappy than ever over Mr. McGrath's conduct. It was abominable of him to jilt that girl, let alone proposing to me. She's a perfectly lovely woman."

"I am disposed to agree with you, Frances. His conduct is inexcusable. At the same time, I cannot blame him for falling in love with you. Any properly constituted man would do that without the slightest difficulty. I myself——"

"Please be serious, David," she interrupted.

"I was never more serious in my life," I assured her, "but—but tell me how you are getting on with the singing."

"I really think I am doing very well," she told me. "Listen, I will sing you a little thing. Baby likes it ever so much."

She sat right down to the piano, beginning at once without the slightest hesitation. It was the lullaby from *Mignon*. I remember hearing Plançon sing it once; it is a beautiful thing. Frances didn't put all her force in it, the whole strength of her voice, of course, but so much tender sentiment and such sweet understanding that the melody held me in thrall and made me close my eyes. What a fool I have been ever to have thought that a woman holding such a treasure would perhaps bestow herself, some day, upon an insignificant writer!



CHAPTER XIX

FRANCES GOES TO THE COUNTRY

I am very fond of my room on the top floor of Mrs. Milliken's house, but, as regards privacy, I might nearly as well have lodgings in a corner grocery. I had finally arranged that Frances was to go to a hilly part of New Jersey, near a very pretty lake, and gather health and a coat of tan for herself and Baby Paul. I was to leave with her on the one forty-five, in order to help her on the journey and see her safely installed. The noon hour had struck and the whistles of a few thousand factories were confirming the announcement, when a vision presented itself at my door. It was very prettily clad, with a love of a hat and a most becoming gown, and smiled engagingly. She had fluffy hair and first rate teeth. Also, she immediately developed a slight lisp that did not lack attractiveness.

"Mr. Cole!" she exclaimed. "May I come in? I am from the *New York Banner*. I should like to have you tell me all about your novels and your impressions of modern literary activities, and something as to your views upon the war, and _____"

She was already in the middle of my room, and I could do no otherwise than to advance a chair for her.

"Pray take a seat, Miss——"

"I am Cordelia."

"Cordelia!"

"Yes, privately Josie Higgins. I hope that you can give me a photograph of yourself that we can publish. The public is dying to hear all about you. I must interview you or die in the attempt, which would be very inconvenient as I have an appointment to see Gretz at two-thirty, fellow who killed his mother-in-law. Thanks, I will take the chair. It is getting quite warm again, isn't it?"

She pulled out a small note book and a business-like pencil from a frivolous handbag, as my heart sank within me. I shared the feelings of a small boy haled before the principal of his school. She looked small and inoffensive, but I knew

that pencil of hers to be sharper than the serpent's tooth. Heavens! She was looking at the slouchy slippers I still wore and at the bed, yet undone, since I had told the landlady she might as well have it attended to after my departure. Her eyes wandered swiftly from the inkspot on the carpet to the bundle of collars and shirts Eulalie had deposited on my trunk. She also picked up my fragrant calabash from the desk close at hand and contemplated it, curiously. All this quick as a flash.

After this, she scrutinized my countenance, with her head cocked a little to one side, and jotted down something.

"That's good," she declared, apparently much gratified. "I think I know what you would say, but you had better tell it yourself. For nothing on earth would I fake an interview, and anyway you look very kind and obliging. Now tell me how you ever happened to think of 'Land o' Love.'"

"I'm sure I don't know," I answered truthfully.

"Undoubtedly," she acquiesced. "Ideas like that just worm themselves into one's head and one puts them down. But, of course, that won't quite do. Don't you think we had better say that you have long been impressed by the sadness of most lives, in the end, and were anxious to show how, from unpromising beginnings, an existence may turn from dross into refined gold by the exercise of will, of human sympathy, of tolerance of foibles and love for one's fellow man? That will do very nicely!"

She was putting down her words with lightning speed.

"Now tell me. Did you ever really know a counterpart of Jennie Frisbie?" she asked again. "She has become a sort of classic, you know. Women are weeping with her and love her to distraction. They wonder how a mere man can have so penetrated the inwardness of their sex and painted such a beautiful picture of it at its best."

"Don't know that I ever did, my dear young lady," I replied reluctantly.

"Of course you didn't. They're not really made that way. For my part, I think that a lot of women are cats," said the famed Cordelia. "But naturally we can't say it in print. Your answer should be that beneath the surface every woman holds the potentialities of a Jennie Frisbie. 'No, I have never known my heroine in person,' said Mr. Cole, looking dreamily out of the window, 'but I have known a thousand

of her. She is a composite photograph, the final impression gathered by one who has done his best to obtain definite colors wherewith to paint a type, accurately and truthfully.' Yes, I think that'll do."

Her pencil was flying, as I looked at her, aghast.

"Miss Cordelia," I said, "you're a very attractive and bewitching young fraud."

She showed her pretty teeth, laughing heartily.

"I'm not at all a fraud," she disclaimed. "I deliver the goods, at least to my paper, and I never hurt people who are decently civil. How about your views on the Great American Novel?"

"It will probably be written by a Frenchman or a Jap," I answered, "for no man can do perfect justice to his own people."

"That's not so bad," she approved, "I think I'll put that down."

She asked me a few more questions, which I mostly answered with my usual confession of ignorance and which she replied to in her own fashion.

"Well, that's a tip-top interview," she declared. "I'm ever so much obliged to you and delighted to have met you. I don't think you look much like one's idea of the writer of that book. I think I will say that your eyes have a youthful look. It will please the women. Why don't you live somewhere else?"

"Don't know," I said again, with little candor.

"I had better put down that in this bit of old New York you find an outlook more in sympathy with your lovable and homely characters. Wisteria blooming in the backyard," she observed, rising and leaning out of the window. "Geraniums on the sills opposite and an old granny darning socks, her white-capped head bending over her work and framed by the scarlet of the flowers. Neat little touch. Hope you'll like my article. Look for it in the number for Sunday week. My murderer goes in day after to-morrow. He won't keep much longer, people have already stopped sending him flowers. Well, good-by and thank you."

I pressed the little hand she laughingly proffered, and she tripped out, meeting Frances in the hallway.

"Isn't that a duck of a baby!" she exclaimed, smiling at the mother and running downstairs.

"Frances, I am famous," I said. "Sunday after next I'll be in the *Banner*, three times the size of life, in at least three columns. That chit of a girl who just went out is the celebrated Cordelia. She has interviewed me and written down a thousand beautiful things I never said. She's a bright little creature."

"She wears nice hats," commented Frances. "I hope she will do justice to you. It is time we went down to lunch, if we are to catch that train. Is your suitcase packed?"

"Never thought of it!" I exclaimed. "You go right down and begin. I'll follow in a moment."

A half an hour later we were in a taxicab, speeding to the station. Eulalie was with us; I had insisted on her being brought along. How could Frances obtain the full rest she needed, unless some of the details of existence were attended to for her? She had objected strenuously and even threatened to unpack her little trunk and remain in New York, but I successfully bullied her into acceptance by commenting on the alleged peaked look of Baby Paul. Maternal fears, despite the infant's appearance of excellent health, prevailed at last. A man, I discover, needs a firm hand in dealing with the opposite sex.

My dear sister had indicated to me a small farm near the lake, where three rooms were to be rented. According to her the cows gave absolutely genuine milk and butter, while the hens laid undeniable eggs. Vegetables grew in profusion, the post office was but a half-mile away and the railway station within twenty minutes' walk. Privacy was also insured by the fact that the big hotel and boarding houses were reasonably far away. Mrs. Gobbins, who bossed the farm and its lord and master, was exceedingly particular as to the occupants of her spare rooms, requiring on their parts qualifications, which appeared to range between the Christian virtues and appetites that would not crave too strongly for city fleshpots.

I was agreeably disappointed by the place. The lake was within a short walk; centenarian elms grew at the sides of the wide main street of the village close at hand; the hills were clad in tender greens, only streaked here and there by the trunks of blight-killed chestnuts. On the road a pair of bluebirds had flitted in front of our chariot, like two racing sapphires, and swallows perched on the telephone wires, twittering. Holstein cows in a pasture envisaged us with a melancholy air, deeming us harbingers of the summering crowd that would compel them to work overtime to supply the dairies. But for the snarling of a

couple of dogs having a misunderstanding, far away, the atmosphere was one of peace. Also, we passed a small forge where the blacksmith paused in the shoeing of a sleepy and spavined steed, the better to gaze at us. He nodded to our driver and resumed his occupation, unhurried.

"This, Frances, holds some advantage over Washington Square as a place wherein to enjoy ease with dignity," I commented. "View the pretty house at the turning of the road. One side is nearly smothered in climbing vines and the picket fence has the silvery look of ancient split chestnut. The cherry trees, I should judge, are ready to awaken the ambitions of youthful climbers. I hope your domicile will prove half as pretty."

She assented, smilingly, and assured Baby Paul, sleeping in her arms, that he would be very happy and comfy and grow fat. At this moment our Jehu stopped before the very house I had pointed out and turned the horse's head into a grassy driveway. Then he drove on by the side of the house and swept, at a mile and a half an hour, in front of the back door. A large and beaming mongrel rose on the small porch, wagging a remnant of tail. Chickens had been fleeing before us, suspecting the purity of our intentions in regard to broilers, and three fat ducks waddled off, greatly disturbed. An ancient turkey-cock uplifted his fan and gobbled a protest, but Mrs. Gobbins appeared, smiling and clad in highly respectable black, relieved by a little white at her neck.

"Welcome, ma'am," she said. "Just hand me that there baby and then ye can get out handy. Look out for that dust on the buggy wheels. That's right! Howdy, Mr. Cole, I'm glad to see ye. I can see you favor your sister some, not but what she's a good lookin' woman. When she wrote as 'twas her brother wanted to come I knew ye'd be all right. Walk in."

We trooped into the kitchen, neat as a pin, whereat Eulalie smiled in approval, and were shown upstairs. A large room facing the north was papered with a design of roses about the size of prize cabbages. The windows were shaded by a couple of the big cherry trees.

"In a few days you will be able to pick ripe fruit by merely putting your hand out," I told Frances.

"Yes," Mrs. Gobbins informed us. "Your sister's two boys was always at them and filled theirselves so full they couldn't hardly eat no decent victuals, let alone havin' stomach ache. This here small room will do for the other lady and yours is over on the other side of the house, sir."

My own residence was also spick and span, and I decided that we had fallen into an oasis of delight. A few minutes sufficed me to repair the damage done by the journey, and I went downstairs. The front door was now open. To one side of it there was a dining-room adorned with chromos advertising gigantic vegetables and fruit, apparently imported from the Promised Land. Opposite this was a parlor where bottle-green plush reigned in unsunned violence of hue and aggressive gilt frames surrounded works of art of impetuous tints. On going out I was met by the dog, who accepted my advances with the greatest urbanity. Towser had still a touching faith in human nature and deemed me inoffensive and fully competent to scratch the back of his head.

