

From a Bench in Our Square

Samuel Hopkins Adams

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FROM A BENCH IN OUR SQUARE

BY

Samuel Hopkins Adams

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FROM A BENCH IN OUR SQUARE

A PATRONESS OF ART

I

Peter (flourish-in-red) Quick (flourish-in-green) Banta (period-in-blue) is the style whereby he is known to Our Square.

Summertimes he is a prop and ornament of Coney, that isle of the blest, whose sands he models into gracious forms and noble sentiments, in anticipation of the casual dime or the munificent quarter, wherewith, if you have low, Philistine tastes or a kind heart, you have perhaps aforesaid rewarded him. In the off-season the thwarted passion of color possesses him; and upon the flagstones before Thorsen's Elite Restaurant, which constitutes his canvas, he will limn you a full-rigged ship in two colors, a portrait of the heavyweight champion in three, or, if financially encouraged, the Statue of Liberty in four. These be, however, concessions to popular taste. His own predilection is for chaste floral designs of a symbolic character borne out and expounded by appropriate legends. Peter Quick Banta is a devotee of his art.

Giving full run to his loftier aspirations, he was engaged, one April day, upon a carefully represented lilac with a butterfly about to light on it, when he became cognizant of a ragged rogue of an urchin regarding him with a grin. Peter Quick Banta misinterpreted this sign of interest.

"What d'ye think of _that_?" he said triumphantly, as he sketched in a set of side-whiskers (presumably intended for antennae) upon the butterfly.

"Rotten," was the prompt response.

"_What_!" said the astounded artist, rising from his knees.

"Punk."

Peter Quick Banta applied the higher criticism to the urchin's nearest ear. It was now that connoisseur's turn to be affronted. Picking himself out of the gutter, he placed his thumb to his nose, and wiggled his finger in active and reprehensible symbolism, whilst enlarging upon his original critique, in a series of shrill roars:

"Rotten! Punk! No good! Swash! Flubdub! Sacre tas de--de--piffle!" Already his vocabulary was rich and plenteous, though, in those days, tainted by his French origin.

He then, I regret to say, spat upon the purple whiskers of the butterfly and took refuge in flight. The long stride of Peter Quick Banta soon

overtook him. Silently struggling he was haled back to the profaned temple of Art.

"Now, young feller," said Peter Quick Banta. "Maybe you think you could do it better." The world-old retort of the creative artist to his critic!

"Any fool could," retorted the boy, which, in various forms, is almost as time-honored as the challenge.

Suspecting that only tactful intervention would forestall possible murder, I sauntered over from my bench. But the decorator of sidewalks had himself under control.

"Try it," he said grimly.

The boy avidly seized the crayons extended to him.

"You want me to draw a picture? There?"

"If you don't, I'll break every bone in your body."

The threat left its object quite unmoved. He pointed a crayon at Peter Quick Banta's creation.

"What is that? A bool-rush?"

"It's a laylock; that's what it is."

"And the little bird that goes to light--"

"That ain't a bird and you know it." Peter Quick Banta breathed hard. "That's a butterfly."

"I see. But the lie-lawc, it drop--so!" The gesture was inimitable. "And the butterfly, she do not come down, plop! She float--so!" The grimy hands fluttered and sank.

"They do, do they? Well, you put it down on the sidewalk."

From that moment the outside world ceased to exist for the urchin. He fell to with concentrated fervor, while Peter Quick Banta and I diverted the traffic. Only once did he speak:

"Yellow," he said, reaching, but not looking up.

Silently the elder artist put the desired crayon in his hand. When the last touches were done, the boy looked up at us, not boastfully, but with supreme confidence.

"There!" said he.

It was crude. It was ill-proportioned. The colors were raw. The arrangements were false.

But --the lilac bloomed. And --the butterfly hovered. The artist had spoken through his ordained medium and the presentment of life stood forth. I hardly dared look at Peter Quick Banta. But beneath his uncouth exterior there lay a great and magnanimous soul.

"Son," said he, "you're a wonder. Wanta keep them crayons?"

Unable to speak for the moment, the boy took off his ragged cap in one of the most gracious gestures I have ever witnessed, raising dog-like eyes of gratitude to his benefactor. Tactfully, Peter Quick Banta proceeded to expound for my benefit the technique of the drawing, giving the youngster time to recover before the inevitable questioning began.

"Where did you learn that?"

"Nowhere. Had a few drawing lessons at No. 19."

"Would you like to work for me?"

"How?"

Peter Quick Banta pointed to the sidewalk.

"That?" The boy laughed happily. "That ain't work. That's fun."

So the partnership was begun, the boy, whose name was Julien Tennier (soon simplified into Tenney for local use), sharing Peter Quick Banta's roomy garret. Success, modest but unfailing, attended it from the first appearance of the junior member of the firm at Coney Island, where, as the local cognoscenti still maintain, he revolutionized the art and practice of the "sand-dabs." Out of the joint takings grew a bank account. Eventually Peter Quick Banta came to me about the boy's education.

"He's a swell," said Peter Quick Banta. "Look at that face! I don't care if he did crawl outa the gutter. I'm an artist and I reco'nize aristocracy when I see it. And I want him brung up accordin'."

So I inducted the youngster into such modest groves of learning as an old, half-shelved pedagogue has access to, and when the Bonnie Lassie came to Our Square to make herself and us famous with her tiny bronzes (this was before she had captured, reformed, and married Cyrus the Gaunt), I took him to her and he fell boyishly and violently in love with her beauty and her genius alike, all of which was good for his developing soul. She arranged for his art training.

"But you know, Dominie," she used to say, wagging her head like a profound and thoughtful bird; "this is all very foolish and shortsighted on my part. Five years from now that gutter-godling of yours will be doing work that will make people forget poor little me and my poor little figurines."

To which I replied that even if it were true, instead of the veriest nonsense, about Julien Tenney or any one else ever eclipsing her, she would help him just the same!

But five years from then Julien had gone over to the Philistines.

II

Justly catalogued, Roberta Holland belonged to the idle rich. She would have objected to the latter classification, averring that, with the rising cost of furs and automobile upkeep, she had barely enough to keep her head above the high tide of Fifth Avenue prices. As to idleness, she scorned the charge. Had she not, throughout the war, performed prodigious feats of committee work, all of it meritorious and some of it

useful? She had. It had left her with a dangerous and destructive appetite for doing good to people. Aside from this, Miss Roberta was a distracting young person. Few looked at her once without wanting to look again, and not a few looked again to their undoing.

Being-done-good-to is, I understand, much in vogue in the purlieus of Fifth Avenue where it is practiced with skill and persistence by a large and needy cult of grateful recipients. Our Square doesn't take to it. As recipients we are, I fear, grudgingly grateful. So when Miss Holland transferred her enthusiasms and activities to our far-away corner of the world she met with a lack of response which might have discouraged one with a less new and superior sense of duty to the lower orders. She came to us through the Bonnie Lassie, guardian of the gateway from the upper strata to our humbler domain, who--Pagan that she is!--indiscriminately accepts all things beautiful simply for their beauty. Having arrived, Miss Holland proceeded to organize us with all the energy of high-blooded sweet-and-twenty and all the imperiousness of confident wealth and beauty. She organized an evening sewing-circle for women whose eyelids would not stay open after their long day's work. She formed cultural improvement classes for such as Leon Coventry, the printer, who knows half the literatures of the world, and MacLachan, the tailor, to whom Carlyle is by way of being light reading. She delivered some edifying exhortations upon the subject of Americanism to Polyglot Elsa, of the Elite Restaurant (who had taken upon her sturdy young shoulders the support of an old mother and a paralytic sister, so that her two brothers might enlist for the war--a detail of patriotism which the dispenser of platitudes might have learned by judicious inquiry). And so forth and so on. Miss Roberta Holland meant well, but she had many things to learn and no master to teach her.

Yet when the flu epidemic returned upon us, she stood by, efficient, deft, and gallant, though still imperious, until the day when she clashed her lath-and-tinsel sword of theory against the tempered steel of the Little Red Doctor's experience. Said the Little Red Doctor (who was pressed for time at the moment): "Take orders. Or get out. Which?"

She straightened like a soldier. "Tell me what you want done."

At the end of the onset, when he gave her her release from volunteer service, she turned shining eyes upon him. "I've never been so treated in my life! You're a bully and a brute."

"You're a brick," retorted the Little Red Doctor. "I'll send for you next time Our Square needs help."

"I'll come," said she, and they shook hands solemnly.

Thereafter Our Square felt a little more lenient toward her ministrations, and even those of us who least approved her activities felt the stir of radiance and color which she brought with her.

On a day when the local philanthropy market was slack, and Miss Holland, seated in the Bonnie Lassie's front window, was maturing some new and benign outrage upon our sensibilities, she called out to the sculptress at work on a group:

"There's a queer man making queer marks on your sidewalk."

"That's Peter Quick Banta. He's a fellow artist."

"And another man, young, with a big, maney head like an amiable lion;

quite a beautiful lion. He's making more marks."

"Let him make all he wants."

"They're waving their arms at each other. At least the queer man is. I think they're going to fight."

"They won't. It's only an academic discussion on technique."

"Who is the young one?"

"He's the ruin of what might have been a big artist."

"No! Is he? What did it? Drink?"

"Does he look it?"

The window-gazer peered more intently at the debaters below. "It's a peculiar face. Awfully interesting, though. He's quite poorly dressed. Does he need money? Is that what's wrong?"

"That's it, Bobbie," returned the Bonnie Lassie with a half-smile. "He needs the money."

The rampant philanthropist stirred within Miss Roberta Holland's fatally well-meaning soul. "Would it be a case where I could help? I'd love to put a real artist back on his feet. Are you sure he's real?"

On the subject of Art, the Bonnie Lassie is never anything but sincere and direct, however much she may play her trickeries with lesser interests, such as life and love and human fate.

"No; I'm not. If he were, I doubt whether he'd have let himself go so wrong."

"Perhaps it isn't too late," said the amateur missionary hopefully. "Is he a man to whom one could offer money?"

The Bonnie Lassie's smile broadened without change in its subtle quality. "Julien Tenney isn't exactly a pauper. He just thinks he can't afford to do the kind of thing he wants and ought to."

"What ought he to do?"

"Paint--paint--paint!" said the Bonnie Lassie vehemently. "Five years ago I believe he had the makings of a great painter in him. And now look what he's doing!"

"Making marks on sidewalks, you mean?"

"Worse. Commercial art."

"Designs and that sort of thing?"

"Do you ever look at the unearthly beautiful, graceful and gloriously dressed young super-Americans who appear in the advertisements, riding in super-cars or wearing super-clothes or brushing super-teeth with super-toothbrushes?"

"I suppose so," said the girl vaguely.

"He draws those."

"Is that what you call pot-boiling?"

"One kind."

"And I suppose it pays just a pittance."

"Well," replied the Bonnie Lassie evasively, "he sticks to it, so it must support him."

"Then I'm going to help him."

"To fulfill his destiny,' is the accepted phrase," said the Bonnie Lassie wickedly. "I'll call him in for you to look over. But you'd best leave the arrangements for a later meeting."

Being summoned, Julien Tenney entered the house as one quite at home despite his smeary garb of the working artist. His presentation to Miss Holland was as brief as it was formal, for she took her departure at once.

"Who is she?" asked Julien, staring after her.

"Bobbie Holland, a gilded butterfly from uptown."

"What's she doing here?"

"Good."

"O Lord!" said he in pained tones. "Has she got a Cause?"

"Naturally."

"Philanthropist?"

"Worse."

"There ain't no sich a animile."

"There is. She's a patron of art."

"Wow!"

"Yes. She's going to patronize you."

"Not if I see her first. How do I qualify as a subject?"

"She considered you a wasted life."

"Where does she get that idea?"

The Bonnie Lassie removed a small, sharp implement from the left eye of a stoical figurine and pointed it at herself.

"Do you think that's fair?" demanded the indignant youth.

The Bonnie Lassie reversed the implement and pointed it at him. "Do you or do you not," she challenged, "invade our humble precincts in a five-thousand-dollar automobile?"

"It's my only extravagance."

"Do you or do you not maintain a luxurious apartment in Gramercy Park, when you are not down here posing in your attic as an honest working-man?"

"Oh, see here, Mrs. Staten, I won't stand for that!" he expostulated. "You know perfectly well I keep my room here because it's the only place I can work in quietly--"

"And because Peter Quick Banta would break his foolish old heart if you left him entirely," supplemented the sculptress.

Julien flushed and stood looking like an awkward child. "Did you tell all this stuff to Miss Holland?" he asked.

"Oh, no! She thinks that your pot-boiling is a desperate and barely sufficient expedient to keep the wolf from the door. So she is planning to help you realize your destiny."

"Which is?" he queried with lifted brows.

"To be a great painter."

The other winced. "As you know, I've meant all along, as soon as I've saved enough--"

"Oh, yes; I know," broke in the Bonnie Lassie, who can be quite ruthless where Art is concerned, "and you know; but time flies and hell is paved with good intentions, and if you want to be that kind of a pavement artist--well, I think Peter Quick Banta is a better."

"Do you suppose she'd let me paint her?" he asked abruptly.

If statuettes could blink, the one upon which the Bonnie Lassie was busied would certainly have shrouded its vision against the dazzling radiance of her smile, for this was coming about as she had planned it from the moment when she had caught the flash of startled surprise and wonder in his eyes, as they first rested on Bobbie Holland. Here, she had guessed, might be the agency to bring Julien Tenney to his artistic senses; and even so it was now working out. But all she said was--and she said it with a sort of venomous blandness--"My dear boy, you can't paint."

"Can't I! Just because I'm a little out of practice--"

"Two years, isn't it, since you've touched a palette?"

"Give me a chance at such a model as she is! That's all I ask."

"Do you think her so pretty?" inquired the sculptress disparagingly.

"Pretty? She's the loveliest thing that--" Catching his hostess's smile he broke off. "You'll admit it's a well-modeled face," he said professionally; "and--and--well, unusual."

"Pooh! 'Dangerous' is the word. Remember it," warned the Bonnie Lassie. "She's a devastating whirlwind, that child, and she comes down here partly to get away from the wreckage. Now, if you play your part cleverly--"

"I'm not going to play any part."

"Then it's all up. How is a patroness of Art going to patronize you, unless you're a poor and struggling young artist, living from hand to mouth by arduous pot-boiling? You won't have to play a part as far as the pot-boiling goes," added his mistress viciously. "Only, don't let her know that the rewards of your shame run to high-powered cars and high-class apartments. Remember, you're poor but honest. Perhaps she'll give you money."

"Perhaps she won't," retorted the youth explosively.

"Oh, it will be done tactfully; never fear. I'll bring her around to see you and you'll have to work the sittings yourself."

As a setting for the abode of a struggling beginner, Julien's attic needed no change. It was a whim of his to keep it bare and simple. He worked out his pictorial schemes of elegance best in an environment where there was nothing to distract the eye. One could see that Miss Roberta Holland, upon her initial visit, approved its stark and cleanly poverty. (Yes, I was there to see; the Bonnie Lassie had taken me along to make up that first party.) Having done the honors, Julien dropped into the background, and presently was curled up over a drawing-board, sketching eagerly while the Bonnie Lassie and I held the doer of good deeds in talk. Now the shrewd and able tribe of advertising managers do not pay to any but a master-draughtsman the prices which "J.T."--with an arrow transfixing the initials--gets; and Julien was as deft and rapid as he was skillful. Soon appreciating what was in progress, the visitor graciously sat quite still. At the conclusion she held out her hand for the cardboard.

To be a patroness of Art does not necessarily imply that one is an adequate critic. Miss Holland contemplated what was a veritable little gem in black-and-white with cool approbation.

"Quite clever," she was pleased to say. "Would you care to sell it?"

"I don't think it would be exactly--" A stern glance from the Bonnie Lassie cut short the refusal. He swallowed the rest of the sentence.

"Would ten dollars be too little?" asked the visitor with bright beneficence.

"Too much," he murmured. (The Bonnie Lassie says that with a little crayoning and retouching he could have sold it for at least fifty times that.)

The patroness delicately dropped a bill on the table.

"Could you some day find time to let me try you in oils?" he asked.

"Does that take long?" she said doubtfully. "I'm very busy."

"You really should try it, Bobbie," put in the crafty Bonnie Lassie. "It might give him the start he needs."

What arguments she added later is a secret between the two women, but she had her way. The Bonnie Lassie always does. So the bare studio was from time to time irradiated with Bobbie Holland's youthful loveliness and laughter. For there was much laughter between those two. Shrewdly foreseeing that this bird of paradise would return to the bare cage only

if it were made amusing for her, Julien exerted himself to the utmost to keep her mind at play, and, as I can vouch who helped train him, there are few men of his age who can be as absorbing a companion as Julien when he chooses to exert his charm. All the time, he was working with a passionate intensity on the portrait; letting everything else go; tossing aside the most remunerative offers; leaving his mail unopened; throwing himself intensely, recklessly, into this one single enterprise. The fact is, he had long been starved for color and was now satiating his soul with it. Probably it was largely impersonal with him at first. The Bonnie Lassie, wise of heart that she is, thinks so. But that could not last. Men who are not otherwise safeguarded do not long retain a neutral attitude toward such creatures of grace and splendor as Bobbie Holland.

Between them developed a curious relation. It was hardly to be called friendship; he was not, to Bobbie's recognition, a habitant of her world. Nor, certainly, was it anything more. Julien would as soon have renounced easel and canvas as have taken advantage of her coming to make love to her. In this waif of our gutters and ward of our sidewalk artist inhered a spirit of the most punctilious and rigid honor, the gift, perhaps, of some forgotten ancestry. More and more, as the intimacy grew, he deserted his uptown haunts and stuck to the attic studio above the rooms where, in the dawning days of prosperity, he had installed Peter Quick Banta in the effete and scandalous luxury of two rooms, a bath, and a gas stove. Yet the picture advanced slowly which is the more surprising in that the exotic Bobbie seemed to find plenty of time for sittings now. Between visits she took to going to the Metropolitan Museum and conscientiously studying pictures and catalogues with a view to helping her protege form sound artistic tastes. (When the Bonnie Lassie heard that, she all but choked.) As for Julien!

"This is all very well," he said, one day in the sculptress's studio; "but sooner or later she's going to catch me at it."

"What then?" asked the Bonnie Lassie, not looking up from her work.

"She'll go away."

"Let her go. Your portrait will be finished meantime, won't it?"

"Oh, yes. That'll be finished."

This time the Bonnie Lassie did look up. Immediately she looked back again.

"In any case she'll have to go away some day--won't she?"

"I suppose so," returned he in a gloomy growl.

"I warned you at the outset, 'Dangerous,'" she pointed out.

They let it drop there. As for the effect upon the girl of Julien Tenny's brilliant and unsettling personality, I could judge only as I saw them occasionally together, she lustrous and exotic as a budding orchid, he in the non-descript motley of his studio garb, serenely unconscious of any incongruity.

"Do you think," I asked the Bonnie Lassie, who was sharing my bench one afternoon as Julien was taking the patroness of Art over to where her car waited, "that she is doing him as much good as she thinks she is, or ought to?"

"Malice ill becomes one of your age, Dominie," said the Bonnie Lassie with dignity.

"I'm quite serious," I protested.

"And very unjust. Bobbie is an adorable little person, when you know her."

"Does Julien know her well enough to have discovered a self-evident fact?"

"Only," pursued my companion, ignoring the question, "she is bored and a little spoiled."

"So she comes down here to escape being bored and to get more spoiled."

"Julien won't spoil her."

"He certainly doesn't appear to bore her."

"She's having the tables turned on her without knowing it. Julien is doing her a lot of good. Already she's far less beneficent and bountiful and all that sort of stuff."

"Lassie," said I, "what, if I may so express myself, is the big idea?"

"Slang is an execrable thing from a professed scholar," she reproved. "However, the big idea is that Julien is really painting. And it's _mine_, that big idea."

"Mightn't it be accompanied by a little idea to the effect that the experience is likely to cost him pretty dear? What will be left when Bobbie Holland goes?"

"Pooh! Don't be an oracular sphinx," was all that I got for my pains.

Nor did Miss Bobbie show any immediate symptoms of going. If the painting seemed at times in danger of stagnation, the same could not be said of the fellowship between painter and paintee. That nourished along, and one day a vagrant wind brought in the dangerous element of historical personalities. The wind, entering at the end of a session, displaced a hanging above the studio door, revealing in bold script upon the plastering Beranger's famous line:

"Dans un grenier qu'on est bien a vingt ans!"

"Did you write that there?" asked the girl.

"Seven long years ago. And meant it, every word."

"How did you come to know Beranger?"

"I'm French born."

"In a garret how good is life at twenty," she translated freely. "I wouldn't have thought"--she turned her softly brilliant regard upon him--"that life had been so good to you."

"It has," was the rejoinder. "But never so good as now."

"I've often wondered--you seem to know so many things--where you got your education?"

"Here and there and everywhere. It's only a patchwork sort of thing." (Ungrateful young scoundrel, so to describe my two-hours-a-day of brain-hammering, and the free run of my library.)

"You're a very puzzling person," said she And when a woman says that to a man, deep has begun to call to deep. (The Bonnie Lassie, who knows everything, is my authority for the statement.)

To her went the patroness of Art, on leaving Julien's "grenier" that day.

"Cecily," she said, in the most casual manner she could contrive, "who _is_ Julien Tenney?"

"Nobody."

"You know what I mean," pleaded the girl. "_What_ is he?"

"A brand snatched from the pot-boiling," returned the Bonnie Lassie, quite pleased with her next turn, which was more than her companion was.

"Please don't be clever. Be nice and tell me--"

"Be nice, sweet maid, and let who will be clever," declaimed the Bonnie Lassie, who was feeling perverse that day. "You want me to define his social status for you and tell you whether you'd better invite him to dinner. You'd better not. He might swallow his knife."

"You know he wouldn't!" denied the girl in resentful tones. "I've never known any one with more instinctive good manners. He seems to go right naturally."

"All due to my influence and training," bragged the Bonnie Lassie. "I helped bring him up."

"Then you must know something of his antecedents."

"Ask the Dominie. He says that Julien crawled out of a gutter with the manners of a _preux chevalier_. Anyway, he never swallowed any of _my_ knives. Though he's had plenty of opportunity."

"It's very puzzling," lamented Bobbie.

"Why let it prey like a worm i' the bud of your mind? You're not going to adopt him, perhaps?"

For the moment Bobbie Holland's eyes were dreamy and her tongue unguarded. "I don't know what I'm going to do with him," said she with a gesture as of one who despairingly gives over an insoluble problem.

"Umph!" said the Bonnie Lassie.

And continued sculpting.

III

As Julien had prophesied, it was only a question of time when he would

be surprised by his patroness in his true garb and estate. The event occurred as he was stepping from his touring-car to get his golf-clubs from the hallway of his Gramercy Park apartment at the very moment when Bobbie Holland emerged from the house next door. Both her hands flew involuntarily to her cheeks, as she took in and wholly misinterpreted his costume, which is not to be wondered at when one considers the similarity of a golfing outfit to a chauffeur's livery.

"Oh!" she cried out, as if something had hurt her.

Julien, for once startled out of his accustomed poise, uncovered and looked at her apprehensively.

Her voice quivered a little as she asked, very low, "Do you _have_ to do that?"

"Why--er--no," began the puzzled Julien, who failed for the moment to perceive what of tragic portent inhered in a prospective afternoon of golf. Her next words enlightened him.

"I should think you might have let me help before taking a--servant's position."

"It's an honest occupation," he averred.

"Do you do this--regularly?" she pursued with an effort.

"Off and on. There's good money in it."

"Oh!" she mourned again. Then: "You're doing this so that you can afford to buy paints and canvas and--and things to paint me," she accused. "It isn't fair!"

"I'd do worse than this for that," he declared valiantly.

Less than a fortnight later she caught him doing worse. She had ceased to speak to him of his chauffeurdom because it seemed to cause him painful embarrassment. (It did, and should have!) There had been a big theater party, important enough to get itself detailed in the valuable columns which the papers devote to such matters, and afterward supper at the most expensive uptown restaurant, Miss Roberta Holland being one of the listed guests. As she took her place at the table, she caught a glimpse of an unmistakable figure disappearing through the waiter's exit. And Julien Tenney, who had risen from his little supper party of four (stag) hastily but just too late, on catching sight of her, saw that he was recognized. Flight, instant and permanent, had been his original intent. Now it would not do. Bolder measures must be devised. He appealed to the head-waiter to help him carry out a joke, and that functionary, developing a sense of humor under the stimulus of a twenty-dollar bill, procured him on the spot an ill-fitting coat and a black string tie, and gave him certain simple directions. When the patroness of Art next observed the object of her patronage, he was performing the humble but useful duties of an omnibus.

Miss Holland suddenly lost a perfectly good and hitherto reliable appetite.

Nor was she the only member of the supper party to develop symptoms of shock. The gilded and stalwart youth on her left, following her glance, stared at the amateur servitor with protruding eyes, ceased to eat or drink, and fell into a state of semi-coma, muttering at intervals an

expressive monosyllable.

"Why not swear out loud, Caspar?" asked Bobbie presently. "It'll do you less harm."

"D'you see that chap over yonder? The big, fine-looking one fixing the forks?"

"Yes," said Bobbie faintly.

"Well, that's--No, by thunder, it can't be!--Yes, by the red-hot hinges, it _is!_"

"Do you think you know him?"

"Know him! I _know_ him? He bunked in with me for two weeks at Grandpre. He was captain of a machine-gun outfit sent down to help us clean out that little wasp's nest. His name's Tenney, and if ever there was a hellion in a fight! And see--what he's come to! My God!"

"Well, don't cry about it," advised the girl, serenely, though it was hard for her to keep her voice steady. "There's nothing to do about it, is there?"

"Isn't there!" retorted the youth, rising purposefully. "I'm going to get him and find him a job that's fit for him if I have to take him into partnership. Of all the dash-blanked-dod-blizzened--"

"Caspar! What are you going to do? Don't. You'll embarrass him frightfully."

But he was already heading off his prey at the exit. Bobbie saw her painter's face flame into welcome, then stiffen into dismay. The pair vanished beyond the watcher's ken. On his return the gilded youth behaved strangely. From time to time he shook his head. From time to time he chuckled. And, while Bobbie was talking to her other neighbor, he shot curious and amused glances at her. He told her nothing. But his interest in his supper returned. Bobbie's didn't.

To discuss the social aspects of menial service with a practitioner of it who has been admitted to a certain implicit equality is a difficult and delicate matter for a girl brought up in Roberta Holland's school. Several times after the restaurant encounter she essayed it; trying both the indirect approach and the method of extreme frankness. Neither answered. Julien responded to her advances by alternate moods of extreme gloom and slyly inexplicable amusement. Bobbie gave it up, concluding that he was in a very queer mood, anyway. She was right. He was.

The next episode of their progress took the form of a veritable unmasking which, perversely enough, only fixed the mask tighter upon Julien Tenney. By way of loosening up his wrist for the open season, Peter Quick Banta had taken advantage of an amiable day to sketch out a composite floral and faunal scheme on the flagging in front of Thorsen's Elite Restaurant, when Miss Holland, in passing, paused to observe and wonder. At the same moment, Julien hurrying around the corner, all but ran her down. She nodded toward the decorator of sidewalks.

"Isn't he the funny man that you were with the first time I saw you?"

"The very same," responded Julien with twinkling eyes.

"What is he doing?"

"He's one of the few remaining examples of the sidewalk or public-view school of art."

"Yes, but what does he do it for?"

"His living."

"Do people give him money for it? Do you think I might give him something?" she asked, looking uncertainly at the artist, who, on hands and knees and with tongue protruding, was putting a green head on a red bird, too absorbed even to notice the onlookers.

"I think he'd be tickled pink."

She took a quarter from her purse, hesitated, then slipped it into her companion's hand.

"_You_ give it to him. I think he'd like it better."

"Oh, no; I don't think he'd like it at all. In fact, I doubt if he'd take it from me."

"Why not?"

"Well, you see," explained Julien blandly, "we're rather intimately connected." He raised his voice. "Hello, Dad!"

The decorator furled his tongue, lifted his head, changed his crayon, replied, "Hello, Lad," and continued his work. "What d' you think of _that_?" he added, after a moment, triumphantly pointing a yellow crayon at the green-headed red-bird.

"Some parrot!" enthused Julien.

"T ain't a parrot. It's a nightingale," retorted the artist indignantly. "You black-and-white fellows never do understand color."

"It's a corker, anyway," said Julien. "Dad here's a--an art patron who wants to contribute to the cause."

The girl, whose face had become flushed and almost frightened, held out her quarter.

"I--I--don't know," she began. "I was interested in your picture and I thought--Mr. Tenney said--"

Peter Quick Banta took the coin with perfect dignity. "Thank you," said he. "There ain't much appreciation of art just at this season. But if you'll come down to Coney about June, I'll show you some sand-modeling that _is_ sand-modeling--'s much as five dollars a day I've taken in there."

Miss Holland recovered her social poise.

"I'd like to very much," she said cheerfully.

She and Julien walked on in silence. Suddenly he laughed, a little jarringly. "Well," he said, "does that help you to place me?"

"I'm not trying to place you," she answered.

"Is that quite true?" he mocked.

"No; it isn't. It's a downright lie," said Bobbie finding courage to raise her eyes to his.

"And now, I suppose, I shall be 'my good man' or something like that, to you."

"Do you think it likely?"

"You called MacLachan that, you know," he reminded her.

"Long ago. When I was--when I didn't understand Our Square."

"And now, of course, our every feeling and thought is an open book to your penetrating vision."

Her lip quivered. "I don't know why you should want to be so hateful to me."

For a flashing second his eyes answered that appeal with a look that thrilled and daunted her. "To keep from being something else that I've no right to be," he muttered.

"How many more sittings do you think it will take to finish the picture?" she asked, striving to get on safer ground.

"Only one or two, I suppose," he answered morosely.

Such was Julien's condition of mind after the last sitting that he actually left the precious portrait unguarded by neglecting to lock the door of the studio on going out, and the Bonnie Lassie and I, happening in, beheld it in its fulfillment. A slow flush burned its way upward in the Bonnie Lassie's face as she studied it.

"He's done it!" she exclaimed. "Flower and flame! Why did I ever take to sculpture? One can't get that in the metal."

"He's done it," I echoed.

"Of course, technically, it's rather a sloppy picture."

"It's a glorious picture!" I cried.

"Naturally that," returned the exasperating critic. "It always will be--when you paint with your heart's blood."

"Do you think your friend Bobbie appreciates the medium in which she's presented?"

"If she doesn't--which she probably does," said the Bonnie Lassie, "she will find out something to her advantage when she sees me to-morrow. I'm going home to 'phone her."

In answer to the summons, Bobbie came. She looked, I thought, as I saw her from my bench, troubled and perplexed and softened, and glowingly lovely. At the door of the Bonnie Lassie's house she was met with the challenge direct.

"What have you been doing to my artistic ward?"

"Nothing," replied Bobbie with unwonted meekness, and to prove it related the incidents of the touring-car, the supper at the Taverne Splendide, and the encounter with the paternal colorist.

"That isn't Julien's father," said the sculptress. "He's only an adoptive father. But Julien adores him, as he ought to. The real father, so I've heard, was a French gentleman--"

"I don't care who his father was!" cried Bobbie. (The Bonnie Lassie's face took on the expression of an exclamation point.) "I can't bear to think of his having to do servant's work. And I told him so yesterday."

"Did you look like that while you were telling him?"

"Like what? I suppose so."

"And what did he do?"

"Do? He didn't do anything."

"Then," pronounced the Bonnie Lassie, "he's a stick of wood--hardwood--with a knot-hole for a heart."

"He isn't! Well, perhaps he is. He was very horrid at the last."

"About what?"

"About taking money."

"I'm a prophetess! And you're a patroness. Born in us, I suppose. You did try to give him money."

"Just to loan it. Enough so that he could go away to study and paint. He wouldn't even let me do that; so I--I--I offered to buy the picture of me, and he said--he said--Cecily, do you think he's sometimes a little queer in his head?"

"Not in the head, necessarily. What did he say?"

"He said he'd bought it himself at the highest price ever paid. And he said it so obstinately that I saw it was no use, so I just told him that I hoped I'd see him when I came back--"

"Back from where? Are you going away?"

"Yes; didn't I tell you? On a three months' cruise."

"Had you told him that?"

"Of course. That's when I tried to get him to take the money. Cecily--" The girl's voice shook a little. "You'll tell him, won't you, that he must keep on painting?"

"Why? Doesn't he intend to?"

"He said he'd painted himself out and he didn't think he'd ever look at color again."

"He will," said the Bonnie Lassie wisely and comfortably. "Grief is just as driving a taskmaster as lo--as other emotions."

"Grief!" The girl's color ebbed. "Cecily! You don't think I've hurt him?"

The Bonnie Lassie caught her in a sudden hug.

"Bobbie, do you know what I'd do in your place?"

"No. What?"

"I'd go right--straight--back to Julien Tenney's studio." She paused impressively.

"Yes?" said the other faintly.

"And I'd walk right--straight--up to Julien Tenney--" Another pause, even more impressive.

"I d-d-don't think I'd--he'd--"

"And I'd say to him: 'Julien, will you marry me?' Like that."

"Oh!" said Bobbie in outraged amazement.

"And maybe--" continued the Bonnie Lassie judicially: "maybe I'd kiss him. Yes. I think I would."

Suddenly all the bright softness of Bobbie's large eyes dissolved in tears. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she sobbed.

"You won't be ashamed of yourself," prophesied the other, "if you do just as I say, quickly and naturally."

"Oh, naturally," retorted the girl in an indignant whimper. "I suppose you think that's natural. Anyway, he probably doesn't care about me at all that way."

"Roberta," said the sculptress sternly, "did you see his portrait of you?"

"Y-y-yes."

"And you have the presumption to say that he doesn't care? Why, that picture doesn't simply tell his secret. It yells it!"

"I don't care," said the hard-pressed Bobbie. "It hasn't yelled it to me. Nobody's yelled it to me. And I c-c-can't ask a m-m-man to--to--"

"Perhaps you can't," allowed her adviser magnanimously. "On second thought, it won't be necessary. You just go back--after powdering your nose a little--and say that you've come to see the picture once more, or that it's a fine day, or that competition is the life of trade, or that--oh, anything! And, if he doesn't do the rest, I'll kill and eat him."

"But, Cecily--"

"You would be a patroness of Art. Now I've given you something real to patronize. Don't you dare fail me." Suddenly the speaker gave herself

over to an access of mirth. "Heaven help that young man when he comes to own up."

