

Many Kingdoms

Elizabeth Jordan

The Project Gutenberg EBook of Many Kingdoms, by Elizabeth Jordan
#2 in our series by Elizabeth Jordan

Copyright laws are changing all over the world. Be sure to check the copyright laws for your country before downloading or redistributing this or any other Project Gutenberg eBook.

This header should be the first thing seen when viewing this Project Gutenberg file. Please do not remove it. Do not change or edit the header without written permission.

Please read the "legal small print," and other information about the eBook and Project Gutenberg at the bottom of this file. Included is important information about your specific rights and restrictions in how the file may be used. You can also find out about how to make a donation to Project Gutenberg, and how to get involved.

****Welcome To The World of Free Plain Vanilla Electronic Texts****

****eBooks Readable By Both Humans and By Computers, Since 1971****

*******These eBooks Were Prepared By Thousands of Volunteers!*******

Title: Many Kingdoms

Author: Elizabeth Jordan

Release Date: June, 2004 [EBook #5953]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on September 29, 2002]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MANY KINGDOMS *****

Produced by Juliet Sutherland, Charles Franks
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

Livros Grátis

<http://www.livrosgratis.com.br>

Milhares de livros grátis para download.

MANY KINGDOMS

BY

ELIZABETH JORDAN

AUTHOR OF

"May Iverson--Her Book"

"Tales of the Cloister"

"Tales of Destiny"

Etc. Etc.

... _ "The state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection." _

--SHAKESPEARE.

MCMVIII

CONTENTS

CHAP.

- I. VARICK'S LADY O' DREAMS
- II. THE EXORCISM OF LILY BELL
- III. HER LAST DAY
- IV. THE SIMPLE LIFE OF GENEVIEVE MAUD
- V. HIS BOY
- VI. THE COMMUNITY'S SUNBEAM
- VII. IN MEMORY OF HANNAH'S LAUGH
- VIII. THE QUEST OF AUNT NANCY
- IX. THE HENRY SMITHS' HONEYMOON
- X. THE CASE OF KATRINA
- XI. BART HARRINGTON, GENIUS

I

VARICK'S LADY O' DREAMS

Varick laid down the book with which he had beguiled an hour of the night, turned off the electric light in the shaded globe that hung above his head, pulled the sheets a little nearer his chin, reversed his pillow that he might rest his cheek more gratefully on the cooler linen, stretched, yawned, and composed himself to slumber with an absolutely untroubled conscience.

He was an eminently practical and almost rudely healthy young man, with an unreflecting belief in the existence of things he had seen, and considerable doubt concerning those which he had not seen. In his heart he regarded sentiment as the expression of a flabby nature in a feeble body. Once or twice he had casually redressing-case, with its

array of silver toilet articles, the solid front of his chiffonnier, the carved arms of his favorite lounging-chair, even the etchings and prints on the walls. Suddenly, as he looked at these familiar objects, a light haze fell over them, giving him for an instant the impression that a gauze curtain had been dropped between them and his eyes. They slowly melted away, and in their place he saw the streets of a tiny village in some foreign country which he did not know. A moment later, in what seemed at the time a perfectly natural transition from his bed in an Adirondack club-house, he was walking up the streets of the little town, in correct tourist attire, looking in vain for a familiar landmark, and with a strange sinking of the heart. How he got there, or why he was there, was equally incomprehensible to him. It was high noon of a warm summer day, and the red roofs of the old buildings seemed to glow in the heat. Before him, at the end of the street down which he was walking, was a public square where marketing was going on in the open. It was crowded with men and women in picturesque peasant costumes he did not recognize, though he had travelled a great deal. As he drew nearer he heard them speaking, but discovered that their tongue was as unknown to him as their garb. He knew French, German, and Italian well; he had, in addition, a smattering of Spanish, and was familiar with the accents of Slavic tongues. But this babel that met his ears was something new. Taken in connection with the rest of the experience, the discovery sent a cold chill down the spinal column of Mr. Lawrence Varick. For the first time in his debonair life he was afraid, and admitted it inwardly, with a sudden whitening of the lips.

"It's so infernally queer," he told himself, uneasily. "If I could remember how I got here, or if I knew anything about the place--"

"Have you classified them?" asked a voice at his elbow. It was feminine, contralto, and exquisitely modulated. The words were English, but spoken with a slight foreign accent. With a leap of the heart Varick turned and looked at the speaker.

She was young, he saw at once--twenty-two, twenty-three, possibly twenty-four. He inclined to the last theory as he observed her perfect poise and self-possession. She was exquisitely dressed; he realized that despite the dimness of masculine perception on such points, and, much more clearly, saw that she was beautiful. She was small, and the eyes she raised to his were large and deeply brown, with long black lashes that matched in color the wavy hair under her coquettish hat. As he stared at her, with surprise, relief, and admiration struggling in his boyishly handsome face, she smiled, and in that instant the phlegmatic young man experienced a new sensation. His own white teeth flashed as he smiled back at her. Then he remembered that it was necessary to reply to her question.

"I--I--beg your pardon," he stammered, "a--a thousand times. But to tell you the truth, I'm--I'm horribly confused this morning. I--I don't seem, somehow, to place myself yet. And I can't understand what these people say. So, when you spoke English it was such a relief--"

He stopped suddenly and turned a rich crimson. It had occurred to him that this incoherent statement was not quite the one to win interest and admiration from a strange and exceedingly attractive woman. What would she think of him? Perhaps that he was intoxicated, or insane. Varick's imagination, never lively, distinguished itself during the next few seconds by the stirring possibilities it presented to his mind. He grew redder, which was very unfortunate, and shuffled

miserably from one foot to the other, until he noticed that she was looking at him with a glance that was entirely dignified yet very friendly. It had an oddly sympathetic quality in it as well. His spirits rose a trifle.

"You must think me an awful duffer," he murmured, contritely. "I'm not always like this, I assure you."

"I know," she assented. "I understand. Walk on with me. Possibly I may be able to help you."

He bowed assent and the two walked toward the crowded square.

"You're awfully good," he said, feeling reassured, yet still boyish and embarrassed. "I don't want to be a nuisance, but if you'll just put me right, somehow--start me on a path that will lead me home--"

The entire idiocy of this struck him. He stopped again, then burst into his contagious, youthful laughter, in which she instantly joined. The mellow contralto and the clear tenor formed a soft and pleasant duet, but Varick noticed that not a head in the crowd around them turned their way, nor did an eye of all the peasant throng give them a glance. He spoke of this to his companion as they continued their walk.

"The most surprising thing to me in all this--unusualness," he said, "is the cool manner in which these beggars ignore us. You know how such people gape, usually; but not a soul among all these people seems to know we're here."

She looked at him with a gentle amusement and sympathy in her brown eyes.

"That is not surprising," she said, quietly. "For, you know, we are not here--really."

Varick stopped for the second time and stared at her, with a repetition of that new and annoying sinking in the region of his heart. Her words were certainly disconcerting, but she herself was delightfully human and most reassuringly natural. She had walked on, and he tried to fall into her mood as he overtook her.

"Where are we, then?" he asked, with a short and not especially mirthful laugh.

Her smooth brow wrinkled for a moment.

"I do not know," she said, frankly. "That is, I do not know this place, where we think we are, though I have been here before, and the experience does not frighten me now. But I know where we really are. You are asleep somewhere in America, and I--but oh, my dear, my dear, you're going to wake!"

The clock that was somewhere struck three. Varick, sitting up in his bed with eyes staring into the darkness, saw again his familiar room, the dim light, the silver, the dressing-case, the pictures. He sprang to the door opening into the hall, and tried it. It was bolted, as he had left it. So was the other door leading into his sitting-room. The darkness around him still seemed full of the refrain of the words he

had just heard--where?

"Oh, my dear, my dear, you're going to wake!" And her eyes--her smile--

Varick got into bed again, in a somewhat dazed condition, with a tremor running through it. Very slowly he straightened himself out, very slowly he pulled up the bedclothes. Then he swore solemnly into the obscurity of the room.

"Well, of--all--the--dreams!" he commented, helplessly.

As the months passed, after Varick got back to town and into the whirl of city life, he recalled his dream, frequently at first, then more rarely, and finally not at all. It was almost a year later when, one night, lying half awake, he saw again the fine, transparent, screen-like veil enshroud the objects in his bedroom. It was winter, and a great log was burning in the large fireplace. He had tried to choke the flames with ashes before he went to bed, but the wood had blazed up again and he had lain quiet, awaiting slumber and blinking indifferently at the light. His bedroom overlooked Fifth Avenue. There was a large club-house just opposite his house, and cabs and carriages still came and went. Varick heard the slam of carriage doors, the click of horses' hoofs on the wet asphalt, and congratulated himself on the common-sense which had inspired him to go to bed at eleven instead of joining the festive throng across the street. He had dutifully spent the morning in his father's offices, and then, with a warming sense of virtue, had run out of town for a late luncheon and a trial of hunters. To-night he was pleasantly tired, but not drowsy. When the curtain fell before his surroundings, and he saw them melting imperceptibly into others quite foreign to them, he at once recalled the similar experience of the year before. With a little quickening of his steady heart-beats, he awaited developments.

Yes, here was the old town, with its red roofs, its quaint architecture, its crowded, narrow, picturesque streets. But this time they seemed almost deserted, and the whole effect of the place was bleak and dreary. The leaves had dropped from the trees, the flowers had faded, the vines that covered the cottage walls were brown and bare. He was pleasantly conscious of the warmth of a sable-lined coat he had brought from Russia two years before. He thrust his gloved hands deep into its capacious pockets and walked on, his eyes turning to right and left as he went. At intervals he saw a bulky masculine figure, queerly dressed, turn a corner or enter a house. Once or twice one came his way and passed him, but no one looked at him or spoke. For a moment Varick was tempted to knock at one of the inhospitably closed doors and ask for information and directions, but something--he did not know what--restrained him.

When she appeared it was as suddenly as she had come before, with no warning, no approach. She was at his elbow--a bewitching thing of furs and feminine beauty, French millinery and cordiality. She held out her small hand with a fine camaraderie.

"Is it not nice?" she asked at once. "I was afraid I should arrive first and have to wait alone. I would not have liked that."

He held her hand close, looking down at her from his great height, his gray eyes shining into hers.

"Then you knew--you were coming?" he asked, slowly.

"Not until the moment before I came. But when I saw the curtain fall--"

"You saw that, too? A thin, gauzy thing, like a transparency?"

"Yes."

He relapsed into silence for a moment, as he unconsciously adapted his stride to hers, and they walked on together as naturally as if it were an every-day occurrence.

"What do you make of it all?" he at length asked.

She shrugged her shoulders with a little foreign gesture which seemed to him, even then, very characteristic.

"I do not know. It frightened me--a little--at first. Now it does not, for it always ends and I awake--at home."

"Where is that?"

She hesitated.

"I may not tell you," she said, slowly. "I do not quite know why, but I may not. Possibly you may know some time. You, I think, are an American."

He stared hard at her, his smooth face taking on a strangely solemn expression.

"You mean to say," he persisted, "that this is all a dream--that you and I, instead of being here, are really asleep somewhere, on different continents?"

She nodded.

"We are asleep," she said, "on different continents, as you say. Whether we are dreaming or whether our two souls are taking a little excursion through space--oh, who shall say? Who can question the wonderful things which happen in this most wonderful world? I have ceased to question, but I have also ceased to fear."

He made no reply. Somewhere, in the back of his head, lay fear--a very definite, paralyzing fear--that something was wrong with him or with her or with them both. Instead of being in the neutral border-land of dreams, had he not perhaps passed the tragic line dividing the normal mind from the insane? She seemed to read his thoughts, and her manner became more gentle, almost tender.

"Is it so very dreadful?" she asked, softly. "We are together, you know, my friend. Would it not be worse to wander about alone?"

With a great effort he pulled himself together.

"Infinitely," he said, with gratifying conviction. "And you're--you're a trump, you know. I'm ashamed of acting like such a boor. If you'll

bear with me I'll try from now on to be more like a man and less like a fretful ghost."

She clapped her hands.

"Capital!" she cried. "I knew you would--what is the word?--oh yes--_adapt_ yourself. And it is only for a little while. You will wake very soon. But you ought to enjoy it while it lasts. There are many amusing things about it all."

Varick reflected grimly that it was the "amusing things" which occasioned his perturbation, but he kept his reflection to himself and smiled down at her sunnily.

"For example," she continued, "as we really do not exist here, and as we are not visible to these people, we cannot do anything that will affect them in any way or attract their attention. Look at that!"

They were passing a small house whose front door, opening on the street, stood ajar. Within they could see a stout woman standing at a tub and washing busily, and a little girl pouring hot water from a quaint kettle into a large pan full of soiled blue dishes. The pan stood near the edge of a wooden table, and the little girl was perched on a stool just high enough to bring her on a level with her work.

"You are, I am sure, a fine athlete," murmured the woman. "Or else your looks belie you," she added, with a roguish upward glance. "Yet with all your strength you cannot push that pan of dishes off the table."

Without a word, Varick passed through the doorway, strode into the house and up to the table. She followed him closely. He attempted to seize the pan in his powerful hands--and, to his horror, discovered that they held nothing. The pan remained on the table and the child was now unconcernedly washing the blue dishes, humming a little folk-song as she worked. As if to add to the irony of the situation, the small laborer quietly lifted the pan and moved it to a position she thought more convenient. This was the last touch. With a stifled murmur of intense exasperation, Varick put forth all his strength in a supreme effort. The pan fell, the water and broken blue dishes covering the floor. He sprang back and stood aghast, gazing at the havoc he had wrought.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" murmured the voice at his side. "I never dreamed you could do it, or I would not have suggested it. Oh, oh, the poor little darling!"

For the stout woman at the tub had hastily dropped her work, crossed the room, and was soundly chastising the unhappy infant who she supposed was responsible for the mischief. Varick caught her arm.

"Oh, I say," he cried, "this won't do at all! She didn't do it; it was all my fault. I'll pay for the things. Here--here--"

He fumbled in his pockets as he spoke and pulled out several gold pieces. But the fat arm of the old woman offered no resistance to his grasp, and the gold pieces did not exist for her. It was evident that she saw neither him nor them, nor the woman with him. With an unsparing hand she spanked the child, whose voice rose in shrill

lamentations. Varick and his companion in guilt crept out of the room with a sense of great helplessness upon them, and he breathed a long breath of relief at finding himself--in bed, with a cold February sun shining in through his windows, and the faithful Parker at his side with the quieting announcement that his bath was ready.

One of Varick's boon companions in camp and hunting excursions was a distinguished New York specialist in nervous diseases. A day or two later Varick found it convenient to drop into this man's office and, quite casually, tell him the story of his dreams, giving it various light touches that he fondly imagined concealed the anxiety that lay beneath the recital. "Recurrent dreams," he then learned, were a very common human experience and not deserving of much attention.

"Don't think about it," said his friend. "Of course, if you worry over it, you'll be dreaming it all the time. Send this 'personally conducted tour' to me if you don't like it. I don't mind meeting pretty women who are 'dreams,' whether in the flesh or out of it."

As time went on and the dream did not return, Varick decided that he would not mind, either. He thought of her a great deal; he even longed for her. Eventually he deliberately tried to induce the dream by going to bed early, putting himself in the proper mental attitude, as he conceived it, and staring wide-eyed into his dimly lighted room. But only once in eighteen months was he even partly successful. Then he saw the haze, saw the familiar streets, saw her far, far ahead of him, and hurrying onward, saw her turn a sharp corner, caught one backward look from her dear brown eyes as she vanished--and awoke! He gave much thought to that look in the months which followed. He was a modest youth, singularly unconscious of his own charms; but the eloquent glance had conveyed to him a sense of longing--of more than longing.

Quite an interval elapsed before she came again. There was, first of all, the inevitable filmy effect, but, in the vision that succeeded it, instead of finding himself in the little town, he was in the depths of a great old forest, and in horrible agony. Some accident had occurred--he did not know what. He only knew that he was shot, suffering, dying! He groaned, and even as he writhed in a spasm of pain he saw her sitting on the sward beside him. He turned glazed eyes on her. Her brown ones looked back into his with a great love and pity in their depths.

"Oh, my dear," she whispered, "I know it seems terribly hard to you. And because you think you suffer, it is almost as hard for you as if you did. But you are not really hurt, you know. You are not suffering. It is all in the dream. You are sound asleep, far, far away."

He forced a sardonic laugh from his stiff throat.

"Not this time," he managed to articulate. "Whatever the others may have been, this is no dream. This is the real thing--and death!"

She smoothed the hair back from his damp brow with a beautiful, caressing touch. He felt her fingers tremble.