Presently, arrived an elderly gentleman in blue jeans, his chin ornamented with whisker and his mouth with a corncob pipe.

"How be ye?" he asked. "Gettin' real hot and the corn's comin' up fine. Wonderful year for strawberries an' sparrer-grass. How's things in the city?"

He sat down on the steps of the veranda, inviting me to do the same, with a civil wave of his pipestem, and we entered into pleasant converse, until the voice of his mate shrilly commanded him to arise and wash his hands and shed the overalls, whereat he hastily deserted me.

Came a supper at which I was able to comment agreeably on the cream served with the berries, whereat Mr. Gobbins gave out dark hints of watery malefactions on the part of some of the keepers of boarding houses in the neighborhood. There was cold pork, usually potent to bring me nightmares, and an obese pie to be washed down with pale tea. Under my breath I deplored the luck that had made me forget to bring digestive tablets and, spurred by unusual appetite, I gorged myself.

The evening was a short one, spent on the porch where I lolled in a hammock, while Frances rocked in a big chair. There was no need to talk, for it was all very new and beautiful. The katydids and tree-frogs took charge of the conversation for us. After a time Eulalie joined us, sitting modestly on the steps. With much genuine sentiment she spoke of the cabbages of her own land and of cows she had once cherished.

"It is like the heaven of the *Bon Dieu* to smell these things again," she informed us, and I decided that she had spoken a great and splendid truth.

We retired early. In my own little room, with the oil-lamp burning, I commented

sadly on the fact that it was only half past nine, the hour at which my busy life commonly begins. Upon the bed I looked hopelessly; it was inviting enough, but, at this time of day, about as attractive as plum-pudding for breakfast. For an hour I read a magazine; the katydids were still clamoring softly and, in the distance, in the direction of the lake, I heard the plaintive notes of whippoorwills. Then I caught myself in a blessed yawn and went to bed. But a few moments seemed to have gone by, when I awoke in a room flooded with sunshine and penetrated by a myriad of joyful sounds coming from the Noah's Ark of the farm. Looking out of the window I was shamed by the sight of Eulalie who, with Baby Paul in her arms, strolled about the kitchen garden, evidently lost in rapture at the sight of leeks and radishes.

I hurried my dressing, donning a pair of white flannel trousers I had bought for the sake of bestowing upon myself some atmosphere of the country, and found Frances sitting in the hammock with Towser's big, nondescript head in her lap.

"I hope you slept ever so well," she told me, looking very radiant and putting out her hand. "And, David, I'm so wonderfully happy. Look at the beautiful lake! We will have to go over there after breakfast, and, perhaps, you can row in a boat, and we will take Eulalie and Baby with us. Or perhaps you can go fishing, or may be you would rather stay quietly here and have a nice long rest. And just listen to that wood-thrush over there. She's up in the cherry tree; or perhaps it's a he, and probably there's a nest somewhere with dear little fellows just hatched out. Isn't it lovely?"

My enthusiasm was just as great as her own. There seemed to be altogether too many beautiful things to do, and to look at, and to allow to soak into one, like some penetrating water from the fountain of youth.

"I'm so glad you like it, Frances," I told her.

And so we spent a heavenly day, and, in the morning, I took the early train and went back to the city, Frances looking rather regretfully at me. But I had decided that I must not remain there; it would not do. One evening after another, of moonlit glory, of whispering winds bearing fragrance and delight, of nearness to this wonderful woman with the heart of a child and the beauty of a goddess, endowed with that voice sounding like melodies from on high, must surely break down my courage. How could I stand it day after day? No, I intended to return for weekends, propped up by new resolve to be silent. A chill would come over me at the idea of suddenly blurting out my love to her and having her look at me

as she once gazed on Gordon, perhaps even more sorrowfully, because I think I have become a more valued friend.

I explained to her that I had some most important work to do and imagined all sorts of meetings with publishers. Also a moving-picture gentleman had thrown out dark hints. The atmosphere of the blazing city, I told her, was utterly needed for my new book. All she had to do was to be very patient, grow strong and brown, watch Baby Paul thrive, and await my coming on Saturday afternoons. In the meanwhile I would send her books and magazines, besides a button hook she had forgotten, and a package of the tea we were partial to, and—and a week was an exceedingly short space of time.

So I said good-by and waved my hand at the turning in the road, and returned to the big city, which I could, without much regret, have seen reduced to the condition of Sodom and Gomorrha, since it would have given me a good excuse to take the next train back.

Upon entering my room, I decided that it was a beastly hole. So hateful did it seem that I strolled off into the opposite one. It seemed like a rather sneaking and underhanded thing to do and, I dare say, I had some of the feelings of a burglar. My old piano was there, upon which she played softly and sang exercises that were perfectly beautiful, and songs beyond compare. The very atmosphere of her was still in the place and things of hers were yet on the dressing table, including the button hook, which I pocketed. They made me think of saintly relics to be worshipped. Baby Paul's crib appealed to me. She had so often bent over it, wistfully, as I watched her, admiring the wondrous curve of her neck, the sunlit glory of her hair.

Mrs. Milliken suddenly caught me there, and I felt a sense of heat in my cheeks.

"Yes," she said, "I'll give it a thorough cleaning. It needs it real bad. And next week I'll put new paper on the walls and have the carpet took up and beaten. I was wishin' you'd stay away long enough so I could do the same to yours. I've known all my life men are mussy, but that room of yours is the limit, Mr. Cole, all littered up with paper so a body don't dare touch anything."

I made no answer. I suppose that house cleaning is a necessary evil but her contemplated invasion of Frances's room seems to me like the desecration of a shrine. It should be locked up and penetrated only by people soft of foot and low of voice.



CHAPTER XX

RICHETTI IS PLEASED

Goodness only knows how many pages I blackened with the experiences of this short summer, but I have thrown them away, in small pieces. They were too introspective; mere impressions of one week after another, when I would take the train and join Frances again, under self-suggested and hypocritical pleas. My wisdom was needed to see to it that Baby Paul grew and thrived. His teething necessitated my worrying Dr. Porter half to death as to the possibilities of such portentous happenings. It was also indispensable that I should accurately ascertain the mother's condition of health and listen to Eulalie's observations. In other words, I pretended that I was a very important person.

But in the heart of me, I knew myself to be like some drug-fiend, only permitted to indulge his destructive habit once a week. The work I turned out of nights, I am afraid, was worth little and will have to be subjected to plentiful alterations. In the day I wandered over the superheated city and occasionally took a boat for a lonely excursion over the Bay, for the sake of fresh air and unneeded rest. But from the Monday morning to Saturday afternoon the fever was always on me to hasten back, to drift with Frances over the little lake, to stroll with her in the woodland roads or among the fields, to steep myself in the atmosphere she radiated, of sweetest womanhood, of tenderness she displayed only to Baby Paul, but some of which was reflected on me. The mere speaking voice of her, telling me of rumbling bull-frogs, of a terrible little garter-snake beheld on the main road, of a tiny calf which, she feared, was destined to go the way of all veal, was melody and charm and delight. Gordon once told me that a man and a woman cannot be true friends long. There is no middle ground, he explained, it must be either more or less. But I would meet her on the road on the days of my arrival. She would walk all but the last quarter mile, that ran along a sun-beaten lane surfaced with red-hot dust, and wait for me beside a little watering trough usually tenanted by a beady-eyed froglet, which she counted among her friends. From afar she would wave her hand, her face joyous and welcoming, and would insist on knowing at once the contents of the packages I was always laden with. On our way to the farm she would faithfully recount the incidents of the past week, and finally we would sit down on the little porch and thirty-six hours of

heavenliness would begin. And always, she was a friend, nothing but the dear friend which Gordon deemed an impossibility, and I firmly endeavored to follow her lead. Yes, there were evenings of starlight, afternoons among the oaks and chestnuts of the hillsides where we sat on ground heavily carpeted with last year's leaves and moss of silvery green, early mornings by the side of the lake under the caress of the rising breeze, and ever I managed to padlock my heart, to control the shakiness of my voice, to laugh out gaily as if the world's beauty could not possibly leave room in a man's soul for hopeless longing.

And then back to the city again! Frances had often urged me to stay a little longer; it would do me so much good. She sometimes thought I looked tired, but I refused with the obstinacy of the weak. She argued that I was utterly master of my time and, one day, with a trace of woman's injustice, said that thirty-six hours of her company was all that I could stand. I remember feeling a terrific wave of heat coming to my brow. Never was I nearer to an indignant protest to be followed by the blurting of the whole truth, of nothing but the truth, to the effect that I loved her madly, wildly, and could have crushed her in my arms till she cried for mercy. But I laughed, stupidly, with my finger-nails digging into the palms of my hands and called her attention to a reticulated pickerel poised beneath some lily-pads, motionless, watchful, gavial-snouted and yet graceful, ready to convert itself into a flashing death for other fishes. I pointed to gossamer-winged dragon-flies, which used to frighten her, till I declared them to be friendly devourers of mosquitoes, and both of us remained breathless when a golden oriole perched on some hazel bushes near at hand, for a moment's display of its gaudiness. She told me of the wood-thrush we had seen on our arrival, and how she had found the nest with the dainty blue eggs, and how one day these had been converted into great big little mouths ever clamoring for a distracted mother who could never find food enough.

"But they grew up all right and took lessons in flying and, by this time, are far away, and the little nest is abandoned," she informed me. "I hope they will all come back another year."

And thus a moment of terrible danger passed. The peril was perhaps averted by the saving grace of that pickerel. I trembled to think over what might have happened. She would have looked at me, astonished and alarmed, with those big, beautiful eyes shining, and she would have sorrowfully shaken her head, and—I could never have returned again—and I would have been compelled to leave Mrs. Milliken's, and the whole beautiful, useless dream would have been ended because Gordon is right, as far as I am concerned. Yet I can remain a friend to

Frances! Please God, I may remain one all my life and never reveal myself to her! But my friendship will never be a perfectly genuine one since, underlying it, there will always be the quivering of a passion held in gyves and suffering, as suffers some gold and ruby-winged butterfly pinned to a card and denied the mercy of a drop of chloroform.

I had received another letter from Gordon, telegraphic in brevity, and sent it to Miss Van Rossum. He was well, having a most wonderful and heartrending experience. He had met some stunning fellows. The taking of awful chances was a daily occurrence, with the little ambulances darting among the wounded, sometimes under shell-fire. He asked me to drop into his studio, from time to time. He had discharged the Jap, but still kept the place. It was looked after by an elderly woman he had installed there, who was supposed to sweep and dust and let some air and light into the studio. I was to see that she kept at it and guarded his accumulated rubbish.

So, of course, I went there, and the ancient party looked at me suspiciously, till I identified myself. Then she gave me the freedom of the place and I hunted high and low, till, finally, I discovered the "Mother and Child" hidden in a large closet and brought it out. I placed it on the easel and glared at it till it grew dark.

