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# FAMILY JOURNAL

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# FAMILY JOURNAL

## THEIR MOTHER'S SECRET

By Gloria Hayden

GOODBYE, FOOTLIGHTS!

HELEN WINFORD entered her dressing-room in the old-fashioned theatre at Sunderbridge, sank into a chair facing the mirror, and breathed a sigh of half-weariness and half-disgust.

"What a miserable hole!" she murmured.

The Theatre Royal at Sunderbridge had evidently been built in the days when the personal comfort and convenience of the performers had been the last consideration of the management.

The walls of the dressing-rooms were mildewed with damp, there were no proper wardrobes, no hot water supply, no proper means of heating in winter, and no means of keeping the place cool in summer. In fact, in the opinion of every actor and actress who had played there recently, it should have been condemned years ago.

However, on the other side of the footlights it was not so bad. True, the stalls and gallery looked shabby with their faded red plush seats, but at least they were comfortable.

Having removed her outdoor frock and put on a flimsy dressing-gown, Helen drew a chair closer to the mildew-spotted mirror, and opened her make-up box. Just over twenty, she had Titian-gold hair and long, silky lashes. Her eyes were wine-coloured and sometimes glowed as though a torch were inside them. Her features were delicately moulded, classic yet not severe.

"You're early, darling," said a voice just behind her, and through the mirror she saw a dark, good-looking girl peering round the half-opened door.

"Oh, come in, Linda," Helen invited, putting down the grease paint she had been using.

Linda Marston entered and sat down on a dress basket.

"Gosh, I've been in some dumps before," she remarked, "but this just about takes the cake."

"It's awful," said Helen, continuing with her make-up.

"Thank goodness we've only three more nights," murmured Linda, taking a packet of cigarettes from her handbag; as she did not go on till the second act, she was in no hurry to change.

"You know," said Helen, applying mascara. "I've a jolly good mind to chuck up the stage altogether. For most of us it doesn't even provide a living these days. If we've worked three months out of the year, we consider we've done marvelously."

"You're right, of course," sighed Linda dejectedly. "But what's to be done about it? I mean—"

"I know what I'm going to do about it," put in Helen determinedly. "I'm going to find a real job with real money attached to it, and that paid regularly every Friday. Glamour's all right, but you can't spread it on your bread and you can't pay your rent with it. There's plenty of real money to be made outside the theatre these days, and I'm going to get my hands on it."

"Darling, why this sudden outburst of 3953

bitterness against the profession?"

"It's not sudden, Linda, it's been smouldering for a long time," said Helen, plying powder. "I was, as the saying goes, born in a dress basket, as both my parents were on the stage. Sometimes they had good engagements, but the money they earned went while they were 'resting'. My mother's life was one long 'make do and mend'—and she was a good actress, too. They never knew what a real home was.

"Believe me," she went on, "I wasn't attracted to the stage by any mistaken ideas of glamour. I knew too much about it. I simply had to follow in my parents' footsteps because it was the only thing to do. But now I'm beginning to see where I made my mistake."

"But, Helen, what can you do apart from acting?" asked her friend, puzzled.

"Go on acting—but not on the stage," replied Helen enigmatically, slipping off her dressing-gown and putting on the costume she wore in the first act.

"I don't get what you mean," said Linda, shaking her head.

"Just look in my handbag and you'll see a newspaper cutting," said the other. "That'll give you a clue—"

"First act, please!" came the voice of the call boy in the corridor.

"Heavens, I must fly!" exclaimed Helen, snatching up a pair of white gloves.

Left to herself, Linda found the newspaper cutting and read with interest the small print—

*Wanted, cultured girl to act as companion-secretary to titled woman. Understanding, intelligence and willingness more important than experience. Apply Box 373.*

Then she replaced the cutting in Helen's bag, a shocked expression on her face.

"Companion-secretary," she murmured to herself, thinking of all the stories she had read about timid, brow-beaten girls who companioned bad-tempered old ladies who treated them little better than slaves.

Helen was only on the stage for about five minutes in the first act, and when she came back Linda's face still wore an expression of distaste.

"But, Helen, you can't! You simply can't!" she said, continuing the conversation as if it had not been left off.

"Can't be a companion-secretary?" queried Helen, as she started to take off her dress. "I don't see why not. It isn't as if you require any special training."

"Yes, but think of the conditions, Helen," protested Linda. "Being always at the beck and call of some fussy woman. You'd simply have no life of your own. You'd be a sort of superior servant, without any of a servant's independence."

"My dear Linda, you've been reading too many Victorian novels," laughed Helen. "Conditions have altered since the days when 'Jane Eyre' was written. Governesses and ladies' companions are no longer ten-a-penny—in fact, they're very difficult to get in these days of full employment."

"Whatever made you think of such a

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thing, Helen?"

"Seeing the advertisement. I wasn't really looking for a job, but that just happened to catch my eye," Helen explained. "I read it and thought, 'Well, why not?' A job of that sort might have openings."

"Such as?" prompted Linda.

"For one thing, darling, Lady Garston has a son, named Walter. He's over twenty-one, and went to Cambridge. His father's a baronet, so, of course, he'll inherit the title—"

"Stop! How do you know all this?" demanded Linda, more puzzled than ever.

"I just looked up the family in one of the reference books," laughed Helen.

"The Garstons are an old county family." "But how did you find out that the name was Garston in the first place?" interrupted Linda again.

"By answering the advertisement, of course, how else? The Garstons live at Ladybrooke Hall, Melsham," rattled on Helen. "And Melsham, I also discovered, is ten miles from Maychester, where we will be playing next week. Call it fate, if you like."

"You—you mean you've actually fixed up an interview?"

"Next Wednesday at two o'clock sharp, so I'll be able to get there and back before the evening show," said Helen.

"Do they know you're an actress?" was Linda's next question.

"Darling, I didn't flatter myself to that extent," Helen answered with mock humility.

"Well, I wish you luck, my dear, of course," said Linda doubtfully. "But really—" She ended with a hunch of her shoulders.

ON the day of her interview with Lady Garston, Helen was faced with the problem of what to wear. She must not appear dowdy, nor must she appear too smart.

Between them the two girls decided on a well-cut tweed suit that Helen wore in the second act of the play they were in. The weather was chilly and country people like the Garstons would regard tweeds as "safe".

"You certainly don't look demure in those," said Linda, surveying the other up and down.

"I don't want to look demure," said Helen, studying herself in the mirror. "Somehow I always associate demureness with being mousey."

"If her ladyship is looking for a repressed young female of humble appearance and servile attitude then she'll have to look somewhere else. I'm going to give the impression of being the type who loves dogs and thinks nothing of a ten-mile walk before breakfast."

She strode up and down the room with long, mannish strides.

"You look absolutely the part," laughed her friend. "One can imagine you riding to hounds, or following the guns."

"Well, I don't suppose I'll be expected to do either," said Helen. "But the idea is to create the right impression. You

know," she added, "I've a sort of hunch that I'm going to get this job."

"Well, it's time you set off for the station," warned Linda.

"Is Ladybrooke Hall far from Melsham station?"

"Gosh, I don't know," mused Helen, looking a little dismayed. "I never thought to ask. I may even have to take a taxi, though I shall make it clear that I expect to be paid back. Anyway," she went on, "I must rush. Wish me luck, darling."

"I do indeed," said Linda, giving her a quick hug.

A quarter of an hour later Helen was seated in the train, gazing unseeingly out of the window and rehearsing in her mind the coming interview. Everything would depend on the sort of person Lady Garston turned out to be, of course. If she were the domineering type, the interview would not last very long.

"I've had enough of that from producers and stage managers," she told herself. "I'm not going to take it from some sour-tempered old woman. But if she's nice to me, I'll be nice to her."

When the train pulled up at Melsham—the nearest station to Ladybrooke Hall—she asked a porter how far it was to the Hall.

"A matter o' five miles, I reckon, miss," he answered.

"Is there a bus that goes near there?" she asked.

"No, miss—leastways not within a couple o' miles."

"Oh, dear, then I suppose I'll have to take a taxi," murmured Helen, having seen an ancient-looking vehicle in the station yard.

She was about to approach it when a man's voice addressed her.

"Pardon me, but are you Miss Winford?"

Turning, she saw a handsome, middle-aged man with iron-grey hair; something in his manner and appearance suggested that he was a retired soldier.

"Why, yes," she answered smilingly.

"I'm Sir Robert Garston. It seems we must have both arrived on the same train," he said, and added—"My car is just coming if you would like a lift."

"Oh, thank you," said Helen, glad to be saving the taxi fare.

At that moment a big Daimler saloon, driven by a uniformed chauffeur, glided up and stopped opposite them. The chauffeur jumped out and approached Sir Robert.

"Hope I haven't kept you waiting, sir," he said, touching his cap. "I was held up by a puncture."

"That's all right, Philips, the train has only just come in," returned Sir Robert smilingly. "We've a passenger on the way back," he added, "Miss Winford."

The chauffeur opened the car door for them and as they moved off Helen was aware that Sir Robert was gazing at her appraisingly, or so she thought.

"You are fond of the country, Miss Winford?" he said suddenly.

"Oh, yes, I love it," answered Helen, wondering whether she did or not.

"I'm glad to hear that, my dear," he said. "So many young people seem to find it boring. But it isn't if you come to understand and love it."

"I find London much more boring, Sir Robert," she said, noting that he had called her "my dear," and deciding that this was a good omen. One gets so tired of the endless streets, the rush hours and the crowded humanity."

"I see we think alike, Miss Winford," he laughed. "I know London well, yet I always feel lost there and long to get out of it." He nodded out of one window. "There's Ladybrooke Hall," he went on.

Looking in the direction indicated, Helen

caught glimpse of an ancient red bricked building partly hidden by huge elm trees.

"The Garstons have lived there ever since it was built," said Sir Robert.

"It must be wonderful to have roots as deep as that," murmured Helen with a little sigh, thinking of her own dead parents who had never had roots anywhere, not for more than a few weeks.

The car turned off the main road and entered a gravel drive with stately trees on either side, ending with a wide lawn and ornamental flower beds. And behind all this was the most beautiful old house Helen had ever seen.

As the car stopped the front door opened and a stately individual, whom Helen rightly judged to be the butler, came slowly down the steps.

"Ah Hopkins, show Miss Winford into the library," said Sir Robert, and then to Helen, "I'll be with you in a minute or two, my dear."

She followed the butler through a great, oak-beamed hall with panelled walls, then into a room lined with books. At the farther end were french windows that looked out upon a rose garden.

"Kindly take a seat, miss," said the butler in a sombre voice, and bowed himself out.

"Well, this is some place," thought Helen, gazing about her.

She had never been in such a room before and realised what is meant by the term: "The stately homes of England." Ladybrooke Hall was indeed one of them. What a long history it must have behind it. What people it must have known! What strange and dramatic scenes it must have witnessed!

The door opened to admit Sir Robert.

"Sit down, my dear," he said, as Helen made to rise. "Lady Garston will be here in a moment or two, but before she comes I thought I had better explain what your duties would be if you came here."

"I see," said Helen, preparing to listen.

"My wife," he went on, "has arthritis in both hands and can scarcely use them—certainly not for correspondence or keeping accounts. One of your duties, therefore, would be to write her letters, attend to the domestic accounts and so on. Then Lady Garston likes being read to. This is due to the fact that she finds it difficult to hold a book for long. Have you what I might call a good reading voice, Miss Winford?"

"I don't quite know," answered Helen. "I don't think I have ever read aloud to anyone." Just in time she saved herself from admitting that she was on the stage.

"Well, we shall soon see," said Sir Robert. "You strike me as having a very soft and musical voice, and that is rather rare these days. Most young people seem to possess loud, strident voices which are anything but soothing."

With her stage training, Helen knew that she could pitch her voice to almost any key.

"I quite agree, Sir Robert," she said smilingly.

"Well, I think that about all I need tell you myself," Sir Robert went on. "Lady Garston will be able to explain better than I can any further duties. Oh, by the way," he went on, suddenly remembering, "there may be occasions when you'll have to deputise for my wife as hostess. She is subject to very bad headaches and has often to stay in her room."

"I think I would be able to manage that all right, Sir Robert," answered Helen, thinking of the number of times she had played the role of hostess in some drawing-room comedy.

"Splendid," he smiled. "You seem to fill the bill perfectly. Come along, we'll go and see my wife."

It was a lovely room to which he led

her, decorated in cream and gold, with a lofty ceiling and a magnificent fireplace.

"My dear, this is Miss Winford," announced Sir Robert and Helen suddenly became aware of a woman sitting in a chair by one of the windows.

She was well-dressed and aristocratic-looking and must have been very beautiful in her younger days. Now however, her face was lined with pain from the illness that gripped her.

"How do you do, Miss Winford," she said in a low, soft voice, half-turning. "Do please sit down."

Sir Robert placed a chair near his wife and Helen sat down.

"I will now leave you to discuss arrangements yourselves," he said, adding to his wife before he left. "There is nothing you want, I suppose, my dear?"

Lady Garston shook her head and thanked him and when he had gone Helen found a pair of pale blue eyes fixed on her as thought weighing her up.

"You are very good-looking, Miss Winford," said the elder woman after a moment, and Helen could not tell if this would count in her favour or not.

"Thank you, my lady," she said, without any show of modesty.

"Well, Miss Winford," Lady Garston went on, "your letter told me all I need know about yourself, I think, and my husband has given you an outline of your duties, has he not?"

Helen nodded.

"Yes, my lady."

"There may be times when you will have to deputise for me," the other continued, "not only in social matters, but in work connected with the parish. Are you acquainted with parochial work at all, Miss Winford?"

"Well, not really, Lady Garston," answered Helen truthfully. There was no point in lying about this.

"Few girls are these days, I'm afraid," said her ladyship. "However, there are several elderly people in the parish whom I visit when I can get out, but when I am confined to the house I should expect you to visit them for me. Miss Winford."

Helen had a sudden picture of herself carrying basins of soup to the "needy poor" and distributing blankets and so forth.

"And I should require you to read to me," Lady Garston went on. "You seem to have a very pleasant voice. I suppose you are—well, fluent?"

"Would you like me to read something to you now?" Helen suggested. "Then you can decide whether my voice pleases you or not."

"That is a good idea. You will find a volume of Tennyson's poems on the table near the sideboard."

Helen fetched the book and turned over the pages.

"What shall I read, my lady?" she asked.

"Have you a favourite poem?"

"No, anything you like."

Helen opened the book at random and alighted on a poem called "Crossing the Bar."

In a low voice, attuned to the subject, and with the feeling which her training had taught her to express, she began:—

*"Sunset and evening star,*

*And one clear call for me!*

*And may there be no moaning of the bar,*

*When I put out to sea.*

Then she stopped, thinking that this would be enough, but Lady Garston's eyes were closed and there was a look of quiet enjoyment on her face.

"Go on, my dear, go on," she whispered.

So Helen finished the other three verses

of the poem and looked up.

"I have never heard that piece read quite so beautifully," said Lady Garston. "You have a lovely voice, my dear, and you know how to use it, too. Thank you very much. Now tell me," she went on, "when do you think you can start?"

"You mean that I am engaged, Lady Garston?" Helen sounded thrilled.

"If you think the post will suit you, Miss Winford. You have already sent me your references, and you know of course the salary. It is now up to you."

Helen remembered that her present tour would end in another fortnight. Instead of going back to London with the rest of the company, she could come here. She suggested the following Monday fortnight.

"Then I think we can call the matter settled, Miss Winford. Will you please ring the bell?"

Helen did so and it was answered by the butler.

"Please show Miss Winford out, Hopkins," said Lady Garston, and then to the girl—"Your other name is Helen, isn't it? I shall call you that. It is a rather beautiful and dignified name, I think."

So Helen followed the butler out to find the car waiting for her in the drive with the chauffeur at the wheel.

"Well," she thought as she seated herself, and the car moved smoothly down the drive, "I've landed a real job at last. I wonder where it is going to lead me?"

#### STRANGE NEW WORLD.

AFTER the show that evening, while having supper in the rooms they shared, Helen told Linda more about her interview.

"Well, it sounds all right," said Linda. "Weren't there any snags?"

"The only thing that bothers me is this visiting the sick poor stuff," said Helen. "I don't see that that need worry you," said Linda, "You just plonk down a pot of her ladyship's home-made jam, inquire after the recipient's rheumatics then back out quickly."

"Sez you!" commented Helen drily. "It won't be as easy as that. 'I expect I'll have to rehearse the part. First a sweet smile with just a touch of condescension in it. Then the sympathetic inquiry, 'How is the rheumatism, Mrs. Moggs?' or whatever the ailment happens to be—"

"You'll have to memorise them, darling," Linda broke in laughingly. "It won't do to ask 'Mrs. Moggs' how her rheumatism is, if she's got asthma."

"That's a point," agreed Helen. "I'll have to make a note of them all."

"You'll probably have to help organise church bazaars and sales of work, too," suggested Linda.

"Oh dear, I hadn't thought of that," Helen pulled a face. "I am beginning to wish I knew more about country life. I'll be like a fish out of water for a time."

"Not you, my pet! You'll be all 'country' before you know where you are," laughed her friend. "By the way," she added, "did you meet the son and heir? Walter, wasn't it?"

"No," answered Helen, "nor the daughter. They have one, you know. Olive, aged nineteen according to the reference books."

"The son may prove interesting," mused Linda. "Heir to the baronetcy and all that. You may be on a good thing, darling. After all, you have 'what it takes' and the young man may fall for you with a resounding splash. Of course," she went on, enjoying the romance she was building up, "there will be complications and mis-

understandings. Bound to be. It wouldn't be a proper love story if there weren't. But everything will come right in the end with wedding bells—"

"Don't be an ass, Linda," said Helen, aware that she was blushing. "This is a job of work, not a part in a musical comedy. It's a regular supply of bread-and-butter I'm after to begin with, the romance can come if it wants to. I certainly won't go out of my way to hook Walter."

"Ah well, we'll see if you are singing the same tune six months hence," said Linda, rising from the supper table. "Anyway, I'm off to bed. Night-night, darling, and sleep well. If you get fixed up I might do the same."

"THIS all your luggage, miss?"

Philips, Sir Robert's chauffeur, nodded towards the suitcase and shabby-looking trunk which had just been hauled from the luggage van of the train.

"Yes, that's all," replied Helen.

He picked up the suitcase and a porter followed with the cabin trunk.

Waiting outside the station this time was an ancient-looking car that had obviously seen better days.

It was, Helen thought, rather a comedown from the luxurious car she had shared with Sir Robert on her first visit. This, she supposed, was evidently used to fetch and carry the servants.

"I'm being put in my place," she told herself with a certain acid amusement.

"We don't use the Daimler all the time," said Philips as if guessing what was in her mind. "It fair eats up the petrol, that bus does—only fifteen miles to the gallon on short journeys—and at four-and-sixpence per gallon, it costs a tiny bit even between the Hall and the station several times a week."

"Yes, I suppose it does," murmured Helen as she climbed in.

"Now Mr. Walter always comes down in his own little sports car," Philips went on as he handed in her small case. "A Cheetah Eight, he's got, and goes like the wind. Thirty to the gallon, miss, that's what she does!"

"Really," nodded Helen, realising that Philips was an enthusiast about cars.

"Whereas Miss Olive," he continued as he got into the driver's seat, "runs a little Mowbray—all noise and no speed."

"Does Miss Olive live at home?" Helen asked as they started off. She grasped this chance to learn as much as she could of the family.

"Most of the time, miss, but just at the moment she's staying with friends in London."

"And Mr. Walter?"

"Oh, he's often down here, miss, but he's got a place in London where he lives most of the time," Philips answered and shook his head. "Been crossed in love, he has, poor young gentleman . . ."

"You mean he's been jilted?" she asked, sounding, even to herself, a little too eager to know.

She knew it was not "the thing" to discuss her employer's family with their chauffeur, but after all it was only fair to herself to find out what sort of people she was going to live amongst.

"Yes, miss," said Philips, now occupied with driving. "Jilted him little more than a month before they were to be married. Of course it was hushed up, but all of us at the Hall knew about it."

He slowed down to pass a lumbering farm cart.

"Proper cut up, Mr. Walter was," he continued. "Still, I suppose he'll get over it all right."

They slid past the farm cart and presently turned into the Hall drive, so there was no

more opportunity for talk.

Helen was glad of this because, though she wanted to find out all she could about the Garstons, she did not want to become too familiar with Philips, even though she was no more than he—a servant.

This time Philips did not pull up in front of the house, but drove round to the servants' entrance at the back. Once again the significance of this did not escape Helen, but instead of feeling affronted, she was somewhat amused. Whatever else it might be, this was going to be an adventure, was the attitude she took.

A prim, middle-aged woman met Helen as she alighted from the car.

"If you come with me, Miss Winford, I will show you your room," she said unsmilingly, adding that Philips would bring up her luggage.

Mrs. Martin the housekeeper led the way up several flights of back stairs and along a corridor with doors opening to both sides.

She opened the last of these and stood aside for Helen to enter.

"This is your room, miss," she said, following her in.

It was a small, but bright and cheerful room overlooking the rose garden—it was comfortably furnished—indeed luxuriously compared to most of the theatrical "digs" Helen had known.

"It looks very nice," she said appreciatively.

"The bathroom is at the other end of the corridor," said Mrs. Martin and departed down another flight of stairs.

"A real character, that woman," Helen smiled, and sat down in front of the mirror to repair her complexion.

Having done this, she ran a comb through her hair, wondering what sort of person Walter Garston would turn out to be, and whether he was as good-looking as his father.

She rose and wondered what she ought to do next, finally deciding to go and report her arrival to Lady Garston.

On her way downstairs she encountered one of the maids and asked her where Lady Garston was to be found. She was a pink faced country-girl who looked very shy and embarrassed.

"In the morning-room, miss," she answered, and added, seeing that Helen looked puzzled, "On the ground floor at the back, Miss."

"Thank you," said Helen and then: "What is your name?"

"Annie, miss," answered the girl and fled like a frightened rabbit.

Helen shrugged.

"Maybe she thought I was one of her ladyship's guests," she decided, and continued on her way.

She reached the great hall and paused; a door at the far end seemed to indicate that it might open on to the morning-room.

"This is where we make our first entrance," she told herself. "Enter Helen looking timorous and ill at ease—I don't think."

She opened the door and went in to find Lady Garston seated at the window.

"Good morning, Lady Garston," she said, wondering whether this was the correct greeting to start with.

"Oh, good morning, Miss Winford," returned Lady Garston smilingly. "Has Mrs. Martin shown you your room?"

"Yes, my lady, it's a very nice one."

"I'm glad you like it, and I hope you'll be very comfortable here. Oh, and do please sit down, my dear. Bring your chair near me. There, that's better. Now we can talk," she added as Helen obeyed.

"Now tell me something about yourself, my dear, other than what you mentioned in your letter," she went on. "You see,

I'm very interested in people, partly, no doubt, because of my affliction. It makes me rather self-conscious, you know."

Helen was wondering how much she should tell. In her letter, she had not mentioned being on the stage, but had said she had been secretary to a business man. This was true in so far that, during one of her "resting" periods she had taken a job as temporary secretary to a busy man whose regular secretary was away ill.

"Well, I've done all sorts of jobs," she said hesitantly, aware that Lady Garston's eyes were fixed on her curiously.

"Then you haven't been a secretary all the time?"

"Oh, no," admitted Helen, feeling that she was in for it this time.

"But you have been on the stage, haven't you?" suggested Lady Garston, and Helen gave a guilty start.

"How—how did you guess that, my lady?" she asked.

"From several little things, my dear," smiled the other. "From the way, for one thing, you read that piece of poetry. No one but a trained actress could have put all that feeling and expression into it. Then, again, from your poise and the way you walk. Finally, because I have been on the stage myself."

"Oh!" said Helen in astonishment.

"Yes," said Lady Garston, with an amused expression. "I played in a music hall sketch under the name of Mary Cotter. Then, for a time, I acted as 'stooge' to a pair of low comics. It was during this engagement that I first met my husband. Ours was a runaway match to Gretna Green, and his people strongly disapproved—quite naturally, of course."

"You surprise me, Lady Garston," said Helen. "I would never have dreamed

"That I hadn't been born to the part?" interrupted Lady Garston smilingly. "Well, I should have been a pretty poor actress if I hadn't been able to adapt myself to the role of lady of the manor, shouldn't I? Besides, it was necessary for me to do so when my husband's father died and he inherited the title."

"I'm telling you all this, my dear, because you and I are, so to speak, of the same breed," she went on. "We both know the smell of grease paint, and the life of the theatre—or, in my case, of the music hall. All the same, it is in strict confidence. No one else suspects my dubious past. You will remember that, won't you?"

"Of course," answered Helen readily. "I am very flattered that you should have told me all this, Lady Garston. I mean to say—"

"My dear, when I realised that you were a touring actress—for I would have known your name if you'd been on the West End stage—my heart gave a little leap," confessed Lady Garston. "Here at last, I thought, is someone who speaks my own language, and with whom I can talk 'shop' till I'm dizzy."

"I think I'm feeling a little dizzy myself," smiled Helen. "This is the most surprising thing that's ever happened to me."

"As a matter of fact, I am still only Mary Cotter playing the part of Lady Garston," said the other.

"Wasn't it very difficult to start with?" said Helen, suddenly feeling at ease with her employer for the first time.

"It was a bit strange at first," Lady Garston answered, nodding. "I had to watch my step. I was terribly afraid that some bit of theatrical slang might come out at the wrong moment. But gradually the strangeness wore off and the part became real. I found myself not only acting it, but living it."

"But though I was nervous, don't think I was unhappy, my dear," she went on. "I had exchanged a hard, exacting life of theatrical uncertainty for financial security, a home and a recognised position in society. And, what was more, I loved my husband, and still do. It has been in every respect a very successful marriage, and I don't regret one single moment of it."

"You are to be envied for that," said Helen quietly, and continued—"By the way, do your son and daughter know all this?"

"I don't think they do," replied her ladyship. "Neither my husband nor I have ever told them. Though it is just possible they may suspect, one never can tell. Not, of course," she added, "that I am ashamed of my former profession, or that I'm a snob—though, believe me, snobbery, especially in the country, is a thing to be reckoned with."

"I have never told my children, simply because they would not understand. It would embarrass them. You see," she continued, "they have been brought up in an environment totally different from the one their mother knew. Besides, they might even hold it against me."

"Oh, surely not!" cried Helen.

"You don't understand, my dear. Their outlook on life, their values, their attitudes, have all been conditioned by their upbringing, which has been that of children of well-to-do parents. In other words, 'the gentry'."

"Imagine their feelings," Lady Garston went on with a rather grim little smile, "if they were suddenly to learn that their mother had once been a music-hall artist whose father had been a stage hand, and mother a wardrobe-mistress!"

"I suppose it would be rather a shock," Helen admitted a little sadly.

"Worse than that, probably, my dear. I doubt if they could 'take it'. They're Garstons every inch, whereas I—well, at heart I'm still Mary Cotter with a low upbringing, a vulgar mind and still more vulgar sense of humour. But I'm an actress for all that. I've learnt my part and I play it. Yet there is one thing I don't have to act, and that is my love of my husband—that is something genuine and deep."

There came the sound of a gong in the hall outside, and Lady Garston rose rather painfully to her feet, assisted by Helen.

"Lunch," she said. "Come along, my dear, I'm feeling quite hungry after that little heart-to-heart talk of ours."

Sir Robert, wearing riding kit, awaited them in the dining-room, and smiled on seeing Helen enter behind his wife.

"I heard you had arrived, Miss Winford," he said. "I hope you have been looked after."

"Yes, Sir Robert, thank you," answered Helen, still feeling a little dazed by Lady Garston's amazing "secret".

"Where have you been all morning, Robert?" asked his wife.

"Having a general look round, my dear," he said. "Crabb says one of the barns needs re-thatching, and so it does, but the cost of thatching is appalling. When he suggested that corrugated iron would be cheaper, I refused to consider it, even though he was thinking of our interests."

"I should think so, indeed!" said Lady Garston indignantly. "I'd rather see the barn fall down than have it roofed with that horrible sheet-iron."

"In the end, I'll have to have it re-thatched," groaned Sir Robert, as they were served with soup. "Who'd be a landed proprietor these days?" he sighed. "One is simply skinned alive by profiteers."

"Still, one grows used to it as eels are supposed to do," remarked Lady Garston,

with a twinkle in her eyes. "One writes to the important London newspapers to complain that the country is going to the dogs, that the old aristocracy is dying out and that Jack is now as good as his master. And what happens?"

"Nothing," answered Sir Robert, with a grin. "Just nothing, my dear."

"Wouldn't it be correct to say, Sir Robert, that people have been saying that the country has been going to the dogs for the last three hundred years at least?" ventured Helen soberly.

Sir Robert looked a trifle surprised, and his wife gave a quiet little chuckle. Too late, Helen realised that it had not been her place to butt into the conversation.

"Oh dear," she said aloud, and again without thinking, "I'm forgetting my part."

"That, my dear, is because you haven't had sufficient rehearsals," laughed Lady Garston, her eyes twinkling. "Besides, it's not the words that are difficult to learn, but the 'business'—so at least I always thought."

And then, turning to her husband—

"I was quite right, Robert. Miss Winford has been on the stage. Hand over that five shillings."

Ruefully her husband drew a handful of silver from his pocket, counted out five shillings and placed them beside his wife's plate.

"You see," Lady Garston explained to a pink-faced Helen, "after that first interview we had, I bet my husband five shillings that you had been an actress, and he accepted it."

"I am glad I have brought some profit to you, Lady Garston," smiled Helen, regaining her self-possession.

"Well, you lost me five bob," grumbled Sir Robert humorously. "But then, I ought to have known that my wife wouldn't make a mistake over a thing like that. She was betting on a cert."

"What's the use of betting on anything else, my dear Robert?" With which his wife picked up the five shillings.

"What are you going to do after lunch, my dear?" Sir Robert then asked.

"Sit on the lawn, I think," she said. "There can't be many more days when I shall be able to do that. It's nearly autumn already."

"Yes, when the sun goes down there's a nip in the air. Be sure you take a rug with you, my dear," he warned, and to Helen—"Make sure she keeps warm, Miss Winford, will you?"

"I'll do my best, Sir Robert," she answered.

Lunch over, Lady Garston and Helen went out on to the lawn, where a couple of deck-chairs had been placed ready for them, Helen carrying a rug over her arm.

They continued chatting in a friendly fashion till the air grew chill and Helen had to insist upon her ladyship going indoors. It was queer, she reflected, how quickly the barrier which usually exists between employer and employee seemed to have disappeared; their relationship towards each other had become almost sisterly.

"But then," she reminded herself, "we both belong to the same tribe in spite of occupying different tribal status."

#### ENTER THE CHILDREN

HELEN lay awake a long time that night pondering on the events of that eventful day. Nothing had turned out as she had expected, and she had not yet got over her surprise at the amazing turn of events.

Not, she reminded herself, that there was anything very strange in Lady Garston

having been on the variety stage; several famous stars of the music hall had married rich and titled men. The extraordinary thing was that she should have met one of these lucky ones.

"I like them both already," she murmured.

After that Helen fell to wondering what the two children were like.

As most people do when they are told about a certain person, she had conjured up a mental picture of Walter and Olive Garston. Somehow she imagined Walter as a somewhat conceited young man, very good-looking and fussy about his dress.

Olive, she supposed, would be the modern equivalent of a "young lady of fashion", selfish and domineering. Or else a "hearty" type devoted to dogs and horses—or racing cars—and without a worth-while thought in her head. It was not so much what Lady Garston had said about them, as what she had left unsaid.

"If they're not arrogant little snobs, then why has she thought it necessary to hide from them the fact that she was once on the variety stage?" Helen argued to herself.

WHEN she came down next morning, Sir Robert was having breakfast by himself. He explained that Lady Garston always had hers in bed.

"She tires easily," he said. "I suppose it's because that infernal complaint takes so much out of her."

"Does she suffer much pain?" asked Helen sympathetically.

"Frequently, but not all the time," he answered. "But it is very exhausting, pain or no pain. Yet when I first met her," he added with a sad sigh, "she was as agile as a young filly. You should have seen her play tennis and dance!"

"Yet she seems quite happy," Helen murmured, as she helped herself to toast.

"Yes, thank goodness, I think she is in spite of everything," he nodded. "She seems to have taken to you, Miss Winford—or may I call you 'Helen'?—Miss Winford sounds so formal, not to say a trifle old-fashioned, don't you think?"

"I quite agree, Sir Robert," she smiled. "Lady Garston calls me 'Helen', so why not you?"

"Well, as I said, my wife seems to have taken to you," he went on. "I am very glad of that, my dear, because she needs a friend. Of course we have plenty of friends in the neighbourhood, but they—how shall I put it?—their way of thought is different. They come from a different world. My wife, if I may put it that way, speaks their language, but it is an acquired one."

"I think I understand," nodded Helen.

"I suppose you wonder why I haven't boldly declared my wife's former profession to the world and defied conventions," he said. "Well, I wanted to. I wanted to declare to all the world that so far from being ashamed of my wife's past, I was proud of it—as, indeed, I am."

"But she was against it," he went on. "She made me promise to keep it secret, so I did. Yet I have never been able to understand why she insisted on this."

"Perhaps," said Helen, "it was for your sake, Sir Robert. She may have thought that it would have—well, have damaged your position here as Lord of the Manor."

"A dam' lot I should have cared!" he put in warmly.

"And it might not have been very pleasant for her," Helen went on. "If local society had cold-shouldered her it would have made her feel very uncomfortable, to say the least. No woman likes to be 'cut', even by people she secretly despises."

"Yes, I suppose there is something in that," he admitted. "However, it didn't happen, and I suppose I should be thankful for Mary's sake. She gets on very well with our neighbours and they all seem quite fond of her. But all that is stale news now. I really don't know why I raked it up."

"I suppose I reminded you," suggested Helen.

"Yes. You, with your theatrical associations, brought it all back," he smiled. "That is why I think you will be so good for my wife. She'll feel she need not put on an act in front of you."

"I hope not, indeed," said Helen. "She and I have already started to talk 'shop' as if we had both come off a tour, and I think she quite enjoyed it."

"I am sure she did. Well, I must be off about my business," he announced, rising. "This is only a small estate, but it needs a lot of attention. By the way, do you ride?"

"I did take lessons once at a riding school, but I wouldn't say that I can ride," she laughed.

"Well, I've got a horse that wouldn't unseat a baby, so I'll lend her to you. One day soon I must take you for a ride round the estate."

"Thank you, Sir Robert, I shall enjoy that," returned Helen.

LATER she and Lady Garston went out into the garden, where the late summer roses were in full bloom.

"Would you like me to read to you, Lady Garston?" Helen suggested.

"No, my dear. Not this morning. I'd rather walk and talk. You mustn't treat me as a chronic invalid, you know. I'm not, apart from this particular disability. Tell me more about yourself."

There wasn't, Helen admitted, very much to tell. She added that both her parents were dead and that she had no sisters or brothers. Also that she had lost touch with her remaining relations.

"My poor child, you must feel very lonely," murmured Lady Garston sympathetically. "I know, because I was in much the same position before I met Robert. But he made up for all that I had lost. I shouldn't be surprised if much the same thing happened to you one day."

"It may, of course," agreed Helen, shrugging, "though I haven't seen any signs so far."

"You surprise me, my dear. You are quite lovely and are far more 'the lady' than I ever was. You don't learn etiquette on the halls, but you have to acquire some knowledge of it if you're a 'pukka' actress."

"Oh, I've had occasional 'crushes' on men, as schoolgirls say, but nothing has ever come of them," admitted Helen.

"And, anyway," she added, "I never wanted to marry an actor."

"It has its drawbacks," Lady Garston agreed. "If you both have to go on working, it usually means taking separate engagements and being apart for long periods at a time. Almost as bad as marrying a sailor."

"Worse," said Helen. "A sailor isn't always in female company as an actor usually is."

"True, my dear," nodded her ladyship. "I'm glad that neither of my children showed any desire to go on the stage. As it is," she continued, "Walter is reading for the Bar, and Olive is going in for interior decorating—it seems very popular with young people just now."

"Are either of them engaged, Lady Garston?" said Helen a little daringly.

"No. Walter did have a brief and rather unfortunate love affair but he seems to have got over it. And I think Olive is still

heart-whole. They never say much to me about these things. I'm expecting them both down for the week-end. They will probably bring friends with them—they usually do."

"Sir Robert has suggested my riding round the estate with him some time," said Helen. "He says he has a horse that even a baby couldn't fall off."

"Oh, that would be Jennifer. She's as staid as a church warden," laughed Lady Garston. "You'll be perfectly safe on her. I used to ride her myself until I found it impossible to hold the reins. I loved riding," she added, with a sigh. "Robert taught me after we were married. He said I had a good 'seat', but he could never persuade me to ride to hounds."

But it was some time before Helen was able to accept Sir Robert's invitation, for the weather suddenly turned wet and cold.

THE following Saturday, she was sitting in the morning-room with Lady Garston, when they heard a car coming up the drive.

Lady Garston rose and went to the window.

"It's Walter!" she exclaimed. "He's down much earlier than I expected."

Through the window Helen saw a tall young man jump out of a sports car and come running towards the front door.

From the first brief glance he looked rather nice.

"Hi, Annie, Mrs. Martin, Hopkins, where's mother?" called his voice in the hall.

Thinking that Lady Garston would prefer to be alone to greet her son, Helen tactfully slipped out of the french window.

She had scarcely escaped when Walter Garston burst in upon her ladyship.

"Hullo, mother!" he cried eagerly, throwing his arms about her and enfolding her in a loving embrace.

"Darling," protested his mother, laughing happily, "I'm not an all-in wrestler, remember."

"Where's father?" he demanded, looking round.

"Somewhere out riding, dear, and please don't shout at the top of your voice as if I were deaf," murmured Lady Garston mildly.

"Sorry, mother," he said, grinning. "By the way you told me in your letter you'd acquired a new secretary-companion. Where is she? I want to give her the once-over and see if she's a suitable person for my mother to know."

"Walter, don't be silly. Miss Winford is somewhere about—she was here when you arrived."

"Ha, ha, so she fled, did she? Then I bet I know what she's like—small, mousy, demure and prim as you like. In short, my dear mother, a real blue stocking. Am I right?"

"My dear boy, you hardly expected to find a glamorous girl, did you?" she asked, her eyes twinkling with mischief. "Perhaps I'd better send for her—"

"No, don't do that, mother, please," he interrupted, in mock horror. "I don't think I could stand the shock at the moment. But why on earth," he went on in tones of repressed exasperation, "didn't you get some decent-looking girl? I don't suppose she'd cost any more than this plain-Jane you've got. Look at that Miss Seely you had! Gosh, she made you want to run away and live on a desert island!"

His mother laughed.

"I hope Miss Winford won't be quite so bad as that, Walter dear," she said. "Besides, she's singularly well-informed."

"Things get worse!" he cried, throwing up his hands. "Full of statistics, quotations and what have you. What did Gladstone

say in eighteen-eighty-four?" or whenever it was, and that sort of thing. Really, mother, I do think you might have considered my feelings in the matter."

"I saw no reason to, darling, seeing that you don't live at home," said Lady Garston. "And what does father think about her?" the young man asked.

"I believe he thinks I have made a very wise choice."

"Gosh, the poor old chap must be losing his grip," he groaned. "He used to have an eye for a pretty girl. Old age creeping on, that's what it must be."

"Walter, that is not a nice thing to say about your father."

"Sorry, mother, I didn't really mean it, of course. It's just the disappointment," he added defensively.

"Disappointment at what, dear?"

"Why, at your getting yourself another of these blue-stocking companions, of course," he grumbled. "Does she wear glasses? No, don't tell me, I know she does—big, goggly ones in shell rims. Horrid!"

"You seem to know a great deal about her, my boy, seeing how very little I have told you about Miss Winford," protested his mother gently, hiding her amusement.

"Well, didn't you say she was demure and prim and mousy and so on?"

"No, Walter, it was you who said all that. I only said she is well-informed."

"That's just as bad," he grumbled. "Anyway, never mind about that, I want to know when lunch will be ready. I'm simply starving!" he declared. "When I've had something to eat I'll be strong enough to face this walking horror."

"Walter!"

"Sorry, and all that," he grinned again. "I think I'll go in search of old Hopkins and ask him why he doesn't sound that confounded lunch gong. By the way, will Olive be down this week-end, do you know?"

"She said she would be," said his mother. "Well, I hope she doesn't bring another of those arty-crafty young females with her this time. The last one did nothing but talk about contemporary this and contemporary that. I was never so bored in all my life."

"Darling, you must be feeling hungry," smiled his mother. "You'd better go and have a wash and brush-up, and by that time I expect luncheon will be ready."

"Will Miss—"

"Yes, dear, Miss Winford will be having lunch with us," said his mother. "But if you keep your eyes on your plate you will be able to avoid looking at her. I wouldn't like you to feel that she was spoiling your meal."

MEANWHILE Helen, who had slipped out of the french windows, on to the terrace, had heard most of the young man's conversation with his mother.

"So," she murmured to herself, her eyes dancing with mingled amusement and chagrin, "the young gentleman thinks I'm mousy and prim and wear goggles and blue stockings, does he? Very well, my lad, I won't disappoint you!"

She went to her own room, changed into her most dowdy frock, put on woolen stockings, then sat down in front of the mirror and brought out her make-up box. With a few deft touches, she gave herself a horribly sallow complexion.

Then, putting on a pair of heavy sunglasses, she looked at the result in the mirror and even she was a little startled at what she saw.

"I wonder if I've over-done it?" she murmured. "I certainly look pretty awful."

She decided to let it go. After all, she

had met young women as unprepossessing as she had made herself look, and anyway she would come well up to Walter Garston's fears and expectations.

At that moment she heard the gong sound for lunch, and, suppressing a giggle, she went downstairs.

Entering the dining-room, she saw that Sir Robert, Lady Garston and their son were already seated. Lady Garston was the first to see her.

She gave a little gasp of amazement and then, guessing the reason for Helen's extraordinary disguise, recovered quickly.

"Please be seated, Miss Winford," she said, giving the girl a sly wink.

Her husband, who had been sampling his soup when Helen had entered, looked up. At sight of her he dropped his spoon.

"Eh, what, who—" he began, and stopped abruptly because his wife had given him a warning kick under the table.

Meanwhile, Walter was staring at Helen in blank dismay. His mother's companion was worse—far worse—than even he had anticipated. Indeed, she was so plain that she held his gaze by some sort of evil fascination.

"Walter dear," said Lady Garston in her most honeyed tones, "this is Miss Winford, my new companion-secretary."

"Er—how do you do?" Walter gave a sickly smile.

In return Helen gave an affected titter and smiled at him with flashing teeth, causing him to shudder visibly and try to hide himself behind a vase of roses.

"Very good soup, this," announced Sir Robert, having the greatest difficulty not to laugh.

Suddenly Helen remembered Walter's words to his mother in regard to herself—"Full of statistics, quotations and what have you." Well, she wouldn't disappoint him, she thought, and turned to the older man.

"Do you know, Sir Robert, that if all the soup consumed by the average person in the course of a life-time were poured into the round pond in Kensington Gardens it would half fill it?" she said, in a high-pitched voice.

"Indeed, Miss Winford?" murmured Sir Robert, and nearly choked as he saw the look on his son's face.

The fish course arrived. Unluckily, perhaps, Lady Garston remarked that the medical profession regarded fish as one of the brain-forming foods.

"That is the phosphorus in the bones, Lady Garston," spoke up Helen learnedly. "Do you know that if all the phosphorus were extracted from the bones of all the fish caught in a week, there would be enough to make ten thousand boxes of matches?"

Walter groaned aloud this time. Sir Robert had a violent fit of coughing and Lady Garston bent down to retrieve the napkin she had dropped on the floor.

Helen, with a self-satisfied smirk on her face, gazed at them all through her glasses as if expecting to be congratulated on her fund of knowledge.

"Well, Walter, my boy, how are you progressing in your study of the law?" asked Sir Robert, trying to get the conversation back on a common footing while he still had his laughter under control.

"Oh, not too badly, father," answered the young man gloomily. "If all goes well I'll be 'called' early next year."

"Oh, dear, what will they call you, Mr. Garston?" Helen piped up with seeming innocence.

"He means, Miss Winford, that if he passes all his exams, he'll be called to the Bar," said Lady Garston with a gravity that Helen admired.

"In other words, he'll be qualified to

plead in a court of law," said Sir Robert sportingly supporting his wife's lead.

"It must be dreadful having to defend someone you feel must surely be guilty," murmured Helen, peering admiringly at Walter through her glasses. "But then," she went on brightly, "as Shakespeare puts it:

*There is some soul of goodness in things evil,*

*Would men observingly distil it out.*

"So I suppose," she went on, "even if your client was awfully wicked, you would have to try and 'distil out' whatever goodness was in him?"

"Er—I suppose so," groaned the unhappy Walter, pushing away his half-eaten fish and deciding there and then to return to London to-morrow, instead of waiting till the day after which was his original intention.

The conversation continued in a rather ragged fashion, and for some time. Helen did not have an opportunity of furnishing the company with another quotation. Then Walter provided her with an opening.

Being a well-brought-up young man he felt that he ought to try and take some interest in this appalling addition to the family circle.

"Do you like the life here, Miss Winford?" he inquired politely as they were about to rise after the last course. "Or," he added, "do you find the country boring?"

"Oh, how nice of you to want to know Mr. Garston," twittered Helen in a simpering voice. "I adore the country. I think it's simply divine. But then I think one should strive to be happy anywhere, don't you? I mean, life is so very wonderful, isn't it? As Shelley says—

*Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,*

*Stains the white radiance of eternity.*

"How true that is, and how beautifully expressed!" she rattled on. "I simply worship Shelley, though it's terribly sad-making to think he died so young. Don't you agree?"

"Yes—yes, of course," muttered Walter and then managed to escape, he had had enough.

As they all left the dining-room, Lady Garston fell a little behind and took Helen's arm.

"My dear, you were splendid!" she whispered. "It really was a wonderful bit of acting. Walter was completely taken in and I think Robert would have been fooled had I not given him a warning kick."

They both laughed and then Helen suggested that perhaps she had better return to her normal self.

"I wonder if you could keep it up for just a little longer, my dear?" said Lady Garston. "At least, until after tea. I'm afraid the spirit of mischief has suddenly got into me, but I'd rather like to see if Olive's reactions are the same as Walter's. She should be down here about tea-time."

"Of course if you'd like me to," returned Helen, though she would have preferred to be herself again.

"Olive is rather inclined to take me for granted," Lady Garston went on. "She—and Walter too, for that matter—are always bringing queer characters down here and expecting me to put up with them. So I think it's my turn to produce a queer character and see just how they like it."

"Oh, I see your point, Lady Garston," murmured Helen smilingly. "Of course I'll do it."

"Thank you, my dear, I fancy it will take them down a peg or two when they realise that their mother can still appreciate a joke—and at their expense. In my opinion, young people have things too much their own way these days."

OLIVE arrived a little before tea-time. She brought two guests with her—one a glamorous young woman named Nina Delane, and the other a handsome young man named Rex Tyndale whose precise occupation no one seemed to know.

They all trooped on to the lawn where Lady Garston and Helen were sitting.

After the usual greetings, Lady Garston introduced Helen. Their reactions were curious. Olive—a pretty, nice-looking girl with blue eyes like her mother—shook hands with Helen and was obviously sorry for her for being so plain. Nina Delane gave her a patronising little smile and then turned away, having no further use for her. Rex Tyndale rudely turned his back on her as though she offended his eyesight.

"Where is Walter, Lady Garston?" asked Nina, who was evidently a frequent visitor to Ladybrooke Hall.

"I don't know, my dear, possibly out with his father," answered her ladyship. Then, turning to Helen—"Will you tell Hopkins that we'll have tea out here on the lawn, my dear?"

Helen went indoors and gave the message and on her way back she met Walter who was unable to avoid her, although he tried.

"Has my sister come yet, Miss Winford?" he inquired.

"Yes, Miss Olive has come and brought two friends, Mr. Garston," she answered, remembering to speak in the same squeaky voice she had used at luncheon.

"Is one of them Miss Delane?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, Mr. Garston."

He dashed out ahead of her and suddenly Helen was aware that she disliked Nina Delane with a dislike that had nothing to do with her patronising manner.

TEA was finished. Hopkins and Annie had cleared away the tea things. Now, Walter having gone off with Nina, and Olive with Rex, Lady Garston and Helen were once again alone.

"Tell me, Helen, what do you think of Nina Delane?" asked Lady Garston suddenly. "I want a frank, woman-to-woman opinion."

"I think," answered Helen after a moment's consideration, "she's the gold-digger type, Lady Garston. I have met so many of them, that I don't think I can be mistaken."

"I quite agree with you, my dear, I know the type, too," nodded the other. "She often comes down here with Olive, but chiefly in the hope of meeting Walter. And he, poor boy, seems to be infatuated with her."

"She's an extremely attractive young person," Helen admitted. "I doubt if many men could resist her if she set out to dazzle them."

"Unless," commented Lady Garston drily, "they were confronted with a counter-attraction even more dazzling."

"Maybe," Helen said briefly.

After a moment, Lady Garston went on—

"And to tell you the truth, my dear, I don't much like Rex Tyndale either. He's too much of the so-called Teddy-boy type to please me. I don't know what he does for a living—if he does anything—or what his background is. I wish Olive hadn't picked him up, just as I wish Walter hadn't

picked up Nina Delane."

"Perhaps, Lady Garston, it was the other way round," Helen suggested sagely.

"The result is equally disturbing whichever way it was, my dear," said the other. "Frankly, I'm rather worried."

"On the other hand, it may be just a harmless flirtation on all sides," said Helen.

"In Olive's case, perhaps. I'm not so sure about Walter and Nina. It seems to me that, to put it vulgarly, she is making a dead set at him—and not without certain signs of success," said Lady Garston.

Being unable to suggest any remedy, Helen remained silent. All the same she felt that Lady Garston was right and that Nina Delane was all out to capture Walter for a husband. And for some reason the thought of this began to make her blood boil.

Calmly she tried to tell herself that she was not jealous, that it mattered nothing to her whether Walter married Nina or any other girl.

But in her heart of hearts the truth was that she herself had already fallen more or less in love with the heir of Ladybrooke Hall, despite—or because of his undisguised dismay when he had first seen her.

Unlike Rex Tyndale, Walter had not been rude; had not turned his back on her. He had tried to be kind and polite, though it had obviously been an effort, which was more than Olive's young man had done. Thus Helen hoped with all her heart that Walter would not fall into the clutches of a girl like Nina.

"Tell me, Helen," Lady Garston said rather startlingly, "have you brought any nice frocks with you?"

"I have three that will pass," answered Helen.

"An evening one?"

"Yes," said Helen, "though I haven't worn it for months."

Lady Garston considered for some moments then—

"As you know, my dear, we don't usually dress for dinner, chiefly because my husband thinks it is too much bother. But to-night I am going to dress, and I want you to do the same. Olive will, too, if I ask her. The men won't, of course, but that doesn't matter. Would you mind?"

"Not a bit, Lady Garston," murmured Helen, wondering what was in the other's mind.

"That isn't all," Lady Garston went on.

"I want you to make yourself as attractive as you possibly can, my dear—not that this will entail much effort, I know. I will send my maid along to attend to your hair, if you wish?"

"That's very kind of you, Lady Garston."

"Lucy is very good," said the other.

"I shall also put on my 'war paint'. I'll show these youngsters a thing or two. I used to get a round of applause when I stepped on to the stage. We'll see what happens to-night."

"I'm sure you'll be a wonderful success," said Helen sincerely.

"To Walter and Olive, I'm just a nice, kind reasonably presentable mother, but with no more glamour than—well, say Mrs. Martin," continued Lady Garston. "Well, I'll show them what an old trouser can do when she makes up her mind to it—Heaven forbid I shan't be carried away and want to do a song and dance," she chuckled. "Or an imitation of Marie Lloyd."

"It would be rather fun," smiled Helen.

"No, my dear, Mary Cotter must never forget she is Lady Garston, at least not to her children. Now you'd better run along and start dolling yourself up, Helen—oh, and don't forget, I want you to make 'a stage entrance'. You understand?"

"Oh, quite," answered Helen smiling.

"I'm feeling quite excited, my dear, rather as if I were waiting my turn to go on. Curtain up, drum-roll, enter Mary Cotter."

Also feeling excited Helen went up to her room, removed her sallow complexion, combed out her hair, and slipped out of her dowdy ill-fitting frock.

This done, she went to the wardrobe and took from its hanger a lovely strapless evening gown of draped golden *lame*. Stockings and shoes followed, long white gloves and a string of artificial pearls. After that she made up with meticulous care and had just finished when Lucy, Lady Garston's personal maid, entered.

"Are you ready for me, Miss Winford?" she inquired.

"Quite, thank you, Lucy," answered Helen, wondering what sort of job the girl would make of her hair.

But she need not have worried. Lucy knew her job.

Gazing at her reflection in the mirror afterwards, Helen had to admit that she had never had a better or more skilful "hair-do".

"M'lady asked me to say that cocktails will be served in the drawing-room at half-past seven, miss," said Lucy before she went.

Helen nodded. She would wait till twenty-to-eight when everybody was present, and then make her entrance.

WHEN the time arrived she went downstairs, opened the drawing-room door and stood there, quite still. The others were standing in little groups chatting and laughing and sipping cocktails.

Walter saw her first, gave a gasp and nearly dropped the glass he was holding. The others, following the direction of his gaze, just stared at the vision of golden loveliness in the doorway.

Then, with the grace and poise of a ballet dancer, Helen advanced slowly into the room and stopped beside Lady Garston and Sir Robert.

"Do have a cocktail, my dear. I would recommend a dry martini," murmured her ladyship.

Even Helen was surprised at the manner in which her employer had changed her appearance. She looked easily ten years younger, her hair was done in the very latest fashion and she was exquisitely dressed.

"Aren't you going to introduce me, mother?" asked Walter, breaking the astonished silence.

"Introduce you?" repeated Lady Garston with assumed surprise. "But you have already been introduced, my dear boy. This is Miss Winford in case you have so quickly forgotten her name."

Again there was a little gasp of astonishment all round while Walter looked dumb-struck. So did Nina Delane, but mixed with her incredulity was a gleam of malicious jealousy and dislike.

The look in Rex Tyndale's eyes betrayed the wolf and Helen wondered if Olive saw it.

"Tell me, mother, why this masquerade?" asked Walter finding his voice at last. "Why did Miss Winford make herself look like—well, like she was this afternoon?"

"Darling, it was merely to please you," answered his mother with a silvery little laugh. "You described so fully the sort of person you expected to see, that I felt it would be a shame to disappoint you."

Helen was quick to notice that her employer took all the blame for this.

"Miss Winford," said Walter turning. "I want to apologise for my behaviour at the lunch table. I am thoroughly ashamed of myself."

"On the contrary," smiled Helen. "I think you were wonderfully tolerant. Mr. Garston. I made an even greater fright of myself than I'd intended."

Olive came up to her, a kindly smile in her nice eyes.

"I'm afraid I owe you an apology too, Miss Winford," she said. "I felt sorry for you when I first saw you, and I'm afraid I let you see it. It wasn't very nice of me, really."

Helen laughed and exchanged amused glances with Lady Garston.

"I think it was very nice of you, Miss Garston," she said to Olive. "Had I really been the unfortunate young person I seemed to be, I should have been deeply touched."

At that moment the gong sounded for dinner and there was a move towards the dining-room. Yet it seemed to Helen that almost everyone still looked a little dazed as though they had not quite recovered from the shock which both she and Lady Garston had given them.

AFTER dinner, when the ladies had gone to the drawing-room, Olive drew Helen aside.

"Tell me," she said in a rather awestricken whisper, "how did you do it, Miss Winford? I can confess now that you looked the most awful frump of a girl I had ever seen."

"The judicious use of make-up and suitable clothes, that's all," answered Helen. "Oh, and I had to alter my voice, of course."

"Surely you've been on the stage, haven't you?" said Olive. "I mean, you couldn't possibly have transformed yourself as you did if you hadn't had some theatrical experience."

"I'm afraid I must plead guilty, Miss Garston."

"Oh please don't call me Miss Garston. It would be so much more friendly if you'd call me Olive, and I shall call you Helen. But there is another thing which puzzles me, too," she added.

"Yes?" Helen prompted.

"About mummy. I've never seen her look so wonderful and glamorous before. I suppose you made her up and so on?"

"Not guilty," answered Helen. "I think," she added, "that Lady Garston is lovely and glamorous in her own right, if I may put it that way. It is only that you, Olive, are so close to her, so familiar with her, that you have never noticed it until now. Just a few touches, as it were, and she suddenly reveals herself to you. Yet it was there all the time, you know."

But Olive was still looking puzzled.

"Yes, I dare say you're right," she said. "But I can't help thinking what a wonderful actress mummy would have made, if she had wished."

"Oh, I'm sure she would have," agreed Helen, dead serious.

"And yet," Olive went on, "no one in our family has ever been remotely connected with the stage. I suspect that if anyone had ever suggested to mummy that she should become an actress, she would have had a fit."

Fortunately for Helen's self-control, the men arrived and Hopkins brought in the coffee.

While this was being handed round, Rex Tyndale sidled up to Helen, when he saw she was alone.

"That was an amazingly good act you put on, Miss Winford," he said, in a low voice.

"I'm glad you liked it, Mr. Tyndale," she drily replied.

"Yes, but now you are your real self again, I seem to recognise your face," he said puzzled. "Weren't you with a touring company playing a thing called 'Sitting

Pretty' or something like that?"

Helen hesitated. She had an odd feeling that he was trying to "pump" her for something other than mere curiosity.

"Why," she asked, putting down her coffee, "should it interest you, Mr. Tyndale?"

"I was just wondering whether Lady Garston knew of your former occupation, that's all," he said, watching her with a cunning look in his dark eyes. "Some of these county families have a quite unreasonable prejudice against theatrical people. Or did you know that?"

Helen gazed at him considerably. What sort of game, she wondered, was he playing at? Was it for money?—she had none—or was it to induce her to do something he wanted? She pretended to be scared.

"I'm sure I can trust you not to give me away, Mr. Tyndale," she said appealingly, in scarcely more than a whisper.

"Oh, that's quite all right, my dear girl, I shan't breathe a word. As long as we understand each other, that's all that matters," and with that enigmatic remark, he turned and left her.

A moment later Sir Robert seated himself at her side.

"By Jove, you put on a wonderful act, my dear Helen," he said in a low voice. "So did Mary. Quite took my breath away. My only fear was that she might be a little too good. What I am really afraid of is that when—as must inevitably happen, I suppose—Olive and Walter learn that their mother had been a music hall artist it will come as a shock to them."

"Oh, surely not nowadays, Sir Robert?" protested Helen. "A couple of generations ago, yes, but not now."

"You misunderstand me, my dear. What I am afraid of is that they will resent having been kept in ignorance. They may even misinterpret the reason for it, and suspect that there was more to conceal than there actually was. In short, they may distrust both their mother and me, wondering if the whole truth has been told to them."

"Oh, I don't think I should worry if I were you, Sir Robert," Helen assured him. "They are two very nice young people and they will just take it in their stride; they may even think it rather a joke. Don't forget that their values are probably not the same as yours. I doubt if any two generations sees and thinks alike."

"You seem to have a very broad-minded philosophy, my dear. I find it very comforting. Thank you," and rising, he strolled over to his wife.

Helen felt touched, and a little flattered, by the confidence that her employers seemed to put in her.

She went over to where Lady Garston was seated and took a chair beside her.

"I saw you in very earnest conversation with my husband, and I think I can guess what it was about," said Lady Garston. "The matter has worried us for some time."

"You mean about your theatrical past, Lady Garston?"

"Yes—we both feel very guilty about it."

Helen repeated the same arguments she had used with Sir Robert. And then went on:

"Lady Garston, you are taking it all much too seriously. In my opinion, I think that if, and when, your children learn who you were they will be prouder of you than ever."

But Lady Garston would not be convinced. She felt that she had kept her secret far too long and would not realise that conventions and prejudices of her younger days had long ago vanished.

THE following day was Sunday. Helen had already learnt that it was the

custom for the Garstons, and any guests who might be staying with them, to attend morning service at the parish church. It was not that they were ardent churchgoers, but they were expected to set an example to their humbler neighbours.

Lady Garston, who always came down to breakfast on Sundays, noted with disapproval that Nina Delane was wearing a knitted pullover with a roll collar, and a rather vivid floral skirt.

"Do you think those are quite the things to wear for church, my dear?" Lady Garston said mildly reproving.

"Oh, I'm not going to church, Lady Garston. I simply can't stand the vicar's sing-song voice," returned Nina brightly. "Walter and I are going for a run in his car instead."

Lady Garston frowned, but said nothing.

Breakfast over, Walter, looking a little ashamed of himself, left the room with Nina and a few minutes later they drove off in his car with Nina driving.

"I wish to goodness Walter wouldn't let that girl drive!" exclaimed Sir Robert with exasperation. "She has absolutely no road sense. I don't think I've ever seen a worse woman driver. How she managed to pass her test, I can't imagine!"

"Probably made eyes at the man who examined her, Robert," smiled his wife. "Now, are we all ready? Where is Mr. Tyndale? Isn't he coming?"

But Rex Tyndale was still asleep, so the others went out without him.

The bells had just stopped ringing when they entered the church and took their places in the family pew.

In true country fashion, when the service was over, they gathered in the entrance-way to talk to the villagers.

"We have to wait for the vicar," Lady Garston told Helen in a whisper. "He always lunches with us on Sundays."

Sunday dinner was not a very enjoyable meal, largely because the vicar, had to have every remark shouted at him, owing to his deafness, and the afternoon was spent in polite conversation until the vicar departed about four o'clock.

Walter and Nina Delane did not return till just before teatime, and Helen had a suspicion that they had quarrelled. At any rate, Nina looked haughty and cross, and Walter seemed to be sulking about something.

After tea Lady Garston went up to her bedroom, and Sir Robert disappeared into his study to browse over the Sunday papers.

As Walter and Nina went off on their own again and Rex Tyndale had gone for a walk, Helen and Olive were left to themselves.

"I'm not happy about Walter," Olive said abruptly to Helen as quietness settled over the big house.

"Oh, why is that?" asked Helen, trying not to sound too interested.