"No," she said. "It is a dream, and almost over."

"Then will you stay with me," he gasped, "to the end?"

"Yes," she promised. "Try to bear it just a moment longer. Courage, dear heart! for already you are waking--you are waking--_you--are--awake!_"

He was, and it was daylight, and around him were the familiar objects of his own room. He wiped his forehead, which was cold and wet. He felt utterly exhausted.

"Stay with me to the end!"

If she only would! If he could find her--find her in this warm, human world, away from that ghastly border-land where they two met. For in that hour he knew he loved--what? A woman or a ghost? A creature of this world or a fantasy of the night? Wherever she was, whatever she was, he loved her and he wanted her. And in that hour of his agony her eyes had told that she loved and wanted him.

It was eight months before they met again. Varick's friends thought him changed, and quite possibly he was. The insouciant boy of twenty-eight had become a man, a sympathetic, serious, thoughtful man, still given to sports and outdoor life, but more than all devoted to a search which had taken him to no end of out-of-the-way European towns. He was sleeping in one of these one night (not _the_ one, alas!--he had not found that) when the veil, now so warmly welcome, fell for the fourth time.

He was in an exquisite Italian garden, a place all perfume and May breezes and flooding sunshine and overarching blue sky. As he entered it he saw her coming to meet him, and he went forward to greet her with his pulses bounding and a light in his eyes which no eyes but hers had ever seen there. Even in that supreme moment the wonderfully _real_ atmosphere of it all impressed him. He heard a dry twig crack under his foot as he walked, and he recognized the different perfumes of the flowers around him--the heavy sweetness of a few belated orange blossoms, the delicate breath of the oleander, the reminiscent perfume of the rose. Then their hands met and their eyes, and each drew a long breath, and neither spoke for a moment. When Varick found words they were very commonplace.

"Oh, my love, my love!" he said. And she, listening to them with sudden tears in her brown eyes, seemed to find in them the utmost eloquence of the human tongue.

"It has been so long, so long!" he gasped. "I began to think I was never to see you again."

They drifted side by side along a winding, rose-hedged path, past an old sun-dial, past a triumphant peacock strutting before his mild little mate, past a fountain whose spray flung out to them a welcome. She led the way with the accustomed step of one who knew and loved the place. They came to a marble seat, half hidden by a tangle of vines and scarlet blossoms, and sheltered by overhanging oleander branches; there she sat down and moved her skirts aside that he might sit close to her. Her brown eyes, raised now to his hungry gray ones, looked at him with the softened brilliance he had sometimes seen in those of a happy child.

"Should you have missed me," she asked, softly, "if you had never seen

me again? Should you have been sorry?"

He drew a long breath.

"I love you," he said. "Whatever you are, wherever you come from, whatever all this means, I love you. I don't understand anything else, but I know that. It's the one sure thing, the one real thing, in all this tangle."

Without a word she put her hand in his. He could feel distinctly its cool, soft, exquisite texture. With an exclamation of delight he drew her toward him, but she held herself away, the expression of her beautiful face softening the effect of the recoil.

"Not yet, dear," she said, gently. "We must be very careful. You do not understand. If you do anything abrupt or sudden you will wake--and then we shall be parted again, who knows for how long!"

There were tears in her eyes as she spoke. Seeing them, he buried his face in his hands and groaned, while the sense of his utter helplessness rolled over him like a flood.

"God!" he broke out, with sudden fierceness. "What devil's trick is this? It's not a dream. It can't be a dream. Here we are, two human beings in a human world--I'll swear it. Smell that oleander. Listen to that bird sing. Hear the trickle of that fountain. And yet you tell me that we are asleep!"

She laid her head in the curve of her arm, resting on the ivy-covered back of the low seat. Bending over her, he saw that her cheeks were wet. The sight made him desperate.

"Don't!" he cried, hoarsely. "Don't do that! Tell me what is expected of me. Whatever it is, no matter how hard it is, or how long it takes, I'll do it."

She did not reply, but she made a quick little gesture with the hand nearest him. It signified hopelessness, almost despair. Darkness began to fall, and an early moon hung pale in the heavens. Somewhere in the thick bushes near them a nightingale began to sing. To Varick's excited fancy there was a heart-breaking pathos in the soft notes. They seemed to have been together, he and she, for a long time--for hours. He bent his head till it touched hers.

"But you love me?" he asked. She moved a little and wiped her eyes with an absurdly tiny, lace-edged square of linen. One corner, he noticed, bore an embroidered coronet.

"Yes," she said, very quietly, "I love you."

Her tone as she spoke expressed such entire hopelessness that the full sense of her words did not at once come to him. When it did, slowly, sweetly, she was speaking again.

"But oh, dearest, dearest!" she broke out, "why do we love? To what can love lead us--two poor shadows in a dream world, in which alone we can meet?"

He was silent. There seemed, somehow, nothing that he could say,

though later he thought of many words with which he might have filled that throbbing silence. The dusk deepened around them. Off in the thicket the nightingale still warbled passionately, and now the stars began to come out over their heads, pale as yet against the warm blue of the heavens. Varick, sitting stiffly on the old marble bench, became conscious of an odd dizziness, and set his teeth with a sudden determination to show no evidence of it. She had risen and was moving about among the rose-bushes just behind them. Almost before he missed her she had returned, holding in her hand a beautiful salmon-hued rose, with a flame-colored, crumpled heart. He had never before seen one like it. As she held it near him it exhaled an exquisitely reminiscent perfume--a perfume which seemed to breathe of old joys, old memories, and loves of long ago.

"Is it not beautiful?" she said. "It is called the Toinnette. Take it, dear, and keep it--for memory." Then, as he took it from her, her eyes widened in a sudden anguish of dread and comprehension.

"Oh, you're leaving me!" she said. "You're waking. Dearest, dearest, stay with me!"

The words and the look that accompanied them galvanized him into sudden action. He sprang to his feet, caught her in his arms, held her there, crushed her there, kissing her eyes, her hair, her exquisitely soft mouth.

"I will not leave you!" he raved. "I swear I won't! I defy the devil that's back of this! I swear--" But she, too, was speaking now, and her words came to his ears as from a long, long distance, sobbingly, with a catch in the breath, but distinct.

"Alas!" she cried, "you have ruined everything! You have ruined everything! You will never see me again. Dearest, dearest--"

He awoke. His heart was thumping to suffocation, and he lay exhausted on his pillow. It was a dark morning, and a cold rain beat dismally against the window-panes. Gone were the Dream Woman, the Italian garden, the song of the nightingale, the perfume of flowers. How definite that perfume had been! He could smell it yet, all around him. It was like--what was it like? He became suddenly conscious of an unusual sensation in his hand, lying on the bedspread. He glanced at it and then sat up with a sudden jerk that almost threw him off his balance. In his upturned palm was a rose--a salmon-colored rose, slightly crushed, but fresh and fragrant, with a flame-colored, crumpled heart. Varick stared at it, shut his eyes, opened them, and stared again. It was still there, and, with the discovery that it was, Varick became conscious of a prickling of the scalp, a chill along the spine. His brown face whitened.

"Well, by all the gods!" he gasped. "How did that thing get here?"

No one ever told him. Possibly no one could except the Dream Woman, and her he never saw again; so the mystery was unfathomable. He put the rose between the leaves of the Bible his mother had given him when he went to college, and which he had not opened since until that morning; and the rose became dry and faded as the years passed, quite as any other rose would have done.

Varick paid a second and quite casual visit to his medical friend, who

scoffed at him rudely and urged him to go on a long hunting trip. He went, and was singularly successful, and came back with considerable big game and a rich, brown complexion. When the doctor asked him whether he still awoke from his innocent slumbers to find his little hands full of pretty flowers, Varick swore naturally and healthfully, turned very red, and playfully thumped the medical man between the shoulders with a force that sent that gentleman's eye-glasses off his nose. But, notwithstanding all these reassuring incidents, Varick has never married; and he remains deeply interested as to the source of that rose. He would be very grateful to any one who could tell him where the thing came from. The nearest he ever came to this was when a man who knew a good deal about flowers once inspected the faded rose, at Varick's request, and listened to the description of how it looked when fresh.

"Why, yes," he said, "I know that variety. It grows in Italy, but I don't think it's known here. They call it the _Toinnette!_"

II

THE EXORCISM OF LILY BELL

It is quite possible that not even Raymond Mortimer Prescott himself could have told definitely the day or the hour when Lily Bell first came into his life; and as Raymond Mortimer Prescott was not only the sole person privileged to enjoy Miss Bell's society, but was also the sole person who had been permitted to gaze upon her charms at all, it would seem that inquiries directed elsewhere were destined to prove fruitless. Raymond himself, moreover, was not communicative; he had the reserve of an only child whose early efforts at conversation had been discouraged by parents selfishly absorbed in "grown-up" interests, and whose home was too remote from other country homes to attract playmates.

His mother was a nervous invalid, and almost in infancy Raymond had grasped the fact that his absence seemed to be of more definite benefit to her than any other remedy for neurasthenia. His father was a busy man, absent from home for weeks at a time, and bearing this exile with a jovial cheerfulness which did not always characterize his moods when he deigned to join the family circle. Occasionally the elder Prescott experienced a twinge of conscience when he looked at his son, ten years of age now, the possessor of a superbly healthy body and presumably of the social aspirations of growing Americans. In such moments of illumination the father reflected uneasily that "the little beggar must have a beastly lonesome time of it"; then, surveying the little beggar's choice company of pets, gazing upon the dam he had built with his own busy hands, inspecting approvingly his prowess in the swimming-hole and with his fish-rods, even noting, in his conscientious appraisal of his heir's assets, the self-assertive quality of the freckles on his nose and the sunburn on the whole of his visage, this perfunctory American parent easily decided that nothing need be changed for another year or two. It was impossible even for a scrupulous conscience to make a youthful martyr of Raymond Mortimer. Not the most rabid New England brand could compass that, and certainly Raymond Mortimer Prescott, Sr., had no such possession. The

housekeeper, Miss Greene, a former trained nurse who had charge of the boy in infancy, looked after his clothes and his meals. Notwithstanding his steadfast elusiveness, she had also succeeded in making him master of extremely elementary knowledge of letters and figures. Beyond this he was arrogantly ignorant, even to the point of being ignorant of his ignorance. He had his dogs, his rods and tackle, his tool-house, unlimited fresh air, sunshine, and perfect health; in addition he had Lily Bell.

How long he may have enjoyed the pleasure of this young person's company unobserved by his elders is a matter of surmise; it may well have been a long time, for family curiosity never concerned itself with Raymond Mortimer unless he was annoyingly obtrusive or disobedient. But the first domestic records of her arrival, kept naturally enough by Miss Greene, whose lonely spinster heart was the boy's domestic refuge, went back to a day in June when he was five. He was in his nursery and she in an adjoining room, the communicating door of which was open. She had heard him in the nursery talking to himself, as she supposed, for a long time. At last his voice took on a note of childish irritation, and she distinctly heard his words.

"But it won't be right that way," he was saying, earnestly. "Don't you see it won't be right that way? There won't be nothing to hold up the top."

There was a long silence, in the midst of which Miss Greene stole cautiously to the nursery door and looked in. The boy was on his knees on the floor, an ambitious structure of blocks before him, which he had evidently drawn back to contemplate. His eyes were turned from it, however, and his head was bent a little to the left. He wore a look of great attention and annoyance. He seemed to be listening to a prolonged argument.

"All right," he said, at last. "I'll do it. But it ain't right, and you'll be sorry when you see it fall." He hurriedly rearranged the block structure, adding to the tremulously soaring tower on the left side. True to his prediction, it fell with a crash, destroying other parts of the edifice in its downfall. The boy turned on his unseen companion a face in which triumph and disgust were equally blended. "There, now!" he taunted; "didn't I tell you so, Lily Bell? But you never will b'lieve what I say--jes like girls!"

Miss Greene hurriedly withdrew, lifting to the ceiling eyes of awed surprise. For some reason which she was subsequently unable to explain, she asked the boy no questions; but she watched him more closely after this, and discovered that, however remote the date of Miss Bell's first appearance, she was now firmly established as a daily guest--an honored one whose influence, though mild, was almost boundless, and whose gentle behests were usually unhesitatingly obeyed. Occasionally, as in the instance of the blocks, Raymond Mortimer combated them; once or twice he disobeyed them. But on the second of these occasions he drooped mournfully through the day, bearing the look of one adrift in the universe; and the observant Miss Greene noted that the following day was a strenuous one, occupied with eager fulfilment of the unexpressed wishes of Lily Bell, who had evidently returned to his side. Again and again the child did things he most obviously would have preferred not to do. The housekeeper looked on with deep but silent interest until she heard him say, for perhaps the tenth time, "Well, I don't like it, but I will if you

really want me to." Then she spoke, but so casually that the boy, absorbed in his play, felt nothing unusual in the question.

"Whom are you talking to, Raymond?" she asked, as she rounded the heel of the stocking she was knitting. He replied abstractedly, without raising his eyes from the work he was doing.

"To Lily Bell," he said.

Miss Greene knitted in silence for a moment. Then, "Where is she?" she asked.

"Why, she's here!" said the child. "Right beside me!"

Miss Greene hesitated and took the plunge. "I don't see her," she remarked, still casually.

This time the boy raised his head and looked at her. There was in his face the slight impatience of one who deals with an inferior understanding.

"Course you don't," he said, carelessly. "You can't. No one can't see Lily Bell but 'cept me."

Miss Greene felt snubbed, but persevered.

"She doesn't seem to be playing very nicely to-day," she hazarded.

He gave her a worried look.

"She isn't," he conceded, "not very. 'Most always she's very, very nice, but she's kind of cross to-day. I guess p'r'aps," he speculated, frankly, "you're 'sturbing her by talking so much."

Miss Greene accepted the subtle hint and remained silent. From that time, however, Raymond Mortimer counted on her acceptance of Lily Bell as a recognized personality, and referred to her freely.

"Lily Bell wants us to go on a picnic to-morrow," he announced, one day when he was six. "She says let's go on the island under the willow an' have egg-san'wiches an' ginger-ale for lunch."

Miss Greene carried out the programme cheerfully, for the child made singularly few requests. Thomas, the gardener, was to row them over, and Miss Greene, a stout person who moved with difficulty, seated herself in the stem of the boat with a sigh of relief, and drew Raymond Mortimer down beside her. He wriggled out of her grasp and struggled to his feet, his stout legs apart, his brown eyes determined.

"You can't sit there, please, Miss Greene," he said, almost austere. "Lily Bell wants to sit there with me. You can take the other seat."

For once the good-natured Miss Greene rebelled.

"I'll do no such thing," she announced, firmly, "flopping round and upsetting the boat and perhaps drowning us all. You and your Lily Bell can sit together in the middle and let me be."

An expression of hope flitted across the child's face. "Will that do, Lily Bell?" he asked, eagerly. The reply was evidently unfavorable, for his jaw fell and he flushed. "She says it won't," he announced, miserably. "I'm awful sorry, Miss Greene, but we'll have to 'sturb you."

If Miss Lily Bell had been in the habit of making such demands, the housekeeper would have continued to rebel. As it was, she had grave doubts of the wisdom of establishing such a dangerous precedent as compliance with the absurd request. But Raymond Mortimer's distress was so genuine, and the pleasure of the picnic so obviously rested on her surrender, that she made it, albeit slowly and with groans and dismal predictions. The boy's face beamed as he thanked her.

"I was so 'fraid Lily Bell would be cross," he confided to her, as he sat sedately on his half of the stern-seat. "But she's all right, an' we're going to have a lovely time."

That prediction was justified by events, for the occasion was a brilliant one, and Lily Bell's share in it so persistent and convincing that at times Miss Greene actually found herself sharing in the delusion of the little girl's presence. Her good-natured yielding in the matter of the seat, moreover, had evidently commended her to Miss Bell's good graces, and that young person brought out the choicest assortment of her best manners to do honor to the grown-up guest.

"Lily Bell wants you to have this seat, Miss Greene, 'cause it's in the shade an' has a nice back," said Raymond, delightedly, almost as soon as they had reached the island; and Miss Greene flopped into it with a sigh of content in the realization that Miss Bell did not intend to usurp all the choice spots, as her persistence earlier in the day might possibly have suggested to a suspicious mind. There, alternately reading and dozing, she incidentally listened to the flow of conversation poured forth by her small charge, varied only by occasional offerings to her, usually suggested by Miss Bell and ranging from the minnow he had succeeded in catching with a worm and a bent pin to the choicest tidbits of the luncheon. There were two glasses for the ginger-ale. Miss Greene had one and Lily Bell the other. Raymond Mortimer gallantly drank from the bottle.