The wonder of that picture! Great Heavens! I remembered how I had once accused Gordon of having been imaginative in his rendering of the model's beauty. At that time my vision must have been coarse and untrained. His genius had at once seized upon her glory, whereas I had dully and slowly spelled it out. But now my eyes were open! It was Frances herself, it was truth, it was the greatness of motherhood revealed, it was the charm and sweetness of the woman who exalts and uplifts, it was art *grandiose* held beautifully in bond by the eternal verity. I saw that some bright gobbets of flashing paint, that had surprised me at first, were amazing touches of genius. He had played with colors as a Paderewski plays with notes, to the ultimate rendering of a noble and profound reality, of poetry made tangible and clear, of ringing harmony expressing true heartbeats. And now my friend Pygmalion had been spurned by his statue come to life and was picking up shattered heroes, that he might forget.

I can honestly say that the ancient dame, who saw to what Gordon was pleased to call his rubbish, was faithfully watched. I would come in at odd times, when the spirit moved me, and sit for hours before the picture. It gave me inspiration when the fount of my ideas had utterly dried up, and I would return home, able to write a few good pages. What if it was but one more way of indulging the

drugging of my soul! Like other fiends I was held fast. Porter has told me that the victims of morphia no longer take pleasure in their vice. The following of it, to them, means but the relief of suffering, and there is no joy in it. In this respect I stood far above the level of the poor beings fallen thus low, for the painted Frances was a perennial delight, as her own living beauty was utter happiness for some hours. The reaction only took place when I was alone in my room, and, even there, I often indulged in dreams and visions as full of charm as they were unreal.

Then, one fine day, came a letter from Signor Richetti, stating that he would return upon a certain date and resume his teaching. I took it to Frances, who read it, happily.

"I am so glad, Dave," she told me. "This has been the most lovely summer one could imagine, and Baby Paul is wonderfully well. I hope the New York milk will agree with him. I am so splendidly strong and well that I think I shall again make rapid progress. I am afraid I must have lost a great deal during this long idle time. Dave! Dave! I'm going to work so hard! I know I shall be able to sing again, and—and I shall owe it all to you!"

So we had, again, thirty-six hours, sadly lessened by the two nights of sleep, and we conscientiously said good-by to the cows and calves, and to such chickens as we had not devoured, and to the lake and the woods and the twittering swallows and the sparrows on the dusty road. Eulalie had grown stout and burned to an Indian hue. She kissed Mrs. Gobbins on both cheeks and shed a tear or two. I stopped the carriage, that conveyed us to the station, in front of the blacksmith's shop. We had become friends, and he wished us a pleasant journey and a happy return next year. Near the station, in the narrow road, we had to turn aside, nearly into the ditch, to allow the passing of a large automobile. In its driver I recognized Mr. O'Flaherty, who owned the garage and occupied half of the second floor. He waved a hand at me and grinned, winking, leaving me to reflect on the thoroughly excusable nature of certain murders. His big car was full of sporty-looking youths and flashily dressed women. I am happy to say that Frances never looked his way.

Then we went on board the train and the beautiful country began to slip by us, and a certain element of sadness came at the idea of leaving it, though it was comforting to think that now I should see Frances every day. But I should sit on the meagerly upholstered chairs instead of occupying the veranda's rocker or the moss-strewn boulders on the hills. The freedom of the country would be gone,

and its inspiration and delight.

"Look!" said Frances to me, suddenly. "There's a woman on the third seat, on the other side of the aisle, who's reading 'Land o' Love.'"

"After all these months," I commented.

"People ought to read it forever, Dave," she assured me, "and I think they will. I'm so proud of you!"

"Well, my publishers tell me the book is flowing out as fast as ever. Jamieson says it will sell a hundred and fifty thousand," I told her. "You see that I am now in Easy Street and can afford all the extravagances I care to indulge in."

"Then, David, you ought to buy yourself a new fall suit," said Frances, "and you need more neckties. I shall get some for you."

All women want to buy men's neckties for them. I was not afraid, feeling sure that Frances would show unquestionable taste. How she would care for a man she loved!

A taxi rattled us up to Mrs. Milliken's door, and the room opposite mine was resplendent in new paper, and the carpet much renovated, and the piano had been rubbed over with something that gave the ancient mahogany a fine polish. Frances left Baby Paul with Eulalie and came into my den.

"It's so good to be back, Dave," she asserted. "This room is all saturated with the atmosphere of you and even the typewriter looks like an old friend. And here's your dirty old calabash and just the same disorder on your desk and the week's washing on the bed. I'm glad Eulalie's sister has been attending to it. Oh! It's fine to be home again!"

So she went back to her room, and I lit the calabash. I had been afraid that, after the country, this top floor would look very dismal and be depressing to her. But she was looking positively joyful. A minute later Frieda invaded the premises, for I had warned her of our arrival. She shrieked with admiration at the sight of the baby and commented at length on the color of Frances's cheeks. Eulalie joined in the cackling, and happiness reigned. We celebrated the evening at Camus.

After this the leaves soon began to drop in the big square, and I ordered the new suit and invested in a few bonds, like a bloated millionaire, and put them in a

little safe at the bank, which could only be penetrated after running the gauntlet of a half a dozen uniformed and suspicious guardians, before whom I felt like an equivocal character.

Frances returned to Richetti and came back the first time with a glowing account of all that he had said. It appeared that she had hardly lost anything and had gained in depth of breathing and power of expression. The technique—ah! *Per Bacco!* She was a natural born singer! She had little need to learn! The voice was in her like those things in Pandora's box and only demanded to fly out. Her singing was the *bel canto*. Three months more of practice was all that was needed. After the first of the year she would sing in the great concert of his pupils. It would be an event! People would discover her again. The cornucopia of Abundance would open, wide-lipped, and success would flow from it!

"And I shall owe it all to you and Frieda, Dave," she said. "But I can't really believe that it will come true. Still, I don't know. Sit down and listen to this."

She opened the piano and sang, and at first my heart sank within me because she was so great compared to my insignificance. Then it became exalted because of the magnificence of her singing, which thrilled me. They were not great locust-cries of *bravura*, nor amazing gymnastics with difficult scales, that made me quiver. Just a sweet old melody heard a thousand times, thrummed by every piano, but now coming with such perfection of tone and such a quality of exquisiteness that I felt a thousand times more uplifted than when I had stood before Gordon's wonderful portrait of her.

When she finished, she turned a little on the revolving stool and looked at me, her head a little inclined to one side, her lips smiling at me, for she could not but know how splendidly she had sung.

"Well, Dave," she asked, "are you pleased?"

"My dear Frances," I answered, "a king of Bavaria had operas performed for himself alone, and, likewise, I have had a treat that might have enraptured thousands. I am a monarch basking in luxury. No, after all I am the same old Dave who has found a treasure by the wayside and is gloating over it. That's what I'm doing. If I knew anything about music, I might, perhaps, tell you what it is that I find to admire in your singing, but I can only say I am impressed by something that leaves me wondering and gives me a keen delight I cannot put in words."

"I'm so glad, Dave!" she exclaimed. "I shall always sing to you as much as you like. I am thankful to be able to give you pleasure."

Pleasure, forsooth! She can give me everything a man longs for in the world! Sweetness, beauty, melody are all in her power of bestowal! But I should be thankful for her affection and grateful for my privileges as a trusted friend. May I never by any folly forfeit them!

And so the winter came again, and the amenities of the holidays and some joyous little dinners with Frieda. I went one day to call on Richetti, and the *maestro* threw himself upon me and clasped me in his arms.

"*Amico carissimo!* It is a delight to see you! Everywhere I hear of you as an author *pregiatissimo*, but you go not out into the world where thousands are dying to know you! About *la signora!* What shall I say! It was a day to be marked with a white stone when you brought her to me. We are giving back to the world a pearl of great price. She has the voice, *amico mio*, and she has the natural method! But more than all else her voice is *simpatica*, it throbs and thrills, it enlists love and affection and the desire to listen forever. At her feet the world will kneel some day. She will be mentioned in the same breath as our greatest *prime donne*. In three weeks I give my concert. Every one will be there. I have given hints to many, made much mystery. She will come out in all her beauty, dressed in a very fine gown, the last on the programme, so that she will be a revelation. People will go away and clamor at her greatness. I am Richetti! I know what I speak of!"

In his enthusiasm he slapped me severely on the back, and I hurried home.

"Frances!" I exclaimed, breathlessly. "Richetti is getting crazy about you. He bubbles over with enthusiasm. Moreover, Jamieson says he is a wise old guy. The *maestro* says you must have a very fine gown to wear at the concert. Where is the gown?"

She cast her eyes down at the floor.

"I—I suppose I will manage to——"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," I told her, severely. "It is a most important matter which we have inexcusably neglected. Come out with me at once and we will buy one."

"Oh, no, Dave, I was thinking that I have a very nice white lace gown I brought from Paris when I first came over, which could——"

"You have no business to think such things. Who is that coming up the stairs? Hello, always on hand when you are most needed, Frieda. I want you to go at once with Frances to the most expensive shop on Fifth Avenue and buy her a concert gown. Here are a hundred dollars."

"That would buy two sleeves and maybe a few flounces," said Frieda, quietly.

"Here's a hundred more which you can leave on deposit. I will see to the balance. Not a word, Frances. Remember that it must be a very fine gown. Richetti says so, I didn't suggest it to him. He knows what's needed. You can pay me back when you are making thousands. Don't argue, but go at once!"

"You're a nasty tempered old bully," Frieda informed me, her eyes twinkling behind her spectacles.

"Good!" I exclaimed. "You're always saying that I don't assert myself enough. Thank goodness, I'm getting cured of that."

So, presently, they went away and I was left alone. Some letters were on my desk. One of them was from Gordon and I seized it eagerly. It read as follows:

"Dear old boy:

"As you suggested in your last letters I've had enquiries made at the war department. Paul Dupont of the 30th dragoons, a violinist by profession and a reservist called from New York, aged 31, was killed at the battle of the Marne. I thought I'd find out about his old people, if I could. Just heard they abandoned their place before it was destroyed and are living with a daughter near Suresnes. I sent them a bit of money, telling them it came from their daughter-in-law. Thought it might please Madame Dupont, but don't tell her. Am still driving one of those gasoline wheelbarrows. We're seeing some hard times. I sometimes feel awfully sorry at what happened. S. was a fine girl, and I a fool. Glad to hear that 'Land o' Love' is making a killing.

"Ever your old pal,

"GORDON."

I was glad enough, in a melancholy way, to receive this piece of news. Frances, while never doubting that her husband was dead, has never had any positive assurance of the fact. I'll not mention it just now, for it wouldn't do to awaken her

memories before the concert. Time has reconciled her a little to her loss, I think, and it would be a shame to disturb her.