"Own up to what?"

"Never mind."

Having consumed a vain and repetitious half-hour in variations upon her query, Bobbie gave it up and decided to find out for herself. It was curiosity and curiosity alone (so she assured herself) that impelled her to return for the last time (she assured herself of that, also) to the attic.

A voice raised in vehement protest, echoing through the open door of the studio, checked her on the landing below as she mounted.

"And you're actually going to let thirty-five thousand a year slip through your fingers, just to pursue a fad?"

To which Julien's equable accents replied:

"That's it, Merrill. I'm going to paint."

The unseen Merrill left a blessing (of a sort) behind, slammed the door upon it, and materialized to the vision of the girl on the landing as an energetic and spruce-looking man of forty-odd, with a harassed expression. At need, Miss Holland could summon considerable decisiveness to her aid.

"Would you think me inexcusably rude," she said softly, "if I asked who you are?"

The descending man snatched off his hat, stared, seemed on the point of whistling, then, recovering himself, said courteously: "I'm George Merrill, advertising manager for the Criterion Clothing Company."

"And Mr. Tenney has been doing drawings for you?"

"He has. For several years."

"So that," said the girl, half to herself, "is his pot-boiling."

"Not a very complimentary term," commented Mr. Merrill, "for the best black-and-white work being done in New York to-day. Between my concern and two others he makes a railroad president's income out of it."

"Yes, I overheard what you said to him. Thank you so much."

"In return, may I ask you something?"

"Certainly."

"Will you not, for his own good, dissuade Mr. Tenney from throwing away his career?"

"Why should you suppose me to have any influence with Mr. Tenney?"

Mr. Merrill's face was grave, as befitted the issue, but a twinkle appeared at the corner of his glasses. "I've seen the portrait," he replied, and with a bow, went on his way.

Julien opened the door to her knock. She stepped inside, facing him with bright, inscrutable eyes.

"Why have you been fooling me about your circumstances?" she demanded.

"D---n Merrill!" said Julien with fervor.

"It's true that your 'pot-boiling' brings you a big income?"

"Yes."

"Then why do you take employment as a chauffeur?"

"I don't. That car belongs to me."

"And your being a waiter? I don't suppose the Taverne Splendide belongs to you?"

"An impromptu bit of acting," confessed the abashed Julien.

"And this attic? Was that hired for the same comedy?"

"No. This is mine, really."

"I don't understand. Why have you done it all?"

"If you want to know the truth," he said defiantly, "so that I could keep on seeing you."

"That's a very poor excuse," she retorted.

"The best in the world. As a successful commercial artist, what possible interest would you have taken in me? You took me for a struggling young painter--that was the Bonnie Lassie's fault, for I never lied to you about it--and after we'd started on that track I didn't--well, I didn't have the courage to risk losing you by quitting the masquerade."

"How you must have laughed at me all the time!"

He flushed to his angry eyes. "Do you think that is fair?" he retorted. "Or kind? Or true?"

"I--I don't know," she faltered. "You let me offer you money. And you've probably got as much as I have."

"I won't have from now on, then. I'm going to paint. I thought, when you told me you were going away, that I couldn't look at a canvas again. But now I know I was wrong. I've got to paint. You'll have left me that, at least."

"Mr. Merrill thinks you're ruining your career. And if you do, it'll be my fault. I'll never, never, never," said the patroness of Art desolately, "try to do any one good again!"

She turned toward the door.

"At least," said Julien in a voice which threatened to get out of control, "you'll know that it wasn't all masquerade. You'll know why I'll always keep the picture, even if I never paint another."

She stole a look at him over her shoulder and, with a thrill, saw the

passion in his eyes and the pride that withheld him from speaking.

"Suppose," she said, "I asked you to give it up."

"You wouldn't," he retorted quickly.

"No, I wouldn't. But--but--" Her glance, wandering away from him, fell on the joyous line of Beranger bold above the door.

"How good is life in an attic at twenty," she murmured. Then, turning to him, she held out her hands.

"I could find it good," she said with a soft little falter in her voice, "even at twenty-two."

Everything passes in review before my bench, sooner or later. The two, going by with transfigured faces, stopped.

"Let's tell Dominie," said Julien.

I waved a jaunty hand. "I know already," said I, "even if it hadn't been announced to a waiting world."

"Wh-wh-why," stammered Bobbie with a blush worth a man's waiting a lifetime to see, "it--it only just happened."

"Bless your dear, innocent hearts, both of you! It's been happening for weeks. Come with me."

I lead them to the sidewalk fronting Thorsen's Elite Restaurant. There stood Peter Quick Banta, admiring his latest masterpiece of imaginative symbolism. It represented a love-bird of eagle size holding in its powerful beak a scroll with a wreath of forget-me-nots on one end and of orange-blossoms on the other, encircling respectively the initials. "J.T." and "R.H." Below, in no less than four colors, ran the legend, "Cupid's Token."

"O Lord! Dad!" cried the horrified Julien, scuffing it out with frantic feet. "How long has this been there?"

"What're you doing? Leave it be!" cried the anguished artist. "It's been there since noon."

"Never mind," put in Bobbie softly; "it's very pretty and tasteful even though it is a little precipitate. But how"--she turned the lovely and puzzled inquiry of her eyes upon the symbolist--"how did you know?"

"Artistic intuition," said Peter Quick Banta with profound complacency. "_I'm_ an artist."

THE HOUSE OF SILVERY VOICES

Wayfarers on the far side of Our Square used to stop before Number 37 and wonder. The little house, it seemed, was making music at them.

"Kleam, kleam, kleam, kleam," it would pipe pleasantly.

"BHONG! BHONG! BHONG!" solemn and churchly, in rebuke of its own levity.

"Kung-_glang_! Kung-_glang_! Kung-_glang_! Kung-_glang_! Kung-_glang_!"

That was a duet in the middle register.

Then from some far-off aerie would ring the tocsin of an elfin silversmith, fast, furious, and tiny:

"Ping-ping-ping-ping-ping-ping-ping-ping!"

We surmised that a retired Swiss bell-ringer had secluded himself in our remote backwater of the great city to mature fresh combinations of his art.

Before the Voices came, Number 37 was as quiet a house as any in the Square. Quieter than most, since it was vacant much of the time and the ceremonious sign of the Mordaunt Estate, "For Rental to Suitable Tenant," invited inspection. "Suitable" is the catch in that innocent-appearing legend. For the Mordaunt Estate, which is no estate at all and never has been, but an ex-butcher of elegant proclivities named Wagboom, prefers to rent its properties on a basis of prejudice rather than profit, and is quite capable of rejecting an applicant as unsuitable on purely eclectic grounds, such as garlic for breakfast, or a glass eye.

How the new tenant had contrived to commend himself to Mr. Mordaunt-Wagboom is something of a mystery. Probably it was his name rather than his appearance, which was shiny, not to say seedy. He encountered the Estate when that incorporated gentleman was engaged in painting the front door, and, in a deprecating voice, inquired whether twenty-five dollars a month would be considered.

"Maybe," returned the Estate, whereupon the stranger introduced himself, with a stiff little bow, as Mr. Winslow Merivale.

Mr. Wagboom was favorably impressed with this, as possessing aristocratic implications.

"The name," he pronounced, "is satisfactory. The sum is satisfactory. It is, however, essential that the lessor should measure up in character and status to the standards of the Mordaunt Estate." This he had adapted from the prospectus of a correspondence school, which had come to him through the mail, very genteelly worded. "Family man?" he added briskly.

"Yes, sir."

"How many of you?"

"Two."

"Wife?"

"No, sir," said the little man, very low.

"Son? Daughter? What age?"

"I have never been blessed with a child."

"Then who--"

"Willy Woolly would share the house with me, sir."

For the first time the Mordaunt Estate noticed a small, fluffy poodle, with an important expression, seated behind the railing.

"I don't like dogs," said the Mordaunt Estate curtly.

"Willy Woolly"--Mr. Winslow Merivale addressed his companion--"this gentleman does not like dogs."

The Mordaunt Estate felt suddenly convicted of social error. The feeling deepened when Willy Woolly advanced, reckoned him up with an appraising eye, and, without the slightest loss of dignity, raised himself on his hind legs, offering the gesture of supplication. He did not, however, droop his paws in the accepted canine style; he joined them, finger tip to finger tip, elegantly and piously, after the manner of the Maiden's Prayer.

The Estate promptly capitulated.

"Some pup!" he exclaimed. "When did you want to move in?"

"At once, if you please."

Before the Estate had finished his artistic improvements on the front door, the new tenant had begun the transfer of his simple lares and penates in a big hand-propelled pushcart. The initial load consisted in the usual implements of eating, sitting, and sleeping. But the burden of the half-dozen succeeding trips was homogeneous. Clocks. Big clocks, little clocks, old clocks, new clocks, fat clocks, lean clocks, solemn clocks, fussy clocks, clocks of red, of green, of brown, of pink, of white, of orange, of blue, clocks that sang, and clocks that rang, clocks that whistled, and blared, and piped, and drummed. One by one, the owner established them in their new domicile, adjusted them, dusted them, and wound them, and, as they set themselves once more to their meticulous busy-ness, that place which had for so long been muffled in quiet and deadened with dust, gave forth the tiny bustle of unresting mechanism and the pleasant chime of the hours. Number 37 became the House of Silvery Voices.

* * * * *

Thus came to Our Square, to be one of us, for better or for worse, Mr. Winslow Merivale, promptly rechristened Stepfather Time. The Bonnie Lassie gave him the name. She said that only a stepfather could bring up his charges so badly. For his clocks were both independent and irresponsible, though through no fault of their own. When they were wound they went. When they were unwound they rested. Seldom were more than half of them simultaneously busy, and their differences of opinion as to the hour were radical and irreconcilable. The big, emphatic eight-day, opposite the front door, might proclaim that it was eleven, only to be at once contradicted by the little tinkler on the parlor mantel, which announced that it was six, thereby starting up the cathedral case on the stairway and the Grandfather in the dining-room, who held out respectively for eight and two, while all the time it was really half-past one. Thence arose in the early days painful misunderstandings on the part of Our Square, for we are a simple people and deem it the duty of a timepiece to keep time. In particular we were befooled by Grandfather, the solemn-voiced Ananias of a clock with a long-range stroke and a most convincing manner. So that Schepstein, the note-shaver, on his way to a profitable appointment at 11 A.M., heard the hour strike (thirty-five minutes in advance of the best professional opinion) from the House of Silvery Voices, and was impelled to the recklessness of hiring a passing taxi, thereby reaching his destination with half an hour to spare and half a dollar to lack, for which latter

he threatened to sue the Mordaunt Estate's tenant. To the credit side of the house's account it must be set down that MacLachan, the tailor, having started one of his disastrous drunks within the precincts of his Home of Fashion, was on his way to finish it in the gutter via the zigzag route from corner saloon to corner saloon, when the Twelve Apostles clock in the basement window lifted up its voice and (presumably through the influence of Peter) thrice denied the hour, which was actually a quarter before midnight. "Losh!" said MacLachan, who invariably reacted in tongue to the stimulus of Scotch whiskey, "they'll a' be closed. Hame an' to bed wi' ye, waster of the priceless hours!" And back he staggered to sleep it off.

Then there was the disastrous case of the Little Red Doctor, who set out to attend a highly interesting consultation at 4 P.M. and, hearing Grandfather Ananias strike three, erroneously concluded that he had spare time to stop in for a peek at Madame Tallafferr's gout (which was really vanity in the guise of tight shoes), and reached the hospital, only to find it all over and the patient dead.

"It's an outrage," declared the Little Red Doctor fiercely, "that an old lunatic can move in here from God-knows-where in a pushcart and play merry hell with a hard-working practitioner's professional duties. And you're the one to tell him so, Dominie. You're the diplomat of the Square."

He even inveigled the Bonnie Lassie into backing him up in this preposterous proposal. She had her own grievance against the House of Silvery Voices.

"It isn't the way it plays tricks on time alone," said she. "There's one clock in there that's worse than conscience."

And she brought her indictment against a raucous timepiece which was wont to lead up to its striking with a long, preliminary clack-and-whirr, alleging that twice, when she had quit her sculpting early because the clay was obdurate and wouldn't come right, and had gone for a walk to clear her vision, the clock had accosted her in these unjustifiable terms:

"Clacketty-whirr-rr-rr! Back-to-yer-worr-rr-rrk! Yerr-rr-rr-rr _wrong! wrong! wrong! wrong!"_

"Wherefore," said the Bonnie Lassie, "your appellant prays that you be a dear, good, stern, forbidding Dominie and go over to Number 37 and ask him what he means by it, anyway, and tell him he's got to stop it."

Now, the Bonnie Lassie holds the power of the high, the middle, and the low justice over all Our Square by the divine right of loveliness and kindness. So that evening I went while the Little Red Doctor, as a self-constituted Committee in Waiting, sat on my bench. Stepfather Time himself opened the door to me.

"What might they call you, sir, if I may ask?" he inquired with timid courtesy.

"They might call me the Dominie hereabouts. And they do."

"I have heard of you." He motioned me to a seat in the bare little room, alive with tickings and clickings. "You have lived long here, sir?"

"Long."

From some interminable distance a voice of time mocked me with a subtle and solemn mockery: "_Long. Long. Long_."

My host waited for the clock to finish before he spoke again. As I afterward discovered, this was his invariable custom.

"I, too, am an old man," he murmured.

"A hardy sixty, I should guess."

"A long life. Might I ask you a question, sir,' as to the folk in this Square?" He hesitated a moment after I had nodded. "Are they, as one might say, friendly? Neighborly?"

I was a little taken aback. "We are not an intrusive people."

"No one," he said, "has been to see my clocks."

I began to perceive that this was a sad little man, and to dislike my errand. "You live here quite alone?" I asked.

"Oh, no!" said he quickly. "You see, I have Willy Woolly. Pardon me. I have not yet presented him."

At his call the fluffy poodle ambled over to me, sniffed at my extended hand, and, rearing, set his paws on my knee.

"He greets you as a friend," said my new acquaintance in a tone which indicated that I had been signally honored. "I trust that we shall see you here often, Mr. Dominie. Would you like to inspect my collection now?"

Here was my opening. "The fact is--" I began, and stopped from sheer cowardice. The job was too distasteful. To wound that gentle pride in his possessions which was obviously the life of the singular being before me--I couldn't do it. "The fact is," I repeated, "I--I have a friend outside waiting for me. The Little Red Doctor--er--Dr. Smith, you know."

"A physician?" he said eagerly. "Would he come in, do you think? Willy Woolly has been quite feverish to-day."

"I'll ask him," I replied, and escaped with that excuse.

When I broke it to the Little Red Doctor, the mildest thing he said to me was to ask me why I should take him for a dash-binged vet!

Appeals to his curiosity finally overpersuaded him, and now it was my turn to wait on the bench while he invaded the realm of the Voices. Happily for me the weather was amiable; it was nearly two hours before my substitute reappeared. He then tried to sneak away without seeing me. Balked in this cowardly endeavor, he put on a vague professional expression and observed that it was an obscure case.

"For a man of sixty," I began, "Mr. Merivale--"

"_Who_?" interrupted the Little Red Doctor; "I'm speaking of the dog."

"Have you, then," I inquired in insinuating accents, "become a dash-binged vet?"

"A man can't be a brute, can he!" he retorted angrily. "When that animated mop put up his paws and stuck his tongue out like a child--"

"I know," I said. "You took on a new patient. Probably gratis," I added, with malice, for this was one of the Little Red Doctor's notoriously weak points.

"Just the same, he's a fool dog."

"On the contrary, he is a person of commanding intellect and nice social discrimination," I asserted, recalling Willy Woolly's flattering acceptance of myself.

"A faker," asseverated my friend. "He pretends to see things."

I sat up straight on my bench. "Things? What kind of things?"

"Things that aren't there," returned the Little Red Doctor, and fell to musing. "They couldn't be," he added presently and argumentatively.

Receiving no encouragement when I sought further details, I asked whether he had called the new resident to account for the delinquencies of his clocks. He shook his head.

"I didn't have time," said he doggedly.

"Time? Why, there's nothing but time in that house."

The Little Red Doctor chose to take my feeble joke at par. "No time at all. None of the clocks keep it."

"How does he manage his life, then?"

"Willy Woolly does that for him. Barks him up in the morning. Jogs his elbow at mealtimes. Tucks him in bed at night, for all I know."

Thus abortively ended Our Square's protest against Stepfather Time and his House of Silvery Voices. The Little Red Doctor's obscure suggestion stuck in my mind, and a few nights later I made a second call. Curiosity rather than neighborliness was the inciting cause. Therefore I ought to have been embarrassed at the quiet warmth of my reception by both of the tenants. Interrupting himself in the work of adjusting a new acquisition's mechanism, Stepfather Time settled me into the most comfortable chair and immediately began to talk of clocks.

Good talk, it was; quaint and flavorful and erudite. But my attention kept wandering to Willy Woolly, who, after politely kissing my hand, had settled down behind his master's chair. Willy Woolly was seeing things. No pretense about it. His mournful eyes yearned hither and thither, following some entity that moved in the room, dimmer than darkness, more ethereal than shadow. His ears quivered. A muffled, measured thumping sounded, dull and indeterminate like spirit rapping; it took me an appreciable time to identify it as the noise of the poodle's tail, beating the floor. Once he whined, a quick, quivering, eager note. And still the amateur of clocks murmured his placid lore. It was rather more than old nerves could stand.

"The dog," I broke in upon the stream of erudition. "Surely, Mr. Merivale--"

"Willy Woolly?" He looked down, and the faithful one withdrew himself from his vision long enough to lick the master hand. "Does he disturb you?"

"Oh, no," I answered, a little confused. "I only thought--it seemed that he is uneasy about something."

"There are finer sensibilities than we poor humans have," said my host gravely.

"Then you have noticed how he watches and follows?"

"He is always like that. Always, since."

His "since" was one of the strangest syllables that ever came to my ears. It implied nothing to follow. It was finality's self.

"It is"--I sought a word--"interesting and curious," I concluded lamely, feeling how insufficient the word was.

"She comes back to him," said my host simply.

No need to ask of whom he spoke. The pronoun was as final and definitive as his "since." Never have I heard such tenderness as he gave to its utterance. Nor such desolation as dimmed his voice when he added:

"She never comes back to me."

That evening he spoke no more of her. Yet I felt that I had been admitted to an intimacy. And, as the habit grew upon me thereafter of dropping in to listen to the remote, restful, unworldly quaintnesses of his philosophy, fragments, dropped here and there, built up the outline of the tragedy which had left him stranded in our little backwater of quiet. She whom he had cherished since they were boy and girl together, had died in the previous winter. She had formed the whole circle of his existence within which he moved, attended by Willy Woolly, happily gathering his troves. Her death had left him not so much alone as alien in the world. He was without companionship except that of Willy Woolly, without interest except that of his timepieces, and without hope except that of rejoining her. Once he emerged from a long spell of musing, to say in a tone of indescribable conviction:

"I suppose I was the happiest man in the world."

Any chance incident or remark might turn his thought and speech, unconscious of the transition, from his favorite technicalities back to the past. Some comment of mine upon a specimen of that dismal songster, the cuckoo clock, which stood on his mantel, had started him into one of his learned expositions.

"The first cuckoo clock, as you are doubtless aware, sir"--he was always scrupulous to assume knowledge on the part of his hearer, no matter how abstruse or technical the subject; it was a phase of his inherent courtesy--"was intended to represent not the cuckoo, but the blackbird. It had a double pipe for the hours, 'Pit-weep! Pit-weep!' and a single--"

His voice trailed into silence as the mechanical bird of his own collection popped forth and piped its wooden lay. Willy Woolly pattered over, sat down before it, and, gazing through and beyond the meaningless face with eyes of adoration whose purport there was no mistaking,

whined lovingly.

"When the cuckoo sounded," continued the collector without the slightest change of intonation, "she used to imitate it to puzzle Willy Woolly. A merry heart! ... All was so still after it stopped beating. The clocks forgot to strike."

The poodle, turning his absorbed regard from the Presence that moves beyond time and its perishing voices, trotted to his master and nuzzled the frail hand.

The hand fondled him. "Yes, little dog," murmured the man. His eyes, sad as those of the animal, quested the dimness.

"Why does she come to him and not to me? He loved her dearly, didn't you, little dog? But not as I did." There was a quivering note of jealousy in his voice. "Why is my vision blinded to what he sees?"

"You have said yourself that there are finer sensibilities than ours," I suggested.

He shook his head. "It lies deeper than that. I think he is drawing near her. He used to have a little bark that he kept for her alone. In the dead of night I have heard him give that bark--since. And I knew that she was speaking to him. I think that he will go first. Perhaps he will tell her that I am coming.... But I should be very lonely."

"Willy's a stout young thing," I asserted, "with years of life before him."

"Perhaps," he returned doubtfully. A gleam of rare fun lit up his pale, vague eyes. "Can't you see him dodging past Saint Peter through the pearly gates" ("I was brought up a Methodist," he added in apologetic explanation), "trotting along the alabaster streets sniffing about for her among all the Shining Ones, listening for her voice amid the sound of the harps, and when he finds her, hallelujahing with that little bark that was for her alone: 'Here I am, mistress! Here I am! And _he's_ coming soon, mistress. Your Old Boy is coming soon.'"

When I retailed that conversation to the Little Red Doctor, he snorted and said that Stepfather Time was one degree crazier than Willy Woolly and that I wasn't much better than a higher moron myself. Well, if I've got to be called a fool by my best friends, I'd rather be called it in Greek than in English. It's more euphonious.

* * * * *

The pair in Number 37 soon settled down to a routine life. Every morning Stepfather Time got out his big pushcart and set forth in search of treasure, accompanied by Willy Woolly. Sometimes the dog trotted beneath the cart; sometimes he rode in it. He was always on the job. Never did he indulge in those divagations so dear to the normal canine heart. Other dogs and their ways interested him not. Cats simply did not exist in his circumscribed life. Even to the shining mark of a boy on a bicycle he was indifferent, and when a dog has reached that stage one may safely say of him that he has renounced the world and all its vanities. Willy Woolly's one concern in life was his master and their joint business.

Soon they became accepted familiars of Our Square. Despite the general conviction that they were slightly touched, we even became proud of

them. They lent distinction to the locality by getting written up in a Sunday supplement, Willy Woolly being specially photographed therefor, a gleam of transient glory, which, however it may have gratified our local pride, left both of the subjects quite indifferent. Stepfather Time might have paid more heed to it had he not, at the time, been wholly preoccupied in a difficult quest.

In a basement window, far over on Avenue D, stood an old and battered timepiece of which Stepfather Time had heard the voice but never seen the face. Each of three attempts to investigate with a view to negotiations had been frustrated by a crabbed and violent-looking man with a repellent club. Nevertheless, the voice alone had ensnared the connoisseur; it was, by the test of the pipe which he carried on all his quests, D in alt, and would thus complete the major chord of a chime which he had long been building up. (She had loved, best of all, harmonic combinations of the clock bells.) Every day he would halt in front of the place and wait to hear it strike, and its owner would peer out from behind it and shake a wasted fist and curse him with strange, hoarse foreign oaths, while Willy Woolly tugged at his trouser leg and urged him to pass on from that unchancy spot. All that he could learn about the basement dweller was that his name was Lukisch and he owed for his rent.

Mr. Lukisch had nothing special against the queer old party who made sheep's eyes at his clock every day. He hated him quite impartially, as he hated everybody. Mr. Lukisch had a bad heart in more senses than one, and a grudge against the world which he blamed for the badness of his heart. Also he had definite ideas of reprisal, which were focused by a dispossess notice, and directed particularly upon the person and property of his landlord. The clock he needed as the instrument of his vengeance; therefore he would not have sold it at any price to the sheep-eyed old lunatic of the pushcart, who now, on the eve of his eviction, stood gazing in with wistful contemplation. Presently he passed on and Mr. Lukisch resumed his tinkering with the clock's insides. He was very delicate and careful about it, for these were the final touches, preparatory to his leaving the timepiece as a memento when he should quietly depart that evening, shortly before nine. What might happen after nine, or, rather, on the stroke of nine, was no worry of his, though it might be and probably would be of the landlord's, provided that heartless extortioner survived it.

Having completed his operations, Mr. Lukisch sat down in a rickety chair and gazed at the clock, face to face, with contemplative satisfaction. Stepfather Time would have been interested in the contrast between those two physiognomies. The clock's face, benign and bland, would have deceived him. But, innocent though he was in the ways of evil, the man's face might have warned him.

Something within the clock's mechanism clicked and checked and went on again. The sound, quite unexpected, gave Mr. Lukisch a bad start. Could something have gone wrong with the combination? Suppose a premature release.... At that panic thought something within Mr. Lukisch's bad heart clicked and checked and did not go on again. The fear in his eyes faded and was succeeded by an expression of surprise and inquiry. Whether the inquiry was answered, nobody could have guessed from the still, unwinking regard on the face of the victim of heart failure.

By and by a crowd gathered on the sidewalk, drawn by that mysterious instinct for sensation which attracts the casual and the idle. Two bold spirits entered the door and stood, hesitant, just inside, awed because the clock seemed so startlingly alive in that place. Some one sent

upstairs for the landlord, who arrived to bemoan the unjust fates which had not only mulcted him of two months' rent with nothing to show for it but a rickety clock, but had also saddled him with a wholly superfluous corpse. He abused both indiscriminately, but chiefly the clock because it gave the effect of being sentient. So fervently did he curse it that Stepfather Time, repassing with Willy Woolly, heard him and entered.

"And who"--the landlord addressed high Heaven with a gesture at once pious and pessimistic--"is to pay me fourteen dollars back rent this dirty beggar owes?"

"The man," said Stepfather Time gently, "is dead."

"He is." The landlord confirmed the unwelcome fact with objurgations. "Now must come the po-liss, the coroner, trouble, and expense. And what have I who run my property honest and respectable got to pay for it? Some rags and a bum clock."

Willy Woolly sniffed at one protruding foot and growled. Dead or alive, this was not Willy Woolly's kind of man. "Now, now, Willy Woolly!" reproved his master. "Who are we that we should judge him?"

"But I don't like him," declared Willy Woolly in unequivocal dog language.

"I think from his face that he has suffered much," said the gentle collector, wise in human pain.

"Me; I suppose I don't suffer!" pointed out the landlord vehemently. "Fourteen dollars out. Two months' rent. A bum clock."

He kicked the shabby case which whizzed and birred and struck five. The voice of its bell, measured and mellow and pure, was unquestionably D in alt.

"My dear sir," said Stepfather Time urbanely, but quivering underneath his calm manner with the hot eagerness of the chase, "I will buy your clock."

A gust of rough laughter passed through the crowd. The injurious word "nut" floated in the air, and was followed by "Verrichter." The landlord took thought and hope.

"It is a very fine clock," he declared.

"It is a bum clock," Stepfather Time reminded him mildly.

"Stepnadel, the auctioneer, would pay me much money for it."

"I will pay you much money for it."

"How much?"

"Seven dollars. That is one month's rent that he owed."

"Two months' rent I must have."

"One," said Stepfather Time firmly.

"Two," said the landlord insistently.

"Urff! Grr--rr--rr--rfff!" said Willy Woolly in emphatic dissuasion.

Stepfather Time was scandalized. Expert opinion was quite outside of Willy Woolly's province. Only once in the course of their years together had he interfered in a purchase. Justice compelled Stepfather Time to recall that the subject of Willy's protests on that occasion had subsequently turned out to be far less antique than the worm holes in the woodwork (artificially blown in with powder) would have led the unsuspecting to suppose. But about the present legacy there could be no such question. It was genuine. It was old. It was valuable. It possessed a seraphic note pitched true to the long-desired chord.

Extracting a ten-dollar note from his wallet, Stepfather Time waved it beneath the landlord's wrinkled and covetous nose. The landlord capitulated. Willy Woolly, sniffing at the clock with fur abristle, lifted up his voice and wailed. Perhaps his delicate nose had already detected the faint, unhallowed odor of the chemicals within. He stubbornly refused to ride back in the cart with the new acquisition, and was accused of being sulky and childish.

* * * * *

The relic of the late unlamented Lukisch was temporarily installed in a high chair before the open window giving on the areaway of Number 37. There it briefly beamed upon the busy life of Our Square with its bland and hypocritical face, and there, thrice and no more, it sounded the passing of the hours with its sweet and false voice, biding the stroke of nine. Meantime Willy Woolly settled down to keep watch on it and could not be moved from that duty. Every time it struck the half he growled. At the hour he barked and raged. When Stepfather Time sought to draw him away to dinner he committed the unpardonable sin of dog-dom, he snarled at his master. Turning this strange manifestation over in his troubled mind, the collector decided that Willy Woolly must be ill, and therefore that evening went to seek the Little Red Doctor and his wisdom.

Together they came across the park space opposite the House of Silvery Voices in time to witness the final scene.

The new clock struck the half after eight as they reached the turn in the path. A long, quavering howl, mingled of rage and desperation, answered in Willy Woolly's voice.

"You hear?" said Stepfather Time anxiously to the Little Red Doctor. "The dog is not himself."

They saw him rear up against the clock case. He seemed to be trying to tear it open with his teeth.

"Willy!" cried his master in a tone such as, I suppose, the well-loved companion had not heard twice before in his life. "Down, Willy!"

The dog drooped back. But it was not in obedience. For once he disregarded the master's command. Perhaps he did not even hear it in the absorption of his dread and rage. Step by step he withdrew, then rushed and launched himself straight at the timepiece. Slight though his bulk was, the impetus of the charge did the work. The clock reeled, toppled, and fell outward through the window; then--

From the House of Silvery Voices rose a roar that smote the heavens. A roar and a belch of flame and a spreading, poisonous stench that struck

the two men in the park to earth. When they struggled to their feet again, the smoke had parted and the House of Silvery Voices gaped open, its front wall stripped bodily away. But within, the sound of the busy industry of time went on uninterrupted.

Weaving and wobbling on his feet, Stepfather Time staggered toward the pot calling on the name of Willy Woolly. At the gate he stopped, put forth his hand, and lifted from the railing a wopsy, woolly fragment, no bigger than a sheet of note paper. It was red and warm and wet.

"He's gone," said Stepfather Time.

The Clock of Conscience took up the tale. "Gone. Gone. Gone," it pealed.

As the collector would not leave the shattered house, they sent for me to stay the night with him. A strange vigil! For now it was the man who followed with intent, unworldly eyes that which I, with my lesser vision, could not discern. And the Unseen moved swiftly about the desolate room, low to the floor, and seemed finally to stop, motionless beneath a caressing hand. I thought to hear that dull, measured thumping of a grateful tail, but it was only the Twelve Apostles getting ready to strike.

Only once that night did Stepfather Time speak, and then not to me.

"Tell her," he said in an assured murmur, "that I shan't be long."

"Not-long. Not-long. Not-long. Not-long. Not-long," confirmed Grandfather from his stance on the stairway.

In that assurance Stepfather Time fell asleep. He did not go out again with his pushcart, but sat in the rear room while the Mordaunt Estate in person superintended the job of putting a new front on the house.

The night after it was finished I received an urgent telephone call to come there at once. At the entrance I met the Little Red Doctor coming out.

"The clocks have stopped," said he gently.

So I turned to cross the park with him.

"I shall certify," said he, "heart disease."

"You may certify what you please," said I. "But what do you believe?"

The Little Red Doctor, who prides himself on being a hard-bitted materialist, glared at me as injuriously as if my innocent question had been an insult.

"I don't believe it!" he averred violently. "Do you take me for a sentimental idiot that I should pin silly labels on my old friend, Death?" His expression underwent a curious change. "But I never saw such joy on any living face," he muttered under his breath.

* * * * *

The House of Silvery Voices is silent now. But its echo still lives and makes music in Our Square. For, with the proceeds of Stepfather Time's clocks, an astounding total, we have built a miniature clock tower facing Number 37, with a silvery voice of its own, for memory. The

Bonnie Lassie designed the tower, and because there is love and understanding in all that the Bonnie Lassie sets her wonder-working hand to, it is as beautiful as it is simple. Among ourselves we call it the Tower of the Two Faithful Hearts.

The silvery voice within it is the product of a paragon among timepieces, a most superior instrument, of unimpeachable construction and great cost. But it has one invincible peculiarity, the despair of the best consulting experts who have been called in to remedy it and, one and all, have failed for reasons which they cannot fathom. How should they!

It never keeps time.

HOME-SEEKERS' GOAL

Long ago I made an important discovery. It comes under the general head of statics and is this: by occupying an invariable bench in Our Square, looking venerable and contemplative and indigenous, as if you had grown up in that selfsame spot, you will draw people to come to you for information, and they will frequently give more than they get of it. Such, I am informed, is the method whereby the flytrap orchid achieves a satisfying meal. Not that I seek to claim for myself the colorful splendors of the Cypripedium, being only a tired old pedagogue with a taste for the sunlight and for observing the human bubbles that float and bob on the current in our remote eddy of life. Nevertheless, I can follow a worthy example, even though the exemplar be only a carnivorous bloom. And, I may confess, on the afternoon of October 1st, I was in a receptive mood for such flies of information as might come to me concerning two large invading vans which had rumbled into our quiet precincts and, after a pause for inquiry, stopped before the Mordaunt Estate's newly repaired property at Number 37.

The Mordaunt Estate in person was painting the front wall. The design which he practiced was based less upon any provisioned concept of art than upon the purchase, at a price, of a rainbow-end job lot of colors.

The vanners descended, bent on negotiations. Progress was obviously unsatisfactory, the artist, after brief and chill consideration, reverting to his toil. Now, tact and discretion are essential in approaching the Mordaunt Estate, for he is a prickly institution. I was sure that the newcomers had taken the wrong tack with him.

Discomfiture was in their mien as they withdrew in my direction. I mused upon my bench, with a metaphysical expression which I have found useful in such cases. They conferred. They approached. They begged my pardon. With an effort which can hardly have failed to be effective, I dragged myself back to the world of actualities and opened languid eyes upon them. It is possible that I opened them somewhat wider than the normal, for they fell at once upon the nearer and smaller of the pair, a butterfly of the most vivid and delightful appearance.

"Is the house with the 'To Let' sign on it really to let, do you know, sir?" she inquired, adding music to color with her voice.

"So I understand," said I, rising.

"And the party with the yellow nose, who is desecrating the front," put in the butterfly's companion. "Is he a lunatic or a designer of

barber poles?"

