

Other Things Being Equal

Emma Wolf

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Chapter I

A humming-bird dipped through the air and lit upon the palm-tree just below the open window; the long drowsy call of a crowing cock came from afar off; the sun spun down in the subdued splendor of a hazy veil. It was a dustless, hence an anomalous, summer's afternoon in San Francisco.

Ruth Levice sat near the window, lazily rocking, her long lithe arms clasped about her knees, her face a dream of the day. The seasons single out their favorite moods: a violet of spring-time woos one, a dusky June rose another; to-day the soft, languorous air had, unconsciously to her, charmed the girl's waking dream.

So removed was she in spirit from her surroundings that she heard with an obvious start a knock at the door. The knock was immediately followed by a smiling, plump young woman, sparkling of eye, rosy of cheek, and glistening with jewels and silk.

"Here you are, Ruth," she exclaimed, kissing her heartily; whereupon she sank into a chair, and threw back her bonnet-strings with an air of relief. "I came up here at once when the maid said your mother was out. Where is she?"

"Out calling. You look heated, Jennie; let me fan you."

"Thanks. How refreshing! Sandal-wood, is it not? Where is your father?"

"He is writing in the library. Do you wish to see him?"

"Oh, no, no! I must see you alone. I am so glad Aunt Esther is out. Why aren't you with her, Ruth? You should not let your mother go off alone."

The young girl laughed in merry surprise.

"Why, Jennie, you forgot that Mamma has been used all her life to going out without me; it is only within the last few months that I have been her companion."

"I know," replied her visitor, leaning back with a grim expression of disapproval, "and I think it the queerest arrangement I ever heard of. The idea of a father having the sole care of a daughter up to her twenty-first birthday, and then delivering her, like a piece of joint property, over to her mother! Oh, I know that according to their lights it did not seem absurd, but the very idea of it is contrary to nature. Of course we all know that your father was peculiarly fitted to undertake your training, and in this way your mother could more easily indulge her love of society; but as it is, no wonder she is as jealous of your success in her realm as your father was in his; no wonder she overdoes things to make up for lost time. How do you like it, Ruth?"

"What?" softly inquired her cousin, slowly waving the dainty fan, while a smile lighted up the gravity of her face at this onslaught.

"Going out continually night after night."

"Mamma likes it."

"Cela va sans dire. But, Ruth, --stop fanning a minute, please, --I want to know, candidly and seriously, would you mind giving it up?"

"Candidly and seriously, I would do so to-day forever."

"Ye-es; your father's daughter," said Mrs. Lewis, speaking more slowly, her bright eyes noting the perfect repose of the young girl's person; "and yet you are having some quiet little conquests, --the golden apples of your mother's Utopia. But to come to the point, do you realize that your mother is very ill?"

"Ill--my mother?" The sudden look of consternation that scattered the soft tranquillity of her face must have fully repaid Mrs. Lewis if she was aiming at a sensation.

"There, sit down. Don't be alarmed; you know she is out and apparently well."

"What do you mean?"

I mean that Aunt Esther is nervous and hysterical. The other day at our house she had such an attack of hysteria that I was obliged to call in a neighboring doctor. She begged us not to mention it to either of you, and then insisted on attending a meeting of some sort. However, I thought it over and decided to let you know, as I consider it serious. I was afraid to alarm Uncle, so I thought of telling you."

"Thank you, Jennie; I shall speak to Father about it." The young girl's tone was quite unagitated; but two pink spots on her usually colorless cheeks betrayed her emotion.

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"That is right, dear. I hope you will forgive me if I seem meddlesome, but Jo and I have noticed it for some time; and your father, by allowing this continual gayety, seems to have overlooked what we find so sadly apparent. Of course you have an engagement for to-night?"

"Yes; we are going to a reception at the Merrills'."

"Merrill? Christians?" was the sharp reply.

"The name speaks for itself."

"What does possess your parents to mix so much with Christians?"

"Fellow-feeling, I suppose. We all dance and talk alike; and as we do not hold services at receptions, wherein lies the difference?"

"There is a difference; and the Christians know it as well as we Jewish people. Not only do they know it, but they show it in countless ways; and the difference, they think, is all to their credit. For my part, I always feel as if they looked down on us, and I should like to prove to them how we differ on that point. I have enough courage to let them know I consider myself as good as the best of them."

"Is that why you wear diamonds and silk on the street, Jennie?" asked Ruth, her serious tones implying no impudence, but carrying a refined reproach.

"Hardly. I wear them because I have them and like them. I see no harm in wearing what is becoming."

"But don't you think they look aggressive on the street? They attract attention; and one hates to be conspicuous. I think they are only in place at a gathering of friends of one's own social standing, where they do not proclaim one's moneyed value."

"Perhaps," replied Mrs. Lewis, her rosy face a little rosier than before. "I suppose you mean to say it is vulgar; well, maybe so. But I scarcely think a little outward show of riches should make others feel they are better because they do not care to make a display. Besides, to be less personal, I don't think any Christian would care to put himself out to meet a Jew of any description."

"Don't you think it would depend a great deal both on Jew and Christian? I always have been led to believe that every broad-minded man of whatever sect will recognize and honor the same quality in any other man. And why should I not move on an equality with my Christian friends? We have had the same schooling, speak the same language, read the same books, are surrounded by the same elements of home refinement. Probably if they had not been congenial, my father would long ago have ceased to associate with them. I think the secret of it all is in the fact that it never occurred to us that the most fastidious could think we were anything but the most fastidious; and so we always met any one we desired to meet on a level footing. I have a great many pleasant friends in the court of your Philistines."

"Possibly. But not having been brought up by your father, I think differently, and perhaps am different. Their ways are not my ways; and what good can you expect from such association?"

"Why, pleasant companionship. What wouldst thou more?"

"I? Not even that. But tell me, can't you dissuade Aunt Esther from going to-night? Tell your father, and let him judge if you had better not."

"I really think Mamma would not care to go, for she said as much to Father; but, averse as he generally is to going out, he insists on our going to-night, and, what is more, intends to accompany us, although Louis is going also. But if you think Mamma is seriously run down, I shall tell him immediately, and—"

A blithe voice at the door interrupted her, calling:

"Open the door, Ruth; my hands are full."

She rose hastily, and with a signal of silence to her loquacious cousin, opened the door for her mother.

"Ah, Jennie, how are your, dear? But let us inspect this box which Nora has just handed me, before we consider you;" and Mrs. Levice softly deposited a huge box upon Ruth's lace-enveloped bed.

She was still bonneted and gloved, and with a slight flush in her clear olive cheek she looked like anything but a subject for fears. From the crown of her dainty bonnet to the point of her boot she was the picture of exquisite refinement; tall, beautifully formed, carrying her head like a queen, gowned in perfect, quiet elegance, she appeared more like Ruth's older sister than her mother.

"Ruth's gown for this evening," she announced, deftly unfolding the wrappings.

"Yellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Lewis, in surprise.

"Corn-color," corrected Mrs. Levice, playfully; "how do you think it will suit my girlie?" She continued,

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shaking out the clinging silken crepe.

"Charmingly; but I thought Ruth objected to anything but white."

"So she does; she thinks white keeps her unnoticed among the rest. This time, however, my will overrode hers. Eh, Daughter?"

The girl made a low courtesy.

"I am only lady-in-waiting to your Majesty, O Queen," she laughed. She had hardly glanced at the gown, being engaged in a silent scrutiny of her mother's face.

"And how is my prime minister this afternoon?" Mrs. Levice was drawing off her gloves, and Ruth's look of pained discovery passed unnoticed.

"I have not been down since luncheon," she replied.

"What! Then go down at once and bring him up. I must see that he gets out of his studiousness and is clothed in festive mind for this evening. Come to my sitting-room, Jennie, and we can have a comfortable chat."

Left to herself, Ruth hesitated before going to her father with her ill-boding tidings. None knew better than she of the great, silent love that bound her parents. As a quiet, observant child, she had often questioned wherein could be any sympathy between her father, almost old, studious, and reserved, and her beautiful, worldly young mother. But as she matured, she became conscious that because of this apparent disparity it would have been still stranger had Mrs. Levice not loved him with a feeling verging nearer humble adoration than any lower passion. It seemed almost a mockery for her to have to tell him he had been negligent, --not only a mockery, but a cruelty. However, it had to be done, and she was the only one to do it. Having come to this conclusion, she ran quickly downstairs, and softly, without knocking, opened the library door.

She entered so quietly that Mr. Levice, reading by the window, did not glance from his book. She stood a moment regarding the small thoughtful-faced, white-haired man.

If one were to judge but by results, Jules Levice would be accounted a fortunate man. Nearing the allotted threescore and ten, blessed with a loving, beloved wife and this one idolized ewe-lamb, surrounded by luxury, in good health, honored, and honorable, --trouble and travail seemed to have passed him by. But this scene of human happiness was the result of intelligent and unremitting effort. A high state of earthly beatitude has seldom been attained without great labor of mind or body by ourselves or those akin to us. Jules Levice had been thrown on the world when a boy of twelve. He resolved to become happy. Many of us do likewise; but we overlook the fact that we are provided with feet, not wings, and cannot fly to the goal. His dream of happiness was ambitious; it soared beyond contentment. Not being a lily of the field, he knew that he must toil; any honest work was acceptable to him. He was possessed of a fine mind; he cultivated it. He had a keen observation; he became a student of his fellow-men; and being strong and untiring, he became rich. This was but the nucleus of his ambitions, and it came to him late in life, but not too late for him to build round it his happy home, and to surround himself with the luxuries of leisure for attaining the pinnacle of wide information that he had always craved. His was merely the prosperity of an intellectual, self-made man whose time for rest had come.

Ruth seated herself on a low stool that she drew up before him, and laid her hand upon his.

"You, darling?" He spoke in a full, musical voice with a marked French accent.

"Can you spare me a few minutes, Father?"

"I am all ears;" he shut the book, and his hand closed about hers.

"Jennie was here just now."

"And did not come in to see me?"

"She had something to tell me."

"A secret?"

"Yes; something I must repeat to you."

"Yes?"

"Father—Jennie thinks—she has reason to know that—dear, do you think Mother is perfectly well?"

"No, my child; I know she is not."

This quiet assurance was staggering.

"And you allow her to go on in this way without calling in a physician?" A wave of indignant color suffused her cheeks.

"Yes."

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"But--but--why?" She became a little confused under his calm gaze, feeling on the instant that she had implied an accusation unjustly.

"Because, Ruth, I have become convinced of it only within the past week. Your mother knows it herself, and is trying to hide it from me."

"Did she admit it?"

"I have not spoken of it to her; she is very excitable, and as she wishes to conceal it, I do not care to annoy her by telling her of my discovery."

"But isn't it wrong--unwise--to allow her to dissipate so much?"

"I have managed within the past week to keep you as quiet as possible."

"But to-night--forgive me, Father--you insist on our going to this reception."

"Yes, my sweet confessor; but I have a good reason, --one not to be spoken of."

"Those who trust us educate us," she pleaded in wistful earnestness.

"Then your education is complete. Well, I knew your mother would resist seeing any physician, for fear of his measures going contrary to her desires; so I have planned for her to meet to-night a certain doctor whom I would trust professionally with my wife's life, and on whom I can rely for the necessary tact to hide the professional object of their meeting. What do you think of my way, dear?"

For answer she stooped and kissed his hand.

"May I know his name?" she asked after a pause.

"His name is Kemp, --Dr. Herbert Kemp."

"Why, he lives a few blocks from here; I have seen his sign. Is he an old physician?"

"I should judge him to be between thirty-five and forty. Not old certainly, but one with the highest reputation for skill. Personally he is a man of great dignity, inspiring confidence in every one."

"Where did you meet him?"

"In the hospitals," said her father quickly. "But I will introduce him to you to-night. Don't lose your head when you talk to him."

"Why should I?"

"Because he is a magnificent fellow; and I wish my daughter to hold her own before a man whom I admire so heartily."

"Why, this is the first time you have ever given me worldly advice," she laughed.

"Only a friendly hint," he answered, rising and putting his book in its place with the precision of a spinster.

Chapter II

"This is what I call a worldly paradise!" A girl with a face like dear Lady Disdain's sank into a divan placed near the conservatory; her voice chimed in prettily with the music of a spraying fountain and the soft strains of remote stringed instruments.

"Is it a frivolous conceit?" she continued, laughing up to the man who stood beside her; "or do the soft light of many candles, faint music, radiant women, and courtly men, satisfy your predilections also that such a place is as near heaven as this wicked world approaches?"

"You forget; paradise was occupied by but two. To my notion, nothing can be farther removed from Elysium than a modern drawing-room full of guests."

"And leaving out the guests?"

"They say imagination can make a paradise of a desert, given the necessary contingencies."

"A solitude of two who love? Dr. Kemp, methinks you are a romantic."

"You supplied the romance, Miss Gwynne. My knowledge is of the hard, matter-of-fact sort."

"Such as bones, I suppose. Still you seem to be interested in the soft-looking piece of humanity over by that cabinet."

"Yes; his expression is reminiscent of a boy's definition of a vacuum, --a large space with nothing in it. Who is he?"

"And I thought you not unknown! He is the husband of a brilliant woman, Mrs. Ames, who has written a novel."

"Clever?"

"Decidedly so; it stands the test of being intoxicating and leaving a bad taste in the mouth, --like dry champagne."

"Which is not made for women."

"You mean school-girls. There she is, --that wisp of a creature listening so eagerly to that elegant youth of the terrier breed. No wonder he interests her; he is as full of information in piquant personal history as a family lawyer, and his knowledge is as much public property as a social city directory."

"You have studied him to advantage. Are you sure you have not stolen a leaf from him?"

"Dr. Kemp!" she exclaimed in pouting reproach, "do I appear as promiscuous as that? You may call me a 'blue book,' but spare my snobbery the opprobrious epithet of 'directory.' There goes the fascinating young Mrs. Shurly with Purcell Burroughs in her toils. Did you catch the fine oratory of the glance she threw us? It said, 'Dorothy Gwynne, how dare you appropriate Dr. Kemp for ten long minutes? Hand him over; pass him around. I want him; you are only boring him, though you seem to be amusing yourself."

Kemp's grave lips twitched at the corners; he was without doubt amused.

"Aren't you improvising?" he asked. A man need only offer an occasional bumper of a remark to keep the conversation from flagging, when his companion is a woman.

"No; you evidently do not know what a feminine sneer is in words. Ah, here comes the Queen of Sheba." She broke off with a pleased smile as Ruth Levice approached on the arm of her cousin, Louis Arnold.

Singly, each would have attracted attention anywhere; together they were doubly striking-looking. Arnold, tall and slight, carrying his head high, fair of complexion as a peachy-cheeked girl, was a peculiarly distinguished-looking man. The delicate pince-nez he wore emphasized slightly the elusive air of supercilious courtliness he always conveyed. Now, as he spoke to Ruth, who, although a tall girl, was some inches shorter than he, he maintained a strict perpendicular from the crown of his head to his heels, only looking down with his eyes. Short women resented this trick of his, protesting that it made them stand on tiptoe to speak to him.

There was something almost Oriental about Ruth, with her creamy, colorless face, like a magnolia blossom; her dusky hair was loosely rolled from her forehead and temples; her eyes were soft and brown beneath delicately pencilled brows, and matched the pure oval of her face. But the languorous air of Southern skies was wholly wanting in the sweet sympathy of her glance, and in a certain alertness about the poise of her head.

Arnold stopped perforce at Miss Gwynne's slight signal.

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"Where are you hastening?" she asked as they turned to greet her. "One would think you saw your Nemesis before you, so oblivious were you to the beauties scattered about." She looked up pertly at Arnold, after giving one comprehensive glance over Ruth's toilet.

"We both wished to see the orchids of which one hears," he answered, with pronounced French accent and idiom; adding, with a slight smile, "I did not overlook you, but you were so busily contemplating other ground that it would have been cruelty to disturb you." He spoke the language slowly, as a stranger upon foreign ground.

"Oh, yes; I forgot. Dr. Kemp, are you acquainted with the Queen of Sheba and her doughty knight Louis, surnamed Arnold?" She paused a moment as the parties acknowledged the curious introduction, and then broke in rather breathlessly: "There, Doctor, I shall leave you with royalty; do not let your republican ignorance forget her proper title. Mr. Arnold, Mrs. Merrill is beckoning to us; will you come?" and with a naive, superbly impish look at Ruth, she drew Arnold away before he could murmur an excuse.

At the impertinent words the soft, rich blood suffused Ruth's face.

"Will you sit here awhile and wait for Mr. Arnold, or shall we go and see the orchids?" The pleasant, deep voice broke in upon her confusion and calmed her self-consciousness. She raised her eyes to the dark, clever face above her; it was a strong, rather than a handsome face. From the broad sweep of the forehead above the steady scrutiny of the gray eyes, to the grave lip and firm chin under the dark, pointed beard, strength and gentleness spoke in every line. His personality bore the stamp of a letter of credit.

"Thank you," said she; "I think I shall sit here. My cousin will probably be back soon."

The doctor seated himself beside her. Miss Gwynne's appellation was not inaptly chosen, still he would have preferred to know her more conventional title.

"This is a peaceful little corner," he said. "Do you notice how removed it seems from the rest of the room?"

"Yes," she answered, meeting and disconcerting his pleasantly questioning look with one of swift resolve. "Dr. Kemp, I wish to tell you that my father has confided to me your joint secret."

"Your father?" he looked bewildered; his knowledge of the Queen of Sheba's progenitors was vague.

"My father, yes," she repeated, smiling at his perplexity. "Our name is not very common; I am Jules Levice's daughter."

He was about to exclaim "NO!" The kinship seemed ridiculous in the face of this lovely girl and the remembered picture of the little plain-faced Jew. What he did say was, --

"Mr. Levice is an esteemed friend of mine. He is present, is he not?"

"Yes. Have you met my mother yet?"

The mother would probably unravel the mysterious origin of this beautiful face and this strange, sweet voice, whose subdued tones held an uncommon charm.

"No; but your father is diplomat enough to manage that before the evening is over. So you know our little scheme. Pardon the 'shop' which I have of a necessity brought with me this evening, but have you seen any signs of illness in your mother?"

"No; I have been very blind and selfish," she replied, somewhat bitterly, "for every one but me seems to have seen that something was wrong. She has been very anxious to give me pleasure, and I fear has been burning the candle at both ends for my light. I wish I had known--probably it lay just within my hand to prevent this, instead of leading her on by my often expressed delight. What I wish to ask you is that if you find anything serious, you will tell me, and allay my father's fears as much as possible. Please do this for me. My father is not young; and I, I think, am trustworthy."

She had spoken rapidly, but with convincing sincerity, looking her companion full in the face.

The doctor quietly scrutinized the earnest young face before he answered. Then he slightly bowed in acquiescence.

"That is a pact," he said lightly; "but in all probability your father's fears are exaggerated."

"Where love is great, the smallest doubts are fears," she quoted, softly flushing. The doctor had a singular impersonal habit of keeping his eyes intently bent upon the person with whom he conversed, that made his companion feel that they two were exclusively alone, --a sensation that was slightly bewildering upon first acquaintance. By and by one understood that it was merely his air of interest that evoked the feeling, and so gradually got used to it as to one of his features.

"That is so," he replied cheerily; "and--I see some one is about to play. Mrs. Merrill told me we should have

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some music."

"It is Louis, I think; I know his touch."

"Your cousin? He plays?"

Ruth looked at him in questioning wonder. Truth to say, the doctor could not but betray his surprise at the idea of the cold-looking Arnold in the light of a musician; his doubts took instant flight after the opening chords. Rubenstein's Melody in F, played by a master-hand, is one long sound of divine ecstasy thrilling the listener to exquisite rapture. Played by Louis Arnold, what the composer had conceived in his soul was magnificently interpreted. As he finished, there was not a murmur; and the next minute he had dashed into a quaint tarantelle that instantly dispelled the former spell of grandeur.

"An artist," said some one standing near.

"Something more," murmured Kemp, rising as he saw Ruth do so. He was about to offer her his arm when Mrs. Merrill, a gently-faced woman, stepped up to them, and laying her hand upon Ruth's shoulder, said rather hurriedly, --

"I am sorry to trouble you, Doctor, but Mrs. Levice--do not be alarmed, Ruth dear--has become somewhat hysterical, and we cannot calm her; will you come this way, please, and no one need know she is in the study."

"My family is making itself prominent to-night," said Ruth, with a little catch in her voice, as they turned with Mrs. Merrill through the conservatory and so across the hall.

"I shall be here, Doctor, if you wish anything," said Mrs. Merrill, standing without as he and Ruth entered and immediately shut the door after them.

"Stay there," he said with quiet authority to Ruth, and she stood quite still where he left her. Mrs. Levice was seated in a large easy-chair with her back to the door; her husband had drawn her head to his bosom. There was no one else in the room, and for a second not a sound, till Mrs. Levice began to sob in a frightened manner.

"It's nothing at all, Jules," she cried, trying to laugh and failing lamentably; "I--I'm only silly."

"There, dear, don't talk." Levice's face was white as he soothingly stroked her hair.

"Oh!"

The doctor stepped in front of them, and laying both hands upon her shoulders, motioned Levice aside.

"Hush! Not a word!"

At the sound of his stern, brusque voice, the long quivering shriek stopped halfway.

"Be perfectly still," he continued, holding her firmly. "Obey this instant," as she began to whimper; "not a sound must I hear."

Ruth and her father stood spell-bound at the effect of the stranger's measures. For a moment Mrs. Levice had started in affright to scream; but the deep, commanding tone, the powerful hands upon her shoulders, the impressive, unswerving eye that held hers, soon began to act almost hypnotically. The sobbing gradually ceased; the shaking limbs slowly regained their calm; and as she sank upon the cushions the strained look in her eyes melted. She was feebly smiling up at the doctor in response to his own persuasive smile that gradually succeeded the gravity of his countenance.

"That is well," said he, speaking soothingly as to a child, and still keeping his smiling eyes upon hers. "Now just close your eyes for a minute; see, I have your hand, --so. Go to sleep."

There was not a sound in the room; Ruth stood where she had been placed, and Mr. Levice was behind the doctor, his face quite colorless, scarcely daring to breathe. Finally the faint, even breathing of Mrs. Levice told that she slept.

Kemp turned to Mr. Levice and spoke low, not in a whisper, which hisses, but his voice was so hushed that it would not have disturbed the lightest sleeper.

"Put your hand, palm up, under hers. I am going to withdraw my hand and retire, as I do not wish to excite her; she will probably open her eyes in a few moments. Take her home as quietly as you can."

"You will call to-morrow?" whispered Levice.

He quietly assented.

"Now be deft." The transfer was quickly made, and nodding cheerfully, Dr. Kemp left the room.

Ruth came forward. Five minutes later Mrs. Levice opened her eyes.

"Why, what has happened?" she asked languidly.

"You fell asleep, Esther," replied her husband, gently.

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"Yes, I know; but why is Ruth in that gown? Oh--ye-es!" Consciousness was returning to her. "And who was that handsome man who was here?"

"A friend of Ruth."

"He is very strong," she observed pensively. She lay back in her chair for a few minutes as if dreaming. Suddenly she started up.

"What thoughtless people we are! Let us go back to the drawing-room, or they will think something dreadful has happened."

"No, Mamma; I do not feel at all like going back. Stay here with Father while I get our wraps."

Before Mrs. Levice could demur, Ruth had left the room. As she turned in the direction of the stairs, she was rather startled by a hand laid upon her shoulder.

"Oh, you, Louis! I am going for our wraps."

"Here they are. How is my aunt?"

"She is quite herself again. Thanks for the wraps. Will you call up the carriage, Louis? We shall go immediately, but do not think of coming yourself."

"Nonsense! Tell your mother you have made your adieux to Mrs. Merrill, --she understands; the carriage is waiting."

A few minutes later the Levices and Louis Arnold quietly stole away. Mrs. Levice has had an attack of hysteria. "Nothing at all," the world said, and dismissed it as carelessly as most of the quiet turning-points in a life-history are dismissed.

Chapter III

The Levinces' house stood well back upon its grounds, almost with an air of reserve in comparison with the rows of stately, bay-windowed houses that faced it and hedged it in on both sides. But the broad, sweeping lawns, the confusion of exquisite roses and heliotropes, the open path to the veranda, whereon stood an hospitable garden settee and chair, the long French windows open this summer's morning to sun and air, told an inviting tale.

As Dr. Kemp ascended the few steps leading to the front door, he looked around approvingly.

"Not a bad berth for the grave little bookworm," he mused as he rang the bell.

It was immediately answered by the "grave little bookworm" in person.

"I've been on the lookout for you for the past hour," he explained, leading him into the library and turning the key of the door as they entered.

It was a cosey room, not small or low, as the word would suggest, but large and airy; the cosiness was supplied by comfortable easy-chairs, a lounge or two, a woman's low rocker, an open piano, a few soft engravings on the walls, and books in cases, books on tables, books on stands, books everywhere. Two long lace-draped windows let in a flood of searching sunlight that brought to light not an atom of dust in the remotest corner. It is the prerogative of every respectable Jewess to keep her house as clean as if at any moment a search-warrant for dirt might be served upon her.

"Will you not be seated?" asked Levice, looking up at Kemp as the latter stood drawing off his gloves.

"Is your wife coming down here?"

"No; she is in her room yet."

"Then let us go up immediately. I am not at leisure."

"I know. Still I wish to ask you to treat whatever ailments you may find as lightly as possible in her presence; she has never known anxiety or worry of any kind. It will be necessary to tell only me, and every precaution will be taken."

Here was a second one of this family of three wishing to take the brunt of the trouble on his shoulders, and the third had been bearing it secretly for some time. Probably a very united family, loving and unselfish doubtless, but the doctor had to stifle an amused smile in the face of the old gentleman's dignified appeal.

"Still she is not a child, I suppose; she knows of the nature of my visit?" He moved toward the door.

"Ruth--my daughter, you know--was about to tell her as I left the room."

"Then we will go up directly."

Levice preceded him up the broad staircase. As they reached the landing, he turned to the doctor.

"Pardon my care, but I must make sure that Ruth has told her. Just step into the sitting-room a second," and the cautious husband went forward to his wife's bedroom, leaving the door open.

Standing there in the hallway, Kemp could plainly hear the following words: --

"And being interested in nervous diseases," the peculiarly low voice was saying, "he told Father he would call and see you, --out of professional curiosity, you know; besides we should not like you to be often taken as you were last night, should we?"

"People with plenty of time on their hands," soliloquized the doctor, looking at his watch in the hallway.

"What is his name, did you say?"

"Dr. Herbert Kemp."

"What! Don't you know that Dr. Kemp is one of the first physicians in the city? Every one knows he has no time for curiosity. Nervous diseases are his specialty; and do you think he would come without--"

"Being asked?" interrupted a pleasant voice; the doctor had remembered the flight of time, and walked in unannounced.

"Keep your seat," he continued, as Mrs. Levice started up, the excited blood springing to her cheeks.

"You hardly need an introduction, Esther," said Levice. "You remember Dr. Kemp from last night?"

"Yes. Don't go, Ruth, please; Jules, hadn't you something to do downstairs?"

Did she imagine for a moment that she could still conceal her trouble from his tender watchfulness? Great dark rings encircled her now feverishly bright eyes; her mouth trembled visibly; and as Ruth drew aside, her

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mother's shaking fingers held tight to her hand.

"I have nothing in the world to do," replied Levice, heartily; "I am going to sit right here and get interested."

"You will have to submit to a friendly cross-examination, Mrs. Levice," said the physician.

He drew a chair up before her and took both her hands in his. As Ruth relinquished her hold, she encountered a pair of pleasantly authoritative gray eyes, and instantly divining their expression, left the room.

She descended a few steps to the windowed landing. Here she intended joining the doctor on his way down. Probably her father would follow him; but it was her intention to intercept any such plan. A fog had arisen, and the struggling rosy beams of the sun glimmered opalescently through the density. Ruth thought it would be clear by noon, when she and her mother could go for a stirring tramp. She stood lost in thought till a firm footfall on the stairs aroused her.

"I see Miss Levice here; don't come down," Kemp was saying. :What further directions I have must be given to a woman."

"Stay with Mamma, Father," called Ruth, looking up at her hesitating father; "I shall see the doctor out;" and she quickly ran down the few remaining steps to Kemp, awaiting her at the foot. She opened the door of the library, and closing it quickly behind them, turned to him expectantly.

"Nothing to be alarmed at," he said, answering her mute inquiry. He seated himself at the table, and drew from his vest-pocket pencil and blank. Without another glance at the girl, he wrote rapidly for some minutes; then quickly moving back his chair, he arose and handed her the two slips of paper.

"The first is a tonic which you will have made up," he explained, picking up his gloves and hat and moving toward the door; "the other is a diet which you are to observe. As I told her just now, she must remain in bed and see no one but her immediate family; you must see that she hears and reads nothing exciting. That is all, I think."

Indignation and alarm held riot in Ruth's face and arrested the doctor's departure.

"Dr. Kemp," she said, "you force me to remind you of a promise you made me last night. Will you at least tell me what ails my mother that you use such strenuous measures?"

A flash of recollection came to the doctor's eyes.

"Why, this is an unpardonable breach upon my part, Miss Levice; but I will tell you all the trouble. Your mother is suffering with a certain form of hysteria to a degree that would have prostrated her had we not come forward in time. As it is, by prostrating her ourselves for awhile, say a month or so, she will regain her equilibrium. You have heard of the food and rest cure?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is what she will undergo mildly. Has she any duties that will suffer by her neglect or that will intrude upon her equanimity?"

"No necessary ones but those of the house. Under no circumstances can I conceive of her giving up their supervision."

"Yet she must do so under the present state of affairs. Remember, her mind must be kept unoccupied, but time must be made to pass pleasantly for her. This is not an easy task, Miss Levice; but, according to my promise, I have left you to undertake it."

"Thank you," she responded quietly.

Kemp looked at her with a sense of calm satisfaction.

"Good-morning," he said, holding out his hand with a smile.

As the door closed behind him, Ruth felt as if a burden had fallen from, instead of upon her. For the last twenty-four hours her apprehensions had been excessive. Now, though she knew positively that her mother's condition needed instant and constant care, which she must herself assume, all sense of responsibility fell from her. The few quiet words of this strange physician had made her trust his strength as she would a rock. She could not have explained why it was so; but as her father remarked once, she might have said, "I trust him implicitly, because, though a man of superiority, he implicitly trusts himself."

As she re-entered her mother's room, her father regarded her intently.

"So we are going to make a baby of you, Mamma," she cried playfully, coming forward and folding her arms around her mother, who lay on the lounge.

"So he says; and what he says one cannot resist." There was an apathetic ring to her mother's voice that surprised her. Quickly the thought flashed through her that she was too weary to resist now that she was found

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out.

"Then we won't try to," Ruth decided, seating herself on the edge of the lounge close to her mother. From his armchair, Mr. Levice noted with remorseful pride the almost matronly poise and expression of his lovely young daughter as she bent over her weary-looking mother and smoothed her hair.

"And if you are to be baby," she continued, smiling down, "I shall have to change places with you, and become mother. You will see what a capital one I shall make. Let's see, what are the duties? First, baby must be kept clean and sweet, --I am an artist at that; secondly, Father and the rest of us must have a perfectly appointed menage; third--"

"I do not doubt that you will make a perfect mother, my child;" the gentle meaning of her father's words and glance caused Ruth to flush with pleasure. When Levice said, "My child," the words were a caress. "Just believe in her, Esther; one of her earliest lessons was 'Whatever you do, do thoroughly.' She had to learn it through experience. But as you trust me, trust my pupil."

The soft smile that played upon her husband's face was reflected on Mrs. Levice's.

"Oh, Ruth," she murmured tremulously, "it will be so hard for you."

This was a virtual laying down of arms, and Ruth was satisfied.

Chapter IV

Louis Arnold, the only other member of the Levice family, had been forced to leave town on some business the morning after Mrs. Levice's attack at the Merrill reception. He was, therefore, much surprised and shocked on his return a week later at finding his aunt in bed and such rigorous measures for quiet in vogue.

Arnold had been an inmate of the house for the past twelve years. He was a direct importation from France, which he had left just before attaining his majority, the glory of soldier-life not proving seductive to his imagination. He had no sooner taken up his abode with his uncle than he was regarded as the most useful and ornamental piece of foreign vertu in the beautiful house.

Being a business man by nature, keen, wary, and indefatigable, he was soon able to take almost the entire charge of Levice's affairs. In a few years his uncle ceased to question his business capabilities. From the time he arrived, he naturally fell into the position of his aunt's escort, thus again relieving Levice, who preferred the quieter life.

When Ruth began to go into society, his presence was almost a necessity, as Jewish etiquette, or rather Jewish espionage, forbids a young man unattached by blood or intentions to appear as the attendant of a single woman. This is one of the ways Jewish heads of families have got into for keeping the young people apart, --making cowards of the young men, and depriving the young girls of a great deal of innocent pleasure.

Arnold, however, was not an escort to be despised, as Ruth soon discovered. She very quickly felt a sort of family pride in his cool, quizzical manner and caustic repartee, that was wholly distinct from the more girlish admiration of his distinguished person. He and Ruth were great friends in a quiet, unspoken way.

They were sitting together alone in the library on the evening of his return. Mrs. Levice had fallen asleep, and her husband was sitting with her. Ruth had stolen down to keep Louis company, fearing he would feel lonesome in the changed aspect of the house.

Arnold lay at full length on the lounge; Ruth swayed backward and forward in the rocker.

"What I am surprised at," he was saying, "is that my aunt submits to this confining treatment;" he pronounced the last word "tritment," but he never stopped at a word because of its pronunciation, thus adding a certain piquancy to his speech.

"You would not be surprised if you knew Dr. Kemp; one follows his directions blindly."

"So I have heard from a great many—women."

"And not men?"

"I have never happened to hold a conversation with a man on the powers of Dr. Kemp. Women delight in such things."

"What things?"

"Why, giving in to the magnetic power of a strong man."

"You err slightly, Louis; it is the power, not the giving in that we delight in, counting it a necessary part of manliness."

"Will you allow me to differ with you? Besides, apart from this great first cause, I do not understand how, after a week of it, she has not rebelled."

"I think I can answer that satisfactorily," replied his cousin, a mischievous smile parting her lips and showing a row of strong white teeth; "she is in love."

"Also?"

"With Father; and so does as she knows will please him best. Love is also something every one loves to give in to."

"Every one who loves, you mean."

"Every one loves something or some one."

"Behold the exception, therefore." He moved his head so as to get a better view of her.

"I do not believe you."

"That—is rude." He kept his eyes meditatively fixed upon her.

"Have you made a discovery in my face?" asked the girl presently, slightly moving from his gaze.

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"No," he replied calmly. "My discovery was made some time ago; I am merely going over beautiful and pleasant ground."

"Really?" she returned, flushing, "then please look away; you annoy me."

"Why should I, since you know it is done in admiration? You are a woman; do not pretend distaste for it."

"I shall certainly go upstairs if you persist in talking so disagreeably."

"Indulge me a little; I feel like talking, and I promise not to be disagreeable. Always wear white; it becomes you. Never forget that beauty needs appropriate surroundings. Another thing, ma belle cousine, this little trick you have of blushing on the slightest provocation spoils your whole appearance. Your complexion should always retain its healthy whiteness, while—"

"You have been indulged quite sufficiently, Louis. Do you know, if you often spoke to me in this manner I should soon hate you?"

"That would indeed be unfortunate. Never hate, Ruth; besides making enemies, hate is an arch enemy to the face, distorting the softest and loveliest."

"We cannot love people who calmly sit and irritate us like mocking tarantulas."

"That is exaggerated, I think. Besides, Heaven forbid our loving everybody! Never love, Ruth; let liking be strong enough for you. Love only wears out the body and narrows the mind, all to no purpose. Cupid, you know, died young, or wasted to plainness, for he never had his portrait taken after he matured."

"A character such as you would have would be unbearable."

"But sensible and wise."

"Happily our hearts need no teaching; they love and hate instinctively before the brain can speak."

"Good—for some. But in me behold the anomaly whose brain always reconnoitres the field beforehand, and has never yet considered it worth while to signal either 'love' or 'hate'."

He rose with a smile and sauntered over to the piano. The unbecoming blush mounted slowly to Ruth's face and her eyes were bright as she watched him. When his hands touched the keys, she spoke.

"No doubt you think it adds to your intellect to pretend independence of all emotion. But, do you know, I think feeling, instead of being a weakness, is often more clever than wisdom? At any rate, what you are doing now is proof sufficient that you feel, and perhaps more strongly than many."

He partly turned on the music-chair, and regarded her questioningly, never, however, lifting his hands from the keys as he played a softly passionate minor strain.

"What am I doing?" he asked.

"Making love to the piano."

"It does not hurt the piano, does it?"

"No; but never say you do not feel when you play like that."

"Is not that rather peremptory? Who taught you to read characters?"

"You."

"I? What a poor teacher I was to allow you to show such bungling work! Will you sing?"

"No, I shall read; I have had quite enough of myself and of you for one night."

"Alas, poor me!" he retorted mockingly, and seeming to accompany his words with his music; "I am sorry for you, my child, that your emotions are so troublesome. You have but made your entrance into the coldest, most exciting arena, --the world. Remember what I tell you, --all the strong motives, love and hate and jealousy, are mere flotsam and jetsam. You are the only loser by their possession."

The quiet closing of the door was his only answer. Ruth had left the room.