Well, there can be no doubt about it. She is entirely free. It is not possible that such beauty and sweetness as hers shall nevermore know love. This concert surely means the beginning of a separation which must come sooner or later. Madame Francesca, as she will be called, can no longer keep on living in this frittering brownstone relic of better days. Her singing will probably take her away from us. There may be concerts and even operatic engagements, who knows? And I shall be left here with the old calabash and my rickety typewriter. Ye Gods! What an outlook! I wonder whether it would not be wise for me to go to Fiji or Yokohama or the Aleutian Islands? I shall get the horrors here all alone. I'm too clumsy for them ever to take me as an ambulance driver in France, but, perhaps, they would let me serve as an orderly in the hospitals. I'll have to think of it!



CHAPTER XXI

THE CONCERT

And so the short weeks went by and the fateful evening came. Frieda had spent the whole afternoon with Frances. The gown, it appeared, had come in plenty of time. My formal orders had, of course, been disobeyed, for women, while they often bow gracefully to a mere man's edicts, always go off and do as they jolly well please. In a sidestreet, not more than a block and a half from the Avenue, our stout friend had unearthed a purveyor of feminine adornment who, she explained to me, was a positive worker of spells when it came to dressing a woman. Also, she was moderate in her prices. The gown cost one hundred and sixty-five dollars and the amount of change Frieda cascaded in my lap made me feel as if I owned a bank. I expressed disbelief in the miraculous dressmaker and made somber prophecies as to the outcome, all of which she treated with contempt. At six o'clock they went off to her flat, where she had prepared the light refecton that would insure prompt digestion and easy breathing. I was instructed to dine where I pleased.

At seven thirty-five came a knock at my door. It was Frieda.

"Dave," she said, "if you're having trouble with that white tie, we'll fix it for you in a minute. Meanwhile, you're permitted to come in the other room. She's got the dress on, I hooked it myself and did her hair."

I followed her, eagerly. Both gaslights were flaming brightly. Eulalie was circling around Frances, totally incapacitated by admiration. The back was turned to me and the arms raised as she gave some mysterious touch to the waves above her temples, but she turned at once and stood before me, happily, with arms now held down and palms turned towards me, in an attitude of graceful abandonment.

"Here's your gown, Dave," she said. "From head to foot you are responsible, slippers and all."

I refuse to go to Frieda for a description of it. I care nothing about displaying my ignorance and will say at once that I have not the slightest idea of what the materials were. All I know is that she looked like beauty and grace incarnate.

The lily might be no better for the gilding, but it displayed her charm to the full. The beautiful arms were bare and the fair neck modestly displayed.

"Let me rub my eyes," I said, "it is another dream come to me."

"Elle est belle comme un amour!" clamored Eulalie.

She was indeed beautiful as a love, as the most splendid, honest, faithful love ever born in a human heart.

And then she came to me and put up her hands and seized upon my recalcitrant tie and gave it a twist and a turn, smiling at me the while.

"You look ever so well, David," she told me. "You need take so little trouble to make yourself look as young in body as you are in heart. You'll be but forty-two next birthday and yet seem to delight in pretending you're such an old fellow. Please stay young, Dave, for the sake of all who love you."

Yes, there was a bit of moisture in her eyes as she spoke. She was so near me that I was conscious of her fragrance; I felt that I was within the aura of her sweetness, and my heart was thumping. But she turned away again, after one more reassured glance at my tie. She began to draw on a long pair of white gloves, as I went back to my room for a few sprays of lily of the valley I had procured for her, which she pinned to her waist. Then she sat down in a chair that looked poorly fitted to bear so charming a burden.

"I needn't be there before nine, David," she told me, "and so there isn't the slightest hurry. Frieda is going home to put on her best and we'll stop for her in the cab."

So the painter of goddesses and nymphs waddled off, hurriedly, and clattered down the stairs. Frances leaned over Baby Paul's crib, for the longest time, after which she gave Eulalie ever so many instructions as to her charge, while I contemplated her, my nerves all aquiver with thoughts of the coming ordeal.

"You—you look ever so calm, Frances," I told her. "Does—doesn't the idea of standing up there and singing to all those people make you nervous?"

"Not a bit, Dave," she answered, gaily. "But if a little bit of stage fright should come I shall look at you and pretend to myself that I'm just singing for you, and then everything will be all right. It will seem as if we were alone here, and the others won't matter. I feel like singing this very minute and giving you a tiny

concert of your own, but it might waken Baby."

She was undeniably happy. With the poor, little, husky voice she had felt a cripple, but the restored organ had changed her in everything but beauty and kindness. She was confident now; the world was opening to her again. She would be able to keep Baby Paul from all suffering such as poverty might have brought, and it gave her an outlook upon the future, wider and more secure.

"I do hope I shall succeed," she said again. "I never had dreamed that a woman could accept all that I have taken from you, Dave. If this means that I shall have gained my independence, I shall be happy indeed, but I will always remember that the time I leaned upon you was made sweet and hopeful by your consideration and friendship. Come, David, it is time to go, I think. I feel that when I return, this evening, I may be able to express a little of what I owe you, and, then, thank God on my bended knees."

"I shall be so proud to watch the dawning of your success and happiness," I told her, with a catch in my throat.

"Yes, success would be splendid, Dave, but the happiness has been coming a long time. You brought me some of it in your pockets all last summer and gave it to me every week. Oh! Dave! God bless you!"

She put out her hand to me and looked deeply in my eyes. Her heart was very full, I know, but I felt that it was the gratitude a woman could give to a beloved brother.

And so we went away, with a last kiss blown at Baby Paul and a thousand good wishes from Eulalie. The taxi I had ordered was at the door and drove first to Dr. Porter's, and then to Frieda's, who was waiting for us, a very shapeless bundle done up in an ample and all-concealing cloak. I was thankful that her head was bare, having dreaded some abomination in the way of a hat.

"Oof!" she exclaimed. "My gown's horribly tight. Had to have the janitress come up to hook it in the back and I hope nothing gives way. We're an awfully swell lot this evening. First thing you know they'll be talking about us in the papers, under the heading of Society News."

She maintained an endless chatter, in which I discovered much method. It was evidently her purpose to keep Frances from getting nervous. Finally, we reached the concert hall, in which people were still crowding. Richetti's circle of

acquaintances is a vast and distinguished one and his concerts, few and far between, are events in the musical world.

Frances and Frieda stood on the sidewalk, while I was paying the driver.

"We are going in by another entrance, David," she told me. "You go and find your seats and possess your souls in patience. You will hear some excellent music. When I come on, don't make too much noise because it might distract my attention."

I gave her my hand, which she pressed in a strong and nervous clasp that lasted for a fraction of a second, and then the two disappeared among the many people surging towards the doors.

For some minutes Porter and I stood at the back of the hall, as did many others, in order not to interrupt a duet between basso and soprano, most creditable to two young people, who retired with many bows and much approval from the audience. The young lady was quite collected and smiling, but the heavy-chested youth was blushing and evidently glad to have passed through the ordeal. Women, I think, average greater courage than men. In the interval before the next number we sought our places and I had but slipped my hat in the grooves beneath my seat when my nearest neighbor, a very charming young person, addressed me at once, and I recognized in her the little lady who had called me an old fogey at the Van Rossums.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Lambley," she said, and turned to a short and wide-shouldered youth who appeared to have taken the place of the six-footer. "Freddy dear, I want to introduce Professor Lambley, who has written a great essay on Dionysius the Areopagite."

The young man pushed an able hand towards me and grasped mine.

"How jolly!" he exclaimed. "Something to do with aviation, isn't it? I'm expecting to take it up soon."

"How silly you are, Freddy," the young woman reproved him, "it's an awfully scientific thing."

"Oh! Well, then, that lets me out," acknowledged Freddy, conscientiously, "but I think a lot of the fellows who work out those affairs. Knew a chap who was drowned at Montauk last summer, who was keen on bees and bugs. Queer Johnnie!"

Our scientific and literary symposium ceased abruptly. The accompanist came in and sat at the piano, being immediately followed by a young lady I remembered seeing in Richetti's rooms. My little neighbor applauded, frantically, as did most of the audience.

"Her father's worth two millions," she informed me, "and she thinks her voice is the biggest ever. Her hair doesn't naturally wave that way and she's got too much rouge on. Richetti didn't want her to go on yet, but she made her father insist."

My own knowledge of the divine art of singing, as I have confessed a thousand times, amounts to little or nothing, but I found something pleasurable in listening to the plutocratic contralto. She was by no means embarrassed and began the "Angelic Voice" from *Gioconda* in a most business-like fashion, finishing amid a salvo of applause.

"There! I've gone and split my glove," said the young lady beside me, "but I just had to do it. I'm going to their house-party next week and the place is perfectly gorgeous."

Next, as an encore, came "He shall feed His flocks" from the *Messiah*, which received similar encomiums and the singer retired, smothered in flowers and followed by uproarious approval.

"Funny she should have selected that," came the voice near me, "seeing that her father made all his money in wool."

In rapid succession came several other singers, all of whom appeared to impress the audience favorably. My heart was beginning to thump again in my breast, for the moment was approaching and I suffered from a vicarious stage-fright that could have been no greater had I myself been sentenced to appear upon the stage. It may be that the hall was overheated; at any rate I had to pass my handkerchief a number of times over my forehead, and my high collar began to choke me. I was grasping Porter's arm, convulsively, when, all of a sudden, before I could realize that the moment had come, she stood before the footlights, bowing before the moderate clapping of hands, and Richetti himself sat at the piano.

"Great Scott!" said the wide-shouldered young man, "ain't she a stunner!"

His companion replied something, but I did not listen. Richetti was playing a few preliminary bars of the melody. I saw her eyes moving confidently over the

orchestra seats and thought she recognized us with a nearly imperceptible accentuation of her smile. She was holding the sheets of music before her, but in them I could not detect the slightest trace of tremor. Then, her gaze was uplifted a little and the song began, while all sense of fear left me and I breathed easily, leaning forward eagerly while each note entered my soul. It was Mendelssohn's "On Wings of Song." It seemed to me that the silence urbanely granted to the other singers became more profound. The audience was surely holding its breath. Not a stir of programmes sounded. Faces were no longer expressing tolerant civility, for they had become intent and fervent. Something like the awed respect of a great churchly crowd filled the hall and was maintained till the very last note, after which came a very storm of applause, delirious, impulsive, unrestrained for the longest time, while she bowed again and again, and Richetti stood up beside her for his share of the triumph.

And after this she gave us "Chantez, Riez" of Gounod, and the gorgeous swing of it was uplifting, and the wonderful tone lent it greatness and the lilt of it a true significance of the joy of living. As a further encore she sang Rossini's "Stabat Mater." Her voice broke into the passion of grief of the mother bereft, in the grandeur of the hope eternal, and the people were hushed, breathless, conquered.

At last she was allowed to leave the stage, with Richetti's hand held in her own. The man was beaming, delighted.

"Come with me," I cried to Porter. "We are to be allowed back of the stage. She's expecting us. Did you see Richetti's look of pride? You're far more responsible for this result than he, bless your heart! Come along."