"He is a proud and reserved ex-butcher, named Wagboom, now doing a limited but high-class business in rentals as the Mordaunt Estate."

"He may be the butcher, but he talks more like the pig. All we could get out of him was a series of grunts when we addressed him by name."

"Ah, but you used the wrong name. For all business purposes he should be addressed as the Mordaunt Estate, his duly incorporated title. Wagboom is an irritant to a haughty property-owner's soul."

"Shall we go back and try a counter-irritant?" asked the young man of his companion.

"With a view to renting?" I inquired.

"Yes."

"Do you keep dogs?"

"No," said the young man.

"Or clocks by the hundred?"

"Certainly not," answered the butterfly.

"Or bombs?"

Upon their combined and emphatic negative they looked at each other with a wild surmise which said plainly: "Are they all crazy down here?"

"If you do," I explained kindly, "you might have trouble in dealing. The latest tenant of Number 37 was a fluffy poodle who pushed one of two hundred clocks into the front area so that it exploded and blew away the front wall." And I outlined the history of that canine clairvoyant, Willy Woolly. "The Mordaunt Estate is sensitive about his tenants, anyway. He rents, not on profits, but on prejudice. Perhaps it would be well for you to flatter him a little; admire his style of house painting."

Accepting this counsel with suitable expressions, they returned to the charge, addressed the proprietor of Number 37 by his official title and delivered the most gratifying opinions regarding his artistry.

"That," said the Mordaunt Estate, wiping his painty hands on his knees with brilliant results, as he turned a fat and smiling face to them, "is after the R. Noovo style. I dunno who R. Noovo was, but he's a bear for color. Are you artists?"

"We're house-hunters," explained the young man.

"As for tenants," said the Mordaunt Estate, "I take 'em or leave 'em as I like 'em or don't. I like you folks. You got an eye for a tasty bit of colorin'. Eight rooms, bath, and kitchen. By the week in case we don't suit each other. Very choice and classy for a young married couple. Eight dollars, in advance. Prices for R. Noovo dwellings has riz."

"We're not married," said the young man.

"Hey? Whaddye mean, not married?" demanded that highly respectable

institution, the Mordaunt Estate, severely. His expression mollified as he turned to the butterfly. "Aimin' to be, I s'pose."

"We only met this morning; so we haven't decided yet," answered the young man. "At least," he added blandly, as his companion seemed to be struggling for utterance, "she hasn't informed me of her decision, if she has made it."

Bewilderment spread like a gray mist across the painty features of the Mordaunt Estate. "Nothin' doin'," he began, "until--"

"Don't decide hastily," adjured the young man. "Take this coin." He forced a half-dollar into the reluctant hand of the decorator.

"Nothin' doin' on account, either. Pay as you enter."

"Only one of us is going to enter. The coin decides. Spin it. Your call," he said to the butterfly.

"Heads," cried the butterfly.

"Tails," proclaimed the arbiter, as the silver shivered into silence on the flagging.

"Then the house is yours," said the butterfly. "Good luck go with it." She smiled, gamely covering her disappointment.

"I don't want it," returned the young man.

"Play fair," she exhorted him. "We both agreed solemnly to stand by the toss. Didn't we?"

"What did we agree?"

"That the winner should have the choice."

"Very well. I won, didn't I?"

"You certainly did."

"And I choose not to take the house," he declared triumphantly. "It's a very nice house, but"--he shaded his eyes as he directed them upon the proud-pied facade, blinking significantly--"I'd have to wear smoked glasses if I lived in it, and they don't suit my style of beauty."

"You'd not get it now, young feller, if you was to go down on your knees with a thousand dollars in each hand," asserted the offended Estate.

"See!" said the young man to the butterfly. "Fate decides for you."

"But what will you do?" she asked solicitously.

"Perhaps I can find some other place in the Square."

She held out her hand. "You've been very nice and helpful, but--I think not. Good-bye."

He regarded the hand blankly. "Not--what?"

"Not here in this Square, if you don't mind."

"But where else is there?" he asked piteously. "You know yourself there are countless thousands of homeless drifters floating around on this teeming island in vans, with no place to land."

"Try Jersey. Or Brooklyn," was her hopeful suggestion.

"And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea,"

he quoted with dramatic intonation, adding helpfully: "Matthew Arnold. Or is it Arnold Bennett? Anyway, think how far away those places are," he pleaded. "From you!" he concluded.

A little decided frown crept between her eyebrows. "I've accepted you as a gentleman on trust," she began, when he broke in:

"Don't do it. It's a fearfully depressing thing to be reminded that you're a gentleman on trust and expected to live up to it. Think how it cramps one's style, not to mention limiting one's choice of real estate. A gentleman may stake his future happiness and his hope of a home on the toss of a coin, but he mustn't presume to want to see the other party to the gamble again, even if she's the only thing in the whole sweep of his horizon worth seeing. Is that fair? Where is Eternal Justice, I ask you, when such things--"

"Oh, do stop!" she implored. "I don't think you're sane."

"No such claim is put forth on behalf of the accused. He confesses to complete loss of mental equilibrium since--let me see--since 11.15 A.M."

Here the Mordaunt Estate, who had been doing some shrewd thinking on his own behalf, interposed.

"I'd rather rent to two than one," he said insinuatingly. "More reliable and steady with the rent. Settin' aside the young feller's weak eyes, you're a nice-matched pair. Gittin' a license is easy, if you know the ropes. I'd even be glad to go with you to--"

"As to not being married," broke in the butterfly, with the light of a great resolve in her eye, "this gentleman may speak for himself. I am."

"Am what?" queried the Estate.

"Married."

"Damn!" exploded the young man. "I mean, congratulations and all that sort of thing. I--I'm really awfully sorry. You'll forgive my making such an ass of myself, won't you?"

To her troubled surprise there was real pain in the eyes which he turned rather helplessly away from her. Had she kept her own gaze fixed on them, she would have experienced a second surprise a moment later, at a sudden alteration and hardening of their expression. For his groping regard had fallen upon her left hand, which was gloved. Now, a wedding ring may be put on and off at will, but the glove, beneath which it has been once worn, never thereafter quite regains the maidenly smoothness of the third finger. The butterfly's gloves were not new, yet there showed not the faintest trace of a ridge in the significant locality. While admitting to himself that the evidence fell short of

conclusiveness, the young man decided to accept it as a working theory and to act, win or lose, do or die, upon the hopeful hypothesis that his delightful but elusive companion was a li--that is to say, an inventor. He would give that invention the run of its young life!

"We--ell," the Mordaunt Estate was saying, "that's too bad. Ain't a widdah lady are you?"

"My husband is in France."

With a prayer that his theory was correct, the young man rushed in where many an angel might have feared to tread. "Maybe he'll stay there," he surmised.

"What!"

In a musical but unappreciated barytone he hummed the initial line of "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

"The maids of France are fond and free.'

"Besides," he added, "it's quite unhealthy there at this season. I wouldn't be surprised"--he halted--"at anything," he finished darkly.

Outraged by this ruthless if hypothetical murder of an equally hypothetical spouse, she groped vainly for adequate words. Before she could find them--

"I'll wait around--in hopes," he decided calmly.

So, that was the attitude this ruffian took with a respectable and ostensibly married woman! And she had mistaken him for a gentleman! She had even begun to feel a reluctant sort of liking for him; at any rate, an interest in his ambiguous and perplexing personality. Now--how dared he! She put it to him at once: "How dare you!"

"Flashing eye, stamp of the foot, hands outstretched in gesture of loathing and repulsion; villain registers shame and remorse," prescribed the unimpressed subject of her retort. "As a wife, you are, of course, unapproachable. As a widow, grass-green, crepe-black, or only prospective"--he suddenly assumed a posture made familiar through the public prints by a widely self-exploited savior of the suffering--"there is H-O-P-E!" he intoned solemnly, wagging a benignant forefinger at her.

The butterfly struggled with an agonizing desire to break down into unbridled mirth and confess. Pride restrained her; pride mingled with foreboding as to what this exceedingly progressive and by no means unattractive young suitor--for he could be relegated to no lesser category--might do next. She said coolly and crisply:

"I wish nothing more to do with you whatever."

"Then I needn't quit the Garden of Ed--I mean, Our Square?"

"You may do as you see fit," she replied loftily.

"Act the gent, can't chuh?" reproved the Mordaunt Estate. "You're makin' the lady cry."

"He isn't," denied the lady, with ferocity. "He couldn't."

"He'll find no spot to lay his head in Our Square, ma'am," the polite Estate assured her.

"If he wants to stay, he'll have to live in his van."

"Grand little idea! I'll do it. I'll be a van hermit and fast and watch and pray beneath your windows."

"You may live in your van forever," retorted the justly incensed butterfly, "but I'll never speak to you as long as I live in this house. Never, never, _never_!"

She vanished beyond the outrageous decorations of the wall. The Mordaunt Estate took down the "To Let" sign, and went in search of a helper to unload the van. The deserted and denounced young man crawled into his own van and lay down with his head on a tantalus and his feet on the collected works of Thackeray, to consider what had happened to him. But his immediate memories were not conducive to sober consideration, shot through as they were with the light of deep-gray eyes and the fugitive smile of lips sensitive to every changeful thought. So he fell to dreams. As to the meeting which had brought the now parted twain to Our Square, it had come about in this wise:

Two miles northwest of Our Square as the sparrow flies, on the brink of a maelstrom of traffic, two moving-vans which had belied their name by remaining motionless for five impassioned minutes, disputed the right of way, nose to nose, while the injurious remarks of the respective drivers inflamed the air. A girlish but decided voice from within the recesses of the larger van said: "Don't give an inch."

Deep inside the other vehicle a no less decisive barytone said what sounded like "Give an ell," but probably was not, as there was no corresponding movement of the wheels.

What the van drivers said is the concern of the censor. What they did upon descending to the sidewalk comes under the head of direct action, and as such was the concern of the authorities which pried them asunder and led them away. Thereupon the inner habitants of the deserted equipages emerged from amid their lares and penates, and met face to face. The effect upon the occupant of the smaller van was electric, not to say paralytic.

"Oh, glory!" he murmured faintly, with staring eyes.

"Would you kindly move?" said the girl, in much the same tone that one would employ toward an obnoxious beetle, supposing that one ever addressed a beetle with freezing dignity.

The young man directed a suffering look upon his van. "I've done nothing else for the last three days. Tell me where I can move to and I'll bless you as a benefactress of the homeless."

"Anywhere out of my way," she replied with a severity which the corners of her sensitive mouth were finding it hard to live up to.

"Behold me eliminated, deleted, expunged," he declared humbly. "But first let me explain that when I told my idiot chauffeur to give 'em--that is, to hold his ground, I didn't know who you were."

She wrinkled dainty brows at him. "Well, you don't know who I am now, do you?"

"I don't have to," he responded with fervor. "Just on sight you may have all of this street and as many of the adjoining avenues as you can use. By the way, who _are_ you?" The question was put with an expression of sweet and innocent simplicity.

The girl looked at him hard and straight. "I don't think that introductions are necessary."

He sighed outrageously. "They Met but to Part; Laura Jean Libbey; twenty-fourth large edition," he murmured. "And I was just about to present myself as Martin Dyke, vagrant, but harmless, and very much at your service. However, I perceive with pain that it is, indeed, my move. May I help you up to the wheel of your ship? I infer that you intend driving yourself."

"I'll have to, if I'm to get anywhere." A look of dismay overspread her piquant face. "Oh, dear! I don't in the least understand this machinery. I can't drive this kind of car."

"Glory be!" exclaimed Mr. Dyke. "I mean, that's too bad," he amended gracefully. "Won't you let me take you where you want to go?"

"What'll become of your van, then? Besides, I haven't any idea where I want to go."

"What! Are you, too, like myself, a wandering home-seeker on the face of an overpopulated earth, Miss?"

The "Miss" surprised her. Why the sudden lapse on the part of this extraordinary and self-confident young person into the terminology of the servant class?

"Yes, I am," she admitted.

"A hundred thousand helpless babes in the wood," he announced sonorously, "are wandering about, lost and homeless on this melancholy and moving day of October 1st, waiting for the little robins to come and bury them under the brown and withered leaves. Ain't it harrowing, Miss! Personally I should prefer to have the last sad dirge sung over me by a quail on toast, or maybe a Welsh rabbit. What time did you breakfast, Miss? I had a ruined egg at six-fifteen."

The girl surrendered to helpless and bewildered laughter. "You ask the most personal questions as if they were a matter of course."

"By way of impressing you with my sprightly and entertaining individuality, so that you will appreciate the advantages to be derived from my continued acquaintance, and grapple me to your soul with hooks of steel, as Hamlet says. Or was it Harold Bell Wright? Do you care for reading, Miss? I've got a neat little library inside, besides an automatic piano and a patent ice-box.... By the way, Miss, is that policeman doing setting-up exercises or motioning us to move on? _I_ think he is."

"But I can't move on," she said pathetically.

"Couldn't you work my van, Miss? It's quite simple."

She gave it a swift examination. "Yes," said she. "It's almost like my own car."

"Then I'll lead, and you follow, Miss."

"But I can't--I don't know who--I don't _want_ your van. Where shall we--"

"Go?" he supplied. "To jail, I judge, unless we go somewhere else and do it _now_. Come on! We're off!"

Overborne by his insistence and further influenced by the scowl of the approaching officer, she took the wheel. At the close of some involved but triumphant maneuverings the exchanged vans removed themselves from the path of progress, headed eastward to Fourth Avenue and bore downtownward. Piloting a strange machine through rush traffic kept the girl in the trailer too busy for speculation, until, in the recesses of a side street, her leader stopped and she followed suit. Mr. Dyke's engaging and confident face appeared below her.

"Within," he stated, pointing to a quaint Gothic doorway, "they dispense the succulent pig's foot and the innocuous and unconvincing near-but-not-very-beer. It is also possible to get something to eat and drink. May I help you down, Miss?"

"No," said the girl dolefully. "I want to go home."

"But on your own showing, you haven't any home."

"I've got to find one. Immediately."

"You'll need help, Miss. It'll take some finding."

"I wish you wouldn't call me Miss," she said with evidences of petulance.

"Have it your own way, Lady. We strive to please, as R.L. Stevenson says. Or is it R.H. Macy? Anyway, a little bite of luncheon Lady, while we discuss the housing problem--"

"Why are you calling me Lady, now?"

He shook a discouraged head. "You seem very hard to please, Sister. I've tried you with Miss and I've tried you with Lady--"

"Are you a gentleman or are you a--a--"

"Don't say it, Duchess. Don't! Remember what Tennyson says: 'One hasty line may blast a budding hope.' Or was it Burleson? When you deny to the companion of your wanderings the privilege of knowing your name, what can he do but fall back for guidance upon that infallible chapter in the Gents' Handbook of Classy Behavior, entitled, 'From Introduction's Uncertainties to Friendship's Fascinations'?"

"We haven't even been introduced," she pointed out.

"Pardon me. We have. By the greatest of all Masters of Ceremonies, Old Man Chance. Heaven knows what it may lead to," he added piously. "Now, Miss--or Lady--or Sister, as the case may be; or even Sis (I believe that form is given in the Gents' Handbook), if you will put your lily hand in mine--"

"Wait. Promise me not to call me any of those awful things during

luncheon, and afterward I may tell you my name. It depends."

"A test! I'm on. We're off."

Mr. Martin Dyke proved himself capable of selecting a suitable repast from an alien-appearing menu. In the course of eating it they pooled their real-estate impressions and information. He revealed that there was no available spot fit to dwell in on the West Side, or in mid-town. She had explored Park Avenue and the purlieus thereof extensively and without success. There remained only the outer darkness to the southward for anything which might meet the needs of either. In the event of a discovery they agreed, on her insistence, to gamble for it by the approved method of the tossed coin: "The winner has the choice."

Throughout the luncheon the girl approved her escort's manner and bearing as unexceptionable. No sooner had they entered into the implied intimacy of the *tete-a-tete* across a table than a subtle change manifested itself in his attitude. Gayety was still the keynote of his talk, but the note of the personal and insistent had gone. And, at the end, when he had paid the bill and she asked:

"What's my share, please?"

"Two-ten," he replied promptly and without protest.

"My name," said she, "is Anne Leffingwell."

"Thank you," he replied gravely. But the twinkle reappeared in his eye as he added: "Of course, that was rudimentary about the check."

Before she had fully digested this remark they were on the sidewalk again. In the act of escorting her to his van, now under her guidance, he suddenly stopped in front of hers and lost himself in wondering contemplation of the group painted on the side in the best style of tea-store art.

"Suffering Raphael!" he exclaimed at length. "What's the lady in the pink shroud supposed to be saying to the bearded patriarch in the nightie? What's it all about, anyway?"

"The title," replied Anne Leffingwell, indicating a line of insignificant lettering, "is 'Swedish Wedding Feast.'"

"Wedding feast," he repeated thoughtfully, looking from the picture to his companion. "Well," he raised an imaginary glass high, "prosit omen!"

The meaning was not to be mistaken. "Well, really," she began indignantly. "If you are going to take advantage--"

"You're not supposed to understand Latin," interposed Mr. Dyke hastily. He grew flustered and stood, for once, at a loss. For some subtle reason her heart warmed to his awkwardness as it never would have done to his over-enterprising adroitness.

"We must be going on," she said.

He gave her a grateful glance. "I was afraid I'd spilled the apple cart and scared Eve clean out of the orchard that time," he murmured. Having helped her to her place at the wheel, he stood bareheaded for a moment, turned away, came back, and asked abruptly:

"Sister of Budge Leffingwell, the Princeton half-back?"

"No. Cousin."

"I knew Old Man Chance had a happy coincidence up his sleeve somewhere," he declared with profound and joyous conviction.

"Are you a friend of Budge's?"

"Friend doesn't half express it! He made the touchdown that won me a clean hundred last season. Outside of that I wouldn't know him from Henry Ford. You see how Fate binds us together."

"Will you tell me one thing, please?" pleaded Anne Leffingwell desperately. "Have you ever been examined for this sort of thing?"

"Not yet. But then, you see, I'm only a beginner. This is my first attempt. I'll get better as I go on."

"Will you please crank my car?" requested Anne Leffingwell faintly.

Not until they reached Our Square did they speak again.

* * * * *

All things come to him who, sedulously acting the orchid's part, vegetates and bides his time. To me in the passage of days came Anne Leffingwell, to talk of many things, the conversation invariably touching at some point upon Mr. Martin Dyke--and lingering there. She was solicitous, not to say skeptical, regarding Mr. Dyke's reason. Came also Martin Dyke to converse intelligently upon labor, free verse, ouija, the football outlook, O. Henry, Crucible Steel, and Mr. Leffingwell. He was both solicitous and skeptical regarding Mr. Leffingwell's existence. Now when two young persons come separately to an old person to discuss each other's affairs, it is a bad sign. Or perhaps a good sign. Just as you choose.

Adopting the Mordaunt Estate's sardonic suggestion, Martin Dyke had settled down to van life in a private alleyway next to Number 37. Anne Leffingwell deemed this criminally extravagant since the rental of a van must be prodigious. ("Tell her not to worry; my family own the storage and moving plant," was one of his many messages that I neglected to deliver.) On his part he worried over the loneliness and simplicity of her establishment--one small but neat maid--which he deemed incongruous with her general effect of luxury and ease of life, and wondered whether she had split with her family. (She hadn't; "I've always been brought up like a--a--an artichoke," she confided to me. "So when father went West for six months, I just moved, and I'm going to be a potato and see how I like it. Besides, I've got some research work to do.")

Every morning a taxi called and took her to an uptown library, and every afternoon she came back to the harlequin-fronted house at Number 37. Dyke's hours were such that he saw her only when she returned early, for he slept by day in his van, and worked most of the night on electrical experiments which he was conducting over on the river front, and which were to send his name resounding down the halls of fame. (The newspapers have already caught an echo or two.) On his way back from his experiments, he daily stopped at the shop of Eberling the Florist, where, besides chaste and elegant set pieces inscribed "Gates Ajar" and "Gone But Not Forgotten," one may, if expert and insistent, obtain really fresh roses. What connection these visits had with the matutinal

arrival of deep pink blossoms addressed to nobody, but delivered regularly at the door of Number 37, I shall not divulge; no, not though a base attempt was made to incriminate me in the transaction.

Between the pair who had arrived in Our Square on such friendly and promising terms, there was now no communication when they met. She was steadfastly adhering to that "Never. Never. Never!" What less, indeed, could be expected of a faithful wife insulted by ardent hopes of her husband's early demise from a young man whom she had known but four hours? So it might have gone on to a sterile conclusion but for a manifestation of rebellious artistic tastes on her part. The Mordaunt Estate stopped at my bench to complain about them one afternoon when Martin Dyke, having just breakfasted, had strolled over to discuss his favorite topic. (She was, at that very moment, knitting her dainty brows over the fifteenth bunch of pink fragrance and deciding regretfully that this thing must come to an end even if she had to call in Terry the Cop.)

"That lady in Number 37," said the Mordaunt Estate bitterly, "ain't the lady I thought she was."

Martin Dyke, under the impulse of his persistent obsession, looked up hopefully. "You mean that she isn't really Mrs. Leffingwell?"

"I mean I'm disappointed in her; that's what I mean. She wants the house front painted over."

"No!" I protested with polite incredulity.

"Where's her artistic sense? I thought she admired your work so deeply."

"She does, too," confirmed the Estate. "But she says it's liable to be misunderstood. She says ladies come there and order tea, and men ask the hired girl when the barbers come on duty, and one old bird with whiskers wanted to know if Ashtaroth, the Master of Destiny, told fortunes there. So she wants I should tone it down. I guess," pursued the Mordaunt Estate, stricken with gloom over the difficulty of finding the Perfect Tenant in an imperfect world, "I'll have to notice her to quit."

"No; don't do that!" cried the young man. "Here! I'll repaint the whole wall for you free of charge."

"What do you know about R. Noovo art? Besides, paints cost money."

"I'll furnish the paint, too," offered the reckless youth. "I'm crazy about art. It's the only solace of my declining years. And," he added cunningly and with evil intent to flatter and cajole, "I can tone down that design of yours without affecting its beauty and originality at all."

Touched by this ingenuous tribute hardly less than by the appeal to his frugality, the Estate accepted the offer. From four to five on the following afternoon, Martin Dyke, appropriately clad in overalls, sat on a plank and painted. On the afternoon following that the lady of the house came home at four-thirty and caught him at it.

"That's going to be ever so much nicer," she called graciously, not recognizing him from the view of his industrious-appearing back.

"Thank you for those few kind words."

"You!" she exclaimed indignantly as he turned a mild and benevolent beam of the eye upon her. "What are you doing to my house?"

"Art. High art."

"How did you get up there?"

"Ladder. High ladder."

"You know that isn't what I mean at all."

"Oh! Well, I've taken a contract to tone down the Midway aspect of your highly respectable residence. One hour per day."

"If you think that this performance is going to do you any good--" she began with withering intonation.

"It's done that already," he hastened to assert. "You've recognized my existence again."

"Only through trickery."

"On the contrary, it's no trick at all to improve on the Mordaunt Estate's art. Now that we've made up again, Miss or Mrs. Leffingwell, as the case may be--"

"We haven't made up. There's nothing to make up."

"Amended to 'Now that we're on speaking terms once more.' Accepted? Thank you. Then let me thank you for those lovely flowers you've been sending me. You can't imagine how they brighten and sweeten my simple and unlovely van life, with their--"

"Mr. Dyke!" Her eyes were flashing now and her color was deeper than the pink of the roses which she had rejected. "You must know that you had no right to send me flowers and that in returning them--"

"Returning? But, dear lady--or girl, as the case may be [here she stamped a violent foot]--if you feel it your duty to return them, why not return them to the florist or the sender? Marked though my attentions may have been, does that justify you in assuming that I am, so to speak, the only floral prospect in the park? There's the Dominie, for instance. He's notoriously your admirer, and I've seen him at Eberling's quite lately." (Mendacious young scoundrel!)

For the moment she was beguiled by the plausibility of his manner.

"How should he know that pink roses are my favorites?" she said uncertainly.

"How should I, for that matter?" he retorted at once. "Though any idiot could see at a glance that you're at least half sister to the whole rose tribe."

"Now you're beginning again," she complained. "You see, it's impossible to treat you as an ordinary acquaintance."

"But what do you think of me as a painter-man?" inquired the bewildering youth.

Preparatory to entering the house she had taken off her gloves, and now

one pinky-brown hand rested on the door lintel below him. "The question is," said she, "wasn't it really you that sent the roses, and don't you realize that you mustn't?"

"The question is," he repeated, "whether, being denied the ordinary avenues of approach to a shrine, one is justified in jumping the fence with one's votive offerings. Now I hold--"

Her left hand, shifting a little, flashed a gleam of gold into his eager eyes, striking him into silence. When he spoke again, all the vividness was gone from his voice. "I beg your pardon," he said. "Yes; I sent the roses. You shan't be troubled again in that way--or any other way. Do you mind if I finish this job?"

Victory for the defense! Yet the rosebud face of Anne Leffingwell expressed concern and doubt rather than gratification. There is such a thing as triumph being too complete.

"I think you're doing it very nicely," was the demure reply.

Notwithstanding this encomium, the workman knocked off early to sit on my bench and indulge in the expression of certain undeniable but vague truisms, such as that while there is life there is hope, and it isn't necessary to display a marriage license in order to purchase a plain gold band. But his usual buoyant optimism was lacking; he spoke like one who strives to convince himself. Later on the lady in the case paused to offer to me some contumelious if impersonal reflections upon love at first sight, which she stigmatized as a superstition unworthy of the consideration of serious minds. But there was a dreamy light in her eyes, and the smile on her lips, while it may not have been expressive of serious consideration, was not wholly condemnatory. The carnivorous orchid was having a good day and keeping its own counsel as a sensible orchid expectant of continued patronage should do.

There was an obviously somber tinge to Mr. Dyke's color scheme on the following afternoon, tending to an over-employment of black, when an impressive and noiseless roadster purred its way to the curb, there discharging a quite superb specimen of manhood in glorious raiment. The motorist paused to regard with unfeigned surprise the design of the house front. Presently he recovered sufficiently to ask:

"Could you tell me if Miss Leffingwell lives here?"

The painter turned upon his precarious plank so sharply that he was all but precipitated into the area. "_Who_?" he said.

"Miss Leffingwell."

"You don't mean Mrs. Leffingwell?" queried the aerial operator in a strained tone.

"No; I don't. I mean Miss Anne Leffingwell."

The painter flourished the implement of his trade to the peril of the immaculate garments below. "Toora-loo!" he warbled.

"I beg your pardon," said the new arrival.

"I said 'Toora-loo.' It's a Patagonian expression signifying satisfaction and relief; sort of I-thought-so-all-the-time effect."

"You seem a rather unusual and learned sort of house painter," reflected the stalwart Adonis. "Is that Patagonian art?"

"Symbolism. It represents hope struggling upward from the oppression of doubt and despair. That," he added, splashing in a prodigal streak of whooping scarlet, "is resurgent joy surmounting the misty mountain-tops of--"

The opening door below him cut short the disquisition.

"Reg!" cried the tenant breathlessly. Straight into the big young man's ready arms she dived, and the petrified and stricken occupant of the dizzy plank heard her muffled voice quaver: "Wh--wh--wh--why didn't you come before?"

To which the young giant responded in gallingly protective tones: "You little idiot!"

The door closed after them. Martin Dyke, amateur house painter, continued blindly to bedeck the face of a ruinous world with radiant hues. After interminable hours (as he reckoned the fifteen elapsed minutes) the tenant escorted her visitor to the door and stood watching him as the powerful and unassertive motor departed. Dazedly the artist descended from his plank to face her.

"Are you going?" he demanded.

A perfectly justifiable response to this unauthorized query would have been that it was no concern of his. But there was that in Martin Dyke's face which hurt the girl to see.

"Yes," she replied.

"With him?"

"Ye--es."

"He isn't your husband."

"No."

"You haven't any husband."

She hung her head guiltily.

"Why did you invent one?"

Instead of replying verbally she raised her arm and pointed across the roadway to a patch of worn green in the park. He followed the indication with his eyes. A Keep-Off-the-Grass sign grinned spitefully in his face.

"I see. The invention was for my special benefit."

"Safety first," she murmured.

"I never really believed it--except when you took me by surprise," he pursued. "That's why I--I went ahead."

"You certainly went ahead," she confirmed. "What are speed laws to you!"

"You're telling me that I haven't played the game according to the

rules. I know I haven't. One has to make his own rules when Fate is in the game against him." He seemed to be reviewing something in his mind. "Fate," he observed sententiously, "is a cheap thimble-rigger."

"Fate," she said, "is the ghost around the corner."

"A dark green, sixty-horse-power ghost, operated by a matinee hero, a movie close-up, a tailor's model--"

"If you mean Reg, it's just as well for you he isn't here."

"Pooh!" retorted the vengeful and embittered Dyke. "I could wreck his loveliness with one flop of my paint-brush."

"Doubtless," she agreed with a side glance at the wall, now bleeding from every pore. "It's a fearful weapon. Spare my poor Reg."

"I suppose," said Dyke, desperate now, but not quite bankrupt of hope, "you'd like me to believe that he's your long-lost brother."

She lowered her eyes, possibly to hide the mischief in them. "No," she returned hesitantly and consciously. "He isn't--exactly my brother."

He recalled the initials, "R.B.W.," on the car's door. Hope sank for the third time without a bubble. "Good-bye," said Martin Dyke.

"Surely you're not going to quit your job unfinished," she protested.

Dyke said something forcible and dismissive about the job.

"What will the Mordaunt Estate think?"

Dyke said something violent and destructive about the Mordaunt Estate.

"Perhaps you'd like to take the house, now that it's vacant."

Dyke, having expressed a preference for the tomb as a place of residence, went on his gloomful way shedding green paint on one side and red on the other.

Insomnia, my old enemy, having clutched me that night, I went to my window and looked abroad over Our Square, as Willy Woolly's memorial clock was striking four (it being actually five-thirty). A shocking sight afflicted my eyes. My bench was occupied by a bum. Hearing the measured footsteps of Terry the Cop, guardian of our destinies, I looked for a swift and painful eviction. Terry, after a glance, passed on. Nothing is worse for insomnia than an unsolved mystery. Slipping into my clothes, I made my way softly to the spot. There in the seat where I was wont to pursue my even tenor as an orchid slumbered Martin Dyke, amateur desecrator of other men's houses, challenger of the wayward fates, fanatic of a will-o'-the-wisp pursuit, desperate adventurer in the uncharted realms of love; and in his face, turned toward the polychromatic abominations of the house, so soon to be deserted, was all the pathos and all the beauty of illusion-haunted youth.

Ah, youth! Blundering, ridiculous youth! An absurd period, excusable only on the score of its brevity. A parlous condition! A traitorous guide, froward, inspired of all manner of levity, pursuant of hopeless phantasms, dupe of roseate and pernicious myths (love-at-first-sight, and the like), butt of the High Gods' stinging laughter, deserving of nothing kinder than mockery from the aged and the wise--which is

doubtless why we old and sage folk thank Heaven daily, uplifting cracked voices and withered hands, that we are no longer young. A pious and fraudulent litany for which may we be forgiven! My young friend on the bench stirred. A shaft of moonlight, streaming through the bush upon his face, bewitched him to unguarded speech:

"Dominie, I have been dreaming."

Fearing to break the spell, I stood silent.

"A fairy came down to me and touched her lips to mine, so lightly, so softly. Did you know there were fairies in Our Square, Dominie?"

"Always."

"I think her name is Happiness. Is there such a fairy in this world, Dominie?"

"There has been."

"Then there will always be. I think it was Happiness because she went away so quickly."

"Happiness does. Did you try to hold her?"

"So hard! But I was clumsy and rough. She slipped through my arms."

"Did she leave nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Then what is this?" I lifted from the ground at his feet a single petal of pink rose, fragrant, unwithered, and placed it in his hand.

"The fairy's kiss," he said dreamily. "That's for farewell."

The moon, dipped beyond a cloud, dissolved the spell. Youth straightened up brusquely on its bench, rubbing enchantment from its eyes.

"Have I been talking in my sleep, Dominie?"

"Possibly."

"What kind of talk? Nonsense?"

"Nonsense--or wisdom. How should I know?"

"Dominie, is there a perfume in the air? A smell of roses?"

"Look in your hand."

He opened his fingers slowly and closed them again, tenderly, jealously. "I must go now," he said vaguely. "May I come back to see you sometimes, Dominie?"

"Perhaps you'll bring Happiness with you," I said.

But he only shook his head. On the morrow his van was gone from the alley and the house at Number 37, which had once been the House of Silvery Voices, was voiceless again.

* * * * *

Something of the savor of life went with the vanners out of Our Square. I missed their broad-ranging and casual talk of politics, art, religion, the fourth dimension, and one another. Yet I felt sure that I should see them both again. There is a spell woven in Our Square--it has held me these sixty years and more, and I wonder at times whether Death himself can break it--which draws back the hearts that have once known the place. It was a long month, though, before the butterfly fluttered back. More radiant than ever she looked, glowing softly in the brave November sun, as she approached my bench. But there was something indefinably wistful about her. She said that she had come to satisfy her awakened appetite for the high art of R. Noovo, as she faced the unaltered and violent frontage of Number 37.

"Empty," said I.

"Then he didn't take my advice and rent it. The painter-man, I mean."

"He's gone."

"Where?"

"I haven't an idea."

"Doesn't he ever come back?"

"You must not assume," said I with severity, "that you are the only devotee of high art. You may perhaps compare your devotion to that of another whom I might mention when you, too, have lost ten pounds and gained ten years--"

"Dominie! Has he?"

"Has he what?"

"G-g-g-gained ten pounds. I mean, lost ten years."

"I haven't said so."

"Dominie, you are a cruel old man," accused the butterfly.

"And you are a wicked woman."

"I'm not. I'm only twenty," was her irrelevant but natural defense.

"Witness, on your oath, answer; were you at any time in the evening or night before you departed from this, Our Square, leaving us desolate--were you, I say, abroad in the park?"

"Y-y-yes, your Honor."

"In the immediate vicinity of this bench?"

"Benches are very alike in the dark."

"But occupants of them are not. Don't fence with the court. Were you wearing one or more roses of the general hue and device of those now displayed in your cheeks?"

"The honorable court has nothing to do with my face," said the witness

defiantly.

"On the contrary, your face is the corpus delicti. Did you, taking advantage of the unconscious and hence defenseless condition of my client, that is, of Mr. Martin Dyke, lean over him and deliberately imprint a--"

"No! No! No! No! No!" cried the butterfly with great and unconvincing fervor. "How dare you accuse me of such a thing?"

