

Mary Minds Her Business

George Weston

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MARY MINDS HER BUSINESS

BY GEORGE WESTON

Author of "Oh, Mary, Be Careful," "The Apple-Tree Girl," and "You Never Saw Such a Girl."

1920

To Karl Edwin Harriman
One of the Noblest of them All
G.W.

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MARY MINDS HER BUSINESS

So that you may understand my heroine, I am going to write a preface and tell you about her forebears.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century, there was a young blacksmith in our part of the country named Josiah Spencer. He had a quick eye, a quick hand and a quicker temper.

Because of his quick eye he married a girl named Mary McMillan. Because of his quick hand, he was never in need of employment. And because of his quick temper, he left the place of his birth one day and travelled west until he came to a ford which crossed the Quinebaug River.

There, before the week was over, he had bought from Oeneko, the Indian chief, five hundred acres on each side of the river--land in those days being the cheapest known commodity. Hewing his own timber and making his own hardware, he soon built a shop of his own, and the ford being on the main road between Hartford and the Providence Plantations, it wasn't long before he had plenty of business.

Above the ford was a waterfall. Josiah put in a wheel, a grist mill and a saw mill.

By that time Mary, his wife, had presented him with one of the two greatest gifts that a woman can ever bestow, and presently a sign was painted over the shop:

JOSIAH SPENCER & SON

In course of time young Josiah made his first horse-shoe and old Josiah made his last.

On a visit to New Amsterdam, the young man had already fallen in love with a girl named Matilda Sturtevant. They were married in 1746 and had one of those round old-fashioned families when twelve children seemed to be the minimum and anything less created comment.

Two of the boys were later killed in the Revolution, another became Supreme Court justice, but the likeliest one succeeded to the business of Josiah Spencer & Son, which was then making a specialty of building wagons--and building them so well that the shop had to be increased in size again and again until it began to have the appearance of quite a respectable looking factory.

The third Spencer to own the business married a Yankee--Patience Babcock--but Patience's only son married a French-Canadian girl--for even then the Canadians were drifting down into our part of the country.

So by that time, as you can see--and this is an important part of my preface--the Spencer stock was a thrifty mixture of Yankee, Irish, Scotch, Dutch and French blood--although you would never have guessed it if you had simply seen the name of one Josiah Spencer following another as the owner of the Quinebaug Wagon Works.

In the same year that the fourth Josiah Spencer succeeded to the

business, a bridge was built to take the place of the ford and the waterfall was fortified by a dam. By that time a regular little town had formed around the factory.

The town was called New Bethel.

It was at this stage of their history that the Spencers grew proud, making a hobby of their family tree and even possibly breathing a sigh over vanished coats-of-arms.

The fifth of the line, for instance, married a Miss Copleigh of Boston. He built a big house on Bradford Hill and brought her home in a tally-ho. The number of her trunks and the size of her crinolines are spoken of to this day in our part of the country--also her manner of closing her eyes when she talked, and holding her little finger at an angle when drinking her tea. She had only one child--fortunately a son.

This son was the grandfather of our heroine. So you see we are getting warm at last.

The grandfather of our heroine was probably the greatest Spencer of them all.

Under his ownership the factory was rebuilt of brick and stone. He developed the town both socially and industrially until New Bethel bade fair to become one of the leading cities in the state. He developed the water power by building a great dam above the factory and forming a lake nearly ten miles long. He also developed an artillery wheel which has probably rolled along every important road in the civilized world.

Indeed he was so engaged in these enterprises that he didn't marry until he was well past forty-five. Then one spring, going to Charlestown to buy his season's supply of pine, he came back with a bride from one of the oldest, one of the most famous families in all America.

There were three children to this marriage--one son and two daughters.

I will tell you about the daughters in my first chapter--two delightful old maids who later had a baby between them--but first I must tell you about the seventh and last Josiah.

In his youth he was wild.

This may have been partly due to that irreducible minimum of Original Sin which (they say) is in all of us--and partly due to his cousin Stanley.

Now I don't mean to say for a moment that Stanley Woodward was a natural born villain. I don't think people are born that way at all. At first the idea probably struck him as a sort of a joke. "If anything happens to young Josiah," I can imagine him thinking to himself with a grin, "I may own this place myself some day.... Who knows?"

And from that day forward, he unconsciously borrowed from the spiders--if you can imagine a smiling spider--and began to spin.

Did young Josiah want to leave the office early? Stanley smilingly did his work for him.

Was young Josiah late the next morning? Stanley smilingly hid his

absence.

Did young Josiah yearn for life and adventure? Stanley spun a few more webs and they met that night in Brigg's livery stable.

It didn't take much of this--unexpectedly little in fact--the last of the Spencers resembling one of those giant firecrackers of bygone days--the bigger the cracker, the shorter the fuse. Some say he married an actress, which was one of the things which were generally whispered when I was a boy. A Russian they said she was--which never failed to bring another gasp. Others say she was a beautiful bare-back rider in a circus and wore tights--which was another of the things which used to be whispered when I was a boy, and not even then unless the children had first been sent from the room and only bosom friends were present.

Whatever she was, young Josiah disappeared with her, and no one saw him again until his mother died in the mansion on the hill. Some say she died of a broken heart, but I never believed in that, for if sorrow could break the human heart I doubt if many of us would be alive to smile at next year's joys. However that may be, I do believe that young Josiah thought that he was partly responsible for his mother's death. He turned up at the funeral with a boy seven years old; and bit by bit we learned that he was separated from his wife and that the court had given him custody of their only child.

As you have probably noticed, there are few who can walk so straight as those who have once been saved from the crooked path. There are few so intolerant of fire as those poor, charred brands who have once been snatched from the burning.

After his mother's funeral young Spencer settled down to a life of atonement and toil, till first his father and then even his cousin Stanley were convinced of the change which had taken place in the one-time black sheep of the family.

By that time the patents on the artillery wheel had expired and a competition had set in which was cutting down the profits to zero. Young Josiah began experimenting on a new design which finally resulted in a patent upon a combination ball and roller bearing. This was such an improvement upon everything which had gone before, that gradually Spencer & Son withdrew from the manufacture of wagons and wheels and re-designed their whole factory to make bearings.

This wasn't done in a month or two, nor even in a year or two. Indeed the returned prodigal grew middle aged in the process. He also saw the possibilities of harnessing the water power above the factory to make electric current. This current was sold so cheaply that more and more factories were drawn to New Bethel until the fame of the city's products were known wherever the language of commerce was spoken.

At the height of his son's success, old Josiah died, joining those silent members of the firm who had gone before. I often like to imagine the whole seven of them, ghostly but inquisitive, following the subsequent strange proceedings with noiseless steps and eyes that missed nothing; and in particular keeping watch upon the last living Josiah Spencer--a heavy, powerfully built man with a look of melancholy in his eyes and a way of sighing to himself as though asking a question, and then answering it with a muffled "Yes... Yes..." This may have been partly due to the past and partly due to the future, for the son whom he had brought home

with him began to worry him--a handsome young rascal who simply didn't have the truth in him at times, and who was buying presents for girls almost before he was out of short trousers.

His name was Paul--"Paul Vionel Olgavitch Spencer," he sometimes proudly recited it, and whenever we heard of that we thought of his mother.

The older Paul grew, the handsomer he grew. And the handsomer he grew, the wilder he became and the less the truth was in him. At times he would go all right for a while, although he was always too fond of the river for his aunts' peace of mind.

At a bend below the dam he had found a sheltered basin, covered with grass and edged with trees. And there he liked to lie, staring up into the sky and dreaming those dreams of youth and adventure which are the heritage of us all.

Or else he would sit and watch the river, although he couldn't do it long, for its swift movement seemed to fascinate him and excite him, and to arouse in him the desire to follow it--to follow it wherever it went. These were his quieter moods.

Ordinarily there was something gipsy-like, something Neck-or-Nothing about him. A craving for excitement seemed to burn under him like a fire. The full progression of correction marched upon him and failed to make impression: arguments, orders, warnings, threats, threshings and the stoppage of funds: none of these seemed to improve him in the least.

Josiah's two sisters did their best, but they could do nothing, either.

"I wouldn't whip him again, Josiah," said Miss Cordelia one night, timidly laying her hand upon her brother's arm. "He'll be all right when he's a little older.... You know, dear ... you were rather wild, yourself ... when you were young.... Patty and I were only saying this morning that if he takes after you, there's really nothing to worry about--"

"He's God's own punishment," said Josiah, looking up wildly. "I know--things I can't tell you. You remember what I say: that boy will disgrace us all...."

He did.

One morning he suddenly and simply vanished with the factory pay-roll and one of the office stenographers.

In the next twelve months Josiah seemed to age at least twelve years--his cousin Stanley watching him closely the while--and then one day came the news that Paul Spencer had shot and killed a man, while attempting to hold him up, somewhere in British Columbia.

If you could have seen Josiah Spencer that day you might have thought that the bullet had grazed his own poor heart.

"It's God's punishment," he said over and over. "For seven generations there has been a Spencer & Son--a trust that was left to me by my father that I should pass it on to my son. And what have I done...!"

Whereupon he made a gesture that wasn't far from despair--and in that gesture, such as only those can make who know in their hearts that they

have shot the albatross, this preface brings itself to a close and at last my story begins.

CHAPTER I

"Patty," said Miss Cordelia one morning, "have you noticed Josiah lately?"

"Yes," nodded Miss Patricia, her eyes a little brighter than they should have been.

"Do you know," continued the other, her voice dropping to a whisper, "I'm afraid--if he keeps on--the way he is--"

"Oh, no, Cordelia! You know as well as I do--there has never been anything like that in our family."

Nevertheless the two sisters looked at each other with awe-stricken eyes, and then their arms went around each other and they eased their hearts in the immemorial manner.

"You know, he worries because we are the last of the Spencers," said Cordelia, "and the family dies with us. Even if you or I had children, I don't think he would take it so hard--"

A wistful look passed over their faces, such as you might expect to see on those who had repented too late and stood looking through St. Peter's gate at scenes in which they knew they could never take a part.

"But I am forty-eight," sighed Cordelia.

"And I--I am fifty--"

The two sisters had been writing when this conversation started. They were busy on a new generation of the Spencer-Spicer genealogy, and if you have ever engaged on a task like that, you will know the correspondence it requires. But now for a time their pens were forgotten and they sat looking at each other over the gatelegged table which served as desk. They were still both remarkably good-looking, though marked with that delicacy of material and workmanship--reminiscent of old china--which seems to indicate the perfect type of spinster-hood. Here and there in their hair gleamed touches of silver, and their cheeks might have reminded you of tinted apples which had lightly been kissed with the frost.

And so they sat looking at each other, intently, almost breathlessly, each suddenly moved by the same question and each wishing that the other would speak.

For the second time it was Cordelia who broke the silence.

"Patty--!"

"Yes, dear?" breathed Patty, and left her lips slightly parted.

"I wonder if Josiah--is too old--to marry again! Of course," she hurriedly added, "he is fifty-two--but it seems to me that one of the Spicers--I think it was Captain Abner Spicer--had children until he was sixty--although by a younger wife, of course."

They looked it up and in so doing they came across an Ezra Babcock, father-in-law of the Third Josiah Spencer, who had had a son proudly born to him in his sixty-fourth year.

They gazed at each other then, those two maiden sisters, like two conspirators in their precious innocence.

"If we could find Josiah a young wife--" said the elder at last.

"Oh, Cordelia!" breathed Patty, "if, indeed, we only could!"

Which was really how it started.

As I think you will realize, it would be a story in itself to describe the progress of that gentle intrigue--the consultations, the gradual eliminations, the search, the abandonment of the search--(which came immediately after learning of two elderly gentlemen with young wives--but no children!)--the almost immediate resumption of the quest because of Josiah's failing health--and finally then the reward of patience, the pious nudge one Sunday morning in church, the whispered "Look, Cordelia, that strange girl with the Pearsons--no, the one with the red cheeks--yes, that one!"--the exchange of significant glances, the introduction, the invitation and last, but not least, the verification of the fruitfulness of the vine.

The girl's name was Martha Berger and her home was in California. She had come east to attend the wedding of her brother and was now staying with the Pearsons a few weeks before returning west. Her age was twenty-six. She had no parents, very little money, and taught French, English and Science in the high school back home.

"Have you any brothers or sisters!" asked Miss Cordelia, with a side glance toward Miss Patty.

"Only five brothers and five sisters," laughed Martha.

For a moment it might be said that Miss Cordelia purred.

"Any of them married?" she continued.

"All but me."

"My dear! ... You don't mean to say that they have made you an aunt already?"

Martha paused with that inward look which generally accompanies mental arithmetic.

"Only about seventeen times," she finally laughed again.

When their guest had gone, the two sisters fairly danced around each other.

"Oh, Patty!" exulted Miss Cordelia, "I'm sure she's a fruitful vine!"

CHAPTER II

There is something inexorable in the purpose of a maiden lady--perhaps because she has no minor domestic troubles to distract her; and when you have two maiden ladies working on the same problem, and both of them possessed of wealth and unusual intelligence--!

They started by taking Martha to North East Harbor for the balance of the summer, and then to keep her from going west in the fall, they engaged her to teach them French that winter at quite a fabulous salary. They also took her to Boston and bought her some of the prettiest dresses imaginable; and the longer they knew her, the more they liked her; and the more they liked her, the more they tried to enlist her sympathies in behalf of poor Josiah--and the more they tried to throw their brother into Martha's private company.

"Look here," he said one day, when his two sisters were pushing him too hard. "What's all this excitement about Martha? Who is she, anyway?"

"Why, don't you know!" Cordelia sweetly asked him, and drawing a full breath she added: "Martha--is--your--future--wife--"

If you had been there, you would have been pardoned for thinking that the last of the Spencers had suddenly discovered that he was sitting upon a remonstrative bee.

The two sisters smiled at him--rather nervously, it is true, but still they kept their hands upon their brother's shoulders, as though they were two nurses soothing a patient and saying: "There, now ... The-e-e-ere ... Just be quiet and you'll feel better in a little while."

"Yes, dear," whispered Cordelia, her mouth ever so close to his ear. "Your future wife--and the mother of your future children--"

"Nonsense, nonsense--" muttered Josiah, breaking away quite flustered. "I'm--I'm too old--"

Almost speaking in concert they told him about Captain Abner Spencer who had children until he was sixty, and Ezra Babcock, father-in-law of the third Josiah Spencer, who had a son proudly born to him in his sixty-fourth year.

"And she's such a lovely girl," said Cordelia earnestly. "Patty and I are quite in love with her ourselves--"

"And think what it would mean to your peace of mind to have another son--"

"And what it would mean to Spencer & Son--!"

Josiah groaned at that. As a matter of fact he hadn't a chance to escape. His two sisters had never allowed themselves to be courted, but they must have had their private ideas of how such affairs should be conducted, for they took Josiah in hand and put him through his paces with a speed which

can only be described as breathless.

Flowers, candy, books, jewellery, a ring, the ring--the two maiden sisters lived a winter of such romance that they nearly bloomed into youth again themselves; and whenever Josiah had the least misgiving about a man of fifty-two marrying a girl of twenty-six, they whispered to him: "Think what it will mean to Spencer & Son--" And whenever Martha showed the least misgivings they whispered to her: "That's only his way, my dear; you mustn't mind that." And once Cordelia added (while Patty nodded her head): "Of course, there has to be a man at a wedding, but I want you to feel that you would be marrying us, as much as you would be marrying Josiah. You would be his wife, of course, but you would be our little sister, too; and Patty and I would make you just as happy as we could--"

Later they were glad they had told her this.

It was a quiet wedding and for a time nothing happened; although if you could have seen the two maiden sisters at church on a Sunday morning, you would have noticed that after the benediction they seemed to be praying very earnestly indeed--even as Sarah prayed in the temple so many years ago. There was this curious difference, however: Sarah had prayed for herself, but these two innocent spinsters were praying for another.

Then one morning, never to be forgotten, Martha thought to herself at the breakfast table, "I'll tell them as soon as breakfast is over."

But she didn't.

She thought, "I'll take them into the garden and tell them there--"

But though she took them into the garden, somehow she couldn't tell them there.

"As soon as we get back into the house," she said, "I'll tell them."

Even then the words didn't come, and Martha sat looking out of the window so quietly and yet with such a look of mingled fear and pride and exaltation on her face, that Cordelia suddenly seemed to divine it.

"Oh, Martha," she cried. "Do you--do you--do you really think--"

Miss Patty looked up, too--stricken breathless all in a moment--and quicker than I can tell it, the three of them had their arms around each other, and tears and smiles and kisses were blended--quite in the immemorial manner.

CHAPTER III

"We must start sewing," said Miss Cordelia.

So they started sewing, Martha and the two maiden sisters, every stitch a hope, every seam the dream of a young life's journey.

"We must think beautiful thoughts," spoke up Miss Patty another day.

So while they sewed, sometimes one and sometimes another read poetry, and sometimes they read the Psalms, especially the Twenty-third, and sometimes Martha played the Melody in F, or the Shower of Stars or the Cinquieme Nocturne.

"We must think brave thoughts, too," said Miss Cordelia.

So after that, whenever one of them came to a stirring editorial in a newspaper, or a rousing passage in a book, it was put on one side to be read at their daily sewing bee; and when these failed they read Barbara Fritchie, or Patrick Henry, or Horatio at the Bridge.

"Do you notice how much better Josiah is looking!" whispered Miss Cordelia to her sister one evening.

"A different man entirely," proudly nodded Miss Patty. "I heard him speaking yesterday about an addition to the factory--"

"I suppose it's because he's living in the future now--"

"Instead of in the past. But I do wish he wouldn't be quite so sure that it's going to be a boy. I'm afraid sometimes--that perhaps he won't like it--if it's a girl--"

They had grown beautiful as they spoke, but now they looked at each other in silence, the same fear in both their glances.

"Oh, Cordelia," suddenly spoke Miss Patty. "Suppose it is a girl--!"

"Hush, dear. Remember, we must have brave thoughts. And even if the first one is a girl, there'll be plenty of time for a boy--"

"I hadn't thought of that," said Miss Patty.

They smiled at each other in concert, and a faint touch of colour arose to Miss Cordelia's slightly withered cheeks.

"Do you know," she said, hesitating, smiling--yes, and thrilling a little, too--"we've had so much to do with bringing it about, that somehow I feel as though it's going to be my baby--"

"Why, Cordelia!" whispered Miss Patty, who had been nodding throughout this confession. "That's exactly how I feel about it, too!"

It wasn't long after that before they began to look up names.

"If Josiah wasn't such a family name," said Miss Cordelia, "I'd like to call him Basil. That means kingly or royal." Then of course they turned to Cordelia. Cordelia meant warm-hearted. Patricia meant royal. Martha meant the ruler of the house.

They were pleased at these revelations.

The week before the great event was expected, Martha had a notion one day. She wished to visit the factory. Josiah interpreted this as the happiest of auguries.

"After seven generations," was his cryptic remark, "you simply can't keep them away. It's bred in the bone...."

He drove Martha down to the works himself, and took her through the various shops, some of which were of such a length that when you stood at one end, the other seemed to vanish into distance.

Everything went well until they reached the shipping room where a travelling crane was rolling on its tracks overhead, carrying a load of boxes. This crane was hurrying back empty for another load, its chain and tackle swinging low, when Martha started across the room to look at one of the boys who had caught his thumb between a hammer and a nail and was trying to bind it with his handkerchief. The next moment the swinging tackle of the crane struck poor Martha in the back, caught in her dress and dragged her for a few horrible yards along the floor.

That night the house on the hill had two unexpected visitors, the Angel of Death following quickly in the footsteps of the Angel of Life.

"You poor motherless little thing," breathed Cordelia, cuddling the baby in her arms. "Look, Josiah," she said, trying to rouse her brother. "Look ...it's smiling at you--"

But Josiah looked up with haggard eyes that saw nothing, and could only repeat the sentence which he had been whispering to himself, "It's God's own punishment--God's own punishment--there are things--I can't tell you--"

The doctor came to him at last and, after he was quieter, the two sisters went away, carrying their precious burden with them.

"Wasn't there a girl's name which means bitterness?" asked Miss Cordelia, suddenly stopping.

"Yes," said Miss Patty. "That's what 'Mary' means."

The two sisters looked at each other earnestly--looked at each other and nodded.

"We'll call her 'Mary' then," said Miss Cordelia.

And that is how my heroine got her name.

CHAPTER IV

I wish I had time to tell you in the fulness of detail how those two spinsters brought up Mary, but there is so much else to put before you that I dare not dally here. Still, I am going to find time to say that all the love and affection which Miss Cordelia and Miss Patty had ever woven into their fancies were now showered down upon Mary--falling softly and sweetly like petals from two full-blown roses when stirred by a breeze from the south.

When she was a baby, Mary's nose had an upward tilt.

One morning after Miss Cordelia had bathed her (which would have reminded you of a function at the court of the Grand Monarque, with its Towel

Holder, Soap Holder, Temperature Taker and all and sundry) she suddenly sent the two maids and the nurse away and, casting dignity to the winds, she lifted Mary in a transport of love which wouldn't be denied any longer, and pretended to bite the end of the poor babe's nose off.

"Oh, I know it's candy," she said, mumbling away and hugging the blessed child. "It's even got powdered sugar on it--"

"That's talcum powder," said Miss Patty, watching with a jealous eye.

"Powdered sugar, yes," persisted Miss Cordelia, mumbling on. "I know. And I know why her nose turns up at the end, too. That naughty Miss Patty washed it with yellow soap one night when I wasn't looking--"

"I never, never did!" protested Miss Patty, all indignation in a moment.

"Washed it with yellow soap, yes," still persisted Miss Cordelia, "and made it shine like a star. And that night, when Mary lay in her bed, the moon looked through the window and saw that little star twinkling there, and the moon said 'Little star! Little star! What are you doing there in Mary's bed? You come up here in the sky and twinkle where you belong!' And all night long, Mary's little nose tried to get up to the moon, and that's why it turns up at the end--" And then in one grand finale of cannibalistic transport, Miss Cordelia concluded, "Oh, I could eat her up!"

But it was Miss Patty's turn then, because although Cordelia bathed the child, it was the younger sister's part to dress her. So Miss Patty put her arms out with an authority which wouldn't take "No" for an answer, and if you had been in the next room, you would then have heard--

"Oh, where have you been
My pretty young thing--?"

Which is a rather active affair, especially where the singer shows how she danced her a dance for the Dauphin of France. By that time you won't be surprised when I tell you that Miss Patty's cheeks had a downright glow on them--and I think her heart had something of the same glow, too, because, seating herself at last to dress our crowing heroine, she beamed over to her sister and said (though somewhat out of breath) "Isn't it nice!"

This, of course, was all strictly private.

In public, Mary was brought up with maidenly deportment. You would never dream, for instance, that she was ever tickled with a turkey feather (which Miss Cordelia kept for the purpose) or that she had ever been atomized all over with Lily of the Valley (which Miss Patty never did again because Ma'm Maynard, the old French nurse, smelled it and told the maids). But always deep down in the child was an indefinable quality which puzzled her two aunts.

As Mary grew older, this quality became clearer.

"I know what it is," said Miss Cordelia one night. "She has a mind of her own. Everything she sees or hears: she tries to reason it out."

I can't tell you why, but Miss Patty looked uneasy.

"Only this morning," continued Miss Cordelia, "I heard Ma'm Maynard telling her that there wasn't a prettier syringa bush anywhere than the one under her bedroom window. Mary turned to her with those eyes of hers--you know the way she does--'Ma'm Maynard,' she said, 'have you seen all the other s'inga bushes in the world?' And only yesterday I said to her, 'Mary, you shouldn't try to whistle. It isn't nice.' She gave me that look--you know--and said, 'Then let us learn to whistle, Aunt T'delia, and help to make it nice.'"

"Imagine you and I saying things like that when we were girls," said Miss Patty, still looking troubled.

"Yes, yes, I know. And yet... I sometimes think that if you and I had been brought up a little differently...."

They were both quiet then for a time, each consulting her memories of hopes long past.

"Just the same," said Miss Patty at last, "there are worse things in the world than being old-fashioned."

In which I think you would have agreed with her, if you could have seen Mary that same evening.

At the time of which I am now writing she was six years old--a rather quiet, solemn child--though she had a smile upon occasions, which was well worth going to see.

For some time back she had heard her aunts speaking of "Poor Josiah!" She had always stood in awe of her father who seemed taller and gaunter than ever. Mary seldom saw him, but she knew that every night after dinner he went to his den and often stayed there (she had heard her aunts say) until long after midnight.

"If he only had some cheerful company," she once heard Aunt Cordelia remark.

"But that's the very thing he seems to shun since poor Martha died," sighed Miss Patty, and dropping her voice, never dreaming for a moment that Mary was listening, she added with another sigh, "If there had only been a boy, too!"

All these things Mary turned over in her mind, as few but children can, especially when they have dreamy eyes and often go a long time without saying anything. And on the same night when Aunt Patty had come to the conclusion that there are worse things in the world than being old-fashioned, Mary waited until she knew that dinner was over and then, escaping Ma'm Maynard, she stole downstairs, her heart skipping a beat now and then at the adventure before her. She passed through the hall and the library like a determined little ghost and then, gently turning the knob, she opened the study door.

Her father was sitting at his desk.

At the sound of the opening door he turned and stared at the apparition which confronted him. Mary had closed the door and stood with her back to it, screwing up her courage for the last stage of her journey.

And in truth it must have taken courage, for there was something in old

Josiah's forbidding brow and solitary mien which would have chilled the purpose of any child. It may have been this which suddenly brought the tears to Mary's eyes, or it may have been that her womanly little breast guessed the loneliness in her father's heart. Whatever it was, she unsteadily crossed the room, her sight blurred but her plan as steadfast as ever, and a moment later she was climbing on Josiah's knee, her arms tight around his neck, sobbing as though it would shake her little frame to pieces.

What passed between those two, partly in speech but chiefly in silence with their wet cheeks pressed together, I need not tell you; but when Ma'm Maynard came searching for her charge and stood quite open-mouthed in the doorway, Josiah waved her away, his finger on his lip, and later he carried Mary upstairs himself--and went back to his study without a word, though blowing his nose in a key which wasn't without significance.

And nearly every night after that, when dinner was over, Mary made a visit to old Josiah's study downstairs; and one Saturday morning when he was leaving for the factory, he heard the front door open and shut behind him and there stood Mary, her little straw bonnet held under her chin with an elastic. In the most matter of fact way she slipped her fingers into his hand. He hesitated, but woman-like she pulled him on. The next minute they were walking down the drive together.

As they passed the end of the house, he remembered the words which he had once used to his sisters, "After seven generations you simply can't keep them away. It's bred in the bone."

A thrill ran over him as he looked at the little figure by his side.

"If she had only been a boy!" he breathed.

At the end of the drive he stopped.

"You must go back now, dear."

"No," said Mary and tried to pull him on.

For as long as it might take you to count five, Josiah stood there irresolute, Mary's fingers pulling him one way and the memory of poor Martha's fate pulling him the other.

"And yet," he thought, "she's bound to see it sometime. Perhaps better now--before she understands--than later--"

He lifted her and sat her on his arm.

"Now, listen, little woman," he said as they gravely regarded each other. "This is important. If I take you this morning, will you promise to be a good girl, and sit in the office, and not go wandering off by yourself? Will you promise me that?"

This, too, may have been heredity, going back as far as Eve: Still gravely regarding him she nodded her head in silence and promised him with a kiss. He set her down, her hand automatically slipping into his palm again, and together they walked to the factory.

The road made a sharp descent to the interval by the side of the river, almost affording a bird's-eye view of the buildings below--lines of

workshops of an incredible length, their ventilators like the helmets of an army of giants.

A freight train was disappearing into one of the warehouses. Long lines of trucks stood on the sidings outside. Wisps of steam arose in every direction, curious, palpitating.

From up the river the roar of the falls could just be heard while from the open windows of the factory came that humming note of industry which, more than anything else, is like the sound which is sometimes made by a hive of bees, immediately before a swarm.

It was a scene which always gave Josiah a well-nigh oppressive feeling of pride and punishment--pride that all this was his, that he was one of those Spencers who had risen so high above the common run of man--punishment that he had betrayed the trust which had been handed down to him, that he had broken the long line of fathers and sons which had sent the Spencer reputation, with steadily increasing fame, to the corners of the earth. As he walked down the hall that Saturday morning, his sombre eyes missing no detail, he felt Mary's fingers tighten around his hand and, glancing down at her, he saw that her attention, too, was engrossed by the scene below, her eyes large and bright as children's are when they listen to a fairy tale.

Arrived at the office, he placed her in a chair by the side of his desk, and you can guess whether she missed anything of what went on. Clerks, business callers, heads of departments came and went. All had a smile for Mary who gravely smiled in return and straightway became her dignified little self again.

"When is Mr. Woodward expected back?" Josiah asked a clerk.

"On the ten-thirty, from Boston."

This was Stanley Woodward, Josiah's cousin--Cousin Stanley of the spider's web whom you have already met. He was now the general manager of the factory, and had always thought that fate was on his side since the night he had heard of Martha's death and that the child she left behind her was a girl.

Josiah glanced at his watch.

"Time to make the rounds," he said and, lifting Mary on his arm, he left the office and started through the plant.

And, oh, how Mary loved it--the forests of belts, whirring and twisting like live things, the orderly lines of machine tools, each doing its work with more than human ingenuity and precision, the enormous presses reminding her of elephants stamping out pieces of metal, the grinders which sang to her, the drilling machines which whirred to her, the polishing machines which danced for her, the power hammers which bowed to her. Yes, and better than all was the smile that each man gave her, smiles that came from the heart, for all the quiet respect that accompanied them.

"It's his daughter," they whispered as soon as Josiah was out of hearing. Here and there one would stop smiling and say, "I remember the day he brought her mother through--"

At the end of one of the workshops, Mr. Spencer looked at his watch again.

"We'd better get back to the office," he said. "Tired, dear?"

In a rapture of denial, she kicked her little toes against his side.

"Bred in the bone..." he mused. "Eh, if she had only been a boy...!" But that was past all sighing for, and in the distance he saw Cousin Stanley, just back from Boston, evidently coming to find him.

Mary, too, was watching the approaching figure. She had sometimes seen him at the house and had formed against him one of those instinctive dislikes which few but children know. As Stanley drew near she turned her head and buried her face against her father's shoulder.

"Good news?" asked Josiah.

"Good news, of course," said Stanley, speaking as an irresistible force might speak, if it were endowed with a tongue. "When Spencer & Son start out for a thing, they get it." You could tell that what he meant was "When Stanley Woodward starts out for a thing, he gets it." His elbows suddenly grew restless. "It will take a lot of money," he added. "Of course we shall have to increase the factory here--"

Still Mary kept her face hidden against her father's shoulder.

"Got the little lady with you, I see."

"Yes; I'm afraid I've tired her out."

A murmur arose from his shoulder.

"What?" said Josiah. "Not tired? Then turn around and shake hands with Uncle Stanley."

Slowly, reluctantly, Mary lifted her head and began to reach out her hand. Then just before their fingers would have touched, she quickly clasped her hands around her father's neck and again she buried her face upon his shoulder.

"She doesn't seem to take to you," said Josiah.

"So it seems," said the other dryly. Reaching around he touched Mary's cheek with the back of his finger. "Not mad at your uncle, are you, little girl?" he asked.

"Don't!" said Josiah, speaking with quick concern. "You're only making her tremble...."

The two stared at each other, slightly frowning. Stanley was the first to catch himself. "I'll see you at the office later," he said, and with a bow at the little figure on Josiah's arm he added with a touch of irony, "Perhaps I had better wait until you're alone!"

He turned and made his way back to the office, his elbows grown restless again.

"A good thing it isn't a boy," he thought, "or he might not like me when

he grows up, either. But a girl... Oh, well, as it happens, girls don't count.... And a good thing, too, they don't," he thoughtfully added. "A good thing, too, they don't...."

CHAPTER V

Mary grew, and grew, and grew.

She never outgrew her aversion to Uncle Stanley, though.

One day, when she was in Josiah's office, a young man entered and was warmly greeted by her father. He carried a walking stick, sported a white edging on his waistcoat and had just the least suspicion of perfumery on him--a faint scent that reminded Mary of raspberry jam.

"He smells nice," she thought, missing nothing of this.

"You've never seen my daughter, have you?" asked Josiah.

"A little queen," said the young man with a brilliant smile. "I hope I'll see her often."

"That's Uncle Stanley's son Burdon," said Josiah when he had left. "He's just through college; he's going to start in the office here."

Mary liked to hear that, and always after that she looked for Burdon and watched him with an interest that had something of fascination in it.

Before she was ten, she and Josiah had become old chums. She knew the factory by the river almost as well as she knew the house on the hill. Not only that but she could have told you most of the processes through which the bearings passed before they were ready for the shipping room.

To show you how her mind worked, one night she asked her father, "What makes a machine squeak?"

"Needs oil," said Josiah, "generally speaking."

The next Saturday morning she not only kept her eyes open, but her ears as well.

Presently her patience was rewarded.

"Squee-e-eak! Squee-e-eak!" complained a lathe which they were passing. Mary stopped her father and looked her very old-fashionedest at the lathe hand.

"Needs oil," said she, "gen'ly speaking."

It was one of the proud moments in Josiah's life, and yet when back of him he heard a whisper, "Chip of the old block," he couldn't repress the well nigh passionate yearning, "Oh, Lord, if she had only been a boy!"

That year an addition was being made to the factory and Mary liked to watch the builders. She often noticed a boy and a dog sitting under the

trees and watching, too.

Once they smiled at each other, the boy blushing like a sunset. After that they sometimes spoke while Josiah was talking to the foreman. His name, she learned, was Archey Forbes, his father was the foreman, and when he grew up he was going to be a builder, too. But no matter how often they saw each other, Archey always blushed to the eyes whenever Mary smiled at him.

Occasionally a man would be hurt at the factory. Whenever this happened, Aunt Patty paid a weekly call to the injured man until he was well--an old Spencer custom that had never died out.

Mary generally accompanied her aunts on these visits--which was a part of the family training--and in this way she saw the inside of many a home.

"I wouldn't mind being a poor man," she said one Saturday morning, breaking a long silence, "but I wouldn't be a poor woman for anything."

"Why not?" asked Miss Cordelia.

She couldn't tell them why but for the last half hour she had been comparing the lives of the men in the factory with the lives of their wives at home.