And so we made our way to a large room at the back of the hall. It was much crowded with women in gorgeous dresses and men among whom I recognized Bartolo Cenci of the Metropolitan and Colonel Duff, the great impresario of concerts and lecture tours, and the shrewd features of FitzMaurice the musical critic of the *Banner*, small, hawk-eyed and of bustling manner.

In a corner, with Frieda at her side, stood Frances, with a little court surrounding her. Richetti, a few paces away, was talking volubly with men, who were probably of the Press. We went to the new diva, who did not await our coming, but stepped towards us, with both hands extended.

"I'll tell you later all that I feel, Dave," she half whispered to me. "Oh! Dr. Porter, dear friend, I am so glad that you have been able to see the results of your work. Come with me!"

She took him by the arm and led him to Richetti.

"Professor, I want to present Dr. Porter. I could not sing a note, and he worked marvels upon me; gave me a new throat, I think, and a better one than ever."

Upon this, the *maestro* nearly fell on Porter's neck and wept, calling him a savior and a performer of miracles, after which he insisted on introducing him to a number of the eager gatherers of information and to Bartolo Cenci, who wrote down his address on his cuff. Our good little Porter was nearly overwhelmed.

Finally a number of us were haled off to Richetti's rooms where a great table was set with flasks of *Chianti* and a huge Milanese *risotto*, and it was nearly two o'clock before we packed ourselves in a taxi, feeling as if such a superfluous thing as sleep could be put off till the Greek Kalends.

Frieda refused to be dropped off at her flat. Porter was also compelled to come to the top of the little brownstone house. We did our best to be quiet in going up, and I hope we awoke no honest sleepers. They crowded into my room, Frances leaving us to see that Baby Paul was thriving. She returned on tiptoe.

"Eulalie is snoring on the sofa," she announced, "and Baby is sleeping like an angel."

So we remained there for an hour, at least, and Frieda told us how Colonel Duff had rushed up to ask about Frances's plans for the rest of the winter, and Cenci had inquired, most pointedly, whether she already had an engagement for next season and what operas she had studied, to which she had replied that her arrangements were in Richetti's hands, whereupon they had assaulted the *maestro* and nearly torn him limb from limb in their eagerness to engage her.

"The proudest man in the world, some day," said Frieda, "will be Baby Paul. He will be going about boasting that Madame Francesca is his mother, and people will love him for her sake."

Then Frances clasped as much of Frieda's form as she could possibly hold in her arms, and kissed her, telling her that she was saying a lot of nonsense, and finally our stout friend went away under Porter's guidance, who had promised to see her home, and Frances and I were left alone on the landing.

Here, a little yellow gas-jet was flickering, very small and poor, and the balustrade upon which I leaned gave a crackling groan. We heard the closing of the front door and turned to one another. Again her hand was put forth and I took

it and raised it to my lips. When I lifted my head I dimly saw a tear shining upon her cheek.

"Dear friend," she said, "I owe it all to you."

With this she clasped my shoulders in both hands and, for an instant, her lips touched the side of my face.

A second later she had closed her door behind her, and I feverishly changed my coat. Then, I put on my heavy ulster and made my way to the old square, where I sat down in the frosty air. That touch upon my cheek had left my temples throbbing, my heart on fire. The whole world seemed confused, the shining stars were dancing overhead, the noises of the sleeping city buzzed in my head, maddeningly.

Finally, I began to feel the cold, and the earth grew stiller and more peaceful. An instant later a great milk-dray rattled across the square, going up Fifth Avenue, the usual alarm warning me of bedtime. So I went home, collected again and tranquil. She had given me a tiny fragment of herself, a reward perhaps too great for the little I had been able to do for her. Peace had returned to me and I fell asleep.



CHAPTER XXII

GORDON RETURNS

And then, after a very short time, the parting came. I was the first to advise it. She could no longer remain in the little, decrepit boarding house. People would come to see her; she had to have a decent home, a place in which she could receive some of the members of this new world she had taken by storm. We had looked together over the accounts in the papers; it was nothing less than a triumph. Richetti was making all sorts of arrangements for her.

After a long dispute she consented to take my piano with her.

"I'm afraid she won't do it," Frieda had told me, when I broached the subject to her.

"I—I should be so glad to think it had belonged to—to the only two women I have—have ever——"

"Poor darling David," said the sweet old painter, wiping her glasses, "Why—why don't you speak?"

"Because—just because," I answered.

"I know, she is moving into another world now. I am glad she is taking Eulalie with her. But she can never forget you, Dave. You will always be the best and dearest of friends to her. You must go and see her often."

"I'm afraid it will never be quite the same, Frieda. She will have a little parlor now, and it won't be like the room she trusted me to enter, the place where Baby Paul first saw the light, the dingy quarters in which her new voice was born. Oh! Frieda! Have we ever fully realized how patient she was, how resigned? We surely never did because we could not know how great her loss had been. We merely had an idea that she had been deprived of a few golden notes, and all the time she knew that she had lost a treasure beyond compare. And yet how brave she was through it all! With what courage she went to work in that poor little shop to gain the pittance that might keep her and Baby Paul farther from want! We have never once heard her whimper, nor has she ever seemed really

discouraged. Sometimes she showed great sadness, of course, but it was born of her misfortune and of her fears for the little one, because of the love for him that surged in her heart. God! Frieda, but you women are brave and strong!"

"Yes, David dear, especially when we find a good man to lean upon," she answered.

And so, as I have said, Frances went away to a very decent little apartment Frieda found for her, and Eulalie was installed in a kitchen of her own, and the latchstring was always out for us. I enjoyed some pleasant days of tacking a few photos on the walls and hanging portières. Some of the time I had to work alone, for she was much taken up. Three weeks after the concert she went away on a tour, having joined forces with Tsheretszewski, the great cellist, an obese and long haired artist with a wife and seven children, who became a thing of poetry and beauty when he played. I heard them in Carnegie Hall, and then they went off on a tour that took them as far as Chicago and St. Louis, and my agency for newspaper cuttings kept on sending me articles by real or alleged critics. Eulalie traveled with her, and the baby also went from town to town. Frances sent me many postals and, often, letters. The latter always began with "Dearest Dave."

Then came the spring again and a meeting that was positively dreadful, during which Frances pulled out little rags of paper full of her scribbling and covered over with numbers which represented her indebtedness to me. We fought like cats and dogs over the items, till, finally, she proudly pulled out a checkbook from a little desk and wrote out the amount, signing the thing boldly and declaring that she would never speak to me again unless I took it.

"You see, David dear," she explained, "everything is all right now and I am making lots of money, and you can't refuse, because you know I only accepted in the hope that I would be able to pay it all back some day, and it will leave me a debtor to you for a million things, and Baby Paul too!"

During the summer she went to Newport, where Richetti gave another concert and where he made her a flattering offer to help in his teaching of the infinitely rich and sometimes voiceless. Thank goodness that a press of work came to me, for Ceballo, the great manager, actually sought me out and insisted on collaborating with me in a dramatization of "Land o' Love," which had passed its second hundred thousand. He nearly drove me to insanity, while we toiled at it, and I would have cried mercy before the end, but for the furious energy with which he kept me a prisoner of his wiles.

Then I spent a few weeks in the Adirondacks, having found a small hotel where people never put on war-paint for dinner and no one was ashamed to wear flannel shirts, and I rowed and pretended to fish and lost myself in the woods to my heart's content, finally returning to my old typewriter with a mass of notes for a further novel. I took up once more my lonely vigils, when I could, because I began to feel the grasp of many cogwheels that were the penalty of success. Some magazines actually requested stories of me.

About the first of October I received a cablegram from Gordon, which appalled me with its suddenness.

"Home by *Rochambeau*. Get old girl to clean up. Can't drive ambulance any more.

"GORDON."

It was simply maddening. Why couldn't he drive? Of course he had been hurt. Why didn't he tell me what was the matter? Poor old chap, in spite of some of his ways there is no man on earth I have ever been so fond of, because, at bottom, there is something very manly and genuine in him. When things got too hot for him he didn't go off somewhere and mope; no, he naturally went and gave the best that was in him to a service of noble charity and virile endeavor.

I ascertained over the phone the date of the *Rochambeau's* probable arrival and walked up the Avenue to a meeting with Ceballo, who was worrying me to death over the ending of the fourth act. He's a most obstinate man. At a busy corner I stopped to allow the passage of a flood of autos. The crowd behind me pressed me forward, nearly against a powerful gray roadster.

"Jump in quick, Mr. Cole," came a woman's voice.

I looked up. It was Miss Sophia Van Rossum who had spoken. The chauffeur was in a little seat behind her and I swiftly obeyed, glad indeed to see her again.

"Are you in a hurry to go anywhere, Mr. Cole, because I'll be glad to take you wherever you want to go?"

"No," I replied, "I was killing time for about an hour. After that I have an appointment."

"Then we can take a little turn in the Park," she said, approvingly.

The carriages and motors were so numerous that for some time we said very little. I watched her self-reliant, skilful driving, and took an occasional glance at her profile. It was beautiful as ever, perhaps more so than ever, colored with health and a fair coat of tan. Once in the Park, however, we found more room and she drove with less preoccupation.

"I—I've heard from you but twice this summer, Mr. Cole. Thank you for letting me know that Gordon was still well. Have you any further news of him?"

"Yes, I have just heard," I replied. "He is on his way back and I wrote you this morning at Southampton."

I watched her closely. For a moment she drove on, looking neither to the right or left, but I saw that her lower lip was being pressed on by her teeth.

"He—he never let me know," she finally said. "I—I hope he will return well and happy."

"Pardon me. I am afraid that something has happened to him," I said, again. "Gordon is the sort of fellow who would see the thing through. He would go on to the end, you know, and—and he didn't write, this time. I have the cable here. You might stop a moment under these trees."

She brought the machine to a standstill, gently, with no undue pressure of brake, losing none of her expertness, and put her hand out for the paper I held.

"I see," she said, very simply and quietly, though the paper shook a little in her grasp. "He has been very badly hurt, Mr. Cole. Otherwise he would have remained, until he was well again, to take up the work once more. I—I would give anything on earth to meet that steamer!"

"The easiest thing in the world, Miss Van Rossum."

"No, the hardest, the most impossible," she retorted, quickly. "He—he might not be glad to see me, else he would have cabled me also, I think. You will be there, of course! Be very sure you meet him, Mr. Cole, and then, please—please let me know what has happened, and find out for me whether there is anything I can do. You promise, don't you?"

I put out my hand and she crushed it, nervously, with wonderful strength, and let it go at once.

"We will go on now, I think," she said, and pressed the selfstarter. Soon we were in the main driveway again, among a flooding and ebbing tide of carriages and motors. Some women bowed to her and she returned the salutations with a graceful move of her head. She drove as easily as usual, and the turn was completed. Finally, she dropped me off at the club and went on, after brief but very genuine thanks.

"Good Lord! David," said Ceballo, a moment later. "Just caught sight of you with Diana at the wheel. Splendid young lady, isn't she? I know her father quite well."

"Yes," I answered, "she is a very fine young woman."

"Doesn't much care for literature, does she?"