"On the circumstantial evidence of a pink rose petal. But worse is coming. The charge is unprovoked and willful murder."

Butterflies are strange creatures. This one seemed far less concerned over the latter than the former accusation. "Of whom?" she inquired.

"You have killed a budding poet." Here I violated a sacred if implied confidence by relating what the bewitched sleeper on the bench had said under the spell of the moon.

The result was most gratifying. The butterfly assured me with indignation that it was only a cold in her head, which had been annoying her for days: that was what made her eyes act so, and I was a suspicious and malevolent old gentleman--and--and--and perhaps some day she and Mr. Martin Dyke might happen to meet.

"Is that a message?" I asked.

"No," answered the butterfly with a suspicion of panic in her eyes.

"Then?" I queried.

"He's so--so awfully go-aheadish," she complained.

"I'll drop him a hint," I offered kindly.

"It might do some good. I'm afraid of him," she confessed.

"And a little bit of yourself?" I suggested.

The look of scorn which she bent upon me would have withered incontinently anything less hardy than a butterfly-devouring orchid. It passed and thoughtfulness supplanted it. "If you really think that he could be influenced to be more--well, more conventional--"

"I guarantee nothing; but I'm a pedagogue by profession and have taught some hard subjects in my time."

"Then do you think you could give him a little message, word for word as I give it to you?"

"Senile decay," I admitted, "may have paralyzed most of my faculties, but as a repeater of messages verbatim, I am faithful as a phonograph."

"Tell him this, then." She ticked the message off on her fingers. "A half is not exactly the same as a whole. Don't forget the 'exactly.'"

"Is this an occasion for mathematical axioms?" I demanded. But she had already gone, with a parting injunction to be precise.

When, three days thereafter, I retailed that banality to young Mr. Dyke,

it produced a startling though not instantaneous effect.

"I've got it!" he shouted.

"Don't scare me off my bench! What is it you've got?"

"The answer. She said he was not exactly her brother."

"Who?"

"That bully-looking big chap in the roadster who took her away." He delivered this shameless reversal of a passionately asserted opinion without a quiver. "Now she says a half isn't exactly the same as a whole. He wasn't exactly her brother, she said; he's her half brother. 'Toora-loora-loo,' as we say in Patagonia."

"For Patagonia it sounds reasonable. What next?"

"Next and immediately," said Mr. Dyke, "I am obtaining an address from the Mordaunt Estate, and I am then taking this evening off."

"Take some advice also, my boy," said I, mindful of the butterfly's alarms. "Go slow."

"Slow! Haven't I lost time enough already?"

"Perhaps. But now you've got all there is. Don't force the game. You've frightened that poor child so that she never can feel sure what you're going to do next."

"Neither can I, Dominie," confessed the candid youth. "But you're quite right. I'll clamp on the brakes. I'll be as cool and conventional as a slice of lemon on an iced clam. 'How well you're looking to-night, Miss Leffingwell'--that'll be my nearest approach to unguarded personalities. Trust me, Dominie, and thank you for the tip."

The memorial and erratic clock of Our Square was just striking seven of the following morning, meaning approximately eight-forty, when my astonished eyes again beheld Martin Dyke seated on my bench, beautifully though inappropriately clad in full evening dress with a pink rose in his coat lapel, and gazing at Number 37 with a wild, ecstatic glare.

"What have you been doing here all night?" I asked.

"Thinking."

I pointed to the flower. "Where did you get that?"

"A fairy gift."

"Martin," said I, "did you abide by my well-meant and inspired advice?"

"Dominie," replied the youth with a guilty flush, "I did my best. I--I tried to. You mustn't think--Nothing is settled. It's only that--"

"It's only that Age is a fool to advise Youth. Why should I expect you to abide by my silly counsels? Who am I to interfere with the dominant fates! Says the snail to the avalanche: 'Go slow!' and the avalanche--"

"Hey! Hi! You Mordaunt Estate!" broke in young Mr. Dyke, shouting. "I beg your pardon, Dominie, I've got to see the Estate for a minute."

Rushing across the street, he intercepted that institutional gentleman in the act of dipping a brush into a can in front of Number 37.

"Don't, for Heaven's sake, touch that front!" implored the improver of it.

"Why not?" demanded the Estate.

"I want to rent it. As it is. From to-day."

The Mordaunt Estate turned a dull, Wagboomish look of denial upon him. "Nope," said he. "I've had enough of short rentals. It don't pay. I'm going to paint her up and lease her for good."

"I'll take your lease," insisted Martin Dyke.

"For how long a period?" inquired the other, in terms of the Estate again.

The light that never was, on sea or land, the look that I had surprised on the face of illusion-haunted Youth in the moon glow, gleamed in Martin Dyke's eyes.

"Say a million years," he answered softly.

THE GUARDIAN OF GOD'S ACRE

As far as the eye could apprehend him, he was palpably an outlander. No such pink of perfection ever sprung from the simple soil of Our Square. A hard pink it was, suggestive less of the flower than of enameled metal. He was freshly shaved, freshly pressed, freshly anointed, and, as he paced gallantly across my vision, I perceived him to be slightly grizzled at the temples, but nevertheless of a vigorous and grim youthfulness that was almost daunting. Not until he returned and stood before me with his feet planted a little apart, giving an impression of purposeful immovability to his wiry figure, did I note that his eyes belied the general jauntiness of his personality. They were cold, direct eyes, with a filmy appearance, rather like those of a morose and self-centered turtle which had lived in our fountain until the day the Rosser twins fell in, when it crawled out and emigrated.

"Nice day," said the stranger, shifting a patent-leathered foot out of a puddle.

"Very," I agreed. Finical over-accuracy about the weather is likely to discourage a budding acquaintanceship.

"Have one?" He extended a gemmed cigarette-case, and when, removing my pipe, I had declined in suitable terms, lighted up, himself. He then sat down upon the driest portion of the bench not occupied by my person.

"Whiplash win in the fi'th," he volunteered presently.

"Yes?" said I with a polite but spurious show of interest.

"Under a pull. Spread-eagled his field."

"Who is Whiplash, may I ask?"

"Oh, Gaw!" said the pink man, appalled. He searched my face suspiciously. "A hoss," he stated at length, satisfied of my ignorance.

After several reflective puffs, the smoke of which insufficiently veiled his furtive appraisal of myself, he tried again:

"They give O'Dowd a shade, last night."

"Indeed? Who did?"

"The sporting writers."

"As a testimonial?" I inquired, adding that a shade, whether of the lamp or sun species seemed an unusual sort of gift.

My interlocutor groaned. He drew from the pocket of his gray-check cutaway, purple and fine linen, the purple being an ornate and indecipherable monogram, wherewith to wipe his troubled brow. Susan Gluck's Orphan, who was playing down-wind, paused to inhale deeply and with a beatific expression. Restoring the fragrant square to its repository, the pink one essayed another conversational skirmish.

"The Reds copped again yesterday."

"If you are referring to the raid on Anarchist Headquarters in Avenue C, I should have inferred that the Reds were copped, to use your term."

Curt and contemptuous laughter was his response. "Don't you ever read the papers, down here?"

"Certainly," I retorted with some spirit, for the implied slur upon Our Square stung me. "In fact, I was reading one of our local publications when you inter--when you arrived. It contains some very interesting poetry."

"Yeh?" said the hard, pink man politely.

"For example, in this issue I find the following apostrophe." I proceeded to read aloud:

"Farewell, our dear one, we must part,
For thou hast gone to heavenly home,
While we below with aching heart
Must long for thee and ever moan."

"Swell stuff," commented the sharer of my bench, with determined interest. "Poetry's a little out of my line, but I'm for it. Who wrote that?"

"It is signed 'Loving Father and 3 Sisters.' But the actual authorship rests with the long gentleman in black whom you see leaning on the park fence yonder. His name is Bartholomew Storrs and he is the elegiac or mortuary or memorial laureate of Our Square."

This was said with intent to mortify the soul of my new acquaintance in revenge for his previous display of erudition. The bewilderment in his face told me that I had scored heavily. But he quickly rallied.

"Do I get you right?" he queried. "Does he write those hymns for other folks to sign?"

"He does."

"What does he do that for?"

"Money. He gets as high as five dollars per stanza."

"Some salesman!" My hard-faced companion regarded the lank figure overhanging the fence with new respect. "Looks to me like the original Gloom," he observed. "What's _his_ grouch?"

"Conscience."

"He must have a bum one!"

"He has a busy one. He expends a great amount of time and sorrow repenting of our sins."

"Whose sins?" asked the other, opening wider his dull and weary eyes.

"Ours. His neighbors. Everybody in Our Square."

My interlocutor promptly and fitly put into words the feeling which had long lurked within my consciousness, ashamed to express itself against a monument of dismal pity such as Bartholomew Storrs. "He's got a nerve!" he asserted.

Warming to him for his pithy analysis of character, I enlarged upon my theme. "He rebukes MacLachan for past drunkenness. He mourns for Schepstein, who occasionally helps out a friend at ten per cent, as a usurer. He once accused old Madame Tallafferr of pride, but he'll never do that again. He calls the Little Red Doctor, our local physician, to account for profanity, and gets a fresh sample every time. Even against the Bonnie Lassie, whose sculptures you can just see in that little house near the corner"--I waved an illustrative hand--"he can quote Scripture, as to graven images. We all revere and respect and hate him. He's coming this way now."

"Good day, Dominie," said Bartholomew Storrs, as he passed, in such a tone as a very superior angel might employ toward a particularly damned soul.

"That frown," I explained to my companion, after returning the salutation, "means that I failed to attend church yesterday."

But the hard, pink man had lost interest in Bartholomew. "Called you 'Dominie,' didn't he?" he remarked. "I thought I had you right. Heard of you from a little red-headed ginger-box named Smith."

"You know the Little Red Doctor?"

"I met him," he replied evasively. "He told me to look you up. 'You talk to the Dominie,' he says."

"About what?"

"I'm coming to that." He leaned forward to place a muscular and confidential hand on my knee. "First, I'd like to do you a little favor," he continued in his husky and intimate voice. "If you're looking for some quick and easy money, I got a little tip that I'd like to pass on to you."

"Evidently the Little Red Doctor told you that my mind was a tottering ruin, which may be quite true; but if it's a matter of investing in the Peruvian Gold, Rubber Tree, and Perpetual Motion Concession, I'm reluctantly compelled--"

"Forget it!" adjured the hard, pink man in a tone which secured my silence and almost my confidence. "This is a hoss. Seven to one, and a sure cop. I _know_ hosses. I've owned 'em."

"Thank you, but I can't afford such luxuries as betting."

"You can't afford not to have something down on this if it's only a shoestring. No? Oh--well!"

Again drawing the art-square from his pocket he lifted his pearl-gray derby and dabbed despairingly at his brow. Catching the scent hot and fresh, Susan Gluck's Orphan came dashing up-wind giving tongue, or rather, nose, voluptuously.

"Mm-m-m! Snmmff!" inhaled the Orphan, wrinkling ecstatic nostrils. "Mister, lemme smell it some more!"

Graciously the dispenser of fragrance waved his balm-laden handkerchief. "Like it, kiddie?" he said.

"Oh, it's grand!" She stretched out her little grimy paws. "Please, Mister," she entreated, "would you flop it over 'em, just once?"

The pink man tossed it to her. "Take it along and, when you get it all snuffed up, give it back to the Dominie here for me."

"Oh, gracious!" said the Orphan, incredulous at this bounty. "Can I have it till to-morra?"

"Sure! What's the big idea for to-morrow?"

"I'm goin' to a funeral. I want it to cry in," said the Orphan importantly.

"A funeral?" I asked. "In Our Square? Whose?"

"My cousin Minnie. She's goin' to be buried in God's Acre, an' I'm invited 'cause I'm a r'lation. She married a sporting gentleman named Hines an' she died yesterday," said the precocious Orphan.

So Minnie Munn, pretty, blithe, life-loving Minnie, whose going had hurt us so, had come back to Our Square, with all her love of life quenched. She had promised that she would come back, in the little, hysterical, defiant note she left under the door. Her father and mother must wait and not worry. There are thousands of homes, I suppose, in which are buried just such letters as Minnie's farewell to her parents; rebellious, passionate, yearning, pitiful. Ah, well! The moth must break its chrysalis. The flower must rend its bonds toward the light. Little Minnie was "going on the stage." A garish and perilous stage it was, whereon Innocence plays a part as sorry as it is brief. And now she was making her exit, without applause. Memory brought back a picture of Minnie as I had first seen her, a wee thing, blinking and smiling in the arms of her Madonna-faced mother, on a bench in Our Square, and the mother (who could not wait for the promised return--she has lain in God's Acre these three years) crooning to her an unforgettable song,

mournfully prophetic:

"Why did I bring thee, Sweet
Into a world of sin?--
Into a world of wonder and doubt
With sorrows and snares for the little white feet--
Into a world whence the going out
Is as dark as the coming in!"

Old lips readily lend themselves to memory; I suppose I must have repeated the final lines aloud, for the pink man said, wearily but politely:

"Very pretty. Something more in the local line?"

"Hardly." I smiled. Between Bartholomew Storr's elegies and William Young's "Wish-makers' Town" stretches an infinite chasm.

"What's this--now--God's Acre the kid was talking about?" was his next question.

"An old local graveyard."

"Anything interesting?" he asked carelessly.

"If you're interested in that sort of thing. Are you an antiquary?"

"Sure!" he replied with such offhand promptitude that I was certain the answer would have been the same had I asked him if he was a dromedary.

"Come along, then. I'll take you there."

To reach that little green space of peace amidst our turmoil of the crowded, encroaching slums, we must pass the Bonnie Lassie's house, where her tiny figurines, touched with the fire of her love and her genius, which are perhaps one and the same, stand ever on guard, looking out over Our Square from her windows. Judging by his appearance and conversation, I should have supposed my companion to be as little concerned with art as with, let us say, poetry or local antiquities. But he stopped dead in his tracks, before the first window. Fingers that were like steel claws buried themselves in my arm. The other hand pointed.

"What's that?" he muttered fiercely.

"That," to which he was pointing, was a pictorial bronze, the figure of a girl, upright in a cockleshell boat, made of a rose-petal, her arms outspread to the breeze that was bearing her out across sunlit ripples. Beneath was the legend: "Far Ports." The face, eager, laughing, passionate, adventurous, was the face of Minnie Munn. Therein the Bonnie Lassie had been prophetess as well as poet and sculptress, for she had finished the bronze before Minnie left us.

"That," I answered the strong, pink man, trying to shake loose his grip, "is a sculpture by Cecily Willard, otherwise Mrs. Cyrus Staten."

"What'll she take for it?"

"It can't be bought." I spoke with authority, for the figurines that the Bonnie Lassie sets in her window are not for sale, but for us of Our Square, who love them.

"Anything can be bought," he retorted, with his quiet, hoarse persuasiveness, "at a price. I've got the price, no matter what it is."

Suddenly I understood my pink and hard acquaintance. I understood that stale look in his eyes. Tears do not bring that. Nothing brings it but sleepless thoughts beyond the assuagement of tears. Behind such eyes the heart is aching cold and the brain searing hot. Who should know better than I, though the kindly years have brought their healing! But here was a wound, raw and fresh and savage. I put my hand on his shoulder.

"What was little Minnie to you?" I asked, and answered myself. "You're Hines. You're the man she married."

"Yes. I'm Chris Hines."

"You've brought her back to us," I said stupidly.

"She made me promise."

Strange how Our Square binds the heartstrings of those who have once lived in it! To find it unendurable in life, to yearn back to it in the hour of death! Many have known the experience. So our tiny God's Acre, shrunk to a small fraction of human acreage through pressure of the encroaching tenements, has filled up until now it has space but for few more of the returning. Laws have been invoked and high and learned courts appealed to for the jealously guarded right to sleep there, as Minnie Munn was so soon to sleep beside her mother.

I told Hines that I would see the Bonnie Lassie about the statuette, and led him on, through the nagged and echoing passage and the iron gate, to the white-studded space of graves. The new excavation showed, brown against the bright verdure. Above it stood the headstone of the Munns, solemn and proud, the cost of a quarter-year's salary, at the pitiful wage which little, broken Mr. Munn drew from his municipal clerkship. Hines's elegant coat rippled on his chest, above what may have been a shudder, as he looked about him.

"It's crowded," he muttered.

"We lie close, as we lived close, in Our Square. I am glad for her father's sake that Minnie wished to come back."

"She said she couldn't rest peaceful anywhere else. She said she had some sort of right to be here."

"The Munns belong to what we call the Inalienables in Our Square," said I, and told him of the high court decision which secured to the descendants of the original "churchyard membership," and to them alone, the inalienable right to lie in God's Acre, provided, as in the ancient charter, they had "died in honorable estate." I added: "Bartholomew Storrs, as sexton, has constituted himself watchdog of our graves and censor of our dead. He carried one case to the Supreme Court in an attempt to keep an unhappy woman from sleeping in that pious company."

"That sour-faced prohibitionist?" growled Mr. Hines, employing what I suspect to be the blackest anathema in his lexicon. "Is he the sexton?"

"The same. Our mortuary genius," I confirmed.

"She was a good girl, Min was," said Mr. Hines firmly, though, it might

appear, a trifle inconsequentially: "I don't care what they say. Anyway, after I met up with her"; in which qualifying afterthought lay a whole sorrowful and veiled history.

I waited.

"What did they say about her, down here?" he asked jealously.

"Oh, there were rumors. They didn't reach her father."

"No: tell me," he persisted. "I gotta know."

Because Mr. Hines had already impressed himself upon me as one with whom straight talk would serve best, I acceded.

"Bartholomew Storrs said that her feet took hold on hell."

Mr. Hines's face remained impassive. Only his hands worked slightly, perhaps kneading an imaginary throat. I perceived him to be a person of considerable and perhaps formidable self-control.

"Not that she hadn't her friends. The Bonnie Lassie would have stood by her if she had come back, and little Mrs. Morse, and our Dr. Smith, and MacLachan, who thought he had lost his own girl the same way, and--and others, plenty."

"And you, Dominie," said the hard, pink Mr. Hines.

"My dear sir, old men cannot afford harsh judgments. They are too near their own time."

"Yeh?" said Mr. Hines absently. "I guess that's right." But his mind was plainly elsewhere. "When would you say would be the best time to do business with old Funeral-Clothes?" he asked after a thoughtful pause.

"You want to see Bartholomew Storrs?" I interpreted.

"Sure. I gotta deliver the death certificate to him if he runs the graveyard, haven't I?"

"Such is the procedure, I believe."

"Besides," he added with a leer, "I want to get some of that weepy poetry of his."

"Well; he'll sell it to you readily."

"I'll say he'll sell it to me," returned Mr. Hines with a grimness which I failed to comprehend.

"Now is as good a time as any to catch him in his office." I pointed to a sign at the farther end of the yard.

Mr. Hines seemed in no hurry to go. With his elegantly lacquered cane, he picked at the sod, undecidedly. His chill, veiled eyes roved about the open space. He lifted his pearl-gray derby, and, for lack of a handkerchief, wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. Although the May day was cool and brisk with wind, his knuckles glistened when they descended. I began to suspect that, despite his stony self-command, Mr. Hines's nerves were not all that they should be.

"Perhaps you'd like me to introduce you to Mr. Storrs," I hazarded.

The cold and filmy eyes gleamed with an instant's dim warmth. "Dominie, you're a good guy," responded Mr. Hines. "If a dead cinch at ten to one, all fruited up for next week, the kind of thing you don't hand on to your own brother, would be any use to you--No? I'm off again," he apologized. "Well--let's go."

We went. At the doorstep of Bartholomew Storrs's office he paused.

"This sexton-guy," he said anxiously, "he don't play the ponies, ever, I wouldn't suppose?"

"No more often than he commits murder or goes to sleep in church," I smiled.

"Yeh?" he answered, disheartened. "I gotta get to him some other way. On the poetry--and that's out of my line."

"I don't quite see what your difficulty is."

"By what you tell me, it's easier to break into a swell Fifth Avenue Club than into this place."

"Except for those having the vested right, as your wife has."

"And this sexton-guy handles the concession for--he's got the say-so," he corrected himself hastily--"on who goes in and who stays out. Is that right?"

"Substantially."

"And he'd rather keep 'em out than let 'em in?"

"Bartholomew," I explained, "considers that the honor of God's Acre is in his keeping. He has a fierce sort of jealousy about it, as if he had a proprietary interest in the place."

"I get you!" Mr. Hines's corded throat worked painfully. "You don't suppose the old goat would slip Min a blackball?" he gulped.

"How can he? As an 'Inalienable'--"

"Yeh; I know. But wasn't there something about a clean record? I'll tell you, Dominie"--Mr. Hines's husky but assured voice trailed away into a miserable, thick whisper--"as to what he said--about her feet taking hold on hell--I guess there was a time--I guess about one more slip--I guess I didn't run across her any too quick. But there never was a straighter, truer girl than Min was with me. I gotta get her planted right, Dominie. I gotta do it," he concluded with pathetic earnestness.

"I see no difficulty," I assured him. "The charter specifies 'died in honorable estate.' Matrimony is an honorable estate. How she lived before that is between her and a gentler Judge than Bartholomew Storrs."

"Give her a straight course and a fair judge and I'll back Min to the limit," said Mr. Hines so simply and loyally that no suggestion of irreverence could attach to him.

Nevertheless, doubt was mingled with determination in his flrid face as

he rang the bell. Bartholomew Storrs opened to us, himself. When he saw me, he hastily pocketed a Rhyming Dictionary. I introduced my companion, stating, by way of a favorable opening, that he was interested in memorial poetry.

"Very pleased," said Bartholomew Storrs in his deep, lugubrious tones. "Bereaved husband?"

Mr. Hines nodded.

"Here's a tasty thing I just completed," continued the poet, and, extending a benignant hand toward the visitor he intoned nasally:

"Together we have lived our life
Till thou hast gone on high.
But I will come to thee, dear Wife,
In the sweet bye-and-bye."

"That style five dollars," he said.

"You're on," barked Mr. Hines. "I'll take it."

"To be published, I suppose, on the first anniversary of death. Shall I look after the insertion in the papers?" queried the obliging poet, who split an advertising agent's percentage on memorial notices placed by him.

"Sure. Got any more? I'd spend a hundred to do this right."

With a smile of astounded gratification, Bartholomew accepted the roll of bills, fresh and crisp as the visitor himself. To do him justice, I believe that his pleasure was due as much to the recognition of his genius as to the stipend it had earned.

"Perhaps you'd like a special elegy to be read at the grave," he rumbled eagerly. "When and where did the interment take place?"

The other glared at him in stony surprise. "It ain't taken place. It's to-morrow. Ain't you on? I'm Hines."

A frown darkened the sexton's heavy features. He shook a reprehensive head. "An unfortunate case," he boomed; "most unfortunate. I will not conceal from you, Mr. Hines, that I have consulted our attorneys upon this case, and unhappily--unhappily, I say--they hold that there is no basis for exclusion provided the certificate is in form. You have it with you?"

Impassive and inscrutable, Mr. Hines tapped his breast-pocket.

The conscience of a responsible sexton being assuaged, Bartholomew's expression mollified into that of the flattered poet.

"Such being the case," he pursued, "there can be no objection to the reading of an elegy as part of the service. Who is to officiate?"

"The Reverend Doctor Hackett."

"He has retired these two years," said the sexton doubtfully. "He is very old. His mind sometimes wanders."

"She wouldn't have any one else," asserted the hard, pink Mr. Hines.

"She was as particular about that as about being buried yonder." He jerked his head toward the window.

"Very well. I will be at the grave. I always am. Trust me to guide the reverend gentleman over any breach in his memory. Excuse me for a moment while I look up my elegies."

"Say," said Mr. Hines in his hoarse, confidential croak, as the poet-sexton retired, "this is dead easy. Why, the guy's on the make. For sale. He'll stand for anything. Passing out this stuff for other folks to sign! He's a crook!"

"Make no such mistake," I advised. "Bartholomew is as honest a man as lives, in his own belief."

"Very likely. That's the worst kind," pronounced the expert Mr. Hines.

Further commentary was cut off by the return of the sexton-poet. "If you will kindly give me the death certificate of the late lamented," said he.

"What becomes of it after I deliver it?" asked Mr. Hines.

"Read, attested, and filed officially."

"Any one else but you see it?"

"Not necessarily."

"That's all right, then."

Hardly had Bartholomew Storrs glanced at the document received from Mr. Hines than he lifted a stiffening face.

"What is this?" he challenged.

"What's what?"

The official tapped the paper with a gaunt finger. "'Minna Merivale, aged twenty-five,'" he read.

"That's the name she went by."

"_Unmarried_" read Bartholomew Storrs in a voice of doom.

"Well?"

In the sexton's eyes gleamed an unholy savagery of satisfaction. "Take her away."

"_What_?"

"Bury her somewhere else. Do not think that you can pollute the ground--"

"Bartholomew!" I broke in, stepping hastily in front of Mr. Hines, for I had seen all the pink ebb out of his face, leaving it a dreadful sort of gray; and I had no desire to be witness of a murder, however much I might deem it justified.

"I'll handle him," said Mr. Hines steadily. "Now; you! You got my

hundred in your jeans, ain't you!"

"Bribery!" boomed the sexton. He drew out the roll of bills and let it fall from his contaminated fingers.

"Sure! Bribery," railed the other. "What'd you think? Ain't it enough for what I'm asking?" The two men glared at each other.

I broke the silence. "Exactly what are you asking, Mr. Hines?"

"File that"--he touched the document--"and forget it. Let Min rest out there as my wife, like she ought to have been."

"Why didn't you make her your wife?" thundered the accuser.

Some invisible thing gripped the corded throat of Mr. Hines. "Couldn't," he gulped. "There was--another. She wouldn't divorce me."

"Your sin has found you out," declared the self-constituted judge of the dead with a dismal sort of relish.

"Yeh? That's all right. _I'll_ pay for it. But she's paid already."

"As she lived so she has died, in sin," the inexorable voice answered. "Let her seek burial elsewhere."

Mr. Hines leaned forward. His expression and tone were passionless as those of a statistician proffering a tabulation: his words were fit to wring the heart of a stone.

"She's dead, ain't she?" he argued gently. "She can't hurt any one, can she? 'Specially if they don't know."

Bartholomew Storrs made a gesture of repulsion.

"Well, who'll she hurt?" pursued the other, in his form of pure and abstract reasoning. "Not her mother, I guess. Her mother's waiting for her; that's what Min said when she was--was going. And her father'll be on the other side of her. And that's all. Min never harmed anybody but herself when she was alive. How's she going to do 'em any damage now, just lying there, resting? Be reasonable, man!"

Be pitiful, oh, man! For there was a time not so long past when you, with all your stern probity and your unwinking conscience, needed pity; yes, and pleaded for it when the mind was out of control. Think back, Bartholomew Storrs, to the day when you stood by another grave, close to that which waits to-day for the weary sleeper--Bartholomew Storrs rested, opened the door and stood by it, grimly waiting. Mr. Hines turned to me.

"What is this thing, Dominie; a man or a snake? Will I kill it?"

"Bartholomew," I began. "When we--"

"Not a word from you, Dominie. My mind is made up."

"The girl is Isabel Munn's daughter."

I saw a tremor shake the gaunt frame.

"When we buried Isabel Munn, you came back in the night to weep at her

grave."

He thrust out a warding hand toward me.

"Why did you weep over Isabel Munn's grave, Bartholomew?"

"Speak no evil of the dead," he cried wildly.

"It is not in my mind. She was a good and pure woman. What would she have been if she had listened to you?"

"What do you know? Who betrayed me?"

"You, yourself. When you came down with pneumonia after the burial, I sat with you through a night of delirium."

Bartholomew Storrs bowed his head.

"My sin hath found me out," he groaned. "God knows I loved her, and--and I hadn't the strength not to tell her. I'd have given up everything for her, my hope of heaven, my--my--I 'd have given up my office and gone away from God's Acre! And that was twenty years ago. I--I don't sleep o' nights yet, for thinking."

"Well, you ain't the only one," said the dull voice of Mr. Hines.

"You're tempting me!" Bartholomew Storrs snarled at him. "You're trying to make me false to my trust."

"Just to let her lie by her mother, like her mother would ask you if she could."

"Don't say it to me!" He beat his head with his clenched hand. Recovering command of himself, he straightened up, taking a deep breath: "I must be guided by my conscience and my God," he said professionally, and I noted a more reverent intonation given to the former than to the latter. A bad sign.

"Isabel Munn's daughter, Bartholomew," I reminded him.

Instead of replying he staggered out of the door. Through the window we saw him, a moment later, posting down the street, bareheaded and stony-eyed, like one spurred by tormenting thoughts.

"Will he do it, do you think?" queried the anxious-visaged Mr. Hines.

I shook my head in doubt. With a man like Bartholomew Storrs, one can never tell.

Old memories are restless companions for the old. So I found them that night. But there is balm for sleeplessness in the leafy quiet of Our Square. I went out to my bench, seeking it, and found an occupant already there.

"We ain't the only ones that need a jab of dope, Dominie," said Mr. Hines, hard and pink and hoarsely confidential as when I first saw him.

"No? Who else?" Though I suspected, of course.

"Old Gloom. He's over in the Acre."

"Did you meet him there? What did he say?"

"I ducked him. He never saw me. He was--well, I guess he was praying," said Mr. Hines shamefacedly.

"Praying? At the Munn grave?"

"That's it. Groaning and saying, 'A sign, O Lord! Vouchsafe thy servant a sign!' Kept saying it over and over."

"For guidance to-morrow," I murmured. "Mr. Hines, I'm not sure that I know Bartholomew Storrs's God. Nor can I tell what manner of sign he might give, or with what meaning. But if I know my God, whom I believe to be the true God, your Minnie is safe with him."

"Yeh? You're a good guy, Dominie," said Mr. Hines in his emotionless voice.

I took him home with me to sleep. But we did not sleep. We smoked.

Minnie Munn's funeral morning dawned clear and fresh. No word came from Bartholomew Storrs. I tried to find him, but without avail.

"We'll go through with it," said Mr. Hines quietly.

How small and insignificant seemed our tiny God's Acre, as the few mourners crept into it behind Minnie Munn's body; the gravestones like petty dots upon the teeming earth, dwarfed by the overshadowing tenements, as if death were but an incident in the vast, unending, continuous sweep of life, as indeed perhaps it is. Then the grandeur of the funeral service, which links death to immortality, was bodied forth in the aged minister's trembling voice, and by it the things which are of life were dwarfed to nothingness. But my uneasy mind refused to be bound by the words; it was concerned with Bartholomew Storrs, standing grim, haggard, inscrutable, beside the grave, his eyes upturned and waiting. Too well I knew for what he was waiting; his sign. So, too, did Mr. Hines, still hard, still pink, still impeccably tailored, and still clinging to his elegant lacquered cane, as he supported little, broken Mr. Munn, very pathetic and decorous in full black, even to the gloves.

The sonorous beauty and simplicity of the rite suddenly checked, faltered. Bartholomew Storrs leaned over anxiously to the minister. The poor, gentle, worn-out old brain was groping now in semi-darkness, through which shot a cross-ray of memory. The tremulous voice took on new confidence, but the marrow of my spine turned icy as I heard the fatally misplaced and confused words that followed:

"If any man know--know just and good cause why this woman--why this woman--should not--"

Bartholomew Storrs's gaunt hand shot upward, high in air, outspread in the gesture of forbiddance. His deep voice rang, overbearing the stumbling accents of the clergyman.

"A sign! A sign from on High! O God, thou hast spoken through thy servant to forefend a sore offense. Listen, ye people. This woman--"

He stopped as there rose, on the opposite side of the open grave another figure, with hands and voice lifted to heaven in what must surely have been the most ingenuous supplication that ever ascended to the throne of Pity and Understanding. All the passion which, through the bitter hours,

had been repressed in the self-commanding soul of the hard and pink Mr. Hines, swelled and cried aloud in his plea:

"O God! have a heart!"

Bartholomew Storrs's hand fell. His eyes faltered. His lips trembled. He stood once more, agonized with doubt. And in that moment the old minister came to his rightful senses.

"Peace, my friends," he commanded with authority. "Let no man disturb the peace of the dead."

And, unwaveringly, he went on to the end of the service.

So little Minnie Munn rests beside the mother who waited for her. No ghosts have risen to protest her presence there. The man who loved her comes back to Our Square from time to time, at which times there are fresh flowers on Minnie's mound, below the headstone reading: "Beloved Wife of Christopher Hines." But the elegiac verse has never appeared. I must record also the disappearance of that tiny bronze cockleshell, outward bound for "Far Ports," from the Bonnie Lassie's window, though Mr. Hines was wrong in his theory that it could be bought--like all else --"at a price." By the way, I believe that he has modified that theory.

As for Bartholomew Storrs, he is prone to take the other side of the Square when he sees me on my accustomed bench. In repose his face is as grim as ever, but I have seen him smile at a child. Probably the weight of our collective sins upon his conscience is less irksome, now that he has a crime of his own to balance them. For forgery and falsification of an official record is a real crime, which might send him to jail. But even that grim and judicial God of his worship ought to welcome him into heaven on the strength of it.

I believe that Bartholomew sleeps o' nights now.

FOR MAYME, READ MARY

I

Mayme McCartney was a bad little good girl. She inspired (I trust) esteem for her goodness. But it was for her hardy and happy impudence, her bent for ingenious mischief, her broad and catholic disrespect for law, conventions, proprieties and persons, and the glint of the devil in her black eyes that we really loved her. Such is the perversity of human nature in Our Square. I am told that it is much the same elsewhere.

She first came into public notice by giving (unsolicited) a most scandalous and spirited imitation of old Madame Tallafferr, aforetime of the Southern aristocracy, in the act of rebuking her landlord, the insecticidal Boggs ("Boggs Kills Bugs" in his patent of nobility), for eating peanuts on his own front steps. She then (earnestly solicited by a growing audience) put on impromptu sketches of the Little Red Doctor diagnosing internal complications in a doodle-bug; of MacLachan (drunk) singing "The Cork Leg" and MacLachan (sober) repenting thereof; of Bartholomew Storrs offering samples of his mortuary poesy to a bereaved second-cousin; and, having decked out her chin in cotton-batten whiskers (limb of Satan!), of myself proffering sage counsel and pious admonitions to Our Square at large. Having concluded, she sat down on a bench and coughed. And the Little Red Doctor, who, from the shelter of a

shrub had observed her presentation of his little idiosyncrasies, drew nearer and looked at her hard. For he disliked the sound of that cough. He suspected that his old friend and opponent, Death, with whom he fought an interminable campaign, was mocking him from ambush. It wasn't quite fair play, either, for the foe to use the particular weapon indicated by the cough on a mere child. With her lustrous hair loose and floating, and her small, eager, flushed face, she looked far short of the mature and self-reliant seventeen which was the tally of her experienced years.