She knew Arnold too well to be affected by his little splurt of cynicism. If she could escape a cynic either in books or in society, she invariably did so. Life was still beautiful for her; and one of her father's untaught lessons was that the cynic is a one-sided creature, having lost the eye that sees the compensation balancing all things. As long as Louis attacked things, it did no harm, except to incite a friendly passage-at-arms; hence, most of such talk passed in the speaking. Not so the disparaging insinuations he had cast at Dr. Kemp.

During the week in which Ruth had established herself as nurse-in-chief to her mother she had seen him almost daily. Time in a quiet sick-room passes monotonously; events that are unnoticed in hours of well-being and activity here assume proportions of importance; meal-times are looked forward to as a break in the day; the doctor's visit especially when it is the only one allowed, is an excitement. Dr. Kemp's visits were short, but the

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two learned to look for his coming and the sound of his deep, cheery voice, as to their morning's tonic that would strengthen the whole day. Naturally, as he was a stranger, Mrs. Levice in her idleness had analyzed and discussed aloud his qualities, both personal and professional, to her satisfaction. She had small ground for basing her judgments, but the doctor formed a good part of her conversation.

Ruth's knowledge of him was somewhat larger, —about the distance between Mrs. Levice's bedroom and the front door. She had a homely little way of seeing people to the door, and here it was the doctor gave her any new instructions. Instructions are soon given and taken; and there was always time for a word or two of a different nature.

In the first place, she had been attracted by his horses, a magnificent pair of jetty blacks.

"I wonder if they would despise a lump of sugar," she said one morning.

"Why should they?" asked Kemp.

"Oh, they seem to hold their heads so haughtily."

"Still, they are human enough to know sweets when they see them," their owner replied, taking in the beautiful figure of the young girl in her quaint, flowered morning-gown. "Try them once, and you won't doubt it."

She did try them; and as she turned a slightly flushed face to Kemp, who stood beside her, he held out his hand, saying almost boyishly, "Let me thank you and shake hands for my horses."

One can become eloquent, witty, or tender over the weather. The doctor became neither of these; but Ruth, whose spirits were mercurially affected by the atmosphere, always viewed the elements with the eye of a private signal-service reporter.

"This is the time for a tramp," she said, as they stood on the veranda, and the summer air, laden with the perfume of heliotrope, stole around them. "That is where the laboring man has the advantage over you, Dr. Kemp."

"Which, ten to one, he finds a disadvantage. I must confess that in such weather every healthy individual with time at his disposal should be inhaling this air at a leisurely trot or stride as his habit may be. You, Miss Levice, should get on your walking togs instantly."

"Yes, but not conveniently. My father and I never failed to take our morning constitutional together when all was well. Father always gave me the dubious compliment of saying I walked as straight and took as long strides as a boy. Being a great lover of the exercise, I was sorry my pas was not ladylike."

"You doubtless make a capital companion, as your father evidently remembered what a troublesome thing it is to conform one's length of limb to the dainty footsteps of a woman."

"Father has no trouble on that score," said Ruth, laughing.

The doctor smiled in response, and raising his hat, said, "That is where he has the advantage over a tall man."

Going over several such scenes, Ruth could remember nothing in his manner but a sort of invigorating, friendly bluntness, totally at variance with the peculiarities of the "lady's man" that Louis had insinuated he was accounted. She resolved to scrutinize him more narrowly the next morning.

Mrs. Levice's room was handsomely furnished and daintily appointed. Even from her pillows she would have detected any lapse in its exquisite neatness, and one of Ruth's duties was to leave none to be detected. The house was large; and with three servants the young girl had to do a great deal of supervising. She took a natural pride in having things go as smoothly as under her mother's administration; and Mr. Levice said it was well his wife had laid herself on the shelf, as the new broom was a vast improvement.

Ruth had given the last touches to her mother's dark hair, and was reading aloud the few unexciting items one finds in the morning's paper. Mrs. Levice, propped almost to a sitting position by many downy pillows, polished her nails and half listened. Her cheeks were no longer brightly flushed, but rather pale; the expression of her eyes was placid, and her slight hand quite firm; the strain lifted from her, a great weariness had taken its place. The sweet morning air came in unrestrained at the open window.

Ruth's reading was interrupted by the entrance of the maid, carrying a dainty basket of Duchesse roses.

"For Madame," she said, handing it to Ruth, who came forward to take it.

"Read the card yourself," she said, placing it in her mother's hand as the girl retired. A pleased smile broke over Mrs. Levice's face; she buried her face in the roses, and then opened the envelope.

"From Louis!" she exclaimed delightedly. "Poor fellow! he was dreadfully upset when he came in. He did not say much, but his look and hand-shake were enough as he bent to kiss me. Do you know, Ruth, I think our Louis

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has a very loving disposition?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Yes. One would not think so, judging from his manner; but I know him to be unusually sympathetic for a man. I would sooner have him for a friend than many a woman; he has not many equals among the young men I know. Don't you agree with me, girlie?"

"Oh, yes; I always liked Louis."

"How coldly you say that! And, by the way, it struck me as very queer last night that you did not kiss him after his absence of a week. Since when has this formal hand-shake come into use?"

A slight flush crimsoned Ruth's cheek.

"It is not my fault," she said, smiling; "I always kissed Louis even after a day's absence. But some few months ago he inaugurated the new regime, and holds me at arm's length. I can't ask him why, when he looks at me so matter-of-factly through his eyeglass, can I?"

"No; certainly not." A slight frown marred the complacency of Mrs. Levice's brow. Such actions were not at all in accordance with her darling plan. Arnold was much to her; but she wished him to be more. This was a side-track upon which she had not wished her train to move.

Her cogitations took a turn when she heard a quick, firm footfall in the hall.

Ruth anticipated the knock, and opened the door to the doctor.

Bowing slightly to her, he advanced rather hurriedly to the bedside. He had not taken off his gloves, and a certain air of purposeful gravity replaced his usual leisurely manner.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Levice," he said, taking her hand in his, and looking searchingly down at her. "How are you feeling this morning? Any starts or shakes of any sort?"

"No; I am beginning to feel as impassive and stupid as a well-fed animal. Won't you sit down, Doctor?"

"No; I have a consultation in a very short time. Keep right on as you have been doing. I do not think it will be necessary for me to call for several days now; probably not before Friday."

"And to-day is Tuesday! Am I to see no one till then?"

"No one but those you have seen. Pray do not complain, Mrs. Levice," he continued rather sternly. "You are a very fortunate invalid; illness with you is cushioned in every conceivable corner. I wish I could make you divide some of your blessings. As I cannot, I wish you to appreciate them as they deserve. Do not come down, Miss Levice," as she moved to follow him; "I am in a great hurry. Good-morning."

"How harassed he looked! I wonder who is his patient!" observed Mrs. Levice, as Ruth quietly returned to her seat. A sunbeam fell aslant the girl's preoccupied face. The doctor's few words had given her food for thought.

When later on she remembered how she was going to disprove for herself Louis's allegations, she wondered if he could have found anything to mock at, had he been present, in Kemp's abrupt visit of the morning.

Chapter V

Ruth always dressed well. Indeed, any little jealousy her lovely presence might occasion was usually summed up in the terse innuendo, "Fine feathers make fine birds."

To dress well is to dress appropriately to time, place, and season. Having a full purse, she could humor every occasion with a change of gown; being possessed of good taste, her toilets never offended; desiring to look pleasing, as every woman should, she studied what was becoming; having a mother to whom a good toilet was one of the most pressing conveniences, and who delighted in planning beautiful gowns for her beautiful daughter, there was nothing lacking to prevent Ruth from being well-dressed.

On this summer's afternoon she was clad from head to foot in soft, pale gray. Every movement of her young body, as she walked toward town, betokened health and elastic strength. Her long, easy gait precluded any idea of hurry; she noticed everything she passed, from a handsome house to a dirty child.

She was approaching that portion of Geary Street which the doctors have appropriated, and she carefully scanned each silvery sign-plate in search of Dr. Kemp's name. It was the first time she had had occasion to go; and with a little feeling of novel curiosity she ran up the stairs leading to his office.

It was just three, --the time stated as the limit of his office-hours; but when Ruth entered the handsome waiting-room, two or three patients were still awaiting their turns. Seated in one of the easy-chairs, near the window, was an aristocratic-looking woman, whom Ruth recognized as a friend of one of her Christian friends, and with whom she had a speaking acquaintance. Nodding pleasantly in response to the rather frigid bow, she walked to the centre of the room, and laying upon the table a bunch of roses that she carried, proceeded to select one of the magazines scattered about. As she sat down, she found herself opposite a stout Irishwoman, coarsely but cleanly dressed, who with undisguised admiration took in every detail of Ruth's appearance. She overlooked the evident simplicity of the woman's stare; but the wistful, yearning look of a little girl who reclined upon the lounge caused her to sit with her magazine unopened. As soon as she perceived that it was her flowers that the child regarded so longingly, she bent forward, and holding out a few roses, said invitingly, --

"Would you like these?"

There is generally something startling in the sudden sound of a voice after a long silence between strangers; but the pretty cadence of Ruth's gentle voice bore no suggestion of abruptness.

"Indeed, and she just do dote on 'em," answered the mother, in a loud tone, for the blushing child.

"So do I," responded Ruth; and leaning farther forward, she put them in the little hand.

But the child's hand did not close over them, and the large eyes turned piteously to her mother.

"It's paralyzed she is," hurriedly explained the mother. "Shall Mamma hold the beautiful roses for ye, darlint?"

"Please," answered the childish treble.

Ruth hesitated a second, and then rising and bending over her said, --

"No; I know of a better way. Wouldn't you like to have me fasten them in your belt? There, now you can smell them all the time."

"Roses is what she likes mostly," proceeded the mother, garrulously, "and she's for giving the doctor one every time she can when he comes. Faith! it's about all he do get for his goodness, for what with--"

The sudden opening of the folding-door interrupted her flow of talk. Seeing the doctor standing on the threshold as a signal for the next in waiting to come forward, the poor woman arose preparatory to helping her child into the consulting-room.

"Let me help Mamie, Mrs. O'Brien," said he, coming toward her. At the same moment the elegant-looking woman rose from her chair and swept toward him.

"I believe it is my turn," she said, in response to his questioning salutation.

"Certainly, if you came before Mrs. O'Brien. If so, walk in," he answered, moving the portiere aside for the other to enter.

"Sure, Doctor," broke in Mrs. O'Brien, anxiously, "we came in together."

"Indeed!" He looked from the florid, flustered face to the haughtily impassive woman beside her.

"Well, then," said he, courteously, "I know Mrs. O'Brien is wanted at home by her little ones. Mrs. Baker, you

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will not object, I am sure."

It was now the elegant woman's turn to flush as Kemp took up the child.

Ruth felt a leap of delight at the action. It was a quiet lesson to be laid to heart; and she knew she could never see him in a better light than when he left the room holding the little charity patient in his arms.

She also noticed with a tinge of amusement the look of added hauteur on the face of Mrs. Baker, as she returned to her seat at the window.

"Haughtiness," mused Ruth, "is merely a cloak to selfishness, or the want of a proper spirit of humanity."

The magazine article remained unread; she drifted into a sort of day-dream, and scarcely noticed when Mrs. Baker left the room.

"Well, Miss Levice."

She started up, slightly embarrassed, as the doctor's voice thus aroused her.

"I beg your pardon," she said, coming forward and flushing slightly under his amused smile. "It was so quiet here that I forgot where I was."

He stood aside as she passed into the room, bringing with her an exquisite fragrance of roses.

"Will you be seated?" he asked, as he turned from closing the door.

"No; it is not worth while."

"What is the trouble, --you or your mother?"

There had been nothing disconcerting in the Irish-woman's stare; but she felt suddenly hot and uncomfortable under the doctor's broad gaze.

"Neither of us," she answered; "I broke the tonic bottle this morning, and as the number was destroyed, I should like to have you give me another prescription."

"Directly. Take this chair for a moment."

She seated herself perforce, and he took the chair beside the desk.

"How is she since yesterday?" he asked, as he wrote, without looking up.

"Quite as comfortable."

He handed her the prescription presently, and she arose at once. He stepped forward to open the outer door for her.

"I hope you no longer feel alarmed over her health," he remarked, with a hand on the knob.

"No; you have made us feel there was no cause for it. But for your method I am afraid there might have been."

"Thank you; but do not think anything of the kind. Your nursing was as potent a factor as my directions. It is not Congress, but the people, who make the country, you know."

"That is condescending, coming from Congress," she laughed gayly; "but I must disclaim the compliment, I am sorry to say; my nursing was only a name."

"As you please. Miss Levice, may I beg a rose of you? No, not all. Well, thank you, they will look wonderful in a certain room I am thinking of."

"Yes?" There was a note of inquiry in the little word in reply to Kemp's pointed remark spoken as with a sudden purpose.

"Yes," he continued, leaning his back against the door and looking earnestly down at the tall girl; "the room of a lad without even the presence of a mother to make it pretty;" he paused as if noting the effect of his words. "He is as lonely and uncomplaining as a tree would be in a desert; these roses will be quite a godsend to him." He finished his sentence pleasantly at sight of the expression of sympathy in the lovely brown eyes.

"Do you think he would care to see any one?"

"Well," replied the doctor, slowly, "I think he would not mind seeing you."

"Then will you tell me where he lives so that I can go there some day?"

"Some day? Why not to-day? Would it be impossible to arrange it?"

"Why, no," she faltered, looking at him in surprise.

"Excuse my curiosity, please; but the boy is in such pressing need of some pleasurable emotion that as soon as I looked at you and your roses I thought, 'Now, that would not be a bad thing for Bob.' You see, I was simply answering a question that has bothered me all day. Then will you drive there with me now?"

"Would not that be impossible with your driver?" she asked, searching unaccountably for an excuse.

"I can easily dispense with him."

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"But won't my presence be annoying?" she persisted, hesitating oddly.

"Not to me," he replied, turning quickly for his hat. "Come, then, please, I must waste no more time in Bob's good cause."

She followed him silently with a sensation of quiet excitement.

Presently she found herself comfortably seated beside the doctor, who drove off at a rapid pace.

"I think," said he, turning his horses westward, "I shall have to make a call out here on Jones Street before going to Bob. You will not mind the delay, Miss Levice, I hope."

"Oh, no. This is 'my afternoon off,' you know. Father is at home, and my mother will not miss me in the least. I was just thinking--"

She came to a sudden pause. She had just remembered that she was about to become communicative to a comparative stranger; the intent, interested look in Kemp's eye as he glanced at her was the disturbing element.

"You were thinking what?" he prompted with his eye now to the horses' heads.

"I am afraid you would not be edified if I continued," she answered hastily, biting her lip. She had been about to remark that her father would miss her, nevertheless—but such personal platitudes are not always in good taste. Seeing that she was disinclined to finish her sentence, he did not urge her; and a few minutes later he drew up his horses before a rather imposing house.

"I shall not be gone a minute, I think," he said, as he sprang out and was about to attach the reins to the post.

"Let me hold them, please," said Ruth, eagerly stretching forth a hand.

He placed them in her hand with a smile, and turned in at the gateway.

He had been in the house about five minutes when she saw him come out hastily. His hat was pulled down over his brows, which were gathered in an unmistakable frown. At the moment when he slammed the gate behind him, a stout woman hurrying along the sidewalk accosted him breathlessly.

He waited stolidly with his foot on the carriage-step till she came up.

"So sorry I had to go out!" she burst forth. "How did you find my husband? What do you think of him?"

"Madame," he replied shortly, "since you ask, I think your husband is little short of an idiot!"

Ruth felt herself flush as she heard.

The woman looked at him in consternation.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Matter? Mayonnaise is the matter. If a man with a weak stomach like his cannot resist gorging himself with things he has been strictly prohibited from touching, he had better proclaim himself irresponsible and be done. It is nonsense to call me in when he persists in cutting up such antics. Good—afternoon."

And abruptly raising his hat, he sprang in beside Ruth, taking the reins from her without a word.

She felt very meek and small beside the evidently exasperated physician. He seemed to forget her presence entirely, and she had too much tact to break the silence of an angry man. In nine cases out of ten, the explosion is bound to take place; but woe to him who lights the powder!

They were now driving northeast toward the quarter known as North Beach. The sweet, fresh breeze in the western heights toward Golden Gate is here charged with odors redolent of anything but the "shores of Araby the blest."

Kemp finally gave vent to his feelings.

"Some men," he said deliberately, as if laying down an axiom, "have no more conception of the dignity of controlled appetites than savages. Here is one who could not withstand anything savory to eat, to save his soul; otherwise he is a strong, sensible man. I can't account for it."

"The force of habit, perhaps," suggested Ruth.

"Probably. Jewish appetite is known to dote on the fat of the land."

That he said this with as little vituperation as if he had remarked on the weather Ruth knew; and she felt no inclination to resent the remark, although a vision of her cousin Jennie protesting did present itself. Some Jewish people with diseased imaginations take every remark on the race as a personal calumny.

"We always make the reservation that the fat be clean," she laughed.

Kemp flashed around at her.

"Miss Levice," he exclaimed contritely, "I completely forgot—I hope I was not rude."

"Why, certainly not," she answered half merrily, half earnestly. "Why should you be?"

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"As you say, why should I be? Jewish individuals, of course, have their faults like the rest of humanity. As a race, most of their characteristics redound to their honor, in my estimation."

"Thank you," said the girl, quietly. "I am very proud of many Jewish traits."

"Such as a high morality, loyalty, intelligence, filial respect, and countless other things."

"Yes."

"Besides, it is wonderful how they hold the balance of power in the musical and histrionic worlds. Still, to be candid, in comparison with these, they do not seem to have made much headway in the other branches of art. Can you explain it, Miss Levice?"

He waited deferentially for a reply.

"I was trying to think of a proper answer," she responded with earnest simplicity; "and I think that their great musical and histrionic powers are the results not so much of art as of passion inherited from times and circumstances stern and sad since the race began. Painting and sculpture require other things."

"Which the Jew cannot obtain?"

A soft glow overspread her face and mounted to her brow.

"Dr. Kemp," she answered, "we have begun. I should like to quote to you the beautiful illustration with which one of our rabbis was inspired to answer a clergyman asking the same question; but I should only spoil that which in his mouth seemed eloquent."

"You would not, Miss Levice. Tell the story, please."

They were on level ground, and the doctor could disengage his attention from the horses. He did not fail to note the emotion that lit up her expressive face, and made her sweet voice tremble.

"It is the story of the Rose of Sharon. This is it briefly: A pilgrim was about to start on a voyage to the Holy Land. In bidding a friend good-by, he said: 'In that far land to which I am journeying, is there not some relic, some sacred souvenir of the time beautiful, that I can bring to you?' The friend mused awhile. 'Yes,' he made answer finally; 'there is a small thing, and one not difficult to obtain. I beg of you to bring me a single rose from the plains of Sharon.' The pilgrim promised, and departed. On his return he presented himself before his friend. 'You have brought it?' he cried. 'Friend,' answered the pilgrim, sadly, 'I have brought your rose; but, alas! After all this weary travelling it is now but a poor, withered thing.' 'Give it me!' exclaimed the friend, eagerly. The other did so. True, it was lifeless and withered; not a vestige remained of its once fragrant glory. But as the man held it tenderly in his hand, memory and love untold overcame him, and he wept in ecstasy. And as his tears fell on the faded rose, lo! The petals sprang up, flushed into life; an exquisite perfume enveloped it, —it had revived in all its beauty. Sir, in the words of the rabbi, 'In the light of toleration and love, we too have revived, we too are looking up.'"

As the girl paused, Kemp slightly, almost reverentially, raised his hat.

"Miss Levice, that is exquisite," he said softly.

They had reached the old, poorer section of the city, and the doctor stopped before a weather-beaten cottage.

"This is where Bob receives," he said, holding out a hand to Ruth; "in all truth it cannot be called a home."

Ruth had a peculiar, inexplicable feeling of mutual understanding with the doctor as she went in with him. She hardly realized that she had been an impressionable witness of some of his dominant moods, and that she herself had been led on to an unrestrained display of feeling.

Chapter VI

They walked directly into a bare, dark hallway. There was no one stirring, and Kemp softly opened the door of one of several rooms leading into the passage. Here a broad band of yellow sunlight fell unrestrained athwart the waxen-like face of the sleeping boy. The rest of the simple, poor-looking room was in shadow. The doctor noiselessly closed the door behind them, and stepped to the bed, which was covered with a heavy horse-blanket.

The boy on the bed even in sleep could not be accounted good-looking; there was a heaviness of feature, a plentitude of freckles, a shock of lack-lustre hair, that made poor Bob Bard anything but a thing of beauty. And yet, as Ruth looked at him, and saw Kemp's strong white hand placed gently on the low forehead, a great wave of tender pity took possession of her. Sleep puts the strongest at the mercy of the watcher; there is a loneliness about it, a silent, expressive plea for protection, that appeals unconsciously. Ruth would have liked to raise the rough, lonely head to her bosom.

"It would be too bad to wake him now," said the doctor, in a low voice, coming back to her side; "he is sleeping restfully; and that is what he needs. I am sorry our little plan is frustrated; but it would be senseless to wait, as there is no telling when he will waken."

A shade of disappointment passed over the girl's face, which he noticed.

"But," he continued, "you might leave your roses where he cannot fail to see them. His conjectures on their mysterious appearance will rouse him sufficiently for one day."

He watched her move lightly across the room, and fill a cup with water from an earthenware pitcher. She looked about for a second as if hesitating where to place it, and then quickly drew up a high-backed wooden chair close to the bedside, and placed thereon a cup with roses, so that they looked straight into the face of the slumbering lad.

"We will go now," Kemp said, and opened the door for Ruth to pass before him. She followed him slowly, but on the threshold drew back, a thoughtful little pucker on her brow.

"I think I shall wait anyway," she explained. "I should like to talk with Bob a little."

The doctor looked slightly annoyed.

"You had better drive home with me," he objected.

"Thank you," she replied, drawing farther back into the room; "but the Jackson Street cars are very convenient."

"Nevertheless, I should prefer to have you come with me," he insisted.

"But I do not wish to," she repeated quietly; "besides, I have decided to stay."

"That settles it, then," smiled Kemp; and shaking her hand, he went out alone.

"When my lady will, she will; and when she won't, she won't," he mused, gathering up his reins. But the terminal point to the thought was a smile.

Ruth, thus left alone, seated herself on the one other chair near the foot of the bed. Strange to say, though she gazed at Bob, her thoughts had flown out of the room. She was dimly conscious that she was pleasantly excited. Had she cared to look the cause boldly in the face, she would have known that Miss Ruth Levice's vanity had been highly fed by Dr. Kemp's unmistakable desire for her assistance. He must at least have looked at her with friendly eyes; but here her modesty drew a line even for herself, and giving herself a mental shake, she saw that two lambent brown eyes were looking wonderingly at her from the face of the sick lad.

"How do you feel now, Bob?" she asked, rising immediately and smiling down at him.

The boy forgot to answer.

"The doctor brought me here," she went on brightly; "but as you were asleep, he could not wait. Are you feeling better, Bob?"

The soft, star-like eyes did not wander in their gaze.

"Why did you come?" he breathed finally. His voice was surprisingly musical.

"Why?" faltered Ruth. "Oh, to bring you these roses. Do you care for flowers, Bob?" She lifted the mass of delicate buds toward him. Two pale, transparent hands went out to meet them. Tenderly as you sometimes see a mother press the cheek of her babe to her own, he drew them to his cheek.

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"Oh, my darlings, my darlings!" he murmured passionately, with his lips pressed to the fragrant petals.

"Do you love them, then, so much?"

"Lady," replied the boy, raising himself to a sitting posture, "there is nothing in the world to me like flowers."

"I never thought boys cared so for flowers," remarked Ruth, in surprise.

"I am a gardener," said he, simply, and again fell to caressing the roses. Sitting up, he looked fully seventeen or eighteen years old.

"You must have missed them during your illness," observed Ruth.

A long sigh answered her. The boy rested his dreamy eyes upon her. He was no longer ugly, with his thoughts illuminating his face.

"Marechal Niel," she heard him whisper, still with his eyes upon her, "all in soft, radiant robes like a gracious queen. Lady, you fit well next my Homer rose."

"What Homer rose?" asked Ruth, humoring the flower-poet's odd conceit.

"My strong, brave Homer. There is none like him for strength, with all his gentle perfume folded close to his heart. I used to think these Duchesses would suit him best; but now, having seen you, I know they were too frail, --Marechal Niel." It was impossible to resent openly the boy's musings; but with a quick insistence that stemmed the current of his thoughts, she said, --

"Tell me where you suffer, Bob."

"I do not suffer. I am only weak; but he is nourishing me, and Mrs. Mills brings me what he orders."

"And is there anything you would like to have of which you forgot to tell him?"

"I never tell him anything I wish," replied the boy, proudly. "He knows beforehand. Did you never draw up close to a delicate flower, lay your cheek softly upon it, so, --close your eyes, so, --and listen to the tale it's telling? Well, that is what my good friend does always."

It was like listening to music to hear the slow, drawling words of the invalid. Ruth's hand closed softly over his.

"I have some pretty stories at home about flowers," she said; "would you like to read them?"

"I can't read very well," answered Bob, in unabashed simplicity.

Yet his spoken words were flawless.

"Then I shall read them to you," she answered pleasantly, "to-morrow, Bob, say at about three."

"You will come again?" The heavy mouth quivered in eager surprise.

"Why, yes; now that I know you, I must know you better. May I come?"

"Oh, lady!"

Ruth went out enveloped in that look of gratitude. It was the first directly personal expression of honest gratitude she had ever received; and as she walked down the hill, she longed to do something that would be really helpful to some one. She had led, on the whole, so far, an egotistic life. Being their only child, her parents expected much of her. During her school-life she had been a sort of human reservoir for all her father's ideas, whims, and hobbies. True, he had made her take a wide interest in everything within the line of vision; hanging on his arm, as they wandered off daily in their peripatetic school, he had imbued her with all his manly nobility of soul. But theorizing does not give much hold on a subject, the mind being taken up with its own clever elucidations. For the past six months, after a year's travel in Europe, her mother had led her on in a whirl of what she called happiness. Ruth had soon gauged the worth of this surface-life, and now that a lull had come, she realized that what she needed was some interest outside of herself, --an interest which the duties of a mere society girl do not allow to develop to a real good.

A plan slowly formed itself in her mind, in which she became so engrossed that she unconsciously crossed the cable of the Jackson Street cars. She did not turn till a hand was suddenly laid upon her arm.

"What are you doing in this part of town?" broke in Louis Arnold's voice in evident anger.

"Oh, Louis, how you startled me! What is the matter with this part of town?"

"You are on a very disreputable street. Where are you going?"

"Home."

"Then be so kind as to turn back with me and take the cars."

She glanced at him quickly, unused to his tone of command, and turned with him.

"How do you happen to be here?" he asked shortly.

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"Dr. Kemp took me to see a poor patient of his."

"Dr. Kemp?" surprise raised his eyebrows half an inch.

"Yes."

"Indeed! Then," he continued in cool, biting words, "why didn't he carry his charity a little farther and take you home again?"

"Because I did not choose to go with him," she returned, rearing her head and looking calmly at him as they walked along.

"Bah! What had your wishing or not wishing to do with it? The man knew where he had taken you even if you did not know. This quarter is occupied by nothing but negroes and foreign loafers. It was decidedly ungentlemanly to leave you to return alone at this time of the evening."

"Probably he gave me credit for being able to take care of myself in broad daylight."

"Probably he never gave it a second's thought one way or the other. Hereafter you had better consult your natural protectors before starting out on Quixotic excursions with indifferent strangers."

"Louis!"

She actually stamped her little foot while walking.

"Well?"

"Stop that, please. You are not my keeper."

Her cousin smiled quizzically. They took their seats on the dummy, just as the sun, a golden ball, was about to glide behind Lone Mountain. Late afternoon is a quiet time, and Ruth and Louis did not speak for a while.

The girl was experiencing a whirl of conflicting emotions, --anger at Louis's interference, pleasure at his protecting care, annoyance at what he considered gross negligence on the doctor's part, and a sneaking pride, in defiance of his insinuations, over the thought that Kemp had trusted to her womanliness as a safeguard against any chance annoyance. She also felt ashamed at having showed temper.

"Louis," she ventured finally, rubbing her shoulder against his, as gentle animals conciliate their mates, "I am sorry I spoke so harshly; but it exasperates me to hear you cast slurs, as you have done before, upon Dr. Kemp in his absence."

"Why should it, my dear, since it give you a chance to uphold him?"

There is a way of saying "my dear" that is as mortifying as a slap in the face.

The dark blood surged over the girl's cheeks. She drew a long, hard breath, and then said in a low voice, --

"I think we will not quarrel, Louis. Will you get off at the next corner with me? I have a prescription to be made up at the drug-store."

"Certainly."

If Arnold had showed anger, he was man enough not to be ashamed of it; this is one of man's many lordly rights.

Chapter VII

Mrs. Jules Levice was slowly gaining the high-road to recovery, and many of the restrictions for her cure had been removed. As a consequence, and with an eye ever to Ruth's social duties, she urged her to leave her more and more to herself.

As a matter of course, Ruth had laid the case of Bob and his neighborhood before her father's consideration. A Jewish girl's life is an open page to her family. Matters of small as well as of larger moment are freely discussed. The result is that while it robs her of much of her Christian sister's spontaneity, which often is the latter's greatest charm, it also, through the sagacity of more experienced heads, guards her against many indiscretions. This may be a relic of European training, but it enables parents to instil into the minds of their daughters principles which compare favorable with the American girl's native self-reliance. It was as natural for Ruth to consult her father in this trivial matter, in view of Louis's disapproval, as it would be for her friend, Dorothy Gwynne, to sally anywhere so long as she herself felt justified in so doing.

Ruth really wished to go; and as her father, after considering the matter, could find no objection, she went. After that it was enough to tell her mother that she was going to see Bob. Mrs. Levice had heard the doctor speak of him to Ruth; and any little charity that came in her way she was only too happy to forward.

Bob's plain, ungarnished room soon began to show signs of beauty under Ruth's deft fingers. A pot of mignonette in the window, a small painting of exquisite chrysanthemums on the wall, a daily bunch of fresh roses, were the food she brought for his poet soul. But there were other substantial things.

The day after she had replaced the coarse horse-blanket with a soft down quilt, the doctor made one of his bi-weekly visits to her mother.

As he stood taking leave of Ruth on the veranda, he turned, with his foot on the last step, and looked up at her as if arrested by a sudden thought.

"Miss Levice," said he, "I should like to give you a friendly scolding. May I?"

"How can I prevent you?"

"Well, if I were you I should not indulge Bob's love of luxury as you do. He positively refused to get up yesterday on account of the 'soft feel,' as he termed it, of that quilt. Now, you know, he must get up; he is able to, and in a week I wish to start him in to work again. Then he won't be able to afford such 'soft feels,' and he will rebel. He has had enough coddling for his own good. I really think it is mistaken kindness on your part, Miss Levice."

The girl was leaning lightly against one of the supporting columns. A playful smile parted her lips as she listened."

"Dr. Kemp," she replied, "may I give you a little friendly scolding?"

"You have every right." His tone was somewhat earnest, despite his smiling eyes. A man of thirty-five does not resent a friendly scolding from a winsome young girl.

"Well, don't you think it is rather hard of you to deprive poor Bob of any pleasure to-day may bring, on the ground that to-morrow he may wish it too, and will not be able to have it?"

"As you put it, it does seem so; but I am pugnacious enough to wish you to see it as practically as I do. Put sentiment aside, and the only sensible thing to be done now is to prepare him for the hard, uncushioned facts of an active life."

"But why must it be so hard for him?"

"Why? In the face of the inevitable, that is a time-wasting, useless question. Life is so; even if we find its underlying cause, the discovery will not alter the fact."

"Yes, it will."

"How?"

"By its enabling us to turn our backs on the hard way and seek a softer."

"You forget that strait-jacket to all inclination, --circumstance."

"And are you not forgetting that friendly hands may help to remove the strait-jacket?"

Her lovely face looked very winning, filled with its kindly meaning.

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"Thank you," said he, raising his hat and forgetting to replace it as he spoke; "that is a gentle truth; some day we shall discuss this further. For the present, use your power in getting Bob upon his feet."

"Yes." She gave a hurried glance at the door behind her, and ran quickly down to the lowest step. "Dr. Kemp," said she, a little breathlessly, "I have wished for some time to ask you to let me know when you have any cases that require assistance outside of a physician's, --such as my father or I might lend. You must have a broad field for such opportunities. Will you think of me then, please?"

"I will," he replied, looking with amused pleasure at her flushed face. "Going in for philanthropy, Miss Levice?"

"No; going out for it, thank you;" and she put her hand into his outstretched one. She watched him step into his carriage; he turned and raised his hat again, --a trifling circumstance that Ruth dwelt upon with pleasure; a second glance always presupposes an interested first.

He did not fail to keep his promise; and once on the lookout for "cases" herself, Ruth soon found enough irons in the fire to occupy her spare moments.

Mrs. Levice, however, insisted upon her resuming her place in society.

"A young girl must not withdraw herself from her sphere, or people will either consider her eccentric or will forget her entirely. Don't be unreasonable, Ruth; there is no reason why you should not enjoy every function in our circle, and Louis is always happy to take you. When he asked you if you would go with him to the Art Exhibition on Friday night, I heard you say you did not know. Now why?"

"Oh, that?" I never gave it a second's thought. I promised Father to go with him in the afternoon; I did not consider it worth an explanation."

"But, you see, I did. It looks very queer for Louis to be travelling around by himself; couldn't you go again in the evening with him?"

"Of course, you over-thoughtful aunt. If the pictures are good, a second visit will not be thrown away, --that is, if Louis is really anxious for my companionship. But, 'I doubt it, I doubt it, I do.'"

"What nonsense!" returned her mother, somewhat testily. "Why shouldn't he be? You are always amiable together, are you not?"

"Well," she said, knitting her brows and pursing her lips drolly, "that, methinks, depends on the limits and requirements of amiability. If disputation showeth a friendly spirit, then is my lord overfriendly; for it oft hath seemed of late to pleasure his mood to wax disputation, though, in sooth, lady fair, I have always maintained a wary and decorous demeanor."

"I can imagine," laughed her mother, a little anxiously; "then you will go?"

"Why not?"

If Arnold really cared for the outcome of such manoeuvres, Mrs. Levice's exertions bore some fruit.

Chapter VIII

There are few communities, comparatively speaking, with more enthusiastic theatre-lovers than are to be found in San Francisco. The play was one of the few worldly pleasures that Mr. Levice thoroughly enjoyed. When a great star was heralded, he was in a feverish delight until it had come and gone. When Bernhardt appeared, the quiet little man fully earned the often indiscriminately applied title of "crazy Frenchman." A Frenchman is never so much one as when confronted in a foreign land with a great French creation; every fibre in his body answers each charm with an appreciation worked to fever-heat by patriotic love; at such times the play of his emotions precludes any idea of reason to an onlooker. Bernhardt was one of Levice's passions. Booth was another, though he took him more composedly. The first time the latter appeared at the Baldwin (his opening play was "Hamlet") the Levices—that is, Ruth and her father—went three times in succession to witness his matchless performance, and every succeeding characterization but strengthened their enthusiasm.

Booth was coming again. The announcement had been rapturously hailed by the Levices.

"It will be impossible for us to go together, Father," Ruth remarked at the breakfast-table. "Louis will have to take me on alternate nights, while you stay at home with Mamma; did you hear, Louis?"

"You will hardly need to do that," answered Arnold, lowering his cup; "if you and your father prefer going together, I shall enjoy staying with your mother on those nights."

"Thanks for the offer—and your evident delight in my company," laughed Ruth; "but there is one play at which you must submit to the infliction of my presence. Don't you remember we always wished to see the 'Merchant of Venice' and judge for ourselves his interpretation of the character? Well, I am determined that we shall see it together."

"When does he play it?"

"A week from Saturday night."

"Sorry to disappoint you, but I shall be out of town at the end of next week."

"Oh, dear? Honestly? Can't you put it off? I want so much to go."

"Impossible. Go with your father."

"You know very well neither of us would go off and leave Mamma alone at night. It is horrid of you to go. I am sure you could manage differently if—"

"Why, my child!"

She was actually pouting; and her father's quiet tone of surprised reprimand just headed off two great tears that threatened to fall.

"I know," she said, trying to smile, and showing an April face instead; "but I had just set my heart on going, and with Louis too."

"That comes of being a spoilt only child," put in Arnold, suavely. "You ought to know by this time that of the many plans we make with ourselves, nine out of ten come to nought. Before you set your heart on a thing, be sure you will not have to give it up."

Ruth, still sore with disappointment, acknowledged this philosophic remark with a curled lip.

"There, save your tears for something more worthy," cut in Levice, briskly; "if you care so much about it, we or chance must arrange it as you wish."

But chance in this instance was not propitious. Wednesday came, and Arnold saw no way of accommodating her. He left town after taking her to see the "Fool's Revenge" as a sort of substitution.

"You seemed to be enjoying the poor Fool's troubles last night," observed Dr. Kemp, in the morning; they were still standing in Mrs. Levice's room.

"I? Not enjoying his troubles; I enjoyed Booth, though, --if you can call it enjoyment when your heart is ready to break for him. Were you there? I did not see you."

"No, I don't suppose you did, or you would have been in the pitiable condition of the princess who had her head turned. I sat directly back of your box, in the dress-circle. Then you like Booth?"

"Take care! That is a dangerous subject with my family," broke in Mrs. Levice. "Ruth has actually exhausted every adjective in her admiration vocabulary. The last extravaganza I heard from her on that theme was after she

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had seen him as Brutus; she wished herself Lucius, that in the tent scene she might kiss Booth's hand."

"It sounds gushing enough for a school-girl now," laughed Ruth merrily, looking up at the doctor; "but at the time I meant it."