"Why don't you use Lily Bell's glass?" was Miss Greene's very natural inquiry. It would seem, indeed, that two such congenial souls would have welcomed the closer union this suggestion invited, but Raymond Mortimer promptly dispelled that illusion.

"She doesn't want to," he responded, gloomily.

In other details, however, Miss Lily Bell was of an engaging sweetness and of a yielding disposition of the utmost correctness. Again and again Raymond Mortimer succeeded in convincing her, by the force and eloquence of his arguments, of the superiority of his ideas on fort building, fishing, and other occupations which filled the day. Miss Greene's heart yearned over the boy as he came to her during the mid-day heat and cuddled down comfortably by her side, heavy-eyed and tired after his exertions.

"Where's Lily Bell?" she asked, brushing his damp hair off his forehead and wondering whether she was also privileged to enjoy the

unseen presence of the guest of honor.

"She's back there under the tree takin' a nap," murmured the boy, drowsily, indicating the exact spot with a grimy little hand. "She tol' me to come an' stay with you for a while."

Miss Greene smiled, deeply touched by this sweet mingling of coyness and thoughtfulness on the maiden's part.

"What does Lily Bell call you?" she asked, with interest. The boy snuggled down on the grass beside her and rested his head comfortably in her lap.

"She knows my name's Raymond Mortimer," he said, sleepily, "but she calls me 'Bill' for short." Then, more sleepily, "I asked her to," he added. In another moment his eyelids had dropped and he too was in the Land of Nod, whither Lily Bell had happily preceded him.

During the next four years Miss Greene was privileged to spend many days in the society of Miss Lily Bell, and the acquaintance between them ripened into a pleasant friendship. To her great satisfaction she found Miss Bell's name one to conjure with in those moments of friction which are unavoidable in the relations of old and young.

"I don't think Lily Bell would like that," she began to say, tentatively, when differences of opinion as to his conduct came up between Raymond and herself. "I think she likes a gentlemanly boy."

Unless her young charge was in a very obstinate mood the reminder usually prevailed, and it was of immense value in overcoming the early prejudice of the small boy against soap and water.

"Isn't Lily Bell clean?" she had inquired one day when he was eight and the necessity of the daily tubbing was again being emphasized to him.

Raymond conceded that she was.

"When she first comes she is," he added. "'Course she gets dirty when we play. Why, sometimes she gets awful dirty!"

The excellent and wise woman saw her opportunity, and promptly grasped it.

"Ah," she exclaimed, "that's the point. I want you to start out clean and to go to bed clean. If you'll promise me to take a tub before you dress in the morning, and another before you go to bed at night, I don't care how dirty you get in the mean time."

This happy compromise effected, she was moved to ask more particularly how Miss Lily Bell looked. She recalled now that she had never heard her described. Raymond Mortimer, she discovered, was no better than the rest of his sex when it came to a description of feminine features and apparel, but on two points his testimony was absolute. Lily Bell had curls and she wore pantalettes. The last word was not in his vocabulary, and it was some time before he succeeded in conveying the correct impression to Miss Greene's mind.

"Don't you remember the little girls in mamma's old Godey books?" he

asked, at last, very anxiously, seeing that his early imperfect description had led to an apparent oscillation of Miss Greene's imagination between the paper ruffle of a lamb-chop and a frilly sunbonnet. "They have slippers an' 'lastic bands an' scallopy funnels coming down under their skirts. Well"--this with a long-drawn sigh of relief as she beamed into acquiescence--"that's how Lily Bell looks!"

Long before this the family had accepted Lily Bell as a part of the domestic circle, finding her a fairly trustworthy and convenient playmate for the boy. Not always, of course; for it was very inconvenient to leave a vacant seat beside Raymond Mortimer when they went driving, but this had to be done or Raymond stayed at home rather than desert his cherished Lily. It was long before his father forgot the noble rebuke administered by his son on one occasion when the elder Prescott, thoughtlessly ignoring the presence of Miss Bell, sought to terminate the argument by sitting down by the boy's side. The shrieks of that youth, usually so self-contained, rent the ambient air.

"Father, _father!_" he howled, literally dancing up and down in his anguish, "you're sitting on Lily Bell!" Then, at the height of the uproar, he stopped short, an expression of overwhelming relief covering his face. "Oh no, you ain't, either," he cried, ecstatically. "She jumped out. But she won't go now, so neither will I"; and he promptly joined his imaginary playmate in the road. Pausing there, he gave his abashed parent a glance of indescribable reproach and a helpful hint on etiquette.

"Don't you know," he asked, stonily, "that gentlemen don't _never_ sit on ladies?" Striding gloomily back to the house, presumably close by the side of the outraged maiden, he left his convulsed parent to survive as best he could the deprivation of their presence. This Mr. Prescott did with reluctance. He was beginning to find the society of his son and Lily Bell both interesting and exhilarating. He showed, in fact, a surprising understanding of and sympathy with "the love-affair," as he called it. "The poor little beggar had to have something," he said, indulgently, "and an imaginary play-mate is as safe as anything I know." Therefore he referred to Miss Bell respectfully in conversation with his son, and, save on the tragic occasion just chronicled, treated her with distinguished consideration.

His wife's acceptance of the situation was less felicitous. Mrs. Prescott, whose utter lack of a sense of humor had long saddened her domestic circle, suddenly felt the birth of one now that was even more saddening, and the cause of it was Lily Bell. She referred to that young person wholly without respect, and was convulsed by foolish laughter when her son soberly replied. The boy resented this attitude --first sullenly, then fiercely.

"She acts as if there _wasn't_ really any Lily Bell," he confided to his father, in a moment of such emotion. "I don't think that's nice or p'lite, an' it hurts Lily Bell's feelings."

"That's bad," said the father, soberly. "We mustn't have that. I'll speak to your mother."

He did subsequently, and to such good effect that the expression of Mrs. Prescott's amusement was temporarily checked. But Raymond

Mortimer's confidence was temporarily blighted, and he kept his little friend and his mother as far apart as possible. Rarely after that did Lily Bell seek the invalid's room with the boy, though she frequently accompanied him to his father's library when that gentleman was home and, presumably, listened with awe to their inspiring conversation. Mr. Prescott had begun to talk to his boy "as man to man," as he once put it, and the phrase had so delighted the boy, now ten, that his father freely gave him the innocent gratification of listening to it often. Moreover, it helped in certain conversations where questions of morals came up. As the small son of an irate father, Raymond Mortimer might not have been much impressed by the parental theory that watermelons must not be stolen from the patches of their only neighbor, a crusty old bachelor. As a man of the world, however, listening to the views of one wiser and more experienced, he was made to see that helping one's self to the melons of another is really not the sort of thing a decent chap can do. Lily Bell, too, held the elder man's opinion.

"She says she doesn't like it, either," the boy confided to his father with an admiring sigh. "She never would go with me, you know. My!"--this with a heavier sigh--"I'm 'fraid if I do all the things you an' Lily Bell want me to I'll be awful good!"

His father sought to reassure him on this point, but he himself was beginning to cherish a lurking fear of a different character. Was longer continuance of this dream companionship really wise? So far, if it had influenced the boy at all, it had been for good. But he was growing older; he was almost eleven. Was it not time that this imaginary child friend should be eliminated in favor of--of what? The father's mind came up against the question and recoiled, blankly. Not exercise, not outdoor pursuits, not pets, for Raymond Mortimer had all these and more. His little girl friend had not made him a milksop. He was an active, energetic, live, healthy-minded boy, with all a boy's normal interests. When he built kennels for his dogs and made hutches for his rabbits, Lily Bell stood by, it is true, but her friendly supervision but added to the vigor and excellence of his work. Indeed, Lily, despite her pantalettes, seemed to have a sporty vein in her. Still, the father reflected uneasily, it could lead to no good--this continued abnormal development of the imagination. For Lily Bell was as real to the boy at ten as she had been at six.

What could be done? With what entering wedge could one begin to dislodge this persistent presence? If one sent the boy away, Lily Bell, of course, would go, too. If one brought--if--one--brought--

Mr. Prescott jumped to his feet and slapped his knee with enthusiasm. He had solved his problem, and the solution was exceedingly simple. What, indeed, but another little girl! A real little girl, a flesh-and-blood little girl, a jolly, active little girl, who, as Mr. Prescott inelegantly put it to himself, "would make Lily Bell, with her ringlets and her pantalettes, look like thirty cents." Surely in the circle of their friends and relatives there must be a little girl who could be borrowed and introduced--oh, casually and with infinite tact!--into their menage for a few months. Mr. Prescott, well pleased with himself, winked a Machiavellian wink and sought his wife, ostensibly to consult her, but in reality to inform her that he had made up his mind, and that it would be her happy privilege to attend to the trivial details of carrying out his plan.

In exactly three weeks Margaret Hamilton Perry was established in the Prescott homestead for a visit of indefinite length, and in precisely three hours after her arrival Margaret Hamilton had annexed the Prescott homestead and its inmates and all the things appertaining thereto and made them her own. She was the most eager and adorable of small, fat girls--alive from the crown of her curly head to the soles of her sensible little spring-heeled shoes. As Mr. Prescott subsequently remarked in a moment of extreme self-appreciation, if she had been made to order she couldn't have filled the bill better. Born and bred in the city, the country was to her a mine of unexplored delights. The shyness of Raymond Mortimer, suddenly confronted by this new personality and the immediate need of entertaining it, gave way before the enthusiasm of the little girl over his pets, his favorite haunts, the works of his hands--everything in which he had a share. Clinging to his hand in a rapturous panic as they visited the animals, she expatiated on the privileges of those happy beings who lived always amid such delights.

"I wish I didn't ever have to go away again," she ended, wistfully.

"I wish you didn't, either," said Raymond, gallantly, and then was shocked at himself. Was this loyalty to Lily Bell? The reflection gave a tinge of coldness to his next utterance. When Margaret Hamilton, cheered by the tribute, asked, confidently, "May I play with you lots and help you to make things?" the boy's response lagged.

"Yes," he said, finally, "if Lily Bell will let you."

"Who's Lily Bell?"

"She--why, she's the girl I play with! Everybody knows Lily Bell!"

"Oh!"

Some of the brightness was gone from the eager face.

"Will she like me?" she asked, at last.

"I don't know--I guess--p'r'aps so."

"Will I like her?"

"I don't know. You can't see her, you know."

"Can't see her? Why can't I see her? Doesn't she come here, ever?"

"Oh yes, she's here all the time, but--" The boy squirmed. For the first time in his short life he was--_was_ he--ashamed of Lily Bell? No; not that. Never that! He held his small head high, and his lips set; but he was a boy, after all, and his voice, to cover the embarrassment, took on a tone of lofty superiority.

"Nobody ever does see her but me," he asserted. "They'd like to, but they don't."

"Why don't they?"

Verily, this was a persistent child. The boy was in for complete surrender, and he made it.

"She ain't a little girl like you," he explained, briefly. "She doesn't have any home, and I don't know where she comes from--heaven, maybe," he hazarded, desperately, as a sort of "When in doubt, play trumps." "But she comes, an' no one but me sees her, an' we play."

"Huh!" This without enthusiasm from Margaret Hamilton Perry. She eyed him remotely for a moment. Then, with an effort at understanding, she spoke again.

"I shouldn't think that would be very much fun," she said, candidly. "Just pretendin' there's a little girl when there ain't! I should think it would be lots nicer--" She hesitated, a sense of delicacy restraining her from making the point she so obviously had in mind.

"Anyhow," she added, handsomely, "I'll like her an' play with her if you do."

Raymond Mortimer was relieved but doubtful. Memories of the extreme contrariness of Lily Bell on occasion overcame him.

"If she'll let you," he repeated, doggedly.

Margaret Hamilton stared at him and her eyes grew big.

"Won't you let me, if she doesn't?" she gasped. "Why--why--" The situation overcame her. The big, brown eyes filled suddenly. A small gingham back rippling with fat sobs was presented to Raymond Mortimer. In him was born immediately man's antipathy to woman's tears.

"Oh, say," he begged, "don't cry; please don't." He approached the gingham back and touched it tentatively. "She will let you play with us," he urged. And then, moved to entire recklessness as the sobs continued, "_I'll make her!"_ he promised. The gingham back stopped heaving; a wet face was turned toward him, and a rainbow arched their little heaven as Margaret Hamilton smiled. Her first triumph was complete.

It is to be regretted that Lily Bell did not at once lend herself to the fulfilment of this agreeable understanding. True, she appeared daily, as of yore, and Margaret Hamilton was permitted to enter her presence and join her games, but the exactions of Lily Bell became hourly more annoying. It was evident that Raymond Mortimer felt them as such, for his anguished blushes testified to the fact when he repeated them to the victim.

"She wants you to go away off and sit down, so's you can't hear what we're saying," he said to Margaret Hamilton one day. "I don't think it's very p'lite of her, but she says you must."

This brief criticism of Lily Bell, the first the boy had ever uttered, cheered the little girl in her exile. "Never mind," she said. "I don't care--much. I know it isn't your fault." For by this time she, too, was under the influence of the spell of convincing reality which Raymond Mortimer succeeded in throwing over his imaginary friend.

"She does things Ray wouldn't do," she once confided to Miss Greene. "I mean," hastily, as she suddenly realized her own words--"I mean she makes him think--he thinks she thinks--Oh, I don't know how to 'splain

it to you!" And Margaret Hamilton hastily abandoned so complicated a problem. In reality she was meeting it with a wisdom far beyond her years. The boy was in the grip of an obsession. Margaret Hamilton would have been sadly puzzled by the words, but in her wise little head lay the idea they convey.

"He thinks she really is here, an' he thinks he's got to be nice to her because they're such ve-ry old fren's," she told herself. "But she isn't very nice lately, an' she makes him cross, so maybe by-an'-by he'll get tired an' make her act better; or maybe--"

But that last "maybe" was too daring to have a place even in the very furthest back part of a little girl's mind.

She lent herself with easy good-nature to Lily Bell's exactions. She had no fondness for that young person, and she let it be seen that she had none, but she was courteous, as to a fellow-guest.

"Pooh! I don't mind," was her usual comment on Miss Bell's behests; and this cheerful acceptance threw into strong relief the dark shadows of Lily Bell's perversity. Once or twice she proposed a holiday.

"Couldn't we go off somewhere, just by ourselves, for a picnic," she hazarded, one morning--"an' not ask Lily Bell?"

It was a bold suggestion, but the conduct of Miss Bell had been especially reprehensible the day before, and even the dauntless spirit of Margaret Hamilton was sore with the strife.

"Wouldn't you like a--a rest, too?" she added, insinuatingly. Apparently the boy would, for without comment he made the preparations for the day, and soon he and the child were seated side by side in the boat in which the old gardener rowed them over to their beloved island.

It was a perfect day. Nothing was said about Lily Bell, and her presence threw no cloud on those hours of sunshine. Seated adoringly by the boy's side, Margaret Hamilton became initiated into the mysteries of bait and fishing, and the lad's respect for his companion increased visibly when he discovered that she could not only bait his hooks for him, but could string the fish, lay the festive board for luncheon, and set it forth. This was a playmate worth while. Raymond Mortimer, long a slave to the exactions of Lily Bell, for whom he had thanklessly fetched and carried, relaxed easily into the comfort of man's more congenial sphere, and permitted himself to be waited on by woman.

In such and other ways the month of August passed. Margaret Hamilton, like the happy-hearted child she was, sang through the summer days and knitted more closely around her the hearts of her companions.

With the almost uncanny wisdom characteristic of her, she refrained from discussing Lily Bell with the other members of the family. Possibly she took her cue from Raymond Mortimer, who himself spoke of her less and less as the weeks passed; but quite probably it was part of an instinct which forbids one to discuss the failings of one's friends. Lily Bell was to Margaret Hamilton a blot on the boy's scutcheon. She would not point it out even to him, actively as her practical little soul revolted against his self-deception. Once,

however, in a rare moment of candor, she unbosomed herself to Mr. Prescott.

"I don't like her very well," she said, referring, of course, to Lily Bell. "She's so silly! I hate to pretend an' pretend an' do things we don't want to do when we could have such good times just by ourselves."

She buried her nose in his waistcoat as she spoke and sniffed rather dismally. It had been a trying day. Lily Bell had been much en evidence, and her presence had weighed perceptibly upon the spirits of the two children.

"Can't you get rid of her?" suggested the man, shamelessly. "A real meat little girl like you ought to do away with a dream kid--an imaginary girl--don't you think?"

Margaret Hamilton raised her head and looked long into the eyes that looked back at her. The man nodded solemnly.

"I'd try if I were you," he said. "I'd try mighty hard. You don't want her around. She's spoiling everything. Besides," he added, half to himself, "it's time the boy got over his nonsense."