"Hello," greeted the Little Red Doctor, speaking with the brusque informality of one assured of his place as a local celebrity. "I don't know you, do I?"

Mayme lifted her eyes. "If you don't," she drawled, "it ain't for lack of tryin'. Is your hat glued on?"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the Little Red Doctor indignantly. "Do you think I'm trying to flirt with you? Why, you're only a kid."

"Get up to date," advised Mayme. "I'm old enough to be your steady. Only, I'm too lucky."

"That's a bad cough you've got," said the Little Red Doctor hastily.

"I've got a better one at home. Like to hear it some day?"

"Bring it over to my office and let's look at the thing," suggested the Little Red Doctor, smiling.

As Mayme McCartney observed that smile with the shrewd judgment of men which comes early, in self-protection, to girls of her environment, the suspicion and impudence died out of her face, which became wistful.

"D'you think it means anything?" she asked.

"Any cough means something. I couldn't tell without examination."

"How much?" inquired the cautious Mayme.

The Little Red Doctor is a willing liar in a good cause. "No charge for first consultation. Come over to my office."

When the test was finished, the Little Red Doctor looked professionally non-committal. "Live with your parents?" he asked.

"No. With my aunt. 'Round in the Avenue."

"Where do you work?"

"The Emporium," answered the girl, naming the great and still fashionable downtown department store, half a mile to the westward.

"You ought to quit. As soon as possible."

"And spoil my delicate digestion?"

"Who said anything about your digestion?"

"I did. If I quit workin', I quit eatin'. And that's bad for me. I tried it once."

"I see," said the Little Red Doctor, recognizing a condition by no means unprecedented in local practice. "Couldn't you get a job in some better climate?"

"Where, for instance?"

"Well, if you knew any one in California."

"How's the walkin'?" asked Mayme.

"It's long," replied the Little Red Doctor, "seein'" again. "Anyway, you've got to have fresh air."

"They serve it fresh, every morning, right here in Our Square," Mayme pointed out.

"Good idea. Get up early and fill your lungs full of it for an hour every day." He gave some further instructions.

Mayme produced a dollar, and delicately placed it on the mantel.

"Take it away," said the Little Red Doctor. "Didn't I tell you--"

"Go-wan!" said Mayme. "Whadda you think you are; Bellevue Hospital? I pay as I go, Doc."

The Little Red Doctor frowned austerely.

"What's the matter? Face hurt you?" asked the solicitous Mayme.

"People don't call me 'Doc,'" began the offended practitioner in dignified tones.

"Oh, that's because they ain't on to you," she assured him. "I wouldn't call you 'Doc' myself if I didn't know you was a good sport back of your bluff."

The Little Red Doctor grinned, looking first at Mayme and then at the dollar. "You aren't such a bad sport yourself," he admitted. "Well, we'll call this a deal. But if I see you in the Square and give you a tip about yourself now and again, that doesn't count. That's on the side. Understand?"

She considered it gravely. "All right," she agreed at length. "Between pals, yes? Shake, Doc."

So began the quaint friendship between our hard-worked, bluff, knightly-hearted practitioner, and the impish and lovable little store-girl. Also another of the innumerable tilts between him and his old friend, Death.

"He's got the jump on me, Dominie," complained the Little Red Doctor to me. "But, at that, we're going to give him a fight. She's clear grit, that youngster is. She's got a philosophy of life, too. I don't know where she got it, or just what it is, but it's there. Oh, she's worth saving, Dominie."

"If I hadn't reason to think you safeguarded, my young friend," said I, "I'd give you solemn warning."

"Why, she's an infant!" returned the Little Red Doctor scornfully. "A poor, little, monkey-faced child. Besides--" He stopped and sighed.

"Yes; I know," I assented. There was at that time a "Besides" in the Little Red Doctor's sorrowful heart which bulked too large to admit of any rivalry. "Nevertheless," I added, "you needn't be so scornful about the simian type in woman. It's a concentrated peril to mankind. I've seen trouble caused in this world by kitten faces, by pure, classic faces, by ox-eyed-Juno faces, by vivid blond faces, by dreamy, poetic faces, by passionate Southern faces, but for real power of catastrophe, for earthquake and eclipse, for red ruin and the breaking up of laws, commend me to the humanized, feminized monkey face. I'll wager that when Antony first set eyes on Cleopatra, he said, 'And which cocoa palm did she fall out of?' Phryne was of the beautified baboon cast of features, and as for Helen of Troy, the best authorities now lean to the belief that the face that launched a thousand ships and fired the topless towers of Ilium was a reversion to the arboreal. I tell you, man that is born of woman cannot resist it. Give little Mayme three more years--"

"I wish to God I could," said the Little Red Doctor.

"Can't you?" I asked, startled. "Is it as bad as that?"

"It isn't much better. How's your insomnia, Dominie?"

"Insomnia," said I, "is a scientific quibble for unladen memories. I take mine out for the early morning air at times, if that's what you mean."

"It is. Keep an eye on the kid, and do what you can to prevent that busy little mind of hers from brooding."

In that way Mayme McCartney and I became early morning friends. She adopted for her special own a bench some rods from mine under the lilac near the fountain. After her walk, taken with her thin shoulders flung back and the chest filling with deep, slow breaths, she would pay me a call or await one from me and we would exchange theories and opinions and argue about this and other worlds. Seventy against seventeen. Fair exchange, for, if mine were the riper creed, hers was the more vivid and adventurous. Who shall say which was the sounder?

On the morning of the astonishing Trespass, I was late, being discouraged by a light rain. As she approached her bench, she found it occupied by an individual who appeared to be playing a contributory part in the general lamentation of nature. The interloper was young and quite exquisite of raiment, which alone would have marked him for an outlander. His elbows were propped on his knees, his fists supported his cheekbones, his whole figure was in a slump of misery. Scrutinizing him with surprise, Mayme was shocked to see a glistening drop, detached from his drooping countenance, fall to the pavement, followed by another. At the same time she heard an unmistakable and melancholic sound.

The benches in Our Square have seen more life than most. They have cradled weariness of body and spirit; they have assuaged grief and given refuge to shaking terror, and been visited by Death. They have shivered to the passion of cursing men and weeping women. But never before had any of their ilk heard grown young manhood blubber. Neither had Mayme McCartney. It inspired her with mingled emotions, the most immediate of which was a desire to laugh.

Accordingly she laughed. The intruder lifted a woeful face, gave her one vague look, and reverted to his former posture. Mayme stopped laughing.

She advanced and put a friendly hand on one of the humped shoulders.

"Cheer up, Buddy," she said. "It ain't as bad as you think it is."

"It's worse," gulped a choky voice. Then the head lifted again. "Who are you?" it demanded.

"I'm your big sister," said Mayme reassuringly. "Tell a feller about it."

The response was neither polite nor explanatory. "D---n sisters!" said the bencher.

"Oh, tutt_ _tutt_ and naughty-naughty!" rebuked Mayme. "Somebody's sister been puttin' somethin' over on poor little Willy?"

"My own sister has." He was in that state of semi-hysterical exhaustion in which revelation of one's intimate troubles to the first comer seems natural. "She's gone and got arrested," he wailed.

Mayme's face became grave and practical.

"That's different," said she. "What's her lay?"

"Lay? I don't know--"

"What's her line? What's she done to get pinched?"

"Shoplifting. At the special night sale of the Emporium."

"You're tellin' me! In the silks, huh?"

"What do you know about it? My God! Is it in the papers already?"

"Keep your hair on, Buddy. I work there, and I heard about that pinch. Swell young married lady. Say," she added, after a thoughtful pause: "has she got somethin' comin'?"

"Something coming? How? What?"

"Don't be dumb. A kid."

He stared. She was looking at him with unabashed frankness. Those who live in the close, rough intimacy of the slums do not cherish false shame about the major facts of life.

"Suppose she has?" queried the youth sulkily.

"Why, that'll be all right, you poor boob," returned the kindly Mayme. "The judge'll let her off with a warning."

"How do you know?"

"They always do. Those cases are common. Dolan ought to be canned for makin' a pinch of a lady in the fam'ly way."

"What if they do let her off?" lamented the youth. "It'll be in all the papers and I'll be ruined. My life's spoiled. I might as well leave the city."

"Ah, don't do a mean trick like that to the old town!" besought the

sardonic Mayme. "Where do you come in to get hurt?"

He burst into the hectic grievances of the pampered and spoiled child. His family was just getting a foothold in Society (with an almost holy emphasis on the word) and now they were disgraced. All was up. Their new, precariously held acquaintances would drop them. In his petulant grief he did an amazing thing; he produced a bunch of clippings from the local society columns, setting forth, in the printed company of the Shining Ones, the doings (mostly charitable) of Mrs. Samuel Berthelin, her daughter, Mrs. Harris, and her son, David, referred to glowingly as "the scion of the wealth and position of the late lamented financier."

Mayme was impressed. Like most shop-girls she was a fervent reader of society news. (If shop-girls did not read this fine flower of American democracy, nobody would, except those who wait eagerly and anxiously for their names to appear.) She perceived--not knowing that the advertising leverage of the Berthelin Loan Agency had forced those insecure portals of print for the entry of Mrs. Berthelin and her progeny--that she was in the presence of the Great. Capacity for awe was not in Mayme's independent soul. But she was interested and sympathetic. Here was a career worth saving!

"Let's go over to the station-house," said she. "I know some of the cops."

To the white building with the green lanterns they went. The shoplifting case, it appeared, had already been bailed out. Furthermore, everything would be all right and there was little fear of publicity; the store itself would see to that. Vastly relieved and refreshed in spirit, David Berthelin began to take stock of his companion with growing interest. She was decidedly not pretty. Just as decidedly she was quaint and piquant and quite new to his jejune but also somewhat bored experience. From the opening passage of their first conversation he deduced, lacking the insight to discriminate between honest frankness and immodesty, that she was a "fly kid." On that theory he invited her to breakfast with him. Mayme accepted. They went to Thomson's Elite Restaurant, on the corner, where David roused mingled awe and misgivings in the breast of Polyglot Elsa, the cashier, by ordering champagne, and Mayme reassured her by declining it.

Thus began an acquaintanceship which swiftly ripened into a queer sort of intimacy, more than a little disturbing to us of Our Square who were interested in Mayme. Young Berthelin's over-ornate roadster lingered in our quiet precincts more often than appeared to us suitable or safe, and black-eyed Mayme, looking demure and a little exalted, was whirled away to unknown worlds, always returning, however, at respectable hours. When the Little Red Doctor remonstrated with her ostensibly on the score of her health, she reminded him in one breath that he hadn't been invited to censor her behavior which was entirely her own affair, and in the next--with his hand caught between hers and her voice low and caressing--declared that he was the best little old Doc in the world and there was nothing to worry about, either as to health or conduct. Indeed, her condition seemed to be improving. I dare say young Mr. Berthelin's expensive food was one of the things she needed. Furthermore, she ceased to be the raggle-taggle, hoydenishly clad Mayme of the cash department, and, having been promoted to saleswoman, quite went in for dress. On this point she sought the advice of the Bonnie Lassie. The result went far to justify my prophecy that Mayme's queer little face might yet make its share of trouble in an impressionable world. But the Bonnie Lassie shook her bonnie head privately and said that the fine-feathers development was a bad sign, and that if young

Berthelin would obligingly run his seventeen-jeweled roadster off the Williamsburgh Bridge, with himself in it, much trouble might be saved for all concerned.

If little Mayme were headed for trouble, she went to meet it with a smiling face. Never had she seemed so joyous, so filled with the desire of life. This much was to be counted on the credit side, the Little Red Doctor said. On the debit side--well, to me was deputed the unwelcome task of conveying the solemn, and, as it were, official protest and warning of Our Square. Of course I did it at the worst possible moment. It was early one morning, when Mayme, on her bench, was looking a little hollow-eyed and disillusioned. I essayed the light and jocular approach to the subject:

"Well, Mayme; how is the ardent swain?"

She turned to me with the old flash in her big, shadowed eyes: "Did you say swain or swine, Dominie?"

"Ah!" said I. "Has he changed his role?"

"He's given himself away, if that's what you mean."

"I thought that would come."

"He--he wanted me to take a trip to Boston with him."

I considered this bit of information, which was not as surprising or unexpected as Mayme appeared to deem it. "Have you told the Little Red Doctor?"

"Doc'd kill him," said Mayme simply.

"What better reason for telling?"

"Oh, the poor kid: he don't know any better."

"Doesn't he? In any case I trust that you know better, after this, than to have anything more to do with him."

"Yep. I've cut him out," replied Mayme listlessly. "I figured you and Doc were right, Dominie. It's no good, his kind of game. Not for girls like me." She looked up at me with limpid eyes, in which there was courage and determination and suffering.

"My dear," I murmured, "I hope it isn't going to be too hard."

"He's so pretty," said Mayme McCartney wistfully.

So he was, now that I came to think of it. With his clear, dark color, his wavy hair, his languishing brown eyes, his almost girlishly graceful figure, and his beautiful clothes, he was pretty enough to fascinate any inexperienced imagination. But I cannot say that he looked pretty when, a few days later, he invaded Our Square in search of a Mayme who had vanished beyond his ken (she had kept her tenement domicile a secret from him), and, addressing me as "you white-whiskered old goat," accused me of having come between him and the girl upon whom he had deigned to bestow his lordly favor. Unfortunately for him, the Little Red Doctor chanced along just then and inquired, none too deferentially, what the Scion of Wealth and Position was doing in that quarter.

"What business is it of yours, Red-Head?" countered the offended visitor.

He then listened with distaste, but perforce (for what else could he do in the grasp of a man of twice his power?), to a brilliant and convincing summary of his character, terminating in a withering sketch of his personal and sartorial appearance.

"I didn't mean the kid any harm," argued the Scion suavely. "I--I came back to apologize."

"Let me catch you snooping around here again and I'll break every bone in your body," the Little Red Doctor answered him.

"I guess this Square's free to everybody. I guess you don't own it," said the youth, retreating to his car.

Notwithstanding the unimpeachable exactitude of this surmise, he was seen no more in that locality. Judge, then, of our dismay, locally, at learning, not a fortnight later, from a fellow employee of Mayme's, that she had been met at closing time by a swell young guy in a cherry-colored rattler, who took her away to dine with him. Catechized upon the point, later on, by a self-appointed committee of two consisting of the Little Red Doctor and myself, Mayme said vaguely that it was all right; we didn't understand. This is, I believe, the usual formula. The last half of it at least, was true.

About that time we, in common with the rest of the Nation, took that upon our minds which was even more important than Mayme McCartney's love affair. War loomed imminently before us. It was only a question of the fitting time to strike; and Our Square was feverishly reckoning up its military capacity. The great day of the declaration came. The Nation had drawn the sword. In the week following, Our Square was invaded.

She descended upon us from the somber sumptuousness of a gigantic limousine, the majestic, the imposing, the formidable, the authoritative Mrs. S. Berthelin. We knew at once who she was, because she led, by the ear, as it were, her hopeful progeny, young David. I do not mean that she had an actual auricular grip on him, but the effect upon his woe-begone and brow-beaten person was the same. He suggested vividly a spoiled and pretty lapdog being sternly conveyed to a detested bath. She suggested a vivified bouquet of artificial flowers. We hastily rallied our forces to meet her; the Little Red Doctor, the Bonnie Lassie, and myself. Mrs. Berthelin opened her exordium in a tone of high philippic, not even awaiting the formalities of introduction. But when I insisted upon these, and she learned that the Bonnie Lassie was Mrs. Cyrus Staten, she cringed. Despite a desire to keep out of the society columns quite as genuine as that of Mrs. Berthelin's to get in, the Cyrus Statens frequently figure among the Shining Ones, a fact almost painfully appreciated by our visitor. After that it was easy to get her into the Bonnie Lassie's house, where her eloquence could not draw a crowd. To get young David there was not quite so easy. He made one well-timed and almost successful effort to bolt, and even evinced signs of balking on the steps.

His punishment was awaiting him. No sooner were we all settled in the Bonnie Lassie's studio than the mother proceeded to regale us with a history and forecast of his career, beginning with his precocious infant lispings and terminating with his projected, though wholly indefinite, marriage into the Highest Social Circles. To do David justice, he squirmed.

"Have you got him a job as a general in the army yet, ma'am?" inquired the Little Red Doctor suavely.

It was quite lost upon Mrs. Berthelin. She informed us that a commission as Captain in the Quartermaster's Department was arranged for, and she expected to have the young officer assigned to New York so that he could live at home in the comfort and luxury suitable to his wealth and condition. And what she wanted us to understand clearly was that no designing little gutter-snipe was to be allowed to compromise David's future. She concluded with an imaginative and most unflattering estimate of Mayme McCartney's character, manners, and morals, in the midst of which I heard a gasp.

It came from Mayme, standing, wide-eyed and white, in the doorway. The front door had been left ajar, and, seeing the Berthelins' monogrammed car outside, she had come in. The oratress turned and stared.

"That's a lie," said Mayme McCartney steadily. "I'm as straight a girl as your own daughter. Ask him."

She pointed to the stricken David. Pointing may not be ladylike, but it can be extremely effective. David's head dropped into his hands.

"Oh, Ma!" he groaned.

"Don't call me 'Ma,'" snapped the goaded Mrs. Berthelin. "And this is the girl?" She looked Mayme up and down. Mayme did the same by her and did it better.

"I could give you a lorny-yette and beat you at the frozen-stare trick," said the irrepressible Mayme at the conclusion of the duel which ended in her favor.

The Little Red Doctor gurgled. I saw the Bonnie Lassie's eyelids quiver, but her face was cold and impassive as she turned to the visitor.

"Mrs. Berthelin," said she, "you have made some very damaging statements, before witnesses, about Miss McCartney's character. What proof have you?"

"Why, he wants to _marry_ her!" almost yelled the mother. "She's trapped him."

"That's another lie," said Mayme.

"He told me himself that he was going to marry you."

"Did he? Then he's wrong. I wouldn't marry him with a brass ring," asserted Mayme.

"You wouldn't mar--You wouldn't _what_?" demanded the mother, outraged and incredulous.

"You heard me. He knows it, too. I don't like the family--what I've seen of them," observed Mayme judicially. "Besides, he's yellow."

David's shamed face emerged into view. "I'm not," he gulped. "She--she made me."

"Captain!" said Mayme with a searing scorn in her voice.

"Quartermaster's Department! Safety first! When half the little fifteen-per tape-snippers in the Emporium are breakin' their fourteen-inch necks volunteerin' early and often to get where the fightin' is."

David Berthelin stood on his feet, and his pretty face wore an ugly expression.

"Let me out of here," he growled.

"David!" said his mother. "Where are you going?"

"To enlist."

"Davey!" It was a shriek. "You shan't."

"I will."

"I won't let you."

"You can go to--"

"Buddy!" Mayme's voice, magically softened, broke in. "Cut out the rough stuff. You better go home and think it over. Bein' a private is no pink-silk picnic."

"I'd rather see a son of mine dead than a common soldier!" cried Mrs. Berthelin.

The Bonnie Lassie, very white, rose. "You must leave this house," she said. "At once. Think yourself fortunate that I cannot bring myself to betray a guest. Otherwise I should report you to the authorities."

Young David addressed Mayme in the words and tone of a misunderstood and aggrieved pet. "You think I'm no good. I'll show you, Mayme. Wait till I come back--if I ever do come back--and you'll be sorry."

"Hero stuff," commented the Little Red Doctor. "It'll all have oozed out of his fingertips this time to-morrow."

"Will you show me a place to enlist?" challenged the boy. "And," he added with a malicious grin, "will you enlist with me?"

"Sure!" said the Little Red Doctor. "I'll show you. But they won't take me." He bestowed a bitter glance on his twisted foot. "Come along."

They went off together, while Mrs. Berthelin scandalized Our Square by an exhibition of hysterics involving language not at all in accord with the rich respectability of her apparel and her limousine.

We waited at the Bonnie Lassie's for the Little Red Doctor's return. He came back alone. I thought that I detected a pathetic little gleam of disappointment in Mayme's deep eyes.

"He's done it," said the Little Red Doctor. And I was sorry for him, so much was there of tragic envy in his face.

"Did you give him your blessing?" I asked.

"I did. He shook hands like a man. There's maybe something in that boy, if it weren't for the old hell-cat of a mother. However, she won't have

much chance. He's off to-morrow."

"Will he write?" said Mayme in a curious, strained voice.

"He will. He'll report to me from time to time."

"Didn't he--wasn't there any message?"

"Just good-bye and good luck," answered the Little Red Doctor, censoring ruthlessly.

The Bonnie Lassie went over and put her arms around Mayme McCartney.

"My dear," she said softly. "It wouldn't do. It really wouldn't. He isn't worth it. You're going to forget him."

"All right." Suddenly Mayme looked like a very helpless and sorrowful little girl. "Only, it--it isn't goin' to be as easy as you think. He was so pretty," said Mayme McCartney wistfully.

II

Summer was smiting Our Square with white-hot bolts of sun-fire, from which one could scarcely find refuge beneath the scraggly shelter of parched shrubbery, when one morning the Bonnie Lassie approached my bench with a fell and purposeful smile.

"Dominie, you're a dear old thing," she began in her most insinuating tones.

"I won't do it," I said determinedly, foreboding something serious.

The Bonnie Lassie raised her eyebrows at me, affecting aggrieved innocence. "Won't do what?" she inquired.

"Whatever it is that you're trying to wheedle me into."

The eyebrows resumed their normal arch, and a dimple flickered in the corner of the soft lips. By this I knew that the case was hopeless. "Oh, but you've already done it," she said.

"Help! Tell me the worst and get it over with."

"It must be lovely to be rich," said the Bonnie Lassie meditatively. "And so generous!"

"How much is it? What do you want it for? I haven't got that much," I hastily remarked.

"And to keep it an absolute secret from everybody. Even from Mayme herself."

"Go on. Don't mind me," I murmured.

"The Little Red Doctor has found the place. It's in New Mexico. And in the fall she's going on to the Coast. He's almost willing to guarantee that a year of it will make her as strong as ever. And the hundred dollars a month you allow her besides her traveling expenses will be plenty. You are a good old thing, Dominie!"

"What you mean is that I'm an old good-thing. How shall I look," I demanded bitterly, "when Mayme comes to thank me?"

"No foolisher than you do now, trying to raise unreasonable objections to our perfectly good plans," retorted the Bonnie Lassie. "Besides, she won't. She knows that your way is to do good by stealth and blush to find it fame, and she's under pledge to pretend to know nothing about it."

"Where did the Little Red Doctor raise it?" I queried.

"There are times, Dominie, when your mind has real penetrative power. Think it over."

"The Weeping Scion of Wealth and Position!" I cried. "Did our medical friend blackmail him?"

"Not necessarily. He only dropped a hint that Mayme's chance here was rather poorer than a soldier's going to war, unless something could be done and the Weeping Scion fairly begged to be allowed to do it. 'Do you think she'd take it from you?' said the Little Red Doctor, 'after what your mother called her?' 'Don't let her know,' says our ornamental young weeper. 'Tell her somebody else is doing it. Tell her it's from that white-whiskered old--from the elderly and handsome gentleman with the benevolent expres--'"

"Yes: I know," I broke in. "Very good. I'm the goat. Lying, hypocrisy, false pretense, fake charity; it's all one to a sin-seared old reprobate like me. After it's over I'll go around the corner and steal what pennies I can find in Blind Simon's cup, just to make me feel comparatively respectable and decent again."

It was no easier than I expected it to be, especially when little Mayme, having come to say good-bye, put her lips close to my ear and tried to whisper something, and cried and kissed me instead.

Our Square was a dimmer and duller place after she left. But her letters helped. They were so exactly like herself! Even at the first, when things seemed to be going ill with her, they were all courage, and quaint humor and determination to get well and come back to Our Square, which was the dearest and best place in the world with the dearest and best people in it. Homesickness! Poor little, lonely Mayme. She was reading--she wrote the Bonnie Lassie--all the books that the Dominie had listed for her, and she was being tutored by a school-teacher with blue goggles and a weak heart who lived at the same resort. "Why grow up a Boob," wrote the philosophic Mayme, "when the lil old world is full of wise guys just aking to spill their wiseness?"

Contemporaneously the Weeping Scion of Wealth was writing back his views on life and the emptiness thereof, in better orthography, but with distinctly less of spirit.

"It appears," reported the Little Red Doctor, "that every man in his own company has licked our young friend and now the other companies of the regiment are beginning to show interest, and he doesn't like it. I believe he'd desert if it weren't that he's afraid of what Mayme would think."

"Still on his mind, is she?" I asked.

The Little Red Doctor produced a letter with a camp postmark from the

South and read a passage:

"You were right when you guessed that I never wanted anything very much before, without having it handed to me. Perhaps you are right about its being good for me. But it comes hard. The promise goes, of course. I'm going to show you and her that I'm not yellow. [So that was still rankling; salutary, if bitter dose!] But if this war ever finishes, all bets are off and I'm coming back to find her. And don't you forget your part of the bargain, to write and let me know how she is getting on." The Little Red Doctor was able to send progressively encouraging news. When the cold weather came, Mayme moved westward to Southern California, and found herself on the edge of one of the strange, tumultuous, semi-insane moving-picture colonies of that region. Thence issued, presently, stirring tidings.

"What do you think?" wrote our exile. "They've got my funny little monkey mug in the movies. Five per and steady work. The director likes me and says he will give me a real chance one of these days. But, as the Dominie would say, this is a hell of a place. [Graceless imp!] I would not say it myself, because I am a perfect lady. You have to be, out here. That reminds me: I have cut out the Mayme. Every fresh little frizzle in the colony with a false front and a pneumatic figure calls herself Mayme or Daisye or Tootsye. Not for me! I am keeping up my lessons and trying to make my head good for something besides carrying a switch. Tell the Little Red Doctor that it is so long since I coughed I have forgotten how. And I love you all so hard that it hurts."

"Your loving

"MARY MCCARTNEY

"P.S. I am going to be Marie Courtenay when I get my name up in the pictures. Put that in the Directory and see how it looks.

"P.S.2. How is my soldier boy getting along? Poor kid! I expect he is finding it a lot different from Broadway with money in your pocket."

About this time the Weeping Scion was finding things very different, indeed, from Broadway, having been shifted to a specially wet and muddy section of France; and was taking them as he found them. That is to say, he had learned the prime lesson of war.

"And he's been made corporal," announced the Little Red Doctor with satisfaction.

"That sounds encouraging," remarked the Bonnie Lassie. "How did it happen?"

"He went over on one of the 'flu ships,' and when the epidemic began to mow 'em down there was a kind of panic. From what I can make out, the Scion kept his head and his nerve, and made good. A corporal's stripes aren't much, but they're something."

Better was to come. There was high triumph in the Little Red Doctor's expression when he came to my bench with the glad tidings of young David's promotion to a sergeantry.

"While it's very gratifying," I remarked, "it doesn't seem to me an epoch-making event."

"Doesn't it!" retorted my friend. "That's because of your abysmal

military ignorance, Dominie. Let me tell you how it is in our army. A fellow can get himself made a captain by pull, or a major by luck, or a colonel by desk-work, or a general by having a fine martial figure, but to get yourself made a sergeant, by Gosh, you've got to show the _stuff_. You've got to be a _man_. You've got to have--"

"Are you going to tell her?" interrupted the Bonnie Lassie who had been sent for to share the news.

The Little Red Doctor fell suddenly grave. "She's another matter," he said. "I don't think I shall."

Matters were going forward with Mayme--beg her pardon, Mary McCartney, too.

"Better and more of it," she wrote the Bonnie Lassie. "They rang me in on one of their local Red Cross shows to do a monologue. Was I a hit? Say, I got more flowers than a hearse! You've got to remember, though, that they deliver flowers by the car-load out here. And the local stock company has made me an offer. Ingenue parts. There is not the money that I might get in the pictures, but the chance is better. So Marie Courtenay moves on to the legit.--I mean the spoken drama. Look out for me on Broadway later!"

In the correspondence from Sergeant Berthelin there came a long hiatus followed by a curt bit of official information: "Seriously wounded." The Little Red Doctor brought the news to me, with a queer expression on his face.

"It doesn't look good, Dominie," he said. "You know, my old friend, Death, is a shrewd picker. He's got an eye for men." He mused, rubbing his tousled, brickish locks with a nervous hand. "I was getting to kind of like that young pup," he muttered moodily.

The saying that no news is good news was surely concocted by some one who never chafed through day after lengthening day for that which does not come. But in the end it did come, in the form of a scrawl from the Weeping Scion himself. He was mending, but very slowly, and they said it would be a long time--months, perhaps--before he could get back to the front. Meantime, they were still picking odds and ends, chiefly metallic, out of various parts of his system.

"I'm one of the guys you read about that came over here to collect souvenirs," he commented. "Well, I've got all I need of 'em. They can have the rest. All I want now is to get back and present a few to Fritzie before the show is over."

Thereafter the Little Red Doctor exhibited, but read to us only in small parts, quite bulky communications from overseas. Some of them, it became known, he was forwarding to our little Mary, out in the Far West. With her answer came the solution.

"Some of the 'Grass and Asphalt' sketches are wonders; some not so good. I am going to try out 'Doggy' if I can find a poodle with enough intelligence to support me. But you need not have been so mysterious, Doc, about your 'young amateur writer who seems to have some talent.' Did you think I would not know it was David? Why, bless your dear, silly heart, I told him some of those stories myself. But how does he get a chance to write them? Is he back on this side? Or is he invalided? Or what? Tell me. I want to know about him. You do not have to worry about my--well, my infatuation for him, any more. He was a pretty boy, though,

wasn't he? But I have seen too many of that kind in the picture game. I'm spoiled for them. How I would love to smear some of their pretty, smirky faces! They give me a queer feeling in my breakfast. Excuse me: I forgot I was a lady. But don't say 'pretty' to me any more. I'm through. At that, you were all wrong about Buddy. He was a lot decenter than you thought: only he was brought up wrong. Give him my love as one pal to another. I hope he don't come back a He-ro. I'm offen he-roes, too. Excuse again!"

Wars and exiles alike come to an end in time. And in time our two wanderers returned, but Mary first, David having been sent into Germany with the Army of Occupation. Modest announcements in the theatrical columns informed an indifferent theater-going world that Miss Marie Courtenay, an actress new to Broadway, was to play the ingenue part in the latest comedy by a highly popular dramatist. Immediately upon the production, the theater-going world ceased to be indifferent to the new actress; in fact, it went into one of its occasional furores about her. Not that she was in any way a great genius, but she had a certain indefinable and winningly individual quality. The critics discussed it gravely and at length, differing argumentatively as to its nature and constitution. I could have given them a hint. My predictions regarding the ancestral potencies of the monkey-face were being abundantly justified.

No announcements, even of the most modest description, heralded the arrival of Sergeant Major (if you please!) David Berthelin upon his native shores. He came at once to Our Square and tackled the Little Red Doctor.

"Where is she?" he asked.

The Little Red Doctor assumed an air of incredulous surprise. "Have you still got that bee in your bonnet?" said he.

"Where is she?" repeated the Weeping Scion.

Maneuvering for time and counsel, the Little Red Doctor took him to see the Bonnie Lassie and they sent for me. We beheld a new and reconstituted David. He was no longer pretty. The soft brown eyes were less soft and more alert, and there were little wrinkles at their corners. He had broadened a foot or so. That pinky-delicate complexion by which he had, in earlier and easier days, set obvious store, was brownish and looked hardened. The Cupid's-bow of his mouth had straightened out. High on one cheekbone was a not unsightly scar. His manner was unassertive, but eminently self-respecting, and me, whom aforetime he had stigmatized as a "white-whiskered old goat," he now addressed as "Sir."

"Perhaps you'll tell me where she is, sir," said he patiently.

"Leave it to me," said the Bonnie Lassie, who has an unquenchable thirst for the dramatic in real life. "And keep next Sunday night open."

She arranged with Mary McCartney to give a reading on that evening, at her studio, of David's "Doggy" from the "Grass and Asphalt" sketches which he had written in hospital. It was a quaint, pathetic little conceit, the bewildered philosophy of a waif of the streets, as expressed to his waif of a dog. For the supporting part we borrowed Willy Woolly from the House of Silvery Voices, and admirably he played it, barking accurately and with true histrionic fervor in the right places (besides promptly falling in love with the star at the first and

only rehearsal). After the try-out, Mary came over to my bench with a check for a rather dazzling sum in her hand, and said that now was the time to settle accounts, but she never could repay--and so forth and so on; all put so sweetly and genuinely that I heartily wished I might accept the thanks if not the check. Instead of which I blurted out the truth.

"Oh, _Dominie_!" said the girl, with such reproach that my heart sank within me. "Do you think that was fair? Don't you know that I never could have taken the money?"

"Precisely. And we had to find a way to make you take it. We couldn't have you dying on the premises," I argued with a feeble attempt at jocularity.

"But from _him_!" she said. "After what had happened--And his mother. How could you let me do it!"

"I thought you would have gotten over that feeling by this time," I ventured.

"Oh, there's none of the old feeling left," she answered, so simply that I knew she believed her own statement. "But to have lived on his money--Where is he?" she asked abruptly.

I told her that also and about Sunday night; the whole thing. The Bonnie Lassie would have slain me. But I couldn't help it. I was feeling rather abject.

Sunday night came, and with it Miss Marie Courtenay, escorted by an "ace" covered with decorations, whose name is a household word and who was only too obviously her adoring slave. Already there had been hints of their engagement. Had I been that ace, I should have felt no small discomposure at the sight of the girl's face when she first saw the changed and matured Weeping Scion of three years before. After the first flash of recognition she had developed on that expressive face of hers a look of wonder and almost pathetic questioning, and, I thought, who knew and loved the child, already something deeper and sweeter. Young David, after greeting the star of the evening, took a modest rear seat as befitted his rank. But when the Bonnie Lassie announced "Doggy," it was his face that was the study.