Olive paused for some moments, considering.

"I suppose," she said at last, "that you know my brother is in love with you?"

Helen felt her heart turn over.

"Oh, Olive, I think you're quite, quite mistaken," she said in tones of denial. "If your brother is interested in anybody, it is Miss Delane."

But Olive ignored this.

"My dear, he fell in love with you the moment you entered the drawing-room—or rather, when you stood framed in the doorway. I don't think you quite know how wonderful you looked on that occasion. I saw Walter's eyes light up as they rested on you, and there was no misunderstanding what they said."

Helen wanted to make some polite disclaimer, but she could not trust her own

voice.

"And frankly I think you've fallen in love with him yourself, haven't you?" Olive continued, ruthlessly probing.

But still Helen could not trust her voice to answer, though she managed to make some kind of empty gesture.

"You needn't admit it, I know," Olive said after a pause.

With an effort, Helen took a stern grip on herself.

"Obviously there is only one thing left for me to do first thing to-morrow," she said in a shaky voice. "I shall have to get you to make any excuses you think fit to your mother and father."

"Helen dear, you misunderstand me!" exclaimed Olive. "I'm not against you and Walter loving each other. Actually, I'm all for it—and for your getting married! Believe me, I'm on your side. And, what's more, I believe that mother and daddy would be the same. They both like you immensely."

"No," she went on soberly, "it's not that. What I'm afraid of is that Nina has already got her claws into him and won't let go. She has somehow bewitched him, and though you have broken the spell, her hold over him still remains."

"I—don't understand," muttered Helen unsteadily.

"Oh, it's quite simple," sighed Olive despairingly. "If my brother has pledged himself to Nina—as I fear he has—he will feel himself bound to honour that pledge. Perhaps it sounds rather old-fashioned and all that, but that's the sort of man he is."

"Yes," murmured Helen, her eyes reflecting her agony of heart, "I think he is that sort of man, too. Perhaps that is why I have fallen in love with him. You guessed right, Olive."

They looked at each other silently for a few moments, pain and despair in their eyes. Then with a half-choked sob, Helen turned and fled.

#### FATE TAKES A HAND

"I SUPPOSE I'm a bit of a cad, Helen, to have told you this now that it's too late," said Walter miserably. "I ought to have kept my mouth shut."

"It doesn't matter really, Walter," returned Helen gently. "When a man falls in love with a girl, whether he tells her or not, she generally knows."

They had met by chance a few minutes ago in the rose garden. The meeting was so unexpected that neither could have avoided the other. They had greeted each other shyly and with constraint, like two people who shared a guilty secret.

It might have ended with a forced smile and some polite comment on the weather, but it so happened that a wasp alighted on Helen's arm and she involuntarily screamed out.

Walter gallantly knocked it off, but before it went the wasp settled on his wrist for a moment and stung him viciously.

Walter gave a little yell.

"Oh!" cried Helen in dismay. "It's stung you!"

"Yes, damn it!" he admitted ruefully.

"Let me see," she commanded. "I was once stung by a wasp and they say that if you squeeze the puncture—"

She broke off and took his wrist in her hand unthinkingly. But at the touch, something like an electric shock seemed to go through her, and she felt herself trembling.

Walter, too, felt the same, and his pulses throbbed under her fingers.

Just for a moment they stood thus—breathless, gazing into each other's eyes, unable, it seemed, to draw apart.

Helen at last released his wrist.

"We—we must get some washing soda or—ammonia to put on that place," she stammered. "Let's go back to the house."

"Helen—oh, my darling!" he whispered, as though he had not heard a word she had said.

Her heart seemed to leap into her throat so that she could not speak, and some force held her chained to the spot.

Then, before she realised it, his lips were on hers with a sweet, intoxicating pressure, and she found herself giving him back kiss for kiss in complete surrender.

Neither knew how long they stood there, how many kisses they exchanged, or which of them at last drew apart. Even when this did happen, they remained gazing into each other's eyes, reading in them the things they dared not put into words. Then—

"I—I'm sorry," murmured Walter at last.

It seemed to Helen that there was nothing to be sorry about. If he loved her, why shouldn't he kiss her?

"I'm not," she whispered softly, her eyes glowing. "That is, if you love me, Walter?"

"You know I do," he answered hoarsely. "But it—it isn't that."

Suddenly Helen remembered what Olive had told her—that she feared Nina Delane had got her "claws" into him, and that she had somehow bewitched him.

"You mean—you're engaged to Nina Delane?" she breathed.

He nodded miserably.

"I don't quite know how it happened even now," he said. "We were in the car together. Nina was driving, and after a while she pulled up. We got out and sat down under a tree. I said something to her—I forget now exactly what it was—but she interpreted it as a proposal of marriage."

"She flung her arms about me and kissed me and said she would try and make me happy," he went on. "I was so taken aback that I could think of nothing to say. And what could I have said? I mean, how could I tell her she'd made a mistake and that I hadn't said what she seemed to think I had? And so I said nothing and she went on kissing me."

"Then knowing all this, why did you kiss me just now, Walter, and tell me that you loved me?" Helen asked.

"It was a caddish thing to do, I've admitted that. But—but when you touched me, when you took my wrist, I lost my head," he muttered. "I knew that you were the girl I loved, and just for the moment nothing else mattered. Oh, Helen, please forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive," she said, in a sad, low voice. "I expect I was as much to blame as you. I shouldn't have let you kiss me. Apart from all else, we hardly know each other, and—"

"That has nothing to do with it," he interrupted harshly. "You can't measure love in terms of time. It could have happened if we'd only known each other for five minutes. Still, for all that, it shouldn't have happened, and it was all my fault."

At that moment they saw Nina enter the rose garden.

As she approached them she looked at Helen with a venomously sweet smile.

"Hullo, are you two quarrelling?" she inquired brightly. "You rather look as if you were."

"Mr. Garston has just been stung by a wasp," said Helen, as though this answered the question.

"Oh, you poor darling!" cried Nina, laying a hand on his arm. "We must do something about it at once. I should have thought," she added, turning to Helen,

"that instead of keeping him here quarrelling, you would have run to the house and rung up the doctor. A wasp sting can have very serious results, you know."

There was enough truth in this to make Helen feel guilty.

"I'll go and ring the doctor at once," she said, and was turning away when Walter stopped her.

"Nonsense. I don't want a doctor. A spot of ammonia or a blue-bag will do the trick," he declared, but Helen could see from his face that he was in pain.

So, ignoring his protest, she ran back to the house and rang up the local doctor.

Having done this she went to the library, where she hoped to be alone long enough to recover her self-control and ponder what she ought to do after her recent heart-shattering experience.

The obvious thing, of course, was to resign her position and leave at once. But this would call for an explanation, an explanation that would be a lie; it would be impossible to confess the truth to Lady Garston.

"Oh, dear, what *am* I to do?" she asked herself miserably as she opened the library door.

It was not until she had entered and closed the door after her that she saw Rex Tyndale sitting in one of the big leather armchairs reading a book.

"How nice of you to keep me company, Miss Winsford," he said in his "smarmiest" voice. "I was getting a little tired of being on my own."

"Oh, I—er—only came for a book, Mr. Tyndale," she said quietly, hoping that this would enable her to get out again.

"Please sit down, Miss Winford, I want to have a little talk with you," he said almost commandingly.

She hesitated a moment and then sat down, deciding she might as well hear what he had to say.

"Yes, Mr. Tyndale?" she prompted, but not very encouragingly.

"You remember, perhaps, a little conversation we had not long ago—in fact, while we were having coffee the other evening?" he suggested.

Helen nodded.

"I remember quite well, Mr. Garston," she answered, wondering what was coming next.

"Would you like to do me a good turn, Miss Winford?" he asked, offering her a cigarette which she refused.

"I am always willing to do people good turns, Mr. Tyndale, if it is not to someone else's disadvantage," she answered, with a sweet smile.

Then she noticed that the french windows were open, and feeling a draught, she was about to rise and close them, when he stopped her.

"Please remain seated, Miss Winford. I won't keep you long," he said, on a note of irritation. "All I want you to do is to persuade Olive to elope with me."

"Elope?" she repeated, staring hard at him.

"Yes. She is, as it were, trembling in the balance. The girl is head over heels in love with me, but rather shies away from the idea of eloping. Now she likes you, Miss Winford—she has told me so—and I feel that a few sympathetic and encouraging words from you might—well, tip the balance, shall we say?"

Helen's first reaction was not only to refuse even to consider such a thing, but to inform Lady Garston immediately of what she had learnt.

Then she checked herself. If she were to do this, it might precipitate matters and Olive might be foolish enough to "elope" with this man before she could be stopped.

"You seem to forget one thing, Mr.

Tyndale," she said coolly. "Miss Garston is under age—she is only nineteen."

"Well?" he smiled.

"It means that the consent of Miss Garston's parents will be required before she can marry."

"Precisely, my dear Miss Winford. How clever of you to think of that! But I believe I said 'elope', not 'marry'."

For a moment Helen did not understand. Then the full wickedness of his plan dawned upon her, and she looked at him with horrified incredulity.

"Ah, I see you grasp the idea," he murmured smilingly. "Once Olive is compromised, her parents will be prepared to go to almost any lengths to 'preserve her honour', or, as others might say, 'make an honest woman of her'. And on my side, if they accept my terms, I shall be prepared to do this."

"I didn't know such scoundrels existed outside plays and books," breathed Helen angrily.

"Don't let's waste time throwing bouquets at each other," he said, an evil smile on his lips. "You want to keep your nice comfortable job, don't you? As a 'bit actress'—if you'll pardon the expression—you're lucky if you get twenty weeks' steady work out of the fifty-two. Am I right?"

"Of course I am," he went on, as she did not reply. "And you have to fill in as best you can by doing any odd job that offers. But now you're sitting pretty, aren't you? And who knows, with a little skill and luck, you might even land young Walter Garston as a husband. It's a job in a thousand, my dear girl—"

"You—you unspeakable cad!" cried Helen.

"Oh, quite. But that's just a little beside the point, isn't it? The question you have to decide is, will you go on holding down this 'cushy' job, or won't you?" he suggested. "A word from me in Lady Garston's ear concerning your real background and I think, to put it crudely, you'd be sacked on the spot. These old county families are so conservative, aren't they?"

"Is that all you have to say, Mr. Tyndale?" Helen inquired tonelessly.

"I think so, except to repeat that with a little encouragement from you, and a promise of co-operation, I think Olive would throw all doubts and fears to the wind and agree to let me run away with her," he answered suavely.

"And if she doesn't?"

"But she will. As an actress, you are an experienced young woman of the world, my dear Miss Winford. But Olive is not. In many ways, she's still wet behind the ears. A few months messing about with interior decorating after leaving a finishing school, doesn't teach worldly wisdom," he said. "That is why, as I happen to know, she looks up to you as a model of sophistication. That is why she will listen to you and take your advice. Now then, is it a bargain?"

Helen was still wondering what she ought to do. Perhaps on the whole it would be better to pretend to agree to this man's villainous plan. It would give her time to think. The best thing might be to reveal Rex Tyndale's real motives to Olive herself and thus open her eyes to his true character. On the other hand, she might be so infatuated with the man that she would refuse to believe a word against him.

It was a dreadful dilemma. But she still had one advantage over Rex Tyndale; his threat to tell Lady Garston about her theatrical connections. It was an empty one.

"Very well," she said, after a long pause.

"Ah, I thought you'd see which side your bread was buttered, my dear girl," he laughed. "No comparison between a

'bed-sitter' in some shabby back street, and life here at Ladybrooke Hall, is there? To say nothing of a regular income, what?"

"You must give me time," she said.

"That's what I can't do," he answered.

"Olive must be persuaded at once. If I remain here after to-morrow, I shall outstay my welcome, besides which, Olive may have second thoughts. She's not the reckless type, you know."

"I'll do my best for both of you, Mr. Tyndale," she said, and he, not realising that the words had a double meaning, grinned his appreciation.

"Good girl," he murmured. "But don't waste any time. And don't bother about details, you can leave those to me."

HELEN left the library and went up to her own room to think.

She was still grappling with the problem when there was a tap on her bedroom door. In answer to her "Come in", the door opened to admit Olive. She looked so pale and agitated, that Helen feared she must be ill, or else that she had just received some bad news.

"Olive, what is the matter?" she asked.

Olive crossed to the bed and sat down on it. Helen saw now that her eyes were red with weeping, and that she was trembling.

"Olive, dear, what is the matter?" she repeated, sitting down beside her and taking one of her hands.

"I—I know everything," replied Olive in a low, shuddering voice.

"Everything—?"

"About—about Rex. I happened to be passing the library a little while ago. The french windows were open," answered Olive. "I recognised your voice and Rex's. I should have gone on—I didn't want to eavesdrop—but I heard my name mentioned. That stopped me."

"I don't think it's wrong to try and overhear what people are saying when you know they're talking about you. Anyhow, I had to listen. So I heard what Rex told you—every word of it. He doesn't love me, he only wants me because, I suppose, he thinks daddy will try and buy him off, or something like that. Oh, what a fool I've been!"

She buried her face in her hands and little, half-choked sobs escaped her.

"Then you don't love him any more, Olive darling?" asked Helen.

"Not now. I've had my eyes opened. I suppose it was infatuation I felt, not real love. But that's all over and finished with. I—I don't suppose I'll ever fall in love again."

"Yes you will, darling, and with someone worth while next time," Helen comforted gently. "You've had a lucky escape."

"Thanks to you, Helen. If Rex hadn't told you what he did, I'd never have known the sort of man he was, would I?—at least, not till it was too late."

"Listen," Helen said. "If your parents knew about all this, they would be terribly upset, and I don't see what good it would do, now that the danger is past. I think the best thing would be for me to see Mr. Tyndale and tell him there is going to be no 'elopement', and that if he values his skin he'd better go while the going is good."

"Yes, but I shall come with you, Helen. He might not believe you, but he'll believe me when I tell him I never want to see his face again. I wonder if he's still in the library?"

So when Olive had removed the traces of tears from her face and renewed her make-up, they went together to the library.

"Everything okay?" Rex inquired with a complacent smile, as the two girls entered.

"Perhaps you had better tell him your-

self, Olive," said Helen.

In a few brief, biting words, Olive did. Rex's face crimsoned, then grew deathly pale. Anger, disappointment and hatred shined in his eyes.

"I think," he said, turning to Helen when Olive had finished, "your stay here will be nearly as short as mine, Miss Winford. I will make sure that Lady Garston is made aware of the way you have fooled her."

"There has been no fooling," returned Helen coolly. "Lady Garston knows that I was on the stage before I took this job."

"I have a little surprise for you, my dear Olive, which I have been keeping up my sleeve," he said, with silky malignancy.

"Do you know that your mother was a music hall artist before she married your father? Yes, my dear, the dignified Lady Garston was known on the halls as 'Mary Cotter'."

"You—unspeakable—cad!" breathed Helen.

But Olive was actually smiling.

"We—my brother and I—have known that for years, but I let Miss Winford believe that we didn't," she said. "When we were young we were playing in one of the attics and came across an old theatrical dress basket. Of course we opened it, and found, among some old theatrical costumes, a number of old music hall programmes and some photographs of mummy signed 'Mary Cotter'. In one of them she was wearing tights—I fancy she must have been playing principal boy in some pantomime when it was taken."

"We didn't tell mummy what we'd found," Olive went on, "because we felt that if she'd wanted us to know, she'd have told us. But we felt awfully proud of her."

Rex Tyndale's face was a study of hatred and impotent frustration.

He turned away without a word and disappeared through the french window.

"So that's the kind of man he is," murmured Olive thoughtfully. "It's queer. I thought I loved him, but I don't seem to mind a bit now. All I feel is an immense relief."

A few moments later they heard a car starting up, then the sound of it disappearing down the drive.

"We'll have to tell your mother that he was suddenly called away," Helen suggested. "It would upset her too much if we told her the real reason for his going."

But oddly enough neither Lady Garston nor her husband seemed to notice the absence of one of their guests, and made no reference to it whatever.

Now that it was all over, and Olive had been saved from disaster, Helen became once more aware of her own misery.

By the following evening all the visitors had left for Town, including Walter and Nina Delane.

As if by mutual consent, Helen and Walter had not seen each other alone since their meeting in the rose garden.

Just as neither Sir Robert nor Lady Garston referred to the abrupt departure of Rex Tyndale, so neither of them referred to their son and Nina. The fact that they did not do so made Helen suspect that they knew of their relationship, and were too deeply troubled to discuss it with outsiders. But Helen could feel that Lady Garston was unhappy.

The week passed slowly, and to everyone the house seemed to be under a cloud.

Then, one day, Lady Garston said abruptly to Helen—

"Thank you, my dear."

"But what for, Lady Garston?"

"For saving Olive from disillusionment and unhappiness," answered Lady Garston.

She reached out her hand and laid it

gently on Helen's. There was no need to say more, and they fell into the silence of deep understanding.

THE following Saturday morning was foggy and chill. Sir Robert expressed doubt as to whether Walter would come down this week-end, especially as the fog showed no signs of lifting. But just before lunch Walter arrived in his car with Nina. It looked to Helen as though they had been quarrelling on the way down.

During lunch, Walter was sulky and silent, while Nina tried, but not very successfully, to start a flirtation with Sir Robert. Obviously annoyed and embarrassed, he left the table before coffee was brought in.

"Well," demanded Nina of Walter when Sir Robert had gone, "are we going to spend the afternoon glowering at each other? This place is about as lively as a morgue. I wish to goodness I hadn't come down with you!"

"Then why did you?" he growled.

"Because you persuaded me!"

"I didn't," he retorted.

"You did!"

"Have it your own way, Nina," he sighed. "But don't let's go on quarrelling. We did enough of that on the way down."

Let's go into the billiards-room and play a hundred up, shall we?"

It was intended as a peace offering, but Nina rejected it. She was in a thoroughly bad temper and had to vent it on someone.

"You must take me back to Town," she said imperiously. "I shall go crazy with boredom if I stay on here."

"But not to-day, surely?" he protested. "Look at the weather! And the fog will probably get thicker."

"You're just making excuses. If you won't drive me back, I'll drive myself!"

"Don't be an ass, Nina," he protested. "No one in their senses would take a car out in this fog unless it were a matter of extreme urgency."

"Well, it is," she retorted. "And the fog isn't any worse than when we arrived."

"Look, Nina," he said with decision, "I'm not going to risk your life and my own, just to satisfy a whim on your part. Do as I suggest and come into the billiards-room—"

He broke off as she rose abruptly from the table and flung out of the room.

He turned to Helen who had been sitting a little apart from them.

"Now she'll sulk for the rest of the week-end, I suppose," he groaned. "I wish we hadn't come down. But she said she would

like to, so I couldn't very well refuse. Oh, well, I'd better go and put the car away," he added, rising to his feet. "I left it in the drive."

At that moment they heard a car starting up. Both he and Helen rushed to the window just in time to see his car disappearing down the drive with Nina at the wheel.

NINE months had elapsed since Nina Delane, driving madly through the fog, had collided with a lorry and been killed instantly.

Now it was summer once more, and Helen sat beside Walter on the lawn at Ladybrooke Hall, taking advantage of the warm sunshine.

"To think that in a week from now we shall be man and wife," he murmured happily. "Isn't it wonderful?"

"So wonderful that I can hardly believe it's true, darling," said Helen, eyes misty with love. "I'm sometimes afraid that I shall wake up and find it's all a dream."

He laughed tenderly, and taking her in his arms, demonstrated in the most convincing way possible that it was no dream, but something very real.

THE END

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## THE SHOWMAN'S DAUGHTER

By Leslie Winter

### THE FUN FAIR MOVES ON

THE holiday was over. The fair ground looked desolate—empty ice-cream cartons, bottles and paper bags strewn all over the place. Gusts of wind caught up the litter and scattered it far and wide. Patches of oil-soaked grass and churned-up earth added to the desolation of the scene.

The roundabouts, swings and "wiggly-wogs", blazing with lights the night before and crowded with shouting, laughing people, were nearly all dismantled.

The tent in which "Madame Zingari", gazing into a crystal ball, foresaw the future; the platform from which "Professor Montelli" urged his audience to come in and see the only two-headed fish in existence—all had come down and were being stowed away in lorries.

In a word, Joe Copperdeck's world-famous fun fair, "Patronized by Royalty", if one were to believe the advertisements, was about to move on. The next pitch would be the last before the season ended and the show went into winter quarters.

One by one the lorries and caravans took the road, bumping and lurching over the uneven ground till they reached the main road. The last to leave was the big, ornate caravan occupied by Joe himself, his wife—Madame Zingari to the public; and their daughter Peggy—Senorita Delargo, the famous lady toreador straight from Madrid, in song and dance.

Here Joe had slightly overstepped the bounds of poetic licence. Peggy had never been nearer Madrid than Margate pier, and the sight of a bull, even when in an enclosed field, terrified her. But she could dance and she possessed a sweet though not very powerful voice.

Attired in Spanish costume complete with mantilla and castanets, her principal "number" was the toreador song from "Carmen". True, the song had been written for a male voice, but a musical pal of Joe's had "dickered" with the key to bring it within the range of a girl's voice. Joe had insisted on this song because, to

his mind, it justified the description "lady toreador".

"If you sing about a toreador, it's almost as good as being one," he had argued.

At the moment, however, Peggy was not fighting bulls even in song—she was engaged on the much less romantic task of peeling potatoes. She was an extremely pretty girl with pale-gold hair and blue eyes the colour of forget-me-nots, and was about as un-Spanish looking as a Viking. When a well-meaning friend had pointed this out to Joe he had contemptuously brushed the objection aside.

If a lot of English people were dark, he had argued, why shouldn't a lot of Spanish people be fair? And since that was that, Peggy became Senorita Delargo straight from Madrid, and what was more, she had got away with it.

Her mother was cutting up the remains of a cold joint which, when the potatoes had been cooked and mashed, would become the contents of a shepherd's pie—Joe's favourite dish.

"If you take my advice, Peggy, you'll give young Ted Sanders a wide berth," her mother was saying. "I don't say his isn't a good act, for it is. Your dad says it's one of the best we've had. But Ted Sanders will never make any girl a good husband."

"Him!" muttered Peggy, with a disdainful toss of her shapely head. "If I can't do better than that, I'll never marry at all!"

She did not like Ted Sanders. Billed as "Texas Jake, the champion knife-thrower of America," he was a Cockney by birth, but had spent several years in Texas as a cowboy. He had returned to England with a convincing Western accent, a skill at throwing knives and a hankering after whisky.

"I'm glad to hear that, my dear," said Mrs. Copperdeck. "Ted's not your sort at all. Besides, your dad and me want you to do well for yourself, Peggy, and there's no reason why you shouldn't. You've got the looks and you've had a decent

education—much better than I ever had."

Peggy smiled to herself—she was of the same opinion. Secretly, she hated the nomadic life she was leading. She wanted roots, a home that was not on wheels, a life that was not half make-believe and, above all, a feeling of security and permanence.

"That's all very well, mum, but what chance do I ever get of meeting any but show people like ourselves?" she said. "We're always on the road except for a month or two in the winter, and I haven't got the same opportunities as other girls."

Mrs. Copperdeck sighed. She knew intuitively what was in her daughter's mind, and it worried her. Born in a caravan herself and living all her life in one, she was a nomad by instinct. But she had enough imagination to realise that Peggy who had spent some years at a boarding-school, might have different ideas.

In fact, it was Mrs. Copperdeck who had insisted on the girl going to the boarding-school. Her husband had been strongly against it. When Peggy grew up and married a showman like himself—and it never entered Joe's mind that she would do anything else—all she'd need in the way of education was the ability to read and write.

"I'm not much good at either, no more are you, Sally," he had said. "But five thousand quid wouldn't buy this show of mine, and it wasn't built up on the 'three R's', as they're called."

All the same, Mrs. Copperdeck had managed to get her way, though now she sometimes had doubts as to whether that way had been the best one after all.

"Well, I don't know, Peg," she said at last. "If you don't want a chap belonging to our set, who do you want to marry—a clerk?"

Peggy shrugged. She did not want to marry a clerk—at least, she didn't think so. But she did want someone who could give her a proper home and some sort of social standing. Occasionally, she bought one of the popular women's magazines

and read fascinating articles on how to furnish a house, how to dress, and how to behave on social occasions.

To most girls, such things were commonplace, but to Peggy they were like glimpses into Fairyland. They presented a way of life she had never known, but for which she yearned. To have a house of one's own, a house that "stayed put" a house with neighbours on either side whom one could get to know—that was her dream of happiness.

Presently her father came in for his dinner. He was a tall, well-built man, with a ruddy, weather-beaten face and a pair of twinkling grey eyes. He was wearing a dungaree suit and rubber wellingtons.

"When do we get to the next stand, Joe?" inquired his wife, as she set the dinner upon the table.

"Not much before midnight," he answered. "The fair ground's about a mile outside the town—different from where it was last year—and we won't have it to ourselves, neither. Still, I reckon we can hold our own even in face of a proper circus."

"How long do we stay there, dad?" asked Peggy.

"Three days, my dear, and then we pack up for the winter," he replied. "Not been a bad season really, in spite of the weather, has it, ma?"

"Well, no, not too bad," admitted Mrs. Copperdeck, who kept the accounts. "Besides, we might get a few small winter dates," she added hopefully.

Sometimes a bazaar or some other semi-social function appealing for popular support, would engage a "turn" as an additional attraction, and Peggy was usually selected because of her musical talent. Sometimes she was advertised as "Senorita Delargo", with the "lady toreador" part left out.

"Another thing," Joe went on, as he started to serve the shepherd's pie, "I'll probably be able to find a few new turns. Wish we could find another like Rita Tolworth's."

"You mean, the one that did the juggling act?" queried his wife.

"Yes, and could she juggle! Used to pretend she'd been taught by Japanese professionals, but I never believed it. Just a natural gift, if you ask me. And to think the fool of a girl went and threw herself away the way she did! But there's no saying what a woman will do."

"But what did she do, dad?" asked Peggy, who was away at school when Rita Tolworth had been one of the show's great attractions.

Her father gave a cynical laugh.

"You'd never believe it, Peg, but she married a doctor!" he said. "Can you beat it? A lady juggler marrying a doctor! I've seen some queer things happen in my time, but that beat the lot of 'em. And it all came about because the girl happened to strain a muscle and went to see a doctor about it."

"You mean, they fell in love, dad?" Peggy asked eagerly.

"I suppose they must have done, my dear girl, else they wouldn't have got married," he replied. "Anyway, the doctor didn't marry her for her money for she hadn't any. But I lost one of the best turns I'd ever had, and I haven't forgiven that doctor for robbing me of her."

"Poor girl!" murmured Mrs. Copperdeck. "I'll bet she often thinks of the time when she travelled the country with us. I think I'd go stark crazy if I had to stay in the same place for the rest of my natural."

"Same here," agreed her husband. "But I reckon it all depends on what you're born to. We think our way of life is the best, Sally, but I expect there's many who'd

sooner be dead than roam about like we do. Takes all sorts to make a world, as the saying is."

As he finished speaking, the caravan stopped, and glancing out of the window, Joe noticed that all the other vehicles had done the same.

"Some sort of hold-up," he grunted. "Hope it won't last long. I don't like pulling into a place in the dark, 'specially when there's a crowd of other wagons already parked."

Several minutes passed, and Joe was about to go and find out the cause of the delay, when the door of the caravan opened and Ted Sanders thrust his head in.

"One of them trucks up front has got a choked feed," he announced, with an exaggerated American accent.

"Well, aren't they doing something about it?" demanded Copperdeck.

"Sure, boss, Bill's fixing it now," Sanders said. "I figgered you'd like to know, that's all."

"Would you like to come in and have a cup of coffee, Ted?" inquired Mrs. Copperdeck affably.

"Thanks, ma," he said, a pleased grin on his face.

He entered the caravan and sat down beside Peggy, and when Mrs. Copperdeck handed round the coffee, Peggy asked him to pass the sugar.

"You don't want no sugar, honey," Sanders told her laughingly, as he passed the bowl. "I guess you're sweet enough without it."

Peggy hated his drawling Americanisms. "Can't you speak like an Englishman when you're not doing your act?" she retorted sarcastically.

"Peggy!" remonstrated her mother.

"If I started talking in any other way, Peggy, I'd lose my American accent," he said. "I'd forget and start talking Cockney. And who'd believe in a Cockney cowboy?"

"Something in that, Ted," put in Joe Copperdeck, who regarded the young man's knife-throwing act as one of the chief attractions of the show.

A short silence followed. Then—

"I've been kinda thinking up a new act, guv'nor," Sanders remarked, as he stirred his coffee. "Them lassoing tricks I do before throwing the knives are getting sort of stale. I mean, lassoing the hat off some guy in the audience don't always go down too good, though it still raises a laugh. Anyway, it's so dead easy that any kid could do it."

"Yes, Ted, the crowd don't know that, do they?" Copperdeck remarked. "What's your idea then?"

"Wal, I figger it this way, boss. However good an act is, it's always better if there's a dame in it. There ain't much drama in just twirling a lasso round your head and tying knots in the air with it. It's a showy trick, no doubt, but it don't mean nothing."

"Now if a girl like Peggy, wearing a female cowboy's outfit, so to speak—fringed skirt and Stetson and so on—was to let herself be lasso'd, I guess it would make a swell act," Sanders went on, glancing out of the corner of his eye at Peggy to see how she was taking it. "Might even work in the knife-throwing, too."

Mrs. Copperdeck shook her head.

"Oh no, there's going to be no knife-throwing with Peggy acting as a sort of target, if that's your idea, Ted," she said. "I remember we had a shooting act once. Now what was it called?"

"The Two Dare-devils," supplied her husband. "They were a married couple, and the man used to turn his back on the woman as she held up a mirror and shoot at a clay pipe she was holding between her

teeth. Yes, and he shattered the pipe every time—they was no deception about that."

"Yes, dad, but he happened to misfire once, didn't he, and the woman was in hospital for nearly six months," Mrs. Copperdeck reminded him. "Same thing could happen with knives, of course."

"Oh, but there are no knives in a lasso act, ma," Sanders said laughingly.

"But what about my Spanish act?" demanded Peggy. "Am I to sing the Toreador piece and then be lasso'd?"

"No, no, honey, you'd do a quick change after the song and dance stuff, then join me," Sanders explained. "I reckon that would go over fine, Peggy."

"Do you? Well, you've another guess coming to you, Ted Sanders," she told him brusquely.

At that moment the wagons started to move on again and Sanders jumped out of the caravan before it began to follow suit. Peggy then started to help clear the table.

"I don't think you ought to have snapped at Ted the way you did, my dear," her mother remarked reproachfully. "After all, he was only making a suggestion, you know."

"Well, I don't like his suggestions, nor him either," returned Peggy. "Fancy him having the cheek to call me 'honey'!"

"Oh, but Ted doesn't mean any harm, my dear," her father put in laughingly. "It's his American way, you know."

"Yes, dad—Texas Jake from Seven Dials!" Peggy retorted.

Her father grinned and picked up a newspaper, and Peggy helped her mother with the washing-up.

Presently, Joe Copperdeck suddenly looked up from his paper and remarked—

"You know, Peg, it seems to me that it's about time you thought of getting married. You don't want to leave it too late, my lass. Start off young, I say. Don't you agree, Sal?" he added, turning to his wife.

"You married me when I was eighteen, Joe," she murmured thoughtfully. "I was doing an equestrian act in Wemble's Circus when we first met, wasn't I?"

Joe nodded.

"Yes, and I was head-groom," he mused. "My dad meant me to be a jockey, but I started to grow too hefty for that. So, as I knew a tidy bit about horses, I got a job with Wemble's. How many years ago is it, Sal?"

"I'll leave you to guess that yourself, Joe," she answered laughingly.

"Anyway, as the song says, 'it ain't been a day too long' as far as I'm concerned, old girl," Joe said. "I reckon the day I joined the circus was the luckiest of my life. We've had plenty of ups and downs, of course, but we've stuck together through it all, haven't we, my dear?"

"Yes, that we have," Mrs. Copperdeck agreed. "That's what we got married for, Joe—I mean, to share whatever was coming, good luck or bad."

Joe nodded again.

"Yes, and your mother and me would like to see you finding a young man for yourself, Peg," he said. "Oughtn't to be so difficult for a good-looking lass like you, my dear," he added, with an affable smile.

Peggy flushed. It was not often that her father paid her compliments.

"Yes, dad but where am I to find a suitable young man?" she said. "We never stay long enough in one place for me to get to know people, do we?"

"Oh, but we meet plenty of show-folk like ourselves, don't we?" he countered. "Remember young Bill Hartley at our last stand? He was properly gone on you, but you gave him the 'bird'. I don't know why, for his family's in a good way of business."

"Travelling cheap jacks!" commented

Peggy, with a toss of her golden head.

"Well, what's wrong with that, my girl?" demanded her father. "It's their line of business, same as running a fun fair is ours. And, mind you they pull in the dough—I reckon old Sam Hartley must be worth thousands for all that he looks like a travelling tinker."

"And we'll be seeing them again at Millington," put in Mrs. Copperdeck. "Bill told me they'd be having a stand there."

Peggy shrugged. Travelling round with an itinerant auctioneer's booth appeared to her no different from travelling round with a fun fair. Neither offered the permanence and security she longed for. Even so, she hadn't given Bill Hartley what her mother called "the bird" because she disliked him, but because she didn't want to raise his hopes, only to disappoint them.

"It seems to me what Peggy wants," Mrs. Copperdeck remarked, an unaccustomed note of bitterness in her voice. "is a respectable little suburban villa and a husband who goes to business every morning and returns every evening as regular as clockwork."

"Well, and is there anything wrong in that?" Peggy demanded, stung by her mother's tone.

"Only that it's not our way of life, Peg, and not the way of life you've been brought up to," her father interposed. "In less than three months, you'd be pining for the good old caravan and life on the road. It's in your blood, my girl, same as it is with your mother and me, although you may not know it."

"Very well. Have it your own way dad. But whatever you say, I'm not going to marry a showman," Peggy declared obstinately.

Her father sighed and picked up his newspaper again. Mrs. Copperdeck secretly decided to ask Bill Hartley to tea when they reached their new stand. She knew that the young man was deeply in love with Peggy, and still had hopes that something would come of it.

It was evening when the little convoy passed through the town of Millington and reached the fair ground a mile or so beyond it. The caravans and lorries pulled into the space which had been allotted to them. But they would not be unloaded, nor would the booths be set up till the following morning.

But the small circus was already setting up the "big top" and canvas shelters for the horses. They would be at it all night, and all night, too, other caravans would be arriving with their varying "attractions" from boxing booths to shooting ranges. For most of them it was the last "stand" for the season and they were determined to make the most of it.

Immediately after breakfast the following morning, Joe Copperdeck went out to supervise the erection of his own booths and side-shows. In the meantime, Peggy ironed out her Spanish dancer's costume, and as she did so, dreamed of a nice little villa with a husband who had a respectable job and didn't throw knives, or auction shoddy goods for a living.

When her father returned shortly before dinner-time, he was accompanied by a dark, rather good-looking young man wearing a well-cut lounge suit. He had brown eyes and wore a "tooth brush" moustache which made him look rather like an army officer.

"This is Mr. Harry Trent of Trent Brothers who do our printing," Joe announced. "Mr. Trent, this is my wife."

Mrs. Copperdeck shook hands with the visitor, who was then introduced to Peggy. As they shook hands, she felt a little thrill such as she had never known before and

quickly lowered her gaze before the brown eyes fixed intently upon her.

"As I expect you know, Mrs. Copperdeck, our printing works are in this town, so I decided to give your husband a call and see if he had any orders for us," the young man explained smilingly.

"As to that, my dear boy, our season is just about over," Joe said. "So there'll be nothing big in the printing line till I know what next season's attractions are going to be."

"Yes, of course, Mr. Copperdeck," the young man agreed. He paused, then added: "It must be a wonderful life going from one place to another, seeing new scenes, new faces and so on. Quite a different life from having to spend week after week, and month after month in the same place, isn't it?"

"Well, I admit it wouldn't suit me," Joe said, "nor my wife either. On the other hand, there are many people who wouldn't find our sort of life suit them. All depends on the way you've been brought up, I reckon."

"Yes, I suppose that is so," Harry Trent remarked. "All the same, Mr. Copperdeck, your nomadic way of life sounds very attractive to me."

Peggy laughed.

"That's because you know nothing about it, Mr. Trent," she said. "I rather think you would hold a different opinion if you were always on the move and had no real friends because you never stayed in one place long enough to make any."

"Well, yes, I hadn't thought of that," he said. "Then would you be content to give up the road and settle down somewhere for the rest of your life, Miss Copperdeck?"

"Yes, I certainly would if I had the chance," Peggy replied with a rebellious glance at her parents.

"My daughter talks like that. Mr. Trent, because she doesn't know what town life is," Mrs. Copperdeck said. "I bet that after three months stuck in a house, she'd give all she had to get back on the road, same as I would."

"That's what you think, mother," Peggy retorted. "But you can't answer for me, any more than I can for you. We've got entirely different notions about it, that's all."

"Well, we can't all have the same likes and dislikes, can we?" Harry Trent observed smilingly. "Nor can we all do the same sort of jobs. Mine's printing, yours entertaining. We're all necessary in our own particular way, of course."

"Aye," put in Joe Copperdeck, "as I always say, it takes all sorts to make a world."

"You'll stay and have a bit of dinner with us, won't you, Mr. Trent?" Mrs. Copperdeck invited, with a beaming smile.

She had noticed that he kept glancing at her daughter, an admiring look in the young man's eyes, and thought what a wonderful thing it would be if Peggy fell in love with him. He was evidently a well-to-do young man and in a position to give Peggy all the things her heart yearned for—security, stability and a real home of her own. So, since she longed for a different way of life, why shouldn't she have it if the chance came her way?

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Copperdeck, I'd love to if it would not be putting you out in any way," he said, with a pleased smile.

"Oh no, not at all, Mr. Trent," she replied.

Peggy seemed to lose some of her customary shyness with strangers and chatted quite gaily with the visitor during dinner. Trent asked her if she would like to have a look over his firm's printing works.

"It would enable you to have a glimpse of a different way of making a living from what you are accustomed to," he told her laughingly. "As your father has said, we can't all do the same jobs."

"Oh yes, I'd love to, Mr. Trent," she answered smilingly.

"Then would to-morrow morning suit you—say, at about eleven o'clock?" he suggested.

"I—I think so—Wouldn't it, daddy?" she stammered, turning to her father.

"Aye, lass, you'll be quite free till the afternoon," he answered.

And so it was arranged. When the visitor had gone and Peggy was visiting another caravan to see Mrs. Carter's new baby—she was the wife of "Prof. Montelli"—Mrs. Copperdeck confided to her husband her suspicion that Peggy and Harry Trent had fallen for each other.

Joe laughed.

"Nonsense, Sally, it's just your fancy," he scoffed. "Our Peg marry a printer! Oh no, there's no fear of anything like that, my dear."

"Anyhow, Joe printers marry same as other folk, don't they?"

"Maybe, but they marry their own kind, Sal. Our Peggy's one of us. She belongs to the Road, even though she does try to make herself believe that she doesn't. It's in her blood, and it'll stay there. Besides," Joe added, frowning, "I'm not sure that I'd approve of such a thing."

"But why not, Joe, supposing the young couple did want to marry?" demanded his wife.

"For one thing, Sal, I don't altogether trust young Trent. He smiles a bit too much for my liking," Joe said.

"Well, of all the ridiculous objections!" cried Mrs. Copperdeck. "Do you want the girl to marry an undertaker, Joe?" she added jestingly. "But maybe I'm mistaken about it after all. Come to think of it, Mr. Trent may be married for all we know, though, somehow he doesn't look as if he was."

"Meaning he looks too happy, my dear?" Joe suggested satirically. "Well, maybe you're right in that, Sally."

**D**URING the evening show, when she had half-hour intervals between each of her acts Peggy put a raincoat over her Spanish dancer's costume and slipped out of the booth. It was her custom to do this every evening to see whether or no business appeared to be good and to report the result to her father.

When she entered the tent where Ted Sanders was giving his knife-throwing display, it was fairly full. He had finished with the lasso and was now handing out his usual "patter"—

"—greatest knife-throwing act in Europe. What's more, folk, if there's any man or woman present who can throw one of these knives and hit the spot I indicate, I'll give him or her a five-pound note. Wal, looks like there ain't no takers, doesn't it?" he added, amid general laughter.

He then descended from the dais and walked to the other end of the tent where there was a small table on which the knives were laid out. At the end which he had just left, was what looked like a huge dart-board.

"Now, folks," he cried, picking up one of the knives. "I'm going to make a complete circle round that board and finish by putting one right dead in the centre."

One by one the knives flew from his hand making, as he had promised, a circle on the board. The last one stuck quivering in the centre.

There was mild applause, and Sanders went on—

"Wait a minute, ladies and gentlemen.

Now I'll pay a fiver to anyone present who can throw a knife to split the haft of that one in the centre of the target. This is not a joke, ladies and gentlemen—it's a genuine challenge. Here's the money—" he held up what purported to be a number of pound notes—"and here's the knife."

"Right you are!" A member of the audience shouted. "I'll have a go," and a tall well-built young man with a mop of reddish hair stepped forward.

Somewhat taken aback—for this was the first time his boasting challenge had ever been accepted—Sanders cried, in a derisive tone—

"Okay, mister, let's see what you can do! You've got to split the haft of that knife in the centre of the target. Now, folks, stand back and give the lad a chance. Let's hope his mother's here so she can be proud of her clever son!"

There was an outburst of laughter at this sally, but the young man hurried forward and took the knife Sanders offered him. He stepped back to make the throw, and a moment or two later, the knife flashed through the air, split the haft of the one sticking in the target, and both had fallen to the ground.

Sander's face went crimson with anger and humiliation, which were not lessened by the loud cheers and laughter of the crowd which greeted the young man's feat.

"You are a professional knife-thrower, aren't you, mister?" he blustered, with a forced grin.

"No, I'm not," came the answer.

"Anyway, you threw it like a professional," Sanders persisted.

"Shut up and give the lad the money as you promised!" shouted someone in the crowd.

"I've never thrown a knife in my life before," the young man said. "But I happen to be the champion dart-thrower at our local."

That statement completed Sander's discomfort. There was a roar of laughter from the onlookers. The idea that an amateur dart-player could beat a professional knife-thrower at his own game, seemed to them the funniest thing ever. Scowling, yet trying to smile as though he, too, thought it funny, Sanders drew the pound notes from his pocket.

"Texas Jake is as good as his word, ladies and gentleman," he declared with a flourish. "Here is the money, mister. You'd better count it now to make sure it's right."

"I don't want the money, was the surprising answer. "Keep it and buy yourself a dart-board, old chap!"

There was another outburst of hilarious laughter and Sander's face grew purple with suppressed fury at the insult from the young man. The audience then started to leave the booth, Peggy with them.

At the exit, she tripped over something and would have fallen had not the local champion dart-thrower caught her in time.

"Oh, thank you," Peggy muttered, and then found herself gazing into the greyish-blue eyes of the young man who had accepted Ted Sanders' challenge.

#### GATHERING CLOUDS.

"TH—THANK you," stammered Peggy again, unable to withdraw her eyes from his.

With one arm still protectively about her, her the young man steered her through the crowd surrounding the booth.

"Well, I've managed to get a good story anyhow," he remarked laughingly.

"A story?" repeated Peggy. "What do you mean, may I ask?"

"A story for my paper," he answered.

"Oh, then are you a newspaper reporter?" she asked.

"Well, yes, Miss. Anything wrong with that?" he countered laughingly.

Peggy had been in the show business long enough to know that a report in a local paper could do a lot of good, or a lot of harm. It could bring people to the show, or it could induce them to stay away.

"You're not going to say anything—well, anything disparaging about the fair, are you?" she murmured apprehensively.

"What does it matter to you what I say?" he asked laughingly.

"Well, you see, this part of the fair belongs to my father, so it matters quite a lot what you write," she told him frankly.

"And that ballyhoo merchant with the knives is one of the chief attractions, eh?" he asked, with a sarcastic grin. "And what do you do, if anything, may I ask?"

"I do a Spanish dance," replied Peggy.

"Do you? Well, I'd rather like to see it," he said.

They were now approaching the booth in which Peggy gave her performance. Outside was a big placard announcing the appearance of "Senorita Delargo from Madrid, engaged at enormous expense, in Song and Dance."

"How long since you were in Madrid?" asked the young man, his grey-blue eyes twinkling with amusement.

Peggy felt herself blushing. Why the question should suddenly make her feel ashamed, she did not know. Nor was she sure whether it was because of her own performance, or the wording of the glaring advertisement. Perhaps it was both.

"As a matter of fact," he went on, when she hesitated, "I don't suppose you've ever been near Madrid, any more than I have. But there's nothing much in that, of course. We all do a bit of exaggerating at times, don't we?" he added laughingly.

"Yes, I—I suppose so," Peggy agreed, with a forced smile. "But you won't write anything that'll keep people away from the fair, will you?"

"Well, no," he promised. "Although after bowling that knife-throwing champion of yours over the way I did, I'd decided to guy the whole show, but I won't now. Tell me—what is your name, Miss—your real name, I mean."

"Peggy Copperdeck," she murmured.

"Oh yes, and your father owns the fun fair, doesn't he? My name is Dick Slater, and I'm a reporter on 'The Millington and County Chronicle'."

"Is—that so?" Peggy murmured and then hurriedly explained that she was due to do her act.

Slater paid his sixpence and entered the booth which was already nearly full. At the far end was a stage with a "back-drop" depicting a matador confronted by a very furious-looking bull. An accordion-player wearing Spanish costume, sat in a chair on the O.P. side of the stage waiting for "Senorita Delargo" to make her entrance.

When she did so, the audience gave her a round of applause. Peggy looked really lovely as she tripped, light as a feather, on to the stage and started her dance, her full skirt swirling about her, her shapely arms above her head, her hands holding the castanets.

The dance itself was ordinary enough and called for no great skill. But it was so gracefully and charmingly performed, that no one could have failed to be pleased with it. The Toreador song which followed was obviously a "stunt", yet that, too, was executed with such charm that the audience was highly delighted.

Dick Slater watched, fascinated—not so much by the dance or the song, as by the girl herself. Now, with the lights full on

her, he saw how very different she was from the girl in a shabby raincoat whom he had met in the other booth.

He caught his breath and leaned forward in his seat, his eyes following the girl's every movement. He was dimly aware that something had happened to him—Dick was not quite sure what it was, but it was a new and thrilling experience for him.

Her act over, Peggy bowed to the applause, and then retired behind the back-drop while the audience filed out. In the ordinary way, she would have remained in the booth till her next performance was due. Instead, however, she put on the shabby raincoat again to conceal her costume, and stole out.

Peggy knew—though she would not have admitted it to herself—that she was hoping to see Dick Slater again. No man had ever intrigued her like this before, and thought she tried to tell herself that it was because he was a newspaper man and lived in a mysterious world unknown to her, she knew in her heart of hearts that it was something more than that.

Could it be his fascinating unruly mop of red hair, his twinkling, grey-blue eyes and the laughter in his voice which intrigued her? she asked herself. Or was it because of the fact that he had made the boastful Ted Sanders look so very silly?

She was a little surprised to find him outside when she emerged from the booth. He greeted her with a grin of recognition.

"That turn of yours was jolly good," he said. "Better than I'd expected."

"Oh, but judging from your remarks when I told you about my act, you didn't expect very much, did you?" she returned laughingly.

"Yes, but I think you must admit that the 'Texas Jake' fiasco was not a good introduction," he retorted defensively. "If the fellow had been throwing darts instead of knives, no one would have paid a penny to see him."

Peggy shrugged, but made no reply.

"I suppose you get a little time off occasionally, don't you, Miss Copperdeck?" he asked.

"Well, yes, when there is not much doing of a morning," she answered.

"Then what about coming for a run in the car with me?" he suggested. "The car belongs to the office, but I have the use of it."

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Slater," she murmured smilingly.

"Oh no, not at all," he said. "And please don't call me 'Mr. Slater'—I'm 'Dick' to all my friends, and I hope you won't mind if I call you 'Peggy'. It sounds much more friendly, doesn't it? Very well, Peggy, then could we meet at say, half-past ten to-morrow morning near the entrance to the fair ground?"

Peggy nodded, her heart leaping with a little thrill of delight.

IT was after the final performance for that night when Peggy met Ted Sanders on her way back to the caravan. He was looking glum and resentful.

"Saw you speaking to that smart Alec who made me look a bit of a fool to-night, Peggy," he growled. "What was he hanging around here for, may I ask?"

"It's no business of yours, Ted Sanders," she said, an angry flush mounting her cheeks.

"Oh, come, Peggy," he said, in a more mollifying tone, "you don't need to snap at me that way, you know. What I mean is, the bloke is not our sort, not of our world is he? Looks to me that he might be an office clerk or something of the kind."

"Well, if you must know, he's a newspaper reporter," Peggy said.

"Anyway, it don't make no difference, Peggy. He don't belong to the clan, if you see what I mean."

"In any case, Ted Sanders, when I want you to choose my friends for me, I'll let you know," she retorted.

"Sorry," he mumbled apologetically. "I—I was only trying to sort of warn you."

"Warn me against what?" she demanded.

"Oh well, I guess the chap is out to have a bit of fun, Peggy. Guys like him think that girls like you—"

"Good-night, Mr. Sanders," she broke in curtly, and left him standing there gazing after her in a sort of dazed bewilderment.

"Then, as he walked slowly on in the direction of his own caravan, Ted Sanders told himself that he would "fix" that insulting "newspaper guy", even if he were "jugged" for it!

[T was a lovely late autumn morning with a sky washed clean by the rain which had fallen overnight. Peggy, wearing a charming rayon frock, met Dick Slater just outside the fair ground as arranged. As he caught sight of her he jumped out of the little two-seater car and opened the door for her.

"Now hop in, Peggy," he said, with a cheerful smile, "and off we'll go like the wind!"

Peggy took the seat beside him, and Dick slid under the steering wheel and pressed the self-starter and they were off—if not "like the wind", at any rate, at a good speed.

Peggy had not told her parents anything about the outing, fearing they might object—or at least ask her a number of questions which she probably wouldn't have been able to answer. And if she felt a slight sense of guilt, it only added spice to the adventure—the first adventure of the kind she had ever experienced.

It was all new to Peggy. For the fun fair caravans, when travelling from one place to another always kept to the main roads, the result being that they saw very little of the real countryside.

Presently, Dick pulled up outside an old-fashioned inn and suggested lunch.

Peggy reluctantly shook her head.

"But mummy and dad will wonder what has become of me, Dick," she murmured.

"You see, I didn't tell them I wouldn't be back for lunch."

"Oh, but I couldn't possibly get you back in time for lunch now, Peggy," he said.

"So we may as well have a bite to eat here, hadn't we?"

Though suffering from a guilty conscience, Peggy decided not to let it spoil her enjoyment of such a delightful outing.

So she accompanied him into the inn, where they had an excellent lunch, the landlord apparently being a friend of Dick's.

"Everybody is my friend," he laughingly told Peggy, when they were sitting in the pretty garden behind the inn having coffee.

"It's my business to make friends; you see and thus keep myself informed about certain coming events that I might otherwise miss."

"It must be a very interesting sort of life for you," she murmured.

"Well, and so is yours, of course," he said, offering her a cigarette.

Peggy shook her head.

"Some people might think so, but it isn't," she said. "We just move on from place to place, and each town seems more or less to be the same. You'd be surprised if you knew how awfully monotonous it becomes."

Dick nodded thoughtfully and lighted the cigarette for her, then one for himself.

"But don't you ever go for an occasional

little jaunt like this, Peggy?" he asked.

"No, I do not," she answered sadly.

"I never have the chance."

"Well, I hope you are enjoying this little outing with me, Peggy," he said, smiling at her.

"Oh yes, very much indeed, Dick," she murmured, smiling back at him.

A short pause followed. Then—

"Well, I wish very much, Peggy, that I had been lucky enough to meet you before," Dick said. "Just think of all the time we've lost!"

"The time we've lost?" she echoed, a little breathlessly.

"Yes, my dear Peggy, the time we've lost," he repeated. "I know, of course, that we met for the first time last night, but Love has nothing to do with time—it can come as swiftly as a flash of lightning, as it actually did with me!"

Peggy tried to say something, but could not. Her heart was pounding violently, and Dick read in her eyes the answer he wanted. He took her hand and pressed it to his lips.

"I have fallen hopelessly in love with you, my dear Peggy," he whispered.

"And I—and I have fallen in love with you, Dick," she murmured, in an ecstasy and a happiness she had never known before.

Nothing seemed to matter now except this wonderful thing which had happened to her.

Presently, Dick glanced at his watch.

"I'm afraid we shall have to be going now, darling," he said regretfully. "Do you think I had better speak to your parents about—about what has happened when we get back?"

His words sent a little chill through Peggy. It was very rarely, as she knew all too well, that show folk married outside their own kind, and such marriages were not regarded with approval. Moreover, she knew that both her father and mother took it for granted that she would marry someone in the business.

"I—I think you had better wait a little, Dick," she murmured, "as perhaps I ought first of all to break the news to my mother and father before you meet them."

"Very well, darling," he said. "You know best, of course. In any case you can introduce me to them, can't you?"

Peggy nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, I—I can do that," she stammered.

"It—it will help to soften the blow."

When, some two hours later, Peggy mounted the steps of the caravan, her parents had already finished their evening meal, but her place had been kept at the table.

"Where on earth have you been, my lass?" her father exclaimed irritably. "We'll have to be opening the show in half-an-hour."

"I—I've brought a reporter from the local paper to see you and mummy," Peggy murmured awkwardly.

Like most experienced showmen, Joe Copperdeck had a tremendous respect for the Press, for a good notice in a local paper meant increased business.

"A reporter?" her father echoed, staring at her in surprise. "And where is he, may I ask?"

"He—he is waiting outside," Peggy answered, and opening the door beckoned to Dick, who came hurrying up the steps.

"This—this is Mr. Slater," she stammered on, as Dick entered. "And this is my father and mother, Mr. Slater," she added, with a wavering smile.

Her father stepped forward and shook hands with the young man. Her mother

did the same, and then invited the visitor to sit down.

"By the way," Joe asked, "are you the chap who accepted Ted Sanders's challenge last night?"

"Well, yes, Mr. Copperdeck, I am," Dick admitted, a little hesitantly.

Joe gave a hearty chuckle.

"I heard about it all last night," he said. "It's one of the best advertisements we've had for a long time. People will now come crowding in, I reckon, hoping to see the same sort of thing happen again."

"Yes," Mrs. Copperdeck put in smilingly. "I've been wondering if Ted didn't arrange it all himself."

"Not him!" cried Joe. "I spoke to Ted about it this morning, and he was hopping mad about it. All the same, it'll do him good. Getting a bit too swollen headed is Master Ted, kidding himself that his is the chief attraction of our show."

"Are you going to report the affair in your paper, Mr. Slater?" asked Mrs. Copperdeck, a little apprehensively.

"Not if you and Mr. Copperdeck would rather I didn't," answered Dick. "But I will write a good notice of the show in general—far and away the best feature in my opinion is Miss Copperdeck's remarkable performance."

"It's very nice of you to say that, Mr. Slater," said Mrs. Copperdeck, her heart warming to the young man. "It is a very praiseworthy performance, though maybe it's not for me, as Peggy's mother, to say so."

"But why not, my dear Sally?" demanded her husband. "If you can't be proud of your own daughter, who can you be proud of? Poor old Ted!" he added laughingly. "I'd have given a quid to see the look on his face when you threw that knife, Mr. Slater!"

When Dick had taken his departure, Peggy told her father and mother, in response to their enquiry, how and where she had met the young man. Her father regarded her reproachfully when she confessed that he had taken her out to lunch that day.

"I don't say there's any harm in it, my lass, but I don't want it to happen again," he said.

"But, daddy, why not if, as you say, there's no harm in it?" Peggy demanded.

"Well, you and Slater might get a bit sweet on each other, Peg, and that wouldn't do at all," he said. "Him and us belong to different ways of life, you know that as well as I do, my girl. So it's best not to run any risks, if you see what I mean."

"No, I don't see it, daddy," she retorted. Although Mr. Slater's work is different from ours, what of it? You might as well say that doctors ought only to marry nurses."

"Your dad's right, my dear," her mother put in. "It's not just the difference in the work, it's the difference in the way of living, and the way you and him was brought up." Then, with sudden suspicion, Mrs. Copperdeck added—"Tell me—has the young man been making love to you, my girl?"

"Well, what if he has, mummy?" Peggy returned rebelliously. "Most girls are made love to some time or other, so why shouldn't I be?"

Her father and mother exchanged worried glances.

"It's like this, Peg," her father said, a serious note in his voice, "your mother and me want you to be happy, and you couldn't be really happy in any way of life other than the one you've been brought up in. You mayn't think so, but it's true, all the same. Bar the time you were away at school, you've lived all your life on the road, and with show people like ourselves."

That's your life, my lass, and you'd only be miserable if you tried to take up with another."

Mrs. Copperdeck nodded gravely. "Yes, your dad's quite right, Peggy," she said. "You've got to marry, when the time comes, a chap in the same way of business as us. Why, I'd sooner you marry Ted Sanders, come to that, for you'd never be happy cooped up for life between four walls."

"But that's exactly what I do want, mum," declared Peggy. "I've told you and dad over and over again. I hate roaming about the country like a gypsy. I—I want a real home," she added, and burst into tears.

The caravan windows were wide open, and standing beneath one of them, Ted Sanders heard every word that had passed between Peggy and her parents. His suspicions were confirmed.

"You got something coming to you, Mr. blinkin' Slater," he muttered to himself as he crept away, "and it ain't gonna be pleasant!"

#### THE SECRET GLADE

DICK SLATER sat in the reporters' room of "The Millington and County Chronicle" writing a report of the local Rural District Council.

It was dull stuff and as he slammed it out on his typewriter, he marvelled that anyone could be sufficiently interested to read it except the councillors themselves.

"There," he murmured, grinning to himself as he drew the last sheet from the machine, "that ought to please 'em. Two and a half columns of verbosity and not one worthwhile original idea in the lot of it."

He was gathering up the typewritten sheets when the door opened to admit an attractive dark-haired girl wearing a smart little frock and a "claw" hat. She tossed a notebook on to one of the desks and subsided into a chair.

"Hullo, Gail, how are things going with you?" inquired Dick grinning at her.

"I've just come from the monthly meeting of the Women's Institute," she answered, with a sigh. "You know the stuff—how to turn dad's old pants into cushion covers, or make a tasty dish out of yesterday's cold rice pudding and so on. Oh, it's frightfully tedious. Dick."

"Yes, I know, my dear Gail, but you'll never make a first-class reporter with that attitude of mind, you know," Dick told her laughingly. "If you're not interested in the stuff you write, how can you expect the readers to be?"

Gail Brandon shrugged.

"What was your assignment, Dick?" she asked.

"District Council—fortnightly meeting of."

"And were you interested, may I ask?"

"I was interested at discovering how people can talk for minutes on end without saying anything," he answered. "By the way, Gail," he added, "have you heard from that boy friend of yours lately?"

Gail's lower lip trembled slightly.

"No, I have not," she answered. "There have been two mails in from Malaya and there wasn't a letter from him in either."

"Oh come, you mustn't let that worry you, my dear girl," said Dick, with a cheerfulness he did not feel. "If he's somewhere in the jungle, where lots of our chaps are, of course, it wouldn't be possible for him to write."

"But two mails, Dick—letters come through even from the jungle districts, you know," she said, her eyes misting. "Mrs. Hartop, whose son is fighting north

of Kota Bharu, had a letter from him last week."

"Just a matter of luck, my dear," Dick said. "Some letters get through, some don't. Besides, if anything had happened to Bob Lister, the War Office would have announced the news."

Gail smiled in spite of her fears.

"What a comforting person you are Dickie!" she murmured. "I don't know what I'd do without you."

"I can tell you," he grinned. "You'd get so many libels in your reports that the paper would be ruined inside a year I think, Gail," he added, as she opened her notebook, "you'd better show me that Institute report before you send it in, just in case."

"Thanks, Dick, I will," she answered, with a pleased smile. "If Mrs. Jones declared that Mrs. Higg's marrow jam was so tasteless that a pig wouldn't eat it, would that be libel?"

"It could in print, my dear girl," Dick told her laughingly. "Always remember the Golden Rule, Gail—when in doubt, cut out. And also the thrice-blessed word 'alleged', which has saved many a journalist's bacon."

He then left the room, and Gail settled down to write her report of the Institute meeting. She had been with "The Chronicle" for only three months, and apart from the errors which all beginners are apt to commit, Gail was shaping very well—thanks largely to Dick Slater's help and advice.

On his way to lunch that day, Dick was hailed by Harry Trent, partner in Trent Brothers, Printers. Since their occupations were closely related, they knew each other well and frequently met at "The Griffin" for lunch. Dick did not particularly care for the other man, whom he regarded as being a bit of a bouncer.

"On your way to lunch, old chap?" inquired Trent.

"Yes," answered Dick, as they fell into step.

"So am I," said Trent. "By the way, Dick," he went on, "what's this I hear about your having knocked spots off that knife-throwing chap at the fun fair? Everybody's talking about it."

"Oh, I just did it for a lark," replied Dick. "This 'Texas Jake', as he calls himself, was challenging all-comers, so I took him up."

"If you ask me," said Trent, "the best 'turn' of the lot in the show is that of old Copperdeck's daughter with her Toreador stuff. She's billed as 'Senorita Delargo from Madrid', but I don't suppose the girl has ever been near the Spanish capital. All the same, she's a peach!"

"Is that so?" muttered Dick, secretly resenting the other's reference to Peggy.

"I met her the other day when I went to see her father about some printing," Trent went on. "You'd expect the girl to be a bit sophisticated, wouldn't you? But, she, certainly not. She's as simple an unspoiled as—well, as a convent-educated kid."

"Show folk, from what I've heard, have a pretty strict code of morals," Dick remarked glumly.

"Anyway, I think I made a good impression on the damsel," Trent chuckled conceitedly. "They're a pretty raw crowd, these show people—the men especially—and I expect it must have seemed to her as if I'd stepped out of a different world. Anyway, I'm going to follow it up, my boy."

Dick frowned.