"A man can work in the factory," she tried to tell them, "and everything is made nice for him. But his wife at home--now--nobody cares--nobody cares what happens to her--"

"I never saw such a child," said Miss Cordelia, watching her start with her father down the hill a few minutes later. "And the worst of it is, I think we are partly to blame for it."

"Cordelia!" said Miss Patty. "How?"

"I mean in keeping her surrounded so completely with old people. When everything is said and done, dear, it isn't natural."

"But we would miss her so much if we sent her to school--"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of sending her to school--"

Miss Patty was quiet for a time.

"If we could find some one of her own age," she said at last, "whom she could play with, and talk with--some one who would lead her thoughts into more natural channels--"

This question of companionship for Mary puzzled the two Miss Spencers for nearly a year, and then it was settled, as so many things are, in an unexpected manner.

In looking up the genealogy of the Spicer family, Miss Patty discovered that a distant relative in Charleston had just died, leaving a daughter behind him--an orphan--who was a year older than Mary. Correspondence finally led Miss Patty to make the journey, and when she returned she brought with her a dark-eyed girl who might have been the very spirit of youthful romance.

"My dear," said Miss Patty, "this is your cousin Helen. She is going to make us a long visit, and I hope you will love each other very much."

The two cousins studied each other. Then in her shy way Mary held out her hand.

"Oh, I love you already!" said Helen impulsively, and hugged her instead. That evening they exchanged confidences and when Miss Cordelia heard about this, she questioned Mary and enjoyed herself immensely.

"And then what did she ask you?" finally inquired Miss Cordelia, making an effort to keep her face straight.

"She asked me if I had a beau, and I told her 'No.'"

"And then what did she say?"

"She asked me if there was anything the matter with the boys around here, and I told her I didn't know."

"And then?"

"And then she said, 'I'll bet you I'll soon find out.' But just then Aunt Patty came in and we had to stop."

Later Miss Patty came downstairs looking thoughtful and spoke to her sister in troubled secret.

"I've just been in Helen's room," she said, "and what do you think she has on her dresser?"

"I give it up," replied Miss Cordelia in a very rich, voice.

"Three photographs of young men!"

The two sisters gazed at each other, quite overcome, and if you had been there you would have seen that if they had held fans in their hands, they would have fanned themselves with vigour.

"Didn't you hear anything of this--in Charleston?" asked Miss Cordelia at last.

"Not a word, my dear. I heard she was very popular; that was all."

"'Popular'...!"

"The one thing, perhaps, that we have never been."

Miss Cordelia shook her head and made a helpless gesture. "Well," she said at last, "I must confess we were looking for an antidote ... but I never thought we'd be quite so successful...."

CHAPTER VI

A few weeks after her arrival, Helen and Mary were walking to the

post-office. Helen had a number of letters to mail, her correspondents being active and her answers prompt.

They hadn't gone far when a young man appeared in the distance, approaching them. Mary gave him a look to see who it was, and after saying to Helen, "This is Bob McAllister--one of our neighbours. He's home from school," she continued the conversation and failed to give Sir Robert another thought.

Not so Helen, however.

One hand went to the back of her hair with a graceful gesture, and next she touched her nose with a powdered handkerchief.

A moment before, she had been looking straight ahead with a rather thoughtful expression, but now she half turned to Mary, smiling and nodding. In some manner her carriage, even her walk, underwent a change. But when I try to tell you what I mean I feel as tongue-tied as a boy who is searching for a word which doesn't exist. As nearly as I can express it, she seemed to "wobble" a little, although that isn't the word. She seemed to hang out a sign "Oh, look--look at me!"--and that doesn't quite describe it, either.

Just as Master McAllister reached them, raising his hat and bowing to Mary and her friend--Helen's eyes and Helen's smile unconsciously lingered on him for a second or two until, apparently recollecting that she was looking at another, she lowered her glance and peeped at him through her eyelashes instead.

Mary meanwhile was calmly continuing her conversation, never even suspecting the comedy which was going on by her side, but when Helen shot a glance over her shoulder and whispered with satisfaction "He turned to look!" even Mary began to have some slight idea of what was going on.

"Helen," she demurred, "you should never turn around to look at a young man."

"Why not?" laughed Helen, her arm going around her cousin's waist. And speaking in the voice of one who has just achieved a triumph, she added, "They're all such fo-oo-ools!"

Mary thought that over.

Helen's correspondents continued active, and as each letter arrived she read parts of it to her cousin. She was a mimic, and two of the letters she read in character one afternoon when Mary was changing her dress for dinner.

"Oh, Helen, you shouldn't," said Mary, laughing in spite of herself and feeling ashamed of it the same moment. "I think it's awful to make fun of people who write you like that."

"Pooh!" laughed Helen. "They're all such fo-oo-ools!"

"You don't think that of all men, do you!"

"Why not?" laughed Helen again, and tucking the letters into her waist she started humming. Unobserved Ma'm Maynard had entered to straighten the room and, through the mirror, Mary saw her grimly nodding her head.

"Why, Ma'm Maynard," said Mary, "you don't think that all men are fools, too, do you?"

"Eet is not halways safe to say what one believes," said Ma'm, pursing her lips with mystery. "Eef mademoiselles, your aunts, should get to hear--"

"Oh, I won't tell."

"Then, yes, ma cherie, I think at times all men are fools ... and I think it is also good at times to make a fool of man. For why? Because it is revenge.

"Ah, ma cherie, I who have been three times wed--I tell you I often think the old-world view is right. Man is the natural enemy of a woman.

"He is not to be trus'.

"I have heard it discuss' by great minds--things I cannot tell you yet--but you will learn them as you live. And halways the same conclusion arrives: Man is the natural enemy of a woman, and the one best way to keep him from making a fool of you, is to turn 'round queeck and make it a fool of him!"

"Oh, Ma'm Maynard, no!" protested Mary, who had turned from the mirror and was staring with wide eyes. "I can't believe it--never!"

"What is it, ma cherie, which you cannot believe?"

"That man is woman's natural enemy."

"But I tell you, yes, yes.... It has halways been so and it halways will. Everything that lives has its own natural enemy--and a woman's natural enemy--it is man!

"Think just for a moment, ma cherie," she continued. "Why are parents so careful? Mon Dieu, you would think it at times that a tiger is out in the streets at night--such precautions are made if the girl she is out after dark. And yes, but the parents are right. There is truly a tiger who roams in the black, but his name--eet is Man!

"Think just for a moment, ma cherie. Why are chaperons require'--even in the highest, most culture' society? Why is marriage require'? Is it not because all the world knows well that a man cannot be left to his own promise, but has to be bound by the law as a lion is held in a cage?"

"No," said Mary, shaking her head, "I'm sure it isn't that way. You're simply turning things around and making everything seem horrid."

"You think so, ma cherie? Eh, bien. Three husbands I've had. I am not without experience."

"But you might as well say that woman is man's natural enemy--"

"And some say that," said Ma'm nodding darkly. "Left to himself, they say, man might aspire to be as the gods; but halways at his helbow is a woman like a figure of fate--and she--she keeps him down where he belongs--"

"I hate all that," said Mary quietly. "Every once in a while I read something like it in a book or a magazine, and whenever I do, I put the book down and open the window and breathe the fresh air. Of course I know some married people aren't happy. But it isn't always because they are married. Single people are unhappy, too. Aunt Patty has indigestion sometimes, and I suppose a lot of people do. But you wouldn't call food a natural enemy; would you? And some children are just as bad as they can be. But you wouldn't call children natural enemies, would you--or try to get along without them?"

But Ma'm Maynard would only shrug her shoulders.

"Eh, bien," she said. "When you have live' as long as me--"

Through the open window a clock could be heard.

"Six o'clock!" squealed Helen, "and I'm not changed yet." As she hurried to the door she said, "I heard Aunt Patty say that Uncle Stanley was coming to dinner again tonight. I hope he brings his handsome son again--don't you?"

CHAPTER VII

Uncle Stanley of late had been a frequent visitor on the hill, occasionally bringing his son Burdon with him, but generally coming alone. After dinner he and Josiah would sit in the den till well past midnight, going over papers and figures, and drafting out instructions for Judge Cutler, the firm's lawyer.

Mary was never able to overcome her aversion to Uncle Stanley.

"I wish he'd stay away," she ruefully remarked to her father one night. "Three evenings this week I haven't been able to come in the den."

"Never mind, dear," said Josiah, looking at her with love in his sombre eyes. "What we're doing: it's all for you."

"All for me? How?"

He explained to her that whereas Josiah Spencer & Son had always been a firm, it was now being changed to a corporation.

"As long as there was a son," he said, "the partnership arrangement was all right. But the way things are now--Well, when I'm gone, Mary, you'll own the stock of the company, and draw your dividends, and have no responsibilities to bother you."

"But who'll run the factory?"

"I suppose Stanley will, as long as he lives. You'll be the owner, of course, but I don't think you'll ever find anybody to beat Uncle Stanley as a general manager."

"And when Uncle Stanley dies--what then?"

"I think you'll find his son Burdon the next best man."

Mary felt her heart grow heavy. It may have been presentiment, or it may have been the thought of her father's possible death.

"Don't let's talk any more about dying," she said. "But tell me: Is that why you are making so many additions to the factory--because we are changing to a corporation?"

Josiah hesitated, struggling to speak to his daughter as though she were a young man instead of a young woman. But heredity, training and world-old custom restrained him. What would a girl know about mergers, combinations, fundamental patents, the differences between common and preferred stock, and all that? "It would only confuse her," he thought, looking at her with love in his eyes. "She would nod her pretty head to be polite, but I might as well be talking Greek to her."

"No, dear," he said, at last. "I'll tell you why we are making those additions. I have bought options on some of the biggest bearing factories in the country--so you won't have so much competition when I'm gone. And instead of running those other factories, I'm going to move their machinery down here. When the changes are once made, it's more economical to run one big factory than half a dozen little ones. And of course it will make it better for New Bethel."

"But it must make it bad for the towns where the factories are now," said Mary after a thoughtful pause. "I know how it would hurt New Bethel if we closed up."

Josiah nodded his head. "I didn't like it myself at first."

"It was Uncle Stanley's idea, then?"

"Yes; he's engineering it."

Again Mary felt her heart grow heavy.

"It must be costing an awful lot of money," she said.

"It is," said Josiah, leaning over and making a gesture. "Of course we'll get it back, and more, too--but for quite a few years now it's been taking a lot of money--a dreadful lot of money. Still, I think the end's in sight--"

He was sitting at his desk with a shaded lamp in front of him, and as he leaned over and gestured with his hands, Mary's eyes caught the shadow on the wall. She seemed to see a spider--a spider that was spinning and weaving his web--and for the third time that night her heart grew heavy within her.

CHAPTER VIII

The next day was Saturday and Mary drove her father down to the factory. A small army of men was at work at the new improvements, and when they

reached the brow of the hill which overlooked the scene below, Josiah felt that thrill of pride which always ran over him when beholding this monument to his family's genius.

"The greatest of its kind in the world," he said.

With her free hand, Mary patted his arm.

"That's us!" she said, as proud as he. "I'll leave you at the office door, and then I'm going to drive around and see how the building's going on--"

There was plenty for Mary to see.

A gang of structural workers was putting up the steel frame-work for one of the new buildings. Nearby the brick-layers were busy with mortar and trowels. Carpenters were swarming over a roof, their hammers beating staccato.

As they worked in the sunshine, they joked and laughed and chatted with each other, and Mary couldn't help reverting to some of her old thoughts.

"How nice to be a man!" she half sighed to herself. "Back home, their wives are working in the kitchens--the same thing every day and nothing to show for it. But the men come out and do all sorts of interesting things, and when they are through they can say 'I helped build that factory' or 'I helped build that ship' or whatever it is that they have been doing. It doesn't seem fair, somehow, but I suppose it's the way it always has been, and always will be--"

Near her a trench was being dug for water pipes. At one place the men had uncovered a large rock, and she was still wondering how they were going to get it out of the way, when a young man came briskly forward and gave one glance at the problem.

"We'll rig up a derrick for this little beauty," he said. "Come on, boys; let's get some timbers."

They were back again in no time, and before Mary knew what they were doing, they had raised a wooden tripod over the rock. The apex of this was bound together with a chain from which a pulley was hung. Other chains were slung under the rock. Then from a nearby hoisting engine, a cable was passed through the pulley and fastened to the chains below.

"All right, boys?"

"All right!"

The young man raised his hand. "Let her go!" he shouted. "Tweet-tweet!" sounded a whistle. The engine throbbed. The cable tightened. The little beauty began to stir uneasily in its hammock of chains. Then slowly and steadily the rock arose, and nearly as quickly as I can write the words, it was lying on the side of the trench and the derrick was being dismantled.

As the young man hurried away he passed Mary's car.

"Why, it's Archey!" she thought. Whether or not it was due to telepathy, the young man looked up and his colour deepened under his tan. "It is

Archey; isn't it?" asked Mary, leaning forward and smiling.

"Yes'm," he said, awkwardly enough, and grammar deserting him in his confusion he added: "It's me all right, Miss Spencer."

"I've been watching you get that rock out," she began, looking at him with frank admiration, and then they talked for a few minutes. I need not tell you what they said--it would only sound trivial--but as they talked a bond of sympathy, of mutual interest, seemed gradually to wind itself around them. They smiled, nodded, looking approvingly at each other; and each felt that feeling of warmth and satisfaction which comes to the heart when instinct whispers, "Make no mistake. You've found a friend."

"But what are you doing here?" she finally asked.

"Working," he grinned. "I graduated last year--construction engineer--and this is my second job. This winter I was down in old Mexico on bridge work--"

"You must tell me about it some time," she said, as one of the workmen came to take him away; and driving off in her car she couldn't help thinking with a smile of amusement, "'Woman's natural enemy'--how silly it sounds in the open air ...!"

CHAPTER IX

Meanwhile the matter of Mary's education was receiving the attention of her aunts.

"Patty," said Miss Cordelia one day, "do you know that child of ours is seventeen?"

The years had dealt kindly with the Misses Spencer and as they looked at each other, with thoughtful benignity, their faces were like two studies in silver and pink.

"Although I say it myself," continued Miss Cordelia, "I doubt if we could have improved her studies. Indeed she is unusually advanced in French, English and music. But I do think she ought to go to a good finishing school now for a year or two--Miss Parsons', of course--where she would not only be welcomed because of her family, but where she would form suitable friendships and learn those lessons of modern deportment which we ourselves, I fear, would never be able to teach her."

But if you had been there when the subject of Miss Parsons' School for Young Ladies was broached to Mary, I think it would have reminded you of that famous recipe for rabbit pie which so wisely begins "First catch your rabbit."

Mary listened to all that was said and then, quietly but unmistakably, she put her foot down on Miss Parsons' fashionable institution of learning.

I doubt if she herself could have given you all her reasons.

For one thing, the older she grew, the more democratic, the more American she was becoming.

Deep in her heart she thought the old original Spencers had done more for the world than any leaders of fashion who ever lived; and when she read or thought of those who had made America, her mind never went to smart society and its doings, but to those great, simple souls who had braved the wilderness in search of liberty and adventure--who had toiled, and fought, and given their lives, unknown, unsung, but never in Mary's mind to be forgotten. And whenever she thought of travel, she found she would rather see the Rockies than the Alps, rather go to New Orleans than Old Orleans, rather visit the Grand Canyon than the Nile, and would infinitely rather cross the American continent and see three thousand miles of her own country, than cross the Atlantic and see three thousand miles of water that belonged to every one in general and no one in particular.

"But, my dear," said Miss Cordelia, altogether taken aback, "you ought to go somewhere, you know. Let me tell you about Miss Parsons' school--"

"It's no use, Aunty. I don't want to go to Miss Parsons' school--"

"Where do you want to go then?"

Like most inspirations, it came like a flash.

"If I'm going anywhere, I want to go to college--"

To college! A Spencer girl--or a Spicer--going to college! Miss Cordelia gasped. If Mary had been noticing, she might not have pursued her inspiration further, but her mind was running along a breathless panorama of Niagara Falls, Great Lakes, Chicago, the farms of the Middle West, Yellowstone Park, geysers, the Old Man of the Mountain, Aztec ruins, redwood forests, orange groves and at the end of the vista--like a statue at the end of a garden walk--she imagined a great democratic institution of learning where one might conceivably be prepared to solve some of those problems which life seems to take such deep delight in presenting to us, with the grim command, "Not one step farther shall you go until you have answered this!"

"To college?" gasped Miss Cordelia.

"Yes," said Mary, still intent upon her panorama, "there's a good one in California. I'll look it up."

The more Mary thought of it, the fonder she grew of her idea--which is, I think, a human trait and true of nearly every one. It was in vain that her aunts argued with her, pointing out the social advantages which she would enjoy from attending Miss Parsons' School. Mary's objection was fundamental. She simply didn't care for those advantages. Indeed, she didn't regard them as advantages at all.

Helen did, though.

In her heart Helen had always longed to tread the stage of society--to her mind, a fairyland of wit and gallantry, masquerades and music, to say nothing of handsome young polo players and titled admirers from foreign shores--"big fools," all of them, as you can guess, when dazzled by the smiles of Youth and Beauty.

"Mary can go to California if she likes," said Helen at last, "but give me Miss Parsons' School."

And Mary did go to California, although I doubt if she would have gained her point if her father hadn't taken her part. For four years she attended the university by the Golden Gate, and every time she made the journey between the two oceans, sometimes accompanied by Miss Cordelia and sometimes by Miss Patty, she seemed to be a little more serene of glance, a little more tranquil of brow, as though one by one she were solving some of those problems which I have mentioned above.

Meanwhile Helen was in her glory at Miss Parsons'; and though the two aunts didn't confess it, they liked to sit and listen to her chatter of the girls whose friendship she was making, and to whose houses she was invited for the holidays.

When she was home, she sang snatches from the operas, danced with imaginary partners, rehearsed parts of private theatricals and dreamed of conquests. She had also learned the knack of dressing her hair which, when done in the grand manner, isn't far from being a talent. Pulled down on one side, with a pin or two adjusted, she was a dashing young duchess who rode to hounds and made the old duke's eyes pop out. Or she could dip it over her ears, change a few pins again and--lo!--she was St. Cecilia seated at the organ, and butter wouldn't melt in her mouth.

"She is quite pretty and very clever," said Miss Cordelia one day. "I think she will marry well."

"Do you think she's as pretty as Mary?" asked Miss Patty.

"My dear!" said Miss Cordelia with a look that said "What a question you are asking!" "--is pretty in a way, of course," she said, "but there is something about our Mary--"

"I know," nodded Miss Patty. "Something you can't express--"

"The dear child," mused Miss Cordelia, looking out toward the west. "I wonder what she is doing this very moment!"

At that very moment, as it happened, Mary was in her room on the other side of the continent studying the manufacture of raisin fudge. Theretofore she had made it too soft, or too sugary, but this time she was determined to have it right. Long ago she had made all the friends that her room would hold, and most of them were there. Some were listening to a girl in spectacles who was talking socialism, while a more frivolous group, perched on the bed, was arguing the question whether the perfect lover had a moustache or a clean-shaven lip.

"Money is cruel; it ought to be abolished," said the earnest girl in the spectacles. "Money is a millstone which the rich use to grind the poor. You girls know it as well as I do."

Mary stirred away at the fudge.

"It's a good thing she doesn't know that I'm rich," she smiled to herself. "I wonder when I shall start grinding the poor!"

"And yet the world simply couldn't get along without the wage-earners,"

continued the young orator. "So all they have to do is strike--and strike--and keep on striking--and they can have everything they want--"

"So could the doctors," mused Mary to herself, stirring away at the fudge. "Imagine the doctors striking.... And so could the farmers. Imagine the farmers striking for eight hours a day, and no work Sundays and holidays, and every Saturday afternoon off...."

Dimly, vaguely, a troubled picture took shape in her mind. She stirred the fudge more reflectively than ever.

"I wonder if civil wars are started that way," she thought, "one class setting out to show its power over another and gradually coming to blows. Suppose--yes, suppose the women were to go on strike for eight hours a day, and as much money as the men, and Saturday afternoons and Sundays off, and all the rest of it.... The world certainly couldn't get along without women. As Becky says, they would only have to strike--and strike--and keep on striking--and they could get everything they wanted--"

Although she didn't suspect it, she was so close to her destiny at that moment that she could have reached out her hand and touched it. But all unconsciously she continued to stir the fudge.

"I've always thought that women have a poor time of it compared with men," she nodded to herself. "Still, perhaps it's the way of the world, like ... like children have the measles ... and old folks have to wear glasses."

She put the pan on the sill to cool and stood there for a time, looking out at the campus, dreamy-eyed, half occupied with her own thoughts and half listening to the conversation behind her.

"There oughtn't to be any such thing as private property--"

"Why, Vera, if he kissed you in the dark, you couldn't tell whether he was a man or a girl--"

"--Everything should belong to the state--"

"--No, listen. Kiss me both ways, and then tell me which you think is the nicest--"

A squeal of laughter arose from the bed and, turning, Mary saw that one of the girls was holding the back of a toothbrush against her upper lip.

"Now," she mumbled, "this is with the moustache ... Kiss me hard ..."

"The greatest book in the world," continued the girl with the spectacles, "is Marx's book on Capital--"

Mary turned to the window again, more dreamy-eyed than ever.

"The greatest book in the world," she thought, "is the book of life.... Oh, if I could only write a few pages in it ... myself ...!"

CHAPTER X

Mary "came out" the winter after her graduation.

If she had been left to herself she would have dispensed with the ceremony quite as cheerfully as she had dispensed with Miss Parsons' School for Young Ladies. But in the first place her aunts were adamant, and in the second place they were assisted by Helen. Helen hadn't been going to finishing school for nothing. She knew the value of a proper social introduction.

Indeed it was her secret ambition to outshine her cousin--an ambition which was at once divined by her two aunts. Whereupon they groomed Mary to such good purpose that I doubt if Society ever looked upon a lovelier debutante.

She was dressed in chiffon, wore the Spencer pearls, and carried herself with such unconscious charm that more than one who danced with her that night felt a rapping on the door of his heart and heard the voice of love exclaiming "Let me in!"

There was one young man in particular who showed her such attention that the matrons either smiled or frowned at each other. Even Miss Cordelia and Miss Patty were pleased, although of course they didn't show it for a moment. He was a handsome, lazy-looking young rascal when he first appeared on the scene, lounging against the doorway, drawling a little as he talked to his friends--evidently a lion, bored in advance with the whole proceeding and meaning to slip away as soon as he could. But when his eye fell on Mary, he stared at her unobserved for nearly a minute and his ennui disappeared into thin air.

"What's the matter, Wally?" asked one of his friends.

"James," he solemnly replied, "I'm afraid it's something serious. I only hope it's catching." The next minute he was being introduced to Mary and was studying her card.

"Some of these I can't dance," she warned him.

"Will you mark them with a tick, please--those you can't dance?"

Unsuspectingly she marked them.

"Good!" said he, writing his name against each tick. "We'll sit those out. The next waltz, though, we will dance that."

"But that's engaged--'Chester A. Bradford,'" she read.

"Poor Brad--didn't I tell you?" asked Wally. "He fell downstairs a moment ago and broke his leg."

That was the beginning of it.

The first dance they sat out Wally said to himself, "I shall kiss her, if it's the last thing I ever do."

But he didn't.

The next dance they sat out he said to himself, "I shall kiss her if I never do another thing as long as I live--"

But he didn't.

The last dance they sat out he said to himself, "I shall kiss her if I hang for it."

He didn't kiss her, even then, but felt himself tremble a little as he looked in her eyes. Then it was that the truth began to dawn upon him. "I'm a gone coon," he told himself, and dabbed his forehead with his handkerchief ...

"You've got him, all right," said Helen later, going to Mary's room ostensibly to undress, but really to exchange those confidences without which no party is complete.

"Got who?" asked Mary. And she a Bachelor of Arts!

"Oh, aren't you innocent! Wally Cabot, of course. Did he kiss you?"

"No, he did not!"

"Of course, if you don't want to tell--!"

"There's nothing to tell."

"There isn't? ... Oh, well, don't worry.... There soon will be."

Helen was right.

From that time forward Mary's own shadow was hardly less attentive than Master Wally Cabot. His high-powered roadster was generally doing one of three things. It was either going to Mary's, or coming from Mary's, or taking a needed rest under Mary's porte cochere.

One day Mary suddenly said to her father, "Who was Paul?"

Fortunately for Josiah the light was on his back.

"Last night at the dance," she continued, "I heard a woman saying that I didn't look the least bit like Paul, and I wondered who he was."

"Perhaps some one in her own family," said Josiah at last.

"Must have been," Mary carelessly nodded. They went on chatting and presently Josiah was himself again.

"What are you going to do about Walter Cabot?" he asked, looking at her with love in his sombre eyes.

Mary made a helpless gesture.

"Has he asked you yet?"

"Yes," she said in a muffled voice, "--often."

"Why don't you take him?"

Again Mary made her helpless gesture and, for a long moment she too was on the point of opening her heart. But again heredity, training and age-old tradition stood between them, finger on lip.

"I sometimes have such a feeling that I want to do something in the world," she nearly told him. "And if I married Wally, it would spoil it all. I sometimes have such dreams--such wonderful dreams of doing something--of being somebody--and I know that if I married Wally I should never be able to dream like that again--"

As you can see, that isn't the sort of a thing which a girl can very well say to her father--or to any one else for that matter, except in fear and hesitation.

"The way I am now," she nearly told him, "there are ever so many things in life that I can do--ever so many doors that I can open. But if I marry Wally, every door is locked but one. I can be his wife; that's all."

Obviously again, you couldn't expect a girl to speak like that, especially a girl with dreamy eyes and shy. Nevertheless those were the thoughts which often came to her at night, after she had said her prayers and popped into bed and lay there in the dark turning things over in her mind.

One night, for instance, after Wally had left earlier than usual, she lay with her head snuggled on the pillow, full of vague dreams and visions--vague dreams of greatness born of the sunsets and stars and flowers--vague visions of proving herself worthy of the heritage of life.

"I don't think it's a bit fair," she thought. "As soon as a woman marries--well, somehow, she's through. But it doesn't seem to make any difference to the man. He can go right on doing the big things--the great things--"

She stopped, arrested by the sound of a mandolin under her window. The next moment the strains of Wally's tenor entered the room, mingled with the moonlight and the scent of the syringa bush. A murmuring, deep-toned trio accompanied him.

"Soft o'er the fountain
Ling'ring falls the southern moon--"

The beauty of it brought a thrill to the roots of Mary's hair--brought quick tears to her eyes--and she was wondering if Wally was right, after all--if love (as he often told her) was indeed the one great thing of life and nothing else mattered, when her door opened and Helen came twittering in.

"A serenade!" she whispered excitedly. "Im-a-gine!"

She tip-toed to the window and, kneeling on the floor, watched the singers through the curtain--knowing well it wasn't for her, but drinking deep of the moment.

Slowly, sweetly, the chorus grew fainter--fainter--

"Nita--Juanita
Ask thy soul if we should part--"

"What do you think of that!" said Helen, leaning over and giving her cousin a squeeze and a kiss. "He had the two Garde boys and Will Thompson with him. I thought he was leaving earlier than usual tonight; didn't you? But a serenade! I wonder if the others heard it, too!"

Miss Patty and Miss Cordelia had both heard it, and Helen had hardly gone when they came pattering in--each as proud as Punch of Mary for having caused such miracles to perform--and gleeful, too, that they had lived in the land long enough to hear a real, live serenade. And after they had kissed her and gone, Ma'm Maynard came in with a pretty little speech in French. So that altogether Mary held quite a reception in bed. As one result, her feeling toward Wally melted into something like tenderness, and if it hadn't been for the tragic event next morning, the things which I have to tell you might never have taken place.

"I wonder if your father heard it," said Miss Patty at the breakfast table next morning.

"I wonder!" laughed Mary. "I think I'll run in and see."

According to his custom Josiah breakfasted early and had gone to his den to look over his mail. Mary passed gaily through the library, but it wasn't long before she was back at the dining room door, looking as though she had seen a ghost.

"Come--come and look," she choked. "Something--something terrible--"

Josiah sat, half collapsed, in his chair. Before him, on the desk, lay his mail. Some he had read. Some he would never, never read.

"He must have had a stroke," said Miss Cordelia, her arms around Mary; and looking at her brother she whispered, "I think something upset him."

When they had sent for the doctor and had taken Mary away, they returned to look over the letters which Josiah had opened as his last mortal act.

"I don't see anything in these that could have bothered him," said Miss Cordelia, fearfully looking.

"What's this?" asked Miss Patty, picking up an empty envelope from the floor.

It was post-marked "Rio de Janeiro" and the date showed that it had taken three weeks to make the journey.

"I have some recollection of that writing," said Miss Cordelia.

"So have I," said Miss Patty in a low voice, "but where's the letter?"

Again it was she who made the discovery.

"That must be it," she said. "His ash tray is cleaned out every morning."

It was a large, brass tray and in it was the char of a paper that had been burned. This ash still lay in its folds and across its surface, black on black, could be seen a few lines which resembled the close of a letter.

"Can you read it?" she asked.

Miss Cordelia bent over, and as a new angle of light struck the tray, the words became as legible as though they had just been written.

"I thought I knew the writing," whispered Miss Cordelia, and lowering her voice until her sister had to hang breathless upon the movement of her lips, she added "Oh, Patty ... We all thought he was dead ... No wonder it killed poor Josiah ..."

Their arms went around each other. Their glances met.

"I know," whispered Miss Patty, her lips suddenly gone dry, "....It was from Paul...!"

CHAPTER XI

For the first few months after her father's death, Mary's dreams seemed to fade into mist.

Between her and Josiah a bond of love had existed, stronger than either had suspected--and now that he was gone the world seemed unaccountably empty--and unaccountably cruel. As her father had gone, so must Aunt Cordelia and Aunt Patty some day surely go ... Yes, and even Mary herself must just as surely follow.

The immemorial doubt assailed her--that doubt which begins in helplessness and ends in despair. "What's the use?" she asked herself. "We plan and work so hard--like children making things in the sand--and then Death comes along with a big wave and flattens everything out ... like that ..."

But gradually her sense of balance began to return. One day she stood on the brink of the hill looking at the great factory below, and a calmer, surer feeling slowly swept over her.

"That's it," she thought. "The real things of life go on, no matter who dies, just as though nothing had happened. Take the first Josiah Spencer and look down there what he left behind him. Why, you might even say that he was alive today! And see what Washington left behind him--and Fulton, who invented the steamboat--and Morse who invented the telegraph. So it's silly to say 'What's the use?' Suppose Columbus had said it--or any of the others who have done great things in the world--"

It slowly came to her then, her doubts still lingering, how many are called, how few are chosen.

"That's the trouble," she said. "We can't all be Washingtons. We can't all do great things. And yet--an awful lot of people had to live so that Washington could be born when he was...."

"His parents: that was two. And his grand-parents: he must have had four. And his great grand-parents: eight of them...."

"Why, it's like the problem of the horse-shoe nails," she continued in growing excitement. "In twenty-eight generations there must have been

millions and millions of people who lived--just so George Washington could be born one day at Mt. Vernon--and grow up to make America free! Yes, and every one of them was just as necessary as Washington himself, because if it hadn't been for every single one of them--we would never have had him!"

For a moment she seemed to be in touch with the infinite plan. Down the hill she saw a woman in a black dress, crossing the street.

"Mrs. Ridge going out for the day," thought Mary, recognizing the figure below. "Yes, and who knows? She may be a link in a chain which is leading straight down to some one who will be greater than Washington--greater than Shakespeare--greater than any man who ever lived...!" And her old dreams, her old visions beginning to return, she added with a sigh, "Oh, dear! I wish I could do something big and noble--so if all those millions who are back of me are watching, they'll feel proud of what I'm doing and nudge each other as if they were saying, 'You see? She's come at last. That's us!'"

As you will realize, this last thought of Mary's suggested more than it told--as I believe great thoughts often do--but at least I think you'll be able to grasp the idea which she herself was groping after. At the same time you mustn't suppose that she was constantly going around dreaming, and trying to find expression for those vague strivings and yearnings which come to us all at different times in our lives, especially in the golden days of youth when the flood of ambition is rising high within us--or again in later years when we feel the tide will soon begin to turn, and we must make haste or it will be too late.

No, Mary had plenty of practical matters, too, to engage her attention and keep her feet on the earth.

For one thing there was Wally Cabot--he who had so lately serenaded Mary in the moonlight. But I'll tell you about him later.

Then the settlement of her father's estate kept coming up for action. Judge Cutler and Mary's two aunts were the trustees--an arrangement which didn't please Uncle Stanley any too well, although he was careful not to show it. And the more Mary saw of the silvery haired judge with his hawk's eyes and gentle smile, the more she liked him.

One of the first things they discovered was that Mary's heritage consisted of the factory by the river--but little else. Practically all the bonds and investments that Josiah had ever owned had been sold for the greater glory of Spencer & Son--to buy in other firms and patents--to increase the factory by the river. As her father had once confided to Mary this had taken money--"a dreadful lot of money"--she remembered the wince with which he had spoken--and a safe deposit box which was nearly empty bore evidence to the truth of what he had said.

"High and low," mused the judge when the inventory was at last completed, "it's always the same. The millionaire and the mill-hand--somehow they always manage to leave less than every one expected--"

"Why is that?" asked Mary. "Is it because the heirs expect too much?"

"No, child. I think it's the result of pride. As a rule, man is a proud animal and he doesn't like to tell anything which doesn't redound to his credit. If a man buys bonds, for instance, he is very apt to mention it

to his family. But if for any reason he has to sell those bonds, he will nearly always do it quietly and say nothing about it, hoping to buy them back again later, or something better yet--

"I've seen so many estates," he continued, "shrink into next to nothing--so many widows who thought they were well off, suddenly waking up and finding themselves at the mercy of the world--the little they have often being taken away from them by the first glib sharper who comes long--that I sometimes think every man should give his family a show-down once a year. It would surely save a lot of worries and heartaches later on--

"Still," he smiled, looking down at the inventory, with its noble line of figures at the bottom of the column, "I don't think you'll have much trouble in keeping the wolf from the door."

Mary turned the pages in a helpless sort of way.

"You'll have to explain some of this," she said at last. But before giving it back to him she looked out of the window for a time--one of her slow, thoughtful glances--and added, "I wonder why girls aren't brought up to know something about business--the way boys are."

"Perhaps it's because they have no head for business."

She thought that over.

"Can you speak French?" she suddenly asked.

"No."