"Have you seen him in all his impersonations?" he asked.

"In everything but 'Shylock.'"

"You will have a chance for that on Saturday night. It will be a great farewell performance."

"Undoubtedly, but I shall have to forego that last glimpse of him."

"Now, Doctor," cried Mrs. Levice, "will you please impress it on her that I am not a lunatic and can be left alone without fear? She wishes to go Saturday night, but refuses to go with her father on the ground that I shall be left alone, as Mr. Arnold is out of town. Is not that being unnecessarily solicitous?"

"Without doubt. But," he added, turning deferentially to Ruth, "in lieu of a better escort, how would I do, Miss Levice?"

"I do not understand."

"Will you come with me Saturday night to see 'Shylock'?"

To be candid, Ruth was embarrassed. The doctor had said neither "will you honor me" nor "will you please me," but he had both pleased and honored her. She turned a pair of radiant eyes to her mother. "Come now, Mrs. Levice," laughed Kemp, noting the action, "will you allow your little girl to go with me? Do not detain me with a refusal; it will be impossible to accept one now, and I shall not be around till then, you know. Good-morning."

Unwittingly, the doctor had caused an excitement in the hearts both of mother and daughter. The latter was naturally surprised at his unexpected invitation, but surprise was soon obliterated by another and quite different feeling, which she kept rigorously to herself. Mrs. Levice was in a dilemma about it, and consulted her husband in the evening.

"By all means, let her go," replied he; "why should you have had any misgivings about it? I am sure I am glad she is going."

"But, Jules, you forget that none of our Jewish friends allow their girls to go out with strangers."

"Is that part of our religion?"

"No; but custom is in itself a religion. People do talk so at every little innovation against convention."

"What will they say? Nothing detrimental either to Ruth or the doctor. Pshaw, Esther! You ought to feel proud that Dr. Kemp has asked the child. If she wishes to go, don't set an impossible bogey in the way of her enjoyment. Besides, you do not care to appear so silly as you would if you said to the doctor, 'I can't let her go on account of people's tongues,' and that is the only honest excuse you can offer." So in his manly, practical way he decided it.

On Saturday night Ruth stood in the drawing-room buttoning her pale suede glove. Kemp had not yet come in. She looked unusually well in her dull sage-green gown. A tiny toque of the same color rested on her soft dark hair. The creamy pallor of her face, the firm white throat revealed by the broad rolling collar, her grave lips and dreamy eyes, hardly told that she was feeling a little shy. Presently the bell rang, and Kemp came in, his open topcoat revealing his evening dress beneath. He came forward hastily.

"I am a little late," he said, taking her hand, "but it was unavoidable. Ten minutes to eight," looking at his watch; "the horses must make good time."

"It is slightly chilly to-night, is it not?" asked Ruth, for want of something better to say as she turned for her wrap.

"I did not feel it," he replied, intercepting her. "But this furry thing will keep the cold off, if there is any," he continued, as he held it for her, and quite unprofessionally bent his head to hook it at her throat. A strange sensation shot through Ruth as his face approached so close her own.

"How are your mother and father?" He asked, holding the door open, while she turned for her fan, thus concealing a slight embarrassment.

"They are as usual," she answered. "Father expects to see you after the play. You will come in for a little supper, will you not?"

"That sounds alluring," he responded lightly, his quick eye remarking, as she came toward him, the dainty femininity of her loveliness, that seemed to have caught a grace beyond the reach of art.

It thus happened that they took their places just as the curtain rose.

Chapter IX

Everybody remembers the sad old comedy, as differently interpreted in its graver sentiment as there are different interpreters. Ruth had seen one who made of Shylock merely a fawning, mercenary, loveless, blood-thirsty wretch. She had seen another who presented a man of quick wit, ready tongue, great dignity, greater vengeance, silent of love, wordy of hate. Booth, without throwing any romantic glamour on the Jew, showed him as God and man, but mostly man, had made him: an old Jew, grown bitter in the world's disfavor through fault of race; grown old in strife for the only worldly power vouchsafed him, —gold; grown old with but one human love to lighten his hard existence; a man who, at length, shorn of his two loves through the same medium that robbed him of his manly birthright, now turned fiend, endeavors with tooth and nail to wreak the smouldering vengeance of a lifetime upon the chance representative of an inexorable persecution.

All through the performance Ruth sat a silent, attentive listener. Kemp, with his ready laugh at Gratiano's sallies, would turn a quick look at her for sympathy; he was rather surprised at the grave, unsmiling face beside him. When, however, the old Jew staggered alone and almost blindly from the triumphantly smiling court-room, a little pinch on his arm decidedly startled him.

He lowered his glass and turned round on her so suddenly that Ruth started.

"Oh," she faltered, "I—I beg your pardon; I had forgotten you were not Louis."

"I do not mind in the least," he assured her easily.

The last act passes merrily and quickly; only the severe, great things of life move slowly.

As the doctor and Ruth made their way through the crowded lobby, the latter thought she had never seen so many acquaintances, each of whom turned an interested look at her stalwart escort. Of this she was perfectly aware, but the same human interest with which Kemp's acquaintances regarded her passed by her unnoticed.

A moment later they were in the fresh, open air.

"How beautiful it is!" said Ruth, looking up at the stars. "The wind has entirely died away."

"On such a night," quoth Kemp, as they approached the curb, "a closed carriage seems out of season."

"And reason," supplemented Ruth, while the doctor opened the door rather slowly. She glanced at him hesitatingly.

"Would you—" she began.

"Right! I would!" The door was banged to.

"John," he said, looking up at his man in the box, "take this trap round to the stable; I shall not need the horses again to-night."

John touched his hat, and Kemp drew his companion's little hand through his arm.

"Well," he said, as they turned the corner, "Were you satisfied with the great man to-night?"

"Yes," she replied meditatively, "fully; there was no exaggeration, —it was all quite natural."

"Except Jessica in boy's clothes."

"Don't mention her, please; I detest her."

"And yet she spoke quite prettily on the night."

"I did not hear her."

"Why, where were you while all the world was making merry on the stage?"

"Not with them; I was with the weary, heart-broken old man who passed out when joy began."

"Ah! I fancied you did not half appreciate Gratiano's jesting. Miss Levice, I am afraid you allow the sorry things of life to take too strong a hold on you. It is not right. I assure you for every tear there is a laugh, and you must learn to forget the former in the latter."

"I am sorry," replied Ruth, quite sadly; "but I fear I cannot learn that, —tears are always stronger than laughter. How could I listen to the others' nonsense when my heart was sobbing with that lonely old man? Forgive me, but I cannot forget him."

They walked along silently for some time. Instinctively, each felt the perfect accord with which they kept step. Ruth's little ear was just about on a level with the doctor's chin. He hardly felt the soft touch of her hand upon his sleeve; but as he looked at the white profile of her cheek against the dark fur of her collar, the knowledge that she

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was there was a pleasing one.

"Did you consider the length of our walk when you fell in with my desire?" he asked presently.

"I like a long walk in pleasant weather; I never tire of walking."

"You have found the essentials of a good pedestrian, --health and strength."

"Yes; if everybody were like me, all your skill would be thrown away, --I am never ill."

"Apparently there is no reason why you should be, with common-sense to back your blessings. If common-sense could be bought at the drug-store, I should be rid of a great many patients."

"That reminds me of a snatch of conversation I once overheard between my mother and a doctor's wife. I am reminded of it because the spirit of your meaning is diametrically opposed to her own. After some talk my mother asked, 'And how is the doctor?' 'Oh,' replied the visitor, with a long sigh, 'he's well enough in body, but he's blue, terribly blue; everybody is so well, you know.'"

"Her sentiment was more human than humane," laughed Kemp. He was glad to see that she had roused herself from her sad musings; but a certain set purpose he had formed robbed him now of his former lightness of manner.

He was about to broach a subject that required delicate handling; but an intuitive knowledge of the womanly character of the young girl aided him much. It was not so much what he had seen her do as what he knew she was, that led him to begin his recital.

"We have a good many blocks before us yet," he said, "and I am going to tell you a little story. Why don't you take the full benefit of my arm? There," he proceeded, drawing her hand farther through his arm, "now you feel more like a big girl than like a bit of thistledown. If I get tiresome, just call 'time,' will you?"

"All right," she laughed. She was beginning to meet halfway this matter-of-fact, unadorned, friendly manner of his; and when she did meet it, she felt a comfortable security in it. From the beginning to the end of his short narrative he looked straight ahead.

"How shall I begin? Do you like fairy tales? Well, this is the soul of one without the fictional wings. Once upon a time, --I think that is the very best introduction extant, --a woman was left a widow with one little girl. She lived in New Orleans, where the blow of her husband's death and the loss of her good fortune came almost simultaneously. She must have had little moral courage, for as soon as she could, she left her home, not being able to bear the inevitable falling off of friends that follows loss of fortune. She wandered over the intermediate States between here and Louisiana, stopping nowhere long, but endeavoring to keep together the bodies and souls of herself and child by teaching. They kept this up for years until the mother succumbed. They were on the way from Nevada to Los Angeles when she died. The daughter, then not eighteen, went on to Los Angeles, where she buried her mother, and endeavored to continue teaching as she had been doing. She was young, unsophisticated, sad, and in want in a strange town. She applied for advice to a man highly honored and recommended by his fellow-citizens. The man played the brute. The girl fled--anywhere. Had she been less brave, she would have fled from herself. She came to San Francisco and took a position as nurse-girl; children, she thought, could not play her false, and she might outlive it. The hope was cruel. She was living near my home, had seen my sign probably, and in the extremity of her distress came to me. There is a good woman who keeps a lodging-house, and who delights in doing me favors. I left the poor child in her hands, and she is now fully recovered. As a physician I can do no more for her, and yet melancholy has almost made a wreck of her. Nothing I say has any effect; all she answers is, 'It isn't worth while.' I understand her perfectly, but I wished to infuse into her some of her old spirit of independence. This morning I asked her if she intended to let herself drift on in this way. I may have spoken a little more harshly than necessary, for my words broke down completely the wall of dogged silence she had built around herself. 'Oh, sir,' she cried, weeping like the child she is, 'what can I do? Can I dare to take little children by the hand, stained as I am? Can I go as an impostor where, if people knew, they would snatch their loved ones from me? Oh, it would be too wretched!' I tried to remonstrate with her, told her that the lily in the dust is no less a lily than is her spotless sister held high above contamination. She looked at me miserably from her tear-stained face, and then said, 'Men may think so, but women don't; a stain with them is ignoble whether made by one's self or another. No woman knowing my story would think me free from dishonor, and hold out her clean hands to me.' 'Plenty,' I contradicted. 'Maybe,' she said humbly; 'but what would it mean? The hand would be held out at arm's length by women safe in their position, who would not fail to show me how debased they think me. I am young yet; can you show me a girl, like myself in years, but white as snow, kept safe from contamination, as you say, who, knowing my story, would hold out her hand to me and not feel herself

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besmirched by the contact? Do not say you can, for I know you cannot.' She was crying so violently that she would not listen to me. When I left her, I myself could think of none of my young friends to whom I could propound the question. I know many sweet, kind girls, but I could count not one among them all who in such a case would be brave as she was womanly--until I thought of you."

Complete silence followed his words. He did not turn his glance from the street ahead of him. He had made no appeal, would make none, in fact. He had told the story with scarcely a reflection on its impropriety, that would have arrested another man from introducing such an element into his gentle fellowship with a girl like Ruth. His lack of hesitancy was born of his manly view of the outcast's blamelessness, of her dire necessity for help, and of a premonition that Ruth Levice would be as free from the artificiality of conventional surface modesty as was he, through the earnestness of the undertaking.

There is something very sweet to a woman in being singled out by a man for some ennobling virtue. Ruth felt this so strongly that she could almost hear her heart beat with the intoxicating knowledge. No question had been asked, but she felt an answer was expected. Yet had her life depended on it, the words could not have come at that moment. Was she indeed what he esteemed her? Unconsciously Dr. Kemp had, in thought, placed her on a pedestal. Did she deserve the high place he had given her, or would she?

With many women the question would have been, did she care for Dr. Kemp's good opinion? Now, though Ruth was indeed put on her mettle, her quick sympathy had been instantly touched by the girl's miserable story. Perhaps the doctor's own feelings had influenced her, but had the girl stood before her at the moment, she would have seized her hand with all her own gentle nobility of soul.

As they turned the corner of the block where Ruth's house stood, Kemp said deliberately, --

"Well?"

"I thank you. Where does she live?"

Her quiet, natural tone told nothing of the tumult of sweet thoughts within. They had reached the house, and the doctor opened the gate before he answered. When he did, after they had passed through, he took both her hands in his.

"I shall take you there," he said, looking down at her with grave, smiling eyes; "I knew you would not fail me. When shall I call for you?"

"Do not call for me at all; I think—I know it will be better for me to walk in alone, as of my own accord."

"Ah, yes!" he said, and told her the address. She ran lightly up the steps, and as he turned her key in the door for her, she raised a pair of starry eyes to his.

"Dr. Kemp," she said, "I have had an exceptionally lovely evening. I shall not soon forget it."

"Nor I," he returned, raising his hat; holding it in his hand, he gently raised her gloved hand to his lips. Herbert Kemp was a gentleman of the old school in his manner of showing reverence to women.

"My brave young friend!" he said; and the next minute his firm footfall was crunching the gravel of the walk. Neither of them had remembered that he was to have come in with her. She waited till the gate clicked behind him, and then softly closed the heavy door.

"My brave young friend!" The words mounted like wine to her head. She forgot her surroundings and stood in a sweet dream in the hall, slowly unbuttoning her glove. She must have remained in this attitude for five minutes, when, raising her eyes, still shadowy with thought, she saw her cousin before her down the hall, his arm resting on the newel-post.

"Louis!" she cried in surprise; and without considering, she hurried to him, threw her arm around his neck, and kissed him on the cheek. Arnold, taken by storm, stepped slightly back.

"When did you get home?" she asked, the pale rose-flush that mantled her cheeks making her face exquisite.

"A half an hour ago."

She looked at him quickly.

"Are you tired, Louis?" she inquired gently. "You are somewhat pale, and you speak in that way."

"Did you enjoy the play?" he asked quietly, passing by her remarks.

"The play!" she echoed, and then a quick burning blush suffused her face. The epilogue had wholly obliterated the play from her recollection.

"Oh, of course," she responded, turning from the rather sardonic smile of his lips and seating herself on the stairs; "do you want to hear about it now?"

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"Why not?"

"Well," she began, laying her gloves in her lap and snuggling her chin in the palms of her hands, "shall I tell you how I felt about it? In the first place, I was not ashamed of Shylock; if his vengeance was distorted, the cause distorted it. But, oh, Louis, the misery of that poor old man! After all, his punishment was as fiendish as his guilt. Booth was great. I wish you could have seen the play of his wonderful eyebrow and the eloquence of his fine hand. Poor old, lonely Shylock! With all his intellect, how could he regret that wretched little Jessica?"

"He was a Jewish father."

"How singularly you say that! Of course he was a Jew; but Jewish hardly describes him, --at least, according to the modern idea. Are you coming up?"

"Yes. Go on; I will lower the gas."

"Wouldn't you like something to eat or drink? You look so worn out; let me get you something."

"Thanks; I have dined. Good-night." The girl passed on to her pretty white and gold room. Shylock had again fled from her memory, but there was singing in her heart a deep, grave voice saying, --

"My brave young friend!"

Chapter X

"A humble bard presents his respects to my Lady Marechal Niel, and begs her to step down to the gate for about two minutes."

The note was handed to Ruth early the next morning as she stood in the kitchen beating up eggs for an omelette for her mother's breakfast. A smile of mingled surprise and amusement overspread her face as she read; instinctively turning the card, she saw, "Herbert Kemp, M. D., " in simple lithograph.

"Do I look all right, Mary?" she asked hurriedly, placing the bowl on the table and half turning to the cook as she walked to the door. Mary deliberately placed both hands on her hips and eyed her sharply.

"And striped flannel dresses and hairs in braids," she began, as she always did, as if continuing a thought, "being nice, pretty flannel and nice, pretty braids, Miss Ruth do look sweet-like, which is nothing out of the common, for she always do!"

The last was almost shouted after Ruth, who had run from the cook's prolixity.

As she hurried down the walk, she recognized the doctor's carriage, containing the doctor himself with Bob in state beside him. Two hands went up to two respective hats as the gate swung behind her, and she advanced with hand extended to Bob.

"You are looking much better," she exclaimed heartily, shaking the rather bashfully outstretched hand; "your first outing, is it not?"

"Yes, lady." It had been impossible for her to make him call her by name.

"He elected to pay his first devoirs to the Queen of Roses, as he expressed it," spoke up Kemp, with his disengaged hand on the boy's shoulder, and looking with a puzzled expression at Ruth. Last night she had been a young woman; this morning she was a young girl; it was only after he had driven off that he discovered the cause lay in the arrangement of her hair.

"Thank you, Bob; presently I expect to have you paying me a visit on foot, when we can come to a clearer understanding about my flower-beds."

"He says," returned the boy, turning an almost humbly devoted look on Kemp, "that I must not think of gardening for some weeks. And so--and so--"

"Yes?"

"And so," explained the doctor, briskly, "he is going to hold my reins on our rounds, and imbibe a world of sunshine to expend on some flowers--yours or mine, perhaps--by and by."

Bob's eyes were luminous with feeling as they rested on the dark, bearded face of his benefactor.

"Now say all you have to say, and we'll be off," said Kemp, tucking in the robe at Bob's side.

"I didn't have anything to say, sir; I came only to let her know."

"And I am so glad, Bob," said Ruth, smiling up into the boy's shy, speaking eyes. People always will try to add to the comfort of a convalescent, and Ruth, in turn, drew down the robe over the lad's hands. As she did so, her cousin, Jennie Lewis, passed hurriedly by. Her quick blue eyes took in to a detail the attitudes of the trio.

"Good-morning, Jennie," said Ruth, turning; "are you coming in?"

"Not now," bowing stiffly and hurrying on.

"Cabbage-rose."

Bob delivered himself of this sentiment as gently as if he had let fall a pearl.

The doctor gave a quick look at Ruth, which she met, smiling.

"He cannot help his inspiration," she remarked easily, and stepped back as the doctor pulled the reins.

"Come again, Bob," she called, and with a smile to Kemp she ran in.

"And I was going to say," continued Mary, as she re-entered the kitchen, "that a speck of aig splashed on your cheek, Miss Ruth."

"Oh, Mary, where?"

"But not knowin' that you would see anybody, I didn't think to run after you; so it's just this side your mouth, like if you hadn't wiped it good after breakfast."

Ruth rubbed it off, wondering with vexation if the doctor had noticed it. Truth to say, the doctor had noticed

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it, and naturally placed the same passing construction on it that Mary had suggested. Not that the little yellow splash occupied much of his attention. When he drove off, all he thought of Ruth's appearance was that her braided hair hung gracefully and heavily down her back; that she looked young, --decidedly young and missish; and that he had probably spoken indiscreetly and impulsively to the wrong person on a wrong subject the night before.

Dress has a subtle influence upon our actions: one gown can make a romp, another a princess, another a boor, another a sparkling coquette, out of the same woman. The female mood is susceptibly sympathetic to the fitness or unfitness of dress. Now, Ruth was without doubt the same girl who had so earnestly and sympathetically heard the doctor's unconventional story; but the fashion of her gown had changed the impression she had made a few hours back.

An hour later, and Dr. Kemp could not have failed to recognize Ruth, the woman of his confidence. Something, perhaps a dormant spirit of worldliness, kept her from disclosing to her mother the reason of her going out. She herself felt no shame or doubt as to the advisability of her action; but the certain knowledge of her mother's disapproval of such a proceeding restrained the disclosure which, of a surety, would have cost her the non-fulfilment of a kindly act. A bit of subterfuge which hurts no one is often not only excusable, but commendable. Besides, it saved her mother an annoying controversy; and so, fully satisfied as to her part, Ruth took her way down the street. The question as to whether the doctor had gone beyond the bounds of their brief acquaintance had of course been presented to her mind; but if a slight flush came into her face when she remembered the nature of the narrative and the personality of the narrator, it was quickly banished by the sweet assurance that in this way he had honored her beyond the reach of current flattery.

A certain placid strength possessed her and showed in her grave brown eyes; with her whole heart and soul she wished to do this thing, and she longed to do it well. Her purpose robbed her of every trace of nervousness; and it was a sweet-faced young woman who gently knocked at room Number 10 on the second floor of a respectable lodging-house on Polk Street.

Receiving no answer to her knock, she repeated it somewhat more loudly. At this a tired voice called, "Come in."

She turned the knob, which yielded to her touch, and found herself in a small, well-lighted, and neat room. Seated in an armchair near the window, but with her back toward it, was what on first view appeared to be a golden-haired child in black; one elbow rested on the arm of the chair, and a childish hand supported the flower-like head. As Ruth hesitated after closing the door behind her, she found a pair of listless violet eyes regarding her from a small white face.

"Well?" queried the girl, without changing her position except to allow her gaze to travel to the floor.

"You are Miss Rose Delano?" said Ruth, as she came a step nearer.

"What of that?" Asked the girl, lifelessly, her dull eyes wandering everywhere but to the face of her strange interlocutor.

"I am Ruth Levice, a friend of Dr. Kemp. Will that introduction be enough to make you shake hands with me?"

She advanced toward her, holding out her hand. A burning flame shot across Rose Delano's face, and she shrank farther back among her pillows.

"No," she said, putting up a repellent hand; "it is not enough. Do not touch me, or you will regret it. You must not, I say." She arose quickly from her chair and stood at bay, regarding Ruth. The latter, taller than she by head and shoulders, looked down at her smiling.

"I know no reason why I must not," she replied gently.

"You do not know me."

"No; but I know of you."

"Then why did you come; why don't you go?" The blue eyes looked with passionate resentment at her.

"Because I have come to see you; because I wish to shake hands with you."

"Why?"

"Why?"

"Why do you wish to do that?"

"Because I wish to be your friend. May we not be friends? I am not much older than you, I think."

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"You are centuries younger. Who sent you here? Dr. Kemp?"

"No one sent me; I came of my own free will."

"Then go as you came."

"No."

She stood gracefully and quietly before her. Rose Delano moved farther from her, as if to escape her grave brown eyes.

"You do not know what you are doing," cried the girl, excitedly; "have you no father or mother, no one to tell you what a girl should not do?"

"I have both; but I have also a friend, --Dr. Kemp."

"He is my friend too," affirmed Rose, tremulously.

"Then we have one good thing in common; and since he is my friend and yours, why should we not be friends?"

"Because he is a man, and you are a woman. He has then told you my story?"

"Yes."

"And you feel yourself unharmed in coming here--to such a creature as I?"

"I feel nothing but pity for you; I do not blame you. But, oh, little one, I do so grieve for you because you won't believe that the world is not all merciless. Come, give me your hand."

"No," she said, clasping her hands behind her and retreating as the other advanced; "go away, please. You are very good, but you are very foolish. Bad as I am, however, I shall not let you harm yourself more; leave my room, please."

"Not till I have held your hands in mine."

"Stop! I tell you I don't want you to come here; I don't want your friendship. Can't you go now, or are you afraid that your sweetheart will upbraid you if you fail to carry out his will?"

"My sweetheart?" she asked in questioning wonder.

"Yes; only a lover could make a girl like you so forget herself. I speak of Dr. Kemp."

"But he is not my lover," she stated, still speaking gently, but with a pale face turned to her companion.

"I--I--beg your pardon," faltered the girl, humbly drooping her head, shamed by the cold pride in her tormentor's face; "but why, oh, why, then, won't you go?" she continued, wildly sobbing. "I assure you it is best."

"This is best," said Ruth, deliberately; and before Rose knew it she had seized her two hands, and unclasping them from behind her, drew them to her own breast.

"Now," she said, holding them tightly, "who is the stronger, you or I?" She looked pleasantly down at the tear-stained face so close to hers.

"O God!" breathed the girl, her storm-beaten eyes held by the power of her captor's calmness.

"Now we are friends," said Ruth, softly, "shall we sit down and talk?"

Still holding the slender hands, she drew up a chair, and seating the frail girl in the armchair, sat down beside her.

"Oh, wait!" whispered Rose; "let me tell you everything before you make me live again."

"I know everything; and truly, Rose, nothing you can say could make me wish to befriend you less."

"How nobly, how kindly he must have told you!"

"Hush! He told me nothing but the truth. To me you are a victim, not a culprit. And now, tell me, do you feel perfectly strong?"

"Oh, yes." The little hand swept in agony over her sad, childish face.

"Then you ought to go out for a nice walk. You have no idea how pleasant it is this morning."

"I can't, indeed I can't! and, oh, why should I?"

"You can and you must, because you must go to work soon."

Two frightened eyes were raised to hers.

"Yes," she added, patting the hand she held; "you are a teacher, are you not?"

"I was," she replied, the catch in her voice still audible.

"What are you used to teaching?"

"Spanish, and English literature."

"Spanish--with your blue eyes!" The sudden outburst of surprise sent a faint April-like beam into Rose's

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face.

"Si, Señorita."

"Then you must teach me. Let me see. Wednesdays, --Wednesday afternoon, yes?"

Again the frightened eyes appealed to her; but Ruth ignored them.

"And so many of my friends would like to speak Spanish. Will you teach them too?"

"Oh, Miss Levice, how can I go with such a past?"

"I tell you," said Ruth, proudly rearing her head, "if I introduce you as my friend, you are, you must be, presentable."

The pale lips strove to answer her.

"To-morrow I shall come with a number of names of girls who are 'dying,' as they say, to speak Spanish, and then you can go and make arrangements with them. Will you?"

Thus pushed to the wall, Rose's tear-filled eyes were her only answer.

Ruth's own filled in turn.

"Dear little Rose," she said, her usual sweet voice coming back to her, "won't it be lovely to do this? You will feel so much better when you once get out and are earning your independent, pleasant living again. And now will you forgive me for having been so harsh?"

"Forgive you!" A red spot glowed on each pallid cheek; she raised her eyes and said with simple fervor, "I would die for you."

"No, but you may live for me," laughed Ruth, rising; "will you promise me to go out this morning, just for a block or two?"

"I promise you."

"Well, then, good-by." She held out her hand meaningfully; a little fluttering one was placed in hers, and Ruth bent and kissed the wistful mouth. That pure kiss would have wiped out every stain from Rose's worshipping soul.

"I shall see you to-morrow surely," she called back, turning a radiant face to the lonely little figure in the doorway. She felt deliriously happy as she ran down the stairs; her eyes shone like stars; a buoyant joyfulness spoke in her step.

"It is so easy to be happy when one has everything," she mused. She forgot to add, "And gives much." There is so much happiness derived from a kind action that were it not for the motive, charity might be called supreme selfishness.

Chapter XI.

She told her mother in a few words at luncheon that she had arranged to take Spanish lessons from a young protege of Dr. Kemp, who had been ill and was in want.

"And I was thinking," she added with naive policy, "that I might combine a little business with pleasure this afternoon, --pay off some of those ever urgent calls you accuse me of outlawing, and at the same time try to get up a class of pupils for Miss Delano. What do you think?"

"That would be nice; don't forget Mrs. Bunker. I know you don't like her, but you must pay a call for the musical which we did not attend; and she has children who might like to learn Spanish. I wonder if I could take lessons too; it would not be exciting, and I am not yet so old but I may learn."

"You might ask the doctor. He has almost dismissed himself now; and after we get back from the country perhaps Jennie would join us two in a class. Mother and daughter can then go to school together."

"It is very fortunate," Mrs. Levice observed pensively, sipping her necessary glass of port, "that C_ sent your hat this morning to wear with your new gown. Isn't it?"

"Fortunate!" Ruth exclaimed, laughing banteringly; "it is destiny."

So Mrs. Levice slipped easily into Ruth's plan from a social standpoint, and Ruth slipped out, trim and graceful, from her mother's artistic manipulations.

Meanwhile Mrs. Levice intended writing some delayed letters till her husband's return, which promised to be early in the afternoon.

She had just about settled herself at her desk when Jennie Lewis came bustling in. Mrs. Lewis always brought in a sense of importance; one looked upon her presence with that exhilarating feeling with which one anticipates the latest number of a society journal.

"Go right on with your writing, Aunt Esther," she said after they had exchanged greetings. "I have brought my work, so I shall not mind the quiet in the least."

"As if I would bore you in that way!" returned Mrs. Levice, with a laughing glance at her, as she closed her desk. "Lay off your things, and let us have a downright comfortable afternoon. Don't forget a single sensation; I am actually starving for one."

Mrs. Lewis smiled grimly as she fluffed up her bang with her hat-pin. She drew up a second cosey rocking-chair near her aunt's, drew out her needle and crochet-work, and as the steel hook flashed in and out, her tongue soon acquired its accustomed momentum.

"Where is Ruth?" she began, winding her thread round her chubby, ring-bedecked finger.

"She is paying off some calls for a change."

"Indeed! Got down to conventionality again?" "You would not call her unconventional, would you?"

"Oh, well; every one has a right to an opinion."

Mrs. Levice glanced at her inquiringly. Without doubt there was an underground mine beneath this non-committal remark. Mrs. Lewis rocked violently backward and forward without raising her eyes. Her face was beet-red, and it looked as if an explosion were imminent. Mrs. Levice waited with no little speculation as to what act of Ruth her cousin disapproved of so obviously. She like Jennie; every one who knew her recognized her sterling good heart; but almost every one who knew her agreed that a grain of flour was a whole cake, baked and iced, to Mrs. Lewis's imagination, and these airy comfits were passed around promiscuously to whoever was on hand. Not a sound broke the portentous silence but the decided snap with which Mrs. Lewis pulled her needle through, and the hurricane she raised with her rocking.

"I was at the theatre last night."

The blow drew no blood.

"Which theatre?" asked Mrs. Levice, innocently.

"The Baldwin; Booth played the 'Merchant of Venice.'"

"Did you enjoy it?" queried her aunt, either evading or failing to perceive the meaning.

"I did." A pause, and then, "Did Ruth?"

Mrs. Levice saw a flash of daylight, but her answer hinted at no perturbation.

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"Very much. Booth is her actor-idol, you know."

"So I have heard." She spread her crochet work on her knee as if measuring its length, then with striking indifference picked it up again and adjusted her needle, --

"She came in rather late, didn't she?"

"Did she?" questioned Mrs. Levice, parrying with enjoyment the indirect thrusts. "I did not know; had the curtain risen?"

"No; there was plenty of time for every one to recognize her."

"I had no idea she was so well known."

"Those who did not know her, knew her escort. Dr. Kemp is well known, and his presence is naturally remarked."

"Yes; his appearance is very striking."

"Aunt Esther!" The vehemence of Mrs. Lewis's feelings sent her ball of cotton rolling to the other end of the room.

"My dear, what is it?" Mrs. Levice turned a pair of bright, interested eyes on her niece.

"You know very well what I wish to say: everybody wondered to see Ruth with Dr. Kemp."

"Why?"

"Because every one knows that she never goes out with any gentleman but Uncle or Louis, and we all were surprised. The Hoffmans sat behind us, and Miss Hoffman leaned forward to ask what it meant. I met several acquaintances this morning who had been there, and each one made some remark about Ruth. One said, 'I had no idea the Levinces were so intimate with Dr. Kemp;' another young girl laughed and said, 'Ruth Levice had a swell escort last night, didn't she?' Still another asked, 'Anything on the tapis in your family, Mrs. Lewis?' And what could I say?"

"What did you say?"

Mrs. Levice's quiet tone did not betray her vexation. She had feared just such a little disturbance from the Jewish community, but her husband's views had overruled hers, and she was now bound to uphold his. Nevertheless, she hated anything of the kind.

"I simply said I knew nothing at all about it, except that he was your physician. Even if I had known, I wouldn't have said more."

"There is no more to be said. Dr. Kemp and Ruth have become friendly through their mutual interest in several poor patients; and in the course of conversation one morning he heard that Ruth was anxious to see this play, and had no escort. So he asked her, and her father saw no objection to her going. It is a pity she didn't think to hand round a written explanation to her different Jewish friends in the theatre."

"There you go, Aunt Esther! Jewish friends! I am sure that no matter how indifferent Uncle is to such things, you must remember that our Jewish girls never go alone to the theatre with any one outside of the family, and certainly not with a Christian."

"What has that to do with it, so long as he is a gentleman?"

"Nothing. Only I didn't think you cared to have Ruth's name coupled with one."

"No, nor with any one. But as I cannot control people's tongues--"

"Then I would not give them cause for wagging. Aunt Esther, is there anything between Ruth and Dr. Kemp?"

"Jennie, you surprise and anger me. Do you know what you insinuate?"

"I can't help it. Either you are crazy, or ignorant of what is going on, and I consider it my duty to enlighten you," --a gossip's duties are all away from home, --"unless, of course, you prefer to remain in blissful or wilful ignorance."

"Speak out, please."

"Of course I knew you must have sanctioned her going last night, though, I must confess, I still think you did very wrongly; but do you know where she went this morning?"

Mrs. Levice was put out. She was enough of a Jewess to realize that if you dislike Jewish comment, you must never step out of the narrowly conventional Jewish pathway. That Ruth, her only daughter, should be the subject of vulgar bandying was more bitter than wormwood to her; but that her own niece could come with these wild conjectures incensed her beyond endurance.

"I do know," she said in response to the foregoing question. "Ruth is not a sneak, --she tells me everything;

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but her enterprises are so mild that there would be no harm if she left them untold. She called on a poor young girl who, after a long illness, desires pupils in Spanish."

"A friend of Dr. Kemp."

"Exactly."

"A young girl, unmarried, who, a few weeks ago, through a merciful fate, lost her child at its birth."

The faint flush on Mrs. Levice's cheek receded.

"Who told you this?" she questioned in an even, low voice.

"I thought you could not know. Mrs. Blake, the landlady where the girl lives, told me."

"And how, pray, do you connect Ruth with this girl?"

"I will tell you. Mrs. Blake does my white sewing. I was there this morning; and just as I went into her room, I saw Ruth leaving another farther down the hall. Naturally I asked Mrs. Blake who had the room, and she told me the story."

"Naturally." The cutting sarcasm drove the blood to Mrs. Lewis's face.

"For me it was; and in this case," she retorted with rising accents, "my vulgar curiosity had its vulgar reward. I heard a scandalous account of the girl whom my cousin was visiting, and, outside of Dr. Kemp, Ruth is the only visitor she has had."

"I am sorry to hear this, Jennie."

"I know you are, Aunt Esther. But what I find so very queer is that Dr. Kemp, who pretends to be her friend, --and I have seen them together many times, --should have sent her there. Don't you?"

"I do not understand it at all, --neither Ruth nor him."

"Surely you don't think Ruth knew anything of this?" questioned Mrs. Lewis, leaning forward and raising her voice in horror.

"Of course not," returned Mrs. Levice, rather lamely. She had long ago acknowledged to herself that there were depths in her daughter's nature that she had never gauged.

"I know what an idol his patients make of him, but he is a man nevertheless; and though you may think it horrible of me, it struck me as very suggestive that he was that girl's only friend."

"Therefore he must have been a good friend."

Mrs. Lewis bounded from her chair and turned a startled face to Mr. Levice, who had thus spoken, standing in the doorway. Mrs. Levice breathed a sigh of hysterical relief.

"Good--afternoon, Jennie," he said, coming into the room and shaking her hand; "sit down again. Good--afternoon Esther;" he stooped to kiss his wife.

Mrs. Lewis's hands trembled; she looked, to say the least, ashamed. She had been caught scandal-mongering by her uncle, Jules Levice, the head and pride of the whole family.

"I am sorry I heard what I did, Jennie; sorry to think that you are so poor as to lay the vilest construction on an affair of which you evidently know nothing, and sorry you could not keep your views to yourself." It was the habit of all of Levice's relatives to listen in silence to any personal reprimand the dignified old man might offer.

"I heard a good part of your conversation, and I can only characterize it as--petty. Can't you and your friends see anything without springing at shilling-shocker conclusions? Don't you know that people sometimes enjoy themselves without any further design? So much for the theatre talk. What is more serious is the fact that you could so misjudge my honorable friend, Dr. Kemp. Such a thing, Jennie, my girl, would be as remote from Dr. Kemp's possibilities as the antipodes. Remember, what I say is indisputable. Whether Ruth knew the story of this girl or not, I cannot say, but either way I feel assured that what she did was well done--if innocently; if with knowledge, so much the better. And I venture to assert that she is not a whit harmed by the action. In all probability she will tell us all the particulars if we ask her. Otherwise, Jennie, don't you think you have been unnecessarily alarmed?" The benign gentleness of his question calmed Mrs. Lewis.

"Uncle," she replied earnestly, "in my life such things are not trivial; perhaps because my life is narrower. I know you and Ruth take a different view of everything."

"Don't disparage yourself; people generally do that to be contradicted or to show that they know their weaknesses and have never cared to change them. A woman of your intelligence need never sink to the level of a spiteful chatterbox; every one should keep his tongue sheathed, for it is more deadly than a sword. Your higher interests should make you overlook every little action of your neighbors. You only see or hear what takes place

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when the window is open; you can never judge from this what takes place when the window is shut. How are the children?"

By dint of great tenderness he strove to make her more at ease.

Ruth, confronted with their knowledge, confessed, with flushed cheeks and glowing eyes, her contretemps.

"And," she said in conclusion, "Father, Mamma, nothing you can say will make me retract anything I have done or purpose doing."

"Nothing?" repeated her father.

"I hope you won't ask me to, but that is my decision."

"My darling, I dislike to hear you call yourself a mule," said her father, looking at her with something softer than disapproval; "but in this case I shall not use the whip to turn you from your purpose. Eh, Esther?"