"Follow what up?" he asked.

"Why, that little peach, of course," laughed Trent. "With a little flattery, a spot of coaxing, a few whispered words of love and a kiss or two, and she'll be

eating out of my hand."

"Is that so?" Dick muttered again, his temper rising. "And what then?"

Trent laughed.

"My dear chap, you don't imagine that I propose just to sit and hold hands, do you?" he said. "What does a man want to do when he gets a pretty girl all to himself?"

"Are you going to propose to her?" Dick suggested grimly, as they entered "The Griffin" and took their seats at the luncheon table.

Trent laughed again.

"Are you trying to pull my leg, old boy?" he asked. "Fancy a man in my position proposing to the daughter of an itinerant showman! That's a good one, Dick!"

"So I take it that you intend to carry on a flirtation with the girl, Trent. Is that what you mean?" Dick asked, trying to keep his voice well under control.

"What else, my dear fellow?" Trent countered. "Girls in that walk of life expect it, of course—in spite of your talk about their 'strict code of morals'."

"And if the girl objects?" grated Dick, his eyes fixed on his plate in case the other man should see the smouldering anger and contempt in them.

"Oh, but she won't, my dear fellow," Trent returned airily. "She fell for me the moment she saw me, I have no doubt whatever about that."

"Yes, Trent, but the young lady may not be quite so easy to handle as you appear to think," Dick suggested dolefully.

"Oh, I shall 'tell the tale' all right, old boy," Trent said. "It's all part of the game, as you know. Some girls won't fall for it, but I know my innocent little peach will."

Presently, Trent glanced at his watch and announced that he had a business appointment to keep.

"Well, cheerio, old chap!" he said, and rising from the table, took his departure.

Dick remained there for some little time pondering over what the other had said. He felt no fear for Peggy, however, for he knew she was not likely to succumb to the wiles of a man like Harry Trent, with his meretricious beguilements and promises.

"All the same," Dick muttered to himself, "I'd love to give the contemptible rotter the hiding he so richly deserves."

At last he rose from the table. There was an autumn flower show which he had to "cover" that afternoon, and that night, worse luck—for he had hoped to be able to go to the fun fair and see Peggy—he had to attend a local rate-payers' meeting for his paper.

When he had finished work that night, Dick consulted the office diary to see what events had to be covered on the following day, and found there was nothing of outstanding importance.

"Now, if only I could get in touch with Peggy, we might go for another run into the country to-morrow," Dick told himself hopefully.

As he was leaving the office he ran into Jim Twickford, the chief sub-editor, who was looking rather worried.

"Hullo, Twicky, you're on late, aren't you?" Dick remarked. "Anyway, what's biting you, old chap?"

"Have you seen Gail?"

"No," answered Dick. "Why?"

"Well, she's evidently greatly upset by something," Twickford replied. "I asked her what the matter was, but she wouldn't tell me. She just gave a jerky sob and fled."

"I wonder if she has had bad news about her fiance in Malaya," mused Dick.

Poor kid! I hope it isn't that."

"After she'd left my office, I went into the reporters's room to see if she was there," Twickford said. "But she was not. Can't understand it at all."

"Nor can I," Dick said, and having wished Twickford good night he set off in the direction of the fair ground hoping to get there in time to see Peggy and arrange for another run into the country.

On arriving at the booth in which Peggy performed, Dick waited outside till she had finished her act.

Presently the audience came trooping out, and he caught sight of Peggy as she emerged from a side entrance. He stepped forward in the semi-darkness to greet her.

"Hullo, darling!" he said, in a low voice.

"You, Dick!" she gasped delightedly. "I—I did not expect to see you to-night."

"Didn't you, my love?" Dick said, smiling into her eyes. "I want to know if you can manage to come for another little run with me into the country to-morrow?"

"Oh yes, Dick, I'd love to," she answered eagerly. "But I do not want us to meet near the fair ground, in case anyone should see us, as it might lead to a lot of idle gossip."

"Very well, darling, then what about our meeting a little way down the main road?" Dick suggested smilingly. "At, say ten o'clock to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, that will be all right," she murmured, with suppressed excitement.

"Good!" said Dick. "Tell me, darling," he added, "how long is your show going to remain here?"

"Well, we were supposed to have moved from here on Monday next," Peggy replied, "but daddy has arranged to stay another week, as he wants to arrange about winter quarters before leaving Millington. Although we shan't be doing any business, of course."

"I see—sort of holiday for you, darling?" Dick suggested smilingly. He hesitated, then added—"when—when do you think I ought to see your parents about—well, about us, my love?"

Peggy drew a quick breath.

"I—I think, Dick, you had better wait a day or two," she stammered. "I rather hinted at it yesterday after you had left our caravan, but—well, my mummy and daddy didn't seem at all pleased about it. They—they seem to think I ought to marry someone in our own way of business and not an 'outsider'!"

"What utter bosh!" muttered Dick. "Might as well suggest that greengrocers' daughters ought only to marry greengrocers' sons!"

"Yes, I know, Dick, and I said something to that effect myself, but they brushed it aside. I think the best thing for us to do is to remain patient for the time being and let my parents sort of get used to the idea, if you understand what I mean, Dick dear."

Dick nodded and gave a resigned shrug.

"All the same, my darling, I'm not going to wait too long," he said. "I want to proclaim to the whole world that you are the one and only girl for me, and that we 'belong'!"

Peggy gave a contented sigh.

"You are not more eager than I am to let the world know that we love each other, my dearest," she breathed. "But I must now fly, Dick, or mummy and daddy will be wondering what's become of me. Good-night, my darling," she added, smiling up at him.

"Good-night, my lovely little sweetheart," he whispered, pressing his lips to hers. "Happy dreams, and, as Juliet said to Romeo—

*That I shall say good night till it be  
morrow.*

But that would never do, would it, darling?"

Dick added tenderly, and kissed her again.

THE following morning, they met a short distance from the fairground, as arranged.

On the outskirts of the town, Dick topped the car, and said—

"I want to show you a delightful little spot that I call 'The Secret Glade', Peggy dear. Gail Brandon and I discovered it one day quite by chance."

"Who is Gail Brandon?" asked Peggy.

"Oh, Gail is a girl reporter on the staff of 'The Millington Chronicle'," Dick replied. "She's an awfully nice girl," he added airily, as they started to walk along a narrow path that led to what looked like an impenetrable wall of huge rhododendrons.

Dick pointed to a low gap in the bushes, and asked her to follow him. Stooping over Peggy did so, and next moment she gave a gasp of delight. They were standing in a small grass clearing surrounded by the giant rhododendrons which afforded complete concealment from the outside world.

"Rather jolly, isn't it, darling?" Dick remarked smilingly. "How these rhododendrons came to be planted here so as to form a complete circle, no one seems to know."

"Oh, it's perfectly lovely here," murmured Peggy, sinking on to the grass.

"Yes, it certainly is," Dick agreed, sitting down beside her.

"Does—does Gail—Miss Brandon—often come here?" asked Peggy.

"No, I don't think so," Dick replied. "But I know Gail loves this spot as much as I do."

"Is—she pretty?" Peggy inquired.

"Well, yes," Dick answered, as he lit a cigarette, "but in a different way from you, Peggy. She's a brunette."

"And have you known her a long time, Dick?"

"No—only since she joined the staff of 'The Chronicle'," he replied. "Her uncle is the editor. Heaven knows why a girl like Gail wanted to take up journalism, for it's one of the toughest jobs going. Now shall we continue our journey, Peggy? I thought I'd like to show you this little haven of peace," he went on, as they rose to their feet. "It's an ideal spot for thinking things out when you feel that all the world is against you—as sometimes happens to most of us—isn't it, darling?"

Peggy nodded thoughtfully.

"Someday, I may want to come here myself, Dick," she murmured.

When they got into the car and set off again, Peggy was unusually quiet, and it suddenly occurred to Dick that she might be wondering how best to break the news of their secret engagement to her parents.

"A penny for them, darling!" he said, smiling at her.

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of anything in particular," she answered evasively. She hesitated a moment, then added—"Tell me, Dick, have you—have you ever been in love before?"

He laughed.

"Oh, well, I've had 'crushes', you know, Peggy, but nothing very serious. No broken hearts or anything of that sort. And what about yourself, may I ask, darling?"

"I've never had even what you call a 'crush' on anyone," Peggy answered, with a forced smile.

"And yet, darling, you must meet quite a number of men, travelling the country as you do."

"Yes, but always the same sort of men, Dick—men in the show business. You're the first 'outsider' that I have ever really known."

"And, apparently, you don't like 'show men'?" he queried.

"It isn't that I don't like them, Dick. Some are gentlemen in the best sense of the word—it's simply that I don't feel I belong to their way of life, queer though it may sound to you."

"Which is jolly lucky for me, isn't it, darling?"

"I wonder, Dick! You see, I know next to nothing about running a house, and I sometimes wonder whether I'm the sort of girl who would be able to make you a good wife."

"Oh, but I'm the best judge of what sort of wife I want, my dearest," Dick told her laughingly.

"I should have thought that Gail Brandon would have suited you better, especially as she's a journalist, like yourself," Peggy went on, indulging in that self-torture so common to lovers. "You did say she was a very nice girl, didn't you?"

"But one doesn't fall in love with a girl merely because she's 'nice', my dear Peggy."

"And do you—do you think that I'm nice, Dick?" she asked, a little wistfully.

"If I were not driving this car, my darling, I'd answer that question in a way which would remove any vestige of doubt from your mind. But just to go on with, let me tell you that you're nicer than nice. Now will that do till I can demonstrate what I mean to you in a more practical fashion?" he asked laughingly.

Half-an-hour or so later on, they were seated on the bank of a little stream that meandered through a larch wood, Peggy nestling in Dick's arms, her head resting on his shoulder. At frequent intervals their lips met and clung and softly murmured words of love passed between them.

"Do you really and truly love me, Dick dear?" Peggy whispered.

"Darling, of course I do," he answered smilingly. "Surely you don't doubt it, do you, sweetheart?"

"No, Dick, not really. Only our love is such a wonderful thing, that sometimes I can hardly believe it has happened to me."

"Well, it has, my dearest."

"Oh, Dick, I think I should die if you ever stopped loving me. I—I just wouldn't care what happened to me."

"But, why these morbid imaginings, my love?" he asked, drawing her still closer to him and smiling into her eyes.

"Oh, I don't know," she murmured. "I suppose intense happiness makes us all a little afraid, sometimes, for it would be terrible to have to lose it. Perhaps, Dick, I feel the way I do about it all because I've never been in love before. It's like—well, rather like being in a wonderful Fairyland that one never knew existed—or had only read about!"

"Yes, I think I know what you mean, darling," he said. "I feel rather that way about it, too."

"But you—but you have been in love before, haven't you," Dick."

"I said I'd had 'crushes', my dearest, and not that I'd been in love. That's quite a different thing, you know."

Peggy sighed.

"Yes, I suppose it is," she murmured. "I expect I must seem awfully inexperienced to you, Dick."

"Inexperienced?" he repeated. "In what way, my love?"

"Well, in love-making, Dick dear. You see apart from my father, no man had ever kissed me before you did?"

Dick smiled.

*'Good night, good night! Parting is such  
sweet sorrow,*

"But have you never even indulged in a mild flirtation with any man?" he asked.

"No, never, Dick," she answered. "I'm afraid you must think me dreadfully lacking in wordly knowledge."

"Only of those things which do not really matter, my darling," he said. "But I'm glad to know that you have not indulged in cheap flirtations, Peggy. It may sound rather foolish of me, but I have a theory that the flirtatious sort of girl is either incapable of loving deeply, or she wastes her love—distributing bits here and there, so to speak, till she has very little left."

"And I suppose that applies to men, too?" she remarked.

Dick shrugged.

"Perhaps, darling, men are better able to isolate their emotions than women," he answered evasively. "I expect you know those lines of Byron's—

*'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart;  
'Tis woman's whole existence'.*"

Peggy nodded.

"Yes, and I think they must be true, Dick," she said. "Now that I know what real love is, I can't imagine life without it," she added wistfully, and as if suddenly afraid, she snuggled still closer to him.

"So long as I live, my dearest Peggy, your life will never be without real love," Dick assured her, sealing his promise with a kiss.

"WHERE'S Gail?" asked Dick, when he arrived at the office next morning and entered the reporters' room.

"Haven't you heard?" asked Bill Howson, another reporter. "About her fiancé, I mean. Gail has received official news from the War Office that Bob Lister is missing and believed killed."

Dick sighed.

"Poor little Gail!" he murmured sadly. "Did she tell you about it herself?"

"Yes, she rang up the office this morning, and I answered the 'phone," Howson replied. "I advised Gail not to come to the office to-day."

"Yes, of course," Dick remarked thoughtfully. "Poor little Gail!" he muttered again.

Gail Brandon was an orphan. She lived with her grandmother, a kind-hearted but somewhat austere old lady. She would sympathise with Gail in her loss, no doubt, Dick reflected, but not in a way that would afford the girl any real comfort.

"It's God's will, and you can only accept it, my child," he could imagine the old lady saying in that dry voice of hers. Or, perhaps, "Grieving won't bring the boy back to you, my dear, so it's no use crying your eyes out about it."

Dick had no assignment that afternoon, and it suddenly dawned on him that, in all probability, Gail had gone to "The Secret Glade". She could be almost certain of being undisturbed there and could cry her heart out if she wished.

On the other hand, he told himself, a little human sympathy and understanding might be the very things of which she stood most in need, and it might do her good to unburden her overcharged heart to someone she could trust.

In any case, he decided to risk it. On reaching the glade, he found Gail there. She was lying face downwards on the grass, her face pillowed on her arms.

He hesitated a moment, not knowing whether to withdraw as silently as he had come, or to remain there. Then she suddenly raised her head and caught sight of him.

"Hullo, Gail dear!" he murmured softly. "So you—you know, Dick?" she gasped breathlessly.

He nodded gravely, and sat down beside her.

"Please don't abandon all hope yet awhile, my dear girl," he urged gently, as Gail choked back her sobs. "I understand that the official message said 'believed killed', so there is still some ground for hope, isn't there, Gail?"

"But it—but it means the same thing—it always does Dick," she answered brokenly.

"Anyway, there's no harm in hoping, my dear," he said.

"Oh, please don't hand me out any so-called comforting clichés, Dick," she said irritably. "I suppose the next thing you'll do is to advise me to work doubly hard and forget my grief that way?"

"Well, if I did that, it wouldn't be bad advice, Gail," he countered. "It's difficult to think of two things at the same time, isn't it? So if you're busy working, you haven't time to think of your troubles."

Gail remained silent for a moment or two. Then, giving a quivering sigh, she went on—

"There—there is no one I can talk to as I can to you, Dick. My grannie means well, of course, but she is entirely lacking in understanding. That's why I came here to be alone with my thoughts."

"I—I quite understand, Gail," he said.

"How very understanding and comforting you are, Dick!" she murmured.

"I'd like to be, my dear Gail," he said.

"But I'm afraid there's precious little comfort that I or anyone else can offer you at a time like this."

She looked so astonishingly young and innocent with her tear-stained face and ruffled hair, that Dick had an irrational impulse to take her in his arms and soothe her as one would a hurt child.

"I—I'm so desperately unhappy, Dick," she went on. "I really don't know what to do. Oh, I wish I was dead!"

The facile words "you'll get over it in time," rose to Dick's lips, but he forced them back. No doubt it would be true, but Gail was in no mood to believe it—not yet. Nor would it be any use prating about "Time, the healer"—the same truth in another form, but no less comfortless in the midst of acute suffering.

Almost without realising what he was doing, Dick drew her to him, and she rested her head on his shoulder.

"I'm so glad you came here, Dick," she whispered. "With—with anyone else, I'd have had to pretend, but not with you."

"No, of course not, my dear Gail," he said, gently stroking her hair.

"I—I'm afraid you think I'm an awful weakling, Dick," she murmured, after a short silence.

"Oh no, I don't think anything of the sort, Gail," he said, smiling at her. "It's much more sensible to let your feelings have full play, than to bottle them up, you know."

"Yes, I expect you are right, Dick. With you, I feel I can just behave naturally." Then, after a short pause—"Do you—do you really think there may be some mistake—about Bob, I mean?"

"Well, it's quite possible, of course," he answered. "After all, Bob might have been captured by the enemy and taken into the jungle as some of our men have been."

"Which means that I should go on hoping for the best, Dick."

"Yes, of course, my dear girl," he replied, and moved by a sudden impulse of pity, Dick gently kissed her on the forehead.

## HEARTS WIN.

ALTHOUGH the fun fair had come to an end on the previous Saturday night, and most of the other showmen had moved on, Joe Copperdeck decided to remain on this "pitch" for another week, as he wanted to go and inspect their winter quarters before leaving.

Thus it so happened that on the very morning Gail Brandon received her ominous message from the War Office, Peggy found herself with nothing to do after she had helped her mother with the domestic chores. She decided to go for a walk.

It was natural, perhaps, that she should direct her footsteps towards "The Secret Glade", which she had visited with Dick. Here she would be quite alone and could indulge in happy day-dreams without fear of interruption. Also, she had to try and think out some way of overcoming her parents' opposition to her marrying the man she loved.

She reached the glade, and was making her way through the gap in the rhododendron bushes when she stopped dead, for suddenly she caught sight of Dick holding a girl in his arms.

For a moment, Peggy's heart seemed to stand still, then started pounding in a way that she felt must choke her. Now he was talking to the girl, as though whispering words of endearment, and gently stroking her hair.

Trembling, and deathly pale, Peggy withdrew silently from the gap. So, she reflected bitterly, this was what Dick Slater's avowals of love and his pretended eagerness to marry her, amounted to! He was probably saying the same things, and making exactly the same promises, to the girl he was now holding in his arms!

Tears sprang to her eyes, but she angrily dashed them away. To-morrow—or even that very evening, perhaps—he would come to her, never doubting that she still believed in him! Well, she would quickly disabuse his mind of that. He would find a very different girl from the yielding, simple maiden he had thought to dazzle and deceive with his spurious love-making!

Yet though her heart felt as though it were breaking, pride came to Peggy's aid. She might only be a showman's daughter, but she would show Dick Slater that she was not the sort of girl to be made a plaything of—and that he was not the only man in the world, either.

When an hour or so later, Peggy arrived back at the caravan, her mother gazed at her in alarm.

"What's happened, my child?" she exclaimed. "Why, you look as white as a ghost!"

"Do I, mummy?" she countered. "I suppose it's the excessive heat. Hasn't daddy returned yet?" she asked, in order to change the subject.

"No, and Mr. Trent has called here with some printing for your dad to look at," her mother replied. "I told him your dad was away and that you'd look over the printing. So the young man is going to call here again this evening."

"I see," Peggy remarked thoughtfully, as she started to read the proofs of the circulars her father had ordered, but all the time she was wondering why the young man had taken the trouble to come all the way to the fair ground himself, instead of sending them by post, or by a messenger.

And why had he decided to come back for the proofs that evening? Was it because he wanted to meet her again? If that were so, Peggy's thoughts ran on, why shouldn't she take advantage of such a meeting? Here was the very opportunity she needed!

When Harry Trent arrived in his sports car, shortly after six o'clock that evening, Peggy had changed into a dainty linen frock and was looking quite herself again. She greeted him so amiably that his brown eyes lighted up with pleasure—and, perhaps, with anticipation.

"Thank you very much indeed for your kindness, Miss Copperdeck," he said, as she handed him the corrected proofs. "What a glorious evening, isn't it? I wonder if you would care to come for a short drive with me? The countryside is looking really lovely—all golds and yellows and russet-browns."

Glancing out of the caravan window as he was speaking, Peggy caught sight of a motor cycle speeding towards them. She suppressed a gasp as she recognised the rider. It was Dick Slater!

"Yes, I—I think I would like to come, Mr. Trent," she stammered, a little breathlessly.

"Splendid!" Trent exclaimed delightedly, and as they descended the caravan steps, Dick alighted from the motor cycle.

He gazed at Trent and frowned. Peggy's heart seemed to turn a somersault, but she managed to maintain an outward expression of calm aloofness.

"Good evening, Mr. Slater," she said, with cool politeness.

Dick stared at her in amazement. They had parted as lovers—and practically betrothed to each other—and now here was Peggy addressing him as "Mr. Slater", as though they were mere casual acquaintances. And, worse still, she seemed to be on friendly terms with that rotter, Harry Trent!

"What—what has happened, Peggy?" he stammered.

"What do you mean, Mr. Slater?" she countered.

Dick's eyes narrowed as he glanced from Peggy, white-faced and grim, to the smiling, triumphant Harry Trent.

"I say, Miss Copperdeck, isn't it about time we set off?" Trent suggested smilingly.

Peggy nodded, and followed him to his car. Trent helped her in, then taking his seat at the wheel, he drove off, leaving Dick standing there completed flabbergasted. Then, mounting his motor bike, he rode away. But he did not go far. Pulling up in a quiet lane, he propped up his machine and sat down to try and think things out.

At first, he could not make head or tail of it all. Peggy's changed attitude towards him was so abrupt as to be quite incomprehensible. Yet there must be something to account for it. But—what?

He lit a cigarette and sought desperately to find a solution to the baffling problem. Presently, he believed he had hit on a probable explanation—that Peggy must have come to "The Secret Glade" while he was there with Gail Brandon, and had jumped to the conclusion that he was actually making love to the girl!

Dick groaned.

"Oh, damn!" he muttered in desperation, rising to his feet and throwing away the stub of his cigarette. "But why has the dear girl gone off with a rotter like Trent? Is it to try and show me she doesn't care—or is it to try and pretend to herself that she doesn't?"

Dick's mind rushed back to the conversation he had had with Harry Trent over lunch at "The Griffin" when Trent had boasted that he would soon have Peggy "eating out of his hand" and that he would then be able to do what he liked with her. Was the rotter now about to put his theory in practice?

Dick gritted his teeth. If so, then Peggy was running a greater risk than she could possibly imagine. Dick suddenly recalled

what she had told him about the strict code of morals of Show folk. Supposing her father should get to know that his daughter had been gallivanting the countryside with a strange man after darkness had set in. He would be furious with rage, no doubt.

"I've got to do something about it—and quickly," Dick told himself, as he kicked the prop from under his motor-bike.

He sat astride his machine for some moments, wondering where Trent could have taken Peggy? Eventually, Dick decided that the most likely place was a somewhat notorious road-house called "The Merry-Go-Round", some ten miles along the main road. Dancing took place there every night, and it was a popular rendezvous for "smart" young people from miles around.

Yes, maybe Trent hoped to dazzle Peggy with such gaiety and to use his own words, "tell her the tale!"

"But not if I can help it!" Dick muttered to himself, as he kicked the engine into life and set off along the main road.

DICK had been mistaken when he decided that Trent would take Peggy to "The Merry-Go-Round", for the young man would have met too many people who knew him there. It would have set the tongue of scandal wagging, and that would be bad for his firm's printing business.

So, after driving some little distance, Trent turned into a country lane and stopped the car.

"Now let's sit and have a quiet talk, shall we, Miss Copperdeck?" he suggested smilingly, and Peggy, feeling too miserable to care what they did, nodded. "Cigarette?" he asked, offering her his case.

"No thanks," she answered, and he helped himself to one.

Knowing that a tactless move on his part might upset all his plans, he smoked in silence for a while, telling himself that the later it got and the darker it grew, the easier it would be to lead her to believe that she had compromised herself.

Wrapped in her own unhappiness, and recalling again and again the scene she had witnessed that afternoon in "the secret glade", Peggy looked up with a start as Trent suddenly broke the dead silence.

"I think we had better be getting back now, don't you, Peggy?" he suggested smilingly.

"Yes, I certainly do," she answered. "My parents will be wondering what has happened to me."

"Oh, but there is no need to worry," he said lightly. "The night is still young, you know, darling."

Peggy felt her cheeks turn hot at his use of the word "darling". To her, it was not just a commonplace and meaningless form of address, but a word implying intimacy and affection.

But she was too anxious to get home to voice her resentment at his undue familiarity. He pressed the self-starter, and the car moved forward, then stopped with a jerk.

"What's the matter with her, I wonder?" Trent muttered. "She isn't usually temperamental," he added, and he pressed the self-starter again.

The engine wakened to life again, but when he let in the clutch, it stalled and the car did not move. Trent got out, raised the bonnet and examined the engine with his pocket torch.

"There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with her," he said, "I can't make it out. Surely she can't have run out of petrol?"

He replaced the bonnet, and then beamed

the torch on a small dial on the dashboard. "She has, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "The needle's pointing to zero—which means there's no juice at all left in the tank!"

"Then—then what are we going to do?" Peggy stammered in alarm.

Trent shrugged.

"It's all my fault for not looking at the gauge before we set out," he said. "But I had an idea the tank was nearly full."

"But—but what are we going to do?" Peggy stammered again.

"I'm afraid there's nothing we can do, my dear girl, except wait till a car comes along so that I can beg enough petrol to get us home," he answered, with a wry grin.

"Then I shall walk home," Peggy declared, starting to rise from her seat.

"Come, come, don't be silly, my dear Peggy," he said, gently forcing her back into her seat. "We're miles from the fair ground, and you would lose your way."

"But I must get home—I really must!" she insisted, suddenly panic-stricken, and she would have climbed out of the car had he not prevented her.

"Don't be silly, Peggy," he urged again. "There's nothing to be frightened of. A car is bound to come along very soon and then we'll be able to borrow all the petrol we need."

He made an effort to draw her to him, and when she angrily forced him away from her, his temper became a little frayed. Things were not quite turning out "according to plan".

"Let me go!" she cried indignantly, as his arm tightened about her.

"Why can't you be nice to me, my dear Peggy?" he pleaded huskily. "I'm not going to do you any harm. Surely you know that darling? Don't you know I'm madly in love with you? After all, you accepted my invitation to come for a drive, didn't you? Surely you weren't foolish enough to think that I intended to sit holding your hands and gazing at the stars, did you?"

"You—you beast!" Peggy gasped. "I—I hate you!"

He gave a cynical little laugh.

"When a girl says she hates a man, it means she's next door to being in love with him," he said. "Come, let me teach you how to love, my adorable Peggy," he added, drawing her still closer to him. "Kiss me, sweetheart," he commanded, his eyes aflame with passion and desire.

Involuntarily, Peggy cried pathetically—

"Dick, oh Dick, please help me!"

"Kiss me!" Trent snarled, angered at hearing the other man's name, and next moment his lips were on hers, searing them with fierce, passionate kisses . . .

DICK, setting out in his quest for Peggy and believing that Trent must have taken her to "The Merry-go-Round" road-house, found when he arrived there that he had drawn a blank.

So he got on his motor-cycle and started off again, wondering what direction to take. Suddenly it occurred to him that they might have gone to "The Secret Glade", probably directed there by Peggy, as a sort of revenge on him.

But when he reached the rhododendron glade, he found that he had been mistaken again. At a loss what to do next, he was tempted to give up what seemed to be a hopeless search.

Still undecided what to do, he rode slowly along the road leading to Milington, and as he was passing the end of a lane, he happened to notice the red rear light of a car parked a few yards off the main road.

Jumping off his machine, he set out to investigate, and as he approached the stationary car, he heard a girl's half-choked scream.

Without a moment's hesitation, Dick wrenched open the door of the car to find Peggy clasped in Trent's arms.

"Hullo, Trent, what's the meaning of this, may I ask?" he demanded indignantly.

Taken utterly by surprise, Trent glowered at Dick for a long moment, and then released Peggy, who at once scrambled out of the car and almost threw herself into Dick's arms.

"Oh Dick, thank Heaven you have come!" she cried brokenly, clinging to him.

Dick gave her a soothing pat on the shoulder.

"Yes, thank Heaven I have found you at last, my darling," he said tenderly, and then turned to Trent, who was still sitting in the car. "Now I want an explanation from you—you rotter!" he muttered grimly.

"And what's it to do with you," blustered Trent, "I suppose I have a right to take a girl for a drive without your consent, haven't I, Slater?"

"Yes, but you have no right to force a girl to remain in your car against her wish the way you were doing, Trent, and—"

"Don't talk such utter rot, my dear chap!" Trent broke in. "I pulled into this lane because I'd unexpectedly run out of petrol. If you don't believe what I say, perhaps you would like to have a look at the petrol gauge for yourself?" he added, on a challenging note.

Dick frowned. He had a look at the gauge and saw that the pointer was at zero.

"Now are you satisfied?" Trent asked, with a triumphant sneer.

"No, I'm not," Dick replied doggedly, and before Trent realised his intention, he had opened the door of the boot and switched on his torch.

Stowed away there, was a "jerrycan". Dick picked it up, and found that it was full.

"Well, and what about this?" he asked, giving Trent a questioning look.

"I—I quite forget I had that can," Trent blustered. "It must have been there some days without my knowing."

"Is that so?" Dick commented caustically. "Anyway, I'm going to take Peggy home now, and perhaps we shall meet again in the police court!"

Trent snarled, and said derisively—

"You're not such an idiot as to suppose that I can be prosecuted for kissing a girl in my car, are you?"

"Well, no, not quite," Dick retorted. "But I happened to notice, when looking at your petrol gauge, that your car licence expired a fortnight ago. That'll mean a summons and an appearance in court, won't it, Trent?"

Dick then turned to Peggy.

"Now come along, Peggy," he said "and I'll have you back home in ten minutes or so. I hope you won't mind having to ride pillion for once."

"No, of course not, Dick," she murmured.

Trent watched them go. Dick's reference to the expired licence was disturbing. He had intended to renew it, but had forgotten all about it. Of course the magistrates would inflict a fine on him, but that didn't matter very much. What did matter, however, was that Dick Slater would probably be in court to report the case and, needless to say, he would make the most of the trivial affair.

Having filled up his tank from the jerrycan, Trent drove slowly back to

Millington with a feeling of considerable disquiet. If only Slater could somehow be prevented from attending the court on the day the summons was heard, he told himself, the probability was that the case would not be reported in any of the newspapers.

As he drew near to the fun fair ground, an idea suddenly occurred to Harry Trent.

**T**ED SANDERS, no longer disguised as "Texas Jake", sat in the bar parlour of "The Royal Oak" with a tankard of beer in front of him. There was a gloomy expression on his face, and the more beer he drank, the gloomier he became.

There were two reasons for this cloud of depression which weighed him down. One was that Peggy Copperdeck had definitely made up her mind not to marry him; the other was that the memory of his recent discomfort at the knife-throwing performance still rankled.

Jokes were constantly being made at his expense, and he was often asked when he was going to issue his next knife-throwing challenge. For long he had pondered on some way of "getting his own back" on Dick Slater for having subjected him to such ridicule, but so far nothing had suggested itself.

As he took a gulp from his tankard, the parlour door opened to admit Harry Trent. The two young men knew each other by sight, and a friendly nod passed between them.

"Hullo, Texas Jake! When are you going to give us another of your clever knife-throwing exhibitions?" inquired Trent jocularly, when he had ordered a drink for himself.

Sanders scowled. He had had enough questions of this sort put to him, and he made no reply.

"D'you know what I'd do if I were you, old chap?" Trent went on, with a genial smile. "I'd challenge that bounder again—I mean that newspaper reporter—Slater and I'd make it darts this time."

"Darts!" repeated Sanders contemptuously. "That's a kids' game! Knives if you like, but—"

He broke off with a scornful shrug and took another drink.

"So you're going to let Slater get away with it, eh?" laughed Trent. "What a lucky chap he is! He's not only managed to beat you at your game, but has won the boss's daughter for his bride!"

"What did you say?" Sanders muttered angrily.

"Yes, Slater has won the boss's daughter, and I expect they'll be putting up the banns before very long," Trent said, watching the other narrowly.

Sanders frowned. He was aware that Slater was rather "sweet" on Peggy, but that he had actually become engaged to her, came as a severe jolt to him. It accounted for his own rejection by Peggy, no doubt. So this was his second defeat by the "newspaper guy!"

Drink up and have one with me, old chap," Trent invited. And when they had been served, he went on, with an affable grin—"Now what about that challenge to this man Slater? He couldn't very well refuse, could he? Obviously his success that night was just a lucky fluke. It could hardly happen again, of course, and his failure would make him look—well, pretty foolish, wouldn't it, Mr. Jake?"

"Sure it would," Sanders agreed, his eyes narrowing. "I'd give quite a lot to get even with that guy." He paused, then added—"Yeah, I guess I'll challenge the bounder, and I'll give him an exhibition of knife-throwing that'll make his eyes pop!"

"Fine, old chap! But be careful not to

lose your temper," Trent said, finishing his drink and calling for another.

"What d'you mean about not losing my temper, mister?" demanded Sanders, narrowing his eyes again.

"Well, you see, my dear chap, if you lost your temper, you might make a mistake and put a knife in the other fellow's shoulder instead of the target you were aiming at," Trent answered laughingly. "Not that you'd be likely to get into serious trouble for that, I suppose after all, a chap can't be held responsible if his foot should happen to slip at a critical moment, can he? Now finish your drink and let's have a deoch-an-doris, dear boy, as I must be getting along," he added, giving Sanders a friendly pat on the shoulder.

A desire to boast of his prowess had now taken possession of Sanders.

"Look here, mister," he said, with semi-drunken gravity, "no guy does the dirty on Texas Jake and gets away with it. I've skinned the pants off better men than this Slater feller. He made me look pretty cheap that night, but you can take it from me that the game ain't played out yet."

He drained his tankard, and went on—

"That darned guy told me to go and buy myself a dart-board. Well, I ain't buying no dart-board, and I ain't playing darts. I'm playing knives—a man's game—and if I challenge the guy, I guess he can't refuse."

"No, of course he can't," agreed Trent. "Besides, the loser of a match, has a right to demand a return game, hasn't he, Jake?"

"Sure he has. And this time it's going to be the real thing!" Sanders declared grimly. "Sometimes when I'm doing my act, I make a mistake on purpose. It makes the act look more difficult than what it is, and folk get sort of keyed up wondering whether I'll miss a second time. They never suspect that it wasn't no accident at all."

"Well, I wish you the best of luck, old chap!" Trent said, giving Sanders another friendly pat on the shoulder, and then hastened out to his car, well pleased with the result of his efforts.

If all went according to plan, Trent told himself gleefully, he would have revenged himself on Dick Slater.

**D**ICK was highly amused, when, two days later, he received a challenge from Ted Sanders. He knew that his success with the knife-throwing that night at the fun fair had been a fluke, and though he had pretended it was a mere nothing to an experienced dart-player, that was sheer bluff, of course.

He confessed as much to Peggy when then once again found themselves sitting side by side in the rhododendron glade.

"Of course, darling, I can't really compete with Sanders at his own game, but it will be rather fun," he said smilingly, "and I shall be able to make an amusing article out of the affair."

Peggy sighed.

"I wish you had refused to accept the challenge, Dick," she murmured. "I know Ted Sanders better than you do, and I don't trust him. Mummy thinks he's all right, but daddy agrees with me."

"You are not afraid that he's going to stick one of his knives into me, are you, darling?" Dick asked laughingly. "That would be just a little too melodramatic, you know."

Then, to change the subject—

"I saw Gail Brandon to-day, and she's putting up a brave show now that she's got over the first shock of hearing the news about her fiancé."

"Oh, Dick, I feel so dreadfully sorry for the poor girl," Peggy said—Dick had

explained the reason for his being with Gail in the glade that afternoon when she had caught them unawares. "If—if anything happened to you, Dick dear, I think I should not want to go on living," she added tremulously.

Dick gave her an affectionate hug.

"Nothing is going to happen to me, my love," he whispered, smiling into her eyes.

THE contest between Dick and Ted Sanders had been arranged to take place on the following evening in the booth which Sanders used for his performances. Word had already gone round about it, and the booth was filled with the local "sports", many of whom had wagers on the result.

Sanders entered the booth dressed as a Texan cowboy, followed by Dick wearing his usual clothes. Both men were loudly applauded. Peggy, in spite of Dick's objections, had insisted on being present.

The object of the throwers was to follow a pattern marked on the target. Every knife which missed the pattern would count so many points against the thrower.

The two men tossed for who should throw first, and Sanders won. He took up his position at the far end of the booth, while Dick stood beside the target to watch how the knives fell. Peggy was standing beside him, but her eyes were not fixed on the target, but on Dick's opponent.

Sanders picked up a knife from the bench in front of him, hesitated a moment, and threw it. Then another, and another, each one following the pattern on the

target with astonishing accuracy. Then, he picked up the last knife, he took a step backwards to aim.

He appeared to stumble just as he was about to release the knife, and swift as lightning, Peggy whose eyes had never left Sanders's face flung herself in front of Dick.

The knife, which had been intended for him, grazed her shoulder, and she sank to the ground, blood seeping through the arm of her frock.

PEGGY lay in a basket-chair on the lawn of the Millington Cottage Hospital. Her face was pale, but there was a happy smile playing about her lips as she caught sight of Dick hurrying towards her. He stooped and kissed her tenderly.

"Well, and how are you, my sweet?" he asked, a beaming smile on his face.

"Oh, I'm getting on splendidly, thanks, Dick," she answered. "The doctors say the wound will be completely healed in a few days."

"Splendid, darling!" he exclaimed delightedly. "Then I had better ask the vicar to put up the banns. I've already fixed up for three weeks' leave, so we'll be able to have a nice long honeymoon, won't we, my dearest?"

Then, sitting down on the grass beside her chair, Dick took her hand in his and went on—

"Well, Ted Sanders has managed to get away with it all right. I was in court this morning for the adjourned hearing, and his solicitor's plea that the whole thing was an accident, convinced the magistrates

and he was acquitted."

"You know, Dick dear, if it hadn't been for Ted Sanders, you and I might never have met," Peggy remarked thoughtfully.

"Yes, I suppose that is so, darling," Dick agreed. "I have some other interesting news for you too, Peggy," he went on. "Harry Trent's case was heard in court day before yesterday, and he pleaded guilty to not having renewed his car licence, and he got off with a nominal fine. But I 'featured' the case in 'The Chronicle'—wrote it up in the sort of way that would make people grin as they read it. Nothing libellous, of course, but—well, making him look a bit of a jackass, if you understand what I mean. But as I treated two other motoring cases in much the same vein, Trent can't say that I picked him out specially as a target."

"No, of course not," Peggy murmured smilingly. "I forgive Mr. Trent in spite of what he tried to do to me, and Ted Sanders as well for what he might have done to you, Dick."

"And to you, darling," Dick said, smiling at her.

"For love and hate cannot live together," Peggy went on. "Love extinguishes hate as bright sunshine extinguishes a fire. Don't you feel that way too, Dick dear?"

Dick nodded. Gently he drew her to him, and with her upturned face resting on his shoulder, their lips met and clung...

THE END.

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## GIRL OF THE FOREST

By Joan Telscombe

THE STRANGER

GILLIAN MARSH packed the last of her food parcels into the Red Indian type canoe, drawn up on the sandy shore in front of the little backwoods trading post. It was a bright, sunny morning in October; a month of frosty dawns and flawless days in that remote part of Northern Canada.

Far in the distance loomed the snow-capped peaks of the Rocky Mountains, while nearer at hand, the smoke from a dozen log cabins rose straight up into the air, presently to drift away and vanish amidst the pine trees which topped the cliff enclosing one side of the lake.

A fine-looking Ojibwa Indian, resplendent in head-dress, paused as he came to the canoe and greeted the girl with the grave politeness she had come to expect from these members of a vanishing race.

Gillian knew him as Oo-ee-nah, a hunting Indian. He often visited the big log-built house where she lived with her father, manager of a timber company. It had been Oo-ee-nah who had taught her to paddle a canoe with the steady, tireless beat of a young brave, to speak Ojibwa, to bend a bow and read Indian smoke-signals.

Like many of his Redskin compatriots, Oo-ee-nah disliked the coming of the big lumber companies, though he accepted them with the same tolerant philosophy which sustained his people throughout the iron winters, with their toll of hardship and, sometimes, disaster.

Suddenly he lifted an arm and shading his eyes with a hand, gazed across the sparkling waters of the lake.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Who come?"

Turning Gillian spotted a canoe approaching the shore.

As it came nearer she saw that it contained two men, one a white man, and, from the head feathers, the other was an Ojibwa Indian. There were signs of camping equipment in the bundles stowed in the frail boat.

Who could be visiting the lonely outpost so late in the year? she wondered.

Four hundred miles from the nearest big town, they depended upon the lakes and rivers for communication with the outside world.

But once a month a seaplane would land on the lake bringing letters and newspapers, although not when the water was frozen over during the coldest part of winter.

They seldom had visitors, their last being the minister from Fort McMurray, a Hudson Bay trading post nearly two hundred miles away.

The canoe grounded and the young man helped the Indian to haul it clear of the water.

Then he turned to Gillian.

He was tall and well set up, with short brown hair and a strong, rugged countenance. He wore the traditional hunting kit of the north: blue jeans tucked into calf-length laced boots, a coloured shirt and a beaver-skin jacket.

"Good morning," he said, in a pleasant drawing voice. "This is Grant's Bay trading post, I take it? Because if it isn't, my navigation is hopelessly wrong." He laughed.

Gillian smiled in return. She was a healthy, splendid looking girl, with wavy fair hair that fell nearly to her shoulders. Her eyes were brown and sparkled with

humour, while there was a lift to her chin that betokened independence of spirit inherited from a long line of Scottish ancestors.

She wore a tartan skirt, with thick ribbed socks and boots of moose-hide, her woollen shirt open at the neck to reveal the slender line of her throat.

"Yes, you are quite right. This is Grant's Bay," she replied. "That's the store and mail-office up there. Mr. McPherson, the factor, is there now."

"Thank you." The young man was about to say something else but his Indian paddler spoke to him and when he turned again, Oo-ee-nah was helping the girl to push her canoe into the water.

A moment later she had sprung in, picked up her paddle and was steadily widening the distance between herself and the shore.

Bill Hammond, for that was the young man's name, stood for a moment watching her.

An Ojibwa canoe is often paddled from a kneeling position, enabling the paddler to throw the full weight of his or her body into the stroke; it is a method requiring skill and dexterity and is not easily learnt.

So it rather surprised Bill to see a young girl paddling like an Ojibwa brave. Quite naturally he wondered who she was and why she was living in this wild part of lumberland, where white girls were very few and far between.

Angus McPherson, the owner of the log-built store enlightened him.

"That be Gillian Marsh," he said, in reply to Bill's question. "She lives up along the lake with her father." He glanced up from the letter of introduction Bill had handed to him and chuckled. "I'm thinking

ye'll no be popular with Mr. Marsh when he learns why ye've come here, Mr. Hammond."

"Oh?" Bill raised his eyebrows. "What has that got to do with it, Mr. McPherson?"

The old storekeeper put down the letter and began to fill his cherry-wood pipe.

"Maybe I'd better put ye wise to the situation," he said more seriously. "Mr. Gregory Marsh is the manager o' the lumber company owning the concession rights to cut and haul timber along the north side o' the lake. It's a big company, ye ken, an' employs a lot o' men in three lumber camps about twenty-five miles apart. Mr. Marsh lives about three miles frae here. I'm thinking he's no going tae be pleased when he learns that ye have been sent to prospect for uranium on land he regards as his company's private property."

"Good gracious, it's got nothing to do with him," said Bill warmly. "I work for the State Department in Ottawa and—" He stopped abruptly as the older man started to chuckle. "What's the joke?" he asked.

"I'm thinking that Ottawa's a long way frae Grant's Bay," replied Angus. He took his pipe from his mouth and waved it vaguely in Bill's direction. "Mr. Marsh is no easy to get on with, lad. Even his own lumber-jacks call him tough! And he dinna likes strangers." He shook his head. "He's certainly a bad mon tae cross."

"Seems to me he's rather an unpleasant customer!" said Bill in no way put out.

Angus reached for a box of matches to re-light his pipe.

"Ye don't understand lad," he said soberly. "Timber is the life blood of a mon like Gregory Marsh. He's been a lumber man ever since he was old enough tae swing an axe. He'll no care a fig if the land around here is filled with uranium." He picked up the letter Bill had given him. "It says here that a survey party is coming up next spring and that ye have come first for a preliminary look round. Ye've left it rather late, haven't ye, lad?"

"Oh, I don't think so," said Bill defensively. "It's still six to eight weeks to winter. I can do a lot in that time."

"Aweel, ye know your own business best, I suppose," said Angus, shrugging. "I'll do all I can tae help ye, o' course, but there's mighty little I can do. But mark my words, lad, and steer clear of Gregory Marsh. Like as not he'll run ye off his land if he's a mind tae it an' he's got all of three hundred lumber-jacks behind him! An' while I'm about it, here's some more advice! Be careful how ye go where Miss Gillian is concerned. Ye wud no be the first mon tae cast sheep's eyes in her direction, and not the first to run up against her father for it. He's an embittered mon is Gregory Marsh. Don't ask me why for I can't tell ye the reason. But watch yer step, lad."

MEANTIME Gillian Marsh drove her canoe across the placid waters of the lake towards the point of land which hid from sight the nearest of her father's three logging camps.

Presently she came in view of the house her father had built against the green tracery of the trees behind it, flanked by the stores and offices.

All the buildings were of hewn logs, with shingled roofs, like the slipway and jetty which ran down to the water from the log cutting mill.

Isolated though her home was, Gillian never felt cut off. Her father maintained a well-stocked library and additional books and periodicals were brought in regularly

by boat and seaplane.

Light and power were supplied by the big generating plant at the mill so that they could boast of possessing many of the amenities of town life, including a radio-gram, and cooking by electricity.

Even were she without all this Gillian would have loved the north, with its brilliant summers and long, silent winters. She loved its vast emptiness, its almost frightening grandeur.

Often at night she would lie awake listening to the myriad sounds that told their own tale; the snarling cry of an ermine on the prowl, the rustling of the chipmunks in the leaves, the distant thumping of a snowshoe rabbit on the trail. Sometimes the timber wolves, hungry for food, would come almost to the steps of the house and she had often watched a lordly moose swimming in the lake.

As her canoe grounded a tall, swarthy-skinned young man in lumber-jack outfit hurried forward and helped her to pull it up the shelving beach.

He was Pierre Lefranc, her father's French-Canadian assistant and, it was said, the only man who was not afraid of "the boss".

"What kind of a trip did you have, Gillian?" he enquired in a faint French accent, as they walked up to the house laden with her parcels.

"Oh, just the usual, Pierre," she smiled. "I saw Oo-ee-nah. He says he is coming to pay us a visit soon."

"I bet the old rascal wants something, then," replied Pierre suspiciously, with a flash of white teeth. "Trust an Indian for that. They're a lazy lot."

"There was a visitor, too," said Gillian. She refused to be drawn into an argument with Pierre about the Indians, knowing that her father's assistant regarded them with contempt. "A young man arrived in a canoe just as I was leaving and wanted to know if he had come to Grant's Bay. He had an Ojibwa paddler and looked as if he were on a hunting trip."

"So?" Pierre raised his bushy eyebrows. "It is a little late in the season for hunting. I wonder what he wanted? Didn't he say?"

She shook her head and went on to describe Bill Hammond, somewhat surprised at the interest Pierre displayed. He listened attentively for a while and then appeared to dismiss the subject as unimportant.

They reached the house, with its main doorway opening on to a large living-room furnished with the home-made chairs and tables. The natural lustre of the wood had been brought out by constant polishing and the animal skin rugs on the floor lent an air of well-ordered comfort to the room. The kitchen quarters were situated at the rear and a short passage led to the bedrooms and the bathroom.

"Will you stay for coffee, Pierre?" she invited, dumping her parcels on a table. "It won't take a minute—I daresay Onieda has it already."

"Thank you, Gillian, but I really mustn't stop," he replied. "I have to go over to Camp Three to see how they are getting on with the new road they started cutting yesterday. There is some big timber there and Mr. McManus might be having difficulty." He took out an oilskin bag and, shaking some tobacco into his palm, began rolling a cigarette. "What I wanted to ask you was whether you'll come with me to the social at Camp Two on Saturday night? It is going to be quite an affair—Tommy Price has promised to come over from Camp Three with his accordian. Mrs. McManus will be coming, too, and two or three other wives."

Gillian shook her head, a wistful expression coming into her brown eyes.

"I'm terribly sorry, Pierre, but I am afraid it is out of the question," she said regretfully. "Father will never allow me to go to one of the camp affairs, so it isn't the least use me asking."

Pierre paused to light his cigarette, his black eyes hardening.

"In other words you won't ask him," he said, drawing a deep breath. He laughed shortly. "Sometimes I think you are much too dutiful, my dear Gillian. After all, you are no longer a child, so why let your father treat you as if you were? I'm sure no other girl would stand for what you have to."

"I do wish you wouldn't say things like that, Pierre," she protested, a break in her voice. "We've had all this out before and arguing further won't get us anywhere. Besides—"

"Yes?" he prompted softly, when she hesitated.

"Oh, it's no use, Pierre," she said, with a little gesture of hopelessness. "You know I would like to go to the social with you but it's out of the question, so please don't make things harder for me."

"You admit they are hard, then!" He smiled, almost triumphantly.

"That's something, at any rate. As a rule you are so loyal to your father that everything he does and says is right! The truth is, I suppose, you don't care enough one way or the other to risk a showdown with him."

He shrugged his shoulders and flicked the ash off his cigarette angrily, a bitter expression on his face.

Gillian flushed.

"That's not fair, Pierre," she countered warmly. "I know you think daddy is unreasonable but you just don't understand."

"I understand enough to know that Mr. Marsh has forgotten what it is like to be young," he retorted swiftly. "Why, shouldn't you be free to enjoy yourself if you want to? Or does he think that lumber-jacks and their wives aren't good enough to mix with his daughter?"

"Don't be silly, Pierre," she returned, going white. "If you go on like this we'll end up by quarrelling and, I don't want to quarrel with you."

"And I don't want to quarrel with you, Gillian," he said, suddenly speaking more gently. He walked to the open window and pitched away his cigarette. Then turned resolutely and came back to face her. "Look here, my dear, it's time we were frank! You know how I feel about you, don't you? I could make you happy, I swear I could, and as my wife you would have every consideration. I'm not one to make fancy speeches, like some I know, but I love you. Why not say 'Yes,' Gillian? Your father couldn't object. I've got a good job and together we can—"

"Oh, Pierre, please don't go on," she interposed. "I've told you, and it's true—I would be very proud and happy to give you the answer you want, but I can't. I—I've told you, more than once, that I don't love you in that way—not to want to marry you."

"You can learn that way, Gillian dear," he murmured pleadingly. "Love can grow and—"

"No!" She drew a deep breath. "I'm sorry, Pierre, but I—I can't change my mind about a thing like that. You—you must be content with being a friend or—or nothing."

"Very well," he conceded slowly, after a brief pause. "But don't forget one thing, Gillian! I love you and nothing will ever stop me from loving. My dear, if you would only listen to me your life would be very different from what it is now, believe me! Do you realise that you haven't been for a trip outside the trading post since you

came here, two and a half years ago? Doesn't he think you ever want to enjoy town life again? Frankly I think its time somebody told him what a selfish old——"

"Stop, please, Pierre!" Gillian broke in almost breathlessly.

She looked frightened, he thought, and his mood softened.

"I'm sorry," he said contritely. "I didn't mean to upset you. But loving you as I do, it hurts to see the way you are being treated." He glanced at the clock. "In any case, I must go—I'm late as it is. I suppose I shall see you between now and Saturday, yes?"

"Yes, Pierre," she said, forcing a smile. "I—I'll be about."

"Good-bye then for the present," he said and snatched her hand and kissed it quickly.

From the window Gillian watched his departing form, a queer, hurt expression in her eyes.

She was too loyal to admit that Pierre's outspoken criticism of her father was justified, but she could no longer deny that he was singularly unreasonable.

A man of violent temper, Gregory Marsh ruled the logging camps with an iron hand and had been known to break the spirit of even the toughest lumberjack who had attempted to defy his word.

Presently she turned away and called to the Indian girl-servant to bring coffee and biscuits. She had left for the trading post after a very early breakfast that morning and was feeling hungry.

She also expected her father at any moment, for he made a practice of calling at the house for mid-morning coffee whenever his duties permitted and she knew that on this particular morning he had gone to the foreman's office at the mill, only a few hundred yards away.

She walked slowly over to the fireplace, carrying the cup of coffee she had poured out for herself, and stood looking down at the logs which burned in the open hearth.

Pierre's indictment of her father had struck home and there was a deeply thoughtful expression in her brown eyes as she pondered the question that had come to dwell in her mind more and more frequently of late.

She had been little more than seventeen when her father had taken her away from the college in Ottawa and brought her to this remote part of Canada. At that time she had never dreamed of questioning his authority, although it had meant that her cherished dreams of studying music had gone by the boards.

Had her mother been alive things might have been different, Gillian reflected wistfully, but as it was, she did not even remember her.

All she knew was that Mrs. Eileen Marsh had been the pretty daughter of another manager and had married thirty-six year old Gregory Marsh when she had been eighteen.

The girl wife had died soon after Gillian's birth and the child had been brought up by Sisters of Mercy at a convent in Winnipeg, until she was twelve. Later, she had won a scholarship and gone to a secondary school in Ottawa.

Gillian often put down her father's bitterness to the fact that he had lost his young wife after so brief a spell of married happiness, but she was never sure that this was the real reason.

He never mentioned her mother, or his wife's relatives. Gillian had been brought up in complete ignorance of this period in her father's life.

Actually, it was only during the last two and a half years that she had really got to know him, she thought.

Previously he had visited her at odd intervals at the various schools she had attended. But he had always kept her well supplied with pocket-money. She had spent two school holidays with him, fishing and shooting along the upper reaches of the mighty St. Lawrence river.

When he had suddenly appeared in Ottawa and had told her that he was on his way to open up new timber concessions on Lake Winisk, with his headquarters at Grant's Bay, she had accepted the decision obediently and had looked forward to the change in her circumstances with a mixture of eagerness and apprehension.

Now she was beginning to wonder if she had the right to squander her youth in this way. Recently she had become very conscious of a sense of frustration that became daily more apparent. There was no piano, so that she could not find an outlet for the creative urge which she tried hard to stifle. Hearing records on a radiogram was not the same thing.

It was one of her private griefs that her father did not appear to like classical music, or any music for that matter, so that if she wished to enjoy one of her favourite records, she had to listen to it when he was not about.

She turned as he came in, a burly, thick-set man in his middle-fifties. He had a weather-beaten face and almost hostile grey eyes.

He flung away his cap, laid a bundle of blue prints on the table, and took the coffee Gillian hastened to pour out for him.

"Did you bring any mail back?" he demanded curtly, standing squarely in front of the fireplace, his whole attitude hinting at the aggressive nature of the man.

Gillian shook her head.

"It wasn't in when I left, father," she said, pouring a cup out for herself. "Angus said the plane was probably delayed by bad weather. The radio-forecast warned of gales."

"H'm! Some of these young chaps want their ideas bucking up a bit," her father remarked testily. "In my day a man didn't run for shelter every time a shower threatened."

"That's not really fair, father," Gillian protested warmly, taking up the defence of the young pilot against whom her father's criticism was obviously directed. "Dick Fairbrother was a squadron-leader in the last war and was twice decorated for bravery. Look at the way he flew through a snow blizzard last year to take your injured logger back to Edmonton Hospital!"

"Pah!" grunted her father. "He took darn good care to wait for a break in the storm before he took off again, I remember."

"Of course he did," said Gillian indignantly. "He had the injured man to think of! It wouldn't have been much good if he had ended up in a crash that might have killed both of them."

"I wonder if young Fairbrother knows what a staunch advocate he has in you?" her father queried, looking grimly amused. Then, with an abrupt change of subject: "Have you seen Pierre? He ought to have been over at Camp Three an hour ago but he hadn't shown up when McManus spoke to me on the field telephone half an hour ago."

"Oh, he was here about half an hour ago, father," Gillian replied, uneasily, aware of the flush that stole into her features. "He helped me carry the shopping up from the beach. But he left almost immediately afterwards for Camp Three."

"What did he want? He didn't hang about waiting for you without a reason, I'll warrant," said her father pointedly.

"No, he wanted to know if I would go with him to the social at Camp Two on

Saturday night," Gillian frankly replied. "I told him I would very much like to go but that I was perfectly certain you would not consent."

Her father looked keenly at her.

"You did quite right, my dear," he said tartly. "Not only do I not approve of what goes on at these affairs, but I have no intention of allowing my daughter to rub shoulders with the kind of riff-raff who attend them. Pierre should have known better than to have asked you."

"I didn't know you regarded women like Mrs. McManus as riff-raff," said Gillian daringly.

"She's different," said her father shortly. And so are the wives of some of the other men. I'm thinking of the camp followers and Indian half-breed women from the settlement. Do you think the men will continue to respect you if you go hobnobbing with them?"

In silence Gillian gave him a second cup of coffee and put a fresh log on the fire.

It would have been impossible to have struck a blow for her independence in the face of his arguments, for she had to admit there was something in what he said.

All the same she had a hard job to quell the rising wave of bitterness which rose within her. It was not so much his refusal to allow her to go to the social, as his manner of doing so. He forbade her to go!

But then, compromise was not a word to be found in Gregory Marsh's vocabulary, so it would never enter his head to try and soften the blow to her pride. It was sufficient that he and he alone had laid down a standard of conduct which he expected his daughter to follow without question. Anything that looked like rebellion on her part would result in complete and utter defeat or be the end of everything between them. For that reason she gave in to him.

STANDING on a rocky bluff overlooking the lake later that day, Gillian tried to find a way out of the invisible prison which seemed to be closing around her.

Not for the first time she longed for someone in whom to confide, a woman friend with sympathy and understanding.

Unfortunately she had no friends except for one of the girls with whom she had been at school in Ottawa and with whom she still corresponded.

Thus, cut off from the companionship that might have eased the situation for her, she was thrown back upon herself to an extent that merely intensified her feelings of frustration.

Even Pierre did not wholly understand. He knew that she loved the north, the solitude and the wildness. But what he failed to realise—mainly, because she could not talk to him about it—was the sense of futility that overcame her when she reviewed the emptiness of her existence.

Pierre had his work. He was a lumberman, born and bred, and could imagine no other kind of life. Cities, to him, were merely places to be visited occasionally, a place to spend money and have a good time. That there could be a fuller, more mentally active and creative life than that of a logging camp would never enter his head.

Yet even without Pierre's companionship she would have been far more unhappy than she was. He had taught her a good deal about the wild life she loved so much, about the Red Men who had roamed the shore of the lake before the coming of the white man.

A firm friendship had sprung up between them and, strangely enough, her father seemed not to disapprove of it.

Two months ago, on their way back from a trip to the Indian settlement on the opposite shore of the lake, Pierre had asked her to marry him.

Her reply had been the same as it had been to-day. She knew, deep down in her heart, that it would always be the same where Pierre was concerned.

#### ORDERED OFF!

LIKE most of the smaller lakes of Northern Canada, Lake Winisk was fed by a number of turbulent rivers and glaciers which started in the Rocky Mountains.

One such river named Little Bear Creek, entered the lake a mile to the west of the logging mill and could be reached by a winding path through the woods from the house.

At the river bank the path turned to the East and followed the course of the stream until it came to a forty-foot waterfall, near which were some stepping stones.

It was a favourite spot of Gillian's and she often went there when she had nothing else to do. Once she had encountered a young grizzly bear near the waterfall, busily engaged in stripping a bush of wild raspberries. When recounting the incident to Pierre afterwards she laughingly confessed that she did not know who was the more scared—she or the bear! For both had bolted in opposite directions.

It was here she came one afternoon a few days later and sat down on a mossy bank.

In the distance could be seen the lake, the blue waters sparkling in the October sunshine, with overhead a sky unsullied by so much as a single cloud.

Away beyond the bluff was a coil of smoke rising above the woods; this was where Pierre was supervising the opening up of a new tract of timber that was to be felled. The smoke was from the cooking fires, tended by Indians.

She often thought it a pity that the tall, stately pines, which had taken so many years to reach maturity, should have to fall at last to the woodman's axe. True, others grew again, so if one took the long view one ought to conclude that nature had put them there for man's needs.

After all, there must be a purpose in everything, or life ceased to have a meaning.

By contrast her own life seemed empty and frustrated, yet try as she might, she could see no way out of the present difficulty, short of falling out with her father to whom she owed both a duty and affection. If there had been the slightest hope of making him understand it might have been different. But as it was—she shrugged mentally.

And so engrossed was she in her thoughts that she was completely unaware that she was not alone in that secluded spot which she had come to regard as her own.

When at last the sound of breaking twigs and undergrowth penetrated her consciousness she looked up startled; it was another bear she expected to see rather than a man.

"I do beg your pardon, Miss Marsh!" he said hastily. "I'm afraid I startled you. I had no idea anyone was here and, of course, the noise of the falls blankets sound until it is quite close to you. Please forgive me."

"Oh, it's quite all right," Gillian said on recovering, and recognised him as the young man she had seen at the trading post a few days earlier. "I was startled for a moment, I must admit, for I thought you were a bear, but that isn't your fault."

"For not being a bear?" he enquired gravely. "I've been likened to a bear with a sore head before now by certain people,

but I assure you it is a base libel." His eyes twinkled and suddenly they both burst out laughing.

Bill Hammond was dressed as she had seen him before, with the addition of a strong leather-covered map case slung over one shoulder. Once again Gillian wondered why he was visiting the territory so late in the year.

"I'm glad I've met you," he said, "I was beginning to feel quite lost. Does this trail take me to the logging mill?"

"Yes, it does," she said smilingly. "It's a relic of an old Indian trail, I believe."

"Oh, good!" he said. "That means I can get back to my camp before nightfall. That is, if I am lucky enough to find your father in. Do you happen to know if he is at the mill, Miss Marsh?"

"He had to go to Camp Three this morning, but I expect he has returned by now," said Gillian.

She wondered how he knew her name, then she remembered that Angus McPherson would have told him, for quite obviously the young man had made enquiries.

She glanced at him half questioningly, half enquiringly.

"I was just about to start back, so I can show you the way if you like?"

"That's very good of you," Bill said gratefully. "But first, may I introduce myself? The name's Hammond—Bill to my friends—and I am a surveyor in the service of the Government Lands Office at Ottawa. Quite a very ordinary person."

"You have come a long way to get to Grant's Bay, in that case, Mr. Hammond," Gillian smiled, turning towards the junction of the path. "Is this your first trip north?"