"...I can. I can speak it, and read it, and write it, and think it.... Now don't you think that if a girl can do that--if she can learn thousands and thousands of new words, how to pronounce them, and spell them, and parse them, and inflect them--how to supply hundreds of rules of grammar--and if she can learn to do this so well that she can chat away in French without giving it a thought--don't you think she might be able to learn something about the language and rules of business, too, if they were only taught to her? Then perhaps there wouldn't be so many helpless widows in the world, as you said just now, at the mercy of the first glib sharper who comes along."

This time it was the judge's turn to think it over.

"You're an exceptional girl, Mary," he said at last.

"No, really I'm not," she earnestly told him. "Any girl can learn anything that a boy can learn--if she is only given a chance. Where boys and girls go to school together--at the grammar schools and high schools--the girls are just as quick as the boys, and their average marks are quite as high. It was true at college, too. The girls could learn anything that the men could learn--and do it just as well."

As one result of this, Judge Cutler began giving Mary lessons in business, using the inventory as a text and explaining each item in the settlement of the estate. He also taught her some of the simpler maxims, beginning with that grand old caution, "Never sign a paper for a stranger--"

It wasn't long after this that Uncle Stanley called at the house on the hill. He talked for a time about some of the improvements which were being made at the factory and then arose as if to go.

"Oh, I nearly forgot," he said, turning back and smiling at his oversight. "We need a new director to take your father's place. When I'm away Burdon looks after things, so I suppose he may as well take the responsibility. It's a thankless position, but some one has to fill it."

"Yes," murmured Mary, "I suppose they do."

"They do," said Uncle Stanley. "So I'll call a stockholders' meeting right away. Meanwhile if you will sign this proxy--"

But just as quietly Mary murmured, "I'd like to think it over."

They looked at each other then--those two--with that careful, yet careless-appearing glance which two duellists might employ when some common instinct warns them that sooner or later they will cross their swords.

Uncle Stanley was the first to lower his eye.

"The law requires three directors," he said in his more usual grumpy voice, "or I wouldn't have bothered you. I'll leave it and you can sign it and send it down this afternoon."

But Mary did neither. Instead she went to see Judge Cutler and when the stockholders' meeting was finally called, she attended it in person--holding practically all the stock--and Judge Cutler was elected to fill the vacancy.

Uncle Stanley just managed to control himself. It took an effort, but he did it.

"We've got to elect a president next," he said, trying to make a joke of it, but unable to keep the tremor of testiness out of his voice. "Of course I've been here all my life--if that counts for anything--and I am now serving in the more or less humble capacity of vice-president--but if the judge would like to throw up his law business and try the manufacturing end instead--"

"No," smiled the judge, lighting a bombshell--though Uncle Stanley little guessed it--"I think the position calls for some one younger than I am. Besides, my name is Cutler, whereas for eight generations this concern has been headed by a Spencer.

"You know, Mr. Woodward, lawyers are sticklers for precedent, and it seems to me that as long as there is a Spencer left in the family, that good old name should stand at the head.

"For the office of president I therefore cast my vote in favour of the last of the Spencers--Miss Mary--"

That was the bombshell, and oh, but didn't it rock Uncle Stanley back on his heels!

"Of course, if you want to make a joke of the company," he said at last, sticking out his lower lip till it made a little shelf, although it

wasn't a very steady little shelf because it trembled as though from emotion. "President, Mary Spencer"--you know as well as I do what people will think when they see that on the letterhead--"

"Unfortunately, yes," said the judge, flashing him one of his hawk's glances but still speaking in his gentle voice. "Still, we can easily get around that difficulty. We can have the letter-heads lithographed 'President, M. Spencer.' Then if our correspondents have imaginations, they will think that the M stands for Matthew or Mark or Michael or Malachi. One thing sure," he smiled at the new president, "they'll never think of Mary."

As in the case of the factory, Uncle Stanley had also been vice-president of the First National Bank. A few days after the proceedings above recorded, the stockholders of the bank met to choose a new president. There was only one vote and when it was counted, Stanley Woodward was found to be elected.

"I wonder what he'll be doing next," said Mary uneasily when she heard the news.

"My dear girl," gently protested the judge, "you mustn't be so suspicious. It will poison your whole life and lead you nowhere."

Mary thought that over.

"You know the old saying, don't you?" he continued. "Suspicion is the seed of discord."

"Yes," nodded Mary, trying to smile, though she still looked troubled. "I know the old saying--but--the trouble is--I know Uncle Stanley, too, and that's what bothers me..."

CHAPTER XII

At this point I had meant to tell you more of Wally Cabot--most perfect, most charming of lovers--but first I find that I must describe a passage which took place one morning between Mary and Uncle Stanley's son Burdon.

Perhaps you remember Burdon, the tall, dark young man who "smelled nice" and wore a white edging on the V of his waistcoat.

As far back as Mary could remember him, he had appealed to her imagination.

His Norfolk jackets, his gold cigarette case and match box, his air of distinction, his wealth of black hair which grew to a point on his forehead, even the walking stick which he sometimes carried; to Mary's mind these had always been properties in a human drama--a drama breathless with possibilities, written by Destiny and entitled Burdon Woodward.

It is hard to express some things, and this is one of them. But among your own acquaintances there are probably one or two figures which stand out above the others as though they had been selected by Fate to play

strenuous parts--whether Columbine, clown or star. Something is always happening to them. Wherever they appear, they seem to hold the centre of the stage, and when they disappear a dullness falls and life seems flat for a time. You think of them more often than you realize, perhaps with a smile, perhaps with a frown, and generally you dismiss them from your mind with some such thought as this--"He'll get in trouble yet," or "I wouldn't be surprised if he makes a great man some day"--or "Something will happen to that girl yet, if she isn't careful!"

That, in short, was the sort of a character that Burdon Woodward had always been to Mary. For as long as she could remember him, she had associated him with romance and drama.

To her he had been Raffles, the amateur cracksman. He had also been Steerforth in David Copperfield--and time after time she had drowned him in the wreck. In stories of buccaneers he was the captain--sometimes Captain Morgan, sometimes Captain Kidd--or else he was Black Jack with Dora in his power and trembling in the balance whether to become a hero or a villain. As Mary grew older these associations not only lingered; they strengthened.

Not long before her father died she read in the paper of a young desperado, handsome and well-dressed, who held up a New York jeweller at the point of a gun and relieved him of five thousand dollars' worth of diamond rings. The story was made remarkable by a detail. An old woman was sitting at the corner, grinding a hand-organ, and as the robber ran past her, he dropped one of the rings into her cup.

"Oh, dad," Mary had said, looking up and speaking on impulse, "did I hear you say last night that Burdon Woodward was in New York?"

"No, dear. Boston."

"Mm," thought Mary. "He'd say he was going to Boston for a blind." And for many a week after that she slyly watched his fingers, to see if she could catch him red-handed so to speak, wearing one of those rings! Yet even while she glanced she had the grace to smile at her fancies.

"All the same," she told herself, "it sounded an awful lot like him."

The encounter which I am now going to tell you about took place one morning after Mary had been elected to the presidency of the company. She had just finished breakfast when Burdon telephoned.

"Your father had some private papers in his desk down here," he said. "I was wondering if you'd like to come down and look them over."

"Thank you," she said. "I will."

Josiah's private room in the factory office building had been an impressive one, high-ceiled and flanked with a fire-place which was, however, never lighted. Ancestral paintings and leather chairs had added their notes of distinction. The office of any executive will generally reflect not only his own personality, but the character of the enterprise of which he stands at the head. Looking in Josiah's room, I think you would have been impressed, either consciously or not, that Spencer & Son had dignity, wealth and a history behind it. And regarding then the dark colouring of the appointments, devoid of either beauty or warmth, and feeling yourself impressed by a certain chilliness of atmosphere, I can

very well imagine you saying to yourself "Not very cheerful!"

But you wouldn't have thought this on the morning when Mary entered it in response to Burdon's suggestion.

A fire was glowing on the andirons. New rugs gave colour and life to the floor. The mantel had been swept clear of annual reports and technical books, and graced with a friendly clock and a still more friendly pair of vases filled with flowers. The monumental swivel chair had disappeared, and in its place was one of wicker, upholstered in cretonne. On the desk was another vase of flowers, a writing set of charming design and a triple photograph frame, containing pictures of Miss Cordelia, Miss Patty and old Josiah himself.

Mary was still marvelling when she caught sight of Burdon Woodward in the doorway.

"Who--who did this?" she asked.

He bowed low--as d'Artagnan might have bowed to the queen of France--but came up smiling.

"Your humble, obedient servant," said he. "Can I come in?"

It had been some time since Mary had seen him so closely, and as he approached she noticed the faultlessness of his dress, the lily of the valley in his buttonhole, and that slightly ironic but smiling manner which is generally attributed to men of the world, especially to those who have travelled far on adventurous and forbidden paths. In another age he might have worn lace cuffs and a sword, and have just returned from a gambling house where he had lost or won a fortune with equal nonchalance.

"He still smells nice," thought Mary to herself, "and I think he's handsomer than ever--if it wasn't for that dark look around his eyes--and even that becomes him." She motioned to a chair and seated herself at the desk.

"I thought you'd like to have a place down here to call your own," he said in his lazy voice. "I didn't make much of a hit with the governor, but then you know I seldom do--"

"Where did you get the pictures?"

"From the photographers'. Of course it required influence, but I am full of that--being connected, as you may know, with Spencer & Son. When I told him why I wanted them, he seemed to be as anxious as I was to find the old plates."

"And the fire and the rugs and everything--you don't know how I appreciate it all. I had no idea--"

"I like surprises, myself," he said. "I suppose that's why I like to surprise others. The keys of the desk are in the top drawer, and I have set aside the brightest boy in the office to answer your buzzer. If you want anybody or anything--to write a letter--to see the governor--or even to see your humble servant--all you have to do is to press this button."

A wave of gratitude swept over her.

"He's nice," she thought, as Burdon continued his agreeable drawl. "But Helen says he's wicked. I wonder if he is.... Imagine him thinking of the pictures: I'm sure that doesn't sound wicked, and... Oh, dear!....Yes, he did it again, then!... He--he's making eyes at me as much as he dares!..."

She turned and opened a drawer of the desk.

"I think I'll take the papers home and sort them there," she said.

"You're sure there's nothing more I can do?" he asked, rising.

"Nothing more; thank you."

"That window behind you is open at the top. You may feel a draft; I'll shut it."

In his voice she caught the note which a woman never misses, and her mind went back to her room at college where the girls used to gather in the evenings and hold classes which were strictly outside the regular course.

"It's simply pathetic," one of the girls had once remarked, "but nearly every man you meet makes love the same way. Talk about sausage for breakfast every morning in the year. It's worse than that!

"First you catch it in their eye and in their voice: 'Are you sure you're comfortable?' 'Are you sure you're warm enough?' 'Are you sure you don't feel a draft?' That's Chapter One.

"Then they try to touch you--absent-mindedly putting their arms along the back of your chair, or taking your elbow to keep you from falling when you have to cross a doorsill or a curb-stone or some dangerous place like that. That's always Chapter Two.

"And then they try to get you into a nice, secluded place, and kiss you. Honestly, the sameness of it is enough to drive a girl wild. Sometimes I say to myself, 'The next time a man looks at me that way and asks me if I feel a draft, I'm going to say, 'Oh, please let's dispense with Chapter Two and pass directly to the nice, secluded place. It will be such a change from the usual routine!'"

Mary laughed to herself at the recollection.

"If Vera's right," she thought, "he'll try to touch me next--perhaps the next time I come."

It happened sooner than that.

After she had tied up the papers and carried them to the car, and had made a tour of the new buildings--Archey Forbes blushing like a sunset the moment he saw her--she returned to her motor which was waiting outside the office building. Burdon must have been waiting for her. He suddenly appeared and opened the door of the car.

"Allow me," he said. When she stepped up, she felt the support of his hand beneath her elbow.

She slipped into her place at the wheel and looked ahead as dreamy-eyed as ever.

"Chapter Two..." she thought to herself as the car began to roll away, and taking a hasty mental review of Wally Cabot, and Burdon Woodward and Archey Forbes, she couldn't help adding, "If a girl's thoughts started to run that way, oh, wouldn't they keep her busy!"

It relieved her feelings to make the car roar up the incline that led from the river, but when she turned into the driveway at the house on the hill, she made a motion of comic despair.

Wally Cabot's car was parked by the side of the house. Inside she heard the phonograph playing a waltz.

CHAPTER XIII

Wally stayed for lunch, looking sheepish at first for having been caught dancing with Helen. But he soon recovered and became his charming self. Miss Cordelia and Miss Patty always made him particularly welcome, listening with approval to his chatter of Boston society, and feeling themselves refreshed as at some Hebian spring at hearing the broad a's and the brilliant names he uttered.

"If I were you, Helen," said Mary when lunch was over, "I think I'd go on teaching Wally that dance." Which may have shown that it rankled a little, even if she were unconscious that it did. "I have some papers that I want to look over and I don't feel very trippy this afternoon."

She went to Josiah's old study, but had hardly untied the papers when she heard the knock of penitence on the door.

"Come in!" she smiled.

The door opened and in came Master Wally, looking ready to weep.

"Wally! Don't!" she laughed. "You'll give yourself the blues!"

"Not when I hear you laugh like that. I know I'm forgiven." He drew a chair to the fire and sat down with an air of luxury. "I can almost imagine that we're an old married couple, sitting in here like this--can't you?"

"No; I can't. And you've got to be quiet and let me work, or I shall send you back to Helen."

"She asked me to dance with her--of course, you know that--or I never would have done it--"

"Oh, fie, for shame," said Mary absently, "blaming the woman. You know you liked to do it."

"Mary--!"

"Hush!"

He watched her for a time and, in truth, she was worth it. He looked at

the colour of her cheeks, her dreamy eyes like pools of mystery, the crease in her chin (which he always wanted to kiss), the rise and fall of the pendant on her breast. He looked until he could look no longer and then he arose and leaned over the desk.

"Mary--!" he breathed, taking her hand.

"Now, please don't start that, Wally. We'll shake hands if you want to... There! How are you? Now go back to your chair and be good."

"Be good!" he savagely echoed.

"Why, you want to be good; don't you?" she asked in surprise.

"I want you to love me. Mary; tell me you love me just a little bit; won't you?"

"I like you a whole lot--but when it comes to love--the way you mean--"

"It's the only thing in life that's worth a hang," he eagerly interrupted her. "The trouble is: you won't try it. You won't allow yourself to let go. I was like that once--thought it was nothing. But after I met you--! Oh, girl, it's all roses and lilies--the only thing in the world, and don't you forget it! Come on in and give it a try!"

"It's not the only thing in the world," said Mary, shaking her head. "That's the reason I don't want to come in: When a man marries, he goes right on with his life as though nothing had happened. That shows it's not the only thing with him. But when a woman marries--well, she simply surrenders her future and her independence. It may be right that she should, too, for all I know--but I'm going to try the other way first. I'm going right on with my life, the same as a man does--and see what I get by it."

"How long are you going to try it, do you think?"

"Until I've found out whether love is the only thing in a woman's life. If I find that I can't do anything else--if I find that a girl can only be as bright as a man until she reaches the marrying age, and then she just naturally stands still while he just naturally goes forward--why, then, I'll put an advertisement in the paper 'Husband Wanted. Mary Spencer. Please apply.'"

"They'll apply over my dead body."

"You're a dear, good boy to say it. No, please, Wally, don't or I shall go upstairs. Now sit by the fire again--that's better--and smoke if you want to, and let me finish these papers."

They were for the greater part the odds and ends which accumulate in every desk. There were receipted bills, old insurance policies, letters that had once seemed worth prizing, catalogues of things that had never been bought, prospectuses, newspaper clippings, copies of old contracts. And yet they had an interest, too--an interest partly historical, partly personal.

This merry letter, for instance, which Mary read and smiled over--who was the "Jack" who had written it? "Dead, perhaps, like dad," thought Mary. Yes, dead perhaps, and all his fun and drollery suddenly fallen into

silence and buried with him.

"Isn't life queer!" she thought. "Now why did he save this clipping?"

She read the clipping and enjoyed it. Wally, watching from his chair, saw the smile which passed over her face.

"She'll warm up some day," he confidently told himself, with that bluntness of thought which comes to us all at times. "See how she flared up because I danced with Helen. Maybe if I made her jealous..."

At the desk Mary picked up another paper--an old cable. She read it, re-read it, and quietly folded it again; but for all her calmness the colour slowly mounted to her cheeks, as the recollection of odd words and phrases arose to her mind.

"Wally," she said in her quietest voice, "I'm going to ask you a question, but first you must promise to answer me truly."

"Cross my heart and hope to die!"

"Are you ready?"

"Quite ready."

"Then did you ever hear of any one in our family named Paul?"

"Y-yes--"

"Who was he?"

It was some time before he told the story, but trust a girl to make a man speak when she wishes it! He softened the recital in every possible way, but trust a girl again to read between the lines when she wants to!

"And didn't he ever come back?" she asked.

"No; you see he couldn't very well. There was an accident out West--somebody killed--anyhow, he was blamed for it. Queer, isn't it?" he broke off, trying to relieve the subject. "The Kaiser can start a war and kill millions. That's glory. But if some poor devil loses his head--"

Mary wasn't through yet.

"You say he's dead!" she asked.

"Oh, yes, years ago. He must have been dead--oh, let me see--about fifteen or twenty years, I guess."

"Poor dad!" thought Mary that night. "What he must have gone through! I'll bet he didn't think that love was the only thing in life. And--that other one," she hesitated, "who was 'wild after the girls,' Wally says, and finally ran off with one--I'll bet he didn't think so, either--before he got through--to say nothing of the poor thing who went with him. But dead fifteen or twenty years--that's the queerest part."

She found the cable again. It was dated Rio Janeiro--

"Gods sake cable two hundred dollars wife children sick desperate next

week too late."

It was signed "Paul" and--the point to which Mary's attention was constantly returning--it wasn't fifteen or twenty years ago that this appeal had been received by her father.

The date of the cable was scarcely three years old.

CHAPTER XIV

For days Mary could think of little else, but as week followed week, her thoughts merged into memories--memories that were stored away and stirred in their hiding places less and less often.

"Dad knew best," she finally told herself. "He bore it in silence all those years, so it wouldn't worry me, and I'm not going to start now. Perhaps--he's dead, too. Anyhow," she sternly repeated, "I'm not going to worry. I've seen enough of worry to start doing that."

Besides, she had too much else on her mind--"to start doing that."

As the war in Europe had progressed--America drawing nearer the crimson whirlpool with every passing month--a Red Cross chapter was organized at New Bethel. Mary took active part in the work, and whenever visitors came to speak at the meetings, they seldom went away without being entertained at the house on the hill.

"I love to think of it," she told Aunt Patty one day. "The greatest organization of mercy ever known--and practically all women's work! Doesn't that mean a lot to you, Aunt Patty? If women can do such wonderful things for the Red Cross, why can't they do wonderful things in other ways?"

Her own question set her thinking, and something seemed to tell her that now or never she must watch her chance to make old dreams come true. Surely never before in the history of the world had woman come to the front with such a splendid arrival.

"We'll get things yet, Aunt Delia," she whispered in confidence, "so that folks will be just as proud of a girl baby as a boy baby." Whereupon she wagged her finger as though to say, "You mark my words!" and went rolling away to hear a distinguished lecturer who had just returned from Europe with a message to the women in America of what their sisters were doing across the seas.

The address was given at the Red Cross rooms, and as Mary listened she sewed upon a flannel swaddling robe that was later to go to Siberia lest a new-born babe might perish. At first she listened conscientiously enough to the speaker--"What our European sisters have done in agriculture--"

"I do believe at times that it's the women more than the men who make a country great," she thought as she heard of the women ploughing, planting, reaping. To Mary's mind each stoical figure glowed with the light of heroism, and she nodded her head as she worked.

"Just as I've always said," she mused; "there's nothing a man can do that a woman can't do."

From her chair by the window she chanced to look out at an old circus poster across the street.

"Now that's funny, too," she thought, her needle suspended; "I never thought of that before--but even in such things as lion taming and trapeze performing--where you would think a woman would really be at a disadvantage--she isn't at all. She's just as good as a man!"

The voice of the speaker broke in upon her thoughts.

"I am now going to tell you," she said, "what the women of Europe are doing in the factories--"

And oh, how Mary listened, then!

It was a long talk--I cannot begin to give it here--but she drank in every word, and hungered and thirsted for more.

"There is not an operation in factory, foundry or laboratory," began the speaker, "where women are not employed--"

As in a dream Mary seemed to see the factory of Spencer & Son. The long lines of men had vanished, and in their places were women, clear-eyed, dexterous and happy at escaping from the unpaid drudgery of housework. "It may come to that, too," she thought, "if we go into war."

"In aeroplane construction," the speaker continued, "where an undetected flaw in her work might mean an aviator's life, woman is doing the carpentry work, building the frame work, making the propellers. They are welding metals, drilling, boring, grinding, milling, even working on the engines and magnetos--"

A quiver ran up and down Mary's back and her eyes felt wet. "Just what I've always said," she thought. "Ah, the poor women--"

"They are making telescopes, periscopes, binoculars, cameras--cutting and grinding the lenses--work so fine that the deviation of a hair's breadth would cause rejection--some of the lenses as small as a split pea. They make the metal parts that hold those lenses, assemble them, adjust them, test them. These are the eyes of the army and navy--surely no small part for the woman to supply."

Mary's thoughts turned to some of the homes she had seen--the surroundings--the expression of the housewife. "All her life and no help for it," she thought. And again, "Ah, the poor women...."

"To tell you the things she is making would be to give you a list of everything used in modern warfare. They are making ships, tanks, cannon, rifles, cartridges. They are operating the most wonderful trip hammers that were ever conceived by the mind of man, and under the same roof they are doing hand work so delicate that the least extra pressure of a file would spoil a week's labour. More! There isn't a process in which she has been employed where woman has failed to show that she is man's equal in speed and skill. In many operations she has shown that she is man's superior--doing this by the simple method of turning out more work in a

day than the man whose place she took--"

Mary invited the speaker to go home with her, and if you had gone past the house on the hill that night, you would have seen lights burning downstairs until after one o'clock.

How did they train the women?

How did they find time to do their washing and ironing?

What about the children? And the babies? And the home?

As the visitor explained, stopping now and then to tell her young hostess where to write for government reports giving facts and figures on the subject which they were discussing, Mary's eyes grew dreamier and dreamier as one fancy after another passed through her mind. And when the clock struck one and she couldn't for shame keep her guest up any longer, she went to her room at last and undressed in a sort of a reverie, her glance inward turned, her head slightly on one side, and with such a look of thoughtful exaltation that I wish I could paint it for you, because I know I can never put it into words.

Still, if you can picture Betsey Ross, it was thus perhaps that Betsey looked when first she saw the flag.

Or Joan of Arc might once have gazed that way in Orleans' woods.

CHAPTER XV

It was in December that Mary's great idea began to assume form. She wrote to the American Ambassadors in Great Britain and France for any documents which they could send her relating to the subject so close to her heart. In due time two formidable packages arrived at the house on the hill.

Mary carried them into the den and opened them with fingers that trembled with eagerness.

Yes, it was all true.... All true.... Here it was in black and white, with photographs and statistics set down by impartial observers and printed by government. Generally a state report is dry reading, but to Mary at least these were more exciting than any romances--more beautiful than any poem she had ever read.

At last woman had been given a chance to show what she could do. And how she had shown them!

Without one single straining effort, without the least thought of doing anything spectacular, she had gently and calmly taken up men's tools and had done men's work--not indifferently well--not in any makeshift manner--but "in all cases, even the most technical, her work has equalled that previously done exclusively by man. In a number of instances, owing to her natural dexterity and colour sense, her work, indeed, has been superior."

How Mary studied those papers!

Never even at college had she applied herself more closely. She memorized, compared, read, thought, held arguments with herself. And finally, when she was able to pass any examination that might be set before her, she went down to the office one day and sent for Mr. MacPherson, the master mechanic.

He came--grey haired, grim faced, a man who seemed to keep his mouth buttoned--and Mary asked him to shut the door behind him. Whereat Mac buttoned his mouth more tightly than before, and looked grimmer, too, if that were possible.

"You don't look a day older," Mary told him with a smile. "I remember you from the days when my father used to carry me around--"

"He was a grand man, Miss Mary; it's a pity he's gone," said Mac and promptly buttoned his mouth again.

"I want to talk to you about something," she said, "but first I want you to promise to keep it a secret."

He blinked his eyes at that, and as much as a grim faced man can look troubled, he looked troubled.

"There are vera few secrets that can be kept around this place," was his strange reply. "Might I ask, Miss Mary, of what nature is the subject?" And seeing that she hesitated he added, first looking cautiously over his shoulder, "Is it anything, for instance, to do wi' Mr. Woodward? Or, say, the conduct of the business?"

"No, no," said Mary, "it--it's about women--" Mac stared at her, but when she added "--about women working in the factory," he drew a breath of relief.

"Aye," he said, "I think I can promise to keep quiet about that."

"Isn't it true," she began, "that most of the machinery we use doesn't require a great deal of skill to run it?"

"We've a lot of automatics," acknowledged Mac. "Your grandfather's idea, Miss Mary. A grand man. He was one of the first to make the machine think instead of the operator."

"How long does it take to break in an ordinary man?"

"A few weeks is generally enough. It depends on the man and the tool."

Mary told him then what she had in her mind, and Mac didn't think much of it until she showed him the photographs. Even then he was "mighty cautious" until he happened to turn to the picture of a munition factory in Glasgow where row after row of overalled women were doing the lathe work.

"Think of that now," said he; "in Glasga!" As he looked, the frost left his eye. "A grand lot of lasses," he said and cleared his throat.

"If they can do it, we can do it, too--don't you think so?"

"Why not?" he asked. "For let me tell you this, Miss Mary. Those old

countries are all grand countries--to somebody's way of thinking. But America is the grandest of them all, or they wouldn't keep coming here as fast as ships can bring them! What they can do, yes, we can do--and add something for good measure, if need be!"

"Well, that's it," said Mary, eagerly. "If we go into the war, we shall have to do the same as they are doing in Europe--let women do the factory work. And if it comes to that, I want Spencer & Son to be ready--to be the first to do it--to show the others the way!"

Mac nodded. "A bit of your grandfather, that," he thought with approval.

"So what I want you to do," she concluded, "is to make me up a list of machines that women can be taught to handle the easiest, and let me have it as soon as you can."

"I'll do that," he grimly nodded. "There's far too many vacant now."

"And remember, please, you are not to say anything. Because, you know, people would only laugh at the idea of a woman being able to do a man's work."

"I'm mute," he nodded again, and started for the door, his mouth buttoned very tightly indeed. But even while his hand was stretched out to reach the knob, he paused and then returned to the desk.

"Miss Mary," he said, "I'm an old man, and you're a young girl. I know nothing, mind you, but sometimes there are funny things going on in the world. And a man's not a fool. What I'm going to tell you now, I want you to remember it, but forget who told it to you. Trust nobody. Be careful. I can say no more."

"He means Uncle Stanley," thought Mary, uneasily, and a shadow fell upon the day. She was still troubled when another disturbing incident arose.

"I'll leave these papers in the desk here," she thought, taking her keys from her handbag. She unlocked the top drawer and was about to place the papers on top of those which already lay there, when suddenly she paused and her eyes opened wide.

On the top letter in her drawer--a grey tinted sheet--was a scattered mound of cigarette ash.

"Somebody's been here--snooping," she thought. "Somebody with a key to the desk. He must have had a cigarette in his hand when he shut the drawer, and the ashes jarred off without being noticed--"

Irresistibly her thoughts turned to Burdon Woodward, with his gold cigarette case and match box.

"It was he who gave me the keys," she thought.

She sighed. A sense of walking among pitfalls took possession of her. As you have probably often noticed, suspicion feeds upon suspicion, and as Mary walked through the outer office she felt that more than one pair of eyes were avoiding her. The old cashier kept his head buried in his ledger and nearly all the men were busy with their papers and books.

"Perhaps it's because I'm a woman," she thought. Ma'm Maynard's words

arose with a new significance, "I tell you, Miss Mary, it has halways been so, and it halways will. Everything that lives has its own natural enemy--and a woman's natural enemy: eet is man!"

But Mary could still smile at that.

"Take Mr. MacPherson," she thought; "how is he my natural enemy? Or Judge Cutler? Or Archey Forbes? Or Wally Cabot?" She felt more normal then, but when these reflections had died away, she still occasionally felt her thoughts reverting to Mac's warning, the cigarette ash, the averted glances in the office.

The next morning, though, she thought she had found the answer to the latter puzzle. She had hardly finished breakfast when Judge Cutler was announced, his hawk's eyes frowning and never a trace of his smile.

"Did you get your copy of the annual report?" he asked.

"Not yet," said Mary, somehow guessing what he meant. "Why?"

"I got mine in the mail this morning." He drew it from his pocket and his frown grew deeper. "Let's go in the den," he said; "we've got to talk this out."

It was the annual report of Spencer & Son's business and briefly stated, it showed an alarming loss for the preceding twelve months.

"Ah-ha!" thought Mary, "that's the reason they didn't look up yesterday. They had seen this, and they felt ashamed."

"As nearly as I can make it out," said the judge, "there's too many improvements going on, and not enough business. We must do something to stop these big expenses, and find a way to get more bearings sold--"

He checked himself then and looked at Mary, much as Mac had looked the previous day, just before issuing his warning.

"Perhaps he's thinking of Uncle Stanley, too," thought Mary.

"Another bad feature is this," continued the judge, "the bank is getting too strong a hold on the company. We must stop that before it gets any worse."

"Why?" asked Mary, looking very innocent.

"Because it isn't good business."

"But Uncle Stanley is president of the bank. You don't think he'd do anything to hurt Spencer & Son; do you?"

The judge tapped his foot on the floor for a time, and then made a noise like a groan--as though he had teeth in his mind and one of them was being pulled.

"Many a time," he said, "I have tried to talk you out of your suspicions. But--if it was any other man than Stanley Woodward, I would say today that he was doing his best to--to--"

"To 'do' me?" suggested Mary, more innocent than ever.

"Yes, my dear--to do you! And another year's work like this wouldn't be far from having that result."

Curiously enough it was Mary's great idea that comforted her. Instead of feeling worried or apprehensive, she felt eager for action, her eyes shining at the thoughts which came to her.

"All right," she said, "we'll have a meeting in a day or two. I'll wait till I get my copy of the report."

Wally came that afternoon, and Mary danced with him--that is to say she danced with him until a freckle-faced apprentice came up from the factory with an envelope addressed in MacPherson's crabbed hand. Mary took one peep inside and danced no more.

"If the women can pick it up as quick as the men," she read, "I have counted 1653 places in this factory where they could be working in a few weeks time--that is, if the places were vacant. List enclosed. Respectfully. James O. MacPherson."

It was a long list beginning "346 automatics, 407 grinders--"

Mary studied it carefully, and then after telephoning to the factory, she called up Judge Cutler.

"I wish you would come down to the office in about half an hour," she said, "... Directors' meeting. All right. Thank you."

"What was it dad used to call me sometimes--his 'Little Hustler'?" she thought. "If he could see, I'll bet that's what he would call me now."

As she passed through the hall she looked in the drawing room to tell Helen where she was going. Helen was sitting on a chaise lounge and Wally was bending over her, as though trying to get something out of her eye with the corner of a handkerchief.

"I don't see anything," Mary heard him saying.

"There must be something. It hurts dreadfully," said Helen.

Looking again, he lightly dabbed at the eye. "Oh!" breathed Helen. "Don't, Wally!"

She took hold of his hand as though to stop him. Mary passed on without saying anything, her nose rather high in the air.

Half way down the hill she laughed at nothing in particular.

"Yes," she told herself. "Helen--in her own way--I guess that she's a little Hustler ... too ...!"

CHAPTER XVI

The meeting was held in Mary's office--the first conference of directors

she had ever attended. By common consent, Uncle Stanley was chosen chairman of the board. Judge Cutler was appointed secretary.

Mary sat in her chair at the desk, her face nearly hidden by the flowers in the vase.

It didn't take the meeting long to get down to business.

"From last year's report," began the judge, "it is evident that we must have a change of policy."

"In what way?" demanded Uncle Stanley.

Whereupon they joined issue--the man of business and the man of law. If Mary had been paying attention she would have seen that the judge was slowly but surely getting the worst of it.

To stop improvements now would be inviting ruin--They had their hands on the top rung of the ladder now; why let go and fall to the bottom--? What would everybody think if those new buildings stayed empty--?

Uncle Stanley piled fact on fact, argument on argument.

Faint heart never won great fortune--As soon as the war was over, and it wouldn't be long now--Before long he began to dominate the conference, the judge growing more and more silent, looking more and more indecisive.

Through it all Mary sat back in her chair at the desk and said nothing, her face nearly hidden by the roses, but woman-like, she never forgot for a moment the things she had come there to do.

"What do you think, Mary?" asked the judge at last. "Do you think we had better try it a little longer and see how it works out?"

"No," said Mary quietly, "I move that we stop everything else but making bearings."

In vain Uncle Stanley arose to his feet, and argued, and reasoned, and sat down again, and brought his fist down on his knee, and turned a rich, brown colour. After a particularly eloquent period he caught a sight of Mary's face among the roses--calm, cool and altogether unmoved--and he stopped almost on the word.

"That's having a woman, in business," he bitterly told himself. "Might as well talk to the wind. Never mind ... It may take a little longer--but in the end...."

Judge Cutler made a minute in the director's book that all work on improvements was to stop at once.

"And now," he said, "the next thing is to speed up the manufacture of bearings."

"Easily said," Uncle Stanley shortly laughed.

"There must be some way of doing it," persisted the judge, taking the argument on himself again. "Why did our earnings fall down so low last year?"

"Because I can manufacture bearings, but I can't manufacture men," reported Uncle Stanley. "We are over three hundred men short, and it's getting worse every day. Let me tell you what munition factories are paying for good mechanics--"

Mary still sat in her wicker chair, back of the flowers, and looked around at the paintings on the walls--of the Josiah Spencers who had lived and laboured in the past. "They all look quiet, as though they never talked much," she thought. "It seems so silly to talk, anyhow, when you know what you are going to do."

But still the argument across the desk continued, and again Uncle Stanley began to gain his point.

"So you see," he finally concluded, "it's just as I said a few minutes ago. I can manufacture bearings, but I can't manufacture men!"

From behind the roses then a patient voice spoke.

"You don't have to manufacture men. We don't need them."