"I don't know, but she has a heart of gold, and that's what counts."

So we retired to a small private table and disputed and argued for a couple of hours, at the end of which my brains were addled and I told him to do as he pleased, whereat he beamed and I parted from him.

Then I began counting the days till the *Rochambeau* should arrive, and Frances came back to town and sent me word at once. She received me joyfully and told me how much good the sea-air on the Newport cliffs had done Baby Paul, who was beginning to talk like a little man and to say "God bless David" in the prayer he babbled after her each evening.

"I'm only back for a short time," she said, "because I'm to sing at a concert in Boston next week, and then we are going to Buffalo for a day, after which I shall return. And what do you think, David? I am to sign an engagement for the Metropolitan! Tsheretschewski is going abroad this winter to play in Spain and England, and so I shall be, for the whole winter, here in New York, and—and I hope you won't neglect me."

I assured her that I would call every day, and left her, after I had inspected Baby Paul, who deigned to let me kiss him and favored my moustache with a powerful tug. He is a stunning infant. She was standing at the outer door of her apartment, her dear sweet smile speaking of her friendship and regard. The temptation came on me again, the awful longing for a touch of those lips, but I held myself within bounds, as bravely as I could, and touched the elevator signal. She waited until the cage had shot up and waved her hand at me. Her "Good-by, Dave" held all

the charm of her song and the tenderness of her heart, I thought, and I answered it with a catch in my throat.

"You will never be anything but a big over-grown kid, David," Frieda had told me, a few days before. Ay! I realized it! I would never cease crying for that radiant moon. Sometimes, in silly dreams, I have seen myself standing before her, with her two hands in mine, with her lips near, with her heart ready to come into my keeping. But, when I waken, I remember the words she said last year, when Gordon made her so unhappy. How could love be left in her heart? she had asked. Was there ever a night when she didn't kneel and pray for the poor soul of the man buried somewhere in France, in those dreadful fields, with, perhaps, never a cross over him nor a flower to bear to him a little of the love she had given? Let well enough alone, David, my boy! You can have her song whenever you care to beg for it, and her friendship and her smiles. Would you forfeit these things because you must come forth and beg for more, ay, for more than she can give you? Would you force her dear eyes to shed tears of sorrow for you, and hear her soft voice breaking with the pain it would give her to refuse?

A few days later she met me at her door, excitedly, and told me that Baby Paul had a slight cold and that Dr. Porter had advised her not to take him away with her.

"And, Dave, I just have to go! It would be too hard on some of the others, if I broke faith and didn't appear. I must leave to-night, and it just breaks my heart to be compelled to start when my Baby Paul isn't well. Dr. Porter has promised to call every day and see him during my absence. Dave dear, you are ever so fond of Baby too. Won't you come in every day, and you must telegraph, if you don't find him getting along as well as he should, or use the long distance telephone."

She was much agitated, and I saw how hard it was on her to leave the dear little man behind. But Frances is the sort of woman who keeps her promises. She has given her word and will go!

So we dined together, that evening, with Frieda, and we saw Frances away to the train and put her on board the sleeper and returned home, and Frieda spoke a great deal and told me about the sale of her latest picture and all that she expected from the one she was going to exhibit at the winter Salon. It was only after I had left her that I realized the dear soul had been trying to divert my thoughts.

In the morning came the telegram from the marine department of the cable

company. The *Rochambeau* would dock at eleven. I was at the waterside an hour earlier, devoured with impatience and anxiety, thinking of a thousand alarming possibilities. Finally, the big ship appeared, far down the stream, and slowly came up. I scanned the decks as soon as people could be distinguished, but could see no sign of my friend.

At last, the steamer was warped into the dock after three puffing tugs had pushed and shoved her for the longest time, and the passengers began to come off, and still he did not show up and the gang plank was nearly bare of people. I seized upon a steward bearing ashore a load of suitcases and bags and asked him whether there was not a Mr. McGrath on board.

"*Certainement, Monsieur*, there he is coming now," replied the man, hurrying away.

I might not have recognized him, so pale and thin did he look, but it was Gordon all right, at the head of the trussed gangway, and he waved a hand at me. A man preceded him, carrying some baggage.

"Hello, Gordon!" I shouted joyfully, in spite of the shock his sharp, worn features had given me.

"Hello, Dave!" he cried back.

A moment later he was down on the dock, stepping lightly, and I pushed my hand out towards him, eager for the strong grasp of former days.

"You'll have to take the left, old boy. The right one's behind, somewhere in Belgium. Wait a moment and I'll give you my keys, Dave. I have to keep everything in my lefthand pockets, so they're crowded. Yes, I have them. I suppose that my trunk is already ashore. Do try and get a customs' officer for me and hurry the thing through."

He was talking as calmly and coolly as if he had been gone but a few days and had suffered only from a cut finger. We were fortunate in being able to get through the formalities very soon, and, shortly after, we drove away in a taxi.

"Well, Dave, how've you been and how's everybody?" he asked, after lighting a cigarette from mine.

"Every one is all right," I answered impatiently. "Oh! Gordon, old man! How did it ever happen?"

"Just a piece of shell while I was picking some fellows up," he answered. "You have no idea of how surprising it is when you suddenly realize that something's missing. But what's a hand more or less after all that I've seen? How's Frieda?"

"Stouter than ever," I replied, "and her appetite's improving. Porter recommended a diet, but she won't follow it. Says her fat doesn't interfere with her sitting at the easel."

"Good old Frieda! I've heard about your book, Dave, it made a big stir, didn't it? And so—so Madame Dupont has become a great singer again; heard all about it from a fellow on board and, of course, your letters spoke of it; but you're such a crazy old duffer I supposed you were getting carried away with your enthusiasm. Never could take things quietly, could you? Any other news?"

"Nothing very special," I told him. "The Van Rossums came to town early, this year. I—I've seen Miss Sophia."

"Have you? Give me another cigarette. Yes, light a match for me. I'm clumsy as the devil with that left hand!"

He sat back, puffing at the thing and looking out of the window.

"Peanuts," he said. "Haven't seen a peanut cart for over a year. Colored women, too. Plenty of fighting niggers in France, but no darky ladies. Look at the big cop! Policemen are the only leisure class in this country, aren't they? Lord! What a big, ghastly brick monstrosity that is! We can lick the world when it comes to fetid commercial architecture, can't we? Are you going all the way up to the studio with me?"

"Of course I am," I asserted indignantly. "What did you suppose I'd do?"

"Thought you might laugh at the uselessness of a studio in my present condition," he replied negligently. "I've told you I'm clumsy as the deuce with that left hand. Tried to draw a face with it the other day, in pencil. Looked like a small boy's effort on a fence. So, of course, I'm through with painting. I've been rather saving, you know. Invested my money quite safely and haven't spent much on this jaunt. Of course a few thousands went where I thought they'd do most good. A fellow who'd keep his hands in his pockets when help is so badly needed would be a queer animal. But I've enough to live on and smoke decent tobacco. I think I'll take a small bachelor apartment in New York, to come to when I get the horrors. I'll spend the rest of the time in the country, a good way off. I'll read

books, yes, even yours, and, perhaps, learn to sit around with a crowd, near a grocery stove, and discuss potatoes and truck. Hang it all! There's always something a fellow can do!"

"My dear Gordon," I began, "I don't see——"

"Oh, shut up, Dave, I know all the things one can say to a cripple. What's the use? Some fellows on board asked me to dine with them this evening at Delmonico's, and I damned them up and down. Sat for eight mortal days at the dining-table on the ship, with an infernal female on each side of me; they'd quarrel as to which of them would cut my meat for me. It's enough for a fellow to go dotty. Sometimes I wouldn't go and had things served in my cabin so the steward would do the cutting. Understand, I'm not kicking. Hang it all, man, I'm not even sorry I went! The chaps I helped out were probably worth it. Great old experience trying to make fifty miles an hour with a fellow inside bleeding to death, I can tell you. I've seen enough of it to have learned that a man's life doesn't amount to much. Any old thing will do for me now."

I was appalled. All this had but one meaning. He was eating his heart out, try as he might to conceal it. To him, his art had been chiefly a means to an end; he had made it the servant of his desires. And now it was getting back at him, it was revenging itself, appearing infinitely desirable for its own sake. He would miss it as a man misses the dead woman, who has held his heart in the hollow of her hand; he was raging at the helplessness that had come upon him. And all this he translated into his usual cynicism. I would have given anything to have seen him break down and weep, so that I might have put my arm around his shoulders and sought to comfort him with love and affection.

We got out at the big building, and he nodded to the colored boy who stood at the door of the elevator, as if he had been gone but a day. On the landing he sought again to pull out his keys, but I touched the electric button and the old woman's steps hurried to the door.

"How are you?" he said, and brushed past her, paying no heed to her salutations. "Glad everything's open. I was afraid it would be all closed up like a beastly morgue. Hello!"

He stopped before the easel. Upon it I had placed a rough study he had made for Miss Van Rossum's picture. It was a thing of a few effective and masterly strokes.

"Good Lord, Dave, but I was a painter for fair, once upon a time! How did I ever do it?"

He sat there, very still, for a long time, while I watched him. I think he had forgotten all about me, for, after a time, he rose and pulled out of a closet some unframed canvasses, which he scattered against the legs of furniture and contemplated.

"Think I'll make a bonfire of them," he suddenly said. "Won't be such an idiot as to keep on staring at those things and looking at my stump, I'll warrant," and he pushed the handleless wrist towards me, tied up in a bit of black silk.

Then the telephone rang.

"Wonder who's the infernal idiot calling up now?" he said. "Go and answer, Dave. No, I'll go myself and tell him to go to the devil!"

Then came one of those fragmentary conversations. I could not help hearing it, of course. It surprised me that he spoke quietly, with a civility of tone and accent I had not expected.

"Yes, came back a few minutes ago——No, Dave ran up here with me, Dave Cole, you know——Oh! Nothing much——Well, I've lost my hand, the one I painted with——Yes, I shall be glad to have you do so——Right away? Yes, if you want to, I mean if you will be so kind. Thank you ever so much!"

He hung up the receiver and turned to me, his eyes looking rather haggard.

"It's—it's Sophia Van Rossum. How did she know I was coming?"

"I let her know, of course," I answered rather shortly.

"You think I've treated her pretty badly, don't you?"

"Rottenly, Gordon!"

"I daresay I did. It was a sort of madness that came over me, but—but there's no excuse. She'll be here in a few minutes. I don't know what I can say to her. Stay here, Dave, and help me out. I used to tell you that she was just a society doll, and that sort of thing. Well, she's pretty strong on society, but she was brought up in it, belonged to it. But she's a great deal more of a woman than I gave her credit for being; I've realized it a thousand times since I've been gone. I call it mighty decent of her to ring me up and offer to come around and see me, after

the way I've behaved to her."

"So do I, Gordon," I approved. "She's got a great big heart, the sort it's a sorry thing for a man to play with."