"My first to this particular territory," he answered, falling in by her side. "I spent two years with a survey party that was working in conjunction with the United States authorities on the construction of the Alaska highway, so I am not exactly a tenderfoot. All the same, I still find something new to learn every day."

"I think we all do, if it comes to that," said Gillian, in an amused voice. "Pierre Lefranc, my father's assistant, says that one can spend a whole lifetime in the north without tapping a quarter of its secrets."

"I can well believe that," Bill Hammond said earnestly. "The more I see of Northern Canada, the more I marvel at the vastness and the unexplored possibilities it contains."

If I were given the choice, I think I could make my home here and never want to see a city again."

"I wonder if you would say that if you had lived for two and a half years in the one spot and seen nothing but the same faces from one year's end to the other?" said Gillian half sullenly.

He glanced at her quickly. "Is that what you have done, Miss Marsh?"

"More or less," she admitted, with a barely suppressed sigh. Then, realising she had been guilty of an indiscretion, added hastily: "That doesn't mean I don't love it here. I do. I could watch the seasons come and go and never tire. As you said just now, there is always something new to learn each day."

"But you would like to feel that you could escape if you wished to!" he said.

She looked at him in surprise; no one had ever understood in just that way before. She had known him a bare five minutes, yet he had placed a finger accurately on the core of her problem.

Coming to a turn in the path, which afforded a wide view of the lake, Gillian took advantage of it to change the subject.

"Look!" she said. "That's the logging camp down there. The long building is

the office and the house on the knoll is where I live with father. That's the trading post away in the distance—you can just make out the ridge of pines on the bluff."

"I can quite see why this is a favourite haunt of yours," he said quietly, gazing around with undisguised interest.

Once again Gillian looked surprised.

"I didn't say it was a favourite haunt of mine, Mr. Hammond," she murmured, amazed at his uncanny perception. "But you are quite right, it is. There are not many places one can go for walks around here, as you can imagine. Apart from other things, one can so easily get lost."

"Quite," he agreed, as they resumed their way. "Don't you find it rather dull here in the winter?"

"Oh, I have enough to occupy my mind," she said lightly. "We have quite a well-stocked library at the house and I always lay in a collection of new records. And there is always the radio, although reception is seldom good."

They walked on, chatting easily, so that Gillian was completely unconscious of being drawn on to talk about herself. Somehow it was impossible not to feel at ease with this young man whose manner gave the impression that his questions were inspired, not by idle curiosity, but by genuine interest.

By the time they reached her house Gillian had given Bill a fairly accurate description of her life as it had been since leaving school and coming to Grant's Bay.

She made him laugh at her early attempts to master the Ojibwa language and of the many mistakes she had made in mastering the art of living in the timberlands.

"It took me ages to learn to paddle in Ojibwa fashion," she confessed. "But quite suddenly it came to me and now I can take a canoe practically anywhere."

"Don't you keep a launch?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Daddy uses it sometimes but I prefer a canoe," she said. "I'm not at all mechanically minded, I am afraid. I always think there might be an engine break-down. I've never forgotten the time when the motor failed as Pierre Lefranc was on his way back from the post late one day last year. It came on to snow soon after dark and the temperature dropped suddenly. It was not until the following day that he was spotted by one of the canoes that had been sent to search for him. He had drifted several miles out into the lake by that time, and when they found him he was badly frost-bitten."

"I see," Bill said thoughtfully. "Perhaps you are wise to stick to a canoe in that case. How do you manage when the lake is frozen over?" he added.

"We have two dog teams," she said. "The tractors which haul the logs down to the mill are fitted with caterpillar runners, but we use sleds for going to and from the trading post. It's rather fun."

She went on to describe how the cut trees were hauled along specially made "rides" through the forests to the logging mill. Here they were cut into suitable lengths before being assembled into huge rafts ready for floating out on the lake in the spring, and sending along to the pulping mills for making into paper.

Bill listened attentively, content to watch the quick turn of her head, the flexing of a dainty wrist, as she pointed out some object of interest.

A good-looking young bachelor, with an assured future, he had met many lovely and attractive women in his time, but not one had stirred his imagination as this young girl had.

Bill Hammond had not known exactly what to expect when he had been called to his chief's office and asked to undertake a

preliminary survey of the Lake Winisk territory.

At first sight it had seemed a simple enough assignment and one that was well within his capacity to carry out, but as he and Gillian approached the house he was remembering, not only Angus McPherson's warning; but the words of his chief, at the close of the interview, prior to leaving Ottawa.

"You'll have to tread warily, Hammond. All that is required at this stage is a preliminary look round and it might be as well if you confined yourself strictly to that, irrespective of what indications you may find. We don't want to invite the kind of opposition that may make negotiations difficult in the future, assuming, of course, that there is uranium in the timberlands."

"What sort of opposition do you mean, sir?" Bill had asked bluntly. "It's just as well to know what I am up against, I imagine."

His chief had nodded.

"Just as well," he had said. "As I see it the position is that nearly all the area involved in your preliminary survey is leased by the Government to a logging concern whose managing director happens to be a Mr. Gregory Marsh. Marsh has a reputation for being a tough nut to crack and he isn't going to take kindly to the idea that his future activities may be severely curtailed. That is why I am sending you alone—if I sent a fully fledged survey party at this stage it would be rather like heralding our intentions with a brass band. Understand?"

"Sure," had said Bill. "You want—"

"I want a thorough report upon which to base future investigations—if any," had interrupted the older man. "If your findings are favourable I will have something to take to the Powers-That-Be. Up to the moment we have very little to go on. I will give you a letter of introduction to a man called McPherson—he's the factor at Grant's Bay and I feel quite sure you can rely on his judgment. I'll leave it to you to decide how much, and how little, you tell Marsh. Only as I have said, tread warily. He has powerful friends in high places and a great deal of influence with certain sectional interests to whom the profits to be made out of a timber concession are more important than, shall we say, the good of the country as a whole!"

NOW as Bill followed Gillian into the living-room of the house he saw a thick-set, burly man standing near the fireplace scanning a document. He looked up as they entered, raking Bill with an insolent stare.

"Father, this is Mr. Hammond," Gillian introduced him, her voice sounding a shade nervous, Bill thought. "I—we met at the waterfall. Mr. Hammond was on his way to see you."

"How d'you do," said Gregory Marsh curtly. He made no move to shake hands, but continued to hold the document he had been reading as if he were waiting for Bill to state his business and go.

Bill took his cue from the other's mood. "I'm from the State Department in Ottawa, Mr. Marsh," he explained. "As I shall want to trespass over your territory during the next month or so I thought it best to call and discuss things with you."

"Oh?" Gregory Marsh frowned. "May I enquire why you will want to trespass on the company's territory, Mr.—er—Hammond? Or is that a State secret?"

The sarcasm caused Bill to redden slightly, but he controlled himself with an effort.

"No, there is no State secret about it, Mr. Marsh," he said. "I have merely been

sent to make a rough survey of the area between Grant's Bay and the headwaters of the lake for a distance of fifty to sixty miles."

"Whatever for?" snapped the other, his features darkening.

"My department is interested in having its records as complete as possible, Mr. Marsh," said Bill calmly. "As you are no doubt aware, there are vast areas around here that we know little or nothing about, either as to their possible mineral wealth or other resources. You see—"

"Do you take me for a fool?" interposed Gregory Marsh angrily. He flung down the paper he had been holding and glowered at the younger man. "That's a mineral detector you're carrying in that map-case, isn't it? Well"—with a sneering smile—"you won't find any uranium in these parts and you can go straight back to Ottawa and tell them so."

"That is what I intend to do when I have carried out a survey, Mr. Marsh," said Bill quietly. "But first I must make sure."

"I said you won't find any uranium in these parts and I mean just that," retorted the older man angrily. "You won't find any because you won't be allowed to get it! I control the area around here and as long as I do so I'm not having any Government snoopers poking their big noses into what doesn't concern them. Is that clear?"

"I see," said Bill unmoved. "You mean you are forbidding me to carry out my duties, Mr. Marsh?"

"I'm saying that I won't have you trespassing on the company's land," declared the other. "What is more, if you are caught doing so after this warning you will only have yourself to blame for what happens!"

"I see," said Bill again and shrugged. "That's a risk I must take, I suppose. It seems to me that you are taking a very short-sighted view of the whole thing, though, Mr. Marsh. We don't know whether there are any uranium deposits or not on this land, but if there are then surely it is your duty as a Canadian citizen to allow the Government every facility for investigation? I might add that the uranium is required for the peaceful use of atomic energy not for warlike purposes."

"I don't need telling what I should and should not do," thundered the other.

"I am only suggesting—"

Gillian's father cut him short with a gesture.

"You are wasting my time and your own, young man," he said curtly. "As far as I am concerned the sooner you take yourself back to Ottawa the better. And don't let me hear that you are camping on the company's property after to-night, either."

With that he gathered up his papers and stalked out of the room, banging the door behind him.

Gillian looked helplessly at Bill. She had known better than to attempt to intervene in the scene she had just witnessed, but now distress showed in her eyes.

"I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Hammond," she murmured apologetically. "I am quite sure my father doesn't really mean—"

"It's quite all right, Miss Marsh," Bill broke in smilingly. "It isn't your fault, and queerly enough, I understand your father's attitude. It is unfortunate that he takes the view he does, for it is going to make my job a trifle more difficult, but that is all."

"You mean, you are going on with your survey?" she whispered, wide-eyed.

"Of course," Bill said gently. "I had hoped to get your father's full co-operation, but as I have failed to do so, I must carry on without it." And with that he left.

SEVERAL times during the next two weeks Gillian encountered Bill Hammond, sometimes when she paddled along the shore on her way to and from the settlement, and twice near the waterfall.

At the end of that time she acknowledged that existence would be lonelier still for her when Bill returned to Ottawa, though at this stage of their acquaintance she had not yet faced up to the full implications of the situation.

Actually, despite her father's unbending attitude, circumstances were all in their favour. The opening up of the new timber tract kept both Gregory Marsh and Pierre very busy, so that they had little time to spare for anything else.

When he and Gillian were alone her father never mentioned the visitor and he evidently assumed that Bill had paid heed to his warning and gone.

Yet the pleasure she found in Bill's company was not entirely unalloyed.

One of Gillian's chief characteristics was her sense of loyalty, and it was useless to argue that, because her father never mentioned him, she was under no obligation to tell him of her meetings with Bill.

Yet to have done so would have been to have ended those brief interludes that were such a welcome break in the daily routine of her life.

That she owed something to herself as well as to her father was beside the point. To a girl brought up as she had been, her conduct bordered very close on deception; as a result her secret worry revealed itself in several little ways that Bill was not slow to notice.

"What's the matter, Gillian?" he asked one evening, when they were at the waterfall, one of her father's magnificent husky dogs at her side. "You looked positively scared just then. Is anything wrong?"

Gillian's lips trembled slightly. She had thought she had heard a sound in the thicket and had felt the dog stiffen at her side. Instinctively she had laid a hand on its collar and the great animal had relaxed.

"It's nothing, really, Bill," she said, with an evasive little laugh. "I thought I heard something. A bear, probably."

"It's too early for bears to come down from the hills yet," he said. "It was probably a chipmunk!" He smiled gently. "I can't imagine you being scared of anything, let alone a bear."

"You don't know me very well, then, Bill," she sighed. "I'm scared of a great many things, really."

He hesitated a moment, knowing he was on dangerous ground. Then:

"You are very loyal, aren't you, Gillian?" he said, a wealth of sympathetic understanding in his voice. "Too loyal to let anyone see just how desperately unhappy you really are! Yet loyalty shouldn't be entirely one-sided, you know."

"What do you mean?" she asked, a hint of breathlessness in her tone. "I have never said I was unhappy."

"I know," he answered quietly. "But it is quite obvious to me that you are. You wouldn't be you if you were content with the kind of existence you lead here. Music and books are all very well, but they can't fill your life unless you are prepared to live in a world of dreams, my dear. There is another world waiting for you—it is crying out for youth, for those with the courage and energy to transform the things we fought for into realities. You will never convince me that you are content to stand on the side-lines and watch!"

She drew a deep breath. Then—  
"I haven't any choice," she said, with a deep sigh. "It's all very well for you to talk, but you don't know all the circumstances."

"Oh, I realise that, of course," he con-

ceded. "I suppose the truth of it is, you are utterly dependent upon your father?"

"It isn't only that, Bill," she answered despairingly. "You see, I don't remember my mother at all and I was brought up by nuns. It is only in recent years that I have really got to know my father at all. Before then he was a kind of legendary figure who appeared at intervals to see how I was getting on. Then, when the company decided to open up Grant's Bay, he brought me to live here with him."

"Didn't that strike you as being rather a selfish action on his part?" he asked, his expression hardening.

"I never gave it a thought at the time," she answered. "After all you must remember how lonely he had been and—well—I had practically finished my education."

"But surely he must have known that you were bound to be lonely in a place like this, cut off from friends and acquaintances and all the things that are a young girl's due! It strikes me that your father is either an extremely self-centred man or completely lacking in imagination."

Gillian got up from the log on which she had been sitting, a hint of tears in her eyes. Loyalty to her father was too strong even in the face of Bill's arguments.

"It is very kind of you to take such an interest in my welfare," she said, with a remote little smile. "But it isn't a subject I can really discuss with anyone."

"I'm sorry, but I quite understand," he said gently. "If I have distressed you I can only apologise. Believe me, it is the last thing I would do willingly."

"Yes, I know, and I do appreciate your desire to help. Only," with a little spurt of pride—"I don't need anybody's help, Bill."

He gave a little shrug as she turned to go.

"In that case, there's nothing more to be said," he declared sombrely. "When shall I see you again, Gillian?"

"I—I don't really know, Bill," she pondered, her brow knitted. "I never know when I shall be free, you see. I have to go to the settlement some time to-morrow—Oo-ee-nah's wife is ill and I said I would take her some things—but I don't know just when."

"It doesn't matter," he said. Then, as she set off, he added: "I'll walk a little way down the trail with you. I don't suppose anyone will see us if I turn back before we come in sight of the mill."

"All right," she agreed, a little sense of guilt running through her at the implied acknowledgement that their meetings were secret.

Though she welcomed his company for even a few minutes longer, Bill seemed disinclined for conversation and they made their way in silence to the place where the trail branched sharply to the right.

There she stopped 'pəʊntɪ pʊə

"Bill," she said, a note of uncertainty in her voice. "There is something I want to ask you. It has been worrying me ever since you came."

"Yes, my dear?" He glanced down at her, surprised by the sudden gravity of her tone. "What is it?"

She hesitated, a troubled expression in her eyes. Then—

"Why have you really come here, Gill?" she asked appealingly. "O I know what you told my father, but there's more to it than that, isn't there?"

He drew a deep breath.

"There is more, but I only told him the bare outlines," he said frankly. "As you may know, there have been recent discoveries of uranium deposits in the areas north of Lake Winnipeg and also in Alberta. Naturally, the Government is interested,

and is, in fact, backing the scheme to develop the finds. Then, a few months ago the department concerned received a mysterious report of some promising indications in the hills running north from Grant's Bay. I was sent to check up, that's all."

"Then you are really looking for uranium?" she said.

"Looking for it hardly describes what I am really doing, Gillian," he answered slowly. "As I have said, we are going on a report that was received by my department and it is my job to assess the value of the indications and to report back."

"I see," she murmured, a far-away look in her eyes. She seemed to be considering his explanation for a moment; then she looked up and continued—

"Why should my father be against your carrying out such a survey, Bill? It can't matter to him whether there are uranium deposits or not, surely?"

"I'm afraid it does," he said gently. "You see, if the reports are true, then the area in question would be taken back by the Government. True, the lumber company would be compensated, but for men like your father and the others employed in getting the timber out, it would hardly be the same thing. From the State's point of view uranium is more important than timber and they will do anything to get it."

She was silent for so long that he was moved by a new, sudden anxiety.

"Gillian!" he said softly. "Gillian dear! What's wrong? You—you won't allow a thing like this to make any difference to us, will you? Or have I been taking too much for granted in thinking that we are real friends?"

She turned her back on him.

"How can we be friends when I know you are working against my father?" she exclaimed despairingly. "Oh, I know you have explained it all to your satisfaction—she turned—"but the fact remains, we are in opposite camps."

"That's not fair," he protested warmly. "I'm a paid employee of the Government and have to carry out their orders. You owe a loyalty to your father, it is true, but that doesn't mean that you are bound to agree with all he happens to think and do. I don't want to appear self-righteous, but there are more important issues at stake than the narrow sectional interests of a solitary lumber company."

He shrugged and continued—

"It was left to my discretion how I handled this matter and after giving it a great deal of thought I decided to approach your father to enlist his active co-operation. As you saw for yourself, I failed, but that isn't going to stop me from doing the job I was sent up here to do."

There was a long pause and then Gillian looked at him with tears in her eyes.

"I don't want to be unjust, Bill," she said slowly, her voice breaking. "But—but I can't help wondering if that is the reason you sought my friendship in the first place. I suppose—with a dreary laugh—"I have been stupid in talking to you as freely as I have done, but I never realised all that was involved until now."

He looked steadily at her, forcing himself to meet the suspicion in her eyes.

"I sought your friendship because I knew what it could mean to me, Gillian," he said earnestly. "Please believe me when I say that I had no ulterior motive in doing so. In fact, if it had been possible, I would have asked to be taken off the job, but it would merely have meant that someone else would have been sent to tackle it in my place. So there was no point in my backing out."

Gillian stared out over the distant tops of the trees to where the sky seemed to

arch down to reach the blue waters of the lake, a vague heaviness of spirit weighing her down. There was no mistaking the sincerity of his tone, and presently she sighed deeply.

"I—I do believe you, Bill, but—"

"Listen to me, dearest," he said tenderly, when she paused.

Greatly daring, he took her hands and held them tightly, looking deep into her eyes. She returned his gaze timidly, her colour deepening a little as she felt the firm pressure of his fingers holding her own.

"I intended to wait a little longer before telling you this, but it seems that only the truth will serve us now. Oh, Gillian darling, can't you guess how I feel towards you? My dearest, I fell in love with you the day I first saw you seated on the bank of the waterfall. It sounds mad, I know, but I knew—then—that there would never be anyone else in the world for me."

"But—but you hardly know me, Bill," she stammered, going pale. "I mean—oh, it's madness!"

"Mad or not, I love you," he said simply. "Darling, dare I hope that the last few days have meant to you what they have to me? *Dare I?*"

"Yes, Bill," she whispered simply, carried away by a joy that trembled through her at his words.

Unconsciously she moved closer to him, hearing the sound of his voice above the wild tumult in her heart.

"Darlingest," he said.

In a moment all else was blotted out save the knowledge that they were young and in love. Love, with all its sweetness and its joy, had come on the wings of the wind to touch them both, sweeping them away on a wave of emotion more poignant than anything Gillian had ever experienced before.

She was the first to recover.

"Oh, Bill darling, what has happened to us?" she murmured unsteadily, blushing and patting her disordered hair into place.

He laughed boyishly.

"The most wonderful thing in the world, my darling," he cried triumphantly, kissing her again. "Oh, my sweet, I can't bear to think of how lonely you have been, but that is all over now. There is nothing to keep us apart—we can be married as soon as you are willing and then you will begin to live."

"It sounds heavenly," she said wistfully. "If only it were—were possible!"

"Darling, what on earth are you talking about?" he asked bewilderedly. "Of course it's possible. Your father can't withhold his consent, I'm sure of that. My position is secure and well-paid—I'm a fully qualified geological surveyor—and I can give you the security to which you are entitled. Not only that—"

"It's no use, Bill darling," she interrupted sadly, with a shake of her head. "Daddy would never consent to my marrying you and, in any case, I couldn't leave him now. You—you must never ask me to."

"But that's absurd, my darling," he expostulated. "No one, not even your father, can expect you to sacrifice your happiness because of some mistaken sense of loyalty. Hang it all, this is the twentieth century—not the days of the Barretts of Wimpole Street."

He drew her into his arms again with something almost fiercely protective in the little embrace.

Gillian sighed and relaxed, her eyes tear-filled.

"Please don't make things more difficult for me than they already are, Bill darling," she begged piteously. "You—you must be patient. I can't decide a thing like this in a hurry. We—we must wait and see

what happens."

He drew a deep breath and squared his shoulders.

"I'll be as patient as you wish, my darling," he said gently. "But in a few weeks time the freeze-up will start and no one will be able to get out until the spring! I intend, therefore, to call on your father immediately and tell him how things stand. If he won't consent to our marriage we must accept his decision and wait until you come of age, but I have an idea that he won't refuse. There is one thing you can be sure of, my dearest, and that is—I will never let you go!"

He kissed her again and with the touch of his lips it seemed as if a warm light shone upon them from another world. Gillian rested against him for a moment longer, then withdrew from his arms, her lips trembling as she spoke.

"I must go now, Bill," she murmured regretfully. "I ought to have been back long ago—father will be wondering what has happened to me. It would be too awful if he came to find me and discovered us together."

Checking the protest she saw on his lips, she added hurriedly:

"Wait for me at the settlement tomorrow if you possibly can and we'll talk things over. Promise to do nothing until then, Bill."

"If that is your wish, I promise," he said tenderly. He saw that she was wrought up and over-strained, and forebore to press her. "Try not to worry too much about everything, my dearest. However difficult it may all seem at the moment, always remember that it is the darkest hour before the dawn!"

#### TERROR OF TIMBERLAND.

THAT night a storm blew up, bringing with it a foretaste of the Arctic winter to come.

As Gillian let herself out of the house early next morning her ski-boots crunched through frozen mud and a stinging wind blew particles of snow into her face.

She had awakened early, after a restless night during which sleep had eluded her, and now she stopped, a little thrill of dismay running through her as she looked at the turbulent waters of the lake, steely-grey under an overcast sky! Ice had formed in the puddles along the track to the mill and the raw wind howled through the madly tossing pines.

There would be no chance of visiting the sick woman at the settlement before the wind dropped, and that might not be for many days to come.

Uncertain what to do she started to walk down to the jetty, and then stopped at the sight of Pierre, who was approaching across the open space in front of the house.

He greeted her in a half casual fashion, making some quite ordinary reference to the sudden drop in temperature while at the same time watching her in a manner that made her feel strangely uneasy.

To say that she had forgotten Pierre in the emotional excitement of the past few hours would have been far from the truth, nevertheless he had receded into the back of her mind, with no more claim upon her attention than one of the Red Indians who visited the place.

"If this storm lasts more than a couple of days we can get ready for the big freeze-up," he remarked glumly, staring out over the lake with sombre eyes. "That means the last of the timber rafts will be frozen in until the ice breaks up in the spring. Your father will not be pleased about that."

"He won't," she agreed tonelessly, one

thought persisting in her mind.

She had promised to meet Bill at the settlement and now she could not get there. Yet, somehow, she must get in touch with him before he took matters into his own hands and went to see her father. The question was—how was she going to contact him?

In silence she and the French-Canadian stood watching the waves as they dashed on to the shelving beach. It was always a matter of wonder to Gillian to see how quickly the placid water became a raging fury.

Then Pierre said suddenly:  
"You are worried about something, Gillian?"

It was more of a statement than a question and she turned startled eyes on him, wondering how much of her thoughts she had revealed. He was regarding her curiously, with a little half smile on his lips, an expression of almost sardonic awareness in his dark eyes.

"On, I was wondering how to get to the settlement," she said quickly. "I promised to take some things to Oo-ee-nah's wife. She has been ill."

"She'll be unlucky, then," he shrugged. "No canoe could live in that for more than a minute. You will have to wait for the snows and then take a dog team."

"I can't do that, Pierre," she protested. "The trail might not be fit for a dog-sled for another two weeks."

"You can't do anything else, my dear Gillian," he returned complacently. "After two winters in the north you should know by now that you can't fight against the elements and expect to win!"

"Maybe the storm will blow itself out by to-night," she said obstinately; it was wishful thinking and she knew it.

Pierre laughed.

"Maybe and maybe not," he said. He nodded towards some ice near the jetty. "It is beginning to freeze up already."

Gillian did not reply. She had been long enough in the north to know that they had entered on the period between the end of autumn and the onset of winter, when all tree-felling ceased and the men set to work widening the trails and cutting new log rides.

Despite the hardships that it brought she loved the frozen silence of the short winter days, when the temperature fell to fifty below zero and the sap exploded in the trees with a report like gun fire.

When this happened it became a solitary, enchanted world with only the distant howl of a timber wolf to break the all-pervading stillness.

It was Pierre who had helped her through her first winter. He had taught her how to manage a dog team, to make a temporary repair to a broken snow-shoe web, to ward off the dangerous apathy induced by intense cold.

Not until her second winter had she learned to accept the hazards of the cold as a normal condition of life in the frozen north, in much the same way that a Londoner accepts the hazards of traffic congestion during the rush hour.

"I think you are worried about something much more important than taking a few things to Oo-ee-nah's wife," Pierre remarked suddenly. "Maybe you are right to worry. In your place, I should worry, too."

Gillian turned startled eyes on him, a little gasp escaping her.

"What—what do you mean, Pierre?" she stammered, going crimson beneath his penetrating gaze.

He shrugged.

"The young man from Ottawa was to

be at the settlement to-day, I think. Yes, I am sure of it. Otherwise you would not be so anxious to take the things to Oo-ee-nah's wife. Now you wonder what he will do when you don't turn up."

For a moment Gillian was too astonished to speak. More than once Pierre had surprised her with his knowledge of all that went on in and around the logging camps, but she had never dreamed that he knew of her meetings with Bill. After all they had been so careful!

"I don't know how you guessed, but as it happens you are quite right," she said quietly. "I promised Mr. Hammond that I would meet him at the settlement some time to-day. We—we have a lot to talk about."

"Of course," Pierre replied smoothly.

For a moment he said nothing further but stared out across the lake, his expression hidden. Then he turned and smiled, his eyes flashing.

"The settlement is not a good place to meet someone," he went on. "It gives you an excuse to go, yes, but Indians talk. Also, I sometimes use the short cut back to the mill round by the waterfall. I did so yesterday."

Gillian remembered the noise she had heard and the way the husky dog had stiffened and then relaxed. He had scented Pierre and then relaxed when he had picked up the scent of someone he knew.

"If—if you know so much there is no point in my denying that I have been meeting him, I suppose," she said, a note of defiance in her tone. "What are you going to do? Tell father?"

"You do me an injustice, my dear Gillian," Pierre said reproachfully. "If I had wished to do anything to hurt you in that way I could have told your father a fortnight ago that the young man he had warned off was disobeying his instructions and, in addition, was meeting you regularly either at the settlement or at the waterfall. But I didn't!"

"You mean—you watched me!"

"I mean I watched over you, my dear Gillian," he corrected. "I know nothing of this young man, whether he is a good one or a bad one. It may be that he loves you—that I can't say—or it may be that he amuses himself with you, yes? When a girl is in love she can sometimes be very blind."

Gillian crimsoned.

"Bill Hammond has asked me to marry him," she said shakily. "He would have come to see my father last night had I let him. I suggested meeting him at the settlement to-day so that we could talk things over."

"And you—you love him?" the French-Canadian asked softly.

"Yes," she faltered, drawing a deep breath. She put out a hand suddenly. "Oh, Pierre, I wish it hadn't been necessary to tell you like this."

"Hush, you must not reproach yourself, my dear," he answered, with a little sigh. "If you love a person enough their happiness comes first, is that not so? But all I would say to you is that I hope you will make very sure that you are in love with your Mr. Hammond. Believe me, a fortnight isn't a very long time to learn the best and the worst of a man."

"Oh, but I am sure, Pierre," she asserted.

"That is all right, then," he said, with a solemn nod, and began to roll a cigarette. Then his eyes narrowed and he asked abruptly: "What are you going to do, Gillian? What are your plans?"

"I don't know," she said wistfully. "If Bill had come here in any other capacity it might have been different, but father quite obviously regards him as some kind of an enemy within the gates and in that

case he will never consent to our marriage."

"Maybe it is just as well," Pierre said, his smile taking the sting out of the words.

"That means you think I am merely infatuated with Bill, doesn't it, Pierre?" she murmured challengingly.

"It means that I would rather see you wait, Gillian," he replied quietly. He moistened the cigarette paper with his tongue and lit it. "If you and this young man are as deeply in love as you think, then it can do no harm to wait a little to see what happens. If you are not, it is best that you should find out before you do something you may live to regret. Is that not good advice?"

Gillian opened her lips to say something, but the ear-shattering wail of a warning siren cut her short.

Pierre stiffened.

"Look—a fire!" he exclaimed, pointing to the north. "There—beyond the new tract at Camp Three!"

He did not wait for her reply, but started for the house at a run.

Gillian followed, gripped by a cold fear. To the north, where he had pointed, a dull-white cloud of vapour had gathered in size and, driven by the wind, was rolling across the tops of the pines towards the lake.

Somewhere beyond Camp Three the forest was on fire!

Oneida, the Indian girl, met them at the door and said that Mr. Marsh had already telephoned the rescue crews and had gone down to the mill. Pierre raced off after him.

Meanwhile, as Gillian changed into more suitable attire, the Indian girl filled some flasks full of coffee.

By the time Gillian got to the mill her father had left in a Land Rover for the scene of the fire and Pierre was about to follow with a fire-fighting crew in a lorry.

"I'm coming too, Pierre," Gillian shouted, passing up the thermos flasks of coffee and the rug she had snatched up as she had left the house.

The French Canadian gave her a grin and hauled her up on to the seat beside him.

"Your father will not like it," he said. "He thinks a woman's place is the home."

"Nonsense," she answered defiantly.

#### HEARTS ENTWINED.

FOR twenty-four hours the forest fire raged through the trees, which clothed the hills above Camp Three, defying all man's efforts to put it out.

During that time the lumberjacks performed deeds of heroism that would have been front page news had there been a reporter to write up the stories and send them back to his paper. But as far as the men were concerned, it was all part of a day's work.

Gregory Marsh worked as hard as the next directing the felling of trees to widen the firebreaks, taking incredible risks in firing the charges of dynamite that were used to blow up others.

Together with Mrs. McManus, the wife of the foreman of Camp Three, and several other women, Gillian organised a refreshment supply service. Driving a Land Rover she went to and fro among the fire-fighting crews with cups of coffee and sandwiches.

She was busy handing round cups when she came face to face with Bill Hammond. His features were almost hidden beneath a mask of grime and smoke and his clothes were scorched. He had obviously been in the thick of the fire fighting.

"I guessed you wouldn't be far away from the scene of action, my sweet," he murmured, taking the cup she offered him,

when she had got over her surprise.

Gillian gave him a warning glance and looked around for her father.

"What are you doing here, Bill?" she whispered breathlessly. "I have been wondering all day what had happened to you when I couldn't get to the settlement."

"It's a long story," he said, sipping his drink calmly. "I can't tell you the whole of it just now but your father is going to live to bless the day I disobeyed his orders to get off the company's land."

"You mean—you were the first to see the fire?"

"I don't know about that, but I certainly gave the first warning," he replied. "I spotted the blaze from the top of that low hill over there, long before it could have been seen from the mill. I made tracks for Camp Three as fast as I could and roused out the foreman. I've been working with his crew and Pierre Lefranc ever since."

Pierre came sauntering up at that moment. He was black from head to foot, and his clothing was almost in ribbons. He had been told by the foreman of Camp Three that Bill Hammond had been responsible for giving the warning.

"Ah! The good Mr. Hammond!" he exclaimed, beginning to roll one of his inevitable cigarettes as he gazed at his rival. "How do you like being a lumberjack?"

"It's rather strenuous at the moment, but quite exciting," smiled Bill. He glanced towards the blackened hillside where a series of thudding explosions spoke of the dynamiters still at work. "How are things going, Lefranc?"

"It is nearly out," said Pierre, with a careless shrug. "Thanks to your prompt warning, Mr. Hammond, we were able to keep the fire confined to a comparatively small area. In another half an hour it would have got out of hand."

"It was pure luck that I happened to see it when I did," said Bill, lighting a pipe.

"Luck?" Pierre laughed and raised his eyebrows, giving his expression a satirical twist. "But then you are a very lucky man, Mr. Hammond. Even if you haven't found any uranium you have found something even more valuable, I think."

Bill glanced round for Gillian but she had gone off to get Pierre a cup of coffee.

"Indeed?" he said turning back. "How did you know?"

"Gillian told me. We had quite a little chat about it. She was very worried because she would not have been able to meet you at the settlement as she had promised."

"I see," said Bill quietly. He gave the other man a level glance. "Just where do you fit into the picture, may I ask, Lefranc?"

"I don't fit in anywhere, apparently," Pierre replied, running his fingers through his hair. "Gillian and I are good friends, that is all. If I hoped to be more than a friend, that is my affair. At the moment I am more concerned to find out how the fire started. You must admit that it is a strange thing to happen at this time of the year. You wouldn't know, I suppose, Mr. Hammond?"

"If I did I would tell you," replied Bill shortly. "You are not suggesting by any chance that I started it, are you?"

"I am not suggesting anything," Pierre answered smoothly. "It wouldn't have been a bad thing if the whole area had been burnt—from your point of view, I mean. Naturally, one wonders!"

Bill frowned.

"In that case, why do you imagine I gave the warning?" he said sarcastically.

"I can think of several reasons," the French-Canadian declared. "You might have thought the fire would get out of hand before we could have got it under

control. On the other hand you might have given the warning just to put yourself right in the eyes of Gillian's father. In any case I advise you to get off the company's land before Mr. Marsh returns."

Bill smiled a little cynically.

"And leave you with a clear field where Gillian is concerned?" he said icily. "Well, I have no intention of doing that, Lefranc. And it doesn't matter two hoots to me whether you think I started the fire or not," he added contemptuously. "Or Mr. Marsh for that matter."

"You may find it matters a very great deal, Mr. Hammond," said Pierre softly. "That is, if you care to ignore my advice."

"As he spoke he looked Bill full in the eyes and they faced each other like two antagonists sparring for an opening.

But nothing further was said, for Gillian rejoined them at that moment, a steaming mug of coffee in her mittened hands.

She glanced from one to the other a little anxiously, sensing the silent enmity that hovered between them.

Then Pierre turned to her with a flash of white teeth and held out his hand for the coffee.

"Thank you, my dear Gillian," he said, making the words sound like a flourish. "That is indeed kind of you. Mr. Hammond and I,"—he shot Bill a malicious glance—"have been having quite an interesting little chat while you were away."

IT was very quiet in the living room of the big log house the following evening when Gillian entered with the after-supper coffee.

Her father was standing in front of the crackling log fire, his pipe gripped in his hand, a frown between his eyes as he looked at Pierre Lefranc who was seated on the arm of an easy chair.

Gillian had not seen Bill since leaving the site of the conflagration. Her father had driven her home in the Land Rover when the fire had been got completely under control and she had gone straight to bed.

Twelve hours later the storm had blown itself out and the sun shone warmly again, but there was another big drop in the temperature which indicated that the great winter freeze-up would soon commence.

As she placed the tray on the table, and proceeded to pour out coffee, she met Pierre's glance and at something she read in his expression she knew a little stab of uneasiness.

The French-Canadian had come to the house a little earlier, bringing with him a report on the damage caused by the forest fire, and she had left them discussing it and gone out to make coffee.

Now her father spoke suddenly, breaking a silence that had evidently prevailed for some minutes. He gestured towards the map which lay next to some papers on the table.

"The fire started in a gully which runs north from the timber line," he said frowningly. "If McManus hadn't received warning when he did it would have jumped the fire-breaks at Moose Creek and swept through the new tract. As it was, we were able to check it in time. That's so, isn't it?"

"Exactly so," said Pierre. He turned his head to smile at Gillian and took the cup she handed him with a murmured, "Thank you!" before turning back to his employer. "The question is, how did Hammond come to be where he says he was when he saw the fire? I understand you had warned him to keep clear of the

company's property some days ago."

"So I did. Do you mean to say he has been snooping around in spite of what I said?" growled Mr. Marsh.

"I couldn't say what he has been doing," said Pierre blandly. "All I know is that he has a camp at the head of Little Bear Creek, less than five miles from where the fire started. Maybe it was a fortunate coincidence that he happened to be close to the spot at precisely the right moment. Maybe it was too much of a coincidence."

"What are you suggesting?" demanded the older man, his brows lowered. "Are you saying he started the fire himself and—"

"Of course he didn't!" Gillian burst out, her cheeks aflame, "Bill is incapable of doing a thing like that! Besides, what could he hope to gain?"

"Quite a lot," replied Pierre, with a huckle. "It is quite easy to start a fire and then give the alarm so promptly that no serious damage is done! Naturally Marsh would be grateful and—"

"Just a minute, Pierre!" Gillian's father broke in curtly. "We can go into all that in a moment." He turned to Gillian. "Did I hear you refer to the young man as Bill, my girl?"

"You did, father." Gillian flung up her head, her cheeks burning. "I would have told you that I have seen him quite often—that we have become friends—but your attitude made that impossible."

"I see," he remarked, with ominous quiet. "Not content with aiding and abetting this young man to defy me, you have apparently betrayed the trust and confidence I put in you! May I ask how far this so-called friendship has gone?"

"Certainly, father," Gillian replied, her pride up in arms at the injustice. "He wants to marry me."

"Really? Judging by the vigour with which you took up the cudgels on his behalf I assume the proposal was not unwelcome! Is that the case?"

"Yes," said Gillian flatly. She drew a deep breath. "I love Bill, father. If you hadn't been so utterly unreasonable about everything he would have come to ask you to consent to our marriage, but as it was, I begged him to wait."

"Why? Wouldn't it have been the more honourable thing to do, instead of carrying on a clandestine affair behind my back?" Without waiting for Gillian's reply he turned to Pierre. "Did you know anything of this?"

"I suspected something of the kind, but suspicions are not proof," said Pierre. He flexed the fingers of his right hand and studied his nails. "As it happens, Gillian was kind enough to honour me with her confidence shortly before the fire, but I had no opportunity of discussing the matter with you or anyone else."

"That's no excuse for failing to see that my orders were carried out," snapped the other angrily.

"I had no proof, I tell you," retorted Pierre sharply. He looked up suddenly, his eyes glittering evilly. "It wasn't until last night that I knew for certain that Hammond had a camp on Little Bear Creek. If it hadn't been for the fire I would have taken steps to see that he was ordered off the company's property in accordance with your instructions, but as it was I had other things to think of. It isn't too late, however! The logging crews only require a hint to the effect that Hammond is responsible—"

"Oh, no!" cried Gillian sharply.

She had heard many unpleasant stories of the rough justice of the north and she knew that Bill would receive scant mercy

at the hands of the logging crews if they thought he had been responsible for setting fire to the forest.

She turned to her father, her hands flung out in appeal.

"Father! For pity's sake—"

She was interrupted by a sharp knock at the outer door.

At a nod from Mr. Marsh Pierre crossed the room to open it, falling back in astonishment as he saw Bill. The latter ignored Pierre and advanced further into the room, taking off his mittens and fleece-lined beaver cap.

"Bill!"

Gillian met his eyes and the smile he gave her held a wealth of meaning, conveying the reassurance that she so sorely needed.

Then he turned to her father.

"I must apologise for intruding in this way, Mr. Marsh," he said respectfully, "but it was important that I saw you tonight. I won't keep you more than a few minutes, but I would like to have a word with Gillian as well, if I may."

"I have already said all I want to say to you, young man," came Gregory Marsh's gruff reply. He stared at Bill from beneath lowering brows. "In view of everything that has happened I consider your visit here an impertinence which will be reported to your superiors in Ottawa. Now let me add this! If you are not off the company's property by sunrise to-morrow I will have you run off by my logging crews. And you know what that means!"

Bill shrugged and glanced round, a half smile on his lips. The fact that everyone in the room was standing seemed to add to the tension.

But when he spoke his tone was as unruffled as ever.

"It is as you wish, of course, Mr. Marsh," he said coolly. "But in view of all that is involved I thought you would like to know that I have discovered how the fire originated."

"I know that already," replied Mr. Marsh meaningly.

Bill looked at him, seeing the suspicion and anger that warred in the other's eyes. He sighed and took a short, smoke-blackened length of fuse from his pocket, which he laid on the table.

"I felt almost certain that the fire didn't start accidentally," he said, ignoring the other's attitude. "It is the wrong time of the year for that kind of thing and I was also certain that there had been no one camping in the vicinity who might have been careless enough to start a blaze. That particular neck of the woods is fairly isolated and very nearly inaccessible, so it wasn't likely that any of the Indians from the settlement had passed that way. Also, it is a little early in the season for trappers."

"Tell us something we don't know," said Pierre sneeringly.

Bill turned and regarded him witheringly.

"I'm going to," he said quietly. He brought his gaze back to Mr. Marsh. "When we met at the scene of the fire, your assistant here threw out the suggestion that I might have started it. As a result of that insinuation I decided to do a little investigating on my own account and it wasn't very long before I found—that!"

He pointed to the object on the table.

"As you see, Mr. Marsh, it is a fragment of a slow burning fuse of the kind used by your logging crews when they are dynamiting a trail. I also found traces of the clay in which it had been packed and I daresay, if you look yourself, you will find more."

"What does that prove?" enquired Gillian's father tersely.

"It proves that the fire was deliberately started by someone who used a very long length of fuse packed in clay, with an end thrust into a heap of dried brushwood," said Bill calmly. "Two hundred feet of such a fuse would take about six hours to burn to the end—plenty of time for a man to light it and return to his quarters or wherever he could be sure of being seen about the place, thus establishing an alibi."

"Why should anyone want to do a thing like that?"

"That isn't for me to say, sir. I've brought you the evidence—the rest is up to you."

"But it isn't evidence!" exclaimed Pierre, advancing to the table and picking up the charred fuse. "All this proves is that *someone* used a length of slow burning fuse to start a fire, but the method isn't important. In any case, how can you say what length it was?"

"Quite easily," replied Bill, with a shrug. "The fuse was packed in clay, as I have said and there are traces of the packing a very considerable distance from the place where I found this."

"I tell you, that proves nothing," retorted Pierre, flinging the fuse down with a gesture of disdain. "You could have done it yourself, or you could have picked up a piece of fuse when the crews were dynamiting the trees to make a fire-break. It's easy enough to come here with a cock-and-bull story of that kind, but it won't wash."

"That's not fair, Pierre!" exclaimed Gillian heatedly. "Why should Bill—"

"Just a minute!" Mr. Marsh broke in.

He had listened to all Bill had to say, his face set, nor had he made any comment while Pierre had spoken. Now he walked to the table and picked up the fragment of fuse and examined it closely.

Then he looked at Bill.

"How did you come to be near the place where the fire started?" he asked quietly.

"I was on my way from the north ridge which intersects the valley there," Bill answered readily. "When I first saw the smoke I thought someone was camping in the neck of the woods and turned off to investigate."

"So you admit you were remaining on the company's property in defiance of my orders?"

"Yes," said Bill flatly, while Gillian held her breath. "I had my job to do and I considered your orders to be unreasonable. You don't forbid trappers and Indians to move freely about the woods, so I saw no reason why I should not do the same. If," he added with a shrug, "you feel so strongly about the matter, don't you think it would be fairer to lay the blame at the right door, Mr. Marsh?"

"What do you mean?"

Bill smiled.

"It should be obvious," he said quietly. "My department doesn't send a trained geologist into the blue to look for possible uranium deposits unless they have good reason to believe that they might exist. Before I left Ottawa I was shown samples of carnotite, the ore in which uranium is found, that had been sent to the department by the man who found them not far from here."

There was a tense little silence. As she saw the change that took place in her father's expression, Gillian felt a tug at her heartstrings. There are some natures to whom one seems to be linked by an invisible thread, so that when they suffer

pain one suffers with them. So it was now. At length Mr. Marsh looked up, his gaze going past Bill to where Pierre was standing.

"It was you!" he said accusingly. His face suddenly became suffused. "Don't deny it! You sent those samples to the state department in Ottawa—you, the man I trusted."

"I have no intention of denying it," said Pierre jauntily, shrugging his shoulders with an air of indifference. "I found an outcrop of carnotite, yes! And I took specimens and sent them to Ottawa with a report. And for why? I'll tell you! I knew that if you got to know about it you would prevent me from doing so! It doesn't matter to you what happens so long as you can go on being a little king here, lordling it over the logging crews and everybody else. You——"

"That'll do!" thundered Mr. Marsh, advancing a step, his hands clenching. He glared at Pierre with eyes that were bright with anger. "I am not questioning your motives for what you did. You may have been actuated by a sense of public duty, though I doubt it. More probably you hoped to cash in on the possible rewards if uranium was found here in workable quantities! The fact remains, you abused my confidence in you——betrayed your trust—and now I don't want to see you again. You can collect your wages at the office to-morrow and get out."

"They will have something to say at head office when I tell them why I have been fired," said Pierre sullenly. "If you take my advice——"

"I'll deal with head office," broke in Mr. Marsh curtly. He indicated the charred fragment on the table. "Amongst other things, they will probably want to know how that particular brand of fuse came to be found near the seat of the fire. It happens to be from the last consignment of special time fuse that is kept in the explosives store down at the mill! As you know, the colouring of the outer casing was changed. None of that fuse was used by the crews yesterday, so it is obvious it couldn't have come from anywhere but the store! Now hand over your keys and get out."

There was another tense little silence which lasted, perhaps, five seconds, though to Gillian it seemed an age. Then, with a swiftly indrawn breath Pierre flung a bunch of keys on the table and turning on his heel, walked to the door.

THE closing of the door behind him seemed to break the spell that had descended upon them.

Bill was the first to speak.

"How could you be so certain that it was Lefranc who sent those samples to Ottawa, Mr. Marsh?" he asked.

The older man looked at him.

"Pierre was by way of being a protege of mine," he said heavily. "I picked him up when he was on his beam ends after the failure of a logging company he had been working for and gave him a job. Before that he had worked for a mining company after leaving school and it was there, I imagine, that he gained some knowledge of geology. He has always been interested in the subject and I knew that he was possibly the only man amongst those here who would recognise carnotite when he saw it, or know what it meant. As you saw, he didn't deny that he was responsible."

"Did you know that it was Pierre who had sent them, Bill?" Gillian asked.

He shook his head.

"No," he answered. "I was shown the samples and told that they had come from this area, but that was all. I have no doubt that Lefranc stipulated that his name should be kept out of the matter, at least at this stage. What I can't understand is why, in that case, he should have tried to saddle me with the blame for starting the fire."

"Can't you?" she asked sadly. "I haven't had a chance to tell you before, but Pierre saw us together at the waterfall the night before the fire started. Up to then he had turned a blind eye on the fact that you were camping at the head of the creek, for it was to his interest that you should be able to carry out your survey, but after that——" She ended with a little expressive gesture.

"I see," said Bill slowly. "So that was why he started the fire. I was in the way!"

"That's all very well," exclaimed Mr. Marsh scowlingly. "You haven't anything to worry about, young man. The evidence of that fuse completely exonerates you and as for the rest, you've got what you came for, haven't you?"

"By no means, Mr. Marsh," said Bill calmly. "If you are referring to the nature of the report I intend to submit to my superiors I can set your mind at rest. There is a lode of carnotite running through the ridge and into the foothills, but it arises from what, in geological circles, we call a fault. There is a certain amount of radio-activity to be detected, indicating the presence of uranium, but certainly not in a workable quantity. It is possible that further north, beyond the mountain range, an investigation might prove more fruitful, but as far as this area is concerned the survey I have carried out has been a waste of time."

Something like a slow grin appeared on Mr. Marsh's face for a moment.

"So our friend Pierre has been too clever in a lot of ways," he said, in a tone of satisfaction. "It is a pity he didn't remain long enough to hear your report, young man. However, he will learn about it in due course, I have no doubt. And now, have you anything else to say?"

"Yes," Bill replied, smiling openly. "I don't know if you are aware of the situation, but I love your daughter and wish to marry her. It will make us both very happy if we have your consent."

"And what if I refuse?" enquired Mr. Marsh grimly.

Bill glanced at Gillian and then brought his gaze back to her father.

"I hope you won't do that, sir," he said gently. "We love each other, so that whether you consent to our marriage or not, it can make no possible difference in the end."

"You mean you are prepared to wait until Gillian is twenty-one?" said the older man.

"If necessary," nodded Bill.

"You haven't known each other very long, you know!"

"Quite long enough," said Bill firmly.

"Do you feel like that, too?" asked Mr. Marsh, turning to Gillian.

"Yes, father," she replied simply.

She walked to where Bill was standing and slipped her hand into his. He put an arm about her slim shoulders and together they stood facing the older man, smiling.

Mr. Marsh looked at them.

"When I was about thirty-six I fell in love with Gillian's mother," he said slowly. "For three years after our marriage we were very happy. Then she left me for another man—left me and her year old child because her head was turned by a plausible scoundrel who was unworthy

to lace her shoes." Bill, his arm around Gillian's shoulder, felt the girl give a convulsive start. "Later, he deserted her as a man of that type might be expected to do and—she came back to me. A year afterwards she died." He paused a moment as if to recover, then went on—

"It is a hard enough thing to have to stand by and see the woman you love stolen from you, but it is harder still to watch her die of a broken heart her self respect and very nearly her sanity destroyed beyond recall. Those are the memories I have had to carry with me ever since, the kind of thing from which I would give my life to protect Gillian!"

With a swift little rush of pity Gillian freed herself from Bill's encircling arm and crossed to where her father was standing.

"Daddy!" she exclaimed chokily, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Oh, daddy darling, why didn't you ever tell me? I can't bear to think of you carrying all that—alone!"

He stroked her shining hair, his face strangely softened.

"It was my desire to protect you, my dear," he said, with a sigh. "I wanted you to think of your mother as she really was and not as she was made to be. If I have told you now it is only because you must know something of the dangers and pitfalls that lie before you, for when two young people embark upon life's journey they have to be very sure."

Gillian slowly turned her head and looked at Bill for a long moment. Then she sighed and rested her head against her father's shoulder.

"I am sure," she whispered. "Quite, quite sure, daddy."

"That's all right, then," he said gently. He bent his head and kissed her on the brow, then looked across to where Bill stood waiting. "Be good to her, Bill," he said. "That is all I ask."

A FEW nights later, standing on the edge of the bluff overlooking the lake, Gillian spoke to Bill about her mother.

"It is quite easy to see now why daddy was so bitter," she said softly. "He was afraid of emotion, afraid to trust anybody for fear of being hurt as he had been hurt in the past. That is why Pierre's treachery was such a terrible blow to him, for he treated him almost as a son!"

"Yes," Bill replied thoughtfully. "The measure of one's hurt is the measure of one's capacity for loving, you see, my dearest! How many men would have done what your father did, I wonder? He not only took your mother back again but he forgave her! What is more, he loves her still!"

"I know," she murmured. She leaned against him. "We talked nearly all that night after you had gone. I think he was glad to be able to confide in me at last. It released something that had been pent up too long inside him. I really believe he is happier now than he has been for ages."

"He has forgiven Pierre hasn't he?" Bill enquired.

"Yes," Gillian told him. "He didn't say anything to me but went out quite early next morning. Later on he told me that he had given Pierre another chance as he felt sure that he—Pierre, I mean—had learnt his lesson."

"Let us hope he has, then," said Bill grimly. "I am afraid it will be a long time before I forget the way that young man tried to frame me on a fire-raising charge! He's not an accomplished villain, though, I must admit. He overplayed his hand in giving me virtual warning of his intentions,

otherwise I might never have gone looking for evidence of the real culprit."

Gillian pressed closer to his side.

"It was frightful," she murmured shakily. "I never thought that anyone would go to such lengths merely because he was jealous! If you hadn't found that fuse—" She broke off, shuddering.

Bill chuckled.

"There was a touch of poetic justice about the way he was hoist by his own petard," he remarked. "I suppose it never occurred to him that the casing of the fuse was a different colour from those being used by the crew at Camp Three. As only he and your father had keys to the explosives store it would have been useless for him to deny that he had taken the coil. He was just a shade too clever, that's all."

She was silent for a long time, gazing out over the lake which looked like fretted silver in the bright moonlight. They were warmly clad in furs and mittens, but the dwarf spruces along the edge of the bluff were sprinkled with snow and the chill breath of the north warned them not to linger.

In a fortnight or less the trails would be blocked and while it would be possible to make short journeys to places like the trading post and the settlement over the frozen surface of the lake, the long journey south was one to be risked only in great emergency.

In a few days time, therefore, they were to leave Grant's Bay accompanied by Mr. Marsh. Arrangements had been made for a helicopter to pick them up at the trading post. They were to fly to Edmonton, where they were to stay with friends of Gillian's father while Bill travelled to Ottawa to hand in his report. Later on they would be married and for their honeymoon Bill proposed to take her to

Vancouver to visit his people.

"It's time we went back," she murmured presently, breaking the intimate little silence with a sign. "I can't believe it all yet. It is as if one phase of my life had ended and another one hasn't quite begun."

"That is just what has happened, my darling," Bill said tenderly, smiling down at her face, framed in the parka hood she was wearing. He put his hands on her shoulders and stooped to kiss her. Then he laughed. "That's the first time I have ever kissed a girl when the bottom was falling out of the thermometer," he said jestingly.

"Oh?" She dimpled. "Have you kissed a lot of girls, then, Bill Hammond?"

"Nary a one except my sister," he said. "Cross my heart! You are the first and only girl I have ever loved, my sweet. I used to laugh when people talked about fate and destiny and all that kind of thing—I believed that one carved out one's own destiny, you see!—but now I know just how wrong I was. For it was all part of the Supreme Plan which brought me to Grant's Bay." He chuckled again, "Shall I tell you what old Angus McPherson said to me the first day I arrived?"

"Something frightful, I'm sure! He's the dearest, most generous and most cynical man I know," said Gillian, laughing.

Bill's eyes wrinkled.

"He said I had better be careful how I went where you were concerned and that I wouldn't be the first to make sheep's eyes in your direction! He added that if I did I would have your father to reckon with."

Gillian blushed.

"Sheep's eyes, indeed! And anyway, it's not true. Wait till I see Angus!"

"You won't get any change out of him, my sweet," said Bill, with a grin. "When I told him we were engaged and that your father had given his consent to our marriage

he just looked me up and down and then said drily 'I might ha' known it!'"

They dissolved into laughter, for they were in the mood to laugh at little things. The shadow which had hung over them had evaporated like those on the snow in the early morning when the sun rose above the hills and life opened up before them, a golden vista that took their breath away with its promise.

Gillian slipped her hand inside Bill's arm as the eerie howl of a timber wolf echoed across the lake.

"Come, my dearest," she said gently. "If we don't go back soon daddy will be sending out a search party! Besides, I know he wants to talk to you about our plans."

Bill put an arm around her and looked deep into her eyes.

"Are you quite sure you won't regret leaving all this—Grant's Bay—your father, Gillian?" he asked directly.

"No, Bill," she murmured, the light of pure happiness coming into her eyes. "You have promised to bring me up here to visit father each year and I know that he will come to see us every so often—he has said so." She smiled tremulously up at him and quoted the famous lines: "Whither thou goest, there will I also go!"

He drew her close to him, holding her so tightly she could scarcely breathe.

"My darling!" he said humbly. "How can I tell you all that is in my heart?"

"There is no need, Bill dearest," she answered softly, lifting her face for his kiss. "You see, darling, I already know!"

In the little hush that followed they heard once again the cry of the timber wolf, symbolical of the north and all that it stood for and out of which had come a happiness almost too great to contain.

THE END.

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## THE UNCHANGING HEART

By Margot Wright

### A FRIEND IN NEED.

SHIRLEY MILVAINE climbed the steep stairs a little wearily. Usually all her movements were quick and alert, but she was tired this evening, after a busy day in the solicitor's office where she was employed as a typist.

This being Friday and pay day, she had done some hurried shopping on the way home, so her arms were full of parcels. Since her widowed mother had died, just over a year ago, Shirley had done her best to keep the home going for her younger sister and brother; but as she could not afford to give up her job, this meant that she had to be both housekeeper and wage-earner—a heavy burden for a girl of twenty-two.

If only Greta, her eighteen-years-old sister would take her share, it would ease the strain considerably, Shirley reflected with a sigh, as she climbed the last flight of stairs to the top-floor flat which was her home.

But, unfortunately, Greta showed no sense of responsibility. She seemed to take it for granted that she had been born into the world to have "a good time", regardless of any obligations to others. As she disliked domestic work, she never did any if she could possibly help it, making the excuse that it spoilt her hands for her job in a West End beauty parlour.

Often she earned more than Shirley,

with the generous presents she received from wealthy clients, but most of the money went on clothes and "pleasure", and even her modest contribution to the household expenses was made grudgingly.

As Shirley paused outside the flat, groping in her handbag for the key while still clutching her parcels, the door was suddenly flung open and Robin, her school-boy brother, appeared, a welcoming smile on his face. At the age of thirteen, he was nearly as tall as Shirley. He had a frank, open expression, and mischievous blue eyes.

"Hullo, Shirley," he cried, as he started to relieve her of the parcels, "I wasn't expecting you home just yet. I was coming to meet you as soon as I'd finished laying the tea."

"Were you, dear?" Shirley said, smiling at him. "Well, anyway, it's very nice to come home and find the table already laid for tea. Please put the parcels on the kitchen table for me, Robin, while I go and take off my hat and coat. I'll soon have a meal ready."

A few minutes later, wearing a flowered overall to protect her dress, Shirley stood at the gas stove cooking sausages and tomatoes, while Robin hovered nearby, hungrily eyeing the contents of the frying-pan and chattering away about the day's events at the Grammar School where he had been a pupil for the past two years.

Shirley was never too tired to listen to

her young brother's news—she knew all the masters of the school by their nicknames, and could almost have passed an examination on the characteristics of the other boys in Robin's form, having heard so much about them.

It warmed her heart and made her efforts worth while to realise that, to a large extent she had been able to take her adored mother's place in the home, if only for Robin's sake. He was at the age when he needed a good home and steady, affectionate understanding, to bring him safely through the difficult years of adolescence, and Shirley did her best to provide both.

As a result, there was a specially strong bond between her and Robin, and she was often touched by his little acts of thoughtfulness towards her. Unfortunately, however, the boy was at his best only when alone with her, for Greta seemed to take a delight in finding fault with him in that curt, impatient way of hers, and this riled Robin.

But Greta was not expected home until late that evening, as she was going out with one of her numerous admirers, so Shirley and Robin had a cheerful meal alone together. The boy was in specially high spirits because Shirley would not have to go to the office next day—she had alternate Saturday mornings off.

"It's absolutely super when you're at home, Shirley," he told her, beaming happily. "I mean, it makes it seem sort of 'homey', and we have extra nice things

to eat, too. Don't forget you promised to come and see me play in the school cricket match, to-morrow afternoon, will you?"

"No, dear, I certainly shan't forget," Shirley answered smilingly, and she made a swift mental note to press Robin's white flannels that evening; also, her best washing dress, for she would be extra busy in the morning, with all the shopping to do and the cleaning and cooking.

When the meal was over, Robin helped her wash-up, then went out to play with his friends on the common until bedtime, while Shirley busied herself with the many household tasks which were waiting to be done.

Long after Robin had had his supper and gone to bed that night, Shirley sat patching and darning, for it was only by constant care that she was able to manage to keep her schoolboy brother presentable. New clothes for such a big boy cost more than she could afford, and she could only solve the problem, when it became really necessary, by drawing on her steadily diminishing savings, or going without something she herself badly needed.

However, she had inherited a good deal of her mother's skill with the needle—Mrs. Milvaine had eked out her meagre income, after her husband's death, by dressmaking—so Shirley always contrived to look neatly dressed and attractive, if not ultra-fashionable, like her sister.

It was getting very late by the time she had finished patching the seat of Robin's pyjamas, and her small, heart-shaped face was pale with weariness as she folded them and put away her work-basket.

Surely, she thought, with an anxious glance at the clock, it was time Greta was home? It always worried her when her sister was out late—after all, the girl was only eighteen, but she insisted on going her own way. Moreover, Shirley knew very little about her sister's friends.

Suddenly she heard a car door slam in the street below, followed by shrill laughter and a medley of voices shouting: "Good-night! Cheerio, darling! We'll be seeing you—"

Shirley pulled the curtain aside and looked down to see a big cream-coloured car just moving off, and her sister walking across the pavement towards the entrance to the flats.

A few moments later, Greta came in. She looked flushed and excited, and prettier even than usual as she dropped into an armchair, snatching off her chic little hat, and pushing back the dark curls that clung to her forehead.

"Oh, Shirley, I've had such a wonderful time!" she said excitedly. "Roy took me to a party at his sister's flat in Chelsea—she's a well-known model and knows all kinds of thrilling people. I was introduced to Mr. Gerald Crowson, the film producer, and—and I think I made quite a hit with him! He said he was sure I'd do well on the films, and if I liked, he'd arrange for me to have a camera test!"

"Isn't it awfully thrilling, Shirley?" she rattled on. "Mr. Crowson brought me home in his car, together with Roy and several other people, and he asked me to be sure and ring him up quite soon! He's so awfully handsome and romantic-looking, and has such perfect manners!"

Greta clasped her hands and raised her eyes ecstatically, and Shirley watched her with a troubled expression on her face. It was very unusual for her sister to talk so freely about what she had been doing, and it was evident that the girl was so excited that she could not contain herself.

"But, my dear," Shirley murmured, "I'm almost sure I remember reading in the newspaper that Mr. Gerald Crowson is married to some well-known actress—"

"Oh yes," Greta interrupted with a shrug, "he's married to Helen Westerby. But, as everyone knows, they don't get on together and are living apart. When I was dancing with him at the party, Gerald told me that his wife had never understood him, and he was terribly lonely, in spite of all his money and success."

"But, Greta, surely you do not believe a man who talks to you in that way about his wife—the first time he meets you!" Shirley remonstrated, now genuinely alarmed. "Oh, my dear, I do hope you will not have anything more to do with this man, as I feel quite sure—"

"I shall do as I like, Shirley—so please don't interfere!" Greta broke in again, springing up from her chair and glaring at her sister. "What an awful simpleton I was to tell you anything about it! I might have known you would find fault, as you always do, and try to stop me enjoying myself!"

"Oh, come, Greta, that's very unfair, you know," Shirley protested. "I have no wish to interfere, but I feel quite sure that Mr. Gerald Crowson is not to be trusted in what he says to you, and it would be very wrong of me not to say so, wouldn't it?"