Uncle Stanley gave the judge a look that seemed to say, "Listen to the woman of it! Lord help us men when we have to deal with women!" And aloud in quite a humouring tone he said, "We don't need men? Then who's to do the work?"

Mary moved the vase so she could have a good look at him.

"Women," she replied. "They can do the work. Yes, women," said she.

Again they looked at each other, those two, with the careful glance with which you might expect two duellists to regard each other--two duellists who had a premonition that one day they would surely cross their swords. And again Uncle Stanley was the first to look away.

"Women!" he thought. "A fine muddle there'll he!"

In fancy he saw the company's organization breaking down, its output decreasing, its product rejected for imperfections. Of course he knew that women were employed in textile mills and match-box factories and gum-and-glue places like that where they couldn't afford to employ men, and had no need for accuracy. But women at Spencer & Sons! Whose boast had always been its accuracy! Where every inch was divided into a thousand parts!

"She's hanging herself with her own rope," he concluded. "I'll say no more."

Mary turned to the judge.

"You might make a minute of that," she said.

Half turning, she chanced to catch a glimpse of Uncle Stanley's satisfaction.

"And you might say this," she quietly added, "that Miss Spencer was placed in charge of the women's department, with full authority to settle all questions that might arise."

"That's all?" asked Uncle Stanley.

"I think that's all this afternoon," she said.

He turned to the judge as one man to another, and made a sweeping gesture toward the portraits on the walls, now half buried in the shadows of approaching evening.

"I wonder what they would think of women working here?" he said in a significant tone.

Mary thought that over.

"I wonder what they would think of this?" she suddenly asked.

She switched on the electric light and as though by magic a soft white radiance flooded the room.

"Would they want to go back to candles?" she asked.

CHAPTER XVII

Later, the thing which Mary always thought of first was the ease with which the change was accomplished.

First of all she called in Archey Forbes and told him her plan.

"I'm going to make you chief of staff," she said; "that is--if you'd care for the place."

He coloured with pleasure--not quite as gorgeously as he once did--but quite enough to be noticeable.

"Anything I can do for you, Miss Mary?" he said.

"Then first we must find a place to train the women workers. One of those empty buildings would be best, I think. I'll give you a list of machines to be set in place."

The "school" was ready the following Monday morning. For "teachers" Mary had selected a number of elderly men whom she had picked for their quiet voices and obvious good nature. They were all expert machinists and had families.

On Saturday the following advertisement had appeared in the local paper:

A CALL FOR WOMEN

Women wanted in machine-shop to do men's work at men's wages for the duration of the war.

No experience necessary. Easier than washing, ironing, scrubbing or sewing. \$21 a week and up.

Apply Monday morning, 8 o'clock.

JOSIAH SPENCER & SON, INC.

As you have guessed, Mary composed that advertisement. It hadn't passed without criticism.

"I don't think it's necessary to pay them as much as the men," Mac had suggested. "To say the least it's vera generous and vera unusual."

"Why shouldn't they get as much as the men if they are going to do men's work?" asked Mary. "Besides, I'm doing it for the men's sake, even more than for the women's."

Mac stared at that and buttoned his mouth very tightly.

"They have been all through that in Europe," she explained. "Don't you see? If a woman can do a man's work, and do it for less money, it brings down men's wages. Because who would hire a man at \$21 a week after the war if they could get a woman to do the same work for \$15?"

"You're richt," said Mac after a thoughtful pause. "I must pass that along. I know from myself that the men will grumble when they think the women are going to make as much money as themselves. But when they richtly understand it's for their own sake, too, they'll hush their noise."

Mary was one of the first at the factory on Monday.

"Won't I look silly, if nobody comes!" she had thought every time she woke in the night. But she needn't have worried. There was an argument in that advertisement, "Easier than washing, ironing, scrubbing or sewing," that appealed to many a feminine imagination, and when the fancy, thus awakened, played around the promising phrase "\$21 a week--and up," hope presently turned to desire--and desire to resolution.

"We'll have to set up more machines," said Mary to Archey when she saw the size of her first class. And looking them over with a proudly beating heart she called out, "Good morning, everybody! Will you please follow me?"

From this point on, particularly, I like to imagine the eight Josiah Spencers who had gone before following the proceedings with ghostly steps and eyes that missed not a move--invisible themselves, but hearing all and saying nothing. And how they must have stared at each other as they followed that procession over the factory grounds, the last of the Spencers followed by a silent, winding train of women, like a new type of Moses leading her sisters into the promised land!

As Mary had never doubted for a moment, the women of New Bethel proved themselves capable of doing anything that the women of Europe had done; and it wasn't long before lines of feminine figures in Turkish overalls were bending over the repetition tools in the Spencer shops--starting, stopping, reversing gears, oiling bearings--and doing it all with that deftness and assurance which is the mark of the finished workman.

Indeed, if you had been near-sighted, and watching from a distance, you might have been pardoned for thinking that they were men--but if you looked closer you would have seen that each woman had a stool to sit on, when her work permitted, and if you had been there at half past ten and

again at half past three, you would have seen a hand-cart going up and down the aisles, serving tea, coffee, cake and sandwiches.

Again at noon you would have seen that the women had a rest room of their own where they could eat their lunch in comfort--a rest room with couches, and easy chairs, and palms and flowers, and a piano, and a talking machine, and a floor that you could dance on, if you felt like dancing immediately before or after lunch. And how the eight Josiahs would have stared at that happy, swaying throng in its Turkish overalls--especially on Friday noon just after the pay envelopes had been handed around!

Meanwhile the school was adding new courses of study. The cleverest operators were brought back to learn how to run more complicated machines. Turret lathe hands, oscillating grinders, inspectors were graduated. In short, by the end of March, Mary was able to report to another special meeting of the board of directors that where Spencer & Son had been 371 men short on the first of the year, every empty place was now taken and a waiting list was not only willing but eager to start upon work which was easier than washing, ironing, scrubbing or sewing, and was guaranteed to pay \$21 a week--and up!

This declaration might be said to mark an epoch in the Spencer factory. Its exact date was March 31st, 1917.

On April 2nd of the same year, another declaration was made, never to be forgotten by mankind.

Upon that date, as you will recall, the Sixty-fifth Congress of the United States of America declared war upon the Imperial German Government.

CHAPTER XVIII

Wally was the first to go.

On a wonderful moonlight night in May he called to bid Mary good-bye. He had received a commission in the aviation department and was already in uniform--as charming and romantic a figure as the eyes of love could ever wish to see.

But Mary couldn't see him that way--not even when she tried--making a bold little experiment with herself and feeling rather sorry, if anything, that her heart beat no quicker and not a thrill ran over her, when her hand rested for a moment on Wally's shoulder.

"I wonder if I'm different from other girls," she thought. "Or is it because I have other things to think about? Perhaps if I had nothing else on my mind, I'd dream of love as much as anybody, until it amounted to--what do they call it?--a fixed idea?--that thing which comes to people when they keep turning the same thing over and over in their minds, till they can't get it out of their thoughts?"

But you mustn't think that Mary didn't care that Wally was going--perhaps never to return. She knew that she liked him--she knew she would miss

him. And when, just before he left, he sang *The Spanish Cavalier* in that stirring tenor which always made her scalp tingle and her breast feel full, she turned her face to the moonlit scene outside and lived one of those minutes which are so filled with beauty and the stirring of the spirit that pleasure becomes poignant and brings a feeling which isn't far from pain.

"I'm off to the war--to the war I must go,
To fight for my country and you, dear;
But if I should fall, in vain I would call
The blessing of my country and you, dear--"

All their eyes were wet then, even Wally's--moved by the sadness of his own song. Aunt Patty, Aunt Cordelia and Helen wiped their tears away unashamed, but Mary tried to hide hers.

And when the time came for his departure, Aunt Cordelia kissed him and breathed in his ear a prayer, and Aunt Patty kissed him and prayed for him, and Helen kissed him, too, her arms tight around his neck. But when it came to Mary's turn, she looked troubled and gazed down at her hand which he was holding in both of his.

"Come on out for a minute," he whispered, gently leading her.

They went out under the moon.

"Aren't you going to kiss me, too?" he asked.

Mary thought it over.

"If I kissed you, I would love you," she said, and tried to hide her tears no more.

He soothed her then in the immemorial manner, and soon she was tranquil again.

"Good-bye, Wally," she said.

"Good-bye, dear. You'll promise to be here when I come back?"

"I shall be here."

"And you won't let anybody run away with you until I've had another chance?"

"Don't worry."

She watched the light of his car diminish until it vanished over the crest of the hill. A gathering sense of loneliness began to assail her, but with it was a feeling of freedom and purpose--the feeling that she was being left alone, clear of distraction, to fight her own fight and achieve her own destiny.

Archey Forbes was the next to go. His going marked a curious incident.

He had applied for a commission in the engineers, and his record and training being good, it wasn't long before he received the beckoning summons of Mars.

Upon the morning of the day when he was to leave New Bethel, he went to the factory to say good-bye. The one he wished to see the most, however, was the first one he missed.

"Miss Mary's around the factory somewhere," said a stenographer.

Another spoke up, a dark girl with a touch of passion in her smile. "I think Mr. Burdon is looking for her, too."

Archey missed neither the smile nor the tone--and liked neither of them.

"He'll get in trouble yet," he thought, "going out with those girls," and his frown grew as he thought of Burdon's daily contact with Mary.

"I'll see if I can find her," he told himself after he had waited a few minutes; and stepping out into the full beauty of the June morning, he crossed the lawn toward the factory buildings.

On one of the trees a robin sang and watched him with its head a tilt. A bee hummed past him and settled on a trellis of roses. In the distance murmured the falls, with their soothing, drowsy note.

"These are the days, when I was a boy, that I used to dream of running away and seeing the world and having great adventures," thought Archey, his frown forgotten. He didn't consciously put it into words, but deep from his mind arose a feeling of the coming true of great dreams--of running away from the humdrum of life, of seeing the world, of taking a part in the greatest adventure ever staged by man.

"What a day!" he breathed, lifting his face to the sun. "Oh, Lord, what a day!"

It was indeed a day--one of those days which seem to have wine in the air--one of those days when old ambitions revive and new ones flower into splendour. Mary, for instance, on her way to the machine shop, was busy with thoughts of a nursery where mothers could bring their children who were too young to go to school.

"Plenty of sun," she thought, "and rompers for them all, and sand piles, and toys, and certified milk, and trained nurses--" And while she dreamed she hummed to herself in approval, and wasn't aware that the air she hummed was the Spanish Cavalier--and wasn't aware that Burdon Woodward was near until she suddenly awoke from her dream and found they were face to face.

He turned and walked with her.

The wine of the day might have been working in Burdon, too, for he hadn't walked far with Mary before he was reminding her more strongly than ever, of Steerforth in David Copperfield--Baffles in the Amateur Cracksman. Indeed, that morning, listening to his drawl and looking up at the dark handsome face with its touch of recklessness, the association of Mary's ideas widened.

M'sieur Beaucaire, just from the gaming table--Don Juan on the Nevski Prospekt--Buckingham on his way to the Tuileries--they all might have been talking to her, warming her thoughts not so much by what they said as by what they might say, appealing to her like a romance which must, however, be read to the end if you wish to know the full story.

They were going through an empty corridor when it happened. Burdon, drawling away as agreeably as ever, gently closed his fingers around Mary's hand.

"I might have known," she thought in a little panic. "It's my own fault." But when she tried to pull her hand away, her panic grew.

"No, no," said Burdon, laughing low, his eyes more reckless than ever, "you might tell--if I stopped now. But you'll never tell a soul on earth--if I kiss you."

Even while Mary was struggling, her head held down, she couldn't help thinking, "So that's the way he does it," and felt, I think, as feels the fly who has walked into the parlour. The next moment she heard a sharp voice, "Here--stop that!" and running steps approaching.

"I think it was Archey," she thought, as she made her escape, her knees shaking, her breath coming fast. She knew it was, ten minutes later, when Archey found her in the office--knew it from the way he looked at her and the hesitation of his speech--but it wasn't until they were shaking hands in parting that she saw the cut on his knuckles.

"You've hurt yourself," she said. "Wait; I have some adhesive plaster."

Even then she didn't guess.

"How did you do it?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't know--"

Mary's glance suddenly deepened into tenderness, and when Archey left a few minutes later, he walked as one who trod the clouds, his head among the stars.

An hour passed, and Mary looked in Uncle Stanley's office. Burdon's desk was closed as though for the day.

"Where's Burdon?" she asked.

"He wasn't feeling very well," said Uncle Stanley after a long look at his son's desk, "--a sort of headache. I told him he had better go home."

And every morning for the rest of the week, when she saw Uncle Stanley, she gave him such an innocent look and said, "How's Burdon's head this morning? Any better?"

Uncle Stanley began to have the irritable feelings of an old mouse in the hands of a young kitten.

"That's the worst of having women around,"--he scowled to himself--"they are worse than--worse than--worse than--"

Searching for a simile, he thought of a flash of lightning, a steel hoop lying on its side, a hornet's nest--but none of these quite suited him. He made a helpless gesture.

"Hang 'em, you never know what they're up to next!" said he.

CHAPTER XIX

For that matter, there were times in the next two years when Mary herself hardly knew what she was up to next, for if ever a girl suddenly found herself in deep waters, it was the last of the Spencers. Strangely enough--although I think it is true of many of life's undertakings--it wasn't the big things which bothered her the most.

She soon demonstrated--if it needed any demonstration--that what the women of France and Britain had done, the women of New Bethel could do. At each call of the draft, more and more men from Spencer & Son obeyed the beckoning finger of Mars, and more and more women presently took their places in the workshops. That was simply a matter of enlarging the training school, of expanding the courses of instruction.

No; it wasn't the big things which ultimately took the bloom from Mary's cheeks and the smile from her eyes.

It was the small things that worried her--things so trifling in themselves that it would sound foolish to mention them--the daily nagging details, the gathering load of responsibility upon her shoulders, the indifference which she had to dispel, the inertia that had to be overcome, the ruffled feelings to be soothed, the squabbles to be settled, the hidden hostilities which she had to contend against in her own office--and yet pretend she never noticed them.

Indeed, if it hadn't been for the recompensing features, Mary's enthusiasm would probably have become chilled by experience, and dreams have come to nothing. But now and then she seemed to sense in the factory a gathering impetus of efficient organization, the human gears working smoothly for a time, the whole machine functioning with that beauty of precision which is the dream of every executive.

That always helped Mary whenever it happened.

And the second thing which kept her going was to see the evidences of prosperity and contentment which the women on the payroll began to show--their new clothes and shoes--the hopeful confidence of their smiles--the frequency with which the furniture dealers' wagons were seen in the streets around the factory, the sounds of pianos and phonographs in the evening and, better than all, the fact that on pay day at Spencer & Sons, the New Bethel Savings Bank stayed open till half past nine at night--and didn't stay open for nothing!

"If things could only keep going like this when the war ends, too," breathed Mary one day. "...I'm sure there must be some way ... some way...."

For the second time in her life (as you will presently see) she was like a blind-folded player with arms outstretched, groping for her destiny and missing it by a hair.

"Still," she thought, "when the men come back, I suppose most of the women will have to go. Of course, the men must have their places back, but you'd think there was some way ... some way...."

In fancy she saw the women going back to the kitchens, back to the old toil from which they had escaped.

"It's silly, of course," she thoughtfully added, "and wicked, too, to say that men and women are natural enemies. But--the way some of the men act--you'd almost think they believed it...."

She thought of Uncle Stanley and his son. At his own request, Burdon had been transferred to the New York office and Mary seldom saw him, but something told her that he would never forgive her for the morning when he had to go home--"with a sort of a headache."

"And Uncle Stanley, too," she thought, her lip quivering as a wave of loneliness swept over her and left her with a feeling of emptiness. "If I were a man, he wouldn't dare to act as he does. But because I'm a girl, I can almost see him hoping that something will happen to me--"

If that, indeed, was Uncle Stanley's hope, he didn't have to wait much longer.

The armistice was signed, you will remember, in the first week of November, 1918. Two months later Mary showed Judge Cutler the financial statement for the preceding year.

"Another year like this," said the judge, "and, barring strikes and accidents, Spencer & Son will be on its feet again, stronger than ever! My dear girl," he said, rising and holding out his hand, "I must congratulate you!"

Mary arose, too, her hand outstretched, but something in her manner caught the judge's attention.

"What's the matter, Mary?" he asked. "Don't you feel well?"

"Men--women," she said, unsteadily smiling and giving him her hand, "they ought to be--now--natural partners--not--not--"

With a sigh she lurched forward and fell--a tired little creature--into his arms.

CHAPTER XX

Mary had a bad time of it the next few weeks. More than once her face seemed turned toward the Valley of the Shadow. But gradually health and strength returned, although it wasn't until April that she was anything like herself again.

She liked to sit--sometimes for hours at a time--reading, thinking, dreaming--and when she was strong enough to go outside she would walk among the flowers, and look at the birds and the budding trees, and draw deep breaths as she watched the glory of the sunset appearing and disappearing in the western sky.

Helen occasionally walked and sat with her--but not often. Helen's time

was being more and more taken up by the younger set at the Country Club. She came home late, humming snatches of the latest dances and talking of the conquests she had made, telling Mary of the men who would dance with no one else, of the compliments they had paid her, of the things they had told her, of the competition to bring her home. One night, it appears, they had an old-fashioned country party at the club, and Helen was in high glee at the number of letters she had received in the game of post office.

"You mean to say they all kissed you?" asked Mary.

"You bet they did! Good and hard! That's what they were there for!"

Mary thought that over.

"It doesn't sound nice to me, somehow," she said at last. "It sounds--oh, I don't know--common."

"That's what the girls thought who didn't get called," laughed Helen.

She arranged her hair in front of the mirror, pulling it down over her forehead till it looked like a golden turban. "Oh, who do you think was there tonight?" she suddenly interrupted herself.

Mary shook her head.

"Burdon Woodward--as handsome as ever. Yes, handsomer, I think, if he could be. He asked after you. I told him you were nearly better."

"Then he must be down at the factory every day," thought Mary. But the thought moved her only a little. Whether or not it was due to her illness, she seemed to have undergone a reaction in regard to the factory. Everything was going on well, Judge Cutler sometimes told her. As the men returned from service, the women were giving up their places.

"Whatever you do," he always concluded, "don't begin worrying about things down there. If you do, you'll never get well."

"I'm not worrying," she told him, and once she added, "It seems ever so long ago, somehow--that time we had down there."

As the spring advanced, her thoughts took her further than ever from their old paths. Instead of thinking of something else (as she used to do), when Helen was telling of her love affairs, Mary began to listen to them--and even to sit up till Helen returned from the club. One night, as Helen was chatting of a young an from Boston who had teased her by following her around until every one was calling him "Helen's little lamb," Mary gradually became aware of an elusive scent in the room.

"Cigarettes," she thought, "and--and raspberry jam--!" She waited until her cousin paused for breath and then, "Did Burdon Woodward ride home with you tonight?" she asked.

"With Doris and me," nodded Helen, smiling at herself in the mirror. "He told us he went over with some of the boys, but he wanted to go home civilized."

Nothing more was said, but a few mornings later, as Helen sat at breakfast reading her mail, Mary was sure she recognized Burdon's dashing

handwriting. A vague sense of uneasiness passed over her, but this was soon forgotten when she went to the den to look at her own mail.

On the top of the pile was a letter addressed to her father.

"Rio de Janeiro," breathed Mary, reading the post-mark. "Why, that's where the cable came from!"

She opened the letter.... It was signed "Paul."

"Dear Sir (it began)

"This isn't begging. I am through with that. When you paid no attention to my cable, I said, 'Never again!' You might like to know that I buried my wife and two youngest that time. It hurt then, but I can see now that they were lucky.

"I have one daughter left--twelve years old. She's just at the age when she ought to be looked after. This is her picture. She's a pretty girl, and a good girl, but fond of fun and good times.

"I've done my best, but I'm down and out--tired--through. I guess it's up to you what sort of a granddaughter you want. There's a school near here where she could go and be brought up right. It won't cost much. You can send the money direct--if you want the right sort of a granddaughter.

"If you want the other kind, all you have to do is to forget it. The crowd I go with aren't good for her.

"Anyway I enclose the card and rates and references of the school. You see they give the consuls' names.

"If you decide yes, you want your granddaughter to have a chance, write a letter to the name and address below. That's me. Then write the school, sending check for one year and say it is for the daughter of the name and address below. That is the name I am known by here.

"I'm sorry for everything, but of course it's too late now. The truest thing in the world is this: As you make your bed, so you've got to lie in it. I made mine wrong, but you couldn't help it. I wouldn't bother you now except for Rosa's sake.

"Your prodigal son who is eating husks now,

"PAUL."

Mary looked at the photograph--a pretty child with her hair over her shoulders and a smile in her eyes.

"You poor little thing," she breathed, "and to think you're my niece--and I'm your aunt ... Aunt Mary," she thoughtfully repeated, and for the first time she realized that youth is not eternal and that years go swiftly by.

"Life's the strangest thing," she thought. "It's only a sort of an accident that I'm not in her place, and she's not in mine.... Perhaps I sha'n't have any children of my own--ever--" she dreamed, "and if I don't--it will be nice to think that I did something--for this one--"

For a moment the chill of caution went over her.

"Suppose it isn't really Paul," she thought. "Suppose--it's some sharper. Perhaps that's why dad never wrote him--"

But an instinct, deeper than anything which the mind can express, told her that the letter rang true and had no false metal in it.

"Or suppose," she thought, "if he knows dad is dead--suppose he turns up and makes trouble for everybody--"

Wally's story returned to her memory. "There was an accident out West--somebody killed. Anyhow he was blamed for it--so he could never come back or they'd get him--"

"That agrees with his living under this Russian name," nodded Mary. "Anyhow, I'm sure there's nothing to fear in doing a good action--for a child like this--"

She propped the picture on her desk and after a great deal of dipping her pen in the ink, she finally began--

"Dear Sir:

"I have opened your letter to my father, Josiah Spencer. He has been dead three years. I am his daughter.

"It doesn't seem right that such a nice girl as Rosa shouldn't have every chance to grow up good and happy. So I am writing the school you mentioned, and sending them the money as you suggest.

"She will probably need some clothes, as they always look at a girl's clothes so when she goes to school. I therefore enclose something for that.

"Trusting that everything will turn out well, I am

"Yours sincerely,

"MARY SPENCER.

"P.S. I would like Rosa to write and tell me how she gets on at school."

She wrote the school next and when that was done she sat back in her chair and looked out of the window at the birds and the flowers and the bees that flew among the flowers.

"What a queer thing it is--love, or whatever they call it," she thought. "The things it has done to people--right in this house! I guess it's like fire--a good servant but a bad master--"

She thought of what it had done to Josiah--and to Josiah's son. She thought of what it had done to Ma'm Maynard, what it was doing to Helen, how it had left Aunt Cordelia and Aunt Patty untouched.

"It's like some sort of a fever," she told herself. "You never know whether you're going to catch it or not--or when you're going to catch, it--or what it's going to do to you--"

She walked to the window and rather unsteadily her hand arose to her breast.

"I wonder if I shall ever catch it...." she thought. "I wonder what it will do to me...!"

CHAPTER XXI

Archey Forbes came back in the beginning of May and the first call he made was to the house on the hill. He had brought with him a collection of souvenirs--a trench-made ring, shrapnel fragments of curious shapes, the inevitable helmet and a sword handle with a piece of wire attached.

"It was part of our work once," he said, "to find booby traps and make them harmless. This was in a barn, looking as though some one had tried to hide his sword in the hay. It looked funny to me, so I went at it easy and found the wire connected to a fuse. There was enough explosive to blow up the barn and everybody around there, but it wouldn't blow up a hill of bears when we got through with it."

He coloured a little through his bronze. "I thought you might like these things," he awkwardly continued.

"Like them? I'd love them!" said Mary, her eyes sparkling.

"I brought them for you."

They were both silent for a time, looking at the souvenirs, but presently their glances met and they smiled at each other.

"Of course you're going back to the factory," she said; and when he hesitated she continued, "I shall rely on you to let me know how things are going on."

Again he coloured a little beneath his bronze and Mary found herself watching it with an indefinable feeling of satisfaction. And after he was gone and she was carrying the souvenirs to the den, she also found herself singing a few broken bars from the Blue Danube.

"Is that you singing!" shouted Helen from the library.

"Trying to."

Helen came hurrying as though to see a miracle, for Mary couldn't sing. "Oh--oh!" she said, her eyes falling on the helmet. "Who sent it? Wally Cabot?"

"No; Archey Forbes brought it."

"Oh-ho!" said Helen again. "Now I see-ee-ee!"

But if she did, she saw more than Mary.

"Perhaps she thinks I'm in love with him," she thought, and though the reflection brought a pleasant sense of disturbance with it, it wasn't

long before she was shaking her head.

"I don't know what it is," she decided at last, "but I'm sure I'm not in love with him."

As nearly as I can express it, Mary was in love with love, and could no more help it than she could help the crease in her chin or the dreaminess of her eyes. If Archey had had the field to himself, her heart might soon have turned to him as unconsciously and innocently as a flower turns its petals to the sun. But the day after Archey returned, Wally Cabot came back and he, too, laid his souvenirs at Mary's feet.

It was the same Wally as ever.

He had also brought a piece of old lace for Aunt Cordelia, a jet necklace for Aunt Patty, a prison-camp brooch for Helen. All afternoon he held them with tales of his adventures in the air, rolling up his sleeve to show them a scar on his arm, and bending his head down so they could see where a German ace had nicked a bit of his hair out.

More than once Mary felt her breath come faster, and when Aunt Cordelia invited him to stay to dinner and he chanced to look at her, she gave a barely perceptible signal "Yes," and smiled to herself at the warmth of his acceptance.

"I'll telephone mother," he said, briskly rising. "Where's the phone, Mary? I forget the way."

She arose to show him.

"Let's waltz out," he laughed. "Play something, Helen. Something lively and happy...."

It was a long time before Mary went to sleep that night. The moon was nearly full and shone in her windows, a stream of its rays falling on her bed and bringing to her those immortal waves of fancy which begin where the scent of flowers stop, and end where immortal and melancholy music begins. Unbidden tears came to her eyes, though she couldn't have told you why, and again a sense of the fleeting of time disturbed her.

"Aunt Mary ..." In a few years she would be old, and her hair would be white like Aunt Patty's.... And in a few years more....

But even as Wally Cabot kept her from thinking too much of Archey Forbes, so now Archey unconsciously revenged himself and kept her thoughts from centring too closely around Wally Cabot.

Archey called the next afternoon and Mary sat on the veranda steps with him, while Helen made hay with Wally on a *tete-a-tete* above.

The few women who were left in the factory were having things made unpleasant for them: that was what Archey had come to tell her. Their canteen had been stopped; the day nursery discontinued; the nurses discharged.

"Of course they are not needed there any longer, so far as that is concerned," concluded Archey, "but they certainly helped us out of a hole when we did need them, and it doesn't seem right now to treat them rough."

At hearing this, a guilty feeling passed over Mary and left her cheeks warm. "They'll think I've deserted them," she thought.

"Well, haven't you?" something inside her asked.

Some of her old dreams returned to her mind, as though to mock her. She was going to be a new Moses once, leading her sisters out of the house of bondage. Woman was to have things different. Old drudgeries were to be lifted from her shoulders. The night was over. The dawn was at hand.

"Well, what can I do?" she thought uneasily.

"You can stop them from being treated roughly," something inside her answered.

"I can certainly do that," she nodded to herself. "I'll telephone Uncle Stanley right away."

But Uncle Stanley was out, and Mary was going riding with Wally that afternoon. So she wrote a hurried note and left it at the factory as they passed by.

"Dear Uncle Stanley," it read,

"Please see that every courtesy and attention is shown, the women who are still working. We may need them again some day.

"Sincerely,

"MARY."

"Now!" she said to Wally, and they started on their ride. And, oh, but that was a ride!

The afternoon was perfect, the sun warm but not hot, the air crystal clear. It had showered the night before and the world, in its spring dress, looked as though it had been washed and spruced for their approval.

"All roses and lilies!" laughed Wally. "That's how I like life!"

They went along hillsides and looked down into the beautiful valleys; they wound around by the sides of rivers and through deep woods; they went like the wind; they loafed; they explored country lanes and lost their way, stopped at a farm-house and found it again, shouted with delight when a squirrel tried to race them along the top of a fence, gasped together when they nearly ran over a turkey, chatted, laughed, sang (though this was a solo, for Mary couldn't sing, though she tried now and then under her breath), and with every mile they rode they seemed to pass invisible milestones along the road which leads from friendship to love.

It came to a crisis two weeks later, on an afternoon in June.

Mary was in the garden picking a bouquet for the table, and Wally went to help her. She gave him a smile that made his heart do a trick, and when he bent over to help her break a piece of mignonette, his hand touched hers....

"Mary...." he whispered.

"Yes?"

"Do you love me a little bit now?"

"I wonder...." said she, and they both bent over to pick another piece of mignonette. Away down deep in Mary, a voice whispered, "Somebody's watching." She looked toward the house and caught sight of Helen who was sitting sideways on the veranda rail and missing never a move.

Wally followed Mary's glance.

"She'll be down here in a minute," he frowned to himself. At the bottom of the lawn, overlooking the valley, was a summer house of rustic cedar, nearly covered with honeysuckle.

"Let's take a stroll down there, shall we?" he asked.

The tremor of his voice told Mary more than his words.

"He wants to love me," she thought, and burying her face in her bouquet she said in a muffled little voice, "...I don't care."

They went down to the summer house, talking, trying to appear indifferent, but both of them knowing that a truly tremendous moment in their drama of life was close at hand.

They seated themselves opposite each other on the bench and Mary's dreamy eyes went out over the valley.

"Mary...." he began. She looked at him for a moment and then her glance went out over the valley again.

"Don't you think we've waited long enough?" he gently asked.

But Mary's eyes were still upon the valley below.

"In a way, I'm glad you've waited," he said. "Judge Cutler told me some of the wonderful things you did here during the war. But you don't want to be bothering with a factory as long as you live. It's grubby, narrow work, and there's so much else in life, so much that's beautiful and--and wonderful--"

For a fleeting moment a picture arose before Mary's eyes: a tired woman bending over a wash-tub with a crying child tugging at her skirt. "So much that's beautiful--and wonderful"--the words were still echoing around her, and almost without thinking she said a peculiar thing. "Suppose we were poor," said she.

"But we aren't poor," smiled Wally. "That's one reason why I want to take you away from this. What's the use of having things if you can't enjoy them?"

She thought that over.

"There is so much that I have always wanted to see," he continued, "but I've had sense enough to wait until I found the right girl--so we could

go and see it together. Switzerland--and the Nile--and Japan--and the Riviera, with 'its skies for ever blue.' Any place we liked, we could stay till we were tired of it. And a house in New York--and an island in the St. Lawrence--or down near Palm Beach. There's nothing we couldn't do--nothing we couldn't have--"

"But don't you think--" hesitated Mary and then stopped, timid of breaking the spell which was stealing over her.

"Don't I think what, dear?"

"Oh, I don't know--but you see so many married people, who seem to have lost interest in each other--nice people, too. You see them at North East Harbor--Boston--everywhere--and somehow they are bored at each other's company. Wouldn't it be awful if--if we were to be married--and then got like that, too?"

"We never, never could! Oh, we couldn't! You know as well as I do that we couldn't!"

"They must have felt that way once," she mused, her thoughts still upon the indifferent ones, "but I suppose if people were awfully careful to guard against it, they wouldn't get that way--"

She felt Wally's arm along the back of the bench.

"Don't be afraid of love, Mary," he whispered. "Don't you know by now that it's the one great thing in life?"

"I wonder...." breathed Mary.

"Oh, but it is. You shouldn't wonder. It's the sweetest story ever told--the greatest adventure ever lived--"

But still old dreams echoed in her memory, though growing fainter with every breath she drew.

"It's all right for the man," she murmured. "If he gets tired of hearing the story, he's got other thoughts to occupy his mind. He's got his work--his career. But what's the woman going to do?"

Instinct told him how to answer her.

"I love you," he whispered.

She looked at him. Somewhere over them a robin began to sing as though its breast would burst. The scent of the honeysuckle grew intoxicating.

"Your heart is beating faster," he whispered again. "'Tck-tck-tck' it's saying. 'There's going to be a wedding next month'--'Tck-tck-tck' it's saying. 'Lieutenant Cabot is now about to kiss his future bride--"

Mary's head bent low and just as Wally was lifting it, his hand gently cupped beneath her chin, he caught sight of Helen running toward them.

"Oh, Mary!" she called.

With an involuntary movement, Mary freed herself from Wally's hand.

"Four women to see you--from the factory, I think," Helen breathlessly announced, and pretending not to notice Wally's scowl she added, "I wouldn't have bothered you ... only one of them's crying...."

CHAPTER XXII

The four women were standing in the driveway by the side of the house, and if you had been there as Mary approached, they might have reminded you of four lost sheep catching sight of their shepherd.

"Come and sit down," said Mary, "and tell me what's the matter."

"We've been discharged," said one with a red face. "Of course I know that we shouldn't have come to bother you about it, Miss Spencer, but it was you who hired us, and I told him, said I, 'Miss Spencer's going to hear about this. She won't stand for any dirty work.'"

Mary had seated herself on the veranda steps and, obeying her gesture, the four women sat on the step below her, two on one side and two on the other.

"Who discharged you?" she asked.

"Mr. Woodward."

"Which Mr. Woodward?"

"The young one--Burdon."

"What did he discharge you for?"

"That's it. That's the very thing I asked him."

"Perhaps they need your places for some of the men who are coming back."

"No, ma'm. We wouldn't mind if that was it, but there's nobody expected back this week."

"Then why is it?"

There was a moment's hesitation, and then the one who had been crying said, "It's because we're women."

A shadow of unconscious indignation swept over Mary's face and, seeing it, the four began speaking at once.

"Things have never been the same, Miss Spencer, since you were sick--"

"First they shut down the nursery--"

"Then the rest room--said it was a bad example for the men--"

"A bad example for the men, mind you--us!"

"And then the canteen was closed--"

"And behind our backs, they called us 'Molls.'"

"Not that I care, but 'Molls,' mind you--"

"Then they began hanging signs in our locker room--"

"'A woman's place is in the home' and things like that--"

"And then they began putting us next to strange men--"

"And, oh, their language, Miss Spencer--"

"Don't tell her--"

As the chorus continued, Mary began to feel hot and uncomfortable. "I had no right to leave them in the lurch like that," she thought, and her cheeks stung as she recalled her old plans, her old visions.