Margaret Hamilton reflected, her small face brightening.

"Are you very, very sure it wouldn't be wicked?" she asked, hopefully.

"Yep. Perfectly sure. Go in and win!"

Greatly cheered by this official sanction, Margaret Hamilton the following day made her second suggestion of a day a deux.

"All by ourselves," she repeated, firmly. "An' not Lily Bell, 'cos she'd spoil it. An' you row me to the island. Don't let's take Thomas."

This was distinctly wrong. The children were not allowed to take the boat save under Thomas's careful eye; but, as has been pointed out, Margaret Hamilton had her faults. Raymond Mortimer struggled weakly in the gulf of temptation, then succumbed and went under.

"All right," he said, largely, "I will. We'll have lunch, too, and p'r'aps I'll build a fire."

"We'll play we're cave-dwellers," contributed Margaret Hamilton, whose invention always exceeded his own, and whose imagination had recently been stimulated by Miss Greene, who occasionally read aloud to the children. "You hunt an' get the food an' bring it home, an' I'll cook it. You be the big, brave man an' I'll be your--your mate," she concluded, quoting freely from the latest interesting volume to which she had lent an ear.

The picture appealed to Raymond Mortimer. With a manly stride he approached the boat, helped her in, loosened it from its moorings, and cast off. His brow dark with care, he loftily ordered her to steer, and spoke no more until they had safely made their landing.

Alone on their desert island, the two children faithfully carried out

the programme of the day. With dry branches gathered by his mate the intrepid male soon made a fire, and retreating hurriedly to a point comfortably distant from it, they gazed upon their work. Fishing and the cleaning and cooking of their catch filled the morning; and if, indeed, the cleaning is something the mind would mercifully pass over, those chiefly concerned were satisfied and ate with prodigious appetite.

"It's awful funny," said Raymond Mortimer, comfortably, as they reposed under a tree after their repast, "but when Lily Bell an' I used to come here--"

He stopped and gazed apprehensively behind him, as if fearful that the unbidden guest was even now within hearing. Apparently reassured, he resumed: "When Lily Bell an' I used to come we 'most always went to sleep after awhile. I--we--got kind of tired talking, I guess. But when you an' I talk I don't get tired."

Margaret Hamilton flushed with delight, but an excess of maidenly modesty overcame her at the same moment.

"Why don't you?" she inquired, coyly.

"'Cos I like you better."

Margaret Hamilton gasped, sputtered, looked around her. Everything was in its place; there had been no submarine upheaval. The boy was there and he had said this thing, the full meaning of which burst suddenly upon her. Rising to her feet, she hurled herself upon him with the impetuosity of her intense nature.

"Do you really?" she gasped and gurgled. "Do you? Oh, do you? Oh, Ray, I'm so glad!"

And she kissed him!

Disengaging himself with dignity from the clinging embrace of the maiden, the outraged youth rose to his feet.

"Don't you ever do that again, Margaret Hamilton Perry," he said, slowly, and with awful sternness. "Don't you ever. Lily Bell never, never did such a thing!"

She retreated, but unabashed.

"It's 'cause I was so glad," she said, happily. "Real girls always do; they're like that. But I won't any more. You like me best, just the same, don't you?" she inquired, anxiously.

He came cautiously nearer.

"Yes, I do," he said, coldly, "but don't you try that any more, or I won't!"

Then they talked of cave-dwellers, and of the pleasant warmth of an open-air fire on an August day, and of marvellous things they would do during the coming weeks. And the absorption of their conversation was such that when the faithful Thomas, having rowed after them, stealthily approached and smote the boy upon the back, they yelled in

startled unison.

That no rancor lingered in the mind of Raymond Mortimer toward the too-demonstrative Margaret Hamilton was proved by the careless remark he made to his father when, some days later, that gentleman uttered a jocund inquiry as to the health of Lily Bell.

His son stared at him for an instant, as one who seeks to recall the snows of yester-year.

"Oh," he said, at last, "I haven't seen her for a long time. She doesn't come round now."

Then, as his father grinned widely over these melancholy tidings, the son flushed crimson.

"Well, I don't care," he said, hotly. "It's all your fault. Didn't you tell me I had to 'muse Margaret? Didn't you? Well--I am. I ain't got time for two. An', anyhow," he concluded, with Adamitic instinct, "Lily Bell stopped coming herself!"

The exorcism of Lily Bell was complete. Unlike more substantial Lily Bells of larger growth, she had known how to make her disappearance coincide with a wish to that effect on the part of her gentleman friend.

III

HER LAST DAY

For some time--possibly an hour or more--she sat perfectly still, staring at a wavering line made on the floor by a stray sunbeam which had forced its way through the window of her hotel sitting-room. At first she looked unseeingly, with the dull, introspective gaze of the melancholic. Then she began to notice the thing, and to fear it, and to watch for outlines of a quivering human face, and to tremble a little. Surely there had been a face--she thought vaguely, and puckered her brow in an effort to remember. It was half an hour before she realized what it was, and the passing of fifteen minutes more had been ticked off by a clock on the table near her when she lifted her glance enough to follow the beam along the floor, up the wall, to the pane where it had entered. She rose suddenly. It was long since she had made a consciously voluntary movement, and she knew this. She drew a deep breath as she stood up, and almost on the instant she experienced a life-giving sensation of poise and freedom. The weight fell from her feet, the blackness in which she had lived for weeks unwrapped itself from around her like a departing fog, her lax muscles tightened. She groped her way to the window and stood there for a moment, resting her cheek against the cool pane and gazing up at the sky. Presently her eyes dropped to the level of a distant water-line, and she saw the river and the trees that fringed its distant bank, and the swiftly moving boats on its surface.

She was better. She knew all that this meant, how much and how little. For an interval, long or short, as it should happen to be, she was

again a rational human being. She abruptly swerved around from the window and swept the room with her eyes, recognizing it as the one she was occupying before she "went under," as she put it to herself, and trying, from association with the familiar objects around her, to form some idea of the length of this attack.

At the beginning of her breakdown the intervals between intelligent consciousness and insanity had been long. She was herself, or was able to keep herself fairly in hand, the greater part of the time, and chaos, when it came, lasted only for a few days or weeks. Recently this condition had been reversed. She had lost knowledge of time, but she felt that centuries must have passed since those last flying, blessed hours when she knew herself at least for what she was. She grasped now at her returning reason, with a desperate, shuddering little moan, which she quickly stifled. Some one must be near, she remembered, on guard: her nurse, or a hotel maid if the nurse was taking one of her infrequent outings. Whoever was in charge of her must be in the next room, for the door was open between the two. The nurse would welcome her return, the patient reflected. It was her habit--a singularly pathetic habit, the nurse had found it--to refer always to her attacks as "absences," and to temporary recovery as "returns."

She moved toward the open door and then stopped, feeling suddenly that she was not yet ready to talk to any one, even the nurse, for whom she had a casually friendly feeling based on dependence and continued association. She wished to think--dear God, to be able to think again!--and there seemed so much thinking to be done and so little time in which to do it. Her heart dropped a beat as she realized that. On how much time could she safely count, she wondered. A week? A few days? It had never been less than a week, until the last episode. She turned from the thought of that with a sick shudder, but memory dragged it up and ruthlessly held it before her--the hour, the moment, the very place she was sitting when it occurred. She had been talking to a friend, who unconsciously said something that annoyed and excited her. She saw now that friend's face growing dim before her eyes--at first puzzled, then frightened, then writhing and twisting into hideous shapes, she thought, until in her horror she had struck at it. She must not think of that, she knew, as she set her teeth and pulled herself up short. She had a will of extraordinary strength, her physicians and nurses had conceded, and she resolved that it should serve her now. With grim determination she pieced together the patches of memory left to her. She had had three days then--three short days. She dared not count on even that much respite now, though she might possibly have it and more. But one day--surely Providence would let her have one day--one last day. Her friends and the specialists had begun to talk of asylums. She had heard whispers of them before she succumbed to this last attack; and though her memory of what occurred in it was mercifully vague, she dimly recalled struggles and the shrieks of some one in agony--her own shrieks, she knew now, though she had not known it then. It all meant that she was getting worse and more "difficult." It all meant chronic invalidism, constant care, eventual confinement.

Her brain was now abnormally clear, supernaturally active. It worked with an eager deference, as if striving to atone for the periods when it failed her. The little clock struck ten. It was early--she had a long day before her, a beautiful spring day; for she noticed now the tender green of the leaves and the youth of the grass. How interesting

it would be, she reflected, idly, to go out into the free, busy world and mingle with human beings, and walk the city streets and come into touch with life and the living. She would go, she would spend the day that way; but, alas! the nurse would go, too--cool, kind, professional, alert, quietly watchful. If she could in any way elude her and go alone. ...

Her eyes narrowed and took on a look of cunning as she turned them sidewise toward the open door. As stealthily as a cat she crept to it and looked in. On a divan in the farthest corner the nurse lay stretched in a deep sleep, whose unpremeditatedness was shown by the book which lay on the floor, dropped, evidently, from her suddenly relaxed fingers. The patient retreated as noiselessly as she had advanced, and, going to a mantel-mirror in her sitting-room, turned on her reflection there a long and frightened look. She saw a woman of thirty-five, thin, pale, haggard, high-bred. Her hair had been arranged in accordance with the nurse's conception of comfort and economy of time, and though her gown was perfect in its fit and tailor-made severity, the lace at her neck and in the sleeves of her silk waist was not wholly fresh. Her lips curled as she looked. This was she, Alice Stansbury, the wreck of a woman who had once had health and beauty and wealth and position. The last two were in a degree left to her, but what difference did it make how she looked, she asked herself, harshly. Even as the thought came, however, she took off her waist and sewed clean lace cuffs on the sleeves, replacing the collar with a fresh one. Then she took down her hair and rearranged it, rapidly but with care. It was a simple matter to change her slippers for walking-boots, and to find her hat and coat and gloves in their old places. Miss Manuel, the nurse, was reliable, she told herself again as she put them on, feeling a moment's gratitude to the woman for trying to keep her "up," even during her "absences," to something approaching the standard a gentlewoman's birth and breeding demanded. Her money, or at least a large part of it, for she did not stop to count it, she found in the despatch-box where she had put it on their arrival in New York, and the key was with others on a ring in the private drawer of her writing-desk. Hurriedly she selected several large bills and put them into a silver purse, pressing it deep into the pocket of her walking-skirt with some vague fear that she might lose it. Then she replaced the box and locked the desk, dropping the key in her pocket. Her movements were extraordinarily swift and noiseless. In twenty minutes from the time she had looked in on the nurse she was ready for the street.

A second glance into the inner room showed her that Miss Manuel was still sleeping. She regarded her distrustfully for an instant, and on a sudden impulse sat down at her desk and wrote a message on a sheet of the hotel paper.

"I am going out for the day. _I will return to-night._ Do nothing, consult no one. I am quite able to take care of myself. Don't make a sensation for the newspapers! ALICE STANSBURY."

"That last sentence will quiet her," she reflected, with cool satisfaction, as she pinned the note to the side of the mirror. "She won't care to advertise far and wide that she has temporarily mislaid a patient!"

The most difficult thing of all remained to be done. The outer door of her own room was locked and the key was missing. To leave the

apartment she must pass through the room where Miss Manuel lay asleep. She held her breath, but crossed in safety, though Miss Manuel stirred and murmured something, as if subconsciously warned of danger. Miss Stansbury closed the door noiselessly behind her and stood silent for a moment in the hall, glancing about her and planning the wisest method of getting away. She knew better than to enter any of the hotel elevators. While there was no certainty that she would be detained if she did, there had been a great deal of interest in her when she arrived at the hotel, and there was every chance that some employe might think it a wise precaution to ask her nurse a question or two after she departed. Then Miss Manuel would be hot upon her trail, and her day would be spoiled. She crept cautiously along the rear halls, keeping out of sight on each floor when the elevators were passing, and meeting only strangers and one preoccupied porter. Her rooms were on the fifth floor, but she descended the four flights of stairs in safety, and, going triumphantly out of the rear entrance of the hotel, found herself in the quiet street on which it opened. The great building was on a corner, and as she crossed its threshold she saw a trolley-car passing along the avenue at her right. On a quick impulse she signalled. When it stopped she entered and seated herself in a corner, surveying her fellow-passengers with seeming unconcern, though her breath came fast. She was safe; she was off! She decided to ride on until she made her plans and knew in more detail what should be done with this gift of the gods, a day that was all her own.

It had been a long time since she had been alone, she suddenly remembered. There had been outings, of course, and shopping expeditions and the like, but always Miss Manuel or one of her kind had been at her elbow--sometimes professionally cheerful, sometimes professionally grave, but at all times professionally watchful. The woman exulted fiercely in her new-found liberty. She had hours before her--free, glorious hours. She would use them, fill them, squander them in a prodigal spending, following every impulse, indulging every desire, for they were hers and they were her last. In the depths of her brain lay a resolution as silent, as deadly, as a coiled serpent waiting to strike. She would enter no asylums, she would endure no more "absences," she would have no more supervision, no more consultations, no more half-concealed fear of friends, no more pity from strangers. There was a way of escaping all this forever, and she knew it and would take it, though it led across the dim threshold over which she could never return.

The car hummed as it sped along. At a distance she saw an entrance to Central Park, and from the inside the branches of trees seemed to wave a salute to her in honor of her freedom. She signalled to the conductor and left the car, retracing her steps until she entered the Park. She was far up-town, near the northern end of it, and the paths, warm in the spring sunshine, were almost deserted. For a while she strolled idly about, her senses revelling in the freshness and beauty around her, in the green vistas that opened to right and left, and the soft breeze that fanned her face. Children, riding tricycles or rolling hoops, raced past her; and once, after she had walked almost an hour, a small boy of four slipped his hand into her gloved one and trotted beside her for a moment, to the open scandal of his nurse. She smiled down at him, pleased by the touch of his little fingers. When he left, as abruptly as he had joined her, and in response to a stentorian Irish summons from the rear, she felt a rather surprising degree of regret. The momentary contact had given her a pleasant sense of companionship; for the first time it came to her that it would be

better to have a sharer of this day of days--no hireling, no scientific-eyed caretaker, but a little child or a friend, some one, any one, whom she liked and who liked her, and who, like the little boy, did not know the truth about her.

Her spirits dropped as suddenly as they had risen, and she felt tired and disappointed. Almost unconsciously she dropped on a bench to rest, her eyes still following the figure of the child, now almost out of sight around a distant bend. The bench was off the path, and she had been too preoccupied when she sat down to notice that it had another occupant; but as the figure of her little friend vanished and she turned her eyes away with a sigh, she found herself looking into those of a man. He was very young, hardly more than a boy, and he occupied the far end of the seat, one arm thrown across the back of it, his knees crossed, and his body so turned that he faced her. The thing she saw in his eyes held her own fastened to them, at first in surprise, then in sudden comprehension. It was hunger. With a long look she took him in--the pinched pallor of his smooth, handsome young face, the feverish brightness of his gray eyes, the shabbiness of his well-made, well-fitting clothes, even the rent in the side of one of his patent-leather shoes. His linen was clean, and his cuffs were fastened with cheap black links; she reflected instinctively that he had pawned those whose place they obviously filled, and then her mind returned at once to her first discovery, that he was hungry. There was no mistaking it. She had never seen hunger in a face before, but she recognized it now. He had taken off his hat and dropped it on the bench beside him. His brown hair was short and wavy, and one lock on his left temple was white. He had been writing a note, or possibly an advertisement for work, with a stub of lead-pencil on a scrap of paper resting on his knee, and now he suddenly raised his eyes--either in an abstracted search for the right word or because her appearance had startled him.

Without hesitation she spoke to him.

"Pardon me," she said, impersonally. "May I ask you some questions?"

He looked at her, and the understanding of his situation revealed in her glance brought the blood to his face. He straightened himself, his lips parting for a reply, but she gave him no time to speak.

"I am a stranger here," she continued, "and New York is not always kind to strangers. You seem to be unhappy, too. I wonder if we cannot help each other."

He smiled with an unyouthful bitterness.

"I'm afraid I'm not much use--to myself or any one else," he answered, with hard deliberation. Then his face underwent a change as he looked at hers and read in it, inexperienced as he was, some of the tragic writing of Fate's inexorable hand. His voice showed his altered mood.

"Of course," he added, quickly, "if there's really anything I can do. I know the town well enough. Perhaps I can help you if you want to get anywhere. What is it you would like?"

Her face, under the sudden idea which came to her, could hardly be said to brighten, but it changed, becoming less of a mask, more human. She felt a thrill of unaccustomed interest, less in him than in the

plan which he unconsciously suggested. Here at last was something to do. Here was a companion who did not know her. He was watching her closely now, and it came to him for the first time, with a sense of surprise, that this strange woman who had spoken to him was not old, and was even attractive.