"Well, I'm the best judge of that, let me tell you!" Greta retorted, with an angry toss of her head. "I have met him, and you haven't—and what's more, Shirley, I'm certainly not throwing away the chance of making a name for myself on the films, because of some silly prejudice of yours!"

Shirley gazed at her helplessly. Her instinct told her that Gerald Crowson was utterly untrustworthy—a born philanderer who was temporarily attracted by her sister's youth and prettiness, and was, moreover, unscrupulous enough to dangle before the foolish girl's eyes the prospect of becoming a film star—with his help.

But it was no use trying to make Greta see this, she reflected sadly. Her sister's vanity was evidently greatly flattered by the man's attentions, and Shirley could only hope that he would forget all about her by to-morrow.

"Anyway, I'm tired of being ordered about by you!" Greta stormed on, "and I may as well tell you right away, Shirley, that I've been thinking for some time of leaving home. Rene Bristow, a friend of mine, has a flat in Bloomsbury, and she wants me to share it with her. It's quite near my work, and would be much more convenient than having to trail right out here to the suburbs—and what's more, I should be able to do as I liked. So, after the dreadful fuss you have made to-night, I shall ask Rene in the morning if I can move in right away."

Shirley stared at her incredulously.

"But, Greta, surely you can't really mean it!" she exclaimed. "There—there are only the three of us, now, and I have done my utmost to keep the home together since dear mother died. I can't believe that you would deliberately leave home and—and for such selfish reasons! Besides, you know how difficult it is for me to make ends meet, even with your contributions to the household expenses. But, without it, I could not possibly manage to carry on. Do you realise that it would cost you much more to share a flat with this friend of yours in Bloomsbury, and having to keep yourself entirely?"

Greta shrugged.

"Oh, well, I've thought about all that, naturally and even if it does, it would be worth while for the sake of having my freedom," she answered airily. "I daresay you'll be able to manage all right—probably you'll be able to get a rise from that miserly old employer of yours, if you know how to tackle him the right way."

"Anyway, Shirley," she went on, "I've

made up my mind to go and share Rene's flat. Don't forget that I shall only be young once, and I don't see why I shouldn't have a good time while I can. I certainly don't intend to sacrifice myself for other people, as you have done, my dear—letting all your chances slip by while you dudge away 'keeping the home together', as you call it. Believe me, you've got to look after yourself in this world, if you want to get the best out of it."

Shirley sighed.

"I'm afraid you are mistaken in that, Greta," she said. "In any case, however, I suppose I cannot prevent you leaving home if you are determined to do so. All the same I very much doubt whether you will be any happier for leaving here."

Greta gave a shrill little laugh.

"That shows how little you know about it, my dear," she retorted. "Why, I shall have the time of my life sharing a flat with Rene. She knows no end of people, besides, I shall be able to entertain my own friends there—which I can't do in this shabby little place, miles from anywhere."

Greta stifled a yawn, and added—

"Well, I'm off to bed—I have to get up at such a ghastly hour every morning to get to work from here—that's another reason why I'll be glad to move."

She then wished Shirley good-night, and went into her room and closed the door.

Shirley sank into a chair and stared blankly before her, feeling as if her heart was made of lead.

It was not only the realisation of the insuperable difficulties her sister's decision would make in keeping the home going that weighed on Shirley's mind; but her fears for Greta herself, who, in her wilful folly, was deliberately cutting herself off from her family to go her own way.

Where would that way lead her? Shirley wondered anxiously. It was only too evident that Greta had got in with a set of shallow, pleasure-loving, unprincipled people, and to a girl of eighteen, whose one idea was to have what she called "a good time", they represented a gay, glittering world where she would find all her dreams come true!

Shirley sighed again as she rose from the chair and walked slowly to her own room. Perhaps the hardest blow of all to her warm-hearted, affectionate nature, was the feeling that she had failed, so far as her sister was concerned, in her resolve to keep the home together.

But she must find a way of carrying on somehow, for Robin's sake, Shirley told herself, but in spite of her tiredness, it was a long time before she was able to forget her overwhelming problems for a while, in sleep.

AS usual, Greta was late getting up next morning, though Shirley took a cup of tea into her room and awakened her. Greta snatched a hasty breakfast and rushed off without saying a word about her decision of the night before, and Shirley began to hope that, perhaps, her sister had thought it over and changed her mind, after all.

She and her brother spent a busy morning. Robin rolled up his sleeves, tied an apron round his waist, and helped Shirley manfully in her weekly task of turning out the flat, and his cheerful chatter kept at bay the worrying thoughts that haunted the back of her mind.

In spite of her wakeful night, Shirley had risen early to bake a fruit cake and make a steak pie for lunch, as well as some small cakes and scones which she and Robin sampled for their "elevenses", together with a cup of coffee—though "sampled" was hardly the word in Robin's case!

"I say, Shirley, they're absolutely super!" he exclaimed happily, as he consumed his third cake.

"Well, you'd better not have another cake, my boy, or you won't want any lunch," Shirley told him laughingly.

"What—with steak pie for lunch!" he protested. "Gosh, Shirley, you must think I've got a very tiny appetite!"

"No, dear, I certainly don't think that," she said, smiling down at him.

After lunch, they set off together for the school playing fields—Robin in cream flannels and sports blazer, carrying his cricket bat, and filling Shirley's heart with secret pride as he walked along beside her.

She had left Greta's lunch in the oven to keep warm for Saturday was her half-day holiday, and Shirley had reminded her sister at breakfast that she was going to Robin's school cricket match that afternoon, and that they would be having lunch earlier than usual.

Fortunately, it was a perfect day for the match, and when they reached the sports ground it made such a charming scene, with the boys in their gaily striped blazers and their mothers and sisters in pretty summer dresses, that Shirley managed to put aside her personal worries for a while and enjoy a pleasant sense of relaxation.

She looked delightfully fresh and cool in her crisply laundered cotton dress and shady hat, as Robin led her towards a deck-chair. Suddenly the tall figure of a young man loomed up in front of them, and Robin stopped short and raised his cap.

"Good afternoon sir," he said shyly.

"Hullo, Milvaine," the master returned, with a genial smile. "Don't forget we're relying on you to knock up a century for the school—especially as you have family support, I am pleased to see," he added, giving Shirley an appreciative glance as he spoke.

Robin blushed and muttered—

"Yes, sir; this is my sister. Shirley, this is Mr. Ranwick."

"How do you do, Mr. Ranwick?" Shirley said smilingly, shaking hands with the young man, of whom she had heard a great deal from Robin.

Stephen Ranwick had only come to the school at the beginning of the term, but he was already exceedingly popular with the boys.

Shirley could well understand this, for the master was an attractive young man, with a pleasant, friendly personality—the sort of man who knew how to be firm without being harsh. He was dark-haired, with smiling grey eyes, and Shirley took an instant liking to him as they stood chatting for a few minutes.

Then Robin was called away, as the game was about to begin, and Stephen Ranwick gave him a pat on the shoulder.

"Now off you go, my boy, and don't forget to make that century!" he said jestingly. "I'll get a deck-chair for your sister and look after her for the time being."

"Thank you—thank you very much, sir," Robin stammered gratefully. "Good-bye for now, Shirley."

He hurried away, leaving Stephen Ranwick to escort Shirley to a deck-chair where she would have a good view of the game.

"Do you mind if I sit here, too, Miss Milvaine?" he asked.

"Oh, no, not at all, Mr. Ranwick," she answered smilingly.

So the young man seated himself beside her, and the game began. It was eagerly watched by the rows of boys squatting on the grass, and Shirley felt very proud, when Robin went in first to bat, and proceeded to acquit himself so well that there were frequent outbursts of clapping from

the onlookers.

"As you may have guessed, Miss Milvaine, your brother is one of our best batsmen," Stephen remarked, turning to her with a smile. "Robin is a likeable lad, too—he is a great credit to you, if I may say so."

Shirley flushed with pleasure.

"It's very kind of you to say that, Mr. Ranwick," she murmured, "but I think the credit is due to my dear mother, who died just over a year ago, and not to me. I—I have merely done my best to take her place as far as possible."

Stephen Ranwick nodded understandingly.

"Yes, Robin has told me that both his parents were dead, and that his elder sister was now running the home, as well as doing office work," he said. "May I say, Miss Milvaine, that I think it is very brave of you to take on such a heavy responsibility?"

Shirley coloured as she met the young man's steady gaze.

"Oh, but I—I like doing it, Mr. Ranwick," she murmured. "I mean—I feel I must keep the home together as long as I can, for all our sakes, and especially for Robin's."

Glancing down at the slim, fragile-looking girl, Stephen Ranwick admired the strength of purpose behind her gentle manner. He had been specially interested in Robin's elder sister and wanting to make her acquaintance ever since the boy had first mentioned, in the course of conversation, the circumstances of his home life. And now that he had done so, he was even more interested in her than ever.

"I am sure your brother and sister must be very grateful to you, Miss Milvaine," he said. "I know that Robin greatly appreciates all that you do for him, as far as a boy of his age is able to do so."

"Oh, yes, Robin is a dear, good boy," she murmured. "He is a very great help to me, Mr. Ranwick—I really don't know what I should do without him."

WHEN then game was over, Stephen Ranwick walked off the field with Shirley and Robin, chatting in friendly fashion.

Shirley could not help noticing the eager way in which her brother kept glancing up at the young man's face, though he was too bashful to speak unless he was spoken to.

It was evident that he hero-worshipped his stalwart schoolmaster, she reflected, and was delighted to think that the fatherless boy had chosen such a fine man to admire, for there was something about Stephen Ranwick that inspired confidence.

In the course of their talk while the cricket match had been in progress, she had discovered that Mr. Ranwick lived in lodgings, and was all alone in the world except for some cousins who lived in the West Country.

Shirley couldn't help feeling rather sorry for him as she pictured him going back to his rooms to have tea all alone, and when they drew near the entrance to the flats, she said impulsively—

"Would you care to come in and have a cup of tea with us, Mr. Ranwick?"

"Thank you, Miss Milvaine. Yes, I'd like to very much, if it won't be putting you out in any way," he answered promptly.

"Oh, no, I shall be getting tea for ourselves, and Robin and I will be delighted to have your company," Shirley said.

"Shirley shall I run on ahead and unlock the door?" Robin offered eagerly.

"Yes, of course, if you would like to, dear," she replied.

Shirley handed him the key, and Robin went racing up the stairs, two at a time, while she and Stephen exchanged a glance.

When they reached the flat, Shirley led the way into the living-room. Her heart

sank as she saw that the cloth was still on the table, with Greta's used plates—evidently her sister had come home to lunch and gone out again without even bothering to clear the table.

"Please take a seat, Mr. Ranwick," she said, "and I will soon have the tea ready. Robin dear, you had better go and change into another suit, hadn't you?" she added, smiling.

Robin nodded and hurried off to his bedroom, and Shirley began to clear the table before taking off her hat.

"I had to leave my sister's lunch on the table, as Robin and I had ours early," she explained, with forced lightness. "Evidently she had to leave in a hurry—"

Shirley broke off, as she suddenly caught sight of a note beside her sister's plate. It read as follows—

*"Dear Shirley—Rene Bristow wants me to move into her flat right away, so I'm taking a suitcase with me and have packed the rest of my belongings into the black trunk, which I will send for as soon as possible. Sorry to rush off in such a hurry, but Rene is giving a party to-night and I want to have plenty of time to get ready for it. I'll probably be seeing you soon. Love—GRETA."*

Stephen Ranwick saw her face whiten as she read the note.

"Is anything the matter, Miss Milvaine?" he enquired, a little anxiously.

Shirley swallowed something in her throat.

"It—it is only a note from my sister to say she has gone to share a flat with a friend of hers," she stammered. "I knew Greta was thinking of doing so, but—it is naturally rather a shock to me to find that she has actually left home so suddenly."

She folded the slip of paper with trembling hands, and added, with a pathetic attempt at a smile—

"However, I am sure you do not want to be bothered with our family affairs, Mr. Ranwick. Now, if you will please excuse me, I'll go into the kitchen and put the kettle on for tea."

As she hurried out of the room, carrying the dirty plates, Stephen Ranwick gazed thoughtfully after her.

What kind of a girl could Greta Milvaine be to behave in such a callous fashion? he reflected perplexedly. Her sudden departure had evidently come as a severe blow to her sister, though she had done her best to hide her feelings. He felt deeply sorry for Shirley—the more so as he remembered what she had told him that afternoon about the effort she was making to keep the home together for them all.

Glancing round the homely room, at the rather shabby though nicely polished furniture, the spotless, neatly darned white curtains, the bowl of wallflowers which stood on the bookcase infusing the air with their sweet fragrance, Stephen figuratively bowed his head to the girl, who managed to achieve so much against such overwhelming odds.

He could not but admire her, and wondered how the other girl could be so utterly selfish as to leave her sister to struggle on alone. It had struck him as significant that Robin rarely mentioned his younger sister—it was always "Shirley" whose name came to the boy's lips, when he spoke of his home—and Stephen now began to understand the reason.

It was evident that the other sister was so spoilt and selfish that she even left the remains of her meal on the table for Shirley to clear away when she came in.

A few moments later, Shirley returned, looking rather pale, but now outwardly composed. She had taken off her hat and

run a comb through her brown hair, which waved softly back from her forehead, giving her a curiously young and appealing look. Her dark grey eyes were her only real claim to beauty, but they seemed too large for her pale face, Stephen was thinking.

"Please let me give you a hand, Miss Milvaine," he offered, rising from his chair as she spread a snowy, lace-edged cloth on the table.

"Oh, please don't bother, Mr. Ranwick," she said smilingly. "Robin will lay the table for me while I cut the bread-and-butter—won't you, dear?" she added, as her brother entered the room.

Robin nodded brightly.

"I suppose Greta won't be in to tea, will she, Shirley?" he remarked.

"No, dear," she answered quietly, and went back to the kitchen.

Time enough to tell Robin that Greta had left home for good when Mr. Ranwick had gone, Shirley reflected with a heavy heart, and telling herself that their guest must be feeling thoroughly bored with their domestic troubles.

Having finished cutting the bread-and-butter, she placed it on a tray, together with the cakes she had made that morning, and a dish of home-made gooseberry jam. By this time the kettle was boiling, and Shirley made the tea, doing it all mechanically, her mind being preoccupied with worry about Greta and the problems she herself would have to face, now that her sister had left home.

But, for their guest's sake, she made an effort to thrust her troubles behind her as she carried the tray into the living-room. Robin had finished laying the table, and he and Stephen Ranwick were bending down, their heads close together, inspecting the contents of the bookcase.

"Yes, that's a grand book, my boy," Stephen was saying. "You'll enjoy reading it tremendously when you're a little older."

As he was speaking, he caught sight of Shirley entering the room, and turned quickly to take the tea-tray from her.

She thanked him with a shy smile, and when, a few moments later, Shirley poured out the tea, Stephen remarked—

"You have a very fine collection of books, Miss Milvaine—I could not resist the temptation to have a look at them. I see you have several of my own special favourites."

"Oh, really?" she murmured, her face lighting up. "And what are they, may I ask, Mr. Ranwick?"

Soon they were deep in an interesting discussion, though, at first, Shirley was rather diffident about expressing her own opinions on literature to the English master at the Grammar School. But she had a genuine love of books, which she had inherited from her father—who had spent most of his spare time, and more money than he could afford, in buying second-hand books, and as her shyness wore off, Stephen was surprised to find how well-read she was.

"How did you manage to find time to read so many books, Miss Milvaine?" he asked, smiling at her.

"I'm afraid I do not have very much time to devote to books nowadays, Mr. Ranwick," she said. "Mostly I read going to and from the office on the bus, or for an hour or so in bed at night—that is, if it's not too late when I get there!"

Stephen smiled.

"I really don't know how you manage to fit so much into your day, Miss Milvaine," he said. "Even to making home-made jam and cakes, too!" Robin had proudly informed him of this fact, as he had passed the jam to him. "I haven't tasted such delicious gooseberry jam since I was a boy and lived in the country with my dear

old Aunt Sarah."

"Did you live on a farm, sir?" Robin enquired eagerly.

Stephen looked at him, his eyes twinkling. "Yes, my boy—I was very lucky in that respect," he answered. "And very lucky, too, to be brought up by such kindly people as my uncle and aunt, after my parents were killed in an accident when I was only two years old. Actually, they were my great-uncle and great-aunt, and were already getting on in life, with grown-up sons and daughters of their own, when they took charge of me. The dear old couple passed away within a year of each other while I was at college."

He broke off, and added, apologetically—"I hope I am not boring you, Miss Milvaine, by talking so much about myself?"

"No, of course not," she said smilingly. "I am extremely interested, so please continue, Mr. Ranwick."

"Well there is not a great deal more to tell," he said, with a rueful smile. "After the death of my uncle and aunt, their farm passed to my eldest cousin, who is now married, and has a family of his own. But Frank insisted that I must always continue to look upon the farm as my home, and they all make me very welcome when I go to stay with them. But, naturally, I do not care to intrude upon them too often."

Shirley nodded understandingly.

"Are you fond of rural life, young man?" Stephen asked, smiling at Robin.

"Oh, yes, sir!" the boy replied eagerly. "I'd like to be a farmer when I grow up—but I don't suppose there's much chance of that!" he added, with a shy smile.

"Well, you never know, my boy," Stephen said. "But you would have to make quite sure that you liked farming first, wouldn't you, Robin? Perhaps I might be able to arrange for you to spend the summer holidays on the farm, if your sister agrees. My cousin has two boys of his own, and could, I expect, easily fit in an extra one. What do you think about it, Miss Milvaine?"

"Oh, how very kind of you to make such a suggestion, Mr. Ranwick!" Shirley said gratefully. "Naturally, I would be only too pleased for Robin to go and stay in the country, during the summer holidays, and I am quite sure he would love it, wouldn't you, dear?"

"Yes, rather!" Robin replied. "But I couldn't leave you here all alone, Shirley. Besides, you haven't had a holiday for a long time, and you need one more than I do."

Shirley smiled.

"Oh, please don't worry about me, Robin dear," she said. "I shall be perfectly all right, and it would make me very happy to think of you having such a nice holiday on a farm. But we mustn't count on it too much, of course, in case Mr. Ranwick's cousin is unable to have you there."

"I don't think there's any doubt whatever about that," Stephen said. "Had there been, Miss Milvaine, I would not have raised Robin's hopes by mentioning the matter. My cousin Frank and his wife are the sort of accommodating couple who can always find room in their hearts and home for another boy in addition to their own little family. Besides, I am quite sure Robin will be able to make himself very useful on the farm. Therefore, I'll write to my cousin during the week-end, and let you know as soon as I have his reply."

Shirley gave him a grateful smile.

"Thank you very much indeed, Mr. Ranwick," she said, and Robin shyly murmured his own thanks.

When tea was over, Stephen rose to say good-bye with secret reluctance, for he knew that his lodgings would seem even

more cheerless than ever after the pleasant and homely atmosphere of the cosy little flat.

"Good-bye, Miss Milvaine—and thank you for inviting me in to have tea with you and Robin," he said, smiling at her, as they shook hands. "I have enjoyed it very much indeed."

"So have we, Mr. Ranwick," murmured Shirley, smiling back at him. "And please allow me to thank you again for your kind suggestion about arranging for Robin to spend a holiday on your cousin's farm. It is exceedingly kind of you, but I hope you will not put yourself to a lot of trouble over it."

"Oh, but it's only a question of writing a letter to Frank and his wife," Stephen answered cheerily. "I will call here and let you know when I have their reply, if I may, Miss Milvaine?"

"Yes, please do, Mr. Ranwick—I am always at home in the evenings," Shirley said, as she wished him good-bye at the door.

Robin politely accompanied their visitor downstairs, and Shirley went slowly back to the sitting-room, a thoughtful expression on her face.

A few moments later, Robin came rushing in, his eyes aglow with excitement.

"I say, Shirley, don't you think Mr. Ranwick is absolutely *super*?" he asked breathlessly.

"Yes, Robin, I certainly think Mr. Ranwick is very nice indeed," she answered. "And wasn't it very good of him to take such a kind interest in you, my dear?" she added, with a pleased smile.

In her heart, Shirley was thinking that she had never met anyone she liked as much as Stephen Ranwick. There was something about him—she could not have put it into words exactly, but she knew that a little thrill of happiness went through her when he had promised to call and see her again.

#### A PAYING GUEST

THAT evening, Shirley broke the news to her brother that Greta had left home to go and share a flat with a friend of hers.

Robin stared at her in puzzled surprise.

"Oh, I say, that's a bit thick, isn't it, Shirley?" he cried. "Fancy Greta doing a thing like that! But it's just like her, isn't it? How are you going to be able to manage without Greta's help with the money, Shirley?"

"I really don't know, Robin, but I dare say I shall think of something," she answered, with a sigh. "But please don't worry, dear," Shirley added quickly. "I expect we shall be able to manage, somehow."

"I wish I was old enough to earn my own living," Robin went on gloomily. "It's a shame it should all fall on your shoulders, Shirley, and as soon as I'm old enough, I'm going to try and get a newspaper round or something. That would help a bit, wouldn't it?"

Shirley smiled.

"Yes, it certainly would, dear," she said, and gave him an affectionate hug. "But now that you have so much homework to do in the evenings, I'm afraid it would be too much of a strain for you to have to get up so early and do a newspaper round before school. However, we'll talk about that later on, Robin, and in the meantime I shall have to think of some other way of augmenting our income."

This problem weighed heavily on Shirley's mind during the week-end—and she had the additional worry which she had not confided in her young brother, about the possible effect on Greta of being freed from

all home restraint.

From all she had heard Rene Bristow was not a girl who was at all likely to have a good influence on her irresponsible sister, for she seemed as pleasure-mad as Greta herself, though she was several years older.

Moreover, it was only too evident that Greta's head had been turned by the flattering attentions of Gerald Crowson, the film producer, whom she had met at the party given by Roy Carrington's sister.

Shirley tried to comfort herself with the thought that a man like Mr. Crowson must know lots of extremely pretty and sophisticated girls, and would probably have forgotten all about Greta as soon as the party was over—in which case, if her sister were foolish enough to get in touch with him, she would, in all probability, be quickly disillusioned.

All the same, Shirley could not help worrying about it all, though she tried to appear cheerful for Robin's sake.

On Sunday morning, she and Robin went to church as usual, and after the service Shirley returned home alone to get the dinner ready while her brother went off with some of his boy friends for a walk.

She had been in the flat only a few minutes when the door-bell rang, and on going to answer it, she found a young man standing there whom she had never seen before.

He was thick-set, with a pleasant, rugged face, and reddened slightly as he raised his hat and muttered, apologetically—

"Excuse me—I think you must be Miss Milvaine. My name is Carrington—Roy Carrington—I had an appointment with Greta, and as she has failed to keep it, I have taken the liberty to call and enquire whether or not there is anything the matter with her."

Shirley hesitated a moment. Then—"I'm sorry, Mr. Carrington," she said, in a low voice, "but didn't you know that my—that my sister has left home?"

"Left home!" the young man echoed, completely taken aback. "No, I certainly was not aware of that, Miss Milvaine. I saw Greta on Friday evening, but she didn't say anything then about her intention to leave home. As a matter of fact, we—we had arranged to meet at Victoria station this morning and spend the day at Richmond, and after having waited there for an hour for her, I became rather alarmed and thought that Greta may have met with an accident of some kind."

"I sincerely hope that is not the case," Shirley said. "I think it is much more likely that my sister has overslept, Mr. Carrington. You see, she—she has gone to share a flat with a friend of hers, Miss Rene Bristow, who, I understand was giving a party last night."

"Rene Bristow!" he exclaimed, a startled expression on his face.

"Do you happen to know her, Mr. Carrington?" Shirley enquired.

"Well, yes, I know her slightly," he replied. "Greta introduced me to her, and we have been to one or two parties at Miss Bristow's flat. But I—but I had no idea your sister was thinking of going to live with her, Miss Milvaine. Evidently Greta must have made up her mind very suddenly?"

"Yes, that is so," Shirley admitted, and on a sudden impulse, she decided to be frank with this young man who, she suspected, was very much in love with her sister. "Please come in, Mr. Carrington," she added, standing aside for him to enter. "I—I would like to have a little chat with you, if you can spare a few moments."

"Yes, of course, Miss Milvaine," he said.

He stepped inside, and Shirley led the

way to the living room and invited him to take a seat.

"Naturally, Mr. Carrington," she went on, "I can't help feeling rather worried about Greta leaving home, especially as I—as I have an idea Miss Bristow is not the ideal companion for her, from what I have heard about her from my sister."

The young man nodded.

"You are quite right, Miss Milvaine," he said. "Miss Bristow is a good deal older than Greta, and I'm sorry to say from what I have seen of her and her friends they are rather a—well, a rackets crowd. It seems a great pity that Greta has decided to go and live with Rene Bristow, when she has such a comfortable home here," he added, glancing appreciatively round the room.

"Yes, I quite agree, Mr. Carrington, but I think my sister wanted to be free to do as she likes," Shirley said. "I'm afraid Greta rather resented my trying to warn her against taking Mr. Gerald Crowson at his word, when he offered to get her into films. But I felt desperately worried about it all, and—and I hope, Mr. Carrington, you will be able to persuade her to have nothing to do with the man."

Roy's face darkened.

"I shall certainly do everything in my power to prevent it, Miss Milvaine," he said, a grim note in his voice, "But I did not know that Crowson had made such an offer to Greta. I regard the man as being something of a rotter, and I would not have taken her to my sister's party if I had known he was going to be there."

"You see," he continued, "Julia and her husband move in rather a Bohemian set—they know all sorts of stage and film people, and I thought it would interest Greta to meet some of them. Also I particularly wanted to introduce her to my sister."

"Then, when Crowson started to pay her a lot of attention, I could see that Greta was flattered, and I tried to warn her, but she only laughed and accused me of being jealous. However, I shall go and see Crowson, if necessary, and warn him to keep away from Greta," Roy added, a determined look on his face.

Shirley felt a sense of relief that she had confided her worry about Greta to so understanding a young man, and when, a few minutes later, he took his departure, she resumed her preparations for dinner in a more cheerful frame of mind.

If only Greta would marry someone like Roy Carrington and settle down! she reflected wistfully. Unfortunately, however, her sister had never made any secret of the fact that she only went out with him because he was in a well-paid position and could afford to give her "a good time."

Evidently, Roy Carrington was not handsome or romantic enough for Greta's taste! Nevertheless, he seemed to be very devoted to her, and would, no doubt, do his best to prevent her from doing anything foolish.

ON the following Tuesday evening, Shirley was ironing in the kitchen and Robin was doing his homework in the next room, when the door-bell rang. Her heart gave a queer little leap as she went to answer it, thinking that it might be Mr. Ranwick, although she reminded herself, it was not likely that he could have received his cousin's reply so soon.

Then, when she opened the door, she saw him standing there.

"Good evening, Miss Milvaine," he said, raising his hat and smiling at her. "I have just called as I was passing to give you some good news."

"Please come in, Mr. Ranwick," she murmured, a little breathlessly.

"Thank you, Miss Milvaine," but only for a moment or two, if I may," he said. "I won't delay you, as I expect you are busy, as usual."

As he stepped into the hall, Robin appeared at the living room door, his face alight with eagerness.

"Well, young man," Stephen said, with that cheerful smile of his, "I found a letter from the farm awaiting me when I arrived home this afternoon, and I am pleased to tell you that my cousin will be delighted to have you on the farm for your summer holidays."

"Whoopee!" cried Robin, before he could stop himself then, with scarlet cheeks, he muttered—"I—I mean, thank you very much, sir."

Stephen laughed, and placed his arm round the boy's shoulder.

"That's all right, Robin—you needn't try to bottle up your feelings on my account, you know," he said. "I'm very glad it's all fixed up—it will be something to look forward to, won't it?"

"Yes, sir," Robin answered, his eyes sparkling with joy. "I—I should just think it will, sir. But I wish Shirley was coming, too," he added, with a wistful glance at his sister.

Shirley smiled.

"Oh please don't worry about that, Robin dear," she said. "As I have already told you, I shall be very happy thinking of you having such a wonderful time on the farm. Please accept my warmest thanks for your kindness, Mr. Ranwick," she went on. "And, of course, I am most grateful to your cousin and his wife. They must be extremely nice people to agree so readily to take a boy they have never even seen."

Stephen shrugged.

"As to that, Miss Milvaine," he said lightly, "my cousin says in his letter that Robin sounds just the right sort of boy for him. You see, Robin is about the same age as his own boy, Dick. Then there are the twins, Bob and Clive, who are fifteen, so Frank is looking forward to having quite a lot of help on the farm this summer. You'll be able to make yourself very useful, won't you, Robin?"

"I—I'll do my best, sir," the boy promised, his blue eyes shining with delight.

Stephen then turned to Shirley, and went on—

"And now, Miss Milvaine, I have a favour to ask you, but please do not hesitate to refuse if it will be putting you out in any way. It so happens that a friend of mine, Miss Laura Ferris, who lives in the village where I was brought up, is coming to London to take a post in a nursery school, and she has written to ask me if I know of a nice, homely family who would be willing to have her as a paying guest."

Stephen smiled, and continued—

"As a matter of fact, Miss Milvaine, I have been thinking that if you could possibly see your way to to do this, it would be an ideal arrangement from Laura's point of view. She is a charming girl, and I feel quite sure you would like each other and that you would find Laura very little trouble. But, it is for you to decide, of course."

Shirley considered a moment or two. Then—

"But—but do you think Miss Ferris would be comfortable here, Mr. Ranwick?" she asked, thinking that the offer seemed the ideal solution to her financial problem. "You see, I have to be out all day, and your friend might prefer to go somewhere where she would have more attention than I could give her."

"Oh, no, I'm sure Laura would be perfectly comfortable with you, Miss Milvaine," he hastened to assure her. "In fact, she mentioned in her letter to me

that she would like to be treated as one of the family and be allowed to make herself useful. You see, Laura kept house for her widowed father until his death, a few months ago, and she feels she would be lonely living in a bed-sitting room. She is one of those quiet, shy girls who does not easily make friends, and it would be a real kindness if you could manage to have her."

"Yes, of course I will, Mr. Ranwick, if you really feel that Miss Ferris would like it here," Shirley said. "Do please come in and sit down, and we will talk the matter over. Perhaps you would care for a cup of coffee, Mr. Ranwick? I was just thinking of making one for myself when you arrived."

"Thank you very much, Miss Milvaine," he said, "but I do not want to interrupt Robin's homework, or delay you more than I can help. So perhaps you will allow me to come and talk to you in the kitchen?" he added, with a glance through the half-open door at the ironing on the table.

"Yes, of course if you don't mind, Mr. Ranwick," she said, with a shy smile.

Robin reluctantly went back to his homework. He found it difficult to concentrate on sums, when, in his mind's eye, he could see himself feeding the pigs, forking hay and so forth on a real farm in the country miles away from London.

Meanwhile, in the cosy kitchen, Shirley chatted with Stephen Ranwick as they sat having coffee. It gave her a queer little thrill of happiness to see him sitting there, looking quite at home, but she could not help feeling a little puzzled about this girl, Laura Ferris, in whom he seemed so very interested. Were they just friends? she wondered. Or was there something more than friendship between them?

Then she reminded herself that it was no business of hers. She had promised to take Laura Ferris as a paying guest, and she would do her utmost to make the girl happy and comfortable.

When Stephen was about to leave, he handed Shirley a slip of paper with Miss Ferris's address on it, so that she could write to the girl and arrange about terms and so on.

"I, too, will write to Laura and tell her I am sure she would be happy with you, Miss Milvaine," he added smilingly. "And I am greatly obliged to you for your kindness in agreeing to have her come to stay with you."

"The obligation is on my side, Mr. Ranwick," murmured Shirley. "You see, I would have had to find some way of augmenting my income, now that my sister has left home, and from what you tell me of Miss Ferris, I think having your friend here as a paying guest will be a pleasant way of solving that problem."

Stephen nodded thoughtfully.

"I certainly hope so, Miss Milvaine," he said, as he shook hands with her and wished her good-night. Then, with a cheery "Good night, Robin!" he took his departure.

Shirley listened to the sound of his receding footsteps on the stairs, then closed the door and went back to the kitchen.

"Laura Ferris," she murmured to herself. It was rather a charming name, and the girl herself sounded quite charming, too, from Mr. Ranwick's description. He had told her that they had known each other all their lives; that they had gone to the village school, and later, to the local High School together. Then he had gone away to college, and Laura had gone to train as a kindergarten teacher.

But they had always kept in touch with each other, and it was evident from the tender note in Stephen Ranwick's voice when he spoke about her loneliness since her father's death, that he was very fond

of Laura Ferris. Shirley sighed. Just how fond? she wondered.

But one thing was certain, she told herself firmly—it would be utterly foolish on her part to think too much about Stephen Ranwick, in spite of the overwhelming attraction he had for her. In any case, his manner towards herself was friendly and helpful—nothing more—and she must be careful to keep her own feelings within those limits, both for her pride's sake, and because there was no surer way to unhappiness than to lose her heart to a man who did not want it.

**L**AURA FERRIS arrived at tea-time on the following Saturday, escorted by Stephen Ranwick, who had gone to meet her at the station.

Shirley took an instant liking to the girl. Rather fragile-looking, with fair hair and a sweet face, it was evident, as Stephen introduced them, that she was painfully shy.

But she quickly responded to Shirley's warm and unaffected welcome.

"Oh, what a delightfully pleasant room, Miss Milvaine!" she remarked, when Shirley showed her into the bedroom that had been previously occupied by Greta.

"What very pretty curtains!"

Shirley had made new curtains of a dainty moss-rose pattern in pink and cream, and had put her own pink bedside rug—one of the first things she had bought out of her own earnings—in her guest's room.

"I am glad you like the room, Miss Ferris," she remarked, with a pleased smile.

"Oh yes, I like it very much indeed," Laura said. "And please let it be understood that I am looking forward to taking my share of the housework, Miss Milvaine. You see, having been used to running a home, I should feel quite out of place if I had to sit back and do nothing. Besides, you are charging me such ridiculously low terms that the least I can do is to make what little return I can for your kindness."

"Thank you very much," Shirley said. "I want you to look upon this as your home, and do exactly as you like, Miss Ferris. By the way," she added smilingly, "don't you think we might start off by calling each other by our Christian names? It would sound much more friendly, wouldn't it?"

"Laura nodded, her eyes lighting up.

"Yes, I certainly do, Shirley," she said. "I feel quite sure I am going to like living here with you and your brother. I am so thankful that Stephen put me in touch with you! And it will be lovely to be so near him, too," Laura added, a soft flush stealing into her cheeks as she turned to unlock her suitcase.

"Yes, of—of course," Shirley murmured, a queer little twitch of pain tugging at her heart. "And now, if you will excuse me, Laura, I will go and make the tea. It will be ready in a few minutes."

"Thank you, dear," Laura said smilingly.

When, a few minutes later, Shirley entered the living room carrying the tea-tray, she found Laura there chatting with Stephen Ranwick and Robin. They were all standing at the window, admiring the flowers in the window-box, and Shirley was quick to notice that Laura had slipped her arm through Stephen's.

"Tea is quite ready," Shirley announced, in a cheerful voice.

#### BOLT FROM THE BLUE.

**L**AURA soon became "one of the family". She made herself so generally useful that Shirley sometimes wondered how she had managed without her help

in the past.

The two girls became firm friends. Even Robin—who had at first secretly disliked the idea of having a stranger to live with them—soon grew used to Laura's friendly presence.

"I hope, Mr. Ranwick, that you will drop in and see Miss Ferris whenever you like," Shirley had smilingly remarked, on the first evening, and Stephen had not been slow to avail himself of the invitation.

Sometimes he spent the whole evening at the flat, and sometimes he called and took Laura out. At week-ends they often went sight-seeing to historical places in London, and much to Robin's delight, Stephen frequently invited him to accompany them.

Shirley, too was invariably included in the invitations, but she always found some excuse to decline, telling herself that Stephen probably asked her only out of politeness, and that he would prefer to be alone with Laura. Even so, she had not the heart to prevent Robin from accompanying them, and he enjoyed these outings tremendously.

Of course, Shirley reflected, a little ruefully, the presence of a schoolboy like Robin would not embarrass a young couple in love in the way that a grown-up person would do. She could imagine Laura and Stephen smiling at each other in secret understanding, while Robin poked about with eager, boyish curiosity, peering into dim corners of the Tower of London, or trying to work, out how the knights of old managed to get into their suits of armour.

Stephen always firmly refused Shirley's offer to pay her brother's expenses on these occasions, pointing out that he was delighted to be able to make some small return for her hospitality to himself. And as this "small return" often involved taking Robin out for the whole day on a Saturday and treating him to lunch at a restaurant, Shirley tried to make it up to Stephen by inviting him to Sunday dinner and tea, and it soon became the accepted thing for him to spend most of his Sundays with them.

For Shirley, however, there was a bitterness in seeing so much of Robin's schoolmaster. Her heartbeats would quicken when she heard his familiar knock on the door, but the glowing look in Laura's eyes would remind her—not that she was likely to forget the fact—that it was not she whom Stephen came to see.

So Shirley effaced herself as much as possible, finding things to do in the kitchen while Laura chatted to Stephen, and if they all went for a stroll together in the afternoon, she took care to walk with Robin, leaving the other two to enjoy each other's company.

On the surface, at any rate, Shirley's life was easier and happier than it had been since her mother's death, for she and Laura got on extremely well together. They shared much of the housework which formerly had fallen on Shirley's shoulders, while the moderate sum she charged Laura for board and lodging was more than Greta had ever given her to help with the household expenses.

Moreover, Shirley felt that it was good for her young brother to see so much of Stephen Ranwick, for whom Robin had such a boyish hero-worship. She, herself, too, greatly enjoyed the many interesting discussions about books which invariably took place when Stephen came to tea.

But under the surface, there were feelings which Shirley tried to hide, even from herself—feelings which seemed to grow stronger every day, in spite of all her efforts to crush them down. The accidental touch of Stephen's fingers on hers as she handed him a cup of tea would send a little thrill through her, and if she happened to find

herself alone with him, her heart would begin to beat with quick, nervous throbs, and she would seize on some excuse to leave him, for fear of betraying her inward turmoil.

Nor was this all, for Shirley was haunted with anxiety about Greta who, apparently, was living in such a whirl of excitement that she could not even find time to come and see her sister and brother. Occasionally, she rang up Shirley at the office, and chattered away vivaciously without giving her an opportunity to ask any questions, and then she would ring off with a jaunty—

"Bye-bye, dear—I'll be seeing you soon!"

These 'phone calls never told Shirley anything she really wanted to know—for instance, whether her sister was seeing Gerald Crowson, and whether or not she was still friendly with Roy Carrington—the result being that she had an uncomfortable feeling that Greta was deliberately hiding something from her.

THEN, one morning on her way to the office, which was only a short bus ride from her home, Shirley glanced at the morning paper and gave a horrified gasp as she saw the headlines on the front page—

"FAMOUS FILM ACTOR FOUND DEAD—  
YOUNG MAN ARRESTED."

Eagerly she read on—

"Mr. Gerald Crowson, the film director, was found lying dead this morning in a courtyard below his third-floor West End flat. It is said that earlier in the evening he had been visited by a man with whom he appeared to have a violent quarrel. A young man, named Roy Carrington, 24, has been detained by the police and is said to have admitted that there was a quarrel, but denies that he was responsible for Mr. Crowson's death. . . ."

The print seemed to blur before Shirley's eyes. She realised, with a sickening dread at her heart, that Roy Carrington had, apparently, quarrelled with the other man, and that Greta must have been the cause of it all!

When she arrived at the office, she was deathly white, and trembling, and her fellow typist, who was standing holding the telephone receiver in her hand, looked at her curiously.

"Oh, there's a 'phone call for you, Shirley," she said. "The bell was ringing when I came in."

She handed her the receiver, and the next moment Shirley heard a hard, impatient voice coming over the line.

"Is that Miss Milvaine? Oh, thank goodness I've managed to get in touch with you. This is Rene Bristow speaking. I'm afraid I must ask you to come and look after Greta at once. She collapsed when she saw the newspaper this morning—about Gerald Crowson's death, I mean—and I can't do anything with her.

"I—I had to leave her at the flat and come to business—I really can't risk losing my job on your sister's account, so you had better go and look after her, Miss Milvaine, and I would be glad if you would take her away, as I—as I have no wish to get mixed up in anything unpleasant," the girl added meaningly.

"Very well. Miss Bristow, I—I will go to my sister at once," Shirley replied, her voice trembling with anxiety and indignation.

She then rang off without giving the other girl time to say any more, and hurried away

to her employer's office, and asked for time off, explaining that her sister had been taken ill.

Mr. Griffiths, a kindly, middle-aged solicitor, readily assented, and a few minutes later Shirley was hastening to the Underground station, on her way to Bloomsbury.

It seemed an age before she reached Rene Bristow's flat. She rang the bell and waited, but there was no reply, and on trying the door handle, she was relieved to find that the latch was up and she was able to walk in.

Shirley found herself in a room with the remains of breakfast still on the table. There was a stocking flung carelessly over the back of a chair, and many other signs of slovenliness and neglect, but she only noted this in passing as she hurried across to a closed door which was evidently the bedroom.

She knocked and entered, and there, stretched out face downward on one of two divan beds on either side of the window, lay Greta, with her head resting on her arms.

"Oh, Greta dear!" Shirley murmured tremulously, as she sat down beside her sister and put her arm round her. "I—I have come to take you home."

Greta slowly raised her head and stared blankly, her face deathly pale. She seemed too stunned to ask how her sister came to be there.

"No," she muttered, in a scarcely audible voice. "I—I can't come home, Shirley. Please go away and leave me. I—I only want to be left alone—it's all my fault, and I—I wish I could die, she added, and then broke into a fit of helpless sobbing.

"Oh, come, dear, you are only making yourself ill by giving way like this," Shirley told her firmly, but gently. "Believe me, I can well understand how you feel about this tragic affair and I want you to come home with me and let me look after you. In any case, you are not in a fit state to stay here alone, are you?"

"What does it matter, anyhow? I—I'm not worth bothering about," Greta cried wildly. "I—I knew all the time, in my heart, that—that you were right about Gerald Crowson, but I shut my eyes to the truth, and—and I quarrelled with Roy Carrington when he tried to warn me against him.

"Then—then yesterday evening," she stammered, "Gerald invited me to dinner at his flat. He—he told me there would be other guests, but—but when I arrived I found it wasn't true. He tried to kiss me, and—and it was then that I realised what a little idiot I had been. So I—so I ran out of the flat, and when I got back here, Rene said that Roy Carrington had called 'o see me and she—and she had told him where I was. I—I suppose he went straight to Gerald's flat, and—and there was a quarrel. Oh dear, it—it's too awful to think about!"

She broke into hysterical sobs again, and Shirley did her best to comfort her.

A few moments later the door-bell rang, and Shirley went to answer it. Standing on the threshold was a tall, elegantly dressed girl, her face pale and set.

"I am Julia Norton—Roy Carrington's sister," she announced abruptly. "and I wish to see Miss Greta Milvaine. I rang up her place of business, and was told—"

"Oh, Julia!" Greta had come rushing out of the bedroom at the sound of Julia Norton's voice. "I—I feel so dreadful about this!" she went on tremulously. "It—it is all my fault and you can't possibly blame me more than I blame myself!"

There was a tense pause, then Shirley murmured—

"Won't you please come in, Mrs. Norton? I am Greta's sister, and I have just arrived here to take her home. As you see, she is extremely upset about this terrible tragedy."

"Yes, and so you ought to be, my girl," Julia Norton said, with bitter emphasis, turning to Greta, as she stepped into the hall. "I guessed you were behind all this dreadful affair, though Roy will not admit it. I have just come from seeing him at the police station, and he refuses to tell his solicitor what his quarrel with Gerald Crowson was about.

"Roy is evidently determined to keep your name out of the affair," Julia continued, as they entered the sitting-room, "even though it would probably help his defence if it was known that he was trying to protect you from the consequences of your own folly."

"Roy is—is doing that—for me?" Greta murmured brokenly, and sank into a chair and buried her face in her hands.

Shirley gave an anxious glance from one to the other. She could understand only too well Julia Norton's bitterness against the girl who was responsible for her brother's tragic predicament. Yet Shirley's heart ached for her sister in her overwhelming remorse.

Even Julia's expression softened a little as she gazed at the girl's bowed head. But before either of them could speak, Greta jumped up and laid a trembling hand on Mrs. Norton's arm.

"Oh, Julia," she pleaded, "please take me to the police station and I will tell them everything, and—and take the blame for it all. It is all my fault, and I—and I will do everything in my power to get Roy out of this terrible mess. I'm quite sure he never killed Gerald Crowson, and if—and if he had done so by accident, he would have confessed the truth, for Roy is too straightforward to lie about it. Oh, what a little fool I have been! But at least I can do my best to make amends—so let us go to the police at once, Julia."

Mrs. Norton hesitated a moment. Then—

"Very well, Greta," she said. "Roy's solicitor is waiting for me outside in the taxi, and he will go with us to the police. Let us hope your statement will help my poor brother's defence. Perhaps you would like to accompany us, Miss Milvaine?" she added, turning to Shirley.

"Yes, I certainly would, Mrs. Norton," Shirley said.

Ten minutes later, they were being shown into a room at the police station, where a detective-inspector listened to what the solicitor had to say. He then gave instructions for Roy Carrington to be brought into the room.

Greta gave an agonised gasp as the young man entered, escorted by a police constable. Impulsively, she sprang to her feet and clasped his arm.

"Oh, Roy dear, it—it is all my fault!" she cried brokenly.

"Greta!" he exclaimed, gazing at her in bewilderment. "What on earth are you doing here?"

"I—I have come to make what amends I can, Roy," she told him tremulously. "Did—did you think for a moment that I would let you weaken your case by—by trying to keep my name out of it?" she stammered on. "I know that you went to Gerald Crowson's flat to try and save me from my own folly, because Rene told you I had gone there to dine with him, didn't she?"

A spasm of pain passed across Roy's face, and for a moment he seemed to forget

his terrible predicament.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to resume your seat, miss, and make a formal statement," the inspector said, with cold formality. "You may sit down, Mr. Carrington."

"I wish to tell you at once, inspector, that I do not want Miss Greta Milvaine brought into this—" Roy began.

"Oh, but can't you see, Roy dear," his sister interposed, "that Greta has at last come to her senses, and that she realises it is you she loves? Surely you do not think she would stand aside and remain silent to protect her own name, if she can help you by telling the truth?"

There followed a tense silence, during which Roy looked at Greta, and a slow flush crept into her pale cheeks.

"Yes, Roy," she murmured. "Julia is right. I—I must insist on telling the truth."

The inspector nodded approvingly.

"Very well, miss," he said. "I will take down your statement."

LATER that morning, Shirley and her sister returned home, after calling at Rene Bristow's flat to collect Greta's belongings. The younger girl scarcely spoke as she sat in the taxi, her eyes closed, and not a vestige of colour in her face.

Shirley unlocked the door of the flat, and as she gently led her sister to a chair, Greta murmured brokenly—

"You—you have been so very good to me, Shirley dear. I must have been stark mad to think that I could be happier living with Rene Bristow, than here, in my own home. As—as soon as things went wrong Rene turned against me, but you—you've stood by me loyally in spite of everything."

"Well, that's what families are for, isn't it, darling?" Shirley said gently. "Now I am going to make you a nice cup of tea," she went on, "then you must go and lie down, my dear. I'm afraid we shall both have to share my room for the time being, as we did before dear mother died, as I can't possibly turn Miss Ferris out, can I? She's an awfully sweet girl, Greta, and has come to look upon this as her home."

"I—I am quite willing to fit in anywhere, dear," Greta said, with unaccustomed humility. "It—it's so good to be home again, and yet I shan't know a moment's peace of mind until—until Roy is freed! Oh, Shirley, you—you do believe he will be proved innocent, don't you? The—the police can't really think he did such a dreadful thing, can they?" she added pathetically.

Shirley was at a loss what to say. She felt sick at heart when she thought of the seemingly insurmountable difficulty Roy would have in proving his innocence, for it appeared that he had been heard quarrelling violently with Gerald Crowson shortly before the tragic happening.

"We can only hope and pray for the best, Greta dear," she answered at last. "But the solicitor said your statement would be of great value to the defence, didn't he? So please try not to worry too much, darling."

Greta bit her trembling lip and lowered her head. Then, suddenly, she gave a queer little moan, and Shirley was just in time to catch her in her arms as she fainted.

THAT afternoon, while Greta was lying down, the door-bell rang. Shirley went to answer it, and gave a gasp of astonishment, unable to believe her eyes as she saw Roy Carrington standing there,

pale, but smiling.

"Roy!" she muttered falteringly. "Is it—can it really be you?"

"Yes, and I am very happy to tell you I have been freed, Miss Milvaine," he answered, his voice vibrating with emotion. "The—the police have now received information that Crowson was seen drinking in a West End bar near his flat after I left him last night, which proves that I had nothing to do with his death. Witnesses say he was the worse for drink and the police think he must have lost his balance while opening the window on his return to the flat, and fell out."

"Oh, I—I'm so very thankful to know that you have been cleared, Roy—both for your sake and Greta's," Shirley said tremulously. "Do please come in—we must tell Greta the wonderful news at once."

But there was no need, for at that moment Greta herself appeared, wrapped in her dressing-gown, her dark hair framing her white face in a riot of tumbled curls as she stared speechlessly at the young man.

"Roy!" she gasped. "Oh, Roy, dear!"

"Greta, my darling girl!" he cried, his arms outstretched to her, a tender smile on his face.

Shirley at once hurried into the kitchen and closed the door. She was trembling from head to foot with the intensity of her relief, and had to lean against the table for some moments to steady herself.

From the adjoining room came the happy murmur of voices, and Shirley sent up a silent, heartfelt prayer of thankfulness that her wilful sister had, at last, found the right road to happiness.

GRETA was married to Roy Carrington a month later, in a nearby church. Stephen Ranwick gave her away, and the little group of onlookers in the front pew consisted of Shirley and Robin, together with Laura Ferris and Roy's sister and her husband.

After the ceremony they all returned to the flat for a simple wedding breakfast before the newly married couple left for their honeymoon—a motoring tour in Roy's car.

Roy had already paid the first deposit on an attractive little modern house, and looking from her sister's radiant face to that of the bridegroom, Shirley had no doubt at all that they would be perfectly happy.

Then, involuntarily, her eyes strayed to Stephen's face, and she looked away again hastily, for she was determined to let no shadow of her own pain and longing darken her happiness on her sister's account on this day of days!

Greta had been lucky—she had married the man she loved, after coming so dangerously near to losing him—but such good fortune did not come to all, Shirley reminded herself.

For her, love must remain a dream, locked away in her secret heart. But in spite of her courage, Shirley could not suppress the sharp stab of anguish that went through her as Stephen rose to propose a toast to the happy couple, and she saw Laura gazing up at him, an adoring look in her blue eyes.

When, at last, it was time for Greta and Roy to set off on their honeymoon, Shirley accompanied her sister into the bedroom to change into a going-away costume.

"You have been simply wonderful to me, darling," Greta said, giving Shirley an affectionate hug. "I shall never forget

the way you stood by me and helped me when—when—"

She broke off with a shudder, and Shirley gave her a tender pat on the shoulder.

"That is all over and done with now, isn't it, dear?" she said. "But that tragic affair proved how very dearly Roy loves you, and opened your eyes to your true feelings for him, didn't it? I feel quite sure that you will both be very happy together."

"Yes, I know we shall," Greta murmured, with a contented sigh. "But it doesn't seem quite fair that I should have so much, after the stupid way I have behaved, and you so little, Shirley dear."

"So little!" Shirley echoed smilingly. "Please don't forget that I have Robin, our home, and the knowledge that you are happily married—not to mention Laura's companionship and—and Stephen's friendship."

Shirley could not prevent the colour mounting her cheeks as she mentioned Stephen's name, and Greta was quick to notice it.

"I—I rather think Stephen means more to you than mere friendship, doesn't he, Shirley dear?" she said. "And what is more, I feel perfectly sure he feels the same about you. But for some reason you seem to persist in keeping him at arm's length, don't you, Shirley? Please forgive me for saying this, my dear, but I couldn't help noticing that you do your utmost to discourage Stephen's interest in you."

"Oh, no, you are completely mistaken, dear," Shirley objected, with heightened colour. "Stephen is not specially interested in me, but in Laura. It is evident that they are very fond of each other, isn't it?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so," Greta agreed. "But whatever Laura's feelings may be, I am convinced that Stephen is only fond of her in a friendly sort of way. I have often seen him looking at you, Shirley, in the way—well, in the way a man looks at a girl when he is in love with her."

Shirley shook her head.

"Oh, no, you must have imagined it, my dear," she said. "Laura and Stephen have known each other all their lives, you see, and I—and I should never dream of coming between them, even if—what you say is true."

Greta smiled.

"So that's why you avoid Stephen, is it—because you are afraid of coming between him and Laura," she said, a challenging note in her voice. "I have often wondered if that could be the reason, knowing how very unselfish you are, and—"

"Nonsense, my dear!" Shirley broke in, with a shaky little laugh. "Anyway, this is *your* great day, darling, and we are wasting time, standing here discussing my affairs, you know. I'm afraid Roy will be getting impatient, if we don't hurry."

After that warning note, Greta concentrated on her toilet, and ten minutes later the two girls emerged from the bedroom arm in arm, and Roy stepped forward to meet his bride with a proud smile.

"Ready, darling?" he asked.

Everyone crowded round to say good-bye and wish them happiness, and then went down to the front door to watch them drive away, after Greta had given her sister a final affectionate hug.

#### THE GREATER LOVE.

DURING the days that followed, Shirley did her best to forget Greta's disturbing remarks about Stephen, telling herself that, of course, her sister was mis-

taken—one had only to see Laura and Stephen together to realise that there was a very deep bond of affection between them.

Besides, how could Stephen help loving a girl like Laura, whom he had known all his life? Shirley asked herself. No one could help being fond of Laura, with her shy, gentle ways, her affectionate, sensitive nature, which seemed so unfitted to stand alone in the hurly-burly of life.

The girl needed someone to cling to and it was evident to Shirley that, since her adored father's death, Laura's whole existence had been centred on Stephen.

Then, one evening, a few days after her sister's wedding, Shirley was alone in the flat when Stephen called to return a book she had lent him.

"Oh, so it's you, Stephen!" she murmured, flushing, as she opened the door to him. "Laura is out—have you forgotten that she arranged to go to a concert this evening with one of her fellow teachers?"

Stephen shook his head and smiled.

"No, I hadn't forgotten, Shirley," he said. "I've called to return this book you were kind enough to lend me."

"I—I see," Shirley murmured. "Would you care to come in for a few minutes, Stephen?"

It seemed discourteous not to invite him in, but her heart began to beat jerkily when he promptly accepted, for the last thing in the world she wanted was to be alone with the man with whom she was so hopelessly in love.

But Shirley forced herself to chat brightly as he followed her into the living-room, where she was busy with her sewing machine, making an outfit for Robin to wear on his farm holiday.

"I hope I haven't called at an inconvenient time," Stephen remarked, glancing at her pile of sewing.

"Oh, no, of course not, Stephen," she said. "Please sit down and make yourself at home. Would you care for a cup of coffee?"

"No, thanks, Shirley, it isn't long since I had my evening meal," he answered, seating himself in the armchair.

Shirley was aware of a certain constraint in the atmosphere, and began to wonder if her manner betrayed the turmoil of emotion that raged within her. She tried desperately to think of something commonplace to say, but Stephen was leaning forward in his chair, gazing at her with a strange expression in his eyes, as he went on—

"Do you realise this is the first time I have had you to myself for a very long time, Shirley?"

"Is it?" she murmured. "I—I'm afraid I hadn't thought about it, Stephen. Naturally, I am always very pleased to see you when you call." She hesitated, then added—"After all, it is not me you specially come to see, is it?"

Stephen shrugged.

"What makes you think that, my dear Shirley?" he asked.

She lowered her eyes, the warm colour flooding her cheeks, and at a loss what to say.

"Well, I—I mean, you and Laura are such old friends, aren't you?" she stammered. "And—and naturally, you want to be together."

"Oh, yes, Laura and I are very old friends, and we are fond of each other," he agreed. "But that does not necessarily mean that I only come here to see Laura. After all, Laura and I are friends, and nothing more. But—but ever since I first

met you, Shirley, my love for you has grown more and more every day!" He paused, then added—"Tell me, my dear Shirley, is there—is there any hope for me? Can you possibly bring yourself to care enough for me to—marry me?"

As he asked the question, Stephen rose from his chair and stood looking down at her, an adoring expression in his eyes.

Shirley caught her breath. So Stephen loved her! The thought filled her with an exhilarating happiness—until she suddenly remembered Laura Ferris. Evidently he was unaware that Laura's world would fall to pieces when she heard that he had lost his heart to another girl!

"Shirley dear, won't you answer my question?" Stephen's voice broke in upon her thoughts. "If—if what I ask is impossible, please don't be afraid to tell me so because of hurting my feelings. I must admit that you have never given me any encouragement to hope that you might care for me in that way, but I felt I could not go on any longer without putting my fate to the test. You see, my dear, it means so—so very much to me."

"Oh, Stephen, I—I—" she began, then broke off helplessly and turned her head away to avoid his penetrating gaze. "I—I'm very sorry, Stephen," she stammered on, after a short pause, "but I'm afraid it—it is quite impossible."

Stephen sighed.

"Then is there no hope for me at all, Shirley?" he asked, in a strained voice.

Shirley felt as if her heart was at breaking point.

"I—I'm afraid not, Stephen," she answered falteringly. "But I—but I thought you were in love with Laura," she managed to say.

Stephen shook his head.

"Oh, no, it is you I love, my dear Shirley, and I can never fall in love with anyone else," he said. "Laura, she and I are merely friends, as I have already told you, and there has never been any question of anything deeper between us."

"Are you—are you quite sure of that, Stephen?" she asked impulsively.

He gave her a questioning look.

"What on earth do you mean, Shirley?" he countered. "Surely you do not think for a moment that Laura cares for me in—that way, do you?"

Shirley swallowed something in her throat. She dared not trust herself to look at him.

"Well, yes, I—I do think so, Stephen," she murmured, "though I don't know whether I am doing right in opening your eyes to the truth. Believe me, I am only doing so because—because I am so very fond of Laura."

Stephen sighed again, and walked over to the window, where he stood motionless, gazing into space.

Shirley broke the tense silence that followed.

"I—I hope you are not angry with me for—for telling you this, Stephen," she murmured.

"Angry with you, Shirley?" he said, turning to face her. "Why should I be angry with you, my dear?" he asked, a tender note in his voice as he hastened towards her. "I realise that you mean it for the best, of course, and that you may be feeling sorry for me because you cannot give me the answer I hoped for. But it is you I love, Shirley, and always shall love. Therefore, it would not be right for me to

marry anyone else, would it? Moreover, even if you are right about Laura caring for me in the way you suggest, nothing can ever change my deep love for you."

"Oh, Stephen!"

The cry broke from Shirley's lips before she could prevent it, and her eyes were suddenly blinded with tears. Next moment he had placed his hands on her shoulders, and was saying—

"Shirley, my dearest—please look at me and tell me why you are crying."

Very gently, he placed one hand beneath her chin and tilted it upwards, and as their eyes met, he gave a gasp of delight.

"My darling, you—you *do* care, don't you?" he said eagerly. "I can read the truth in your eyes. Oh, Shirley, my dearest girl—"

Somehow, she found herself in his arms weeping against his shoulder.

"My dearest love!" he said, stroking her wavy brown hair. "Why did you try to pretend you did not care for me? Was it because of that—of that foolish idea of yours that Laura was in love with me? It is you I love, of course, and—and you do love me, don't you, darling?"

Shirley looked up at him with tears shining in her eyes.

"Yes, Stephen, I—I love you with all my heart, although I—I have tried to hide it from you," she murmured shakily. "But I—but I can do so no longer."

"My sweet little love!" he whispered, with infinite tenderness.

Neither of them had heard Laura's key in the front door—she had returned unexpectedly because her friend whom she had arranged to accompany to the concert had been taken suddenly ill and was unable to go.

She now stood in the tiny hall, as if turned to stone. The sitting-room door was a little ajar; and she had overheard Stephen's voice saying—"My dearest little love, why did you try to pretend you did not care for me? Was it because of that foolish idea of yours that Laura was in love with me?"

Suddenly Laura turned and quietly slipped out of the flat again, a sort of frozen numbness gripping her. So Stephen was in love with Shirley! she told herself, in an agony of despair, and evidently he had asked her to marry him! How blind she had been! She had been misled by Shirley's self-effacing ways, never guessing that the girl was trying to crush down her own love for Stephen for her, Laura's, sake!

Presently, Laura found herself walking on the nearby common, her mind utterly distraught. She wandered on, not daring to return to the flat until she had managed to subdue the turmoil in her heart, and was able to hear the news of their engagement. Somehow, she had to convince Shirley that she was mistaken in believing that she herself was in love with Stephen—not only for her pride's sake, but because she was resolved that there should be no shadow of regret to cloud their happiness.

Suddenly Laura heard a shout, and the thunder of hooves behind her, then realised that she had strayed on to the bridle path, where some of the well-to-do residents of the district often went riding.

Quickly turning her head, she saw a runaway horse bearing down upon her at full speed, with a young girl in the saddle tugging desperately at the reins as she tried to keep her seat.

Seeing someone in its path, the horse

suddenly swerved, and was heading straight for a clump of trees.

Without a moment's hesitation, Laura sprang forward and snatched at the bridle. As she gripped it she was swung off her feet and felt herself being dragged along. Then something struck her on the head, and she lost consciousness.

**H**ALF-AN-HOUR or so later a policeman called at the flat and broke the news to Shirley that her friend, Miss Laura Ferris, was in the local hospital suffering from severe concussion as the result of an accident.

"We found your address on some letters in her handbag, Miss Milvaine," he went on to explain. "The young lady was knocked down while trying to stop a runaway horse—little Miss Jean Mitchell, the doctor's daughter, was riding it when it took fright and bolted. It appears that Miss Ferris managed to grip the bridle and stop the horse, but in doing so she was dragged along the ground for some distance, and struck her head on a stone."