"And now they've got to go back to their kitchens for the rest of their lives--and told they are not wanted anywhere else--because they are women--"

The more she thought about it, the warmer she grew; and the higher her indignation arose, the more remote were her thoughts of Wally--Wally with his greatest adventure that was ever lived--Wally with his sweetest story ever told. She looked at the hands of the two women below her and saw three wedding rings.

"The roses and lilies didn't last long with them," thought Mary grimly. "Oh, I'm sure it's all wrong, somehow.... I'm sure there's some way that things could be made happier for women...."

She interrupted the quartette, in her voice a note which Wally had never heard before and which made him exchange a glance with Helen.

"Now first of all," she said, "just how badly do you four women need your pay envelopes every week?"

They told her, especially the one who had been crying, and who now started crying again.

"Wait here a minute, please," said Mary, that note in her voice more marked than before. She arose and went in the house, and Wally guessed that she had gone to telephone the factory. For a while they couldn't hear her, except when she said "I want to speak to Mr. Burdon Woodward--yes--Mr. Burdon Woodward--"

They could faintly hear her talking then, but toward the end her voice came full and clear.

"I want you to set them to work again! They are coming right back! Yes, the four of them! I shall be at the office in the morning. That's all. Good-bye."

She came out, then, like a young Aurora riding the storm.

"You're to go right back to your work," she said, and in a gentler voice, "Wally, can I speak to you, please?"

He followed her into the house and when he came out alone ten minutes later, he drew a deep sigh and sat down again by Helen, a picture of utter dejection.

"Never mind, Wally," she said, and patted his arm.

"I can't make her out at times," he sighed.

"No, and nobody else," she whispered.

"What do you think, Helen?" he asked. "Don't you think that love is the greatest thing in life?"

"Why, of course it is," she whispered, and patted his arm again.

CHAPTER XXIII

In spite of her brave words the day before, when Mary left the house for the office in the morning, a feeling of uncertainty and regret weighed upon her, and made her pensive. More than once she cast a backward look at the things she was leaving behind--love, the joys of youth, the pleasure places of the world to see, romance, heart's ease, and "skies for ever blue."

At the memory of Wally's phrase she grew more thoughtful than before.

"But would they be for ever blue?" she asked herself. "I guess every woman in the world expects them to be, when she marries. Yes, and they ought to be, too, an awful lot more than they are. Oh, I'm sure there's something wrong somewhere.... I'm, sure here's something wrong...."

She thought of the four women standing in the driveway by the side of the house, looking lost and bewildered, and the old sigh of pity arose in her heart.

"The poor women," she thought. "They didn't look as though the sweetest story ever told had lasted long with them--"

She had reached the crest of the hill and the factory came to her view. A breeze was rising from the river and as she looked down at the scene below, as her forbears had looked so many times before her, she felt as a sailor from the north might feel when after drifting around in drowsy tropic seas, he comes at last to his own home port and feels the clean wind whip his face and blow away his languor.

The old familiar office seemed to be waiting for her, the pictures regarding her as though they were saying "Where have you been, young lady? We began to think you had gone." Through the window sounded the old symphony, the roar of the falls above the hum of the shops, the choruses and variations of well-nigh countless tools, each having its own particular note or song.

Mary's eyes shone bright.

Gone, she found, were her feeling of uncertainty, her sighs of regret. Here at last was something real, something definite, something noble and great in the work of the world.

"And all mine," she thought with an almost passionate feeling of possession. "All mine--mine--mine--"

Archey was the first to come in, and it only needed a glance to see that Archey was unhappy.

"I'm afraid the men in the automatic room are shaping for trouble," he said, as soon as their greetings were over.

"What's the matter with them?"

"It's about those four women--the four who came back."

Mary's eyes opened wide.

"There has been quite a lot of feeling," he continued, "and when the four women turned up this morning again and started work, the men went out and held a meeting in the locker room. In fact I wouldn't be surprised if the automatic hands went on strike."

"You mean to say they will go on strike before they will work with their own wives and sisters?"

"That's the funny part of it. As far as I can find out, the trouble wasn't started by our own men--but by strangers--men from New York and Boston--professional agitators, they look like to me--plenty of money and plenty of talk and clever workmen, too. I don't know just how far they've gone, but--"

The office boy appeared in the doorway and he, too, looked worried.

"There's a committee to see you, Miss Spencer," he said, "a bunch from the lathe shops."

"Have they seen Mr. Woodward?"

"No'm. He referred them to you."

"All right, Joe. Send them in, please."

The committee filed in and Archey noted that they were still wearing their street clothes. "Looks bad," he told himself.

There were three men, two of them strangers to Mary, but the third she recognized as one of the teachers in her old "school"--a thoughtful looking man well past middle age, with a long grey moustache and reflective eyes. "Mr. Edsol, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes'm," he solemnly replied. "That's me."

She looked at the other two. The first had the alert glance and actions which generally mark the orator, the second was a dark, heavy man who never once stopped frowning.

"Miss Spencer," immediately began the spokesman--he who looked like the

orator--"we have been appointed a committee by the automatic shop to tell you that we do not believe in the dilution of labour by women. Unless the four women who are working in our department are laid off at once, the men in our shop will quit."

"Just a moment, please," said Mary, ringing. "Joe, will you please tell Mr. Woodward, Sr., that I would like to see him?"

"He's just gone out," said Joe.

"Mr. Burdon, then."

"Mr. Burdon sent word he wouldn't be down today. He's gone to New York."

Mary thought that over.

"Joe," she said. "There are four women working in the automatic shop. I wish you'd go and bring them here." And turning to the committee she said, "I think there must be some way of settling this to everybody's satisfaction, if we all get together and try."

It wasn't long before the four women came in, and again it struck Mary how nervous and bewildered three of them looked. The fourth, however, held her back straight and seemed to walk more than upright.

"Now," smiled Mary to the spokesman of the committee, "won't you tell me, please, what fault you find with these four women?"

"As I understand it," he replied, "we are not here to argue the point. Same time, I don't see the harm of telling you what we think about it. First place, it isn't natural for a woman to be working in a factory."

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing, if you don't mind me speaking out, because she has babies."

"But the war has proved a baby is lucky to have its mother working in a modern factory," replied Mary. "The work is easier than housework, the surroundings are better, the matter is given more attention. As a result, the death rate of factory babies has been lower than the death rate of home babies. Don't you think that's a good thing? Wouldn't you like to see it go on?"

"Who says factory work is easier than housework?"

"The women who have tried both. These four, for instance."

"Well, another thing," he said, "a woman can't be looking after her children when she's working in a factory."

"That's true. But she can't be looking after them, either, when she's washing, or cooking, or doing things like that. They lie and cry--or crawl around and fall downstairs--or sit on the doorstep--or play in the street.

"Now, here, during the war," she continued, "we had a day nursery. You never saw such happy children in your life. Why, almost the only time they cried was when they had to go home at night!" Mary's eyes brightened

at the memory of it. "Didn't your son's wife have a baby in the nursery, Mr. Edsol?"

"Two," he solemnly nodded.

"For another thing," said the chairman, "a woman is naturally weaker than a man. You couldn't imagine a woman standing up under overtime, for instance."

"Oh, you shouldn't say that," said Mary earnestly, "because everybody knows that in the human family, woman is the only one who has always worked overtime."

Here the third member of the committee muttered a gruff aside. "No use talking to a woman," said he.

"You be quiet, I'm doing this," said the chairman. "Another thing that everybody knows," he continued to Mary, "a woman hasn't the natural knack for mechanics that a man has."

"During the war," Mary told him, "she mastered nearly two thousand different kinds of skilled work--work involving the utmost precision. And the women who did this weren't specially selected, either. They came from every walk of life--domestic servants, cooks, laundresses, girls who had never left home before, wives of small business men, daughters of dock labourers, titled ladies--all kinds, all conditions."

She told him, then, some of the things women had made--read him reports--showed him pictures.

"In fact," she concluded, "we don't have to go outside this factory to prove that a woman has the same knack for mechanics that a man has. During the war we had as many women working here as men, and every one will tell you that they did as well as the men."

"Well, let's look at it another way," said the chairman, and he nodded to his colleagues as though he knew there could be no answer to this one. "There are only so many jobs to go around. What are the men going to do if the women take their jobs?"

"That's it!" nodded the other two. All three looked at Mary.

"I used to wonder that myself," she said, "but one day I saw that I was asking the wrong question. There is just so much work that has to be done in the world every day, so we can all be fed and clothed, and have those things which we need to make us happy. Now everybody in this room knows that 'many hands make light work.' So, don't you see? The more who work, the easier it will be for everybody."

But the spokesman only smiled at this--that smile which always meant to Mary, "No use talking to a woman"--and aloud he said, "Well, as I told you before, we weren't sent to argue. We only came to tell you what the automatic hands were going to do if these four women weren't laid off."

"I understand," said Mary; and turning to the four she asked, "How do you feel about it?"

"I suppose we'll have to go," said Mrs. Ridge, her face red but her back straighter than ever. "I guess it was our misfortune, Miss Spencer, that

we were born women. It seems to me we always get the worst end of it, though I'm sure I don't know why. I did think once, when the war was on, that things were going to be different for us women after this. But it seems not.... You've been good to us, and we don't want to get you mixed up in any strike, Miss Spencer.... I guess we'd better go...."

Judge Cutler's expression returned to Mary's mind: "Another year like this and, barring strikes and accidents, Spencer & Son will be on its feet again--" Barring strikes! Mary was under no misapprehension as to what a strike might mean....

"I want to get this exactly right," she said, turning to the chairman again. "The only reason you wish these women discharged is because they are women, is that it?"

"Yes; I guess that's it, when you come right down to it."

"Do you think it's fair?"

"I'm sorry, Miss Spencer, but it's not a bit of use arguing any longer. If these four women stay, the men in our department quit: that's all."

Mary looked up at the pictures of her forbears who seemed to be listening attentively for her answer.

"Please tell the men that I shall be sorry--very sorry--to see them go," she said at last, "but these four women are certainly going to stay."

CHAPTER XXIV

From one of the windows of Mary's office, she could see the factory gate.

"If they do go on strike," she thought, "I shall see them walk out."

She didn't have to watch long.

First in groups of twos and threes, and then thick and fast, the men appeared, their lunch boxes under their arms, all making for the gate. Some were arguing, some were joking, others looked serious. It struck Mary that perhaps these latter were wondering what they would tell their wives.

"I don't envy them the explanation," she half smiled to herself.

But her smile was short-lived. In the hallway she heard a step and, turning, she saw Uncle Stanley looking at her.

"What's the matter with those men who are going out?" he asked.

"As if he didn't know!" she thought, but aloud she answered, "They're going on strike."

"What are they striking for?"

"Because I wouldn't discharge those four women."

He gave her a look that seemed to say, "You see what you've done--think you could run things. A nice hornet's nest you've stirred up!" At first he turned away as though to go back to his office, but he seemed to think better of it.

"You might as well shut down the whole plant," he said. "We can't do anything without the automatics. You know that as well as I do."

He waited for a time, but she made no answer.

"Shall I tell the rest of the men?" he asked.

"Tell them what, Uncle Stanley?"

"That we're going to shut down till further notice?"

Mary shook her head.

"It would be a pity to do that," she said, "because--don't you see?--there wouldn't be anything then for the four women to do."

At this new evidence of woman's utter inability to deal with large affairs, Uncle Stanley snorted. "We've got to do something," said he.

"All right, Uncle," said Mary, pressing the button on the side of her desk, "I'll do the best I can."

For in the last few minutes a plan had entered her mind--a plan which has probably already presented itself to you.

"When the war was on," she thought, "nearly all the work in that room was done by women. I wonder if I couldn't get them back there now--just to show the men what we can do--"

In answer to her ring, Joe knocked and entered, respectful admiration in his eye. You may remember Joe, "the brightest boy in the office." In the three years that Mary had known him, he had grown and was now in the transient stage between office boy and clerk--wore garters around his shirt sleeves to keep his cuffs up, feathered his hair in the front, and wore a large black enamel ring with the initial "J" worked out in "diamonds."

"Joe," she said, "I want you to bring me the employment cards of all the women who worked here during the war. And send Miss Haskins in, please; I want to write a circular letter."

She hurried him away with a nod and a quick smile.

"Gee, I wish there was a lion or something out here," he thought as he hurried through the hall to the outer office, and after he had taken Mary the cards and sent Miss Haskins in, he proudly remarked to the other clerks, "Maybe they thought she'd faint away and call for the doctor when they went on strike, but, say, she hasn't turned a hair. I'll bet she's up to something, too."

It wasn't a long letter that Mary sent to the list of names which she gave Miss Haskins, but it had that quiet pull and power which messages

have when they come from the heart.

"Oh, I know a lot will come," said Mrs. Ridge when Mary showed her a copy of it. "They would come anyhow, Miss Spencer. Most of them never made money like they made it here. They've been away long enough now to miss it and--Ha-ha-a!--Excuse me." She suddenly checked herself and looked very red and solemn.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Mary.

"I was thinking of my next door neighbour, Mrs. Strauss. She's never through saying that the year she was here was the happiest year of her life; and how she'd like to come back again. She'll be one of the first to come--I know she will. And her husband is one of the strikers--that's the funny part of it!"

Mary smiled herself at that, and she smiled again the next morning when she saw the women coming through the gate.

"Report in your old locker room," her letter had read, "and bring your working clothes."

By nine o'clock more than half the automatic machines were busy, and women were still arriving.

"The canteen's going again," ran the report up and down the aisles.

At half past ten the old gong sounded in the lathe room, and the old tea wagon began its old-time trundling. In addition to refreshments each woman received a rose-bud--"From Miss Spencer. With thanks and best wishes."

"Do you know if the piano's here yet?" asked a brisk looking matron in sky blue overalls.

"Yep," nodded the tea girl. "When I came through, they were taking the cover off it, and fixing up the rest room."

"Isn't it good to be back again!" said the brisk young matron to her neighbour. "Believe me or not, I haven't seen a dancing floor since I quit work here."

Mrs. Ridge had been appointed forewoman. Just before noon she reported to Mary.

"There'll be a lot more tomorrow," she said. "When these get home, they'll do nothing but talk about it; and I keep hearing of women who are fixing things up at home so they can come in the morning. So don't you worry, Miss Spencer, this strike isn't going to hurt you none, but--Ha-ha-ha!--Excuse me," she said, suddenly checking her mirth again and looking very red and solemn.

"I like to hear you laugh," said Mary, "but what's it about this time!"

"Mrs. Strauss is here. I told you she would be. She left her husband home to do the housework and today is washday--that's the funny part of it!"

Whatever Mrs. Ridge's ability as a critic of humour might be, at least she was a good prophet. Nearly all the machines were busy the next

morning, and new arrivals kept dropping in throughout the day.

Mary began to breathe easy, but not for long.

"I don't want to be a gloom," reported Archey, "but the lathe hands are trying to get the grinders to walk out. They say the men must stick together, or they'll all lose their jobs."

She looked thoughtful at that.

"I think we had better get the nursery ready," she said. "Let's go and find the painters."

It was a pleasant place--that nursery--with its windows overlooking the river and the lawn. In less than half an hour the painters had spread their sheets and the teamster had gone for a load of white sand. The cots and mattresses were put in the sun to air. The toys had been stored in the nurse's room. These were now brought out and inspected.

"I think I'll have the other end of the room finished off as a kindergarten," said Mary. "Then we'll be able to take care of any children up to school age, and their mothers won't have to worry a bit."

She showed him where she wished the partition built, and as he ran his rule across the distance, she noticed a scar across the knuckles of his right hand.

"That's where I dressed it, that time," she thought. "Isn't life queer! He was in France for more than a year, but the only scar that I can see is the one he got--that morning--"

Something of this may have shown in her eyes for when Archey straightened and looked at her, he blushed ("He'll never get over that!" thought Mary)--and hurried off to find the carpenters.

These preparations were completed only just in time.

On Thursday she went to New York to select her kindergarten equipment. On Friday a truck arrived at the factory, filled with diminutive chairs, tables, blackboards, charts, modelling clay, building blocks, and more miscellaneous items than I can tell you. And on Saturday morning the grinders sent a committee to the office that they could no longer labour on bearings which had passed through the hands of women workers.

Mary tried to argue with them.

"When women start to take men's jobs away--" began one of the committee.

"But they didn't," she said. "The men quit."

"When women start to take men's jobs away from them," he repeated, "it's time for the men to assert themselves."

"We know that you mean well, Miss Spencer," said another, "but you are starting something here that's bad. You're starting something that will take men's work away from them--something that will make more workers than there are jobs."

"It was the war that started it," she pleaded, "not I. Now let me ask you

something. There is so much work that has to be done in the world every day; isn't there?"

"Yes, I guess that's right."

"Well, don't you see? The more people there are to do that work, the easier it will be for everybody."

But no, they couldn't see that. So Mary had to ring for Joe to bring in the old employment cards again, and that night and all day Sunday, Mrs. Ridge's company spread the news that four hundred more women were wanted at Spencer & Son's--"and you ought to see the place they've got for looking after children," was invariably added to the mothers of tots, "free milk, free nurses, free doctoring, free toys, rompers, little chairs and tables, animals, sand piles, swings, little pails and shovels--you never saw anything like it in your life--!"

If the tots in question heard this, and were old enough to understand, their eyes stood out like little painted saucers, and mutely then or loudly they pleaded Mary's cause.

CHAPTER XXV

It sometimes seems to me that the old saying, "History repeats itself," is one of the truest ever written. At least history repeated itself in the case of the grinders.

Before the week was over, the places left vacant by the men had been filled by women, and the nursery and kindergarten had proved to be unqualified successes.

Many of the details I will reserve till later, including the growth of the canteen, the vanishing mirror, an improvement in overalls, to say nothing of daffodils and daisies and Mrs. Kelly's drum. And though some of these things may sound peculiar at first, you will soon see that they were all repetitions of history. They followed closely after things that had already been done by other women in other places, and were only adopted by Mary first because they added human touches to a rather serious business, and second because they had proved their worth elsewhere.

Before going into these affairs, however, I must tell you about the reporters.

The day the grinders went on strike, a local correspondent sent a story to his New York paper. It wasn't a long story, but the editor saw possibilities in it. He gave it a heading, "Good-bye, Man, Says She. Woman Owner of Big Machine Shop Replaces Men With Women." He also sent a special writer and an artist to New Bethel to get a story for the Sunday edition.

Other editors saw the value of that "Good-bye, Man" idea and they also sent reporters to the scene. They came; they saw; they interviewed; and almost before Mary knew what was happening, New Bethel and Spencer & Son were on their way to fame.

Some of the stories were written from a serious point of view, others in a lighter vein, but all of them seemed to reflect the opinion that a rather tremendous question was threatening--a question that was bound to come up for settlement sooner or later, but which hadn't been expected so soon.

"Is Woman Really Man's Equal?" That was the gist of the problem. Was her equality theoretical--or real? Now that she had the ballot and could no longer be legislated against, could she hold her own industrially on equal terms with man? Or, putting it as briefly as possible, "Could she make good?"

Some of these articles worried Mary at first, and some made her smile, and after reading others she wanted to run away and hide. Judge Cutler made a collection of them, and whenever he came to a good one, he showed it to Mary.

"I wish they would leave us alone," she said one day.

"I don't," said the judge seriously. "I'm glad they have turned the spotlight on."

"Why?"

"Because with so much publicity, there's very little chance of rough work. Of course the men here at home wouldn't do anything against their own women folks, but quite a few outsiders are coming in, and if they could work in the dark, they might start a whisper, 'Anything to win!'"

Mary thought that over, and somehow the sun didn't shine so brightly for the next few minutes. Ma'm Maynard's old saying arose to her mind:

"I tell you, Miss Mary, it has halways been so and it halways will: Everything that lives has its own natural enemy--and a woman's natural enemy: eet is man!"

"No, sir, I don't believe it!" Mary told herself. "And I never shall believe it, either!"

The next afternoon Judge Cutler brought her an editorial entitled, "We Shall See."

"The women of New Bethel (it read) are trying an experiment which, carried to its logical conclusion, may change industrial history.

"Perhaps industrial history needs a change. It has many dark pages where none but man has written.

"If woman is the equal of man, industrially speaking, she is bound to find her natural level. If she is not the equal of man, the New Bethel experiment will help to mark her limitations.

"Whatever the outcome, the question needs an answer and those who claim that she is unfitted for this new field should be the most willing to let her prove it.

"By granting them the suffrage, we have given our women equal rights. Unless for demonstrated incapacity, upon what grounds shall we now deny

them equal opportunities?

"The New Bethel experiment should be worked out without hard feeling or rancour on either side.

"Can a woman do a man's work?

"Let us watch and we shall see."

Mary read it twice.

"I like that," she said. "I wish everybody in town could see that."

"Just what I thought," said the judge. "What do you say if we have it printed in big type, and pasted on the bill-boards?"

They had it done.

The day after the bills were posted, Archey went around to see how they were being received.

"It was a good idea," he told Mary the next morning, but she noticed that he looked troubled and absent-minded, as though his thoughts weren't in his words.

"What's the matter, Archey?" she quietly asked.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, and with the least possible touch of irritation he added, "Sometimes I think it's because I don't like him. Everything that counts against him sticks--and I may have been mistaken anyway--"

"It's something about Burdon," thought Mary, and in the same quiet voice as before she said,

"What is it, Archey?"

"Well," he said, hesitating, "I went out after dinner last night--to see if they were reading the bill-boards. I thought I'd walk down Jay Street--that's where the strikers have their headquarters. I was walking along when all at once I thought I saw Burdon's old car turning a corner ahead of me.

"It stopped in front of Repetti's pool-room. Two men came out and got in.

"A little while later I was speaking to one of our men and he said some rough actors were drifting in town and he didn't like the way they were talking. I asked him where these men were making their headquarters and he said, 'Repetti's Pool Room.'"

Mary thought that over.

"Mind you, I wouldn't swear it was Burdon's old car," said Archey, more troubled than before. "I can only tell you I'm sure of it--and I might be mistaken at that. And even if it was Burdon, he'd only say that he had gone there to try to keep the strike from spreading--yes, and he might be right at that," he added, desperately trying to be fair, "but--well, he worries me--that's all."

He was worrying Mary, too, although for a different reason.

With increasing frequency, Helen was coming home from the Country Club unconsciously scented with that combination of cigarette smoke and raspberry jam. Burdon had a new car, a swift, piratical craft which had been built to his order, and sometimes when he called at the house on the hill for Helen, Mary amused herself by thinking that he only needed a little flag-pole and a Jolly Roger--a skirted coat and a feathered hat--and he would be the typical younger son of romance, scouring the main in search of Spanish gold.

Occasionally when he rolled to the door, Wally's car was already there, for Wally--after an absence--was again coming around, pale and in need of sympathy, singing his tenor songs to Helen's accompaniment and with greater power of pathos than ever, especially when he sang the sad ones at Mary's head--

"There in the churchyard, crying, a grave I se-ee-ee
Nina, that sweet dove flying was thee-ee-ee, was thee--"

"Ah, I have sighed for rest--"

"--And if she willeth to destroy me
I can die.... I can die...."

After Wally had moved them all to a feeling of imminent tears, he would hover around Helen with a vague ambition of making her cousin jealous--a proceeding which didn't bother Mary at all.

But she did worry about the growing intimacy between Helen and Burdon and, one evening when Helen was driving her up to the house from the factory, Mary tried to talk to her.

"If I were you, Helen," she said, "I don't think I'd go around with Burdon Woodward quite so much--or come to the office to see him quite so often."

Helen blew the horn, once, twice and again.

"No, really, dear, I wouldn't," continued Mary. "Of course you know he's a terrible flirt. Why he can't even leave the girls at the office alone."

Quite unconsciously Helen adopted the immemorial formula.

"Burdon Woodward has always acted to me like a perfect gentleman," said she.

"Of course he has, dear. If he hadn't, I know you wouldn't have gone out with him last night, for instance. But he has such a reckless, headstrong way with him. Suppose last night, instead of coming home, he had turned the car toward Boston or New York, what would you have done then?"

"Don't worry. I could have stopped him."

"Stopped him? How could you, if he were driving very fast?"

"Oh, it's easy enough to stop a car," said Helen. "One of the girls at school showed me." Leaning over, she ran her free hand under the instrument board.

"Feel these wires back of the switch," she said. "All you have to do is to reach under quick and pull one loose--just a little tug like this--and you can stop the wildest man, and the wildest car on earth.... See?"

In the excitement of her demonstration she tugged the wire too hard. It came loose in her hand and the engine stopped as though by magic.

"It's a good thing we are up to the house," she laughed. "You needn't look worried. Robert can fix it in a minute."

It wasn't that, though, which troubled Mary.

"Think of her knowing such a thing!" she was saying to herself. "How her mind must run at times!"

But of course she couldn't voice a thought like that.

"All the same, Helen," she said aloud, "I wouldn't go out with him so much, if I were you. People will begin to notice it, and you know the way they talk."

Helen tossed her head, but in her heart she knew that her cousin was right--a knowledge which only made her the more defiant. Yes ...people were beginning to notice it....

The Saturday afternoon before, when Burdon was taking her to the club in his gallant new car, they had stopped at the station to let a train pass. A girl on the sidewalk had smiled at Burdon and stared at Helen with equal intensity and equal significance.

"Who was that?" asked Helen, when the train had passed.

"Oh, one of the girls at the office. She's in my department--sort of a bookkeeper." Noticing Helen's silence he added more carelessly than before, "You know how some girls act if you are any way pleasant to them."

It was one of those trifling incidents which occasionally seem to have the deepest effect upon life. That very afternoon, when Mary had tried to warn her cousin, Helen had gone to the factory apparently to bring Mary home, but in reality to see Burdon. She had been in his private office, perched on the edge of his desk and swinging her foot, when the same girl came in--the girl who had smiled and stared near the station.

"All right, Fanny," said Burdon without looking around. "Leave the checks. I'll attend to them."

It seemed to Helen that the girl went out slowly, a sudden spot of colour on each of her cheeks.

"You call her Fanny!" Helen asked, when, the door shut again.

"Yes," he said, busy with the checks. "They do more for you, when you are decent with them."

"You think so?"

He caught the meaning in her voice and sighed a little as he sprawled his

signature on the next check. "I often wish I was a sour, old crab," he said, half to Helen and half to himself. "I'd get through life a whole lot better than I do."

Mary had come to the door then, ready to start for home. When Helen passed through the outer office she saw the girl again, her cheek on her palm, her head bent over her desk, dipping her pen in the red ink and then pushing the point through her blotter pad. None of this was lost on Helen, nor the girl's frown, nor the row of crimson blotches that stretched across the blotter.

"She'll go in now to get those checks," thought Helen, as the car started up the hill, and it was just then that Mary started to warn her about going out so much with Burdon.

Once in the night Helen awoke and lay for a long time looking at the silhouette of the windows. "...I wonder what they said to each other...." she thought.

The next morning Mary was going through her mail at the office when she came to an envelope with a newspaper clipping in it. This had been cut from the society notes of the New Bethel Herald.

"Burdon Woodward has a specially designed new car which is attracting much attention."

The clipping had been pasted upon a sheet of paper, and underneath it, the following two questions were typewritten:

"How can a man buy \$8,000 cars on a \$10,000 salary?"

"Why don't you audit his books and see who paid for that car?"

Mary's cheeks stung with the brutality of it.

"What a horrible thing to do!" she thought. "If any one paid attention to things like this--why, no one would be safe!"

She was on the point of tearing it to shreds when another thought struck her.

"Perhaps I ought to show it to him," she uneasily thought. "If a thing like this is being whispered around, I think he ought to get to the bottom of it, and stop it.... I know I don't like him for some things," she continued, more undecided than ever, "but that's all the more reason why I should be fair to him--in things like this, for instance."

She compromised by tucking the letter in her pocket, and when Judge Cutler dropped in that afternoon, she first made him promise secrecy, and then she showed it to him.

"I feel like you," he said at last. "An anonymous attack like this is usually beneath contempt. And I feel all the more like ignoring it because it raises a question which I have been asking myself lately: How can a man on a ten thousand dollar salary afford to buy an eight thousand dollar car?"

Mary couldn't follow that line of reasoning at all.

"Why do you feel like ignoring it, if it's such a natural question?" she asked.

"Because it's a question that might have occurred to anybody."

That puzzled Mary, too.

"Perhaps Burdon has money beside his salary," she suggested.

"He hasn't. I know he hasn't. He's in debt right now."

They thought it over in silence.

"I think if I were you, I'd tear it up," he said at last.

She promptly tore it into shreds.

"Now we'll forget that," he said. "I must confess, however, that it has raised another question to my mind. How long is it since your bookkeeping system was overhauled here?"

She couldn't remember.

"Just what I thought. It must need expert attention. Modern conditions call for modern methods, even in bookkeeping. I think I'll get a good firm of accountants to go over our present system, and make such changes as will keep you in closer touch with everything that is going on."

Mary hardly knew what to think.

"You're sure it has nothing to do with this?" she asked, indicating the fragments in the waste-basket.

"Not the least connection! Besides," he argued, "you and I know very well--don't we?--that with all his faults, Burdon would never do anything like that--"

"Of course he wouldn't!"

"Very well. I think we ought to forget that part of it, and never refer to it again--or it might be said that we were fearing for him."

This masculine logic took Mary's breath away, but though she thought it over many a time that day, she couldn't find the flaw in it.

"Men are queer," she finally concluded. "But then I suppose they think women are queer, too. To me," she thought, "it almost seems insulting to Burdon to call accountants in now; but according to the judge it would be insulting to Burdon not to call them in--"

She was still puzzling over it when Archey, that stormy petrel of bad news, came in and very soon took her mind from anonymous letters.

"The finishers are getting ready to quit," he announced. "They had a vote this noon. It was close, but the strikers won."

They both knew what a blow this would be. With each successive wave of the strike movement, it grew harder to fill the men's places with women.

"If this keeps on, I don't know what we shall do," she thought. "By the time we have filled these empty places, we shall have as many women working here as we had during the war."

Outwardly, however, she gave no signs of misgivings, but calmly set in motion the machinery which had filled the gaps before.

"If you're going to put that advertisement in again," said Archey, "I think I'd add 'Nursery, Restaurant, Rest-room, Music'"

She included the words in her copy, and after a moment's reflection she added "Laundry."

"But we have no laundry," objected Archey, half laughing. "Are you forgetting a little detail like that?"

"No, I'm not," said Mary, her eyes dancing. "You must do the same with the laundry as I did with the kindergarten. Go to Boston this afternoon.... Take a laundryman with you if you like.... And bring the things back in the morning by motor truck. We have steam and hot water and plenty of buildings, and I'm sure it won't take long to get the machines set up when you once get them here--"

At such moments there was something great in Mary. To conceive a plan and put it through to an irresistible conclusion: there was nothing in which she took a deeper delight.

That night, at home, she told them of her new plan.

"Just think," she said, "if a woman lives seventy years, and the washing is done once a week, you might say she spent one-seventh of her life--or ten whole years--at the meanest hardest work that was ever invented--"

"They don't do the washing when they're children," said Helen.

"No, but they hate it just as much. I used to see them on wash days when Aunt Patty took me around, and I always felt sorry for the children."

Wally came in later and listened sadly to the news of the day.

"You're only using yourself up," he said, "for a lot of people who don't care a snap of the finger for you. It seems to me," he added, "that you'd be doing better to make one man happy who loves you, than try to please a thousand women who never, never will."

She thought that over, for this was an angle which hadn't occurred to her before.

"No," she said, "I'm not doing it to gain anything for myself, but to lift the poor women up--to give them something to hope for, something to live for, something to make them happier than they are now. Yes, and from everybody's point of view, I think I'm doing something good. Because when the woman is miserable, she can generally make her man miserable. But when the woman is happy, she can nearly always make the man happy, too."

"I wish you'd make me happy," sighed poor Wally.

"Here comes Helen," said Mary with just the least trace of wickedness in her voice. "She'll do her best, I'm sure."

Helen was dressed for the evening, her arms and shoulders gleaming, her coiffure like a golden turban.

"Mary hardly ever dresses any more," she said as she came down the stairs, "so I feel I have to do double duty."

On the bottom landing she stopped and with extravagant motions of her body sang the opening lines of the Bedouin's Love Song, Wally joining in at last with his plaintive, passionate tenor.

"If you ever lose your money, Wally," she said, coming down the remaining stairs, "we'll take up comic opera." Curtseying low she simpered, "My lord!" and gave him her hand to kiss.

"She knows how to handle men," thought Mary watching, "just as the women at the factory know how to handle metal. I wonder if it comes natural to her, or if she studies it by herself, or if she learned any of it at Miss Parsons'."

She was interrupted by a message from Hutchins, the butler. The spread of the strike had been flashed out by the news association early in the afternoon, and the eight-ten train had brought a company of reporters.

"There are half a dozen of them," said Hutchins, noble in voice and deportment. "Knowing your kindness to them before, I took the liberty of showing them into the library. Do you care to see them, or shall I tell them you are out?"

Mary saw them and they greeted her like old friends. It didn't take long to confirm the news of the strike's extension.

"How many men are out now?" one of them asked.

"About fifteen hundred."

"What are you going to do when you have used up all your local women?" asked another.

"What would you do?" she asked.

"I don't know," he replied. "I guess I'd advertise for women in other cities--cities where they did this sort of thing during the war."

"Bridgeport, for instance," suggested another.

"Pittsburgh--there were a lot of women doing machine work there--"

"St. Louis," said a fourth. "Some of the shops in St. Louis were half full of women--" With the help they gave her, Mary made up a list.

"Even if you could fill the places locally," said the first, "I think I'd get a few women from as many places as possible. It spreads the idea--makes a bigger story--rounds out the whole scheme."

After they had gone Mary sat thoughtful for a few minutes and then returned to the drawing room. When she entered, Helen and Wally were seated on the music bench, and it seemed to Mary that they suddenly drew apart--or if I may express a distinction, that Wally suddenly drew apart

while Helen played a chord upon the piano.

"Poor Wally," thought Mary a little later. "I wish he wouldn't look like that when he sings.... Perhaps he feels like I felt this spring.... I wonder if Ma'm was right.... I wonder if people do fall in love with love...."

Her reflections took a strange turn, half serious, half humorous.