"I think you can help me, if you will," she went on, quietly. "As I have said, I am a stranger in New York. I have never seen anything of it except the streets I passed through this morning between the Park and my hotel. But I've always wanted to see it, and to-day is my first and only opportunity, for I am going away to-night."

He surveyed her thoughtfully. The shadow had returned to his face, and it was plain that under his air of courteous interest stirred the self-despair she had surprised in her first look at him.

"Of course I can make out a sight-seer's list for you," he said, when she stopped, "and I will, with pleasure. I think you'd better drop into the Metropolitan Art Galleries while you're in the Park. I'll write the other places in their street order going down-town, so you won't waste time doubling on your tracks. Have you a bit of paper?"

He began to fumble in his own pockets as he spoke, but vaguely, as one who knows the search is vain. She shook her head.

"No," she told him, "and I don't want one. That isn't my idea at all--a list of places to look up all alone and a dismal round of dreary sight-seeing. What I would like"--she smiled almost demurely--"is a 'personally conducted' tour. Are you very busy?"

He flushed again and looked at her, this time with a veiled suspicion in his glance. She met it with such calm appreciation that it changed to one of surprised doubt. She knew perfectly what was passing in his mind, and it caused her no more concern than the puzzled silence of a child who has heard a new word. She went on as complacently as if he were the little boy who had walked beside her a few moments before.

"In Paris and London," she remarked, "one can engage a guide, a gentleman, for a day at a fixed price. Probably there are such guides here in New York, if I knew where they were to be found and had the time to look for them. You are much younger than I am. You might almost be my son! Moreover, you will not mind my saying that I fancied you were unemployed and possibly were looking for employment. You can hardly help seeing the definite connection in all this."

His eyes met hers for a moment and then dropped. He blushed boyishly.

"I see you're trying to help me," he murmured, apologetically.

She went on as if she had not heard him.

"Let me employ you for the day. I need amusement, interest, occupation--more than you can imagine. I am in the same mood, as far as desolation and discouragement go, that you are in. I must be about, seeing people and diverting my mind. We can each supply the other with one thing that we need. I have money. To earn a little of that professionally, by a humane service, should really appeal to you."

Something in her voice as she uttered the last words made him turn

toward her again. As he looked, his young face softened. She waited in silence for what he would say.

He sat up and straightened his shoulders with a quick gesture.

"You are right," he said, "but I'm awfully afraid you'll get the worst of it. I'm not an ornamental escort for a lady, as you see." He looked at his broken shoe, and then at her. Her expression showed entire indifference to the point he had raised.

"We will consider it settled," she said. "You will take my purse and pay our joint expenses. I think," she went on, as she handed it to him, "we'll omit the Metropolitan. After miles of the Louvre and the Luxembourg and the Vatican, I don't seem to crave miles of that. Suppose we take a cab and drive round. I want to see the streets, and the crowds, and the different types of men and women, and the slums. I used to be interested in Settlement work, long ago."

"Pardon me," he said. "You have won your case. I will serve you to the best of my ability. But as a preliminary I insist on counting the money in this purse, and on your seeing that my accounts are all right."

"Do as you like about that," she replied, indifferently, but her glance rested on him with a glint of approval.

He deliberately counted the bills. "There are three hundred and forty dollars," he said, replacing them.

She nodded absently. She had sunk into a momentary reverie, from which he did not arouse her until she suddenly looked at her watch. "Why, it's after twelve!" she exclaimed, with more animation than she had yet shown. "We'll go to Delmonico's or Sherry's for luncheon, and make our programme while we're there."

He started, and leaned forward, fixing his eyes on her, but she did not meet them. She replaced her watch in her belt with a successful assumption of abstraction, but she was full of doubt as to how he would take this first proposition. The next instant the bench trembled under the force with which he had dropped back on it.

"God!" he cried, hoarsely, "it's all a put-up job to feed me because you suspect I'm hungry! No, you don't even suspect--you _know_ I'm hungry!"

She put her hand on his arm, and the gesture silenced him.

"Be quiet," she said. "Suppose you are hungry? What of it? Is it a disgrace to be hungry? Men and women deliberately cultivate the condition! Come," she ended, as she rose abruptly, "keep to your bargain. We both need our luncheon."

He replaced the purse in the inside-pocket of his coat, and rose. They walked a few moments without a word. She noticed how well he carried himself and how muscular and athletic his figure appeared even in its shabby clothes. As they strolled toward the nearest exit she talked of the Park, and asked him a few matter-of-fact questions, to which he replied with growing animation. "I can't give you figures and statistics, I'm afraid," he added, smiling.

She shook her head. "It would be sad if you could," she said. "Give me anything but information. As for statistics, I've a constitutional distaste for them. Where can we find a cab?"

"We won't find a cab," he explained, with an authoritative independence which somehow appealed to her. "We'll take this trolley-car and ride to within a short walk of Delmonico's. After luncheon we'll find cabs at every turn."

He helped her into a car as he spoke, and paid their fare from her purse, flushing as he had to change a five-dollar note to do so. The simple act emphasized for him, as no words could have done, his peculiar relation to this strange woman, whom he had never seen until half an hour ago. Balancing the purse in his hand, he glanced at her, taking in almost unconsciously the tragic droop of her lips, the prematurely gray locks in her dark hair, and the unchanging gloom of her brown eyes.

"How do you know I won't drop off the car at some corner and abscond with this?" he asked, in a low voice.

She looked at him calmly.

"I think I know you will not. But if you did it would hurt me."

"Would it spoil your day?"

"Yes," she conceded, "it would spoil my day."

"Well," he announced, judiciously, "you shall not have to reproach me with anything of that kind. Your day shall be a success if I can make it so."

His manner was more than gentle. His mood was one of gratitude and pleasant expectation. He was getting to know her and was sorry for her--possibly because she trusted him and was sorry for him. She was not the companion he would have chosen for a day's outing, and it was doubtful if she would be any too cheerful; but he would serve her loyally, wherever this queer adventure led, and he was young enough to appreciate its possibilities. Inwardly she was amused by his little affectation of experience, of ripe age addressing youth, but it was so unconsciously done, so unconquerably youthful, that it added to the interest he had aroused in her. She liked, too, his freshness and boyish beauty, and his habit of asserting his sense of honor above everything. Above all things, she liked his ignorance of her. To him, she was merely a woman like other women; there was a satisfaction to her in that thought as deep as it was indescribable. The only other occupants of the car were a messenger-boy, lost to his surroundings in a paper-covered novel, and a commercial traveller whose brow was corrugated by mental strain over a notebook.

"There are some things I would like to do in New York," she confided. "We will do them now--lunch at Delmonico's, go sight-seeing all the afternoon, dine at Sherry's, and go to the theatre this evening. Which is the best play in town?"

"Well--er--that, you know, depends on what you like," hazarded the boy, sagely. "Do you prefer comedy, tragedy, or melodrama?"

She reflected.

"Something light," she decided; "something airy and effervescent--with no problems or even thoughts in it."

His eyes twinkled as he smiled at her. If these were her tastes, she was getting on, he reflected, and the vista of the long day before him offered attractions.

"Peter Pan!" he exclaimed. "That's all those things. I've not seen it, but I've read the criticisms, and I know a fellow who has gone five times."

"Testimony enough," agreed his companion. "We'll go to 'Peter Pan.' Now tell me something about yourself."

"Is that in the bond?"

"No. That would be a gift."

"I'd--I'd rather not, if you don't mind."

He indulged in his inevitable painful blush as he spoke, but she stared at him without pity and with a sudden hauteur which gave him a glimpse of another side of her complex nature. This woman who picked up strange youths in the street and spent the day with them was obviously accustomed to unquestioning deference from others. He edged away from her, firm but unhappy.

"You're right," she said, at last. "We'll add a clause to our compact and play we're disembodied spirits. Neither of us will ask the other a personal question."

"Agreed, and thank you. It's not that I wouldn't be flattered, you know, by your interest, and all that," he went on, awkwardly. "It's only because it's such a beastly harrowing recital and shows me up in such--such an inefficient light. It would depress you, and it couldn't do me any good. The things about myself are what I want to get away from--for a while."

They were soon at Delmonico's, and she followed him into the main dining-room, where she selected a table at a window looking out on the Avenue. The head waiter glanced at him, hesitated, surveyed her, and showed that he was indeed a good servant who knew his own. He hovered over them with deepening interest as they scanned the menu.

The boy smiled at his companion, trying not to notice the smell of the food around them, nor the horrible sinking sensation which overwhelmed him at intervals. A sickening fear swept over him that he would faint before luncheon came--faint on a lady's hands, and from starvation at that! He plunged into conversation with reckless vivacity.

When the waiter came with the oysters she set the example of eating them at once. Her companion followed it in leisurely fashion. She told herself that he was a thoroughbred, and that she had not been mistaken in him, but she would almost have preferred to see him eat wolfishly. His restraint got on her nerves. She could not eat, though she made a pretence of it. When he had eaten his soup with the same careful

deliberation, a little color came into his face. She observed this, and her tension relaxed.

"The last time I was here," he said, absently, "was two years ago. One of the fellows at New Haven had a birthday, and we celebrated it in the corner room just above this. It was a pretty lively dinner. We kept it up from seven o'clock until two in the morning, and then we all went out on the Avenue and sat down in the middle of the street, where it was cool, to smoke and talk it over. That was Davidson's idea. It annoyed the cabmen and policemen horribly. They have such ready tempers and such torpid minds."

The recital and the picture it called up amused her.

"What else did you do?" she asked, with interest.

"I'm afraid I don't remember much of it," he confessed. "I know we were pretty silly; but I do remember how foolish the head waiter looked when Davidson insisted on kissing him good-bye in the hall out there, and cried because he didn't know when he'd see him again. Of course you can't see how funny that was, because you don't know Davidson. He was the most dignified chap at college, and hated gush more than any one I ever knew."

He drank the last of his black coffee with a sigh of content, and blew a last ring from the cigar she had insisted that he should smoke.

"Don't you think," he hazarded, "that it would be jolly to drive up and down Broadway and Fifth Avenue for an hour or two? If you want crowds, they're there; and if you see anything worth closer inspection, we can get out and look at it."

She agreed, and he paid the bill, tipping the waiter discriminatingly.

As their hansom threaded its way through the crowded street she rarely smiled, but her sombre eyes took in everything, and she "said things," as the boy put it, which he recalled and quoted years afterward. Incidentally she talked of herself, though always without giving him a clue as to who she was and where she came from. Several times, as a face in the passing throng caught her interest, she outlined for him in a few terse words the character of its possessor. He was interested, but he must have unconsciously suggested a certain unbelief in her intuition, for once she stopped speaking and looked at him sharply.

"You think I don't know," she said, "but I do. We always know, until we kill the gift with conventionalities. We're born with an intuitive knowledge of character. Savages have it, and animals, and babies. We lose it as we advance in civilization, for then we distrust our impressions and force our likes and dislikes to follow the dictates of policy. I've worked hard to keep and develop my insight, and behold my reward! I recognized you at the first glance as the perfect companion of a day."

The boy's face flamed with pleasure.

"Then it is a success?"

"It is a success. But it's also five o'clock. What next?"

"Then it's been a success?" he repeated, dreamily--"so far, I mean. We've done so little in one way, but I'm awfully glad you've liked it. We'll drop into Sherry's now for a cup of tea and a buttered English muffin and the beautiful ladies and the Hungarian Band. Then, instead of dining there, suppose we go to some gayer, more typical New York place--one of the big Broadway restaurants? That will show you another 'phase,' as you say; and the cooking is almost as good."

She agreed at once. "I think I'd like that," she said. "I want as much variety as I can get."

He leaned toward her impressively over the little table in the tea-room, recalling her unexpected tribute to the "perfect companion," and feeling all at once surprisingly well acquainted with her.

"What a pity you've got to go away tonight!" he murmured, ingenuously. "There's so much left to do."

For an instant, as memory rolled over her, her heart stopped beating. He observed her change of expression and looked at her with a sympathetic question in his gray eyes.

"Can't you change your plans?" he suggested, hopefully. "Must you go?"

"No, they're not that kind of plans. I must go."

As she spoke her face had the colorlessness and the immobility he had seen in it during the first moments it was turned toward him in the morning, and her features suddenly looked old and drawn. Under the revelation of a trouble greater than he could understand, the boy dropped his eyes.

"By Jove!" he thought, suddenly, "she's got something the matter with her." He wondered what it was, and the idea flashed over him that it might be an incurable disease. Only the year before he had heard a friend receive his death-warrant in a specialist's office, and the memory of the experience remained with him. He was so deep in these reflections that for a moment he forgot to speak, and she in her turn sat silent.

"I'm sorry," he then said, awkwardly. Then, rightly divining the quickest way to divert her thoughts, he suggested that they should drive again before dinner, for an hour or two, to get the effect of the twilight and the early lights on Broadway.

She agreed at once, as she had agreed to most of his suggestions, and her face when she looked at him was serene again, but he was not wholly reassured. In silence he followed her to the cab.

Over their dinner that night in the glittering Broadway restaurant, with the swinging music of French and German waltzes in their ears, she relaxed again from the impersonal attitude she had observed during the greater part of the day. She looked at him more as if she saw him, he told himself, but he could not flatter himself that the change was due to any deepening of her interest in him. It was merely that she knew him better, and that their long hours of sight-seeing had verified her judgment of him.

Their talk swept over the world. He realized that she had lived much abroad and had known many interesting men and women. From casual remarks she dropped he learned that she was an orphan, unmarried, with no close ties, and that her home was not near New York. This, when the next day, after a dazed reading of the morning newspapers, he summed up his knowledge of her, was all he could recall--the garnered drift-wood of a talk that had extended over twelve hours.

"You look," he said once, glancing critically at her, "as if you had lived for centuries and had learned all the lessons life could teach."

She shook her head. "I have lived for centuries, so far as that goes," she said, "but of all the lessons I've really learned only one."

"And that is?"

"How little it all amounts to."

Again, as he studied her, he experienced an unpleasant little tremor. He felt at the same time an odd conviction that this woman had played a part all day, and that now, through fatigue and depression, she was tiring of her role and would cast it away, showing herself to him as she was. For some reason he did not want this. The face behind the mask, of which he was beginning to get a glimpse at intervals, was a face he feared he would not like. He shrank from it as a child shrinks from what it does not understand.

Much to his relief, she threw off the dark mood that seemed to threaten her, and at the play she was more human than she had been yet.

"Ah, that first act," she said, as the curtain fell on Peter Pan's flight through the window with the Darling Children--"that delicious first act! Of course Barrie can't keep it up--no one could. But the humor of it and the tenderness and the naivete! Only a grown-up with the heart of a child could really appreciate it."

"And you are that?" he asked, daringly. He knew she was not.

"Only for this half-hour," she smiled. "I may get critical at any moment and entirely out of touch."

She did not, however, and watching her indulgent appreciation of the little boys in Never Never Land, he unconsciously reflected that, after all, this must be the real woman. That other personality, some sudden disheartening side of which he got from time to time, was not his new friend who laughed like a young girl over the crocodile with the clock inside, and showed a sudden swift moisture in her brown eyes when the actress pleaded for the dying fairy. When the curtain fell on the last act, leaving Peter Pan alone with his twinkling fairy friends in his little home high among the trees, Alice Stansbury turned to her companion with the sudden change of expression he had learned to dread. The pupils of her eyes were strangely dilated, and she was evidently laboring under some suppressed excitement. She spoke to him curtly and coolly.

"We'll have a Welsh rabbit somewhere," she said, "and then I'll go--back." He was struck by this use of the word, and by the tone of her voice as she said it. "Back," he repeated, mentally--"back to

something mighty unpleasant, I'll wager."

At the restaurant she ate nothing and said little. All the snap and sparkle had gone out of the day and out of their companionship as well. Even the music was mournful, as if in tacit sympathy, and the faces of the diners around them looked tired and old. When they left the dining-room they stood together for an instant in the vestibule opening into the street. No one was near them, and they were for the moment beyond the reach of curious eyes. She cast one quick look around to be sure of this, and then, going close to him, she put both her hands on his shoulders. As she stood thus he realized for the first time how tall she was. Her eyes were almost on a level with his own.

"You're a dear boy," she said, quickly, and a little breathlessly. "You have made the day perfect, and I thank you. We shall not meet again, but I'd like to feel that you won't forget me, and I want you to tell me your first name."

He put his hands over hers.

"It's Philip," he said, simply, "and as for forgetting, you may be very sure I won't. This isn't the kind of thing one forgets, and you're not the kind of woman."