He made no answer, looking out from his window into the Park and its yellowing foliage. Then he lifted his maimed arm and stared at it.



CHAPTER XXIII

THE REPAIR OF A BROKEN STRAND

We sat there for some long minutes, in silence. Gordon was thinking deeply. His expression, the abandonment shown in the looseness of his limbs and the falling forward of his head, were instinct with something that represented to me a forgetting of pose and calculated conduct.

"I've seen so much suffering," he suddenly said. "That sort of thing either hardens a man into stone or softens his heart till he can cry out in hatred of the idea of inflicting pain that can be spared."

I made no answer. It was best to chance no interruption of his mood. My thoughts were of the meeting that would take place in a few minutes. Indeed, I felt that I ought not to be there, that my presence might hinder some cry of the heart, words a woman's soul might dictate. But I was compelled to remain, since Gordon wished me to. He was now like a child needing the comfort of a friendly hand before entering a place of darkness. But I would seize the first opportunity of leaving them alone. At any rate, I could cross the long studio and go into the next room, if needed.

Then the bell rang. I think it startled Gordon. The old woman went to the door, and we heard the girl asking for Mr. McGrath, in her pleasant and assured voice. I rose to meet her, lifting one of the portières to one side.

She looked at me, slightly surprised, but put out her hand, smiling rather vaguely, her eyes belying the calmness of her voice, her movements showing slight nervousness. Gordon was standing. I expected him to come forward, but he remained where he was, rather helplessly, and she stepped forward toward him, swiftly.

"Hello, Gordon!" she exclaimed. "I'm so glad to see you again. What a bad boy you've been not to write to me! That—that only letter of yours implied that you gave me back my freedom, and so I suppose I am at liberty to consider myself as a little sister—or a pretty big one, and greet you as one."

With a swift motion of her hand she pushed up the tiny transparent veil she wore,

put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him, quickly, as if he really had been a brother she was delighted to see again. Then she sat down on the stool he had used to put his palette and tubes on and turned to me.

"It isn't very conventional, Mr. Cole," she said, with a little laugh that sounded forced. "Gordon and I have already kissed one another a few times. Once more will make no difference. I have done nothing to prevent him from at least continuing to consider me as a good friend, perhaps as the sister I've been playing at. Of course we'll have to give it up, now, because—because people can't keep on playing all the time and—and others wouldn't understand. I don't mind you, because you wrote that wonderful book and—and you seem to know so many things."

Then she turned to him again.

"Now tell me about yourself, Gordon," she said pleasantly, folding her hands upon her lap.

He had remained standing. An instinct of shyness, something like the humiliation of the man imperfectly clad or conscious of an ugly blemish, made him keep his right arm behind him.

"There—there's not much to tell," he began, rather haltingly, though he soon regained control. "I've come back because I could no longer be any good over there and—and because I became hungry for a sight of old things—and of old friends, I suppose. You—you're awfully kind, you—you've always been a splendid woman—a proud one, too, but now you come here and put out your hand in friendship to—to a fellow who has behaved rottenly to you. No, don't say anything! Dave used that word. He sometimes speaks to the point. I'll tell you everything. It will hurt you, I'm afraid, as it hurts me, but I've got to do it and I will beg your pardon afterwards. It was all a plan on my part, at first. You were a wonderful, gorgeous creature, one to whom any man would be attracted, and I thought you would make a grand wife and a great stepping-stone to the ambitions that filled my stupid head. And then, somehow, these all went by the board, and a passion came to me—yes, a passion like the week's or the month's insanity that comes to some, for another woman. She is a good woman and a very beautiful one also, the sort of woman who, like yourself, deserves the best and noblest in the man whose love she may return. And she refused me, quickly, sharply, with just a word or two. I think she also thought I was insane; I remember that she looked frightened. And then I wrote to you, a beastly letter. I

tore up a score of them and sent the worst, I'm afraid. Then I took the steamer and went off to drive up and down those roads. It—it has, perhaps, been good for me, for I've seen how little a man himself amounts to, and how great and noble his heart and soul may be. And that passion passed away, so that I no longer thought of her, but always I grew hot and angry at myself, when I remembered you. I've seen you before me a good many times, yes, even in that hospital they took me to, a few weeks ago, during the nights when I couldn't sleep. It was a great vision of a fine woman, big-hearted and strong, too good for such a cad as I. No, don't interrupt! I felt that it was fortunate for you, the best thing that ever happened, that I had shown myself to you under my true colors and saved you—saved you from marrying me. That madness has gone long ago, and there's no trace of it left in me, I swear, but I'm the same impossible Gordon, I daresay, except for that missing hand."

He slowly brought the maimed limb forward, but she never looked at it. Her eyes were upon his, very shiny with unshed tears.

"Yes, the same old Gordon, with perhaps a little of his silly pose gone, with a realization of his uselessness and worthlessness. And now I humbly beg your pardon, Sophia—I mean Miss Van Rossum, for I have forfeited every title to your forbearance—I no longer deserve it. And—and now I stand before you with my soul naked and ashamed, and—and Dave will see you to the door, for—for he's a good man, fit to touch any woman's hand!"

His legs seemed to weaken under him. His left hand sought the window-ledge behind him, and he sank on the seat beneath. She rose from the stool and went to him, sitting down at his side, and put her hand on his right arm.

"You have been very unhappy, Gordon," she said gently. "I am not sure that you have the right perspective as yet, and I don't see in all this anything to prevent our remaining good friends. We've had so many of the good things of life, you and I, and, perhaps, it is good for one to pay for them with a little sorrow. It may prevent one from getting too conceited. And you're so much better off than if this—this hurt had come just in wrecking a motor, or in being stepped on by a polo pony, because you will always realize that it happened while you were giving the best of yourself towards helping others, towards doing big things. And perhaps, some day, you might be able to paint again. They—they make such wonderful artificial things, I have heard, with aluminum and—and stuff that's ever so light. It might take you a whole year of practice before you could do anything; but what is a year when one's heart isn't too sad and weary. Even if you

can't draw as well as you used to, you could take to landscapes, done broadly and strongly. There is no one who can mass colors and produce such effects as you are able to find. When you get confidence, I know you will be able to draw also, ever so well, and, perhaps, for your first trial, you will let me come and sit here and we'll chat together as we used to, and you'll paint again."

"Never!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, sometime, I'm sure, when you feel better, Gordon, because you will forgive yourself after a time. That's so much harder for a man to do than to obtain the pardon of a woman! If you really think you want mine, it is yours, with all my heart, and——"

But she stopped, looking at him wistfully, her long lashes wet, her voice faintly tremulous. I knew that she would have granted him not only the pardon he had sued for, but also her strong and noble self, if he had begged for it.

He probably forgot his missing hand, for he swept the silk-wrapped thing across his eyes.

"You must think again, Sophia," he said very slowly. "You can't really mean it. Do you indeed feel that you can forgive me? Is it true that in your heart there is such charity?"

"It—I don't think it's charity, Gordon. I—I'm afraid it's something more than that. Perhaps you don't know as much as you think about women's hearts. Ask our friend David, here, he has looked into them very wisely, or he couldn't have written 'Land o' Love.' And now I think I must be going away. You mustn't use that word charity again, it is one that hurts just the least little bit. It's so dreadfully inexpressive, you know! And—and you'll write to me when you want me, won't you?"

"I want you now!" he cried. "I'd give the last drop of my blood for a shred of hope, for the knowledge that things might again, some day——"

"One moment, Gordon dear," she said, smiling through her tears, and looked into a tiny gold-meshed bag from which she pulled out a ring with a glistening stone. "I have always kept it. Do you mean that you would like me to put it on again?"

"Do, for the love of God!" he cried.

"Yes, and of dear old Gordon," she consented gently.

So I rose, quickly, with something very big and uncomfortable in my throat, and looked at my watch.

"I must run," I said. "I am ever so late. I'll come in again to-morrow, Gordon! God bless you both!"

I only heard, confusedly, the word or two with which they sought to detain me, but I ran away.

She had said that I knew women's hearts. God forgive her! What man on earth can penetrate such things, can ever gauge the depths of them, see all the wondrous beauty that may hide in them and blossom forth, full of awe and wonder. Every one must worship something, if it be but an idea, and my reverence goes out to the woman who exalts, to the mother of men, to the consoler, for, when she is at her highest and best, she becomes an object of veneration among such earthly things as we may bend a knee to.

The man had remained strong in his abasement, and the woman had seen it. She had been unembarrassed by my presence. Hers was the strength that spurns all pettiness. She knew that I loved Gordon and was assured of my regard for herself. If in her words there had been renunciation and the casting away of wounded pride, if in them there had been the surging of the great love that had long filled her heart, the whole world was welcome to hear them and to behold her while she gave her troth again into the man's keeping. She had risen above the smallness of recrimination, and, with a gesture, had swept away the past since in it there was nothing really shameful, nothing that could soil her ermine coat of fair and clean womanhood. Her faith in the man had returned, and, with it, the confidence born of her instinctive knowledge of a pure woman's mastery over men. She knew that Gordon had beheld those visions of hell that strengthen a man's dire need of heaven, and so, in all simplicity and with the wondrous openhandedness of a Ceres sowing abroad a world's supply of germinating seed, she had cast the treasure of herself before him.

I jumped into a taxi and drove over to the little apartment where Baby Paul was to lie motherless for a few days. I rang the bell and heard Eulalie's heavy steps, hurrying to the door.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I am so glad you have come, but I was hoping it was Monsieur the doctor!"

Whereat I rushed in, filled with alarm.



CHAPTER XXIV

"THE MOTHER AND CHILD"

Little Paul, as I immediately saw as soon as I looked at him, was very ill. He had, of late, always shown pleasure at my coming; he had babbled of simple things and of mysteries; his little arms spontaneously came to me and I would take him in my arms and get moist kisses from his tiny lips and dandle him and share in his ecstasies over woolly lambs.

Porter came in a few minutes later and declared the trouble to be a beginning of measles. Eulalie acknowledged that, a week or ten days before, Baby Paul had come in contact with a blotchy infant in the Park. She had snatched him up and carried him away, after which she had thought no more about it. We sent at once for a trained nurse, whom Eulalie at first considered as an intruder with evil intentions, but whose gentle ministrations soon won her heart.

"Am I to send immediately for Mrs. Dupont?" I asked the doctor.

"It doesn't look like a very severe case," he answered, "but it might be better to communicate with her."

A few minutes later I had Frances on the long-distance telephone, greatest of marvels. I stood in her little hallway in New York, and over in Buffalo, a half a thousand miles away or so, I heard her dear voice becoming excited and tremulous.

"I simply must sing to-night," she was saying, "but from the concert-hall I will rush to the station and take the train. No, don't take the trouble to meet me, David dear, for I'll jump in a taxi and come ever so quick, but you can be at the apartment, if you like. No, I can't tell you the exact time, but it will be the first train after eleven o'clock. You can look in the time table and find out when it reaches New York. Thank you a thousand times, David dear!"