"It's like a trap, almost, when you think of it that way," she thought. "When a man falls in love, he can climb out again and go on with his work, and live his life, and do wonderful things if he has a chance. But when a woman falls in the trap, she can never climb out and live her own life again. I wonder if the world wouldn't be better off if the women had been allowed to go right on and develop themselves, and do big things like the men do...."

"I'm sure they couldn't do worse...."

"Look at the war--the awfullest thing that ever happened: that's a sample of what men do, when they try to do everything themselves.... But they'll have to let the women out of their traps, if they want them to help...."

"I wonder if they ever will let them out...."

"I wonder if they ought to come out...."

"I wonder...."

To look at Mary as she sat there, tranquil of brow and dreamy-eyed, you would never have guessed that thoughts like these were passing through her mind, and later when Helen took Wally into the next room to show him something, and returned with a smile that was close to ownership, you would never have guessed that Mary's heart went heavy for a moment.

"Helen," she said, when their visitor had gone, "do you really love Wally--or are you just amusing yourself?"

"I only wish that Burdon had half his money."

"Helen!"

"Oh, it's easy for you to say 'Helen'! You don't know what it is to be poor.... Well, good-night, beloved--"

"Good-night, good-night
My love, my own--"

she sang. "I've a busy day ahead of me tomorrow."

Mary had a busy day, too.

Nearly two hundred women responded to her new advertisement in the morning, and as many more at noon. Fortunately some of these were familiar with the work, and the most skilful were added to the corps of teachers. In addition to this, new nurses were telephoned for to take care of the rapidly growing nursery, temporary tables were improvised in the canteen, another battery of ranges was ordered from the gas company, and preparations were made for Archey's arrival with the laundry

equipment.

Yes, it was a busy day and a busy week for Mary; but somehow she felt a glory in every minute of it--even, I think, as Molly Pitcher gloried in her self-appointed task so many years ago. And when at the close of each day, she locked her desk, she grew into the habit of glancing up and nodding at the portraits on the walls--a glance and a nod that seemed to say, "That's us!"

For myself, I like to think of that long line of Josiah Spencers, holding ghostly consultations at night; and if the spirits of the dead can ever return to the scenes of life which they loved the best, they must have spent many an hour together over the things they saw and heard.

Steadily and surely the places left vacant by the men were filled with women, naturally deft of hand and quick of eye; but the more apparent it became that the third phase of the strike was being lost by the men, the more worried Archey looked--the oftener he peeped into the future and frowned at what he saw there.

"The next thing we know," he said to Mary one day, "every man on the place will walk out, and what are we going to do then?"

She told him of the reporter's suggestion.

"A good idea, too," he said. "If I were you, I'd start advertising in those other cities right away, and get as many applications on file as you can. Don't just ask for women workers. Mention the kind you want: machine tool hands, fixers, tool makers, temperers, finishers, inspectors, packers--I'll make you up a list. And if you don't mind I'll enlarge the canteen, and change the loft above it into a big dining room, and have everything ready this time--"

A few days later Spencer & Son's advertisement appeared for the first time outside of New Bethel, and soon a steady stream of applications began to come in.

Although Mary didn't know it, her appeal had a stirring note like the peal of a silver trumpet. It gripped attention and warmed imagination all the way from its first line "A CALL TO WOMEN" to its signature, "Josiah Spencer & Son, Inc. Mary Spencer, President."

"That's the best yet," said Archey, looking at the pile of applications on the third day. "I sha'n't worry about the future half as much now."

"I don't worry at all any more," said Mary, serene in her faith. "Or at least I don't worry about this," she added to herself.

She was thinking of Helen again.

The night before Helen had come in late, and Mary soon knew that she had been with Burdon. Helen was quiet--for her--and rather pale as well.

"Did you have a quarrel?" Mary had hopefully asked.

"Quarrel with Burdon Woodward?" asked Helen, and in a low voice she answered herself, "I couldn't if I tried."

"... Do you love him, Helen?"

To which after a pause, Helen had answered, much as she had spoken before, "I only wish he had half of Wally's money...." And would say no more.

"I have warned her so often," said Mary. "What more can I say?" She uneasily wondered whether she ought to speak to her aunts, but soon shook her head at that. "It would only bother them," she told herself, "and what good could it do?"

Next day at the factory she seemed to feel a shadow around her and a weight upon her mind.

"What is it?" she thought more than once, pulling herself up short. The answer was never far away. "Oh, yes--Helen and Burdon Woodward. Well, I'm glad she's going out with Wally today. She's safe enough with him."

It had been arranged that Wally should drive Helen to Hartford to do some shopping, and they were expected back about nine o'clock in the evening. But nine o'clock, ten o'clock, eleven o'clock and midnight came--and still no sign of Wally's car.

"They must have had an accident," thought Mary, and at first she pictured this as a slight affair which simply called for a few hours' delay at a local garage--perhaps the engine had overheated, or the battery had failed.

But when one o'clock struck, and still no word from the absent pair, Mary's fancies grew more tragic.

By two o'clock she imagined the car overturned at the bottom of some embankment, and both of them badly hurt. At three o'clock she began to have such dire forebodings that she went and woke up Aunt Cordelia, and was on the point of telephoning Wally's mother when the welcome rumbling of a car was heard under the porte cochere. It was Wally and Helen, and though Helen looked pale she had that air of ownership over her apologetic escort which every woman understands.

Mary already divined the end of the story.

"We were coming along all right," said Wally, "and would have been home before ten. But when we were about nine miles from nowhere and going over a bad road, I had a puncture.

"Of course that delayed me a little--to change the wheels--but when I tried to start the car again, she wouldn't go.

"I fussed and fixed for a couple of hours, it seems to me, and then I thought I'd better go to the nearest telephone and have a garage send a car out for us. But Helen, poor girl, was tired and of course I couldn't leave her there alone. So I tackled the engine again and just when I was giving up hope, a car came along.

"They couldn't take us in--they were filled--but they promised to wake up a garage man in the next town and send him to the rescue. It was half past two when he turned up, but it didn't take him long to find the trouble, and here we are at last."

He drew a full breath and turned to Helen.

"Of course I wouldn't have cared a snap," he said, "if it hadn't been for poor Helen here."

"Oh, I don't mind--now," she said.

"I knew it!" thought Mary. "They're engaged..." And though she tried to smile at them both, for some reason which I can never hope to explain, it took an effort. Wally and Helen were still looking at each other.

"Tired, dear?" he asked.

Helen nodded and glanced at Mary with a look that said, "Did you hear him call me 'Dear'?"

"I think if I were you, I'd go to bed," continued Wally, all gentle solicitude. She took an impulsive step toward him. He kissed her.

"We're engaged," he said to Mary.

What Mary said in answer, she couldn't remember herself when she tried to recall it later, for a strange thought had leaped into her mind, driving out everything else.

"I almost hate to ask," she thought. "It would be too dreadful to know."

But curiosity has always been one of mankind's fateful gifts, and at the breakfast table next morning, Mary had Wally to herself.

"Oh, Wally," she said. "What did the garage man find was the trouble with your car?"

"The simplest thing imaginable," he said. "One of the wires leading to the switch on the instrument board had worked loose--that awful road, you know."

"I knew it," Mary quietly told herself, and in her mind she again saw Helen demonstrating how to quell the wildest car on earth. Mary ought to have stopped there, but a wicked imp seemed to have taken possession of her.

"Did Helen cry, when she saw how late it was getting?"

"She did at first," he said, looking very solemn, "but when I told her--"

His confessions were interrupted by Hutchins, who whispered to Mary that she was wanted on the telephone.

"It's Mr. Forbes," he said.

Archev's voice was ringing with excitement when he greeted Mary over the wire.

"Can you come down to the office early this morning?" he asked.

"What's the matter?"

"I just found out that the rest of the men had a meeting last night--and they voted to strike. There won't be a man on the place this morning ...

and I think there may be trouble...."

CHAPTER XXVI

Afterwards, when Mary looked back at the leading incidents of the big strike it wasn't the epic note which interested her the most, although the contest had for her its moments of exaltation.

Nor did her thoughts revert the oftenest to those strange things which might have engrossed the chance observer--work and happiness walking hand in hand, for instance, to the accompaniment of Mrs. Kelly's drum--or woman showing that she can acquire the same dexterity on a drilling machine as on a sewing machine, the same skill at a tempering oven as at a cook stove, the same competence and neatness in a factory as in a house.

Indeed, when all is said and done, the sound of the work which women were presently doing at New Bethel was only an echo of the tasks which women had done during four years of war, and being a repetition of history, it didn't surprise Mary when she stopped to think it over. But looking back at the whole experience later, these were the two reflections which interested her the most.

"They have always called woman a riddle," she thought. "I wonder if that is because she could never be natural. If woman has been a riddle in the past, I wonder if this is the answer now...."

That was her first reflection.

Her second was this, and in it she unconsciously worded one of the great lessons of life. "The things I worried about seldom happened. It was something which nobody ever dreamed of--that nearly ended everything."

And when she thought of that, her breath would come a little quicker and soon she would shake her head, and try to put her mind on something else; although if you had been there I think you would have seen a suspicious moisture in her eye, and if she were in her room at home, she would go to a photograph on the wall--the picture of a gravely smiling girl on a convent portico--signed "With all my love, Rosa."

Still, as you can see, I am running ahead of my story, and so that you may better understand Mary's two reflections and the events which led to them, I will now return to the morning when she received Archey's message that every man in the factory had gone on strike as a protest against the employment of women.

As soon as she reached the office she sent a facsimile letter to the skilled women workers who had applied from out of town.

"If we only get a third of them," she thought, "we'll pull through somehow."

But Mary was reckoning without her book. For one thing, she was unaware of the publicity which her experiment was receiving, and for another thing perhaps it didn't occur to her that the same yearnings, the same

longings, the same stirrings which moved her own heart and mind so often--the same vague feeling of imprisonment, the same vague groping for a way out--might also be moving the hearts and minds of countless other women, and especially those who had for the first time in their lives achieved economic independence by means of their labour in the war.

Whatever the reason, so many skilled women journeyed to New Bethel that week, coming with the glow of crusaders, eager to write their names on this momentous page of woman's history, that Mary's worry turned into a source of embarrassment. However, by straining every effort, accommodations were found for the visitors and the work of re-organization was at once begun.

The next six weeks were the busiest, I had almost said the most feverish, in Mary's life.

The day after the big strike was declared, not a single bearing was made at Spencer & Son's great plant. For a factory is like a road of many bridges, and when half of these bridges are suddenly swept away, traffic is out of the question.

So the first problem was to bridge the gaps.

From the new arrivals, fixers, case-hardeners and temperers were set to work--women who had learned their trades during the war.

Also a call was issued for local workers and the "school" was opened, larger than ever. For the first few weeks it might be said that half the factory was a school of intensive instruction; and then, one day which Mary will never forget, a few lonely looking bearings made laborious progress through the plant--only a few, but each one embodying a secret which I will tell you about later.

The missing bridges weren't completed yet, you understand--not by any manner of means--but at least the foundations had been laid, and every day the roadway became a little wider and a little firmer--and the progress of the bearings became a little thicker and a little quicker.

And, oh, the enthusiasm of the women--their shining eyes, their breathless attention--as they felt the roadway growing solid beneath their feet and knew it was all their work!

"If we keep on at this rate," said Archey, looking at the reports in Mary's office one morning, "it won't be long before we're doing something big."

There was just the least touch of astonishment in his voice--masculine, unconscious--which raised an equally unconscious touch of exultation in Mary's answer.

"Perhaps sooner than you think," she said.

For no one knew better than she that the new organization was rapidly finding itself now that the roadway of production had been rebuilt. Every day weak spots had been mended, curves straightened out, narrow places made wider.

"Let's speed up today," she finally said, "and see what we can do."

At the end of that day the reports showed that all the departments had made an improvement until the bearings reached the final assembling room and there the traffic had become congested. For the rest of the week the assembly room was kept under scrutiny, new methods were tried, more women were set to work.

"Let's speed up again today," said Mary one morning, "and see if we can make it this time--"

And finally came the day when they did make it! For four consecutive days their output equalled the best ever done by the factory, and then just as every woman was beginning to thrill with that jubilation which only comes of a hard task well done, a weak spot developed in the hardening department.

Oh, how everybody frowned and clicked their tongues! You might have thought that all the cakes in the world had suddenly burned in the ovens--that every clothes line in America had broken on a muddy washday!

"Never mind," said Mary. "We're nearly there. One more good try, and over the top we'll go...."

One more good try, and they did go over the top. For two days, three days, four days, five days, a whole week, they equalled the best man-made records. For one week, two weeks, three weeks, the famous Spencer bearings rolled out of the final inspection room and into their wooden cases as fast as man had ever rolled them. And when Mary saw that at last the first part of her vision had come true, she did a feminine thing, that is to say a human thing. She simultaneously said, "I told you so," and sprung her secret by sending the following message to the newspapers:

"The three thousand women at this factory are daily turning out the same number of bearings that three thousand men once turned out.

"The new bearings are identical with the old ones in every detail but one, namely: they are one thousandth of an inch more accurate than Spencer bearings were ever made before.

"Our customers appreciate this improvement and know what it means.

"Our unfriendly critics, I think, will also appreciate it and know what it means."

Upon consideration, Mary had that last paragraph taken out.

"I'll leave that to their imaginations," she said, and after she had signed each letter, she did another feminine thing.

She had a gentle little cry all by herself, and then through her tears she smiled at her silent forbears who seemed to be watching her more attentively than ever from their frames of tarnished gilt upon the walls.

"It hasn't been all roses and lilies," she told them, "but--that's us!"

Meanwhile, as you will guess, it hadn't been "all roses and lilies" either, for the men who had gone on strike.

"Didn't you say you expected trouble?" Mary asked Archey one morning just after the big strike was declared.

"Yes," he told her. "They were talking that way. But they are so sure now that we'll have to give in, that they are quite good natured about it."

Mary said nothing, but her back grew stiff, something like Mrs. Ridge's; and when she saw Uncle Stanley in the outer office a few minutes later and he smiled without looking at her--smiled and shook his head to himself as though he were thinking of something droll--Mary went back to her room in a hurry, and stayed there until she felt tranquil again.

"What are the men saying now?" she asked Archey the following week.

"They are still taking it as a sort of a joke," he told her, "but here and there you catch a few who are looking thoughtful--especially those who have wives or daughters working here."

That pleased her.

The next time the subject was mentioned, Archey brought it up himself.

"There was quite a fight on Jay Street yesterday," he said.

As Mary knew, Jay Street was the headquarters of the strikers, and suddenly she became all attention.

"Those out-of-town agitators are beginning to feel anxious, I guess. Two of them went around yesterday whispering that the women at the factory needed a few good scares, so they'd stay home where they belonged. They tackled Jimmy Kelly, not knowing his wife works here. 'What do you mean: good scares?' he asked. 'Rough stuff,' they told him, on the quiet. 'What do you mean, rough stuff?' he asked them. They whispered something--nobody knows what it was--but they say Jimmy fell on them both like a ton of bricks on two bad eggs. 'Try a little rough stuff, yourself,' he said, 'and maybe you'll stay home where you belong.'"

Mary's eyes shone. It may be that blood called to blood, for if you remember one of those Josiah Spencers on the walls had married a Mary McMillan.

"It's things like that," she said, "that sometimes make me wish I was a man," and straightway went and interviewed Mrs. James Kelly, and gave her a message of thanks to be conveyed to her double-fisted husband.

The next week Mary didn't have to ask Archey what the men were doing, because one of the Sunday papers had made a special story of the subject.

Some of the men were getting work elsewhere, she read.

Others were on holidays, or visiting friends out of town.

Some were grumpy, some were merry, one had been caught red-handed--or at least blue-aproned--cooking his own dinner. All who could be reached had been asked how they thought the strike would end, and the reply which I

am quoting is typical of many.

"They may bungle through with a few bearings for a while," said Mr. Reisinger, "but they won't last long. It stands to reason that a woman can't do man's work and get away with it."

Mary was walking through the factory the next day when she heard two women discussing that article.

"I told Sam Reisinger what I thought about him last night," said the younger. "He was over to our house for supper.

"So it stands to reason, does it?' I said to him, 'that a woman can't do a man's work and get away with it? Well, I like your nerve! What do you understand by a man's work?' I said to him.

"Do you think she ought to have all the meanest, hardest work in the world, and get paid nothing for it, working from the time she gets up in the morning till she goes to bed at night? Is that your idea of woman's work?' I said to him. 'But any nice, easy job that only has to be worked at four hours in the morning, and four hours in the afternoon, and has a pay envelope attached to it: I suppose you think that's a man's work!' I said to him.

"Listen to me, Sam Reisinger, there's no such thing as man's work, and there's no such thing as woman's work,' I said to him. 'Work's work, and it makes no difference who does it, as long as it gets done!

"Take dressmaking,' I said to him. 'I suppose you call that woman's work. Then how about Worth, and those other big men dressmakers?

"Maybe you think cooking is woman's work. Then how about the chefs at the big hotels?' I said to him.

"Maybe you think washing is woman's work. Then how about the steam laundries where nearly all the shirt ironers are men?' I said to him.

"Maybe you think that working in somebody else's house is woman's work. Then how about that butler up at Miss Spencer's?' I said to him.

"And maybe we can bungle through with a few bearings for a while, can we?' I said to him, very polite. 'Well, let me tell you one thing, Sam Reisinger, if that's the way you think of women, you can bungle over to the movies with yourself tomorrow night. I'm not going with you!'"

For a long time after that when things went wrong, Mary only had to recall some of the remarks which had been made to a certain Mr. Sam Reisinger on a certain Sunday afternoon, and she always felt better for it.

"What are the men saying now?" she asked Archey at the end of their first good week.

"They're not saying much, but I think they're up to something. They've called a special meeting for tonight."

The next morning was Sunday. Mary was hardly downstairs when Archey called.

"I've found out about their meeting last night," he said. "They have appointed a committee to try to have a boycott declared on our bearings."

It didn't take Mary long to see that this might be a mortal thrust unless it were parried.

"But how can they?" she asked.

"They are going to try labour headquarters first. 'Unfair to labour'--that's what they are going to claim it is--to allow women to do what they're doing here. They're going to try to have a boycott declared, so that no union man will handle Spencer bearings, the teamsters won't truck them, the railways won't ship them, the metal workers and mechanics won't install them, and no union man will use a tool or a machine that has a Spencer bearing in it. That's their program. That's what they are going to try to do."

From over the distance came the memory of Ma'm Maynard's words:

"I tell you, Miss Mary, it has halways been so and it halways will: Everything that lives has its own natural enemy--and a woman's natural enemy--eet is man!"

"No, sir!" said Mary to herself, as resolutely as ever, "I don't believe it. They're trying to gain their point--that's all--the same as I'm trying to gain mine.... But aren't they fighting hard when they do a thing like that...!"

It came to her then with a sharp sense of relief that no organization--no union--could well afford to boycott products simply because they were made by women. "Because then," she thought, "women could boycott things that were made by unions, and I'm sure the unions wouldn't want that."

She mentioned this to Archey and it was decided that Judge Cutler should follow the strikers' committee to Washington and present the women's side of the case.

Archey went, but the atmosphere of worry which he had brought with him stayed behind. Mary seemed to breathe it all day and to feel its oppression every time she awoke in the night.

"What a thing it would be," she thought, "if they did declare a boycott! All the work we've done would go for nothing--all our hopes and plans--everything wiped right out--and every woman pushed right back in her trap--and a man sitting on the lid--with a boycott in his hand...!"

The next day after a bad night, she was listlessly turning over the pages of a production report, when Mrs. Kelly came in glowing with enthusiasm, holding in her hand a book from the rest room library.

"Miss Spencer," she said, "it's in this book that over on the other side the women in the factories had orchestras. I wonder if we couldn't have an orchestra now!"

Mary's listlessness vanished.

"I've talked it over with a lot of the women," continued Mrs. Kelly, "and they think it's great. I've come to quite a few that play different instruments. I only wish I knew my notes, so I could play something,

too."

Mary thought that over. It didn't seem right to her that the originator of the idea couldn't take part in it.

"Couldn't you play the drum?" she suddenly asked.

"Why, so I could!" beamed Mrs. Kelly in rare delight. "Do you mind then if I start a subscription for the instruments?"

"No; I'll do that, if you'll promise to play the drum."

"It's a promise," agreed Mrs. Kelly, and when she reached the hall outside and saw the size of Mary's subscription she joyfully smote an imaginary sheepskin, "Boom.... Boom.... Boom-boom-boom...!"

That is the week that Wally was married--with a ceremony that Helen had determined should be the social event of the year.

She was busy with her plans for weeks, making frequent trips to New York and Boston in the building up of her trousseau, arranging the details of the breakfast, making preparations for the decorations at the church and at the house on the hill, preparing and revising her list of those to be invited, ordering the cake and the boxes, attending to the engraving, choosing the music, keeping in touch with the bridesmaids and their dresses.

"Why, she's as busy as I am," thought Mary one day, in growing surprise at Helen's knowledge and ability; and dimly she began to see that in herself and Helen were embodied two opposite ideas of feminine activity.

"Of course she believes her way is the best," continued Mary thoughtfully, "just the same as I believe mine is. But I can't help thinking that it's best to be doing something useful, something that really makes a difference in the world--so that at the end of every week we can say to ourselves, 'Well, I did this' or 'I did that'--'I haven't lived this week for nothing....'"

Mary started dreaming then, and the next day when she accompanied Helen up the aisle of St. Thomas's as maid of honour, her eyes went dreamier still. And yet if you had been there I think you might have seen the least trace of a shadow in their depths--just the least suspicion of a wavering, unguessed doubt.

But when Wally, with his wife at his side, started his car an hour later and rolled smoothly on his wedding tour in search of the great adventure, in search of the sweetest story--Mary changed her dress and hurried back to the factory where she made a tour of her own. And as she walked through the workshops with their long lines of contented women, passing up one aisle and down another--nearly every face turning for a moment and flashing her a smile--the shadows vanished from her eyes and her doubts went with them.

"This is the best," she told herself, "I'm sure I did right, choosing this instead of Wally. It's best for me, and best for these three thousand women--" Her imagination caught fire. She saw her three thousand pioneers growing into three hundred thousand, into three million. A moment of greatness fell upon her and in fancy she thus addressed her unsuspecting workers:

"You are doing something useful--something that you can be proud of. Your daily labour isn't wasted. There isn't a country in the world that won't profit by it.

"Because of these bearings which you are making, automobiles and trucks will carry their loads more easily, tractors will plough better, engines will run longer, water will be pumped more quickly, electric light will be sold for less money.

"You are helping transportation--agriculture--commerce. And if that isn't better, nobler work than washing, ironing, getting your own meals, washing your own dishes, and doing the same old round of profitless chores day after day, and year after year, from the hour you are old enough to work, till the hour you are old enough to die--well, then, I'm wrong and Helen's right; and I ought to have married Wally--and not one of you women ought to be here today!"

A whisper arose in her mind. "...Somebody's got to do the housework...."

"Yes, but it needn't take up a woman's whole life," she shortly told herself, "any more than it does a man's. I'm sure there must be some way...some way...."

She stopped, a sudden flush striking along her cheek as she caught the first glimpse of her golden vision--that vision which may some day change the history of the human race. "Oh, if I only could!" she breathed to herself. "If I only could!"

She slowly returned to the office. Judge Cutler was waiting to see her, just back from his visit to Washington.

"Well?" she asked eagerly, shutting the door. "Are they going to boycott us?"

"I don't think so," he answered. "I told them how it started. As far as I can find out, the strike here is a local affair. The men I saw disclaimed any knowledge or responsibility for it.

"Of course, I pointed out that women had the vote now, and that boycotts were catching.... But I don't think you need worry.

"They're splendid men--all of them. I'm sure you'd like them, Mary. They are all interested in what you are doing, but I think they are marking time a little--waiting to see how things turn out before they commit themselves one way or the other."

Mary thrilled at that.

"More than ever now it depends on me," she thought, and another surge of greatness seemed to lift her like a flood.

The judge's voice recalled her.

"On my way back," he was saying, "I stopped in New York and engaged a firm of accountants to come and look over the books. They are busy now, but I told them there was no hurry--that we only wanted their suggestions--"

"I had forgotten about that," said Mary.

"So had I. What do you suppose reminded me of it?"

She shook her head.

"One of the first men I saw in Washington was Burdon Woodward."

"I think it just happened that way," said Mary uneasily. "He told me he was going away for a few days, but I'm sure he only did it to get out of going to Helen's wedding."

"Well, anyhow, no harm done. It was the sight of him down there that reminded me: that's all.... How has everything been running here? Smoothly, I hope?"

Smoothly, yes. That was the week when Mary sent her letters to the papers, announcing that the women at Spencer & Son's had not only equalled past outputs, but were working within a closer degree of accuracy.

And all that month, and the next month, and the next, the work at Spencer & Son's kept rolling out as smoothly as though it were moving on its own bearings--not only the mechanical, but the welfare work as well.

The dining room was re-modelled, as you will presently see. The band progressed, as you will presently hear. The women were proud and happy in the work they were doing, and Mary was proud because they were proud, happy because they were happy, and all the time she was nursing another secret, no one dreaming what was in her mind.

Along in the third month, Wally and Helen came back from their wedding tour. Mary looked once, and she saw there was something wrong with Wally. A shadow of depression hung over him--a shadow which he tried to hide with bursts of cheerfulness. But his old air of eagerness was gone--that air with which he had once looked at the future as a child might stare with delighted eyes at a conjurer drawing rabbits and roses out of old hats and empty vases.

In a word, he looked disenchanted, as though he had seen how the illusion was produced, how the trick was done, and was simultaneously abating his applause for the performer and his interest in the show.

"He's found her out," thought Mary, and with that terrible frankness which sometimes comes unbidden to our minds she added with a sigh, "I was always afraid he would."

Wally had taken a house near the country club--one of those brick mansions surrounded by trees and lawns which are somehow reminiscent of titled society and fox hunters in buckskin and scarlet. There Helen was soon working her way to the leadership of the younger set.

She seldom called at the house on the hill.

"I'm generally dated up for the evening, and you're never there in the daytime. So I have to drop in and see you here," she said one afternoon, giving Mary a surprise visit at the office. "Do you, know you're getting to be fashionable?" she continued.

"Who? Me?"

"Yes. You. Nearly everywhere we went, they began quizzing us as soon as they found Miss Spencer was a cousin of mine."

Mary noted Helen's self-promotion to the head of the cousinship, but she kept her usual tranquil expression.

"It's because she's Mrs. Cabot now," she thought. "Perhaps she wouldn't have called at all if these people hadn't mentioned me!"

But when Helen arose to go, Mary revised her opinion of the reason for her cousin's call.

"Well, I must be going," said Helen, rising. "I'll drop in and see Burdon for a few minutes on my way out."

"That's it," thought Mary, and her reflections again taking upon themselves that terrible frankness which can seldom be put in words, she added to herself, "Poor Wally.... I was always afraid of it...."

She was still looking out of the window in troubled meditation when the arrival of the afternoon mail turned her thoughts into another track. As Helen had said, the New Bethel experiment had become fashionable. Taking it as their text, the women's clubs throughout the country were giving much of their time to a discussion of the changed industrial relations due to the war. Increasingly often, visitors appeared at the factory, asking if they could see for themselves--well-known, even famous figures among them. But on the afternoon when Helen Cabot made her first call, Mary received a letter which took her breath away, so distinguished, so illustrious were the names of those who were asking if they could pay a visit on the following day.

Mary sent a telegram and then, her cheeks coloured with pride, she made a tour through the factory to make sure that everything would be in order, whispering the news here and there, and knowing that every woman would hear it as unmistakably as though it had been pealed from the heavens in tones of thunder.

The visitors arrived at ten o'clock the next morning.

There were four in the party--two men and two women. Mary recognized three of them at the first glance and felt a glow of pride warm her as they seated themselves in her office.

"Not even you," she thought with a glance at the attentive figures on the walls, "not even you ever had visitors like these." And in some subtle manner which I simply cannot describe to you, she felt that the portrayed figures were proud of the visitors, too--and prouder yet of the dreamy-eyed girl who had brought it about, flesh of their flesh, blood of their blood, who was looking so queenly and chatting so quietly to the elect of the earth.

The fourth caller was introduced as Professor Marsh, and Mary soon perceived that he was a hostile critic.

"I shall have to be careful of him," she thought, "or I shall be giving him some good, hard bouncers before I know it--and that would never do today." So putting the temptation behind her she presently said, "We'll

start at the nursery, if you like--any time you're ready."

You have already seen something of that nursery, its long row of windows facing the south, its awnings, toys, sand-piles and white-robed nurses. Since then Mary had had time to elaborate the original theme with a kitchen for preparing their majesties' food, linen closets and a rest-room for the nurses.

The chief glory of the nursery, however, was its noble line of play-rooms, each in charge of two nurses.

"Let's look in here," said Mary, opening a door.

They came upon an interesting scene. In this room were twelve children, about two years old. The nurses were feeding them. Each nurse sat on the inside of a kidney shaped table, large enough to accommodate six children, but low enough to avoid the necessity for high chairs with the consequent dangling between earth and heaven.

In front of each child was a plate set in a recess in the table--this to guard against overturning in the excitement of the moment--and in each plate was a generous portion of chicken broth poured over broken bread.

It was evidently good. Approval shone on each pink face. A brisk play of spoons and the smacking of lips seemed to be the order of the day.

"Each play room has its own wash room--" said Mary.

She opened another door belonging to this particular suite and disclosed a bathroom with special fixtures for babies. Large bowls, with hot and cold water, were set in porcelain tables.

"What's the use of having so many bath-bowls in this table," asked Professor Marsh, "when you only have two nurses to do the bathing?"

"Every woman with a baby has half an hour off in the morning, and another half hour in the afternoon," he was told. "In the morning, she bathes her baby. In the afternoon she loves it."

In the next play-room which they visited, the babies were of the bottle age, and were proving this to the satisfaction of every one concerned.

In the next, refreshments were over; and some of the youngsters slept while others were starting large engineering projects upon the sand pile.

"I never saw such nurseries," said the most distinguished visitor. He looked at the artistic miniature furniture, the decorations, the low padded seat which ran around the walls--at once a seat and a cupboard for toys. He looked at the sunlight, the screened verandah, the awning, the flowers, the birds hopping over the lawn, the river gleaming through the trees.

"Miss Spencer," he said, "I congratulate you. If they could understand me, I would congratulate these happy youngsters, too."

"But don't you think it's altogether wrong," said Professor Marsh, "to deprive a child of the advantages of home life?"

"I read and hear that so often," said Mary, "that I have adopted my own

method of replying to it."

She led her visitors into a small room with a low ceiling. It was furnished with a cookstove, a table, a small side-board, an old conch and a few chairs. The floor was splintery and only partly covered by frayed rugs and worn oil cloth. The paper on the walls was a dark mottled green. The ceiling was discoloured by smoke.

"This is the kitchen of an average wage-earner," said Mary. "Some are better. Some are worse. I bought the furniture out of a room, just as it stood, and had the whole place copied in detail."

Three of the visitors looked at each other.

"Imagine a tired woman," continued Mary, "standing over that stove--perhaps expecting another baby before long. She has been washing all morning and now she is cooking. The room is damp with steam, the ceiling dotted with flies. Then imagine a child crawling around the floor, its mother too busy to attend to it, and you'll get an idea of where some of these children in the nursery would be--if they weren't here. Mind," she earnestly continued, "I'm not saying that home life for poor children doesn't have its advantages, but we mustn't forget that it has its disadvantages, too."

She led them next to the kindergarten.

A recess was on and the children were out in the play-ground--some swinging, some sliding down the chutes, others playing in a merry-go-round which was pushed around by hand.

"Every other hour they have for play," said Mary. "In the alternate hours the teachers read to them, talk to them, teach them their letters, teach them to sing and give them the regular kindergarten course. If they weren't here," she said, half turning to Professor Marsh, "most of them would probably be playing on the street."

The next place they visited was the dining room--which occupied the upper floor of one of the great buildings which Mary's father had planned. But to look at it, you would never have suspected the original purpose for which the place had been intended. It was a dining room that any hotel would be glad to call its own, with its forest-colour decorations, its growing palms and ferns on every side.

"The compartments around the walls are for the families," explained Mary. "It is, of course, optional with those who work here whether they use the dining room or not. We supply all food at cost. This was this morning's breakfast."

The bill of fare is too long to quote in full, but the visitors noted that it included a choice of fruit, choice of cereal, choice of tea, coffee, milk or cocoa--and for the main dish, either fish, ham and eggs, oyster stew or small steak.

"What you have seen so far," said Mary, "is a side issue. Many of our workers are young women not yet married, others have some one at home to look after the children. In fact the woman with a baby or little children is in the minority, but I thought it only right to provide for them--for a number of reasons--"

"Including sympathy?" smiled one of the ladies.

Mary gave her a grateful glance.

"We will now have an inspection of our real work here," she said, "--the same being the manufacture of bearings."

The first room they entered was the ground floor of one of the buildings which housed the automatic department. At the nearer machines were long lines of women stamping out the metal discs which held the balls and rollers in their places.

"When these machines were operated by men," said Mary, "it required considerable strength to throw the levers. But by a very simple improvement we changed the machines so that the lightest touch on the handle is sufficient to do the work. We also put backs on the stools--and elbow rests--and racks for the feet--"

They followed her glances to each of these changes but their attention soon turned to the business-like speed and precision with which each woman did her work.

"Women, of course, are naturally quick," said Mary as though reading their thoughts. "You know what they can do on a typewriter, for instance--or on a sewing machine. As you can see, it is much simpler to operate one of these automatic machines than it is to typewrite a legal document--or make a dress."

Together they looked up the long aisle at the double line of workers in their creams and browns, their fingers deftly placing the blanks in position and removing the finished discs. Somewhere, unseen, a phonograph started playing a lively tune.

"Where do they get their flowers?" asked one of the guests, noticing that each woman was wearing a rose or a carnation.

"They find them in their locker rooms every morning," said Mary. "They usually sing when the phonograph plays," she added, "but perhaps they feel nervous--at having company--"

This was confirmed when they left the room, for as they stood in the hallway first a hum was heard behind them here and there, and soon a mellow toned chorus arose.

"They certainly seem happy," said one of the visitors.

"They are," said Mary. "And, indeed, why shouldn't they be? Their work is light and interesting; they are paid well; and more than anything else, I think, they all know they are making something useful--something tangible--something they can look upon with satisfaction and pride."

They ascended a stairway and suddenly the scene changed. Below, the work had been cast as though in a light staccato key, but here the music for the machinery had a more powerful note.