As he spoke the grip of her hands on his shoulders tightened, and she leaned forward and kissed him on the mouth. Under the suddenness and the surprise of it his senses whirled, but even in the chaos of the moment he was conscious of two conflicting impressions--the first, an odd disappointment in her, his friend; the second, an absurd resentment against the singular remoteness of those cool, soft lips that for an instant brushed his own. She gave him no chance to speak.

"I've left my gloves on the table," she said, crisply. "Get them."

He went without a word. When he returned the vestibule was deserted. With a swift intuition of the truth he opened the door and rushed out into the street. She was not there, nor the cabman whom he had instructed to wait for them. She had slipped away, as she intended to do, and the kiss she had given him had been a farewell. He was left standing looking stupidly up and down the street, with her gloves in his hand and her purse, as he now remembered, in his pocket. Well, he could advertise that the next morning, in such a way that she could reclaim it without seeing him again if she wished. He could even seal it in an envelope and leave it at the Herald office, to be given to any one who would describe it. He walked slowly down Broadway and turned into the side street which held the house and the unattractive hall bedroom he called home. He felt "let down," as he would have put it, and horribly lonely and depressed. She was such a good sort, he reflected, and it was such a big pity she wouldn't let him see her again. He knew somehow that he never would. She was not a woman that changed her mind about things. Jove! but the whole experience had been interesting; and that kiss--that kiss he had been cad enough to misunderstand for an instant. ... The deepest blush of the day scorched his face as he recalled it.

Miss Stansbury arrived at the front entrance of her hotel at the same moment, and tersely instructed the driver to collect his fare at the desk. She entered the hall with him, and walked indifferently past the

night clerk, answering with a nod the tacit question of that youth as he glanced from her to the cabman. She was not unconscious of the suppressed excitement in his manner nor of the elevator boy's relief as he joyfully greeted her appearance in his car. What did it matter? What did anything matter now? Her day was over.

Miss Manuel, already informed of her arrival by a hurried telephone message from the office, was waiting for her at the door of their apartment. She burst into tears as she put her arms around her patient and kissed her and led her inside.

"Oh, my dear, how could you?" she cried, reproachfully. "Think of the agonies I've been through. It's almost twelve o'clock."

The other woman did not look at her, nor did she return the caress. She walked into the room and sat down at her desk, with a strange appearance of haste, at which the nurse marvelled. Without waiting to take off her hat or coat, she seized a pen and paper and wrote these lines, marking them plainly:

PERSONAL

FOR INSERTION IN TO-MORROW'S "HERALD"

PHILIP--The purse was purposely left with you. Its contents are yours._

She put this in an envelope and directed it to the Herald Advertising Department. Then, for the first time, she spoke to the nurse, balancing the envelope absently in her hand as she talked, and not looking once at the other's face. Her tones were level and monotonous, almost as if she were repeating a lesson.

"You need not have worried," she said, answering at last the nurse's first words. "I've had what I've wanted for years--a whole day to myself. I've done what I wanted to do. It's been worth while. But," she added, more slowly, "you needn't ask me about it, for I shall not tell you anything. Ring for a messenger, please. I want this taken to the Herald office at once; give him the money to pay for it."

In silence Miss Manuel obeyed. When the boy came she went into the hall to hand the envelope to him, glancing at the address as she did so. The instant she crossed the threshold Alice Stansbury slipped into the next room and opened a window looking down into a court. As she did so she whimpered like a frightened child.

"I must do it," she whispered. "I must--I must--now--now--now! If I wait, I won't--dare."

When the nurse entered the room there was only the open window to tell her what had happened. Panting, she leaned out and looked down with starting eyes. Far below, on the asphalt floor of the court, was a dark mass which moved once and then lay still.

The little clock on the table in the inner room struck twelve. Out in the hall the messenger whistled softly as he waited for the elevator. Hearing these familiar sounds, the nurse cast off the paralysis which had held her, and the silent corridor of the great hotel echoed her

useless call for help.

IV

THE SIMPLE LIFE OF GENEVIEVE MAUD

Genevieve Maud reclined in a geranium-bed in an attitude of unstudied ease. On her fat body was a white dress, round her waist was a wide, blue sash, perched on one side of her head was a flaunting blue bow, and in her heart was bitterness. It was dimly comforting to lie down in all this finery, but it did not really help much. She brooded darkly upon her wrongs. They were numerous, and her cherubic little face took on additional gloom as she summed them up. First, she had been requested to be good--a suggestion always unwelcome to the haughty soul of Genevieve Maud, and doubly so this morning when she saw no alternative but to obey it. Secondly, there was no one to play with--a situation depressing to any companionable being, and grindingly so to one who considered all men her peers, all women her unquestioning slaves, and all animals grateful ministers to her needs in lowlier fields of delight.

These delusions, it must be admitted, had been fostered during the four short but eventful years of Genevieve Maud's life. Her method of approach had been singularly compelling; old and young paused not to argue, but freely stripped themselves of adornments she fancied, and animals, from the kitten she carried round by one ear to the great St. Bernard she half strangled in recurring moments of endearment, bore with her adoringly, and humbly followed the trail of cake she left behind her when she tired of them and trotted off in search of fresh attractions. These were usually numerous; and had they been rarer, the ingenuity of Genevieve Maud would have been equal to the test. There were no social distinctions in her individual world. But one short year ago she had followed a hand-organ man and a monkey to a point safely distant from too-observant relatives and servants; there, beside the chattering monkey, she had sung and danced and scrambled for pennies and shaken a tambourine, and generally conducted herself like a debutante maenad.

That had been a glorious day. She recalled it now smoulderingly, resentfully. Different, indeed, was the tragic present. No one to play with--that was bad enough. But there were still worse conditions. She was not even allowed to play by herself! Rover had been banished to a neighbor's, the kitten had been lent generously to the Joyce children, her human playmates had been warned off the premises, and Genevieve Maud had been urged to be a dear little girl and keep very, very quiet because mamma was sick. As if this was not enough, fate drove its relentless knife and gave it a final twist. Far back in a corner of the garden where she lay, almost hidden by the drooping branches of an old willow, sat her two sisters, Helen Adeline and Grace Margaret, highly superior beings of a stately dignity even beyond their ripe ages of eleven and nine years. They were too old to play with little girls, as they had frequently mentioned to Genevieve Maud, but they were not wholly beyond the power of her spell, and there had been occasions when they had so far forgotten themselves as to descend to her level and enjoy doll tea-parties and similar infantile pleasures.

To-day, however, they were of a remoteness. Their plump backs were turned to her, their heads were close together, and on the soft afternoon breeze that floated over the garden were borne sibilant whispers. They were telling each other secrets--secrets from which Genevieve Maud, by reason of her tender years, was irrevocably shut out.

Genevieve Maud sat up suddenly in the flower-bed as the full horror of this truth burst upon her, and then briskly entered into action designed to transform the peace and quiet of the scene. Her small, fat face turned purple, her big, brown eyes shut tight, her round mouth opened, and from the tiny aperture came a succession of shrieks which would have lulled a siren into abashed silence. The effect of this demonstration, rarely long delayed, was instantaneous now. A white-capped nurse came to an up-stairs window and shook her head warningly; the two small sisters rose and scurried across the lawn; a neighbor came to the hedge and clapped her hands softly, clucking mystic monosyllables supposed to be of a soothing nature; neighboring children within hearing assumed half-holiday expressions and started with a rush to the side of the blatant afflicted one. Surveying all this through half-shut eyes and hearing the steady tramp of the oncoming relief corps, an expression of triumphant content rested for an instant of Genevieve Maud's face. Then she tied it up again into knots of even more disfiguring pattern, took another long breath, and apparently made an earnest effort to attract the attention of citizens of the next township. "I'm tired!" was the message Genevieve Maud sent to a sympathetic world on the wings of this megaphonic roar.

The trained nurse, who had rushed down-stairs and into the garden, now reached her side and drastically checked Genevieve Maud's histrionism by spreading a spacious palm over the wide little mouth. With her other hand she hoisted Genevieve Maud from the flower-bed and escorted her to neutral ground on the lawn.

"Tired!" repeated the irate nurse, as the uproar subsided to gurgles. "Heavens! I should think you would be, after that!" Helen Adeline and Grace Margaret arrived simultaneously, and the older child took the situation and the infant in hand with her best imitation of her mother's manner.

"I am so sorry you were disturbed, Miss Wynne," she said, "and poor mamma, too. We will take care of Genevieve Maud, and she won't cry any more. We were just making some plans for her future," she ended, loftily.

The mouth of Genevieve Maud, stretched for another yell, was arrested in its distension. Her small ears opened wide. Was she, after all, in the secret? It would seem so, for the nurse, seemingly satisfied, left the three children alone and went back to her patient, while Helen Adeline at once led her small sister to the choice retreat under the willow.

"We are going to talk to you, Genevieve Maud," she began, "ve-ry seriously, and we want you to pay 'tention and try to understand." This much was easy. Mamma usually opened her impressive addresses in such fashion.

"Pay 'tention and try to understand," echoed Genevieve Maud, and grinned in joyful interest.

"Yes, really try," repeated Helen Adeline, firmly. Then, rather impatiently, and as one bearing with the painful limitations of the young, she went on:

"You're so little, Maudie, you see, you don't know; and you won't know even if we tell you. But you are a spoiled child; every one says so, and mamma said the other day that something should be done. She's sick, so she can't do it, but we can. We've got to take care of you, anyhow, so this is a good time. Now what it really is, is a kind of game. Gracie and I will play it, and you are going to--to--well, you are going to be the game."

Genevieve Maud nodded solemnly, well satisfied. She was in it, anyhow. What mattered the petty details? "Going to be the game," she echoed, as was her invariable custom, with the air of uttering an original thought.

Helen Adeline went on impressively.

"It's called the simple life," she said, "and grown-up folks are playing it now. I heard the minister an' mamma talking about it las' week for hours an' hours an' hours. They give up pomps an' vanerties, the minister says, an' they mus'n't have luxuries, an' they mus' live like nature an' save their souls. They can't save their souls when they have pomps an' vanerties. We thought we'd try it with you first, an' then if we like it--er--if it's nice, I mean, p'r'aps Grace an' I will, too. But mamma is sick, an' you've had too many things an' too much 'tention, so it's a good time for you to lead the simple life an' do without things."

Genevieve Maud, gazing into her sister's face with big, interested eyes, was vaguely, subconsciously aware that the new game might halt this side of perfect content; but she was of an experimental turn and refrained from expressing any scepticism until she knew what was coming. In the mean time the eyes of her sister Grace Margaret had roamed disapprovingly over Genevieve Maud's white dress, the blue sash that begirded her middle, the rampant bow on her hair. Katie had put on all these things conscientiously, and had then joyfully freed her mind from the burden of thought of the child for the rest of the afternoon.

"Don't you think," Grace Margaret asked Helen Adeline, tentatively, "sashes an' bows is pomps?"

Helen Adeline gave the speaker a stolid, unexpressive glance. She acquiesced.

"Let's take 'em off," went on the younger and more practical spirit. "Then we won't never have to tie 'em for her, either, when they get loose."

They stripped Genevieve Maud, first of the sash and bows, then of the white gown, next of her soft undergarments, finally, as zeal waxed, even of her shoes and stockings. She stood before them clad in innocence and full of joyful expectation.

"All these fine clothes is pomps an' vanerties," remarked Helen Adeline, firmly. "The minister said so when he was talking with mamma

'bout the simple life, an' Gracie and I listened. It was very interestin'."

She surveyed the innocent nudity of her little sister, "naked but not ashamed," with a speculative glance.

"Katie will be glad, won't she?" she reflected, aloud. "She says there's too much washing. Now she won't have to do any more for you. Don't you feel better an' happier without those pomps?" she asked Genevieve Maud.

That young person was already rolling on the grass, thrusting her little toes into the cool earth, exulting in her new-found sartorial emancipation. If this was the "new game," the new game was a winner. Grace Margaret, gazing doubtfully at her, was dimly conscious of an effect of incompleteness.

"I think she ought to have a hat," she murmured, at last. Helen Adeline was good-naturedly acquiescent.

"All right," she answered, cheerfully, "but not a pompy one. Papa's big straw will do." They found it and put it on the infant, whose eyes and face were thereby fortunately shaded from the hot glare of the August sun. Almost before it was on her head she had slipped away and was running in and out of the shrubbery, her white body flashing among the leaves.

"We'll have our luncheon here," announced Helen Adeline, firmly, "an' I'll bring it out to save Katie trouble. Maudie can't have rich food, of course, 'cos she's livin' the simple life. We'll give her bread off a tin plate."

Grace Margaret looked startled.

"We haven't got any tin plate," she objected.

"Rover has."

Grace Margaret's eyes dropped suddenly, then rose and met her sister's. An unwilling admiration crept into them.

"How will Maudie learn nice table manners?" she protested, feebly. "Mamma says she must, you know."

"Folks don't have nice table manners when they're livin' simple lives," announced Helen Adeline, loftily. "They just eat. I guess we won't give her knives an' forks an' spoons, either."

Grace Margaret battled with temptation and weakly succumbed.

"Let's give her some of the rice pudding, though," she suggested. "It will be such fun to see her eat it, 'specially if it's very creamy!"

Of further details of that luncheon all three children thereafter declined to speak. To Genevieve Maud the only point worthy of mention was that she had what the others had. This compromise effected, the manner of eating it was to her a detail of indescribable unimportance. What were knives, forks, spoons, or their lack, to Genevieve Maud? The tin plate was merely a gratifying novelty, and that she had been in

close communion with rice pudding was eloquently testified by the samples of that delicacy which clung affectionately to her features and her fat person during the afternoon.

While they ate, Helen Adeline's active mind had been busy. She generously gave her sisters the benefit of its working without delay.

"She mus'n't have any money," she observed, thoughtfully, following with unseeing eyes the final careful polish the small tongue of Genevieve Maud was giving Rover's borrowed plate. "No one has money in the simple life, so we mus' take her bank an' get all the money out an'--"

"Spend it!" suggested Grace Margaret, rapturously, with her second inspiration. Helen Adeline reflected. The temptation was great, but at the back of her wise little head lay a dim foreboding as to the possible consequences.

"No," she finally decided, consistently. "I guess it mus' be given to the poor. We'll break the bank an' take it out, an' Maudie can give it to the poor all by herself. Then if any one scolds, she did it! You'll enjoy that kind an' noble act, won't you, Maudie?" she added, in her stateliest grown-up manner.

Maudie decided that she would, and promptly corroborated Helen Adeline's impression. The soft August breeze fanned her body, the grass was cool and fresh under her feet, and her little stomach looked as if modelled from a football by her ample luncheon. She was to be the central figure in the distribution of her wealth, and wisdom beyond her own would burden itself with the insignificant details. Genevieve Maud, getting together the material for large and slushy mud pies, sang blithely to herself, and found the simple life its own reward.

"We'll leave her with her dolls," continued Helen Adeline, "an' we'll hunt up deservin' poor. Then we'll bring 'em here an' Maudie can give 'em all she has. But first"--her little sharp eyes rested discontentedly upon Genevieve Maud's family--six dolls reposing in a blissful row in a pansy-bed--"first we mus' remove those pomps an' vanerties."

Grace gasped.

"Take away the dolls?" she ejaculated, dizzily.

"No, not edzactly. Jus' take off all their clothes. Don't you think it looks silly for them to have clothes on when Maudie hasn't any?"

Grace Margaret agreed that it did, and at once the mistake was rectified, the clothing was added to the heap of Genevieve Maud's garments, and a pleasing effect of harmony reigned. The little girls regarded it with innocent satisfaction.

"I s'pose we couldn't really take her dolls," reflected Helen Adeline, aloud. "She'd make an awful fuss, an' she's so good an' quiet now it's a pity to start her off. But her toys mus' go. They're very expensive, an' they're pomps an' vanerties, I know. So we'll take 'em with us an' give 'em to poor children."

"You think of lots of things, don't you?" gurgled Grace Margaret, with warm admiration. Her sister accepted the tribute modestly, as no more than her due. Leaving Genevieve Maud happy with her mud pies and her stripped dolls, the two sought the nursery and there made a discriminating collection of her choicest treasures. Her Noah's Ark, her picture-books, her colored balls and blocks, her woolly lambs that moved on wheels, her miniature croquet set, all fell into their ruthless young hands and, as a crowning crime, were dumped into the little go-cart that was the very apple of Genevieve Maud's round eyes. It squeaked under its burden as the children drew it carefully along the hall. They carried it down-stairs with exaggerated caution, but Genevieve Maud saw it from afar, and, deeply moved by their thoughtfulness, approached with gurgles of selfish appreciation. The conspirators exchanged glances of despair. It was the intrepid spirit of Helen Adeline that coped with the distressing situation. Sitting down before her victim, she took Maudie's reluctant hands in hers and gazed deep into her eyes as mamma was wont to gaze into hers on the various occasions when serious talks became necessary.