"It is Quixotic," affirmed Mrs. Levice; "but since you have gone so far, there is no reasonable way of getting out of it. When next I see the doctor, I shall speak to him of it."

"There will be no occasion, dear," remonstrated the indulgent father, at sight of the annoyed flash in Ruth's eyes; "I shall."

By which it will be seen that the course of an only child is not so smooth as one of many children may think; every action of the former assumes such prominence that it is examined and cross-examined, and very often sent to Coventry; whereas, in a large family, the happy-go-lucky offspring has his little light dimmed, and therefore less remarked, through the propinquity of others.

Chapter XII

If Ruth, in the privacy of her heart, realized that she was sailing toward dangerous rapids, the premonition gave her no unpleasant fears. Possibly she used no lens, being content to glide forever on her smooth stream of delight. When the sun blinds us, we cannot see the warning black lurking in the far horizon. Without doubt the girl's soul and sympathies were receiving their proper food. Life was full for her, not because she was occupied, --for a busy life does not always prove a full one, --but because she entered thoroughly into the lives of others, struggled with their struggles, triumphed in their triumphs, and was beginning to see in everything, good or bad, its necessity of existence. Under ordinary circumstances one cannot see much misery without experiencing a world of disillusion and futile rebellion of spirit; but Ruth was not living just at that time under ordinary circumstances.

Something of the nature of electricity seemed to envelop her, that made her pulses bound, her lips quick to smile, and her eyes shine like twin dreamstars. She seemed to be moving to some rapturous music unheard save only by herself. At night, alone with her heart, she dared hardly name to herself the meaning of it all, _ a puritanic modesty withheld her. Yet all the sweet humility of which she was possessed could not banish from her memory the lingering clasp of a hand, the warm light that fell from eyes that glanced at her. For the present, these were grace sufficient for her daily need. Given the perfume, what need to name the flower?

Her family, without understanding it, noted the difference in their different ways. Mrs. Levice saw with a thrill of delight that she was growing more softly beautiful. Her father, holding his hands a few inches from her shoulders, said, one morning, with a drolly puzzled look, "I am afraid to touch you; sparks might fly."

Arnold surprised her standing in the gloaming by a window, her hands clasped over her head, a smile parting her lips, her eyes haunting in the witchery of their expression. By some occult power her glance fell unconsciously on him; and he beheld, with mingled amazement and speculation, a rosy hue overspread her face and throat; her hands went swiftly to her face as if she would hide something it might reveal, and she passed quickly from the room. Arnold sat down to solve this problem of an unknown quantity.

Ruth's birthday came in its course, a few days after her meeting with Rose Delano.

The family celebrated it in their usual simple way, which consisted only in making the day pass pleasantly for the one whose day of days it was, --a graceful way of showing that the birth has been a happy one for all concerned.

On this evening of her twenty-second birthday, Ruth seemed to be in her element. She had donned, in a spirit of mischief, a gown she had worn five years before on the occasion of some festivity. The girlish fashion of the white frock, with its straight, full skirt to her ankles, the round baby waist, and short puffs on her shoulders made a very child of her.

"Who can imagine me seventeen?" she asked gayly as she entered the library, softly lighted by many wax candles. Her mother, who was again enjoying the freedom of the house, and who was now snugly ensconced in her own particular chair, looked up at her.

"That little frock makes me long to take you in my lap," said she, brightly.

"And it makes me long to be there," answered Ruth, throwing herself into her mother's arms and twining her arms about her neck.

"How now, Mr. Arnold, you can't scare me tonight with your sarcastic disapproval!" she laughed, glancing provokingly over at her cousin seated in a deep blue-cushioned chair.

"I have no desire to scare you, little one," he answered pleasantly. "I only do that to children or grown-up people."

"And what am I, pray, good sir?"

"You are neither; you are neither child or woman; you are neither flesh nor spirit; you are uncanny."

"Dear me! In other words, I am a conundrum. Who will guess me?"

"You are the Sphinx," replied her cousin.

"I won't be that ugly-faced thing," she retorted; "guess again."

"Impossible. Once acquire a sphinx's elusiveness and you are a mystery perpetual. You alone can unriddle the

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riddle."

"I can't. I give myself up."

"Not so fast, young woman," broke in her father, shutting his magazine and settling his glasses more firmly upon his nose; "that is an office I alone can perform. Who has been hunting on my preserves?"

"Alas! They are not tempting, so be quite calm on that score." She sat up with a forlorn sigh, adding, "Think of it, Father, twenty-two, and not a heart to hang on my chatelaine."

"Hands are supposed to mean hearts nowadays," said Louis, reassuringly; "I am sure you have mittened one or two."

"Oh, yes," she answered, laughing evasively, "both of little Toddie Flynn's. Mamma, don't you think I am too big a baby for you to hold long?" She sprang up, and drawing a stool before her father's chair, exclaimed, --

"Now, Father, a grown-up Mother-Goose story for my birthday; make it short and sweet and with a moral like you."

Mr. Levice patted her head and rumpled the loosely gathered hair.

"Once upon a time," he began, "a little boy went into his father's warehouse and ate up all the sugar in the land. He did not die, but he was so sweet that everybody wanted to bite him. That is short and sweet; and what is the moral?"

"Selfishness brings misery," answered Ruth, promptly; "clever of both of us, but what is the analogy? Louis, you look lonesome over there. I feel as if I were masquerading; come nearer the footlights."

"And get scorched for my pains? Thanks; this is very comfortable. Distance adds to illusion."

"You don't mean to admit you have any illusions, do you? Why, those glasses of yours could see through a rhinoceros, I verily believe. Did you ever see anything you did not consider a delusion and a snare?"

"Yes; there is a standing institution of whose honest value there is no doubt."

"And that is?"

"My bed."

"After all, it is a lying institution, my friend; and are you not depositing your masculine muse, --your cigar? Oh, that reminds me of the annual peace-pipe."

She jumped up, snatched a candle, and left the room. As she turned toward the staircase she was arrested by the ringing of the doorbell. She stood quite still, holding the lighted candle while the maid opened the door.

"Is Miss Levice in?" asked the voice that made the little candle-light seem like myriads of swimming stars. As the maid answered in the affirmative, she came mechanically forward and met the bright-glancing eyes of Dr. Kemp.

"Good-evening," she said, holding out her disengaged hand, which he grasped and shook heartily.

"Is it Santa Filomena?" he asked, smiling into her eyes.

"No, only Ruth Levice, who is pleased to see you. Will you step into the library? We are having a little home evening together."

"Thank you. Directly." He slipped out of his topcoat, and turning quietly to her, said, "But before we go in, and I enact the odd number, I wish to say a few words to you alone, please."

She bent a look of inquiry upon him, and meeting the gaze of his compelling eyes, led him across the hall into the drawing-room. He noticed how the soft light she held made her the only white spot in the dark room, till, touching a tall silver lamp, she threw a rosy halo over everything. That it was an exquisite, graceful apartment he felt at a glance.

She placed her candle upon a tiny rococo table, and seated herself in a quaint, low chair overtopped by two tiny ivory horns that spread like hands of blessing above her head. The doctor declined to sit down, but stood with one hand upon the fragile table and looked down at her.

"I am inclined to think, after all," he said slowly, "that you are in truth the divine lady with the light. It is a pretty name and a pretty fame, --that of Santa Filomena."

What had come over her eyelids that they refused to be raised?

"I think," he continued with a low laugh, "that I shall always call you so, and have all rights reserved. May I?"

"I am afraid," she answered, raising her eyes, "that your poem would be without rhyme or reason; a candle is too slight a thing for such an assumption."

"But not a Rose Delano. I saw her to-day, and at least one sufferer would turn to kiss your shadow. Do you

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know what a wonderfully beautiful thing you have done? I came to-night to thank you; for any one who makes good our ideals is a subject for thanks. Of course, the thing had no personal bearing upon myself; but being an officious fellow, I thought it proper to let you know that I know. That is my only excuse for coming."

"Did you need an excuse?"

"That, or an invitation."

"Oh, I never thought of you--as--as--"

"As a man?"

How to answer this? Then finally she said, --

"As caring to waste an evening."

"Would it be a waste? There is an old adage that one might adapt, then, 'A wilful waste makes a woful want.' Want is a bad thing, so economy would not be a half-bad idea. Shall we go in to your family now, or will they not think you have been spirited away?"

He took the candle from her, and they retraced their steps. As she turned the handle of the door, she said, --

"Will you give me the candle, please, and walk in? I am going upstairs."

"Are you coming down again?" he asked, standing abruptly still.

"Oh, yes. Father," she called, opening wide the door, "here is Dr. Kemp."

With this announcement she fled up the staircase.

She had come up for some cigars; but when she got into her father's room, she seated herself blindly and looked aimlessly down at her hands. What a blessed reprieve this was! If she could but stay here! She could if it were not for the peace-pipe. Such a silly performance too! Father kept those superfine cigars over in the cabinet there. Should she bring only two as usual? Then she was going? Why not? It would look very rude not to do so. Besides, she wondered what they were talking about. She supposed she must have looked very foolish in that gown with her hair all mussed; and then his eyes— She arose suddenly and walked to the dressing-table with her light. After all, it was not very unbecoming. Had her face been so white all the evening? Louis liked her face to be colorless. Oh, she had better hurry down.

"Here comes the chief!" cried her mother as she entered. "Now, Doctor, you can see the native celebrating her natal day."

"She enacts the witch," said her father "and sends us, living, to the happy hunting-grounds. Will you join us, Doctor?"

"If Lachesis thinks me worthy. Is the operation painful?"

He received no answer as Ruth came forward with a box of tempting Havanas. She selected one, and placing the box on a chair, reached to the high-tiled mantel-shelf, whence she took a tiny pair of scissors and deftly cut off the point of the cigar. She seemed quite unconscious that all were watching her. Louis handed her a lighted match, and putting the cigar between her lips, she lit it into life. The doctor was amused.

She blew up a wreath of the fragrant smoke and handing it to her father, said, --

"With this year's love, Father."

The doctor grew interested.

She took another, and lighting it as gracefully, and without the slightest approach to Bohemianism, gave it into Louis's outstretched hand.

"Well?" he suggested, holding it from his lips till she had spoken.

"I can think of nothing you care for sufficiently to wish you."

"Nothing?"

"Unless," with sudden mischief, "I wish you a comfortable bed all the year round--and pleasant dreams, Louis."

"That is much," he answered dryly as he drew a cloud of smoke.

The doctor became anticipative.

Ruth's embarrassment was evident as she turned and offered him a cigar.

"Do you smoke?" she asked, holding out the box.

"Like a chimney," he replied, looking at her, but taking none, "and in the same manner as other common mortals."

She stood still, but withdrew her hand a little as if repelling the hint his words conveyed; whereupon he

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immediately selected a cigar, saying as he did so, "So you were born in summer, --the time of all good things. Well, 'Thy dearest wish, wish I thee,' and may it not pass in the smoking!"

She swept him a deep, mock courtesy.

Afer this, Ruth sat a rather silent listener to the conversation. She knew that they were discussing the pros and cons of the advantages for a bachelor of club life over home life. She knew that Louis was making some brilliantly cynical remarks, --asserting that the apparent privacy of the latter was delusive, and that the reputed publicity of the former was deceptive, as it was even more isolated than the latter. All of which the doctor laughed down as untruly epigrammatic.

"Then there is only one loophole for the poor bachelor," Mrs. Levice summed up, "and that is to marry. Louis complains of the club, and thinks himself a sort of cynosure in a large household. You, Doctor, complain of the want of coseyness in a bachelor establishment. To state it simply, you need a wife."

"And oust my Pooh--ba! Madame, you do not know what a treasure that old soldier of mine is. If I call him a veritable Martha, I shall but be paying proper tribute to the neatness with which he keeps my house and linen; he entertains my palate as deliciously as a Corinne her salon, and--is never in my way or thoughts. Can you commend me any woman so self--abnegatory?"

"Many women, but no wife, I am glad to say. But you need one."

"So! Pray explain wherein the lack is apparent."

"Oh, not to me, but--"

"You mean you consider a wife an adjunct to a doctor's certificate."

"It is a great guarantee with women," put in Louis, "as a voucher against impatience with their own foibles. They think only home practice can secure the adequate tolerance. Eh, Aunt Esther?"

"Nonsense, Louis!" interrupted Mr. Levice; "what has that to do with skill?"

"Skill is one thing; the manner of man is another--with women."

"That is worth considering--or adding to the curriculum," observed Kemp, turning his steady, quiet gaze upon Arnold.

Ruth noticed that the two men had taken the same position, --vis--vis to each other in their respective easy--chairs, their heads thrown back upon the cushions, their arms resting on the chair--arms. Something in Louis's veiled eyes caused her to interpose.

"Will you play, Louis?" she asked.

"Not to-night, ma cousine," he replied, glancing at her from lowered lids.

"It is not optional with you to-night, Louis," she insisted playfully, rising; "we--desire you to play."

"Or be punished for treason? Has your Majesty any other behest?"

"No; I shall even turn the leaves for you."

"The leaves of what, --memory? I'll play by rote."

He strolled over to the piano and sat down. He struck a few random chords, some soft, some florid, some harsh, some melting; he strung them together and then glided into a dreamy, melodious rhythm, that faded into a bird--like hallelujah, --swelling now into grandeur, then fainting into sobs, then rushing into an allegro so brilliantly bewildering that when the closing chords came like the pealing tones of an organ, Ruth drew a long sigh with the last lingering vibrations.

"What is that?" asked Levice, looking curiously at his nephew, who, turning on his music--chair, took up his cigar again.

"That," he replied, flecking an ash from his coat lappel, "has no name that I know of; some people call it 'The Soul.'"

A pained sensation shot through Ruth at his words, for he had plainly been improvising, and he must have felt what he had played.

"Here, Ruth, sing this," he continued, turning round and picking up a sheet of music.

"What?" she asked without moving.

"The bugle; I like it."

Kemp looked at her expectantly. He said he had not known she sang; but since she did, he was sure her voice was contralto.

"Why?" she asked.

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"Because your face is contralto."

She turned from his eyes as if they hurt her, and walked over to Louis's side.

It could hardly be called singing. Louis had often said that her voice needed merely to be set to rhythmic time to be music; in pursuance of which idea he would put into her hand some poem that touched his fancy, tell her to read it, and as she read, he would adapt to it an accompaniment according to the meaning and measure of the lines, —grandly solemn, daintily tripping, or wildly inspiriting. It was more like a chant than a song. To-night he chose Tennyson's Bugle-song. Her voice was subservient to the accompaniment, that shook its faint, sweet bugle-notes at first as in a rosy splendor; it rose and swelled and echoed and reverberated and died away slowly as if loath to depart. Arnold's playing was the poem, Ruth's voice the music the poet might have heard as he wrote, sweet as a violin, deep as the feeling evolved, —for when she came to the line beginning, "oh, love, they die in yon rich sky," she might have stood alone with one, in some high, clear place, so mellow was the thrill of her voice, so rapt the expression of her face. Kemp looked as if he would not tire if the sound should "grow forever and forever."

Mrs. Levice was wakeful after she had gone to bed. Her husband also seemed inclined to prolong the night, for he made no move to undress.

"Jules," said she in a low, confidential tone, "do you realize that our daughter is twenty-two?"

He looked at her with a half-smile.

"Is not this her birthday?"

"Her twenty-second, and she is still unmarried."

"Well?"

"Well, it is time she were. I should like to see it."

"So should I," he acquiesced with marked decision.

Mrs. Levice straightened herself up in bed and looked at her husband eagerly.

"Is it possible," she exclaimed, "that we have both thought of the same parti?"

It was now Mr. Levice's turn to start into an interested position.

"Of whom," he asked with some restraint, "are you speaking?"

"Hush! Come here; I have longed for it for some time, but have never breathed it to a soul, --Louis."

"Levice had become quite pale, but as she pronounced the familiar name, the color returned to his cheek, and a surprised look sprang into his eyes.

"Louis? Why do you think of such a thing?"

"Because I think them particularly well suited. Ruth, pardon me, dear, has imbibed some very peculiar and high-flown notions. No merely commonplace young man would make her happy. A man must have some ideas outside of what his daily life brings him, if she is to spend a moment's interested thought on him. She has repelled some of the most eligible advances for no obvious reasons whatever. Now, she does not care a rap for society, and goes only because I exact it. That is no condition for a young girl to allow herself to sink into; she owes a duty to her future. I am telling you this because, of course, you see nothing peculiar in such a course. But it is time you were roused; you know one look from you is worth a whole sermon from me. As to my thinking of Louis, well, in running over my list of eligibles, I found he fulfilled every condition, --good-looking, clever, cultivated, well-to-do, and—of good family. Why should it not be? They like each other, and see enough of each other to learn to love. We, however, must bring it to a head."

"First provide the hearts, little woman. What can I do, ask Louis or Ruth?"

"Jules," she returned with vexation, "how childish! Don't you feel well? Your cheeks are rather flushed."

"They are somewhat warm. I am going in to kiss the child good-night; she ran off while I saw Dr. Kemp out."

Ruth sat in her white dressing-gown, her heavy dark hair about her, her brush idle in her hand. Her father stood silently in the doorway, regarding her, a great dread tugging at his heart. Jules Levice was a keen student of the human face, and he had caught a faint glimpse of something in the doctor's eyes while Ruth sang. He knew it had been harmless, for her back had been turned, but he wished to reassure himself.

"Not in bed yet, my child?"

She started up in confusion as he came in.

"Of what were you thinking, darling?" he continued, putting his hand under her soft white chin and looking deeply into her eyes.

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"Well," she answered slowly, "I was not thinking of anything important; I was thinking of you. We are going to Beacham's next week—and have you any fine silk shirts?"

He laughed a hearty, relieved laugh.

"Well, no," he answered; "I leave all such fancies to your care. So we go next week. I am glad; and you?"

"I? Oh, I love the country in its summer dress, you know."

"Yes. Well, good-night, love." He took her face between his hands, and drawing it down to his, kissed it. Still holding her, he said with sweet solemnity, --

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee.

"The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee.

"The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

Chapter XIII

It was August. The Levinces had purposely postponed leaving town until the gay, merry-making crowds had disappeared, when Mrs. Levice, in the quiet autumn, could put a crown to her recovery.

Ruth had quite a busy time getting all three ready, as she was to continue the management of the household affairs until their return, a month later. Besides which, numerous little private incidentals had to be put in running order for a month, and she realized with a pang at parting with some of her simple, sincere proteges that were this part of her life withdrawn, the rest would pall insufferably.

The evening before their departure she stood bareheaded upon the steps of the veranda with Louis, who was enjoying a post-prandial smoke. Mr. and Mrs. Levice, in the soft golden gloaming of late summer, were strolling arm-in-arm among the flower-beds. Mrs. Levice, without obviously looking toward them, felt with satisfaction that Ruth was looking well in a plain black gown which she had had no time to change after her late shopping. She did not know that, close and isolated as the young man and woman stood, not only were they silent, but each appeared oblivious of the other's presence.

Ruth, with her hands clasped behind her, and Arnold, blowing wreaths of blue smoke into the heliotrope-scented air, looked as if under a dream-spell.

As Mrs. Levice passed within ear-shot, Ruth heard snatches of the broken sentence, --

"Jennie—good-by—to-day."

This roused her from her reverie, and she called to her mother, --

"Why, I forgot to drop in at Jennie's this afternoon, as I promised."

"How annoying! When you know how sensitive she is and how angry she gets at any neglect."

"I can run out there now. It is light enough."

"But it will be dark in less than an hour. Louis, will you go out to Jennie's with Ruth?"

"Eh? Oh, certainly, if she wishes me."

"I wish you to come if you yourself wish it. I'll run in and get my hat and jacket while you decide."

Ruth came back in a few minutes with a jaunty little sailor hat on and a light gray jacket, which she handed to Louis to hold for her.

"New?" he asked, pulling it into place in the back.

"Yes," she answered; "do you like it for travelling?"

"Under a duster. Otherwise its delicate complexion will be rather freckled when you arrive at Beacham's."

He pulled his hat on from ease to respectability and followed her down to the gate. They turned the corner, walking southward toward the valley. Mrs. Levice and her husband stood at the gate and watched them saunter off. When they were quite out of sight, Mrs. Levice turned around and sang gayly to Mr. Levice, "'Ca va bien!'"

The other two walked on silently. The evening was perfect. To the west and sweeping toward Golden Gate a hazy glory flushed the sky rose-color and molten gold, purple and silver; and then seas of glinting pale green to the northward held the eye with their beauty. The air was soft and languorous after a very warm day; now and then a piano, violin, or mandolin sounded through open windows; the peace and beauty of rest was over all.

They continued down Van Ness Avenue a few blocks, and unconsciously turned into one of the dividing streets toward Franklin. Suddenly Arnold felt his companion start, and saw she had taken her far-off gaze from the landscape. Following the direction of her eyes, he also straightened up. The disturbing object was a slight black column attached to a garden fence and bearing in small gold letters the simple name, Dr. Herbert Kemp.

As they approached nearer, Arnold knew of a certainty that there would be more speaking signs of the doctor's propinquity. His forecasting was not at fault.

Dr. Kemp's quaint, dark-red cottage, with its flower-edged lawn, was reached by a flight of low granite steps, at the top of which lounged the medical gentleman in person. He was not heaven-gazing, but seemed plunged in tobacco-inspired meditation of the flowers beneath him. Arnold's quick eye detected the pink flush that rose to the little ear of his cousin. The sound of their footsteps on the stone sidewalk came faintly to Kemp; he raised his eyes slowly and indifferently. The indifference vanished when he recognized them.

With a hasty movement he threw the cigar from him and ran down the steps.

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"Good-evening," he called, raising his old slouch hat and arresting their evident intention of proceeding on their way. They came up, perforce, and met him at the foot of the steps.

"A beautiful evening," he said originally, holding out a cordial hand to Arnold and looking with happy eyes at Ruth. She noticed that there was a marked difference in his appearance from anything she had been used to. His figure looked particularly tall and easy in a loose dark velvet jacket, thrown open from his broad chest; the large sombrero-like hat which had settled on the back of his head left to view his dark hair brushed carelessly backward; an unusual color was on his cheek, and a warm glow in his gray eyes.

"I hope," he went on, frankly transferring his attention to Ruth, "this weather will continue. We shall have a magnificent autumn; the woods must be beginning to look gorgeous."

"I shall know better to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes; we leave for Beacham's to-morrow, you know."

"No, I did not know;" an indefinable shadow over-clouded his face, but he said quickly, --

"That is an old hunting-ground of mine. The river teems with speckled treasures. Are you a disciple of old Walton, Mr. Arnold?" he added, turning with courtesy to the silent Frenchman.

"You mean fishing? No; life is too short to hang my humor of a whole day on the end of a line. I have never been at Beacham's."

"It is a fine spot. You will probably go down there this year."

"My business keeps me tied to the city just at present. A professional man has no such bond; his will is his master."

"Hardly, or I should have slipped cables long ago. A restful night is an unknown indulgence sometimes for weeks."

His gaze moved from Arnold's peachy cheek, and falling upon Ruth, surprised her dark eyes resting upon him in anxious questioning. He smiled.

"We shall have to be moving on," she said, holding out a gloved hand.

"Will you be gone long?" he asked, pressing it cordially.

"About a month."

"You will be missed--by the Flynn's. Good-by." He raised his hat as he looked at her.

Arnold drew her arm within his, and they walked off.

They say that the first thing a Frenchman learns in studying the English language is the use of that highly expressive outlet of emotion, "Damn." Arnold was an old-timer, but he had not outgrown the charm of his first linguistic victory; and now as he replaced his hat in reply to Kemp, he distinctly though coolly said, "Damn him."

Ruth looked at him, startled; but the composed, non-committal expression of his face led her to believe that her ears had deceived her.

A few more blocks were passed, and they stopped at a pretentious, many-windowed, Queen Anne house. Ruth ran lightly up the steps, her cousin following her leisurely.

She had scarcely rung the bell when the door was opened by Mrs. Lewis herself.

"Good-evening, Ruth; why, Mr. Arnold doesn't mean to say that he does us the honor?"

Mr. Arnold had said nothing of the kind; but he offered no disclaimer, and giving her rather a loose hand-shake, walked in.

"Come right into the dining-room," she continued. "I suppose you were surprised to find me in the hall; I had just come from putting the children to bed. They were in mischievous spirits and annoyed their father, who wished to be very quiet this evening."

By this time they had reached the room at the end of the hall, the door of which she threw open.

Jewish people, as a rule, use their dining-rooms to sit in, keeping the drawing-rooms for company only. This is always presupposing that they have no extra sitting-room. After all, a dining-room is not a bad place for the family gathering, having a large table as an objective plane for a round game, which also serves as a support for reading matter; while from an economical point of view it preserves the drawing-rooms in reception stiffness and ceremonious newness.

The apartment they entered was large and square, and contained the regulation chairs, table, and silver and crystal loaded sideboard.

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Upon the mantel-piece, the unflickering light from a waxen taper burning in a glass of oil lent an unusual air of Sabbath quiet to the room.

"I have 'Yahrzeit' for my mother," explained Jo Lewis, glancing toward the taper after greeting his visitors. He sat down quietly again.

"Do you always burn the light?" asked Arnold.

"Always. A light once a year to a mother's memory is not much to ask of a son."

"How long is it since you lost your mother?" questioned Ruth, gently.

Jo Lewis was a man with whom she had little in common. To her he seemed to have but one idea, --the amassing of wealth. With her more intellectual cravings, the continual striving for this, to the exclusion of all higher aspirations, put him on a plane too narrow for her footing. Unpolished he certainly was, but the rough, exposed grain of his unhewn nature showed many strata of strength and virility. In this gentle mood a tenderness had come into view that drew her to him with a touch of kinship.

"Thirty years," he answered musingly, -- "thirty years. It is a long time, Ruth; but every year when I light the taper it seems as if but yesterday I was a boy crying because my mother had gone away forever." The strong man wiped his eyes.

"The little light casts a long ray," observed Ruth. "Love builds its own lighthouse, and by its gleaming we travel back as at a leap to that which seemed eternally lost."

Jo Lewis sighed. Presently the thoughts that so strongly possessed him found an outlet.

"There was a woman for you!" he cried with glowing eyes. "Why, Arnold, you talk of men being great financiers; I wonder what you would have said to the powers my mother showed. We were poor, but poor to a degree of which you can know nothing. Well, with a large family of small children she struggled on alone and managed to keep us not only alive, but clean and respectable. In our village Sara Lewis was a name that every man and woman honored as if it belonged to a princess. Jennie is a good woman, but life is made easy for her. I often think how grand my mother would feel if she were here, and I were able to give her every comfort. God knows how proud and happy I would have been to say, 'You have struggled enough, Mother; life is going to be a heaven on earth to you now.' Well, well, what is the good of thinking of it? To-morrow I shall go down town and deal with men, not memories; it is more profitable."

"Not always," said Arnold, dryly. The two men drifted into a business discussion that neither Mrs. Lewis nor Ruth cared to follow.

"Are you quite ready?" asked Mrs. Lewis, drawing her chair closer to Ruth's.

"Entirely," she replied; "we start on the 8.30 train in the morning."

"You will be gone a month, will you not?"

"Yes; we wish to get back for the holidays. New Year's falls on the 12th of September, and we must give the house its usual holiday cleaning."

"I have begun already. Somehow I never thought you would mind being away."

"Why, we always go to the Temple, you know; and I would not miss the Atonement services for a great deal."

"Why don't you say 'Yom Kippur,' as everybody else does?"

"Because 'Atonement' is English and means something to me. Is there anything odd about that?"

"I suppose not. By the way, if there is anything you would like to have done while you are away, let me know."

"I think I have seen to everything. You might run in and see Louis now and then."

"Louis," Mrs. Lewis called instantly, "be sure to come in often for dinner while the folks are gone."

"Thank you; I shall. The last dinner I ate with you was delicious enough to do away with any verbal invitation to another."

He arose, seeing Ruth had risen and was kissing her cousins good-by.

Mrs. Lewis beamed with pleasure at his words.

"Now, won't you take something before you go?" she asked. "Ruth, I have the loveliest cakes."

"Oh, Jennie," remonstrated Ruth, as her cousin hustled off, "we have just dined."

"Let her enjoy herself," observed Louis; "she is never so happy as when she is feeding somebody."

The clink of glasses was soon heard, and Mrs. Lewis's rosy face appeared behind a tray with tiny glasses and a plate of rich, brown-looking little cakes.

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"Jo, get the Kirsch. You must try one, Ruth; I made them myself."

When they had complimented her on her cakes and Louis had drunk to his next undertaking, suggested by Jo Lewis, the visitors departed.

They had been walking in almost total silence for a number of blocks, when Ruth turned suddenly to him and said with great earnestness, --

"Louis, what is the matter with you? For the last few days you have hardly spoken to me. Have I done anything to annoy you?"

"You? Why, no, not that I remember."

"Then, please, before we go off, be friendly with me again."

"I am afraid I am not of a very hilarious temperament."

"Still, you manage to talk to others."

"Have you cared very much who talked to you lately?"

Her cheek changed color in the starlight.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Anything or nothing."

Ruth looked at him haughtily.

"If nothing," he continued, observing her askance from lowered lids, "what I am about to say will be harmless. If anything, I still hope you will find it pardonable."

"What are you about to say?"

"It won't take long. Will you be my wife?"

And the stars still shone up in heaven!

Her face turned white as a Niphetus rose.

"Louis," she said finally and speaking with difficulty, "why do you ask me this?"

"Why does any man ask a woman to be his wife?"

"Generally because he loves her."

"Well?"

If he had spoken outright, she might have answered him; but the simple monosyllable, implying a world of restrained avowal, confronted her like a wall, before which she stood silent.

"Answer me, Ruth."

"If you mean it, Louis, I am very, very sorry."

"Why?"

"Because I can never be your wife."

"Why not?"

"I do not love you--like that."

Silence for half a block, the man's lips pressed hard together under his mustache, the girl's heart beating suffocatingly. When he spoke, his voice sounded oddly clear in the hushed night air.

"What do you mean by 'like that'?"

Her little hand was clinched tight as it lay on his arm. The perfect silence that followed the words of each made every movement significant.

"You know, --as a woman loves the man she would marry, not as she loves a brotherly cousin."

"The difference is not clear to me--but--how did you learn the difference?"

"How dare you?" she cried, flashing a pair of dark, wet eyes upon him.

"In such a case, 'I dare do all that may become a man.' Besides, even if there is a difference, I still ask you to be my wife. You would not regret it, Ruth, I think."

His voice was not soft, but there was a certain strained pleading about it that pained her inexpressibly.

"Louis," she said, with slow distinctness, her hand moving down until it touched his, "I never thought of this as a possibility. You know how much I have always loved you, dear; but oh, Louis, will it hurt you very much, will you forgive me if I have to say no, I cannot be your wife?"

"Wait. I wish you to consider this well. I am offering you all that I have in the world; it is not despicable. Your family, I know, would be pleased. Besides, it would be well for you--God knows, not because I am what I am, but for other reasons. Wait. I beg of you not to answer me till you have thought it over. You know me; I am no

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saint, but a man who would give his life for you. I ask of you nothing but the right to guard yours. Do not answer me now."

They had turned the corner of their block.

"I need no time," said Ruth, with a sad sob in her voice; "I cannot marry you, Louis. My answer would be the same to-morrow or at the end of all time, --I can never, never be your wife."

"It is then as I feared, --anything."

The girl's bowed head was the only answer to his bitter words.

"Well," he said, with a hard laugh, "that ends it, then. Don't let it bother you. Your answer has put it entirely from my mind. I should be pleased if you would forget it as readily as I shall. I hardly think we shall meet in the morning. I am going down to the club now. Good-by; enjoy yourself."

He held out his hand carelessly; Ruth carried it in both hers to her lips. Being at the gate, he lifted his hat with a smile and walked away. Ruth did not smile; neither did Arnold when he had turned from her.

Chapter XIV

Beacham's lies in a dimple of the inner coast range, and is reached nowadays through one of the finest pieces of engineering skill in the State. The tortuous route through the mountains, over trestle-bridges that span what seem, from the car-windows, like bottomless chasms, needs must hold some compensation at the end to counterbalance the fears engendered on the way. The higher one goes the more beautiful becomes the scenery among the wild, marvellous redwoods that stand like mammoth guides pointing heavenward; and Beacham's realizes expectation.

It is a quiet little place, with its one hotel and two attached cottages, its old, disused saw-mill, its tiny schoolhouse beyond the fairy-like woods, its one general merchandise store, where cheese and calico, hats and hoes, ham and hominy, are forthcoming upon solicitation. It is by no means a fashionable resort; the Levinces had searched for something as unlike the Del Monte and Coronado as milk is unlike champagne. They were looking for a pretty, healthful spot, with good accommodations and few social attractions, and Beacham's offered this.

They were not disappointed. Ruth's anticipation was fulfilled when she saw the river. Russian River is about as pretty a stream as one can view upon a summer's day. Here at Beacham's it is very narrow and shallow, with low, shelving beaches on either bank; but in the tiny row-boat which she immediately secured, Ruth pushed her way into enchantment. The river winds in and out through exquisite coves entangled in a wilderness of brambles and lace-like ferns that are almost transparent as they bend and dip toward the silvery waters; while, climbing over the rocky cliffs, run bracken and the fragrant yerba-buena, till, on high, they creep as if in awe about the great redwoods and pines of the forest.

Morning and night Ruth, in her little boat, wooed the lisping waters. Often of a morning her mother was her companion; later on, her father or little Ethel Tyrrell; in the evening one of the Tyrrell boys, generally Will, was her gallant chevalier. But it was always Ruth who rowed, --Ruth in her pretty sailor blouses, with her strong round arms and steadily browning hands; Ruth, whose creamy face and neck remained provokingly unreddened, and took on only a little deeper tint, as if a dash of bistre had been softly applied. It was pleasant enough rowing down-stream with Ruth; she always knew when to sing "Nancy Lee," and when "White Wings" sounded prettiest. There were numerous coves too, where she loved to beach her boat, --here to fill a flask with honey-sweet water from a rollicking little spring that came merrily dashing over the rocks, here to gather some delicate ferns or maiden-hair with which to decorate the table, or the trailing yerba-buena for festooning the boat. But Ethel Tyrrell, aged three, thought they had the "dolliest" time when she and Ruth, having rowed a space out of sight, jumped out, and taking off their shoes and stockings and making other necessary preliminaries to wading, pattered along over the pebbly bottom, screaming when a sharp stone came against their tender feet, and laughing gleefully when the water rose a little higher than they had bargained for; then, when quite tired, they would retire to the beach or the boat and dry themselves with the soft damask of the sun.

Ruth was happy. There were moments when the remembrance of her last meeting with Louis came like a summer cloud over the ineffable brightness of her sky, and she felt a sharp pang at her heart; still, she thought, it was different with Louis. His feeling for her could not be so strong as to make him suffer poignantly over her refusal. She was almost convinced that he had asked her more from a whim of good-fellowship, a sudden desire, perhaps a preference for her close companionship when he did marry, than from any deeper emotion. In consequence of these reflections her musings were not so sad as they might otherwise have been.

Her parents laughed to see how she revelled in the freedom of the old-fashioned little spot, which, though on the river, was decidedly "out of the swim." It was late in the season, and there were few guests at the hotel. The Levinces occupied one of the cottages, the other being used by a pair of belated turtle-doves, --the wife a blushing dot of a woman, the husband an overgrown youth who bent over her in their walks like a devoted weeping-willow; there was a young man with a consumptive cough, a natty little stenographer off on a solitary vacation, and the golden-haired Tyrrell family, little and big, for Papa Tyrrell could not enjoy his hard-earned rest without one and all. They were such a refined, happy, sweet family, for all their pinched circumstances, that the Levinces were attracted to them at once. To be with Mrs. Tyrrell one whole day, Mrs. Levice said was a liberal education, --so bright, so uncomplaining, so ambitious for her children was she, and such a help and inspiration

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to her hard-worked husband. Mr. Levice tramped about the woods with Tyrrell and brier-wood pipes, and appreciated the moral bravery of a man who struggled on with a happy face and small hope for any earthly rest. But the children!—Floy with her dreamy face and busy sketch-book, Will with his halo of golden hair, his manly figure and broad, open ambitions, Boss with his busy step and fishing-tackle, and baby Ethel, the wee darling, who ran after Ruth the first time she saw her and begged her to come and play with her; ever since, she formed a part of the drapery of Ruth's skirt or a rather cumbersome necklace about her neck. Every girl who has been debarred the blessing of babies in the house loves them promiscuously and passionately. Ruth was no exception; it amused the ladies to watch her cuddle the child and wonder aloud at all her baby-talk.

Will was her next favorite satellite. A young girl with a winsome, sympathetic face, and hearty manner, can easily become the confidante of a fine fellow of fourteen. Will, with his arm tucked through hers, would saunter around after dusk and tell her all his ambitions.

The soft, starry evenings up in the mountains, where heaven seems so near, are just the time for such talk.

They were walking thus one evening toward the river, Ruth in a creamy gown and with a white burnous thrown over her head, Will holding his hat in his hand and letting the sweet air play through his hair, as he loved to do.

"What do you think are the greatest professions, Miss Ruth?" asked the boy suddenly.

"Well, law is one—" she began.

"That's the way Papa begins," he interrupted impatiently; "but I'll tell you what I think is the greatest. Guess, now."

"The ministry?" she ventured.

"Oh, of course; but I'm not good enough for that, —that takes exceptions. Guess again."

"Well, there are the fine arts, or soldiery, —that is it. You would be a brave soldier, Willikins, my man."