"These are the oscillating grinders," said Mary, raising her voice above the skirling symphony. "It isn't everybody who can run them."

She wondered whether her visitors caught the unconscious air of pride

which many of the women wore in this department. At one end of the room a steady stream of rough castings came flowing in, while at the other end an equally steady volume of finished cones went flowing out. Mary had always liked to watch the oscillators and as she stood there, her guests temporarily forgotten, her eyes filled with the almost human movements of the whirling machines, her ears with the triumphant music of the abrasive wheels biting into the metal, that same unconscious air of pride fell upon her, too, and although she didn't know it, her glance deepened and her head went up--quite in the old Spencer manner.

"Is their work fairly accurate?" asked one of the visitors, breaking the spell.

"Let's go and see," said Mary, leading the way.

The cones left the grinders upon an endless conveyor which carried them to an inspection room. Here at long tables were lines of attentive women, each with a set of gauges in front of her. The visitors stopped behind one of these inspectors just as she picked up a cone to put it through its course of tests.

First she slipped it into a gauge to see if it was too large. A pointer on a dial before her swung to "O.K." Almost without stopping the motion of her hand, she inserted it into another gauge to see if it was too small. Again the pointer swung to "O.K." The third test was to verify the angle of the cone, and for the third time the pointer said "O.K." The next moment the cone had been dropped into a box and another was going through the same course.

"How many have been rejected today?" asked one of the visitors.

"Two," said the inspector.

These two unfortunates lay on a rack in front of her. Interrupting her work she picked up one of them. At the second operation the pointer turned to a red segment of the dial and a bell rang.

"I don't hear many bells ringing," commented the visitor, quizzically looking around the room.

Mary smiled with quiet pleasure.

"Next," she said, "I'm going to take you to a department where women never worked before."

She led the way to one of the tempering buildings--a building equipped with long lines of ovens--each as large as a baker's oven--where metal cones were heated instead of rolls.

"Here, too, as you will see," said Mary, "we have tried to reduce the element of human error as far as possible. In each oven is an electric thermometer and when the bearings have reached the proper degree of heat, an incandescent bulb is automatically lighted in front of the oven.... See?"

They made their way to the oven where a white light had appeared. A woman-worker had already opened the door and was pulling a lever. As though by magic, a bunch of castings, wired together, came travelling out of their heat bath and were immediately lowered into a large tank which

held the tempering liquid.

"What would have happened if the oven hadn't been opened when the white light appeared?" asked another of the visitors.

"In five minutes a red lamp would have been automatically lighted," said Mary "--a signal for the forewoman to come and take charge of the oven."

"And suppose the red lamp had been disregarded?"

"In five minutes more an alarm bell would have started. You would have heard it over half the factory--and it would have kept ringing until the superintendent herself had come and stopped it with a key which only she is allowed to carry."

"Is that the bell now?" he asked, as a mellow chime came from one of the distant buildings.

"No," smiled Mary, listening, "that's the lunch bell. In another ten minutes I shall have a surprise for you."

At the end of that time, they made their way to the dining room, which was already filled with eager women. In one corner was a private room, glass-partitioned. As Mary followed her guests toward it, the full, subdued strains of the Crusader March suddenly sounded in harmonious greeting from the other end of the room.

"Ah!" said the most distinguished visitor, turning to look. "Men at last!"

Mary let him look and then she beamed with pleasure at his glance of appreciation.

"Our own orchestra--one hundred pieces," she said. "This is their first public appearance."

Oh, but it was a red-letter day for Mary!

Whether it was the way she felt, or because the sound became softened and mellowed in travelling the length of the dining room, it seemed to her that she had never heard music so sweet, had never listened to sounds that filled her heart so full or lifted her thoughts so high.

The climax came at the end of the dessert. A shy girl entered, a small leather box in her hand.

"I have a souvenir for your visitor, Miss Spencer," she said, and turning to him she added, "We made it with our own hands, thinking you might like to use it as a paper weight--as a reminder of what women can do."

The box was lined with blue velvet and contained a small model of the Spencer bearing, made of gold, perfect to the last ball and the last roller. The visitor examined it with admiration--every eye in the dining room (which could be brought to bear) watching him through the glass partition.

"If I ever received a more interesting souvenir," he said, "I fail to recall it. Thank you, and please thank the others for me. Tell them how very much I appreciate it, and tell them, too, if you will, that here in

this factory today I have had my outlook on life widened to an extent which I had thought impossible. For that, too, I thank you."

Of course they couldn't hear him in the main room, but they could see when he had finished speaking. They clapped their hands; the band played; and when he arose and bowed, they clapped and played louder than before. And a few minutes later when the party left the dining room to the strains of El Capitan, it seemed to Mary that after the closing chord she heard two vigorous beats of the drum--soul expression of Mrs. Kelly, signifying "That's us!"

The visitors departed at last, and Mary returned to her office to find other callers awaiting her.

The first was Helen, toggled to the nines.

"Somehow she heard they were here," thought Mary, "and she came down thinking to meet them. She thought surely I would bring them in here again." But her next reflection made her frown a little. "--Partly that, I guess," she thought, "and partly to see Burdon, as usual."

A knock on the door interrupted her, and Joe entered, bearing two cards.

"These gentlemen have been waiting since noon," he announced, "but they said they didn't mind waiting when I told them who was with you."

The cards bore the name of a firm of public accountants.

"Oh, yes," said Mary. "Show them in, please, Joe. And ask Mr. Burdon if I can see him for a few minutes."

If you had been there, you might have noticed a change pass over Helen. A moment before Burdon's name was mentioned she was sitting relaxed and rather dispirited, as you sometimes see a yacht becalmed, riding the water without life or interest. But as soon as it appeared that Burdon was about to enter, a breeze suddenly seemed to fill Helen's sails. Her beauty, passive before, became active. Her bunting fluttered. Her flags began to fly.

The door opened, but Helen's smiling glance was disappointed. The two auditors entered.

One was grey, the other was young; but each had the same pale, incurious air of detachment. They reminded Mary of two astronomy professors of her college days, two men who had just such an air of detachment, who always seemed to be out of their element in the daylight, always waiting for the night to come to resume the study of their beloved stars.

"I have sent for our treasurer, Mr. Woodward," said Mary. "Won't you be seated for a few minutes?"

They sat down in the same impersonal way and glanced around the room with eyes that seemed to see nothing. By the side of the mantel was a framed piece of history, an itemized bill of the first generation of the firm, dated June 28, 1706, and quaint with its old spelling, its triple column of pounds, shillings and pence.

"May I look at that?" asked one of the accountants, rising. The other followed him. Their heads bent over the document.... It occurred to Mary

that they were verifying the addition.

Again the door opened and this time it was Burdon, his dashing personality immediately dominating the room.

Mary introduced the accountants to him.

"With our new methods," she said, "we probably need a new system of bookkeeping. I also want to compare our old costs with present costs--"

Burdon stared at her, but Mary--half-ashamed of what she was doing--kept her glance upon the two accountants.

"Mr. Burdon will give you all the old records, all the old books you want," she said, "and will help you in every possible way--"

And still Burdon stared at her--his whole life concentrated for a moment in his glance. And still Mary looked at the two accountants who completed the triangle by looking at Burdon, as they naturally would, waiting for him to turn and speak to them. As Mary watched them, she became conscious of a change in their manner, a tenseness of interest, such as the two astronomers aforesaid might display at the sight of some disturbance in the heavens.

"What do they see?" she thought, and looked at Burdon. But Burdon at the same moment had turned to the accountants, his manner as large, his air as dashing as ever.

"Anything you want, gentlemen," he said, "you have only to ask for it."

When Mary reached home that evening, you can imagine how Aunt Patty and Aunt Cordelia listened to her recital, their white heads nodding at the periods, their cheeks pink with pride. Now and then they exchanged glances. "Our baby!" these glances seemed to say, and then turned back to Mary with such love and admiration that finally the object of this pantomime could stand it no longer, but had to kiss them both till their cheeks turned pinker than ever and they gasped for breath.

That night, when Mary went to her room and stood at the window, looking out at the world below and the sky above, she threw out her arms and, turning her face to the moonlight, she felt that world-old wish to express the inexpressible, to put immortal yearnings into mortal words.

Life--thankfulness for life--a joy so deep that it wasn't far from pain--hoping--longing--yearning ... for what? Mary herself could not have told you--perhaps to be one with the starlight and the scent of flowers--to have the freedom of infinity--to express the inexpressible--

For a long time she stood at the window, the moon looking down upon her and bathing her face in its radiance.... Insensibly then the earth recalled her and her thoughts began to return to the events of the day.

"Oh, yes," she suddenly said to herself, "I knew there was something.... I wonder why the accountants stared at Burdon so...."

Far away, that same moon was watching another scene--a ship on the Southern sea throbbing its way to New York.

It was a steamer just out of Rio, its drawing rooms and upper decks filled with tourists doubly happy because they were going home.

On the steerage deck below, in the apron of a kitchen worker, a man was standing with his elbows on the rail--an uncertain figure in the moonlight. Once when he turned to look at the deck above, a lamp shone upon him. If you had been there you would have seen that while a beard covered much of his face, his cheeks were wasted and his eyes looked as though he needed rest.

He turned his glance out over the sea again, looking now to the north star and now to the roadway of ripples that led to the moon.

"I wonder if Rosa's asleep," he thought. "Eleven o'clock. She ought to be. It's a good school. She's lucky. So was I, that the old gentleman didn't get my letter...."

On the deck above, a violin and harp were accompanying a piano.

"That's where I ought to be--up there," he thought, "not peeling potatoes and scouring pans down here. All I have to do is to go up and announce myself...." He smiled--a grim affair. "Yes, all I have to do is to go up and announce myself.... They'd take care of me, all right!"

He lifted his hand and thoughtfully rubbed his beard.

"As long as I stick to Russian, I'm safe. Nicholas Rapieff--nobody has suspected me now for fifteen years. Paul Spencer's dead--dead long ago. But, somehow or other, I have taken it into my head that I would like to see the place where he was born...."

His glance were on the ripples that led to the moon.

"I wonder if the orchard is still back of the house," he thought, "and the winesap tree I fell out of. I wonder if old Hutch is dead yet. I remember he carried me in the house, and the very next week I knocked the clock down on him.... I wonder if that swimming hole is still there where the river turns below the dam. That was the best of all.... I remember how I liked to lie there--an innocent kid--and dream what I was going to do when I was a man.... Lord in Heaven, what wouldn't I give to dream those dreams again...."

On the upper deck the dance had come to an end.

"Time to turn in," thought Paul.

He crossed to the steerage door and a moment later the moon was shining on an empty deck.

CHAPTER XXIX

As time went on, it became increasingly clear to Mary that Wally wasn't happy--that the "one great thing in life" for him was turning out badly. Never had a Jason sailed forth with greater determination to find the Golden Fleece of Happiness, but with every passing week he seemed to be further than ever from the winning of his prize.

Mary turned it over in her mind for a long time before she found a clue to the answer.

"I believe it's because Helen has nothing useful to occupy her mind," she thought one day; and more quickly than words can describe the fancy, she seemed to see the wives at each end of the social scale--each group engaged from morning till night on a never-ending round of unproductive activities, walkers of treadmills, drudges of want and wealth.

"They are in just the same fix--the very rich and the very poor," she thought, "grinding away all day and getting nowhere--never satisfied--never happy--because way down in their hearts they know they're not doing anything useful--not doing anything that counts--"

Her mind returned to Helen's case.

"I'm sure that's it," she nodded. "Helen hasn't found happiness, so she goes out looking for it, and never thinks of trying the only thing that would help her. Yes, and I believe that's why so many rich people have divorces. When you come to think of it, you hardly ever heard of divorces during the war--because for the first time in their lives a lot of people were doing something useful--"

Hesitating then she asked herself if she ought not to speak to Helen.

"I didn't get any thanks the last time I tried it," she ruefully remarked. "But perhaps if I used an awful lot of tact--"

She had her chance that afternoon when Helen dropped in at the office on her way back from the city.

"Shopping--all day--tired to death," she said, sinking into the chair by the side of the desk. "How are you getting on?"

Mary felt like replying, "Very well, thank you.... But how are you getting on, Helen?.... you and Wally?"

Somehow, though, it sounded dreadful, even to hint that everything wasn't as it should be between Wally and his wife.

"Besides," thought Mary, "she'd only say, 'Oh, all right,' and yawn and change the subject--and what could I do then?" She answered herself, "Nothing," and thoughtfully added, "It will take a lot of tact."

Indeed there are some topics which require so much tact in their presentation that the article becomes lost in its wrappings, and its presence isn't even suspected by the recipient.

"How's Wally?" asked Mary.

"Oh, he's all right."

"When I saw him the other day, I thought he was looking a bit under."

"Oh, I don't know--"

As Mary had guessed, Helen patted her hand over her mouth to hide a yawn. "How's Aunt Patty and Aunt Cordelia?" she asked.

Mary sighed to herself.

"What can I do?" she thought. "If I say, 'Helen, you know you're not happy. Folks never are unless they are doing something useful,' she would only think I was trying to preach to her. But if I don't say anything--and things go wrong--"

One of the accountants entered--the elder one--with a sheaf of papers in his hand. On seeing the visitor, he drew back.

"Don't let me interrupt you," whispered Helen to Mary. "I'll run in and see Burdon for a few minutes--"

Absent-mindedly Mary began to look at the papers which the accountant placed before her--her thoughts elsewhere--but gradually her interest centred upon the matter in hand.

"What?" she exclaimed. "A shortage as big as that last year? Never!"

The accountant looked at her with the same quizzical air as an astronomer might assume in looking at a child who had just said, "What? The sun ninety million miles away from the earth? Never!"

"Either that," he said, "or a good many bearings were made in the factory last year--and lost in the river--"

"Oh, there's some mistake," said Mary earnestly. "Perhaps the factory didn't make as many bearings as you think."

Again he gave her his astronomical smile, as though she were saying now, "Perhaps the moon isn't as round as you think it is; it doesn't always look round to me."

"I thought it best to show you this, confidentially," he said, gathering the papers together, "because we have lately become conscious of a feeling of opposition--in trying to trace the source of this discrepancy. It seems to us," he suggested, speaking always in his impersonal manner, "that this is a point which needs clearing up--for the benefit of every one concerned."

"Yes," said Mary after a pause "Of course you must do that. It isn't right to raise suspicions and then not clear them up.... Besides," she added, "I know that you'll find it's just a mistake somewhere--"

After he had gone, Helen looked in, Burdon standing behind her, holding his cane horizontally, one hand near the handle, the other near the ferrule. In the half gloom of the hall he looked more dashing--more reckless--than Mary had ever visioned him. His cane might have been a sword ... his hat three-cornered with a sable feather in it....

"I just looked in to say good-bye," said Helen. "I'm going to take Burdon home."

"I need somebody to mind me," said Burdon, flashing Mary one of his violent smiles; and turning to go he said to Helen over his shoulder, "Come, child. We're late."

"He calls her 'child'..." thought Mary.

That night Wally was a visitor at the house on the hill--and when Mary saw how subdued he was--how chastened he looked--her heart went out to him.

"It seems so good to be here, calling again like this," he said. "Does it remind you of old times, the same as it does me?"

But Mary wouldn't follow him there. As they talked it occurred to her more than once that while Wally appeared to be listening to her, his thoughts were elsewhere--his ears attuned for other sounds.

"What are you listening for!" she asked him once.

He answered her with a puzzle.

"For the Lorelei's song," he said, and going to the piano he sang it, his clear, plaintive tenor still retaining its power to make her nose smart and the dumb chills to run up and down her back. She was sitting near the piano and when he was through, he turned around on the bench.

"Have you ever been the least bit sorry," he asked, "that you turned me down--for a business career?"

"I didn't turn you down," she said. "We couldn't agree on certain things: that's all."

"On what, for instance?"

"That love is the one great thing in life, for instance. You always said it was--especially to a girl. And I always said there were other things in a woman's life, too--that love shouldn't monopolize her any more than it does a man."

"You were wrong, Mary, and you know you were wrong."

"I was right, Wally, and you know I was right. Because, don't you see?--if love is the only thing in life, and love fails, a person's whole life is in ruins--and that isn't fair--"

"It's true, though," he answered, more to himself than to her. Again he unconsciously assumed a listening attitude, as one who is trying to catch a sound from afar.

"Wally!" said Mary. "What on earth are you listening for?"

Again it pleased him to answer her with a riddle.

"Italian opera," he said; and turning back to the keyboard he began--

"Woman is fickle
False altogether
Moves like a feather

Borne on the breezes--"

"Did you ever sing when you were flying?" she asked, trying to shake him out of his mood.

The question proved a happy one. For nearly two hours they chatted and smiled and hummed old airs together--that is to say, Wally hummed them and Mary tried, for, as you know, she couldn't sing but could only follow the melody with a sort of a deep note far down in her throat, always pretending that she wasn't doing it and shyly laughing when Wally nodded in encouragement and tried to get her to sing up louder.

"Eleven o'clock!" he exclaimed at last. "That's the first time in three months--"

Whatever it was, he didn't finish it, but when he bade her good-bye he said in a low voice, "Young lady, do you know that you played the very Old Ned with my life when you turned me down?"

But Mary wouldn't follow him there, either.

"Good-bye, Wally," she said, and just before he went down to his car, she saw him standing on the step, his face turned toward the drive as though still listening for that distant sound--that sound which never came.

The riddle was solved the next morning.

Helen appeared at the office soon after nine and the moment she saw Mary she said, "Has Wally phoned you this morning?"

"No," said Mary.

Her cousin looked relieved.

"I want you to fib for me," she said. "You know the way the men stick together.... Well, the women have to do it, too.... At dinner yesterday," she continued, "Wally happened to ask me where I was going that evening, and I told him I was coming over to see you. And really, dear, I meant it at the time. Instead, a little crowd of us happened to get together and we went to the club.

"Well, that was all right. But it was nearly twelve when I got home, and he looked so miserable that I hated to tell him that I had been off enjoying myself, so I pretended I had been over to see you."

Mary blinked at the inference, but was too breathless, too alarmed to speak.

"He asked me if I got to your house early," resumed Helen, "and I said, 'Oh, about eight.' And then he said, 'What time did you leave Mary's?' and I said, 'Oh, about half-past eleven.'

"Of course, I thought everything was all right, but I could tell from something he said this morning that he didn't believe me. So if he calls you up, tell him that I was over at your house last night--will you?--there's a dear--"

"But I can't," said Mary, more breathless, more alarmed than ever. "Wally was over himself last night--and, oh, Helen, now I know! He was listening

for your car every minute!"

Helen stared ... and then suddenly she laughed--a laugh that had no mirth in it--that sound, half bitter, half mocking, which is sometimes used as ironical applause for ironical circumstance.

"I guess I can square it up somehow," she said. "I'll drop in and see Burdon for a few minutes."

Before her cousin knew it, she was gone.

"I'll speak to her when she comes out," Mary told herself, but while she was trying to decide what to say, the morning mail was placed on her desk and the routine of the day began. Half an hour later she heard the sound of Helen's car rolling away.

"She went without saying good-bye," thought Mary. "Oh, well, I'll see her again before long."

To her own surprise the events of the last few days worried her less than she expected. For one reason, she had lived long enough to notice that no matter how involved things may look, Time has an astonishing faculty of straightening them out. And for another reason, having two worries to think about, each one tended to take her mind off the other.

Whenever she started thinking about the accountant's report, she presently found herself wondering how Helen proposed to square it up with Wally.

"Oh, well," she thought again, realizing the futility of trying to read the future, "let's hope everything will come out right in the end.... It always has, so far...."

Archey came in toward noon, and Mary went with him to inspect a colony of bungalows which she was having built on the heights by the side of the lake.

Another thing that she had lived long enough to notice was the different effect which different people had upon her. Although she preserved, or tried to preserve, the same tranquil air of interest toward them all--a tranquillity and interest which generally required no effort--some of the people she met in the day's work subconsciously aroused a feeling of antagonism in her, some secretly amused her, some irritated her, some made her feel under a strain, and some even had the queer, vampirish effect of leaving her washed out and listless--psychological puzzles which she had never been able to solve. But with Archey she always felt restful and contented, smiling at him and talking to him without exertion or repression and--using one of those old-fashioned phrases which are often the last word in description--always "feeling at home" with him, and never as though he had to be thought of as company.

They climbed the hill together and began inspecting the bungalows.

"I wouldn't mind living in one of these myself," said Archey. "What are you going to do with them?"

But that was a secret. Mary smiled inscrutably and led the way into the kitchen.

I have called it a kitchen, but it was just as much a living room, a dining room. A Pullman table had been built in between two of the windows and on each side of this was a settee. At the other end of the room was a gas range. When Wally opened the refrigerator door he saw that it could be iced from the porch. Electric light fixtures hung from the ceiling and the walls.

"Going to have an artists' colony up here?" teased Archey, and looking around in admiration he repeated, "No, sir! I wouldn't mind living in one of these houses myself--"

They went into the next room--the sitting room proper--unusual for its big bay window, its built-in cupboards and bookshelves. Then came the bathroom and three bed-rooms, all in true bungalow style on one floor.

When they had first entered, Mary and Archey had chatted freely enough, but gradually they had grown quieter. There is probably no place in the world so contributive to growing intimacy as a new empty house--when viewed by a young man and a younger woman who have known each other for many years--

The place seems alive, hushed, expectant, watching every move of its visitors, breathing suggestions to them--

"Do you like it?" asked Mary, breaking the silence.

Archey nodded, afraid for the moment to trust himself to speak. They looked at each other and, almost in haste, they went outside.

"He'll never get over that trick of blushing," thought Mary. At the end of the hall was a closet door with a mirror set in it. She caught sight of her own cheeks. "Oh, dear!" she breathed to herself. "I wonder if I'm catching it, too!"

Once outside, Archey began talking with the concentration of a man who is trying to put his mind on something else.

"This work up here was a lucky turn for some of the strikers," he said. "Things are getting slack again now and men are being laid off. Here and there I begin to hear the old grumbling, 'Three thousand women keeping three thousand men out of jobs.' So whenever I hear that, I remind them how you found work for a lot of the men up here--and then of course I tell them it was their own fault--going on strike in the first place--just to get four women discharged!"

"And even if three thousand women are doing the work of three thousand men," said Mary, "I don't see why any one should object--if the women don't. The wages are being spent just the same to pay rent and buy food and clothes--and the savings are going into the bank--more so than when the men were drawing the money!"

"I guess it's a question of pride on the man's part--as much as anything else--"

"Oh, Archey--don't you think a woman has pride, too?"

"Well, you know what I mean. He feels he ought to be doing the work, instead of the woman."

"Oh, Archey," she said again. "Can't you begin to see that the average woman has always worked harder than the average man? You ask any of the women at the factory which is the easiest--the work they are doing now--or the work they used to do."

"I keep forgetting that. But how about this--I hear it all the time. Suppose the idea spreads and after a while there are millions of women doing work that used to be done by men--what are the men going to do?"

"That's a secret," she laughed. "But I'll tell you some day--if you're good--"

The friendly words slipped out unconsciously, but for some reason her tone and manner made his heart hammer away like that powerful downward passage of the Anvil Chorus. "I'll be good," he managed to say.

Mary hardly heard him.

"I wonder what made me speak like that," she was thinking. "I must be more dignified--or he'll think I'm bold...." And in a very dignified voice indeed, she said, "I must be getting back now. I wish you'd find the contractor and ask him when he'll be through."

She went down the hill alone. On the way a queer thought came to her. I sha'n't attempt to explain it--only to report it.

"Of course it isn't the only thing in life--that's ridiculous," she thought. "But sooner or later ... I guess it becomes quite important...."

CHAPTER XXX

A few hours later, Mary was sitting in her office, thinking of this and that (as the old phrase goes) when a knock sounded on the door and the elderly accountant entered.

"We have finished the first part of our work," he said, "that dealing with factory costs. I will leave this with you and when you have read it, I would like to go over it with you in detail."

It was a formidable document, nearly three hundred typewritten pages, neatly bound in hard covers. Mary hadn't looked in it far when she knew she was examining a work of art.

"How he must love his work!" she thought, and couldn't help wondering what accidental turn of life had guided his career into the field of figures.

"How interesting he makes it!" she thought again. "Why, it's almost like a novel."

Brilliant sentences illuminated nearly every page. "This system, admirable in its way, is probably a legacy from the past, when the bookkeepers of Spencer & Son powdered their hair and used quill pens.--" "Under these conditions, a stock clerk must become a prodigy and depend upon his memory. When memory fails he must become a poet, for he has

nothing but imagination to guide him." "Thus one department would corroborate another, like two witnesses independently sworn and each examined in private--"

The back of the volume, she noticed, was filled with tables of figures. "This won't be so interesting," she told herself, turning the leaves. But suddenly she stopped at one of the open pages--and read it again--and again--

"Comparative Efficiency of Men's Labour and Women's Labour," the sheet was headed. And there it was in black and white, line after line, just how much it had cost to make each Spencer bearing when the men did the work, and just how much it was costing under the new conditions.

"There!" said Mary, "I always knew we could do it, if the women in Europe could! There! No wonder we've been making so much money lately--!"

She took the report home in triumph to show to her aunts, and when dinner was over she carried the volume to her den, and never a young lady in bye-gone days sat down to Don Juan with any more pleasurable anticipation than Mary felt when she buried herself in her easy chair and opened that report again.

She was still gloating over the table of women's efficiency when Hutchins appeared.

"Mr. Archibald Forbes is calling."

Archey had news.

"The men had a meeting this afternoon," he said. "They've been getting up a big petition, and they are going to send another committee to Washington."

"What for?"

"To press for that boycott. Headquarters put them off last time, but there are so many men out of work now at other factories that they hope to get a favourable decision."

"I'll see Judge Cutler in the morning," promised Mary, and noticing Archey's expression, she said, "Don't worry. I'm not the least alarmed."

"What bothers me," he said, "is to have this thing hanging over all the time. It's like old What's-his-name who had the sword hanging over his head by a single hair all through the dinner."

The sword didn't seem to bother Mary, though. That comparative table had given her another idea--an idea that was part plan and part pride. When she reached the office in the morning she telephoned Judge Cutler and Uncle Stanley.

"A directors' meeting--something important," she told them both; and after another talk with the accountant she began writing another of her advertisements. She was finishing this when Judge Cutler appeared. A minute later Uncle Stanley followed him.

Lately Uncle Stanley had been making his headquarters at the bank--his attitude toward the factory being one of scornful amusement.

"Women mechanics!" he sometimes scoffed to visitors at the bank. "Women foremen! Women presidents! By Judas, I'm beginning to think Old Ned himself is a woman--the sort of mischief he's raising lately!... Something's bound to crack before long, though."

In that last sentence you have the picture of Uncle Stanley. Even as Mr. Micawber was always waiting for something to turn up, so Uncle Stanley was always waiting for something to go wrong.

Mary opened the meeting by showing the accountants' report and then reading her proposed advertisement. If you had been there, I think you would have seen the gleam of satisfaction in Uncle Stanley's eye.

"I knew I'd catch her wrong yet," he seemed to be saying to himself. "As soon as she's made a bit of money, she wants everybody to have it. It's the hen and the egg all over again--they've simply got to cackle."

Thus the gleam in Uncle Stanley's eye. Looking up at the end of her reading, Mary caught it. "How he hates women!" she thought. "Still, in a way, you can't wonder at it... If it hadn't been for women and the things they can do he would have had the factory long ago." Aloud she said, "What do you think of it?"

"I think it's a piece of foolishness, myself," said Uncle Stanley promptly. "But I know you are going to do it, if you've made up your mind to do it."

"I'm not so sure it's foolish," said the judge. "It seems to me it's going to bring us a lot of new business."

"Got all we can handle now, haven't we?"

"Well, we can expand! It wouldn't be the first time in Spencer & Son's history that the factory has been doubled, and, by Jingo, I believe Mary's going to do it, too!"

Mary said nothing, but a few mornings later when the advertisement appeared in the leading newspapers throughout the country, she made a remark which showed that her co-directors had failed to see at least two of the birds at which she was throwing her stone.... She had the newspapers brought to her room that morning, and was soon reading the following quarter page announcement:

THE FRUITS OF HER LABOUR

For the past six months, Spencer bearings have been made exclusively by women.

The first result of this is a finer degree of accuracy than had ever been attained before.

The second result is a reduction in the cost of manufacture, this notwithstanding the fact that every woman on our payroll has always received man's wages, and we have never worked more than eight hours a day.

To those who watched the work done by women in the war, neither of the above results will be surprising.

Because of the accuracy of her work, Spencer bearings are giving better satisfaction than ever before.

Because of her dexterity and quickness, we are able to make the following public announcement:

We are raising the wages of every woman in our factory one dollar a day; and we are reducing the price of our bearings ten per cent.

These changes go into effect immediately.

JOSIAH SPENCER & SON, INC.
MARY SPENCER, President.

"There!" said Mary, sitting up in bed and making a gesture to the world outside. "That's what women can do! ... Are you going to boycott us now?"

CHAPTER XXXI

If you can imagine a smiling, dreamy-eyed bombshell that explodes in silence, aimed at men's minds instead of their bodies, rocking fixed ideas upon their foundations and shaking innumerable old notions upon their pedestals until it is hard to tell whether or not they are going to fall, perhaps you can get an idea of the first effect of Mary's advertisement. Wherever skilled workmen gathered together her announcement was discussed, and nowhere with greater interest than in her own home town.

"Seems to me this thing may spread," said a thoughtful looking striker in Repetti's pool-room. "Looks to me as though we had started something that's going to be powerful hard to stop."

"What makes you think it's going to spread?" asked another.

"Stands to reason. If women can make bearings cheaper than men, the other bearing companies have got to hire women, too, or else go out of business. And you can bet your life they won't go out of business without giving the other thing a try."

"Hang it all, there ought to be a law against women working," said a third.

"You mean working for wages?"

"Sure I mean working for wages."

"How are you going to pass a law like that when women can vote?" impatiently demanded a fourth.

"Bill's right," said another. "We've started something here that's going to be hard to stop."

"And the next thing you know," continued Bill, looking more thoughtful than ever, "some manufacturer in another line of business--say

automobiles--is going to get the idea of cutting his costs and lowering his prices--and pretty soon you'll see women making automobiles, too. You can go to sleep at some of those tools in a motor shop. Pie for the ladies!"

"What are us men going to do after a while?" complained another. "Wash the dishes? Or sweep the streets? Or what?"

"Search me. I guess it'll come out all right in the end; but, believe me, we certainly pulled a bonehead play when we went on strike because of those four women."

"I was against it from the first, myself," said another.

"So was I. I voted against the strike."

"So did I!"

"So did I!"

It was a conversation that would have pleased Mary if she could have heard it, especially when it became apparent that those who had caused the strike were becoming so hard to find. But however much they might now regret the first cause, the effect was growing more irresistible with every passing hour.

It began to remind Mary of the dikes in Holland.

For centuries, working unconsciously more often than not, men had built walls that kept women out of certain industries.

Then through their own strike, the men at New Bethel had made a small hole in the wall--and the women had started to trickle through. With the growth of the strike, the gap in the wall had widened and deepened. More and more women were pouring through, with untold millions behind them, a flowing flood of power that was beginning to make Mary feel solemn. Like William the Thoughtful, she, too, saw that she had started something which was going to be hard to stop....

All over the country, women had been watching for the outcome of her experiment, and when the last announcement appeared, a stream of letters and inquiries poured upon her desk.... The reporters returned in greater strength than ever.... It sometimes seemed to Mary that the whole dike was beginning to crack.... Even Jove must have felt a sense of awe when he saw the effect of his first thunderbolt....

"If they would only go slowly," she uneasily told herself, "it would be all right. But if they go too fast..."

She made a helpless gesture--again the gesture of those who have started something which they can't stop--but just before she went home that evening she received a telegram which relieved the tension.

"May we confer with you Monday at your office regarding situation at New Bethel?"

That was the telegram. It was signed by three leaders of labour--the same men, Mary remembered, whom Judge Cutler had seen when he had visited headquarters.

"Splendid men, all of them," she remembered him reporting. "I'm sure you'd like them, Mary."

"Perhaps they'll be able to help," she told herself. "Anyhow, I'm not going to worry any more until I have seen them."

That night, after dinner, two callers appeared at the house on the hill.

The first was Helen.

Dinner was hardly over when Mary saw her smart coupe turn in to the garage. A minute later Helen ran up the steps, a travelling bag in her hand. She kissed her cousin twice, quotation marks of affection which enclosed the whisper, "Do you mind if I stay all night?"

"Of course I don't," said Mary, laughing at her earnestness. "What's the matter? Wally out of town?"

"Oh, don't talk to me about Wally! ... No; he isn't out of town. That's why I'm here.... Can I have my old room?"

She was down again soon, her eyes brighter than they should have been, her manner so high strung that it wasn't far from being flighty. As though to avoid conversation, she seated herself at the piano and played her most brilliant pieces.

"I think you might tell me," said Mary, in the first lull.

"I told you long ago. Men are fools! But if he thinks he can bully me--!"

"Who?"

"Wally!" Mary's exclamation of surprise was drowned in the ballet from Coppelia. "I don't allow any man to worry me!" said Helen over her shoulder.

"But, Helen--don't you think it's just possible--that you've been worrying him?"

A crashing series of chords was her only answer. In the middle of a run Helen topped and swung around on the bench.

"Talking about worrying people," she said. "What's the matter with Burdon down at the office lately? What have you been doing to him?"

"Helen! What a thing to say!"

"Well, that's how it started, if you want to know! I was trying to cheer him up a little ... and Wally thought he saw more than he did...."

For a feverish minute she resumed Delibes' dance, but couldn't finish it. She rose, half stumbling, blinded by her tears and Mary comforted her.

"Now, go and get your bag, dear," she said at last, "and I'll go home with you, and stay all night if you like."

But Helen wouldn't have that.

"No," she said, "I'm going to stay here a few days. I told my maid where she could find me--but I made her promise not to tell Wally till morning--and I'm not going back till he comes for me."

"I wonder what he saw..." Mary kept thinking. "Poor Wally!" And then more gently, "Poor Helen! ... It's just as I've always said."

Mary was a long time going to sleep that night, thinking of Helen, and Wally and Burdon.

Yes, Helen was right about Burdon. Something was evidently worrying him. For the last few days she had noticed how irritable he was, how drawn he looked.