"Now, Genevieve Maud," she began, "you mus' listen an' you mus' mind, or you can't play. Ain't you havin' a good time? If you don't want to do what we say, we'll put your clothes right straight on again an' leave you in the midst of your pomps an' vaneries: an' then--what'll become of your soul?" She paused impressively to allow this vital question to make its full appeal. Genevieve Maud writhed and squirmed.

"But," continued Helen Adeline, solemnly, "if you do jus' as we say, we'll let you play some more." The larger issue was temporarily lost sight of this time, but the one presented seemed to appeal vividly to Genevieve Maud.

"Let Genevieve Maud play some more," she wheedled.

"And will you do everything we say?"

"Do everything you say," promised Genevieve Maud, recklessly.

"Very well,"--this with a fidelity in its imitation to her mother's manner which would have convulsed that admirable and long-suffering woman could she have heard it. "An' first of all we mus' give away your toys to poor children."

The mouth of Genevieve Maud opened. Helen Adeline held up a warning hand, and it shut.

"They're _pomps_," repeated the older sister, positively, "an' we'll bring you simple toys if poor children will exchange with us."

This was at least extenuating. Genevieve Maud hesitated and sniffed. In the matter of being stripped, toys were more important than clothes.

"If you don't, you know, you can't play," Grace Margaret reminded her.

"Awright," remarked Genevieve Maud, briefly. "Give toys to poor chil'ren."

They hurriedly left her before her noble purpose could do so, and Genevieve Maud, left to her own resources, made unctuous mud pies and

fed them to her family. Grace Margaret and Helen Adeline returned in triumph within the hour and laid at the feet of their small victim modest offerings consisting of one armless rubber doll, one dirty and badly torn picture-book, and one top, broken.

"These is simple," declared Helen Adeline, with truth, "an' the poor Murphy children has your pomps, Maudie. Are you glad?"

Genevieve Maud, surveying doubtfully the nondescript collection before her, murmured without visible enthusiasm something which was interpreted as meaning that she was glad. As a matter of fact, the charm of the simple life was not borne in upon her compellingly. The top she accepted until she discovered that it would not go. The rubber doll she declined to touch until Grace Margaret suggested that it had been in a hospital and had had its arms amputated like Mrs. Clark's son Charlie. Deeply moved by the pathos of this tragic fate, Genevieve Maud added the rubber doll to her aristocratic family, whose members seemed to shrink aside as it fell among them. The picture-book she declined to touch at all.

"It's dirty," she remarked, with an air of finality which effectually closed the discussion. By this time she was not herself an especially effective monument of cleanliness. The rice pudding and the mud pies had combined to produce a somewhat bizarre effect, and the dirt she had casually gathered from the paths, the flower-beds, and the hedges enlivened but did not improve the ensemble.

"She ought to be washed pretty soon," suggested Grace, surveying her critically; but to this tacit criticism Helen Adeline promptly took exception.

"They don't have to, so much," she objected, "when it's the simple life. That's one of the nice things."

With this decision Genevieve Maud was well content. Her tender years forbade hair-splitting and subtle distinctions; the term "accumulated dirt" or "old dirt" had no significance for her. She could not have told why she rejected the Murphy child's thoroughly grimed picture-book, yet herself rolled happily about in a thin coating of mud and dust, but she did both instinctively.

Her attention was pleasantly distracted by subdued cries from the street beyond the garden hedge. Three Italian women, all old, stood there gesticulating freely and signalling to the children, and a small ragged boy on crutches hovered nervously near them. Helen Adeline jumped to her feet with a sudden exclamation.

"It's the poor!" she said, excitedly. "For your money, Genevieve Maud. I told them to come. Get the bank, Gracie, an' she mus' give it all away!"

Grace departed promptly on her errand, but there was some delay in opening the bank when she returned--an interval filled pleasantly by the visitors with interested scrutiny of the shameless Genevieve Maud, whose airy unconsciousness of her unconventional appearance uniquely attested her youth. When the money finally came, rolling out in pennies, five-cent pieces, and rare dimes, the look of good-natured wonder in the old black eyes peering wolfishly over the hedge changed quickly to one of keen cupidity, but the children saw nothing of this.

Helen Adeline divided the money as evenly as she could into four little heaps.

"It's all she has," she explained, grandly, "so she's got to give it all to you, 'cos riches is poms an' ruins souls. Give it, Genevieve Maud," she continued, magnanimously surrendering the centre of the stage to the novice in the simple life.

Genevieve Maud handed it over with a fat and dirty little paw, and the women and the lame boy took it uncritically, with words of thanks and even with friendly smiles. Strangely enough, there was no quarrelling among themselves over the distribution of the spoils. For one golden moment they were touched and softened by the gift of the baby hand that gave its all so generously. Then the wisdom of a speedy disappearance struck them and they faded away, leaving the quiet street again deserted. Helen Adeline drew a long breath as the bright gleam of their kerchiefs disappeared around a corner.

"That's nice," she exclaimed, contentedly. "Now what else can we make her do?"

The two pair of eyes rested meditatively on the unconscious little sister, again lost to her surroundings in the construction of her twenty-third mud pie. Not even the surrender of her fortune beguiled her from this unleavened joy of the simple life. "We've made her do 'mos' everything, I guess," admitted Grace Margaret, with evident reluctance. It appeared so, indeed. Stripped of her clothing, her money and her toys, it would seem that little in the way of earthly possessions was left to Genevieve Maud; but even as they looked again, Grace Margaret had another inspiration.

"Don't they work when they have simple lives?" she asked, abruptly. "'Course they work."

"Then let's have Genevieve Maud do our work."

There was silence for a moment--silence filled with the soul-satisfying enjoyment of a noble conception.

"Grace Margaret Davenport," said Helen, solemnly, "you're a smart girl!" She exhaled a happy sigh, and added: "'Course we'll let her! She mus' work. She can water the geraniums for you an' the pansies for me, an' gather up the croquet things for me an' take them in, an' fill Rover's water-basin, an' get seed for the birds, an' pick up all the paper an' leaves on the lawn."

It is to be deplored that the active and even strenuous life thus outlined did not for the moment appeal to Genevieve Maud when they brought its attractions to her attention. The afternoon was fading, and Genevieve Maud was beginning to fade, too; her little feet were tired, and her fat legs seemed to curve more in her weariness of well-doing; but the awful threat of being left out of the game still held, and she struggled bravely with her task, while the two arch-conspirators reposed languidly and surveyed her efforts from beneath the willow-tree.

"It'll be her bedtime pretty soon," suggested Helen Adeline, the suspicion of a guilty conscience lurking in the remark. "She can have her bread and milk like she always does--that's simple 'nuff. But do

you think she ought to sleep in that handsome brass crib?"

Grace Margaret did not think so, but she was sadly puzzled to find a substitute.

"Mamma won't let her sleep anywhere else, either," she pointed out.

"Mamma won't know."

"Annie or Katie will know--p'r'aps."

The "p'r'aps" was tentative. Annie and Katie had taken full advantage of the liberty attending the illness of their mistress, and their policy with the children was one of masterly inactivity. So long as the little girls were quiet they were presumably good, and hence, to a surety, undisturbed. Still, it is hardly possible that even their carelessness would fail to take account of Genevieve Maud's unoccupied bed, if unoccupied it proved to be.

"An' cert'inly papa will know."

Helen Adeline's last hope died with this sudden reminder. She sighed. Of course papa would come to kiss his chicks good-night, but that was hours hence. Much could be done in those hours. Her problem was suddenly simplified, for even as she bent her brows and pondered, Grace Margaret called her attention to an alluring picture behind her. Under the shelter of a blossoming white hydrangea lay Genevieve Maud fast asleep. It was a dirty and an exhausted Genevieve Maud, worn with the heat and toil of the day, scratched by bush and brier, but wonderfully appealing in her helplessness--so appealing, that Helen Adeline's heart yearned over her. She conquered the momentary weakness.

"_I_ think," she suggested, casually, "she ought to sleep in the barn."

Grace Margaret gasped.

"It ain't a simple life sleepin' in lovely gardens," continued the authority, with simple but thrilling conviction. "An'--wasn't the Infant Jesus born in barns?"

Grace Margaret essayed a faint protest.

"Papa won't like it," she began, feebly.

"He won't know. 'Course we won't let her _stay_ there! But just a little while, to make it finish right--the way it ought to be."

The holding up of such lofty ideals of consistency conquered Grace Margaret--so thoroughly, in fact, that she helped to carry the sleeping Genevieve Maud not only to the barn, but even, in a glorious inspiration, to Rover's kennel--a roomy habitation and beautifully clean. The pair deposited the still sleeping innocent there and stepped back to survey the effect. Helen Adeline drew a long breath of satisfaction. "Well," she said, with the content of an artist surveying the perfect work, "if that ain't simple lives, I don't know what is!"

They stole out of the place and into the house. The shadows lengthened on the floor of the big barn, and the voices of the children in the street beyond grew fainter and finally died away.

Lights began to twinkle in neighboring windows. Rover, returning from his friendly visit, sought his home, approached its entrance confidently, and retreated with a low growl. The baby slept on, and the dog, finally recognizing his playmate, stretched himself before the entrance of his kennel and loyally mounted guard, with a puzzled look in his faithful brown eyes. The older children, lost in agreeable conversation and the attractions of baked apples and milk toast, wholly forgot Genevieve Maud and the flying hours.

It was almost dark when their father came home and, after a visit to the bedside of his wife, looked to the welfare of his children. The expression on the faces of the two older ones as they suddenly grasped the fact of his presence explained in part the absence of the third. Mr. Davenport had enjoyed the advantages of eleven years of daily association with his daughter Helen Adeline.

"Where is she?" he asked, briefly, with a slight prickling of the scalp.

In solemn procession, in their night-gowns, they led him to her side; and the peace of the perfumed night as they passed through the garden was broken with explanations and mutual recriminations and expressions of unavailing regret. Rover rose as they approached and looked up into his master's eyes, wagging his tail in eager welcome.

"Here she is," he seemed to say. "It's all right. I looked after her."

The father's eyes grew dim as he patted the dog's fine head and lifted the naked body of his youngest daughter in his arms. Her little body was cold, and she shivered as she awoke and looked at him. Then she gazed down into the conscience-stricken faces of her sisters and memory returned. It drew from her one of her rare spontaneous remarks.

"Don't yike simple yives," announced Genevieve Maud, with considerable firmness. "Don't yant to play any more."

"You shall not, my babykins," promised her father, huskily. "No more simple life for Genevieve Maud, you may be sure."

Later, after the hot bath and the supper which both her father and the trained nurse had supervised, Genevieve Maud was tucked cozily away in the little brass crib which had earlier drawn out the stern disapproval of her sisters. Her round face shone with cold cream. A silver mug, full of milk, stood beside her crib, on her suggestion that she might become "firsty" during the night. Finding the occasion one of unlimited indulgence and concession, she had demanded and secured the privilege of wearing her best night-gown--one resplendent with a large pink bow. In her hand she clasped a fat cookie.

Helen Adeline and Grace Margaret surveyed this sybaritic scene from the outer darkness of the hall.

"Look at her poor, perishin' body full of comforts," sighed Helen Adeline, dismally. Then, with concentrated bitterness, "I s'pose we'll

never dare to even _think_ 'bout her soul again!"

V

HIS BOY

Captain Arthur Hamilton, of the ----th Infantry, moved on his narrow cot, groaned partly from irritation and partly from pain, muttered a few inaudible words, and looked with strong disapproval toward the opening of the hospital tent in which he lay. Through it came the soft breezes of the Cuban night, a glimpse of brilliantly starred horizon-line, and the cheerful voice of Private Kelly, raised in song. The words came distinctly to the helpless officer's reluctant ears.

"Oh, Liza, de-ar Liza," carolled Kelly, in buoyant response to the beauty of the evening.

Captain Hamilton muttered again as he suppressed a seductive desire to throw something at the Irishman's head, silhouetted against the sky as he limped past the entrance. Six weeks had elapsed since the battle of San Juan, in which Hamilton and Kelly had been among the many grievously hurt. Kelly, witness this needless service of song, was already convalescent. He could wander from tent to tent in well-meaning but futile efforts to cheer less fortunate mates. Baker was around again, too, Hamilton remembered, and Barnard and Hallenbeck and Lee, and--oh, hosts of others. He ran over their names as he had done countless times before in the long days and nights which had passed since he had been "out of it all," as he put it to himself. He alone, of his fellow officers in the regiment, still lay chained to his wretched cot, a very log of helplessness, in which a fiery spirit flamed and consumed. His was not a nature that took gracefully to inactivity; and of late it had been borne in upon him with a cold, sickening sense of fear, new, like his helplessness, that inactivity must be his portion for a long, long time to come. At first the thought had touched his consciousness only at wide intervals, but now it was becoming a constant, lurking horror, always with him, or just within reach, ready to spring.

He was "out of it all," not for weeks or even for months, but very possibly for all time. The doctor's reticence told him this; so did his own sick heart; so did the dutiful cheerfulness of his men and his brother officers. They overdid it, he realized, and the efforts they so conscientiously made showed how deep their sympathy must be, and how tragic the cause of it. His lips twisted sardonically as he remembered their optimistic predictions of his immediate recovery and the tributes they paid to his courage in the field. It was true he had distinguished himself in action (by chance, he assured himself and them), and he had figured as a hero in the subsequent reports of the battle. But the other fellows would hardly have bothered to have a trifle like that mentioned, he told himself, if the little glowing badge of fame he carried off the field had not been now his sole possession. He had given more than his life for it. He had sacrificed his career, his place in the active ranks, his perfect, athletic body. His life would have been a simple gift in comparison. Why couldn't it have been taken? he wondered for the hundredth time. Why could not he,

like others, have died gloriously and been laid away with the flag wrapped round him? But that, he reflected, bitterly, would have been too much luck. Instead, he must drag on and on and on, of no use to himself or to any one else.

Again and again he contemplated the dreary outlook, checking off mentally the details of the past, the depressing experiences to come, the hopelessness of it all; and as his mind swung wearily round the small circle he despised himself for the futility of the whole mental process, and for his inability to fix his thoughts on things other than his own misfortune. A man paralyzed; a thing dead from the waist down--that was what he had become. He groaned again as the realization gnawed at his soul, and at the sound a white-capped nurse rose from a table where she had been sitting and came to his bedside with a smile of professional cheerfulness. She had a tired, worn face, and faded blue eyes, which looked as if they had seen too much of human suffering. But an indomitable spirit gazed out of them, and spoke, too, in her alert step and in the fine poise of her head and shoulders.

"Your mail has come," she told him, "and there seem to be some nice letters--fat ones. One, from Russia, has a gold crown on the envelope. Perhaps I had better leave you alone while you read it."

Hamilton smiled grimly as he held out a languid hand. He liked Miss Foster. She was a good sort, and she had stood by the boys nobly through the awful days after the fight. He liked her humor, too, though he sometimes had suspicions as to its spontaneity. Then his eye fell on the top envelope of the little package she had given him, and at the sight of the handwriting he caught his breath, and the blood rushed suddenly to his face. He closed his eyes for a moment in an effort to pull himself together. Did he still care, after ten years, and like that! But possibly, very probably, it was merely a manifestation of his wretched weakness, which could not endure even a pleasant surprise without these absurd physical effects. He

remembered, with a more cheerful grin, that he had hardly thought of her at all during the past year. Preparations for war and his small part in them had absorbed him heart and soul. He opened the letter without further self-analysis, and read with deepening interest the closely written lines on the thin foreign paper, whose left-hand corner held a duplicate of the gold crown on the envelope.

"DEAR OLD FRIEND,--You have forgotten me, no doubt, in all these years. Ten, is it not? But I have not forgotten you, nor my other friends in America, exile though I am and oblivious though I may have seemed. I do not know quite why I have not come home for a visit long before this. Indeed, I have planned to do so from year to year, but a full life and many varied interests have deferred the journey one way or another. I have three boys--nine, seven, and five--and it would be difficult to bring them with me and impossible to leave them behind. So, you see--

"But my heart often longs for my native land, and in one tower of this old castle I have a great room full of souvenirs of home. It is the spot I love best in my new country. Here I read my mail and write my letters and follow American news in the newspapers friends send me. Here, with my boys tumbling over each other before the fireplace, I read of the ascent of San Juan Hill, and of you, my friend, and your

splendid courage, and your injury.