"No, sir," he replied, flinging back his head; "I don't want to take lives; I want to save them."

"You mean a physician, Will?"

"That's it—but not exactly—I mean a surgeon. Don't you think that takes bravery? And it's a long sight better than being a solider; he draws blood to kill, we do it to save. What do you think, Miss Ruth?"

"Indeed, you are right," she answered dreamily, her thoughts wandering beyond the river. So they walked along; and as they were about to descent the slope, a man in overalls and carrying a leather bag came suddenly upon them in the gloaming. He stood stock-still, his mouth gaping wide.

When Ruth saw it was Ben, the steward, she laughed.

"Why, Ben!" she exclaimed.

The man's mouth slowly closed, and his hand went up to his cap.

"Begging your pardon, Miss, —I mean Her pardon, —the Lord forgive me, I took you for the Lady Madonna and the blessed Boy with the shining hair. Now, don't be telling of me, will you?"

"Indeed, we won't; we'll keep the pretty compliment to ourselves. Have you the mail? I wonder if there is a letter for me."

Ben immediately drew out his little pack, and handed her two. It was still light enough to read; and as Ben moved on, she stood and opened them.

"This," she announced in a matter-of-course way, "is from Miss Dorothy Gwynne, who requests the pleasure of my company at a high-tea next Saturday. That, or the hay-ride, Will? And this—this—"

It was a simple envelope addressed to

Miss RUTH LEVICE— Beacham's— . . . County— Cal.

It was the sight of the dashes that caused the hiatus in her sentence, and made her heart give one great rushing bound. The enclosure was to the point.

SAN FRANCISCO, Aug. 18, 188—.

MISS RUTH LEVICE:

MY DEAR FRIEND, —That you may not denounce me as too presumptuous, I shall at once explain that I am writing this at Bob's urgent desire. He has at length got the position at the florist's, and tells me to tell you that he is now happy. I dropped in there last night; and when he gave me this message, I told him that I feared you would take it as an advertisement. He merely smiled, picked up a Marechal Niel that lay on the counter, and said, "Drop this in. It's my mark; she'll understand." So here are Bob's rose and my apology.

HERBERT KEMP.

She was pale when she turned round to the courteously waiting boy. It was a very cold note, and she put it in her pocket to keep it warm. The rose she showed to Will, and told him the story of the sender.

"Didn't I tell you," he cried, when she had finished, "a doctor has the greatest opportunity in the world to be great—and a surgeon comes near it? I say, Miss Ruth, your Dr. Kemp must be a brick. Isn't he?"

"Boys would call him so," she answered, shivering slightly.

It was so like him, she thought, to fulfil Bob's request in his hearty, friendly way; she supposed he wanted her to understand that he wrote to her only as Bob's amanuensis, --it was plain enough. And yet, and yet, she thought passionately, it would have been no more than common etiquette to send a friendly word from himself to her mother. Still the note was not thrown away. Girls are so irrational; if they cannot have the hand-shake, they will content themselves with a sight of the glove.

And Ruth in the warm, throbbing, summer days was happy. She was not always active; there were long afternoons when mere existence was intensely beautiful. To lie at full length upon the soft turf in the depths of the small enchanted woods, and hear and feel the countless spells of Nature, was unspeakable rapture.

"Ah, Floy," she cried one afternoon, as she lay with her face turned up to the great green boughs that seemed pencilled against the azure sky, "if one could paint what one feels! Look at these silent, living trees that stand in all their grandeur under some mighty spell; see how the wonderful heaven steals through the leaves and throws its blue softness upon the twilight gloom; here at our feet nestle the soft, green ferns, and over all is the indescribable fragrance of the redwoods. Turn there, to your right, little artist, high up on that mountain; can you see through the shimmering haze a great team moving as if through the air? It is like the vision of the Bethshemites in Dore's mystic work, when in the valley they lifted up their eyes and beheld the ark returning. Oh, Floy, it is not Nature; it is God. And who can paint God?"

"No one. If one could paint Him, He would no longer be great," answered the girl, resting her sober eyes upon Ruth's enraptured countenance.

One afternoon Ruth took a book and Ethel over the tramway to this fairy spot. It was very warm and still. Mrs. Levice had swung herself to sleep in the hammock, and Mr. Levice was dozing and talking in snatches to the Tyrrells, who were likewise resting on the Levinces' veranda. All Nature was drowsy, as Ruth wandered off with the little one, who chattered on as was her wont.

"Me and you's yunnin' away," she chatted; "we's goin' to a fowest, and by and by two 'ittle birdies will cover us up wid leaves. My! Won't my mamma be sorry? No darlin' 'ittle Ethel to pank and tiss no more. Poor Mamma!"

"Does Ethel think Mamma likes to spank her?"

"Yes; Mamma does des what she likes."

"But it is only when Ethel is naughty that Mamma spanks her. Here, sweetheart, let me tie your sunbonnet tighter. Now Ruth is going to lie here and read, and you can play hide-and-seek all about these trees."

"Can I go wound and sit on dat log by a bwook?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I's afwaid. I's dweffully afwaid."

"Why, you can turn round and talk to me all the time."

"But nobody'll be sitting by me at all."

"I am here just where you can see me; besides, God will be right next to you."

"Will He? Ven all yight."

Ruth took off her hat and prepared to enjoy herself. As her head touched the green earth, she saw the little maiden seat herself on the log, and turning her face sideways, say in her pleasant, piping voice, --

"How-de-do, Dod?" And having made her acknowledgments, all her fears vanished.

Ruth laughed softly to herself, and straightway began to read. The afternoon burned itself away. Ethel played and sang and danced about her, quite oblivious of the heat, till, tired out, she threw herself into Ruth's arms.

"Sing by-low now," she demanded sleepily; "pay it's night, and you and me's in a yockin'-chair goin' to by-low land."

Ruth realized that the child was weary, and drawing her little head to her bosom, threw off the huge sunbonnet and ruffled up the damp, golden locks.

"What shall I sing, darling?" she mused: she was unused to singing babies to sleep. Suddenly a little

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kindergarten melody she had heard came to her, and she sang softly in her rich, tender contralto the swinging cradle-song: --

"In a cradle, on the treetop, Sleeps a tiny bird; Sweeter sound than mother's chirping Never yet was heard. See, the green leaves spread like curtains Round the tiny bed, While the mother's wings, outstretching, Shield--the--tiny--head?"

As her voice died slowly into silence, she found Ethel looking over her shoulder and nodding her head.

"No; I won't tell," she said loudly.

"Tell what?" asked Ruth, amused.

"Hush! He put his finger on his mouf -- sh!"

"Who?" asked Ruth, turning her head hurriedly. Not being able to see through the tree, she started to her feet, still holding the child. Between two trees stood the stalwart figure of Dr. Kemp, --Dr. Kemp in loose, light gray tweeds and white flannel shirt; on the back of his head was a small, soft felt hat, which he lifted as she turned, --a wave of color springing to his cheek with the action. As for Ruth, --a woman's face dare not speak sometimes.

"Did I startle you?" he asked, coming slowly forward, hat in hand, the golden shafts of the sun falling upon his head and figure.

"Yes," she answered, trying to speak calmly, and failing, dropped into silence.

She made no movement toward him, but let the child glide softly down till she stood at her side.

"I interrupted you," he continued; "will you shake hands with me, nevertheless?"

She put her hand in his proffered one, which lingered in the touch; and then, without looking at her, he stooped and spoke to the child. In that moment she had time to compose herself.

"Do you often come up this way?" she questioned.

He turned from the child, straightened himself, and leaning one arm against the tree, answered, --

"Once or twice every summer I run away from humanity for a few days, and generally find myself in this part of the country. This is one of my select spots. I knew you would ferret it out."

"It is very lovely here. But we are going home now; the afternoon is growing old. Come, Ethel."

A shadow fell upon his dark eyes as she spoke, scarcely looking at him. Why should she hurry off at his coming?

"I am sorry my presence disturbs you," he said quietly; "But I can easily go away again."

"Was I so rude?" she asked, looking up with a sudden smile. "I did not mean it so; but Ethel's mother will want her now."

"Ethel wants to be carried," begged the child.

"All right; Ruth will carry you," and she stooped to raise her; but as she did so, Kemp's strong hand was laid upon her arm and held her back.

"Ethel will ride home on my shoulder," he said in the gay, winning voice he knew how so well to use with children. The baby's blue eyes smiled in response to his as he swing her lightly to his broad shoulder. There is nothing prettier to a woman than to see the confidence that a little child reposes in a strong man.

So through the mellow, golden sunlight they strolled slowly homeward.

Chapter XV

Mr. Levice, sauntering down the garden-path, saw the trio approaching. For a moment he did not recognize the gentleman in his summer attire. When he did, surprise, then pleasure, then a spirit of inquietude, took possession of him. He had been unexpectedly startled on Ruth's birthnight by a vague something in Kemp's eyes. The feeling, however, had vanished gradually in the knowledge that the doctor always had a peculiarly intent gaze, and, moreover, no one could have helped appreciating her loveliness that night. This, of itself, will bring a softness into a man's manner; and without doubt his fears had been groundless, --fears that he had not dared to put into words. For old man as he was, he realized that Dr. Kemp's strong personality was such as would prove dangerously seductive to any woman whom he cared to honor with his favor; but with a "Get thee behind me, Satan" desire, he had put the question from him. He could have taken his oath on Ruth's heart-wholeness, yet now, as he recognized her companion, his misgivings returned threefold. The courteous gentleman, however, was at his ease as they came up.

"This is a surprise, Doctor," he exclaimed cordially, opening the gate and extending his hand. "Who would have thought of meeting you here?"

Kemp grasped his hand heartily.

"I am a sort of surprise-party," he answered, swinging Ethel to the ground and watching her scamper off to the hotel; "and what is more," he continued, turning to him, "I have not brought a hamper, which makes one of me."

"You calculate without your host," responded Levice; "this is a veritable land of milk and honey. Come up and listen to my wife rhapsodize."

"How is she?" he asked, turning with him and catching a glimpse of Ruth's vanishing figure.

"Feeling quite well," replied Levice; "she is all impatience now for a delirious winter season."

"I thought so," laughed the doctor; "but if you take my advice, you will draw the bit slightly."

Mrs. Levice was delighted to see him; she said it was like the sight of a cable-car in a desert. He protested at such a stupendous comparison, and insisted that she make clear that the dummy was not included. The short afternoon glided into evening, and Dr. Kemp went over to the hotel and dined at the Levinces' table.

Ruth, in a white wool gown, sat opposite him. It was the first time he had dined with them; and he enjoyed a singular feeling over the situation. He noticed that although Mrs. Levice kept up an almost incessant flow of talk, she ate a hearty meal, and that Ruth, who was unusually quiet, tasted scarcely anything. Her father also observed it, and resolved upon a course of strict surveillance. He was glad to hear that the doctor had to leave on the early morning's train, though, of course, he did not say so. As they strolled about afterward, he managed to keep his daughter with him and allowed Kemp to appropriate his wife.

They finally drifted to the cottage-steps, and were enjoying the beauty of the night when Will Tyrrell presented himself before them.

"Good-evening," he said, taking off his hat as he stood at the foot of the steps. "Mr. Levice, Father says he has at last scared up two other gentlemen; and will you please come over and play a rubber of whist?"

Mr. Levice felt himself a victim of circumstances. He and Mr. Tyrrell had been looking for a couple of opponents, and had almost given up the search. Now, when he decidedly objected to moving, it would have been heartless not to go.

"Don't consider me," said the doctor, observing his hesitancy. "If it ill relieve you, I assure you I shall not miss you in the least."

"Go right ahead, Jules" urged his wife; "Ruth and I will take care of the doctor."

If she had promised to take care of Ruth, it would have been more to his mind; but since his wife was there, what harm could accrue that his presence would prevent? So with a sincere apology he went over to the hotel.

He hardly appreciated what an admirable aide he had left behind him in his wife.

Kemp sat upon the top step, and leaned his back against the railing; although outwardly he kept up a constant low run of conversation with Mrs. Levice, who swayed to and fro in her rocker, he was intently conscious of Ruth's white figure perched on the window-sill.

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How Mrs. Levice happened to broach the subject, Ruth never knew; but she was rather startled when she perceived that Kemp was addressing her.

"I should like to show my prowess to you, Miss Levice."

"In what?" she asked, somewhat dazed.

"Ruth, Ruth," laughed her mother, "do you mean to say you have not heard a word of all my glowing compliments on your rowing?"

"And I was telling your mother that in all modesty I was considered a fine oar at my Alma Mater."

"And I hazarded the suggestion," added Mrs. Levice, "that as it is such a beautiful night, there is nothing to prevent your taking a little row, and then each can judge of the other's claim to superiority?"

"My claim has never been justly established," said Ruth. "I have never allowed any one to usurp my oars."

"As yet," corrected Kemp. "Then will you wrap something about you and come down to the river?"

"Certainly she will," answered her mother; "run in and get some wraps, Ruth."

"You will come too, Mamma?"

"Of course; but considering Dr. Kemp's length, a third in your little boat will be the proverbial trumpery. Still, I suppose I can rely on you two crack oarsmen, though you know the slightest tremble in the boat in the fairest weather is likely to create a squall on my part."

If Dr. Kemp wished to row, he should row; and since the Jewish Mrs. Grundy was not on hand, anything harmlessly enjoyable was permissible.

Ruth went indoors. This was certainly something she had not bargained for. How could her mother be so blind as not to know or feel her desire to evade Dr. Kemp? She felt a positive contempt for herself that his presence should affect her as it did; she dared not look at him lest her heart should flutter to her eyes. Probably the display amused him. What was she to him anyway but a girl with whom he could flirt in his idle moments? Well (with a passionate fling of her arms), she would extinguish her uncontrollable little beater for the nonce; she would meet and answer every one of his long glances in kind.

She wound a black lace shawl around her head, and with some wraps for her mother, came out.

"Hadn't you better put something over your shoulders?" he asked deferentially as she appeared.

"And disgust the night with lack of appreciation?"

She turned to a corner of the porch and lifted a pair of oars to her shoulder.

"Why," he said in surprise, coming toward her, "you keep your oars at home?"

"On the principle of 'neither a borrower nor a lender be;' we find it saves both time and spleen."

She held them lightly in place on her shoulder.

"Allow me," he said, placing his hand upon the oars.

A spirit of contradiction took possession of her.

"Indeed, no," she answered; "why should I? They are not at all heavy."

He gently lifted her resisting fingers one by one and raised the broad bone of contention to his shoulder. Then without a look he turned and offered his arm to Mrs. Levice.

The crickets chirped in the hedges; now and then a firefly flashed before them; the trees seemed wrapped in silent awe at the majesty of the bewildering heavens. As they approached the river, the faint susurra came to them, mingled with the sound of a guitar and some one singing in the distance.

"Others are enjoying themselves also," he remarked as their feet touched the pebbly beach. A faint crescent moon shone over the water. Ruth went straight to the little boat aground on the shore.

"It looks like a cockle-shell," he said, as he put one foot in after shoving it off. "Will you sit in the stern or the bow, Mrs. Levice?"

"In the bow; I dislike to see dangers before we come to them."

He helped her carefully to her place; she thanked him laughingly for his exceptionally strong arm, and he turned to Ruth.

"I was waiting for you to move from my place," she said in defiant mischief, standing motionless beside the boat.

"Your place? Ah, yes; now," he said, holding out his hand to her, "will you step in?"

She took his hand and stepped in; they were both standing, and as the little bark swayed he made a movement to catch hold of her.

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"You had better sit down," he said, motioning to the rower's seat.

"And you?" she asked.

"I shall sit beside you and use the other oar," he answered nonchalantly, smiling down at her.

With a half-pleased feeling of discomfiture Ruth seated herself in the stern, whereupon Kemp sat in the contested throne.

"You will have to excuse my turning my back on you, Mrs. Levice," he said pleasantly.

"That is no hindrance to my volubility, I am glad to say; a back is not very inspiring or expressive, but Ruth can tell me when you look bored if I wax too discursive."

It was a tiny boat; and seated thus, Kemp's knees were not half a foot from Ruth's white gown.

"Will you direct me?" he said, as he swept around. "I have not rowed on this river for two or three years."

"You can keep straight ahead for some distance," she said, leaning back in her seat.

She could not fail to notice the easy motion of his figure as he rowed lightly down the river. His flannel shirt, low at the throat, showed his strong white neck rising like a column from his broad shoulders, and his dark face with the steady gray eyes looked across at her with grave sweetness. She would have been glad enough to be able to turn from the short range of vision between them; but the stars and river afforded her good vantage-ground, and on them she fixed her gaze.

Mrs. Levice was in bright spirits, and seemed striving to outdo the night in brilliancy. For a while Kemp maintained a sort of Roland—for—an—Oliver conversation with her; but with his eyes continually straying to the girl before him, it became rather difficult. Some merry rowers down the river were singing college songs harmoniously; and Mrs. Levice soon began to hum with them, her voice gradually subsiding into a faint murmur. The balmy, summer-freighted air made her feel drowsy. She listened absently to Ruth's occasional warnings to Kemp, and to the swift dip of the oars.

"Now we have clear sailing for a stretch," said Ruth, as they came to a broad curve. "Did you think you were going to be capsized when we shot over that snag, Mamma?"

She leaned a little farther forward, looking past Kemp.

"Mamma!"

Then she straightened herself back in her seat. Kemp, noting the sudden flush that had rushed to and from her cheek, turned halfway to look at Mrs. Levice. Her head was leaning against the flag-staff; her eyes were closed, in the manner of more wary chaperones, —Mrs. Levice slept.

Dr. Kemp moved quietly back to his former position.

Far across the river a woman's silvery voice was singing the sweet old love-song, "Juanita;" overhead, the golden crescent moon hung low from the floor of heaven pulsating with stars; it was a passionate, tender night, and Ruth, with her face raised to the holy beauty, was a dreamy part of it. Against the black lace about her head her face shone like a cameo, her eyes were brown wells of starlight; she scarcely seemed to breathe, so still she sat, her slender hands loosely clasped in her lap.

Dr. Kemp sat opposite her—and Mrs. Levice slept.

Slowly and more slowly sped the tiny boat; long gentle strokes touched the water; and presently the oars lay idle in their locks, —they were unconsciously drifting. The water dipped and lapped about the sides; the tender woman's voice across the water stole to them, singing of love; their eyes met—and Mrs. Levice slept.

Ever, in the after time, when Ruth heard that song, she was again rocking in the frail row-boat upon the lovely river, and a man's deep, grave eyes held hers as if they would never let them go, till under his worshipping eyes her own filled with slow ecstatic tears.

"Doctor," called a startled voice, "row out; I am right under the trees."

They both started. Mrs. Levice was, without doubt, awake. They had drifted into a cove, and she was cowering from the over-hanging boughs.

"I do not care to be Absalom'd; where were your eyes, Ruth?" she complained, as Kemp pushed out with a happy, apologetic laugh. "Did not you see where we were going?"

"No," she answered a little breathlessly; "I believe I am growing far-sighted."

"It must be time to sight home now," said her mother; "I am quite chilly."

In five minutes Kemp had grounded the boat and helped Mrs. Levice out. When he turned for Ruth, she had already sprung ashore and had started up the slope; for the first time the oars lay forgotten in the bottom of the

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boat.

"Wait for us, Ruth," called Mrs. Levice, and the slight white figure stood still till they came up.

"You are so slow," she said with a reckless little laugh; "I feel as if I could fly home."

"Are you light-headed, Ruth?" asked her mother, but the girl had fallen behind them. She could not yet meet his eyes again.

"Come, Ruth, either stay with us or just ahead of us." Mrs. Levice, awake, was an exemplary duenna.

"There is nothing abroad here but the stars," she answered, flitting before them.

"And they are stanch, silent friends on such a night," remarked Kemp, softly.

She kept before them till they reached the gate, and stood inside of it as they drew near.

"Then you will not be home till Monday," he said, taking Mrs. Levice's hand and raising his hat; "and I am off on the early morning train. Good-by."

As she turned in at the gate, he held out his hand to Ruth. His fingers closed softly, tightly over hers; she heard him say almost inaudibly, --

"Till Monday."

She raised her shy eyes for one brief second to his glowing ones; and he passed, a tall, dark figure, down the shadowy road.

When Mr. Levice returned from his game of whist, he quietly opened the door of his daughter's bedroom and looked in. All was well; the wolf had departed, and his lamb slept safe in the fold.

But in the dark his lamb's eyes were mysteriously bright. Sleep! With this new crown upon her! Humble as the beautiful beggar-maid must have felt when the king raised her, she wondered why she had been thus chosen by one whom she had deemed so immeasurably above her. And this is another phase of woman's love, --that it exalts the beloved beyond all reasoning.

Chapter XVI

At six o'clock the hills in their soft carpet of dull browns and greens were gently warming under the sun's first rays. At seven the early train that Dr. Kemp purposed taking would leave. Ruth, with this knowledge at heart, had softly risen and left the cottage. Close behind the depot rose a wooded hill. She had often climbed it with the Tyrrell boys; and what was to prevent her doing so now? It afforded an excellent view of the station.

It was very little past six, and she began leisurely to ascend the hill. The sweet morning air was in her nostrils, and she pushed the broad hat from her happy eyes. She paused a moment, looking up at the wooded hill-top, which the sun was jewelling in silver.

"Do you see something beautiful up there?"

With an inarticulate cry she wheeled around and faced Dr. Kemp within a hand's breadth of her.

"Oh," she cried, stepping back with burning cheeks, "I did not mean—I did not expect—"

"Nor did I," he said in a low voice; "chance is kinder to us than ourselves—beloved."

She turned quite white at the low, intense word.

"You understood me last night—and I was not—deceived?"

Her head drooped lower till the broad brim of her hat hid her face.

With one quick step he reached her side.

"Ruth, look at me."

She never had been able to resist his compelling voice; and now with a swift-drawn breath she threw back her head and looked up at him fairly, with all her soul in her eyes.

"Are you satisfied?" she asked tremulously.

"Not yet," he answered as with one movement he drew her to him.

"My Santa Filomena," he murmured with his lips against her hair, "this is worth a lifetime of waiting; and I have waited long."

In his close, passionate clasp her face was hidden; she hardly dared meet his eyes when he finally held her from him.

"Why, you are not afraid to look at me? No one knows you better than I, dear; you can trust me, I think."

"I know," she said, her hand fluttering in his; "but isn't—the train coming?"

"Are you so anxious to have me go?"

Her hand closed tightly around his.

"Because," laying his bearded cheek against her fair one, "I have something to ask you."

"To ask me?"

"Yes; are you surprised, can't you guess? Ruth, will you bless me still further? Will you be my wife, love?"

A strange thrill stole over her; his voice had assumed a bewildering tenderness. "If you really want me," she replied, with a sobbing laugh.

"Soon?" he persisted.

"Why?"

"Because you must. You will find me a tyrant in love, my Ruth."

"I am not afraid of you, sir."

"Then you should be. Think, child, I am an old man, already thirty-five; did you remember that when you made me king among men?"

"Then I am quite an old lady; I am twenty-two."

"As ancient as that? Then you should be able to answer me. Make it soon, sweetheart."

"Why, how you beg—for a king. Besides, there is Father, you know; he decides everything for me."

"I know; and I have already asked him on paper. There is a note awaiting him at the hotel; you will see I took a great deal for granted last night, and—Ah, the whistle! What day is this, Ruth?"

"Friday."

"Good Friday, sweet, I think."

"Oh, I am not at all superstitious."

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"And Monday is four days off; well, it must make up for all we lose. Monday will be four days rolled into one."

"Remember," he continued hurriedly, "you are doubly precious now, darling, and take good care of yourself till our 'Auf Wiedersehn.'"

"And--and--you will remember that for me too, D--doctor?"

"Who? There is no doctor here that I know of."

"But I know one--Herbert."

"God bless you for that, dear!" he answered gravely.

Mr. Levice, sleepily turning on his pillow, heard the whistle of the out-going train with benignant satisfaction. It was taking Dr. Kemp where he belonged, --to his busy practice, --and leaving his child's peace undisturbed. Confound the man, anyway! he mused; what had possessed him to drop down upon them in that manner and rob Ruth of her appetite and happy talk? No doubt she had been flattered by the interest he had shown in her; but he was too old and too dignified a gentleman to resort to flirtation, and anything deeper was out of the question. He must certainly have a little plain talk with the child this morning, and, well, he could cry "Ebenezer!" on his departure. With this conclusion, he softly rose, taking care not to disturb his placidly sleeping wife, who never dreamed of waking till nine.

Ruth generally waited for him for breakfast, but not seeing her around, he went in and took a solitary meal. Sauntering out afterward toward the hotel porch, his hat on, his stick under his arm, and busily lighting a cigar, he was met at the door of the billiard-room by one of the clerks.

"Dr. Kemp left this for you this morning," said he, holding out a small envelope. A flush rose to the old gentleman's sallow cheek as he took it.

"Thank you," he said; "I believe I shall come in here for a few minutes."

He passed by the clerk and seated himself in a deep, cane-bottomed chair near the window. He fumbled for the cord of his glasses in a slightly nervous manner, and adjusted them hastily. The missive was addressed to him, certainly; and with no little wonder he tore it open and read:—

BEACHAM'S Friday morning.

MR. LEVICE:

MY DEAR SIR,—Pardon the hurried nature of this communication, but I must leave shortly on the in-coming train, having an important operation to undertake this morning; otherwise I should have liked to prepare you more fully, but time presses. Simply, then, I love your daughter. I told her so last night upon the river, and she has made me the proudest and happiest of men by returning my love. I am well aware what I am asking of you when I ask her of you to be my wife. You know me personally; you know my financial standing; I trust to you to remember my failings with mercy in the knowledge of our great love. Till Monday night, then, I leave her and my happiness to your consideration and love.

With the greatest respect, Yours Sincerely, HERBERT KEMP.

"My God!"

The clerk standing near him in the doorway turned hurriedly.

"Any trouble?" he asked, moving toward him and noticing the ashy pallor of his face.

The old man's hand closed spasmodically over the paper.

"Nothing," he managed to answer, waving the man away; "don't notice me."

The clerk, seeing his presence was undesirable, took up his position in the doorway again.

Levice sat on. No further sound broke from him; he had clinched his teeth hard. It had come to this, then. She loved him; it was too late. If the man's heart alone were concerned, it would have been an easy matter; but hers, Ruth's. God! If she really loved, her father knew only too well how she would love. Was the man crazy? Had he entirely forgotten the gulf that lay between them? Great drops of perspiration rose to his forehead. Two ideas held him in a desperate struggle, --his child's happiness; the prejudice of a lifetime. Something conquered finally, and he arose quietly and walked slowly off.

Through the trees he heard laughter. He walked round and saw her swinging Will Tyrrell.

"There's your father," cried Boss, from the limb of a tree.

She looked up, startled. With a newborn shyness she had endeavored to put off this meeting with her father. She gave the swing another push and waited his approach with beating heart.

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"The boys will excuse you, Ruth, I think; I wish you to come for a short walk with me."

At his voice, the gentle seriousness of which penetrated even to the Tyrrell boys' understanding, she felt that her secret was known.

She laid her arm about his neck and gave him his usual morning kiss, reddening slowly under his long searching look as he held her to him. She followed him almost blindly as he turned from the grounds and struck into the lane leading to the woods. Mr. Levice walked along, aimlessly knocking off with his stick the dandelions and camomile in the hedges. It was with a wrench he spoke.

"My child," he said, and now the stick acted as a support, "I was just handed a note from Dr. Kemp. He has asked me for your hand."

In the pause that followed Ruth's lovely face was hidden in her hat.

"He also told me that he loves you," he continued slowly, "and that you return his love. Will you turn your face to me, Ruth?"

She did so with dignity.

"You love this man?"

"I do." As reverently as if at the altar, she faced and answered her father. All her love was in the eyes she raised to his. Beneath their happy glow Levice's sank and his steady lips grew pale.

They were away from mankind in the shelter of the woods, the birds gayly carolling their matins above them.

"And you desire to become his wife?"

Neck, face, and ears were suffused with color as she faltered unsteadily, --

"Oh, Father, he loves me." Then at the wonder of it, she exclaimed, throwing her arms about his neck impulsively and hiding her face in his shoulder, "I am so happy, so happy! It seems almost too beautiful to be true."

The old man's trembling hand smoothed the soft little tendrils of hair that had escaped from their pins. He stifled a groan as he was thus disarmed.

"And what," she asked, her sweet eyes holding his as she stepped back, "what do you think of Herbert Kemp, M. D.? Will you be proud of your son-in-law, Father darling?"

Levice's hand fell suddenly on her shoulder. He schooled himself to smile quietly upon her.

"Dr. Kemp is a great friend of mine. He is a gentleman whom all the world honors, not only for his professional worth, but for his manly qualities. I am not surprised that you love him, nor yet that he loves you--except for one thing."

"And that?" she asked, smiling confidently at him.

"Child, you are a Jewess; Dr. Kemp is a Christian."

And still his daughter smiled trustingly.

"What difference can that make, since we love each other?" she asked.

"Will you believe me, Ruth, when I say that all I desire is your happiness?"

"Father, I know it."

"Then I tell you I can never bring myself to approve of a marriage between you and a Christian. There can be no true happiness in such a union."

"Why not? Inasmuch as all my life you have taught me to look upon my Christian friends as upon my Jewish, and since you admit him irreproachable from every standpoint, why can he not be my husband?"

"Have you ever thought of what such a marriage entails?"

"Never."

"Then do so now: think of every sacrifice, social and religious, it enforces; think of the great difference between the Jewish race and the Christians; and if, after you have measured with the deadliest earnestness every duty that married life brings, you can still believe that you will be happy, then marry him."

"With your blessing?" Her lovely, pleading eyes still held his.

"Always with my blessing, child. One thing more: did Dr. Kemp mention anything of this to you?"

"No; he must have forgotten it as I did, or rather, if I ever thought of it, it was a mere passing shadow. I put it aside with the thought that though you and I had never discussed such a circumstance, judging by all your other actions in our relations with Christians, you would be above considering such a thing a serious obstacle to two people's happiness."

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"You see, when it comes to action, my broad views dwindle down to detail, and I am only an old man with old-fashioned ideas. However, I shall remind Dr. Kemp of this grave consideration, and then—you will not object to this?"

"Oh, no; but I know—I know—" What did she know except of the greatness of his love that would annihilate all her father's forebodings?

"Yes," her father answered the half-spoken thought; "I know too. But ponder this well, as I shall insist on his doing; then, on Monday night, when you have both satisfactorily answered to each other every phase of this terrible difference, I shall have nothing more to say."

Love is so selfish. Ruth, hugging her happiness, failed, as she had never failed before, to mark the wearied voice, the pale face, and the sad eyes of her father.

"Your mother will soon be awake," he said; "had you not better go back?"

Something that she had expected was wanting in this meeting; she looked at him reproachfully, her mouth visibly trembling.

"What is it?" he asked gently.

"Why, Father, you are so cold and hard, and you have not even—"

"Wait till Monday night, Ruth. Then I will do anything you ask me. Now go back to your mother, but understand, not a word of this to her yet. I shall not recur to this again; meanwhile we shall both have something to think of."

That afternoon Dr. Kemp received the following brief note: —

BEACHAM'S, August 25, 188—..

DR. KEMP:

DEAR SIR,—

Have you forgotten that my daughter is a Jewess; that you are a Christian? Till Monday night I shall expect you to consider this question from every possible point of view. If then both you and my daughter can satisfactorily override the many objections I undoubtedly have, I shall raise no obstacle to your desires. Sincerely your friend, JULES LEVICE.

In the mean time Ruth was thinking it all out. Love was blinding her, dazzling her; and the giants that rose before her were dwarfed into pygmies, at which she tried to look gravely, but succeeded only in smiling at their feebleness. Love was an Armada, and bore down upon the little armament that thought called up, and rode it all to atoms.

Small wonder, then, that on their return on Monday morning, as little Rose Delano stood in Ruth's room looking up into her friend's face, the dreamy, starry eyes, the smiles that crept in thoughtful dimples about the corners of her mouth, the whole air of a mysterious something, baffled and bewildered her.

Upon Ruth's writing-table rested a basket of delicate Marechal Niel buds, almost veiled in tender maiden-hair; the anonymous sender was not unknown.

"It has agreed well with you, Miss Levice," said Rose, in her gentle, patient voice, that seemed so out of keeping with her young face. "You look as if you had been dipped in a love-elixir."

"So I have," laughed Ruth, her hand straying to the velvety buds; "it has made a 'nut-brown mayde' of me, I think, Rosebud. But tell me the city news. Everything in running order? Tell me."

"Everything is as your kind help has willed it. I have a pleasant little room with a middle-aged couple on Post Street. Altogether I earn ten dollars over my actual monthly expenses. Oh, Miss Levice, when shall I be able to make you understand how deeply grateful I am?"

"Never, Rose; believe me, I never could understand deep things; that is why I am so happy."

"You are teasing now, with that mischievous light in your eyes. Yet the first time I saw your face I thought that either you had or would have a history."

"Sad?" The sudden poignancy of the question startled Rose.

She looked quickly at her to note if she were as earnest as her voice sounded. The dark eyes smiled daringly, defiantly at her.

"I am no sorceress," she answered evasively but lightly; "look in the glass and see."

"You remind me of Floy Tyrrell. Pooh! Let us talk of something else. Then it can't be Wednesdays?"

"It can be any day. The Page children can have Friday."

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"Do you know how Mr. Page is?"

"Did you not hear of the great operations he—Dr. Kemp—performed Friday?"

"No." She could have shaken herself for the telltale, inevitable rush of blood that overspread her face. If Rose saw, she made no sign; she had had one lesson.

"I did not know such a thing was in his line. I had been giving Miss Dora a lesson in the nursery. The old nurse had brought the two little ones in there, and kept us all on tenter-hooks running in and out. One of the doctors, Wells, I think she said, had fainted; it was a very delicate and dangerous operation. When my lesson was over, I slipped quietly out; I was passing through the corridor when Dr. Kemp came out of one of the rooms. He was quite pale. He recognized me immediately; and though I wished to pass straight on, he stopped me and shook my hand so very friendly. And now I hear it was a great success. Oh, Miss Levice, he has no parallel but himself!"

It did not sound exaggerated to Ruth to hear him thus made much of. It was only very sweet and true.

"I knew just what he must be when I saw him," the girl babbled on; "that was why I went to him. I knew he was a doctor by his carriage, and his strong, kind face was my only stimulus. But there, you must forgive me if I tire you; you see he sent you to me."

"You do not tire me, Rose," she said gravely. And the same expression rested upon her face till evening.

Chapter XVII

Monday night had come. As Ruth half hid a pale yellow bud in her heavy, low-coiled hair, the gravity of her mien seemed to deepen. This was partially the result of her father's expressive countenance and voice. If he had smiled, it had been such a faint flicker that it was forgotten in the look of repression that had followed. In the afternoon he had spoken a few disturbing words to her:

"I have told your mother that Dr. Kemp is coming to discuss a certain project and desires your presence. She intends to retire rather early, and there is nothing to prevent your receiving him."

At the distantly courteous tone she raised a pair of startled eyes. He was regarding her patiently, as if awaiting some remark.

"Surely you do not wish me to be present at this interview?" she questioned, her voice slightly trembling.

"Not only that, but I desire your most earnest attention and calm reasoning powers to be brought with you. You have not forgotten what I told you to consider, Ruth?"

"No, Father."

She felt, though in a greater degree, as she had often felt in childhood, when, in taking her to task for some naughtiness, he had worn this same sad and distant look. He had never punished her nominally; the pain he himself showed had always affected her as the severest reprimand never could have done.

She looked like a peaceful, sweet-faced nun in her simple white gown, that fell in long straight folds to her feet; not another sign of color was upon her.

A calmness pervaded her whole person as she paced the softly lighted drawing-room and waited for Kemp.

When he was shown into the room, this tranquillity struck him immediately.

She stood quite still as he came toward her. He certainly had some old-time manners, for the reverence he felt for her caused him first of all to raise her hand to his lips. The curious, well-known flush rose slowly to her sensitive face at the action; when he had caught her swiftly to him, a sobbing sigh escaped her.

"What is it?" he asked, drawing her down to a seat beside him. "Are you tired of me already, love?"

"Not of you; of waiting," she answered, half shyly meeting his look.

"I hardly expected this," he said after a pause; "has your father flown bodily from the enemy and left you to face him alone?"

"Not exactly. But really it was kind of him to keep away for a while, was it not?" she asked simply.

"It was unusually kind. I suppose, however, you will have to make your exit on his entrance."

"No," she laughed quietly; "I am going to play the rôle of the audience to-night. He expressly desires my presence; but if you differ—"

He looked at her curiously. The earnestness with which she had greeted him settled like a mask upon his face. The hand that held hers drew it quickly to his breast.

"I think it is well that you remain," he said, "because we agree at any rate on the main point, --that we love each other. Always that, darling?"

"Always that--love."

The low, sweet voice that for the first time so caressed him thrilled him oddly; but a measured step was heard in the hall, and Ruth moved like a bird to a chair. He could not know that the sound of the step had given her the momentary courage thus to address him.

He arose deferentially as Mr. Levice entered. The two men formed a striking contrast. Kemp stood tall, stalwart, straight as an arrow; Levice, with his short stature, his stooping shoulders, and his silvery hair falling about and softening somewhat his plain Jewish face, served as a foil to the other's bright, handsome figure.

Kemp came forward to meet him and grasped his hand. Nothing is more thoroughly expressive than this shaking of hands between men. It is a freemasonry that women lack and are the losers thereby. The kiss is a sign of emotion; the hand-clasp bespeaks strong esteem or otherwise. Levice's hand closed tightly about the doctor's large one; there was a great feeling of mutual respect between these two.