Of that performance I shall say nothing. It is now famous and familiar to thousands of theater-goers. But if ever mortal man spent twenty minutes in fairyland, it was David, while Mary was playing the work of his fancy. At the close, he disappeared. I suppose he did not dare trust himself to join in the congratulations with which she was overwhelmed. I found him, as I rather expected, on the bench where he had sat when Mayme McCartney first found him. And when the crowd had departed from the studio, I told the girl. Without even stopping to put on her hat she went out to him.

He was sitting with his elbows on his knees and his fists supporting his cheekbones. But this time he was not weeping. He was thinking. Just as of old she put a hand on his humped shoulder. Startled, he looked up, and jumped to his feet. She was holding something out to him.

"What's that?" he said.

"A check. For what I owe you."

"Who told you? The Little Red Doctor promised--"

"He's kept his promise. The Dominie told me."

"Oh! I suppose," he said slowly, "I've got to take this. You wouldn't--no, of course you wouldn't," he sighed.

"I've tried to keep strict account," she said.

David adopted a matter-of-fact tone. "I can't deny that it'll come in handy, just now," he remarked. "At the present price of clothing, and with my personal exchequer in its depleted state--"

"Why," she broke in, "has anything happened? Your mother--?"

"Cut off," said David briefly.

"She's cut you off? On my account? Oh--"

"No. I've cut her off. Temporarily. She doesn't want me to work. I'm working. On a newspaper."

"That's good," said the girl warmly. "Let's sit down."

They sat down. Each, however, found it curiously hard to begin again. Mary was aching to thank him, but had a dreadful fear that if she tried to, she would cry. She didn't want to cry. She had a feeling that crying would be a highly unstrategic procedure leading to possible alarming developments. Why didn't David say something? Finally he did make a beginning.

"Mayme."

"No: not 'Mayme' any more."

He flushed to his temples. "I beg your pardon, Miss Courtenay."

"Nonsense!" she said softly. "Mary. I've discarded the 'Mayme' long ago."

"Mary," he repeated in a tone of musing content.

"Buddy."

He caught his breath. "A few thousand of the best guys in the world," he said, "call a fellow that. And every time they said it, it made my heart ache with longing to hear it in your voice."

"You're a queer Buddy," returned the girl, not quite steadily. "Did you bring me home a German helmet for a souvenir?"

He shook his head. "I didn't bring home much of anything, except some experience and the discovery of the fact that when I had to stand on my own feet, I wasn't much."

"You got your stripes, didn't you?" suggested the girl.

"That's all I did get," he returned jealously. "I didn't get any medal, or palms or decorations or crosses of war: I didn't get anything except an occasional calling down and a few scratches. If I'd had the luck to get into aviation or some of the fancy branches--" David checked

himself. "There I go," he said in self-disgust. "Beefing again."

It was quite in the old, spoiled-child tone; an echo of indestructible personality, the Weeping Scion of other days; and it went straight to Mary's swelling, bewildered, groping heart. She began to laugh and a sob tangled itself in the laughter, and she choked and said:

"Buddy."

He turned toward her.

"Don't be dumb, Buddy," she said, in the words of their unforgotten first talk. "You've--you've got me--if you still want me."

She put out a tremulous hand to him, and it slipped over his shoulder and around his neck, and she was drawn close into his arms.

"The Little Red Doctor," remarked David after an interlude, in the shaken tone of one who has had undeserved miracles thrust upon him, "said that to want something more than anything in the world and not get it was good for my soul, besides serving me right."

"The Little Red Doctor," retorted Mary McCartney, with the reckless ingratitude of a woman in love, "is a dear little red idiot. What does he know about _Us!_"

BARBRAN

Immediately upon hearing of my fell design MacLachan, the tailor, paid a visit of protest to my bench.

"Is it true fact that I hear, Dominie?"

"What do you hear, MacLachan?"

"That ye're to make one of yer silly histories about Barbran?"

"Perfectly true," said I, passing over the uncomplimentary adjective.

"'Tis a feckless waste of time."

"Very likely."

"'Twill encourage the pair, when a man of yer age and influence in Our Square should be dissuadin' them."

"Perhaps they need a friendly word."

MacLachan frowned. "Ye're determined?"

"Oh, quite!"

"Then I'll give ye a title for yer romance."

"That's very kind of you. Give it."

"The Story of Two Young Fools. By an Old One," said MacLachan witheringly, and turned to depart.

"Mac!"

"What?"

"Wait a moment."

I held him with my glittering eye. Also, in case that should be inadequate, with the crook of my cane firmly fixed upon his ankle.

"I'll waste na time from the tailorin'," began the Scot disdainfully, but paused as I pointed a loaded finger at his head. "Well?" he said, showing a guilty inclination to flinch.

"Mac, was _I_ an original accomplice in this affair?"

"Will ye purtend to deny--"

"Did _I_ scheme and plot with Cyrus the Gaunt and young Stacey?"

MacLachan mumbled something about undue influence.

"Did _I_ get arrested?"

MacLachan grunted.

"In a cellar?"

MacLachan snorted.

"With my nose painted green?"

MacLachan groaned. "There was others," he pleaded.

"A man of your age and influence in Our Square," I interrupted sternly, "should have been dissuading them."

"Arr ye designin' to put all that in yer sil--in yer interestin' account?"

"Every detail."

MacLachan dislodged my crook from his leg, gave me such a look as mid-Victorian painters strove for in pictures of the Dying Stag, and retired to his Home of Fashion.

* * * * *

That men of the sobriety and standing of Cyrus the Gaunt, MacLachan, Leon Coventry, the Little Red Doctor, and Boggs (I do not count young Phil Stacey, for he was insane at the time, and has been so, with modifications and glorifications, ever since) should paint their noses green and frequent dubious cellars, calls for explanation. The explanation is Barbran.

Barbran came to us from the immeasurable distances; to wit, Washington Square.

Let me confess at once that we are a bit supercilious in our attitude toward the sister Square far to our West, across the Alps of Broadway. Our Square was an established center of the social respectabilities when the foot of Fifth Avenue was still frequented by the occasional cow

whose wanderings are responsible for the street-plan of Greenwich Village. Our Square remains true to the ancient and simple traditions, whereas Washington Square has grown long hair, smeared its fingers with paint and its lips with free verse, and gone into debt for its inconsiderable laundry bills. Washington Square we suspect of playing at life; Our Square has a sufficiently hard time living it. We have little in common.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that there are veritable humans, not wholly submerged in the crowd of self-conscious mummies who crowd the Occidental park-space, and it was at the house of one of these, a woman architect with a golden dream of rebuilding Greenwich Village, street by street, into something simple and beautiful and, in the larger sense urban, that the Bonnie Lassie, whose artistic deviations often take her far afield, met Barbran.

They went for coffee to a queer little burrow decorated with improving sentiments from the immortal Lewis Carroll which, Barbran told the Bonnie Lassie, was making its blue-smocked, bobbed-haired, attractive and shrewd little proprietress quite rich. Barbran hinted that she was thinking of improving on the Mole's Hole idea if she could find a suitable location, not so much for the money, of course--her tone implied a lordly indifference to such considerations--as for the fun of the thing.

The Bonnie Lassie was amused but not impressed. What did impress her about Barbran was a certain gay yet restful charm; the sort of difficult thing that our indomitable sculptress loves to catch and fix in her wonderful little bronzes. She set about catching Barbran.

Now the way of a snake with a bird is as nothing for fascination compared to the way of the Bonnie Lassie with the doomed person whom she has marked down as a subject. Barbran hesitated, capitulated, came to the Bonnie Lassie's house, moused about Our Square in a rapt manner and stayed. She rented a room from the Angel of Death ("Boggs Kills Bugs" is the remainder of his sign, which is considered to lend tone and local interest to his whole side of the Square), just over Madame Tallafferr's apartments, and, in the course of time, stopped at my bench and looked at me contemplatively. She was a small person with shy, soft eyes.

"The Bonnie Lassie sent you," said I.

She nodded.

"You've come here to live--Heaven only knows why--but we're glad to see you. And you want to know about the people; so the Bonnie Lassie said, 'Ask the Dominie; he landed here from the ark.' Didn't she?"

Barbran sat down and smiled at me.

"Having sought information," I pursued, "on my own account, I learn that you are the only daughter of a Western millionaire ranch-owner. How does it feel to revel in millions?"

"Romantic," said she.

"Of course you have designs upon us."

"Yes."

"Humanitarian, artistic, or sociological?"

"Oh, nothing long and clever like that."

"You grow more interesting. Having designs upon us, you doubtless wish my advice."

"No," she answered softly: "I've done it already."

"Rash and precipitate adventuress! What have you done already?"

"Started my designs. I've rented the basement of Number 26."

"Are you a rag-picker in disguise?"

"I'm going to start a coffee cellar. I was thinking of calling it 'The Coffee Pot.' What do you think?"

"So you do wish my advice. I will give it to you. Do you see that plumber's shop next to the corner saloon?" I pointed to the Avenue whose ceaseless stream of humanity flows past Our Square without ever sweeping us into its current. "That was once a tea-shop. It was started by a dear little, prim little old maiden lady. The saloon was run by Tough Bill Manigan. The little old lady had a dainty sign painted and hung it up outside her place, 'The Teacup.' Tough Bill took a board and painted a sign and hung it up outside his place; 'The Hiccup.' The dear little, prim little old maiden lady took down her sign and went away. Yet there are those who say that competition is the life of trade."

"Is there a moral to your story, Mr. Dominie?"

"Take it or leave it," said I amiably.

"I will not call my cellar 'The Coffee Pot' lest a worse thing befall it."

"You are a sensible young woman, Miss Barbara Ann Waterbury."

"It is true that my parents named me that," said she, "but my friends call me 'Barbran' because I always used to call myself that when I was little, and I want to be called Barbran here."

"That's very friendly of you," I observed.

She gave me a swift, suspicious look. "You think I'm a fool," she observed calmly. "But I'm not. I'm going to become a local institution. A local institution can't be called Barbara Ann Waterbury, unless it's a creche or a drinking-fountain or something like that, can it?"

"It cannot, Barbran."

"Thank you, Mr. Dominie," said Barbran gratefully. She then proceeded to sketch out for me her plans for making her Coffee Cellar and herself a Local Institution, which should lure hopeful seekers for Bohemia from the far parts of Harlem and Jersey City, and even such outer realms of darkness as New Haven and Cohoes.

"That's what I intend to do," said Barbran, "as soon as I get my Great Idea worked out."

What the Great Idea was, I was to learn later and from other lips. In fact, from the lips of young Phil Stacey, who appeared, rather

elaborately loitering out from behind the fountain, shortly after my new friend had departed, a peculiar look upon his extremely plain and friendly face. Young Mr. Stacey is notable, if for no other reason than that he represents a flat artistic failure on the part of the Bonnie Lassie, who has tried him in bronze, in plaster, and in clay with equal lack of success. There is something untransferable in the boy's face; perhaps its outshining character. I know that I never yet have said to any woman who knew him, no matter what her age, condition, or sentimental predilections, "Isn't he a homely cub!" that she didn't reply indignantly: "He's _sweet_!" Now when women--wonderful women like the Bonnie Lassie and stupid women like Mrs. Rosser, the twins' aunt, and fastidious women like Madame Tallafferr--unite in terming a smiling human freckle "_sweet_", there is nothing more to be said. Adonis may as well take a back seat and the Apollo Belvedere seek the helpful resources of a beauty parlor. Said young Phil carelessly:

"Dominie, who's the newcomer?"

"That," said I, "is Barbran."

"Barbran," he repeated with a rising inflection. "It sounds like a breakfast food."

"As she pronounces it, it sounds like a strain of music," said I.

"What's the rest of her name?"

"I am not officially authorized to communicate that."

"Are you officially authorized to present your friends to her?"

"On what do you base your claim to acquaintanceship, my boy?" I asked austerely.

"Oh, claim! Well, you see, a couple of days ago, she was on the cross-town car; and I--well, I just happened to notice her, you know. That's all."

"Yet I am informed on good and sufficient authority that her appearance is not such as to commend her, visually, if I may so express myself, to the discriminating eye."

"Who's the fool--" began Mr. Stacey hotly.

"Tut-tut, my young friend," said I. "Certain ladies whom we both esteem can and will prove, to the satisfaction of the fair-minded, that none of the young person's features is exactly what it should be or precisely where it ought to be. Nevertheless, the net result is surprising and even gratifying."

"She's a peach!" asseverated my companion.

"Substantially what I was remarking. As for your other hint, you need no introduction to Barbran. Nobody does."

"_What_?" Phil Stacey's plain face became ugly; a hostile light glittered in his eyes. "What do you mean by that?" he growled.

"Simply that she's about to become a local institution. She's plotting against the peace and security of Our Square, to the extent of starting a coffee-house at Number 26."

"No!" cried Phil joyously. "Good news!"

"As a fad. She's a budding millionairess from the West."

"No!" growled Phil, his face falling.

"Bad news; eh? It occurred to me that she might want some decorations, and that you might be the one to do them." In his leisure hours, my young friend, who is an expert accountant by trade (the term "expert" appears to be rather an empty compliment, since his stipend is only twenty-five dollars a week), perpetrates impressionistic decorations and scenery for such minor theaters as will endure them.

"You're a grand old man, Dominie!" said he. "Let's go."

We went. We found Barbran. We conversed. Half an hour later when I left them--without any strenuous protests on the part of either--they were deeply engrossed in a mutual discussion upon decorations, religion, the high cost of living, free verse, two-cent transfers, Charley Chaplin, aviation, ouija, and other equally safe topics. Did I say safe? Dangerous is what I mean. For when a youth who is as homely as young Phil Stacey and in that particular style of homeliness, and a girl who is as far from homely as Barbran begin, at first sight, to explore each other's opinions, they are venturing into a dim and haunted region, lighted by will-o'-the-wisps and beset with perils and pitfalls. Usually they smile as they go. Phil was smiling as I left them. So was Barbran. I may have smiled myself.

Anything but a smile was on Phil Stacey's normally cheerful face when, some three days thereafter, he came to my rooms.

"Dominie," said he, "I want to tap your library. Have you got any of the works of Harvey Wheelwright?"

"God forbid!" said I.

Phil looked surprised. "Is it as bad as that? I didn't suppose there was anything wrong with the stuff."

"Don't you imperil your decent young soul with it," I advised earnestly. "It reeks of poisonous piety. The world he paints is so full of nauseating virtues that any self-respecting man would rather live in hell. His characters all talk like a Sunday-school picnic out of the Rollo books. No such people ever lived or ever could live, because a righteously enraged populace would have killed 'em in early childhood. He's the smuggest fraud and best seller in the United States. Wheelwright? The crudest, shrewdest, most preposterous panderer to weak-minded--"

"Whew! Help! I didn't know what I was starting," protested my visitor. "As a literary critic you're some Big Bertha, Dominie. I begin to suspect that you don't care an awful lot about Mr. Wheelwright's style of composition. Just the same, I've got to read him. All of him. Do you think I'll find his stuff in the Penny Circulator?"

"My poor, lost boy! Probably not. It is doubtless all out in the hands of eager readers."

However, Phil contrived to round it up somewhere. The awful and unsuspected results I beheld on my first visit of patronage to Barbran's

cellar, the occasion being the formal opening. A large and curious crowd of five persons, including myself and Phil Stacey, were there. Outside, an old English design of a signboard with a wheel on it creaked despairingly in the wind. Below was a legend: "_At the Sign of the Wheel --_The Wrightery_." The interior of the cellar was decorated with scenes from the novels of Harvey Wheelwright, triumphant virtue, discomfited villains, benignant blessings, chaste embraces, edifying death-beds, and orange-blossoms. They were unsigned; but well I knew whose was the shame. Over the fireplace hung a framed letter from the Great Soul. It began, "Dear Young Friend and Admirer," and ended, "Yours for the Light. Harvey Wheelwright."

The guests did as well as could be expected. They ate and drank everything in sight. They then left; that is to say, four of them did. Finally Phil departed, glowering at me. I am a patient soul. No sooner had the door slammed behind him than I turned to Barbran, who was looking discouraged.

"Well, what have you to say in your defense?"

The way Barbran's eyebrows went up constituted in itself a defense fit to move any jury to acquittal.

"For what?" she asked.

"For corrupting my young friend Stacey. You made him paint those pictures."

"They're very nice," returned Barbran demurely. "Quite true to the subject."

"They're awful. They're an offense to civilization. They're an insult to Our Square. Of all subjects in the world, Harvey Wheelwright! Why, Barbran? Why? Why? Why?"

"Business," said Barbran.

"Explain, please," said I.

"I got the idea from a friend of mine in Washington Square. She got up a little cellar cafe built around Alice. Alice in Wonderland, you know, and the Looking Glass. Though I don't suppose a learned and serious person like you would ever have read such nonsense."

"It happened to be Friday and there wasn't a hippopotamus in the house," I murmured.

"Oh," said Barbran, brightening. "Well, I thought if she could do it with Alice, I could do it with Harvey Wheelwright."

"In the name of Hatta and the March Hare, _why_?"

"Because, for every one person who reads Alice nowadays, ten read the author of 'Reborn Through Righteousness' and 'Called by the Cause.' Isn't it so?"

"Mathematically unimpeachable."

"Therefore I ought to get ten times as many people as the other place. Don't you think so?" she inquired wistfully.

Who am I to withhold a comforting fallacy from a hopeful soul.
"Undoubtedly," I agreed. "But do you love him?"

"Who?" said Barbran, with a start. The faint pink color ran up her cheeks.

"Harvey Wheelwright, of course. Whom did you think I meant?"

"He is a very estimable writer," returned Barbran primly, quite ignoring my other query.

"Good-night, Barbran," said I sadly. "I'm going out to mourn your lost soul."

One might reasonably expect to find peace and quiet in the vicinity of one's own particular bench at 11.45 P.M. in Our Square. But not at all on this occasion. There sat Phil Stacey. I challenged him at once.

"What did you do it for?"

To do him justice he did not dodge or pretend to misunderstand. "Pay," said he.

"Phil! Did you take money for that stuff?"

"Not exactly. I'm taking it out in trade. I'm going to eat there."

"You'll starve to death."

"I haven't got much of an appetite."

"The inevitable effect of overfeeding on sweets. An uninterrupted diet of Harvey Wheelwright--"

"Don't speak the swine's name," implored Phil, "or I'll be sick."

"You've sold your artistic birthright for a mess of pottage, probably indigestible at that."

"I don't care," he averred stoutly. "I don't care for anything except--Dominie, who told you her father was a millionaire?"

"It's well known," I said vaguely. "He's a cattle king or an emperor of sheep or the sultan of the piggery or something. A good thing for Barbran, too, if she expects to keep her cellar going. The kind of people who read Har--our unmentionable author, don't frequent Bohemian coffee cellars. They would regard it as reckless and abandoned debauchery. Barbran has shot at the wrong mark."

"The place has got to be a success," declared Phil between his teeth, his plain face expressing a sort of desperate determination.

"Otherwise the butterfly will fly back West," I suggested. The boy winced.

What man could do to make it a success, Phil Stacey did and heroically. Not only did he eat all his meals there, but he went forth into the highways and byways and haled in other patrons (whom he privately paid for) to an extent which threatened to exhaust his means.

Our Square is conservative, not to say distrustful in its bearing toward

innovations. Thorsen's Elite Restaurant has always sufficed for our inner cravings. We are, I suppose, too old to change. Nor does Harvey Wheelwright exercise an inspirational sway over us. We let the little millionairess and her Washington Square importation pretty well alone. She advertised feebly in the "Where to Eat" columns, catching a few stray outlanders, but for the most part people didn't come. Until the first of the month, that is. Then too many came. They brought their bills with them.

Evening after evening Barbran and Phil Stacey sat in the cellar almost or quite alone. So far as I could judge from my occasional visits of patronage (Barbran furnished excellent sweet cider and cakes for late comers), they endured the lack of custom with fortitude, not to say indifference. But in the mornings her soft eyes looked heavy, and once, as she was passing my bench deep in thought, I surprised a look of blank terror on her face. One can understand that even a millionaire's daughter might spend sleepless nights brooding over a failure. But that look of mortal dread! How well I know it! How often have I seen it, preceding some sordid or brave tragedy of want and wretchedness in Our Square! What should it mean, though, on Barbran's sunny face? Puzzling over the question I put it to the Bonnie Lassie.

"Read me a riddle, O Lady of the Wise Heart. Of what is a child of fortune, young, strong, and charming, afraid?"

At the time we were passing the house in which the insecticidal Angel of Death takes carefully selected and certified lodgers.

"I know whom you mean," said the Bonnie Lassie, pointing up to the little dormer window which was Barbran's outlook on life. "Interpret me a signal. What do you see up there?"

"It appears to be a handkerchief pasted to the window," said I adjusting my glasses.

"Upside down," said the Bonnie Lassie.

"How can a handkerchief be upside down?" I inquired, in what was intended to be a tone of sweet reasonableness.

Contempt was all that it brought me. "Metaphorically, of course! It's a signal of distress."

"In what distress can Barbran be?"

"In what kind of distress are most people who live next under the roof in Our Square?"

"She's doing that just to get into our atmosphere. She told me so herself. A millionaire's daughter--"

"Do millionaires' daughters wash their own handkerchiefs and paste them on windows to dry? Does any woman in or out of Our Square ever soak her own handkerchiefs in her own washbowl except when she's desperately saving pennies? Did you ever wash one single handkerchief in your rooms, Dominie?"

"Certainly not. It isn't manly. Then you think she isn't a millionairess?"

"Look at her shoes when next you see her," answered the Bonnie Lassie

conclusively. "_I_ think the poor little thing has put her every cent in the world into her senseless cellar, and she's going under."

"But, good Heavens!" I exclaimed. "Something has got to be done."

"It's going to be."

"Who's going to do it?"

"Me," returned the Bonnie Lassie, who is least grammatical when most purposeful.

"Then," said I, "the Fates may as well shut up shop and Providence take a day off; the universe has temporarily changed its management. Can I help?"

The Bonnie Lassie focused her gaze in a peculiar manner upon the exact center of my countenance. A sort of fairy grin played about her lips. "I wonder if--No," she sighed. "No. I don't think it would do, Dominie. Anyway, I've got six without you."

"Including Phil Stacey?"

"Of course," retorted the Bonnie Lassie. "It was he who came to me for help. I'm really doing this for him."

"I thought you were doing it for Barbran."

"Oh; she's just a transposed Washington Squarer," answered the tyrant of Our Square. "Though she's a dear kiddie, too, underneath the nonsense."

"Do I understand--"

"I don't see," interrupted the Bonnie Lassie sweetly, "how you could. I haven't told you. And the rest are bound to secrecy. But don't be unduly alarmed at anything queer you may see in Our Square within the next few days."

Only by virtue of that warning was I able to command the emotions aroused by an encounter with Cyrus the Gaunt some evenings later. He was hurrying across the park space in the furtive manner of one going to a shameful rendezvous, and upon my hailing him he at first essayed to sheer off. When he saw who it was he came up with a rather swaggering and nonchalant effect. I may observe here that nobody has a monopoly of nonchalance in this world.

"Good-evening, Cyrus," I said.

"Good-evening, Dominie."

"Beautiful weather we're having."

"Couldn't be finer."

"Do you think it will hold?"

"The paper says rain to-morrow."

"Why is the tip of your nose painted green?"

"Is it green?" inquired Cyrus, as if he hadn't given the matter any

special consideration, but thought it quite possible.

"Emerald," said I. "It looks as if it were mortifying."

"It would be mortifying," admitted Cyrus the Gaunt, "if it weren't in a good cause."

"What cause?" I asked.

"Come out of there!" said Cyrus the Gaunt, not to me, but to a figure lurking in the shrubbery.

The Little Red Doctor emerged. I took one look at his most distinctive feature.

"You, too!" I said. "What do you mean by it?"

"Ask Cyrus," returned the Little Red Doctor glumly.

"It's a cult," said Cyrus. "The credit of the notion belongs not to me, but to my esteemed better half. A few chosen souls--"

"Here comes another of them," I conjectured, as a bowed form approached. "Who is it? MacLachan!"

The old Scot appeared to be suffering from a severe cold. His handkerchief was pressed to his face.

"Take it down, Mac," I ordered. "It's useless." He did so, and my worst suspicions were confirmed.

"He bullied me into it," declared the tailor, glowering at Cyrus the Gaunt.

"It'll do your nose good," declared Cyrus jauntily. "Give it a change. Complementary colors, you know. What ho! Our leader."

Phil Stacey appeared. He appeared serious; that is, as serious as one can appear when his central feature glows like the starboard light of an incoming steamship. Following him were Leon Coventry, huge and shy, and the lethal Boggs looking unhappy.

"Where are you all going?" I demanded.

"To the Wrightery," said Phil.

"Is it a party?"

"It's a gathering."

"Am I included?"

"If you'll--"

"Not on any account," I declared firmly. It had just occurred to me why the Bonnie Lassie had centered her gaze upon my features. "Follow your indecent noses as far as you like. I stay."

Still lost in meditation, I may have dozed on my bench, when heavy, measured footsteps aroused me. I looked up to see Terry the Cop, guardian of our peace, arbiter of differences, conservator of our

morals. I peered at him with anxiety.

"Terry," I inquired, "how is your nose?"

"Keen, Dominie," said Terry. He sniffed the air. "Don't you detect the smell of illegal alcohol?"

"I can't say I do."

"It's very plain," declared the officer wriggling his nasal organ which, I was vastly relieved to observe, retained its original hue. "Wouldn't you say, Dominie, it comes from yonder cellar?"

"Barbran's cellar?"

"I am informed that a circle of dangerous char-_ack_ters with green noses gather there and drink cider containing more than two-seventy-five per cent of apple juice. I'm about to pull the place."

"For Heaven's sake, Terry; don't do that! You'll scare--"

"Whisht, Dominie!" interrupted Terry with an elaborate wink. "There'll be no surprise, except maybe to the Judge in the morning. You better drop in at the court."

Of the round-up I have no details, except that it seemed to be quietly conducted. The case was called the next day, before Magistrate Wolf Tone Hanrahan, known as the "Human Judge." Besides being human, his Honor is, as may be inferred from his name, somewhat Irish. He heard the evidence, tested the sample, announced his intention of coming around that evening for some more, and honorably discharged Barbran.

"And what about these min?" he inquired, gazing upon the dauntless six.

"Dangerous suspects, Yeronner," said Terry the Cop.

"They look mild as goat's milk to me," returned the Magistrate, "though now I get me eye on the rid-hidded wan [with a friendly wink at the Little Red Doctor] I reckonize him as a desprit charackter that'd save your life as soon as look at ye. What way are they dang'rous?"

"When apprehended," replied Terry, looking covertly about to see that the reporters were within hearing distance, "their noses were painted green."

"Is this true?" asked the Magistrate of the six.

"It is, your Honor," they replied.

"An', why not!" demanded the Human Judge hotly. "'Tis a glorious color! Erin go bragh! Off'cer, ye've exceeded yer jooty. D' ye think this is downtrodden an' sufferin' Oireland an' yerself the tyrant General French? Let 'em paint their noses anny color they loike; but green for preference. I'm tellin' ye, this is the land of freedom an' equality, an' ivery citizen thereof is entitled to life, liberty, and the purshoot of happiness, an' a man's nose is his castle, an' don't ye fergit it. Dis-charrrrrged! Go an' sin no more. I mane, let the good worruk go awn!"

"Now watch for the evening papers," said young Phil Stacey exultantly. "The Wrightery will get some free advertising that'll crowd it for months."

Alas for youth's golden hopes! The evening papers ignored the carefully prepared event. One morning paper published a paragraph, attributing the green noses to a masquerade party. The conspirators, gathered at the cellar with their war-paints on (in case of reporters), discussed the fiasco in embittered tones. Young Stacey raged against a stupid and corrupt press. MacLachan expressed the acidulous hope that thereafter Cyrus the Gaunt would be content with making a fool of himself without implicating innocent and confiding friends. The Bonnie Lassie was not present, but sent word (characteristically) that they must have done it all wrong; men had no sense, anyway. The party then sent out for turpentine and broke up to reassemble no more. Only Phil Stacey, inventor of the great idea, was still faithful to and hopeful of it. Each evening he conscientiously greened himself and went to eat with Barbran.

Time justified his faith. One evening there dropped in a plump man who exhaled a mild and comforting benevolence, like a gentle country parson. He smiled sweetly at Phil, and introduced himself as a reporter for the "Sunday World Magazine"--and where was the rest of the circle? In a flurry of excitement, the pair sent for Cyrus the Gaunt to do the talking. Cyrus arrived, breathless and a trifle off color (the Bonnie Lassie had unfortunately got a touch of bronze scenic paint mixed with the green, so that he smelled like an over-ripe banana), and proceeded to exposition.

"This," he explained, "is a new cult. It is based on the back-to-the-spring idea. The well-spring of life, you know. The--er--spring of eternal youth, and--and so forth. You understand?"

"I hope to," said the reporter politely. "Why on the nose?"

"I will explain that," returned Cyrus, getting his second wind; "but first let me get the central idea in your mind. It's a nature movement; a readjustment of art to nature. All nature is green. Look about you." Here he paused for effect, which was unfortunate.

"Quite so," agreed the reporter. "The cable-car, for instance, and the dollar bill, not to mention the croton bug and the polar bear. But, pardon me, I interrupt the flow of your eloquence."

"You do," said Cyrus severely. "Inanimate nature I speak of. All inanimate nature is green. But we poor fellow creatures have gotten away from the universal mother-color. We must get back to it. We must learn to think greenly. But first we must learn to see greenly. How shall we accomplish this? Put green in our eyes? Impossible, unfortunately. But, our noses--there is the solution. In direct proximity to the eye, the color, properly applied, tints one's vision of all things. Green shadows in a green world," mooned Cyrus the Gaunt poetically. "As the bard puts it:

"Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade."

"Wait a minute," said the visitor, and made a note on an envelope-back.

"Accordingly, Miss Barbran, the daughter and heiress of a millionaire cattle owner in Wyoming [here the reporter made his second note], has established this center where we meet to renew and refresh our souls."

"Good!" said the benevolent reporter. "Fine! Of course it's all bunk--"

"Bunk!" echoed Barbran and Phil, aghast, while Cyrus sat with his lank jaw drooping.

"You don't see any of your favorite color in my eye, do you?" inquired the visitor pleasantly. "Just what you're putting over I don't know. Some kind of new grease paint, perhaps. Don't tell me. It's good enough, anyway. I'll fall for it. It's worth a page story. Of course I'll want some photographs of the mural paintings. They're almost painfully beautiful.... What's wrong with our young friend; is he sick?" he added, looking with astonishment at Phil Stacey who was exhibiting sub-nauseous symptoms.

"He painted 'em," explained Cyrus, grinning.

"And he's sorry," supplemented Barbran.

"Yes; I wouldn't wonder. Well, I won't give him away," said the kindly journalist. "Now, as to the membership of your circle...."

The Sunday "story" covered a full page. The "millionairess" feature was played up conspicuously and repeatedly, and the illustrations did what little the text failed to do. It was a "josh-story" from beginning to end.

"I'll kill that pious fraud of a reporter," declared Phil.

"Now the place is ruined," mourned Barbran.

"Wait and see," advised the wiser Cyrus.

Great is the power of publicity. The Wrightery was swamped with custom on the Monday evening following publication, and for the rest of that week and the succeeding week.

"I never was good at figures," said the transported Barbran to Phil Stacey at the close of the month, "but as near as I can make out, I've a clear profit of eight dollars and seventy cents. My fortune is made. And it's all due to you."

Had the Bonnie Lassie been able to hold her painted retainers in line, the owner's golden prophecy might have been made good. But they had other matters on hand for their evenings than sitting about in a dim cellar gazing cross-eyed at their own scandalous noses. MacLachan was the first defection. He said that he thought he was going crazy and he knew he was going blind. The Little Red Doctor was unreliable owing to the pressure of professional calls. He complained with some justice that a green nose on a practicing physician tended to impair confidence. Then Leon Coventry went away, and Boggs discovered (or invented) an important engagement with a growing family of clothes-moths in a Connecticut country house. So there remained only the faithful Phil. One swallow does not make a summer; nor does one youth with a vernal proboscis convince a skeptical public that it is enjoying the fearful companionship of a subversive and revolutionary cult. Patronage ebbed out as fast as it had flooded in. Barbran's eyes were as soft and happy as ever in the evenings, when she and Phil sat in a less and less interrupted solitude. But in the mornings palpable fear stalked her. Phil never saw it. He was preoccupied with a dread of his own.

One evening of howling wind and hammering rain, when all was cosy and home-like for two in the little firelit Wrightery, she nerved herself up

to facing the facts.

"It's going to be a failure," she said dismally.

"Then you're going away?" he asked, trying to keep his voice from quaking.

She set her little chin quite firmly. "Not while there's a chance left of pulling it out."

"Well; it doesn't matter as far as I'm concerned," he muttered. "I'm going away myself."

"You?" She sat up very straight and startled. "Where?"

"Kansas City."

"Oh! What for?"

"Do you remember a fat old grandpa who was here last month and came back to ask about the decorations?"

"Yes."

"He's built him a new house--he calls it a mansion--and he wants me to paint the music-room. He likes"--Phil gulped a little--"my style of art."

"Isn't that great!" said Barbran in the voice of one giving three cheers for a funeral. "How does he want his music-room decorated?"

Young Phil put his head in his hands. "Scenes from Moody and Sankey," he said in a muffled voice.

"Good gracious! You aren't going to do it?"

"I am," retorted the other gloomily. "It's good money." Almost immediately he added, "Damn the money!"

"No; no; you mustn't do that. You must go, of course. Would--will it take long?"

"I'm not coming back."

"I don't _want_ you not to come back," said Barbran, in a queer, frightened voice. She put out her hand to him and hastily withdrew it.

He said desperately: "What's the use? I can't sit here forever looking at you and--and dreaming of--of impossible things, and eating my heart out with my nose painted green."

"The poor nose!" murmured Barbran.

With one of her home-laundered handkerchiefs dipped in turpentine, she gently rubbed it clean. It then looked (as she said later in a feeble attempt to palliate her subsequent conduct) very pink and boyish and pathetic, but somehow faithful and reliable and altogether lovable.

So she kissed it. Then she tried to run away. The attempt failed.

It was not Barbran's nose that got kissed next. Nor, for that matter,

was it young Phil's. Then he held her off and shut his eyes, for the untrammelled exercise of his reasoning powers, and again demanded of Barbran and the fates:

"What's the use?"

"What's the use of what?" returned Barbran tremulously.

"Of all this? Your father's a millionaire, and I won't--I can't--"

"He isn't!" cried Barbran. "And you can--you will."

"He isn't?" ejaculated Phil. "What is he?"