"I do believe he's in trouble of some sort," she sighed. "And he looks so reckless, too. I'm glad that Wally did speak to Helen. He isn't safe." And again the thought recurring, "I wonder what Wally saw...."

A sound from the lawn beneath her window stopped her. At first she thought she was dreaming--but no, it was a mandolin being played on muted strings. She stole to the window. In the shadow stood a figure and at the first subdued note of his song, Mary knew who it was.

"Soft o'er the fountain
Ling'ring falls the southern moon--"

"If that isn't Wally all over," thought Mary. "He thinks Helen's here, and he wants to make up."

But how did he know Helen was there? And why was he singing so sadly, so plaintively just underneath Mary's window? Another possibility came to her mind and she was still wondering what to do when Helen came in, even as she had come in that night so long ago when Wally had sung Juanita before.

"Wait till morning! He'll hear from me!" said Helen in indignation.

Wally's song was growing fainter. He had evidently turned and was walking toward the driveway. A minute later the rumble of a car was heard.

"If he thinks he can talk to me the way he did," said Helen, more indignant than before, "and then come around here like that--serenading you--!"

"Oh, Helen, don't," said Mary, trembling. "...I think he was saying good-bye.... Wait till I put the light on...."

The distress in her voice checked Helen's anger, and a moment later the two cousins were staring at each other, two tragic figures suddenly uncovered from the mantle of light.

"I won't go back to my room; I'll stay here," whispered Helen at last. "Don't fret, Mary; he won't do anything."

It was a long time, though, before Mary could stop trembling, but an hour later when the telephone bell began ringing downstairs, she found that her old habit of calmness had fallen on her again.

"I'll answer it," she said to Helen. "Don't cry now. I'm sure it's

nothing."

But when she returned in a few minutes, Helen only needed one glance to tell her how far it was from being nothing.

"Your maid," said Mary, hurrying to her dresser. "Wally's car ran into the Bar Harbor express at the crossing near the club.... He's terribly hurt, but the doctor says there's just a chance.... You run and dress now, as quickly as you can.... I have a key to the garage...."

CHAPTER XXXII

The first east-bound express that left New York the following morning carried in one of its Pullmans a famous surgeon and his assistant, bound for New Bethel. In the murk of the smoker ahead was a third passenger whose ticket bore the name of the same city--a bearded man with rounded shoulders and tired eyes, whose clothes betrayed a foreign origin.

This was Paul Spencer on the last stage of his journey home.

Until the train drew out of the station, the seat by his side was unoccupied. But then another foreign looking passenger entered and made his way up the aisle.

You have probably noticed how some instinctive law of selection seems to guide us in choosing our companion in a car where all the window seats are taken. The newcomer passed a number of empty places and sat down by the side of Paul. He was tall, blonde, with dusty looking eyebrows and a beard that was nearly the colour of dead grass.

"Russian, I guess," thought Paul, "and probably thinks I am something of the same."

The reflection pleased him.

"If that's the way I look to him, nobody else is going to guess."

When the conductor came, Paul's seat-mate tried to ask if he would have to change cars before reaching his destination, but his language was so broken that he couldn't make himself understood.

"I thought he was Russian," Paul nodded to himself, catching a word here and there; and, aloud, he quietly added in his mother's tongue, "It's all right, batuchka; you don't have to change."

The other gave him a grateful glance, and soon they were talking together.

"A Bolshevik," thought Paul, recognizing now and then a phrase or an argument which he had heard from some of his friends in Rio, "but what's he going to New Bethel for?"

As the train drew nearer the place of his birth, Paul grew quieter. Old landmarks, nearly forgotten, began to appear and remind him of the past.

"What time do we get there?" he asked a passing brakeman.

"Eleven-thirty-four."

Paul's companion gave him a look of envy.

"You speak English well," said he.

Paul didn't like that, and took refuge behind one of those Slavonic indirections which are typical of the Russian mind--an indirection hinting at mysterious purpose and power.

"There are times in a life," said he, "when it becomes necessary to speak a foreign language well."

They looked at each other then, and simultaneously they nodded.

"You are right, batuchka," said the blonde giant at last, matching indirection with indirection. "For myself, I cannot speak English well--ah, no--but I have a language that all men understand--and fear--and when I speak, the houses fall and the mountains shake their heads."

His eyes gleamed and he breathed quickly--intoxicated by the poetry of his own words; but Paul had heard too much of that sort of imagery to be impressed.

"A Bolshevik, sure enough," he thought.

A familiar landscape outside attracted his attention.

"We'll be there in a few minutes," he thought. "Yes, there's the road ... and there's the lower bridge.... I hope that old place at the bend of the river's still there. I'll take a walk down this afternoon, and see."

At the station he noted that his late companion was being greeted by a group of friends who had evidently come to meet him. Paul stood for a few minutes on the platform, unrecognized, unheeded, jostled by the throng.

"The prodigal son returns," he sighed, and slowly crossed the square....

Late in the afternoon a tired figure made its way along the river below the factory. The banks were high, but where the stream turned, a small grass-covered cove had been hollowed out by the edge of the water.

"This is the best of all," thought Paul after he had climbed down the bank and, sinking upon the grass, he lay with his face to the sun, as he had so often lain when he was a boy, dreaming those golden dreams of youth which are the heritage of us all.

"I was a fool to come," he told himself. "I'll get back to the ship tomorrow...."

For where he had hoped to find pleasure, he had found little but bitterness. The sight of the house on the hill, the factory in the hollow below the dam, even the faces which he had recognized had given him a feeling of sadness, of punishment--a feeling which only an outcast can know to the full--an outcast who returns to the scene of his home after many years, unrecognized, unwanted, afraid almost to speak for fear he

will betray himself....

For a long time Paul lay there, sometimes staring up at the sky, sometimes half turning to look up the river where he could catch a glimpse of the factory grounds and, farther up, the high cascade of water falling over the dam--the bridge just above it....

Gradually a sense of rest, of relaxation took possession of him. "This is the best of all," he sighed, "but I'll get back to the ship tomorrow...."

The sun shone on his face.... His eyes closed....

When he opened them again it was dark.

"First time I've slept like that for years," he said, sitting up and stretching. Around him the grass was wet with dew. "Must be getting late," he thought. "I'd better get under shelter."

On the bridge above the dam he saw the headlights of a car slowly moving. In the centre it stopped and the lights went out.

"That's funny," he thought. "Something the matter with his wires, maybe."

He stood up, idly watching. After a few minutes the lights switched on again and the car began to move forward. Behind it appeared the approaching lights of a second machine.

"That first car doesn't want to be seen," thought Paul. At each end of the bridge was an arc lamp. As the first car passed under the light, he caught a glimpse of it--a grey touring car, evidently capable of speed.

Paul didn't think of this again until he was near the place where he had decided to pass the night. At the corner of the street ahead of him a grey car stopped and three men got out--his blonde companion of the train among them, conspicuous both on account of his height and his beard.

"That's the same car," thought Paul, watching it roll away; and frowning as he thought of his Russian acquaintance of the morning he uneasily added, "I wonder what they were doing on that bridge...."

CHAPTER XXXIII

The next morning Wally was a little better.

He was still unconscious, but thanks to the surgeon his breathing was less laboured and he was resting more quietly. Mary had stayed with Helen overnight, and more than once it had occurred to her that even as it requires darkness to bring out the beauty of the stars, so in the shadow of overhanging disaster, Helen's better qualities came into view and shone with unexpected radiance.

"I know..." thought Mary. "It's partly because she's sorry, and partly because she's busy, too. She's doing the most useful work she ever did in her life, and it's helping her as much as it's helping him--"

They had a day nurse, but Helen had insisted upon doing the night work herself. There were sedatives to be given, bandages to be kept moist. Mary wanted to stay up, too, but Helen didn't like that.

"I want to feel that I'm doing something for him--all myself," she said, and with a quivering lip she added, "Oh, Mary... If he ever gets over this...!"

And in the morning, to their great joy, the doctor pronounced him a little better. Mary would have stayed longer, but that was the day when the labour leaders were to visit the factory; so after hearing the physician's good report, she started for the office.

At ten o'clock she telephoned Helen who told her that Wally had just fallen off into his first quiet sleep.

"I'm going to get some sleep myself, now, if I can," she added. "The nurse has promised to call me when he wakes."

Mary breathed easier, for some deep instinct told her that Wally would come through it all right. She was still smiling with satisfaction when Joe of the Plumed Hair came in with three cards, the dignity of his manner attesting to the importance of the names.

"All right, Joe, send them in," she said. "And I wish you'd find Mr. Forbes and Mr. Woodward, and tell them I would like to see them."

"Mr. Woodward hasn't come down yet, but I guess I know where Mr. Forbes is--"

He disappeared and returned with the three callers.

Mary arose and bowed as they introduced themselves, meanwhile studying them with tranquil attentiveness.

"The judge was right," she told herself. "I like them." And when they sat down, there was already a friendly spirit in the air.

"This is a wonderful work you are doing here, Miss Spencer," said one.

"You think so?" she asked. "You mean for the women to be making bearings?"

"Yes. Weren't you surprised yourself when your idea worked out so well?"

"But it wasn't my idea," she said. "It was worked out in the war--oh, ever so much further than we have gone here. We are only making bearings, but when the war was on, women made rifles and cartridges and shells, cameras and lenses, telescopes, binoculars and aeroplanes. I can't begin to tell you the things they made--every part from the tiniest screws as big as the end of this pin--to rough castings. They did designing, and drafting, and moulding, and soldering, and machining, and carpentering, and electrical work--even the most unlikely things--things you would never think of--like ship-building, for instance!

"Ship-building! Imagine!" she continued.

"Why, one of the members of the British Board of Munitions said that if the war had lasted a few months longer, he could have guaranteed to build

a battleship from keel to crow's-nest--with all its machinery and equipment--all its arms and ammunition--everything on it--entirely by woman's labour!

"So, you see, I can't very well get conceited about what we are doing here--although, of course, I am proud of it, too, in a way--"

She stopped then, afraid they would think she was gossipy--and she let them talk for a while. The conversation turned to her last advertisement.

"Are you sure your figures are right?" asked one. "Are you sure your women workers are turning out bearings so much cheaper than the men did?"

"They are not my figures," she told them. "They are taken from an audit by a firm of public accountants."

She mentioned the name of the firm and her three callers nodded with respect.

"I have the report here," she said--and showed them the table of comparative efficiency.

"Remarkable!" said one.

"It only confirms," said Mary, "what often happened during the war."

"Perhaps you are working your women too hard."

"If you would like to go through the factory," said Mary, "you can judge for yourselves."

Archev was in the outer office and they took him with them. They began with the nursery and went on, step by step, until they arrived at the shipping room.

"Do you think they are overworked?" asked Mary then.

The three callers shook their heads. They had all grown rather silent as the tour had progressed, but in their eyes was the light of those who have seen revelations.

"As happy a factory as I have ever seen," said one. "In fact, it makes it difficult to say what we wanted to say."

They returned to the office and when they were seated again, Mary said, "What is it you wanted to say?"

"We wanted to talk to you about the strike. As we understand your principle, Miss Spencer, you regard it as unfair to bar a woman from any line of work which she may wish to follow--simply because she is a woman."

"That's it," she said.

"And for the same reason, of course, no man should be debarred from working, simply because he's a man."

They smiled at that.

"Such being the case," he continued, "I think we ought to be able to find some way of settling this strike to the satisfaction of both sides. Of course you know, Miss Spencer, that you have won the strike. But I think I can read character well enough to know that you will be as fair to the men as you wish them to be with the women."

"The strike was absolutely without authority from us," said one of the others. "The men will tell you that. It was a mistake. They will tell you that, too. Worse than a mistake, it was silly."

"However, that's ancient history now," said the third. "The present question is: How can we settle this matter to suit both sides?"

"Of course I can't discharge any of the women," said Mary thoughtfully, "and I don't think they want to leave--"

"They certainly don't look as if they did--"

"I have another plan in mind," she said, more thoughtfully than before, "but that's too uncertain yet.... The only other thing I can think of is to equip some of our empty buildings and start the men to work there. Since our new prices went into effect we have been turning business away."

"You'll do that, Miss Spencer?"

"Of course the men would have to do as much work as the women are doing now--so we could go on selling at the new prices."

"You leave that to us--and to them. If there's such a thing as pride in the world, a thousand men are going to turn out as many bearings as a thousand women!"

"There's one thing more," said the second; "I notice you have raised your women's wages a dollar a day. Can we tell the men that they are going to get women's wages?"

They laughed at this inversion of old ideas.

"You can tell them they'll get women's wages," said Mary, "if they can do women's work!"

But in spite of her smile, for the last few minutes she had become increasingly conscious of a false note, a forced conclusion in their plans--had caught glimpses of future hostilities, misunderstandings, suspicions. The next remark of one of the labour leaders cleared her thoughts and brought her back face to face with her golden vision.

"The strike was silly--yes," one of the leaders said. "But back of the men's actions I think I can see the question which disturbed their minds. If women enter the trades, what are the men going to do? Will there be work enough for everybody?"

Even before he stopped speaking, Mary knew that she had found herself, knew that the solid rock was under her feet again.

"There is just so much useful work that has to be done in the world every day," she said, "and the more hands there are to do it, the quicker it will get done."

That was as far as she had ever gone before, but now she went a step farther.

"Let us suppose, for instance, that we had three thousand married men working here eight hours a day to support their families. If now we allow three thousand women to come out of those same homes and work side by side with the men--why, don't you see?--the work could be done in four hours instead of eight, and yet the same family would receive just the same income as they are getting now--the only difference being that instead of the man drawing all the money, he would draw half and his wife would draw half."

"A four hour day!" said one of the leaders, almost in awe.

"I'm sure it's possible if the women help," said Mary, "and I know they want to help. They want to feel that they are doing something--earning something--just the same as a man does. They want to progress--develop--"

"We used to think they couldn't do men's work," she continued. "I used to think so, myself. So we kept them fastened up at home--something like squirrels in cages--because we thought housework was the only thing they could do...."

"But, oh, how the war has opened our eyes!..."

"There's nothing a man can do that a woman can't do--nothing! And now the question is: Are we going to crowd her back into her kitchen, when if we let her out we could do the world's work in four hours instead of eight?"

"Of course there are conditions where four hours wouldn't work," said one of the leaders half to himself. "I can see that in many places it might be feasible, but not everywhere--"

"No plan works everywhere. No plan is perfect," said Mary earnestly. "I've thought of that, too. The world is doing its best to progress--to make people happier--to make life more worth living all the time. But no single step will mark the end of human progress. Each step is a step: that's all..."

"Take the eight hour day, for instance. It doesn't apply to women at all--I mean house women. And nearly half the people are house women. It doesn't apply to farmers, either; and more than a quarter of the people in America are on farms. But you don't condemn the eight hour day--do you?--just because it doesn't fit everybody?"

"A four hour day!" repeated the first leader, still speaking in tones of awe.

"If that wouldn't make labour happy," said the second, "I don't know what would."

"Myself, I'd like to see it tried out somewhere," said the third. "It sounds possible--the way Miss Spencer puts it--but will it work?"

"That's the very thing to find out," said Mary, "and it won't take long."

She told them about the model bungalows.

"I intended to try it with twenty-five families first," she said, taking a list from her desk. "Here are the names of a hundred women working here, whose husbands are among the strikers. I thought that out of these hundred families, I might be able to find twenty-five who would be willing to try the experiment."

The three callers looked at each other and then they nodded approval.

"So while we're having lunch," she said, "I'll send these women out to find their husbands, and we'll talk to them altogether."

It was half past one when Mary entered the rest room with her three visitors and Archey. Nearly all the women had found their men, and they were waiting with evident curiosity.

As simply as she could, Mary repeated the plan which she had outlined to the leaders.

"So there you are," she said in conclusion. "I want to find twenty-five families to give the idea a trial. They will live in those new bungalows--you have probably all seen them.

"There's a gas range in each to make cooking easy. They have steam heat from the factory--no stoves--no coal--no ashes to bother with. There's electric light, refrigerator, bathroom, hot and cold water--everything I could think of to save labour and make housework easy.

"Now, Mrs. Strauss, suppose you and your husband decide to try this new arrangement. You would both come here and work till twelve o'clock, and the afternoons you would have to yourselves.

"In the afternoons you could go shopping, or fishing, or walking, or boating, or skating, or visiting, or you could take up a course of study, or read a good book, or go to the theatre, or take a nap, or work in your garden--anything you liked....

"In short, after twelve o'clock, the whole day would be your own--for your own development, your own pleasure, your own ideas--anything you wanted to use it for. Do you understand it, Mrs. Strauss?"

"Indeed I do. I think it's fine."

"Is Mr. Strauss here? Does he understand it?"

"Yes, I understand it," said a voice among the men. Assisted by his neighbours he arose. "I'm to work four hours a day," he said, "and so's the wife. Instead of drawing full money, I draw half and she draws half. We'd have to chip in on the family expenses. Every day is to be like Saturday--work in the morning and the afternoon off. Suits me to a dot, if it suits her. I always did think Saturday was the one sensible day in the week."

A chorus of masculine laughter attested approval to this sentiment and Mr. Strauss sat down abashed.

"Well, now, if you all understand it," said Mary, "I want twenty-five families who will volunteer to try this four-hour-a-day arrangement--so we can see how it works. All those who would like to try it--will they

please stand up?"

Presently one of the labour leaders turned to Mary with a beaming eye.

"Looks as though they'll have to draw lots," said he... "They are all standing up...!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

The afternoon was well advanced when her callers left, and Mary had to make up her work as best she could.

A violent thunder-storm had arisen, but in spite of the lightning she telephoned Helen.

Wally was still improving.

"I'll be over as soon as I've had dinner," said Mary, "but don't expect me early."

She was hanging up the receiver when the senior accountant entered, a little more detached, a little more impersonal than she had ever seen him.

"We shall have our final report ready in the morning," he said.

"That's good," said Mary, starting to sign her letters. "I'll be glad to see it any time."

At the door he turned, one hand on the knob.

"I haven't seen Mr. Woodward, Jr., today. Do you expect him tomorrow?"

At any other time she would have asked herself, "Why is he inquiring for Burdon?"--but she had so much work waiting on her desk, demanding her attention, that it might be said she was talking subconsciously, hardly knowing what was asked or answered.

It was dusk when she was through, and the rain had stopped for a time. Near the entrance to the house on the hill--a turn where she always had to drive slowly--a shabby man was standing--a bearded man with rounded shoulders and tired eyes.

"I wonder who he is?" thought Mary. "That's twice I've seen him standing there...."

Without seeming to do so, a pretence which only a woman can accomplish, she looked at him again. "How he stares!" she breathed.

As you have guessed, the waiting man was Paul.

For the first time that morning he had heard about the strike--had heard other things, too--in the cheap hotel where he had spent the night--obscure but alarming rumours which had led him to change his plans about an immediate return to his ship. A bit here, a bit there, he had

pieced the story of the strike together--a story which spared no names, and would have made Burdon Woodward's ears burn many a time if he had heard it.

"There's a bunch of Bolsheviks come in now--" this was one of the things which Paul had been told. "Down with the capitalists who prey on women! That's them! But it hasn't caught on. Sounds sort of flat around here to those who know the women. So this bunch of Bols has been laying low the last few days. They've hired a boat and go fishing in the lake. They don't fool me, though--not much they don't. They're up to some devilry, you can bet your sweet life, and we'll be hearing about it before long--"

Paul's mind turned to the blonde giant who had ridden on the train from New York, and the group of friends who had been waiting for him at the station.

"He was up to something--the way he spoke," thought Paul. "And last night he was in that car on the bridge.... Where do these Bols hang out?" he asked aloud.

He was told they made their headquarters at Repetti's pool-room, but though he looked in that establishment half a dozen times in the course of the day, he failed to see them.

"Looking for somebody?" an attendant asked him.

"Yes," said Paul. "Tall man with a light beard. Came in from New York yesterday."

"Oh, that bunch," grinned the attendant. "They've gone fishing again. Going to get wet, too, if they ain't back soon."

For over three hours then the storm had raged, the rain falling with the force of a cloudburst. At seven it stopped and, going out, Paul found himself drifting toward the house on the hill.

It was there he saw Mary turning in at the gate. He stood for a long time looking at the lights in the windows and thinking those thoughts which can only come to the Ishmaels of the world--to those sons of Hagar who may never return to their father's homes.

"I was a fool for coming," he half groaned, tasting the dregs of bitterness. Unconsciously he compared the things that were with the things that might have been.

"She certainly acted like a queen to Rosa," he thought once.

For a moment he felt a wild desire to enter the gate, to see his home again, to make himself known--but the next moment he knew that this was his punishment--"to look, to long, but ne'er again to feel the warmth of home."

He returned to the pool-room, his eyes more tired than ever, and found a seat in a far corner. Some one had left a paper in the next chair. Paul was reading it when he became conscious of some one standing in front of him, waiting for him to look up. It was his acquaintance of the day before--the Russian traveller--and Paul perceived that he was excited, and was holding himself very high.

"Good evening, batuchka," said Paul, and looking at the other's wet clothes he added, "I see you were caught in the storm."

"You are right, batuchka," said the other, and leaning over, his voice slightly shaking, he added, "Others, too, are about to be caught in a storm." He raised his finger with a touch of grandeur and took the chair by Paul's side, breathing hard and obviously holding himself at a tension.

"Your friends aren't with you tonight?"

Again the Russian spoke in parables. "Some men run from great events. Others stop to witness them."

"Something in the wind," thought Paul. "I think he'll talk." Aloud he said, pretending to yawn, "Great events, batuchka? There are no more great events in the world."

"I tell you, there are great events," said the other, "wherever there are great men to do them."

"You mean your friends?" asked Paul. "But no. Why should I ask! For great men would not spend their days in catching little fishes--am I not right, batuchka?"

"A thousand times right," said the other, his grandeur growing, "but instead of catching little fishes, what do you say of a man who can let loose a large fish--an iron fish--a fish that can speak with a loud noise and make the whole world tremble--!"

Paul quickly raised his finger to his lips.

"Let's go outside," he said. "Some one may hear us here..."

CHAPTER XXXV

At eight o'clock Mary had gone to Helen's.

"If I'm not back at ten, I sha'n't be home tonight," she had told Hutchins as she left the house.

At half past eight Archey called, full of the topic which had been started that afternoon. Hutchins told him what Mary had said.

"All right," he said. "I'll wait." He left his car under the porte cochere, and went upstairs to chat with Miss Cordelia and Miss Patty.

At twenty to ten, Hutchins was looking through the hall window up the drive when he saw a figure running toward the house. The door-bell rang--a loud, insistent peal.

Hutchins opened the door and saw a man standing there, shabby and spattered with mud.

"Is Miss Spencer in?"

"No; she's out."

The hall light shone on the visitor's face and he stared hard at the butler. "Hutch," he said in a quieter voice, "don't you remember me?"

"N-n-no, sir; I think not, sir," said the other--and he, too, began to stare.

"Don't you remember the day I fell out of the winesap tree, and you carried me in, and the next week I tried to climb on top of that hall clock, and knocked it over, and you tried to catch it, and it knocked you over, too?"

The butler's lips moved, but at first he couldn't speak.

"Is it you, Master Paul?" he whispered at last, as though he were seeing a visitor from the other world. And again "Is it you, Master Paul?"

"You know it is. Listen, now. Pull yourself together. We've got to get to the dam before ten o'clock, or they'll blow it up. Put your hat on. Have you a car here?"

In the hall the clock chimed a quarter to ten. The tone of its bell seemed to act as a spur to them both.

"There's a young gentleman here," said Hutchins, suddenly turning. "I'll run and get him right away."

As they speeded along the road which led to the bridge above the dam, Paul told what he had heard--Archey in the front seat listening as well as he could.

"He didn't come right out and say so," Paul rapidly explained, "but he dropped hints that a blind man could see. I met him on a train yesterday--a Russian--a fanatic--proud of what he's done--!"

"As nearly as I can make it out, they have got a boat leaning against the dam with five hundred pounds of TNT in it--or hanging under it--I don't know which--"

"There is a battery in the boat, and clockwork to set the whole thing off at ten o'clock tonight. He didn't come right out and say so, you understand, and I may be making a fool of myself. But if I am--God knows, it won't be the first time ... Anyhow we'll soon know."

It was a circuitous road that led to the dam. The rain was pouring again, the streets deserted. Once they were held up at a railroad crossing....

The clock in the car pointed at five minutes to ten when their headlights finally fell upon the bridge. As they drew nearer they could hear nothing in the darkness but the thunder of the water. The bridge was a low one and only twenty yards up the stream from the falls; but though they strained their eyes to the uttermost they couldn't see as far as the dam.

"I'll turn one of the headlights," said Archey, "and we'll drive over slow."

The lamp, turned at an angle, swept over the edge of the dam like a

searchlight. Half way over the bridge the car stopped. They had found what they were looking for.

"Why doesn't it go over?" shouted Archey, jumping out.

"Anchored to a tree up the bend, I guess," Paul shouted back. "They must have played her down the stream after dark."

Nearly over the dam was a boat painted black and covered with tarpaulin.

"The explosive is probably hanging from a chain underneath," thought Paul. "The current would hold it tight against the mason-work."

"We ought to have brought some help," shouted Archey, suddenly realizing. "If that dam breaks, it will sweep away the factory and part of the town.... What are you going to do?"

Paul had dropped his hat in the stream below the bridge and was watching to see where it went over the crest. It swept over the edge a few feet to the right of the boat.

He moved up a little and tried next by dropping his coat. This caught fairly against the boat. Then before they knew what he was doing, he had climbed over the rail of the bridge and had dropped into the swiftly moving water below.

"Done it!" gasped Hutchins.

Paul's arms were clinging around the bow of the boat. He twisted his body, the current helping him, and gained the top of the tarpaulin. Under the spotlight thrown by the car, it was like a scene from some epic drama, staged by the gods for their own amusement--man against the elements, courage against the unknown-life against death.

"He's feeling for his knife," thought Archey. "He's got it!"

Paul ran his blade around the cloth and had soon tossed the tarpaulin over the dam. Then he made a gesture of helplessness. From the bridge, they could see that the stern of the boat was heavily boxed in.

"It's under there!" groaned Hutchins. "He can't get to it!"

Archey ran to the car for a hammer, but Paul had climbed to the bow and was looking at the ring in which was fastened the cable that held the boat in place. The strain of the current had probably weakened this, for the next thing they saw--Paul was tugging at the cable with all his strength, worrying it from side to side, kicking at the bow with the front of his heel, evidently trying to pull the ring from its socket.

"If that gives way, the whole thing goes over," cried Archey. "I'll throw him the hammer."

Even as he spoke the ring suddenly came out of the bow; and thrown off his balance by his own effort, Paul went over the side of the boat and in the same moment had disappeared from view.

"Gone ..." gasped Hutchins. "And now that's going after him...."

The boat was lurching forward--unsteadily--unevenly--

"Something chained to the bottom, all right," thought Archey, all eyes to see, the hammer still in his hand. As they watched, the boat tipped forward--lurched--vanished--followed quickly by two cylindrical objects which, in the momentary glimpse they caught of them, had the appearance of steel barrels.

The two on the bridge were still looking at each other, when Archey thought to glance at the clock in his car.

It was on the stroke of ten.

"That may go off yet if the thing holds together," shouted Archey. "It was built good and strong...."

They stood there for a minute looking down into the darkness and were just on the point of turning back to the car when an explosion arose from the racing waters far below the dam....

Presently the wind, blowing up stream, drenched their faces with spray.... Splinters of rock and sand began to fall....

CHAPTER XXXVI

The next morning ushered in one of those days in June which make the spirit rejoice.

When Mary left Helen's, she thought she had never known the sky so blue, the world so fair, the air so full of the breath of life, the song of birds, the scent of flowers.

Wally was definitely out of danger and Helen was nursing him back to strength like a ministering angel, every touch a caress, every glance a look of love.

"Now if Burdon will only leave her alone," thought Mary as she turned the car toward the factory.

She needn't have worried.

Before she had time to look at her mail, Joe announced that the two accountants were waiting to see her.

"They've been hanging around for the last half hour," he confidentially added. "I guess they want to catch a train or something."

"All right, Joe," she nodded. "Show them in."

They entered, and for the first time since she had known them, Mary thought she saw a trace of excitement in their manner--such, for instance, as you might expect to see in two learned astronomers who had seen Sirius the dog-star rushing over the heavens in pursuit of the Big Bear--or the Virgin seating herself in Cassiopeia's Chair.

"We finished our report last night," said the elder, handing her a copy.

"As you will see, we have discovered a very serious situation in the treasurer's department."

It struck Mary later that she showed no surprise. Indeed, more than once in the last few days, when noticing Burdon's nervous recklessness, she had found herself connecting it with the auditors' work upon the books.

"I would have asked Mr. Woodward for an explanation," continued the accountant, "but he has been absent yesterday and today. However, as you will see, no explanation can possibly cover the facts disclosed. There is a clear case for criminal action against him."

"I don't think there will be any action," said Mary, looking up after a pause. "I'm sure his father will make good the shortage." But when she looked at the total she couldn't help thinking, "It will be a tight squeeze, though, even for Uncle Stanley."

Now that it was over, she felt relieved, as though a load had lifted from her mind. "He'll never bother Helen again," she found herself thinking. "Perhaps I had better telephone Judge Cutler and let him handle it--"

The judge promised to be down at once, and Mary turned to her mail. Near the bottom she found a letter addressed in Burdon's writing. It was unstamped and had evidently been left at the office. The date-line simply said "Midnight."

It was a long letter, some of it clear enough and some of it obscure. Mary was puzzling over it when Judge Cutler and Hutchins entered. As far as she could remember, it was the first time that the butler had ever appeared at the factory.

"Anything wrong?" she asked in alarm.

"He was in my office when you telephoned," said the judge. "I'll let him tell his story as he told it to me.... I think I ought to ask you something first, though.... Did any one ever tell you that you had a brother Paul? ..."

"Yes," said Mary, her heart contracting.

Throughout the recital she sat breathless. Now and then the colour rose to her cheeks, and more than once the tears came to her eyes, especially when Hutchins' voice broke, and when he said in tones of pride, "Before we could stop him, Master Paul was over the rail and in the water--"

More than once Mary looked away to hide her emotion, glancing around the room at her forebears who had never seemed so attentive as then. "You may well listen," thought Mary. "He may have been the black sheep of the family, but you see what he did in the end...."

Hutchins told them about the search which he and Archey had made up and down the banks, aided with a flashlight, climbing, calling, and sometimes all but falling in the stream themselves. "But it was no use, Miss Mary," he concluded. "Master Paul is past all finding, I'm afraid."

For a long time Mary sat silent, her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Archey is still looking," said the judge, rising. "I'll start another searching party at once. And telephone the towns below, too. We are bound

to find him if we keep on looking, you know--"

They found him sooner than they expected, in the grassy basin at the bend of the river, where the high water of the night before had borne him--in the place where he had loved to dream his dreams of youth and adventure when life was young and the future full of promise. He was lying on his side, his head on his arm, his face turned to the whispering river, and there perhaps he was dreaming again--those eternal dreams which only those who have gone to their rest can know.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Time, quickly passing, brought Mary to another wonderful morning in the Story of her life. Even as her father's death had broadened her outlook, so now Paul's heroism gave her a deeper glance at the future, a more tolerant view of the past.

On the morning in question, Helen brought Wally to the office. He was now entirely recovered, but Helen still mothered him, every touch a caress, every glance a look of love. Mary grew very thoughtful as she watched them. The next morning they were leaving for a tour of the Maine woods.

When they left, an architect called.

Under his arm he had a portfolio of plans for a Welfare Building which he had drawn exactly according to Mary's suggestions. As long as the idea had been a nebulous one--drawn only in fancy and coloured with nothing stronger than conversation, she had liked it immensely; but seeing now precisely how the building would look--how the space would be divided, she found herself shaking her head.

"It's my own fault," she said. "You have followed out every one of my ideas--but somehow--well, I don't like it: that's all. If you'll leave these drawings, I'll think them over and call you up again in a few days."

At Judge Cutler's suggestion, Archey had been elected treasurer to take Burdon's place. Mary took the plans into his office and showed them to him. They were still discussing them, sitting at opposite sides of his flat-top desk, when the twelve o'clock whistle blew. A few minutes later, the four-hour workers passed through the gate, the men walking with their wives, the children playing between.

"I wonder how it's going to turn out," said Archey.

"I wonder ..." said Mary. "Of course it's too early to tell yet. I don't know.... Time will tell."

"It was the only solution," he told her.

"I wonder ..." she mused again. "Anyhow it was something definite. If women are really going to take up men's trades, it's only right that they should know what it means. As long as we just keep talking on general lines about a thing, we can make it sound as nice as we like. But when we try to put theory into practice ... it doesn't always seem the same.

"Take these plans, for instance," she ruefully remarked. "I thought I knew exactly what I wanted. But now that I see it drawn out to scale, I don't like it. And that, perhaps, is what we've been doing here in the factory. We have taken a view of woman's possible future and we have drawn it out to scale. Everybody can see what it looks like now--they can think about it--and talk about it--and then they can decide whether they want it or not..."

He caught a note in her voice that had a touch of emptiness in it.

"Do you know what I would do if I were you?" he gently asked.

She looked at him, his eyes eager with sympathy, his smile tender and touched with an admiration so deep that it might be called devotion. Never before had Archey seemed so restful to her--never before with him had she felt so much at home.

"If I smile at him, he'll blush," she caught herself thinking--and experienced a rising sense of elation at the thought.

"What would you do!" she asked.

"I'd go away for a few weeks.... I believe the change would do you good."

She smiled at him and watched his responding colour with satisfaction.

"If Vera was right," she thought, "that's Chapter One the way he just spoke. Now next--he'll try to touch me."

Her eyes ever so dreamy, she reached her hand over the desk and began playing with, the blotter.

"Why, he's trembling a little," she thought. "And he's looking at it.... But, oh, isn't he shy!"

She tried to hum then and lightly beat time with her hand. "No, it isn't the only thing in life," she repeated to herself, "but--just as I said before--sooner or later--it becomes awfully important--" She caught Archey's glance and smilingly led it back to her waiting fingers.

"How dark your hand is by the side of mine," she said.

He rose to his feet.

"Mary!"

"Yes ... Archey?"

"If I were a rich man--or you were a poor girl...."

Mary, too, arose.

"Well," she laughed unsteadily, "we may be ... some day...."

Ten minutes later Sir Joseph of the Plumed Crest opened the door with a handful of mail. He suddenly stopped ... stared ... smiled ... and silently withdrew.

THE END

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