"Oh, how—how dreadful!" Shirley gasped, and Stephen put his hand under her elbow to steady her. "Poor Laura! But—but I don't understand how she came to be on the common—she left here this evening to go to a concert."

"Shall we be allowed to see Miss Ferris, constable?" Stephen enquired, looking pale and shocked.

"Sorry, sir, but I gather from what the matron told me that no one can see the patient for a day or two. The young lady is unconscious, and the doctors can't tell when she's likely to come round. But if you rang up the hospital in the morning, sir, they might be able to give you some idea when you would be allowed to see her," the constable added.

**S**EVERAL days passed before Laura gradually emerged from the coma, but her mind was a complete blank about what had happened on the evening when the accident occurred.

"I—I remember coming home instead of going to the concert, because Elaine was not feeling very well," she murmured, in a faltering voice, when, at last, Shirley was allowed to visit her. "But after letting myself into the flat, I remember nothing! I've no idea whatever how I came to be on the common."

She paused, a strained look on her face. Shirley gently squeezed her hand, and said—

"Well, never mind about that at the moment, my dear. "The most important thing is that you probably saved little Jean Mitchell's life by your brave action in stopping her runaway horse, isn't it, Laura? You can imagine how very grateful Dr. Mitchell feels—he and Jean called at the flat to tell me how very much they owe to you for your remarkable bravery. The nurse informs me that Doctor Mitchell sends these lovely flowers for you every day, and is anxiously waiting to thank you in person."

"But—but I don't remember a thing about it, Shirley. Everything is a blank, from the time I let myself into the flat, until I woke up here in hospital. It—it's an awfully queer feeling, Shirley."

"Yes, yes, of course, dear," Shirley said. "But please try not to worry about it. No doubt everything will all come back in time, darling."

A short silence followed. Then—

"How—how is Stephen?" Laura murmured. "I—I would very much like to see him."

Shirley's heart gave a queer little lurch,

but she managed to say calmly—

"Yes, Laura dear, and Stephen would like to see you too, but the doctor thinks it best for you not to have too many visitors for the time being. But I know Stephen will be very pleased to come and see you as soon as he is allowed to do so."

As she walked homeward with Stephen, who had accompanied her to the hospital, Shirley's thoughts were deeply troubled. If Laura's mind was a blank from the time she had left herself into the flat until she woke up in hospital, surely it could only mean that, after entering the flat, she must have received a severe shock of some kind!

Could it possibly be that Laura had overheard what had passed between herself and Stephen, and, in a state of stunned despair, had gone out again for a walk on the common to try and recover her self-control?

The more she thought about it, the more likely this explanation seemed—and the heavier Shirley's heart became.

"You're very quiet, dear," Stephen remarked, slipping his arm through hers as they walked slowly along. "You—you are not unduly worried about Laura, are you, Shirley? I mean, you don't think she is worse than they have given us to understand, do you?"

Shirley shook her head.

"No, Stephen," she answered. "Laura seems to be making satisfactory progress, though, of course, it will be some little time before she is quite recovered. Poor girl! Her mind is a blank about the events on the evening of the accident. She—she spoke about you, and begged me to—to arrange for you to come and see her as soon as possible."

"Yes, naturally," Stephen murmured thoughtfully. "Tell me dear," he added hesitantly, "did you—did you tell Laura about our engagement?"

"No, I—I couldn't possibly do that, Stephen," she said. "I felt I couldn't deal her a second cruel blow in her present state of health."

Stephen gave her a puzzled look.

"I'm afraid I don't understand, darling," he said.

Shirley hesitated a moment. Then—

"I—I have been wondering Stephen, if Laura happened to have overheard something of what passed between us that evening, when she returned unexpectedly from the concert! Such a thing is quite possible, you know, and after receiving such a stunning blow, she might have gone for a walk on the common in order to recover herself. That would probably explain why her memory has gone from that moment, wouldn't it?"

Stephen nodded thoughtfully and after a short silence, Shirley went on—

"It is quite evident to me that Laura is deeply in love with you, Stephen. If you had heard the way she spoke, when she said how much she wanted to see you, you could not have any further doubts about it. In any case, Stephen dear, we must keep our engagement a secret from her for the time being. Otherwise it might do Laura untold harm."

Stephen nodded understandingly.

"Very well, Shirley dear. I will be very careful to say nothing about it when I see Laura," he promised.

Stephen was allowed to see the patient on the following evening.

"Here is Mr. Ranwick to see you," the nurse announced brightly.

Laura's eyes lit up at once.

"Oh, Stephen, how lovely to see you

again," she murmured, as she held out her hand to him.

Stephen smiled down at her, a feeling of pity in his heart. She looked so fragile lying there, with her fair hair tumbling in soft tendrils over the bandages that bound her head.

"Well, and how are you, my dear Laura?" he asked.

"Oh, I—I seem to be getting on splendidly," she answered. "But do please sit down, Stephen dear. I don't suppose they'll let you stay very long, so I want to make the most of every minute."

He took the chair beside her bed, Laura's slender fingers still clinging to his, and her blue eyes never left his face.

"You gave us all a pretty bad fright, you know," he said. "But it was a wonderfully brave action of yours, Laura, in risking your life to save little Jean Mitchell, and we are all very proud of you, my dear Laura."

"Oh, but I'm not at all a brave person, Stephen—not really," she said, with a shaky little smile. "I think I must have acted on the spur of the moment. Doctor Mitchell came to see me this morning, and was awfully sweet to me, but I feel rather a fraud, because I can't remember anything about it all."

"Well, that doesn't alter the fact that you saved little Jean's life—thank Heaven you did not lose your own in doing so, my dear Laura."

"Would it—would it have mattered so very much to you if I had, Stephen?" she asked, smiling up at him.

"How can you ask such a question, my dear girl?" he countered, with a forced little laugh.

Suddenly she lifted his hand and pressed it to her cheek.

"Oh, Stephen dear," she murmured chokily, "it—it's so wonderful to know that we—that you and I mean so much to each other. I don't know what I should have done without you, after my dear father died. I—I had no one else to turn to—"

She broke off, and tears came to her eyes.

"Oh come, please don't upset yourself, my dear," Stephen said. "You may rest assured that I shall always do my best to take care of you, Laura. You know that, don't you?"

She gazed up at him, wide-eyed.

"Oh, Stephen, do you—do you mean—are you asking me to—to marry you?" she stammered tremulously. "It—it would make me the happiest girl in the world to know that I belonged to you—for ever!"

Stephen winced. He realised that she had misunderstood him. How was he going to bring himself to tell her the truth—that his promise to take care of her had been merely made as a friend, and that it was Shirley he loved?

Before he could think of anything to say, the nurse entered, and announced smilingly.

"I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to leave now, Mr. Ranwick."

Stephen rose and nodded, greatly relieved at having an excuse to get away by himself and think things out.

"Well, good-bye, Laura dear," he said, smiling down at her and gave her hand a gentle squeeze.

"You—you will come again soon, won't you, Stephen?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, of course, Laura," he answered.

She gazed after him, a dreamy look in her eyes as the nurse opened the door for

him and he turned and waved her a smiling good-bye.

WHAT on earth was he to do about it all? Stephen asked himself, as he left the hospital. To tell Laura the truth in her present condition, might have serious consequences to her health. Yet, he reminded himself, the longer he allowed the misunderstanding to continue, the more difficult things would become.

When he arrived at the entrance to the block of flats where Shirley lived, Stephen decided to call and tell Shirley what had happened. Deep in thought, he slowly made his way up the stairs and rang the door-bell. Shirley answered it.

"Oh it's you, Stephen dear!" she greeted him, flushing with pleasure.

He stepped inside, and gave her a tender kiss, then followed her into the sitting-room.

"I—I have called to tell you something, darling," he said, as they sat down side by side on the sofa.

He then proceeded to tell Shirley of his visit to the hospital and of what Laura had said to him, in a low, troubled voice.

When he reached the end, Shirley sighed and laid her hand on his arm.

"You must not blame yourself, Stephen dear," she said. "It—it was not your fault, of course. I can guess how easily such an unfortunate misunderstanding could have happened, as I know how very fond you are of Laura."

"Yes, I know, but only in a brotherly way, Shirley," he said. "It is you I love, my dearest, and now it seems the only thing I can do is to wait until Laura is restored to health, and then tell her the truth about my feelings, much as I hate having to hurt the dear girl."

Shirley sighed again.

"Yes, Stephen, and in the meantime, you will have to act as if—as if you really were engaged to Laura, won't you?" she murmured. "But it will make it all the harder for you both later on, when you do tell her the truth."

"Yes, I—I suppose that is so," he agreed. Stephen paused, and gave her a puzzled look. "Then are you suggesting that I—that I should go through with it, Shirley, when it is you I love?" he asked.

"Oh, Stephen, please don't make it harder than it already is for me," she pleaded with trembling lips. "You are very fond of Laura, aren't you? And Laura is deeply in love with you—in fact, her whole life is centred on you. Moreover, she is all alone in the world, and—and needs you, Stephen. So I—"

Her voice faltered and died away and Stephen rose and paced up and down the room, his face pale and haggard.

"How can we possibly give each other up, my dear Shirley—even for Laurar's sake?" he asked, in a hoarse voice.

Shirley clasped her hands together tightly in her lap, praying silently, desperately, for strength.

"We—we have no choice, have we, Stephen?" she managed to say. "I think we both realise that, so we—so we had better say good-bye, hadn't we?"

She dared not trust herself to look at him, as he stood gazing down at her, a tortured expression on his face.

"Well, yes, I—I suppose you are right, Shirley," he muttered at last. "Good-bye, my dear, and may Heaven bless you," he added, in a strained voice, then turned and hurriedly left the flat.

Shirley heard the outer door close behind him, but still she sat there, motionless as a statue, her face deathly white as she stared blankly into space.

No tears came—she was too numbed with anguish to weep. She felt as if her life was shattered. There was no hope anywhere—only a dreary, empty greyness stretching before her, now that she had lost the man she loved.

THE following afternoon Laura lay watching the sunlight on the wall of the ward, and thinking of Stephen, when a nurse entered, accompanied by Dr. Mitchell.

"I hope I am not making a nuisance of myself by calling to see you so often Miss Ferris?" the doctor said, in his usual genial fashion, his blue eyes twinkling.

"Oh, no, of course not, Doctor Mitchell—it is very kind of you to come and see me," Laura said, smiling up at him. "Won't you please sit down?"

A man in his early thirties, and a widower for three years, Dr. Mitchell had a rugged, kindly face and was very popular in the neighbourhood.

"I am delighted to hear that you are making such good progress, Miss Ferris," he said, as he sat down in the bedside chair. "Doctor Greenfield tells me he hopes to be able to discharge you in about a week or ten days' time."

"Oh, really?" Laura's eyes lit up with pleasure. "I am very pleased to hear that Doctor Mitchell."

"As a matter of fact, Miss Ferris," he went on, "I have come to make a suggestion to you. I have decided to rent a seaside cottage in Sussex for the summer, and my intention is to send my young daughter there for her summer holidays when school breaks up next week. I hope to be able to join her there later on in the season for a few weeks."

"And it has occurred to me, Miss Ferris," the doctor continued, "that if you have not yet made any definite plans for the holidays, I might be able to persuade you to spend them at the cottage with Jean, who is so very fond of you. You would be well looked after by my housekeeper, Mrs. Clark, and, needless to say, Jean and I would be very delighted to have you there. I know, of course, that you are a teacher at the nursery school, so you will have a nice long holiday before you, and starting at about the same time as Jean's. So if you could see your way to accept my suggestion, Miss Ferris, I should be very pleased indeed," he added smilingly.

"Thank you very much, Doctor Mitchell," she murmured, deeply touched by his warm friendliness. "But I am very sorry I cannot accept your very generous offer. You see, I—I have recently become engaged, and my fiance and I will probably spend our holidays in the West Country village where we both lived as children."

Dr. Mitchell looked at her in surprise.

"I—I see," he said. "I had no idea that you were engaged, Miss Ferris. Please allow me to congratulate you. Do I happen to know the lucky man, may I ask?"

"My fiance is the English master at the Grammar School—Stephen Ranwick," she proudly explained.

"Oh yes, I have met Mr. Ranwick," the doctor said, doing his best to hide his secret disappointment, for he was greatly attracted to this girl whose bravery had probably saved the life of his young daughter. "And now I come to think of it, Miss Ferris," he went on, "you were muttering the name Stephen when I picked you up unconscious after your accident. Jean and I had been riding together that evening, and while I stopped to speak to a friend, some boys fired a toy pistol and the child's horse bolted. I galloped after her

at once, but was unable to overtake her in time, and but for your prompt action

"The doctor broke off, struck by the strange expression on the girl's face as she stared at him dazedly.

"Oh yes, I—I remember it all now," Laura exclaimed excitedly. "I was crossing the bride path when—I heard a horse galloping towards me. Oh yes," she said again, "it—it is all coming back to me. I was walking across the common and—and was very unhappy, because—because

Suddenly her voice faltered and she pressed her hands to her face with a queer little moan. Dr. Mitchell leaned towards her, a look of grave concern in his eyes.

"Please forgive me if I have inadvertently said anything to upset you, Miss Ferris," he said, in an anxious tone.

"On the contrary, Doctor Mitchell," she murmured brokenly, "I am very grateful to you for—for helping me to remember before—before it was too late!"

THAT evening, Shirley was alone in the flat when the door-bell rang. Her heart gave a wild lurch, for there was only one person who rang in that particular way—it was Stephen!

Her whole being shrank from seeing him again, but somehow she found the will-power to go to the door and open it.

"Shirley—my darling girl!" Stephen exclaimed exultantly, "I—I have something of the utmost importance to tell you!" and next moment he had stepped inside and closed the door to behind him. "My own dear love," he went on, taking her hands in his and gazing adoringly into her pale face, "there—there is nothing now to keep us apart any longer. Laura has released me from our engagement!"

Shirley drew a quick breath, and stared at him incredulously.

"Yes, it is quite true, my dearest," he continued. "When I went to see Laura at the hospital this evening, she told me she had recovered her memory of what happened that night of the accident. It was as you surmised, darling—while she was standing in the hall, Laura overheard my declaration of love for you, and then went out again for a walk on the common. It—it appears that Doctor Mitchell called to see her this afternoon, and while he was describing how Jean's horse bolted, everything suddenly came back to her!"

"Oh, the poor darling!" Shirley gasped.

"Laura was very sweet to me," Stephen hurried on. "She said how very thankful she was that she had found it all out in time, and—and how very grateful she was for the sacrifice we had both been ready to make for her sake."

"Oh, Stephen, dear!" Shirley murmured shakily, as, holding her tightly in his arms, he went on, his grey eyes aglow with happiness:

"I have a feeling, darling, that everything will come right for Laura. She tells me that Doctor Mitchell has invited her to spend the summer holidays with Jean at a seaside cottage he has taken in Sussex, with his housekeeper to look after them. It is quite evident to me that Laura is very fond of Doctor Mitchell, and he of her, so let us hope the dear girl may eventually find a greater happiness with him than I could have given her!"

Shirley nodded understandingly.

"I sincerely hope so, Stephen dear," she whispered, gazing up at him with starry eyes.

# WHEN WE TWO MET

By Barbara Sutton

## TWO SAD HEARTS.

IT was Judy Spender's last day at the office. She had taken down her last short-hand notes, put the cover on her typewriter for the last time, and now her friends were pressing round to wish her good-bye—and future happiness.

She had worked with the firm for just over two years, ever since, as a shy young girl of sixteen she had arrived fresh from a commercial college. Now she was leaving to be married!

It was all so very exciting that even now she couldn't quite believe it. It was like something out of a fairy tale, and Judy had never expected that anything even remotely resembling a fairy tale would ever happen to her.

Nevertheless it was true; Brian's ring sparkled on her engagement finger, her reservations on the steamer, which would carry her to join him in his distant West African bungalow, had been made. Her trousseau was almost complete and in a fortnight's time she would be setting off on the journey which was to end in a romantic honeymoon in Africa.

"I wish I were you," said Lucille Brand enviously, "I wonder if you have any idea how fortunate you are, Judy? That marvellous fiancé of yours—almost too good-looking to be true——" and she sighed sentimentally.

"And going to live in Africa," said another girl equally envious. "No horrid London winter fogs, no rush hours, no standing in queues with damp feet. Instead there will be long hours of golden sunshine with nothing to do but lie around and develop the most glorious tan."

"Also lots of servants to do your slightest bidding," said Gwen Clarke, a plump girl, whose one idea of happiness was to have nothing to do and all day to do it in.

"And there'll be snakes," put in a dark-haired girl thoughtfully, "and lions, as well as things like scorpions and mosquitoes. You'll have plenty of adventures, Judy."

"Well, all marriage is an adventure, isn't it?" said Molly Green, who had been Judy's closest friend for nearly two years. "The fact is we are all envious of you, Judy dear, but we think you deserve your good fortune and we wish you the best of everything."

"Yes, indeed," the all said.

"Mind you write to us Judy, and give our love to that wonderful Brian of yours," said Gwen Clarke.

"It's funny, but all the times I've told your fortune by the cards, or tea-leaves, they've never come out right for you, Judy," said Lucille who fancied herself at telling fortunes. "I can't understand it, but the cards always show you marrying a dark man—and who could be fairer than Brian? And they have never given even a hint that you might be going on a journey. It's most disappointing. Yet look how right they were about that old Miss Mayne leaving to be married last month. I mean to say, who on earth would have thought it possible that any man would look at her twice."

"Never mind, Lucille, of course such fortune telling is only a game!" smiled Judy.

Flushed and happy she gathered up the little personal gifts her friends had given her.

The heads of the firm had earlier that day presented her with a cheque, and altogether she felt that she had been treated far more generously than she deserved.

But then it was all in keeping with her wonderful good fortune in having met a man like Brian Fortescue, who had fallen in love with her almost at first sight and whom she adored with all the warmth and ardour of her young heart.

Even now, when she was about to join him, and become his wife, Judy could not quite understand what it was about her that had attracted anyone so wonderful, for Brian certainly was very handsome, and had, in addition, a very good post in West Africa.

Judy herself was a nice looking girl with a little oval face framed in dark, lustrous curls. Her skin was clear and fine, and she had a pair of large liquid brown eyes.

It was her sweet, candid expression which caused people so frequently to say—"What a charming girl Judy Spender is."

When all the good-byes were finally over, and Judy had walked down the familiar steps for the last time, she felt that a chapter in her life was definitely over; that before her were unopened pages upon which destiny had yet to set its mark.

Judy's life had not been all roses by any means. When very young she had been left an orphan, and no matter how kind friends and relatives can be, nothing can ever make up for the love of a mother and father.

Judy had been brought up by a bachelor uncle who, at first, had not enjoyed the prospect of having a little girl thrust upon him. Luckily for Judy his kind and motherly housekeeper had done her best to give the child the love and care that every little one is entitled to, but this warm-hearted woman had died during Judy's early school-days and her uncle had never taken on another.

Instead, he had sold Hill House, in which he had lived from boyhood, and had gone to live next door in the little cottage which had once housed his gardener, and where he was looked after by a daily woman from the village.

It was obvious that there was little future for a young girl of sixteen in the quiet, off-the-map little hamlet of Tansy Green, and although Judy could have made her home with her uncle who had now grown fond of her, she had the wholesome wish of most girls for independence and a career of her own.

And so it had come about that a room had been found for her in the home of the Froggetts, a nice, respectable family who lived in South London. Thereafter the girl had entered upon what had proved to be a brief business career.

She still went to see her uncle at Christmas and spent her annual fortnight's holiday with him; it was her uncle who was going to see her off on the boat which would take her to West Africa in just over two weeks time.

On the day she left her office for the last time, perhaps no happier girl than Judy

Spender could have been found in all the length and breadth of the land.

As she stood before the entrance door of the Froggett's house, searching for her latchkey, the door opened and Mrs. Froggett appeared in the act of letting someone out; a girl about Judy's own age.

"That's the one who is taking on your room, dear," Mrs. Froggett remarked when the stranger was out of earshot. "There's been a regular procession of them all through the day, but she's the only one I fancied and she's coming in to-day fortnight. Paid me a week's rent in advance, she did, so anxious she was to get the room."

"We're going to miss you, Judy, my dear, more than I can say," she went on. "Quite low about it Mr. Froggett is, for you've always been a favourite of his. But we wouldn't have it any different, for you're going to better yourself and that's a fact, marrying a nice young gentleman like Mr. Fortescue. I'm sure if ever a girl deserved a fine young fellow it's yourself."

"By the way," she added, quickly, "there's a letter from him love, come by air-mail it has, I took it up and put it on your mantelpiece so as it should be the first thing you saw when you came back. When you've read it there'll be a nice cup of tea waiting for you and a slice of your favourite home-made cake."

"Mrs. Froggett, wherever I go and whatever happens to me I shall never receive greater kindness than you have shown me," Judy said a little emotionally. "I have been very happy living here with you, and if I hadn't met Brian I could have been contented to stay on here forever. As it is, when I am in Africa, I will always be thinking of you."

"I'm sure we will, too," said Mrs. Froggett, deeply gratified. "A nicer, better behaved young lady no one could wish to have in their house, and it's real sorry we shall be to part with you. I only hope that this next one who is coming will be half as satisfactory."

"I hope they will like her," thought Judy as she ran swiftly upstairs.

It was odd to think of another girl sleeping in her bed, looking out of her window on to the little back garden so carefully attended to by Mr. Froggett, while she herself would be far away on the high seas being borne swiftly to her waiting sweetheart in Africa.

There on the mantelpiece of her little bed-sitting room was the Air Mail from Brian and she held it for a minute to her breast in a rather touching way.

It would almost certainly be the last letter she would have from him, she told herself, as she sank into a chair and carefully slit the paper along the dotted lines.

"Judy, my dear," ran the small precise writing she knew so well, "how I am going to write this letter I don't know. I am so miserable, so ashamed of myself that I'd give almost anything in the world not to have to do it. No man likes to prove himself a cad, but that is exactly what I have proved to be where you are concerned."

"Judy—it's got to be said, don't take it too hard or grieve too much for one so unworthy of you, but the fact is that I was

*married yesterday to a girl I met out here. I don't ask your forgiveness, I only ask you not to hate me too much for, indeed, you are still dear to me and always will be. Oh, Judy, if you only knew how deeply I regret having treated you so badly, but what is the use of saying that? The fact remains that I have behaved like a cad to one of the dearest little girls on earth.—Brian."*

Blinking and dazed she folded the letter and put it on the dressing table.

"Of course if it were true it would be, well, just unbearable," she heard herself muttering. "But it isn't true—it can't be! Brian would never do such a thing to me. We love each other, we're going to be married."

Then the truth struck her more forcibly and like one in a dream she stretched out her hand and took up the letter again. A second reading would, she told herself, clarify things—show her where she had been mistaken—perhaps Brian had written it all as a horrible kind of joke!

But as her eyes scanned the written lines every word seemed to fall upon her heart like a drop of ice.

It was true, coldly and cruelly true. Brian had forsaken her on what was almost the eve of her wedding. It didn't seem to make sense, men like Brian did not do such things to girls, and yet before her eyes, in his own unmistakable handwriting, she read the words which told her that he was already married to another girl!

Although she did not know it a groan burst from her lips and she got up and began to pace the room feverishly.

From its place on the bedside-table Brian's photograph smiled out at her with all its winning charm. Who was it who had said that he was almost too handsome to be true? One of the girls at the office, perhaps, for they were forever raving about his good looks.

All at once she remembered that Lucille Brand had found even the cards and tea leaves strangely silent on the subject of her coming voyage and at the same time insistent that it was a dark man she was going to marry and not a fair one like Brian.

And now there was to be no voyage for her, no lovers' meeting, no marriage to any man either dark or fair.

All at once the room seemed too small and cramped to hold both her and her grief, and scarcely realising what she did she opened the door and went swiftly downstairs past the Froggetts' kitchen whence proceeded an appetising odour of freshly-baked cakes, and so into the road.

With the curious impression that if she only walked far and fast enough she would escape the torturing knowledge forced upon her by Brian's letter, Judy hurried along blind and deaf to all and everything around.

She had received a severe shock, and as yet her mind was stunned, aware only of its immediate agony, and of the longing to escape—somewhere, anywhere, in much the same way that a hurt animal creeps away to be alone to lick its wounds.

Presently she reached a district of narrow mean streets where women gossiped on the doorsteps and children sprawled over the pavement playing and squabbling.

It was such a group—a cluster of small boys playing marbles—which caused Judy to move aside mechanically. And she stepped into the road, right into the path of a speeding cyclist, and a kind and merciful darkness descended upon her.

"YOU'RE quite all right, my dear, don't be frightened."

As if from afar Judy heard these comforting words, and opening her eyes looked into the face of a hospital nurse who smiled back at her reassuringly.

Through a nearby window bright sunshine lay in shafts upon the floor, along each side of which stretched a row of beds similar to the one in which she found herself.

She was in a hospital then, she told herself. What had happened? Why was she here? Confused and bewildered she made as if to sit up and the same kind voice said quietly:

"I shouldn't try to sit up just yet, my dear. You had an accident and broke some ribs and you're in plaster, you know. What about a nice cup of tea?"

"I'd like one," Judy said dazedly. "How did I come here, nurse? I can't remember anything."

"That's only natural because you've had concussion, you see, due to your accident. But you're all right now and I shouldn't bother to think for the moment. You came in an ambulance two days ago."

"Two days?" Judy exclaimed feverishly. "What must the Froggetts be thinking? They'll be terribly worried about me. I must let them know—"

"Everything has been taken care of," said the nurse soothingly. "Your friends know where you are; there's nothing to worry about, so you just lie quietly and I'll bring you that cup of tea."

Closing her eyes Judy tried to piece everything together.

Her head felt strangely as if it were stuffed with cotton wool, she was in no pain, and felt quite comfortable.

But at the back of her clouded mind it seemed as if something sinister lurked, something waiting to spring out on her, something she did not want to remember.

She drank the tea gratefully, with it there came some pieces of buttered toast which she ate with sudden appetite and then she fell asleep.

When she opened her eyes again the shadows of evening filled the ward and in a chair by her bedside was a figure so like her uncle that Judy felt that she must be dreaming. For how had Uncle John got here?

It was certainly his voice which said gently.

"Awake at last, are you, my dear? You've had a real good sleep."

"So it is you, Uncle John?" Judy murmured. "Everything's beyond me. I don't know what's been happening. Please tell me."

In a few quiet words her uncle described all that had happened. How she had been knocked down by a cyclist and brought to the hospital by ambulance. He told her how the Froggetts, alarmed by her unusual absence, had communicated with the police, who in turn had made enquiries at the various hospitals thus establishing her identity. Lastly of how the police had informed him of all that had happened.

"And here I am," he smiled, "and here you are, with nothing more serious the matter with you than a few broken ribs, which will soon mend. In these days of jet-planes and motor cars to get knocked out by a bicycle seems almost fantastic. I don't know how you managed it!"

"I don't know either, uncle," Judy murmured, smiling back. "The last thing I

seem to recollect is stepping on to the road out of the way of some boys playing marbles— Uncle—what happened to the cyclist? Was he hurt?"

"He also had concussion," was the reply, "and I believe he broke his collar bone, but neither of you suffered any serious harm, for which you should be very grateful. But I'm afraid Judy, my dear—" and here the kind-hearted man looked grave—"I'm afraid that you won't be able to sail to West Africa yet awhile. I haven't cabled yet to Brian, but I fear that you and he will be disappointed when you hear what the doctor says."

It was as if that cloud at the back of Judy's brain suddenly lifted, and everything came rushing back to her.

She felt her throat thicken with sobs so that it was only with difficulty that she managed to murmur:

"There's no need to cable Brian, Uncle. The wedding is off. I don't want to talk about it now, but—but Brian is already married to someone else."

It was some time before her startled Uncle fully realised that she was not speaking under the influence of delirium, and when the truth was finally forced upon him he had to choke back his words of anger.

That night Judy hardly slept at all. Utter and complete desolation pressed down upon her, filling her with despair.

She had lost everything. Her job, her comfortable lodging, her lover, her hopes of the future, all swept away by one crushing, cruel blow, just when life had seemed to be at its brightest and best.

How happy she had been, how wretched now! Sadly she told herself that she would never know happiness again, and it is not too much to say that her mental suffering considerably retarded her recovery.

So much so that one day the Lady Superintendent, a much loved member of the hospital staff, said to her gently:

"You're not making the progress you should, my child. It seems to me that you have something on your mind. If so, will you not tell me so that we can talk it over and see if there is nothing to be done about it? Sometimes it helps to tell a stranger what you could not talk about to your own people."

Something in the sympathetic voice broke down Judy's defences, and in a faltering voice she poured out the full story of her shattered romance. How, at the eleventh hour, with all her trousseau bought, all her plans made, the date of her sailing fixed, her fiancé had written to tell her that he was already married to another girl.

"And now what is there left to live for?" Judy asked in a hard, brittle voice. "I have lost everything, everything."

"Have you never thought of trying to live for others?" asked the quiet, gentle voice at her side. "My dear, you have had a shocking experience, and I do not wonder that it has filled you with bitterness. But believe me, you could never have found true peace or happiness with a man who could behave with such weakness and lack of consideration. Some day you will live to be thankful that this has happened while you are still young enough to form new attachments and to make a fresh start in life. And remember this, Judith dear, when God closes one door He opens another—nothing is more true than that."

"Will He open one for me?" Judy asked, her big, tragic eyes lifted wonderingly.

"He will, indeed, my dear. You have only to step through it to discover what

lies beyond. Believe me, sad as your story may be, there are many in this very ward still sadder, but for them, too, there awaits consolation."

This brief conversation made a lasting impression upon Judy, and though it would be false to say that she ceased to be unhappy from that minute, it is the fact that all bitterness and resentment left her and she prepared to face life again with hope and courage.

A FEW days later she left the hospital to motor down with her Uncle John to his little cottage at Tansy Green, there to begin a new phase of existence.

She had come back to the place which, two years earlier, she had regarded as too quiet and uneventful to offer anything worth the taking but which now had become as a haven of refuge.

Moreover she discovered that she was wanted there. Her uncle, ageing and lonely, was grateful for her companionship, and, in fulfilling all those little domestic details which go towards creating a happy home, Judy found an outlet for her energies and a reason for living.

At first her uncle, fearing that life might be dull, would look at her questioningly from time to time as if to catch her off her guard.

"Are you contented child, leading this quiet life?" he asked one day.

Judy smiled reassuringly.

"I find country life far from quiet, Uncle," she said. "I seem to have many more things to occupy me here than ever I had when I lived in London. Why, this summer has been a positive round of gaiety, what with all the fetes and the various agricultural shows! We've never a dull moment."

"Besides, in London I was a little Miss Nobody, but here I am Judy Spender, niece to one of the important and certainly one of the most respected members of the community. Dear Uncle John, I often feel that I have never thanked you half enough for all you have done for your penniless niece" and as she spoke the girl looked at him with grateful eyes.

Mr. Spender was touched. He had not looked for gratitude; in his opinion Judy had given him even more than he had given her. He had been lonely, and, although a popular and respected figure he had never known the joys of family ties and domestic affection.

His niece had given him companionship and love, two very precious things to an ageing man who had never married. Though why he should have remained a bachelor was a puzzle to Judy, for it was obvious that in his day he must have been a fine figure of a man as well as being the possessor of a kind and generous nature.

She was to learn the reason in the answer he now made to her in return for her expression of gratitude.

"I have never wanted thanks for anything I have been able to do for you, Judy my dear," he said softly. "Once, I found it very difficult to regard you with anything but resentment, your presence was painful to me. But after a little those unworthy feelings died, and I only remembered that you were the daughter of the one woman I ever loved."

Judy looked at him in speechless astonishment, and he went on quietly:

"Yes, your dear mother was the love of my life, Judy, but she preferred my brother, your father, and they were married, since

when I have been unable to replace her by anyone else. You are a little like her Judy, but only a little. To me she has always remained the loveliest girl I ever knew."

He ended this brief little sketch with a wistful sigh, and Judy regarded him with fresh interest.

There were people then who stayed faithful to a lost love for a lifetime? Her own tragic experience came rushing back upon her and she told herself sadly that her fate would be a repetition of her uncle's; there would never be anyone to take Brian's place in her heart.

"And yet your sorrow does not seem to have made you bitter, Uncle?" she said, thoughtfully.

"All that has passed," he shrugged. "I did know bitterness and rebellion, I went through deep waters and told myself that I cared little if they submerged me entirely. But time softens all wounds, and gradually I became aware that there were other things to live for outside my own personal happiness, and now you see in me a perfectly contented man, Judy dear, especially since you have come into my life."

But how many long and empty years had it taken to produce that resignation? Judy asked herself rebelliously, all her eager, impatient youth up in arms against the imaginary grey future she pictured for herself as the result of listening to her uncle's long-dead romance.

It was not resignation one wanted when one was young, neither could tender memories supply the place of that love which every human being has a right to, but which, she told herself, would never come to her a second time.

She was one of the sad army of those who have loved and lost of whom it is said that they are better off than if they had never loved at all, a poetical assertion with which, at that stage of her career, she could not find herself in agreement.

But the knowledge of her uncle's love for her mother seemed to make him all the dearer to Judy, and had she been his daughter she could not have striven more earnestly to make him comfortable and happy.

#### A STRANGE SITUATION.

ON a pleasant Spring afternoon, some two years later, Judy Spender was mowing the lawn of the cottage for the first time that year.

The two years which had elapsed since she had come to Tansy Green had brought their inevitable changes, saddest of which had been her Uncle John's death.

He had died very suddenly six months ago, leaving Judy everything he possessed in the world.

He was her only relative, and although by now she had made many friends, and acquired many interests in life, Judy mourned him very sincerely. At the same time she felt unsettled and restless, not quite certain what use she wanted to make of her life, above all she felt lonely.

With the passing of time she had managed to swallow her humiliation sufficiently to contact Molly Green with whom she had been so friendly in her office days.

She had told Molly everything about her lost romance and had frequently had her friend to stay with her at the cottage.

But Molly was now engaged, and Judy knew that she had lost her to some extent, for naturally the engaged pair endeavoured

to spend as much time together as they could. Yet although Judy had by this time several girl friends in the neighbourhood, none of them had quite taken Molly's place.

She put in a lot of time in the garden, grew her own vegetables, and kept a few hens. But although these pursuits took up quite a lot of her time she did not feel that she had enough to do.

Something was lacking, and of this Judy was painfully aware, although it was not until Molly had put her wise that she realised what it was.

"You need a boy friend," Molly said bluntly. "Oh, I know that it is your intention never to fall in love again and all that sort of thing, and one can't wonder at your feeling like that after your experience. But believe me, Judy, all men are not alike, and all girls are happier if they have a boy to get around with. When Tim and I are married I shall have you to stay with us and we'll introduce you to all the bachelors we know of."

Judy did not volunteer the information that she had recently turned down a proposal of marriage from the local vet: a very nice young man with whom she had nearly taken a post as kennel maid, work which would have suited her down to the ground, for she was intensely fond of all animals and had "a way" with them as the saying goes.

But young George Harvey had developed a romantic interest in her and so her scheme to work with him had to fall through.

"I wish I *could* fall in love," Judy thought on that Spring day as she pushed the lawnmower backwards and forwards. "Molly is quite right in saying that life is dull without a touch of romance. If only I could have cared for George we might have made quite a go of things."

At this moment her train of thought was interrupted by the sight of a car coming to a standstill outside the front gate of the cottage.

As she watched a young man stepped out, glanced rather fixedly at her, then opened the gate and entered the garden.

He was tall and dark, with a rather rugged, handsome face, and his almost black hair clung to his head in masses of curls. He was so deeply tanned that Judy gathered at once that he had been living in some far-off tropical country.

"I'm so sorry to intrude," he began, with a disarming smile, "I am looking for a Miss Spender."

"I am Miss Spender," Judy told him. "Is there something I can do for you?"

He was looking at her now in rather an odd way, as if he were puzzled about something. In fact, his glance was so intent that she felt herself colour up resentfully.

Instantly aware of this the young man said quickly:

"Forgive me if I appear to stare at you too closely—the fact is your face is in some strange way very familiar to me and yet I cannot believe that we have ever met before? I am sure that I should remember had we done so."

"I don't recollect ever having seen you before," Judy said, "but it is possible that we may have just glimpsed each other somewhere. Have you been to Tansy Green before?"

"No. I am a complete stranger, in fact I have only just returned from Nigeria," was the reply, and for a moment Judy felt a twinge of pain as he uttered the last word. Nigeria! That was where she was to

have gone to join Brian all those years ago.

But it was only a momentary stab of memory, for Judy had schooled herself not to indulge in vain repining for what could never be undone.

The stranger was still speaking.

"I'm home on leave," he said, "and you can't imagine how beautiful these little English villages appear to one who has been an exile for some years. Even the name—Tansy Green—is so quaint and attractive. Oh, and that reminds me, Miss Spender, of my errand. They told me at the estate agents office in Ardingley that you had one of the keys of Hill House. I have an order to view that property, and this being early closing day there was no one who could come to show me over the place. Hence my coming to see you."

"Oh, are you thinking of coming to live here?" Judy exclaimed. "I hope you are, for Hill House has been empty for months. I used to live there as a child," she went on, "it belonged to my uncle at one time. I shall be very pleased to show you over. Garner and Wilson, the estate agents, often make use of me in this way, for Hill House is just up the little drive which borders my garden. I'll go and get the keys," she added, and disappeared through the front door of the cottage.

The young man looked after her speculatively.

"Now where can I have seen her before?" he puzzled. "Of whom can she remind me? There's a certain charm about her which is most alluring."

Hill House was only separated from Judy's cottage by about fifty yards.

It was a square-built house of grey stone, over which wisteria and ivy grew in unchecked profusion. As Judy had said the place had been empty for nearly a year and was beginning to show signs of neglect.

It would be rather nice, she thought, to have a pleasant neighbour like this agreeable young man. Was he married? she wondered. If not he must be contemplating matrimony, for no man would consider taking on such a house for himself alone.

Beyond being well-built and comfortable Hill House had no outstanding features of interest. It was roomy and light and stood in a moderately-sized garden, in which, long ago, Judy had played through the long hours of vanished summers. Upstairs was the nursery, with bars across the windows.

"It's just the place for kiddies," the young man declared delightedly. "I honestly believe that I've found what I'm looking for, Miss Spender."

Judy looked at his bronzed young face and asked herself if it was possible that he was the father of children? He looked so young, not in the least as if the responsibility of parenthood was his.

Moved by curiosity she glanced at the card she held in her hand, the order to view presented by Messrs. Garner and Wilson, and a very odd sensation stole over her as she read the words "Please allow Mr. Barry Rickaby to see over the house and premises of Hill House."

Barry Rickaby! How often she had heard that name on Brian's lips. Barry Rickaby, his great friend, who was to have been the best man at Judy's wedding, who had an engineering job in Nigeria, not far away from Lagos.

Ricky, Brian had always called him, the best friend any man could wish to have. It must be the same man, Judy told herself, for had he not already stated that he had been living in Nigeria?

Memories of the past returned to her with such poignancy that she felt quite unnerved. She had tried so hard to forget, to put what was over and done with away from her, that it seemed so very unkind of life to have thrust this living reminder of the unhappy past upon her.

A little while ago she had been thinking what an agreeable neighbour he would make if he should come to live at Hill House. Now Judy rather hoped that he would decide against the place, for he would be a constant reminder of things she had painfully schooled herself to forget.

"I really believe that I've found the very place for them," he said enthusiastically. "There are just the right number of bedrooms. I think it will just about suit my friend, Miss Spender."

He looked at her with a beaming smile, his teeth very white in his brown face, and in spite of her somewhat perturbed feelings she smiled back at him.

"Your friend?" she repeated. "Then it's not for yourself you want the house?"

"Gracious, no," he laughed, "I'm acting for the widow of a friend of mine. Poor girl, left with two young twins, for whom the climate of Nigeria is not suitable. She wants to buy a house in the country for their sake, something big enough for herself and a nurse. I hope she'll approve of this one, I should like to think that she had you as a neighbour, Miss Spender."

"Well, for my part I should be glad to see Hill House occupied," said Judy. "An empty house is always rather depressing, don't you think? It would be marvellous to have children there, especially twins. I always think twins are so interesting."

"Well, I'm particularly interested in the ones in question because I knew their father so well," said Barry.

To herself Judy wondered if, in that far-off country where both of them had lived, he and Brian had recently met? She found that she could not quite bring herself to ask the question, for this sudden link with the buried past had disturbed her.

"I've something promising to submit to Nancy at last," Barry said as they locked up the house once more and emerged into the spring sunshine. "I hope she'll approve, she jolly well ought to, for it seems to me just the job, and with a neighbour like you thrown in too," he added, giving Judy one of his wide infectious grins. "You'd be friends, you two, I'm sure."

"Let us hope that you're right," Judy said smiling back, wondering what he would feel like if he knew that he had once been cast for the role of best man at that wedding which had never taken place. Her name of Spender was not uncommon enough to have supplied the necessary clue to aid his memory, she thought, although she herself had recognised his name at once.

"It's been nice meeting you," Barry said as they reached her home, "thanks a lot for showing me round. I must be getting back now."

"Not before you've had a cup of tea," declared Judy, who during her two years residence had developed the country-dweller's ready hospitality. "I'll run in and put the kettle on while you enjoy a smoke under the sycamore," and deaf to his half-hearted protests she ran indoors.

She liked this stray caller and thought it extremely kind of him to give up his time in searching for a house for his dead friend's widow.

A sudden sound outside drew her eyes to the window. Barry was mowing the half-

finished lawn, his sleeves rolled up to the elbow displaying brown, muscular forearms, while in his strong grip the machine which Judy found so heavy seemed to glide over the grass in an effortless manner.

"That's very kind of you," she called through the window.

"It's the least I can do, having dragged you away from your work," he said. "This machine could do with a spot of oil, you know. Is there any handy?"

Judy directed him to the tool-shed and by the time she had carried out the tea-tray, with its pretty green-and-white china, and a plate of buttered scones, he was ready to wash his hands at the kitchen sink, having given the lawn mower the necessary oil.

"There's no doubt that a man has his uses about a house," Judy declared smilingly. "I should never have tackled that machine myself although I knew it needed oiling badly."

"Do you live here alone?" he asked in some surprise, and when she nodded, went on: "But you can't want for a man about the house, surely, a charming girl like you?"

She felt the colour run up into her cheeks and he said quickly:

"I say, is that rather cheek on my part? I mean, on so short an acquaintance? I didn't mean to be offensive."

"A compliment is seldom offensive," she said lightly, and was surprised to find how pleased she felt at his tribute.

"Then I'll make you another," Barry said. "These scones are smashing, Miss Spender, and I'm sure they're home-made. I'm afraid I've made rather a pig of myself over them," with a rueful glance at the all but emptied plate.

"Which in itself is another compliment and one which gladdens the heart of any hostess," Judy said.

"I wish I could think who it is you remind me of," he murmured, his eyes caught again by that fugitive likeness which had already puzzled him. "Perhaps," he went on, "I met you in a dream."

"It is said that each of us has a double," Judy replied, "which is a much more likely solution of your problem."

"But not so romantic," he said. "I should like to think that I had seen you in a dream, Miss Spender, and I'm going to believe I did until I have proof to the contrary."

It was very pleasant, sitting in the sheltered corner of the garden, the scent of a white lilac bush filling the air with a perfume which might be that of Spring itself.

"I hope my next job will be in England," Barry said. "The old country takes some beating whatever anyone may say."

He rose as he spoke and all at once it came as an unwelcome thought to Judy that probably they would never meet again.

As if the same thought were his Barry said as he took her hand:

"Not good-bye, Miss Spender, only *au revoir*. We shall meet again."

"In one of your dreams?" Judy asked darily.

"Quite probably," he said gravely, "but also in the flesh. I'm going to push Hill House as much as I can, for I'm convinced that Nancy will never find anything to suit her better. When she comes to live here I shall be a frequent visitor I expect, Miss Spender, at least that is my fixed intention since—well, since coming here," he ended lamely, obviously substituting the last three words for others.

Judy watched his car disappear down the lane and wondered if what he had really meant to say was "since meeting you." Then she chided herself for being conceited enough to think that she had made any impression on him.

Quite probably he was interested in the young widow he spoke of as Nancy, who, with two children, might become her neighbour if the young man got his way.

I would be nice to have someone living in poor old Hill House again, especially someone young. Yes, she hoped with all her heart that the young widow might approve of Barry's choice for her, even though it would be strange to have someone almost on her own doorstep as it were, who probably knew Brian and his wife.

Once more she wondered how long it was since her recent visitor had seen Brian, that faithless lover of hers who had left her so heartlessly in the lurch.

Somehow Judy did not think that Barry could have approved of such a cruel action, and yet—what could she possibly know of his character, she who had been taken in so easily by another man?

"But I was so young then," she tried to excuse herself. "I should not be so easily deceived to-day."

She sighed as she remembered the suffering of those past days when her loss had been like an open wound and life had seemed scarcely worth the living.

Did Brian ever think of her now? she wondered. Had the girl who had become his wife been lucky enough to keep the love of a man who had proved himself to be fickle and unreliable?

It seemed that Barry's visit had brought the past back too vividly for Judy's peace of mind, and she thought perhaps it might be better if she never saw him again.

AS it turned out she saw him within a week.

She was in the garden, transplanting some seedlings, when she heard a car stop in the lane. Next moment she saw Barry striding up the path.

"Hello," she said, and there was pleased surprise in her voice.

"What do you think?" he began excitedly as she stood upright. "Nancy has taken the house! Taken it without even seeing it."

His satisfaction was obvious and once more the idea crossed Judy's mind that he might be thinking of marrying this Nancy of whom he spoke.

"You couldn't sound more pleased if you were going to live at Hill House yourself," she said, watching his reaction to this.

"Oh, well, I shall often be over here," he said. "I intend to be a constant visitor. Anyway, I think I've earned the right to after all the trouble I've been to, don't you?"

All at once Judy became aware that her appearance must be anything but attractive. Her hands were earth-stained, her hair in riotous disorder, and she more than suspected she had a speck on her nose.

But Barry did not seem to be in the least put off by this.

"Instead he said happily:

"It is good to see you again, Miss Spender!"

"I'm glad to see you also," she replied. "And very glad to hear your news. But I think your friend is very trusting to take a house purely on someone else's recommendation, without having seen it herself."

"Oh, Nancy is like that," he smiled. "She's rather a helpless sort of female

really, if you know what I mean. No idea whatever of business and quite content to leave everything in my hands as her husband wished. One of my reasons for coming on here from Ardingley, where I've been interviewing the estate agents, is to ask your help," and he gave her one of his disarming smiles.

"Well, of course I'll do anything I can," she said, and he went on to say that he felt sure that she must know everyone in the village and might therefore be able to arrange for a woman to take on the job of daily help to the new owners of Hill House.

"Rather cheek to count on you, perhaps," he added, "but Nancy has got to have someone, she's not over-strong and that house is too big for her to tackle alone. Of course, there's a coloured nanny to look after the kiddies."

"I daresay the woman who comes to me for an occasional day would take it on," Judy said. "I'll ask her."

"Thanks very much," he said gratefully.

"And what was your other reason for coming to Tansy Green?" enquired Judy. "Is there something else I can do for you?"

He looked at her and smiled.

"My other reason was, of course, to see you again."

A warm thrill, such as she had not experienced for years, ran through Judy.

"I rather asked for that, I suppose," she exclaimed with assumed carelessness, not caring for him to see that she was moved in any way.

"It was no empty compliment, I assure you," he remarked seriously, adding in a lighter tone: "The last time I was here you asked me to tea. It's my turn now to ask you to come out with me. I passed several delightful-looking tea-places on the way down. Let's go and sample one, shall we?"

Judy looked distressfully down at herself.

"I'd love to—but look at me," she cried. "Of rather, should I say, don't look at me? It would take ages to make myself fit to be seen."

"Well, take as long as you like," he said. "It doesn't matter to me when I get back to my digs. I've all the time in the world."

Judy washed and changed in almost record time. A good brushing restored her curls to their usual lustre, excitement painted roses on her cheeks.

In her wardrobe hung a tan dress, with white turned-back collar and cuffs, which had a Spring-like touch. When she had put it on it so transformed her appearance that Barry, who had only seen her so far in work-day garments, stared in mingled astonishment and admiration.

"I say, you do look marvellous!" he exclaimed involuntarily.

"I'm glad you approve," Judy murmured, feeling all at once oddly self-conscious, for it was long since she had given any thought to the possible effect her appearance might have on young men.

"I took the liberty of tidying up your tools and taking them to the shed," he said, "so there's nothing to detain you."

"I'll just make sure that I have my key," Judy hesitated, opening her bag. "I don't want to have to climb in through a window, as I once had to do when I forgot it."

"I can see that you want someone to look after you," he grinned. "I can't imagine why that idea has not occurred to some lucky fellow before now. Perhaps it has?" and he looked at her questioningly as he took his place by her side in the comfortable little car.

"Perhaps," Judy agreed and left it at that.

"I'm sticking my neck out, I can see," he said. "Sorry and all that, Miss Spender, but a fellow usually likes to know if a girl has a fellow before he gets friendly with her."

"This girl hasn't," she smiled, "and not likely to have," at which remark Barry gave her a frowning look.

"I say, you're not a man-hater or anything in that line are you?" he enquired anxiously.

"Not in the least," she replied, and to change the subject added admiringly—"What a smoothly-running car Mr. Rickaby."

"I say, couldn't you possibly manage to call me, Barry?" he said plaintively. "Mr. Rickaby is a bit formal, isn't it?"

"All right," she agreed, "so long as you return the compliment and call me Judy."

Barry started so violently that the car gave a sudden lurch, and drawing to the side of the lane he turned and stared at the girl beside him, his face a curious study of mingled emotions.

"Judy Spender?" he breathed slowly. "Gosh, I must have been blind—Judy Spender?—Oh, my hat! What a truly impossible situation—and yet I knew your face was familiar from the start."

"Yes," Judy said quietly. "I am the girl who was once engaged to Brian Fortescue. He is your friend, isn't he? He used to speak about you to me. Ricky he called you. I remembered your name at once, you were to have been our best man."

"But—of all the unfortunate things to happen," he muttered, his face puckered with anxiety. "If I had realised that your full name was Judy Spender I should have known at once that you were the original of the photograph he used to carry about with him and showed to everyone with such pride. And now, what's going to happen?"

His consternation was so obvious that Judy felt that it was up to her to put him at ease.

"Why does it matter so much?" she asked soothingly. "I have known who you were all the time, you needn't be afraid that it embarrasses me to have met Brian's friend—it was all over two years ago remember."

"Yes, but that's not all," he murmured miserably. "A most awkward situation has arisen, Judy—an impossible one. Oh, if only I had recognised you earlier."

"I don't know what you are getting at," she said. "What is this situation which you find so awkward? Please tell me," she added with a note of urgency.

"I—I don't think I ever told you the full name of the purchaser of Hill House," he said unhappily. "It is Nancy—Fortescue!"

Judy drew in her breath in a gasping sigh and felt the colour drain from her face.

"Nancy Fortescue? Then Brian—Brian is dead?" she murmured.

Barry bent his head.

"He died nearly a year ago," he said. "Heaven knows I hate to be the one to tell you this news," he went on. "It's the very deuce of a fix, Nancy coming to live next door to you. I shall never forgive myself for having urged her to buy Hill House, and all the time I thought that I was being so very clever!"

Judy did not know quite how she felt. The immense surprise of the discovery that her new neighbour was Brian's widow seemed to have bereft her of all power to think. That, and the tragic fact that Brian,

the handsome, splendidly healthy young lover of her youth, was dead.

"How—how did he die?" she asked unsteadily.

"He had a bad bout of malaria from which he had not fully recovered when he got blood-poisoning," said Barry. "Everything possible was done for him, but death strikes quickly out there." He paused. "I must get Nancy to put the house on the market again. You certainly cannot be exposed to such a painful position if I can help it."

His distress was such that Judy pulled herself together.

"If you don't mind driving on," she said, "and not talking to me for a little I shall be able to get my thoughts into some kind of order. What you have told me has been rather a shock——"

Despite all her efforts her lips quivered, and she had to fight back an inclination to burst into tears.

All the past, with its suffering and humiliation came rushing back upon her. She had thought herself secure in her little haven against all hurtful memories, but now her refuge was to be invaded, and her peace of mind in danger of being undermined.

In silence they rushed through the peaceful countryside, and such was the soothing motion that Judy's first torrent of rebellion began to subside, and she started to look facts squarely in the face and realised that, after all, there was nothing so very unbearable in the situation.

For long now Brian had been as good as dead to her, and though his early death was tragically sad it could not touch her with the personal grief which would have been hers had things been different.

They had reached a district quite unfamiliar to Judy by the time she had made up her mind how to act. Barry was looking ahead with frowning brows obviously trying to puzzle out the best way to act.

"It's all right, Barry, don't look so worried," she said gently. "I've had time to think things out and I don't want anything altered. I don't see why Brian's widow should have to alter her plans—even if she were willing to do so—because of something that was over and done with more than two years ago."

"But, Judy dear, it will be so difficult—so painful for you," he said. "Frankly, I don't see how you can be expected to stand it. It's going to be an impossible situation."

"Not unless she and I choose to make it so," was her reply. "You know the sort of girl she is, Barry, I don't. What are her reactions likely to be?"

"Oh, Nancy is all right," Brian said. "She's very nice—I'm sure you'd have liked her immensely if—if——"

"If she hadn't been Brian's widow, you mean?" she interposed gently. "Well, I shan't be mean enough to allow that to prejudice me against her. It wasn't her fault that he was—was weak and fickle. No, Barry, I shan't be the one to make any trouble, you can count on that. Once I thought Brian had spoilt my whole life, but now I'm not so sure," and again her voice quivered into silence.

"I know," he nodded. "I—I never was able to think of him in quite the same way again, Judy. He's dead, poor chap, but one can't disguise the fact that he behaved to you in a very dishonourable way, and it made a great difference to our friendship. In fact, it was not until he was on what was proved to be his death-bed, that the earlier

relationship between us returned. He begged me to stand by his wife, and those poor little kiddies, should anything happen to him. He explained that Nancy was far away from all her own people and would have nobody to whom to turn in the event of his death.

"Naturally, I gave him my word to do all in my power," he went on, "for he and I had once been like David and Jonathan, and out there friendship counts for much more than it does over here. So when Nancy decided to return to England with the children I wangled my leave a month or two early and came back with her. Little did I think that my journey would end in a meeting with the girl Brian had formerly intended to marry."

"But you don't regret it too much, I hope?" Judy asked softly; his confidences had proved to her more strongly than ever what a really nice person he was.

"You bet, I don't," he cried with boyish enthusiasm. "It's been a pleasure and an honour to know you, Judy, and I think you are behaving marvellously over this business. I admire you more than I can say."

"After such a flattering speech what can I do but say that I also am glad to have met you, Barry," she declared frankly, "so shall we celebrate the occasion with a cup of tea in that inviting-looking cafe over there?"

#### LOVE COMES AGAIN.

JUDY had plenty of time in which to get used to the idea of having Brian's widow as her neighbour, for Nancy gave orders for Hill House to be decorated inside and out before she took over.

Money appeared to be of no object, but what was curious to Judy was the way in which the young widow left everything in Barry's hands.

It was he who superintended all the arrangements for her occupation, and it often struck Judy how unselfish his attitude was in giving up so much of his time to Nancy Fortescue's affairs. Tansy Green was a good fifty miles from the London suburb where the young man had found lodgings, and he must have made the journey at least twice a week.

Judy, of course, saw him frequently, and a firm friendship established itself between them.

She began to look forward to his sudden arrivals with a keenness, which should have warned her of what was happening, although safe in her firm conviction that she would never love again, the idea that Barry was becoming the most important thing in her life never dawned upon her.

But so it was. He had flashed into her quiet well-ordered existence and upset all her carefully-planned routine. It was as if a burst of dazzling sunlight had suddenly illuminated a colourless landscape, shedding brilliance where formerly all had been a quiet peaceful grey.

For the first time for years Judy was conscious of her youth and of the wish to experience youth's lawful pleasures. All at once she began to realise how much more exhilarating it was to get around with a young man than with a girl.

And get around she did, for Barry was always suggesting some excursion or another, seemingly as wishful as herself, once his self-imposed duties connected with Hill House were carried out, to drive off in the car with her beside him, a picnic-basket, well-stocked with home-made delicacies, on the back seat.

It was no wonder that Judy blossomed into what was almost beauty under these new conditions, no wonder that her sleeping heart should stir from its long slumber to fresh life.

"You can't imagine what all this means to me after the heat of West Africa," Barry declared one day,

He was stretched full-length on the bank of a river, while Judy was seated with her arms hugging her knees watching a water-vole washing its face with fairy like little hands.

"Oh Barry, you've frightened him away just as he had got to the washing-behind the ears stage," she cried a little reproachfully.

"Personally I'd rather look at you any day than at a water-vole," Barry said with a lazy smile. "You're such a very nice person to look at, Judy. Besides, I want to talk to you, I want you to know how grateful I am to you for making my leave so enjoyable. Having someone like you to go about with has made all the difference."

"Why, I thought it was I who ought to be grateful," Judy said a little breathlessly. "You've given me a lovely time, I shall never forget this summer."

"I won't let you," he said vigorously, "at least I shan't let you forget me, anyhow. I'm glad that I saw that advertisement in the paper about Hill House. But for that we might never have met—think of that, Judy!"

She had thought of it, often, but she did not tell him so.

Instead she said slowly:

"A week to-day and they'll be here."

He knew to whom she alluded.

"Yes, a week to-day Nancy is due to arrive and you won't ever be lonely again, Judy, that's one thing. Even when I'm not here you'll have Nancy."

"As if that would be the same," she thought with a sudden sinking feeling in her breast. So soon this pleasant—this more than pleasant—this all-satisfying companionship would be over, for Nancy would be there to share their little outings.

Judy was ashamed of the feeling of resentment which filled her at this knowledge and resolutely choked it back.

"What is she like Barry?" she enquired, turning over on her side and looking at him.

His face lit up.

"Oh, she's a charming girl," he exclaimed. "Very sweet and feminine, the sort of girl men always want to help and look after."

"I mean to look at?" Judy asked.

His response was full of enthusiasm.

"She's lovely outstandingly so, golden hair and eyes like violets, and a wonderful figure, all the fellows were absolutely potty about her," he said. "She could have picked and chosen amongst a dozen of them."

"And she had to pick on Brian," Judy observed slowly.

"You mustn't hold that against her," he said hurriedly. "She knew nothing about you when Brian proposed to her—she told me so herself."

"I'm sure she didn't," Judy replied generously. "She wouldn't be as nice as you say she is if she took another girl's man without any scruple. Well, you've described a paragon of beauty and sweetness, Barry, and I don't know how I'm going to live up to her."

"Well, perhaps I'm a little biased in her

favour," he observed, "but I assure you that I've not been exaggerating."

Judy got to her feet and said that she thought she would wander down the stream a short way and see if she could catch another glimpse of the kingfisher which had flashed before their dazzled gaze a little earlier.

Barry looked after her, telling himself that she and Nancy would be firm friends, of that he was assured, and he was glad for both their sakes that it should be so.

"Brian showed good taste in his choice of girls," he mused half aloud. "Pity that he turned out to be such an outsider."

Meanwhile Judy was not thinking of any kingfisher as she slowly strolled along the river bank. Her thoughts were with the girl Brian had married, the incomparable Nancy, "the kind of girl men liked."

Evidently she was the kind Barry liked, she told herself, and was aware all at once that the sun had gone behind a cloud and that a chilly little breeze was ruffling the surface of the water.

It was time to go home; the beauty of the day was over, in more ways than one.

EXACTLY a week later the new owner of Hill House arrived to take possession. Judy had a glimpse of a golden mass of curls above a slight figure seated at Barry's side with the coloured nanny and tiny twins in the back seat.

The furniture had come a day or two previously and Judy had given a lot of time helping to arrange it after the men had gone. She had also seen to the stocking of the larder and had engaged a daily woman's services, to say nothing of the hours she and Barry had spent trying to get the garden in order.

They had got rid of most of the weeds and Barry had borrowed Judy's lawnmower to run over the grass, so that the garden did not look too bad as Nancy passed up the avenue in Barry's car, followed by Judy's curious eyes from her vantage point at an upstairs window of her own home.

It was queer to see another girl sitting in the place she herself had so often occupied beside the driver, and with a little twinge Judy realised that no longer could she regard that seat as her own special property. As a married woman, even though she were a widow, Nancy would have priority over her in almost every way.

The more she thought of it the more fantastic it seemed to be that her uncle's house, once her own childhood's home, should have passed into the possession of Brian's widow.

She went slowly downstairs, feeling that another chapter in her life had opened with the arrival of Nancy Fortescue upon the scene.

Presently the sound of voices reached her and looking through the sitting-room window she saw Barry coming up the garden together with the girl who had taken her place in Brian's heart.

Without waiting for them to knock she hastened to open the door, and her first glance of Nancy more than justified Barry's description of her.

There was something delicate and almost fairylike about the other girl's beauty. She was like an exquisite Dresden-china figure, perfect in every detail.

She looked at Judy with the sweetest of smiles.

"My dear," she said, "I couldn't wait to come to thank you for all you have done

to help over this dreadful move. What should I have done without you? Barry says that you have worked like a slave inside the house and out, and indeed everywhere looks lovely. I am so grateful to you."

As she listened to the low sweet voice and felt the full impact of the young woman's charm, Judy could almost forgive Brian's lack of faithfulness.

Even as she replied to the other girl's greeting, and led her and the young man into the sitting-room, she remembered all that Barry had done to help her, and began to understand the demands such a woman could make upon a man all unconsciously.

"Such a sweet little place," Nancy was saying as she looked around. "A cottage like this would have suited me exactly, but you see there are the twins to think of, and their nanny. I have always wanted them to have the kind of home their father lived in—poor dear Brian—" and she turned away, her violet eyes heavy with unshed tears.

"I hope that you are going to be very happy in your new home," Judy said gently, her ready sympathy aroused. "You will find this a very friendly neighbourhood, and I know that everyone is prepared to give you a warm welcome."

"For which I have you to thank," Nancy said, delicately dabbing at her eyes. "Barry tells me that you are the local fairy-godmother. I am very lucky to have you for a neighbour and I do so hope that we are going to be good friends."