"How are you and your wife?" asked the doctor, seating himself in a low, silken easy-chair as Levice took one opposite him.

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"She is well, but tired this evening, and has gone to bed. She wished to be remembered to you." As he spoke, he half turned his head to where Ruth sat in a corner, a little removed.

"Why do you sit back there, Ruth?"

She arose, and seeing no other convenient seat at hand, drew up the curious ivory-topped chair. Thus seated, they formed the figure of an isosceles triangle, with Ruth at the apex, the men at the angles of the base. It is a rigid outline, that of the isosceles, bespeaking each point an alien from the others.

There was an uncomfortable pause for some moments after she had seated herself, during which Ruth noted how, as the candle-light from the sconce behind fell upon her father's head, each silvery hair seemed to speak of quiet old age.

Kemp was the first to speak, and, as usual, came straight to the point.

"Mr. Levice, there is no use in disguising or beating around the bush the thought that is uppermost in all our minds. I ask you now, in person, what I asked you in writing last Friday, --will you give me your daughter to be my wife?"

"I will answer you as I did in writing. Have you considered that you are a Christian; that she is a Jewess?"

"I have."

It was the first gun and the answering shot of a strenuous battle.

"And you, my child?" he addressed her in the old sweet way that she had missed in the afternoon.

"I have also done so to the best of my ability."

"Then you have found it raised no barrier to your desire to become Dr. Kemp's wife?"

"None."

The two men drew a deep breath at the sound of the little decisive word, but with a difference. Kemp's face shone exultantly. Levice pressed his lips hard together as the shuddering breath left him; his heavy-veined hands were tightly clinched; when he spoke, however, his voice was quite peaceful.

"It is an old and just custom for parents to be consulted by their children upon their choice of husband or wife. In France the parents are consulted before the daughter; it is not a bad plan. It often saves some unnecessary pangs—for the daughter. I am sorry in this case that we are not living in France."

"Then you object?" Kemp almost hurled the words at him.

"I crave your patience," answered the old man, slowly; "I have grown accustomed to doing things deliberately, and will not be hurried in this instance. But as you have put the question, I may answer you now. I do most solemnly and seriously object."

Ruth, sitting intently listening to her father, paled slowly. The doctor also changed color.

"My child," Levice continued, looking her sadly in the face, "by allowing you to fall blindly into this trouble, without warning, with my apparent sanction for any relationship with Christians, I have done you a great wrong; I admit it with anguish. I ask your forgiveness."

"Don't, Father!"

Dr. Kemp's clinched hand came down with force upon his knee. He was white to the lips, for though Levice spoke so quietly, a strong decisiveness rang unmistakably in every word.

"Mr. Levice, I trust I am not speaking disrespectfully," he began, his manly voice plainly agitated, "but I must say that it was a great oversight on your part when you threw your daughter, equipped as she is, into Christian society, --put her right in the way of loving or being loved by any Christian, knowing all along that such a state of affairs could lead to nothing. It was not only wrong, but, holding such views, it was cruel."

"I acknowledge my culpability; my only excuse lies in the fact that such an event never presented itself as a possibility to my imagination. If it had, I should probably have trusted that her own Jewish conscience and bringing-up would protest against her allowing herself to think seriously upon such an issue."

"But, sir, I do not understand your exception; you are not orthodox."

"No; but I am intensely Jewish," answered the old man, proudly regarding his antagonist. "I tell you I object to this marriage; that is not saying I oppose it. There are certain things connected with it of which neither you nor my daughter have probably thought. To me they are all-powerful obstacles to your happiness. Being an old man and more experienced, will you permit me to suggest these points? My friend, I am seeking nothing but my child's happiness; if, by opening the eyes of both of you to what menaces her future welfare, I can avert what promises but a sometime misery, I must do it, late though it may be. If, when I have stated my view, you can convince me

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that I am wrong, I shall be persuaded and admit it. Will you accept my plan?"

Kemp bowed his head. The dogged earnestness about his mouth and eyes deepened; he kept his gaze steadily and attentively fixed upon Levice. Ruth, who was the cause of the whole painful scene, seemed remote and shadowy.

"As you say," began Levice, "we are not orthodox; but before we become orthodox or reform, we are born, and being born, we are invested with certain hereditary traits that are unconvertible. Every Jew bears in his blood the glory, the triumph, the misery, the abjectness of Israel. The farther we move in the generations, the fainter grown the inheritance. In most countries in these times the abjectness is vanishing; we have been set upon our feet; we have been allowed to walk; we are beginning to smile, --that is, some of us. Those whose fathers were helped on are nearer the man as he should be than those whose fathers are still grovelling. My child, I think, stands a perfect type of what culture and refinement can give. She is not an exception; there are thousands like her among our Jewish girls. Take any intrinsically pure-souled Jew from his coarser surroundings and give him the highest advantages, and he will stand forth the equal, at least, of any man; but he could not mix forever with pitch and remain undefiled."

"No man could," observed Kemp, as Levice paused. "But what are these things to me?"

"Nothing; but to Ruth, much. That is part of the bar-sinister between you. Possibly your sense of refinement has never been offended in my family; but there are many families, people we visit and love, who, though possessing all the substrata of goodness, have never been moved to cast off the surface thorns that would prick your good taste as sharply as any physical pain. This, of course, is not because they are Jews, but because they lack refining influences in their surroundings. We look for and excuse these signs; many Christians take them as the inevitable marks of the race, and without looking further, conclude that a cultured Jew is an impossibility."

"Mr. Levice, I am but an atom in the Christian world, and you who number so many of them among your friends should not make such sweeping assertions. The world is narrow-minded; individuals are broader."

"True; but I speak of the majority, who decide the vote, and by whom my child would be, without doubt, ostracized. This only by your people; by ours it would be worse, --for she will have raised a terrible barrier by renouncing her religion."

"I shall never renounce my religion, Father."

"Such a marriage would mean only that to the world; and so you would be cut adrift from both sides, as all women are who move from where they rightfully belong to where they are not wanted."

"Sir," interrupted Kemp, "allow me to show you wherein such a state of affairs would, if it should happen, be of no consequence. The friends we care for and who care for us will not drop off if we remain unchanged. Because I love your daughter and she loves me, and because we both desire our love to be honored in the sight of God and man, wherein have we erred? We shall still remain the same man and woman."

"Unhappily the world would not think so."

"Then let them hold to their bigoted opinion; it is valueless, and having each other, we can dispense with them."

"You speak in the heat of passion; and at such a time it would be impossible to make you understand the honeymoon of life is made up of more than two, and a third being inimical can make it wretched. The knowledge that people we respect hold aloof from us is bitter."

"But such knowledge," interrupted Ruth's sweet voice, "would be robbed of all bitterness when surrounded and hedged in by all that we love."

Her father looked in surprise at the brave face raised so earnestly to his.

"Very well," he responded; "count the world as nothing. You have just said, my Ruth, that you would not renounce your religion. How could that be when you have a Christian husband who would not renounce his?"

"I should hope he would not; I should have little respect for any man who would give up his sacred convictions because I have come into his life. As for my religion, I am a Jewess, and will die one. My God is fixed and unalterable; he is one and indivisible; to divide his divinity would be to deny his omnipotence. As to forms, you, Father, have bred in me a contempt for all but a few. Saturday will always be my Sabbath, no matter what convention would make me do. We have decided that writing or sewing or pleasuring, since it hurts no one, is no more a sin on that day than on another; to sit with idle hands and gossip or slander is more so. But on that day my heart always holds its Sabbath; this is the force of custom. Any day would do as well if we were used to

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it, --for who can tell which was the first and which the seventh counting from creation? On our New Year I should still feel that a holy cycle of time had passed; but I live only according to one record of time, and my New Year falls always on the 1st of January. Atonement is a sacred day to me; I could not desecrate it. Our services are magnificently beautiful, and I should feel like a culprit if debarred from their holiness. As to fasting, you and I have agreed that any physical punishment that keeps our thoughts one moment from God, and puts them on the feast that is to come, is mere sham and pretence. After these, Father, wherein does our religion show itself?"

"Surely," he replied with some bitterness, "we hold few Jewish rites. Well, and so you think you can keep these up? And you, Dr. Kemp?"

Dr. Kemp had been listening attentively while Ruth spoke. His eyes kindled brightly as he answered, --

"Why should she not? If all her orisons have made her as beautiful, body and soul, as she is to me, what is to prevent her from so continuing? And if my wife would permit me to go with her upon her holidays to your beautiful Temple, no one would listen more reverently than I. Loving her, what she finds worshipful could find nothing but respect in me."

Plainly Mr. Levice had forgotten the wellspring that was to enrich their lives; but he perceived that some impregnable armor encased them that made every shot of his harmless.

"I can understand," he ventured, "that no gentleman with self-respect would, at least outwardly, show disrespect for any person's religion. You, Doctor, might even come to regard with awe a faith that has withheld everything and has never yet been sneered at, however its followers have been persecuted. Many of its minor forms are slowly dying out and will soon be remembered only historically; this history belongs to every one."

"Certainly. Let us, however, stick to the point in question. You are a man who has absorbed the essence of his religion, and cast off most of its unnecessary externals. You have done the same for my--for your daughter. This distinguishes you. If I were to say the characteristic has never been unbeautiful in my eyes, I should be excusing what needs no excuse. Now, sir, I, in turn, am a Christian broadly speaking; more formally, a Unitarian. Our faiths are not widely divergent. We are both liberal; otherwise marriage between us might be a grave experiment. As to forms, for me they are a show, but for many they are a necessity, --a sort of moral backbone without which they might fall. Sunday is to me a day of rest if my patients do not need me. I enjoy hearing a good sermon by any noble, broad-minded man, and go to church not only for that, but for the pleasure of having my spiritual tendencies given a gentle stirring up. There is one holiday that I keep and love to keep; that is Christmas."

"And I honor you for it; but loving this day of days, looking for sympathy for it from all you meet, how will it be when in your own home the wife whom you love above all others stands coldly by and watches your feelings with no answering sympathy? Will this not breed dissension, if not in words, at least in spirit? Will you not feel the want and resent it?"

Dr. Kemp was silent. The question was a telling one and required thought; therefore he was surprised when Ruth answered for him. Her quiet voice carried no sense of hysterical emotion, but one of grave grace.

She addressed her father; each had refrained from appealing to the other. The situation in the light of their new, great love was strained and unnatural.

"I should endeavor that he should feel no lack," she said; "for so far as Christmas is concerned, I am a Christian also."

"I do not understand." Her father's lips were dry, his voice husky.

"Ever since I have been able to judge," explained the girl, quietly, "Christ has been to me the loveliest and one of the best men that ever lived. You yourself, Father, admire and reverence his life."

"Yes?" His eyes were half closed as if in pain; he motioned to her to continue.

"And so, in our study, he was never anything but what was great and good. Later, when I had read his 'Sermon on the Mount,' I grew to see that what he preached was beautiful. It did not change my religion; it made me no less a Jewess in the true sense, but helped me to gentleness. To me he became the embodiment of Love in the highest, --Love perfect, but warm and human; human Love so glorious that it needs no divinity to augment its power over us. He was God's attestation, God's symbol of what Man might be. As a teacher of brotherly love, he is sublime. So I may call myself a christian, though I spell it with a small letter. It is right that such a man's birthday should be remembered with love; it shows what a sweet power his name is, when, as that time approaches, everybody seems to love everybody better. Feeling so, would it be wrong for me to participate in my husband's actions on that day?"

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She received no answer. She looked only at her father with loving earnestness, and the look of adoration Kemp bent upon her was quite lost.

"Would this be wrong, Father?" she urged.

He straightened himself in his chair as if under a load. His dark, sallow face seemed to have grown worn and more haggard.

"I have always imagined myself just and liberal in opinion," he responded; "I have sought to make you so. I never thought you could leap thus far. It were better had I left you to your mother. Wrong? No; you would be but giving your real feelings expression. But such an expression would grieve—Pardon; I am to consider your happiness." He seemed to swallow something, and hastily continued: "While we are still on this subject, are you aware, my child, that you could not be married by a Jewish rabbi?"

She started perceptibly.

"I should love to be married by Doctor C----." As she pronounced the grand old rabbi's name, a tone of reverential love accompanied it.

"I know. But you would have to take a justice as a substitute."

"A Unitarian minister would be breaking no law in uniting us, and I think would not object to do so; that is, of course, if you had no objection." The doctor looked at him questioningly. Levice answered by turning to Ruth. She passed her hand over her forehead.

"Do you think," she asked, "that after a ceremony had been performed, Dr. C---- would bless us? As a friend, would he have to refuse?"

"He would be openly sanctioning a marriage which according to the rabbinical law is no marriage at all. Do you think he would do this, notwithstanding his friendship for you?" returned her father. They both looked at him intently.

"Ah, well," she answered, throwing back her head, a half-smile coming to her pale lips, "it is but a sentiment, and I could forego it, I suppose. One must give up little things sometimes for great."

"Yes; and this would be but the first. My children, there is something radically wrong when we have to overlook and excuse so much before marriage. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' and why should we add trouble to days already burdened before they come?"

"We should find all this no trouble," said Kemp; "and what is to trouble us after? We have now the wherewithal for our happiness; what, in God's name, do you ask for more?"

"As I have said, Dr. Kemp, we are an earnest people. Marriage is a step not entered into lightly. Divorce, for this reason, is seldom heard of with us, and for this reason we have few unhappy marriages. We know beforehand what we have to expect from every quarter. No question I have put would be necessary with a Jew. His ways are ours, and, with few exceptions, a woman has nothing but happiness to expect from him. How am I sure of this with you? In a moment of anger this difference of faith may be flung in each other's teeth, and what then?"

"You mean you cannot trust me."

The quiet, forceful words were accompanied by no sign of emotion. His deep eyes rested as respectfully as ever upon the old gentleman's face. But the attack was a hard one upon Levice. A vein on his temple sprang into blue prominence as he quickly considered his answer.

"I trust you, sir, as one gentleman would trust another in any undertaking; but I have not the same knowledge of what to expect from you as I should have from any Jew who would ask for my daughter's hand."

"I understand that," admitted the other; "but a few minutes ago you imputed a possibility to me that would be an impossibility to any gentleman. You may have heard of such happenings among some, but an event of that kind would be as removed from us as the meeting of the poles. Everything depends on the parties concerned."

"Besides, Father," added Ruth, her sweet voice full with feeling, "when one loves greatly, one is great through love. Can true married love ever be divided and sink to this?"

The little white and gold clock ticked on; it was the only sound. Levice's forehead rested upon his hand over which his silvery hair hung. Kemp's strong face was as calm as a block of granite; Ruth's was pale with thought.

Suddenly the old man threw back his head. They both started at the revelation: great dark rings were about his eyes; his mouth was set in a strained smile.

"I—I," he cleared his throat as if something impeded his utterance,—"I have one last suggestion to make. You may have children. What will be their religion?"

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The little clock ticked on; a dark hue overspread Kemp's face. As for the girl, she scarcely seemed to hear; her eyes were riveted upon her father's changed face.

"Well?"

The doctor gave one quick glance at Ruth and answered, --

"If God should so bless us, I think the simple religion of love enough for childhood. Later, as their judgment ripened, I should let them choose for themselves, as all should be allowed."

"And you, my Ruth?"

A shudder shook her frame; she answered mechanically, --

"I should be guided by my husband."

The little clock ticked on, backward and forward, and forward and back, dully reiterating, "Time flies, time flies."

"I have quite finished," said Levice, rising.

Kemp did likewise.

"After all," he said deferentially, "you have not answered my question."

"I--think--I--have," replied the old man, slowly. "But to what question do you refer?"

"The simple one, --will you give me your daughter?"

"No, sir; I will not."

Kemp drew himself up, bowed low, and stood waiting some further word, his face ashy white. Levice's lips trembled nervously, and then he spoke in a gentle, restrained way, half apologetically and in strange contrast to his former violence.

"You see, I am an old man rooted in old ideas; my wife, not so old, holds with me in this. I do not know how wildly she would take such a proposition. But, Dr. Kemp, as I said before, though I object, I shall not oppose this marriage. I love my daughter too dearly to place my beliefs as an obstacle to what she considers her happiness; it is she who will have to live the life, not I. You and I, sir, have been friends; outside of this one great difference there is no man to whom I would more gladly trust my child. I honor and esteem you as a gentleman who has honored my child in his love for her. If I have hurt you in these bitter words, forgive me; as my daughter's husband, we must be more than friends."

He held out his hand. The doctor took it, and holding it tightly in his, made answer somewhat confusedly, --

"Mr. Levice, I thank you. I can say no more now, except that no son could love and honor you more than I shall."

Levice bent his head, and turned to Ruth, who sat, without a movement, looking straight ahead of her.

"My darling," said her father, softly laying his hand on her head and raising her lovely face, "if I have seemed selfish and peculiar, trust me, dear, it was through no lack of love for you. Do not consider me; forget, if you will, all I have said. You are better able, perhaps, than I to judge what is best for you. Since you love Dr. Kemp, and if after all this thought, you feel you will be happy with him, then marry him. You know that I hold him highly, and though I cannot honestly give you to him, I shall not keep you from him. My child, the door is open; you can pass through without my hand. Good-night, my little girl."

His voice quavered sadly over the old-time pet name as he stooped and kissed her. He wrung the doctor's hand again in passing, and abruptly turned to leave the room. It was a long room to cross. Kemp and Ruth followed with their eyes the small, slightly stooped figure of the old man passing slowly out by himself. As the heavy portiere fell into place behind him, the doctor turned to Ruth, still seated in her chair.

Chapter XVIII

She was perfectly still. Her eyes seemed gazing into vacancy.

"Ruth," he said softly; but she did not move. His own face showed signs of the emotions through which he had passed, but was peaceful as if after a long, triumphant struggle. He came nearer and laid his hand gently upon her shoulder.

"Love," he whispered, "have you forgotten me entirely?"

His hand shook slightly; but Ruth gave no sign that she saw or heard.

"This has been too much for you," he said, drawing her head to his breast. She lay there as if in a trance, with eyes closed, her face lily-white against him. They remained in this position for some minutes till he became alarmed at her passivity.

"You are tired, darling," he said, stroking her cheek; "shall I leave you?"

She started up as if alive to his presence for the first time, and sprang to her feet. She turned giddy and swayed toward him. He caught her in his arms.

"I am so dizzy," she laughed in a broken voice, looking with dry, shining eyes at him; "hold me for a minute."

He experienced a feeling of surprise as she clasped her arms around his neck; Ruth had been very shy with her caresses.

His eyes met hers in a long, strange look.

"Of what are you thinking?" he asked in a low voice.

"There is an old German song I used to sing," she replied musingly; "will you think me very foolish if I say it is repeating itself to me now, over and over again?"

"What is it, dear?" he asked, humoring her.

"Do you understand German? Oh, of course, my student; but this is a sad old song; students don't sing such things. These are some of the words: 'Beh te Gott! es war zu sch'n gewesen.' I wish—"

"It is a miserable song," he said lightly; "forget it."

She disengaged herself from his arms and sat down. Some late roisterers passing by in the street were heard singing to the twang of a mandolin. It was a full, deep song, and the casual voices blended in perfect accord. As the harmony floated out of hearing, she looked up at him with a haunting smile.

"People are always singing to us; I wish they wouldn't. Music is so sad; it is like a heart-break."

He knelt beside her; he was a tall man, and the action seemed natural.

"You are pale and tired," he said; "and I am going to take a doctor's privilege and send you to bed. To-morrow you can answer better what I so long to hear. You heard what your father said; your answer rests entirely with you. Will you write, or shall I come?"

"Do you know," she answered, her eyes burning in her pale face, "you have very pretty, soft dark hair? Does it feel as soft as it looks?" She raised her hand, and ran her fingers lingeringly through his short, thick hair.

"Why," she said brightly, "here are some silvery threads on your temples. Troubles, darling?"

"You shall pull them out," he answered, drawing her little hand to his lips.

"There, go away," she said quickly, snatching it from him and moving from her chair as he rose. She rested her elbow on the mantel-shelf, and the candles from the silver candelabra shone on her face; it looked strained and weary. Kemp's brows gathered in a frown as he saw it.

"I am going this minute," he said; "and I wish you to go to bed at once. Don't think of anything but sleep. Promise me you will go to bed as soon as I leave."

"Very well."

"Good-night, sweetheart," he said, kissing her softly, "and dream happy dreams." He stooped again to kiss her hands, and moved toward the door.

"Herbert!" His hand was on the portiere, and he turned in alarm at her strange call.

"What is it?" he asked, taking a step toward her.

"Nothing. Don't--don't come back, I say. I just wished to see your face. I shall write to you. Good-night."

And the curtain fell behind him.

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As he passed down the gravel walk, a hack drew up and stopped in front of the house. Louis Arnold sprang out. The two men came face to face.

Arnold recognized the doctor immediately and drew back. When Kemp saw who it was, he bowed and passed on. Arnold did likewise, but he went in where the other went out.

It was late, after midnight. He had just arrived on a delayed southern train. He knew the family had come home that morning. Dr. Kemp was rather early in making a visit; it had also taken him long to make it.

Louis put his key in the latch and opened the door. It was very quiet; he supposed every one had retired. He flung his hat and overcoat on a chair and walked toward the staircase. As he passed the drawing-room, a stream of light came from beneath the portiere. He hesitated in surprise, everything was so quiet. Probably the last one had forgotten to put out the lights. He stepped noiselessly up and entered the room. His footfall made no sound on the soft carpet as he moved about putting out the lights. He walked to the mantel to blow out the candles, but stopped, dumfounded, within a foot of it. The thing that disturbed him was the motionless white figure of his cousin. It might have been a marble statue, so lifeless she seemed, though her face was hidden in her hands.

For a moment Arnold was terrified; but the feeling was immediately succeeded by one of exquisite pain. He was a man not slow to conjecture; by some intuition he understood.

He regained his presence of mind and turned quietly to quit the room; his innate delicacy demanded it. He had but turned when a low, moaning sound arrested him; he came back irresolutely.

"Did you call, Ruth?"

Silence.

"Ruth, it is I, Louis, who is speaking to you. Do you know how late it is?"

With gentle force he drew her fingers from her face. The mute misery there depicted was pitiful.

"Come, go to bed, Ruth," he said as to a child.

She made a movement to rise, but sank back again.

"I am so tired, Louis," she pleaded in a voice of tears, like a weary child.

"Yes, I know; but I will help you." The unfamiliar, gentle quality of his voice penetrated even to her numbed senses.

She had not seen him since the night he had asked her to be his wife. No remembrance of this came to her, but his presence held something new and restful. She allowed him to draw her to her feet; and as calmly as a brother he led her upstairs and into her room. Without a question he lit the gas for her.

"Good-night, Ruth," he said, blowing out the match. "Go right to bed; your head will be relieved by sleep."

"Thank you, Louis," she said, feeling dimly grateful for something his words implied; "good-night."

Arnold noiselessly closed the door behind him. She quickly locked it and sat down in the nearest chair.

Her hands were interlaced so tightly that her nails left imprints in the flesh. She had something to consider. Oh dear, it was such a simple thing; was she to break her father's heart, or her own and--his? Her father's, or his.

It was so stupid to sit and repeat it. Surely it was decided long ago. Such a long time ago, when her father's loving face had put on its misery. Would it look that way always? No, no, no! She would not have it; she dared not; it was too utterly wretched.

Still, there was some one else at the thought of whom her temples throbbed wildly. It would hurt him; she knew it. The thought for a moment was a miserable ecstasy; for he loved her, --her, simple Ruth Levice, --beyond all doubting she knew he loved her; and, oh, father, father, how she loved him! Why must she give it all up? she questioned fiercely; did she owe no duty to herself? Was she to drag out all the rest of her weary life without his love? Life! It would be a lingering death, and she was young yet in years. Other girls had married with graver obstacles, in open rupture with their parents, and they had been happy. Why could not she? It was not as if he were at fault; no one dared breathe a word against his fair fame. To look at his strong, handsome face meant confidence. That was when he left the room.

Some one else had left the room also. Some one who had loved her all her life, some one who had grown accustomed in more than twenty years to listen gladly for her voice, to anticipate every wish, to hold her as in the palm of a loving hand, to look for and rest on her unquestioned love. He too had left the room; but he was not strong and handsome, poor, poor old father with his small bent shoulders. What a wretched thing it is to be old and have the heart-strings that have so confidently twisted themselves all these years around another rudely cut off, --and that by your only child!

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At the thought an icy quiet stole over her. How long she sat there, musing, debating, she did not know. When the gray dawn broke, she rose up calmly and seated herself at her writing-table. She wrote steadily for some time without erasing a single word. She addressed the envelope without a falter over the name.

"That is over," she said audibly and deliberately.

A cock crowed. It was the beginning of another day.

Chapter XIX

Dr. Kemp tossed the reins to his man, sprang from his carriage, and hurried into his house. "Burke!" he called while closing the door, "Burke!" He walked toward the back of the house and into the kitchen, still calling. Finding it empty, he walked back again and began a still hunt about the pieces of furniture in the various rooms. Being unsuccessful, he went into his bedroom, made a hasty toilet, and hurried again to the kitchen.

"Where have you been, Burke?" he exclaimed as that spare-looking personage turned, spoon in hand, from the range.

"Right here, General," he replied in surprise, "except when I went out."

"Well; did any mail come here for me?"

"One little Billy-do, General. I put it under your dinner-plate; and shall I serve the soup?" the last was bellowed after his master's retreating form.

"Wait till I ring," he called back.

He lifted his solitary plate, snatched up the little letter, and sat down hastily, conscious of a slight excitement.

His name and address stared at him from the white envelope in a round, firm hand. There was something about the loop-letters that reminded him of her, and he passed his hand caressingly over the surface. He did not break the seal for some minutes, —anticipation is sometimes sweeter than realization. Finally it was done, but he closed his eyes for a second, — a boyish trick of his that had survived when he wished some expected pleasure to spring suddenly upon him. How would she address him? The memory of their last meeting gave him courage, and he opened his eyes. The denouement was disconcerting. Directly under the tiny white monogram she had begun without heading of any description: —

It was cruel of me to let you go as I did: you were hopeful when you left. I led you to this state for a purely selfish reason. After all, it saved you the anguish of knowing it was a final farewell; for even then I knew it could never be. Never! Forever!—do you know the meaning of those two long words? I do. They have burned themselves irrevocably into my brain; try to understand them, —they are final.

I retract nothing that I said to my father in your presence; you know exactly how I still consider what is separating us. I am wrong. Only I am causing this separation; no one else could or would. Do not blame my father; if he were to see me writing thus he would beg me to desist; he would think I am sacrificing my happiness for him. I have no doubt you think so now. Let me try to make you understand how different it really is. I am no Jephthah's daughter, —he wants no sacrifice, and I make none. Duty, the hardest word to learn, is not leading me. You heard my father's words; but not holding him as I do, his face could not recoil upon your heart like a death's hand.

I am trying to write coherently and to the point: see what a coward I am! Let me say it now, —I could never be happy with you. Do you remember Shylock, —the old man who withdrew from the merry-making with a breaking heart? I could not make merry while he wept; my heart would weep also. You see how selfish I am; I am doing it for my own sake, and for no one's else.

And that is why I ask you now to forgive me, —because I am not noble enough to consider you when my happiness is at stake. I suppose I am a light person seemingly to play thus with a man's heart. If this reflection can rob you of regret, think me so. Does it sound presumptuous or ironical for me to say I shall pray you may be happy without me? Well, it is said hearts do not break for love, —that is, not quickly. If you will just think of what I have done, surely you will not regret your release; you may yet find a paradise with some other and better woman. No, I am not harsh or unreasonable; even I expect to be happy. Why should not you, then, —you, a man; I, a woman? Forget me. In your busy, full life this should be easy. Trust me, no woman is worthy of spoiling your life for you.

My pen keeps trailing on; like summer twilight it is loath to depart. I am such a woman. I may never see your face again. Will you not forgive me?

RUTH.

He looked up with a bloodless face at Burke standing with the smoking soup.

"I—I—thought you had forgotten to ring," he stammered, shocked at the altered face.

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"Take it away," said his master, hoarsely, rising from his chair. "I do not wish any dinner, Burke. I am going to my office, and must not be disturbed."

The man looked after him with a sadly wondering shake of his head, and went back to his more comprehensible pots and kettles.

Kemp walked steadily into his office, lit the gas, and sat down at his desk. He began to re-read the letter slowly from the beginning. It took a long time, for he read between the lines. A deep groan escaped him as he laid it down. It was written as she would have spoken; he could see the expression of her face in the written words, and a miserable empty feeling of powerlessness came upon him. He did not blame her, --how could he, with that sad evidence of her breaking heart before him? He got up and paced the floor. His head was throbbing, and a cold, sick feeling almost overpowered him. The words of the letter repeated themselves to him. "Paradise with some other, better woman," --she might have left that out; she knew better; she was only trying to cheat herself. "I too shall be happy." Not that, not some other man's wife, --the thought was demoniacal. He caught his reflection in the glass in passing. "I must get out of this," he laughed with dry, parched lips. He seized his hat and went out. The wind was blowing stiffly; for hours he wrestled with it, and then came home and wrote to her: --

I can never forgive you; love's litany holds no such word. Be happy if you can, my santa Filomena; it will help me much, --the fact that you are somewhere in the world and not desolate will make life more worth the living. If it will strengthen you to know that I shall always love you, the knowledge will be eternally true. Wherever you are, whatever the need, remember--I am at hand.

HERBERT KEMP.

Mr. Levice's face was more haggard than Ruth's when, after this answer was received, she came to him with a gentle smile, despite the heavy shadows around her eyes.

"It is all over, Father," she said; "we have parted forever. Perhaps I did not love him enough to give up so much for him. At any rate I shall be happier with you, dear."

"Are you sure, my darling?"

"Quite sure; and there is no more to be said of it. Remember, it is dead and buried; we must never remind each other of it again. Kiss me, Father, and forget that it has been."

Mr. Levice drew a long sigh, partly of relief, partly of pain, as he looked into her lovely, resolute face.

Chapter XX

We do not live wholly through ourselves. What is called fate is but the outcome of the spinning of other individuals twisted into the woof of our own making; so no life should be judged as a unit.

Ruth Levice was not alone in the world; she was neither recluse nor a genius, but a girl with many loving friends and a genial home-life. Having resolved to bear to the world an unchanged front, she outwardly did as she had always done. Her mother's zealous worldliness returned with her health; and Ruth fell in with all her plans for a gay winter, —that is, the plans were gay; Ruth's presence could hardly be termed so. The old spontaneous laugh was superseded by a gentle smile, sympathetic perhaps, but never joyous. She listened more, and seldom now took the lead in a general conversation, though there was a charm about a talk with her that earnest persons, men and women, felt without being able to define it. For the change, without doubt, was there. It was as if a quiet hand had been passed over her exuberant, happy girlhood and left a serious, thoughtful woman in its stead. A subtile change like this is not speedily noticed by outsiders; it requires usage before an acquaintance will account it a characteristic instead of a mood. But her family knew it. Mrs. Levice, wholly in the dark as to the cause, wondered openly.

"You might be thirty, Ruth, instead of twenty-two, by the staidness of your demeanor. While other girls are laughing and chatting as girls should, you look on with the tolerant dignity of a woman of grave concerns. If you had anything to trouble you, there might be some excuse; but as it is, why can't you go into enjoyments like the rest of your friends?"

"Don't I? Why, I hardly know another girl who lives in such constant gayety as I. Are we not going to a dinner this evening and to the ball to-morrow night?"

"Yes; but you might as well be going to a funeral for all the pleasure you seem to anticipate. If you come to a ball with such a grandly serious air, the men will just as soon think of asking a statue to dance as you. A statue may be beautiful in its niche, but people do not care to study its meaning at a ball."

"What do you wish me to do, Mamma? I should hate the distinction of a wall-flower, which you think imminent. I am afraid I am too big a woman to be frolicsome."

"You never were that, but you were at least a girl. People will begin to think you consider yourself above them, or else that you have some secret trouble."

The smile of incredulity with which she answered her would have been heart-breaking had it been understood. No flush stained the ivory pallor of her face at these thrusts in the dark; Louis was never annoyed in this way now. Her old-time excited contradictions never obtruded themselves in their conversations. A silent knowledge lay between them which neither, by word or look, ever alluded to. Mrs. Levice noted with delight their changed relations. Louis's sarcasm ceased to be directed at Ruth; and though the familiar sparring was missing, Mrs. Levice preferred his deferential bearing when he addressed her, and Ruth's grave graciousness with him. She drew her own conclusions, and accepted Ruth's quietness with more patience on this account.

Louis understood somewhat; and in his manliness he could not hide that her suffering had cost him a new code of actions. But he could not understand as her father did. Despite her brave smile, Levice could almost read her heart-beats, and the knowledge brought a hardness and a bitter regret. He grew to scanning her face surreptitiously, looking in vain for the old, untroubled delight in things; and when the unmistakable signs of secret anguish would leave traces at times, he would turn away with a groan. Yet there was nothing to be done. He knew that her love had been no light thing nor could her giving up be so; but feeling that no matter what the present cost, the result would compensate, he trusted to time to heal the wound. Meanwhile his own self-blame at these times left its mark upon him.

For Ruth lived a dual life. The real one was passed in her quiet chamber, in her long solitary walks, and when she sat with her book, apparently reading. She would look up with blank, despairing eyes, clinched hands, and hard-set teeth when the thought of him and all her loss would steal upon her. Her father had caught many such a look upon her face. She had resolved to live without him, but accomplishment is not so easy. Besides, it was not as if she never saw him. San Francisco is not so large a city but that by the turning of a corner you may not come across a friend. Ruth grew to study the sounds the different kinds of vehicles made; and the rolling wheels of a

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doctor's carriage behind her would set her pulses fluttering in fright.

She was walking one day along Sutter Street toward Gough from Octavia. The street takes a sudden down-grade midway in the block. She was approaching this declension just before the Boys' High School when a carriage drove quickly up the hill toward her. The horses gave a bound as if the reins had been jerked; there was the momentary flash of a man's stern, white face as he raised his hat; and Ruth was walking down the hill, trembling and pale. It was the first time; and for one minute her heart seemed to stop beating and then rushed wildly on. Whether she had bowed or made any sign of recognition, she did not know. It did not matter, though; if he thought her cold or strange or anything, what difference could it possibly make? For her there would be left forever this dead emptiness. These casual meetings were inevitable; and she would come home after them worn-out and heavy-eyed. "A slight headache" was a recurrent excuse with her.

They had common friends, and it would not have been surprising had she met him at the different affairs to which she went, always through her mother's desire. But the dread of coming upon him slowly departed as the months rolled by and with them all token of him. Time and again she would hear allusions to him. "Dr. Kemp has developed into a misogynist," pouted Dorothy Gwynne. "He was one of the few decided eligibles on the horizon, but it requires the magnet of illness to draw him now. I really must look up the symptoms of a possible ache; the toilet and expression of an invalid are very becoming, you know."

"Dr. Kemp made a splendid donation to our kindergarten to-day. I have not seen him since we were in the country, and he thought me looking very well. He inquired after the family, and I told him we had a residence, at which he smiled." This from Mrs. Levice. Ruth would have given much to have been able to ask after him with self-possession, but the muscles of her throat seemed to swell and choke her while silent. She went now and then to see Bob Bard in his flower-store; he would without fail inquire after "our friend" or tell her of his having passed that day. Here was her one chance of inquiring if he was looking well, to which the answer was invariably "yes."

She sat one night at the opera in her wonted beauty, with her soft, dusky hair rolled from her sweet Madonna face. Many a lorgnette was raised a second and a third time toward her. Louis, seated next to her, resented with unaccountable ferocity this free admiration that she did not see or feel.

As the curtain went down on the first act, he drew her attention to some celebrity then passing out. She raised her glass, but her hand fell nerveless in her lap. Immediately following him came Dr. Kemp. Their eyes met, and he bowed low, passing on immediately. The rest of the evening passed like a nightmare; she heard nothing but her heart-throbs, saw nothing but his beloved face regarding her with simple courtesy. Louis knew that for her the opera was over; the tell-tale bistrous shadows grew around her eyes, and she became deadly silent.

"What a magnificent man he is," murmured Mrs. Levice, "and what an impressive bow he has!" Ruth did not hear her; but when she reached her own room, she threw herself face downward on her bed in intolerable anguish. She was not a girl who cried easily. If she had been, her suffering would not have been so intense, --when the flood-gates are opened, the river finds relief. Over and over again she wished she might die and end this eager, passionate craving for some token of love from him, or for the power of letting him know how it was with her. And it would always be thus as long as she lived. She did not deceive herself; no mere friendship would have sufficed, --all or nothing after what had been.

Physically, however, she bore no traces of this continual restraint. On the contrary, her slender figure matured to womanly proportions. Little children, seeing her, smiled responsively at her, or clamored to be taken into her arms, there was such a tender mother-look about her. By degrees her friends began to feel the repose of her intellect and the sympathy of her face, and came to regard her as the queen of confidantes. Young girls with their continual love episodes and excitements, ambitious youths with their whimsical schemes of life and aspirations of love, sought her out openly. Few of these latter dared hope for any individual thought from her, though any of the older men would have staked a good deal for the knowledge that she singled him for her consideration.

Arnold viewed it all with inward satisfaction. He regarded memory but as a sort of palimpsest; and he was patiently waiting until his own name should appear again, when the other's should have been sufficiently obliterated.

It was a severe winter, and everybody appreciated the luxury of a warm home. December came in wet and cold, and la grippe held the country in its disagreeable hold. The Levices were congratulating themselves one evening on their having escaped the epidemic.