"No doubt by the time this letter reaches you you will be well again, and in no need of my sympathy. But you will let me tell you how proud of you I am.

"I read the newspaper accounts to my boys, who were greatly interested and impressed when they learned that mamma knew the hero. I was much amused by the youngest, Charlie--too small, I thought, to understand it all. But he stood before me with his hands on my knees and his big brown eyes on my face; and when I finished reading he asked many questions about the war and about you. He is the most American of my children, and loves to hear of his mother's country. After the others had gone he cuddled down in my lap and demanded the 'story' repeated in full; and when I described again the magnificent way in which you saved your men, he said, firmly, 'I am his boy.'

"I thought you might be interested in this unsought, spontaneous tribute, and my purpose in writing is to pass it on to you--though I admit it has taken me a long time to get 'round to it!

"You will forgive this rambling letter, and you will believe me, now as ever,

"Sincerely your friend,

"MARGARET CHALLONER VALDRONOVNA."

Hamilton slowly refolded the letter and returned it to its envelope, letting the solace of its sweet friendliness sink into his sore heart the while. She had not wholly forgotten him, then, this beautiful woman he had loved and who had given him a gracious and charming camaraderie in return for the devotion of his life. He had not been senseless enough to misconstrue her feeling, so he had never spoken; and she, after two brilliant Washington seasons, had married a great Russian noble and sailed away without suspecting, he felt sure, what she was to him. He had recovered, as men do, but he had not loved again, nor had he married. He wondered if she knew. Very probably; for the newspapers which devoted so much space to his achievements had added detailed biographical sketches, over which he had winced from instinctive distaste of such intimate discussion of his personal affairs. The earlier reports (evidently the ones she had read) had published misleading accounts of his injuries. They were serious, but not dangerous, according to these authorities. It was only recently that rumors of his true condition had begun to creep into print. The Princess had not read these. Hamilton was glad of that.

He recalled dreamily the different passages of her letter, the remainder of his mail lying neglected on his bed. That boy--her boy--his boy. He smiled to himself, at first with amusement, then with a sudden tenderness that pleasantly softened his stern lips. He was weak enough, frightened enough, lonely enough, to grasp with an actual pitiful throb of the heart this tiny hand stretched out to him across the sea. He liked that boy--his boy. He must be a fine fellow. He wondered idly how he looked. "Three boys--nine, seven, five"--yes, Charlie was five and had great brown eyes. Like his mother's, the stricken man remembered. She had brown eyes--and such brown eyes. Such kind, friendly, womanly brown eyes--true mirrors of the strong soul that looked from them. Something hot and wet stung the surface of

Hamilton's cheek. He touched it unsuspectingly, and then swore alone in deep, frank self-disgust.

"Well, of all the sentimental idiots!" he muttered. "My nerves are in a nice way, when I bawl like a baby because some one sends me a friendly letter. Guess I'll answer it."

Miss Foster brought him pen, ink, and paper, and he began, writing with some difficulty, as he lay flat on his back.

"MY DEAR PRINCESS,--Your letter has just reached me, and you cannot, I am sure, imagine the cheer and comfort it brought. I am still lingering unwillingly on the sick-list, but there is some talk now of shipping me north on the Relief next week, when I hope to give a better account of myself. In the mean time, and after, I shall think much of you and the boys, especially of the youngest and his flattering adoption of me. I am already insufferably proud of that, and rather sentimental as well, as you will see by the fact that I want his photograph! Will you send it to me, in care of the Morton Trust Company, New York? I do not yet know just where I shall be.

"There is a pleasant revelation of well-being and happiness between the lines of your letter. Believe me, I rejoice in both.

"Faithfully yours,

"ARTHUR HAMILTON."

As he read it over the letter seemed curt and unsatisfactory, but he was already exhausted and had not the strength to make another effort. So he wearily sealed and addressed it, and gave it to Miss Foster for the next mail. Her tired eyes widened a little as she artlessly read the inscription.

During the seemingly endless days and nights that followed, Hamilton battled manfully but despairingly with his sick soul. Wherever he looked there was blackness, lightened once or twice, and for an instant only, by a sudden passing memory of a little child. It would be too much to say that the memory comforted him. Nothing could do that, yet. All he dared hope for was for the strength to go through his ordeal with something approaching manliness and dignity. The visits of his friends were a strain to him, as well as to them, and it was sadly easy to see how the sense of his hopeless case depressed them. He could imagine the long breath they drew as they left his tent and found themselves again in the rich, warm, healthy world. He did not blame them. In their places, he would no doubt have felt just the same. But he was inevitably driven more and more into himself, and in his dogged efforts to get away from self-centred thought he turned with a sturdy determination to fancies about remote things, and especially to imaginings of the boy--the little fellow who loved him, and who, thank God, was not as yet "sorry for him!" Oddly enough, the mother seemed to have taken her place in the background of Hamilton's thoughts. It was her son who appealed to him--the innocent man-child, half American, half Russian, entering so happily and unconsciously on the enhanced uncertainties of life in the tragic land of his birth.

During the trying, stormy voyage north on the great hospital ship, Hamilton had strange, half-waking visions of a curly headed lad with brown eyes, tumbling over a bear-skin rug in front of a great

fireplace, or standing at his mother's knee looking into her face as she talked of America and of an American soldier. He began to fancy that the vision held at bay the other crowding horrors which lay in wait. If he could keep his mind on that he was safe. He was glad the mother and son could not, in their turn, picture him--as he was.

When the photographs arrived, soon after he reached New York, the helpless officer opened the bulky package with eager fingers. There were two "cabinets," both of the child. One showed him at the tender age of two, a plump, dimpled, beautiful baby, airily clad in an embroidered towel. The second was apparently quite recent. A five-year-old boy, in black velvet and a bewildering expanse of lace collar, looked straight out of the picture with tragic dark eyes, whose direct glance was so like his mother's that ten years seemed suddenly obliterated as Hamilton returned their gaze. With these was a little letter on a child's note-paper, in printed characters which reeled drunkenly down the page from left to right. Hamilton read it with a chuckle.

"DEAR CAPTAIN HAMILTON,--I love you very much. I love you becous you fought in the war. I have your picture. I have put a candle befront of your picture. The candle is burning. I love you very much. Your boy,

"CHARLIE."

Accompanying this epistolary masterpiece was a brief note from the writer's mother, explaining that the "picture" of Captain Hamilton, of whose possession her infant boasted, had been cut from an illustrated newspaper and pasted on stiff card-board in gratification of the child's whim.

"He insists on burning a candle before it," she wrote, "evidently from some dim association with tapers and altars and the rest. As it is all a new manifestation of his character, we are indulging him freely. Certainly it can do him no harm to love and admire a brave man. Besides, to have a candle burned for you! Is not that a new flutter of glory?"

Hamilton, still in the grasp of a dumb depression he would voice to no one, was a little amused and more touched. In his hideous loneliness and terror the pretty incident, one he would have smiled at and forgotten a year ago, took on an interest out of all proportion to its importance. He felt a sudden, unaccountable sense of pleasant companionship. The child became a loved personality--the one human, close, vital thing in a world over which there seemed to hang a thick black fog through which Hamilton vaguely, wretchedly groped. He himself did not know why the child interested him so keenly, nor did he try to analyze the fact. He was merely grateful for it, and for the other fact that he cherished no sentimental feeling for the boy's mother. That had passed out of his life as everything else had seemingly passed which belonged to the old order of things. He had always been a calm, reserved, self-absorbed, unemotional type of man, glorying a little, perhaps, in his lack of dependence on human kind. In his need he had turned to his fellows and turned in vain. Now that a precious thing had come to him unsought, he did not intend to lose it.

Through his physicians he pulled various journalistic wires, resulting in the suppression, in the newspapers, of the hopeless facts of his

case. He did not intend, he decided, to have his boy think of him as tied to an invalid's couch. Then, knowing something of human nature, and of the evanescent character of childish fancies, he ordered shipped to Russia a variety of American mechanical toys, calculated to swell the proud bosom of the small boy who received them. This shameless bid for continued favor met with immediate success. An ecstatic, incoherent little shriek of delight came from the land of the czar in the form of another letter; and the candle, which quite possibly would have burned low or even gone out, blazed up cheerily again.

That was the beginning of an intercourse which interested and diverted Hamilton for months. He spared no pains to adapt his letters to the interest and comprehension of his small correspondent, and he derived a quite incredible amount of satisfaction from the childish scrawls which came to him in reply. They were wholly babyish documents, about the donkey, the nurse, the toys, and games of the small boy's daily life. Usually they were written in his own printed letters. Sometimes they were dictated to his mother, who faithfully reported every weighty word that fell from the infant's lips. But always they were full of the hero-worship of the little child for the big, strong, American fighting-man; and in every letter, sometimes in the beginning, sometimes at the end, occasionally in both places, as the enthusiasm of the writer waxed, was the satisfying assurance, "_I am your boy._" Hamilton's eyes raced over the little pages till he found that line, and there rested contentedly.

As the months passed, the healing influence of time wrought its effects. Hamilton, shut in though he was, adapted himself to the narrow world of an invalid's room and its few interests. With the wealth he had fortunately inherited he brought to his side leading specialists who might possibly help him, and went through alternate ecstatic hopes and abysmal fears as the great men came and departed. Very quietly, too, he helped others less fortunate, financially, than himself. The nurses and physicians in the hospital where he lay learned to like and admire him, and other patients, convalescents or newcomers who were able to move about, sought his cheerful rooms and brought into them a whiff of the outside world. Through it all, winding in and out of the neutral-colored weeks like a scarlet thread of life and hope, came the childish letters from Russia, and each week a thick letter went back, artfully designed to keep alive the love and interest of an imaginative little boy.

At the end of six months young Charles fell from his donkey and broke his left arm, but this trivial incident was not allowed to interfere with the gratifying regularity with which his letters arrived. It was, however, interesting, as throwing a high light on the place his American hero held in the child's fancy. His mother touched on this in her letter describing the accident.

"The arm had to be set at once," she wrote, "and of course it was very painful. But I told Charlie you would be greatly disappointed if your boy were not brave and did not obey the doctor. He saw the force of this immediately, and did not shed a tear, though his dear little face was white and drawn with pain."

Master Charlie himself discussed the same pleasant incident in the first letter he dictated after the episode.

"I did not cry," he mentioned, with natural satisfaction. "Mamma cried, and Sonya cried. Men do not cry. Do they? You did not cry when you were hurt, did you? I am going to be just like you."

Hamilton laughed over the letter, his pale cheek flushing a little at the same time. He had cried, once or twice; he recalled it now with shame. He must try to do better, remembering that he loomed large as a heroic model for the young.

He was still reading the little letter when Dr. Van Buren, his classmate at the Point, his one intimate since then, and his physician now, entered the room, greeted him curtly, and stood at the window for a moment, drumming his fingers fiercely against the pane. Hamilton knew the symptoms; Van Buren was nervous and worried about something. He dropped the small envelope into his lap and looked up.

"Well?" he said, tersely.

Van Buren did not answer for a moment. Then he turned, crossed the room abruptly, and sat down near the reclining-chair in which the officer spent his days. The physician's face was strained and pale. His glance, usually direct, shifted and fell under his friend's inquiring gaze.

"Well?" repeated the latter, compellingly. "I suppose you fellows have been talking me over again. What's the outcome?"

Van Buren cleared his throat.

"Yes, we--we have, old man," he began, rather huskily--"in there, you know." He indicated the direction of the consulting-room as he spoke. "We don't like the recent symptoms."

Unconsciously, Hamilton straightened his shoulders.

"Out with it. Don't mince matters, Frank. Do you think life is so precious a thing to me that I can't part with it if I've got to?"

Van Buren writhed in his chair.

"It isn't that," he said, "life or death. It's wor--I mean, it's different. It's--it's these." He laid his hand on the officer's helpless legs, stretched out stiffly under a gay red afghan. "God!" he broke out, suddenly, "I don't know how you'll take it, old chap; and there's no sense in trying to break a thing like this gently. We're afraid--we think--they'll--have to come off!"

Under the shock of it Hamilton set his teeth.

"Why?" he asked, quietly.

"Because--well, because they're no good. They're dead. They're a constant menace to you. A scratch or injury of any kind--they've got to go--that's all, Arthur. But we've been talking it over and we can fix you up so you can get about and be much better off than you are now." He leaned forward as he spoke, and his words came quickly and eagerly. The worst was over; he was ready to picture the other side. Hamilton stopped him with a gesture.

"Suppose I decline to let them go?" he asked, grimly.

Van Buren stared at him.

"You can't!" he stammered.

"Why not?"

"Because--why, because your life depends on their coming off!"

Hamilton's lips set.

"My _life!_" he repeated. "My precious, glad, young life! So full of happiness! So useful!" He dropped the savagely bitter tone suddenly. "No, Frank," he said, quietly, "I won't go through life as the half of a man. I'll let the thing take its course; or if that will be too slow and too--horrible, I'll help the hobbling beast on its way. I think I'd be justified. It's too much to ask--you know it--to be hoisted through life as a remnant."

Van Buren rose, moved his chair nearer to Hamilton's, and sat down close to his friend's side. All nervousness had left him. He was again cool, scientific, professional; but with it all there was the deep sympathy and understanding of a friend.

"No, you won't," he said, firmly; "you won't do anything of the kind, and I'll tell you why you won't. Because it isn't in your make-up to play the coward. That's why. You've got to go through with it and take what comes, and do it all like the strong chap you are. If you think there won't be anything left in life, you are mistaken. You can be of a lot of use; you can do a lot of good. You will have time and inclination and money. You will be able to get around, not as quickly, but as surely. With a good man-servant you'll be entirely independent of drafts on charity or pity. Money has some beautiful uses. If you were a poor devil who hadn't a cent in the world and would be dependent on the grudging service of others, I should wish you to accept and bear, perhaps, but I could not urge you to. Now, your life is helpful to others. You can give and aid and bless. You can be a greater hero than the man who went up San Juan Hill, and there are those who will feel it."

"That is, my money is needed, and because I've got it I should drag out years of misery while I spread little financial poultices on other people's ills," returned Hamilton. "No, thanks; it's not enough good. They can have the money just the same. That can be amputated with profit to all concerned. I'll leave it to hospitals and homes for the helpless, especially for fractional humanity--needy remnants. But I decline absolutely, once and for all, to accept the noble future you have outlined. I grant you it would be heroic. But have you ever heard of great heroism with no stimulus to arouse it?"

He raised his hand as he spoke, and brought it down with a gesture of finality. As it fell, it dropped on the little letter. Mechanically, his fingers closed on it.

His boy! His brave little boy who had not flinched or cried, because he meant to be just like Captain Hamilton. What would _he_ think when the truth came to him years hence, as it must do. What would she think now, the mother who was glad that her son should "love and admire a

brave man"? The small missive was a stimulus.

Hamilton turned to Van Buren again, checking with a little shake of the head the imp

Livros Grátis

(<http://www.livrosgratis.com.br>)

Milhares de Livros para Download:

[Baixar livros de Administração](#)

[Baixar livros de Agronomia](#)

[Baixar livros de Arquitetura](#)

[Baixar livros de Artes](#)

[Baixar livros de Astronomia](#)

[Baixar livros de Biologia Geral](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência da Computação](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência da Informação](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência Política](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciências da Saúde](#)

[Baixar livros de Comunicação](#)

[Baixar livros do Conselho Nacional de Educação - CNE](#)

[Baixar livros de Defesa civil](#)

[Baixar livros de Direito](#)

[Baixar livros de Direitos humanos](#)

[Baixar livros de Economia](#)

[Baixar livros de Economia Doméstica](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação - Trânsito](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação Física](#)

[Baixar livros de Engenharia Aeroespacial](#)

[Baixar livros de Farmácia](#)

[Baixar livros de Filosofia](#)

[Baixar livros de Física](#)

[Baixar livros de Geociências](#)

[Baixar livros de Geografia](#)

[Baixar livros de História](#)

[Baixar livros de Línguas](#)

[Baixar livros de Literatura](#)
[Baixar livros de Literatura de Cordel](#)
[Baixar livros de Literatura Infantil](#)
[Baixar livros de Matemática](#)
[Baixar livros de Medicina](#)
[Baixar livros de Medicina Veterinária](#)
[Baixar livros de Meio Ambiente](#)
[Baixar livros de Meteorologia](#)
[Baixar Monografias e TCC](#)
[Baixar livros Multidisciplinar](#)
[Baixar livros de Música](#)
[Baixar livros de Psicologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Química](#)
[Baixar livros de Saúde Coletiva](#)
[Baixar livros de Serviço Social](#)
[Baixar livros de Sociologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Teologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Trabalho](#)
[Baixar livros de Turismo](#)