When I announced my intention of remaining all night at the flat, Eulalie gave a clamorous sigh of relief. She proposed to make a bed for me on the sofa. She regretted that she had but a much worn pair of her slippers she could offer me, vast pedic recipients she brought me apologetically and which I felt compelled to

decline. She insisted I should use a rug to wrap around my legs, because that woman in the cap persisted in leaving the window open. She wanted to know what she could prepare for my supper?

At last, she left me in peace and the long night began. Sleep! It was impossible to think of such a thing. The room was kept very dark because Miss Follansbee explained that children's eyes were very sensitive during the measles, and easily inflamed. For many hours, from the sofa on which I sat, I watched this stranger, gradually realizing how capable and attentive she was. Porter came in again at twelve and remained for a long time with me, uttering words of encouragement. Yes, he informed me, children sometimes died of the measles, generally when it became complicated with pneumonia, but, with good care, the great majority recovered. There was nothing alarming, so far. The fever would probably fall a little as soon as the eruption had come out in full force.

He drives a little car now and, I am glad to say, is prospering. I think he cast his bread upon the waters when he was so kind to Frances. At her words of advice, a number of singers have consulted him, and he is doing well. Of course she paid the very moderate fees he asked and told him, as she has told me, that she would ever be his debtor.

So he went away again, after putting a comforting hand on my shoulder, and the hours went slowly by in the dimly lighted room, my thoughts going constantly to the mother who was now speeding towards us. I remember hoping that she would be able to sleep a little on the train. To me the hours were long, but, at least, I was near and fairly reassured; to her, in deep anxiety, they must be agonizing.

It is possible that in the wee small hours I dozed a little, though I never reclined on the sofa. At any rate Miss Follansbee assured me that I had a few catnaps. At last the light began to return; carts and autos began to pass through the busy street; men and women were going by, hurriedly, seeking the day's work. Eulalie gave me some breakfast, with much strong and delicious coffee, and Miss Follansbee awaited the coming of Dr. Porter before retiring for a few hours of rest. He told me that he was quite satisfied, but I looked at him incredulously, for the baby's face was of an appalling hue. He insisted that it was all in the game and would last but for a few days. He promised to return early in the afternoon and, after he left, Miss Follansbee gave me many directions and strict injunctions, after which she went to the room that had been prepared for her, enjoining me to call her if there was the slightest need.

The shades were lowered and the room kept dark. I sat by the little crib, thinking and watching, and the baby's harsh little cough distressed me badly, for I dearly loved him.

So the morning wore on and I rose often and looked out of the window, as if, by some miracle, the train could have come in ahead of schedule time. Baby Paul began to moan, and I hastened back to him. He stretched his little arms out to me, being, perhaps, weary of the hot bed. At any rate he cried to have me take him up, so that I wrapped him in the little blanket and lifted him out. In my arms he rested quietly again and fell asleep, so that I dared not move.

Then I heard the key in the latch, in the hallway outside, and she rushed in, casting her hat upon the bed. A second later she was kneeling at my side, weeping and yet glad, glad that he was living, glad to be again near him. And I dared only whisper a word of welcome to her, lest he might awaken. But soon he opened his eyes, that were very red, and blinked in the faint light, and wanted her.

So he was taken from my arms into hers, and she sat with him in a rocking chair. For some minutes I stood up before her, in my clumsy way, looking at her. I could do so to my heart's content, for her eyes were only for Baby Paul. She rocked him, gently, and her wonderful voice came, sweet and low like the murmur of brooks, the distant song of birds, the sighing of aspens in a summer night's scented breeze. And so the baby slept again, secure and comforted in her dear arms.

Then she looked at me, and a smile came to her face. It is possible that her quick glance detected some slight rumpling of collar and tie, or some disorder of hair I had last brushed the day before.

"David dear, have you been up all night with him?" she asked.

"Yes, but Miss Follansbee took care of him. I knew I would be perfectly useless, but then, Baby Paul is Baby Paul, you see, and—and any one has the right to love a baby. You don't object to that, I'm sure, you—you like to have me love him, don't you?"

"I just love to see you so fond of him, Dave," she answered.

"Yes, I felt that you did. And that's why I stayed, because I knew you wouldn't mind. And now I'll go away and—and come back early this evening to find out

how you both are and—and I won't bother you. You'll tell me if I do, won't you?"

"Of course, Dave, as soon as you grow troublesome, I'll let you know. I will tell you, when I become tired of you. Oh, Dave dear! You're the kindest and most lovable creature in the world, and—and it's a joy and a blessing to have you near!"

"I'm awfully glad," I told her, "because when I can't see you and Baby Paul, life isn't—it isn't much of a pleasure, you know. And so I'll go off now and have a bath and fix up a little and then——"

"Then you ought to lie down and have a good nap, because you need a rest, and don't come back too soon or I'll know you have been disobedient, Dave."

She was smiling at me, and yet there was a tear hanging on her long lashes. Surely, the emotion of that summoning and of the hurried anxious journey had been hard upon her.

So I went out, just as Frieda came bustling in, monstrously alarmed and immediately made happy by the knowledge that there was, as yet, no danger, and I went home where I met Mrs. Milliken on the doorstep.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Cole," she said. "You look a bit played out and your bed ain't been slept in. At your time o' life you want to take more care of your health. I wanted to say something as I ain't told any one yet. I'm goin' to give up the house soon. My uncle Ambrose he died and has left me a little money, so I'm going to be a lady of leisure now and live with my daughter."

"I wish you joy, Mrs. Milliken. You deserve a rest from your hard toiling."

I left her and climbed up to my room. It seems that I shall have to give it up soon. Yet it is the only little corner of the earth I am attached to. Where shall I go?

The room opposite is vacant still. I have been paying rent for it since Frances left, being unable to bear the idea of its being occupied by—by any one else. Besides, I can go in there when I want to and sit in the armchair and indulge in memories of the days when I saw her so often. I didn't know I was so happy then, but I realize it now, with no feelings of regret, because I know her life is so much fuller and happier now that she is in a world no longer of sadness and anxious care.

And so I saw Frances and Baby Paul every day for another week, and he got along so well that it was a joy to watch his constant improvement. Mrs. Gobbins, over by the little lake, answered a letter of mine, saying that she would be delighted to have Mrs. Dupont there, and the baby, for as long a time as she cared to stay. Porter had recommended a little country air.

It was heartbreaking to say good-by. I had meant to go with them, at least for a day, but at the last minute Ceballo insisted I must attend the first rehearsal of the "Land o' Love," a play in four acts. So I went to the theatre, but for the life of me could take little interest in what went on. I returned home with a dreadful headache, and the next morning my throat was sore and my limbs ached. When Mrs. Milliken came up to attend to the room, she found me still in bed and insisted on sending for Dr. Porter at once.

"Hello! I'm afraid you'll have to go to the babies' ward," he told me, after a glance.

"What the deuce do you mean?" I said. "I'm as sick as a dog."

"I know you are and I beg your pardon, old man."

"What is it?" I asked him.

"Baby Paul has given you the measles," he answered.

"Nonsense, grown people don't get that."

"They sometimes do," he assured me, after which he prescribed some medicine and spent several hours with me, that day, while I anathematized my luck and felt properly ashamed of my infantile complaint. After this a bad cough came, followed by a pain in my chest, and the medicine put me asleep, I think, for I woke up to find Frieda on one side of me and a nurse on the other. It was Miss Follansbee, who had looked after Baby Paul, and Frieda had gone off and haled her back, bodily. It was only afterwards that I knew my measles were complicated with pneumonia.

There was a week that was a sort of nightmare, I think, because for days I didn't know very much, and tossed about, and felt that pain in my side most of the time, and struggled unavailingly for a decent long breath that wouldn't hurt. One day a strange doctor came in with Dr. Porter.

Later, arrived a morning when I felt ever so well and Miss Follansbee was

dozing a little in her chair, looking very weary, and the breathing was no longer painful and Porter came in and capered about the room and Frieda smeared her cheeks with the rubbing in of tears of joy. I suppose I must have been rather badly off during some of those days.

Then came the evening and with it a queer notion that visions and strange dreams were coming back to me, for through the open door there sounded a footfall I had been hearing vaguely and longing for. Suddenly, Frances rushed in and was kneeling by my bed.

"Oh, Dave dearest!" she cried, "You wicked, wicked man! They tell me that you forbade them to let me know for fear I would bring Baby back before he was all well! I'll never forgive you!"

As a proof of her anger, I suppose, she had taken up my thin bony hand and was kissing it.

"Please, please don't," I whispered hoarsely. "You—you'll get it too, first thing you know, and it's bad when it gets on one's lungs. You might lose that beautiful dear voice of yours again."

But she rose, shaking her head at me like a mother who feels that her boy is incorrigible, and dragged a chair by the bed and put her finger to her lips when I would have spoken again, and laid her soft hand on mine, whereupon sleep came, dreamless and beautiful.

During the night a hand gave me water, once or twice, and milk, I think, and I slept again and, when I awoke in the morning, I turned my head.

"Miss Follansbee," I said, "I rather think——"

"I told her that she must have a good night's sleep, Dave," came the beloved voice, "and I've been playing nurse, ever so poorly, I'm afraid. But Dr. Porter said that you would be all right now. And—and I've been so happy to be in the dear old room, and to see the old typewriter, and the calabash, and to know you are getting well again."

"I—I am thrice blessed," I said, "but it is too bad you took so much trouble. You must be dreadfully tired."

"I've been tired so long, Dave," she said, with tears coming to her eyes. "It—it has been such weary waiting."

"The nights are awfully long," I told her.

"The nights and the days, David dearest. I've been waiting such a long, long time."

She threw herself on her knees by the bed, and took up my hand, stroking it, and suddenly an amazing light seemed to flood the room, laden with knowledge, sweeping away fears, bringing a tremulous bliss to my heart.

"Dearest love!" I cried. "Is this true, or is it another dream? How could I speak of my love to you? How could old Dave cry out to the beautiful star that was so high up in the wonderful sky? I feared it would vanish and leave me in utter darkness. Do—do you mean that I may tell you of my heart's desire?"

"Yes, David dearest! Tell me of it. Tell it forever, for years and years to come. I've been so hungry for those words you dared not tell."

"I—I am all unshaven and unshorn," I said, "and——"

"But in spite of that, you're my own dearest Dave, with the strength of a man and the heart of a child."

So she bent over and her dear lips touched mine, and the days of sorrow were ended.



Some days later she took my arm. It was my first walk. I was to go as far as the room that had been hers and back again. For this tremendous excursion I was clad in a gorgeous dressing-gown Frieda had bought for me, and my cheeks were shaven clean and, somehow, I felt young again, as if the dear hand in mine had brushed away a score of years.

So I went with her, leaning upon her. She opened the door and led me in. Frieda was there, and Gordon and Sophia. Near the window there was an easel, and

upon it I saw Gordon's masterpiece, which they had sent with their love. And the painted "Mother and Child" was mine, as the living ones also were.

END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A TOP-FLOOR IDYL

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