"He's a school-teacher, and I haven't got a thing but debts."

Phil received this untoward news as if a flock of angels, ringing joy bells, had just brought him the gladdest tidings in history. After an interlude he said:

"But, why--"

"Because," said Barbran, burrowing her nose in his coat: "I thought it would be an asset. I thought people would consider it romantic and it would help business. See how much that reporter made of it! Phil! Wh-wh-why are you treating me like a--a--a--dumbbell?"

For he had thrust her away from him at arm's-length again.

"There's one other thing between us, Barbran."

"If there is, it's your fault. What is it?"

"Harvey Wheelwright," he said solemnly. "Do you really like that sickening slush-slinger?"

She raised to him eyes in which a righteous hate quivered. "I loathe him. I've always loathed him. I despise the very ink he writes with and the paper it's printed on."

When I happened in a few minutes later, they were ritually burning the "Dear Friend and Admirer" letter in a slow candle-flame, and Harvey Wheelwright, as represented by his unctuously rolling signature, was writhing in merited torment. Between them they told me their little romance.

"And he's not going to Kansas City," said Barbran defiantly.

"I'm not going anywhere, ever, away from Barbran," said young Phil.

"And he's going to paint what he wants to."

"Pictures of Barbran," said young Phil.

"And we're going to burn the Wheel sign in effigy, and wipe off the walls and _make_ the place a success," said Barbran.

"And we're going to be married right away," said Phil.

"Next week," said Barbran.

"What do you think?" said both.

Now I know what I ought to have said just as well as MacLachan himself. I should have pointed out the folly and recklessness of marrying on twenty-five dollars a week and a dowry of debts. I should have preached prudence and caution and delay, and have pointed out--The wind blew the door open: Young Spring was in the park, and the wet odor of little burgeoning leaves was borne in, wakening unwithered memories in my withered heart.

"Bless you, my children!" said I.

It was actually for this, as holding out encouragement to their reckless, feckless plans, that Wisdom, in the person of MacLachan, the tailor, reprehended me, rather than for my historical intentions regarding the pair.

"What'll they be marryin' on?" demanded Mac Wisdom--that is to say, MacLachan.

"Spring and youth," I said. "The fragrance of lilac in the air, the glow of romance in their hearts. What better would you ask?"

"A bit of prudence," said MacLachan.

"Prudence!" I retorted scornfully. "The miser of the virtues. It may pay its own way through the world. But when did it ever take Happiness along for a jaunt?"

I was quite pleased with my little epigram until the Scot countered upon me with his observation about two young fools and an old one.

Oh, well! Likely enough. Most unwise, and rash and inexcusable, that headlong mating; and there will be a reckoning to pay. Babies, probably, and new needs and pressing anxieties, and Love will perhaps flutter at the window when Want shows his grim face at the door; and Wisdom will be justified of his forebodings, and yet--and yet--who am I, old and lonely and unaccompanied, yet once touched with the spheral music and the sacred fire, that I should subscribe to the dour orthodoxies of MacLachan and that ilk?

Years and years ago a bird flew in at my window, a bird of wonderful and flashing hues, and of lilting melodies. It came; it tarried--and I let the chill voice of Prudence overbear its music. It left me. But the song endures; the song endures, and all life has been the richer for its echoes. So let them hold and cherish their happiness, the two young fools.

As for the old one, would that some good fairy, possessed of the pigment and secret of perishable youth, might come down and paint his nose green!

PLOOIE OF OUR SQUARE

Whenever Plooie went shuffling by my bench, I used to think of an old and melancholy song that my grandfather sang:

"And his skin was so thin
You could almost see his bones

As he ran, hobble--hobble--hobble
Over the stones."

Before I could wholly recapture the quaint melody, my efforts would invariably be nullified by the raucous shriek of his trade which had forever fixed the nickname whereby Our Square knew Plooie:

"Parapluie-ee-ee-ee-ees a raccomoder!" He would then recapitulate in English, or rather that unreproducible dialect which was his substitute for it. "Oombrella for mend? Annie oombrella for mend?"

So he would pass on his way, shattering the peaceful air at half-minute intervals with his bilingual disharmonies. He was pallid, meagerly built, stoop-shouldered, bristly-haired, pock-marked, and stiff-gaited, with a face which would have been totally insignificant but for an obstinate chin and a pair of velvet-black, pathetically questioning eyes; and he was incurably an outlander. For five years he had lived among us, occupying a cubbyhole in Schepstein's basement full of ribs, handles, crooks, patches, and springs, without appreciably improving his speech or his position. It was said that his name was Garin--nobody really knew or cared--and it was assumed from his speech that he was French.

Few umbrellas came his way. Those of us affluent enough to maintain such non-essentials patch them ourselves until they are beyond reclamation. Why Plooie did not starve is one of the mysteries of Our Square, though by no means the only one of its kind. I have a notion that the Bonnie Lassie, to whom any variety of want or helplessness is its own sufficient recommendation, drummed up trade for him among her uptown friends. Something certainly enlisted his gratitude, for he invariably took off his frowsy cap when he passed her house, whether or not she was there to see, and he once unbosomed himself to me to the extent of declaring that she was a kind lady. This is the only commentary I ever heard him make upon any one in Our Square, which in turn completely ignored him until the development of his love affair stimulated our condescending and contemptuous interest.

The object of Plooie's addresses was a little Swiss of unknown derivation and obscure history. She appeared to be as detached from the surrounding world as the umbrella-mender himself. An insignificant bit of a thing she was, anaemic and subdued, with a sad little face, soft hazel eyes slightly crossed, and the deprecating manner of those who scrub other people's doorsteps at fifteen cents an hour.

For a year their courtship, if such it might be termed, ran an uneventful course. I had almost said unromantic. But who shall tell where is fancy bred or wherein romance consists? Whenever Plooie saw the drabbled little worker busy on a doorstep, he would cross over and open the conversation according to an invariable formula.

"Annie oombrella for mend? Annie oombrella?" Thereby the little Swiss became known as, and ever will be called locally, "Annie Oombrella." Like most close-knit, centripetal communities, we have a fatal penchant for nicknames in Our Square.

She would look up and smile wanly, and shake her head. Where, indeed, should the like of her get an umbrella to be mended!

Then would he say--I shall not attempt to torture the good English alphabet into a reproduction of his singular phonetics: "It makes fine to-day, it do!"

And she would reply "Yes, a fine day"; and look as if the sun were a little warmer upon her pale skin because of Plooie's greeting, as, perhaps, indeed, it was.

After that he would nod solemnly, or, if feeling especially loquacious, venture some prophecy concerning the morrow, before resuming his unproductive rounds and his lugubrious yawp. One day he discovered that she spoke French. From that time the relationship advanced rapidly. On Christmas he gave her a pair of red woolen gloves. On New Year's he took her walking among the tombstones in God's Acre, which is a serious and sentimental, not to say determinative, social step. Twice in the following week he carried her bucket from house to house. And in the glowing dusk of a crisp winter afternoon they sat together hand in hand, on a bench back of my habitual seat, and looked in each other's eyes, and spoke, infrequently, in their own language, forgetful of the rest of the world, including myself, who was, perhaps, supposed not to understand. But even without hearing their words, I could have guessed. It was very simple and direct, and rather touching. Plooie said:

"If one marries themselves?"

And she replied: "I believe it well."

They kissed solemnly, and their faces, in the gleam of the electric light which at that moment spluttered into ill-timed and tactless activity, were transfigured so that I marveled at the dim splendor of them.

But the Bonnie Lassie was scandalized. On general principles she mistrusts that any marriage is really made in heaven unless she acts as earthly agent of it. What had those two poverty-stricken little creatures to marry on? She put the question rhetorically to Our Square in general and to the two people most concerned in particular. Courts of law might have rejected their replies as irrelevant. Humanly, however, they were convincing enough.

Said Plooie: "Who will have a care of that little one if I have not?"

Said Annie Ombrella: "He is so lonely!"

So those two unfortunates united their misfortunes, and lo! happiness came of it. Luckily that is all that did come of it. What disposition the pair would have made of children, had any arrived, it is difficult to conjecture. Only by miraculous compression of ribs, handles, and fabrics was space contrived in the basement cubbyhole for Annie Ombrella to squeeze in. However, she set up housekeeping cheerily as a bird, with an odd lot of pots and pans which Schepstein had picked up at an auction and resold to them at not more than two hundred per cent profit, plus a kerosene stove, the magnificent wedding gift of the Bonnie Lassie and her husband, Cyrus the Gaunt. Twice a week they had meat. They were rising in the social scale.

Habitude is the real secret of tolerance. As we became accustomed to Plooie, Our Square ceased to resent his invincible outlandishness; we endured him with equanimity, although it would be exaggeration to say that we accepted him, and we certainly did not patronize him professionally. Nevertheless, in a minor degree, he nourished. Annie Ombrella must have lavished care upon him. His pinched-in shoulders broadened perceptibly. His gait, still a halting shuffle, grew noticeably brisker. There was even a heartier note in his lamentable

trade cry:

"Parapluie-ee-ee-ee-ees a raccomoder!"

As for Annie Ombrella, having some one to look after quite transformed her. She grew plump and chirpy, and bustling as a blithe little sparrow, though perhaps duck would be a happier comparison, for she was dabbling and splashing in water all the day long, making the stairs and porches of her curatorship fairly glisten with cleanliness. Her rates went up to twenty cents an hour. There were rumors that she had started a savings account. Life stretched out before the little couple, smooth and peaceful and sunny with companionship.

Then came the war.

The calamitous quality of a great world tragedy is that it brings to so many helpless little folk bitter and ignoble tragedies of shame and humiliation and misunderstanding. With a few racial exceptions, Our Square was vehemently pro-Ally. In spirit we fought with valiant France and prayed for heroic Belgium. What a Godspeed we gave to the few sons of Gaul who, in those early days, left us to fight the good fight! How sourly we looked upon Plooie continuing his peaceful rounds. Whence arose the rumor, I cannot say, but it was noised about just at that time of wrath and tension that Plooie was born in Liege. Liege, that city of fire and slaughter and heroism, upon which the eyes and hopes of the world were turned in wonder and admiration. Somebody had seen the entry on the marriage register! The Bonnie Lassie told me of it, pausing at my bench with a little furrow between her bright eyes.

"Dominie, you know Emile Garin pretty well?"

"Not at all," I replied, failing to identify the rickety Plooie by his rightful name.

"Of course you do! Never a morning but he stops at your bench and asks if you have an umbrella to mend."

"I never have. What of him?"

"Have you any influence with him?"

"Not compared with yours."

The Bonnie Lassie made a little gesture of despair. "I can't find him. And Annie Ombrella won't tell me where he is. She only cries."

"That's bad. You think he--he is--"

"Why don't you say it outright, Dominie? You think he's hiding."

"Really!" I expostulated. "You come to me with accusations against the poor fellow and then undertake to make me responsible for them."

"I don't believe it's true at all," averred the Bonnie Lassie loyally. "I don't believe Plooie is a coward. There's some reason why he doesn't go over and help! I want to know what it is."

Perceiving that I was expected to provide excuses for the erring one, I did my best. "Over age," I suggested.

"He's only thirty-two."

"Bless me! He looks sixty. Well--physical infirmity."

"He can carry a load all day."

"He won't leave Annie Ombrella, then. Or perhaps she won't let him."

"When I asked her, she cried harder than ever and said that her mother was French and she would go and fight herself, if they'd have her."

"Then I give it up. What does your Olympian wisdom make of it?"

"I don't know. But I'm afraid the Garins are going to have trouble."

Within a few days Plooie reappeared and his strident falsetto appeal for trade rang shrill in the space of Our Square. Trouble developed at once. Small boys booed at him, called him "yellow," and advised him to go carefully, there was a German behind the next tree. Henri Dumain, our little old French David who fought the tragic duel of tooth and claw with his German Jonathan in Thorsen's Elite Restaurant, stung him with that most insulting word in any known tongue--"Lache!"--and threatened him with uplifted cane; and poor Plooie slunk away. But I think it was the fact that he who stayed at home when others went forward had set a picture of Albert of Belgium in the window of his cubbyhole that most exasperated us against him. Tactless, to say the least! His call grew quavery and furtive. Annie Ombrella ceased to sing at work. Matters looked ill for the Garins.

The evil came to a head the week after David and Jonathan broke off all relations. Perhaps that tragedy of shattered friendship (afterward rejoined through the agency of the great peacemaker, Death) had got on our nerves. Ordinarily, had Plooie chased a small boy who had tipped a barrel down his basement steps, nothing would have come of it. But the chase took him into the midst of a group of the younger and more boisterous element, returning from a business meeting of the Gentlemen's Sons of Avenue B, and before he could turn, they had surrounded him.

"Here's our little 'ee-ro!" "Looka the Frenchy that won't fight!"
"Safety first, hey, Plooie?" "Charge umbrellas--backward, march!"

Plooie did his best to break for a run through, which was the worst thing he could have tried. They collared him. By that contact he became their captive, their prey. What to do with him? To loose a prisoner, once in the hand, is an unthinkable anti-climax. Somebody developed an inspirational thought: "Ride him on a rail!"

Near by, a house front under repair supplied a scantling. Plooie was hustled upon it. He fell off. They jammed him back again. He clung, wide-eyed, white-faced, and silent. The mob, for it was that now, bore him with jeers and jokes and ribaldry along the edge of the park.

When they came within my ken he was riding high, and the mob was being augmented momentarily from every quarter. I looked about for Terry the Cop. But Terry was elsewhere. It is not beyond the bounds of reasonable probability that he had absented himself on purpose. "God hates a coward" is a tenet of Terry's creed. I confess to a certain sympathy with it myself. After all, a harsh lesson might not be amiss for Plooie, the recusant. Composing my soul to a non-intervention policy, I leaned back on my bench, when a pitiful sight ruined my neutrality.

Along the outer edge of the compact mob trotted little Annie Ombrella.

From time to time she dashed herself blindly against that human wall, which repulsed her not too roughly and with indulgent laughter. Their concern was not with her. It was with the coward; their prisoner, delivered by fate to the stern decrees of mob justice. I could hear his voice now, calling out to her in their own language across the supervening heads:

"Do not have fear, my little one. They do me no harm. Go you home, little cat. Soon I come also. Do not fear."

From his forehead ran a little stream of blood. But there was that in his face which told me that if he was fearful it was only for her. His voice, steady and piercing, overrode the clamor of the crowd. I began to entertain doubts as to his essential cowardice.

Annie Ombrella, dumb with misery and terror, only dashed herself the more hopelessly against the barrier of bodies.

Even the delight of rail-riding a victim becomes monotonous in time. The many-headed sought further measures of correction and reprobation.

"Le's tar-and-feather him."

"White feathers!"

"Where'll we gettum?"

"Satkins's kosher shop on the Av'noo."

"Where's yer tar?"

This was a poser; Satkins was saved from a raid. A more practical expedient now evolved from the collective brain.

"Duck'm in the fountain!"

"_Drown_ him in the fountain!" amended an enthusiast.

Whooping with delight, the mob turned toward the gate. This was becoming dangerous. That there was no real intent to drown the unfortunate umbrella-mender I was well satisfied. But mob intent is subject to mob impulse. If they once got him into the water, the temptation of the playful to push his head under just once more might be too strong. Plainly the time was ripe for intervention.

Owing to some enthusiastically concerted but ill-directed engineering, the scantling with its human burden had jammed crosswise of the posts. Now, if ever, was the opportunity for eloquence of dissuasion.

For the heroic role of Horatius at the Bridge I am ill-fitted both by temperament and the fullness of years. Nevertheless, I advanced into the imminent deadly breach and raised the appeal to reason.

The result was unsatisfactory. Some hooted. Others laughed.

"Never mind the Dominie," yelled Inky Mike, laying hold of the rail by an end and hauling it around. "He don't mean nothin'."

Old bones are no match for young barbarism. The rush through the gate brushed me aside like a feather. I saw the tragi-comic parade go by, as I leaned against a supporting tree: the advance guard of clamorous

urchins, the rail-bearers, the white-faced figure of Plooie, jolted aloft, bleeding but calm, self-forgetful, and still calling out reassurances to his wife; the jostling rabble, and upon the edge of it a frantic woman, clawing, sobbing, imploring. On they swept. I listened for the splash.

It did not come.

A lion had risen in the path. To be more accurate, a lioness. To my unsuccessful role of Horatius, a Horatia better fitted for the fray had succeeded, in the austere and superb person of Madame Rachel Pinckney Pemberton Tallafferr, aforetime of the sovereign State of Virginia.

Where all my eloquence had failed, she checked that joyously anticipative rabble by the simple query, set in the chilliest and most peremptory of aristocratic tones, as to what they were doing.

I like to think--the Bonnie Lassie says that I am flattering myself thereby--that it was the momentary halt caused by my abortive effort to hold the gate, which gave time for a greater than my humble self to intervene.

Madame Tallafferr, in the glory of black silk, the Pinckney lace, the Pemberton diamond, and accompanied by that fat relic of slavery, Black Sally, had been taking the air genteelly on a bench when the disturbance grated upon her sensitive ear.

"What is that rabble about, Sally?" she inquired.

The aged negress reconnoitered. "Reckon dey's ridin' a gentmun on a rail," she reported.

"A _gentleman_, Sally? Impossible. No gentleman would endure such an affront. Look again."

"Yessum. It's dat po' white trash dey call Plooie. Mained yo' umbrella oncet."

"My umbrella-mender!" (The mere fact that the victim had once tinkered for her a decrepit parasol entitled him in her feudal mind to the high protection of the Tallafferr tradition.) "Tell them to desist at once."

Apologetically but shrewdly Sally opined that the neighborhood of the advancing mob was "no place foh a niggah."

With perfect faith in the powers of her superior she added: "You desist 'em, mist'ess."

Sally's confidence in her mistress was equaled or perhaps even excelled by her mistress's confidence in herself.

Leaning upon her cane and attended by the faithful though terrified servitor, Madame Tallafferr rustled forward. She took her stand upon the brink of the fountain in almost the exact spot where she had disarmed MacLachan, the tailor, drunk, songful, and suicidal, two years before. Since that feat an almost mythologic awe had attached itself to her locally.

She waited, small and thin, hawk-eyed, imperious, and tempered like steel. The ring of tempered steel, too, was in her voice when, at the proper moment, she raised it.

"What are you doing?"

The clamor of the mob died down. The sight of Horatia (I beg her pardon humbly, Madame Tallafferr) in the path smote them with misgivings. As in Macaulay's immortal, if somewhat jingly epic, "those behind cried 'Forward' and those before cried 'Back!'" That single hale and fiery old lady held them. No more could those two hundred ruffians have defied the challenge of her contemptuous eyes than they could have advanced into the flaming doors of a furnace.

A cautious voice from the rear inquired: "Who's the dame?"

"She's a witch," conjectured some one.

"It's the Duchess," said another, giving her the local title of veneration.

"It's the lady that shot the tailor," proclaimed an awe-stricken bystander. (Legend takes strange twists in Our Square as elsewhere.) Some outlander, ignorant of our traditions, prescribed in a malevolent squeak:

"T'row 'er in the drink."

"Who spoke?" said Madame Tallafferr, crisp and clear.

Silence. Then the sound of objurgations as the advocate frantically resisted well-meant efforts to thrust him into undesirable prominence. Finally a miniature eruption outward from the mob's edge, followed by a glimpse of a shadowy figure departing at full speed. The Duchess leveled a bony finger at Inky Mike, the nearest figure personally known to her, who began a series of contortions suggestive of a desire to crawl into his own pocket.

"Michael," said the Duchess.

"Yessum," said Inky Mike, whose name happens to be Moe Sapperstein.

"What are you doing to that unfortunate person?"

"J-j-just a little j-j-joke," replied the other in what was doubtless intended for a light-hearted and care-free tone.

"Let him down." Inky Mike hesitated. "At once!" snapped the Duchess and stamped her foot.

"Yessum," said Inky Mike meekly.

Loosing his hold on the scantling, he retreated upon the feet of those behind. They let go also. Plooie slid forward to the ground. Madame Tallafferr's bony finger (backed by the sparkle of an authoritative diamond) swept slowly around a half-circle, with very much the easy and significant motion of a machine gun and something of the effect. A subtle suggestion of limpness manifested itself in the mass before her. Addressing them, she raised her voice not a whit. She had no need to.

"Go about your business," she said. "Rabble!" she added in precisely the tone which one might expect of a well-bred but particularly deadly snake.

The mob wilted to a purposeless and abashed crowd. The crowd disintegrated into individuals. The individuals asked themselves what they were doing there, and, finding no sufficient answer, slunk away. Plooie was triumphantly escorted by Madame Tallafferr and Black Sally, and (less triumphantly) by my limping self, to the nearest haven, which chanced to be the Bonnie Lassie's house. Annie Oombrella pattered along beside him, fumbling his hand and trying not to cry.

But when the Bonnie Lassie saw the melancholy wreck, *_she_* cried, as much from fury as from pity, and said that men were brutes and bullies and cowards and imbeciles--and why hadn't her Cyrus been at home to stop it? Where to Madame Tallafferr complacently responded that Mr. Cyrus Staten had not been needed: the *_canaille_* would always respect a proper show of authority from its superiors; and so went home, rustling and sparkling.

After all, Plooie was not much hurt. Perhaps more frightened than anything else. Panic was, in fact, the reason generally ascribed in Our Square for his quiet departure, with his Annie, of course, on the following Sunday. Only the Bonnie Lassie dissented. But as the Bonnie Lassie reasons with her heart instead of her head, we accept her theories with habitual and smiling indulgence rather than respect--until the facts bear them out. She had, it appeared, called on the Plooies to inquire as to their proposed course, and had rather more than hinted that if the head of the house wished to respond to his country's call, Our Square would look after Annie Oombrella. To this he returned only a stubborn and somber silence. The Bonnie Lassie said afterward that he seemed ashamed. She added that he had left good-bye for me and hoped the Dominie would not think too hard of him. Recalling that I had rather markedly failed to acknowledge his salute on the morning before his departure, I felt a qualm of misgiving. After all, judging your neighbor's soul is a kittle business. There is such an insufficiency of data.

So Schepstein lost a renter. The basement cubbyhole remained vacant, with only the picture of Albert of the Kingdom of Sorrows in the window as a memento. Nothing further was seen or heard of Plooie. But Schepstein, wandering far afield in search of tenement sales a full year after, encountered Annie Oombrella washing down the steps of an office far over in Lewis Street, nearly to the river. All the plumpness which she had taken on in the happy days was gone. She looked wistful and haggard.

Schepstein, doing the polite (which, as he accurately states, costs nothing and might get you something some time), asked after Plooie. Where was he? Annie Oombrella shook her head.

"Left you, has he?" asked Schepstein, astonished at this evidence of iniquity.

"Yes," said Annie Oombrella. But there was a ring in her voice that Schepstein failed to understand. It sounded almost like defiance. Her eyes were deep-hollowed and sorrowful, but they met his as squarely as they could, considering their cast. Schepstein was quite shocked to observe that there was no shame in them. I suppose the shock temporarily unbalanced his principles, for, having caught sight of one of her shoes, he offered to lend her three dollars, indefinitely and without interest, on her bare note-of-hand. (When he saw the other shoe, he made it five.) She looked at the money anxiously, but shook her head.

"Well, if you ever need a home, the basement's vacant and there ain't a

better basement in Our Square."

Annie Ombrella began to cry quietly, and Schepstein went on about his business.

Through the ensuing years many women cried quietly or vehemently, according to their natures, and many men went away from places that had known them, to be no more known of those places; and the little Kingdom of Sorrows, shattered, blood-soaked, and unconquerable, stood fast, a bulwark between the ravager of the world and his victory until there sped across the death-haunted seas the army that was to turn the scales. Our Square gave to that sacrifice what it can never recover: witness the simple memorials in Our Square.

Many people see ghosts; Our Square is well haunted, as befits its ancient and diminished glories. Few hear ghosts. This is as it ought to be. In their very nature, ghosts should be seen, not heard. Yet, in the year of grace, 1919, under a blazing September sun, with a cicada, vagrant from heaven knows whence, frying his sizzling sausages in our lilac bush, and other equally insistent sounds of reality filling the air, my ears were smitten with a voice from the realm of wraiths.

"Parapluie-ee-ee-ee-ees," it cried on a faint and clattering note.
"Parapluie-ee-ee-ee-ees a raccomoder."

Over in the far corner of the park an apparition moved into my visual range. It looked like Plooie. It moved like Plooie. It was loaded like Plooie. It opened a mouth like Plooie's and emitted again the familiar though diminished falsetto shriek. No doubt of it now; it was Plooie. He had come back to us who never thought to see him again, who never wished to see him again, still unpurged of his stigma.

As he passed me, I acknowledged his greeting, somewhat stiffly, I fear, and walked over to Schepstein's. There in the basement, amid the familiar wreckage as of a thousand umbrellas, sat little Annie.

"Bonjour, Dominie," said she wistfully.

"Good-morning, Annie. So you are back."

"Yes, Dominie. Is there need that one wash the step at your house?"

"There is need that one explain one's self. What have you been doing these three years?"

"I work. I work hard."

"And your husband? What has he been doing?" I asked sternly.

Annie Ombrella's soft face drooped. "Soyez gentil, Dominie," she implored. "Be a kind, good man and ask him not. That make him so triste--so sad."

"He doesn't look well, Annie."

"He have been ver' seeck. Now we come home he is already weller."

"But do you think it is wise for you to come back here?" I demanded, feeling brutal as I put the question. Annie Ombrella's reply did not make me feel any less so. She sent a quivering look around that unspeakably messy, choked-up little hole in the wall that was home to

Plooie and her.

"We have loved each other so much here," said she.

Our Square is too poor to be enduringly uncharitable, either in deed or thought. War's resentments died out quickly in us. No longer was Plooie in danger of mob violence. By common consent we let him alone; he made his rounds unmolested, but also unpatronized. But for Annie Oombrella's prodigies of industry with pail and brush, the little couple in Schepstein's basement would have fared ill.

Annie earned for both. In the process, happiness came back to her face.

To the fat Rosser twin accrues the credit of a pleasurable discovery about Plooie. This was that, if you sneaked softly up behind him and shouted: "Hey, Plooie! What was you doing in the war?" his jaw would drop and his whole rickety body begin to quiver, and he would heave his burden to his shoulder and break into a spavined gallop, muttering and sobbing like one demented. As the juvenile sense of humor is highly developed in Our Square, Plooie got a good deal of exercise, first and last.

Eventually he foiled them by coming out only in school hours. This didn't help his trade. But then his trade had dwindled to the vanishing point anyway. Even Madame Tallafferr had dropped him. She preferred not to deal with a poltroon, as she put it.

On the day of the great exodus, Plooie put in some extra hours. He was in no danger from his youthful persecutors, because they had all gone up to line Fifth Avenue and help cheer the visiting King of the Belgians. So had such of the rest of Our Square as were not at work. The place was practically deserted. Nevertheless, Plooie prowled about, uttering his cracked and lugubrious cry in the forlorn hope of picking up a parapluie to raccommode. I was one of the few left to hear him, because Mendel, the jeweler, had most inconsiderately gone to view royalty, leaving my unrepaired glasses locked in his shop; otherwise I, too, would have been on the Fifth Avenue curb shouting with the best of them. Do not misinterpret me. For the divinity that doth hedge a king I care as little as one should whose forbears fought in the Revolution. But for the divinity of high courage and devotion that certifies to the image of God within man, I should have been proud to take off my old but still glossy silk hat to Albert of the Belgians. So I was rather cross, and it was well for my equanimity that the Bonnie Lassie, who had remained at home for reasons which are peculiarly her own affair and that of Cyrus the Gaunt, should have come over to my favorite bench to cheer me up. Said the Bonnie Lassie:

"I wonder why Plooie didn't go to see his king."

"Sense of shame," I suggested acidly.

"Yes?" said the Bonnie Lassie in a tone which I mistrusted.

"It is no use," I assured her, "for you to favor me with that pitying and contemptuous smile of yours, for I can't see it. Mendel has my nearer range of vision locked in his shop."

"I was just thinking," said the Bonnie Lassie in ruminant accents, "how nice it must be to look back on a long life of unspotted correctness with not an item in it to be ashamed of. It gives one such a comfortable basis for sitting in judgment."

"Her lips drip honey," I observed, "and the poison of asps is under her tongue."

"Your quotations are fatally mixed," retorted my companion.

From across the park sounded Plooie's patient falsetto:

"Parapluie-ee-ee-ees! Annie Oombrella for mend? Parapluie-ee-ee-" The call broke off in a kind of choke.

"What's happened to Plooie?" I asked. "The youngsters can't have got back from the parade already, have they?"

"A very tall man has stopped him," said the Bonnie Lassie. "Plooie has dropped his kit.... He's trying to salute.... It must be one of the Belgian officers.... Oh, Dominie!"

"Well, what?" I demanded impatiently and cursed the recreant Mendel in my heart.

"It can't be ... you don't think they can be arresting poor Plooie at this late day for evading service?"

"Serve him right if they did," said I.

"I believe they are. The big man has taken him by the arm and is leading him along. Poor Plooie! He's all wilted down. It's a shame!" cried the Bonnie Lassie, beginning to flame. "It ought not to be allowed."

"Probably they're taking him away. Do you see an official-looking automobile anywhere about?"

"There's a strange car over on the Avenue. Oh, dear! Poor Annie Oombrella! But--but they're not going there. They're going into Schepstein's basement."

I could feel the Bonnie Lassie fidgeting on the bench. For a moment I endured it. Then I said:

"Well, Lassie, why don't you?"

"Why don't I what?"

"Take your usual constitutional, over by the railings. Opposite Schepstein's."

"That isn't my usual constitutional, and you know it, Dominie," said the Bonnie Lassie with dignity.

"Isn't it? Well, curiosity killed a cat, you know."

"How shamelessly you garble! It was--"

"Never mind; the quotation is erroneous, anyway. It should be: _suppressed_ curiosity killed a cat."

The Bonnie Lassie sniffed.

"Rather than be dislodged from my precarious perch on this bench," I pursued, "through the trembling imparted to it by your clinging to the back to restrain yourself from going to see what is up, I should almost

prefer that you would go--and peek."

"Dominie," said the Bonnie Lassie, "you are a despicable old man.... I'll be back in a minute."

"Don't stay long," I pleaded. "Pity the blind."

Her golden laughter floated back to me. But there was no mirth in her voice when she returned.

"It's so dark in there I can hardly see. But the big man is sitting on a pile of ribs talking to Plooie, and Annie Oombrella's face is all swollen with crying. I saw it in the window for a minute."

Pro and con we argued what the probable event might be and how we could best meet it. So intent upon our discussion did we become that we did not note the approach of a stranger until he was within a few paces of the bench. With my crippled vision I apprehended him only as very tall and straight and wearing a loose cape. The effect upon the Bonnie Lassie of his approach was surprising. I heard her give a little gasp. She got up from the bench. Her hand fell upon my shoulder. It was trembling. Where, I wondered, had those two met and in what circumstances, that the mere sight of the stranger caused such emotion in the unusually self-controlled wife of Cyrus Staten. The man spoke quickly in a deep and curiously melancholy voice:

"Madame perhaps does me the honor to remember me?"

"I--I--I--" began the Bonnie Lassie.

"The Comte de Tournon. At Trouville we met, was it not? Several years since?"

"Y-yes. Certainly. At Trouville."

(Now I happen to know that the Bonnie Lassie has never been at Trouville, which did not assuage my suspicions.)

"You are friends of my--countryman, Emile Garin, are you not?" he pursued in his phraseology of extreme precision, with only the faint echo of an accent.

"Who?" I said. "Oh, Plooie, you mean. Friends? Well, acquaintances would be more accurate."

"He tells me that you, Monsieur, befriended him when he had great need of friends. And you, Madame, always. So I have come to thank you."

"You are interested in Plooie?" I asked.

"Plooie?" he repeated doubtfully. I explained to him and he laughed gently. "Profoundly interested," he said. "I have here one of his finest umbrellas which his good wife presented to me. There was also a lady of whom he speaks, a grande dame, of very great authority." For all the sadness of the deep voice, I felt that his eyes were twinkling.

"Madame Tallafferr," supplied the Bonnie Lassie. "She is away on a visit."

"I should like to have met that queller of mobs. She ought to be knighted."

"Knighthood would add nothing to her status," said I, dryly. "She is a Pinckney and a Pemberton besides being a Tallafferr, with two _f_s, two _l_s, and two _r_s."

"Doubtless. I do not comprehend the details of your American orders of merit," said the big sad-voiced man courteously. "But I should have been proud to meet her."

"May I tell her that?" asked the Bonnie Lassie eagerly.

"By all means--when I am gone." Again I felt the smile that must be in the eyes. "But there were others here, not so friendly to the little Garin. That is true, is it not?"

"Yes," said the Bonnie Lassie.

"There is at least a strong suspicion that he is not a deserving case," I pointed out defensively.

"Then it is only because he does not explain himself well," returned the Belgian quickly.

"He does not explain himself at all," I corrected. "Nor does Annie Oom--his wife."

"Ah? That will clarify itself, perhaps, in time. If you will bear with me, I should like to tell you a little story to be passed on to those who are not his friends. Will you not be seated, Madame?"

The Bonnie Lassie resumed her place on the bench. Standing before us, the big man began to speak. Many times since have I wished that I might have taken down what he said verbatim; so gracious it was, so simple, so straightly the expression of a great and generous personality.

"Emile Garin," he said, "was a son of Belgium. He was poor and his people were little folk of nothing-at-all. Moreover, they were dead. So he came to your great country to make his living. When our enemies invaded my country and the call went out to all sons of Belgium, the little Garin was ashamed because he knew that he was physically unfit for military service. But he tried. He tried everywhere. In the mornings they must sweep him away from our Consul-General's doorsteps here because otherwise he would not--You spoke, Monsieur?"

"Nothing. I only said, 'God forgive us!'"

"Amen," said the narrator gravely. "Everywhere they rejected him as unfit. So he became morbid. He hid himself away. Is it not so?"

"That is why they left Our Square so mysteriously," confirmed the Bonnie Lassie.

"After that he hung about the docks. He saw his chance and crawled into the hold of a vessel as a stowaway. He starved. It did not matter. He was kicked. It did not matter. He was arrested. It did not matter. Nothing mattered except that he should reach Belgium. And he did reach my country at the darkest hour, the time when Belgium needed every man, no matter who he was. But he could not be a soldier, the little Garin, because he was unable to march. He had weak legs."

At this point the eternal feminine asserted itself in the Bonnie Lassie.