"That I am sure we shall be," Judy replied, "you must count on me to help in any way I can, you know that, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, Barry does nothing but talk about your kindness and warm-heartedness," Nancy said. "You're one of Miss Spender's most enthusiastic fans, aren't you darling?" she added turning to Barry, who had taken no part in the conversation.

"Judy knows exactly what I think of her," was the young man's reply and Nancy gave one of her rippling little laughs.

"You've such a lot to live up to, Miss Spender," she cried, "whatever you do you mustn't disappoint me."

"I'm afraid that is inevitable," Judy declared. "Barry has obviously been too indulgent with me. I think he tries to see the best in everyone, don't you, Barry? You mustn't believe all you have been told," she added turning to Nancy. "Oh, and by the way, please call me Judy, and I hope that I may be allowed to call you by your first name, too."

"But, of course, Judy, my dear, anything else would be too formal for words. I am so glad to have met you at last after all I have heard about you—" and for a moment it struck Judy that the speaker laid a peculiar emphasis on the last few words, so that she wondered if Nancy were thinking of Brian?—"but just now I am a little tired and over-excited and I am sure that dear Barry is dying for something to eat." She slipped her hand inside the man's arm as she spoke, and as they turned away added:

"To-morrow you must see my darling babies. Barry simply adores them, don't you, darling? Good-bye for now, Judy, and thank you again for everything."

Judy watched her visitors go off arm-in-arm and felt a deep depression suddenly settle upon her.

All at once she had a disconcerting feeling that the other girl would rob her of her

friendship with Barry. It would be Nancy whom he would come to see in future, not herself. There had been something very possessive in the young widow's manner towards him, something which revived Judy's former surmises that perhaps she and Barry intended to marry.

Yes, she was convinced. nothing could be more natural than for Brian's friend to marry Brian's widow; they would settle at Hill House—

Suddenly she was torn by such a pang of fierce rebellion that she did not know what had happened to her

Then she understood. She had fallen in love with Barry, and the prospect of having to watch his courtship of another girl—his possible marriage to her—was insupportable to the girl who had already lost one sweetheart to the same woman she now visualised as Barry's future wife.

It was so bitter a thought that it showed Judy all too plainly the depth of her new-found love.

Without encouragement, and certainly completely unaware in which direction she was drifting, love had come to her for the second time and she who had declared, and believed, that she was immune for ever from its onslaughts, now recognised the true nature of her feelings for Barry Rickaby.

"That is something I just could not stand," she thought almost angrily. "To be a daily witness of their married happiness—forever just outside the magic circle of their love—no, if that were to happen I would sell this cottage and go right away."

For quite a time she stood there, just where the other two had left her, so deep in depression and gloom that she did not hear Barry's footsteps until he was almost upon her. Then—

"Why—I thought you were up at the house with Nancy," she stammered, the recent revelation of her feelings for him causing her pulses to throb.

"Have I given you a fright, Judy?" he asked gently and put an affectionate hand on her arm.

"I—I thought you were still at Hill House."

"But surely you knew that I should look in to see you before going back to Town?" he exclaimed. "I believe you've been working too hard, Judy, helping me to get things ship-shape up there, for you don't look yourself at all. I'll put the kettle on and make you a nice strong cup of coffee, shall I, dear?"

His affectionate solitude almost broke her down. She had an absurd inclination to put her head on his shoulder and cry her eyes out. And yet his arrival brought a feeling of almost unbearable relief, showing, as it did, that she still had some claim on him.

Perhaps she was wrong and Nancy meant nothing more than a sacred charge committed to him by his dead friend? Jealousy magnifies and distorts everything, and with a secret shame Judy owned that she had allowed jealousy to get the upper hand of her.

"Yes, let's have some coffee," she agreed brightly. "We can take it out on to the lawn, and while we drink it you shall tell me what Nancy thinks of her new home."

"What I want to know is—what do you think of Nancy?" Barry asked. "She thinks that you're absolutely sweet, Judy. She couldn't say enough about you?"

After only ten minutes in my company?

Judy asked herself sceptically, but aloud replied:

"She's just what you described her as being, Barry. I've never seen a lovelier face than hers—"

"Then—it hasn't upset you in any way—now that you have really come face to face with Brian's widow?" he asked anxiously.

"Not in the least," Judy said composedly.

But to herself she could not help thinking how strange it was that it was not Brian's relationship with Nancy that troubled her so much as the possible relationship between Nancy and Barry.

What changes life brought! Never would Judy have believed that any other man could ever have taken Brian's place in her heart. Yet the seemingly impossible had happened; she was in love again, and so far as she could see doomed to witness the object of her love become the husband of the same girl who had robbed her of Brian.

"You sit there and relax and I'll make the coffee," Barry said. "You know you always say I make a better brew than you do."

"Only because you're more extravagant," Judy replied, smiling because she knew that he was concerned about her.

If only he were not always so kind and considerate perhaps she would not love him so much, she told herself.

LATER, as she stood at the gate watching his car disappear down the lane, she was joined by Nancy, looking in the same direction.

"Is that Barry's car? Has he only just gone?" she enquired, and into her voice a note of sharpness seemed to have crept. "I expect you and he have seen quite a lot of each other this summer?" she went on more agreeably.

"Well, we have rather," Judy replied. "He had a great deal of business connected with your house, you know, and he used to drop in here for a meal sometimes."

"Yes, it must have been very convenient for him," Nancy remarked. "Men are all such opportunists aren't they? Even the best and sweetest of them! One can't help admiring the way they turn things to their own advantage. I know Barry is extremely grateful to you for all the hospitality you gave him, it must have saved him so many journeys down to the village."

Judy had never considered this aspect of her friendship with the man in question, and she was a little indignant at the suggestion.

"Oh, I'm quite sure he never thought of it in that way," she exclaimed. "He's not that sort of man at all."

Nancy gave a silvery laugh.

"My dear, you speak as if you knew our dear Barry better than I do," she said amusedly. "He and I have been very special friends for years. There is nothing you can tell me about him I assure you, that I don't know already."

She turned her big violet eyes on the other girl and added in her sweetest tone—

"You know, I think it's simply wonderful, considering everything, that you can be so sweet to me, Judy. I must have hurt you so desperately in the past. I can't imagine how you can bear to have anything to do with me."

"Oh please," murmured Judy shrinkingly, "need we allude to the past? It is all over and done with. I assure you that I bear

you no ill-will, none whatever, so please let it all be forgotten."

"It is so generous of you to feel like that," Nancy declared. "When Barry told me who you were I felt I dare not meet you—the girl Brian and I had so deeply wronged, the girl I felt I had robbed, although it was not my fault that he fell so violently in love with me."

"I have never blamed you," Judy murmured, and against her will seemed to sense something not quite sincere in the other's words.

The speech appeared unnecessary to Judy, the sort of thing much better left unsaid. In Nancy's place she herself would have been incapable of uttering such words, and yet perhaps she might be misjudging the other's motive.

"So long as you understand," Nancy whispered wistfully, and with decided firmness Judy assured her that she did.

"Then so long as that is cleared up there is nothing to prevent our becoming good friends," Nancy declared. "Good-night Judy, sleep well."

And she fluttered away into the twilight, like a butterfly who had stayed out too late, leaving Judy with very complicated and uncomfortable feelings.

For instinct warned her that this sweet-spoken young woman was not to be trusted, and hitherto Judy had always found that she could rely upon her instinct.

Yet how unfair and unkind it was to judge Nancy upon so short an acquaintance!

"I must not form so hasty a judgment," she told herself sternly. "Maybe it is because I am jealous of her that I feel that she does not ring quite true. When I know her better I may feel thoroughly ashamed of any such suspicions, and yet somehow I can't help wishing that she had never come to live at Tansy Green."

Now that she had seen her Judy could not imagine the other girl fitting in with the quiet routine of country existence or finding any of the local inhabitants very congenial.

But that, too, was something that remained to be proved, and earnestly striving to rid her mind of all prejudice Judy prepared for bed.

"And from her room she could see the lighted windows of Hill House, where Brian's twin children slept; those children who might have been her own!

#### THE LAST GOODBYE.

IT very soon became apparent that Nancy had no intention of living a quiet life in the country.

During the first few weeks she quite enjoyed witnessing the effect of her personality upon her new neighbours. She returned their calls, and gave little tea-parties, during which the contrast presented by the dark-skinned Nanny with her own blonde beauty, and the fair-haired little twins, provoked an outburst of general admiration. This was one of the reasons why Nancy liked to have the native girl around her.

She thrived on admiration, it was almost as necessary to her as food and drink, and no tribute to her beauty could be too exaggerated.

It had not taken Judy long to find this out, although for a time she tried to close her eyes to it.

By nature Judy was charitable, slow to

believe harm of anyone. Furthermore she was always afraid that her personal jealousy might prejudice her against Nancy.

But living in almost daily contact with her it was difficult to ignore the all too obvious signs of egotism in Brian's widow.

Her treatment of the children alone gave her away. For although professing an absorbing love for them, which she showed in tender caresses and cooing sounds of endearment, Nancy spent very little time indeed in her nursery. At the least sign of indisposition or bad behaviour on their part she took herself off immediately on the plea that her nerves could not stand any upset.

Judy, who truly loved the babies, often felt hot with indignation at their mother's neglect. It hurt her to see them stretch imploring arms in vain to the parent they loved, when at the end of a few minutes' visit to the nursery Nancy would say that she could not stop with them.

They were such sweet little mites, and it was no hardship for Judy to relieve their Nanny from time to time and take charge of them.

Meanwhile Nancy was far from finding life dull or boring.

During her long stay in London, on her return from Africa, she had made friends with a crowd of young people, whom she now invited down to her country home.

The house was always full of visitors, their cars cluttered up the little country lanes; their loud merriment and late hours provided the villagers with tit-bits of gossip.

Charmingly pretty and gay, Nancy had little about her of the sorrowful young widow people had been so ready to believe she was.

Her clothes were beautiful, her house extremely comfortable, so that her London friends, tired and jaded after a hot summer, were glad enough to motor down for the week-end.

And as neither of her two women helpers would consider staying after six o'clock, each of them having children of their own to look after, Nancy would take her guests to supper at one of the many new road-houses springing up along the London Road.

Judy was never one in these parties, and Barry scarcely ever.

Now that Nancy was settled in her new home there was really nothing to bring him down to Hill House as frequently as in the past, although he never let a week go by without finding some excuse or another to motor down.

It struck Judy that he must resent not being able to have Nancy to himself as in the past, because it was never long before he stole away from the noisy house party and sought the more peaceful atmosphere of Judy's little cottage.

"Don't know how it is, but after living in Africa for so long I don't seem able to appreciate any sort of social life," he said once. "It's so much nicer sitting here with you, Judy, in this dear little garden."

"We won't be able to sit out much longer," she said sadly, "the evenings are drawing in and soon it will be autumn."

"Well, then we can sit by a nice log fire and listen to the wind and the rain outside and think how comfortable we are," he laughed. Then he added: "Judy, doesn't Nancy ever ask you to join her parties?"

"She knows I'm not fond of being one of a crowd," Judy said. "I feel like a fish

out of water amongst all those fashionable friends of hers and I've told her so. Besides when they all go rushing off somewhere or other, I am useful in helping to keep an eye on the babies. Nanny is very good, but she needs a rest from them sometimes."

Barry frowned a little.

"You and she aren't quite the friends I fancied you would be," he remarked. "Don't you like her, Judy?"

She hesitated, and he noticed the sensitive colour run up into her cheeks.

"We—get on quite well," Judy said, "but we are such entirely different types, Barry, that we have hardly any common meeting ground. I think Nancy rather regards me as being too quiet and dull for anything. She can't understand my taking pleasure in the doings of the village. Nancy is cut out for all the beautiful, exciting things of life, it is no wonder that she finds me a humdrum sort of person and says that I will become an old maid."

"That's what she thinks, is it?" Barry ejaculated. He gave her an odd look. "You won't be an old maid Judy, why—"

He broke off with what sounded very like an exclamation of annoyance as the garden-gate clicked and Nancy entered.

Her head was bare but she had tied a blue ribbon round her golden curls and the effect was altogether charming even in the eyes of one of her own sex.

"Good gracious, Barry——" There was a marked hint of sharpness in her tones—"I thought you had gone long ago. What-ever are you doing here?"

Barry got leisurely to his feet and gave the newcomer a lazy smile.

"Can't you see, my dear girl? I am being entertained by our friend Judy."

"But you said you couldn't stop," Nancy reminded him with a little pout.

"No more I could, not up there with that crowd of cackling hens," was his reply.

"That's not being very polite to my friends, Barry, I must say," said Nancy plaintively. "Is that why I hardly ever see you nowadays, because you don't like my friends?"

"My dear girl, you don't need me now in the way you did at first," he said gently. "But whenever you do want my help you know you have only to ask for it."

"Dear me, how difficult things are sometimes," sighed the young woman who, all her life, had had people to smooth away every obstacle and stumbling-block from her path.

She looked at Judy who happened to be wearing her gardening outfit and presented as great a contrast to the other girl as could possibly be imagined.

Perhaps that satisfactory fact was apparent to Nancy because all at once the ruffled look faded from her pink-and-white face and she said coaxingly:

"Judy darling, I really dropped in to ask you a tremendous favour. Nanny has got the most ghastly bilious attack and can hardly hold her head up, and you know how peevish the babies are now that they are teething. They're really almost too much for her. I wonder if you would look in when I've gone out and lend a hand?"

"I was going to take Judy out to tea," Barry interposed quietly. "Can't you look after your own children for once, Nancy?"

Nancy fluttered her long dark lashes appealingly as she murmured—

"You know that I would if it were possible, Barry, even thought they exhaust

me to the point of extinction, poor darlings, especially now that they are teething. But how can I take them on with a houseful of people? Be reasonable—it's just not possible."

"Send your friends home," Barry suggested. "Or get them to lend you a hand with the children—it wouldn't do them any harm to do something useful for once."

"What an unreasonable mood you are in, darling," Nancy cooed, "how could I possibly treat any visitors so rudely?"

"It's all right Nancy, I'll be along when I've had a wash and a tidy up," Judy interposed. "The children will be all right with me, and I'll put poor Nanny to bed."

"You're coming out to tea with me," Barry declared, "and we'll take the twins with us. I have spoken," he declaimed, striking an attitude, "so go up and make yourself beautiful, Judy my girl, as befits such an occasion."

"I don't know whether I want the twins to be taken in the car," Nancy said. "I've told you they're teething and——"

"Then you've only to say the word and we'll leave them behind," Barry said smoothly. "After all, you're their mother."

"Oh well, out of consideration for poor Nanny I had better agree," Nancy said. She gave one of her most enchanting smiles. "You're always so sweet to everyone, Barry darling," she said. "What should I do without you?"

"You'd do very well," was the reply. "You're the sort who will always have slaves to do your bidding, my dear, just as you always have had," and giving her an appraising, all-over glance added: "You're so very attractive you see, Nancy, all the men adore you."

She went away delighted with his compliment although at the back of her mind a strange suspicion kept nagging.

"Can he be really interested in Judy?" she asked herself. "He seems to find his way to her cottage pretty frequently."

Where Barry was concerned Nancy's possessive instinct was strongly aroused. She had always counted him amongst her admirers and if no better man turned up she was prepared to marry him. The little fact that he had not yet asked her to do so counted for nothing in her view.

She knew that the time would soon come when she must decide which of her admirers to accept as a husband, and out of them all she preferred Barry, who, although not wealthy, was reasonably well off.

Money was essential to Nancy; at the moment she was living far beyond her means and her capital was rapidly diminishing through the constant demands she made upon it. It might all end in a toss-up between the Barry she preferred and one of her wealthier admirers, one of whom was an Italian.

Whichever way it turned out she had no intention of allowing another girl to annex any one of her followers, and if Judy was making-up to Barry she must be put in her place. That was her true character speaking.

Men were such easy prey, she thought disdainfully, such simple fools where women were concerned, and certainly Nancy was in a position to know if ever any girl was.

Judy might easily have succeeded in awakening Barry's interest, just because she had once been Brian's jilted fiancée. And although Nancy could not bring herself to look upon the other girl as a serious rival, yet she determined to put a spoke in her wheel at the earliest

opportunity.

"I daresay the truth of the matter is that Barry is feeling a bit jealous of my friends," Nancy mused. "Some of the fellows don't trouble to disguise their intentions towards me and poor Barry may be feeling left out in the cold a bit. Nothing makes a man run for sympathy to another girl sooner than feeling that he is not being appreciated."

Meanwhile, the girl whose life she had once helped to wreck, was seated happily in the back of Barry's car with a cleanly-washed and white-clad twin on either side of her.

They were always good for Judy, somehow or other she gave them a feeling of security and although it was true that each of them was cutting a tooth they cooed and gurgled contentedly enough until, soothed by the motion of the car, they fell asleep.

"Nice little things, aren't they?" Barry's eyes met Judy's in the little square of glass which enabled him to see the road behind. "You don't mind my having suggested bringing them?"

"Of course not, the darlings. Nothing would have induced me to leave them," she said. "Their poor nanny was really ill, and just couldn't have coped with them a minute longer. I can easily wash them and put them to bed later. I like it—it's fun."

"You're a sweet girl, Judy," he said tenderly. "I've known you for some months now and I've yet to catch you out in a selfish action."

"Don't make me blush," she said jestingly, but all at once the air seemed full of romantic music to her.

It was one of the rare occasions when Judy dared to hope that, after all, Barry was not in love with Nancy and that if he was fond of anyone it was of herself. It was such a dimly flickering little hope that it never lasted long, but while it did it filled her with almost unbearable happiness.

It served to make that afternoon one of complete happiness to her. They had their tea in the garden of a pretty thatched tea-house, and Barry spread the car-rug on the grass for the children, who kicked their legs contentedly and never cried once during the whole outing.

"Such a young-looking couple to have two such fine kiddies," they heard another customer murmur as she looked their way.

Although Judy blushed self-consciously Barry was quite pleased.

"Did you hear that?" he asked as they left the place. "They take me for the father? Why, you've gone as red as a lobster, Judy," and he laughed uproariously.

"We'll do this again," he told her later as he put her down outside the entrance to Hill House. "It gives that poor nurse a break and I believe the twins enjoyed the outing, they've been almost too good to be true."

"I WONDER if I could ever get Judy to care for me?" he mused as he drove back to his solitary lodgings just outside London a little while afterwards.

He often wondered if she had got over her first unhappy attachment, or if her heart still clung to memories of Brian Fortescue?

He thought she was not the sort of girl to forget easily, besides which there was also the possibility that after her former experi-

ence she might be afraid to let herself love again. Because of this he had waited before confessing his love.

But his leave would come to an end and he might be sent to the other ends of the world on some engineering job or other, and so with this in mind he resolved to put his hopes to the test the very next time he saw Judy.

Accordingly, a few days after coming to this decision, he drove his car along the now familiar road leading to Tansy Green.

Arriving, it was very disappointing to find that Judy was out, and after a little hesitation he decided to walk up to Hill House to see if she was there, or if Nancy could tell him where she was likely to be found.

He found the latter curled up in an easy chair in the sunny loggia with a book in her hand.

"Dear Barry, how nice to see you," Nancy said. "For once you find me alone, the last of my guests went off last night, so we can have a nice cosy little talk without fear of interruption. Sit down and light a cigarette, darling, and you can give me one as well."

"I wondered if I should find Judy up here?" he said when they had chatted for a few minutes about nothing in particular.

"Judy? Oh, she's spending the day at the Vicarage," Nancy replied. "Getting things ready for a sale of work or something equally dull and uninteresting. Barry, I'm worried about our dear Judy."

Her companion looked at her enquiringly.

"Worried? You don't mean anything to do with her health?" he asked anxiously.

"No, no, she's as strong as a horse, I often envy her marvellous energy," Nancy said. "If only I were half as fit and well as she is! But having lived in that frightful African climate has almost ruined my constitution."

"Nonsense, Nancy," he said briskly. "Your constitution must be as sound as a bell or you couldn't racket about the way you do with those London friends of yours. But what's this about Judy? Why are you worried on her account?"

"You know how awfully fond I am of her," Nancy said. "If she were my sister I couldn't think more of her, and I know that she's fond of me, too. We've become the greatest friends."

"I'm awfully glad to hear that, Nancy," Barry declared his heart warming towards her.

Nancy sighed.

"Somehow I don't know that my coming here has made poor Judy happy," she murmured. "You see—" her big violet eyes filling with tears—"she is still so terribly in love with Brian's memory and it has been naturally extremely painful for her to have Brian's widow and children on her doorstep, as it were."

"But she adores the children," Barry said. "Nancy, I can't help thinking that you are mistaken—I'm sure that Judy is too sensible to go on grieving over a man who treated her as badly as Brian did. Forgive me, Nancy, but it's difficult not to remember how cruel he was to her. How can she still be in love with him? It isn't possible," and he got up and began to walk about the loggia, so obviously agitated that Nancy knew that her suspicions were no idle ones.

"Barry darling—I hope that *you* don't care for Judy in that way yourself?" she asked softly.

"Why should you hope so?" he asked roughly, and Nancy gave a little pitying murmur.

"Then you actually do?" she said. "Judy was right, and I thought she had been imagining things."

"Nancy, will you please tell me what you're talking about?" Barry demanded, "for personally I haven't the least idea. What did Judy tell you?"

"Why, that she was afraid that you were getting too fond of her," was the reply. "She said she knew that she could never forget Brian sufficiently to fall in love with any second man and that she didn't want you to get hurt."

"That was kind of her," Barry said stiffly. "Very thoughtful and considerate. You can put her mind at rest Nancy, I shan't give her any further cause for anxiety."

The blow he had received was so severe that he had difficulty in concealing his reaction to it.

"It must have been very unpleasant for you to have to tell me this, Nancy dear," he said. "I'm grateful, thanks for the tip, no man likes to make a fool of himself," and he walked quickly away leaving Nancy sore and angry at the knowledge that he had a weakness for the other girl.

"But what he can see in her beats me," she told herself, reaching out slim white fingers for the book she had discarded. "It was something I never could understand in Brian, and now Barry seems to have developed a similar liking. What can it be about Judy that attracts them?"

She had no pity for the man tearing back along the road to London, all his fondest hopes shattered and his pride in the dust.

Instead she was filled with a kind of cold anger towards him because he had dared to prefer another girl to herself.

"Why, I'd have married him," she thought, and a determination to pay Judy out for her unconscious conquest rose within her.

AFTER a really wonderful summer the fine weather broke at last and a wet, rainy season set in. The leaves fell early that year and it seemed to Judy as if she had no respite from sweeping them from the lawn and paths.

Doubtless it was the unpleasant weather which accounted for the low state of her spirits just then, although had she been honest with herself she would have owned that she was sick at heart with longing for Barry Rickaby whom she had never seen since the afternoon when he had taken the twins and herself for that drive—weeks ago.

He had promised to repeat the experiment, but he had never come, and Judy had at last given up listening for his car, although she could not stop herself wondering why his visits had so suddenly ceased.

She found it difficult to speak of him to Nancy, but one day her longing got the better of her.

"Do you ever hear anything of Barry nowadays?" she asked the other girl when they happened to meet outside the post-office.

"I've seen him once or twice in London when I've been there for the day," was Nancy's reply, "but I don't think we shall see much more of him, poor boy," and her eyes took on a misty look of regret.

"Really?" Judy said trying to sound casual, "why is that, Nancy? He had

become quite a regular visitor."

"Walk back with me if you've finished your shopping," Nancy said. "I've meant to tell you for some time, but I didn't want to hurt you," and she passed her arm within Judy's as they set off side by side, "so I kept putting off telling you."

"I don't understand," Judy murmured. "How could you hurt me, Nancy?"

"Well, of course, we all know how terribly in love you are with him," Nancy began, speaking, as was her way, with such rapidity that to interrupt her was almost impossible. "And it seems so—well, so more than tragic that for the second time in your life it had to be me who robbed you of your man. Judy—I'm frightfully sorry for you, I really am, but if you hadn't been blind you must have seen that Barry cared only for me. He always has done, poor boy, ever since Brian's death, and not long ago I—well, I had to turn him down Judy because there is someone else who is mad about me, someone I may decide to marry."

"I see," Judy said lifelessly. She had not even the spirit left in her to attempt to deny Nancy's assertion that she had been in love with Barry. After all, it was only too true, she thought miserably as, completely sunk under this unwelcome news, she heard Nancy prattling on.

"You mustn't let it make you too unhappy, my dear Judy. After all, you got over that business with Brian, didn't you, so there is no reason to fear that you won't rise above this second disappointment. I feel awful about it myself, because its almost as if it were my fault, taking two men away from you. It will be a miracle if it doesn't make you hate me."

"No Nancy, it won't do that," Judy said quietly. "As you say I must have been blind not to realise that he was in love with you, you're so beautiful, he always told me you were one of the loveliest people he had ever seen."

"How sweet of him," Nancy declared, much gratified. "I'm sorry I couldn't return his love, poor fellow, and I'm more than sorry for you, dear. But you'll still have your good works won't you, and they will be a great consolation to you."

"Yes, I shall still have my good works as you call them," Judy said, and was thankful that they had reached the entrance drive of Hill House. "Good-bye, Nancy, and don't worry about me, I shall be all right."

She went indoors and looked round her little solitary domain and a great feeling of terror came over her as she sensed her own loneliness.

"What have I done to deserve this second disappointment?" she murmured bitterly, "and how am I going to endure it? And yet what grounds had I ever got to think that he cared for me?"

BEFORE many more days had gone Tansy Green was agreeably supplied with two items of interest.

One was that the gay and beautiful young widow had announced her engagement to an Italian nobleman, the other that following on this event Hill House would once more be up for sale.

Nancy would have her own castle in sunny Italy, where her blonde beauty would arouse universal admiration, and with the castle went a title and a satisfyingly adequate income.

Except that she would miss the twins Judy could not pretend that she would look upon Nancy's departure as a loss. She

was connected with too much unhappiness to be a really congenial neighbour to Judy. She wished her well and bore her no ill-will but she knew that had they lived next door to each other for the rest of their lives there would never have been any real friendship between them.

It would have been a good thing for Judy if Nancy had never heard of Hill House for then the former would have been spared a good deal of pain. That misbegotten love of hers for Barry Rickaby still kept her awake at night and stole all the gladness from her waking hours.

About this time she had a letter from Molly Green announcing her approaching marriage, and as Judy was now confronted with the necessity of buying two wedding-presents she decided to go to London on a shopping expedition.

It was not often that she went to Town, possibly three times a year at the most, and she rather enjoyed the novelty of the lively busy atmosphere and the sight of the autumn fashions so tastefully displayed in the shop windows.

After she had purchased what she hoped were suitable presents for the two so widely-different brides, Judy had a meal in a smart restaurant before going to deliver one of the gifts to Molly, who lived just off Westbourne Grove.

The afternoon was cool but fine, just the kind of day for a walk and Judy resolved to turn into Kensington Gardens and make her way on foot to her destination.

As she hesitated at the crossing by the busy Marble Arch a man suddenly appeared at her side and with a start of mutual recognition Judy and Barry looked once more into each other's eyes.

"Surprising to see you here, isn't it?" he said stiffly, and struggling to conceal her very mingled emotions Judy's manner also became stiffly formal.

"How are you, Barry? You are the last person I expected to meet."

"Allow me to see you across," he said just touching her arm with his fingers. "This is always rather a tricky crossing."

"Thank you," she murmured, "the day is so pleasant that I thought a walk would be preferable to a bus ride. I am on my way to Westbourne Grove."

They had reached the path by now, which runs parallel with the Bayswater Road, and Judy confidently awaited his departure. There was something very painful to her in their formal exchange of conversation, so different from their former intimacy, and yet his presence had its own bitter sweetness for her.

He looked, she thought, older than he had done, and she supposed that it was the result of his disappointment concerning Nancy.

"I will walk a little way with you, if I may," he said.

He was annoyed to find how deeply the meeting moved him—to find that he still cared for her as much as ever. Because of what she had made him suffer he had the desire to penetrate her seeming calm indifference.

She gave him an opening all unconsciously.

"It is quite a long time since you were down our way," she said conversationally.

"No one can know the reason for that better than yourself," he said roughly.

"Of course—I had forgotten—I am so sorry," Judy murmured, thinking that he referred to Nancy and her rejection of him, "I—I hope that you were not too

disappointed——" She faltered into silence aware that the matter was too delicate for any real discussion.

"What by? The knowledge that you were still in love with a memory?" he exclaimed. "I've always been regretful that my behaviour gave you cause to confide in Nancy," he said, "the last thing in the world I should wish to do is to pester a girl with unwelcome attentions."

He took a savage delight in seeing the colour rise to her face in an agonised scarlet, but what he was not prepared for was the absolute bewilderment in her candid eyes.

She stood still and looked at him almost fearfully, for his words were unintelligible to her, and she began to wonder if he were quite in his right senses.

"Barry—I don't understand," she began, and then, as she regained some of her lost composure added with dignity:

"I think I must ask you to explain. I have never made one word of complaint concerning you to Nancy—I had no cause to do so. As for the rest of your remark it is completely meaningless to me—I do not even know the identity of the girl you are supposed to have pestered with your unwelcome attentions—I always thought that you were in love—or at least half-in-love with Nancy."

It was now his turn to stare.

"But—Nancy told me herself that you were afraid that I was getting too fond of you," he stammered, "that is why I kept away from you all. As for Nancy—she is not at all the type of girl I should wish to marry, I have never even thought of her in that light. Judy—you look so queer, are you all right?"

She looked as if turned to stone, all the life shocked out of her face by the man's disclosures. When he would have put his arm on her's she warded him off.

"Nancy could not have told you such a wicked lie," she said, "it's impossible—you—you must have imagined it."

"If I did it has given me some of the unhappiest hours I have ever spent," he replied bitterly. "It's the truth I'm telling you Judy, whether you believe it or not. One day when I called round and you were out she and I sat in the loggia, and she practically warned me off you—said that you had told her that you could never care for any other man because you were still in love with a memory, and that you were afraid that I was going to get hurt because I was growing too fond of you."

Judy gave a long-drawn gasp and a look of horror dawned in her eyes.

"Barry"—she said, scarcely above a whisper, "she told me that the reason you stayed away from Tansy Green was because she had turned you down."

"No?" he exclaimed violently, "Judy—what an infamous lie! It was you I loved—almost from the first, never anyone but you—and Nancy knew it."

A shudder convulsed Judy as the realisation of the other girl's treachery was laid bare. Then, like a burst of sunshine the meaning of Barry's words reached her—he loved her, had loved her all the time, and as she looked into his expressive eyes she saw that he loved her still.

"Barry—darling——" she murmured, and on her lips he knew that the endearment was no empty phrase but that it meant that his love was returned at last and all else, even the knowledge of Nancy's inexplicable treachery, faded away and they stood looking at each other with the

distant uproar of London's traffic in the background, filled with the wonder and the glory of their discovery.

After a little while they began to walk on and bit by bit the full story of the plot which had so nearly separated them for ever was laid bare, and Barry discovered with amazement how greatly he had been taken in by the seemingly sweet character of his dead friend's widow.

"Though I did begin to realise her selfishness when I saw her behaviour to her children," he told Judy, "but that she was capable of such wicked lies, such carefully-planned mischief, never entered my head. What could have been her object, Judy?"

The girl shook her head.

"It's beyond me," she said, "and does it really matter, darling, now that we have found each other? I am so happy that I can't even find it in my heart to be angry with Nancy. Think what she'll feel when she hears our news, and knows that we have found her out?"

But Nancy did not wait to be confronted by the two she had so cruelly and wantonly deceived. She left Hill House on the following day and never returned.

"So now that she has gone we need not sell the cottage," Judy told Barry contentedly as he sat in his old seat in the living-room, "I should hate to see the dear little place go."

Her fiancé's face fell. "Judy—does that mean that you don't intend to go abroad with me? That you're going to stay here?" he asked in deep dismay.

"Silly," she laughed. "I'm going to stick to you like wax, darling, you'll never escape me wherever you go. But I'd like to keep this cottage which my dear old uncle left me and where you and I met. We'll let it, furnished, and then we shall always have an anchor in our own country wherever else life may send us roving. Tansy Green will still be our real home."

"What an exceedingly clever and practical little wife I am going to marry," Barry exclaimed appreciatively and crossing over to where she sat kissed her tenderly.

THE END.

## A NEW ONE.

The pretty young motorist was not going very soothingly through the sleepy village when the constable for the district stepped out in the road in front of her and caused her to stop. "What have I done?" she asked. "You were travelling at forty miles an hour," he replied, taking out his notebook. "Forty miles an hour!" echoed the fair one. "Why, I haven't been out an hour!" The policeman scratched his head with his pencil before replying: "Carry on then. That's a new one on me."

## MAKING IT PLEASANT.

Another sweet young thing had ventured out in her fiancé's sports car. She was speeding along a new main road and thoroughly enjoying the sensation when she realised, to her annoyance, that she was in a police trap. Before she could do anything a handsome young stalwart in blue appeared from behind a tree. "What is your name, miss?" he asked, notebook in hand. "Er—Mary Prudence," she replied sweetly. "And what is yours?" Later on the same policeman had to question a girl motorist who had become involved in a collision. "What gear were you in when the accident occurred, miss?" "Gear? Oh, yes. I was wearing a tweed coat, brogue shoes and a brown beret."

## A HURRIED EXCHANGE

"I DO so hope you do not mind being left alone like this." Lady Marshfield looked at her friend anxiously. "It is horrid of me to go off when you have only just arrived, and after such years since we met, too: but what can I do? You do see, don't you?" Her eyes were full of concern.

Sylvia Harding smiled and nodded.

"Of course, Kitty, I perfectly understand, and I shall be quite happy until your return. Don't worry about me."

Only within the last ten minutes she had arrived at Sir Robert Marshfield's beautiful country house, having travelled from the North by a night express and breakfasted in London from whence she had come on, "as quickly as she could," according to Lady Marshfield's letter of instructions.

They were old friends and had not met for several years, but though circumstances had made Sylvia's life a very different one from Kitty Marshfield's, they had never quite lost sight of each other, and lately this visit of Sylvia's to Marshfield had been arranged.

She had arrived—a little nervously, perhaps, if the truth be told—to find her old school friend as delightfully inconsequent as ever.

That very morning, as she was told, just when Kitty was looking forward to a delightful day quite alone with Sylvia to talk over old times together, she had received news that her husband's mother was seriously ill at her own place, about twenty miles distant on the other side of the county.

"You think me a beast, I can see, Sylvia, but I am quite certain there is nothing the matter with the dear old thing. There is no cause for alarm; the old lady is as sound and hearty as both of us put together—but every now and then we go through this sort of thing. And what is really so tragic is the fact that poor, dear Robert who hasn't a grain of humour, is always taken in. He dashed off directly his mother's message arrived this morning, preparing appropriate last words the whole way there. He wanted me to go with him, but I was firm. I wanted to wait and see you first, and told him so."

"You should have put me off, Kitty," Sylvia expostulated. "I am sure Sir Robert will find me a bore."

"Put you off, just when I have been counting on your coming? Not much! Why, my dear girl, I am going to motor over there for a few hours to see how things are, and then I will be back in time to give you your tea, and to tell you I found the dear thing had taken it into her head not to die this time after all, but that when I got there I found her sitting up in bed eating sandwiches and drinking champagne. That really happened one of the times, for she gave me some of the champagne, and I drank to her speedy recovery." Lady Marshfield's eyes twinkled.

Sylvia assured her hostess repeatedly that she did not mind; had helped her to get into her big coat, was just on the point of escorting her downstairs to see her safely into the car which was already waiting, when Kitty pounced upon a telegram which had lain unopened under her fur gloves which she had taken from the table.

"Good gracious! This wire came hours ago, I remember. It was just when Robert was starting, and I put it down for a moment, and then I must have forgotten all about it."

She tore it open, and after reading it, gave a gasp of horror.

"Oh, my dear, what a kettle of fish!" she wailed.

"Is it anything serious? Can I help?" Sylvia enquired.

"No—yes—at least I really don't know." Kitty was very muddled. "It is really rather awkward, and I believe he is touchy. I must explain, though. I wonder if I told you that Robert is having my portrait painted? Well, he is and by a celebrated artist, who is also a friend of his. He comes down and stays with us for a day or two now and then to work at it, and it is almost finished—there's really only the gown to do. I said he could come any day he liked for I had no engagements; and, just my luck, this,"—she flicked the telegram in her hand tragically—"this is to say he is coming to-day—will be here by eleven-thirty unless he has a wire to the contrary. Now what shall I do? It will be a waste of a whole day, his coming, and it is too late to stop him. He will be here directly. He will be furious, and if I don't go to the old lady Robert will be equally furious. If I didn't go this time, you'd see she would die, just to vex me."

"I am so sorry, Kitty." Sylvia tried hard not to smile at the tragic face, which looked so sweet and so unlike grief in its becoming hat. "I wish I could do something to help."

Slowly a light beamed across Lady Marshfield's face.

"Do you know, Sylvia, I believe there is something you could do. It isn't my face he wants to paint this time, just my gown, he told me. Why shouldn't you sit in my place? We are the same size, so the frock will fit you all right. If you would, it would be perfectly angelic of you, and you would save the situation."

"Why, of course I will, if you think that would do," Sylvia exclaimed.

"It will be the very thing." Kitty heaved a sigh of relief. "Marie knows the gown get her to dress you up. And now I must fly. I shall be back in heaps of time for tea."

By then she was running from the room, Sylvia after her, and an instant later flying down the wide oak staircase.

At the front door she turned.

"Don't be too dull, and eat lots at luncheon."

She was entering the car as she spoke, and Sylvia, on the doorstep, waved her hand. Just as the car moved off, Lady Marshfield's head came through the window.

"Don't waste time trying to make an impression on the artist; I forgot to tell you he is a woman-hater," she called back gaily, and a second later was whirled away down the long avenue.

It was only as Sylvia walked up the stairs again to find Kitty's maid and to ask her to help her put on the gown her mistress was being painted in, that it struck her Kitty had not told her the artist's name.

"A very celebrated artist," that was what she had said, and she wondered who it could be.

"He'll probably be very annoyed and refuse to paint at all," she thought a little later in the morning as she walked along the big corridor towards the room which Marie, the maid, told her had been made into a studio for the time being.

The artist had arrived and was installed there already, but Marie's knowledge of English was as shaky as Sylvia's command

of French, so she had gleaned very little not even his name.

To her relief Sylvia had found that the gown Kitty was being painted in fitted her perfectly.

It was soft shimmering grey and very beautiful did she look in it, could she have realised it though totally different from Lady Marshfield.

Her face had grown very grave, and her dark eyes were filled with a sudden pain, or rather the awakening of a very old one as she flitted towards the studio—for this talk of artists and painting had aroused an old sorrow and drawn wide the floodgates of memory.

Long ago, just before the crash came that had brought so many changes to the lives of Sylvia Harding and those she loved, there had come down to the picturesque village near to the gates of her old home, a young, enthusiastic but quite unknown artist.

He was clever, determined to get on, and without a penny to bless himself with—not a singular trio of characteristics in any man, an artist in particular.

Clive Howard had been welcomed at the Manor, for the Hardings in those days kept "open house," and this clever, struggling young man had won their sympathies.

He sketched the house as it lay bathed in summer sunshine in return for the many kindnesses showered upon him at the Manor, did many rough drawings of the various brothers and of Althea Harding also (she was the elder daughter), and worst of all, he fell in love with Sylvia.

And she, of course, loved him in return.

He was handsome, young, clever—what else could any girl wish for, at least a girl brought up like Sylvia, without any ambition towards a fine position in the world?

She was so young that her people, though they saw quite which way the feelings of both Clive Howard and Sylvia were tending, thought it wisest to leave matters alone for the present, and not interfere.

It would have been cruel to tell her to put all thoughts of him out of her mind, but she was very young, so was he, and they might forget, or he might succeed in making a name for himself and a home for Sylvia.

Thus it was left—no real engagement, but an "understanding". Alas! that fatal state of affairs that has spoilt so many lives.

There certainly existed an understanding between the two, however, on that lovely day in autumn when Clive Howard and Sylvia parted in the wood beside the old Manor House.

"Don't quite forget me, Sylvia," he had said, holding her slim hands. "When I return from Rome next year I am going to come back with my face turned to good fortune, and it won't be good fortune unless you are there to share it."

And Sylvia had whispered it would be quite as impossible for her to cease to breathe and go on living, as it would be for her to forget him.

And what afterwards seemed so tragic to herself and others who watched in silence was that she had meant every word; and he—he had forgotten, had "only been amusing himself," as the cruel phrase goes.

Within a month or two, the crash of ill-fortune came to the Manor.

In the midst of all their troubles Sylvia wrote to Clive Howard to tell him of their misfortune, but no answer came.

With the following year came the final

breaking-up of her home: and still Clive Howard never wrote and never came, and through all the years that followed Sylvia found herself still waiting.

She had long ago lost sight of him in her busy life, but in her heart his memory was as fresh as on the autumn morning long gone when she had said good-bye.

And now this talk of artists and painting had brought him vividly before her mind with such cruel force that her face was sad, very unlike the gay Lady Marshfield the great artist was waiting to paint.

As she opened the door she saw a man standing at an easel, his back turned towards the carved doors. He was busy arranging his colours, and apparently had not heard her coming.

"Lady Marshfield begs you will excuse her and paint her gown on me if possible," Sylvia said quietly, walking forward. "She has been called away on business."

The man turned an exclamation of impatience on his lips.

"I do hope he does not really mind," she thought Kitty's last taunt about his being a "woman-hater" coming to her mind.

Then she stepped into the full light of the studio.

Slowly the truth came to her and with it she felt the room swaying round her. The well-known artist who was painting Kitty Marshfield—the woman-hater she was not to waste her time over—was Clive Howard!

She found herself praying he would not know her—it would be far better for both. But that hope was denied her.

He had put down his palette and was staring at her as at a ghost.

And thus, after so many years of silence,

those two met again—he a famous artist, and she in a gown that was not her own, come in a moment of hurried exchange to act for a friend.

"Sylvia!"

Just that one word, but there was something in the ring of it that told her, whatever it was that had kept him from her, was not forgetfulness.

"Yes," she said stiffly. "It is Sylvia. Did you think me a ghost? How long is it since we met?"

He was at her side now, quite recovered from his first amazement.

"I ought to have written at the time to congratulate you," he said gravely. "But I could not, I—Sylvia, you must have known why."

"Congratulate me!"

"On what must be of course an old story now—your marriage. It was the only thing I heard about you after I went abroad."

"My marriage!"

"A friend told me of it when I first went to Italy, and then you never wrote as you had promised. I was too hurt, too angry, to write to you—" He broke off.

"Forgive me. I have no right to speak like this to you," he added.

"For all that, I feel I must explain several things." She laughed softly a happy little laugh. "Firstly, I did write to you to the address you gave me, telling you of our troubles, of our bad fortune. You never answered. I, too, was hurt and angry."

"I had no letter from you, Sylvia," he replied and to his face too had come the light of hope.

"Secondly"—she lingered over the words for an instant—"I am not married."

"Not married!" he cried incredulously.

"No." She shook her head demurely. How easy it is to play with happiness for a brief moment or two when it is almost ours! "No. Althea married not long after you went abroad, just when our troubles were at their worst. It was the one ray of brightness vouchsafed to us. but I never married."

He had both her hands at last. His head was bent to her face, his eyes read deep down into her soul and into her faithful heart, where his memory alone had lived through all the years.

"Why have you never married? Tell me why. If you only knew how I have suffered, and hated all women because of the one I thought had played so cruelly with me!"

"I never married because the one man I cared for did not return to tell me he wanted me to care for him," she whispered.

"And he?"

But Sylvia's only answer was to look up into his eyes, so that he understood and read there his coming happiness.

When Lady Marshfield did return, leaving a convalescent mother-in-law behind, she thought somehow that the great Clive Howard and Sylvia both looked as she afterwards described it, "a little odd"; but she at first guessed nothing.

"Have you had a happy day, Sylvia dear?" she inquired, rushing impulsively to her friend's side, and it was Clive who answered.

"We have both had the happiest day either of us have had for over ten years, thanks to you, Lady Marshfield."

And then they told her.

THE END.

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## THREE MEN AND JUDY

By Michael Haven

### DAINGEROUS FRIENDSHIP

THE hot African sunshine clothed the District Commissioner's garden in its burning radiance. Against the dry, chocolate-brown of the gravel paths, the lawns were a pleasant emerald green, the twirling water-sprinklers creating a fine mist of spray through which danced all the colours of the rainbow.

A clock was just striking the hour when a native servant came out of the low-built bungalow to tell Judy Bannister that she was wanted on the telephone.

When she went inside and picked up the receiver she heard Helen Rowan's voice. It was a little breathless as usual, as if life was too short to cram in all the excitement that Helen wanted, so that she was always in a hurry.

"Judy? Helen here," she said. "Listen, darling, we're organising a moonlight picnic to the Falls. It's going to be fun. Now don't start making excuses, there's a lamb. Dick is seeing about cars and food—the McAllisters are coming, and Kitty Marlowe. Basil is coming, too, of course."

"It's rather short notice, Helen," Judy said doubtfully, flicking a rhinoceros beetle off the window-sill. "I mean—"

"Oh come, darling," Helen broke in imperiously. "What notice do you want for a moonlight picnic, anyway? Don't tell me you have letters to write or I'll

begin to suspect that you are afraid of The Ogre! Besides, if you don't come we'll be a girl short and Basil will sulk for the rest of the evening."

"Oh, all right, I'll come," said Judy flatly.

She did not want to go to the picnic, but Helen had been very kind to her since she had come to live in Nyasaland. Helen's husband was a surveyor in the Government Lands Department, and Judy had spent many pleasant week-ends at their charming house on the outskirts of Gwala. It was there that she had first met Basil Cordray!

"Good," cried Helen enthusiastically. "I'll ring Basil now and tell him to call for you at eight-thirty. We're all to meet at the Falls by nine."

"All right, Helen," said Judy again, still in that flat voice, and she hung up the receiver.

It was impossible to tell Helen that a moonlight picnic, with Basil Cordray as her escort, was not what she wanted just then. The last time she had been out with him had taught her that tropical moonlight and a romantic situation could be a decidedly explosive mixture.

She returned to the garden, all the doubts that had been tormenting her for the past few months flooding into her mind, and re-seated herself in the canvas chair where she had been reading.

It was very hot, even for Nyasaland, and

her fair, wavy hair clung damply to her temples. She supposed she had better wear a sun-suit for the picnic: a dress would be too ordinary and blouse and shorts too informal.

She picked up her book and made an abortive attempt to concentrate, but not for long.

Strange and disturbing things had been happening to her of late, but despite the influence of forces she had never dreamed she possessed, she had—so far—clung desperately to the standards by which her life had been regulated.

It was all very well for girls like Kitty Marlowe to argue that virtue was a back number these days and all that mattered was to get as much out of life as one could grasp.

For long, Judy had steadfastly refused to be drawn into the meretricious flirtations and hectic love affairs that provided much of the material for local gossip.

But all that had been before Basil Cordray had appeared on the scene and then her ideas had changed.

Lately, however, she had come to realise the direction in which she had been drifting and had pulled up sharply. But the result had been to add fuel to the flames that threatened to scorch her unless she watched her step.

Basil had come to the district a few yea

previously, having bought a coffee plantation that had come into the market on the death of its previous owner.

Gay, witty, and handsome, he had quickly made himself popular and it had not been long before no party or other social function would have been considered complete without him as a guest.

The fact that Judy became the chief target for his attentions did not deceive her for a moment. Basil was no more in love with her than he was with Helen or Kitty, or any other girl, for that matter.

As Helen had rather cynically put it, all was grist that came to Basil's mill and Judy was young and attractive—and apparently unattainable. Her proud invulnerability was a challenge to a man like Basil Cordray, and made him all the more eager to conquer.

Seated there in the shade of the giant bread-fruit tree, Judy could not help making comparisons between her present life and the far-off days when she had been a carefree school-girl in Cape Town.

Her mother, still a young woman, had died when Judy had been a small child and she had spent the intervening years journeying between a boarding school and the smaller house at Camps Bay, where her father had moved after his beloved wife's death.

Then, within a month of her seventeenth birthday, the bottom had been knocked out of her world by the sudden death of her father, following a chill caught as a result of exposure when leading a rescue party to the aid of some inexperienced young climbers trapped on Table Mountain.

Looking round the sun-baked garden, with its carefully-tended lawns and weedless paths, it seemed a far cry to the day when she had faced Colonel Bannister's solicitor across the width of a polished teak desk and heard the terms of her father's will.

She had gone hot and cold with indignation when he had finally finished reading.

"But surely father cannot have meant that?"

Her father had died a comparatively wealthy man and had left her everything he had possessed in trust, until she was twenty-five.

Not only that but he had appointed Ian Forrester as her legal guardian until she reached the age of twenty-one, a man who was only a name to her and about whom she knew absolutely nothing beyond the fact that he was a District Commissioner in Nyasaland. This was the part of the will that had amazed her.

She still vividly remembered their first and last discussion of the situation. Ian Forrester had arrived by plane from Gatooma, in Northern Rhodesia, and had called to see her at the home of the Dobsons, where she had gone after her father's funeral.

Tall, with dark brown hair, greying at the temples, he possessed a clean cut mouth and steely grey eyes. She put his age at thirty-six.

"As you probably know, I was with your father in the Tank Regiment he commanded during the war, and when Tobruk fell we were taken prisoner together. What his courage and faith in ultimate victory meant to us in captivity, I would find it hard to tell you. I owe him a debt of gratitude that nothing I can do for him will ever repay."

Regarding the terms of the will Ian Forrester had had his own ideas on the subject.

"You'll have to come back with me to Gwala, of course," he had said calmly, brushing aside her protests. "Obviously, I can't leave you here in Cape Town, for to do so would be to shirk my responsibilities. How soon can you be ready?"

It had been her first experience of the uncompromising attitude which characterised all he said and did, and had been by no means the last.

When she had finally put her objections into words he had reasoned with her, but she had not deluded herself into thinking that his views had changed.

"You are seventeen, Miss Bannister," he had said. "As I look at it, you would not dream of questioning your father's authority if he decided to go and live elsewhere. Well, I have accepted the responsibility of looking after you, so I must ask you to accept the situation. Remember it isn't one I have made myself," he had added somewhat grimly.

ON their way to Nyasaland they had stayed the night at a coffee plantation owned by a Mr. and Mrs. Denny, some friends Ian had made when he had first taken up his appointment as District Commissioner for the territory. From them Judy had been given an insight into the kind of life she might thereafter expect to lead.

"Gwala is only a township—you can't call it anything else," Mrs. Denny had said, after supper; Ian and Tom Denny had gone to look at an irrigation dam the planter had built. "There is nothing in the way of a cinema or anything of that kind and very few shops apart from the Indian *duka*, which is mainly concerned with the native trade.

"But it is a lovely place, and there are some very nice people amongst the local planters," Mrs. Denny had continued. "You won't be dull, that's certain. Ian is a very important person, you know, and as his ward you will find yourself much sought after!" Her eyes had twinkled. "Knowing Ian as I do, I thought it was too priceless for words, but now I have met you I won't worry. You may be young but I don't think your head will easily be turned."

"Won't people think it all very peculiar?" Judy had wanted to know.

"It all depends upon what you mean by peculiar, my dear," had said Mrs. Denny. "The fact that Ian has made himself responsible for your welfare will be something of a nine days wonder as far as Gwala is concerned, but you will be quite adequately chaperoned, so no one will be able to point a finger at either of you. Mrs. Guthrie, Ian's housekeeper, is a model of respectability and if local gossip is to be believed, she is the only person who has ever dared to tell him where he gets off!"

Now she was nineteen and the two years that had elapsed since then had brought a noticeable change in their previously somewhat delicately poised relationship.

Ian Forrester was a more than considerate guardian and something very like friendship had replaced the rigid courtesy with which he had treated her in the beginning.

He took her about as much as his important duties permitted, and saw to it that she met the right people.

But though he no longer seemed to regard her as just another responsibility, she was still a child in his eyes, to be humourous and indulged as far as possible, while being carefully guarded from the pitfalls that might lie in the path of a young girl.

With a little quirk of humour Judy remembered his expression when, on the eve of her first Country Club dance, to which she was being taken by Helen Rowan, he had given her some well meaning advice.

She had come into the lounge wearing full evening dress for the first time, a pastel blue crinoline gown with slippers to match, her mother's triple string of pearls at her throat.

"My word," he had said admiringly.

"You look positively grown-up, Judy! I can see you leaving a trail of broken hearts behind you if you're not careful."

She had refrained from reminding him that she was eighteen.

"These affairs at the club are pretty mixed," he had continued, filling his pipe. "By that I mean you'll meet all kinds of people, good, bad and indifferent. I know I can trust you to discriminate, but—well, if anyone offers you a cocktail, take my advice and say no. You're only young and cocktails are apt to cloud one's judgment."

Judy had not been able to resist the temptation to shock him.

So she had opened her eyes to their widest and put on an innocent air.

"But I *love* having my judgment clouded, Ian," she had said. "It's fun!"

She had feared she had gone too far and had braced herself for a stinging reply. But he had just lit his pipe and said no more.

But at the dance her strongest drink had been iced claret cup.

SOMEWHAT to her surprise, her guardian never forgot her birthday, even if he did not seem to realise that each one was a milestone on the road between girlhood and womanhood.

On her eighteenth he had given her a dainty brooch set in the form of the Southern Cross, the stars represented by five small but perfectly cut diamonds, mounted on platinum bars. The gift had been accompanied by a lovely spray of hothouse flowers that could only have been specially ordered from Gatooma.

A gift of flowers to a woman, means a very great deal and in that respect Judy was no different from any other girl of her age. Whether or not she was reading more into his thoughtfulness than was intended she could not have said, but to her the flowers represented a very definite step forward in their relationship.

Now the booming of the lunch gong reminded her of the passage of time and she got to her feet, realising, with a little sense of shock, that she had not thought of Basil Cordray once since she had returned to the garden from the phone.

The fact that he was calling for her as a prelude to a hectic evening when, in all probability, they would run the entire gamut of human emotions from frustration to sheer exhaustion, did not seem to matter just then.

She entered the cool, tastefully furnished lounge, with its antlered heads on the walls and skins on the polished floor, thinking that, in the years that had elapsed since she had first come to Gwala, she had got to know Ian Forrester better, possibly, than anyone else.

Yet as she sat down to lunch, and thoughtfully unfolded her table napkin, she realised how little she really knew of the man who sat opposite her.

Helen had called him The Ogre, because he seemed so stern; but she really rather liked him.

Presently, Judy found herself making comparisons, studying him from beneath her long lashes, noting the firm jaw and clean-cut mouth, the incisive movements of his hands.

He looked up suddenly and met her eyes.

"You look very thoughtful, my dear Judy, he remarked casually. "What is your mind on—a new dress?"

Judy smiled and picked up her soup spoon.

"Nothing so exciting, Ian," she answered.

She was suddenly conscious of him in a way she had never been before. It was as if something had sprung to life between them, something disturbing.

"Helen telephoned this morning," she

went on, a little confused. "She is getting up a moonlight picnic this evening and wants me to go along."

"Really? I wonder where she gets all her energy from," he said. "Who else is going?"

"The usual crowd—the McAllisters—Kitty Marlowe. Oh, and Basil Cordray."

"I see." His face was expressionless as he spoke.

"You don't mind, I hope, Ian?"

"Mind?" He raised his eyebrows a trifle, giving his features a slightly sardonic look. "Why should I mind?"

Nonplussed, she could only stare at him, her cheeks pink, wondering, somewhat desperately, whether it really was a matter of indifference to him what she did with her own time.

"Well," she said a little lamely, "it is rather short notice. You might have had other plans for us."

"Nothing of importance," he shrugged. "I have to go to Chief Makusa's village to attend a meeting of the tribal elders in connection with the Government's plans for federation. I may not be back until late. That was all."

Judy toyed with the curry a house-boy had placed before her.

She knew that Ian was having a difficult time with the local chiefs, some of whom were opposed to the proposed union with Northern Rhodesia, and that it was his duty to win them round to the Government's way of thinking. Hostile interests, both political and financial, were at work to undermine all he did, so that his task was made harder than it need have been.

He had given her an opening of which she was glad to avail herself, however. She longed to help, to stand by his side during the difficult period which lay ahead, to encourage him when it seemed that he must fail in what he had set out to do.

But so far she had been permitted to know very little of what was going on. Had he been other than he was; if he were not so keen on keeping up the strictly formal basis upon which their relationship depended, it might have been easier for her.

As it was, they had no common ground upon which to meet. There was no way of breaking through the invisible barrier that had been erected between them.

Often she wondered why he had never married, if there was any truth in the rumour that he had been engaged to a girl in England before he had been taken prisoner in the Western Desert.

"You—you expect trouble from the natives, don't you, Ian?" she ventured, after a slight pause. "About this federation, I mean?"

He appeared to be weighing up her question, still eating.

"It isn't a popular move, as you well know," he said, laying aside his knife and fork. "And, of course, there are always certain sections who'll take advantage of any situation to further their own ends. I haven't any reason to believe that commonsense and good-will won't prevail in the long run, though."

He touched his lips with his table-napkin and took a drink of iced water. "What time do you expect to be back from the picnic?" he added.

"I couldn't say, Helen didn't give any idea," she said.

"It doesn't matter. Someone will see you safely home, I presume."

"Yes."

She could not be certain, but she thought there was a hint of sarcasm in his tone. How much did he know about her and Basil?

There was not a great deal of love lost between him and the young planter, she was sure of that. Basil was the type for whom Ian had very little use.

Not only that, but the younger man lost no opportunity of sneering openly at the Government's policy, which was aimed at freeing the native from the superstitious background against which he lived and had his being. Several chiefs knew that Basil and the District Commissioner were in open opposition on the subject.

JUDY was ready when the bell rang that evening; she took a last glance at herself in the mirror.

No one, Basil least of all, could possibly guess that her pulses were beating faster than normal and that for a moment she had been hard put to quell a childish desire to run away and hide.

She went into the lounge, a slender, girlish figure in a sun-suit, with a finger length coat flung loosely over her shoulders.

Basil turned at her entrance.

"Ah, good evening, Judy," he exclaimed, his good-looking features lighting up at the picture she made. He came forward and took her hand. "How charming you look! I need not tell you how pleased I am that you have decided to strike your colours after all, need I?" He laughed softly.

"On the contrary, they are still nailed to the mast, Basil," she said, equally lightly.

She withdrew her hand, outwardly cool and self-possessed.

"In that case, the fruits of victory will be all the sweeter, my dear," he mocked, grinning when the colour flooded her cheeks. "At least I can take heart from the fact that you have condescended to join the revels this evening. If I remember, the last time we were together you said you would never come out with me again! Correct?"

"You flatter yourself, Basil," she returned coldly. "I am coming because Helen asked me to and for no other reason."

"Is that so?" He lifted his eyebrows.

"Well then, as they used to say in the good old days, let battle commence! In the meantime, your chariot awaits. Shall we go, fair lady?"

THE Falls where the picnic was being held were considered one of the local beauty spots, and consisted of several cataracts down which the river plunged into a rocky defile.

A little lower down the river made a sharp, right-hand turn between steep banks, so that it was possible to stand under the trees on the lip of a rocky promontory, directly opposite the main fall, and watch the spray rising hundreds of feet into the air.

The picnic was a great success, as far as everybody but Judy was concerned. There were eight of them in all—Helen Rowan and her husband; a dark-haired, pretty girl called Kitty Marlowe, who was the daughter of the local district surgeon, a young Army officer named Tarrant and a couple named McAllister. Basil Cordray and Judy made up the eight.

"My house-boy thinks we are all mad," laughed Helen, busily opening cans of fruit. "He simply can't understand why, when we all have perfectly good houses to eat in, we want to go to the inconvenience of carting our food out into the open."

"Obviously the man has no poetry in his soul," said Clive MacAllister, amid laughter.

Helen put down the tin-opener and turned to see what her husband was doing about the drinks.

The acknowledged social leader in Gwala, she was in excellent form and her remarks kept the company in constant fits of laughter.

Helen had lived in Nyasaland for nearly ten years, so that there was very little she did not know about the place, its people and customs. She was as clever as she was beautiful, and a shrewd judge of character.

It was she who had warned Judy about Basil Cordray.

"He's very good company but he doesn't know what a conscience is, never having possessed anything so inconvenient," she had said. "Give him an inch and he'll take a yard, so watch your step, my dear."

Judy was thinking of the warning as she sat with her back to a tree nibbling a sandwich and listening with half her mind to the ebb and flow of conversation going on all around her.

The night was very close and someone remarked that the monsoon could not be far off. Helen gave a shudder and said that she hoped to go south for a holiday until the worst of them was over, always provided she could get her husband away from his desk.

"He's as bad as that guardian of yours," she complained, glancing across at Judy. "The main difference is that The Ogre has at least been considerate enough to spare some wretched woman the doubtful privilege of darning his socks for him."

Her husband grinned hugely.

"It's a good job that someone in the place does a spot of work now and again," he said.

"That," said Basil, nodding towards Captain Tarrant, "is a dig at you and me, young fellow. These Government types regard everyone else—planters and soldiers alike—as gilded popinjays who toil not, neither do they spin! They don't seem able to grasp the fact that we have more leisure than they have, simply because we organise things better."

The young officer laughed.

"I can't speak for the planters, but as far as I'm concerned, I admit I don't get nearly enough to do," he confessed.

"Don't worry, you'll have more than enough to do looking after the natives if this crack-brained idea of Forrester's goes through," said Basil a little scornfully. "Why they can't leave well alone defeats me. I suppose it makes them feel like tin-pot Dictators to rearrange everything according to their own ideas."

Judy glanced at him in surprise. The remark was as uncalled-for as it was tactless, and she wondered at the venom it only barely concealed.

Dick Rowan seemed unperturbed, however, for he answered in his usual slow tones, as if the matter was of no importance.

"Whether the idea of federation is crack-brained or not, only time will prove," he said. "But it certainly isn't Forrester's idea any more than it's mine. We're here to carry out orders—nothing else."

"Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die!" quoted Basil mockingly.