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"I suppose the secret of it lies in the fact that we do not coddle ourselves," observed Levice.

"If you were to coddle yourself a little more," retorted his wife, "you would not cough every morning as you do. Really, Jules, if you do not consult a physician, I shall send for Kemp myself. I actually think it is making you thin."

"Nonsense!" he replied carelessly; "it is only a little irritation of the throat every morning. If the weather is clear next week, I must go to New York. Eh, Louis?"

"At this time of the year!" cried Mrs. Levice, in expostulation.

"Some one has to go, and the only one that should is I."

"I think I could manage it," said Louis, "if you would see about the other adjustment while I am gone."

"No, you could not,"—when Levice said "no," it seldom meant an ultimate "yes." "Besides, the trip will do me good."

"I shall go with you," put in Mrs. Levice, decidedly.

"No, dear; you could not stand the cold in New York, and I could not be bothered with a woman's grip-sack."

"Take Ruth, then."

"I should love to go with you, Father," she replied to the questioning glance of his eyes. He seemed to ponder over it for a while, but shook his head finally.

"No," he said again; "I shall be very busy, and a woman would be a nuisance to me. Besides, I wish to be alone for a while."

They all looked at him in surprise; he was so unused to making testy remarks.

"Grown tired of womankind?" asked Mrs. Levice, playfully. "Well, if you must, you must; don't overstay your health and visit, and bring us something pretty. How long will you be gone?"

"That depends on the speediness of the courts. No more than three weeks at the utmost, however."

So the following Wednesday being bright and sunny, he set off; the family crossed the bay with him.

"Take care of your mother, Ruth," he said at parting, "and of yourself, my pale darling."

"Don't worry about me, Father," she said, pulling up his furred collar; "indeed, I am well and happy. If you could believe me, perhaps you would love me as much as you used to."

"As much! My child, I never loved you better than now; remember that. I think I have forgotten everybody else in you."

"Don't, dear! it makes me feel miserable to think I should cause you a moment's uneasiness. Won't you believe that everything is as I wish it?"

"If I could, I should have to lose the memory of the last four months. Well, try your best to forgive me, child."

"Unless you hate me, don't hurt me with that thought again. I forgive you? I, who am the cause of it all?"

He kissed her tear-filled eyes tenderly, and turned with a sign to her mother.

They watched to the last his loved face at the window, Ruth with a sad smile and a loving wave of her handkerchief.

Over at the mole it is not a bad place to witness tragedies. Pathos holds the upper hand, and the welcomes are sometimes as heart-rending as the leave-takings. A woman stood on the ferry with a blank, working face down which the tears fell heedlessly; a man, her husband, turned from her, drew his hat down over his eyes, and stalked off toward the train without a backward glance. Parting is a figure of death in this respect, —that only those who are left need mourn; the others have something new beyond.

Chapter XXI

The fire-light threw grotesque shadows on the walls. Ruth and Louis in the library made no movement to ring for lights; it was quite cosey as it was. They had both drawn near the crackling wood-blaze, Ruth in a low rocker, Arnold in Mr. Levice's broad easy-chair.

"I surely thought you intended going to the concert this evening, Louis," she said, looking across at him. "I fancy Mamma expected you to accompany her."

"What! Voluntarily put myself into the cold when there is a fire blazing right here? Ah, no. At any rate, your mother is all right with the Lewises, and I am all right with you."

"I give you a guarantee I shall not bite; you look altogether too hard for my cannibalistic propensities."

"It is something not to be accounted soft. I think a redundancy of flesh overflows in trickling sentimentality. My worst enemy could not accuse me of either fault."

"But your best friend would not mind a little thaw now and then. One of the girls confided to me today that walking on and over-waxed floor was nothing to attempting an equal footing in conversation with you."

"I am sorry I am such a slippery customer. Does not the fire burn your face? Shall I hand you a screen?"

"No; I like to toast."

"But your complexion might char; move your chair a little forward."

"In two minutes I intend to have lights and to bring my work down. Will it make you tired to watch me?"

"Exceedingly. I prefer your undivided attention; it is not often we are alone, Ruth."

She looked up slightly startled; he seldom made personal remarks. Her pulses began to flutter with the premonition that reference to a tacitly buried secret was going to be made.

"We have been going out and receiving a good deal lately, though somehow I don't feel festive, with Father away in freezing New York. Mamma would gladly have stayed at home to-night if Jennie had not insisted."

"You think so? I fancy she was a very willing captive; she intimated as much to me."

"How?"

"Not in words, but her eyes were interesting reading: first, capitulation to Jennie, then, in rapid succession, inspiration, command, entreaty, a challenge and retreat, all directed at me. Possibly this eloquence was lost upon you."

"Entirely. What was your interpretation?"

"Ah, that was confidential. Perhaps I even endowed her with these thoughts, knowing her desires were in touch with my own."

"It is wanton cruelty to arouse a woman's curiosity and leave it unsatisfied."

"It is not cruelty; it is cowardice."

She gazed at him in wonder. His apple-blossom cheeks wore a rosier glow than usual. He seized a log from the box, threw it on the blaze that illumined their faces, grasped the poker, and leaning forward in his chair let it grow hot as he held it to the flames. His glasses fell off, dangling from the cord; and as he adjusted them, he caught the curious, half-amused smile on Ruth's attentive face. He gave the fire a sharp raking and addressed her, gazing into the leaping flames.

"I was wondering why, after all, you could not be happy as my wife."

A numbness as of death overspread her.

"I think I could make you happy, Ruth."

In the pregnant silence that followed he looked up, and meeting her sad, reproachful eyes, laid down the poker softly but resolutely; there was method in the action.

"In fact, I know I could make you happy."

"Louis, have you forgotten?" she cried in sharp pain.

"I have forgotten nothing," he replied incisively. "Listen to me, Ruth. It is because I remember that I ask you. Give me the right to care for you, and you will be happier than you can ever be in these circumstances."

"You do not know what you ask, Louis. Even if I could, you would never be satisfied."

"Try me, Ruth," he entreated.

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She raised herself from her easy, reclining position, and regarded him earnestly.

"What you desire," she said in a restrained manner, "would be little short of a crime for me. What manner of wife should I be to you when my every thought is given to another?"

His face put on the set look of one who has shut his teeth hard together.

"I anticipated this repulse," he said after a pause; "so what you have just assured me of does not affect my wish or my resolution to continue my plea."

"Would you marry a woman who feels herself as closely bound to another, or the memory of another, as if the marriage rite had been actually performed? Oh, Louis, how could you force me to these disclosures?"

"I am seeking no disclosure, but it is impossible for me to continue silent now."

"Why?"

"Why? Because I love you."

They sat so close together he might have touched her by putting out his hand, but he remained perfectly still, only the pale excitement of long repression speaking from his face; but she shrank back at his words and raised her hand as if about to receive a blow.

"Do not be alarmed," he continued, noticing the action; "my love cannot hurt you, or it would have killed you long ago."

"Oh, Louis," she murmured, "forgive me; I never thought you cared so much."

"How should you? I am not a man to wear my heart upon my sleeve. I think I have always loved you; but living as familiarly as we have lived, seeing you whenever I wished, the thought that some day this might end never occurred to me. It was only when the possibility of some other man's claiming your love and taking you from me presented itself, that my heart rose up in arms against it, --and then I asked you to be my wife."

"Yes," she replied, raising her pale face; "and I refused. The same cause that moved me then, and to which you submitted without protest, rules me now, and you know it."

"No; I do not know it. What then might have had a possible issue is now done with--or do I err?"

Her mouth trembled piteously, but no tears came as she lowered her head.

"Then listen to me. You may think me a poor sort of a fellow even to wish you to marry me when you assure me that you love another. That means that you do not love me as a husband should be loved, but it does not prove that you never could love me so."

"It proves just that."

"No, you may think so now, but let me reason you into seeing the falsity of your thought, --for I do not wish to force or impel you to do a thing repugnant to your reason as well as to your feelings. To begin with, you do not dislike me?"

His face was painful in its eagerness.

"I have always loved you as a dear brother."

"Some people would consider that worse than hostility; I do not. Another question: Is there anything about my life or personality to which you object, or of which you are ashamed?"

"You know how proud we all are of you in your bearing in every relation of life."

"I was egotist enough to think as much at any rate; otherwise I could not approach you so confidently. Well, love--indifferent if you will--and respect are not a bad foundation for something stronger. Will you, for the sake of argument, suppose that for some reason you have forgotten your opposition and have been led into marrying me?"

The sad indulgence of her smile was not inspiring, but he continued, --

"Now, then, say you are my wife; that means I am your husband, and I love you. You do not return my love, you say; you think you would be wretched with me because you love another. Still, you are married to me; that gives me rights that no other man can possess, no matter how much you love him. You are bound to me, I to you and your happiness; so I pledge myself to make you happier than you are now, because I shall make you forget this man."

"You could not, and I should only grow to hate you."

"Impossible," the pallor of his face intensifying; "because I should so act that my love would wait upon your pleasure: it would never push itself into another's place, but it would in time overshadow the other. For, remember, I shall be your husband. I shall give you another life; I shall take you away with me. You will leave all

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your old friends and associations for a while, and I shall be with you always, --not intrusively, but necessarily. I shall give you every pleasure and novelty that the Old World can afford. I shall shower my love on you, not myself. In return I shall expect your tolerance. In time I will make you love me."

His voice shook with the strength of his passion, while she listened in heart-sick fear. Carried away by his manner, she almost felt as if he had accomplished his object. He quieted down after this.

"Don't you see, Ruth, that all this change must make you forget? And if you tried to put the past from you for no other reason than that your wifehood would be less untrue, you would be but following the instincts of a truly honorable woman. After that, all would be easy. In every instance you would be forced to look upon me as your husband, for you would belong to me. I should be the author of all your surroundings; and always keeping in mind how I want you to regard me, I should woo you so tenderly that without knowing it you would finally yield. Then, and only then, when I had filled your thought to the exclusion of every other man, I should bring you home; and I think we should be happy."

"And you would be satisfied to give so much and receive so little?"

"The end would repay me."

"It is a pretty story," she said, letting her hands fall listlessly into her lap, "but the denouement is a castle in Spain that we should never inhabit. You think your love is strong enough to kill mine first of all; well, I tell you, nothing is strong enough for that. With this fact established the rest is needless to speak of. It is only your dream, Louis; forgive me that I unwittingly intruded into it; reality would mean disillusion, --we are happy only when we dream."

"You are bitter."

"Our relations are turned, then; I have put into practice your old theories of the uselessness of life. No; I am wrong. It is better to die than not to have loved."

"You think you have lived your life, then. I can't convince you otherwise now; but I am going to beg you to think this over, to try to imagine yourself my wife. I will not hasten your decision, but in a week's time you should be able to answer me yes or no. If anything can help my cause, I cannot overlook it; so I may tell you now that for some occult reason your mother's one wish is to see you my wife."

"And my father?" her voice was harsh now.

"Your father has expressed to your mother that such a course would make him happy."

She rose suddenly as if oppressed. Her face looked hard to a degree. She stood before him, tall and rigid. He stood up and faced her, reading her face so intently that he straightened himself as if to receive an attack.

"I will consider what you have said," she said mechanically.

The reaction was so unexpected that he turned giddy and caught on to the back of a chair to steady himself.

"It will not take me a week," she went on with no change in her monotone; "I can give you an answer in a day or two. To-morrow night, perhaps."

He made a step forward, a movement to seize her hand; but she stepped back and waved him off.

"Don't touch me," she cried in a suppressed voice; "at least you are not my husband--yet."

She turned hastily toward the door without another word.

"Wait!"

His vibrant voice compelled her to turn.

"I want no martyr for a wife, nor yet a tragedy queen. If you can come to me and honestly say, 'I trust my happiness to you,' well and good. But as I told you once before, I am not a saint, and I cannot always control myself as I have been forced to do tonight. If this admission is damaging, it is too true to be put lightly aside. I shall not detain you longer."

He looked haughty and cold regarding her from this dim distance. Her gentleness struggled to get the better of her, and she came back and held out her hand.

"I am sorry if I offended you, Louis; good-night. Will you not pardon my selfishness?"

His eyes gleamed behind their glasses; he did not take her hand, but merely bent over the little peace-offering as over a sacrament. Seeing that he had no intention of doing more, her hand fell passively to her side, and she left the room.

As the door closed softly, Arnold sank with a hopeless gesture into a chair and buried his face in his hands. He was not a stoic, but a man, --a Frenchman, who loved much; but Arnold, half-blinded by his own love, scarcely

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appreciated the depths of self-forgetfulness to which Ruth would have to succumb in order to accept the guaranty of happiness which he offered her.

The question now presented itself in the light of a duty: if by this action she could undo the remorse that her former offence had inflicted, had she the right to ignore the opportunity? A vision of her own sad face obtruded itself, but she put it sternly from her. If she were to do this thing, the motive alone must be considered; and she rigidly kept in view the fact that her marriage would be the only means by which her father might be relieved of the haunting knowledge of her lost peace of mind. Had she given one thought to Louis, the possibility of the act would have been abhorrent to her. One picture she kept constantly before her, —her father's happy eyes.

Chapter XXII

Mrs. Levice's gaze strayed pensively from the violets she was embroidering to Ruth's pale face. Every time the latter stirred, her mother started expectantly; but the anxiously awaited disclosure was not forthcoming. Outside the rain kept up a sullen downpour, deepening the feeling of comfort indoors; but Mrs. Levice was not what one might call comfortably-minded. Her frequent inventories of Ruth's face had at last led her to believe that the pallor there depicted and the heavy, dark shadows about her eyes meant something decidedly not gladsome.

"Don't you feel well, Ruth?" she asked finally with some anxiety.

Ruth raised her heavy eyes.

"I? Oh, I feel perfectly well. Why do you ask? Do I look ill?"

"Yes, you do; your face is pale, and your eyes look tired. Did you sit up late last night?"

This was a leading move, but Ruth evaded the deeper meaning that was so evident to her now.

"No," she replied; "I believe it could not have been nine when I went upstairs."

"Why? Were you too fatigued to sit up, or was Louis's company unpleasant?"

"Oh, no," was the abrupt response, and her eyes fell on the open page again.

Mrs. Levice, once started on the trail, was not to be baffled by such tactics. Since Ruth was not ill, she had had some mental disturbance of which her weary appearance was the consequence. She felt almost positive that Louis had made some advances last night, from the flash of intelligence with which he had met her telegraphic expression. It was natural for her to be curious; it was unnatural for Ruth to be so reserved. With feelings not a little hurt she decided to know something more.

"For my part," she observed, as if continuing a discussion, "I think Louis charming in a tete-a-tete, --when he feels inclined to be interesting he generally succeeds. Did he tell you anything worth repeating? It is a dull afternoon, and you might entertain me a little."

She looked up from the violet petal she had just completed and encountered Ruth's full, questioning gaze.

"What is it you would like to know, Mamma?" she asked in a gentle voice.

"Nothing that you do not wish to tell," her mother answered proudly, but regarding her intently.

Ruth passed her hand wearily across her brow, and considered a moment before answering.

"I did not wish to hurt you by my silence, Mamma; but before I had decided I hardly thought it necessary to say anything. He asked me to--marry him."

The avowal was not made with the conventional confusion and trembling.

Mrs. Levice was startled by the dead calm of her manner.

"You say that as if it were a daily occurrence for a man like Louis Arnold to offer you his hand and name."

"I hope not."

"But you do. I confess I think you are not one tenth as excited as I am. Why didn't you tell me before? Any other girl would have sat up to tell her mother in the night. Oh, Ruth darling, I am so glad. I have been looking forward to this ever since you grew up. What did you mean by saying you wished to wait till you had decided? Decided what?"

"Upon my answer."

"As if you could question it, you fortunate girl! Or were you waiting for me to help you to it? I scarcely need tell you how you have been honored."

"Honor is not everything, Mamma."

At that moment a desperate longing for her mother's sympathy seized her; but the next minute the knowledge of the needless sorrow it would occasion came to her, and her lips remained closed.

"No," responded her mother, "and you have more than that; surely Louis did not neglect to tell you."

"You mean his love, I suppose, --yes, I have that."

"Then what else would you have? You probably know that he can give you every luxury within reason, --so much for honest practicality. As to Louis himself, the most fastidious could find nothing to cavil at, --he will make you a perfect husband. You are familiar enough with him to know his faults; but no man is faultless. I hope

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you are not so silly as to expect some girlish ideal, --for all the ideals died in the Golden Age, you know."

"As mine did. No; I have outgrown imagination in that line."

"Then why do you hesitate?" Her mother's eyes were shining; her face was alive with the excitement of hope fulfilled. "Is there anything else wanting?"

"No," she responded dully; "but let us not talk about it any more, please. I must see Louis again, you know."

"If your father were here, he could help you better, dear;" there was no reproach in Mrs. Levice's gentle acceptance of the fact; "he will be so happy over it. There, kiss me, girlie; I know you like to think things out in silence, and I shall not say another word about it till you give me leave."

She kept her word. The dreary afternoon dragged on. By four o'clock it was growing dark, and Mrs. Levice became restless.

"I am going to my room to write to your father now, --he shall have a good scolding for the non-receipt of a letter to-day;" and forthwith she betook herself upstairs.

Ruth closed her book and moved restlessly about the room. She wandered over to the front window, and drawing aside the silken curtain, looked out into the storm-tossed garden. The pale heliotropes lay wet and sweet against the trellises; some loosened rose-petals fluttered noiselessly to the ground; only the gorgeous chrysanthemums looked proudly indifferent to the elements; and the beautiful, stately palm-tree just at the side of the window spread its gracious arms like a protecting temple. She felt suddenly oppressed and feverish, and threw open the long French window. The rain had ceased for the time, and she stepped out upon the veranda. The fragrance of the rain-soaked flowers stole to her senses; the soft, sweet breeze caressed her temples; she stood still in the perfumed freshness and enjoyed its peace. By and by she began to walk up and down. Evening was approaching, and Louis would soon be home. She had decided to meet him on his return and have it over with. She must school herself to some show of graciousness. The thing must not be done by halves or it must not be done at all. Her father's happiness; over and over she repeated it. She went so far as to picture herself in his arms; she heard the old-time words of blessing; she saw his smiling eyes; and a gentleness stole over her whole face, a gentle nobility that made it strangely sweet. The soft patter of rain on the gravel roused her, and she went in; but she felt better, and wished Louis might come in while the mood was upon her.

It was nearing six when Mrs. Levice came back humming a song.

"I thought you would still be here. Make a light, will you, Ruth; it is as pitchy as Hades, only that smouldering log looks purgatorial."

Ruth lit the gas; and as she stood with upturned eyes adjusting the burner, her mother noticed that the heaviness had departed from her face. She sank into a rocker and took up the evening paper.

"What time is it, Ruth?"

"Twenty minutes to six," she answered, glancing at the clock.

"As late as that?" She meant to say, "And Louis not home yet?" but forbore to mention his name.

"It is raining heavily now," said Ruth, throwing a log upon the fire. Mrs. Levice unfolded the crackling newspaper, and Ruth moved over to the window to draw down the blinds. As she stood looking out with her hand on the chair, she saw the gate swing slowly open, and a messenger-boy came dawdling up the walk as if the sun were streaming full upon him.

Ruth stepped noiselessly out, meaning to anticipate his ring. A vague foreboding drove the blood from her lips as she stood waiting at the open hall-door. Seeing the streaming light, the boy managed to accelerate his snail's pace.

"Miss Ruth Levice live here?" he asked, stopping in the doorway.

"Yes." She took the packet he handed her. "Any charges or answers?" she asked.

"Nom," answered the boy; and noticing her pallor and apprehension, "I'll shet the door for you," he added, laying his hand on the knob.

"Thank you. Here, take two cars if necessary; it is too wet to walk." She handed him a quarter, and the boy went off, gayly whistling.

She closed the heavy door softly and sat down on a chair. She recognized Louis's handwriting on the wrapper, and her heart fluttered ominously. She tore off the damp covering, and the first thing she encountered was another wrapper on which was written in large characters: --

DEAR RUTH, --Do not be alarmed; everything is all right. I had to leave town on the overland at 6 P.M.

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Read the letter first, then the telegram; they will explain.

LOUIS

The kindly feeling that had prompted this warning was appreciated; one fear was stilled. She drew out the letter; she saw in perplexity that it was from her father. She hurriedly opened it and read:

NEW YORK, Jan. 21, 188--.

DEAR LOUIS, --I am writing this from my bed, where I have been confined for the last week with pneumonia, although I managed to write a daily postal. Have been quite ill, but am on the mend and only anxious to start home again. I really cannot rest here, and have made arrangements to leave to-morrow. Have taken every precaution against catching cold, and apart from feeling a trifle weak and annoyed by a cough, am all right. Shall come home directly. Say nothing of this to Esther or Ruth; shall apprise them by telegram of my home-coming. Had almost completed the business, and can leave the rest to Hamilton.

My love to you all.

Your loving Uncle,

JULES LEVICE.

Under this Louis had pencilled,

Received this this morning at 10.30.

Ruth closed her eyes as she unfolded the telegram; then with every nerve quivering she read the yellow missive: --

RENO, Jan. 27, 188--.

LOUIS ARNOLD, San Francisco, Cal.:

Have been delayed by my cough. Feeling too weak to travel alone. Come if you can.

JULES LEVICE.

Her limbs shook as she sat; her teeth chattered; for one minute she turned sick and faint. Under the telegram Arnold had written: --

Am sure it is nothing. He has never been ill, and is more frightened than a more experienced person would be. There is no need to alarm your mother unnecessarily, so say nothing till you hear from me. Shall wire you as soon as I arrive, which will be to-morrow night.

LOUIS.

How could she refrain from telling her mother? She felt suddenly weak and powerless. O God, good God, her heart cried, only make him well!

The sound of the library door closing made her spring to her feet; her mother stood regarding her.

"What is it, Ruth?" she asked.

"Nothing," she cried, her voice breaking despite her effort to be calm, -- "nothing at all. Louis has just sent me word that he had to leave town this evening, and says not to wait dinner for him."

"That is very strange," mused her mother, moving slowly toward her and holding out her hand for the note; but Ruth thrust the papers into her pocket.

"It is to me, Mamma; you do not care for second-hand love-letters, do you?" she asked, assuming a desperate gayety. "There is nothing strange about it; he often leaves like this."

"Not in such weather and not after_ There won't be a man in the house to-night. I wish your father were home; he would not like it if he knew." She shivered slightly as they went into the dining-room.

Chapter XXIII

The next day passed like a nightmare. To add to the misery of her secret, her mother began to fidget over the continued lack of any communication from her husband. Had the weather been fair, Ruth would have insisted on her going out with her; but to the rain of the day before was added a heavy windstorm that made any unnecessary expedition from home absurd.

Mrs. Levice worried herself into a headache, but would not lie down. She was sure that the next delivery would bring something. Was it not time for the second delivery? Would not Ruth please watch for the postman? By half-past one she took up her station at the window only to see the jaunty little rubber-encased man go indifferently by. At half-past four this scene was repeated, and then she decided to act.

"Ring up the telegraph-office, Ruth; I am going to send a despatch."

"Why, Mamma, probably the mail is delayed; it always is in winter. Besides, you will only frighten Father."

"Nonsense; two days is a long delay without the excuse of a blockade. Go to the telephone, please."

"The telephone was broken yesterday, you know."

"I had forgotten. Well, one of the girls must go; I can't stand it any longer."

"You can't send any of the girls in such weather; both the maids have terrible colds, and Mary would not go if you asked her. Listen! It is frightful. I promise to go in the morning if we don't get a letter, but we probably shall. Let us play checkers for a while." With a forced stoicism she essayed to distract her mother's thoughts, but with poor success. The wretched afternoon drew to a close; and immediately after a show of dining, Mrs. Levice went to bed. At Ruth's suggestion she took some headache medicine.

"It will make me sleep, perhaps; and that will be better than worrying awake and unable to do anything."

The opiate soon had its effect; and with a sigh of relief Ruth heard her mother's regular breathing. It was now her turn to suffer openly the fox-wounds. Louis had said she would hear to-night; but at what time? It was now eight o'clock, and the bell might ring at any moment. Mrs. Levice slept; and Ruth sat dry-eyed and alert, feeling her heart rise to her throat every time the windows shook or the doors rattled. It was one of the wildest nights San Francisco ever experienced; trees groaned, gates slammed, and a perfect war of the elements was abroad. The wailing wind about the house haunted her like the desolate cry of some one begging for shelter. The ormolu clock ticked on and chimed forth nine. Still her mother slept. Ruth from her chair could see that her cheeks were unnaturally flushed and that her breathing was hurried; but any degree of oblivion was better than the impatient outlook for menacing tidings. Despite the heated room, her hands grew cold, and she wrapped them in the fleecy shawl that enveloped her. The action brought to her mind the way her father used to tuck her little hands under the coverlet when a child, after they had clung around his neck in a long good-night, and how no sooner were they there than out they would pop for "just one squeeze more, Father;" how long the good-nights were with this play! She had never called him "papa" like other children, but he had always liked it best so. She brushed a few drops from her lashes as the sweet little chimer rang out ten bells; she began to grow heart-sick with her thoughts; her limbs ached with stiffness, and she began a gentle walk up and down the room. Would it keep up all night? There! surely somebody was crunching up the gravel-walk. With one look at her sleeping mother, she quickly left the room, closing the door carefully behind her. With a palpitating heart she leaned over the balustrade; was it a false alarm, after all? The next instant there was a violent pull at the bell, as startling in the dead of the night as some supernatural summons. Before Ruth could hurry down, Nora, looking greatly bewildered, came out of her room and rushed to the door. In a trice she was back again with the telegram and had put it into Ruth's hands.

"Fifteen cents' charges," she said.

"Pay it," returned Ruth.

As the maid turned away, she tore open the envelope. Before she could open the form, a firm hand was placed upon hers.

"Give me that," said her mother's voice.

Ruth recoiled; Mrs. Levice stood before her unusually quiet in her white night-dress; with a strong hand she endeavored to relax Ruth's fingers from the paper.

"But, Mamma, it was addressed to me"

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"It was a mistake, then; I know it was meant for me. Let go instantly, or I shall tear the paper. Obey me, Ruth."

Her voice sounded harsh as a man's. At the strange tone Ruth's fingers loosened, and Mrs. Levice, taking the telegram, re-entered the room; Ruth followed her closely.

Standing under the chandelier, Mrs. Levice read. No change came over her face; when she had finished, she handed the paper without a word to Ruth. This was the message: —

RENO, Jan. 28, 188—

MISS RUTH LEVICE, San Francisco, Cal."

Found your father very weak and feverish and coughing continually. Insists on getting home immediately. Says to inform Dr. Kemp, who will understand, and have him at the house on our arrival at 11.30 Thursday. No present danger.

LOUIS ARNOLD

"Explain," commanded her mother, speaking in her overwrought condition as if to a stranger.

"Get into bed first, Mamma, or you will take cold."

Mrs. Levice suffered herself to be led there, and in a few words Ruth explained what she knew.

"You knew that yesterday before the train left?"

"Yes, Mamma."

"And why didn't you tell me? I should have gone to him. Oh, why didn't you tell me?"

"It would have been too late, dear."

"No, it is too late now; do you hear? I shall never see him again, and it is all your fault—what do you know? Stop crying! will you stop crying, or—"

"Mamma, I am not crying; you are crying, and saying things that are not true. It will not be too late; perhaps it is nothing but the cough. Louis says there is no danger."

"Hush!" cried her mother, her whole figure trembling. "I know there is danger now, this minute. Oh, what can I do, what can I do?" With this cry all her strength seemed to give way; she sobbed and laughed with the hysteria of long ago; when Ruth strove to put her arms around her, she shook her off convulsively.

"Don't touch me!" she breathed; "it is all your fault—he wants me—needs me—and, oh, look at me here! Why do you stand there like a ghost? Go away. No, come here—I want Dr. Kemp; now, at once, he said to have him; send for him, Ruth."

"On Thursday morning," she managed to answer.

"No, now—I must, must, must have him! You won't go? Then I shall; move aside."

Ruth, summoning all her strength, strove to hold her in her arms, all to no avail.

"Lie still," she said sternly; "I shall go for Dr. Kemp."

"You can't; it is night and raining. Oh," she continued, half deliriously, "I know I am acting strangely, and he will calm me. Ruth, I want to be calm; don't you understand?"

The two maids, frightened by the noise, stood in the doorway. Both had their heads covered with shawls; both were suffering with heavy colds.

"Come in, girls. Stay here with my mother; I am going for the doctor."

"Oh, Miss Ruth, ain't you afraid? It's a awful night, and black as pitch, and you all alone?" asked one, with wide, frightened eyes.

"I am not afraid," said the girl, a great calmness in her voice as she spoke above her mother's sobbing; "stay and try to quiet her. I shall not be gone long."

She flew into her room, drew on her overshoes and mackintosh, grasped a sealskin hood, which she tied securely under her chin, and went out into the howling, raging night.

She had but a few blocks to go, but under ordinary circumstances the undertaking would have been disagreeable enough. The rain came down in heavy, wild torrents; the wind roared madly, wrapping her skirts around her limbs and making walking almost an impossibility; the darkness was impenetrable save for the sickly, quavering light shed by the few street-lamps, as far apart as angel visitants. Lowering her head and keeping her figure as erect as possible, she struggled bravely on. She met scarcely any one, and those she did meet occasioned her little uneasiness in the flood of unusual emotions that overwhelmed her soul. At any other time the thought of her destination would have blotted out every other perception; now this was but one of many shuddering visions.

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Trouble was making her hard; life could offer her little that would find her unequal to the test. Down the broad, deserted avenue, with its dark, imposing mansions, she hurried as if she were alone in the havocking elements. The rain beat her and lashed her in the face; she faced it unflinchingly as a small part of her trials. Without a tremor she ran up Dr. Kemp's steps. It was only when she stood with her finger on the bell-button that she realized whom she was about to encounter. Then for the first time she gave one long sob of self-recollection, and pushed the button.

Burke almost immediately opened the door. Ruth had no intention of entering; it would be sufficient to leave her message and hurry home.

"Who's there?" asked Burke, peering out into the darkness. "It's a devil of a night for any one but—"

"Is Dr. Kemp in?" The sweet woman-voice so startled him that he opened the door wide.

"Come in, mum," he said apologetically; "come in out of the night."

"No. Is the doctor in?"

"I don't know," he grumbled, "and I can't stand here with the door open."

"Close it, then, but see if he is in, please."

"I'll leave it open, and ye can come in or stay out according if ye are dry-humored or wet-soled;" and he shuffled off. The door was open! Her father had assured her of this once long ago. Inside were warmth and light; outside, in the shadow, were cold and darkness. Here she stood. Would the man never return? Ah, here he came hurrying along; she drew nearer the door; within a half-foot she stood still with locked jaw and swimming senses.

"My good woman," said the grave, kindly voice which calmed while it unnerved her, "come in and speak to me here. Am I wanted anywhere? Come in, please; the door must be closed."

With almost superhuman will she drew herself together and came closer. Seeing the dark, moving figure, he opened the door wide, and she stepped in; then as it closed she faced him, turning up her white, haggard face to his.

"You!"

He recoiled as if stunned, but quickly recovered himself.

"What trouble has brought you to me?" he cried.

"My mother," she replied in a low, stifled voice, adding almost instantly in a distant and formal tone, "can you come at once? She is suffering with hysteria and calls you incessantly."

He drew himself up and looked at her with a cold, grand air. This girl had been the only woman who had signally affected his life; yet if her only recognition of it was this cold manner, he could command the same.

"I will come," he replied, looking unbendingly, with steely gray eyes, into her white passionless face, framed in its dark hood.

She bowed her head—further words were impossible—and turned to the door.

He watched her tugging in blind stupefaction at the strange bolt, but did not move to her assistance. Her head was bent low over the intricate thing; but it was useless, --it would not move, and she suddenly raised her eyes beseechingly to him; with a great revulsion of feeling he saw that they were swimming in tears. His own lips trembled, and his heart gave a wild leap. Then one of those unaccountable moods that sometimes masters the best swayed him strongly.

She was alone with him there; he could keep her if he wished. One look at her lovely, beloved face, and his higher manhood asserted itself. He unlatched the door, and still holding it closed, said in a deferential tone, —

"Will you not wait till I ring for my carriage?"

"I would rather go at once."

Nothing was left but for him to comply with her wishes; and as she walked out, he quickly got himself into his proper vestments, seized a vial from his office, and hurried after her. At this juncture the storm was frightful. Up the street he could see come one trying ineffectually to move on. Being a powerful man, he strode on, though the great gusts carried his breath away. In a few minutes he came alongside of Ruth, who was making small progress.

"Will you take my arm?" he asked quietly. "It will help you."

She drew back in alarm.

"There is no necessity," he indistinctly heard in the roar of the gale.

He kept near enough to her, however, to see her. All along this block of Van Ness Avenue is a row of tall, heavy-foliaged eucalyptus-trees; they tossed and creaked and groaned in the furious wind. A violent gust almost

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took the two pedestrians off their feet, but not too quickly for Dr. Kemp to make a stride toward Ruth and drag her back. At the same moment, one of the trees lurched forward and fell with a crash upon them. By a great effort he had turned and, holding her before him, received the greater blow upon his back.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, bending his head so near her face that his short wet beard brushed her cheek.

"No," she said, wresting herself from him; "I thank you—but you have hurt yourself."

"You are mistaken," he said abruptly. "Take my arm, please."

He did not wait for her yea or nay; but drawing her arm through his, he strode on in silence, holding it closely pinioned against his heart. When they reached the house, they were both white and breathless. Nora opened the door for them.

"Oh, Miss Ruth, do hurry up!" she cried, wringing her hands as the doctor threw off his coat and hat; "all she does now is to stare at us with her teeth all chattering."

The doctor sprang up three steps at a time, Ruth quickly following.

The room was in a blaze of light; Mrs. Levice sat up in bed, her large dark eyes staring into vacancy, her face as white as the snowy counterpane.

Kemp looked like a pillar of strength as he came up to the bedside.

"Well?" he said, holding out his hand and smiling at her.

As he took her hand in his, she strove to speak; but the sobbing result was painful.

"None of that!" he said sternly, laying his hand on her shoulders. "If you try, you can stop this. Now see, I am holding you. Look at me, and you will understand you must quiet down."

He used his well-known power of magnetism. Gradually the quivering shoulders quieted beneath his hands; the staring eyes relaxed, and he gently laid her head upon the pillow.

"Don't go away!" she implored piteously, as she felt his hands move from her.

"No, indeed," he replied in a bright, soothing voice; "see, I am going to give you a few drops of this, which will make you all right in a short time. Now then, open your mouth."

"But, Doctor, I wish to speak to you."

"After you have taken this and rested awhile."

"And you won't go away?" she persisted.

"I shall stay right here." She obediently swallowed the dose; and as he drew up an easy-chair and seated himself, the drawn lines on her face relaxed.

"It is so strengthening to have you here," she murmured.

"It will be more strengthening for you to close your eyes."

Ruth, who still stood in her wet clothes, lowered the lights.

"You had better change your clothes immediately," said Kemp, in a low tone from his chair.

She did not look at him, but at his voice she left the room.

Quickly removing her wet garments, she slipped into a loose, dull red gown. As the dry warmth of it reached her senses, she suddenly remembered that his feet might be wet. She lit a candle, and going into Louis's room, appropriated a pair of slippers that stood in his closet.

It was now past midnight; but no thought of sleep occurred to her till, entering her mother's room, she perceived in the semi-darkness that the doctor lay back with closed eyes. He was not asleep, however, for he opened his eyes at her light footfall. She looked very beautiful in her unconfined gown, the red tone heightening the creamy colorlessness of her face.

"Will you put them on?" she asked in a hushed voice, holding out the slippers.

"You are very kind," he replied, looking with hungry eyes into her face. Seeing that he did not take them, she placed them on the carpet. The action recalled him to himself, and wishing to detain her, he said, —

"Do they belong to a man as big as I?"

"They are my cousin's."

She had half turned to leave.

"Ah," he returned, "and will he relish the idea of my standing in his shoes?"

No double-entendre was intended, but Ruth's thoughts gave one miserable bound to Arnold.

"He will be pleased to add to your comfort," spoke Mrs. Levice from the bed, thus saving Ruth an answer.

"I do not need them," said the doctor, turning to her swiftly; "and, Mrs. Levice, if you do not go to sleep, I

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shall leave."

"I want Ruth to stay in the room," she murmured petulantly.

"Very well, Mamma," said Ruth, wearily, seating herself in a low, soft-cushioned chair in a remote corner. She knew how to sit perfectly still. It was a peculiar situation, --the mother, who had been the means of drawing these two together first and last, slept peacefully; and he and she, the only waking mortals in the house, with the miserable gulf between them, sat there without a word.

Ruth's temples throbbed painfully; she felt weak and tired; toward morning she sank into a heavy sleep. Kemp did not sleep; he kept his face turned from her, trying to quiet his thoughts with the dull lullaby of the rain. But he knew when she slept; his gaze wandered searchingly around the room till it fell upon a slumber-robe thrown across a divan. He arose softly and picked it up; his light step made no sound in the soft carpet. As he came up to Ruth, he saw with an inward groan the change upon her sleeping face. Great, dark shadows lay about her eyes not caused by the curling lashes; her mouth drooped pathetically at the corners; her temples, from which her soft hair was rolled, showed the blue veins; he would have given much to touch her hair with his hand, but he laid the cover over her shoulders without touching her, and tucked it lightly about her knees and feet. Then he went back to his chair. It was five o'clock before either mother or daughter opened her eyes; they started up almost simultaneously. Ruth noticed the warm robe about her, and her eyes sped to the doctor. He, however, was speaking to Mrs. Levice, who in the dim light looked pale but calm.