"I _told_ you there was something," she murmured triumphantly.

"Hush!" said I.

"I am glad to find that he had one true defender here," pursued the biographer of Plooie. "Though he could not fight in the ranks there was use for him. There was use for all true sons of Belgium in those black days. He was made driver of a--a charette; I do not know if you have them in your great city?" He paused, and I guessed that the rumble of heavy wheels on the asphalt, heard near by, had come opportunely. "Ah, yes; there is one."

"A dump-cart," supplied the Bonnie Lassie.

"Merci, Madame. A dump-cart. It is perhaps not an evidently glorious thing to drive a dump-cart for one's country--unless one makes it so. But it was the best the little Garin could do. His legs were what you call quaint--I have already told you. He was faithful and hard-working. They helped build roads near the front, the little Garin and his big cart."

"Not precisely safety-first," whispered the Bonnie Lassie to me, maliciously.

"You are interrupting the story," said I with dignity.

"One day he was driving a load of mud through a village street. Here on this side is a hospital. There on that side is another hospital. Down the middle of the road walks an idiot of a sergeant carrying a new type of grenade with which we were experimenting. One moves a little lever--so. One counts; one, two, three, four, five. One throws the grenade, and at the count of ten, all about it is destroyed, for it is of terrible power. The idiot sergeant sets down the grenade in the middle of the road between the two hospitals full of the helplessly wounded. For what? Perhaps to sneeze. Perhaps to light a cigarette. Heaven only knows, for the sergeant has the luck to be killed next day by a German shell, before he can be court-martialed. As he sets down the grenade, the little lever is moved. The sergeant loses his head. He runs, shouting to everybody to run also.

"But the hospitals, they cannot run. And the wounded, they cannot run. They can only be still and wait. In the nearest hospital there is a visitor. A great lady. A great and greatly loved lady." The sad voice deepened and softened.

"I know," whispered the Bonnie Lassie; "I can guess."

"Yes. But the little Garin, approaching on his big dump-cart, does not know. He knows the danger, for he hears the shouts and sees the people escaping. He sees the grenade, too. A man running past him shouts, 'Turn your cart, you fool, and save yourself.' Oh, yes; he can save himself. That is easy. But what of the people in the hospitals? Who can save them? The little Garin thinks hard and swiftly. He drives his big dump-cart over the grenade. He pulls the lever which dumps the mud. The mud buries the grenade; much mud, very soft and heavy. The grenade explodes, nevertheless.

"One mule blows through one hospital, one through another. Everything near is covered with mud. The great lady is thrown to the floor, but she is not hurt. She rises and attends the injured and calms the terrified. The hospitals are saved. It is a glorious thing to have driven a

dump-cart for one's country--so."

"But what became of our Plooie?" besought the Bonnie Lassie.

The big man spread his arms in a wide, Gallic gesture. "They looked for him everywhere. No sign. But by and by some one saw a quite large piece of mud on the hospital roof begin to wriggle. The little Garin was that large piece of mud. They brought him down and put him in the hospital which he had saved. For a long time he had shell-shock. Even now he cannot speak of the war without his nerves being affected. When he got out of hospital, he did not seem to know who he was. Or perhaps he did not care. Shell-shock is a strange thing. He went away, and his records were lost in the general confusion. Afterward we sought for him. The great lady wished very much to see him. But we could find nothing except that he had come back to this country. Official inquiry was made here and he was traced to Our Square. So I came to see him. Because he cannot speak for himself and will not allow his wife to tell his story--it is part of the shell-shock which will wear off in time--I came to speak for him."

"Does your--do you do this sort of thing often?" asked the Bonnie Lassie with a queer sort of resonance in her voice.

The big man answered, in a tone which suggested that he was smiling: "One cannot visit all the brave men who suffered for Belgium. But there is a special reason here, the matter of the great and greatly loved lady whom the little Garin saved."

"I see," said the Bonnie Lassie softly.

After the big man had made his adieux, we sat silent for some minutes. Presently she spoke; there was wonder and something else in her voice.

"Plooie!" she said, and that was all.

"You are crying," I said.

"I'm not," she retorted indignantly. "But you ought to be. For your injustice."

"If we all bewept our injustices," said I oracularly, "Noah would have to come back and build a new ark for a bigger flood than his."

"What do you think of him?" said the Bonnie Lassie.

"As a weather-prophet, he was unequaled. As an expert animal-breeder, his selections were at times ill-advised."

"Don't be tiresome, Dominie. You know that I'm not interested in Noah."

"As to our romantic visitant," I said, "I think that Cyrus the Gaunt would better be watchful. I've never known anyone else except Cyrus to produce such an emotional effect upon you."

"Don't be school-girlish!" admonished the Bonnie Lassie severely. "Poor old Dominie! He doesn't know what's going on under his very nose. Where are your eyes?"

"In Mendel's top drawer, I suppose.... The question is how are we going to make it up to Plooie?"

"I don't think you need worry about that," returned the Bonnie Lassie loftily.

Nor was there any occasion for worry. Two days later there occurred an irruption of dismaying young men with casual squares of paper in their pockets, upon which they scratched brief notes. They were, I was subsequently given to understand, the pick and flower of the city's reportorial genius. (I could imagine the ghost of Inky Mike with his important notebook and high-poised pencil, regarding with wonder and disdain their quiet and unimpressive methods.) A freshly painted sign across the front of Plooie's basement, was the magnet that drew them:

Emile Garin & Wife
Umbrella Mender & Porch Cleanser

to

His Majesty

The King of the Belgians
(By Royal Warranty)

No; Plooie and Annie Oombrella need no help from the humble now. Their well-deserved fortune is made.

TRIUMPH

The months go by--bleak March and May-day heat--
Harvest is over--winter well-nigh done--
And still I say, "To-morrow we shall meet."

MAY PROBYN

The Little Red Doctor sat on the far end of my bench. Snow fringed the bristling curve of his mustache. He shivered.

"Dominie," said he, "it's a wild day."

I assented.

"Dominie," said the Little Red Doctor, "it is no kind of a day for an old man to be sitting on a bench."

I dissented.

"Dominie," persisted the Little Red Doctor, "you can't deny that you're old."

"Whose fault is that but yours?" I retorted.

"Don't try to flatter me," said the Little Red Doctor. "You'd have licked my old friend, Death, in that bout you had with him, without any help of mine. And, anyway, you were already old, then. You're a tough old bird, Dominie. Otherwise you wouldn't be sitting here in a March blizzard staring at the Worth mansion and wondering what really happened there three years ago."

"Your old friend, Death, beat you that time," said I maliciously.

The Little Red Doctor chose to ignore my taunt. "Look your fill, Dominie," he advised. "You won't have much more chance."

"Why?" I asked, startled.

"The wreckers begin on it next month. Also a nice, new building is going up next door to it on that little, secret, walled jungle that Ely Crouch used to misname his garden. I'm glad of it, too. I don't like anachronisms."

"I'm an anachronism," I returned. "You'll be one pretty soon. Our Square is one solid anachronism."

"It won't be much longer. The tide is undermining us. Other houses will go as the Worth place is going. You'll miss it, Dominie. You love houses as if they were people."

It is true. To me houses are the only fabrications of man's hands that are personalities. Enterprise builds the factory, Greed the tenement, but Love alone builds the house, and by Love alone is it maintained against the city's relentless encroachments. Once hallowed by habitation, what warm and vivid influences impregnate it! Ambition, pride, hope, joys happily shared; suffering, sorrow, and loss bravely endured--the walls outlive them all, gathering with age, from grief and joy alike, kind memories and stanch traditions. Yes, I love the old houses. Yet I should not be sorry to see the Worth mansion razed. It has outlived all the lives that once cherished it and become a dead, unhuman thing.

That solid square of brown, gray-trimmed stone had grown old honorably with the honorable generations of the Worths. Then it had died. In one smiting stroke of tragedy the life had gone out of it. Now it stood staring bleakly out from its corner with filmed eyes, across the busy square. Passing its closed gates daily, I was always sensible of a qualm of the spirit, a daunting prescience that the stilled mansion still harbored the ghost of an unlaidd secret.

The Little Red Doctor broke in upon my reverie.

"Yes; you're old, Dominie. But you're not wise. You're very foolish. Foolish and obstinate."

Knowing well what he meant, I nevertheless pampered him by asking: "Why am I foolish and obstinate?"

"Because you refuse to believe that Ned Worth murdered Ely Crouch. Don't you?"

"I do."

"Then why did Ned commit suicide?"

"I don't know."

"How do you explain away his written confession?"

"I don't. I only know that it was not in Ned Worth's character willfully to kill an old man. You were his friend; you ought to know it as well as I do."

"Ah, that's different," said the Little Red Doctor, giving me one of his

queer looks. "Yes; you're a pig-headed old man, Dominie."

"I'm a believer in character."

"I don't know of any other man equally pig-headed, except possibly one. He's old, too."

"Gale Sheldon," said I, naming the gentle, withered librarian of a branch library a few blocks to the westward, the only other resident of Our Square who had unfailingly supported me in my loyalty to the memory of the last of the Worths.

"Yes. He's waiting for us now in his rooms. Will you come?"

Perceiving that there was something back of this--there usually is, in the Little Red Doctor's maneuvers--I rose and we set out. As we passed the Worth house it seemed grimmer and bleaker than ever before. There was something savage and desperate in its desolation. The cold curse of abandonment lay upon it. At the turn of the corner the Little Red Doctor said abruptly.

"She's dead."

"Who?" I demanded.

"The girl. The woman in the case."

"In the Ely Crouch case? A woman? There was never any woman hinted at."

"No. And there never would have been as long as she was alive. Now--Well, I'll leave Sheldon to explain her. He loved her, too, in his way."

In Gale Sheldon's big, still room, crowded with the friendly ghosts of mighty books, a clear fire was burning. One shaded lamp at the desk was turned on, for though it was afternoon the blizzard cast a gloom like dusk. The Little Red Doctor retired to a far corner where he was all but merged in the shadows.

"Have you seen this?" Sheldon asked me, pointing to the table.

Thereon was spread strange literature for the scholarly taste of our local book-worm, a section from the most sensational of New York's Sunday newspapers. From the front page, surrounded by a barbarous conglomeration of headlines and uproarious type, there smiled happily forth a face of such appealing loveliness as no journalistic vulgarity could taint or profane. I recognized it at once, as any one must have done who had ever seen the unforgettable original. It was Virginia Kingsley, who, two years before, had been Sheldon's assistant. The picture was labeled, "Death Ends Wanderlust of Mysterious Heiress," and the article was couched in a like style of curiosity-piquing sensationalism. Stripped of its fulsome verbiage, it told of the girl's recent death in Italy, after traveling about Europe with an invalid sister; during which progress, the article gloated, she was "vainly wooed by the Old World's proudest nobility for her beauty and wealth," the latter having been unexpectedly left her by an aged relative. Her inexorable refusals were set down, by the romantic journalist, as due to some secret and prior attachment. (He termed it an "affaire de court"!)

Out of the welter of words there stood forth one sentence to tempt the imagination: "She met death as a tryst." For that brief flash the

reporter had been lifted out of his bathos and tawdriness into a clearer element. One could well believe that she had "met death as a tryst." For if ever I have beheld unfaltering hope and unflagging courage glorified and spiritualized into unearthly beauty, it was there in that pictured face, fixed by the imperishable magic of the camera.

"No; I hadn't seen it," I said after reading. "Is it true?"

"In part." Then, after a pause, "You knew her, didn't you, Dominie?"

"Only by sight. She had special charge of the poetry alcove, hadn't she?"

"Yes. She belonged there of right. She was the soul and fragrance of all that the singers of springtime and youth have sung." He sighed, shaking his grizzled head mournfully. "'And all that glory now lies dimmed in death.' It doesn't seem believable."

He rose and went to the window. Through the whorls of snow could be vaguely seen the outlines of the Worth house, looming on its corner. He stared at it musing.

"I've often wondered if she cared for him," he murmured.

"For him? For Worth!" I exclaimed in amazement. "Were they friends?"

"Hardly more than acquaintances, I thought. But she left very strangely the day of his death and never came back."

From the physician's corner there came an indeterminate grunt.

"If that is a request for further information, Doctor, I can say that on the few occasions when they met here in the library, it was only in the line of her duties. He was interested in the twentieth-century poets. But even that interest died out. It was months before the--the tragedy that he stopped coming to the Library."

"It was months before the tragedy that he stopped going anywhere, wasn't it?" I asked.

"Yes. Nobody understood it; least of all, his friends. I even heard it hinted that he was suffering from some malady of the brain." He turned inquiringly to the far, dim corner.

Out of it the Little Red Doctor barked: "Death had him by the throat."

"Death? In what form?"

"Slow, sure fingers, shutting off his breath. Do you need further details or will the dry, scientific term, epithelioma, be enough?" The voice came grim out of the gloom. No answer being returned, it continued: "I've had easier jobs than telling Ned Worth. It was hopeless from the first. My old friend, Death, had too long a start on me."

"Was it something that affected his mind?"

"No. His mind was perfectly clear. Vividly clear. May I take my last verdict, when it comes, with a spirit as clear and as noble."

Silence fell, and in the stillness we heard the Little Red Doctor communing with memories. Now and then came a muttered word. "Suicide!"

in a snarl of scornful rejection. "Fool-made definitions!" Presently, "Story for a romancer, not a physician." He seemed to be canvassing an inadequacy in himself with dissatisfaction. Then, more clearly: "Love from the first. At a glance, perhaps. The contagion of flame for powder. But in that abyss together they saw each other's soul."

"The Little Red Doctor is turning poet," said Sheldon to me in an incredulous whisper.

There was the snap and crackle of a match from the shadowed corner. The keen, gnarled young face sprang from the darkness, vivid and softened with a strange triumph, then receded behind an imperfect circle, clouded the next instant by a nimbus of smoke. The Little Red Doctor spoke.

Ned Worth was my friend as well as my patient. No need to tell you men, who knew him, why I was fond of him. I don't suppose any one ever came in contact with that fantastic and smiling humanity of his without loving him for it. "Immortal hilarity!" The phrase might have been coined for him.

It wasn't as physician that I went home with Ned, after pronouncing sentence upon him, but as friend. I didn't want him to be alone that first night. Yet I dare say that any one, seeing the two of us, would have thought me the one who had heard his life-limit defined. He was as steady as a rock.

"No danger of my being a miser of life," he said. "You've given me leave to spend freely what's left of it." Well, he spent. Freely and splendidly!

The spacious old library on the second floor--you know it, Dominie, smelt of disuse, as we entered, Ned's servant bringing up the rear with a handbag. Dust had settled down like an army of occupation over everything. The furniture was shrouded in denim. The tall clock in the corner stood voiceless. Three months of desertion will change any house into a tomb. And the Worth mansion was never too cheerful, anyway. Since the others of the family died, Ned hadn't stayed there long enough at a time to humanize it.

Ned's man set down the grip, unstrapped it, took his orders for some late purchases, and left to execute them. I went over to open the two deep-set windows on the farther side of the room. It was a still, close October night, and the late scent of warmed-over earth came up to me out of Ely Crouch's garden next door. From where I stood in the broad embrasure of the south window, I was concealed from the room. But I could see everything through a tiny gap in the hangings. Ned sat at his desk sorting some papers. A sort of stern intentness had settled upon his face, without marring its curious faun-like beauty. I carry the picture in my mind.

"What's become of you, Chris?" he demanded presently. I came out into the main part of the room. "Oh, there you are! You'll look after a few little matters for me, won't you?" He indicated a sheaf of papers.

"You needn't be in such a hurry," said I with illogical resentment. "It isn't going to be to-morrow or next week."

"Isn't it?" Something in his tone made me look at him sharply. "Six months or three months or to-morrow," he added, more lightly; "what does it matter as long as it's sure! You know, what I appreciate is that you gave me the truth straight."

"It's a luxury few of my patients get. Their constitutions won't stand it."

"It's a compliment to my nerve. Strangely enough I don't feel nervous about it."

"I do. Damnably! About something, anyway. There's something wrong with this room, Ned. What is it?"

"Don't you know?" he laughed. "It's the sepulchral silence of Old Grandfather Clock, over there. You're looking right at him and wondering subconsciously why he doesn't make a noise like Time."

"That's easily remedied." Consulting my watch I set and wound the ancient timepiece. Its comfortable iteration made the place at once more livable. Immediately it struck the hour.

"Ten o'clock," I said, and parted the draperies at the lower window to look out again. "Ten o'clock of a still, cloudy night and--and the devil is on a prowl in his garden."

"Meaning my highly respected neighbor and ornament to the local bar, the Honorable Ely Crouch?"

"Exactly. Preceded by a familiar spirit in animal form."

"Oh, that's his pet ferret and boon companion."

"Not his only companion. There's some one with him," I said. "A woman."

"I don't admire her taste in romance," said Ned.

"Nor her discretion. You know what they say: 'A dollar or a woman never safe alone with Ely Crouch.'"

"My dollars certainly weren't," observed Ned.

"How did he ever defend your suit for an accounting?" I asked.

"Heedlessness on my side, a crooked judge on his. Stop spying on my neighbor's flirtations and look here."

I turned and got a shock. The handbag lay open on the desk, surrounded by a respectable-sized fortune in bank-notes.

"Pretty much all that the Honorable Ely has left me," he added.

"Is it enough to go on with, Ned?" I asked.

He smiled at me. "Plenty for my time. You forget."

For the moment I had forgotten. "But what on earth are you going to do with all that ready cash?"

"Carry out a brilliant idea. I conceived it after you had handed down your verdict. Went around to the bank and quietly drew out the lot. I've planned a wild and original orgy. A riot of dissipation in giving. Think of the fun one can have with that much tangible money. Already to-day I've struck one man dumb and reduced another to mental decay, by the simple medium of a thousand-dollar bill. Miracles! Declare a vacation,

Chris, and come with me on my secret and jubilant bat, and we'll work wonders."

"And after?" I asked.

"Oh, after! Well, there'll be no further reason for the 'permanent possibility of sensation' on my part. That's your precious science's best definition of life, I believe. It doesn't appeal to one as alluring when the sensation promises to become--well, increasingly unpleasant."

There was no mistaking his meaning. "I can't have that, my son," I protested.

"No? That's a purely professional prejudice of yours. Look at it from my point of view. Am I to wait to be strangled by invisible hands, rather than make an easy and graceful exit? Suicide! The word has no meaning for a man in my condition. If you'll tell me there's a chance, one mere, remote human chance--" He paused, turning to me with what was almost appeal in his glance. How I longed to lie to him! But Ned Worth was the kind that you can't lie to. I looked at him standing there so strong and fine, with all the mirthful zest of living in his veins, sentenced beyond hope, and I thought of those terrible lines of another man under doom:

"I never saw a man who looked
So wistfully at the day."

We medical men learn to throw a protective film over our feelings, like the veil over the eagle's eye. We have to. But I give you my word, I could not trust my voice to answer him.

"You see," he said; "you can't." His hand fell on my arm. "I'm sorry, Chris," he said in that winning voice of his; "I shouldn't plague you for something that you can't give me."

"I can tell you this, anyway," said I: "that it's something less than courage to give up until the time comes. You didn't give your life. You haven't the right to take it; anyway, not until its last usefulness is over."

He made a movement of impatience.

"Oh, I'm not asking you to endure torture. I'd release you myself from that, if it comes to it, in spite of man-made laws. But how can you tell that being alive instead of dead next week or next month may not make an eternal difference to some other life? Your part isn't played out yet. Who are you to say how much good you may yet do before the curtain is rung down?"

"Or how much evil! Well, as a suitable finish, suppose I go down into that garden and kill Ely Crouch," he suggested, smiling. "That would be a beneficial enough act to entitle me to a prompt and peaceful death, wouldn't it?"

"Theoretically sound, but unfortunately impracticable," I answered, relieved at his change of tone.

"I suppose it is." He looked at me, still smiling, but intent. "Chris, what do you believe comes after?"

"Justice."

"A hard word for cowards. What do I believe, I wonder? At any rate, in being sport enough to play the game through. You're right, old hard-shell. I'll stick it out. It will only mean spending _this_ "--he swept the money back into its repository--"a little more slowly."

"I was sure I could count on you," I said. "Now I can give you the talisman." I set on the desk before him a small pasteboard box. "Pay strict attention. You see that label? That's to remind you. One tablet if you can't sleep."

"I couldn't last night."

"Two if the pain becomes more than you can stand."

He nodded.

"But three at one time and you'll sleep so sound that nothing will ever awaken you."

"Good old Chris!" Opening the box, he fingered the pellets curiously. "A blessed thing, your science! Three and the sure sleep."

"On trust, Ned."

"On honor," he agreed. "Then I mustn't expunge old Crouch? It's a disappointment," he added gayly.

He pushed the box away from him and crossed over to the upper window. His voice came to me from behind the enshrouding curtains.

"Our friend has finished his promenade. The air is the sweeter for it. I'll stay here and breathe it."

"Good!" said I. "I've five minutes of telephoning to do. Then I'll be back."

Nobody can ever tell me again that there's an instinct which feels the presence of persons unseen. On my way to the door I passed within arm's-length of a creature tense and pulsating with the most desperate emotions. I could have stretched out a hand and touched her as she crouched, hidden in the embrasure of the lower window. It would seem as if the whole atmosphere of the room must have been surcharged with the terrific passion of her newborn and dreadful hopes. And I felt--nothing. No sense, as I brushed by, of the tragic and concentrated force of will which nerved and restrained her. I went on, and out unconscious. Afterward she was unable to tell me how long she had been there. It must have been for some minutes, for what roused her from her stupor of terror was the word "Suicide." It was like an echo, a mockery to her, at first; and then, as she listened with passionate attention to what followed, my instructions about the poison took on the voice of a ministering providence. The draperies had shut off the view of Ned, nor had she recognized his voice, already altered by the encroachments of the disease. But she heard him walk to the upper window, and saw me pass on my way to the telephone, and knew that the moment had come. From what she told me later, and from that to which I was a mazed witness on my return, I piece together the events which so swiftly followed.

A wind had risen outside or Ned might have heard the footsteps sooner. As it was, when he stepped out from behind the draperies of the upper window those of the lower window were still waving, but the swift figure

had almost reached the desk. The face was turned from him. Even in that moment of astonishment he noticed that she carried her left arm close to her body, with a curious awkwardness.

"Hello!" he challenged.

She cried out sharply, and covered the remaining distance with a rush. Her hand fell upon the box of pellets. She turned, clutching that little box of desperate hopes to her bosom.

"Good God! Virginia!" he exclaimed. "Miss Kingsley!"

"Mr. Worth! Was it you I heard? Why--how are you here?"

"This is my house."

"I didn't know." Keeping her eyes fixed upon him like a watchful animal, she slowly backed to interpose the table between herself and a possible interference. Her arm, still stiffly pressed to her side, impeded her fumbling efforts to open the box. Presently, however, the cover yielded.

He measured the chances of intervention, and abandoned the hope. His brain hummed with a thousand conjectures, a thousand questions centering upon her obvious and preposterous purpose. Suddenly, as her fingers trembled among the tablets, his thoughts steadied and his stratagem was formed.

"What do you want with my tonic?" he asked coolly.

"Tonic? I--I thought--"

"You thought it was the poison. Well, you've got the wrong box. The poison box is in the drawer."

"In the drawer," she repeated. She spoke in the mechanical voice of one desperately intent upon holding the mind to some vital project. Her nerveless hands fumbled at the side of the desk.

He crossed quickly, caught up the box which she had just relinquished, and dropped it into his pocket.

"Oh!" she moaned, and stared at him with stricken and accusing eyes. "Then it was the poison!"

"Yes."

"Give it back to me!" she implored, like a bereft child. "Oh, give it to me!"

"Why do you want to kill yourself?"

She looked at him in dumb despair.

"How did you get here?" he demanded.

"Your fire escape."

"And to that from the garden wall, I suppose? So you were Ely Crouch's companion," he cried with a changed voice.

"Don't," she shuddered, throwing her right arm over her face.

"I beg your pardon," he said gently. "Take a swallow of this water. What's the matter with your arm? Are you hurt?"

"No." Her eyes would not meet his. They were fixed obstinately upon the pocket into which he had dropped the poison.

"It's incredible!" he burst out. "You with your youth and loveliness! With everything that makes life sweet for yourself and others. What madness--" He broke off and his voice softened into persuasion. "We were almost friends, once. Can't I--won't you let me help? Don't you think you can trust me?"

She raised her eyes to his, and he read in them hopeless terror. "Yes, I could trust you. But there is only one help for me now. And you've taken it from me."

"Who can tell? You've been badly frightened," he said in as soothing a tone as he could command. "Try to believe that no harm can come to you here, and that I--I would give the blood of my heart to save you from harm or danger. You said you could trust me. What was your errand with Ely Crouch?"

"Money."

"Money!" he repeated, drawing back.

"It was our own; my sister's and mine. Mr. Crouch had it. He had managed our affairs since my father's death. I could never get an accounting from him. To-day the doctor told me that Alice must go away at once for an operation. And to-day Mr. Crouch made this appointment for to-night."

"Didn't you know his reputation? Weren't you afraid?"

"I didn't think of fear. When I told him how matters stood, he offered me money, but--but--Oh, I can't tell you!"

"No need," he said quickly. "I know what he is. I was joking when I spoke of killing him, a little while ago. By God, I wish I had killed him! It isn't too late now."

"It is too late."

Her eyes, dilated, were fixed upon his.

"Why? How--too late?" he stammered.

"I killed him."

"You! You--killed--Ely--Crouch?"

"He had a cane," she said, in a hurried, flat, half-whisper. "When he caught at me, I tried to get it to defend myself. The handle pulled out. There was a dagger on it. He came at me again. I didn't realize what I was doing. All I could see was that hateful face drawing nearer. Then it changed and he seemed to dissolve into a hideous heap. I didn't mean to kill him." Her voice rose in the struggle against hysteria. "God knows, I didn't mean to kill him."

"Hush!"

His hands fell on her shoulders and held her against the onset. Energy and resolution quickened in his eyes. "Who knows of your being in the garden?"

"No one."

"Any one see you climb the wall and come here?"

"No."

"Or know that you had an appointment with him?"

"No."

"Will you do exactly as I tell you?"

"What is the use?" she said dully.

"I'm going to get you out of here."

"I should have to face it later. I couldn't face it--the horror and shame of it. I'd rather die a thousand times." She lifted her arms, the coat opened, and the cane-handled blade dropped to the floor, and rolled. She shuddered away from it. "I kept that for myself, but I couldn't do it. It's got his blood on it. When I heard the doctor speak of the poison, it seemed like a miracle of Providence sent to guide me. Oh, give it to me! Is it"--she faltered--"is it quick?"

"Steady!" Stooping he picked up the weapon. "It needn't come to that, if you can play your part. Have you got the courage to walk out of this house and go home to safety? Absolute safety!"

She searched his face in bewilderment. "I--don't know."

"If I give you my word of honor that it depends only on yourself?"

"How?"

"Pull yourself together. Go downstairs quietly. Turn to your left. You'll see a door. It opens on the street. Walk out with your head up, and go home. You're as safe as though you'd never seen Ely Crouch. There's no clue to you."

"No clue! Look down the fire escape!"

He crossed the room at a bound. Beneath him, its evil snout pointed upwards, sat the dead man's familiar spirit.

"Good God! The ferret!"

"It's been sitting there, watching, watching, watching."

"The more reason for haste. Pull yourself together. Forward, march!" he cried, pressing his will upon her.

"But you? When they come what will you say to them?"

"I'll fix up something." He drew back from the window, lowering his voice. "Men in the garden. A policeman."

"They've found him!" She fell into Ned's chair, dropping her head in her

hands. For an instant he studied her. Then he took his great and tender resolution. His hand fell warm and firm on her shoulder.

"Listen; suppose they suspect some one else?"

"Who?"

"Me."

"You? Why should they?"

"Circumstances. The place. The weapon here in my possession. My known trouble with Ely Crouch. Don't you see how it all fits in?"

She recovered from the stupor of surprise into which his suggestion had plunged her. "Are you mad? Do you think that I'd let you sacrifice yourself? What am I to you that you should do this for me?"

"The woman I love," he said quietly. "I have loved you from the first day that I saw you."

It was at this moment that I returned and halted at the door, an unwilling witness to the rest, only half understanding, not daring to move. I saw the splendid color mount and glorify her beauty. I saw her hands go out to him half in appeal, half in rejection.

"Oh, it's madness!" she cried. "It's your life you're offering me."

"What else should I offer you--you who have given life its real meaning for me?"

He caught her hands in his and held them. He caught her eyes in his and held them. Then he began speaking, evenly, soothingly, persuasively, binding her to his will.

"What does my life amount to? Think how little it means. A few more weeks of waiting. Then the suffering; then the release. You heard Dr. Smith. You know. You understand. Didn't you understand?"

"Yes," she breathed.

"Then you must see what a splendid way out this is for me. No more waiting. No pain. Death never came to any one so kindly before. It's my chance, if only you'll make it worth while. Will you?" he pleaded.

"Oh, the wonder of it!" she whispered, gazing on him with parted lips. But he did not understand, yet. He pressed what he thought to be his advantage.

"Here," he cried, suddenly dropping her hands and catching up the bills from the valise. "Here's safety. Here's life. For you and your sister, both. You spoke of Providence a moment ago. Here's Providence for you! Quick! Take it."

"What is it?" she asked, drawing away as he sought to thrust the money into her hands.

"Twenty thousand dollars. More. It doesn't matter. It's life for both of you. Have you the right to refuse it? Take it and go."

She let the bank-notes fall from her hands unnoticed.

"Do you think I would leave you _now_?" she cried in a voice of thrilled music. "Even if they weren't sure to trace me, as they would be."

This last she uttered as an unimportant matter dismissed with indifference.

"There will be nothing to trace. My confession will cover the ground."

"Confession? To what?"

"To the murder of Ely Crouch."

Some sort of sound I was conscious of making. I suppose I gasped. But they were too engrossed to hear.

"You would do even that? But the penalty--the shame--"

"What do they matter to a dying man?" he retorted impatiently.

She had fallen back from him, in the shock of his suggestion, but now she came forward again slowly, her glorious eyes fixed on his. So they stood face to face, soul to soul, deep answering unto deep, and, as I sit here speaking, I saw the wonder and the miracle flower in her face. When she spoke again, her words seemed the inevitable expression of that which had passed silently between them.

"Do you love me?"

"Before God I do," he answered.

"Take me away! There's time yet. I'll go with you anywhere, anywhere! I'm all yours. I've loved you from the first, I think, as you have loved me. All I ask is to live for you, and when you die, to die with you."

Fire flashed from his face at the call. He took a step toward her. A shout, half-muffled, sounded from outside the window. Instantly the light and passion died in his eyes. I have never seen a face at once so stern and so gentle as his was when he caught the outreaching hands in his own.

"You forget that they must find one of us, or it's all no use. Listen carefully, dear one. If you truly love me, you must do as I bid you. Give me my chance of fooling fate; of making my death worth while. It won't be hard." He took the little box from his pocket. "It will be very easy."

"Give it to me, too," she pleaded like a child. "Ah, Ned, we can't part now! Both of us together."

He shook his head, smiling. The man's face was as beautiful as a god's at that moment or an angel's. "You must go back to your sister," he said simply. "You haven't the right to die."

He turned to the table, drew a sheet of paper to him and wrote four words. You all know what they were; his confession. Then his hand went up, a swift movement, and a moment later he was setting back the glass of water upon the desk whence he had taken it.

"Love and glory of my life, will you go?" he said.

"Yes," she whispered.

Not until then did the paralysis, which had gripped me when I saw Ned turn the pellets into his hand, relax. I ran forward. The girl cried out. Ned met me with his hand against my breast.

"How much have you heard?" he said quickly.

"Enough."

"Then you'll understand." His faith was more irresistible than a thousand arguments. "Take her home, Chris."

I held out my hand. "Come," I said.

She turned and faced him. "Must I? Alone?" What a depth of desolation in that word!

"There is no other way, dearest one."

"Good-bye, then, until we meet," she said in the passionate music of her voice. "Every beat of my heart will bring me nearer to you. There will be no other life for me. Soon or late I'll come to you. You believe it. Say you believe it!"

"I believe it." He bent and kissed her lips. Then his form slackened away from the arms that clasped it, and sank into the chair. A policeman's whistle shrilled outside the window. The faintest flicker of a smile passed over the face of the sleeper.

I took her away, still with that unearthly ecstasy on her face.

* * * * *

The glow of the narrator's cigar waxed, a pin-point of light in a world of dimness and mystery. Subdued breathing made our silence rhythmic. When I found my voice, it was hardly more than a whisper.

"Good God! What a tragedy!"

"Tragedy? You think it so?" The Little Red Doctor's gnarled face gleamed strangely behind the tiny radiance. "Dominie, you have a queer notion of this life and little faith in the next."

"She met death as a tryst," murmured the old librarian. "And he! 'Trailing clouds of glory!' The triumph of that victory over fate! One would like to have seen the meeting between them, after the waiting."

The Little Red Doctor rose. "When some brutal and needless tragedy of the sort that we medical men witness so often shakes my faith in my kind, I turn to think of those two in the splendor of their last meeting on earth, the man with the courage to face death, the woman with the courage to face life."

He strode over to the table and lifted the newspaper, which had slipped to the floor unnoticed. The girlish face turned toward us its irresistible appeal, yearning out from amidst the lurid indignities of print.

"You heard from her afterward?" I asked.

"Often. The sister died and left her nothing to live for but her promise. Always in her letters sounded the note of courage and of waiting. It was in the last word I had from her--received since her death--set to the song of some poet, I don't know who. You ought to know, Mr. Sheldon."

His deep voice rose to the rhythm.

"Ah, long-delayed to-morrow! Hearts that beat
Measure the length of every moment gone.
Ever the suns rise tardily or fleet
And light the letters on a churchyard stone.--
And still I say, 'To-morrow we shall meet!'"

"May Probyn," the librarian identified. "Too few people know her. A wonderful poem!"

Silence fell again, folding us and our thoughts in its kindly refuge. Rising, I crossed to the window and drew the curtain aside. A surging wind had swept the sky clear, all but one bank of low-lurking, western cloud shot through with naming crimson. In that luminous setting the ancient house across Our Square, grim and bleak no longer to my eyes, gleamed, through eyes again come to life, with an inconceivable glory. Behind me in the shadow, the measured voice of the witness to life and death repeated once more the message of imperishable hope:

"And still I say, 'To-morrow we shall meet.'"

THE END

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