"How any intelligent man—"

"Oh, pack up, Basil dear," Helen broke in crossly. "You're never so happy as when you are baiting someone in the government, but we don't all think as you do, thank goodness. Why don't you make yourself useful and shake a few cocktails."

"To hear is to obey, my dear Helen," Basil grinned down at her. "The trouble in this country is that politics bore to death far too many people, so they don't even want to know what is going on under their very noses. However, as the poet says, Nemesis comes with foot as fleet on the Texas trail as in Regent Street, or something like that."

"That cuts more ways than one," said Dick Rowan meaningly. There was the slightest edge of sarcasm to his voice which made Judy look at him, but he was bending over one of the hampers so she could not

see his expression.

The conversation became general, with Kitty Marlowe and the young officer keeping the ball rolling, but a shadow had been cast over the party.

So it was with a sense of relief that Judy heard Helen announce that she and Dick were going to walk as far as the point, where they could watch the spray rising up from the falls.

"Coming?"

Judy looked up to see Basil looming over her.

He helped her up and she allowed him to place her coat loosely around her shoulders.

This was the moment she had known would come and one which she had dreaded; the moment when Basil would manoeuvre things so that they became separated from the rest of the party.

They reached a junction in the path, Helen and the others having gone ahead.

"There's no point in all sticking together," Basil said, taking her arm. "Let's walk as far as the lower cataract, my dear. It's not so noisy there and I want to talk to you."

Judy stopped in the shelter of a spreading yellow-wood tree and looked at him, her eyes baffling in the moonlight.

"What do you want to talk about, Basil?" she asked warily.

"You should know the answer to that one, Judy darling," he grinned. "Who else but you and me, of course? Or have you forgotten our very pleasant conversation the other night? We didn't finish it, if I remember rightly."

Judy sighed.

"I'm sorry, Basil, but I've no intention of finishing it." She paused a moment, picking her words carefully. "When first we met I was prepared to be friends—I thought that was what you wanted. But if you persist in asking for more, then—" She ended abruptly, lifting her shoulders in an expressive little shrug.

He laughed mockingly.

"You're like all your sex, my dear Judy," he chided. "Playing hard-to-get is a sop to your vanity, I suppose, but you can overdo it, you know. You've kept me dangling on a string quite long enough and now it's time to foot the bill. Why can't you be honest with yourself and admit that you care—a little?"

With his last words his voice dropped to a lower, more persuasive note, and he bent his head, bringing his face close to hers.

Instinctively Judy stepped back and it was as if her action fired something in him.

With a muttered exclamation he seized her in his arms, before she could save herself, pressed his lips savagely on hers.

Her senses leapt and for a moment she lay passive in his embrace, her eyes closed.

Then, with a convulsive start she tried to push him away, pressing against his chest with both hands.

"Basil—no—please don't!" she begged pantedly. "You—you'll make me hate you. I—"

He laughed, and at what she saw in his face she was shocked into silence, fear clamping icy bands on her heart.

He kissed her again, savagely and possessively, so that she felt she was being shrivelled up in the scarlet ravishment that mocked the very name of love; his hot fingers seemed to scorch her skin through the thin material of her dress.

With an immense effort she broke free, the back of one hand pressed to her lips as if to wipe away the stain of his kisses; then she gave him one of sick loathing.

"No!" she exclaimed sharply, when he would have seized her again. "No! Please don't—touch—me."

He drew a deep breath and for a moment

it looked as if he would ignore her protests. Then he laughed.

"According to the book I ought to apologise, I suppose," he said, breathing like a man who has been running. "I assure you, though, I haven't the least intention of doing so. For one thing, I'm not made of stone and for another," he paused meaningly—"neither, apparently, are you! That being the case, if you think I am going to let anyone else reap the fruits of my patience, you can think again, my dear girl." He seized her wrist. "Come along now—why can't you be sensible?"

"Basil—please!" she begged, pulling back, her lips trembling so that she could scarcely frame the words. "I—I'm sorry, but whatever you say it won't make any difference. You said—the other night—that you loved me, but you don't really. If you did, you couldn't treat me like this! Oh, please—you're hurting me . . ."

"Don't be such a damned little fool," he said roughly, pulling her towards him. "You know perfectly well that you—"

"Coo-ee! Judy! Basil! Where are you?" It was Helen's voice.

With a startled gasp Basil released his grip and turned to where the sound came from, his face convulsed in rage.

Judy did not wait. Turning, she ran towards where Helen had appeared from somewhere just behind.

"Good heavens, what's the matter?" she asked, as Judy panted towards her, her cheeks white.

"I—I—please take me away from here." Judy scarcely knew that she had spoken, her mind a whirling conflict of emotions.

Basil sauntered calmly up, smoking a hastily lit cigarette.

"Judy had a fright," he said, with a light laugh. "She nearly stepped on an adder and I'm afraid it rather upset her."

Helen glanced from one to the other, an enigmatic smile playing about the corners of her mouth.

"I'm not surprised," she said, putting an arm around the girl's shoulders. "Snakes are loathsome things at the best of times and not only adders. Anyhow, let's get back to the others—I think coffee is indicated."

AS they approached the camp fire, and the laughing group around it, Judy heard nothing of what Helen and Basil were saying.

But she smiled and tried to appear responsive when the others sympathised with her about the fright Helen told them she had had.

Afterwards she stood in the shadows and watched while Basil laughed and joked with Kitty Marlowe and Captain Tarrant.

How could he be like that? she wondered, desperately and with added humiliation.

And with the thought came the chilling knowledge that he would expect to drive her back to Gwala when it was time to go; that Helen's providential appearance on the scene had merely postponed the final reckoning with him!

At that moment Helen looked up from making coffee and met her glance.

"What have you done with your coat, Judy?" she asked.

Judy looked blankly at her, suddenly remembering that her coat had fallen from her shoulders when Basil had kissed her.

"I—I think I must have dropped it," she stammered in confusion, "I'll go—"

"Let me—I know the exact spot," said Basil, who had overheard. "Won't be a few minutes."

Helen followed his departing form through the gloom, then got up and came

to where Judy was standing.

"You'd better come back with Dick and me in our car, my dear," she said quietly. "I think you've had quite enough excitement for one evening! Don't worry about Basil—I'll fix things."

Judy nodded, unable to speak. She felt ashamed and embarrassed, for it was obvious that Helen had guessed that the "snake" was a two-legged one.

Presently Basil came back and placed her coat around her shoulders, the sleeves hanging down.

"Thank you," she murmured, half inaudibly, trying not to shrink from his touch.

He looked down at her, his lips curled.

"It's a pleasure, my dear," he said. "That will stop you from shivering."

#### BREAKERS AHEAD

IT was quite cool in the secluded corner of the garden, where Judy often went to think things out.

Using her well-known tact, Helen had managed it so that she and Dick had brought Judy back from the Falls the previous night.

It was a case of the biter bit, she thought, with a trace of humour. Basil's promptly thought-up excuse for her condition had recoiled on his own head, for there was nothing he could say when Helen had hinted that Judy was still feeling very upset from her encounter with the "snake".

He had passed the situation off in his usual airy fashion, however, promising to telephone the next day to find out how she was. But he had not done so—not yet!

Judy thought she knew why. He had proved himself an adept at playing a waiting game and, knowing that she would expect to hear from him, was deliberately keeping her guessing.

She was under no illusions about him, however. To someone like Basil Cordray her resistance was, in itself, a challenge to his vanity.

The trouble was, she admitted, she was afraid of him, yet it was out of the question to remain cowering in her private funk-hole as she was now doing.

Nor could she confide in anyone. Helen quite obviously guessed there was something amiss, but she would never understand. To her the situation would have been nothing out of the ordinary, one which could easily be handled by anyone with half her experience.

Time passed, but Judy sat on, her chin cupped in her hand.

For some reason that she could not fathom, she knew a childish dread of going back to the house in case the telephone should ring and, on picking up the receiver, she should hear Basil's mocking voice over the wires.

I'm a perfect idiot, she thought despondently. Helen would laugh at the very idea of being afraid of Basil. But she doesn't know him as I do! There is something about him I can't fight. He knows that. At any rate, he has guessed. That's why he kissed me as he did.

A shadow fell across her and she looked up quickly, startled.

"Oh, it's you," she said uncertainly.

Ian Forrester smiled down at her. Normally he did not come home until very late. It was now mid-afternoon.

"Don't get up," he said quickly, when she made a sudden movement. "You look very comfortable as you are and this is as good a place as any for a chat."

"A chat?" She looked confused, her colour rising. "You—you didn't come home specially from your office just to talk to me, surely?"

"Why not?" He seated himself on the grass. "Don't you think it's a good idea? There are quite a lot of things I want to talk to you about."

"I can't imagine there is anything important enough to justify leaving the country to run itself for the best part of an afternoon," she said, her carefully assumed flippancy concealing the storm of apprehension which rose within her.

His unforced laughter rang out, startling a honeybird into indignant flight.

"You seem to have a most exaggerated idea of my place in the scheme of things, my dear girl," he said humorously. "The country isn't run from a mere District Commissioner's office, I can assure you. We have a legislative assembly for that. My job is to carry out its policy."

"Right or wrong?" she asked, still only half serious.

"We can advise, of course," he said. "But there is no obligation on the part of those ultimately responsible to follow the advice tendered! A District Commissioner's job is to keep his fingers on the native pulse, so to speak, and to iron out the various troubles which occur from time to time. Our chief difficulty is to interpret the policy of the Government in terms that the natives can understand. It is difficult, sometimes, to get them to take the long-sighted view of things."

"Such as Federation?" she queried.

"That and other things," he replied, clasping his hands round one knee and looking thoughtfully into distance. "Some learned man once coined a phrase which ought to be written out and posted in every government office. It was to the effect that not only must justice be done, but that it must be manifestly done."

Judy thought of the lines of Tennyson's that Basil had quoted when a similar discussion had taken place at the picnic. "Theirs not to reason why; Theirs but to do and die."

She picked up a twig and began poking a hole in the ground at her feet. Then—"What did you want to talk to me about, Ian?" she asked suddenly. "Have I done something wrong?"

"No; not that I'm aware of," he returned smilingly. He paused a moment, regarding her bend head, then seriously; "Will you promise to be strictly truthful if I ask you a question, my dear?"

Judy's head rose but the retort she had been about to make remained unspoken. "I'm always as truthful as I know how," she said instead.

"I don't doubt that for a moment," he nodded. "It's all a question of how far the truth extends, though, isn't it? When you take an oath in court you have to swear to tell, not only the truth, but the *whole* truth."

"And you think I might not do that?"

"What I think isn't evidence," he said, looking whimsically at her. "But all that apart, I really do want to know something and only you can tell me."

"What is it?" she asked, poking at the hole.

His reply took her completely unawares, for it was the last thing she had expected.

"Why are you unhappy, Judy? Don't tell me you are not, for I won't believe you. Is it something I have done—or failed to do? Will you tell me?"

She raised her head and met his calm, discerning gaze, then looked away, flushing.

"What makes you think I am unhappy, Ian?" she evaded, after the briefest of pauses. "Even if I were, it doesn't necessarily follow that you are responsible."

"That means I'm right—there *is* something wrong," he said.

"And being a conscientious guardian you consider it your bounden duty to find out

what it is and put it right?"

"That isn't worthy of you, my dear girl," he said, a little put out by her sarcasm. "But let it go. This is one occasion when I would prefer any role but that of a guardian, believe me. I hoped—in fact, I believed—that you looked on me as a friend."

"Being a friend doesn't give you the right to trespass," she said, and seeing him stiffen, added: "If I am unhappy, it's my own fault. It isn't something I wish to discuss, though."

"In other words, I can't help?"

"No, you can't help," she repeated a little huskily. Then, looking up, went on quickly: "I—I think I'd like to go away for a time, Ian, if you don't mind. Margaret Dobson is always writing to ask me to spend a few weeks in Cape Town with her and it would be a nice change."

"Margaret Dobson? She's the girl who came to stay with you last year, isn't she?"

"Yes. We were at school together."

"I remember. Do you really want to go, Judy?"

"It would be nice," she said evasively.

"I see."

Quite obviously he did not see, but then there was no reason why he should. He kept aloof from so much that went on, scarcely ever putting in an appearance at the Club, and was seemingly content to allow her to make her own friends.

"I thought you were happy here—that you had become reconciled to a state of affairs which, however distasteful it might have been in the beginning, has had its moments since," he went on, rubbing his jaw pensively. "I realise, of course, that it must be dull for you at times—that it was inevitable—but there are compensations, surely? This is your *home*—at least, I hope you consider it as such. If you don't, then it means I have failed in some way."

"You—you haven't failed, Ian. It isn't that. I—"

She broke off, unable to put her confused thoughts into words.

"So we are back where we started," he said coolly. "Obviously, if it isn't me it's someone else. You've too much character to become bored and restless as so many of the women do in a place like this." He paused a moment and looked piercingly at her. "What are you trying to run away from, Judy?"

There was a pause during which the drone of an insect seemed to penetrate deep into Judy's brain.

Ian was no fool and her evasions, coupled with her urgent desire to go away, had only landed her deeper into the mire.

She got up and stood looking down at the placid surface of a nearby lily pond.

"You are quite mistaken," she said without turning. "I *am* bored and restless and I feel that if I don't get away for a time I shall scream! I never thought—" She broke off with an abrupt gesture, then laughed drearily. "I'm sorry, Ian, but—well—there it is. I'm beginning to hate Gwala. There—there's nothing for me to do."

He rose and putting out a hand, tilted her face towards him. For a moment he stood with his hand resting lightly under her chin, looking deep into her eyes.

Then she flushed and jerked her head away.

"You're not a very good fibber, Judy," Ian said calmly. "However, as you have pointed out, I have no right to trespass. If you want to go to Cape Town there is nothing to prevent you. The trip would do you good and doubtless you'll have a good time. Don't overdo it, though. Despite the wisecracks, a hair of the dog that bit you isn't always good medicine."

"What do you mean?" She turned to face him frowning.

"I'm just giving you a little friendly advice, that's all, my dear," he said casually. "What will you do—send Miss Dobson a wire? There's no point in hanging about once you've made up your mind."

"I suppose that would be best," she agreed, turning away, a pain in her heart that was almost physical.

Ian did not mind her going, that was certain. He did not mind in the least.

In silence, she walked back with him to the house.

He was not to blame because he could not see the truth when it stuck out a mile. He could not be blamed for not caring whether she went or stayed.

She belonged to a side of his life that scarcely touched the things which mattered to him most. Like keeping a dog, she thought with a flash of grim humour. One saw that the dog was fed and housed, took it for walks and called in the vet when it was ill. And there it ended!

### THE THIRD MAN

MARGARET DOBSON was at Cape Town airport to meet her. A tall, vivacious girl of Judy's own age, they had been at school together, and had kept up a regular correspondence ever since. Eighteen months earlier Margaret had paid a long promised visit to Gwala at a time when Ian had been up country on an official tour, returning the day before she had left.

Since then she had written several times to Judy, urging her to pay a return visit to Cape Town, where Margaret lived with her parents.

She had her own car, and in it they drove swiftly through the bright sunshine to the gracious old homestead set in the shadows of the famous Table Mountain, which reared itself like a rampart above the city.

"I've mapped out a simply marvellous programme for you, Judy," she said, as the car sped swiftly along tree-lined roads towards the house. "Several of the girls you knew at school are married now—Vera Mackinley, for one—but we kept in touch and they're all dying to see you again. Dear old Miss Heppel wants me to take you round to her place for coffee. She was very interested when she heard you were coming. You were always her star pupil, she says."

"She must be nearly seventy. Is she still teaching?" asked Judy.

"No. She retired last year. The school gave her a marvellous send-off and the Old Girl's Association subscribed to buy her a new radio. You sent a contribution, I know. It's marvellous when you come to think of it—fifty years at one school! Of course, you've got to be specially made to be able to do that kind of thing. I should have gone crazy and murdered someone long before if it had been me."

"Oh, I don't know," said Judy smilingly. "One never knows what one can do until one tries."

"Thank goodness I never had to try, then," said Margaret, turning in between two wrought iron gates. "But it's queer you should have said that—about never knowing what one can do until one tries. I'll tell you about it later."

Mrs. Dobson came out when she heard the car, followed by a coloured servant who carried in Judy's luggage. Tall and gracious, with a well-groomed head of silvery hair, Margaret's mother still revealed traces of the beauty she had passed on to her daughter.

"Welcome back, my dear," she said, taking Judy's hands and kissing her. She held her a little away off, smiling wistfully.

"My word, you make me feel positively old. Do you know, I haven't seen you since you were seventeen?"

"I'm still the same, Mrs. Dobson," said Judy, with a tremulous smile. "Different clothes and hair-style, that's all."

"All? Oh, no!" Mrs. Dobson shook her head and led the way into the house. "You were little more than a schoolgirl when you went away, but now you're a grown-up young woman. You'll have all the young men in Cape Town laying their scalps at your feet within no time!"

"Better be careful, Judy," warned Margaret laughingly. "Mother is an inveterate matchmaker. She'll do her best to marry you off if she gets half a chance!"

AFTER lunch, eaten in the cool shade of the loggia, the two girls went for a stroll in the grounds. It was too early, and too hot, to go anywhere and Margaret felt sure that Judy did not want to go rushing off on a round of visits the moment she arrived.

"I thought we might go for a drive along the coast after tea," she said. "If you felt like it we could stop off somewhere for an iced drink. There's a new place on the road to Camps Bay, called The Lobster Pot—there are sure to be some of the crowd there and it might be fun. They've got a dream of a dance band."

She made the suggestion casually, but Judy was not easily deceived. She looked at her friend, a hint of a smile lurking in her eyes.

"By the crowd I suppose you mean the set you run around with? Is there someone special, Margaret?" she asked.

"Not really," said the other, colouring. "At least—well, it's just possible that Mollie Rogers and her husband may be there. Or Jack Warburton."

"I see," remarked Judy drily. She paused to admire the distant vista of mountain and sea. "It seems queer to be back again after all this time. Everything seems familiar and at the same time new and strange. I can't explain exactly."

"I think I know," sighed Margaret. "In those days we were schoolgirls—now we're not. The place hasn't changed—but we have."

"I suppose that's it," Judy agreed. Then, as they resumed their walk: "Speaking of changes, do they still sell flowers along the pavement in Adderley Street?"

"Not as they used to do," Margaret answered, a note of regret in her voice. "The Corporation have built a new flower market for them with concrete troughs and running water. It's not the same, though. Did you notice I put some chinkeringchees in your room? I got those in Adderley Street."

"Yes, it was very sweet of you, dear," said Judy gratefully. "It made me feel I had really come home."

"But your home is in Gwala," said Margaret. "Oh, by the way," she added, "how is that rather unapproachable guardian of yours? The Ogre, didn't they call him? Still as unapproachable as ever?"

Judy thought of Ian as she had last seen him standing in front of the airport buildings at Gatooma, sun-hat in hand.

He had seen to everything—booked her seat on the plane, arranged for traveller's cheques and bought papers and magazines to while away the time.

"Oh, I wouldn't call him unapproachable, Margaret," she defended. "It's only that Ian is terribly reserved."

"Oh, I daresay," returned Margaret carelessly, shrugging. "Have you always called him Ian?"

"Well, yes and no," smiled Judy. "I started off by calling him Mr. Forrester, but he said he had enough formality in his

work without having to come home to it as well."

She glanced thoughtfully to where a liner was heading towards the open sea, its smoke a ragged pennant trailing behind it.

"I think something must have annoyed him that day!" she went on. "At any rate, he said the whole situation was absurd and that I needn't make it worse by addressing him as if he were about seventy-odd."

"That sounds quite human of the man," laughed Margaret. She glanced slyly at the other. "You sound very fond of him, my dear."

"He's been very kind to me," returned Judy evasively, and then hastily changed the subject. "What did you mean when you said you would tell me later about not knowing what you could do until you tried?"

"Oh, that!" Margaret blushed suddenly. "It's nothing, really. You know what a poor head I used to have for heights, don't you? Well, about a year ago I met Jack—he's the one I was telling you about just now. He's a newspaper reporter and he's crazy on climbing. He spends most of his spare time hanging on to Table Mountain by his eyebrows."

"One day he asked me to make one of a party that was going climbing," she went on, "but I said I wouldn't go because I was afraid of heights. But he just laughed and said it was just a matter of having confidence——"

"So you let him take you in hand and now you are an expert climber?" put in Judy.

"I'm far from being an expert yet," nodded Margaret. "But I've certainly lost my fear of heights. In fact, I love it."

"Do your people know?" asked Judy. "That I'm keen on Jack, do you mean?"

Margaret enquired. "Oh, yes, I think they guess. Of course, we're not engaged or anything like that, but Jack is only waiting till he gets a fabulous increase in pay, then we are going to be. I'm simply dying for you to meet him, Judy."

They returned to the house and Judy went to her room to change, a sudden longing for Gwala, and all that it stood for, gripping her the moment she was alone.

Restless, she went to the window and looked out towards Table Mountain, which seemed to grow larger and more sombre as night began to fall. There was something in its ageless majesty that was like a balm to her heart, and gave her a feeling that she would have liked to have escaped from the house and gone for a long walk along the foreshore—alone!

Margaret, it seemed, had found her dream knight and a perfect happiness was hers, a happiness such as Judy felt she herself would never know.

Was her restlessness due to envy of her friend, or was she unconsciously dramatising a situation so ordinary that it must have been enacted countless times down the years? She had always cherished a hearty contempt for people who did that kind of thing—it would be tragically ironical if she were to discover that she was as frail as others.

She had been unable to avoid meeting Basil Cordray before leaving for Cape Town. Fortunately it had been at the club, one of the most public places in Gwala. That was probably why she had been able to appear both cool and collected.

"I hear you're shaking the dust of Gwala off your dainty feet, my dear Judy," he had said, coming up to where she was talking to Kitty Marlowe. His voice had contained an undertone of mockery that only Judy could detect. "Will you be away long?"

"I couldn't say," she had answered

with apparent indifference. "About a month, I expect, maybe longer."

"Well, travel broadens the mind, they say," he had remarked, grinning. "Don't entirely forget us when you are out on the spree in Cape Town. When do you leave?"

"To-morrow—early!" she had said, with emphasis.

She had enjoyed saying that; enjoyed watching his expression. But it had not changed except that a gleam had come into his eyes.

"So soon?" he had said, with a lift of his eyebrows. "Then we won't have the pleasure of seeing you at a dance on Saturday night? Pity!"

"Oh, I daresay I'll be going to something equally exciting in Cape Town," she had replied, made suddenly reckless by a sense of freedom that was as new as it was exhilarating. She had met his glance with a hint of challenge in her own. "It's just as well, perhaps. I should hate to encounter another adder."

She had the satisfaction of seeing him flush darkly under his tan.

Then he had laughed.

"You shouldn't tempt providence, you know," he had said lightly. "Everything comes to those who wait and they say that adders are very, very patient creatures. They generally get their victim in the end."

"Now what on earth did he mean by that very peculiar remark?" Kitty Marlowe had wondered aloud, when he had left them. "The trouble with Basil is that he's always trying to be so clever—I never do understand half of what he says."

It was just as well, Judy had thought.

WELL, what do you think of it now that you have got this far, Judy?"

Judy, in shorts and sweater and wearing stout climbing boots, turned wondering eyes from the vast panorama of Cape Town spread out below her and smiled at the man who had spoken.

They were standing on a rocky ledge which jutted out from the mountain side, a coil of climbing rope at their feet.

Above them, Margaret and the fourth member of the party, Jack Warburton, were preparing to belay a second rope for the last part of the climb.

"It's breathtaking, Miles," she said. "Why one can see the whole of the Cape from here! It's marvellous."

"Yes, it is, isn't it? That's False Bay over there. The Twelve Apostles are those peaks over on the left." The young man, whose name was Miles Armstrong, smiled and added: "Glad you came?"

"Very glad," she said simply. "I never knew climbing could be so exhilarating. Was I a very difficult pupil?"

"Gracious, no, quite the contrary," he assured her. "You're a natural climber with a good sense of balance and, what is more important, you did exactly as you were told."

"Climbing isn't at all difficult if one has just ordinary nerve and uses a little common sense," he continued. "Some people would have you believe that it is a kind of mystic ability granted only to supermen, but that's tommy-rot. Look at Margaret! She thinks nothing of quite a stiffish climb now, yet a year ago she would have told you that she was afraid to stand on a chair for fear of falling off. Jack's a good teacher, though—that makes a difference, of course."

Judy smiled.

"They are very much in love," she whispered, looking up at the others.

"Yes, bless their hearts," Miles grinned. "I really thought old Jack was a confirmed bachelor with only one object in life—to climb higher than anyone else. But now he's all set for domestic bliss. It was

literally a case of I came—I saw—she conquered!"

Jack shouted and a rope came snaking down to them. Miles fastened it around Judy's waist and took the loops over her shoulders.

"Up you go," he said encouragingly. "Take it easy and make sure you have a foothold before you shift your grip. Keep a strain on the rope and remember I'm just behind you."

She gave him a smile and felt the rope tighten in response to a signal.

For a dizzy moment she swung out over space before her foot was guided into a crevice. Then she gripped the edge of the cornice above her, confidence restored.

Five minutes later she was standing on the summit with Jack Warburton and Margaret waiting for Miles to come up and join them.

TEN minutes later, they opened their packs and ate lunch seated on the rocks, using their rucksacks as supports for their backs. It was delightfully warm without being too hot, and the absence of low cloud gave them a magnificent view over the whole of the Cape Peninsular.

Margaret chatted nineteen to the dozen so that it was easy for Judy to take refuge in thought. She sat on the sun-warmed rock, her hands clasped around her knees, a dreamy expression coming into her eyes.

It was nearly six weeks since she had arrived in Cape Town, and at the end of the week she was due to return to Gwala. Whether to be glad or sorry was something she found it very difficult to make up her mind about.

It would have been foolish to deny that she missed Gwala and all it stood for.

On the other hand it would have been equally foolish to pretend that she would not experience a real pang of regret on bidding good-bye to those who, like her young companions on the mountain, had done so much to restore a sense of proportion she had been in danger of losing.

During the whole six weeks she had heard from Ian only once—a short letter in answer to the one she had written to announce her safe arrival. In it he had said he was well and that there was no news worth repeating.

She had sent view cards to various people, including Helen and had received a long and chatty letter in return. Whether the omission was significant or not Judy could not decide, but though Helen had told her all the latest gossip, she had not mentioned Basil.

Despite the secret longings which left her emotionally unsure of herself, Judy had enjoyed every second of her visit. It had been a bitter-sweet experience to revisit so many old haunts again and look up old school friends who had either married or become engaged.

She had visited the place where her parents had been laid to rest, taking with her a huge bunch of Cape flowers she had bought in Adderley Street.

Mr. and Mrs. Dobson had been kindness itself. They occupied an enviable social position in the Cape, where Mr. Dobson was head of a big engineering concern and they had gone out of their way to make Judy's stay a memorable one.

Picnics on the beach had followed tennis parties and drives along the famous Garden route to Stellenbosch and Oudtshoorn, and almost every other night there had been a visit to a concert or a play.

Margaret had introduced Judy to a wide circle of friends, including Jack Warburton and Miles, who had come to Cape Town the previous year to represent rival newspapers. Both were keen on climbing and

Margaret had become an enthusiast as well.

It was a source of wonder, as well as of amusement to Judy, for it was quite evident that Margaret was an enthusiast and that her new found passion for climbing was as genuine an emotion as her feelings for the man who had inspired it.

When the present outing had been suggested, Judy had demurred, saying she knew nothing about climbing and did not want to spoil their fun. But she had been over-ruled, Miles promising to take her in hand and now she was glad she had come.

"When do you actually go back, Judy?"

Miles rolled over on one elbow the better to look at her.

With a start Judy realised that they were alone and that Margaret and Jack had gone away to search for botanical specimens for Jack's collection.

She met his smiling glance in some confusion.

"I'm sorry. I'm afraid I was thinking, Miles," she confessed. "What were you saying—"

"I merely asked when do you actually go back," he repeated with a grin. "To be strictly truthful, you had obviously gone such a long way away that I thought it high time to bring you back again."

Her colour deepened.

"I hadn't gone very far," she said, suddenly conscious of his glance, of something that seemed to lie behind it. "I was actually thinking how quickly the time has flown and of all the things I have crammed into it."

"Must you go back?"

"Of course, Miles," she said in surprise, "I'm only here on holiday, remember."

"But what's the hurry?" he persisted. "It isn't as if you had your people living in Gwala, or anything like that to take you back. You can pretty well please yourself where you live, surely?"

"Up to a point, yes," Judy admitted. "But—well—it just isn't something I have ever considered. There—there wouldn't be any point in it, so to speak."

"That all depends," he said quietly. "The thing is, do you want to go back?"

"I'm not sure, Miles." She wrinkled her brows in thought. "In some ways I would like nothing better than to have a home in Cape Town, but—well—you can't turn life into one long holiday, can you?"

"True," he agreed, his eyes fixed on the horizon. "But what I'm getting at is something quite different. Margaret tells me that you are under no obligation to go back to Gwala—that your guardian is the type who couldn't care less where you were—"

"Oh, but that isn't so," Judy said, almost sharply. "I don't know what Margaret has said to you but you can take it from me that Ian Forrester isn't a bit like that, Miles. He has been most terribly kind to me and—but you wouldn't understand."

He glanced at her curiously without speaking for a moment. Then—

"I'm sorry if I've said the wrong thing, Judy," he said quietly. "I only went on what I was told and it seemed to me that you only had yourself to consider. I mean, it isn't as if it was your real home or that you run the house or something."

Judy stared at him.

"What has that got to do with it?" she asked.

"Quite a lot," he replied, going a trifle red. "I thought you would have guessed by this time. You see, I happen to have fallen in love with you, Judy darling, and I'm wondering if there is a chance for me. I mean to say, we like the same kind of things, so why can't we go on from there? I've got a good job and I'd give my life to make you happy."

For a brief instant Judy fought with

temptation. Miles was the very opposite of all that a man like Basil Cordray stood for and different, too, in his way, from Ian. The girl Miles married would be fortunate indeed, for she would know a tenderness and understanding that was rare among men.

But that kind of happiness was not for her, Judy knew. To marry Miles merely in order to escape from the maze of conflicting emotions in which she wandered would be worse than cowardly—it would be degrading!

She turned grave eyes on him, sighing deeply.

"Oh, Miles," she murmured. "I wish you hadn't done that. I can't bear to hurt you but I'm afraid it is out of the question. I like you very much—I do really—but I don't love you in that way. And, liking isn't enough, is it?"

He shrugged.

"I suppose not." He ran his fingers through his hair, an enigmatic expression on his rugged features. "Still, nothing venture, nothing have, so they say. You didn't mind my asking, did you, Judy?"

"Of course not, Miles," she said softly. "You have paid me a very great compliment—I only wish I could give you the answer you would like to hear, but—but I can't."

"That's all right, my dear." He got up and stood looking down at her, his thumbs hooked into his belt, smiling ruefully. "Anyhow, forget it. You're not the kind of girl to play a fellow up, so when you say it's no go, then I reckon there's nothing more to be said. We're still friends, I hope?"

She got up in turn and smiled tremulously at him.

"I hope so, Miles," she said. "What do you take me for? Your friendship has come to mean a very great deal to me this last few weeks—I would like you to know that."

He nodded understandingly, taking her hand.

"I'm not blind," he said quietly. "I thought, the very first time we met, that you were trying to forget something. But there it is—no one can fall in love to order so I guess it isn't much use my hoping. But if ever you do change your mind I'll be waiting."

She bowed her head, tears not far from the surface.

"Oh, Miles, you make me feel awful!" she murmured.

"That's silly," he said, taking her arm and giving it a little squeeze. "I'd rather have it this way than never to have known you, my dear. Now let's go and find the others. It's getting near time to make a start if we want to get down before dark."

#### THE TRUTH DAWNS

FROM somewhere in the shadowed depths of oblivion Judy's mind emerged slowly into the light.

Somewhere at the back of her head was a throbbing pain and she closed her eyes again wearily, as if the effort to keep them open was too much.

When she made a little restless movement a voice said something close to her ear. It was a strange voice, calm and authoritative—and comforting.

"Don't try to move. You're quite safe now. Just rest."

There came other sounds. The muffled opening and closing of a door. The clink of glass upon glass. Her head was gently raised and something cool touched her lips, though she was surprised to find how difficult it was to swallow.

"There," said the soothing voice again. "Now you can sleep."

Judy started to say something but the waves of darkness swooped down upon her once more and she sank into unconsciousness. Where she was and how she had got there no one seemed willing to tell her. It was all very bewildering—

The next time she opened her eyes she was able to take in something of her surroundings. The pain had gone but she still felt too weak to move her head.

Her restricted vision showed her a window with transparent plastic curtains drawn to one side. Through the opening she could see some trees.

There was a strong, clean smell about everything that seemed familiar, but she could not remember where she had encountered it before. Wherever it was, it had been a long time ago.

Painfully she turned slowly over in her mind the fact that she was in bed, striving to connect up the tenuous threads of memory that would solve the puzzle as to how she came to be there.

There had been her holiday in Cape Town . . . she remembered going to the airport in the Dobson's car and Margaret and Mrs. Dobson seeing her off. But there must have been something else . . . something extremely important that she ought to remember. If only there wasn't that queer blank in her mind . . .

Presently she became aware that someone had come into the room and was standing at the bed, looking down at her. She opened her eyes and as her vision cleared, saw Ian, an expression of deep concern on his sombre face.

A nurse brought a chair forward and placed it near the bed.

"Ten minutes, Mr. Forrester," she said briskly. Not a second more!"

Ian seated himself in the chair and took the hand that lay outside the coverlet. "How do you feel now, Judy?" he asked very gently.

"I—I don't know. I mean—" Her voice trailed off, but in her eyes he saw the question she had not the strength to put into words.

"You were in the plane when it crashed in the jungle about two hundred miles south of Gatooma," he said. "Something went wrong and the pilot had to bring it down where he could. Some of the other passengers were hurt, too, but fortunately no one was killed. But we'll talk about that to-morrow—all you have to think about now is getting better."

"Where—I mean—"

"You're in hospital at Sessui," he said. "I came as soon as I heard. I've been here ever since."

"You—you won't—leave me, will you, Ian?" she begged weakly.

"No, I won't leave you, Judy," he promised.

"That—that's all right, then."

Two tears rolled down her cheeks, tears of sheer weakness. Taking out a handkerchief Ian wiped them away with a touch as gentle as a woman's.

"Try to sleep," he murmured. "There's nothing to worry about—*nothing at all*. In a few days you'll be able to get up and we'll go back to Gwala. You'd like that, wouldn't you, Judy?"

"Yes." She started to say something, but the words became a mere mumble.

Then with a contented sigh she relapsed into an exhausted slumber.

When the nurse came back, a glance at the patient told her that she was sleeping like a child, the man still holding her hand and looking anxiously down at her.

JUDY awoke several times in the night. Once she thought she saw Ian at her bedside, but she could not be sure. Then the doctor came and said something soothing, and something pricked her arm, and after that she went into a dead sleep.

When she awoke Helen was seated where Ian had been the previous day, smiling at her. Judy's lips were dry and there was a stickiness about her mouth that she supposed must be the after-effect of some drug or other.

"Can I have a drink?" she asked plaintively.

"Of course, my dear," said Helen, getting up. "The nurse told me to give you this if you woke up."

Helen handed her a glass and propped her up while she drank some of the contents. It tasted rather like lime-juice.

"Thank you." Words came more easily now and she lay back on her pillows, white and exhausted. Then: "How did you come, Helen?"

"With Ian. As soon as he heard about the crash he rang me up and I said I'd come with him."

"Oh!" Returning memory came to Judy's mind. "I remember now. Someone started to scream and then the plane went down. What happened after that?"

"My dear, it was a miracle you were not all killed," said Helen dramatically. "The plane turned right over and a wing came off. You and several others were brought here by natives."

"I see." Judy put a hand to her head and became aware of bandages for the first time. Her eyes widened with dismay. "My hair! What have they done to it?"

"They had to cut some of it off, darling," Helen soothed her. "But there's nothing to worry about. It will soon grown again."

"I must look a peri. fright," grimaced Judy. "Did—did Ian see me like this?"

Helen smiled.

"I don't suppose he even noticed," she said amusedly. "Believe me, child, he was far more concerned with your safety than with your appearance. He spent the first two nights beside your bed—at least, for most of the time. You were delirious and kept asking for him and so they let him stay."

Judy flushed, the vivid colour rushing into her cheeks. What secrets had she given away in her delirium? she wondered.

When Helen had gone, she lay back on her pillows, thoughts milling in confusion through her mind. She had wanted to ask about Basil—to find out if Helen knew anything and, above all, if anyone had been talking. There had been a certain amount of gossip coupling her name with Basil's before she had left for Cape Town and she wondered if any of it had reached Ian's ears.

A LITTLE after seven the staff nurse came in. She took Judy's temperature, keeping up a running commentary on all that was happening in the hospital and then handed the girl a mirror.

"Heavens, what *do* I look like!" Judy exclaimed in such horror-stricken tones that the nurse laughed.

"What are you worrying about?" she said cheerfully. "You ought to be thankful it's no worse. You had a nasty scalp wound and only just escaped a fractured skull."

Judy sighed. The face which looked back at her from the glass was one she scarcely recognised as her own.

Pale, with dark shadows under her eyes,

her pallor accentuated by the white bandages, she looked almost haggard—or thought she did.

When the nurse ushered Ian in, Judy put down the mirror hurriedly and pushed her hands beneath the covers to conceal their trembling.

Ian's smile gave away nothing of his thoughts.

"Been appraising the damage?" he asked, his glance going to the mirror. "Considering everything you got off pretty lightly, young lady."

"But I look hideous," she wailed. "My hair's a frightful mess."

Ian laughed out loud.

"If you can worry about that you are obviously feeling a great deal better," he said. "Anyway, you look all right to me."

"That's a comfort at least!" She made it sound as if it were anything but that, and Ian laughed again.

"Never mind," he said soothingly. "We'll soon put all that right. The doctor says that if you go on as you are doing I can take you home at the end of the week. Would you like that?"

"Of course, Ian." Her eyes shone. "That would be wonderful, I can't tell you how much I am looking forward to seeing Gwala again."

"Is that so?" He sounded inwardly amused. "If I remember rightly the last time we discussed anything like that you were equally anxious to see the last of the place. Didn't Cape Town come up to expectations?"

"Of course," she replied, going a trifle pink. "I had a wonderful time. But, naturally, I'm anxious to get out of here."

"Oh, quite," he said drily. There was a curious air of detachment about him, as if he were holding something back.

"You look worried," she said at last, after an embarrassing little silence. "I suppose you ought not to be here, really. I mean—your work—"

Her voice trailed off before the expression of unconcealed astonishment which came into his eyes.

"My dear child, he said almost crossly. "Of course I'm worried. You don't know how seriously ill you have been! As for my work, that can take care of itself for a few days longer. Helen, by the way, is going back to-morrow," he added, "but she has offered to return to accompany us when we leave. That is, if you would like her to."

"Oh, is that necessary?" Judy asked, feeling her way. "It—it is very kind of Helen but I don't want to take advantage of her kindness. I mean, I shall be all right."

"You don't know whether you'll be all right or not," he said reprovingly. "You'll have to be careful not to overdo things for a long time to come. No tennis. No excitements of any kind for—well—a couple of months. I'll have to send you for a few weeks to the coast when you are really fit to travel. It will do you good to lie about in the sea air for a while."

"I should hate it," she said obstinately, pouting. "I can lie about at home just as well. I—I don't want to go away again, Ian."

"We'll see, then," he nodded. "But, as I said just now, you have been seriously ill, you know." He paused a moment, the hint of a smile touching his lips. "Have you any idea of the date?"

"N-no," faltered Judy, glancing around as if in search of a calendar. "I—I haven't thought about it."

Ian leaned forward.

"It's the seventeenth," he said.

Judy's mind lurched. She had left Cape Town on the ninth. Nine from seventeen was eight. That meant that Ian had been at Sessui Hospital for over a week!

"I—I didn't know," she said slowly.

"You were completely unconscious, except for some slight mutterings, for the best part of six days," he said impressively. "For the first two of them we didn't know just *how* bad you were. Fortunately your injuries were less serious than we feared and it turned out that you were suffering from severe concussion and *not* a fractured skull. That kind of thing passes off quickly, but you can't afford to take liberties. Naturally, you'll be under doctor's orders for some time to come."

Sounds outside heralded the doctor's visit and the staff nurse put her head in at the door.

"The doctor would like to see the patient," she said looking at Ian. "You can come back a little later if you wish, Mr. Forrester."

"Thank you, nurse." Ian rose to his feet and stood looking down at Judy. "Sleep well," he advised, a hint of laughter lurking in his eyes. "And don't worry too much about your hair. The thing to remember is that you are all in one piece."

"I'll try," she smiled gratefully. "Thank you for the flowers, Ian. I'm sorry to have been so much trouble to everyone."

THE following day Ian brought some news. Helen had been in earlier to say she was going back. She had also told her that Basil Cordray had left Gwala.

Judy was lying back on the pillows, trying to think out what this would mean, when Ian came in.

"The doctor has said you can travel on Saturday," he said, taking his usual seat. "I suggest we start about ten and go as far as Gatooma, where we can spend the night at one of the hotels there. The next day we can go as far as the Denny's place and so on by easy stages."

Judy flushed with pleasure.

"Oh, Ian! That's marvellous," she cried.

"I really believe you want to go back," he said, in a half-bantering tone. Then suddenly serious. "I understand your friend Cordray has left the district."

"Yes, I know—Helen told me," Judy said, puzzled.

"I thought I ought to tell you." He looked down at the floor. "But as Helen had already done so, it didn't matter."

Judy went pink. So he *had* heard the gossip that linked her name with Basil's. And having done so had jumped to the obvious conclusion that her eagerness to return to Gwala was rooted in a desire to see Basil again.

He went on—

"I don't know any details, but it appears that Cordray had an offer for that estate of his and decided to accept. Evidently he thinks, as a great many other people do, that the unrest amongst the native population will lead to troubles of the kind they are having in Kenya." He shrugged. "I'm sorry. You were rather fond of him, I gathered."

"Fond of Basil?" She was unable to prevent the bitterness coming into her voice. "Why should you think that, Ian?"

"Why?" He raised his head, looking a little puzzled. "It isn't unusual for a young woman to form an attachment for a member of the opposite sex, especially when circumstances are all in their favour. You had interests in common, I presume and there wasn't a great deal of difference in your ages. At least, not enough to worry about."

Judy did not know whether to laugh or cry.

"The things you mention are of the least importance," she said. Then after hesitating a moment; "You asked me once what I was running away from, Ian. Well, I'll tell you—I was running away from Basil. I was afraid of him! The night I went to that picnic with Helen and the others he—" She broke off short and turned her head away.

Ian put out a hand and laid it on hers.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he said gently.

"After all, that's what I'm here for. I guessed that Cordray had something to do with your sudden desire to get away but I thought it was in order to—well—make up your mind about things. When I heard that he was selling up I was rather puzzled, to be honest, I was afraid you might take his decision to go badly."

Judy smiled crookedly.

"It's the kind of thing Basil would do," she said quietly. "He was incapable of considering anyone but himself."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Ian asked again. "It would have saved us both a great deal of heartburning. As it was, I was left to wonder whether my judgment had been at fault."

Judy looked at him, her eyes frank and clear.

"How could I?" she countered. "Apart from anything else, it was one of those things I had to work out for myself. You—you couldn't have done anything about it."

"No," he conceded thoughtfully. "I don't suppose I could have."

It was left at that, but when he had gone Judy lay staring at the tops of the trees she could see from her window, her eyes pensive.

It seemed that something epoch-making had happened, something almost magical that turned a mere exchange of glances a half-uttered confidence, into an adventure, almost unbearably sweet.

And when the door opened again to admit Nurse Morrison and the doctor, she greeted them with a smile of such spontaneous gaiety that they both smiled in return, responding as people do to an aura of happiness that envelops all with whom it comes into contact.

EVERYBODY was pleased to see her. As she got out of the car and saw the familiar garden, Judy was conscious of a sense of uplift she had never thought to experience again. Mrs. Guthrie, plump and matronly, hurried down the steps to welcome her, her kindly face beaming with pleasure at seeing "Miss Judy" safe and sound.

"My word, but you gave us all a nice old fright," declared the housekeeper as she helped Judy undress, for Ian had given orders for her to go straight to bed after the long drive. "You should have seen Mr. Forrester when he heard the news! They telephoned from Gatooma to say that there had been a crash and that you had been taken to hospital and it was just as if he'd had his death-summons. He went as white as a sheet and didn't seem to understand when I spoke to him."

She rattled on, and did not guess that not all the choirs of heaven could have made sweeter music than her words, as far as Judy was concerned.

She told the eagerly listening girl how he had telephoned Helen and said that he was leaving within the hour; how Helen had arrived with a suitcase, insisting that she must go as well; how Ian had telephoned from Sessui every day to report Judy's progress—and a great deal more besides.

"Mrs. Rowan telephoned about an hour ago to know when you were expected," she

said finally. "I said I didn't know, but as you were stopping last night at Mrs. Denny's you would likely be here about six o'clock. So she said she might pop round if you weren't too tired to see her for a few minutes. She asked me to ring her back to say."

"Please tell her that I would love to see her, Mrs. Guthrie," Judy murmured. "I do feel tired, but not nearly as much as I expected to do." She relaxed against the pillows. "Oh, but it's nice to be home again."

"Aye, there's no place like home, I say, and nothing to beat a nice hot cup of tea when you're feeling done," said Mrs. Guthrie, folding Judy's clothes and laying them on a chair. "Now just you lie there and forget all your troubles while I put the kettle on."

"That sounds lovely," Judy murmured. Then she looked questioningly at the older woman. "Where is Mr. Forrester? Did he go out?"

Mrs. Guthrie put on a resigned expression.

"Now, where would you think he is?" she asked, in a tone which indicated that she had long since given up hope of making her employer conform to rules. "As soon as you were indoors he turned the car and went off to his office! I daresay he wants to find out if the country has gone to rack and ruin in his absence. He wouldn't even stop for tea!"

HELEN arrived an hour later and perched herself on the edge of the bed.

"You look better already," she said, in response to Judy's greeting. "How does your head feel?"

"It ached a bit during the drive," Judy replied. "But it doesn't throb as much as it did. I can't read much yet, though—it begins to ache at once if I do."

"That's bound to happen," said Helen sympathetically. "I suppose Dr. Sanger will be coming along presently to see you. I saw him this morning and he told me he was very anxious to know how you were."

"Ian has brought a letter for him from the hospital doctor," said Judy. "He has to take the stitches out of the wound and then, I hope, I shall be able to have these frightful bandages removed."

"What's the hurry?" Helen enquired, with a quirk of amusement. "You look very romantic like that! Enough to make even Ian Forrester sit up and take notice. I should think!"

Judy crimsoned and tried to look indignant at the same time.

"Don't be ridiculous, Helen," she complained. "That kind of thing is just silly."

Helen looked knowingly at her.

"All right, don't be so touchy, my dear," she said laughingly. "I can see through a brick wall as far as most people and I know you have been in love with Ian for ages."

"Now I'll tell you something that you *don't* know—he's in love with you!"

"Oh, please!" Judy made a little protesting gesture, her colour receding to leave her pale. "I—I don't like that kind of thing, Helen. I—" She broke off, turning her head away and blinking back the sudden tears that filled her eyes. "In any case, it isn't true. Ian just looks upon me as—as a friend. I mean—" Again she stopped.

Helen was both generous and impulsive by nature, as her rush to Judy's bedside revealed. She could also be very understanding at times.

She leaned a little forward and put a hand on the younger girl's.

"Listen, my dear," she said gently. "They say that fools rush in where angels fear to tread, so in that respect, at any rate, I am being a fool. But there is something I think you ought to know. Ian won't tell

you, I'm quite certain of that, first of all because he would rather die than see you humiliated in any way. Secondly, because he feels responsible.

"I told you that Basil Cordray had sold his place and left the district," Helen continued, while Judy regarded her with wondering eyes. "I didn't tell you the rest because you were too ill to be worried about that kind of thing and also because I wasn't sure that I ought to do so. After all, it was Ian's business and I imagined that if he wanted you to know he would tell you himself. Now I'm not so sure."

"What do you mean?" Judy whispered, her heart sinking.

Helen drew a deep breath.

"Basil is the type of man who can't bear to think that any girl could remain impervious to his charms," she said scornfully. "When you went away so soon after that night we had the picnic, I guessed pretty well what had happened, so that it didn't surprise me in the least when he began to throw out—well—hints. It was very silly of him, because some of the things he said about you reached Ian's ears. I know that, because Dick told me so.

"What happened after that no one knows, but there were rumours floating round to the effect that Ian had waylaid Basil and that there had been some kind of a flare-up. Some people have gone so far as to say that Ian took a *kiboko* and thrashed Basil within an inch of his life—others say that they had a fight. Whatever it was, *something* happened, for a few days later we heard that Basil had gone to the coast and that his place was being offered for sale."

Judy stared woodenly in front of her. That Basil Cordray had been boasting of his imaginary conquest did not surprise her in the least. But it was a shock to learn that Ian had taken the law into his own hands in some way or other. That he would take a rhinoceros hide whip and thrash the younger man she did not believe for a moment.

But whatever it was that had happened, it had evidently been sufficient to cause Basil to decide to quit the district. It revealed Ian in a light in which she had never previously seen him and left her feeling as if she had suddenly discovered that he possessed two heads!

It would be like him to try to safeguard her from the humiliation that he knew would be hers if she learned to what lengths Basil had gone, she reflected.

She could imagine the furtive gestures, the nodding heads, the whisperings that had gone on in the club about it all. She felt all at once as if she had been stripped of the last vestige of her pride to become the cynosure of all eyes, so that she could have wished that she had never survived the plane crash. Men had acted like savages because of her.

At length—

"Thank you for telling me," she said, with a dreary little laugh. "Forewarned is forearmed, I suppose, and it is just as well to know. I mean, I will know what everyone is thinking if ever I go to the Club again!"

"My dear, you mustn't take such a morbid view of things," Helen admonished gently. "You don't imagine that anyone believes the things that Basil has been saying about you, do you? Everybody knows what he is—we're well rid of him, if you ask me."

"How do I know they don't believe it?" asked Judy bitterly. "Ian may believe it. He probably does. After all, I wouldn't be the first girl in the world to make a fool of myself over a rotter."

"I'm sorry, Judy," said Helen remorsefully. "I didn't mean to upset you. Only—"

"I'm not upset," said Judy shortly. Disgust and rage surged up in her so that she was hard put to it to keep her temper. "I just think the whole thing is too utterly beastly for words, that's all. If—if you had told me when I was in the hospital I would not have come back."

Helen picked up her bag and gloves.

"I'm sorry you've taken it like this, my dear," she said. "After all, as you said just now, forewarned is forearmed. You were bound to find out sooner or later that *something* had happened, and I thought it only fair to Ian to tell you the truth as far as I know it. If you want details you can ask him."

Impulsively Judy turned, her eyes shining unusually bright.

"Forgive me, Helen," she said quickly. "I shouldn't have gone off the deep end like that."

"That's all right, darling," Helen said, bending to kiss her. "I happen to be rather fond of you and—well—that's my excuse. But I know how you feel. Try not to be bitter."

"But how can I help it?" Judy asked despondently. "You would be in my place."

"My dear, I've been in your place heaps of times. If I hadn't *known* Dick—well, some of those pussycats at the club would have smashed things for us long ago. I don't want to see them smash things for you and Ian, that's all. Pecker up, darling."

LONG after Helen had gone, Judy remained relaxed against the pillows, staring at the opposite wall.

Bitterly she resented the fact that she had been talked about in that way; more bitterly she resented the fact that Ian had thought fit to take up the cudgels on her behalf. She ought to feel grateful to Helen for telling her, she knew. In a way she *was* grateful. All the same it hurt.

She forced herself to look into the future. What was going to be the outcome of it all?

That Ian was in love with her, as Helen had declared he was, she dismissed as being no more important than an example of wishful thinking.

She tried to face the position squarely, to arrange things in her mind so that she could find some way out, but her usual reasoning powers seemed to have dried up.

She thought of Miles Armstrong, who wanted to marry her, of the letter he had written to the hospital at Sessui after learning about the crash. She had only to pick up her pen to give him the answer that would solve all her problems, and once again, as it had done that day on the mountain, temptation shook her.

That she should squander her youth in hopeless longing was a thought so abhorrent that she recoiled from it in horror. It would be equivalent to condemning herself to an arid existence that would daily become more and more intolerable.

Above all, she was afraid of giving herself away and inviting the pity that she feared to see in Ian's eyes.

She wondered why she had rounded on Helen as she had done. Was it because she was ashamed for her to guess the truth, as it seemed evident she had?

If only she could take her love and trample it underfoot so that it might never raise its head again. That way and that only could she find the peace of mind she so desperately needed.

But she was learning the lesson that while love could be thwarted, even denied, it could not be stifled. Frustration and bitterness might dim its flame but it would never completely go out.

She felt as if she had been beaten with sticks until her whole body was one aching bruise. The long day, with the dusty road stretching endlessly before them, had taken more out of her than she realised and the shock of what Helen had told her left her mentally and emotionally exhausted.

When Ian looked in an hour later she was lying on her side, her bandaged head pillowed on one slender arm, sunk in an exhausted slumber, on her cheeks the stains of the tears she had not known she had shed.

JUDY was seated in a chair in the garden a few days later when Ian came out of the house and crossed the lawn towards her.

He had been more than usually busy since their return, catching up arrears of work and dealing with the many important matters that had been held over for his attention.

As a result, Judy had seen very little of him except at meals so that there had been no chance of discussing that which was uppermost in her mind.

She had had several visitors, and wondered rather scornfully whether they had come out of curiosity or concern.

Almost morbidly sensitive, she had thought to read in their glances something that, perhaps, was not there. It was strange, though, that no one mentioned Basil by name! Evidently it would have been considered tactless to discuss his rather abrupt departure, she supposed.

"Do you feel up to going for a short drive, Judy?" Ian asked, coming to a halt beside her chair. "I have to go to Chief Makusa's village this afternoon and I wondered if you would like to come with me. It will do you good to get away from the house for a bit."

"Is that the only reason you are asking?" she said, a faintly mocking expression in her eyes.

"Of course not. I would like to have you with me if you'd care to come," he said. He frowned. "What's come over you lately, my dear? Have I done something to offend you?"

"You asked me that once before," she said with a careless laugh. "The answer is still the same. You don't have to be responsible for my moods, you know."

He stared at her for a moment and she braced herself for an angry retort, but he only smiled.

"Thank goodness for that," he said humorously. "You are quite enough responsibility as it is. However, if you feel you can bear my company for a couple of hours it might be a good idea to come."

"I'll try," she said, getting up.

The bandages were gone, and her hair had been carefully trimmed and set by Helen, who was good at that kind of thing, so that Judy looked very different from the girl who had tossed in delirium on the narrow hospital bed. Her strength had almost returned and she no longer felt as if her limbs were weighted with lead.

"I'll get a hat," she said carelessly, turning away.

"Better bring a coat as well," he advised. "It may be after sundown when we get back and it can be quite chilly down by the river."

Judy nodded and hurried indoors, wondering what sudden impulse had made him ask her to go with him. He often went to visit native chiefs, but usually he went alone or with a native soldier.

It was a very pleasant drive past the falls and into the foothills. As the brake plunged down into the teeming valley, where the native village was situated, she was suddenly conscious of a sense of space and freedom. The purple hibiscus was in bloom and made a brave splash of colour against the greeny-brown of the hills.

With a sudden sense of well-being, Judy turned and smiled at Ian with something of the air of a child given an unexpected treat.

"Enjoying yourself?" he asked, in much the same tone that Miles Armstrong had asked a similar question that day on Table Mountain.

She drew a deep breath.

"Oh, yes, thank you, Ian. I'm glad you asked me to come."

"You'll have to sit in the car while I talk to old Makusa," he said. "It isn't etiquette for a woman to be present when matters of High Policy are being discussed!" His eyes twinkled. "I'll be as quick as I can, however."

"I don't mind," she said. "I shall enjoy myself just looking at the hills."

Inwardly she marvelled at her complete acceptance of things as they were. It was as if, during the week that had passed, she had steeled herself into a state of acquiescence, wilfully blinding herself to what the future might or might not hold, living for the moment and snatching what happiness she could from times like this.

She relaxed in the seat while Ian was in the village, a collection of dome-shaped huts out of the doorways of which she saw the curious faces of children peering.

She wanted to get down and make friends with them, but knew that her action would be frowned upon as a breach of political etiquette.

She thought again of Miles, making comparisons, and knew with an intrinsic certainty that came from some fount of wisdom within her, that he would find the happiness he sought—elsewhere. Miles was so young, so eager, so filled with the zest for life that it was unthinkable he would dedicate his spiritual and emotional ideals to a memory.

That thought set her free in some way, as if there were no longer any links to hold her in thrall. It was as if her life had been divided into two halves, the one half belonging to the time before the plane crash, the other afterwards.

And, thinking of this, she realised suddenly that there was more to it than that.

Before the crash she had been a girl, standing on the threshold of life and now she was a woman, with all a woman's feelings and desires and the man she loved was walking towards her from the direction of the chief's hut.

LATER they drove in silence until they came to the falls, where Ian stopped the car for a moment so that they could watch the spray rising against the sunset. And then, without thinking, responding solely to the subconscious promptings of her instinct, Judy spoke.

"Why didn't you tell me the truth about Basil, Ian?" she asked.

He turned his head, his only reaction the sudden tensing of his hands on the wheel.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You know what I mean," she answered quietly. "It was through you that he left the district, wasn't it?"

"Has someone been talking?"

"I couldn't say. I daresay a lot of people have talked. But it was Helen who told me. She didn't know *what* had happened, of course, only that something *had*."

"I see," he remarked thoughtfully. "I suppose it was too much to expect—that you wouldn't hear something, I mean. I wanted to spare you that."

"What did you want to spare me? The knowledge that Basil had been—boasting?"

"That, and other things," he nodded. "Unfortunately he went too far so that I was compelled to take notice of what had been said. I gave him the option of clearing out or taking a public horse-whipping. He chose the former, though, to be fair to him, I think he was influenced by the other considerations I mentioned to you."

"Did you believe the things he said about me?" she asked.

"Good heavens, what a question to ask." He stared at her. "You might give me credit for a little common sense, my dear Judy."

She smiled faintly.

"Thank you," she said. "That clears the air, doesn't it? But you *did* think I was in love with him, didn't you?"

"I wasn't sure. Then Helen told me about some incident the night of the picnic and hinted that you were afraid of him. I put two and two together and realised why you wanted to go away. That left me free to deal with the man as I thought fit."

"I see," she murmured, with a hint of sarcasm. "I suppose it never occurred to you that people would say you and Basil had been fighting over me?"

"They must be mad," he said angrily. Judy laughed.

"Mad or not, that is what they *are* saying, Ian. It's rather hard on a girl, don't you think?"

He glanced at her suspiciously. He could not be sure, but it sounded as if there was an undercurrent of laughter in her voice.

"I imagine it would be excessively humiliating," he said stiffly.

"It's more than that," she said demurely. "It is distinctly compromising! It—it isn't like you to shirk your responsibility, you know, Ian."

"What on earth do you mean?" he ejaculated, astonishment mastering his sudden anger.

Judy smiled and stared at a bird that regarded them with beady eyes from a branch of a tree.

"Well, surely it's your duty to make an honest woman of me? At least, I'm quite sure that is what everybody will expect."

He jerked round as if he had been stung.

"What are you getting at, Judy?" he was breathing deeply. "If that's a joke—!" He broke off, for once in his life completely at a loss.

"But it isn't a joke," said Judy wide-eyed. She met his bewildered gaze fearlessly, her colour rising. "I—oh, please don't make

me say it, Ian! I shall feel frightful if you do."

He hesitated. Then—

"Are you suggesting we should get married?" he asked, heavily sarcastic.

"Don't you think it's a good idea?" she enquired anxiously.

He drew a deep breath. Then he took his hands from the steering wheel and gripped her shoulders.

"Judy! Are you trying to tell me—oh, but it's impossible. You can't possibly mean that you—that you—love me!"

Judy smiled tremulously.

"That's what I've been trying to tell you for ages," she said, with a deep sigh. "Only you were so obstinately blind, Ian darling. Do you imagine I didn't know what you were thinking when you told me all that nonsense about Basil only being a few years older than me? I guessed . . . then."

"I'm thirty-five and you're—"

"Twenty next birthday," she cut in, with a sudden glow in her eyes. "Daddy was seventeen years older than mummy and *they* were the happiest people I ever knew! You—you *do* love me, don't you, Ian? I—I'm not making a—mistake?"

"No, my darling, you're not making a mistake," he said solemnly.

Then, with a sudden movement he drew her into his arms, his eyes alight, and his lips found hers.

Presently she moved in his arms and smiled.

"I want to tell you, Ian. There was a boy in Cape Town who wanted to marry me. He's rather a dear and I was very tempted. You see, I thought—then—that you didn't love me. That was one of the reasons I had to go away."

"But you came back," he smiled.

She nodded.

"Yes, I came back, Ian. That day on Table Mountain I realised that this was where I belonged—whatever happened."

"My darling," he murmured huskily. He buried his face in her hair. "If you only knew how I tried to keep my feelings under control. You see, I loved you from the very first and then, when I thought you were falling for Basil Cordray I didn't know what to do. It never occurred to me that you might return my love."

"What a dear, blind silly you were," she sighed, with a little laugh. "Why, I positively threw myself at your head only you were so busy being correct that you couldn't see it." She blushed suddenly. "Ian! What did I say when I was delirious? You've no idea how I've worried about it all."

He grinned suddenly.

"You didn't tell me anything very dramatic," he said. "You seemed to get Cordray and me and a young man called Miles mixed up and kept calling on us to save you from falling. You gave nothing away."

"How disappointing," she murmured, hiding her face against his coat. "I hoped you might have discovered that I was in love with you."

"Minx!" he said laughingly, and putting his hand beneath her chin, raised her face and kissed her on the lips. "Judy darling, is it really true? You do love me?"

"Yes, Ian. With all there is of me," she replied, with a tender sigh. "Oh, darling, hold me tight and promise that you will never, never let me go again!"

THE END.

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