"I feel perfectly well," she was saying, "and shall get up immediately."

"Where is the necessity?" he inquired. "Lie still to-day; it is not bad weather for staying in bed."

"Did not Ruth tell you?"

"Tell me?" he repeated in surprise.

"Of the cause of this attack?"

"No."

"Then I must. Briefly, my husband has been in New York for the past five weeks; he suffered there with acute pneumonia for a week, told us nothing, but hurried home as soon as possible, --too soon, I suppose. Day before yesterday my nephew received a letter stating these facts, and, later, a telegram asking him to come to Reno, where he was delayed, feeling too ill to go farther alone. The first I heard of this was last night, when Ruth received this telegram from Louis." She handed it to him.

As Kemp read, an unmistakable gravity settled on his face. As he was folding the paper thoughtfully, Mrs. Levice addressed him again in her unfamiliar, calm voice, --

"Will you please explain what he means by your understanding?"

"Yes; I suppose it is expedient for me to tell you at once," he said slowly, reseating himself and pausing as if trying to recall something.

"Last year," he began, "probably as early as February, your husband came to me complaining of a cough that annoyed him nights and mornings; he further told me that when he felt it coming, he went to another apartment so as not to disturb you. I examined him, and found he was suffering with the first stages of asthma, and that one of his lungs was slightly diseased already. I treated him and gave him directions for living carefully. You knew nothing of this?"

"Nothing," she answered hoarsely.

"Well," he went on gently, "there was no cause for worry; if checked in time, a man may live to second childhood with asthma, and the loss of a small portion of a lung is not necessarily fatal. He knew this, and was mending slowly; I examined him several times and found no increase in the loss of tissue, while he told me the cough was not so troublesome."

"But for some weeks before he left," said Mrs. Levice, "he coughed every morning and night. When I besought him to see a doctor, he ridiculed me out of the idea. How did you find him before he left?"

"I have not seen Mr. Levice for some months," he replied gravely.

Mrs. Levice eyed him questioningly, but he offered no explanation.

"Then do you think," she continued, "that this asthma made the pneumonia more dangerous?"

"Undoubtedly."

Her fingers clutched at the sheet convulsively; but the strength of her voice and aspect remained unbroken.

"Thank you," she said, "for telling me so candidly. Then will you be here to-morrow morning?"

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"I shall manage to meet him at Oakland with a closed carriage."

"May I go with you?"

"Pardon me; but it will be best for you to receive him quietly at home. There must be nothing whatever to disturb him. Have all ready, especially yourself."

"I understand," she said. "And now, Doctor, let me thank you for your kindness to me;" she held out both hands. "Will you let Ruth show you to a room, and will you breakfast with us when you have rested?"

"I thank you; it is impossible," he replied, looking at his watch. "I shall hurry home now. Good-morning, Mrs. Levice. There may be small cause for anxiety; and, remember, the less excited you remain, the more you can help him."

He turned from her.

"Ruth, will you see the doctor to the door?"

She followed him down the broad staircase, as in former days, but with a difference. Then he had waited for her to come abreast with him, and they had descended together, talking pleasantly. Now not a word was said till he had put on his heavy outer coat. As he laid his hand on the knob, Ruth spoke, --

"Is there anything I can do for my father, do you think?"

She started as he turned a tired, haggard face to hers.

"I can think of nothing but to have his bed in readiness and complete quiet about the house."

"Yes; and--and do you think there is any danger?"

"No, no! at least, I hope not. I shall be able to tell better when I see him. Is there anything I can do for you?"

She shook her head; she dared not trust herself to speak in the light of his tender eyes. He hastily opened the door, and bowing, closed it quickly behind him.

Chapter XXIV

The sun shone with its usual winter favoritism upon San Francisco this Thursday morning. After the rain the air felt as exhilarating as a day in spring. Young girls tripped forth "in their figures," as the French have it; and even the matrons unfastened their wraps under the genial wooing of sunbeams.

Everything was quiet about the Levice mansion. Neither Ruth nor her mother felt inclined to talk; so when Mrs. Levice took up her position in her husband's room, Ruth wandered downstairs. The silence seemed vocal with her fears.

"So I tell ye's two," remarked the cook as her young mistress passed from the kitchen, "that darter and father is more than kin, they is soul-kin, if ye know what that means; an' the boss's girl do love him more'n seven times seven children which such a man-angel should 'a' had." For the "boss" was to those who served him "little lower than the angels;" and their prayers the night before had held an eloquent appeal for his welfare.

Ruth, with her face against the window, watched in sickening anxiety. She knew they were not to be expected for some time, but it was better to stand here than in the fear-haunted background.

Suddenly and almost miraculously, it seemed to her, a carriage stood before the gate. She flew to the door, and as she opened it leaned for one second blindly against the wall.

"Tell my mother they have come," she gasped to the maid, who had entered the hall.

Then she looked out. Two men were carrying one between them up the walk. As they came nearer, she saw how it was. That bundled-up figure was her father's; that emaciated, dark, furrowed face was her father's; but as they carefully helped him up the steps, and the loud, painful, panting breaths came to her, were they her father's too? No need, Ruth, to rush forward and vainly implore some power to tear from yourself the respiration withheld from him. Air, air! So, man, so; one step more and then relief. Ah!

She paused in agony at the foot of the stairs as the closing door shut out the dreadful sound. We never value our blessings till we have lost them; who thinks it a boon to be able to breathe without thinking of the action?

He had not seen her; his eyes had been closed as if in exhaustion as they gently helped him along, and she had understood at once that the only thing to be thought of was, by some manner of means, to remove the choking obstacle from his lungs. Oh, to be able in her young strength to hold the weak, loved form in her arms and breathe into him her overflowing life-breath! She walked upstairs presently; he would be expecting her. As she reached the upper landing, Kemp came from the room, closing the door behind him. His bearing revealed a gravity she had never witnessed before. In his tightly buttoned morning-suit, with the small white tie at his throat, he might have been officiating at some solemn ceremonial. He stood still as Ruth confronted him at the head of the stairs, and met her lovely, miserable eyes with a look of sympathy. She essayed to speak, but succeeded only in gazing at him in speechless entreaty.

"Yes, I know," he responded to her silent appeal; "you were shocked at what you heard: it was the asthma that has completely overpowered him. His illness has made him extremely weak."

"And you think—"

"We must wait till he has rested; the trip was severe for one in his condition."

"Tell me the truth, please, with no reservations; is there danger?"

Her eager, abrupt questions told clearly what she suffered.

"He has never had any serious illness; if the asthma has not overleaped itself, we have much to hope for."

The intended consolation conveyed a contrary admission which she immediately grasped.

"That means--the worst," she said, her clasped fingers speaking the language of despair. "Oh, Doctor, you who know so much, can't you help him? Think, think of everything; there must be something! Only do your best, do your utmost; you will, won't you?"

His deep, grave eyes answered her silently as he took both her little clasped hands in his one strong one, saying simply, —

"Trust me, but only so far as lies within my human power. He is somewhat eased, and asks for you. Look at your mother: she is surpassing herself; if your love for him can achieve one half such a conquest, you will but be making good your inheritance. I shall be in again at one, and will send some medicines up at once." He ended in

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his usual businesslike tone, and walked hastily downstairs.

There was perfect quiet in the room as Ruth entered. Propped high by many pillows, Jules Levice lay in his bed; his wife's arm was about him; his head rested on her bosom; with her one disengaged hand she smoothed his white hair. Never was the difference between them more marked than now, when her beautiful face shone above his, which had the touch of the destroyer already upon it; never was the love between them more marked than now, when he leaned in his weakness upon her who had never failed him in all their wedded years.

His eyes were half closed as if in rest; but he heard her enter, and Mrs. Levice felt the tremor that thrilled him as Ruth approached.

"My child."

The softly whispered love-name of old made her tremble; she smiled through her tears, but when his feeble arms strove to draw her to him, she stooped, and laying them about her neck, placed her cheek upon his. For some minutes these three remained knit in a close embrace; love, strong and tender, spoke and answered in that silence.

"It is good to be at home," he said, speaking with difficulty.

"It was not home without you, dear," murmured his wife, laying her lips softly upon his forehead. Ruth, kneeling beside the bed, noticed how loosely the dark signet-ring he wore hung upon his slender finger.

"You look ill, my Ruth," he said, after a pause. "Lay my head down, Esther love; you must be tired. Sit before me, dear, I want to see your two faces together."

His gaunt eyes flitted from one to the other.

"It is a fair picture to take with one," he whispered.

"To keep with one," softly trembled his wife's voice; his eyes met hers in a commiserating smile.

Suddenly he started up.

"Ruth," he gasped, "will you go to Louis? He must be worn out."

She left the room hurriedly. Her faint knock was not immediately answered, and she called softly; receiving no reply, she turned the knob, which yielded to her hand. Sunbeams danced merrily about the room of the young man, who sat in their light in a dejected attitude. He evidently had made no change in his toilet; and as Ruth stood unnoticed beside him, her eyes wandered over his gray, unshaven face, travel-stained and weary to a degree. She laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Louis," she called gently.

He shook under her touch, but made no further sign that he knew of her presence.

"You must be so tired, Louis," she continued sympathetically.

It may have been the words, it may have been the tone, it may have been that she touched some hidden thought, for suddenly, without premonition, his breast heaved, and he sobbed heavily as only a man can sob.

She started back in pain. That such emotion could so unstring Louis Arnold was a marvel. It did not last long; and as he rose from his chair he spoke in his accustomed, quiet tone.

"Forgive my unmanliness," he said; "it was kind of you to come to me."

"You look very ill, Louis; can't I bring you something to refresh you, or will you lie down?"

"We shall see; is there anything you wish to ask me?

"Nothing."

After a pause he said, --

"You must not be hopeless; he is in good hands, and everything that can be done will be done. Is he resting now?"

"Yes; if to breathe like that is to rest. Oh, Louis, when I think how for months he has suffered alone, it almost drives me crazy."

"Why think of it, then? Or, if you must, remember that in his surpassing unselfishness he saved you much anxiety; for you could not have helped him."

"Not with our sympathy?"

"Not him, Ruth; to know that you suffered for him was--would have been his crowning sorrow. Is there anything I can do now?"

"No, only think of yourself for a moment; perhaps you can rest a little, for you need it, dear."

A flame of color burned in his cheek at the unusual endearment.

"I shall bring you a cup of tea presently," she said as she left him.

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The morning passed into afternoon. Silence hung upon the house. A card had been pinned under the door-bell; and the many friends, who in the short time since the sick man's arrival had heard of his illness, dropped in quietly and left as they came.

Dr. Kemp came in after luncheon. Mr. Levice was sleeping, —in all truth, one could say easily, but the doctor counted much from the rest. He expected Dr. H——— for a consultation. This he had done as a voucher and a sort of comforting assurance that nothing would be left undone. Dr. H——— came in blandly; he went out gravely. There was little to be said.

Kemp walked thoughtfully upstairs after his colleague had left, and went straight to Arnold's room. the freedom of the house was his; he seemed to have established himself here simply through his earnestness and devotion.

"Mr. Arnold," he said to the Frenchman, who quickly rose from his desk, "I want you to prepare your aunt and your cousin for the worst. You know this; but if he should have a spell of coughing, the end might be sudden."

A cold pallor overspread Louis's face at the confirmation of his secret fears.

He bowed slightly and cleared his throat before answering.

"There will be no necessity," he said; "my uncle intends doing so himself."

"He must not hasten it by excitement," said Kemp, moving toward the door.

"That is unavoidable," returned Arnold. "You must know he had an object in hurrying home."

"I did not know; but I shall prevent any unnecessary effort to speak. If you can do this for him, will you not?"

"I cannot."

"And you know what it is in detail?"

"I do."

"Then for his sake —"

"And for the others, he must be allowed to speak."

Kemp regarded him steadily, wondering wherein lay the impression of concealed power which emanated from him. He left the room without another word.

"Dr. H——— must have gone to school with you," panted Levice, as Dr. Kemp entered; "even his eyes have been educated to express the same feeling; except for a little —"

"There, there," quieted Kemp; "don't exhaust yourself. Miss Levice, that fan, please. A little higher? How's that?"

"Do not go, Doctor," he said feebly; "I have something to say, to do, and you—I want you—give me something—I must say it now. Esther, where are you?"

"Here, love."

"Mr. Levice, you must not talk now," put in Kemp, authoritatively; "whatever you have to say will last till morning."

"And I?"

"And you. Now go to sleep."

Mrs. Levice followed him to the door.

"You spoke just now of a nurse," she said through her pale lips; "I shall not want one: I alone can nurse him."

"There is much required; I doubt if you are strong enough."

"I am strong."

He clasped her hand in assent; he could not deny her.

"I shall come in and stay with you to-night," he said simply.

"You. Why should you?"

"Because I too love him."

Her mouth trembled and the lines of her face quivered, but she drew her hand quickly over it.

Kemp gave one sharp glance over to the bed; Ruth had laid her head beside her father's and held his hand. In such a house, in every Jewish house, one finds the best nurses in the family.

Chapter XXV

Shafts of pale sunlight darted into the room and rested on Mr. Levice's hair, covering it with a silver glory, --they trailed along the silken coverlet, but stopped there; one little beam strayed slowly, and almost as if with intention, toward Arnold, seated near the foot of the bed. Ruth, lovely in her pallor, sat near him; Mrs. Levice, on the other side of the bed, leaned back in her chair placed close to her husband's pillow; more remote, though inadvertently so, sat Dr. Kemp. It was by Mr. Levice's desire that these four had assembled here.

He was sitting up, supported by many pillows; his face was hollow and colorless; his hands lay listlessly upon the counterpane. No one touches him; bathed in sunlight, as he was, the others seemed in shadow. When he spoke, his voice was almost a whisper, but it was distinctly audible to the four intent listeners; only the clock seemed to accompany his staccato speech, running a race, as it were, with his failing strength.

"It is a beautiful world," he said dreamily, "a very beautiful world;" the sunbeams kissed his pale hands as if thanking him; no one stirred, letting the old man take his time. Finally he realized that all were waiting for him, and thought sprang, strong and powerful, to his face.

"Dr. Kemp," he began, "I have something to say to you, --to you in particular, and to my daughter Ruth. My wife and nephew know in brief what I have to say; therefore I need not dwell on the painful event that happened here last September; you will pardon me, when you see the necessity, for my reverting to it at all."

Every one's eyes rested upon him, --that is, all but Arnold's, which seemed holding some secret communion with the cupids on the ceiling, --and the look of convulsive agony that swept across Ruth's face was unnoticed.

"In all my long, diversified life," he went on, "I had never suffered as I did after she told me her decision, --for in all those years no one had ever been made to suffer through me; that is, so far as I knew. Unconsciously, or in anger, I may have hurt many, but never, as in this case, with knowledge aforethought, --when the blow fell upon my own child. You will understand, and perhaps forgive, when I say I gave no thought to you. She came to me with her sweet, renunciating hands held out, and with a smile of self-forgetfulness, said, 'Father, you are right; I could not be happy with this man.' At the moment I believed her, thinking she had adopted my views; but with all her bravery, her real feelings conquered her, and I saw. Not that she had spoken untruly, but she had implied the truth only in part, I knew my child loved me, and she meant honestly that my pain would rob her of perfect happiness with you, --my pain would form an eclipse strong enough to darken everything. Do you think this knowledge made me glad or proud? Do you know how love, that in the withholding justifies itself, suffers from the pain inflicted? But I said, 'After all, it is as I think; she will thank me for it some day.' I was not altogether selfish, please remember. Then, as I saw her silent wrestling, came distrust of myself; I remembered I was pitted against two, younger and no more fallible than myself. As soon as doubt of myself attacked me, I strove to look on the other side; I strove to rid myself of the old prejudices, the old superstitions, the old narrowness of faith; it was useless, --I was too old, and my prejudices had become part of me. It was in this state of perturbation that I had gone one day up to the top floor of the Palace Hotel. Thank you, Doctor."

The latter had quietly risen and administered a stimulant. As he resumed his seat, Levice continued:

"I was seated at a window overlooking Market Street. Below me surged a black mass of crowding, jostling, hurrying beings, so far removed they seemed like little dots, each as large and no larger than his fellows. Above them stretched the same blue arch of heaven, they breathed the same air, trod in each other's footsteps; and yet I knew they were all so different, --ignorance walked with enlightenment, vice with virtue, rich with poor, low with high, --but I felt, poised thus above them, that they were creatures of the same God. Go once thus, and you will understand the feeling. And so I judged these aliens. Which was greater; which was less? This one, who from birth and inheritance is able to stand the equal of any one, or this one, who through birth and inheritance blinks blindly at the good and beautiful? Character and circumstance are not altogether of our own making; they are, to a great degree, results of inherited tendencies over which we have no control, --accidents of birthplace, in the choosing of which we had no voice. The high in the world do not shine altogether by their own light, not do the lowly grovel altogether in their own debasement, --I felt the excuse for humanity. I was overwhelmed with one feeling, --only God can weigh such circumstantial evidence; we, in our little knowledge of results, pronounce sentence, but final judgment is reserved for a higher court, that sees the cross-purposes in which we are blindly

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caught. So with everything. Below me prayed Christian and Jew, Mohammedan and Brahmin, idolater and agnostic. Why was one man different in this way from his fellows? Because he was born so, because his parents were so, because he was bred so, because it seemed natural and convenient to remain so, --custom and environment had made his religion. Because Jesus Christ dared to attack their existing customs and beliefs, the Jews, then powerful, first reviled, then feared, then slew him; because the Jews could not honestly say, 'I believe this man to be a God,' they were hurled from their eminence and dragged, living, for centuries in the dust. And yet why? Because God withheld and still withholds from this little band the power of believing in Christ as his son. Christians call this a wilful weakness; Jews call it strength. After all, who is to be praised or blamed for it? God. Then instead of beating the Jew, and instead of sneering at the Christian, let each pity the other; because one, I know not which, is weak, and because the other, I know not which, is strong. I left the building; I came upon the street. I felt like saluting every one as my brother. A little ragged child touched me, and as I laid my hand upon her curly head, the thrill of humanity shot through me.

"It was not until I went to New York that the feelings I then experienced took on a definite shape. There, removed from my old haunts, I wandered alone when I could. Then I thought of you, my friend, of you, my child, and beside you I was pitiful, --pitiful, because in my narrowness I had thought myself strong enough to uphold a vanishing restriction. I resolved to be practical; I have been accused of being a dreamer. I grasped your two images before me and drew parallels. Socially each was as high as the other. Mentally the woman was as strong in her sphere as the man was in his. Physically both were perfect types of pure, healthy blood. Morally both were irreproachable. Religiously each held a broad love for God and man. I stood convicted; I was in the position of a blind fool who, with a beautiful picture before him, fastens his critical, condemning gaze upon a rusting nail in the rusting wall behind, --a nail even now loosened, and which in another generation will be displaced. Yet what was I to do? Come back and tell you that I had been needlessly cruel? What would that avail? True, I might make you believe that I no longer thought marriage between you wrong; but that would not remove the fact that the world, which so easily makes us happy or otherwise, did not see as I saw. In this vortex I was stricken ill. All the while I wanted to hasten to you, to tell you how it was with me, and it seemed as if I never could get to you. 'Is this Nemesis,' I thought, 'or divine interposition?' So I struggled till Louis came. Then all was easier. I told him everything and said, 'Louis, what shall I do?' "only this," he answered simply: 'tell them that their happy marriage will be your happiness, and the rest of the world will be as nothing to these two who love each other."

The old man paused; the little sunbeam had reached the end of the coverlet and gave a leap upon Louis's shoulder like an angle's finger, but his gaze remained fixed upon the cupids on the ceiling. Ruth had covered her face with her hands. Mrs. Levice was softly weeping, with her eyes on Louis. Dr. Kemp had risen and stood, tall and pale, meeting Levice's eyes.

"I believe--and my wife believes," said Levice, heavily, as if the words were so many burdens, "that our child will be happy only as your wife, and that nothing should stand in the way of the consummation of this happiness. Dr. Kemp, you have assured me you still love my daughter. Ruth!"

She sprang to her feet, looking only at her father.

"Little one," he faltered, "I have been very cruel in my ignorance."

"Do not think of this, Father," she whispered.

"I must," he said, taking her hand in his. "Kemp, your hand, please."

He grasped the strong white hand and drew the two together; and as Kemp's large hand closed firmly over her little one, Levice stooped his head, kissed them thus clasped, and laid his hand upon them.

"There is one thing more," he said. "At the utmost I have but a few days to live. I shall not see your happiness: I shall not see you, my Ruth, as I have often pictured you. Ah, well, darling, a father may be permitted sweet dreams of his only child. You have always been a good girl, and now I am going to ask you to do one thing more--you also, Doctor. Will you be married now, this day, here, so that I may yet bless your new life? Will you let me see this? And listen, --will you let the world know that you were married with my sanction, and did not have to wait till the old man was dead? Will you do this for me, my dear ones?"

"Will you, Ruth?" asked Kemp, softly, his fingers pressing hers gently.

Ruth stifled a sob as she met her father's eager eyes.

"I will," she answered so low that only the intense silence in the room made it audible.

Levice separated their hands and held one on each of his cheeks.

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"Always doing things for her ugly old father," he murmured; "this time giving up a pretty wedding-day that all girls so love."

"Oh, hush, my darling."

"You will have no guests, unless, Doctor, there is some one you would like to have."

"I think not," he decided, noting with a pang the pale, weary face of Levice; "we will have it all as quiet as possible. You must rest now, and leave everything to me. Would you prefer Dr. Stephens or a justice?"

"Either. Dr. Stephens is a good man, whom I know, however; and one good man with the legal right is as good as another to marry you."

There was little more said then. Kemp turned to Mrs. Levice and raised her hand to his lips. Arnold confronted him with a pale, smiling face; the two men wrung each other's hands, passing out together immediately after.

Chapter XXVI

Herbert Kemp and Dr. Stephens stood quietly talking to Mr. Levice. The latter seemed weaker since his exertion of the morning, and his head lay back among the pillows as if the support were grateful. Still his eager eyes were keenly fastened upon the close-lipped mouth and broad, speaking brow of the minister who spoke so quietly and pleasantly. Kemp, looking pale and handsome, answered fitfully when appealed to, and kept an expectant eye upon the door. When Ruth entered, he went forward to meet her, drawing her arm through his. They had had no word together, no meeting of any kind but right here in the morning; and now, as she walked toward the bed, the gentle smile that came as far as her eyes was all for her father. Thought could hold no rival for him that day.

"This is Miss Levice, Dr. Stephens," said Kemp, presenting them. A swift look of wonderment passed under the reverend gentleman's beetle-brows as he bent over her hand. Could this tall, beautiful girl be the daughter of little Jules Levice? Where did she get that pure Madonna face, that regal bearing, that mobile and expressive mouth? The explanation was sufficient when Mrs. Levice entered. They stood talking, not much, but in that wandering, obligatory way that precedes any undertaking. They were waiting for Arnold; he came in presently with a bunch of pale heliotropes. He always looked well and in character when dressed for some social event; it was as if he were made for this style of dress, not the style for him. The delicate pink of his cheeks looked more like the damask skin of a young girl than ever; his eyes, however, behind their glasses, were veiled. As he handed Ruth the flowers, he said, --

"I asked the doctor to allow me to give you these. Will you hold them with my love?"

"They are both very dear to me," she replied, raising the flowers to her lips.

Their fragrance filled the room while the simple ceremony was being performed. It was a striking picture, and one not likely to be forgotten. Levice's eyes filled with proud, pardonable tears as he looked at his daughter, --for never had she looked as to-day in her simple white gown, her face like a magnolia bud, a fragrant dream; standing next to Kemp, the well-mated forms were noticeable. Even Arnold, with his heart like a crushed ball of lead, acknowledged it in bitter resignation. For him the scene was one of those silent, purgatorial moments that are approached with senses steeled and thought held in a vice. To the others it passed, as if it had happened in a dream. Even when Kemp stooped and pressed his lips for the first time upon his wife's, the real meaning of what had taken place seemed far away to Ruth; the present held but one thing in prominence, --the pale face upon the pillow. She felt her mother's arms around her; she knew that Louis had raised her hand to his lips, that she had drawn his head down and kissed him, that Dr. Kemp was standing silently beside her, that the minister had spoken some gravely pleasant words; but all the while she wanted to tear herself away from it all and fold that eager, loving, dying face close to hers. She was allowed to do so finally; and when she was drawn into the outstretched arms, there was only the long silence of love.

Kemp had left the room with Dr. Stephens, having a further favor to intrust to him. The short announcement of this marriage, which Dr. Stephens gave for insertion in the evening papers, created a world of talk.

When Kemp re-entered, Levice called him to him, holding out his hand. The doctor grasped it in that firm clasp which was always a tonic.

"Will you kneel?" asked Levice; Kemp knelt beside his wife, and the old father blessed them in the words that held a double solemnity now: --

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee."

"The Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee."

"The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace."

"I think if you don't mind, dear, I shall close my eyes now," he said as they arose.

Ruth moved about, closing the blinds.

"Don't close out all the sun," said her father; "I like it, --it is an old friend. After all, I don't think I'll sleep; let me lie here and look at you all awhile. Louis, my boy, must you go?"

"Oh, no," he replied, turning back from the door and gliding into a chair.

"Thank you; and now don't think of me. Go on talking; it will be a foretaste of something better to lie here and

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listen. Esther, are you cold? I felt a shudder go through your hand, love. Ruth, give your mother a shawl; don't forget that sometimes some one should see that your mother is not cold. Just talk, will you?"

So they talked, --that is, the men did. Their grave, deep voices and the heavily breathing of the invalid were the only sounds in the room. Finally, as the twilight stole in, it was quite still. Levice had dropped into a sort of stupor. Kemp arose then.

"I shall be back presently," he said, addressing Mrs. Levice, who started perceptibly as he spoke. "I have some few directions to give to my man that I entirely forgot."

"Could not we send some one? You must not stay away now."

"I shall return immediately. Mr. Levice does not need me while he sleeps, and these instructions are important. Don't stir, Arnold; I know my way out."

Nevertheless Arnold accompanied him to the door. Ruth gave little heed to their movements. Her agitated heart had grasped the fact that the lines upon her father's face had grown weaker and paler, his breathing shorter and more rasping; when she passed him and touched his hand, it seemed cold and lifeless.

At nine the doctor came in again; the only appreciable difference in his going or coming was that no one rose or made any formal remarks. He went up to the bed and placed his hand on the sleeping head. Mrs. Levice moved her chair slightly as he seated himself on the edge of the bed and took Levice's hand. Ruth, watching him with wide, distended eyes, thought he would never drop it. Her senses, sharpened by suffering, read every change on his face. As he withdrew his hand, she gave one long, involuntary moan. He turned quickly to her.

"What is it?" he asked, his grave eyes scanning her anxiously.

"Nothing," she responded. It was the first word she had spoken to him since the afternoon ceremony. He turned back to Levice, lowering his ear to his chest. After a faint, almost imperceptible pause he arose.

"I think you had all better lie down," he said softly. "I shall sit with him, and you all need rest."

"I could not rest," said Mrs. Levice; "this chair is all I require."

"If you would lie on the couch here," he urged, "you would find the position easier."

"No, no! I could not."

He looked at Ruth.

"I shall go by and by," she answered.

Arnold had long since gone out.

Ruth's by and by stretched on interminably. Kemp took up the "Argonaut" that lay folded on the table. He did not read much, his eyes straying from the printed page before him to the "finis" writing itself slowly on Jules Levice's face, and thence to Ruth's pale profile; she was crying, --so quietly, though, that but for the visible tears an onlooker might not have known it; she herself did not, --her heart was silently overflowing.

Toward morning Levice suddenly sprang up in bed and made as if to leap upon the floor. Kemp's quick, strong hand held him back.

"Where are you going?" he asked. Mrs. Levice stood instantly beside him.

"Oh," gasped Levice, his eyes falling upon her, "I wanted to get home; but it is all right now. Is the child in bed, Esther?"

"Here she is; lie still, Jules; you know you are ill."

"But not now. Ah, Kemp, I can get up now; I am quite well, you know."

"Wait till morning," he resisted, humorizing this inevitable idiosyncrasy.

"But it is morning now; and I feel so light and well. Open the shutters, Ruth; see, Esther; a beautiful day."

It was quite dark with the darkness that immediately precedes dawn; the windows were bespangled with the distillations of the night, which gleamed as the light fell on them.

Mrs. Levice seated herself beside him.

"It is very early, Jules," she said, smiling with hope, not knowing that this deceptive feeling was but the rose-flush of the sinking sun; "but if you feel well when day breaks you can get up, can't he Doctor?"

"Yes."

Levice lay back with closed eyes for some minutes. A quivering smile crossed his face and his eyes opened.

"Were you singing that song just now, Ruth, my angel?"

"What son, Father dear?"

"That--'Adieu, --adieu--pays--amours'--we sang it--you know--when we left home together--my

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mother said—I was too small—too small—and—too—"

Ruth looked around wildly for Kemp. He had left the room; she must go for him. As she came into the hall, she saw him and Louis hurriedly advancing up the corridor. Seeing her, they reached her side in a breath.

"Go," she whispered through pale lips; "he is breathing with that—"

Kemp laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Stay here a second; it will be quite peaceful."

She looked at him in agony and walked blindly in after Louis.

He was lying as they had left him, with Mrs. Levice's hand in his.

"Keep tight hold, darling," the rattling voice was saying. "Don't take it off till—another takes it—it will not be hard then." Suddenly he saw Louis standing pale and straight at the foot of the bed.

"My good boy," he faltered, "my good boy, God will bless—" His eyes closed again; paler and paler grew his face.

"Father!" cried Ruth in agony.

He looked toward her smiling.

"The sweetest word," he murmured; "it was--my glory."

Silence. A soul is passing; a simple, loving soul, giving no trouble in its passage; dropping the toils, expanding with infinity. Not utterly gone; immortality is assured us in the hearts that have touched ours.

Silence. A shadow falls, and Jules Levice's work is done; and the first sunbeams crept about him, lay at his feet a moment, touched the quiet hands, fell on the head like a benediction, and rested there.

Chapter XXVII

"I thought you would be quiet at this hour," said Rose Delano, seating herself opposite her friend in the library, the Thursday evening after the funeral. They looked so different even in the waning light, —Ruth in soft black, her white face shining like a lily above her sombre gown, Rose, like a bright firefly, perched on a cricket, her cheeks rosy, her eyes sparkling from walking against the sharp, cold wind.

"We are always quiet now," she answered softly; "friends come and go, but we are very quiet. It does me good to see you, Rosebud."

"Does it?" her sweet eyes smiled happily. "I was longing to drop in if only to hold your hand for a minute; but I did not know exactly where to find you."

"Why, where could I be but here?"

"I thought possibly you had removed to your husband's home."

For a second Ruth looked at her wonderingly; then the slow rich color mounted, inch by inch, back to her little ears till her face was one rosy cloud.

"No; I have stayed right on."

"I saw the doctor to-day," she chatted. "He looks pale; is he too busy?"

"I do not know, —that is, I suppose so. How are the lessons, Rose?"

"Everything is improving wonderfully; I am so happy, dear Mrs. Kemp, and what I wished to say was that all happiness and all blessings should, I pray, fall on you two who have been so much to me. Miss Gwynne told me that to do good was your birthright. She said that the funeral, with its vast gathering of friends, rich, poor, old, young, strong, and crippled of all grades of society, was a revelation of his life even to those who thought they knew him best. You should feel very proud with such sweet memories."

"Yes," assented Ruth, her eyes quickly suffused with tears.

They sat quietly thus for some time, till Rose, rising from her cricket, kissed her friend silently and departed.

The waning light fell softly through the lace curtains, printing quaint arabesques on the walls and furniture and bathing the room in a rich yellow light. A carriage rolled up in front of the house. Dr. Kemp handed the reins to his man and alighted. He walked slowly up to the door. It was very still about the house in the evening twilight. He pushed his hat back on his head and looked up at the clear blue sky, as if the keen breeze were pleasant to his temples. Then with a quick motion, as though recalling his thoughts, he turned and rang the bell. The latchkey of the householder was not his.

Ruth, sitting in the shadows, had scarcely heard the ring. She was absorbed in a new train of thought. Rose Delano was the first one who had clearly brought home to her the thought that she was really married. She had been very quiet with her other friends, and every one, looking at her grief-stricken face, had shrunk from mentioning what would have called for congratulation. Rose, who knew only these two, naturally dwelt on their changed relations. Her husband! Her dormant love gave an exultant bound. Wave upon wave of emotion beat upon her heart; she sprang to her feet; the door opened, and he came in. He saw her standing faintly outlined in the dark.

"Good-evening," he said, coming slowly toward her with extended hand; "have you been quite well to-day?" He felt her fingers tremble in his close clasp, and let them fall slowly. "Bob sent you these early violets. Shall I light the gas?"

"If you will."

He turned from her and rapidly filled the room with light.

"Where is your mother?" he asked, turning toward her again. Her face was hidden in the violets.

"Upstairs with Louis. They had something to arrange. Did you wish to see her?" To judge from Ruth's manner, Kemp might have been a visitor.

"No," he replied. "If you will sit down, we can talk quietly till they come in."

As she resumed her high-backed chair and he seated himself in another before her, he was instantly struck by some new change in her face. The faraway, impersonal look with which she had met him in these sad days had been what he had expected, and he had curbed with a strong will every impulse for any closer recognition. But

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this new look, --what did it mean? In the effort to appear unconcerned the dark color had risen to his own cheeks.

"I had quite a pleasant little encounter to-day," he observed; "shall I tell it to you?"

"If it will not tire you."

Keeping his eyes fixed on the picture over her head, he did not see the look of anxious love that dwelt in her eyes as they swept over him.

"Oh, no," he responded, slightly smiling over the recollection. "I was coming down my office steps this afternoon, and had just reached the foot, when a bright-faced, bright-haired boy stood before me with an eager light in his eyes. 'Aren't you Dr. Kemp?' he asked breathlessly, like one who had been running. I recollect him the instant he raised his hat from his nimbus of golden hair. 'Yes; and you are Will Tyrrell,' I answered promptly. 'Why, how did you remember?' he asked in surprise; 'you saw me only once.' 'Never mind; I remember that night,' I answered. 'How is that baby sister of yours?' 'Oh, she's all right,' he replied dismissing the subject with the royalty that brotherhood confers. 'I say, do you ever see Miss Levice nowadays?' I looked at him with a half-smile, not knowing whether to set him right or not, when he finally blurted out, 'She's the finest girl I ever met. Do you know her well, Doctor?' 'Well,' I answered, 'I know her slightly, --she is my wife.'"

He had told the little incident brightly; but as he came to the end, his voice gradually lowered, and as he pronounced the last word, his eyes sought hers. Her eyelids fluttered; her breath seemed suspended.

"I said you were my wife," he repeated softly, leaning forward, his hands grasping the chair-arms.

"And what," asked Ruth, a little excited ring in her voice, --"what did Will say?"

"Who cared?" he asked, quickly moving closer to her; "do you?" He caught her hand in his, scarce knowing what he said, and interlaced his fingers with hers.

"Ruth," he asked below his breath, "have you forgotten entirely what we are to each other?"

It was such a cruel lover's act to make her face him thus, her bosom panting, her face changing from white to red and from red to white.

"Have you, sweet love?" he insisted.

"No," she whispered, trying to turn her head from him.

"No, who?"

With an irrepressible movement she sprang up, pushing his hand from hers. He rose also, his face pale and disturbed, and indescribable fear overpowering him.

"You mean," he said quietly, "that you no longer love me, --say it now and have it over."

"Oh," she cried in exquisite pain, "why do you tantalize me so--can't you see that--"

She looked so beautiful thus confessed that with sudden ecstasy he drew her to him and pressed his lips in one long kiss to hers.

A little later Mrs. Levice and Louis came down. Mrs. Levice entered first and stood still; Louis, looking over her shoulder, saw too--nothing but Ruth standing encircled by her husband's arm; her lovely face smiled into his, which looked down at her with an expression that drove every drop of blood from Arnold's face. For a moment they were unseen; but when Ruth, who was the first to feel their presence, started from Kemp as if she had committed a crime, Arnold came forward entirely at his ease.

Kemp met Mrs. Levice with outstretched hands and smiling eyes.

"Good-evening, Mother," he said; "we had just been speaking of you." Mrs. Levice looked into his deep, tender eyes, and raising her arm, drew his head down and kissed him.

Ruth had rolled forward a comfortable chair, and stood beside it with shy, sweet look as her mother sat down and drew her down beside her. Sorrow had softened Mrs. Levice wonderfully; and looking for love, she wooed everybody by her manner.

"What were you saying of me?" she asked, keeping Ruth's hand in hers and looking up at Kemp, who leaned against the mantel-shelf, his face radiant with gladness.

"We were saying that it will do you good to come out of this great house to our little one, till we find something better."

Mrs. Levice looked across at Louis, who stood at the piano, his back half turned, looking over a book.

"It is very sweet to be wanted by you all now," she said, her voice trembling slightly; "but I never could leave this house to strangers, --every room is too full of old associations, and sweet memories of him. Louis wants me to go down the coast with him soon, stopping for a month or so at Coronado. Go to your cottage meanwhile by

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yourselves; even I should be an intruder. There, Ruth, don't I know? And when we come back, we shall see. It is all settled, isn't it, Louis?"

He turned around then.

"Yes, I feel that I need a change of scene, and I should like to have her with me; you do not need her now."

Ruth looked at his careworn face, and said with tender solicitude, --

"You are right, Louis."

And so it was decided.